PROCLAIMING CHRIST: THOMAS AQUINAS AND KARL BARTH ON HANDING ON THE WORD OF GOD IN HUMAN WORDS

Dissertation
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences of the UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

By
Matthew David Archer

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
Dayton, Ohio
August 2016
PROCLAIMING CHRIST: THOMAS AQUINAS AND KARL BARTH ON HANDING ON THE WORD OF GOD IN HUMAN WORDS

Name: Archer, Matthew David

APPROVED BY:

Matthew J. Levering, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Vincent J. Miller, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Jana M. Bennett, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Brad J. Kallenberg, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Reinhard Hütter, Ph.D.
Committee Member
ABSTRACT

PROCLAIMING CHRIST: THOMAS AQUINAS AND KARL BARTH ON HANDING ON THE WORD OF GOD IN HUMAN WORDS

Name: Archer, Matthew David
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. Matthew Levering

This dissertation seeks to offer an account of the presence of the Word of God in human words, the presence of Jesus in the Church’s speech about him. This topic is explored by taking Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth as interlocutors, framing an ecumenical and systematic approach to analyzing the mystery of the Church’s preaching and teaching through comparing and contrasting their works on the Word of God. Special focus is on the role of handing on the Word in three genres: biblical exegesis, sermons, and systematic presentations of Christian doctrine (summa and dogmatics). My aim is to offer a Catholic and ecumenical theology of the Word of God: my three-genre focus is essential to this task.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................... iii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: AQUINAS’S *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS* .......................................................... 34

CHAPTER TWO: BARTH’S *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* ................................................................. 65

CHAPTER THREE: AQUINAS’S *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* ............................................................... 101

CHAPTER FOUR: BARTH’S *CHURCH DOGMATICS* ................................................................. 152

CHAPTER FIVE: AQUINAS’S SERMONS ...................................................................................... 187

CHAPTER SIX: BARTH’S SERMONS ............................................................................................ 214

CONCLUSION .............................................................................................................................. 235

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................................... 265
INTRODUCTION

It has become common in recent years for many observers of Catholicism to speak of a “crisis in catechesis” or a crisis in Catholic preaching.¹ These “crises” have extended to the interpretation of scripture as well: as John Cavadini has noted, a “gap” has opened in catechesis “between “scripture” on the one hand, and “doctrine” or “dogma” on the other.”² My dissertation aims to address such crises and questions from a theological rather than a purely practical perspective. Yet the theology I aim to work with here is itself deeply practical, in that I am interested in how the risen Jesus, the Son or

¹ I.e., Joseph Ratzinger, “Handing on the Faith and the Sources of Faith” in Handing on the Faith in an Age of Disbelief (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 13; see also his description of a “crisis in Christian preaching” in Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O’Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 77. This “crisis” is by no means limited to Catholics: the Protestant ethicist Stanley Hauerwas notes that contemporary preaching among Mainline Protestants is beset by a “lack of trust many who preach have that God will show up in the words we use…If God is not so present, then the sermon is but another ‘talk.’” Stanley Hauerwas, A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 18.

² John Cavadini, “Scripture, Doctrine, and Proclamation: the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Renewal of Homiletics,” Letter & Spirit 4 (2008): 246. In his book Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph Ratzinger notes that the time has come to “recognize the limits of the historical-critical method itself,” because this method by itself does not have the capacity to make the word of Scripture “into something present today.” Joseph Ratzinger, Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, trans. Adrian Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xvi. These questions are not only asked by dogmatic or historical theologians, but many biblical scholars as well, in the context of growing interest in theological exegesis of Scripture. Joel Green offers one instance:

Biblical studies is accustomed to “hearing voices” [i.e., the voice of redactors or the community behind the text], then, but it has not made a practice of enabling its practitioners to hear the divine voice—except, in some circles, as a secondary or tertiary task, a derivative step in the hermeneutical process, as through God could speak only after history had spoken. Hear the words of the liturgy:

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The question, then, is how to hear in the words of Scripture the word of God speaking in the present tense. This is (and not simply was and/or might somehow become) the Word of the Lord. Joel Green, Practicing Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 5.
Word of God, turns the hearts of believers to himself through the words of human intermediaries, whether in preaching, in the interpretation of scripture, or in systematic dogmatic reflection. How exactly is Christ, the incarnate Word, “present” in the words of Christian preaching? How does learning about Christ, through study of the words of scripture or doctrinal reflection, actually bring a person into contact with the living Jesus, the Word of God?1 How can the Church, in human words, define Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word at the Council of Chalcedon, and what is the status of the Church’s words?

One of the most profound teachings of the Catholic tradition is its assertion of Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist, along with its emphasis on how the other sacraments connect believers to Christ. But there seems to be a lack of contemporary emphasis among Catholic ministers and theologians on the question of how Christ, who is the divine Word incarnate, is made present in words, particularly the words of preaching and the words of scripture. The Lutheran and Reformed traditions of Protestant Christianity, partly on a polemical basis of defining themselves over against the Catholic emphasis on the seven sacraments, have on the other hand developed a strong emphasis on the presence of the incarnate Word in the words of Scripture and in the words of preaching.2

---

1 These issues are addressed, with a philosophical focus on the notion that “God speaks,” by Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks (New York: Cambridge, 2000).

2 The Reformed Second Helvetic Confession of 1564 declares that “the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God,” and, commenting on Romans 10:17, “faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God by the preaching of Christ,” argues that the gospel is in most cases proclaimed to hearers through such preachers, in spite of the personal character of the minister (The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Confessions: Study Edition (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 93-4 (Article I). The Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530 declares that in order for believers to obtain the gift of faith, “the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake,
to the Father in the Spirit. Aquinas discusses the mediation of human words in a manner which includes an incredibly positive valuation of human nature under grace and of the human capacity, in the Spirit, to know the Word and grow in the Word, since human beings were created with a natural affinity for the Word. Aquinas offers a theology of the Word in the context of his highly developed understanding of how created things, especially human beings, can participate in Christ’s mediation of revelation and salvation: this is his crucial contribution, I argue.

In this dissertation, I seek to retrieve Aquinas’s theological understanding of handing on the Word of God alongside the greatest recent Protestant theology of the Word of God: the work of Karl Barth. In the first phase of his career, Barth wrote as a

---


7 The enterprise of Catholic dialogue with Karl Barth has a long and interesting history. The most notable example of such dialogue is Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological engagement with Karl Barth. Balthasar’s reading of Barth is squarely focused on theological questions of ecumenical dialogue with Protestants. Balthasar considers that Barth offers “the most thorough and penetrating display of the Protestant view and the closest rapprochement with the Catholic.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 22-3. Other significant works on Barth by Catholic theologians include Henri Bouillard, Karl Barth, 3 vols, (Paris: Aubier, 1957); Hans Küng, Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). Of special significance for this dissertation especially is Yves Congar’s discussion of Barth in Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay: One Volume Edition, trans. Michal Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 281; 404-6, which will play a major role in my final conclusion, and, less present in this dissertation but still important for shaping my approach to Barth, Louis Bouyer’s discussion of Barth in The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism, trans. A. V. Littledale (Maryland: Newman Press,
pastor concerned with the needs of the local parish, typified by his working class parish in Safenwil, Switzerland. In this context, Barth was focused on recovering the notion that God speaks, in all its theological depth, and he did this by a particularly Protestant kind of ressourcement, turning to a close theological exegesis of Paul’s letter to the Romans, published as his *Epistle to the Romans*. Later in his life, when he wrote his multivolume work on Christian doctrine, the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth retrieved from the Protestant tradition the notion that the words of preachers in a local parish, when preaching is rightly based on Scripture, are by God’s power a divine word, the Word of God. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth takes the Word of God preached, written, and revealed as the criterion of dogmatic theology. Barth even remarks that “God commits Himself with His eternal Word to the preaching of the Christian Church.” Barth emphasizes the presence and action of God in each "moment" of mediation: God is directly at work in the

---

8 Barth explains that “it simply came about that the familiar situation of the minister on Saturday at his desk and on Sunday in his pulpit crystallized in my case into a marginal note to all theology, which finally assumed a voluminous form of a complete commentary upon the Epistle to the Romans” (Karl Barth, “The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper, 1957), 101). After reading Franz Overbeck’s posthumous publications, along with philosophical works by Søren Kierkegaard and works by his brother Heinrich Barth, Barth decided in 1920 to write a revised commentary on Romans, which he completed in eleven months (Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn Hoskyns (New York: Oxford, 1969), 3-4; Busch 115-7). This second edition, essentially a second commentary, is often referred to in secondary literature as “Romans II.” It was Barth’s second-edition commentary that made him famous, because in this second edition Barth fully rethought the intellectual task of biblical exegesis in light of a clearer articulation of the “independent sovereignty” of God’s approach to humanity through the words of Scripture (cf. Busch, 119). In his second edition commentary, this freedom was especially articulated through recourse to paradox. Barth’s writing in “Romans II” was immediately received as something shocking, or even violent: the “bombshell in the playground of the theologians” (Karl Adam, “Die Theologie der Krisis,” *Hochland* 23:2 (1926): 271-86).

9 Martin Luther said that “every honest pastor’s and preacher’s mouth is Christ’s mouth, and his word and forgiveness is Christ’s word and forgiveness…we do well to call the pastor’s and preacher’s word when he preacheth, God’s Word. For the office is not the pastor’s or the preacher’s, but God’s.” Quoted in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: T&T Clark, 1955), 98-140. Hereafter abbreviated to “CD I/1.”

apostolic authorship of scripture and in the preaching of the Word in the present. This offers a deeply theocentric understanding of scripture and preaching: ultimately a theocentric understanding of the liturgy. Handing on the Word always in some way involves God speaking, even though there are humans doing the speaking. While awareness of this mystery of God’s act of being revealed through human words is present in Aquinas, it is understated in his thought, and underrepresented in Thomist theology.

While Barth, like Aquinas, seems to allow for some role of human words in handing on the Word of God, I have chosen to work with Barth along with Aquinas because he also raises some key theological questions about such mediation. First of all, Barth understood this mediation to take place in an “actualist” manner: by this I mean that God’s work of speaking through Scripture or through the preaching of the gospel does not depend on some inherent quality that these possess. Rather, God enacts revelation by a divine act in each instance.12 Secondly, we must note that, as a twentieth century Protestant pastor and theologian, Barth did not see dogmas as binding. Barth thought that the only binding dogma for Christian theologians is the “dogma” (in the sense of “proclamation”) of the name “Jesus Christos.”13 Vigorous debate has appeared

12 George Hunsinger observes that Barth’s “actualism” is a “motif” in his theology wherein Barth “emphasizes the sovereign activity of God in patterns of love and freedom – not only in God’s self-relationship, but in relationship to others.” George Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology (New York: Oxford, 1991), 30. This “actualism” involves denying the possibility of an “ahistorical” relationship to God (based in natural theology, understanding God’s being in “static or inactive terms” separate from God’s free revealing act). Instead, “our relationship to God must be understood in active, historical terms, and it must be a relationship given to us strictly from the outside” (31). Henri Bouillard, an early Catholic interpreter of Barth, describes this gist of this “actualism” well: “Même communiqué, Dieu n’est jamais possédé: toujours objet d’espérance, toujours à venir, sa présence est à chaque instant un future éternel” (Henri Bouillard, Karl Barth: Genèse et Évolution de la Théologie Dialectique volume I (Montaigne, 1957), 259).

13 “The answer of the New Testament to our question about the reality of God’s revelation is to be found in the constant reiteration in all its pages of the name Jesus Christ. This name is God’s revelation, or to be more exact, the definition of revelation arising out of revelation itself, taken from it and answering to it.” Barth, CD I/2, 10. See also CD I/1, 307-309. In a phrase which Barth himself notes can sound misleading, Barth calls dogma an “eschatological concept.” Barth, CD I/1, 309. Dogma is eschatological because of
in recent years on the question of how much Barth’s theology agrees with the classical
doctrinal formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon.\textsuperscript{14} Thirdly, related to these, Barth raised
questions throughout his \textit{Church Dogmatics} about the notion of sacramental mediation in
general. For instance, in the final part-volume of his \textit{Church Dogmatics} (IV/4), Barth
remarks that there is no possibility of human cooperation in the sacraments being a means
of grace.\textsuperscript{15} The sacraments of the Church, and by implication scripture and the Church’s

\textsuperscript{14} Representing a particular take on Barth, Bruce McCormack seeks to better understand the realization of
God as Trinity in God’s economic relations with human beings, drawing on Barth’s principles but moving
to a conclusion that Barth himself never endorsed. McCormack argues that if Barth had followed his logic
more thoroughly he would have seen the modes of being of the Son and Spirit in God as aspects of God’s
decision in eternity to enter into covenant relationship with human beings, rather than forming part of
God’s eternally Triune being. Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election
in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology” in \textit{Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth}
(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 183-200; “Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology: Just How “Chalcedonian”
Is It?” in \textit{Orthodox and Modern}, 201-233. McCormack’s account protects God’s freedom and
transcendence by grounding the self-giving revelation of God in Jesus Christ in God’s eternal decision to
choose Jesus as the subject of election. In dialogue with the language of Aquinas’s Trinitarian theology,
McCormack suggests that he has made the Trinitarian “missions” the goal of the “processions.” Cf. Bruce
McCormack, “Processions and Missions: A Point of Convergence between Thomas Aquinas and Karl
White and Bruce McCormack, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2013), 99-126. The advantage of
McCormack’s account is that it brings greater simplicity and coherence to Barth’s Trinitarian theology. The
question, though, is whether Barth, who was always more concerned that the Church speak rightly of Christ
than resolve its proclamation into a coherent system, would have been pleased with McCormack’s
understanding of the relationship between Christology and Trinity: George Hunsinger and others, for
instance, argue he would not have. Cf. George Hunsinger, “Election and Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on
the Theology of Karl Barth (Revised)” in \textit{Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth
and Related Themes} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 32-55; \textit{Reading Barth with Charity: A
Hermeneutical Proposal} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015). See also Paul Molnar, \textit{Faith, Freedom, and the
Spirit: the Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance, and Contemporary Theology} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP
Academic, 2015). Hunsinger’s reading of Barth describes his position as approximating Nicaea and
Chalcedon, along with Aquinas and the Reformed tradition: the Word, who proceeds from the Father for all
eternity, elected to be Incarnate in Christ at the beginning of time.

\textsuperscript{15} Rather than seeing baptism as an act of God accomplished by the instrumentality of the sacrament, Barth
sees baptism, in CD IV/4, as “the human action whose meaning is obedience to Jesus Christ and hope in
him” (Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV/4, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and T. F.
Torrance (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004), 105). While baptism, as a response to Christ’s grace, is an
important part of Christian salvation, it is only a human action in response to a previous offer of grace in
Christ: “water baptism which is given by the community and desired and received by the candidates is the
human action which corresponds to the divine action in the founding of the Christian life” (Ibid., 105).
Barth thus sees baptism as a kind of prayer or oath called forth by the salvific initiative of Christ (Ibid.,
preaching, can only be a human response, through an essential response, to God’s unmerited favor. When we read Aquinas and Barth together, the question arises: what role does the mediation of human words really play in the work of the Triune God in saving human beings?

*The Doctrinal Framework for Considering the Word’s Presence in Human Words*

What makes the words of scripture and Christian teaching and preaching uniquely powerful? For both Aquinas and Barth, believers encounter God through scripture, doctrine, and preaching because these are ultimately words about the incarnate Word Jesus, who is “the way, the truth, and the life.” When we turn to the discussions of Aquinas and Barth on handing on the Word in words, we find that their accounts of Christ as the divine and human Word, or Son, influence their accounts of God’s presence in scripture, doctrine, and preaching. Since the Word of God became human and spoke in human words, human words about Christ must, in some way, connect us to his mediatory role as the incarnate Word.

How can the Church’s teachers speak about God if “God is unspeakable?” Augustine summarizes well the tension between the divine Word and human words, asking “have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel

16 The issue of Barth’s critical comments on baptism and its implications for preaching and ecclesial mediation as a whole are analyzed, with reference to Yves Congar as a Catholic interlocutor, in Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, xi-xxii, 171-183. The Protestant theologian Eberhard Jüngel saw CD IV/4 as an implicit “de-sacramentalizing” of preaching (as well as baptism, the volume’s explicit focus) that amounts to a substantial change from Barth’s Doctrine of the Word of God in CD I, through Yocum notes that this is a contentious reading. Eberhard Jüngel, “Thesen zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe,” *Barth-Studien* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1982), 291, discussed in Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, xiii.
that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say.” Nonetheless God saves human beings through the “foolishness of preaching.” Christians can speak about God because God has given his Word through the Prophets and ultimately through Jesus Christ and the apostolic testimony to Christ in scripture.

The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople declared and reaffirmed this “Word” and “Son,” Jesus of Nazareth, to be “homoousios” with the Father. The Council of Nicaea (along with the Council of Constantinople) thus relates to the question of the transmission of the Word of God in human words in a twofold way: it asserts that Jesus (the Word) is of the same nature as the Father, and it suggests that the Church has recourse to unbiblical words in preaching and teaching scripture in explaining the meaning of its testimony to the incarnate Word.

The Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon, and its ongoing reception in later theology, also plays a major role in this question of the mediation of the Word in human words. The Council of Chalcedon declared that Jesus is divine and

---

18 Ibid., I.13 (p. 10).
19 Cf. Ibid., I. 24-26 (p. 13-14).
20 Out of an understanding of the Father as essentially being “unbegotten,” Eunomius argued that the Son and the Father are unlike in essence, or, as Khaled Anatolios suggests, united in will rather than in being. Khaled Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 69-79; Gilles Emery, The Trinity: An Introduction to the Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 63. In response, the first Council of Constantinople reaffirmed Nicaea’s use of the unbiblical term “homoousios” as making scripture’s description of Christ explicit “by avoiding with firmness and precision the error of those who rejected the true divinity of the Son” (Emery, Trinity, 73).
21 For Catholic theologians, the dogmatic constitution Dei Verbum makes the link between Chalcedonian doctrine and the basis of the Church’s divine and human witness to Christ in teaching and preaching Scripture explicit: “the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.” Dei Verbum 13. For a discussion of Aquinas’s understanding of biblical inspiration and divine revelation in dialogue with Dei Verbum, see Leo Elders, Sur les traces de saint Thomas d’Aquin théologien: Étude de ses commentaires bibliques, Thèmes theologiques (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009), 13-35. Both Aquinas and Barth presume that the presence of Christ in the Church’s human work of handing on the Word has a “dogmatic analogy” in Chalcedon. Guy Mansini discusses this dogmatic analogy in Aquinas in “Ecclesial Mediation of Grace and Truth,” The Thomist 75 (2011): 555-83. As Guy Mansini
human, “unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures.”

The Christological controversy that was resolved by this Christological declaration in 451 turned on questions about how to preach Christ and how to interpret Scripture. The Archbishop of Constantinople Nestorius, following the example of his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia, solved difficult problems in interpreting scripture by insisting on “two subjects” in Christ, the divine Logos and Christ’s human nature. This “two subjects”

notes, the instrumentality of the Church, which involves sinful human beings, is different from the instrumentality of Christ’s human will, although these two “instrumentalities” are closely connected:

[T]he humanity of Christ mediates the person of Christ to us, and of this mediation, too, we are confident, because the Son subsists in the humanity of Jesus (Chalcedon), and the humanity of Jesus is his instrument, and he is united to it in and according to his hypostasis (Constantinople II). To listen to the man Jesus or to be touched by him is therefore to listen to and to be touched by the Son of God. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 2:5). The Church, however, is not consubstantial with God, nor is the Church, even as the mystical body of Christ, the conjoined instrument of the Word of God, as is the humanity of Jesus. The humanity of Christ, because it is the instrument of the Word, cannot be a principle of sin, nor could Christ be mistaken in his human mind about his identity and mission or fail to communicate it accurately and successfully. But Christians, who make up the Church, the people of God, for all that they are members of the body can still sin, and can fall into error about the things of God and his Christ. (Mansini, “Ecclesial Mediation of Grace and Truth,” 558.)

In CD I/2, Barth establishes an explicit Chalcedonian analogy regarding the presence of the divine Word in the human words of Scripture, helpfully analyzed by Paul Dafydd Jones in “The Heart of the Matter: Karl Barth’s Christological Exegesis” in Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 173-179.


23 Cf. Frances Young, From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background (London: SCM Press, 2010), 270. See also Edward T. Oakes, Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 137-141. For instance, Theodore offers statements like the following: “he [Christ] had an inclination beyond the ordinary toward nobler things because of his union with God the Logos, of which also he was deemed worthy by the foreknowledge of God the Logos, who united him to himself from above.” Theodore of Mopsuestia, On the Incarnation, Fragment 3, in Richard Norris, Jr., ed. The Christological Controversy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 118. Elsewhere he speaks of “God the Logos” uniting “Jesus with himself,” urging the human Jesus “on toward a larger perfection” (On the Incarnation, Fragment 5, in Norris, 119). John O’Keefe also sees the Christological controversy as fundamentally exegetical. As he puts it, “Cyril wanted to say that when philosophy and the biblical narrative conflict, preference ought to be given to the biblical narrative. The Antiochenes tended to do the reverse. In practical terms, this means that Cyril’s christological expression appeared dangerously “theopaschite” to his Antiochene antagonists.” John J. O’Keefe, “Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology,” Theological Studies 58 (1997): 41. Cyril’s emphasis on the unity of Christ is a much better fit to the idioms Scripture itself uses to describe the Son’s work of salvation than that of Theodore: “since, however, the body that had become his own [the Word’s] underwent suffering, he is—once again—said to have suffered these things for our sakes, for the impassible One was within the suffering body…God’s Logos is by nature immortal and incorruptible and Life and Life-giver, but since, as Paul says, “by the grace of God” his very own body “tasted death on behalf of every person” [Heb 2:9], he himself is said to have suffered this death which came about on our account.”
exegesis led Nestorius to claim, in a fiery sermon, that calling Mary the “Mother of God” was false and an embarrassment for Christianity.  

In arguing against Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria articulated a clear rationale for proclaiming that Christ is really the Son of God who is “consubstantial with the Father,” even though Christ is fully and truly human. In “becoming flesh” (John 1:14), the person of the Word assumed human nature, not being transformed into a human being, not transforming the human being into something divine, but coming to exist, as the Word, simultaneously as divine and human. Christ’s human teachings and human actions can therefore be understood, on Cyril’s logic, to in some way share in the divine Word’s teachings and actions, because the divine Word emptied himself and spoke and taught humanly by his words and actions.

In response to Cyril’s defense of the Church’s title for Mary as “theotokos,” a defense offered on this Christological basis, the Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned Nestorius’s teaching, but without offering a precise dogmatic formula as the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople had done. Controversy sprouted over the interpretation of Cyril’s Christological legacy after he died in 444: Eutyches and Dioscorus, the latter Cyril of Alexandria, “Second Letter to Nestorius” in Richard Norris, Jr., ed. The Christological Controversy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 133-4. 


Cyril’s arguments against Nestorius ultimately had a sacramental focus: Christ must be one divine and human Son in order for the share in his baptism and the participation in Christ’s saving flesh in the Eucharist to have any salvific benefit. Cyril observes that Nestorius cannot give an account of how Christ’s flesh, the flesh of the Eucharist, can be “life-giving.” He states, referencing John 6:51, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven,” that “if the Word’s flesh is the flesh of a different son than him,” Nestorius’s approach to Christ threatens the “great mystery of piety” in the Eucharist. Cyril of Alexandria, On the Unity of Christ, 131-2. See also McGuckin, Cyril, 187-188. Daniel Keating explains the connection between the sacraments, Christology, and salvation with reference to Cyril’s commentary on John in “Divinization in Cyril: The Appropriation of Divine Life” in The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation, Weinandy and Keating, eds. (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 149-185.
being Cyril’s successor as patriarch of Alexandria, emphasized that Christ only has one nature after the incarnation.\(^{27}\) Responding to this controversy, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 affirmed, drawing on the Christology of Leo the Great (although the extent of Leo’s influence on Chalcedon is a topic of contemporary debate), that the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ is not an erasure of Christ’s full humanity: Christ’s humanity is a humanity like ours, only that it is now the Word’s humanity.\(^{28}\) Leo argued that the “characteristic properties of both natures and substances are kept intact and come together in one person.”\(^{29}\)

Chalcedon’s Christological definition furnishes a certain “logic” for the Church’s understanding of the presence of the Word: God works through human realities, such as the sacraments or the words of Scripture or the preaching of the Church, these realities, while used as divine instruments, still retain their proper createdness, their humanness, and their humility, just as the Word is “spoken” in the incarnate Christ without any lessening of his divinity.

\(^{27}\) There was a controversial second council in Ephesus in 449, called the “robber council” by Pope Leo because of open hostility by Dioscorus to his opponents. Cf. McGuckin, *Cyril*, 227-243. While Cyril’s chief concern was the affirmation of a “single subjectivity,” he affirmed this using a formula that had problematic connotations for the Antiochenes, which described Christ as having “one nature” (“\(*m*ia \varphi*ysis*”). While he saw this formula as correct, later on in life he came to realize its potential for misuse (cf. McGuckin, *Cyril*, 207-212). While Cyril would surely have supported Chalcedon, there was a reason Eutyches argued as he did.


\(^{29}\) Pope Leo I, “Letter to Flavian,” in Richard Norris, Jr., ed. *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 148. This does not lessen the profound mystery of the emptying of Philippians 2:5-11, in fact it preserves it: “lowliness is taken on my majesty, weakness by power, mortality by eternity.” Ibid., 148. It was thought by most that Cyril’s Christology was represented by Chalcedon’s Christological definition, though not all could agree: the separation of the so-called “Oriental Orthodox” was Chalcedon’s price. Andrew Louth, “Why did the Syrians Reject the Council of Chalcedon?” in *Chalcedon in Context*, Richard Price and Mary Whitby, eds. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 108-9. This owed much to political reasons as much as theological ones. For more on Chalcedon’s reception see Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, 71-75.
Aquinas’s Theology of the Word

Thomas Aquinas’s theology of the Word is influenced by his context as a thirteenth-century scholastic Master of theology and a Dominican friar. This means that Aquinas takes the teachings of the Councils as an authoritative and dogmatically binding mediation of the Word; they are a sign and fruit of the Church’s visible unity in the truth of faith under the guidance of the Spirit.30 For Aquinas, God is the Truth, and the Son or Word can rightly be called God’s “Wisdom,” since the Son “is designated Word in that he does possess and express fully the entire truth of who the Father is.”31 Aquinas then argues that the Truth, the Wisdom and Word of God, has become human in Christ: this is the central message of the gospel that must be preached to the whole world. The acts and sufferings of Christ’s humanity reveal the truth about God, and therefore the doctrinal statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon are central to understanding the gospel of the crucified Christ.

By way of the Eastern Fathers, most importantly John of Damascus, Chalcedon furnished Aquinas with a logic of the instrumentality of human agents. Just as Christ’s human mind and will are instrumental in our salvation, so the human minds and wills of the preachers of the Church and the ministers of the Sacraments are the ways that God

chooses to turn human beings to life in Christ in the Church. Aquinas uses the language of instrumental causality – the language Aquinas uses to explain how the Sacraments join believers to Christ – extensively when talking about the transmission of the faith.

Aquinas saw himself and other preachers and teachers of the Church, past and present, as participating in this revelation of God in the humanity of Christ through his human words of preaching and teaching. God proposes the truths of faith to most people not by direct inspiration, but by speaking through human teachers. Aquinas’s discussion of the cause of faith in the Summa theologiae, inspired by Paul, references the “preachers of the faith” as the way most people hear the things to be believed in faith (cf. Romans 10:14-17). As is to be expected for a thinker of significance to the development of Catholic theology, Aquinas’s understanding of his mission as a teacher and preacher was deeply ecclesial. The apostolic authorship of Scripture is a kind of “preaching,” for Aquinas, in the sense that the Apostles were handing on Christ’s doctrine in written form.

Preaching is an important way one participates in the Word, participates in Christ, for Aquinas. After all, he was a member of an “Order of Preachers.” He regularly gave sermons and conferences as part of his role as a University Master. This aspect of the “unknown Thomas,” Thomas as preacher, is (surprisingly) largely in its infancy as a topic.

---


34 Soujeole, “Mystère de la predication,” 358.

35 ST II-II. 6. 1.

36 ST III. 42. 4.
for historians and theologians. Yet Aquinas saw giving sermons as but one way to be a preacher. Teaching in the form of works like the *Summa theologiae* or through biblical commentaries is another way. Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* attempts to hand on the Word in a way that “briefly and clearly” [*breviter ac dilucide*] presents the whole of Christian teaching required for salvation.\(^{37}\) The *Summa theologiae* seems to have been meant especially to give Dominicans a synthetic theology fitted for a life of preaching, teaching, and hearing confessions.\(^{38}\) More deeply, Aquinas saw teaching as sharing in God’s *doctrina* in Jesus Christ: by the ministry of teachers “the light of divine wisdom flows down into the minds of students.”\(^{39}\) Teaching, even in speculative works like the *Summa theologiae*, is a theological event for Aquinas and shares in the same mystery as preaching (in that human beings are being used by God as instruments to join other human beings to himself). Aquinas also saw his work as a biblical commentator as a kind of preaching, in terms of handing on divine truth: words that speak truly about the Word.

In his inaugural lecture as a Master in Paris, Aquinas commends Sacred Scripture for its “authority,” “eternal truth,” and “usefulness,” identifying his work as a University Master with handing on and expositing the Bible.\(^{40}\) Aquinas saw his work as a commentator as

---

\(^{37}\) ST I. Prologue, see also I.1.1.


\(^{39}\) Thomas Aquinas, Inaugural Lecture (1256) in *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings*, Simon Tugwell, ed. (New York: Paulist, 1988), 355

\(^{40}\) Thomas Aquinas, “The Inaugural Sermons” in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, Ralph McInerny, ed. and trans. (New York: Penguin, 1988), 5-17. As Christopher Baglow observes, for Aquinas, sacred doctrine and Scripture exist in a “perichoretic” relation, because scripture especially hands on the *veritas* of the Son: the fact that the words of Scripture are human words makes them a *way* which the human mind can traverse; the fact that these human words contain divine revelation makes them the medium of divine truth as well as salvation... just as Scripture follows and participates in the pattern of the Incarnation, so to break scriptural revelation away from later articulations would be parallel to a static separation of Christ’s presence in human history in his life and death, and his ongoing presence in the Church in his resurrection (Christopher Baglow, “Sacred Scripture and Sacred
Commenting on Scripture is thus a kind of participation in God’s “economic” work of revealing truth to the Church. This understanding of biblical commentary was not unique to Aquinas, but a part of his scholastic context, and the calling of every *Magister in sacra pagina*. Biblical commentary was the primary work of the Masters, although the Masters also produced commentaries on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* as well as their own *Summae*.

**Barth’s Theology of the Word**

The understanding of Christ as the Word of God, God’s supreme and unsurpassable act of revelation, is a central motif in Barth’s theology. Barth states that the Word came to human beings as Jesus of Nazareth, revealing “himself as the person he

**Footnotes**

41 Prügl, “Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” 403.
42 In Aquinas’s “syllabus” for theology students, Aquinas emphasized lecturing on scripture (*lectio prima*) and saw the *Summa theologiae* as secondary work or teaching (*lectio secunda*), putting the Bible at the center of the Dominican curriculum he develops at Naples (M. Michèle Mulcahey, *First the Bow is Bent in Study:* Dominican Education before 1350 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 320-1). Aquinas’s commentaries are all lectures in the scholastic style. Scholastic biblical commentaries were a formalized academic genre. I should note that there were many synonyms which were in or out of fashion during the time from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries for what I am calling a “commentary.” On this cf. Nikolaus M. Häring, “Commentary and Hermeneutics” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 174-9. The genre of the scholastic commentary in Aquinas’s time featured both a “rigidly formalized structure” and “varying degrees of speculative originality” (Francesco del Punta, “The genre of commentaries in the Middle Ages and its relation to the nature and originality of medieval thought,” *Miscellanea mediaevalia* 26 (1996): 139). The origin of the medieval scholastic biblical commentary can be traced back to the philosophical commentaries of the late Greco-Roman world.
already is antecedently, even apart from this event, already in himself.”43 The Word must be a “mode of existence” of God (Barth’s preferred term for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit over “person”) because, on Barth’s logic, “who can reveal God except God himself?”44 Jesus is present today in the Church by means of the Bible’s witness, and the Church’s proclamation of that witness. However, Barth understands the capacity of the Bible and the Church to testify to the incarnate Word to have an “eventful and living character.”45

Barth’s theology of the Word has its origin in his reflection on the task of preaching while a pastor at Safenwil, and the following work of composing the two editions of his commentary on Romans. In his sermons, Barth sought to hand on the Word to his congregation at Safenwil in a fresh way, but he struggled with the theological question of how his words, as human words, could really speak of God.46 We can see him wrestling with this notion when we study his sermons. Barth explains that he wrote his commentary on Romans as “copy book exercises” for explaining his reflections on the difficulty of speaking of God to himself and to his friends.47 He wrote his extensively

44 Hunsinger, “Barth and some Protestant theologians,” 305.
46 In preaching, Barth found himself increasingly in “perplexity” over the message of the Bible itself, much less how to apply the Bible to the needs of his Safenwil congregation. Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 90. Barth observes, for instance, “once in the ministry, I found myself growing away from these theological habits of thought [formed by his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann] and being forced back at every point more and more upon the specific minister’s problem, the sermon.” Karl Barth, “The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching” in The Word of God and the Word of Man (New York: Harper, 1957), 100. Here Barth himself points to the genre of the sermon as generative, if not of theological insights, at least of theological questions and disruptions. Later Barth will say, in his first attempt at an organized presentation of Christian doctrine (the Göttingen Dogmatics) that dogmatics involves answering the questions “What will you say about God?” and “What will you say about God?” Karl Barth, The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 5-6. Cf. also Daniel Migliore’s Introduction to the Göttingen Dogmatics, xxi. See also William H. Willimon, Conversations with Barth on Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 10-13.
47 Busch, 98.
revised second edition commentary in order to address the problem of the dominance of historical-critical and Schleiermachian approaches to biblical exegesis. Both of these works, his sermons and his commentaries on Romans, are meant to hand on the Word in a new way, to point to Christ in a way that Barth thought had been forgotten among his contemporaries.

Barth’s sermons and his *Epistle to the Romans* emphasize that God is revealed and active through the human acts and sufferings of Jesus Christ. Barth saw his work in the genre of sermon and the genre of biblical commentary as handing on Christ by pointing to him, and away from modern false idols, by means of human words. But, for Barth, pointing to Christ is not pointing to some fulfillment of human potentiality, an apex of the human spirit or religious consciousness: in pointing to Christ, one is pointing to God. And since Christ is human, God can at least in some limited way be spoken of according to human categories, in reference to the mystery of Christ. This is Barth’s “Chalcedonian” approach to handing on the Word in his sermons and biblical commentaries.

Yet Barth continually agonized over the question of how the Church’s preachers can hand on Christ in human words, and which human words (dogmas) are important to this handing on. As Amy Marga has most recently shown, much fuel was added to this fire in Barth’s thought during his early years as a university professor by dialogue with Catholic theologians.48 We see the full fruit of this dialogue in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. There, partly in response to Catholic dogmatics as well as in response to liberal Protestant theology, Barth engages more fully with the Protestant tradition of

---

claiming that the preached and written Word of God is a way in which God is really present. The Church Dogmatics also features insightful dialogue with the Church Fathers and medieval Scholastics (Anselm and Aquinas in particular) on the Trinity, Christology, and revelation, an engagement which has been called a “paradigm” for “Protestant ressourcement.” Barth also enters into a long debate, which extends through the Church Dogmatics, with Lutheran and Reformed scholastic theology. In his Church Dogmatics, Barth states that God speaks this Word in the Church through human instruments, and he even has a role for tradition in testifying to the Word, suggesting that doctrinal tradition has some (limited) authority in the life of the Church. Yet Barth raises concerns about preachers in the present or the dogmatic tradition in the past being described as “mediating” God’s self-revelation: revelation, like salvation, must in some sense be a work attributed to God’s impartation alone.

49 Two compilations of Protestant scholastic theology influenced Karl Barth’s theology especially: one was by Heinrich Heppe, a compendium of Reformed scholasticism, and the other by Heinrich Schmid on Lutheran scholasticism (on their influence on Barth, cf. Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 154). Drawing on Johannes Heideggerus’s Corpus Theologiae, Heinrich Heppe explains that “the elect are called by another more potent means, the Word of God, not any word, but that one by which God becomes lovable to man the sinner. This word is the notification of the eternal testament or purpose of God, which He decreed to redeem the sinner in Christ” (Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics: Set out and Illustrated from the Sources, trans. G. T. Thompson, ed. Ernst Bizer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1978), 514). Yet Heppe notes, like the Helvetic confession, that at times God “calls some to Him only by the inner light and leading of the Holy Spirit without the ministry of His outward word” (Heppe, 515, quoting the Leiden Synopsis). Heinrich Schmid’s Doctrinal theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church states that the Holy Spirit’s work of saving and renewing human beings “operates only by the Word,” and thus that the Word of God has the capacity to bring human beings into a state of grace (Heinrich Schmid, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. Charles Hay, Henry Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1876), 516-517). Johannes Quenstedt argued that Word and Sacrament (with sacrament being a “visible word”) are “means” of attaining salvation, or means of grace (quoted in Schmid, 517).


51 As Barth observes: “the Word of God is the speech, the act, the mystery of God, and so not a substance immanent to the Church apart from the event of its being spoken and believed, or discoverable and demonstrable in her…the Church is not constantly, continuously, the Church of Jesus Christ, but such she is in the event of the Word of God being spoken to her and believed by her” (Barth, CD I/1, 299). Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a helpful discussion of this point in Divine Discourse, 63-74.
The Plan of This Work: Theology and Genre

In this dissertation I will analyze and compare the theological understanding of the Word of God in Aquinas and Barth as it appears in three genres: biblical commentary, dogmatic theology, and sermons. All three genres are needed for a full portrait of their accounts of the Word, because each of these three genres represent key theological “moments” of the Church’s hearing of the Word.

The Word himself, becoming incarnate, handed on truths about himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit to his disciples by “opening the Scriptures” for them and fulfilling the Old Testament (Luke 24:32). The genre of biblical commentary involves joining Jesus’ disciples in hearing and expositing this prophetic (and apostolic) Word of Christ. Yet even in the time of the New Testament, the biblical authors were passing on teachings of Christ accompanied by short statements of faith or creedal formulas (i.e., Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:3, Romans 10:9). These formulas summarized Christian teaching and were meant to guide the Church’s preaching and interpretation of scripture. Scripture requires interpretation, especially when errors or debates over its interpretation arise: thus theological works analyzing the Church’s doctrine as a whole play a crucial part in hearing and handing on the Word of Christ in scripture. Jesus commissioned his disciples in the New Testament to go out and preach the gospel (i.e., Matthew 10:1-11:1, 28:16-20). The book of Acts offers vivid accounts of apostolic preaching, which involved exegesis of the Old Testament (Acts 2:14-36). Moreover, Acts suggests that God is present and active by the power of the Holy Spirit when Jesus’ disciples testify about him (Acts 10:44-48).
These three genres, then, have a special interrelation. Biblical commentary responds to the scriptural Word by reading individual inspired texts closely, dogmatic theology seeks to respond to the “Word” as a whole (both the whole of scriptural revelation, but also the Word as mediated by doctrines, traditions, liturgies and practices), and sermons seek to bring about a response to a brief passage from scripture, read in light of the Christian message as a whole (dogmatics), in a congregation of hearers. And each of these, in some way, denotes a “Chalcedonian” reality in the sense of involving both human and divine acts, as human words participate in or testify to the Word of God as an event in the Church in a special way in these three genres.

These genres do not exhaust the full range of literary forms available to Aquinas and Barth. Aquinas wrote scholastic disputations and philosophical commentaries and Barth did not, while Barth wrote academic essays in the style of the German-speaking academy of his time and Aquinas did not. Yet these other genres do not represent particularly Christian responses to the Word like the genres of biblical commentary, dogmatic theology, and sermons, and, furthermore, are not present in all periods of Christian history like these three. These three genres, in which both Aquinas and Barth wrote extensively, provide an important means of comparison for examining their theological accounts of the Word of God and its relationship to human words.

1. Biblical Commentaries

Because Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is a humanly written but divinely inspired “word” of God, we come in contact with human words that hand on the
incarnate Word most intensely when we approach scripture. Aquinas and Barth both hold, though in different ways of understanding biblical inspiration, that scripture has primacy as a way in which the Word of God is present. Scripture, as the written Word of God, is the basis and source of theology and preaching. Scripture is a crucial way the Word testifies to himself using human words. What role do we find that human (or ecclesial) mediation plays here?

We are fortunate to have extensive exegetical works by Aquinas and Barth. We have an overlap between the two in their commentaries on Romans: both wrote important works of theological exegesis on this book of the Bible, and we do not have a similar instance regarding another book (except perhaps Philippians). In the commentaries on Romans offered by Aquinas and Barth, Christology not surprisingly plays a central role. To analyze the logic of the approaches to the Word in the words of scripture in Aquinas and Barth, I will examine their commentaries on Romans in chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

In my first chapter, I will analyze Aquinas’s understanding of scripture as mediating the Word of God in a human way. In Aquinas’s account, Paul’s individual experience of divine grace and his work of carrying the name of Christ in his life and in his letters is what makes Romans the kind of letter it is. Aquinas’s commentary on

---

Romans is essentially about concentric spheres of mediation or words handing on the Word: the way Paul as an Apostle hands on the Word, the way preachers and commentators hand on the words of Paul in the present, and, ultimately, the way that the Word speaks through the “words” of his acts and sufferings as ways of bringing about redemption which are fitting to human beings. The various words in Paul participate humanly in the visible mission, the “speaking” in the “language” of human nature, of the eternal Word in becoming flesh.

In my second chapter, I will show how Barth, in the process of exegeting Romans, finds that the crucial “Word” offered by Paul to his time as well as ours is the notion that human words, including scriptural words, stand under a *krisis* of judgment when they are compared with the existential Word of Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul’s witness to Christ, as a part of scripture, is determined by the eschatological knowledge and expectation brought about by the event of the Word incarnate. This insight into the authoritative Word of scripture drives Barth’s theology in all other genres. His dogmatic theology in the *Church Dogmatics*, for instance, takes its bearings from an

A major aspect of the genre of the biblical commentary in Aquinas’s time is the practice of *divisio textus*. Aquinas uses this method to find an ordered arrangement in Paul’s corpus as a whole, an arrangement which relates to my point here: Aquinas says that the Pauline corpus has an overall structure. Aquinas says that Paul’s letters are entirely about “Christ’s grace,” but that Paul considers this grace in three ways. In the letter to the Hebrews, Paul considers Christ’s grace in himself as Head of the Church. Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Fabian Larcher (Ave Maria, Florida: Aquinas Center for Theological Renewal), 11. Paul considers Christ’s grace as it relates to “Prelates” in the Church in 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul considers Christ’s grace as it relates to Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church, in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Each of these divisions feature further division. For the third group of letters, on Christ’s grace as it relates to Christ’s mystical body, Paul divides the letters as follows: In Romans, Paul discusses grace in itself, in 1 and 2 Corinthians, he discusses grace “as it exists in the Sacraments of the church,” and in Galatians, Paul rejects the ideas of “certain men who wanted to join the old sacraments to the new ones.” Paul discusses the unity of the mystical body in Ephesians and Philippians, the unity of the body in regard to error and persecution in Colossians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and so on. For more on this technique, see John Boyle, “The Theological Character of the Scholastic “Division of the Text” with Particular Reference to the Commentaries of Saint Thomas Aquinas” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
account of scripture’s authority. It is useful, therefore, to begin by examining Barth’s most significant work of biblical exegesis—wrestling with the authoritative written Word—before turning to examine how Barth understands this Word in other genres. For Barth, the goal of biblical commentary is to avoid turning aside from scripture’s uniquely inspired words about the Word—and thus turning away from the Word—to an idol of one’s own making (our constant temptation as we, human preachers and teachers, attempt to proclaim the sole incarnate Word). The task of commenting on scripture, then, is to try to point readers towards God’s authoritative act of speaking, and to point to the various errors made by human words in the past in speaking about Christ, showing how human words are already under judgment in light of Christ as witnessed to by Paul. However, Barth suggests that this exegetical task of pointing readers to the words itself involves a certain degree of “creative energy,” creative work which he finds to be typical of Martin Luther’s biblical commentaries, for instance.\(^5\)

2. Dogmatic Theology

Can human beings give synthetic or coherent structure to the many different words used in the Church’s interpretation and proclamation of biblical revelation? Why and how can the Church faithfully use unbiblical words or frameworks for understanding the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ? These are the central questions I will explore in my chapters on the dogmatic works of Aquinas and Barth.

While these works of “dogmatic theology” by Aquinas and Barth have different aims and structures, I find them nonetheless comparable. In fact, as Hans Urs von

\(^5\) Barth, *Epistle*, 7.
Balthasar has observed, while Aquinas and Barth write in very different contexts, surprisingly similar themes abound in these works: “the accent in both theologies falls on treatises on the one God, on creation and its exaltation, on divine conservation and providence and especially on ethics and eschatology…and they focus on a Christ (more Pauline and Johannine than Synoptic) who in every way is related to this cosmos.”

Nonetheless, Aquinas does not use the term “dogmatic theology,” which was a later development, and instead uses the term *sacra doctrina* to describe his work in the *Summa theologiae*. Aquinas’s goal in his *Summa theologiae* is to offer an organized presentation of *sacra doctrina*, or the truths revealed by God necessary for salvation. Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, on the other hand, offers a “self-test” of the Church’s preaching and teaching in light of the Word of God, which for Barth is not only the written Word of scripture, but also ways in which this Word has been revealed in the Church through preaching aided by the Holy Spirit.

In my third chapter, I will show that one goal Aquinas had in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae* was to show how the Church’s teaching in human words is a mediation of salvation that participates in Christ’s unique mediation. Aquinas argues that by their words, the Church’s teachers can participate in the divine Word’s act of teaching and saving. In this process, Aquinas develops an account of Christ as a unique prophet and mediator who, as divine and human, is the source of the Church’s grace and knowledge of the truth when members of the Church are united to him by the sending of the Holy Spirit. I will show that Aquinas is presenting an account of the words of the

---

55 Cf. ST I. Prologue, I.1.1 and 2.
56 Barth, CD I/1, 2-3; on the threefold Word CD I/1, 98-140. For his discussion of dogmatics as a practical rather than speculative science, see CD I/1, 310-315.
Church’s doctrines—including scripture as doctrine—as joining human beings to Jesus, when faith is present, giving them real knowledge of him and allowing them to participate in his prophetic office by grace. On this basis, Aquinas understands the Church to authoritatively interpret scripture when it makes a doctrinal declaration regulating its interpretation.

In my fourth chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Barth understands the Word to be both present in and transcendent over the Church’s human words in his discussion of the Word of God in his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* volume I/2 surveys human words in the Church, particularly biblical, doctrinal, and homiletic words, in light of the theology of the Word and theology of the Trinity which Barth develops at the core of *Church Dogmatics* I. Barth’s retrieval of the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for 20th-century Protestant theology plays a key role in this chapter, though I will also focus on Barth’s understanding of Chalcedon. Barth’s discussions of both the Trinity and Christology influence how he understands the divine and human Christ to be manifested by a divine action enlivening and empowering human doctrinal words in the Church.

3. Sermons

What might the sermons of Aquinas and Barth add to my study? Aquinas’s academic sermons, most likely given to Dominican novices, offer a portrait of Aquinas’s understanding of theological education as growth in the Word which I take to be crucial
to understanding his theology of the Word in its fullness. Aquinas offers a portrait of theological learning as a participation in the dynamism of the Word’s mission in becoming incarnate in the world in these sermons, a portrait which is not clearly stated in his other works. Barth holds that theological reflection is concerned essentially with the “Sunday sermon.” If this is the case, it suggests that reading his own sermons is worthwhile for giving a full account of his theology of the Word of God in human words. In Barth’s case omitting study of his preaching is a significant lacuna not only for this reason, but also because Barth saw his preaching as useful for others beyond the immediate contexts in which he preached: published collections of sermons were one of Barth’s earliest publishing ventures, and he published his sermons throughout his life.

Aquinas’s sermons were relatively understudied until recent works by J.-P. Torrell and F. C. Bauerschmidt emphasizing the light they cast on Aquinas’s overall theological project. Vivian Boland has discussed Aquinas’s sermons in relation to developing a particularly Dominican approach to theological education as well. Cf. J.-P. Torrell, “The Sower went Out to Sow: the Image of Christ as Preacher in Friar Thomas Aquinas” in Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. Bernard Blakenhorn (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 159-173; Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ (New York: Oxford, 2013); Vivian Boland, “Truth, Knowledge, and Communication: Thomas Aquinas and the Mystery of Teaching.” Studies in Christian Ethics 19 (2006): 287-304; and idem., “St Thomas’s sermon Puer Iesus: a neglected source for his understanding of teaching and learning.” New Blackfriars 88 (2007): 457-470. The relative neglect of his sermons by scholars is understandable at least on one level: Aquinas did not prepare edited versions of his sermons as he did with his biblical commentaries, and the task of establishing the authenticity of the occasional sermons attributed to him has proven to be very difficult. Cf. Mark-Robin Hoogland, Introduction to Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 3-20. Nonetheless, there is actually a kind of advantage in this, which is noted by the editor of the English translation of Aquinas’s sermons. In these sermons we catch a glimpse of the “everyday,” unedited Aquinas going about his work as preacher and Master. Aquinas’s secretaries polished up his other sermons on the Lord’s Prayer and on the Ten Commandments, but not his occasional sermons. With Aquinas’s occasional academic sermons, touched less by the hands of editors, we have a “stylistically looser and livelier” Thomas, one focused on handing on the Word in a particular (spiritual, missional) context more than establishing a doctrinal pattern or framework for posterity (Hoogland, Introduction to Academic Sermons, 6).

Barth published his sermons together with those of his friend Eduard Thurneysen in 1917, as Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben (Seek God and You Will Live). Barth published two other volumes of sermons with Eduard Thurneysen, Komm, Schöpfer Geist! in 1924 (translated and published in English as Come, Holy Spirit in 1935) and Die grosse Barmherzigkeit in 1935 (published in English as God’s Search for Man in 1935). Barth published three more volumes of sermons by himself: Fürchte dich nicht in 1949, Den Gefangen Befreiung in 1959 (containing seventeen of his prison chapel sermons), and Rufe mich an! in 1965. At least parts of these three have English translations. The pastoral prayers from the sermons in Fürchte dich nicht are translated and published in Karl Barth, Fifty Prayers (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). Den Gefangenen Befreiung has been published (and republished) in
In my fifth chapter, I will show, drawing on Aquinas’s academic sermons, that Aquinas understands the work of preachers in handing on the Word in words as a kind of participation in the dynamism of deification, particularly a participation in the Son’s “going out” from the Father as a “visible” Word. Thus human words handing on the Word instrumentally teach and sanctify both preacher and listener. There are hints at this understanding in Aquinas’s discussions of the instrumentality of human words used by the Word in his Lectures on Romans and his Summa theologiae, but it is in his sermons that this understanding of the connection between handing on the Word and participating in the Word by grace and deification is made explicit. In his sermons, Aquinas explains how mediating the Word of God by the words of preaching leads to spiritual growth “in” the Word by learning his wisdom, and sharing in the Word’s loving desire to share truth with others. Preaching is not a matter of passively receiving the Word from God, but rather being called by the Word to acquire wisdom through study and to hand on this wisdom to others: preaching and hearing preaching are spiritual exercises by which believers come to participate in the Word’s incarnational mission and in the life of the Trinity. This participatory response is described by Aquinas in a way which seems to give a strong basis to his own Dominican mission, though, as is true with most of Aquinas’s other works, he does not explicitly refer to St. Dominic or his order (though he does speak of “preachers”). Preaching here is presented as a whole manner of life: Aquinas offers an ecclesiology and a spirituality centered on preaching in his sermons.

In my sixth chapter I will show that Barth’s sermons, in practice, place a strong emphasis on the cooperating work of the preacher’s words in handing on the Word.

Barth’s sermons thus offer a contrasting emphasis to his *Epistle to the Romans* and his *Church Dogmatics* in terms of the relationship between the Word and mediating human words. In a way that differs from my prior two chapters on Barth, in this chapter there is substantial commonality between Barth’s approach and that of Aquinas in the same genre (or roughly the same genre, given the differences between their contexts). On the basis of Barth’s sermons we can also say, as I suggest with Aquinas, that the preacher in Barth’s homiletics is cooperating with the divine Word through his or her human words. The task of the preacher is to find, with scripture as a guide, the human words, or aspects of human life and experience, which Christ has already assumed and transformed by his incarnation, life, and death and resurrection. In Barth’s sermons, this is done by studying the written words of Scripture theologically: looking for the contemporary “Word” or meaning Scripture has in its testimony to the incarnate Word Christ, how the historical testimony to Christ speaks to the needs and problems of the contemporary situation. Barth’s sermons emphasize the idea that the preached Word of God involves direct contact on the part of the congregation with the salvific work of Christ, brought about by the work of the preacher in pointing them to Christ’s work through Scripture.

*Comparing Aquinas’s and Barth’s Theologies of the Word*

The key question of my comparison of Aquinas and Barth in works in these three genres regards how the Word is at work in the Church’s human words of teaching about him. When the name of Christ is invoked in teaching and encouraging the faithful—in human words—how is he present? Does Christ act through the mediation of the merely
human teacher, and thus through the various media of scripture, tradition, and the teaching office of the Church? Or is the merely human teacher merely an occasion for the incarnate Word himself to speak?

For Aquinas, both in his theory and in his practice of handing on the truth of the incarnate Word, the Word of God is not spoken without a cloud of mediating human witnesses, including first and foremost the words of scripture, but also the words of various doctrinal statements of the Church and (of lesser authority, but necessary nonetheless) statements of Church Fathers and Doctors, preachers and ascetics. These mediating human voices all not only testify to the incarnate Word, but participate in God’s speaking of the Word in Christ to the whole human race. Aquinas offers an account of God’s revelation which affirms that the Church receives and hands on God’s incarnate Word as a whole body, animated and diversified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

---

60 Aquinas sees the whole process of revelation and its transmission, from the authorship of Scripture to the deliberations of Church Councils down to the humble sermon of a parish priest, as an extended process of sanctification and deification, involving divine and human cooperation and various forms of mediation making up a complex whole. The connection between Christian teaching and grace and deification in Aquinas is analyzed by Romanus Cessario in *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996); see esp. his introduction and pp. 62-76. Cf. also Daniel Keating, “Justification, Sanctification, and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, Weinandy, Keating, and Yocum, eds. (New York: T&T Clark 2004), 139-158. Keating suggests reading Aquinas’s discussion of the virtues in the *Secunda Pars* as “the most developed account in the Christian tradition of the possibilities for the divinization of our human nature in the present age” (155). On the role of the Sacraments in this process of sanctification and deification, see in the same volume Matthew Levering, “Aquinas on the Liturgy of the Eucharist,” 183-198.

(although Aquinas affirms that God is free to reveal himself directly to whomever God wishes to be revealed).  

Karl Barth also believes that God is revealed through the action of human words. From the words of Paul, to the words of Luther, to the words of the common parish minister’s sermon, God speaks by employing human words in the Church to testify to Jesus. However, Barth unlike Aquinas would not see human words as participating in God’s speaking his Word in Christ, rather testifying to this Word: Barth emphasizes the radical asymmetry of human words and the divine Word. His understanding of the Word in words can be seen as an application of the “unconfused, unaltered” clause of the Chalcedonian formula to thinking about handing on the Word in human words. Just as Christ’s divinity is not mixed with his humanity in the incarnate union, so also the Word exists and acts in an “unconfused, unaltered” way with the human words that hand him on. Human words do not hand on the Word, because the Word is present only by the Word’s sovereign choice to make himself present (by actualizing particular human words). Barth’s central conviction is that while God uses human instruments to proclaim this Word, it is still God who does the revealing through a special divine action, not the human intermediary. Barth’s actualism is an emphasis on God’s sovereignty, but it is also

---

62 Retrieving Aquinas’s richly communal account of handing on the Word thus is congruent with a major aspect of the ressourcement of patristic theology performed by the twentieth century theologians of the Nouvelle Theologie: the recovery of the notion that “Christianity is a communion.” See for instance Yves Congar, Tradition and Traditions, 241-3, and his discussion of the “ecclesiosphere” of faith in Ibid., 256.  
63 I borrow this Chalcedonian analogy from George Hunsinger in his review of D. Stephen Long’s Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Preoccupation:

Divine and human action are, as I argue in How to Read Karl Barth (Oxford, 1991), always related for Barth by means of the Chalcedonian pattern. They are related “without separation or division” (inseparable unity), “without confusion or change” (abiding distinction), and with an “asymmetrical ordering principle” (the absolute primacy and precedence belong always to God). Within this fundamental structure divine and human agency are non-competitive. For Barth, in line with the Reformation, Catholic views of divine and human agency regularly violate this stricture against confusion or change, and especially against compromising the principle of asymmetry. (George Hunsinger, Karl Barth Society Newsletter 50 (Spring 2015): 16.)
an affirmation of God’s freedom to speak to the Church in new ways and inspire new forms of faithfulness to the Word. Since, as Barth rightly notes, human words cannot exhaust the sovereign Word, there is always more of this Word to be heard, understood, and obeyed as the Church progresses throughout history.

Scholars have long been aware that there are differences between Aquinas and Barth with respect to the handing on of the divine Word in human words. The specific contribution of my dissertation, then, is to propose that studying the three genres enables us to understand these differences in a new light, by seeing how the chief concerns in these two theologies might be interrelated: ways that a Barthian perspective could find the mediation that is a part of Aquinas’s account congenial, ways that a Thomist perspective can be seen as “actualist” like that of Karl Barth. Such connections would have clear ecumenical value, since the major divisions between Catholics and Protestants today involve the question of the mediation of revelation by liturgy, tradition, and philosophy (regarding which Aquinas offers a typical Catholic instance), as well as the question of whether scripture can speak freshly or critically towards the Church and its traditions and institutions (regarding which Barth offers a typical Protestant instance).64

In my chapters I hope to present Barth’s actualist approach to revelation as, in

---

64 See Matthew Levering’s Catholic rejection of “ecclesiastical fall narratives,” which involves for him affirming and exploring “the missional, liturgical, and doctrinal forms of the Church’s mediation of divine revelation,” with a focus on scripture. Matthew Levering, Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3-4. The Baptist theologian James McClendon offers a Protestant account of scripture’s critical function in the life of the Church and in the Church’s doctrine similar to that which I take Barth to offer: “what if the [Christian] community’s common convictions betray the word of Scripture? Yet an adequate answer is available to anyone who has taken part in reading the Bible in the church. Whenever it speaks, its story not only supports and conserves, but challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves. God’s Spirit who breathed upon the writers of Scripture breathes also on us, sometimes harshly. The consequence is that our stubborn wills are turned, our blind eyes opened, our arhythmatic hearts set beating in tempo. This is not always immediate and is never without ugly exceptions, but it happens often enough to confirm our faith in the Author of the Book.” James McClendon, Systematic Theology Volume 2: Doctrine (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), 41.
part, a reception and intensification of a number of insights from scripture and tradition regarding the presence of the Word in words, something especially apparent when Barth’s work is approached in three genres. Some of these insights which appear in an intensified way in Barth’s project are cornerstones of Aquinas’s theology as well: this makes Barth an important dialogue partner for a Catholic theology of the Word. Nonetheless, I also hope to show that Barth, in the context of his work in the genre of biblical commentary and sermon, is more open to the forms of mediation that Aquinas emphasizes, yet without negating what I take to be important critical points made regarding the mediation of the Word in the *Church Dogmatics*. In sum, I aim to offer a Catholic theology of the Word which draws on what I take to be essential points on the mediation of the Word by human words from Aquinas, but which also draws on key insights from Protestant theology, leading to a theology of the Word which I hope can aid the preaching and teaching of scripture in both Catholic and Protestant communities.
CHAPTER ONE

AQUINAS’S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

Given the question of how Aquinas and Barth understand the Word incarnate to be handed on by human words, it is clear that scripture is the most significant instance of such handing on, since the human words of the biblical authors have been understood, from the outset of Christianity, to be “inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The dogmatic constitution Dei Verbum describes the “condescension” of the Word of God into human speech in scripture as an extension of the incarnation: it states that “the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.”

I argue in this chapter that the biblical commentaries of Thomas Aquinas provide theological resources for understanding and deepening this Christological analogy in Dei Verbum between the incarnation of the Word and the divinely inspired human words of the biblical authors. Aquinas believes that God speaks to the Church by means of ministers who, by participating in Christ’s body by grace in various ways, build up the

---

1 Second Vatican Council, “Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” § 13. Reference is made specifically to John Chrysostom. This incarnational analogy for scripture has been recently proposed as a framework for an evangelical engagement with historical biblical scholarship by Peter Enns in his book Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Press, 2005).
faith and charity of the Church by their words. The purpose of this participation of human beings in the mystical body of Christ by means of their words is to draw others further into their own fellowship with the Word (which is ultimately fellowship with the Trinity by faith, hope, and charity). The authors of scripture are given a share in Christ’s visible mission, and in this way the words of the biblical authors are an extension of the incarnation in Aquinas’s understanding.

Aquinas’s understanding of God’s inspiration of human words, including scripture, is not simply one of divine dictation, but of God’s enabling humans to speak and act with and in response to the initiative of divine grace in deeply personal ways.\(^2\) This is especially true in the case of Paul: I turn to Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans* to analyze Aquinas’s understanding of how God speaks through scripture and how God relates to the Church through scripture (my chapter on Aquinas’s *Summa theologicae*, on the other hand, will analyze how Aquinas understands God to speak through the Church in its mediation of scriptural doctrine).\(^3\)

Commenting on Romans leads Aquinas to reflect on the role of human agency in the process of scripture writing. Aquinas’s understanding of the Apostles’ role in writing scripture is Christocentric: the Apostles wrote and spoke of their experiences and knowledge of the teaching of Jesus Christ, which was imprinted on their hearts. Aquinas argues that the Apostles had a profound grasp of truth which they sought to hand on to others in virtue of their closeness to Christ (Bonino, “Role of the Apostles,” 341-346). As part of his teaching responsibilities, Aquinas wrote a number of biblical commentaries, including commentaries on Old Testament books like the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah, and a number of New Testament commentaries on John, Matthew, and Paul’s letters. Some of Aquinas’s commentaries survive in carefully prepared copies, while others exist only as “reportationes” or shorthand notes taken by students hearing his lectures. Some surviving texts of Aquinas’s biblical commentaries are *reportationes* which Aquinas himself went over and revised. Aquinas’s commentary on Romans is seen by many scholars as one of Aquinas’s best, along with his commentary on John. See the introduction to *Reading Romans with Saint Thomas*.

\(^2\) Leo Elders suggests that Aquinas’s understanding of Biblical inspiration is tied to his Aristotelian vision of human beings as social animals, needing mutual help in order to search for truth (*Sur les traces de saint Thomas d’Aquين theologien: Étude de ses commentaires bibliques, Thèmes theologiques* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009), 22). See also Serge-Thomas Bonino, “The Role of the Apostles in the Communication of Revelation according to the *Lectura super Ioannem* of St. Thomas Aquinas” in Levering and Dauphinais, eds., *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 318-346. In writing scripture, the Apostles presented the teaching of Christ, which itself was too noble to be committed to writing, to the Church (Aquinas, *Summa theologicae*, III. 42. 4). Aquinas thus has a rich understanding of the human agency of the Apostles, one that is nonetheless very Christocentric: scripture involves the work of the Holy Spirit in leading the Apostles to write and speak of their experiences and knowledge of the teaching of Jesus Christ, a teaching which was imprinted on their hearts. Aquinas argues that the Apostles had a profound grasp of truth which they seek to hand on to others in virtue of their closeness to Christ (Bonino, “Role of the Apostles,” 341-346).

\(^3\) As part of his teaching responsibilities, Aquinas wrote a number of biblical commentaries, including commentaries on Old Testament books like the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah, and a number of New Testament commentaries on John, Matthew, and Paul’s letters. Some of Aquinas’s commentaries survive in carefully prepared copies, while others exist only as “reportationes” or shorthand notes taken by students hearing his lectures. Some surviving texts of Aquinas’s biblical commentaries are *reportationes* which Aquinas himself went over and revised. Aquinas’s commentary on Romans is seen by many scholars as one of Aquinas’s best, along with his commentary on John. See the introduction to *Reading Romans with Saint Thomas*. 

35
on the nature of apostolicity and prophecy in relation to Christ, leading to insights not
found in Aquinas’s more systematic works, such as the *Summa theologiae*.4

To describe this unique account of the interrelation between Christology,
scripture, and apostolicity we find in Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans*, first I will examine
how Aquinas understands scripture as a whole in his commentary. Second, I will examine
Aquinas’s comments on the nature of Christ’s speaking through Paul, including
Aquinas’s Christological account of Paul’s life and mission as an Apostle. Third, I will
discuss the way Aquinas understands the Church’s doctrinal decisions to play a role in
this scriptural manifestation of truth, thus being essential for approaching scripture.
Fourth, I will discuss how Aquinas understands Christ to be salvifically present through
scriptural words, particularly the connection between Paul’s words and the unity of the

---

4 John Boyle suggests seeing the *Summa theologiae* as “lab work” and Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans* as
“field work,” that is, that the *Summa theologiae* is Aquinas’s development of “categories and distinctions”
needed to further explore the truths of the faith presented in “living form” by Paul in Romans. John Boyle,
“On the Relation of St. Thomas’s Commentary on Romans to the *Summa theologiae*” in *Reading Romans
with Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic
University of America Press, 2012), 81. The twentieth century saw considerable debate over when
Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans* were offered and the relationship between Aquinas’s commentary on
Romans and the theology of the *Summa theologiae*. The most recent scholarship suggests they were given
Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 250-7. If this dating is correct, then
we can see Aquinas’s commentary on Romans as a culmination of his lifetime of theological research. His
commentary on Romans benefits from his most mature speculative theology, since Aquinas was most likely
composing the later sections of the *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa theologiae* at the same time. Aquinas’s
commentary on Romans is not only valuable as a piece of theological exegesis, but also, scholars have
noted, offers considerable insight into Aquinas’s thoughts on predestination and adoptive sonship (Luc-
Thomas Somme, *Fils Adoptifs de Dieu: filiation divine par adoption dans la théologie de saint Thomas
Church brought about by indwelling Trinity acting through them (through the virtue of faith). Fifth and finally, I will discuss Aquinas’s understanding of the mission or confession called forth by scripture: Aquinas notes that those who hear this Word handed on by Paul are led to a confession of faith, called by Christ to take up Christ’s words and share in the mission for which Christ sent the Apostles.

The Biblical Authors Participate in Christ’s Mission

In his Lectures on Romans, Aquinas is not only interested in the words of Paul. A quick glance shows that Aquinas’s commentary is deeply intertextual, involving quotes from both the Old Testament and the New used in the process of discussing the words of Paul. For instance: to comment on Romans 5:2’s description of the “grace in which we stand” through faith in Jesus, Aquinas quotes John 1:17 (“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”), Psalm 122:2 (“Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem”), Psalm 20:8 (“we have risen and stand upright”), and Ephesians 2:8 (“by grace you have been saved through faith”). Aquinas offers little more explanation than simply quoting these to explain Romans 5:2.

This intertextual nature of Aquinas’s commentary is itself a theological statement about the unity of biblical inspiration. Scripture must be read as a whole; it must be exegeted in the context of the whole of revelation. Aquinas’s exegesis presumes that the revelation given by God through the Old and New Testaments has a fundamental unity, that it is intelligible to use the theology of John or the Psalms to help elucidate the words.

---

of Paul. Aquinas explains that the Bible can be read as a whole because the words of scripture have their roots in God’s gift of graces of assistance to the biblical authors. Paul himself speaks of this, Aquinas notes, in his discussion of his “reception” of apostleship by grace in Romans 1:5 and the grace “given” to him as an Apostle in Romans 12:3. Aquinas explains Paul’s words by using the theological concept of the “gratuitous graces” [gratia gratis data], commenting that the “grace” given to Paul to which Paul refers is a special category of grace not common to all, but involving gifts given to the Church’s leaders “for the building up of the faith.” This inspiring grace involves the giving of the Holy Spirit, Aquinas notes, drawing on Joel 2:28 (“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy”). Aquinas explains this diversity of graces in the Church, including the uniqueness of apostolic grace, drawing on 1 Corinthians 12: God has given the “manifestation of the Spirit to the common good” (12:7), but there are a “variety of gifts” (12:4).

In this context of speaking of the Holy Spirit, Aquinas explains that the Old and New Testaments are connected, and also connected with contemporary interpreters, because “scripture is explained in the same Spirit as it is written.” Aquinas describes prophecy as a kind of participation in God’s knowledge brought about by the Holy Spirit, quoting 1 John 1:5, “God is light and there is no darkness in him.” This divine inspiration of scripture gives its words a special dignity and power: Aquinas states that Paul’s writings, as the works of other prophets and apostles, are “holy,” since he writes as “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21), “inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16), and

---

6 Aquinas, Lectures on Romans, § 60-61; § 969.
7 Ibid., § 971.
8 Ibid., § 26.
9 Ibid., § 971.
10 Ibid., § 978.
11 Ibid., § 978.
because his subject matter is holy and the reading of his subject matter can make readers holy, with the aid of the Holy Spirit.¹²

Yet apostleship, Aquinas explains, is a special kind of grace given by God different from the grace of prophecy, though related to it. In order to fully understand Paul’s theology, Aquinas suggests that we must understand his apostleship. Furthermore, apostleship is more than simply an inspiration by God. It is an office, an active experience of being sent by Christ: Paul’s individuality and personality play a major role in his exercise of his particular apostolic office in the economy of salvation.

Following Paul, Aquinas explains that apostleship is a grace which conforms particular persons to Christ in a unique way.¹³ In commenting on Romans 1:5, “by [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship,” Aquinas explains “Christ himself is called an Apostle,” in terms of being sent.¹⁴ Drawing in Hebrews 3:1 (Jesus is the “Apostle and high priest of our confession”), Aquinas explains that the Apostles have their office only by a participation in Christ’s office: they share in Christ’s mission in terms of being “sent forth” visibly from the Father.¹⁵ The purpose of the Apostles, Paul himself declares, is to “bring about the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5).¹⁶ But the Apostles were also meant to bring about obedience of faith “in all nations” (Romans 1:5), meaning, Aquinas interprets, spreading Christ’s doctrine to the Gentiles.¹⁷

However, the words of the Apostles are fundamentally connected to the words of the Prophets of the Old Testament, for Aquinas. Paul himself refers to the Prophets: he declares that the coming of Christ was “promised beforehand through [God’s] prophets in

¹² Ibid., § 27.
¹³ Ibid., § 60-61.
¹⁴ Ibid., § 61.
¹⁵ Ibid., § 61.
¹⁶ Ibid., § 62.
¹⁷ Ibid., § 63.
the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:2). Aquinas explains that the Son is “deservedly called the subject matter of the Holy Scriptures,” with regard to both the Old and New Testaments. Aquinas believes that the Son speaks through all of scripture, both the Prophets and the later Apostles, because on one level the Son is wisdom and truth itself: pointing to 1 Corinthians 1:24, “Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God,” Aquinas notes that the Son is “the Word and wisdom begotten.” To support this Aquinas refers to Deuteronomy 4:6, where Moses tells the Israelites that the “statutes and ordinances” he hands on from the Lord “will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all peoples.” The words of the Old Testament, particularly the words of the Law, are God’s “wisdom” shared with human beings in the form of inspired prophetic words. On another level, this wisdom’s presence in the form of the Old Testament is not final, but awaits a fuller, “personal” presence among human beings in Christ, a presence announced by Paul’s gospel. With the advent of the incarnate Lord, Aquinas states “we have obtained God’s word through Christ’s birth and resurrection.” Aquinas understands the words of the Old Testament Prophets to reach their fullness to the degree that they point forward to the incarnate Word. Aquinas explains this further by glossing Amos 3:7: “‘The Lord will not make a word,’ namely, make it be incarnate, ‘without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.’”

Yet for Aquinas the Old Testament Law is also in a sense a “word” of Christ. Aquinas explains that the old Law had a hidden purpose (referring to Paul’s line about the Law “entering in secretly” in Romans 6:20): teaching human beings humility through

---

18 Ibid., § 25-7.  
19 Ibid., § 29.  
20 Ibid., § 29.  
21 Ibid., § 29.  
22 Ibid., § 828.  
23 Ibid., § 26.
the abundance of sin they commit on account of not being able to keep its words.\textsuperscript{24} This hidden purpose of the word of the old Law is revealed and fulfilled in Christ and the grace given to human beings through Christ. The Law’s hidden purpose is not merely negative: it was “given as a scourge” to teach those who Aquinas calls “the adamant,” or sinners, to obey the moral precepts by threat of punishment and to avoid worshipping other gods by the ceremonial precepts. To the “proficient” of the Old Testament, the Law functions as a pedagogue that also guides people in the proper manner of divine worship and helps them act justly.\textsuperscript{25} Yet the “perfect,” Aquinas notes, perceived the ceremonial aspects of the Law as a sign pointing to its fulfillment by Christ.\textsuperscript{26} Earlier in his commentary he describes the Mercy Seat in Exodus 25:17 as a “figure” of Christ’s propitiation of sin described in Romans 3:25.\textsuperscript{27}

The mediation of the incarnate Word by the Apostles in the New Testament perfects and fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Aquinas comments that Christ fulfills the Law by explaining its moral precepts rightly and adding counsels of perfection, while also summarizing the Law and making its teaching “simpler and briefer” “because it [his teaching] included all of the figurative sacrifices of the Law in one true sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{28} By being himself present by the incarnation, the Word “himself spoke in the flesh” a word which is “more perfect and powerful than the words He spoke through the prophets.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., § 460. 
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., § 463. 
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., § 463. And the moral aspects of the Law as a “consolation,” drawing on Romans 7:22, “I delight in the law of God.” 
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., § 308. 
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., § 803. 
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., § 804. Aquinas says this in reference to Hebrews 1:1: “God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.”
How Paul Shares in Christ’s Mission as an Apostle

I have outlined above an account of how Aquinas understands the inspiration of scripture in general in his Lectures on Romans, but his commentary also includes a great deal of interest in the person of Paul himself and in his manner of writing Romans. Aquinas suggests that Paul was shaped by God’s grace to be a special “vessel” containing and pouring out Christ. In this, Aquinas offers a meditation on Acts 9:15 (“This man is to me a chosen vessel to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel”) that sets up the understanding of apostolicity which Aquinas develops throughout his Lectures on Romans. Aquinas understands the status of different “vessels” in the Church as established by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, based on 1 Corinthians 12’s description of spiritual gifts. God gave Paul wisdom, love, and the virtues, but gave Paul these in such a way as he would teach others about them through his writings: a vessel, after all, is used to contain and pour things. The wisdom, love and the virtues Paul has are all Christological, Aquinas explains: Paul’s wisdom is knowing Jesus (“For I decided to know nothing among you except Christ,” 1 Cor. 2:2), his love is love of Jesus (“Who will separate us from the love of Christ?,” Rom. 8:35), and Paul’s virtues are his living his life to God (“it is no longer I who love, but Christ who lives in me,” Gal. 2:20). By “carrying” Christ’s name to the Gentiles in the form of handing on his Christological teaching of wisdom, love, and virtues, Paul participates, Aquinas suggests, in the same hierarchical mediation by which God enlightens human beings by the angels:

---

30 Ibid., § 1.
31 Ibid., § 3.
32 Ibid., § 2.
33 Ibid., § 3.
“just as the angels bestow God’s light on us as being far from God, so the apostles brought us the gospel teaching from Christ.”

Aquinas notes that Paul’s words, compared to the writings of the other Apostles contained in scripture, offer a privileged testimony to Christ because of Paul’s unique experience of conversion. Paul’s experience of divine grace was unlike that of the other Apostles, and more intense, because he formerly persecuted the Church. God inspired Paul to be a biblical author, Aquinas explains, so that his readers “might be aroused to hope.” Paul thus plays a distinctive role in God’s work of manifesting truth through scripture. Aquinas observes that in Paul’s writings “are contained almost the whole teaching of theology.” Paul was transformed by divine grace and appointed by Christ to be Apostle to the Gentiles, thus God’s mercy and forgiveness are demonstrated in a special way through him. It is not surprising, thus, that Aquinas understands the whole of Paul’s corpus to be an extended treatment of divine grace. Paul’s word is a deeply human word—it involves his own experience of grace—but it is also ultimately a word about Christ, a particular personal channel of the subject matter of grace in Christ which he discusses in his letters.

Because the Word of God is mediated by apostolic scriptural words, including the particular experiences of the Apostles, we can observe that for Aquinas Paul shares in Jesus’ doctrine and even inflects Jesus’ teaching with his own particularity. The logic in Aquinas’s commentary suggests that the work that God is doing in speaking through Paul is not the same work as God speaking through James, because Paul and James have

---

34 Ibid., § 4.
36 Ibid., § 6. The other text which contains the whole of theology, Aquinas notes, are the Psalms of David, one who similarly had a profound experience of having “obtained pardon after sin.”
37 Ibid., § 11.
different dispositions and different experiences. But God spoke through both Paul and James all the same. The divine (incarnate) Word is given an inflection by the human authors who are given a share in his unique mediation of salvation.

Paul plays a particular role in the apostolic mediation of Christ to the Gentiles as he “in particular had received a mandate to all nations.” Aquinas interprets Isaiah 49:6, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will give you as a light to the nations,” as referring not to Christ, but to Paul. Yet this mission to the Gentiles does not exclude the Jews, but is a kind of mission to the Jews in itself, as Paul himself notes in Romans 11:13-14, “I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.”

The Role of the Church’s Doctrinal Decisions in the Scriptural Economy of Salvation

If Aquinas and other teachers of the Church can share in Paul’s mission of handing on the Word, this raises the question of how the Church as a whole shares in Paul’s apostolic mission of handing on the Word. Aquinas comments on Paul by drawing on the aid of other texts from scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the Church, and the words of Church Fathers and of philosophers. How can these other sources play a role in the Church’s exercise of its participation in Paul’s mission of preaching? Are the words of the Church’s doctrine also the words of Jesus? What is the relationship between the doctrinal words of the Church’s councils and creeds and the scriptural words of Paul’s

---

38 Ibid., § 63.
39 Ibid., § 63.
40 Ibid., § 63.
writings?

Aquinas sees the Church’s doctrine as a frame, rooted in the entirety of divine revelation, which should be in place at the start for reading Romans rightly. Aquinas’s ultimate task is to pass on the Word of God handed on to the Church by Paul’s mediation to his hearers. But God not only inspires Paul, but also spoke through the authors of the Old Testament before Paul along with inspiring other NT writers, and God continues to speak to the Church, especially through inspiring its authoritative doctrinal decisions. This is why Aquinas approaches Romans with questions drawn from the Church’s doctrinal tradition, and he incorporates later doctrine into his biblical exegesis seamlessly. Because God speaks in multiple ways to the Church, those tasked with presenting all truths “useful for salvation” must draw on this multiplicity of sources, even when commenting on a particular biblical author or book.

Aquinas describes the Church’s doctrine as clearing up possible misunderstandings of Paul’s discussion of Jesus in Romans. Yet, interestingly, he locates the importance of rejecting particular heresies not in the context of agreeing with the authority of the Church’s declarations, but rather in offering an intertextual approach to scripture, reading the Bible as a whole rather than taking Paul’s “Christology” in Romans as an isolated text. Aquinas’s arguments against particular heresies in his commentary are largely exegetical arguments. In commenting on Paul’s reference to “God’s Son” in Romans 1:3, Aquinas notes that there have been varieties of opinions regarding Christ’s sonship in Christian history, including major errors. A first group of errors misunderstands the Son’s share in the divine nature of the Father. The first example of this kind of misunderstanding is to proclaim Christ’s sonship as adoptive. But Aquinas
observes Christ’s sonship cannot be adoptive, Aquinas notes, because Christ says in John 6:38 “I have come down from heaven.”\(^41\) A second error would be to claim that the Father turned into the Son in the process of coming down from heaven, and thus that the Son and the Father are actually the same person (i.e., Sabellianism). But Aquinas musters John 6:38 against this as well, as Christ says that he came from heaven “to do the will of him who sent me.”\(^42\) Since scripture describes the Father sending the Son, Aquinas notes that they cannot be the same person. A third error is that of Arianism, to see Christ’s sonship as created, and the Son as a creature. Aquinas musters John 1:3 against this, saying that a thing made cannot himself be him “through whom all things were made.”\(^43\) Aquinas points to the fact that Paul describes Jesus as “God’s” Son as an ontological link between Christ and God that excludes these three heretical options.\(^44\)

Aquinas argues that these heresies involve poor exegesis: in particular, reading Christological passages in Romans which are susceptible to misinterpretation in abstraction from other biblical passages and from the teaching of the Church as a whole. Aquinas also believes that a number of significant Christological errors must be excluded at the start of the theological work of explaining Paul’s words in Romans. By rejecting this list of heresies, Aquinas is able to describe the incarnate Son as the “subject matter of the Holy Scriptures” without the possibility of particular misunderstandings. Speaking of the Son of God as distinct from God the Father, as Paul does at numerous points in Romans, raises a number of theological questions. How can believers participate in God through the Son if the Son is somehow different from the Father (and the Holy Spirit)?

\(^{41}\) Ibid., § 30.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., § 31.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., § 32.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., § 33.
How can this divine Son/Word also be incarnate as human? These questions involve general assumptions and presuppositions of theological exegesis, and thus they must be answered first before the work of exegesis, listening for the Word of God in Paul’s human words, begins. If these questions are answered wrongly (heretically), then the whole enterprise of coming to know the Word of God through Paul’s words, the “subject matter of Holy Scripture,” is threatened.

For Aquinas, the Council of Chalcedon’s rejection of major errors (Nestorianism and Eutychianism) provides an important framework for understanding Paul’s scriptural words. Aquinas thus receives Chalcedon, as a statement of human words, as an authoritative guide given by the Holy Spirit for hearing the Word in Romans. By following Chalcedon’s Christological definition, Aquinas is able to better appreciate how Paul is testifying to Christ as being the Son who has been visibly sent. Aquinas identifies the sending of the Son with the Son’s coming to be present in the world in a new way, “visibly by means of the flesh he assumed.” Yet this raises speculative questions: how could such a visible mission be possible, if the Son shares in the divine nature of the Father? How is this sending integral to God’s work of salvation?

Aquinas seems to think that the chief Christological error one can make in reading Romans is Nestorianism, or seeing the union of the Word and human nature more as an “indwelling” than as a real union. There is nothing in Paul that explicitly refutes Nestorianism: rather, the rejection of Nestorianism is presented by Aquinas as a kind of exegetical principle that sees the acts of Christ as acts of a united Son, rather than two bifurcated human and divine entities. Aquinas notes that by definition seeing a union as

46 Ibid., § 35.
an “indwelling,” as Nestorius does, implies two separate beings, and thus Nestorius taught that Christ did not have a single hypostasis, but was two hypostases or persons, one human and one divine. Aquinas comments that this runs counter to Philippians 2:7, especially Paul’s description of the Son’s “emptying himself.” Nestorius’s account of union seems to deny the “emptying” on the part of the person of the Son described by Paul. Aquinas also notes near-contemporary homo assumptus theologians, who hold to one person in Christ but claim two hypostases or supposta. Aquinas responds to this position just as he does in the Tertia Pars of the Summa theologiae, pointing to a Boethian definition of “person” as inherently excluding the attribution of two hypostases to Christ, since a person is a hypostasis of a rational nature.

Aquinas also notes Eutychianism as an option to be avoided, a problem because Eutyches’ position on the unity of natures runs counter to what must be affirmed about God’s immutability. Paul’s words in Romans 1:3 might lend themselves in a Eutychian direction: Paul, after all, proclaims that God’s Son “was made for him from the seed of David according to the flesh.” Would not speaking of the Son being “made” imply a change in God’s nature? Aquinas’s answer is to point to his teaching on the incarnate union as “created,” that is, that the incarnation does not run counter to the Son’s immutability, but involves human nature subsisting, in a way unparalleled among created things, in the person of the Son. Speaking of the Son of God being “made according to the flesh” describes Christ’s humanity subsisting in the Son and having its being in the

47 Ibid., § 35.
48 Ibid., § 36.
49 Ibid., § 36. Cf. ST III.2.3.
50 Aquinas, Lectures on Romans, § 37.
Son, rather than a change in God’s own nature.\(^{51}\)

This rejection of heresies allows Aquinas to rightly describe the economy of salvation that is both described by and enacted by scripture. Paul, after all, is saying that salvation comes through Jesus: but how could the salvation wrought by the God of Israel be accomplished through the acts and sufferings associated with a human nature? This is an exegetical question. Aquinas notes that Paul speaks of “grace and peace” coming “from the Lord Jesus Christ” as well as from “God the Father.”\(^{52}\) Is God bound by an external requirement to offer grace and peace to humanity through Christ in this manner? Are Jesus and the Father separate agents? These are not unusual questions; they would present themselves to anyone seeking to read Paul with theological consistency. Aquinas’s articulation of the nature of Christ’s sonship and predestination has given him conceptual tools with which he can answer these questions. In fact, he suggests two possible ways of reading this particular passage in light of his presentation of Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy: one is to argue that the phrase “God the Father” by Paul, used in this context, is not a reference to the Divine Person of the Father, but “can be taken for the whole Trinity,” denoting God’s relationship to creatures as a whole.\(^{53}\) Paul’s addition “and from the Lord Jesus Christ” in this case is not describing Christ as something less than God, but rather stressing the importance of “the human nature by whose mystery the gifts of grace come to us.”\(^{54}\) Aquinas also suggests another possible interpretation, one not necessarily contrary to this first. In this second interpretation, Paul’s phrase “God the Father” denotes the person of the Father, describing the Father’s

\(^{51}\) Ibid., § 37.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., § 70.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., § 72.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., § 72.
role in the origin of grace by appropriation, “the Lord Jesus Christ” denotes the Person of
the Son, and the “grace and peace” from the Father and from the Son represents the Holy
Spirit, thus describing a Trinitarian source of grace.55

Through his Chalcedonian Christology, Aquinas is also able to explain how grace
comes to human beings by a “Christic” channel, how grace involves conformity to
Christ’s death and resurrection. This has obvious exegetical benefit, as it helps Aquinas
explain passages where Paul describes the salvation wrought by Christ as a participation
in Christ’s death and resurrection. Particularly, Aquinas notes, Paul connects the death of
Christ with the propitiation of sins and the resurrection with an effect of holiness in
human beings in Romans 3:21-26 and in Romans 4:25-6. In commenting on passages
where Paul emphasizes that salvation comes through particular sufferings of Christ,
Aquinas notes that while all the acts and sufferings of Christ are equally salvific, in the
“order of exemplarity” Christ’s death and resurrection have specific effects.56 Thus, for
instance, the Chalcedonian Christological definition helps Aquins make sense of
Romans 4:25, which states that Christ was “raised for our justification.” Aquinas uses
Chalcedonian exegesis (drawing specifically on John of Damascus) to clarify how
Christ’s resurrection could be salvific by describing his humanity as an “organ” or
instrument of his divinity.57 Aquinas explains that the Son of God acts divinely through
his humanity as an instrument, “effecting” the way of salvation for human beings through

55 Ibid., § 72-3.
56 Ibid., § 380. I should note, though, that this specific distinction, while present in Aquinas’s Lectures on
Romans, is not made explicit. The term “order of exemplarity” appears in the Summa theologiae, when
Aquinas discusses Christ’s Passion and resurrection. In the Summa theologiae, Aquinas makes a distinction
between the order of efficiency and the order of exemplarity: in the latter, Christ’s resurrection and his
passion have distinct salvific benefits. Cf. Aquinas, Summa theologiae III. 56. 2. Reply 4. Cf. Torrell,
57 Aquinas, Lectures on Romans, § 380.
his *acta et passa*.\textsuperscript{58} Because Christ’s human nature is an instrument of his divinity, “all the acts and sufferings of his human nature were salutary for us, considering that they flowed from the power of his divinity.”\textsuperscript{59} Saying that the Son’s human acts and sufferings are an “organ” or instrument allows Aquinas to emphasize that Christ’s human acts are the Son’s acts. Because the Son acts “theandrically” (divinely and humanly) for salvation, his human acts and sufferings – particularly his Passion and resurrection – play an essential role in salvation and in shaping the Christian life.\textsuperscript{60} As Bernard Blankenhorn puts it, Aquinas’s Chalcedonian framework for understanding Christ in Romans has wed an Alexandrian emphasis on Christ’s divinizing humanity to an Aristotelian account of formal causality.\textsuperscript{61} Aquinas thereby shows that salvation does not simply come about through the Son’s human acts as a nondescript channel: habitual grace conforms its recipients to Christ, because “an effect has to some extent similarity to a cause.”\textsuperscript{62} In this case, the grace which comes by faith in Christ’s resurrection conforms believers to the newness of life which Christ exemplifies in a high degree.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., § 380.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., § 380.


\textsuperscript{61} Bernard Blankenhorn, “The Place of Romans 6 in Aquinas’s Doctrine of Sacramental Causality” in in *Ressourcement Thomisme: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 141-2. Jean-Pierre Torrell has shown that Aquinas’s Chalcedonian of Christ’s human acts and sufferings as an “organ” of his divinity, which also appears in the *Summa theologiae*, represents a development in Aquinas’s thought that does not appear in his earlier works, such as his commentary on the *Sentences*. In his Commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas speaks of God’s grace working through Christ’s humanity “dispositively” and “ministerially,” that is, using Christ’s human action as the occasion for divine action, rather than working a divine thing humanly, which Aquinas asserts of Christ’s action in his later works. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 128.

\textsuperscript{62} Aquinas, *Lectures on Romans*, § 380.
Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans* are about the relationship between the mediation of the Word in words and Christ’s mystical body, his gifts of grace to the Church. Thus the unity of the Church established through the preaching of the Apostles is a major theme of Aquinas’s commentary.63 The result of divine grace’s outpouring through Christ, Aquinas notes, is that there arises a “spiritual unity” in Christ’s body by which “we are united to one another and to God by faith and love.”64 The words of the Apostles bring about this unity of the Church with Christ: Jesus “unites us to one another and to God by his Spirit whom he gives us” by interceding for the Church in his High Priestly prayer (John 18:22, “that they may be one even as we are one”).65

Aquinas’s understanding of the unity of the Church established in Christ is a particular kind of exegetical argument: it gathers up particular threads in Paul’s thought (such as Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 1:10) and uses them to interpret the letter as a whole, particularly the meaning of Paul’s “gospel.” It is not so much a framework borrowed from later tradition as an interpretation of Romans as a whole, and Paul’s purpose in writing Romans, in light of one of its major themes: the participation of the Church in Christ’s body. This unity of the Church’s members with God and with each other is rooted, in Aquinas’s understanding, in the union of divine and human natures in Christ. Aquinas states that the good news of Paul’s gospel is a union with the Word established through the Word’s incarnation: he explains that the word “gospel” describes three

---

64 Ibid., § 974.
65 Ibid., § 974.
“unions” established in Christ. Each of these unions is an aspect of God’s desire to draw humans to himself by his Word.

Aquinas discusses these gospel unions near the very beginning of his commentary, in explaining the meaning of the word “gospel” which Paul first uses in Romans 1:1.66 One union is the “glory of attainment” in which human beings will have eternal life.67 This is achieved by means of another union, the union of the “grace of adoption,” or sanctifying grace.68 But Aquinas explains that these two unions, sanctifying grace and the glory of attainment, are both rooted in another union: the union of the Word with human flesh in the incarnation.69 The union of the incarnation, by which the Word is made flesh, is the source of these other two unions. Later on in his commentary, Aquinas states that sanctifying grace or the grace of adoption is “nothing more than that conformity,” “being conformed to [God’s] true son.”70 By being conformed to the incarnate Word, created things are being restored “as an artisan repairs a house by means of the same art as he built it,” that is, repaired by the same Word by whom “all things were made” (John 1:3).71 The distinction between these two unions of grace—adoption and glory—seems to come from Romans 8, where Paul says “we wait for adoption as sons” (which Aquinas understands as the “completion of adoption”), and creation “groans” for the “glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21-23).72

Aquinas’s understanding of these three unions involves a corporate and

---

66 This section of Aquinas’s commentary on Romans has been put into dialogue with the more recent Protestant theologian Scot McKnight’s book The King Jesus Gospel by Matthew Levering, Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 113-138.
67 Ibid., § 24.
68 Ibid., § 24.
69 Ibid., § 24.
70 Ibid., § 704.
71 Ibid., § 60.
72 Ibid., § 680.
communal understanding of the Church as well, rooted in the union of the incarnation. This is apparent in Aquinas’s “divisio” of Paul’s letters as a whole as topics of divine grace. Aquinas explains that one of the major aspects of Paul’s writings, not only in Romans but in his other Epistles as well, involves the unity of the Church brought about by grace. Aquinas observes that while Romans treats grace in itself, and 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians treat grace in regard to the old and new sacraments, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians treat grace “considered in regard to the unity it produces in the Church.” Thus one of the major effects of divine grace, one which Aquinas sees as a major biblical theme in Paul’s epistles, is “ecclesial unity.” Ephesians analyzes the “establishment” of this unity, Philippians its “consolidation and progress,” Colossians its “defense against certain errors,” and 1 and 2 Thessalonians discusses ecclesial unity in relation to persecution. Aquinas also explains that Paul’s letters to Prelates of the Church (1 Timothy and Titus) are also about “preserving and governing ecclesial unity” as well. I mention these examples to show that when Aquinas is thinking of divine grace in relation to Paul, ecclesial unity is a major theme, both of Paul’s letters and in Aquinas’s understanding of what divine grace is and does as well.

Christ, the incarnate Word, is always drawing human beings into union with the Trinity, and sends the Apostles as preachers to enact this unity in the Church by the mediation of their preaching of the gospel. The faith of the Apostles plays a special role in the life of the mystical body, because they were given a particular share in Christ’s

73 Ibid., § 11.
74 Ibid., § 11.
75 Ibid., § 11.
76 Ibid., § 11.
grace and truth so as to hand this on to the rest of the Church: Aquinas reads Paul as an Apostle through a Dionysian understanding of the Church’s hierarchical mediation. Aquinas grounds this approach exegetically in Romans 8:23, where Paul proclaims that “we” (which Aquinas interprets to be the Apostles) “have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” Aquinas explains that the Apostles “had the Holy Spirit before others and more abundantly than others.” Aquinas believes that Romans 8:23 shows that “the apostles are greater than all other saints no matter what their credentials, whether virginity or learning or martyrdom, because they have the Holy Spirit more fully.” The Apostles have the height of grace and special dignity that they do because “they received from Christ himself the things that pertain to salvation and the commission to deliver them to others” and “the Church in a sense is founded on them,” which Aquinas supports with Revelation 21:14 (“the walls of the city had twelve foundations”). The Apostles, as handing on Christ, play a role in the founding of the unity of the Church through their mediation of the teachings of Christ and through their own personal grace.

The unity of the Church as the body of Christ is thereby established in faith and charity, but this faith and charity requires the mediation of human words which testify to Christ, the apostolic preaching of the gospel. The unity with God established by faith involves faith in realities “heard” by apostolic testimony, particularly faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Faith, then, is a sharing in the person of Christ; a participation in the salvific work of Christ’s death and resurrection. Aquinas comments that the “death of Christ is applied to us by faith,” inasmuch as his death was a propitiation for sins, in

---

77 Ibid., § 676.
78 Ibid., § 676.
79 Ibid., § 676.
80 Ibid., § 678.
explaining Romans 3:25’s discussion of “faith in his blood.” Christ was “put forward” by God to satisfy for the sins of human beings. Believers are joined to this sacrifice by faith. Through faith in Christ’s death or resurrection, Aquinas comments, “we participate in its effect,” Aquinas’s reading of the “peace with God” had by faith referred to by Paul in Romans 5:1. The effect of Christ’s death is the “extinguishing of our sins,” and the effect of the resurrection is a “new life of righteousness.” Aquinas explains in commenting on Romans 4:25 that faith in Christ’s passion “is the cause of extinguishing our sins” while the faith in resurrection is the means “by which we return to a new life of righteousness.” Aquinas takes the justifying faith Paul refers to in Romans 5:1 as faith in the resurrection in particular, although Aquinas also states in commenting on Romans 4:25, as I have already noted above, that all the acts and sufferings of Christ are salvific following the hypostatic union.

Salvation thus involves explicit faith in Christ. Therefore the faithful require Apostles handing on the Word in scriptural words so that later generations might come to this saving faith in the acts and sufferings of Christ. Scripture plays an important role in the economy of salvation: in hearing and confessing the truths proposed therein, human

---

81 Ibid., § 309.
82 Ibid., § 308.
83 Ibid., § 380-382.
84 Ibid., § 380.
85 Ibid., § 382.
86 Ibid., § 382.
87 Cf. ST II-II.2. 5-7, where Aquinas discusses the need for explicit faith in Jesus after his coming in the incarnation. This suggests that a “sacramental” approach to scripture is an inherent part of the patristic-medieval approach to scripture, as Yves Congar notes in his book Tradition and Traditions: “The Word of God was seen throughout as a sign of divine saving action, an efficacious sign, a sign of grace: and these are also the marks of a sacrament.” Congar adds that the res of this sacramentum of the written (and preached) Word of Scripture is not the written (or spoken) word, but the “understanding and salvation” invoked through the Word when the “epiclesis” of prayer is present. Yves Congar, Tradition and Traditions: An historical and a theological essay, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 404-5. For an evangelical appraisal of this understanding of the sacramentality of scripture in Congar (and thus, implicitly, an appraisal of the kind of exegesis practiced by Aquinas), in conversation with contemporary evangelical biblical scholarship, see Hans Boersma, Heavenly Participation: the Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 120-153.
beings are brought into union with God. Paul proclaims that his gospel is “for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Aquinas explains that in preaching the gospel, Paul hands on the “words of eternal life” passed on by Christ, and thus shares in Christ’s salvific work and is thereby conformed to Christ—“it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Even the written words of Scripture have a certain divine power, Aquinas suggests, quoting a story of the written words of the Gospel bringing about miraculous cures, though he adds a note about avoiding superstition regarding the written letters of Scripture. The human words of the gospel which Paul hands on have “power” (the gospel is “the power of God,” Rom 1:16). The gospel is power in one sense because of the work God has accomplished in Christ: power working in the past. Aquinas finds Psalm 111:6 illustrative here, “he has shown the people the power of his works.” Aquinas adds that the announcing of the gospel also has power in that it “contains in itself God’s power.” For Aquinas, God is powerfully active in and through the human announcement of the gospel. Aquinas references Psalm 68 here, a Psalm which emphasizes God’s power and his intervention in human affairs, giving “power and strength” to his people. Aquinas’s quotation is from 68:33, which proclaims that God “sends out his voice, his mighty voice.” Aquinas draws on the Psalmist’s account of God’s Word as an active part of God’s salvific intervention on behalf of human beings and applies it to scripture: when heard in faith, the apostolic preaching in the New Testament forgives sins. Aquinas observes that “sins are forgiven by the word of the Gospel,” referencing James 1:21, “receive with meekness the implanted word,

88 Aquinas, Lectures on Romans, § 104.
89 Ibid., § 100.
90 Ibid., § 98.
91 Ibid., § 98.
92 Ibid., § 98.
93 Ibid., § 98.
which is able to save your soul,” and John 15:3, “you are made clean by the word I have spoken to you.” Aquinas explains that the words of the announcement of the gospel also sanctify, drawing on John 17:17: “sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth,” and bring about eternal life, which Aquinas bases on Peter’s exclamation “you have the words of eternal life” in John 6:68. 

However, if faith involves hearing the Word of Christ mediated through the Apostles, what happens to those who have no possibility of hearing the Gospel? Aquinas briefly discusses this in his commentary, noting the example of the implicit faith of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-46. Aquinas observes that “two things are required for faith,” the “heart to believe” which is shaped by God’s grace and the material which regards “what to believe” which comes by hearing preaching. Yet Aquinas notes that Cornelius “needed Peter to be sent to him” for his salvation. For Aquinas, Cornelius needed explicit faith in Christ, which requires hearing about Christ through the words of a preacher handing on apostolic testimony. The virtue of faith, after the coming of Christ, requires an external, explicit word, requiring God to send preachers. As Edgardo Colón-Emeric notes, Aquinas seems to believe that essentially all are bound to explicit faith, since he thinks that the gospel has gone out to the entire world. For Aquinas, the question of a person who has no chance of hearing the gospel (the problem of the “boy raised in the wilderness” as it was phrased by the scholastics) is an “exceptional case.” Yet for Aquinas, even those who have no chance to hear the words of the Gospel explicitly “are

---

94 Ibid., § 99.
95 Ibid., § 99.
96 Ibid., § 844.
97 Ibid., § 844.
not simply floating in a soteriological vacuum,” and, in Aquinas’s mind, “the ordinary way in which God provides for these persons is by sending them a preacher.” The question remains as to whether Aquinas thought those who had no possibility of hearing the Gospel from preachers after the time of Christ were bound to explicit faith, a subject of some debate among commentators. It might suffice to comment that Aquinas’s emphasis on explicit faith in his Lectures on Romans is an attempt to follow Paul’s lead in emphasizing the salvific role of explicit faith in Jesus, along with emphasizing the vocation of the preacher in the economy of salvation, an emphasis that might be in tension with theological reflection conducted in a more systematic or philosophical rather than exegetical mode.

Confessing the Faith and Sharing in the Word

Aquinas comments that the Word of God proclaimed by the Apostles not only involves the mediation of truths relating to Christ’s death and resurrection, but also calls forth the response of human beings who then cooperate with the Word proclaimed to them by means of their own words of confession. While noting that faith comes to human beings by grace, Aquinas also emphasizes that faith involves the assent of the believer,

99 Colón-Emeric, 90-91.
100 Aquinas argues that explicit faith in Christ is needed for all in order to have salvation after the coming of Christ in the Summa theologiae, II-II.2.7: “both learned and simple folk are bound to explicit faith in the mysteries of Christ.” However, Aquinas did not know that there were continents full of many persons who had (in his time) no hope of hearing the gospel, which posed a central question for those interpreting Aquinas’s theology of faith, preaching and salvation in the sixteenth century. The Dominican Bartholomé de Las Casas, drawing on Aquinas in the context of attempting to offer a program for evangelizing the Americas while avoiding the excesses of forced conversions, produced “an extensive meditation and application of Thomas Aquinas’s theology of preaching for the context of the Americas” (Colón-Emeric, 92).
cooperating with the Word proclaimed to them with the help of grace.\textsuperscript{101} Aquinas explains that “confess[ing] with your lips that Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9) means that his hearers “recognize Him as Lord by submitting your will to him.”\textsuperscript{102} Believing “in your heart” in Jesus means “complete faith which works through love.”\textsuperscript{103} The assent of faith also involves working through love in order to live in response to the truth proclaimed by faith.\textsuperscript{104} Aquinas notes that “all virtuous acts” are related to faith, and can be seen as a confession of faith, because these acts are a loving response to God’s precepts handed on to faith.\textsuperscript{105}

When this biblical Word is used by Christ to draw believers into union with himself, the confession of faith with which believers respond to this Word can also take the form of handing on this Word to others. Thus for Aquinas the apostolic Word is profoundly participatory: not only do the Apostles share in Christ’s own mission by being sent by him to proclaim the gospel, but also those who hear this apostolic Word are given their own mission of confessing the faith in public.

Aquinas describes the life of preaching and teaching as a particular form of this salvific reception of the Word of God by confession in his lectures on Romans 10:10-17. Aquinas explains that some of those who receive the Word of Christ handed on by the Apostles are called, in the context of hearing this Word, to proclaim it to others. After all, part of Christ’s own Word to his disciples was commanding them to “preach the gospel

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Aquinas, \textit{Lectures on Romans}, § 831.
\item[102] Ibid., § 829.
\item[103] Ibid., § 829.
\item[104] Ibid., § 831; see also 108: “God dwells in the soul through faith: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17), but this indwelling is not perfect, unless faith is formed by charity, which by the bond of perfection unites us to God, as Col 3:(14) says.”
\item[105] Ibid., § 832.
\end{footnotes}
to every creature” (Matthew 28:19). Thus for Aquinas, the confession of faith is not merely the confession of “divine truth” in the face of persecution (i.e., as in Matthew 10:32: “every one who confesses me before men, I will also confess before my Father in heaven”). Those appointed by the Church’s Prelates to preach the gospel must make a “confession of faith” by preaching, a confession which is required for their salvation. God appoints and sends preachers “mediately” [mediante] by means of its Prelates, “who take God’s place” in sending out preachers. Aquinas notes that while sometimes God teaches particular persons directly by the grace of prophecy, the way that most come to know the truths of the faith—following Paul in Romans 10:14, “how are they to hear without a preacher?”—is through the mediation of preachers sent by the authority of the Church’s Prelates.

**Conclusion**

Aquinas approaches Paul in order to hear his words, but also with an understanding of the whole of revelation (shown by his extensive citations from scripture and his use of Church authorities) which he uses as a frame to understand Paul. Aquinas reads Paul not only with an interest in understanding Paul himself, but to reflect on the nature of Paul’s mission, the nature of apostolicity in the context of the body of Christ. In

---

106 Ibid., § 837.
107 Ibid., § 832.
108 Ibid., § 832-838.
109 Ibid., § 837-8. The canonical appointment of a preacher was understood by the scholastics as the “formal cause” of their preaching. Canonical mission was a way of expressing the “apostolic” character of the call to preaching given mediately by the Church’s prelates. Augustine Rock discusses the importance of canonical mission for Christian preaching in the Middle Ages drawing not only on Aquinas, but also on Albert the Great and Bonaventure in Unless they be Sent: A Theological Study of the Nature and Purpose of Preaching (London: Blackfriars, 1955), 102-128.
doing so, Aquinas at times seems to exceed Paul’s text, cross-referencing other Old and New Testament texts, discussing Trinitarian and Christological heresies, and even discussing John of Damascus’s Christology in the process of commenting on Romans.

Is Aquinas’s approach, overall, one of eisegesis? I hope to have suggested through this chapter that Aquinas’s commentary on Romans is not eisegetical because he is not exegeting words of Paul, but the Word of God: particularly God speaking through Paul’s mediating testimony to the incarnate Word. Aquinas’s particular way of interpreting Paul depends on assumptions—assumptions that he helpfully spells out exegetically—regarding the nature of God’s self-revelation and the role of the biblical authors in that economy of self-revelation. As Aquinas argues in his Lectures on Romans, the Word of God comes to the Church through chains of mediation: God speaks “in person” in Jesus, who in turn is witnessed to by Paul (and who is then in turn witnessed to by the Church’s teachers). Paul shares in God’s primary work of speaking his Word in Christ, and inflects the Word of God with his own particularity. In this vein, Aquinas suggests that human words, as secondary causes, participate distinctively in the revelatory work of God as the primary cause of salvation. Because the members of the Church are brought into one body by faith in apostolic preaching, the scriptural words that testify to Christ share in the incarnate Word as their divine source and telos, and the Church as Christ’s body can authoritatively interpret this scriptural testimony because it is guided by the same Spirit which enlivened the faith of the Apostles and “sent” them in imitation of Christ’s sending.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Aquinas thus is a resource for answering the Catholic theologian Denis Farkasfalvy’s call for a renewed connection between biblical study and Catholic theology in the wake of Dei Verbum, particularly, I think, because of his understanding of the biblical authors as participating distinctively in the economy of divine
However, Aquinas’s understanding of biblical inspiration raises the question of the ecclesial interpretation and mediation of scripture. Since the manifestation of truth in the incarnate Word is mediated through the Apostles (those who share in Christ’s mission), how do members of the Church continue to participate in this apostolic mission today, and what is the relation of their doctrine—particularly any new doctrinal formulations or extra-biblical terms used—to the apostolic mediation in scripture? Indeed, as I have noted above, Aquinas draws on Church teachings extensively to help explain the words of Paul. Aquinas notes in the *Summa theologiae* that some of the words of Paul or other biblical authors are not necessarily easy to understand, and that the teaching of the Church is needed to guide those who interpret scripture. The question of how scripture’s testimony to the Word in words might be mediated through the Church’s later doctrinal words—whether the words of the Church’s councils or of individual theologians—remains to be addressed. I will do so in my chapter on Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*.

We can also ask at this point whether Aquinas wrestles with the words of Paul enough as a Word of God which confronts the Church, challenging its presuppositions and traditions. John Webster argues that the Church is constituted “by the divine address as the *hearing* church,” and that, thus, Scripture is not an “immanent ecclesial entity,” but draws the church towards an “ecstatic orientation in all its undertakings.” Has Aquinas considered the role Scripture might play in “build[ing] the church up by breaking the

---

111 Summa theologiae II-II. 1. 9. Reply 1.

church open” enough in his commentary?\textsuperscript{113} Does Aquinas’s notion of instrumentality domesticate Paul, making him into another scholastic professor of theology like himself rather than a dynamic, challenging apostle of Jesus?\textsuperscript{114} Karl Barth’s commentary on Romans emphasizes the resisting response of sinful human beings to the gospel of Christ, but also how Christ overcomes this sinful resistance. Barth believes that our human words resist the Word of God in Christ, existing in tension with Christ. I will turn to discussing Barth’s commentary and evaluate his understanding of the presence of the Word in Scriptural words in light of the position of Aquinas described here in my next chapter.

\textsuperscript{113} Webster, \textit{Holy Scripture}, 46.
\textsuperscript{114} A concern of Otto Pesch, “Paul as Professor of Theology: The Image of the Apostle in Saint Thomas’s Theology,” \textit{The Thomist} 38 (1974): 584-605. Pesch argues that Aquinas does “domesticate” Paul in some particulars (in terms of framing Paul’s ideas under “traditional theological schemas” and his “Aristotelian ‘pre-understanding’” on topics of “divine predestination, virginity and marriage, the doublet of “flesh and spirit,” the faith coming from what is heard, the image of Christ in the Epistle to the Colossians, and so on”). Yet Pesch maintains that on the whole the challenge of Paul’s gospel, “God's unconditioned, non-deserved mercy,” is preserved (605).
CHAPTER TWO
BARTH’S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* emphasizes the existential response of the hearer of the Word to God. With his commentary he sought to reinvigorate a style of biblical interpretation which saw scripture as God speaking his authoritative Word, not as a piece of historical data which can be approached objectively.\(^1\) In this project of renewal his *Epistle to the Romans* was a massive success, deemed the “bombshell in the playground of the theologians,” and reinvigorated theological approaches to biblical exegesis for many theologians, Protestant as well as Catholic.\(^2\) At the core of Barth’s “hermeneutical manifesto” is the central claim which my dissertation seeks to explore: the assertion that

---

\(^1\) Barth’s commentary had its genesis in his pastoral ministry at Safenwil and his profound personal friendship with fellow pastor Eduard Thurneysen. The biblical exegesis of Barth’s time seemed unconducive to Barth’s existential mode of receiving or handing on the Word which is demonstrated in his sermons. Barth and Thurneysen described the change that came over their minds in the process of preaching and thinking about the Bible in the 1910s as “two desks” becoming one. At the start, their approach to the Bible involved “one desk” of historical research and use of biblical scholarship, and the other, “second desk” involving reading the Bible devotionally for the people in Church. Yet Barth and Thurneysen describe a powerful call from the “second desk,” one that called to overwhelm their lives and overwhelm the historical research of the first desk. See Paul Minear, “Barth’s Commentary on the Romans, 1922-1972, or Karl Barth vs the Exegetes” in *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972* (Corporation for the Publication of Academic Studies of Religion in Canada, 1974), 10-11. It is not accidental that Barth’s first edition commentary on Romans is described as resembling “a collection of expository sermons.” Kenneth Oakes, *Reading Karl Barth: A Guide to the Epistle to the Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 8.

God’s Word is present and active in the words of scripture. When one hears scripture, one is confronted with the present voice of the authoritative Lord. Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* offers a *ressourcement* of this authoritative voice, this existential aspect of the hearing of the Word of God in scripture. When one hears scripture, one is confronted with the present voice of the authoritative Lord. Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* offers a *ressourcement* of this authoritative voice, this existential aspect of the hearing of the Word of God in scripture.

In this chapter I seek to show that we should take Barth’s statement in his preface at face value: Barth’s main task in *Epistle to the Romans* really is to hear the Word of God through Paul. As John Webster has noted, Barth’s theological exegesis of Romans, as exegesis, has been largely underappreciated.

Richard Burnett notes that the “new world” of the Bible which Barth discovers in the process of writing his first commentary on Romans (discussed in his significant essay translated into English as “the Strange New World Within the Bible;” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 28-50) is not simply a principle of intertextuality, but a theological claim about divine action: Barth’s “discovery” was finding that “the Bible’s central subject matter, content, and theme was God” and that the Bible is “God’s Word.”

Barth’s second-edition *Epistle to the Romans* was called a “hermeneutical manifesto” by the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method*, trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2012), 510. The genre of the biblical commentary in Barth’s time was very significant: Wilhelm Dilthey, a profound influence on the German academy in Barth’s time, argued that all human sciences boil down to the science of hermeneutics. There was something drastically at stake in interpreting the Bible in the German-speaking world. Cf. Burnett, *Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 42-50.

Richard Burnett argues that this is because readings of *Epistle to the Romans* have been crowded out by description of the commentary as a “hermeneutical manifesto” or a work of “irregular dogmatics.” John Webster, “Karl Barth” in *Reading Romans through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth*, eds. Jeffrey Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 205-223. One exception is Mark Reasoner’s treatment of the history of interpretation of Romans, which, among its other merits, can be read as a cumulative argument for the value of Barth’s theological exegesis. Reasoner praises Barth for his “ability to hold both the individual and corporate dimensions of humanity in view” and for his “prophetic stance against idolatry.” Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 148. Barth’s exegetical approach was not simply *ad hoc*: evidence shows that Barth carefully and laboriously developed his particular way of reading Scripture theologically. In his drafting of the first edition of his Romans commentary he labored with his friend Eduard Thurneysen over how to craft this theological exegesis in the face of trends in modern Protestant exegesis (trends especially reliant on Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics). This has been shown by Richard Burnett in an analysis of unpublished drafts of Barth’s first edition *Epistle to the Romans* in his book *Karl Barth’s*...
nourished Barth’s own sense of the paradox of the gospel of Jesus Christ. With this chapter I aim to analyze Barth’s exegesis of Romans and show the link between exegesis and the existential tension between the Word of God and human words which characterizes his approach to theology in his dogmatic and homiletic works as well as in his exegetical works.

In this chapter, first I will show how Barth finds this dialectical tension between God’s Word and human words with his exegesis of Romans. This dialectical tension comes from Barth’s close reading of Paul’s description of the revelatory nature of Christ’s death and resurrection. Then I will show how Barth is led by Paul’s testimony to put the Word of God revealed in Christ in critical tension with four particular groups of words: the words of modern historical-critical exegetes, the words of other passages of scripture (particularly the words of the Law of Israel), the words of the Church’s historical doctrines, and the words of the Church’s contemporary witness to Christ. However, while Barth sees the Word of God in Christ handed on by Paul as challenging, this Word involves the participation of human beings in its work as well. Barth states that the Word of Christ handed on by Paul speaks to and establishes the Church. Yet how can this be possible if the Word of Christ and human words are in tension? I will finish my chapter by discussing Barth’s understanding of the participation of the Church in Christ as hearers of the Word in order to more fully demonstrate how Barth understands human words to mediate the Word—especially as this is related to salvation by faith—in the context of scripture.

Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004).

Barth explains that Paul’s subject matter in Romans is God’s speech in Jesus Christ. In his commentary on Romans 1, Barth emphasizes that Paul’s gospel is the “gospel of God,” the “Word of the Primal Origin of all things.” But this Word is spoken exhaustively in Jesus Christ: Christ alone “brings the world of the Father.” Christ “is the gospel and the meaning of history.” Jesus is the gospel not as a representation of particular human potentiality or a myth of a dying and rising humanity. The gospel of Jesus is based on the “historical Jesus” and the “historical occurrence” taking place in “the years A.D. 1-30.” The event, and its meaning for human beings, is Paul’s subject matter.

However, this divine Word is not identical with each and every word of Paul: Barth observes that interpreters must work so that “the Word” can be “exposed in the words,” with a mode of operation that involves engaging with the subject matter “by a creative straining of the sinews” and by the “dialectical method.” This “dialectical method” or “creative straining” in Barth’s commentary plays out in his emphasis on Paul’s contemporaneity.

Barth’s well-known emphasis on God’s transcendence, or the “infinite qualitative distinction” between human beings and God as he quotes it from Søren Kierkegaard, is Barth’s explanation of what he takes to be a theme of Romans. In his preface to the second edition of his Epistle to the Romans, Barth observes that reviewers of his first edition

---

8 Barth, Epistle, 28.
9 Barth, Epistle, 30.
10 Ibid., 29.
11 Ibid., 29.
12 Ibid., 8.
edition commentary accused him of approaching Paul from a previously conceived philosophical “system.” Barth replies “if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the “infinite qualitative distinction” between time and eternity.” Barth uses this notion from Kierkegaard to assist his understanding of divine transcendence as he finds it exegetically in Romans. But note that Barth prefaces his reference to Kierkegaard with “if I have a system.” I suggest that Barth’s emphasis on God’s transcendence is a matter of his hearing the Word of God mediated through Paul, rather than Barth reading the religious culture of his time through a particular philosophical lens. Furthermore, I hope to show that this emphasis on transcendence is more specifically based on Barth’s understanding of the person of Jesus Christ in light of scripture.

Barth’s discussion of an existential response to the Word, with an emphasis on God’s transcendence, reaches its highest pitch in his discussion of the “Night,” his term for Paul’s condemnation of idolatry in Romans 1. Barth applies Paul’s critique of idolatry to the liberal theology and complacent religious culture of his time. The chief passage in focus, which guides Barth’s interpretation of the rest, is Romans 1:23: “[they] changed the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man.” Barth’s key exegetical move is to state that idolatry does not simply involve the worship of graven images, but any time the acknowledgement of God is neglected in favor of a God fashioned in “an image made like to corruptible man” (Romans 1:23). Barth argues that idolatry, on this expanded definition, is a common error by Christian pastors and

theologians.

Barth explains this process of the descent into idolatry in detail: “some one of the relationships of men to objects of their fear or of their desire…is taken to be in itself significant and of supreme importance.”  

14 Humans project their ultimate concerns as being God, and, Barth observes, then “there emerge precisely all those intermediary, collateral, lawless divinities and power and authorities and principalities that obscure and discolour the light of the true God.”  

15 Barth states that such false gods among his contemporaries are “Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland.”  

16 By thinking with Paul, or “creatively straining at the sinews” of Paul’s words, Barth uncovers what he takes to be a general principle of idolatry disclosed in Paul’s discussion of God’s wrath. This principle of idolatry in Paul is any approach to religion which might keep one from acknowledging the true God.

Why are people drawn in such a way to such idolatry? The temptation to idolatry is a temptation to worship what makes one personally comfortable rather than to worship the true God. Barth suggests that this temptation is expressed in a common human desire to “deck ourselves out as [God’s] companions, patrons, advisors, and commissioners.”  

17 Humans, out of “arrogance,” demand “some super-world should also be known and accessible to us.”  

18 Barth seems to have in mind a criticism of civic or cultured piety in which worship and preaching is “a solemn affirmation of ourselves” and a “pious setting aside of the contradiction” of the truth about God.  

19 This expresses a psychological demand: humans commit idolatry “in spite of knowing God” (Romans 1:21), because

---

14 Barth, Epistle, 50.
15 Ibid., 50.
16 Ibid., 50.
17 Ibid., 44.
18 Ibid., 44.
19 Ibid., 44.
“the invisibility of God seems to us less tolerable than the questionable visibility of what we like to call ‘God’.”20 Barth observes that idolatry is the “imprisonment of truth” (following Romans 1:18), in that “thinking of ourselves what can be thought only of God, we are unable to think of Him more highly than we think of ourselves.”21

Yet Barth adds to this critique of idolatry an astute reading of Paul’s own critique of works-righteousness in Romans 2:3-5: “reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practice such things, and doest the same, that thou in particular shalt escape the judgement of God?”22 Barth explains that even a critique of idolatry can itself be a form of idolatry, if the critique of idolatry is taken to be God’s revelation rather than God’s act of revelation (in Jesus) itself. Barth takes Paul as speaking to contemporary self-righteous piety: such is taking “what has been bestowed upon thee in eternity” and counting it as “possessing temporal validity.” Instead of radical reliance on God’s word of judgment and redemption for salvation “thou boastest of faith as of some achievement of men.”23 When this happens, Barth notes that “the divine operation of faith is ended, and it is degraded to a worthless and transitory thing of this world.”24 Even a “Barthian” rejection of idolatry based on a notion of God’s transcendence can become an idol if the focus is not placed on God’s grace in speaking his Word in Jesus.

---

20 Ibid., 47.
21 Ibid., 45.
22 Ibid., 58.
23 Ibid., 58-9.
24 Ibid., 59.
Barth reads the rest of Romans through the lens of his interpretation of Paul’s critique of idolatry as applying to Christians, but he adds to this interpretation of idolatry an emphasis on Jesus Christ as revealing the true God. Barth’s understanding of idolatry and God’s transcendence in *Epistle to the Romans* is Christological: Barth’s discussion of idolatry bears the title “the Night,” while Barth’s discussion of salvation in Christ in Romans 5 bears the title “the Coming Day.” For Barth, God is transcendent and sovereign over human words ultimately because God acts, because God “sent his Son.” Idolatry is precisely the construction of a God who can be known outside of this revelation in the sending of Jesus.

Barth explains that Christ was a historical figure unlike any other because Christ’s life and work are wholly constituted by being God’s action, God’s sending or “breaking in” upon the world. In describing what Paul’s “gospel” is in his commentary on Romans 1:2-4, Barth comments that, in Christ, “two worlds meet and go apart, two planes intersect.”25 One of these worlds is a fallen creation in need of redemption, and the other is the unknown world of God, both the source of our world in creation and its consummation in the “final redemption.”26 Barth describes Christ in this context as the “crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell.”27 Yet it should be noted that “divide” between these two worlds, God and humans, eternity and time, is not in any

---

25 Ibid., 29.
26 Ibid., 29.
27 Ibid., 29.
philosophical commitment to God’s transcendence, but rather in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{28} Jesus Christ shows the dividing line between these two worlds, embodying the distinction between them in himself.\textsuperscript{29} The “infinite distinction” between human beings and God is seen, and is only seen, in Jesus Christ: a human being crucified and risen.

Drawing on Paul, Barth observes that any Christian theology is idolatrous if it does not involve a reception of God’s salvific action in Christ’s actual human acts and sufferings.\textsuperscript{30} Barth’s commitment to God’s transcendence is another form of “creatively straining” the sinews of Romans to bring about an existential response to Christ in his hearers: Barth thinks that a God who is revealed through the dying and rising of a human being is different from any divine being which human piety or religious philosophy could create for itself. Barth calls this the “existentiality of divinity” shown in Jesus.\textsuperscript{31} For Barth, Jesus is God’s “being,” God’s self-revelation, not simply a divine envoy or a messenger. The particularity of Christ is the very thing that shows God to be transcendent. For Barth, “we encounter the action of God in contemplating the crucified and risen Christ.”\textsuperscript{32} It is the death and resurrection of Christ which make him unlike any other human word. Christ is a “problem” to the human mind because he dies and is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Barth, \textit{Epistle}, 29. I should note that a common way of reading Barth’s \textit{Epistle to the Romans} in secondary literature involves an emphasis on its dialectic between “eternity” and “time.” But this should not be allowed to crowd out the fact that, as McCormack observes, there are in fact several “dialectics” functioning in \textit{Epistle to the Romans} at once, and that these are all based in Barth’s focus on the revelation of God in Christ’s death and resurrection, rather than a philosophical precondition for speech about God (Bruce McCormack, \textit{Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 266-274).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Barth, \textit{Epistle}, 29.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 276.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 151.
\end{itemize}
raised.\textsuperscript{33} It is in Christ’s death and resurrection that he is recognized as Lord and Messiah: thus Christ crucified and risen is the central content of the divine Word God speaks through Paul.\textsuperscript{34}

Barth comments that all of Christ’s life and teachings must be read in light of his crucifixion and resurrection as an act of God: “the life of Christ is His oboedientia passiva, His death on the Cross.”\textsuperscript{35} Barth’s rejection of Christ’s merit is based on his interpretation of the cross in Romans. The nature of the revelation of God in Jesus as the “crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell” or a “tangent touching a circle” is established by the fact that God is revealed through the death of a human being.\textsuperscript{36} Human possibilities are “finally and critically negated” by the cross.\textsuperscript{37} Barth also rules out the possibility of human cooperation in the salvation accomplished in Christ: because of this, the relationship of salvation is established completely on the side of God’s sovereign choice of human beings to be saved in Christ.\textsuperscript{38} Reconciliation with God is never a “concrete and direct occurrence,” but is a “dialectical” observation made when looking upon the crucified Christ as and act of God in faith.\textsuperscript{39}

What is it about Christ’s death that suggests to Barth that it involves the negation of all human possibilities? Barth explains that Christ’s death reveals all the ways that human beings seek to ignore or cheat death by their own power, including through religiosity, and reveals all of this as sin standing under the wrath of God, or the “the

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 29-30.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Ibid., 29, 160.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 164.
Christ’s death is the stone that smashess the idol of theologia gloriae, showing it to be an idol of false religion. Christ’s crucifixion exposes the limits of human words which seek to attain to God of their own power. Christ’s death on the cross is a profound negation of the false idols, or “No-Gods,” that human beings set up for themselves in this world. Barth critiques any approach to Jesus that sees him as revealing something independent of his death on the cross. He notes, for instance, that the Reformed doctrinal emphasis on Christ’s munus triplex, or threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King, “weakens the New Testament concentration upon the death of Christ.” The doctrine of munus triplex, which emphasizes Christ’s action, risks moving past the Word of God spoken through Christ’s death. Barth also refers to scholarly reconstructions of Jesus’ message common in liberal Protestantism and historical-critical studies of the Gospels. Barth offers a long list of these types of proposals:

Neither the personality of Jesus, nor the ‘Christ Idea’, nor the Sermon on the Mount, nor His miracles of healing, nor His trust in God, nor His love of His brethren, nor His demand for repentance, nor His call to poverty and discipleship; neither the implications of His Gospel for the social life or for the life of the individual, nor the eschatological or the immediate aspects of Him teaching

---

40 Ibid., 42-45. Barth’s teaching here is remarkably similar to Athanasius’s “pedagogical” reasoning for the Incarnation: God is revealed through Christ’s death and resurrection in order to turn human beings from the worship of idols, guiding them to knowledge of God in truth. In his classic work On the Incarnation, Athanasius claims that one of the reasons why the Word became Incarnate is that human beings had “rejected the contemplation of God” and, instead of rightly worshipping God, they search for God in “creation and things perceptible, setting up for themselves mortal humans and demons as gods.” Athanasius, On the Incarnation, trans. John Behr (Yonkers, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 65. In response to this sin of idolatry, out of love God “draws to himself the perceptible senses of all human beings” though the humanity of Christ (Athanasius, 65). Christ’s death and resurrection work by “dulling and overshadowing” the works of other human beings, thereby drawing human beings to the knowledge of “his own true Father” (Athanasius, 65-66). Aquinas brings forward a similar but more abbreviated “pedagogical” logic in Summa theologiae III.1.2. See “reasons” 1-4, 6-9.

41 Ibid., 159. For a helpful discussion of this doctrine, with a focus on its appearance in Aquinas, see Matthew Levering, Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 2002), 66-79.
concerning the Kingdom of God – none of these things exist in their own right.44 Christ’s life and work, as inseparable from his death, cannot denote elements of human psychology or social life that can be cultivated solely for the sake of the present age: the death shows that he is divine, that he is from an eternity beyond this age.45 Christ’s death on the cross is a word that forces human beings to live eschatologically, showing “human things” to be “created by [God], and yet to await His redeeming work.”46 Christ’s death helps humans to “recognize the law of our own dying,” to recognize that all human possibilities end in death and thus are open to judgment by God. When Christ dies on the cross, “he bids farewell to all those achievements by which men obscure the fact of death; and because He passes by and turns away and bids farewell, his life shines.”47 Elsewhere in his commentary Barth calls this the “supreme negation of the Word of the cross.”48

Christ’s crucifixion reveals human beings before this confrontation with Christ to be in “Adam,” that is, to habitually avoid the knowledge of God due to a predilection to idolatry.49 The crucifixion reveals the “wrath” of God against this idolatry. Barth’s critical comments on “religion” all throughout his Epistle to the Romans should be read in light of this point.50 The sinful situation of human beings is that “we suppose that we know what we are saying when we say ‘God’” and that “we are able to arrange our relation to Him as we arrange our other relationships.”51 Christ shows us that we “try to

44 Barth, Epistle, 159.
45 Ibid., 159-160.
46 Ibid., 159.
47 Ibid., 159.
48 Ibid., 378. Note Barth’s caveat against the Church practicing a “radical negation of all things human” on the basis of Christ here, though, as a false, non-Christological “positive human negation.”
49 Cf. Ibid., 170-172.
50 I.e., Ibid., 172-174, 184-5, and almost all of his commentary on Romans 7, 229-270.
51 Ibid., 44.
bury out of sight the suspicions and reservations” that affect our human life and human
words from the fact of death.52 Sin arises when human beings attempt “in our arrogant
endeavor to cross the line of death by which we are bounded.”53 The result of this
endeavor is an “unreal aloofness from God who is the Life of our Life.”54

Christ’s resurrection is a part of God’s revelation in Christ as well, though not in
as fundamental a way as his crucifixion. Barth explains that Christ’s resurrection creates
a new “ego” that exists in hope of the coming world of the futurum resurrectionis by the
sign of Christ’s resurrection.55 Christ’s death, as a negation of human possibility, is not
enough: what is needed is a discussion of the “creation of the new man” in Christ’s
resurrection set free from the danger of idolatry by Christ’s death.56 Barth describes the
resurrection of Christ as a kind of sign: the resurrection shows that Christ’s death is a
divine action. The resurrection shows that a “new man” exists in Christ, and that human
beings “know God, or, rather, are known of Him” through Christ’s resurrection.57
However, this “new man” is strongly eschatological, for Barth: human beings “perceive
the Futurum resurrectionis” in Christ, but in a way that is “wholly distinct from such
moral and actual experiences or dispositions of character as may accompany the
perception.”58 The transformation of life by Christ’s resurrection is “the eternal future,”
not a present perception.59

52 Ibid., 167.
53 Ibid., 168. Barth realizes that this reverses Paul’s words in 5:12, “as through one man sin entered into the
world, and death through sin…” Cf. Ibid., 169-170.
54 Ibid., 168.
55 Ibid., 181, 195.
56 Ibid., 195.
57 Ibid., 206.
58 Ibid., 196-7.
59 Ibid., 197.
I. Barth and Historical-Critical Exegesis

I turn now to discuss ways that Barth puts this challenging Word of God in Christ in tension with particular groups of human words throughout his commentary. First I turn to the words of the biblical scholarship of the German-speaking academy of Barth’s time.

For Barth, the fact that Paul testifies to Christ, the Word of God, means that the human words that make up the modern historical-critical enterprise are in tension with Paul’s subject matter. Barth’s prefaces to the different editions of his Epistle to the contain a considerable amount of reflection on Barth’s part on the task of exegesis in critical conversation with historical-critical and liberal theological approaches to scripture. There Barth describes his approach to Scripture in Epistle to the Romans as having “certain affinities with the old doctrine of Verbal Inspiration.” However, Barth approaches the question of inspiration of Paul in his commentary more from the perspective of modern hermeneutics than a strict doctrine of inspiration. While Barth critiques the hermeneutical approaches of many of his contemporaries, the general tone of his approach tends to follow the scholarly conversation about biblical hermeneutics and about Paul going on in Barth’s time. Paul has not taken down divine dictation from the Holy Spirit, but rather Paul speaks about divine subject matter (Sache), the meaning of which must be carefully exegeted.

This is a hermeneutical approach which Barth develops as he is writing his first edition commentary on Romans. In this approach, a work should be interpreted in light of its subject matter. Barth suggests that this hermeneutical approach is “applicable also to

---

60 Ibid., 18.
61 Webster, “Karl Barth” in Reading Romans through the Centuries, 215-220.
the study of Lao-Tse and Goethe.”

Barth notes, against criticism that his first edition commentary was insufficiently historical, that the scholarly commentaries of his time “confine themselves to an interpretation of the text which seems to me to be no commentary at all, but merely the first step towards a commentary.”

By this Barth means the philological, archaeological, and linguistic material that makes up many historical-critical studies of Romans. Barth suggests that such historical work is merely preliminary, falling short of being “driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter.”

Barth compares the work of contemporary historical-critical commentaries on Romans to the exegesis of John Calvin, saying “how energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent!”

Barth gestures towards Calvin’s exegetical practice as being deeper than a simple doctrine of verbal inspiration, but a practical effort of wrestling with Paul’s subject matter and straining to make this subject matter contemporary.

Barth notes that Paul’s thought “can be justified only as resting in God.”

Discussing Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,” Barth comments that Paul is not a “genius rejoicing in his own creative ability” (a description quoted from a contemporary scholar, apparently Friedrich Zündel). Although Barth does not explicitly claim that Paul’s words are verbally inspired, he does claim that Paul’s words are only intelligible to readers who approach Paul with an obedient

---

62 Barth, Epistle, 12. Exploration of this point with a focus on Barth’s first edition Epistle to the Romans, with attention to unpublished preface drafts, is the contribution of Richard Burnett’s Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis.

63 Barth, Epistle, 6.

64 Ibid., 8.

65 Ibid., 7.

66 Ibid., 27.
relationship to God formed in faith. Paul’s words make no sense without perceiving their divine source, and one needs a relationship of faith with God to understand these words:

Paul’s words are different from any other text because his subject matter is Jesus: the Word of God in Jesus is fundamentally different from the other various human words studied by historical-critical methods. While “the name Jesus defines an historical occurrence,” the nature of this occurrence as history is hidden: “in so far as our world is touched in Jesus by the other world [of God], it ceases to be capable of direct observation as history, time, or thing.” While Jesus was truly human and acted as other humans do in history, because his is a divine action, Barth argues that the death and resurrection of Jesus is not an observable part of history like other historical events: “Jesus is the plane which lies beyond our comprehension.”

_The Word in Paul’s Words Confronts Exegetes Existentially_

Because Paul’s words, as testimony to the divine Word, are unlike any other text, Barth explains that the response to hearing this scriptural Word passed on by Paul must be to respond existentially to it. To subject Paul’s words to methods of critical analysis but escape this existential demand is to misread Paul. Proper exegesis of Paul makes God’s authoritative call present rather than seeking to explain Paul in terms of the human sciences. Barth offers a citation from Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews at the end of his preface to the third edition that sums up his thoughts on his point: in Scripture, “[God] promises eternal life—to those who are dead. He speaks of the blessedness of

---

67 Ibid., 29.
68 Ibid., 29-30.
resurrection—to those who are compassed about with corruption. He pronounces those in whom sin dwells—to be righteous.” 69 Scripture is God’s speech: “God cries out to us that he is quickly coming to our aid.” 70 Early on in his commentary, echoing these statements by Calvin, Barth notes that by the Word of Christ “we have been dissolved as men and established in God.” 71

Barth observes that those who approach scripture with an overly intellectual focus see no “underlying problem” in the text, and thus miss the real “Word in the words.” 72 Barth critiques Rudolf Bultmann for standing in a position of judgment and superiority over Scripture even amid a kind of theological hermeneutic, in discerning what in Scripture fit the “Spirit of Christ” and what did not. 73 Against Bultmann, Barth asks, “is there any way of penetrating to the heart of a document—of any document!—except on the assumption that its spirit will speak to our spirit through the actual written words?” 74 Barth proposes instead to “learn and teach” while “standing by Paul’s side.” 75 While readers must “learn to see beyond Paul” in seeing the subject matter in Paul’s words, this can be done better with “utter loyalty” to Paul rather than a position of authority over Paul. 76

2. The Word of Christ and the Words of the Old Law

For Barth, the condemnation of idolatry and emphasis on God’s transcendence

---

69 Ibid., 20.
70 Ibid., 20.
71 Ibid., 30.
72 Ibid., 9.
73 Ibid., 18.
74 Ibid., 18.
75 Ibid., 19.
76 Ibid., 19.
that he finds in Paul is rooted in the Old Testament’s understanding of God and critique of idolatry. Far from neglecting the Old Testament, Barth offers in fact an inherently “anti-Marcionite” reading of Paul. Barth explicitly discusses Marcion at one point: noting that the Old Law involves human words, Barth asks, “why should we not enrol ourselves as disciples of Marcion, and proclaim a new God, quite distinct from the old God of the law?” Barth answers that Marcionism is “pseudo-radicalism.” Marcionism is not radical enough in its approach to the relationship between the Word and human words: posing that one group of words (such as selections from the New Testament) connects one to Christ while another (the Old Law) does not draws the Pauline response “God forbid!” (Romans 7:7). Furthermore, the Law is necessary, along with all words of religion, as by it “men perceive themselves to be bounded as men of the world by that which is divine.” The Old Law, as the highest possibility of human religion, “compels us to the perception that God is not to be found in religion.” The Old Law is the “evolution of religion” in this sense. The Old Law is a work of religion that points human beings towards eschatological hope in the light of human limits and death. Marcionism is “pseudo-radicalism” precisely because in positing the words of the Law as not being the Word of God, it suggests that there are human words elsewhere (the New Testament) which testify to the Word without God’s sovereign authority to challenge human beings through the crucified and risen Christ (i.e., words which undialectically testify to the Word).

Yet Barth’s rejection of Marcionism precisely gives him the notion that all human

---

77 Ibid., 241.
78 Ibid., 241-2.
79 Ibid., 242.
80 Ibid., 242.
81 Ibid., 243.
religious words, especially the words of scripture, can play a role in the economy of salvation in gesturing to the Word of God in Christ, even though these words point to Christ “as a tangent touches a circle.”82 Barth explains that the Law “brings all human possibility into the clear light of an all-embracing krasis.”83 While Barth identifies the Old Law of Israel with human words of “religion,” he also claims that the Law is from God. Barth sees the Old Law as testifying to God’s Word in human words in much the same way as he understands the words of Paul to testify to the Word.

However, Barth argues that the Old Law can be misused if it is not read as pointing to God’s grace in Christ, but as a religion enclosed upon itself. Barth first turns to discussing the Old Law in commenting on the meaning of Romans 2:14, “Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things of the law.” In explaining this, Barth describes the nature of the Law: “an impression of divine revelation left behind in time, in history, and in the lives of men.”84 Barth interprets Paul’s words about Gentiles obeying the Law without being given the Law as referring to God’s ability to relate to human beings and bring them salvation apart from the mediation of the Law, the mediation of this past divine revelation: “revelation is from God…it is not bound to the impress which it once had made, but is free.”85 God is not bound to God’s manner of speaking in the past: a past revelation understood in its “human, historical, subjective side” is not itself God’s speech, but a testimony to God’s speech which, as a human word, Barth explains can be an occasion of sin.86

Barth’s understanding of the Old Law (and scripture as a whole) is determined by

---

82 Ibid., 242. For Barth’s geometric image of the tangent of a circle, see Ibid., 30.
83 Ibid., 242.
84 Ibid., 65.
85 Ibid., 67.
86 Ibid., 183.
the Pauline notion that through Jesus, God has spoken, declaring his righteousness and declaring people righteous “apart from the law” (Romans 3:21).\(^{87}\) God speaks and saves people through Jesus independently of the Law, although God gave the Law. Barth explains that God’s transcendent speech through Jesus “cuts sharply through all human sense of possession and semi-possession, even through all sense of not-possessing.”\(^{88}\) In other words, the word of God spoken in Jesus is a proclamation of God’s absolute sovereignty over human beings, even those who possess the Law as a record of human response to God’s past revelation, because God’s word in Jesus is sovereign even over God’s past speech. God is not bound to the Law, even though the Law is a manner of relating to God given by God: “he speaks where law is, not because law is there, but because he willeth to speak.”\(^{89}\)

Barth’s understanding of God’s revelation in Jesus as centered in Christ’s death and resurrection comes into his discussion of the Law as well. Barth observes, “to be Christ, so far as human possibility is concerned, means to die in the midst of evil doers.”\(^{90}\) While the Law “has its invisible foundation and meaning from God,” the Law, as a human response to the word, “belongs mentally and morally to the old world, and stands in the shadow of sin and death.”\(^{91}\) Those seeking to live out Christianity in line with Paul today, then, must distinguish between the “divine possibility of religion” which is revealed by the dialectical judgment of human words and human religion in Jesus and the “human possibility” of religion which is created by God, but runs the risk of sinfully

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 92.  
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 92.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 92.  
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 185.  
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 184.
“entering between” (Romans 5:20) and obscuring the salvific work of Christ.92

Barth understands the Law, therefore, to be human words which express God’s judgment and absence. But he takes the Law also as an expectation and desire that God speak his word in Jesus today. The Law, Barth explains, is “constantly reawakening in men the recollection of that relationship with God which they have—lost.”93

At times, Barth interprets Paul’s references to the Old Law as referring not only to the Torah given to Israel, but to any human religious impulse: all human words, when spoken in response to God’s self-revelation, become “Law” in Paul’s sense. Barth observes that the Law can work “consciously or unconsciously.”94 Yet Barth also posits that the Law really is God’s revelation, only revelation “broken into beams of different colors in the prism of the sequence and variety of human events.”95 Speaking to Paul’s discussion of the “advantage” of Jews in Romans 3, particularly that they were “entrusted with the oracles of God,” Barth interprets “oracles of God” to mean “comprehensible signs of the incomprehensible truth that, through the world is incapable of redemption, yet there is redemption for the world.”96 Barth adds, however, that such “oracles” include not only the Old Law, but could also be “John the Baptist, Plato or Socialism, or that moral perception which dwells in all its simplicity in the midst of the rough and tumble of human life.”97 In his attempt to “creatively strain at the sinews” of interpretation of Paul, Barth allegorizes these references of Paul to the Old Law and to the people of Israel as denoting anyone who has had a “conscious or unconscious” experience of God’s revelation.

92 Ibid., 184.
93 Ibid., 173.
94 Ibid., 173.
95 Ibid., 173.
96 Ibid., 79.
97 Ibid., 79.
While Barth at times allegorizes Paul’s discussion to describe the Law as human religiosity in general, he also takes the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament to be the fulfillment of this religious impulse in history. Offering a “point of view of comparative religion,” Barth comments that religion—as the human expectation of the Word God will speak in Jesus—“reaches its highest and purest peak in the Law of Israel, that is, in the assault made upon men by the Prophets.” 98 The Old Testament is the fulfillment of religion because it reveals that all other human religions involve human beings “arrogantly and illegitimately daring the impossible and raising themselves to equality with God.” 99 The Old Testament shows human beings that they are “conditioned invisibly by sin.” 100

For Barth, the word of God in Jesus judges but also fulfills the words of the Old Law, including human religious words: he notes this in commenting on Romans 7:4, “ye also were made dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God.” 101 Barth explains this saying that Jesus shows that the religious words end in death: “Golgotha is the end of the law and the frontier of religion…in the slain Christaccording-to-the-law, the last and noblest human possibility, the possibility of human piety and belief and enthusiasm and prayer, is fulfilled by being evacuated.” 102 Yet Jesus’ resurrection shows that despite its limits, human religion or the Old Law has a meaning not ended by death, but a meaning that extends beyond death into eternal life, giving

98 Ibid., 243. See also Ibid., 366: “Can there be a ‘supreme’ religion, a highest pinnacle of all human work, in the relation between God and men? If such a religion were to be found anywhere, it would be in the ‘religion’ of the prophets and psalmists of Israel, which is nowhere excelled, certainly not in the history of Christianity.”
99 Ibid., 244.
100 Ibid., 244.
101 Ibid., 233-4.
102 Ibid., 233.
religious people a new freedom: “beyond the evacuation in Christ of the achievement of religion…we perceive in Him the power of obedience which is the power of His Resurrection.”103 In other words, righteousness comes from God’s act in Christ, Christ’s death and resurrection, rather than independent works of religious piety separate from Christ. Yet Barth notes at the start of his discussion of Romans 7 that this “evacuation” of the Old Law/religion does not mean that the Old Law has no value: rather, one cannot “divorce grace from the experience of graces which takes form and shape in religion and in morality, in dogma and in ecclesiasticism.”104

3. The Word of Christ and the Words of the Church’s Later Doctrine

Barth believes that Jesus, as the divine Word testified to humanly by Paul and the rest of scripture, exists in a state of tension with the human words of the history of Christian doctrines. Christian orthodoxy, like the Old Law, is for Barth a God-given human wrestling with the Word, a form of “religion.” Yet over against these human words Christ is the “Word of freedom which religion is unable to discover.”105

While Barth does not discuss the Church’s historical doctrines in his Epistle to the Romans as much as he does in his Church Dogmatics, one doctrine which plays a major role in Barth’s commentary on Romans is the Council of Chalcedon’s Christological definition of Jesus as being fully divine and fully human. Barth refers indirectly to the Chalcedonian formula in commenting on Romans 1:4 and quotes the Chalcedonian formula more explicitly to comment on Romans 8.

103 Ibid., 234.
104 Ibid., 230.
105 Ibid., 276.
Following Paul, Barth emphasizes that Jesus is “declared” to be the Son of God “with power” by the fact of his resurrection (Romans 1:4). Barth interprets this to mean that this declaration by means of the resurrection is the teaching which must be proclaimed about Jesus, an “establishing or declaration” of the transformation of the world begun by God given to human beings “from above.”\(^{106}\) Barth comments that in the resurrection, the Holy Spirit “touches the old world of the flesh” as “a tangent touches a circle.”\(^{107}\) The Holy Spirit touches the world “as its frontier” in Jesus’ resurrection.\(^{108}\) Because Christ has to be “declared” Son of God by the resurrection, Barth takes this as showing that Christ comes from the “world of the Father” and that “we who stand in this concrete world know nothing, and are incapable of knowing anything, of that other world.”\(^{109}\) Since Christ is declared “Son” by the resurrection, this means, in other words, that Christ’s sonship is a concept which cannot be understood apart from this resurrection, which is a divine act.

In this context of commenting on Romans 1:4, Barth suggests that a certain mistaken understanding of the Chalcedonian formula can obscure the testimony to Jesus in Paul. In Jesus, Barth comments, “there is here no merging or fusion of God and man, no exaltation of humanity to divinity, no overflowing of God into human nature.”\(^{110}\) Such a “merging or fusion” associated with Jesus’ sonship, Barth notes, is an attempt to describe Jesus’ sonship while avoiding the manner by which Paul proclaims that God has revealed Jesus as son: through his resurrection. Apart from his resurrection from the

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{108}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{109}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{110}\) Ibid., 30.
dead, for Barth, Jesus has no more significance than any other historical figure.\textsuperscript{111} Barth explains that the resurrection is an event in and beyond history: in history because it took place “outside the gates of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30,” beyond history because it “brings the world of the Father.”\textsuperscript{112} With Barth’s critique of Chalcedon-like language—“no merging or fusion of God and man”—Barth seems to be saying that a certain more “ontological” approach to Jesus’ sonship misses the way God acts through the resurrection in a historical and yet history-transcending way.

Barth turns to Chalcedon again, this time using the explicitly Chalcedonian formula “very God and very man,” in speaking of another of Paul’s major discussions of Jesus as the Son of God, Romans 8:3, “God sent his own Son.”\textsuperscript{113} In speaking of this, Barth offers a series of orthodox formulas and affirmations, but he takes pains to show how the revelation of God in Christ also challenges a non-historical and non-paradoxical understanding of each of these orthodox statements. Quoting the Nicene Creed, Barth states that Jesus is “begotten not made,” but adds “let no orthodox person rejoice.”\textsuperscript{114} Barth explains that Jesus is “contrasted with every creature familiar to us.”\textsuperscript{115} One can speak of Jesus as “begotten not made,” but not in a way which assumes that one has full knowledge of what one is saying thereby about Jesus and God. He quotes the Creed again, saying that Jesus is “born of the Virgin Mary,” but adds that this is only a sign “against assigning eternity to any humanity or nature or history that we can observe.”\textsuperscript{116}

After putting these citations from the Nicene Creed in tension with his reading of Paul’s words in Romans 8:3, Barth does the same with the Chalcedonian formula. He

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 30.  
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 30.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 277.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 277.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 277.  
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 277.
observes that Jesus is indeed “very God and very man,” but explains that this means that Jesus is “the document by which the original, lost-but-recoverable union of God and man is guaranteed.”

Barth argues that preachers and theologians cannot speak of Christ ontologically apart from his soteriological work (accomplished through his death and resurrection) as the Son “sent” from God. Barth seems concerned, as he was in his commentary on Romans 1:3, that a certain Christological approach might emphasize Christ’s ontological status as divine and human over the “historical” and salvific aspects of Christ’s work. Barth explains that “the scandal of the historical revelation of Christ criss-crosses every form of rationalism,” and here Barth is implicitly targeting a particular form of what he takes to be theological rationalism. He states that God’s “eternity,” or divine nature, “is not a constant factor which we can affirm safely and directly and non-paradoxically, as though it were a series of universal ideas—such as the idea of God, of Christ, and of Mediation.”

Barth here seems to gesture towards a particular philosophical account of the incarnation or Chalcedon—humanity and divinity merging without reference to Christ’s concrete lordship handed on by Paul—as being a temptation that affects “Chalcedonian” or “orthodox” readers of Paul.

While he does not deny that Chalcedon has truth to it, even truth as a means of interpreting Romans, Barth cautions against seeing Paul’s words in Romans as describing a concept that can be understood without reference to God’s sovereign proclamation and establishment of salvation in Christ. Jesus was not sent to merge humanity and divinity in a philosophical manner that can be analyzed without participating personally and existentially in the economy of salvation: he was sent “to announce the resurrection of the

---

117 Ibid., 277.
118 Ibid., 276.
119 Ibid., 276.
4. The Church’s Hearing and Proclamation of the Word of God

If Barth believes that the Word of Christ and human words (such as the words of the Old Law and of later doctrine) exist in tension in this manner, then what role can Barth assign to the Church as actively participating in Christ? How is this tension between the Word and human words expressed when Barth discusses the Church as a body brought into being by the Word? Barth’s understanding of the Church will have ramifications for his understanding of how the words of the biblical authors can hand on the Word, since the Church’s existence must in some way be grounded, as it is in Aquinas, in the apostolic testimony to Christ.

Barth argues that the relationship between the Word of God and the Church, as a body of human hearers of the Word, must be grounded in Paul’s discussion of Israel in Romans 9-11. The locus of Barth’s exegetical discussion of the relationship between the Word of God and the Church created by that Word is Romans 9:6, “but I do not sorrow as though the word of God hath come to nought.” Barth here is observing that the Church really does hand on the Word in its human words: “the theme of the Church is the very Word of God—the Word of Beginning and End, of the Creator and Redeemer, of Judgment and Righteousness: but the Theme is proclaimed by human lips and received by human ears.” However, this Word proclaimed humanly is not a human word, but “the eternal and absolute Word of God” which stands over and judges the Church even as

---

120 Ibid., 277.
121 Ibid., 340.
122 Ibid., 341.
it proclaims the Word. Barth comments that Israel and the Church, as human hearers and speakers of the Word, always exist in dialectical tension with the Word they proclaim: “the Church is condemned by that which establishes it, and is broken in pieces upon its foundations.”

While Barth suggests that the Word stands over and judges the Church, this does not mean that Barth is implying that Israel and the Church play no role in the economy of salvation. Barth explains that “a non-ecclesiastical relation between men and God is no more a reality in this world than is the innocence of paradise.” Barth grounds this position exegetically, by the fact that Paul spends Romans 9-11 explaining the “fact of Israel” in light of Romans 3-8. Barth sees Israel and the Church as identified with one another because they are both hearers of the Word. Barth emphasizes that the Church can be understood only in the context of God speaking the Word in Christ because it is in the Church, and only in these, that the Word spoken in Christ is presented to the world, even though they are judged by Christ: “the Church, situated on this side of the abyss which separates men from God, is the place where the eternity of revelation is transformed into a temporal, concrete, directly visible thing in this world.” Barth includes Israel in this definition of “Church.” Barth notes that Israel and the Church have an inherent tension with the Word, because “the Church is the endeavour to make the incomprehensible and unavoidable Way intelligible to men.” While such a task of

123 Ibid., 341.
124 Ibid., 341.
125 Ibid., 334.
126 Ibid., 337.
127 Ibid., 337: “the Church is that visibility which forces invisibility upon our notice, that humanity which directs our attention to God.”
128 Ibid., 332.
129 Ibid., 332.
130 Ibid., 332.
making the Word of God in Christ fully intelligible is beyond the power of Israel and the Church’s human words, it is only through such an attempt that the Word of Christ comes to human beings at all. Israel and the Church point to Christ through Parables, Barth observes, adding that parables are the only way human words can point to the Word.\textsuperscript{131}

Barth seeks to accomplish a kind of “Copernican revolution” of the Church in his commentary, in which the mission of the Church in the world comes to be judged by and critiqued by the Word of God, rather than the Church’s handing on of the Word of God coming to be judged by what human persons in the Church take to be the conditions of its mission. Barth makes this comment in the context of Paul’s statement about Israel in Romans 9:32: “[Israel’s] pursuit comes not from faith, but from works.”\textsuperscript{132} Barth invokes Immanuel Kant at this point: he suggests that the Church must “outstrip even Kant in the careful preservation of the boundaries of humanity.”\textsuperscript{133} Rather than resting in their hearing and proclamation of the Word of God—their faith—Barth describes Israel and the Church’s “works” as the active avoidance of being “a stranger in the world,” the desire of Israel and the Church to be “orientated to what can be seen of men.”\textsuperscript{134} The position of “works” here, as Barth reads it in his exegesis, is one where faith in the Word of God is seen as “too unsympathetic, too loveless, too dangerous, too unpsychological, too unpractical,” and the Church on this basis seeks after another Word to proclaim, to perform “works” instead of living by “faith.”\textsuperscript{135} Barth describes this as the fundamental “guiltiness” of Israel and the Church.\textsuperscript{136} Barth envisions an ecclesial renewal—although he presents the Church’s guilt as a perennial temptation of the Church as a hearer of the

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 333-4.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 362; 367.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 367.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 368.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 368.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 369.
Word—in which the Church would appear to the world “as a Church under judgment” and would “know of no other justification save that which is in judgment,” the judgment of the Word of faith proclaimed by God in Christ.  

Even though Barth’s commentary tends to have a focus on the “guilt of the Church” in refusing to speak the Word of God in Christ, this negation presumes a deeper positive affirmation: that the Church can and does at times testify to Christ faithfully. Such positive testimony is grounded in the historicity of Christ’s death, where “the invisible God becomes for us visible; in so far as his death is the place where atonement with God takes place.” Jesus not only marks a divide between God and human beings, the “crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell,” but reveals a deep union between God and human beings established in his cross. In commenting on Romans 5:10, “God commendeth his own love towards us,” Barth explains that the cross reveals an “indissoluble union” between God and human beings established in Christ’s cross. In Christ’s cross “here is Emmanuel, God with us; and God commendeth his love towards us.”

Barth comments that Paul in Romans 5:1-10 testifies to a “New Man” and a “New World” revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection, which puts God and human beings in a relationship of “indissoluble union.” This proclamation of Paul is the type of the Church’s proper proclamation in faith. The “peace” Paul proclaims has “its establishment and realization in God,” and is seen only through “contemplating the crucified and risen

137 Ibid., 370.
138 Ibid., 160.
139 Ibid., 162.
140 Ibid., 162.
141 Ibid., 163.
Barth presents Paul’s words in Romans 5:1-10 as the Church’s proper, non-idolatrous way of speaking. The work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is not simply a forensic justification that leaves human beings as they were before the moment of justification, but transforms human beings into those who “have no alternative but to love Him in return.”

Barth also explains that this “New Man” is a Trinitarian reality. Based on the description of the Holy Spirit in Romans 5:3-5, Barth states that the Holy Spirit gives human beings a new identity, a new subjective “I” that stands rightly in the presence of God. The Holy Spirit, Barth notes, is what makes the “New Man” in faith a paradox to the rest of the world, in its creation of a new subject in human beings. This paradox stands in opposition to the self-made religion Barth describes as under God’s judgment in “the Night,” or Romans 1:18.

Yet Barth calls God’s salvific action in Christ the “Coming Day” because the “New Man” established in Christ is established in hope, not yet in reality. This is why the Church’s testimony in the world can sound “too unsympathetic, too loveless, too dangerous, too unpractical.” Barth emphasizes the limits of faith: by the claims of Christian revelation, one cannot give any “short cut” to the “future eternity which lies beyond us.” Christians cannot make their Christian hope into a “present reality.” Barth argues that there is a real change in human beings in salvation, that Christ does effect a new “Ego” in the believer, but also that any discussion of Christ in the present

---

142 Ibid., 151.
143 Ibid., 163.
144 Ibid., 158. See also 181-2.
145 Ibid., 157-8.
146 Ibid., 368.
147 Ibid., 153.
148 Ibid., 153.
age is dialectically qualified by the hope of the future resurrection. This dialectical qualification comes from the fact that God’s self-revelation is only in Christ’s death and resurrection for Barth, and speech about salvation, or participation in God, cannot “go around” this objectivity.

Christ’s death and resurrection lead to faith and hope by the “creative and redemptive power” of the Holy Spirit (following Paul in Romans 5:5, on the love of the Holy Spirit “poured out into our hearts”).\(^{149}\) The Holy Spirit creates a new subject in the human person, creating a new way of being related to God.\(^{150}\) However, for Barth, the Holy Spirit largely points the human subject to a future rather than present reality. Barth observes that the Spirit is “comprehensible and conspicuous only in what is not given,” that is, the Spirit is a promise of a future full righteousness before God not yet achieved.\(^{151}\) The Holy Spirit, for Barth, is in essence a promise of future hope “beyond all future understanding.”\(^{152}\) In the Holy Spirit, God “reckons righteousness to the believer” on account of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the human being.\(^{153}\)

Barth comments that the Holy Spirit enables human beings to proleptically “name” themselves as “son of God” in Christ, following Christ.\(^{154}\) The Holy Spirit, working through the “Word” of Christ crucified and risen, allows one to say “I—yet veritably not ‘I’ but Christ in me—am, when I obey the truth, irresistibly obey it, not the slave of God, not a stranger to Him, but—His Son.”\(^{155}\) The Holy Spirit enables one to participate in Christ’s relationship of closeness and obedience to the Father, though this

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 157.
\(^{150}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{151}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 296.
\(^{155}\) Ibid., 296.
participation is a proleptic one. This “Spirit of Sonship” creates the new “unobservable, existential ego” which comes from hearing the Word of God in Christ. Yet this is always still a proleptic reality. Barth later notes that the Love of God “is not a ‘property’, which men may achieve or inherit or which inheres in them.” The emphasis must be on God “who has first loved men.”

Conclusion

Biblical commentary is foundational for Barth because handing on the Word in genres such as dogmatics or sermons for him must be governed by the words of scripture. This is ultimately because scripture witnesses to the Church’s Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the definitive revelation of God as the Son of God sent to redeem the world. In the process of reading Romans, Barth develops a Christocentric approach to divine revelation which emphasizes God’s authority to be known through Christ as the source of revelation, rather than points of contact between Paul and romanticized ideas about human spirituality. For Barth, rightly hearing the Word of God in scripture involves recognizing the Word’s freedom and allowing oneself to be called and led by the Word “spoken” in Christ and handed on by Paul. This means recognizing that scripture is the voice of the authoritative Lord, not merely raw material for later doctrinal development: scripture can speak in new and fresh ways.

This approach to scriptural revelation influences his work in other genres. With this chapter I have shown that the “negative theology” of Barth’s commentary (and in all

156 Ibid., 297.
157 Ibid., 321.
158 Ibid., 321-2.
his works), that which seems to set him apart so strongly from Aquinas, comes from his reading of Paul as testifying to God’s being revealed through the acts and sufferings of the fully human Jesus Christ. While Barth is cautious of orthodox language—claiming that the language of the Nicene Creed or Chalcedon can become an idol—his commentary offers a fundamentally “Chalcedonian” hermeneutic for reading Romans: one can only speak of God on the basis of the “very divine and very human” Jesus. In this “Chalcedonian” approach to God’s revelation, God is known only by the “existentiality of divinity” shown through the Son of God crucified and raised. Barth argues, in the process of reading Paul deeply, that the revelation of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is what reveals the “Night” of idolatry in its pervasiveness: idolatry is not polytheism per se but the setting up of a false God made in the image of human ideas and desires rather than in the image of the mystery of Christ. This Christocentric theology of the Word which Barth finds in Romans influences his rejection of natural theology and the *analogia entis* as well. These must be the words of “religion” or “Law” which Christ judges and fulfills: if natural theology or philosophy are seen as existing on equal footing with the testimony to Christ in scripture, then God’s sovereign authority to judge human words through the “existentiality of divinity” of the crucified and risen Christ is threatened.

On one level, the approaches of Aquinas and Barth to Romans are similar. Aquinas also has a strong emphasis on a Chalcedonian account of Christ in his *Lectures on Romans*. Aquinas identifies Paul’s gospel with the incarnate union, and the salvation brought about by it.\(^{159}\) Aquinas emphasizes like Barth that it is only through the

---

\(^{159}\) Aquinas, *Lectures on Romans*. ch. 1, § 24; ch. 4, § 380.
“mystery” of the Son’s humanity that “the gifts of grace come to us.”160 Though Aquinas does not interpret Paul’s discussion of idolatry and the Old Law as applying to religious speech in the same way that Barth does, Aquinas does state that members of the Church are continually called to recognize Jesus as Lord and submit their will to him.161

Aquinas and Barth differ on a deeper level, though, because of Barth’s positing of a stronger tension between the Word of God and human words, especially doctrinal words. Barth’s commentary in Epistle to the Romans presents a dialectic between the Church’s guilt and hope: the Church’s testimony to the Word is always inadequate to its subject matter, but at times God miraculously justifies this speech to testify to Christ rightly. Barth argues that the Church’s “Chalcedonian” reception of Christ determines the Church’s speech as dependent on God’s authoritative Word and as eschatological, not something it can possess in itself, since Christ is not merely a fulfillment of human possibilities, but, through his death and resurrection, a divine as well as human “event.” While Aquinas would also affirm like Barth that no human words can hope to adequately speak of the mystery of the incarnate Christ, Aquinas also asserts that, with the aid of the Holy Spirit joining believers to Christ’s body, members of the Church can share in Christ’s humanity and thus participate in his prophetic office by receiving and handing on divine revelation. Since the Church is the body of Christ guided by the Holy Spirit, Aquinas receives the authoritative mediation of scripture in the Church’s later doctrine as

---

160 Aquinas, Lectures on Romans. Chapter 1, § 72.
being, in a way, the Word of the incarnate Lord in his commentary on Romans.

With my study of their exegetical works, I hope to have shown how Aquinas and Barth understand the Word of God, the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, to speak contemporaneously to the Church through scriptural words. This divide between Aquinas and Barth on whether the Church’s doctrine can mediate scripture is crucial for understanding differences between a Catholic and Protestant theology of the Word. But since the approaches to scripture in both theologians are so focused on Christ as the Church’s authoritative Lord and source of the Church’s knowledge of God (this understood in “Chalcedonian” ways), there must be a possibility for further connections that bridge the Catholic-Protestant divide.

With my analysis of their works of dogmatic theology in my next two chapters, I hope to show how Aquinas and Barth understand this scriptural testimony to Jesus to be handed on by the Church’s teachers, and how they understand the capacity of the human mind to receive and restate biblical words and still faithfully hand them on as revelation. Analyzing the accounts of Christian doctrine as a whole in Aquinas and Barth will shed light on the theologies of the Word presented in these exegetical works of theirs as well.
Aquinas believes that Jesus speaks his word—and thus speaks himself, the incarnate Word—to the Church in the present. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church encounters the incarnate Word in scripture and tradition.\(^1\) The Church’s doctrinal activity does not leave Christ’s unique mediation behind because Jesus is always teaching the Church, both in his acts of teaching his disciples in the past and in his acts in the present by which he intercedes for the Church, giving it graces which help and guide it in its prophetic office under the Spirit’s guidance. On this view, human words are not merely the occasion for God’s speaking of his authoritative Word, as is the case according to Karl Barth’s view. Rather, human words share in Christ’s power to enlighten and sanctify in a ministerial or instrumental way, because the Church’s teachers and preachers are members of Christ’s mystical body by the grace of the Holy Spirit and were chosen by

---

\(^1\) For Aquinas, the Word of God is spoken through Scripture as well as through, if I might borrow words from *Dei Verbum*, a “tradition which comes from the Apostles” that “develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.” Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation], November 18, 1965, sec. 8. Furthermore, Aquinas would certainly agree that “sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others” (*Dei Verbum* 10). *Lumen Gentium* suggests that the Church’s doctrine and work participates in Christ as well: the Council Fathers observe that the relationship between Christ and the Church exists “by no weak analogy” with “the mystery of the incarnate Word,” in that “as the assumed nature inseparably united to him serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body” (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], November 21, 1964, sec. 8).
Christ to hand on his doctrine. The *Summa theologiae*, uniquely among Aquinas’s writings, approaches the life of Christ by means of a carefully and systematically ordered analysis of Christ’s human nature in light of the incarnation, an analysis that includes discussion of Christ’s grace and prophecy, his office as mediator between God and humans, and his life and teaching. In this, Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* is a work of medieval “science” or *scientia.* Aquinas’s treatise on Christ in the *Tertia Pars*, read in the context of the *Summa theologiae* as a whole, is designed to give the reader “an understanding of who and what Christ is so as to grasp more profoundly the meaning of what Christ does.”

Even though prophecy is not a major structuring principle in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas nonetheless discusses prophecy in enough detail to give us a complex and multifaceted portrait of how he understands Christ to be a prophet and how

---

2 Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 1948), I.1.2. Latin text: Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 4-12: *Summa theologiae* (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1888-1906). Aquinas sought with his *Summa theologiae* to articulate the various aspects in a synthetic structure that could most represent *sacra doctrina*’s character as “wisdom.” Thus, as M.-D. Chenu has famously observed, Aquinas plots the various *loci* of the Christian faith in a larger plan of creation and salvation, described using concentric patterns of *exitus* and *reditus*, as a way of relating creation, human acts, and salvation to God as cause. For a relatively recent account of this *exitus-reditus* structure and its relationship to Aquinas’s *sacra doctrina*, see Romanus Cessario, *Introduction to Moral Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 3-15. According to M.-D. Chenu’s classic account, the *Summa theologiae* is structured by a circular movement, of God moving outward (*exitus*) in creation and creation moving in a return motion (*reditus*) towards God in the human actions elicited by divine grace through Christ and the Sacraments. Chenu says Aquinas appealed to a structure of *exitus-reditus* as an arrangement of his thought that was both doctrinally and pedagogically an improvement on the structure in previous systematic works by Masters like Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard. M.-D. Chenu, *Towards Understanding St. Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 303-4. Chenu also points to a philosophical discussion of causality behind “exitus-reditus” in the *Summa*. The key to Aquinas’s arrangement, Chenu says, is a desire to read “every being, every action, every destiny” through the lens of “the highest causality wherein the reason of their being will be fully revealed under the light of God itself” (304). By adopting the exitus-reditus scheme, Aquinas hopes ultimately to show the relationship of all reality to the one God. This is more than just a pedagogically helpful or doctrinally pleasing arrangement: the plan of the *Summa*, Chenu explains, builds on and goes beyond the epistemology of the Greek philosophers to “explain the becoming of created being” in light of God’s revelation. (304). On the historical background to Aquinas’s approach in the *Summa theologiae*, see the helpful essay by Romanus Cessario, “Towards understanding Aquinas' theological method: the early Twelfth-century Experience” in *Studies in Thomistic Theology*, ed. Paul Lockley, et al. (Houston, Texas: University of St. Thomas, 1995), 17-89.

he understands the Church to participate in his prophetic office.

In order to analyze Aquinas’s Christological understanding of the Church’s prophetic (doctrinal) office, in this chapter I will offer a close analysis of selected questions in Aquinas’s treatise on the incarnation and treatise on the life of Christ in the Tertia Pars of the Summa theologiae. My focus will be on bringing out the ways in which the teaching of the Church participates in Christ’s own teaching, without undermining the status of Christ as the unique mediator between God and human beings (1 Tim 2:5). Aquinas believes that the Church’s prophetic activity, or its doctrine, is grounded in Christ’s personal grace and knowledge in his human nature. Aquinas’s account of Christ as prophet depends on some precise distinctions he makes in discussing Christ’s divine and human knowledge. Thus, my analysis will begin there. As a second step, I will discuss how Aquinas understands the relationship between Christ’s prophecy and Christ’s mediation of truth and salvation. As mediator, Christ hands on his infused knowledge of God through a uniquely dignified teaching. To fully understand Christ as mediator, we must examine how Christ offers his spoken doctrine with an aim towards its being handed on instrumentally by his disciples. As mediator, Christ also gives grace to the Church as its head, including the grace of prophecy. Third, after analyzing these aspects of Christ’s mediation, I will discuss how Aquinas thinks the Church participates in Christ’s doctrine and how he understands himself to be a participant in Christ’s prophetic office as a Master in theology.
How Was Christ a Prophet?

Prophets are human beings who speak the Word of God. But how can a human presume to speak the Word of God? My task in this section of this chapter is to show how Aquinas understands this to be possible in terms of the Church’s mediation of divine truth.

This question of how a Prophet could speak the Word is pressing because for Aquinas the Word of God is ultimately the second person of the Trinity, a subsistent relation fully in act sharing in the divine nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit. For Aquinas, the Word of God cannot be expressed in a univocal way by human words because the divine nature is infinite and human words belong to the realm of the finite. While humans can understand certain truths about God from studying creation—such as that God exists—they cannot understand God fully on the basis of creatures. In fact, for Aquinas the essence of God remains infinitely beyond our understanding even when we name God (validly) by attributes such as “goodness” or “life.” God is a mystery beyond the full capacities of human naming. Though one can ascribe particular perfections of creatures to God by analogy, such predication nonetheless would always be false if we imagined it to include its inevitably finite “mode of signification.”

How then can human beings participate in the divine Word by their human words in prophecy? We should begin by looking at Aquinas’s discussion of the Old Testament Prophets: Aquinas holds that the Old Testament prophets participated in the mediation of divine truth.”

---

5 ST, I.12.12; I.13.2.
the Word “inasmuch as they foretold and foreshadowed the true and perfect Mediator of God and men.” For Aquinas, the prophets of the Old Testament cannot be understood outside of consideration of the Word made flesh. Examining Aquinas’s understanding of the Christological basis of the prophetic office is therefore crucial to offering an account of how human words can hand on the Word of God according to the *Summa theologiae*.8

Aquinas asks whether Christ is a prophet in question 7 of the *Tertia Pars*, on whether Christ has the “gratuitous grace” of prophecy. Aquinas defines a prophet as a “teller or seer of far-off things,” announcing events and truths which are “far from men’s senses.”9 Aquinas explains that “prophecy” only takes place when what we might call supernatural knowledge is involved: someone speaking about observed current events, or that which they know directly, is not a prophet.10 Why does Aquinas specify this oddly obvious point in speaking of Christ’s prophecy? Because Aquinas also believes that Christ had “full and unveiled knowledge” of God from birth, making him categorically different from the Prophets in history, even different from Moses.11 On account of his full knowledge of God from birth, Christ has direct knowledge of God which seems to forestall the definition of him as “prophet,” since prophecy as a divine gift which hands on knowledge beyond what a human “naturally” knows.

---

9 ST III.7.8. Response. I am setting aside the question of whether or not this approach to prophecy is faithful to all the valences of the understanding of prophecy in the Old and New Testaments. As Edward Oakes notes, for instance, the title “Prophet” in the New Testament appears to have acquired an eschatological connotation, suggesting a return of the “era of the classical prophets” heralding a renewal of Israel. Edward T. Oakes, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 28-30.
Aquinas on one level resists calling Christ a prophet, because prophecy, as Aquinas explains in his treatise on the gratuitous graces, actually involves a certain obscurity or distance between the prophet and what they know by divine inspiration: “prophecy denotes vision of some supernatural truth as being far remote from us.”\(^{12}\) Aquinas explains that Christ is a prophet nonetheless, though, by saying that Christ, before his passion, is simultaneously a “comprehensor” and a “wayfarer.”\(^ {13}\) In his discussion of the defects of Christ’s soul, Aquinas explains that Christ is a “wayfarer,” even though his full knowledge of God makes him a comprehensor, on account of the passibility of his soul and thus his body before his passion.\(^ {14}\) Aquinas further explains that Christ had full knowledge of God in the “intellective part” of his soul, but that because he is a wayfarer as well as a comprehensor Christ must understand some truths through “certain similitudes” in the “imaginative part” of his soul.\(^ {15}\)

Therefore, to find the fullest meaning of Aquinas’s account of Christ’s prophetic office, we must turn to his more detailed discussion of Christ’s human knowledge and the different aspects of this knowledge.\(^ {16}\) Particularly, Aquinas seems to associate Christ’s prophecy with his infused knowledge, that is, knowledge that is specially given to his human nature aside from beatific knowledge (which is the knowledge of “comprehensors”). While part of Aquinas’s treatise on Christ’s knowledge in the *Summa*

\(^{12}\) ST II-II.174.5. Response.

\(^{13}\) ST III.7.8. Response. Aquinas makes this argument also in II-II. 174. 5. Reply 3.

\(^{14}\) ST III.15.10. Response. This is due to a special “will of his Godhead” that Christ’s beatitude not “overflow into his body,” and “the delight of contemplation was so kept in the mind as not to overflow into the sensitive powers, lest sensible pain should thereby be prevented.” (ST III.14.1. Reply 2, 15.7. Reply 3).

\(^{15}\) ST III.7.8. Reply 1.

\(^{16}\) Yves Congar suggests that Aquinas’s division of the three aspects of Christ’s human nature in regard to grace (Christ’s grace, knowledge, and power), in questions 7-13 of the *Tertia Pars* correspond to the *munus triplex*, with knowledge relating to Christ’s prophetic office. Aquinas says in a prologue to question 7, “we must now consider such things as were co-assumed by the Son of God in human nature, and first what belongs to perfection... (1) the grace of Christ, (2) His knowledge, (3) his power.” Yves Congar, “Sur la triloque: Prophe-roi-pretre,” *Revue des sciences philosophique et theologiques* 67 (1983): 102.
theologiae is a speculative exploration of the nature of the humanity of the incarnate Word, we can also see this account of Christ’s knowledge as an account of how Christ teaches his Church, and thus as an account of the human knowledge (of the incarnate Word) in which the Church shares as the source of its knowledge.

Christ has the particular infused (that is, prophetic) knowledge that he does because of the hypostatic union. Aquinas describes Christ as having an infused intelligible knowledge of all things. In this way, Aquinas argues that Christ is not merely a prophet, but the perfecting source of all prophecy. Christ has every intelligible “word” in himself, in his human nature, which the Church hands on in its communication of the Word of God in its doctrine. This divine enlightening of the human mind by

---

17 While Christ’s human knowledge pales in comparison to his divine knowledge, these two knowledges are not opposed: rather Christ’s human knowledge exists as “illuminated” in relation to his divine knowledge as “illuminating.” ST III.9.1. Reply 2. In other words, the divine and human “knowledges” in Christ, while distinct, are not competitive. One illuminates the other. The human knowledge is “strengthened” by divine knowledge: this suggests an economic role to Christ’s human knowledge. Christ’s human knowledge is a medium, like “light of the air by the light of the sun,” for the illuminating divine knowledge. ST III.9.1. Reply 2. Aquinas asserts that Christ has a surpassing level of knowledge owing to the overflowing grace that he has as a consequence of the hypostatic union. However, prophets are not simply those who know, but messengers. If Aquinas is simply associating Christ’s prophecy with his knowledge, this seems unfitting to the biblical understanding of prophecy.

To fully understand Aquinas here, we must understand his presupposition: the ultimate goal of prophecy, like any Word of God, is union between God and human beings. The ultimate goal of Christ’s prophetic office is for human beings to share in the beatific vision, and Aquinas believes that this is not possible unless Christ, the highest prophet, himself shares in the beatific vision. Aquinas suggests that Christ has this beatific knowledge in his humanity in order to pass on this beatitude to others: the key philosophical understanding operating underneath Aquinas’s thoughts here is that “the cause ought always to be more efficacious than the effect.” Aquinas adds, though, that the prophetic work of Christ does not involve passing on his beatific knowledge, but other forms of knowledge.

Yet these other forms of knowledge have their ultimate goal in leading human beings to the beatific knowledge of God. Aquinas makes distinctions between particular types of human knowledge in Christ: along with his divine knowledge, Christ has beatific, infused, and acquired forms of human knowledge. Christ’s prophetic knowledge is a form of knowledge given to Christ’s soul by a special act of God’s grace. Aquinas emphasizes that the perfection of Christ’s humanity involves him knowing all things: Aquinas explains that this knowledge of all things is given to Christ by infused knowledge. While beatific knowledge perfects human beings, Aquinas notes that there is nothing that keeps beatific knowledge from existing side by side with an infused knowledge of all things by intelligible species, as this latter form of knowing is “proportioned to its [human] nature.” ST III.9.3. Reply 2 and 3. The human mind has potentiality not only towards knowledge of God due to being made in the image of God, but also potential regarding “all intelligible things.” ST III.9.3. Response. For the connection between the image of God and the beatific vision, see ST III.9.1. Response. Christ thus knows things not only in light of the Word, but also in their “proper nature,” due to the enlightenment of his mind by infused knowledge. ST III.9.3.
infusion of intelligible species is what Aquinas describes elsewhere as the gratuitous
grace of prophecy. Aquinas observes that prophecy can occur either through visible
images, through images infused into the imagination, or intelligible species infused
directly into the intellect, such as is the case with Solomon’s wisdom and the wisdom of
the Apostles. Aquinas notes in his treatise on prophecy that the prophet has higher
dignity when prophecy involves direct infusion of intellectual vision rather than
occurring by means of bodily or imaginary visions. The prophecy in which “the bare
intelligible truth is revealed” is “greater than all” other forms of prophecy.

Thus, prophecy for Aquinas involves the enlightening of the intellect, but in such
a way as to help the prophet instruct others in the truths necessary for salvation.
Prophecy is “economic” in Aquinas, and this is true supremely of Christ’s prophecy.

Christ has the infused prophetic knowledge he does so as to enlighten the human race.
Christ’s soul is “wholly perfected by having each of its powers reduced to act” not simply
so that Christ could be perfect in his human nature, but additionally so that Christ’s
perfection can be passed on to the Apostles and Prophets by grace, and thereby to the
Church. By Christ’s infused knowledge, he “knew all things made known to man by
divine revelation, whether they belong to the gift of wisdom or the gift of prophecy, or to
any other gift of the Holy Ghost.” Christ was given this knowledge as part of his being
“established by God as the Head of the Church,” so that, possessing the fullness of truth

---

18 ST II-II.173.2. Response.  
19 ST II-II.173.2. Response.  
20 ST II-II.174.2. Response.  
21 ST II-II.174.2. Reply 1.  
23 ST III.11.1.  
in his humanity, “all might receive the doctrine of truth from him.”25 By explaining that Christ knew all the truths handed on by prophecy, Aquinas suggests that Christ’s human knowledge is the source, in a sense, of the truths above reason which the Church knows by faith, along with any gratuitous graces which aid the Church in its doctrine.26 Aquinas’s philosophical principle of the cause containing in an eminent way that which it effects appears here again: Aquinas states that the soul of Christ “knew more fully and completely” what members of the Church know by their share in Christ through faith.27

The Relationship Between Christ’s Prophetic Mediation and Mediators in the Church

This economic dimension of Christ’s prophetic knowledge brings us to consideration of Christ as mediator. While Aquinas explicitly discusses how Christ hands on his knowledge in his treatises on Christ’s doctrine and on Christ’s resurrection appearances, we should approach these treatises in light of Aquinas’s theological understanding of Christ as mediator. Aquinas’s treatment of Christ as mediator is found

25 ST III.12.3. Response. John 18:37, “for this I came into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth” seems to loom large here, cited by Aquinas right after the quote above.

26 For Aquinas, the gratuitous graces are special helps God gives the Church that assist the Church’s mission of leading the world to Christ. Aquinas grounds his teaching on the gratuitous graces in scripture, particularly 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: “To one indeed by the Spirit is given the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another interpretation of speeches.” Aquinas’s article on the gratuitous graces offers an analysis of this passage in which he describes the different gifts and their particular roles in the Church’s mission:

Gratuitous grace embraces whatever a man needs in order to instruct another in divine things which are above reason. Now for this three things are required: first, a man must possess the fullness of knowledge of divine things, so as to be capable of teaching others. Secondly, he must be able to confirm or prove what he says, otherwise his words would have no weight. Thirdly, he must be capable of fittingly presenting to his hearers what he knows. (ST I-II.111.4. Response.)

By saying that Christ has all the gratuitous graces, Aquinas is saying that “Christ is the first and chief teacher of spiritual doctrine and faith” (ST III.7.7. Response). Christ not only directly inspires the faith of all believers in the Church but also is the source of the graces which help the Church proclaim the faith in a social or outwardly-directed way.

at the hinge between Aquinas’s two-part Christology, between his “ontological” treatise on Christ in questions 1-26 and a “historical” treatise covering Christ’s life in questions 27-59. As mediator between God and human beings, Aquinas explains, Christ hands on “precepts and gifts” from God and offers satisfaction on the part of human beings to God.28 It is clear in Aquinas’s treatise that Christ is a mediator in a threefold way, prophetically (handing on precepts), priestly (bringing divine gifts to human beings and making satisfaction on their behalf by being simultaneously priest and victim), and kingly (occupying a place of dignity and authority between God and other human beings), even though Aquinas does not explicitly use this framework to structure his question on Christ’s mediation.29 While Christ’s priestly satisfaction for sin is a major aspect of Christ’s mediation and the salvific efficacy of the incarnation as a whole, this aspect of satisfaction is not the only way Christ brings about salvation. Christ’s doctrine plays a role in salvation as well.

Due to my focus on prophecy and doctrine in this chapter, I will briefly discuss how Christ is a mediator as a prophet, that is, mediating truths beyond the capacity of

29 While Aquinas does not offer an extended, systematic account of Christ as prophet, priest, and king in the Summa theologiae, he leaves all the elements needed to form such an account in the Tertia Pars. For instance, in question 22 on Christ’s priesthood, Aquinas notes that God gives the grace of priesthood, kingship, and “lawgiver” (which is related to prophecy, as is clear with Aquinas’s quotation from Malachi 2:7) to individual persons in Israel separately, but that the “fount” of these graces exists in Christ as the source of all grace. ST III.22.1. Reply 3. As J.-P. Torrell observes, “it is the meaning of the word “Christus” (anointed) that gives Thomas the opportunity to bring up this threefold dignity—and especially the possibility of clarifying that the anointing of kings, priests, and prophets, given to the humanity of Christ by the Holy Spirit, flows from him as Head upon the members of his ecclesial body.” Jean-Pierre Torrell, Christ and Spirituality in Saint Thomas Aquinas, trans. Bernard Blankenhorn (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 135-6. Torrell notes that Aquinas is pointing the way towards a distinction between Christ’s priestly office and his other mediatorial offices in his question on mediation in the Tertia Pars: by having a question on Christ as mediator separate from a question on Christ’s priesthood, Aquinas is suggesting that Christ’s mediation cannot be wholly understood under the rubric of his priesthood. Torrell suggests that this fits Vatican II’s attempt to “restore a vision of ministry that distances itself from the too-narrowly cultic conception that was current not too long ago.” Torrell, Christ and Spirituality, 156. For more on Christ’s munus triplex and grace see also Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 149-151.
human nature to grasp through his own human nature as an instrument. The Church’s
doctrine, its share in Christ’s prophetic office, comes by the mediation of Christ’s human
nature. By understanding how Christ himself mediates the truths necessary for salvation,
we can better understand how the Church—in its inspired apostles, in its own teaching
office, and in the teaching of doctors such as Aquinas himself—participates in Christ’s
prophetic office. Christ’s prophetic “precepts” involve his spoken doctrine, but more
deeply than this the New Law of grace imprinted upon the heart, to which the
“mediators” in the form of the Old Testament prophets and lawgivers witnessed. Christ
also gives the Church “gifts” or graces which bring about a participation of the Church in
him as their head.

Crucial to Aquinas’s entire discussion of Christ’s mediation is the acclamation of
Christ as being “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14, a quotation which appears in
Aquinas’s transition to the topic of Christ’s grace in question 6 article 6 of the Tertia
Pars. Aquinas explains that John 1:14 is describing the “spiritual holiness” of Christ
which follows the fact of his union: “because this man (as a result of the union) is the
Only-begotten of the Father, he is full of grace and truth.” Christ’s grace has an
economic relation to his disciples: “we have seen his glory” (John 1:14). As Aquinas
observes throughout his treatise on Christ’s grace, Christ not only has grace for himself,

In [Christ’s] doctrine He fulfilled the precepts of the Law in three ways. First, by explaining the
true sense of the Law. This is clear in the case of murder and adultery, the prohibition of which the
Scribes and Pharisees thought to refer only to the exterior act: wherefore Our Lord fulfilled the
Law by showing that the prohibition extended also to the interior acts of sins. Secondly, Our Lord
fulfilled the precepts of the Law by prescribing the safest way of complying with the statutes of
the Old Law. Thus the Old Law forbade perjury: and this is more safely avoided, by abstaining
altogether from swearing, save in cases of urgency. Thirdly, Our Lord fulfilled the precepts of the
Law, by adding some counsels of perfection: this is clearly seen in Matthew 19:21, where Our
Lord said to the man who affirmed that he had kept all the precepts of the Old Law: "One thing is
wanting to thee: If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell whatsoever thou hast," etc..
but also that by Christ, the Church might be “filled unto all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).  

Observing that Christ receives the plenitude of grace is another way of proclaiming that Christ’s humanity was perfectly filled with the Holy Spirit. The Church’s share in various offices—prophetic, priestly, and kingly—comes by participation in Christ’s possession of the supreme anointing of the Holy Spirit undergirding these offices in a preeminent way. Aquinas explains that Christ’s soul, since it belongs to the human nature of the Word in the hypostatic union, happened to “attain so closely to God by knowledge and love,” an attainment which is only possible by grace, i.e., in the participation in the Holy Spirit that is grace. In other words, the Word’s human soul exists in a special relationship with the divine persons, knowing and loving the triune God to a degree different from all other rational creatures on account of being the Word’s human soul. Aquinas explains that Christ’s soul is “nearer” to the Word of God as the “inflowing cause” of grace on account of the hypostatic union. In this discussion, Aquinas emphasizes that this grace in the Word’s humanity is economic. The Word is giving grace through his humanity in order to heal and enlighten human beings:

33 ST III.7.11. Obj. and Reply 2.
34 ST III.7.1. Sed contra: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him” (Isaiah 11:2). As Yves Congar notes, the offices of prophet, priest, and king were set apart from other offices, such as judges, scribes, or elders, by an anointing. Yves Congar, “Sur la triloge: Prophet-e-roi-pretre,” Revue des sciences philosophique et theologiques 67 (1983): 98.
35 ST III.7.1. Response.  
“it behooved Him [Christ] to have grace which would overflow upon others,” Aquinas observes, citing 1 Tim. 2:5 and John 1:16. The grace given to Christ makes him the “universal principle in the genus of such as have grace.” Christ’s grace is the cause of all the “effects of grace” in the Church, including “virtues, gifts, and the like.” The Church thus gains all its grace through Christ’s grace as its source.

Aquinas’s discussion of Christ as mediator shows how the mediations of the prophets and priests of the Old Testament and the ministers of the New Covenant after Christ’s death and resurrection, above all the Apostles, participate in Christ’s unique mediation. As Aquinas notes, the Bible records Old Testament prophets and priests being called mediators, and Pseudo-Dionysius suggests that the Angels are mediators between God and human beings in his Divine Names and Celestial Hierarchy. The Holy Spirit also seems to have a mediatory function, as Paul explains in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit “intercedes for us.” Aquinas brings up these other forms of mediation in order to demonstrate the unique character of Christ’s mediation: more precisely, these forms of mediation “cooperate” with Christ’s mediation “in uniting men to God,” and do so “dispositively and ministerially.” The Old Testament prophets and priests were called mediators “dispositively and ministerially,” because God gave them “foretellings” and “foreshadowings” of Christ and the New Covenant established in Christ. While these are rightly called mediators, they do not have mediatory power separate from Christ, but rather are fulfilled by Christ. Aquinas states that the Angels also fulfill their mediatory

37 ST III.7.1. Response. See also III.8.5. Response.
38 ST III.7.9. Response.
function ministerially and dispositively in service to Christ. Aquinas takes Matthew 4:11, “Angels came and ministered unto him,” not as a sign of Angels caring for Christ’s bodily needs, but of coming into Christ’s service and obeying him.\(^{44}\) While the Bible describes the Holy Spirit as mediating between God and human beings, especially Paul in Romans 8:26, where we hear that the Holy Spirit “asketh God for us with unspeakable groanings,” Aquinas explains that the Holy Spirit, while it helps, is not really a “mediator” since the Holy Spirit has the divine nature in common with the Father and the Son.\(^{45}\) The Holy Spirit is not a mediator, but rather the Spirit by divine power gives human beings the ability to ask God for what they need.

Aquinas discusses all of these mediators in light of Christ, therefore, to show not only how Christ is different from these forms of mediation, but also how these forms of mediation participate in Christ’s mediation. But questions remain as to how these mediators participate in Christ’s mediation of infused divine truth, that is, in his prophetic office.

**Christ’s Manner of Teaching the Church as Prophet**

If Christ’s words express the Word of God, since Christ’s human nature is an instrument of his divine nature, bringing about salvation “theandrically,” then we must explore what—and how—Christ teaches. One among the many themes present in Aquinas’s treatise on Christ’s manner of life involves the Son’s mission of teaching. In his discussion of Christ’s manner of life, Aquinas explains that Christ lived and taught

\(^{44}\) ST III.26.1. Reply 2.

publicly so that “he might publish the truth,” thus living a manner of life that accords with the goal of his incarnation (instead of living a solitary life).\textsuperscript{46} Christ’s manner of life fits with the “economic” nature of his prophetic knowledge: Christ has knowledge on account of the hypostatic union in order to share this knowledge with others. Christ’s public manner of life not only was a means by which Christ taught his “precepts” to others, but also a way in which Christ inspires the Church to hand on his teaching: Aquinas draws on Chrysostom to argue that Christ’s manner of mendicant preaching, going out to the “lost sheep,” was meant to be a model for the Church’s preachers.\textsuperscript{47} Christ’s poverty, similarly, was “in keeping with the duty of preaching” which he was fulfilling as the incarnate Word.\textsuperscript{48} Christ teaches, furthermore, by his action of being subject to the Old Law, to show the divine origin of the Old Law as well as to perfect it in himself.\textsuperscript{49}

Aquinas’s question on whether Christ should have taught the Gentiles and not only the Jews is essentially a study of how Christ’s mission of teaching is structured so as to be continued by the apostolic mission to the Gentiles. Aquinas notes that Christ did not teach the Gentiles, except for a few individuals, because this was the task of the Church which Christ rules and sends. In the voice of an objection, Aquinas raises questions about this claim: is not Christ the “light of the nations” (Isaiah 49:6)? Does it not suggest lesser dignity for the Gospel that Christ himself did not hand on his teaching to the Gentiles, but

\textsuperscript{47} ST III.40.1. Response.
\textsuperscript{48} ST III.40.3. Response.
\textsuperscript{49} ST III.40.4. Response.
sent subordinates for this task? Aquinas’s response to these questions partly involves a notion of hierarchical order drawn from Pseudo-Dionysius. Aquinas explains that Christ’s doctrine is better shown to be “of God” when preached only to the Jews because the Jews were “nearer to God” due to their “worshiping one God.” Thus enlightening the Jews first and then the Gentiles is analogous to how “in the heavenly hierarchy the Divine enlightenment comes to the lower angels through the higher.” This reference to hierarchical order suggests an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

For Aquinas, the dignity of Christ’s doctrine consists precisely in the fact that it is taken up by others: Christ’s doctrine is not completed in his earthly ministry, but is continued and extended by the members of his body in the Church. Christ speaks through chains of mediators in the Church. More fundamentally, in his answers to the objections, Aquinas argues that Christ is the “light of the nations” to the Gentiles because he is no less present in the preaching of the Church’s Apostles than in his own personal preaching. For Aquinas, the words of the Apostles, especially the written words of scripture, are Christ’s words, because Christ inspires and leads the Apostles by his grace of headship. Thus the mediation of Christ’s teaching by an ecclesiastical hierarchy is not a problem for Christ’s doctrine, but its fulfillment: it is the nature of Christ’s doctrine to be passed on by others. Aquinas states that “it is a sign, not of lesser, but of greater power to do something by others rather than by oneself.” The “divine power” in Christ’s doctrine is shown in the way that he “bestowed on the teaching of his disciples such a power that

50 I.e., ST III.42.1. Obj. 1-2.  
51 ST III.42.1. Response.  
52 ST III.42.1. Response.  
53 ST III.42.1. Reply 1 and 2.  
54 ST III.42.4. Reply 1.  
55 ST III.42.1. Reply 2.
they converted the Gentiles.”

In answering the question of why Jesus never wrote a book, Aquinas refers to the dignity of Christ’s teaching in that “His doctrine is imprinted on the hearts of His hearers.” This teaching involves the sending of the Holy Spirit, since Christ’s doctrine is “the law of the spirit of life.” This interior teaching of the heart, Aquinas explains, is a teaching richer in meaning than a teaching committed to writing. Aquinas seems to think that it would lessen the dignity of Christ’s teaching if it were written down, as “men would have no deeper thought of his doctrine than that which appears on the surface of his writing.” Because Christ’s doctrine is meant to be written on the heart, written and even spoken words cannot fully do it justice: thus Christ spoke in parables which presented “spiritual mysteries” in a way which those who were “unable or unwilling” to hear could at least partly understand, and Christ’s speech to his disciples “did not make known all the depths of his wisdom” (this latter point referring to Christ’s promise of sending the Holy Spirit, John 16:12: “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”). The depths of Christ’s wisdom are then mediated in inspired words by the Apostles, having learned from Christ. Christ teaches his disciples “immediately” in order that they could subsequently teach others by their own “preaching and writing,” making this fuller teaching on the heart explicit in particular words so as to illuminate others.

Christ not only teaches his disciples in his spoken doctrine during his life before

---

56 ST III.42.1. Reply 2. 
57 ST III.42.4. Response. 
58 ST III.42.4. Reply 2. Referencing Romans 8:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:3. 
60 ST III.42.3. Response and Reply 2. 
61 ST III.42.4. Response.
his Passion: Aquinas notes that another major aspect of Christ’s doctrine is when he himself appears to his disciples to instruct them in regard to his resurrection. The Church was given the special dignity of announcing Christ’s resurrection to the world. The second central mystery of the Christian faith (with the Passion as the first) is handed on to the wider world not by Christ, but rather by the inspired human words of the Apostles to whom Christ is manifested.

Aquinas notes that on one level this seems illogical: the resurrection is an important event for the world—why reveal it only to a few? Aquinas explains that while Christ’s Passion was a deeply “public” act of Christ, his resurrection, as a divine act in the order of grace and the beginning of eternal life for the Church, was hidden but revealed only to a special few who were uniquely prepared for it, in a sense. Drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas explains that God’s work involving a “special favor of grace” is always passed through a hierarchy, “revealed immediately by God to higher persons” and then “imparted to others.” Thus Christ’s resurrection was not revealed to humans directly, but first through the witness of angels. Christ’s resurrection is in no way a secret—the Apostles hand on the truth about Christ’s resurrection to the human race—but Aquinas thinks that it befits the nature of Christ’s resurrection that Christ be manifested in a hierarchical manner, so that Christ prepares the Apostles who then unfold the mystery to the world.

---

63 ST III.55.1. Response.
64 ST III.55.2. Response.
65 This hierarchical understanding is explained further in the discussion of the sacrament of orders in the supplement to the *Summa theologiae*, question 36 article 2: in discussing whether all priests should know Holy Scripture, Aquinas answers no, but adds that priests charged with care for the “mystical body” must know the aspects of scripture which are required for belief, and have recourse to their Bishops, who must know scripture even in matters which present “difficulty.” Cf. Thomas O’Meara, “Theology of Church” in
Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s resurrection doctrine suggests that Christ’s resurrection appearances are a slow and cautious enlightening of the mind of the Church, a step-by-step process in which the Church comes over time to appreciate the depth of what has occurred in the resurrection, and then hands this on to the world. The risen Christ’s doctrine makes up a significant aspect of the Church’s proclamation: 1 John 1:1, “that which we have seen and have heard, and our hands have handled,” plays a special role in Aquinas’s exposition.\(^{66}\) Christ taught his disciples about himself and his own resurrection in such a way that they could fittingly hand on their own faith in the resurrection to others. Aquinas explains that Christ taught his disciples with a “double testimony,” speaking first by sending angels to them and secondly himself explaining the “testimony of the Scriptures.”\(^{67}\) Aquinas observes in this regard that “just as man comes from the hearing of faith to the beatific vision, so did men come to the sight of the risen Christ through the message already received from the angels.”\(^{68}\) Christ then manifested himself to his disciples at first to show the “truth” of his resurrection, but he did not live constantly with his disciples in order to maintain the “glory” of his resurrection.\(^{69}\) Christ also taught by not appearing to his disciples in the manner of his transfigured body: Aquinas comments that this was to emphasize the truth of his resurrection body.\(^{70}\)

Aquinas suggests that all of these examples show a careful pedagogy on Christ’s part: Christ did not live with his disciples after the resurrection so that it would not “seem

---


\(^{67}\) ST III.55.5. Response.

\(^{68}\) ST III.55.6. Response.

\(^{69}\) ST III.55.2. Reply 1.

\(^{70}\) ST III.55.3. Response.

\(^{70}\) ST III.55.6. Reply 4.
that he rose unto the same life as before.” He finds a logical order in Christ’s appearances: he “appeared oftener on the first day” in order to convince his disciples of the truth of the resurrection and to comfort them. Yet he “judged it to be more suitable for the apostles’ instruction that he should not abide continually with them.” Christ appears to the disciples on the way to Emmaus to strengthen their tepid faith with the association of his “true countenance” with the sacrament, but appears at first in another shape to them at first in regard to the weakness of their faith. He allows himself to be touched, and shows himself in his own shape, and shows his wounds to show the truth of his body. He eats and drinks with his disciples and speaks to them to show the truth of his soul. He explains the Scriptures to his disciples to show that he has a true human intellect. He shows his continued divine nature through the miraculous catch of fish and his ascension. Christ shows the glorious nature of his resurrection body by appearing among the disciples in their locked room and disappearing from the disciples on the way to Emmaus.

Why did the risen Christ not remain to instruct the Church? This seemingly odd hypothetical question is the way in which Aquinas transitions from discussing the salvific effects of Christ’s resurrection to discussing his ascension. The ascension is itself a form of doctrine, as by his ascension Christ, ascending by his own power, not only stirs up faith, hope, and love in believers but also increases “our reverence for him” by

---

71 ST III.55.3. Response.
72 ST III.55.3. Reply 3.
73 ST III.55.3. Reply 2.
74 ST III.55.4. Response and Reply 3.
75 ST III.55.6. Response.
76 ST III.55.6. Response.
77 ST III.55.6. Response.
78 ST III.55.6. Response.
identifying him with the “God of heaven.”

But this question about the ascension also helps us to further understand how exactly Christ teaches the Church by his human nature: it reminds us that (in the words of question 26 on Christ’s mediation) Christ teaches not only by handing on “precepts” but also by handing on “gifts.” We see that Christ’s teaching of his disciples is connected to the grace which flows from the hypostatic union, and the grace which Christ pours out on believers as head of the Church. Aquinas explains that Christ after his ascension is not absent from his Church on earth, but continually present with the Church in the form of the grace he bestows upon the Church as its head. Aquinas notes in an objection that it seems that “it would have been more beneficial for men if he had tarried with us upon earth.”

In response, Aquinas comments that “the presence of his Godhead is ever with the faithful,” drawing on Matthew 28:20 (“I am with you always”), and adds that his ascension was “more profitable for us than his bodily presence would have been.” The profit of the ascension of Christ’s human nature is the ways that it increases the faith, hope, and charity of human beings: by Christ’s ascension, together with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is “drawing us up to heavenly things.”

By ascending into heaven, Christ sends the Holy Spirit upon believers as the high priest sending “down gifts upon men.”

---

**Christ’s Guidance of the Church as its Head by Grace**

Aquinas’s understanding of Christ as teaching a New Law written on the heart is

---

79 ST III.57.6. Response.
80 ST III.57.1. Obj. 3.
81 ST III.57.1. Reply 3.
82 ST III.57.1. Reply 3.
83 ST III.57.6. Response.
crucial to understanding how members of the Church can share in Christ’s doctrine, but also share in this doctrine by drawing on new and nonbiblical words. The New Law of Christ’s doctrine is written on the hearts of his disciples, and on the hearts of the members of the Church, by the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit is the gift given when grace is bestowed upon the Church, Aquinas states that the work of sending or giving the Spirit “belongs also to [Christ] as man, inasmuch as his manhood is an instrument of His Godhead.” Christ’s humanity, as an instrument united to his divinity, was a means by which God elected to send the Spirit “both meritoriously and efficiently.”

By its act of existence as Christ’s body with Christ as its head, the Church participates in Christ’s knowledge and extends his doctrinal activity. The Church participates mystically in Christ’s human nature, forming “one mystical person” with him, even while remaining under his authority and as yet not fully formed in him. Aquinas explains that headship relates to “order,” “perfection,” and “power.” Christ is the higher part of his members (order), the head contains the senses (perfection), and the head governs the body (power). He is the principle of all who receive grace (order, being “first”), he has perfection in grace (perfection), and he bestows grace upon the Church (power). In Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s power as head, especially, we see again the economic role of Christ’s grace: Christ has the fullness of grace so that all might receive

---

84 ST III.8.1. Reply 1.
85 ST III.8.1. Reply 1.
86 ST III.19.4. Response: “grace was in Christ not merely as an individual, but also as in the Head of the whole Church, to whom all are united, as members to a head, who constitute one mystical person.” On the roots of this in Aquinas’s reading of Augustine and John of Damascus together, cf. Torrell, Aquinas: Spiritual Master, 147-8.
87 ST III.8.1. Response.
“of his fullness” (John 1:16).⁸⁹ Christ bestows grace just as the head governs the parts of the body. Christ’s influence extends even to the bodies of those who are his members, as the “life of glory” flows from souls that are in Christ to their corresponding bodies.⁹⁰ This sharing in Christ’s knowledge is how the Church can draw on new and nonbiblical words in its exercise of its prophetic office.

Faith and hope, as virtues communicated by Christ to his body, are not just ways that God enlightens the soul, but participations in Christ, participations in his human knowledge.⁹¹ Even though Christ does not have the virtues of faith and hope, Christ has the knowledge and love of God that these virtues involve, and this knowledge and love on the part of Christ is shared with human beings in a way that fits their “defects” of knowledge: thus the knowledge Christ has in his humanity becomes faith and hope in those who receive his grace.⁹² Christ is the “author of grace,” and so he is the giver of the perfections in knowing and loving God that those with faith and hope receive.⁹³ Faith and hope are participations in the work of the Holy Spirit accomplished uniquely in Christ’s rational soul (i.e., Christ’s grace), in which the Church shares as members of Christ’s body with Christ as their head.⁹⁴

The Participation of the Church’s Human Teachers in Christ’s Prophetic Office by Grace

What might this participation of the Church in Christ’s prophetic office, brought

⁸⁹ ST III.8.1. Response. See also III.8.5. Response.
⁹⁰ ST III.8.2. Response.
⁹¹ ST III.7.2. Response.
⁹² ST III.7.3. and ST III.7.9. Reply 1.
⁹³ ST III.7.9. Reply 1.
⁹⁴ ST III.8.1. Response.
about by the Church’s share in Christ’s grace, look like? First and foremost, the Church’s share in Christ’s prophetic office is expressed in and conditioned by the Holy Spirit’s work of inspiring the biblical authors, who were members of the Church. For Aquinas, scripture is an authoritative mediation of the Word of God, and, as inspired by Christ, forms the basis of theology. Yet analyzing Aquinas’s own use of scripture in the Tertia pars is complex because Aquinas is writing about scripture in a manner “as may tend to the instruction of beginners.” In other words, Aquinas is handing on the Word in a “scientific” or carefully-ordered arrangement by means of offering short biblical citations as authorities in the context of a well thought out ordo disciplinae. Furthermore, Aquinas reads scripture through the lens of the Fathers of the Church, at times with accompanying citations from the Fathers. In handing on the scriptural record of divine revelation, the Church necessarily interprets Scripture. “Doctors of the Church” for Aquinas are those who “have been principally concerned in their work with the grasping of God’s word in scripture and meditation on the scriptural message.”

95 ST Prologue.
96 Aquinas’s scriptural citations in his sed contras are the basis of the whole work of presenting sacred doctrine in the Summa theologiae, since, Aquinas notes, sacred doctrine takes as its foundation arguments from authority. Cf. Leo Elders, “Structure et fonction de l’argument “sed contra” dans la Somme théologique de Saint Thomas,” Divus Thomas 80 (1977): 245-60. Aquinas associates authority in this context chiefly with divine revelation in scripture (ST I.1.8). Yet Elders notes that Aquinas’s use of sed contras is not uniform: in some articles (though they are not common), Aquinas cites non-Christian philosophers or offers arguments ex ratione, yet this tends to occur when Aquinas is treating a philosophical topic related to theology, not a central subject of theology itself. Wilhelmus Valkenburg notes that those interpreting Aquinas today must keep two points in mind when looking at his use of scripture in the Summa theologiae: first, the function of scripture in the Summa theologiae is determined by the needs and forms of the Summa and quaestio genre (and not a general statement made by Aquinas on how scripture should be used at all times), and second, that the meaning of a quotation from scripture “should not be limited to its function within the text,” but rather draws on a “prior function outside the text.” Wilhelmus Valkenburg, Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Leeuven: Peeters, 2000), 48.
God’s word can take place on the level of an authoritative interpretation (the Church’s councils), or on a more “probable” level of authority (the Church’s Fathers and, with less deference, Masters and other individual theologians). The mediation of the word of God in the Church’s teaching is fundamentally a form of extending the mediation of the incarnate Word in the inspired words of scripture.

Aquinas holds that the Holy Spirit inspires and guides the Church’s work of mediating and interpreting scripture. In saying that the Church’s teaching is “governed by Holy Spirit,” Aquinas is claiming that its teaching exists by the grace which comes from Christ’s human nature. In the Tertia Pars, the Church’s teaching office must be understood in light of the discussion of Christ’s headship and Christ’s reception of the Holy Spirit in his humanity. The Holy Spirit is the “heart” of the Church, as it “invisibly quickens and unifies the Church,” while Christ is its visible “head.” The operation of one is inseparable from the other. When the Church speaks, Christ’s unique mediation of truth is not left behind: rather, the Church’s ministers and teachers participate in Christ’s mediation (as we have seen in question 26).

In the framework that results, theologians raise questions in the process of meditating on and expounding scripture, questions which seek to make explicit what is implicit in scripture. Such theological questioning shares in Christ’s prophetic office in a twofold way: first by receiving Christ’s word (and thus Christ as the Word) as handed on by the biblical authors, and secondly by receiving the virtue of faith from the Holy Spirit

---

99 ST II-II.1.9.
100 ST II-II.1.9. Sed contra.
through membership in Christ’s body. The Holy Spirit also speaks through the authoritative words of the Church’s councils when debates or controversies arise due to the work of theologians in receiving and proclaiming scripture. The Holy Spirit guides the Church’s doctrine not only by inspiring Scripture, but also by regulating its interpretation through these authoritative councils. Theologians participate in Christ’s prophetic office as individuals, but in the gathering of a council the Church participates in Christ’s prophetic office—reflecting on and proclaiming the faith—as a united hierarchical body.  

In the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, we can discern multiple levels of the communication of the Word of God along these lines. Each level is focused on handing on Christ, the Word of God, who is the source of all these forms of mediation, and all these forms of mediation share in the incarnate Word’s unique mediation. The Word is mediated to the Church authoritatively and definitively by the inspired texts of the Prophets and Apostles. Then there are the words of the Church Fathers and Masters who

---

103 For Aquinas, the unity of the faith of the Church is very important, and on this topic he quotes 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul’s injunction “that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you” (ST I-II.1.10). According to Aquinas, the Pope plays an important role in this doctrinal unity of the Church. Aquinas’s only discussion of the role of the Church’s hierarchy or the Church’s councils in his treatise on faith is the question “whether it belongs to the Sovereign Pontiff to draw up a symbol of faith?” In answering this question, Aquinas seems to locate the authority of the Pope specifically in defining the faith when erroneous interpretations arise: while the “truth of faith is sufficiently explicit in the teaching of Christ and the apostles,” it became “necessary as time went on to express the faith more explicitly against the errors which arose” (ST II-II.1.10. Reply 1).

One might ask why Aquinas does not say more about the role of Councils in the *Summa theologiae*’s treatise on faith: he says in his *sed contra* in his article which discusses the Pope’s relation to the Church’s doctrine that while creeds or “symbols” have been written in the past by Councils, “a council cannot be convoked otherwise than by the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff.” Ulrich Horst suggests that Aquinas has the *filioque* clause in mind in his discussion of Papal authority in relation to the declarations of Councils: “the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son is contained implicitly in the creed of Constantinople. But as errors began to circulate, it was fitting that the *filioque* be formulated explicitly in a creed. From these historical facts Thomas draws a general conclusion: just as a later synod has the authority to interpret an earlier one, so the Roman pontiff also has the power to make such an interpretation, since he alone can call a council and confirm its decrees.” Ulrich Horst, *The Dominicans and the Pope: Papal Teaching Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Thomist Tradition*, trans. James Mixson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 18-19.
interpret and explain scripture. While Aquinas holds the words of the Fathers as more authoritative than his own words or the words of the Masters, the work they do in interpreting scripture is nonetheless similar to Aquinas’s work. As I have noted above, another aspect of the Church’s mediation of the Word of God is the authoritative interpretations of the words of scripture and the words of theologians offered by the Church’s councils. Thus we have four levels: (1) the incarnate Word itself, (2) the testimony to this Word in scripture, (3) guidance of the interpretation of scripture along with questions and meditations on scripture in the Fathers and Masters and in the authoritative doctrine of the Church, and (4) Aquinas’s own presentation of the Word of Christ in the form of his *Summa theologiae*, an arrangement of the truths involved in *sacra doctrina* “for beginners.” For reasons of space, I will limit myself to analyzing Aquinas’s use of these different levels in questions 1-8 of the *Tertia pars*, with a short discussion of questions 18 and 19 (since these also deal with a Christological council explicitly).

1. The Prologue to the *Tertia Pars*

What is the “Word” that Aquinas is seeking to receive and proclaim in the *Tertia Pars*? The first major instance of Aquinas receiving the Word by the means of scriptural testimony in the *Tertia Pars* is Aquinas’s quotation of Matthew 1:21 in the first sentence of the *Tertia Pars*: “forasmuch as our savior the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to save his people from their sins, as the angel announced, showed us in his own person the way to truth…it is necessary, in order to complete the work of theology, that…there should
follow the consideration of the Savior of all, and of the benefits bestowed by him on the
human race. ” Aquinas is quoting the Angel’s announcement to Joseph in his dream
that Jesus will “save his people from their sins.” Arguably, the work of the whole
*Tertia Pars* is Aquinas’s own attempt to hand on this testimony to Christ by the Angel in
Matthew: Aquinas will describe Christ’s coming with a view towards how the salvation
accomplished by Christ is brought about in believers, i.e., how believers are joined to
Christ by the Sacraments and what the nature of the Resurrection body is like (the body
of those saved from their sins). Put another way, Aquinas’s proclamation of the incarnate
Word in the *Tertia Pars* involves proclaiming the truth of Christ as manifested by
Christ’s words and deeds and as foretold by the Prophets in the Old Testament.

Thus Aquinas receives this Word—with Joseph as it were—from the Angel, but
seeks then to explain it in a sapiential arrangement: that is, drawing not on scripture alone
but also on the interpretation of the Fathers and Councils, and attempting to present the
wisdom of all of these sources in a logical manner. Thus Aquinas is handing on a divine
Word, mediated by the words of an Angel and the human words of the gospel of
Matthew, but doing so in the *Summa theologiae* in a manner befitting the human mode of
knowing. As a theologian, Aquinas is “helping” the incarnate Word (Matthew 1:21,
John 14:6) be proclaimed, through offering a particular arrangement of material in the
*Summa theologiae*. This mediation on Aquinas’s part takes place by drawing on earlier
mediations. The Fathers and Councils mediate the Word of God in scripture not only by
interpreting it, but also by offering questions and reflections which influence Aquinas’s

---

104 ST III. Prologue.
105 ST III. Prologue.
106 Cf. ST I.1.8. Reply 2: “Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason
should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity.”
ordo disciplinae in the Tertia Pars. In the Tertia Pars, this involves showing the reasonableness of the faith, whether by necessary reasons or, where these are lacking, reasons of fittingness. Aquinas uses a number of human words to help flesh out the meaning of the divine Word of salvation communicated through the human words of sacred scripture.

2. The Question of Fittingness

Aquinas opens the Tertia Pars with a discussion of the fittingness of the incarnation. How could this be a hearing of the Word of Christ? Neither Jesus nor the apostolic authors of the New Testament speak of the fittingness of salvation, but rather seem to imply the necessity of the salvific order. For Aquinas, the question of fittingness is an extrabiblical question meant to aid interpretation of scripture and the truths contained therein. Such theological reasoning aims not merely to clear up possible misunderstandings, but to achieve a deeper understanding of the reality of Christ. The “reasons of fittingness” help theologians not only to hand on the scriptural words about the Word, but also to better understand the wisdom of God’s way of teaching and saving humans. The discussion of fittingness is thus a human question (framed by the thoughts of the Fathers) meant to aid in understanding the divine reality of the incarnation and the salvation brought about by it.

Aquinas’s discussion of fittingness is an instance of his hearing the Word by means of the interpretation of theologians who share in Christ’s prophetic office as
individuals offering probable arguments. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas points to Augustine as a prototype of his approach to fittingness in books 12 and 13 of his *De trinitate*. Augustine is Aquinas’s major source for discussing the fittingness of the incarnation for salvation in question 1 article 2 of the *Tertia Pars*: Augustine observes that since God is all powerful, “other ways” of salvation “were not wanting to God, to whose power all things are equally subject; but that there was not a more fitting way of healing our misery.” Since, based on his understanding of God’s omnipotence, Augustine does not believe that theologians can assert that the incarnation is necessary for God, he turns to speak of its fittingness. Aquinas believes that the Fathers’ readings of the Word both set up this question of fittingness and offer reasons why the incarnation was fitting. These reasons are a meditation on ideas contained implicitly in scripture.

For instance, in discussing the fittingness of the incarnation, Aquinas first points to the synthesis of the Eastern Fathers in John of Damascus, where John states that the incarnation reveals many of God’s characteristics at once, such as simultaneously revealing his goodness and his justice by forgiving sin through the mediation of the divine and human Christ. Aquinas then quotes Pseudo-Dionysius, from whom he obtains the idea that the incarnation is fitting as an expression of the divine nature as self-diffusive goodness and truth, since “it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others.” Aquinas also quotes book 13 of Augustine’s *De trinitate*: in this book Augustine notes that it was both in God’s power to save humans by means other than the incarnation, but also that the incarnation “advertises the grace of

---

110 ST III.1.1. *Response*. 

130
God towards us” and has many other benefits which are reminiscent of Aquinas’s list of reasons for the “fittingness” of the incarnation.\textsuperscript{111} Augustine explains, in \textit{City of God} book 11, that the Son became incarnate so that the Son, whom Augustine associates with truth itself as God’s “wisdom,” might make truth itself present in a human way.\textsuperscript{112} Augustine here reads Christ’s teaching in word and deed in light of 1 Cor. 1:24, “Christ the power and wisdom of God” and John 1:14. That is, Christ’s teaching is an expression of his larger nature and mission as the God’s wisdom, the incarnate Word, the second person of the Trinity. It is logical, though certainly not necessary, that God’s “wisdom” would endeavor to speak in a way which helps humans to “journey more trustfully toward the truth.”\textsuperscript{113} Thus the incarnation is not necessary, but it does seem to be fitting, both to the Word of God and to humans, as a way of teaching humans. Aquinas finds other reasons in the texts of Augustine to suggest that the incarnation raises hope and love as well as faith, and that the incarnation provides an exemplar for human life.\textsuperscript{114} The other reasons for the fittingness of the incarnation, each of which Aquinas draws from the Fathers (with the last one seemingly from Anselm’s \textit{Cur Deus Homo}) have a similar structure.

In accord with his understanding of the mediation of the incarnate Word, Aquinas sees his discussion of the fittingness of the incarnation as guided by the authoritative scriptural word, even though he is discussing questions raised and addressed by the Fathers. Aquinas takes Romans 1:20, “the invisible things of God…are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,” to be a reference to God’s nature as a

\textsuperscript{112} Quoted in ST III.1.2. Response.
\textsuperscript{113} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, Book 11, quoted in ST III.1.2. Response.
\textsuperscript{114} ST III.1.2. Response.
teacher, thus suggesting that it is not unfitting for God “that by visible things the invisible things of God should be made known.” While Romans 1:20 does not explicitly state that the incarnation is fitting for the divine nature, Aquinas makes a general inference from Romans 1:20 (with the aid of the Fathers) to show that it is fitting for God to be revealed through material or visible things, including the visible mission of the Son in the incarnation. Another important scripture passage on fittingness that Aquinas quotes is John 3:16. Aquinas reads John 3:16 as denoting that the “mystery of the incarnation” is “necessary” for salvation in the sense of being the most fitting and expedient means of salvation.

Aquinas notes that the Fathers of the Church also raise hypothetical questions about the incarnate union that are not explicitly raised by scripture. These hypothetical questions are a particular way of handing on the Word transmitted in scripture by means of exploring the relationship between the Trinity and the economy of salvation established in the incarnation of the Word. For example, John of Damascus claims that the incarnation of the Son manifests God’s wisdom, since wisdom is appropriated to the Son in 1 Corinthians 1:24 (“Christ the wisdom and power of God”). Aquinas’s first reason for the fittingness of the incarnation of the Son rather than of the other persons appears to be the same as one of the reasonings offered by Athanasius in his On the Incarnation: it is fitting that the Son be incarnate, because all things were made through him, and the Son becomes incarnate as the one in whom the “exemplar likeness” of all things exists to repair the damage done to the world by sin as the world’s original

---

116 ST III.1.2. Sed contra.
craftsman. Aquinas further notes that the incarnation of the Son rather than the other persons is fitting because of a fittingness to the adoptive sonship that is accomplished by God’s grace (pointing to Romans 8), and because the incarnation of God’s “Wisdom” is a fitting remedy for sin, which originated in a disordered desire for knowledge. While Aquinas does not cite particular Fathers to support these points, these arguments have patristic provenance, and they are a mode of the kind of theological reflection that Aquinas sees as common to both the Fathers and himself: reading scripture and seeking reasons (necessary or fitting) for the different aspects of the faith handed on in scripture.

3. The Council of Chalcedon

The Church’s Councils are very important to Aquinas’s discussion of the nature of the incarnate union in the Summa theologiae: the councils are needed chiefly because of the way that humans can misunderstand or twist the meaning of human words. The doctrinal declarations of councils are thus divinely guided statements by humans meant to aid the reading of divinely inspired human words in scripture, needed precisely because the divine Word makes himself present in human words (his own and the inspired words of scripture) and thus is susceptible to erroneous interpretation. The Councils make doctrinal affirmations in their own human words about the reality of the incarnate Word handed on in scripture. Aquinas’s use of the Councils, therefore, have much to teach us

---

120 Aquinas argues that the Church offers Symbols or official statements of doctrine “lest anyone might stray from the truth through ignorance of the faith” (ST II-II.1.9. Response). See also ST III.3.8. Reply 1: “even if the Person of the Father had become incarnate, men would have been capable of finding an occasion of error [i.e., some heresy comparable to Arianism would have arisen], as though the Son were not able to restore human nature.”
about the mediation of the incarnate Word in human words, whether in scriptural words, the words of the Fathers and Councils, and Aquinas’s own theological words.

The Church exercised its prophetic office at Chalcedon and in the controversies surrounding it by making precise distinctions which make explicit what is implicit in scripture, and which illuminate scripture’s testimony to the being and person of Christ as divine and human.\textsuperscript{121} The passage from the Council of Chalcedon in the \textit{sed contra} of Aquinas’s first question on the mode of union in Christ is presented as an authoritative guide for understanding the incarnate union. Aquinas quotes Chalcedon as saying that Christ exists “in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”\textsuperscript{122} Aquinas then exposits this definition by offering a philosophical discussion of the term “nature” in his response, borrowing especially from Boethius’s definition of “nature” as what signifies the “essence or the \textit{what-it-is} or the quiddity of the species.”\textsuperscript{123}

This authoritative statement of Chalcedon, which involves the use of extrabiblical philosophical terms (like “nature”), is needed in particular because of statements of the Fathers which risk ambiguity. Aquinas opens his treatise on the mode of the incarnate union with a quotation from Cyril of Alexandria in an objection which seems to suggest what would come to be seen as Eutychian Christology: Cyril states “we must understand not two natures, but one incarnate nature of the Word of God.”\textsuperscript{124} Aquinas also quotes Gregory of Nazianzus’s \textit{Letter to Cledonius} as saying that Christ’s “human nature is

\textsuperscript{121} Aquinas claims that theologians can use nonbiblical words “to make clear other things that are put forward in this [sacred] doctrine.” ST I.1.8. Reply 2.
\textsuperscript{122} ST III.2.1. Sed contra.
\textsuperscript{123} ST III.2.1. Response.
\textsuperscript{124} ST III.2.1. Obj. 1.
These statements of Cyril and Gregory are theological explorations of the nature of the incarnate union. Aquinas then further explains the quotations from Cyril and Gregory. He interprets Cyril by recourse to a quotation from Constantinople II’s commentary on Cyril’s teaching: “from the divine and human natures (a union in subsistence having taken place) one Christ results.” Constantinople II explicitly criticizes a Eutychian rendering of Cyril’s meaning, in which one “endeavors from these [Cyril’s] words to introduce one nature or substance of the Divinity and flesh of Christ.”

The council of Chalcedon also uses the extrabiblical term “person” to refute both Eutychianism and Nestorianism. Chalcedon makes a crucial distinction: while Christ has two natures without confusion, Christ is “not divided into two persons.” The term “person,” as used by Chalcedon, allows the Church to proclaim that the Word really is both divine and human after the incarnation.

---

125 ST III.2.1. Obj. 3.
126 ST III.2.1. Reply 1.
127 ST III.2.2. Sed contra.
128 ST III.2.2. Response.
129 Drawing on the Fathers, Aquinas explains that rational natures, such as human beings, never exist abstractly, but only “exist in concrete reality as the natural determinations of persons” (Thomas Joseph White, “The Crucified Lord: Thomistic Reflections on the Communication of Idioms and the Theology of the Cross,” *Aquinas and Barth*, 166). All things that we encounter in the phenomenal world are hypostases, and persons are rational hypostases. One never sees “natures” as such, rather the instantiation of these natures, for instance human nature, in persons. Aquinas will say further that a person is a rational hypostasis or supposit. In the terminology Aquinas borrows from John of Damascus, “a hypostasis was essentially a particular individual within a universal species, identifiable as such or such a thing by the qualities it shared with similar individuals, yet marked off as unique by a set of characteristics all its own.” Brian Daley, “Nature and the Mode of Union: Late Patristic Models for the Personal Unity of Christ” in Davis, Kendall, O’Collins, eds. *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 194. Natures are observed in hypostases, or persons in the case of rational natures. Human beings share in human nature as their essence, but an individual human being, say, a person walking down the street, is not human nature per se, Aquinas says, but a supposit, a subsisting instance of human nature. This definition in Aquinas is drawn from Boethius’s description of a person as an “individual substance of a rational nature.” Aquinas connects this to his citation of Boethius’s definition of “nature” in his first article on the mode of union in Christ. An individual substance, Aquinas explains, is something subsisting. Thus a person is a rational supposit, a rational being who subsists, who does not exist in a more perfect thing. The scholastic discussion of the term “person” in Bonaventure and other medieval masters leading up to the time of Aquinas is helpfully summarized in Corey Barnes, “Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great on Person, Hypostasis, and Hypostatic Union,” *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 109-114. Cf. also Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to the Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, D.C.:
of the incarnation took place in the person is denied, then, Aquinas states, “the Christian faith is wholly overturned.”\textsuperscript{130} Chalcedon’s doctrinal statement is thus not a particular probable opinion of a theologian or Church Father, but an authoritative statement of the Christian faith itself, not a new “Word” from God but an authoritative formulation of the Church’s reception of the biblical Word.

If the Word of God is a mystery beyond human understanding, how could philosophical concepts which are not present in scripture be used to assist in appreciating God’s revelation? A key assumption in Aquinas is that these terms are being used analogically. Aquinas uses the term “person” for speaking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in an analogical way, applying the term “person” (along with “nature” and other terms) not “as it is applied to creatures” but in an analogical, “more excellent way” of appreciating the significance of the term.\textsuperscript{131} For Aquinas, philosophical discourse about God is possible when humans apply predications to God “reaffirmed and re-posited as in God under the negation of its finite mode in creatures,” i.e., when God is proclaimed as wise or simple while affirming that this is not in the same way as creatures.\textsuperscript{132}

\textit{Why the Statements of Councils (and the Analogical Terms they Employ) are Needed}

Aquinas recognizes that problems can arise in theology when such statements of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{130} ST III.2.2. Response.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{132} Rudi te Velde, \textit{Aquinas on God: The Divine Science of the Summa Theologiae} (New York: Ashgate, 2006), 104.
\end{flushright}
the Church’s Councils are forgotten. Therefore, the work of reading and understanding the Church’s authoritative Councils is an important part of sacred doctrine as a whole: when Councils are forgotten, serious errors in handing on the Word of God can result. Such is the case, he observes, with recent masters who, following Peter Lombard’s list of options for understanding the incarnate union in his *Sentences*, opt for reasons which are actually Nestorian (condemned by Chalcedon and later Councils which had been forgotten in the West). Aquinas thinks that erroneous understandings of the relationship between the word “person” and the word “supposit” (or Greek “hypostasis”) led to serious errors among the Masters: the mediation of the Word by theologians is not always free of danger. On the basis of Boethius’s definition of a person as an “individual substance of a rational nature,” some of the Masters before Aquinas posed two hypostases or subsistences in Christ. They held that a human supposit or hypostasis had to be predicated of Christ in order for Christ to be truly human. For Christ to be truly human, they thought, Christ must have a human subsistence apart from his union with the Word. This perspective is called *homo assumptus*, and appears, for instance, as the first among three possible opinions Peter Lombard presents in his *Sentences* for describing the incarnate union. Aquinas notes that the term supposit lends itself etymologically to this application, that supposit describes something which underlies *[supponitur]* that which is predicated of a thing, including its operation. If one asserts that Christ has two hypostases, something claimed by *homo assumptus* theologians, then it appears that one cannot state that the Son of God was born of a Virgin or was crucified, which goes against the Council of Ephesus’s condemnation of Nestorianism: “by the incarnation of

---

one of the Holy Trinity, God the Word, the Holy Trinity received no augment of person or subsistence.” On this basis, Aquinas asserts that homo assumptus Christology is “plainly a heresy condemned long by the Church.”

The words of scripture are not absent from Aquinas’s discussion of Chalcedon, but present in the background. Scripture’s words undergird his technical discussion of the debates of Fathers and Councils on the mode of union, while simultaneously being interpreted in light of these debates. In question 2 article 5 of the Tertia Pars Aquinas quotes Philippians 2:7, “being made in the likeness of a man,” to suggest that Christ, to be essentially human, must have a union of soul and body. Aquinas also quotes Luke 24:39, “a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me to have” in his reply to an objection arguing that Christ assumed a particular human body and soul, not human nature in general. Aquinas also offers brief comments on Colossians 2:9, “in Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally,” in article 10 on a theme related to this discussion of body and soul in Christ. Aquinas uses his discussion of the incarnation taking place by grace to flesh out the meaning of this passage, and also uses this passage to flesh out the meaning of grace in the incarnation. The Chalcedonian mediation of scripture also helps Aquinas interpret Christ’s testimony to himself by means of prophetic expectation of the Messiah recorded in the Old Testament. In question 2 article 11, Aquinas asks whether the merits of the Old Testament saints brought about the incarnation. Aquinas includes this article as part of his larger discussion of Chalcedon because the flow of his argument in question 2 leads from

---

134 ST III.2.3. Response.
135 ST III.2.3. Response.
136 ST III.2.5. Response.
137 ST III.2.5. Reply 2.
138 ST III.2.10. Obj 2.
discussing the nature of the incarnate union (articles 1-9) to the fact that the union takes place by grace (10), and his discussion of a possible meriting expectation of Israel depends on this question of the union taking place by grace.

4. Questions on Christ’s Human Nature

In his discussion of Christ’s human nature, Aquinas is seeking to argue that the Word’s self-revelation occurs through the acts and sufferings of a particular hypostasis of divine and human natures, a particular human “visibility.” Aquinas argues this by receiving the written Word of scripture through the mediation of the interpretations of the Fathers, particularly John of Damascus’s Chalcedonian theology. While Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s human nature is highly technical, it is biblical as well: Aquinas’s first *sed contra* involves a quotation from Proverbs 8:31, where personified wisdom states “my delights were to be with the children of men.” Aquinas believes that Proverbs 8 suggests a special fittingness to the incarnation of the Word as human. John of Damascus discusses the possibility of the incarnation being of an abstract nature: what if the Word has become human by assuming human nature in general, and not in a particular hypostasis? This reflection leads Aquinas to a deeper understanding of Baruch 3:38 as a prophetic testimony to the nature of the Word’s speaking in Christ. Observing that the purpose of the incarnation was so that the Son might “show himself in men’s sight,” Aquinas quotes Baruch 3:38, which says that wisdom was “seen upon earth, and

139 ST III.4.1. Sed contra.
140 Based on the authority of this text, Aquinas states in his *sed contra* in his own words that “there seems to be some fitness in the union of the Son of God with human nature.” ST III.4.1. Sed contra. Aquinas explains this fitness in his response by saying that irrational creatures do not have minds that can be raised to God, and that angels cannot be restored from their fall, thus making humans the most fitting choice for the incarnation (ST III.4.1. Response and Reply 3.).
In discussing Christ’s human nature, Aquinas draws on a principle from Augustine: the written Word of scripture, as the Word of Christ, cannot be deceptive. Christ as the Truth would not lie, and since scripture is a manifestation of the Word in written words, scripture does not contain any deceptive statements, although it can of course have layers of meaning beyond the literal. Thus Jesus’ statements, such as Luke 14:39, “Handle, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me to have” can be taken securely as a true testimony to the Word of God handed on by written words. Yet Aquinas also notes in further questions on Christ’s human nature that scripture is at times not clear on crucial questions, such as whether Christ had a soul, and so the Fathers are needed to help interpret scripture. Based on scripture alone, for instance, one cannot firmly argue against Apollinaris’s idea that Christ had no human soul. Aquinas cites Matthew 26:38 (“my soul is sorrowful even unto death”) and John 10:18 (“I have power to lay down my soul”), but notes that these do not offer enough textual evidence to strongly refute Apollinaris: one could argue, as Apollinaris did, that these passages from scripture are metaphorical. What is needed to refute Apollinaris, then, is a reception of the Word in words drawing on the overall logic of the faith and on a philosophical understanding of human nature to help understand the testimony to the Word in the written words of scripture. Following Augustine, Aquinas holds that we can look to passages of scripture where Jesus “wondered, was angered, sad and hungry.”

Augustine shows that these passages denote that Christ has a soul, and if these are denied,

---

141 ST III.4.4. Response.
142 ST III.5.1. Response.
143 ST III.5.3. Response.
then it seems that Christ is deceptive or a phantom. Aquinas also observes that turning to philosophy in the context of reading scripture can help. Aquinas notes that according to Aristotle, the soul is the form of the body: without the soul, there are “no bones nor flesh, except equivocally.”

5. Questions on Christ’s Grace and Headship

Almost all of Aquinas’s articles on Christ’s grace and headship of the Church have quotations from scripture in their sed contras. Indeed, these are some of the most “biblical” questions, in terms of the number of scriptural citations involved, in the treatise on the incarnation in the Tertia Pars. It is all the more important if we recognize, with Jean-Pierre Torrell and others, that these questions on Christ’s grace are at the heart of Aquinas’s understanding of the Church, along with the New Law. If the whole purpose of the Tertia Pars is to discuss how Jesus “saves people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21 in the prologue), however, why does Aquinas not begin the Tertia Pars with this more

---

145 ST III.5.3. Response.
146 ST III.5.3. Response.
147 For instance, in the first article of question 7, Aquinas quotes Isaiah 11:2: “the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him” in his sed contra. Aquinas reads this, in the context of his sed contra, as denoting the resting of the Holy Spirit on Christ, i.e. habitual grace. This text with Aquinas’s other citations in this article offer a catena of key biblical texts on grace, all analyzed and read together. Borrowing from Psalm 73:12, Aquinas argues that God is the source of grace, since the Psalm says “the Lord will give grace and glory.” Yet Aquinas notes that Christ is the unique source of this grace, and must have grace on account of his “relation to the human race” because 1 Timothy 2:5 describes Christ as “mediator of God and men,” and because John 1:16 speaks of Christ’s “fullness” of “grace for grace” being “received” by believers. ST III.7.1. Sed contra and Response. Aquinas’s discussions of Christ’s grace in relation to the grace of believers (whether Christ has the virtues, faith, and so on) draws on either allegorical interpretations of Old Testament texts or statements Christ makes about himself as recorded in the gospels. For instance, Aquinas takes Psalm 1:2’s description of the “blessed man” as having “will” “in the Law of the Lord” as describing Christ’s fullness of virtue, drawing on a gloss (ST III.7.2. Sed contra). Aquinas takes Christ’s words “a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country” (Matthew 13:57) as denoting that Christ had the gift of prophecy (ST III.7.8. Sed contra).
148 Torrell, Aquinas: Spiritual Master, 147-8; 188-9; 291-6. Cf. also O’Meara, “Theology of Church,” 303-325.
biblical discussion of Christ’s grace?

Aquinas’s discussion in his objections and replies in his first article on Christ’s grace provides a clue. Aquinas notes in his objections that it seems that grace is not necessary for Christ. Following 2 Peter 1:4, Aquinas states that grace involves human beings being made “partakers of the divine nature.” Yet the incarnate union seems to suffice for this: why would there be any need for a particular grace in Christ beyond the sharing of his human nature in the divine nature in the person of the Word? Furthermore, Aquinas notes that grace causes salvation, quoting Romans 6:23: “the grace of God (is) life everlasting.” But Christ seems not to need salvation, since he is not a sinner.

Aquinas’s responses to these problems show the importance of laying out a close analysis of the mode of the incarnate union, following the Council of Chalcedon, before reading these biblical passages about Christ’s grace and its connection to our salvation. If one were to hold that Christ partakes of the divine nature without the need for grace, one would come close to a Eutychian Christology, Aquinas suggests. Because of the distinction of natures affirmed by Chalcedon, Christ’s soul is not “essentially divine,” but receives grace in a human way on account of an overflowing from the hypostatic union. Furthermore, while Christ’s soul was not sinful, Christ’s soul, like the soul of all other human beings, requires the grace of God for full happiness and vision of God. Saying otherwise amounts to Eutychianism, denying the difference of natures.

In question 7 articles 9, 10, and 12, Aquinas reads the Johannine prologue’s ascription of the fullness of grace to Christ in light of a pattern of hierarchical mediation

\[149\] ST III.7.1. Obj. 1.
\[150\] ST III.7.1. Obj. 2.
\[151\] ST III.7.1. Reply 1.
\[152\] ST III.7.1. Response and Reply 1.
borrowed from Dionysius. Aquinas also draws significantly on the Johannine prologue in arguing for the unique fullness of Christ’s grace in articles 9, 10, and 12 of question 7. Aquinas quotes John 1:14’s ascription of fullness of grace and truth to Christ as the “only-begotten” of the Father in the sed contra of each of these articles. Aquinas refers to the Johannine prologue earlier in article 1 of question 7, in the context of his response, drawing on John 1:16, “of his grace we have received” to claim that Christ has grace so as to offer it to others joined to him in the Church. Aquinas briefly cites Pseudo-Dionysius to explain the hierarchical way that Christ has and passes on grace, that is, Christ has the fullness of grace due to the hypostatic union (being near to the “inflowing cause” of grace, the divine nature) so as to pass it on to others. Thus the ascription of the fullness of grace to Christ is not merely an exclamatory metaphor by John, but a description of the nature of God’s mediation of grace to human beings by means of Jesus’ humanity.

Aquinas’s description of Christ as head of the Church might seem at first glance to involve him reading scriptural testimony to the image of Christ as Head and the Church as Christ’s body in a straightforward way. We should recall, however, that Aquinas is also reading this testimony through the lens of his Chalcedonian Christology. Aquinas cites Ephesians 1:22’s description of Christ as head of the Church in his sed contra, and notes Paul’s other uses of the theme of the body of Christ “from its likeness to the natural body of a man” in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Aquinas explains that Christ is Head of the Church precisely due to his particular manner of receiving grace by an overflowing from the hypostatic union. Because his human nature is united to

---

154 ST III.7.1. Response.  
155 ST III.7.9. Response.  
the divine nature, Christ has grace in a way that makes him “highest and first,” and thus “all have received grace on account of his grace.” Aquinas uses this framework to explain Romans 8:29, “predestined to be made conformable to the image of his Son, that he might be first-born among many brethren.” Aquinas thus describes this conformity to the image of the Son brought about by Christ’s grace. Aquinas also observes that Christ is head of the Church because of his possession of the fullness of grace and virtue, hearkening back to his use of the Johannine prologue in articles 9, 10, and 12 in question 7 with quotations from John 1:14 and 1:16 in the body of his response to question 8 article 1.

6. Constantinople III

Questions 18 and 19 of the Tertia Pars represent another instance of Aquinas’s reading scripture (receiving the Word in human words) through the lens of a Christological council: in this case, Constantinople III. This is a perfect instance for showing how Aquinas understands the Church to hear and proclaim the Word by means of mediators, because in these questions Aquinas is wrestling with a few central biblical passages (the story of Christ’s Agony in the Garden in the Gospels, along with Philippians 2:8-9 and Romans 5:18), read through the lens of the Fathers (Ambrose), whose interpretations are themselves sifted authoritatively by a Church Council (Constantinople III).

Aquinas explains that the controversies surrounding Constantinople III lead not
only towards a right understanding of how Christ has two knowledges and two wills and operations, but also a better understanding of texts of the New Testament which give the humanity of Christ a role in salvation. Theological discussion of Christ’s knowledge and will in the Fathers leading up to the council of Constantinople III, Aquinas shows, leads to a better understanding of how Christ brings about salvation as divine and human, i.e., how he is a mediator. The first two key sed contras in question 18 of the Tertia Pars, on the unity of wills in Christ, quote Ambrose’s reflections on the scriptural testimony to Christ’s agony in Gethsemane. Speaking on Luke 22:42, Christ’s words “remove this chalice from me. But not yet my will but thine be done,” Ambrose comments “as he assumed my will, he assumed my sorrow.”159 Ambrose locates the struggle of Christ in Gethsemane within the whole economy of the incarnation: Christ assumes human nature, including a human will, in order to sanctify it and heal it. Further on, Aquinas quotes Philippians 2:8-9 and Romans 5:18 in his sed contras on Christ’s two operations.160

The Church’s prophetic office thus enriches and enlivens the Church’s reception of scripture precisely through the work of theologians and councils making explicit what is implicit in scripture by drawing on nonbiblical words and terms, many drawn from Hellenistic philosophy. Aquinas fleshes out Ambrose’s insistence that Christ assumed human will and sorrow by briefly narrating the history of the Christological controversy involving Christ’s human mind and will, beginning with Apollinaris and Nestorius and ending by quoting Constantinople III’s affirmation of “two natural wills” and “two natural operations” in Christ.161 Aquinas further quotes Ambrose to argue, in the next article, that Christ had a “will of sensuality” as well as a “will of reason,” and uses this

160 See the sed contras in ST III.19.3 and 4.
161 ST III.18.1. Response.
distinction to explain Christ’s agony in Gethsemane. Aquinas is summarizing the process of theological reception of the testimony to Christ in the New Testament, particularly the seeming contradiction between Christ being the incarnate Word and suffering an agony of choice, suggesting contrariety of wills, in the garden of Gethsemane. While the words of theologians on this topic are merely probable arguments, much of their thoughts on Christ’s two knowledges and two wills were defined as doctrine by the Council of Constantinople III.

Constantinople III’s discussion of Christ’s two operations seems interminably obscure: is discussion of a divine and human operation in Christ foreign to the portrayal of Christ in scripture? Aquinas shows that the Fathers, in debating these issues, were keenly concerned to understand the nature of the action by which Christ brings about salvation as divine and human: thus discussion of Christ’s operations continues to flesh out the central aspect of the story of salvation conveyed in the gospel testimony to Christ’s agony in the garden (along with Christ’s passion and resurrection). Aquinas quotes Ambrose’s De Fide to open his discussion of Christ’s two operations, where Ambrose observes that Christ’s two natures involve “different powers” and “different substances,” which means that there cannot be only “one operation.” Much of what is at issue here is the fact that Pseudo-Dionysius appears to hold to only one operation in Christ, mentioning “only one human and divine operation, which is written in Greek theandrike, i.e., God-manlike.” Aquinas responds by quoting Constantinople III’s denunciation of a single-operation Christology as a heresy, and quoting Leo the Great’s

\[^{162}\text{ST III.18.2; see also III.18.4. Reply 3.}\]
\[^{163}\text{Cf. ST III.18.6.}\]
\[^{164}\text{ST III.19.1. Sed contra.}\]
\[^{165}\text{ST III.19.1. Obj. 1.}\]
“Tome” as saying that Christ’s divine and human natures or “forms” “do what is proper to each in union with the other.”¹⁶⁶ What Pseudo-Dionysius meant by saying Christ’s action was “theandric,” Aquinas explains, is that Christ’s “Divine operation employs the human, and his human operation shares in the power of the Divine.”¹⁶⁷ Calling Christ’s action “theandric” means that he “wrought divine things humanly.” Understanding Christ’s human and divine operation is key to understanding how Christ’s acts and sufferings can be salvific: this is why Leo the Great, Pseudo-Dionysius, and the Council Fathers of Constantinople III approach these issues of Christ’s action with such concern.

In the case of question 19 of the Tertia Pars, the authoritative words of Constantinople III, in Aquinas’s mind, not only forbid particular errors, but also provide a framework necessary for understanding the salvation wrought by Christ rightly: Constantinople III is a necessary part of interpretation of the Word of God in scripture. If Christ’s human and divine operations were not distinct, it would be impossible to speak of merit, because Christ would act divinely and not humanly. Aquinas shows by his placement of New Testament texts in his sed contras and in the body of his articles that this position would forestall interpretation of some key New Testament texts: for example, Paul ascribes merit to Christ’s passion in Philippians 2:8-9, "Becoming obedient unto death . . . For which cause God also hath exalted Him." Aquinas parses this verse by saying that Jesus, “by obeying,” “merited something for Himself,” particularly his bodily glory and ascension.¹⁶⁸ Reflecting on Christ’s merit with Constantinople III

¹⁶⁸ ST III.19.3. Sed Contra.
and the Fathers is a means of better understanding scripture.\textsuperscript{169} Another important text for Aquinas is Romans 5:18, where Paul says “As by the offense of one, unto all men to condemnation; so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life.” Aquinas argues that this text extends Christ’s merit to the justification of human beings: “the merit of Christ, who has been appointed by God to be head of all men in regard to grace, extends to his members.”\textsuperscript{170} Normally one human being cannot merit salvation for another, but Christ, on account of his fullness of habitual grace and headship of the Church, communicates his merit to his members. Christ’s merit not only demonstrates the truth of his humanity, but makes possible the grace and merit of believers who share in Christ’s body.\textsuperscript{171}

\textit{Conclusion}

For Aquinas, the Church’s doctrine truly and authoritatively interprets the incarnate Word in a way that is inextricably linked to the Word present in the human words of scripture. As Aquinas makes clear in the \textit{Summa theologiae}, the Church’s mediation of scripture is not separate from Christ, but rather is a participation in Christ’s offering of precepts and gifts as the unique mediator between God and human beings. This is because the Church, as founded upon the inspired apostolic witness to Christ’s

\textsuperscript{169} For Aquinas, God created and predestined human beings in such a way that they could merit though their actions by God’s power. Human merit “only exists on the presupposition of the Divine ordination, so that man obtains from God, as a reward of his operation, what God gave him the power of operation for.” See ST I-II. 114.1. Response and Reply 2. See also Joseph Wawrykow, \textit{God’s Grace and Human Action: ‘Merit’ in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas} (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1995).

\textsuperscript{170} ST III.19.4. Reply 1.

\textsuperscript{171} All this being said, Aquinas notes further that it was in God’s power to raise human beings to beatitude without merit on their part. The role of merit in justification is a matter relating to a fitting demonstration of God’s goodness, and the nobility of human beings as being created with free will, rather than necessity. See Wawrykow, \textit{God’s Grace and Human Action}, 184-6 fn. 84; 241.
doctrine, shares mystically in Christ’s body and Christ’s doctrine. The words of the Church, even in its use of nonbiblical words for presenting doctrine, can hand on truth about the Word of God because the economy of salvation involves the mediation of divine truth through the human mind of Christ, the incarnate Word, and because Christ wrote his doctrine on the hearts of his disciples, joining them to his body and giving them grace as head of the Church, entrusting them to hand on his doctrine to the nations.

The sections of Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* I have studied here offer a theological rationale for how teachers can mediate biblical revelation in new scientific and pedagogical forms in a way that assists the Church’s testimony to biblical revelation rather than stifling it. The framework offered by Aquinas for understanding the Church’s mediation shows how his own practice of dogmatic theology as a University Master and as an author of *summae* can participate in biblical revelation by handing it on, even while drawing on unbiblical terms and frameworks. The *Summa theologiae* does not compete with Paul’s authority to hand on Christian doctrine definitively in scripture, but *shares in* Paul’s (and the rest of scripture’s) mediation of doctrine. Aquinas would not see his own theological reflections as having the same authority as those of statements of Popes and Councils or of the Church Fathers. Yet the confidence Aquinas has in the ability of the Church’s teachers to mediate and interpret scriptural revelation (especially in Councils like Chalcedon and Constantinople III) inspires Aquinas’s own approach to a “scientific,” rather than strictly biblical, presentation of the truths of *sacra doctrina* “for beginners” in the *Summa theologiae*. If the Church can draw on terms not explicitly found in scripture to present the revelation accomplished in Christ, why not offer a presentation of doctrine as a whole according to philosophical frameworks which seem to help students grasp the
truth of the faith in an organized whole? This was exactly Aquinas’s goal in his work in the “genre” of the summa.\textsuperscript{172}

Yet Aquinas’s Summa theologiae, clearly, is not the only approach or mode of reasoning used in the history of the Church’s practice of dogmatic theology. Barth explicitly places his approach to these issues in his Church Dogmatics in critical dialogue with Catholic dogmatics, including a number of citations from Aquinas and other Masters. Barth critiques Catholic dogmatics by emphasizing that the Church should neither approach dogmatics using a particular systematic or philosophical framework, nor approach doctrine as a list of principles which can be analyzed without concrete submission to the various events of the Lord speaking the Word in the Church through scripture. Barth’s Church Dogmatics argues that the living and active Word of God, in its freedom to speak newly or harshly in the Church, must be the basis of dogmatics. This means that dogmatics cannot use a philosophical system or synthesis to hand on the whole of Christian doctrine except in a provisional way. Barth holds that the words of Church Councils cannot mediate the Word of God with final authority or permanence.

Is any confluence between Aquinas’s Summa theologiae and Barth’s Church Dogmatics possible? The key to comparing Aquinas and Barth on this point involves

\textsuperscript{172} M.-D. Chenu argues that the arrangement of theological summae like Aquinas’s Summa theologiae was more than pedagogical, arising out of a desire to show the inner unity of the complex whole of sacred history and sacred doctrine as revealed in scripture and the later tradition. That is, to present the complex and numerous words of sacred doctrine in a way that mirrors the “inner word” of these same truths in God Himself (Chenu, Towards Understanding, 301). Aquinas’s Summa theologiae can be seen as the exemplar of this kind of work where, as Chenu says, theologians work to discover reasonable order within the “contingent facts” contained in sacred history (Chenu, 307). The Summa theologiae was a way of organizing the teaching of Sacred Doctrine so as to connect all things back to God: as Rudi te Velde observes, the “principle theme and focus” of Aquinas’s theological thought “concerned the truth of that absolute reality which people name God.” This is woven into the Summa theologiae by an emphasis on a “metaphysical account of the divine as the prima causa of everything which exists.” Rudi te Velde, Aquinas on God: the “Divine Science” of the Summa Theologiae (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2006), 1-3. The goal of the teaching of sacra doctrina in the Summa theologiae is not to make new discoveries in theology, but “to clarify, to make understandable” Christian affirmations about God.
comparing how they understand the teachers of the Church to share in Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit, thereby sharing in Christ’s unique mediation as ministers and instruments joined to Christ. In order to make this comparison, we must examine and contrast the different but comparable Chalcedonian or incarnational “logics” in Aquinas and Barth as they work out in their works of dogmatic theology. While Aquinas and Barth differ on the status of authoritative doctrine in the Church, they both argue that revelation is mediated by the divine and human Christ. They both offer “Chalcedonian” and “Constantinopolitan” (referring to Constantinople III on the centrality of Christ’s human will and action, along with his divine will, in the economy of salvation) accounts of revelation. This offers a way forward for ecumenical conversation on a theology of the Word.
Can the human words of the Church’s doctrinal formulations, or scientific compendiums of Christian doctrine like Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*, mediate the Word of God with authority? Barth’s answer in his *Church Dogmatics* is “no.” Barth describes dogmatics as a science about the one “dogma” (proclamation) of “Jesus Christos,” not a science of sequential dogmas.¹ Yet even the Church’s proclamation of Jesus is eschatological in a way that would preclude speaking of the Church’s human words as “mediating” the Word of God, the incarnate Christ. “Testifying” to the Word is all that is possible, and this testimony must be affirmed by a divine act to be true. Barth calls dogma an “eschatological concept” because of God’s freedom in being self-revealed in Christ. The “eschatological” nature of dogma has to do not with the fact that God might reveal something other than Jesus Christ, but lies in the fact that the Church’s proclamation of Christ is a gift from without, not its own possession.² The Church

¹ “The answer of the New Testament to our question about the reality of God’s revelation is to be found in the constant reiteration in all its pages of the name Jesus Christ. This name is God’s revelation, or to be more exact, the definition of revelation arising out of revelation itself, taken from it and answering to it.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2010), 10. German text *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik: 1.2 §13-15: Die Offenbarung Gottes 2. Abschnitt: Die Fleischwerdung des Wortes* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1989). See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: T&T Clark, 1955), 307-309.

cannot have any kind of hold on the freedom of this eschatological Word of Christ to be spoken and heard in the Church in new ways. What is the purpose of Barth’s massive work of dogmatic theology, the *Church Dogmatics*, then? Dogmatic theology is crucial to Barth for handing on the Word because Jesus, as human, was handed on by the human words of scripture and must be witnessed to by the human words of the Church’s preaching. Dogmatic theology, for Barth, answers the question “what should Christians teach about God?” in a way that mediates between biblical commentary (“what does the Bible say about God?”) and preaching (“what should I tell my parish or congregation, addressing its concrete situation, about God?”).\(^3\) Dogmatic theology draws first and foremost on scripture and is focused on the “Sunday sermon” as its end or goal.\(^4\) As a Word entrusted to human words, the biblical “Word” is vulnerable to corruption and misunderstanding insofar as it involves human words. The Church’s proclamation of the gospel requires the human words of dogmatic teaching to present biblical revelation in its fullness and to preserve it from error: this is where the Church’s historical doctrines like Nicaea and Chalcedon come in to play. Yet Barth’s approach to doctrine in the *Church Dogmatics* is in continuity with his understanding of the tension between Word of God and the words of the Church’s doctrine in his second-edition *Epistle to the Romans*. Church doctrines are all ultimately revisable in light of the Word who freely speaks here and now through scripture. Thus the focus of handing on the Word in the *Church Dogmatics* is to allow the Word (Jesus Christ) to make himself present: in Barth studies, this has been described as Barth’s “actualist” approach to doctrinal tradition.\(^5\)

---

\(^3\) Barth, CD I/1, 3.
\(^4\) Barth, CD I/1. 91.
\(^5\) The word “actualism” is a special term in Barth studies, used in a particular way by Barth scholars. For more on actualism as a term used in the reception of Barth’s theology, see my introduction, note 13.
Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, because of his actualist approach to doctrine, presents a particular challenge to the understanding of doctrine in Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*, but also possibility for fruitful conversation. Aquinas approaches dogmatic theology in his *Summa theologiae* as a medieval Master and friar; Barth writes dogmatic theology as a twentieth century Protestant pastor and professor in the modern German-speaking university. At the start of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth denounced Catholic theology for holding to an *analogia entis* (“analogy of being”) as a source of its speech about God alongside scripture, rather than holding to scripture alone.⁶ How can congruence between Aquinas and Barth be possible here? Because Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* was also a conscious refusal to work within the modalities used by many of the Protestant theologians contemporary to Barth, opting for a mode of reasoning which is closer to that of Aquinas than that of Barth’s contemporaries like Adolf von Harnack or Wilhelm Herrmann (though still quite different from Aquinas).⁷ Many of Barth’s Protestant

---

⁶ Barth, CD I/1, x.
⁷ John Webster has called the *Church Dogmatics* an attempt to negotiate the divide between the modern academy and theology’s older context of sermons and biblical commentaries by creating a new “literary art” for theological reflection (John Webster, *Karl Barth* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 50). Theology became an established part of the German University system in the nineteenth century, partly owing to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and in this setting theology was transformed from a confessional enterprise into a discipline defined by *Wissenschaft*, or the “ethos of modern critical knowledge” (Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 7). Theologians in the nineteenth century sought to legitimate their presence in the University by showing the indispensability of Christianity to the nation state and scientific community. Barth borrows the systematic approach and conceptual rigor of the nineteenth and early twentieth century theological academy, but criticizes the positivistic overtones of the theological *Wissenschaft* practiced by his teachers and colleagues. Barth’s work of theological *Wissenschaft* in the *Church Dogmatics*, unlike the works of Schleiermacher or Barth’s teacher Wilhelm Hermann, does not determine the validity of statements about God based on philosophical, historical, or sociological foundations, but on God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ: in the case of CD I, Barth intentionally relegates discussion of religious experience and the inspiration of Holy Scripture to a secondary position relative to the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, these forming the formal and material center of his doctrine of the Word of God, or doctrine of revelation.

Barth’s disagreement with liberal Protestant dogmatics involved more than simply opting for one school over another. In offering an account of dogmatics different from liberal Protestantism, Barth realized that the liberal Protestant dogmatics he was attacking “was intertwined with the thinking and outlook of the greatest intellectual achievements of modern Europe…all the Geisteswissenschaften of brilliant European culture.” T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: an Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931*
colleagues were confused by Barth’s publishing a massive work of dogmatic theology which drew on the Church Fathers, medieval and later Protestant scholastics, and was in dialogue with Catholic dogmatics along with liberal Protestant theology. Barth was accused of being “crypto-Catholic.” In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth was attempting to found a new “school” dogmatics, or a new tradition of what Barth calls “regular” dogmatics, albeit one defined by his actualist approach to God’s revelation. Barth’s goal in the *Church Dogmatics* was nothing less than a kind of new, more biblical, more dynamic Protestant scholasticism.

---

8 Karl Barth, Foreword to Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set out and Illustrated from the (New York: Continuum, 2000), 56. The theological *Wissenschaft* of the German universities was not uninterested in preaching or the pastoral work of the Church: in fact, liberal Protestant dogmatics emphasized the relationship between theological reflection and preaching. The goal of university theology, for Schleiermacher, was the training Protestant ministers. Friedrich Schleiermacher argued for theology’s place at the University of Berlin by saying that human society as such needs those who take care of its religious needs (cf. David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: the Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), 16). The ideal of theological *Wissenschaft*, with its twofold aim of presenting theology as a serious academic discipline and to serve the ideals of the State, led to new genres for theology in the nineteenth century. Most popular was the new theological encyclopedia: largely methodological works that sought to organize and present the study of theology according to highly formalized principles. The chief example of this kind of work is Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, in which he divides theological study into the subdisciplines of Philosophical, Historical, and Practical theology, each fields of inquiry with their own proper subject matter and methods of investigation. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1850), 100-103. The most popular instance of this encyclopedia in Barth’s time was K. R. Hagenbach, *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie ber Theologischen Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1889). The thought behind these works was that, for society to function smoothly, it needed “properly trained” religious leaders, and the research University’s “scientific” method of inquiry into Christian theology would help precisely to determine the proper role of clergy in society and the ways clergy should be formed through University education (Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, 17-18).

9 In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth praises Protestant Scholasticism’s emphasis on offering an organized and coherent portrait of Christian doctrine. He complains that Protestant theologians of his day are not producing the kind of robust, wide-ranging, and synthetic accounts of dogmatics as are found in the Thomist and Protestant Orthodox traditions (Barth, CD I/1, 318). Barth here also, perhaps surprisingly, praises the interest in Thomas Aquinas in late nineteenth century Catholicism as recovering a robust tradition of regular dogmatics. Regular “school” theology, Barth explains, is necessary to address the “human reality of the Church,” particularly the need for organized, coherent teaching. Barth worries that Protestantism in his day suffers from an “excess of irregularities” in dogmatic theology, with the individualism and personality of various theological authors threatening to fragment the general discourse of Protestant theology as such (Barth, CD I/1, 318-20). Barth labels his own work as a renewed attempt at regular dogmatics, claiming “fear of scholasticism is the mark of a false prophet” (CD I/1, 320).

10 In speaking of his engagement with the Protestant scholastics, Barth notes that in discovering their writings he “found a dogmatics which had both form and substance, oriented upon the central indications of the biblical evidences for revelation, which it also managed to follow out in detail with astonishing richness.” Karl Barth, Foreward to Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set out and Illustrated from the
The best place for examining Barth’s understanding of the relationship between the Word of God and human words in the context of dogmatic theology, in its relationship to scripture and preaching and in conversation with Aquinas, is *Church Dogmatics* volume I part 2. Here Barth lays out the role of the incarnation of the Word in the context of the doctrine of revelation as a whole, along with treating scripture, doctrine, and preaching as extensions of this incarnation in the context of the Church.

*Church Dogmatics* I/2, I argue, is one of Barth’s theological masterpieces, an extended exploration of how the Word of God can be handed on by the Church’s human words conducted in the guiding light of Barth’s extended discussions of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

This chapter will trace Barth’s understanding of the relationship between the Word and human words (especially doctrinal words) in CD I/2. First, I will briefly discuss Barth’s overall approach in CD I/1 and I/2. Barth is attempting to show with the whole volume that dogmatics and proclamation must be based on God’s Word, God’s

---

*Sources*, trans. G. T. Thompson, ed. Ernst Bizer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), v. Barth was deeply influenced by two compilations of Protestant scholastic theology, Herman Heppe’s *Reformed Dogmatics* and Heinrich Schmid’s *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Bruce McCormack says that it was Barth’s process of reading Heppe’s *Reformed Dogmatics* while preparing his dogmatics lectures at Göttingen, rather than his reading of Anselm of Canterbury, that should be seen as the decisive theological “turn” in Barth’s thought between “Romans II” and the publication of the *Church Dogmatics* (Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 334-337. However, the importance of Barth’s dialogue with Catholicism has been restated recently by Amy Marga (*Karl Barth’s Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for his Doctrine of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). In fact, Marga suggests that Barth’s first two attempts at dogmatics while teaching in Göttingen and Münster were defined by Barth’s receptive ecumenical engagement with Catholic theology, especially as represented by Thomas Aquinas (read through the lens of Barth’s colleague Erik Peterson) and Erich Przywara. Marga poses that Barth learned his particular Chalcedonian pattern of thinking in his *Church Dogmatics* (which will be discussed further in chapter three) not chiefly from the Protestant Scholastics, but from Erik Peterson’s lectures on Thomas Aquinas (Marga, 1-13). In his early dogmatics lectures, Barth spoke positively about the *analogia entis*, and acknowledged that there was an inherent connection between creation and salvation, and between human nature and the action of divine grace (cf. Marga, 98-102; 109-112). Yet this was still conducted within an actualist framework: in his early dogmatics, Barth “holds on to the premise that God can only be known through God’s own action,” and “the suitability of creation [for revelation] still relies upon and finds its reality in God’s own act of self-revelation” (Marga, 102)
self-revelation, rather than aspects of historical development in human culture or thematizations of religious experience. Secondly, I will turn to CD I/2 where Barth explains the role of Jesus in God’s self-revelation as the divine and human Word of God (“objective revelation”) and the Holy Spirit’s creation of subjects which can receive this Word (“subjective revelation”). In light of this Trinitarian understanding of revelation, Barth lays out his actualist understanding of the Word of God as speaking to and judging the Church through scripture, doctrine, and preaching. I will end this chapter by examining these various levels of the testimony to the Word of God in human words discussed by Barth, focusing especially on what Barth states about the Church’s dogmatic decisions such as Chalcedon, which Barth discusses as interpreted by Lutheran and Reformed scholasticism.

I. Barth’s Doctrine of Revelation as a Whole

A. The Word of God in Light of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Barth claims that the Church’s theological reflection must always take into account first and foremost the fact that the Word of God is “God’s mystery.” The mystery of God for theology is expressed for Barth in the fact that theology’s “object,” i.e. God, “is never in any sense at our disposal.” This mystery of the Word of God is expressed precisely in its capacity for worldly expression, the fact that the Word becomes

11 Barth, CD I/1, 184.
12 Barth, CD I/1, 185.
Jesus Christ “the Rabbi of Nazareth.” The response to the hearing of this Word of God in faith is not a move from negativity to positivity, or from not-knowing to knowing, but “the recognition of our limits and the recognition of the mystery of the Word of God, the recognition that our hearing is about to God Himself who wills to lead us…who one way or the other does not give himself into our hands, but keeps us in his hand.” This understanding of the mystery of the Word of God leads Barth to ground his understanding of revelation in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Barth’s Trinitarian explanation of how the Church can speak of the infinite God or ineffable Word appears in the first sentence of his treatise on the Triune God in CD I/1: “God’s Word is God Himself in His revelation.” For Barth, God’s revelation is not the handing on of a discrete set of truths, but God’s being present with human beings. Because “God the revealer” is “identical with his act in revelation, identical also with its effect,” a doctrine of revelation, or the Word of God, must begin with the doctrine of the Trinity, and not a doctrine of Holy Scripture or religious experience.

This self-revelation of God is manifested through Jesus as divine and human. A key to the doctrine of the Trinity, Barth notes, is the fact that the primary theme of the development of Trinitarian theology in the Church’s history was a focus on the divinity of Christ, God the Son. Barth puts this development in terms of the doctrine of revelation: Christ demonstrates the mystery of a “Revelation” from God, a “manifestation of what previously was hidden,” a revelation which “signifies something utterly new over against

---

13 Barth, CD I/1, 188.
14 Barth, CD I/1, 201.
15 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 339. [Hereafter abbreviated to “CD I/1.”]
16 Barth, CD I/1, 339.
17 Barth, CD I/1, 340; 345. Barth notes that Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* and Bonaventure’s *Brevoloquium* take up a similar arrangement of dogmatic material (beginning with the Trinity first), CD I/1, 345.
the mystery of the Revealer,” and which simultaneously reveals “that there is a source, an authorship, a ground of revelation, a Revealer of Himself.”

Barth understands the Son as Revelation and the Father as Revealer. The Son is God’s Word “spoken to us” in Christ because the Son “is so antecedently in Himself as the Son or the Word of God the Father.” For Christ to truly reveal God, “he must himself be God, whatever his relation to creatureliness.”

Barth does not neglect the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the “revealedness” to the Son as “revelation” and the Father as “Revealer.” Barth states that God’s Word is always a “Pentecost,” always an “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” which makes human beings share in the mission of the Prophets and Apostles. In this way the Holy Spirit is the “purpose of the Revealer” and simultaneously “the meaning, the trend of the revelation.”

Recall again that God’s Word is God’s self-revelation (God’s revealed “being,” in a sense). For Barth, this means that the subjective phenomenon of receiving the Word must also be an act of God. As Barth explains: “to claim [as the New Testament does] that God gives man his pneuma, or that man receives this pneuma, is now a claim that God comes to man, that he discloses himself to man and man to himself, gives himself to man in experience….makes to himself a community of faith and proclamation.” The Holy Spirit is the subjective side of revelation, which is not simply in the human subject who receives revelation. Rather, the Holy Spirit is God’s work of creating the subject in human beings that will receive this revelation. The possibility of

---

18 Barth, CD I/1, 417.
19 Barth, CD I/1, 457.
20 Barth, CD I/1, 465.
21 Barth, CD I/1, 417.
22 Barth, CD I/1, 380; see also CD I/1, 515.
23 Barth, CD I/1, 417.
24 The theme of Barth, CD I/2, §16 on the Holy Spirit and the Church, which I will discuss below.
25 Barth, CD I/1, 515.
faith in Jesus is a “possibility coming from a mode of God’s existence, a mode of existence which is on a level, in essential unity, with Him who in the NT is described as Father and Son.”\(^2^6\) The Father sends the Son, the “object” of revelation, while the Holy Spirit is sent to “create” the subject that receives the Son. In the midst of all this, Barth affirms that God’s essence and operation \textit{ad extra} is one, despite being “Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness.”\(^2^7\)

\textbf{B. The Chalcedonian Logic of the Word of God}

Barth’s major task in \textit{Church Dogmatics} I/2 is to describe how God is revealed as and through the Word which became flesh, and how scripture and the Church’s doctrine testify to this.\(^2^8\) In his chapter on the Incarnation of the Word in CD I/2, Barth begins by referring back to his notion that revelation is related to God’s being as Triune: “the God who, as the Lord, is the Father from whom it [revelation] proceeds, the Son who fulfills it objectively (for us), and the Holy Spirit who fulfills it subjectively (in us).”\(^2^9\)

For Barth, the New Testament expressly emphasizes that God’s revelation takes place in a “simple reality,” the reality of the acts and sufferings of Jesus Christ. Barth’s method of laying out his Chalcedonian theology takes something of a circuitous route in CD I/2. Barth is expressly concerned to avoid offering an “incarnational” understanding of God and human beings separate from the concrete testimony in the New Testament to Christ. On this basis, Barth emphasizes God’s “freedom” repeatedly in the first few pages

\(^{2^6}\) Barth, \textit{CD} I/1, 528.
\(^{2^7}\) Barth, \textit{CD} I/1, 426. Cf. also \textit{CD} I/2, 33-4.
\(^{2^8}\) Barth, \textit{CD} I/2, 33.
\(^{2^9}\) Barth, \textit{CD} I/2, 1.
on the incarnation in CD I/2. Barth describes this freedom of God and God’s initiative in the incarnation as the “reality” [Wirklichkeit] of God’s revelation. As Barth notes, the New Testament simply presents the “reality” of God’s revelation in its “constant reiteration” of the name “Jesus Christ.” The New Testament, as with the Old, does not demonstrate particular “principles” regarding the relationship between God and human beings, whether philosophical or moral. Barth critiques Liberal theologians like Albrecht Ritschl for seeing Jesus as the revelation of “the deepest and final reality of man.” Jesus, in all his concreteness, is “the name in which it is all true and real, living and moving,” the “mystery of God, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).”

Barth argues (but with heavy qualifications) that it was necessary that the Word become human because of the nature of human perception, so as to be God present in “objective reality.” Barth suggests at one point that God “speaks” the Word through the incarnate Jesus because otherwise God’s self-revelation would be unintelligible, or perhaps even destructive, to human beings. This is because our world is determined by interaction with other human beings: Barth explains that "to see and hear is to see and hear men.” Barth continues, “the words that come to us, without which we ourselves would have no language, are human words.” A revelation of God without the humanity of Christ, Barth suggests, would be unintelligible or damaging because our perception is

---

30 Barth, CD I/2, 1-10.
31 Barth, CD I/2, 10.
32 Barth, CD I/2, 11.
33 Barth, CD I/2, 12.
34 Barth, CD I/2, 11.
35 Barth, CD I/2, 35-37.
36 Barth, CD I/2, 39-44.
37 Barth, CD I/2, 42. Interestingly enough, Barth draws positively on Ludwig Feuerbach’s philosophical works in making this point.
so determined by interaction with other human beings.\textsuperscript{38}

Christ’s humanity as well as his divinity, therefore, plays a special role in God’s self-revelation for Barth, as his humanity is the “means of His [God’s] revelation.”\textsuperscript{39} The Son became human so that God could be revealed in a “form at least known to us” so that God could “become cognizable by us by analogy with other forms known to us.”\textsuperscript{40} Barth’s description of the Word of God as a “threefold Word” (preached, written, and revealed) should be read in light of this Chalcedonian understanding of God’s “objectivity” in the humanity of Christ, as testified to by particular human words.\textsuperscript{41} Note that Barth’s understanding of the purpose of the incarnation is in line essentially with that of Aquinas at this point, especially Aquinas’s first reason for the incarnation’s role in salvation: the Son was visibly sent by assuming human nature to teach the truth, since humans learn best from visible and human realities. Barth, like Aquinas, also suggests that this mode of revelation through incarnation demonstrates a certain dignity to human beings: revelation “does not anywhere infringe the nature and history of our cosmos as we know them,” even though the demonstration of God in Christ is accompanied with “signs and wonders.”\textsuperscript{42} God is revealed, and a certain human dignity is shown, because “in this human being God’s Word is revealed to us.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{38} Barth adds a heavy proviso to this discussion, warning that his account of how human existence relates to God’s revelation is no kind of \textit{analogia entis}. Barth, CD I/2, 43.

\textsuperscript{39} Barth, CD I/2, 35.

\textsuperscript{40} Barth, CD I/2, 35.

\textsuperscript{41} The “written Word” of scripture is a testimony to the fact “that God’s Word has already been spoken, that revelation has already taken place” (Barth, CD I/1, 111). The fact that the Church has a written Word of God comes from the fact that the Church’s “concrete confrontation” with Christ’s objective reality as the Word of God involves a “succession” of revelatory encounters with Christ, or, in other words, a history of hearing the Word of God which determines the hearing and proclamation of the Word of God in the present (CD I/1, 115).

\textsuperscript{42} Barth, CD I/2, 36.

\textsuperscript{43} Barth, CD I/2, 36. See key quotes on this theme from the \textit{Epistle to Diognetus}, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Augustine, and Luther.
C. The Church Shares in God’s Self-Revelation by the Holy Spirit

As the “revealedness” of revelation, Barth explains that the Holy Spirit calls the Church together into a visible shape and into offering a definite, concrete testimony to Christ. The Holy Spirit calls human beings not only in an “inward” way, but “visibly and outwardly” as well.\(^44\) The Holy Spirit creates the Church by making human beings members of Christ’s body, with Christ as their head: the “Church in which Jesus Christ is present as the real acting subject, as the head of all the members gathered in the Church with their definite tasks and functions.”\(^45\) Barth thus, like Aquinas, uses the metaphor of the Church as a mystical person with Christ, and members of the Church as members of Christ in understanding the Church’s doctrine. The Church’s “existence” as a body called to testify to Christ by the Holy Spirit itself involves a “repetition of the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ” in the “area of the rest of humanity.”\(^46\) The Church not only testifies to Christ, but hands on the presence of Christ as incarnate in a certain sense, an extension of the human objective reality of the incarnate Son. Nonetheless, Barth emphasizes that this visibility of the Church, this joining of human beings to Christ by the Holy Spirit, is a work of God and not the work of an independent human community, or a fulfillment of a particular human spiritual potential: “God Himself and God alone turns man into a recipient of revelation,” but those who are turned into such recipients are now in the “area of the Church.”\(^47\) The Church is united to Christ in an anhypostatic union: the Church cannot exist as an entity or corporate “person” apart

\(^{44}\) Barth, CD I/2, 208-9.
\(^{45}\) Barth, CD I/2, 210.
\(^{46}\) Barth, CD I/2, 215.
\(^{47}\) Barth, CD I/2, 210.
from Christ, but only in and through Christ.⁴⁸

Barth even observes that those who receive God’s self-revelation receive it by a mediation bound to the Church. He observes that “while God is as little bound to the Church as to the Synagogue, the recipients of his revelation are.”⁴⁹ Becoming a recipient of God’s revelation in the Holy Spirit, Barth suggests, involves not just an inward, individual illumination, but joining a visible body, a concrete mediation of the Word of God in history in the Church as the body of Christ. Barth notes that this sounds like a “Roman Catholic” theme, but affirms that it is “a biblical and therefore of necessity a universally Christian doctrine,” pointing especially to John 17:20 (Christ’s prayer “that all may be one”).⁵⁰

Because the Holy Spirit is “revealedness,” this means that the human words of the Church can participate in God’s work of objective and subjective self-revelation. The Holy Spirit leads the Church to testify to Christ by means of “definite signs” which make the objective reality of Christ present.⁵¹ When the Holy Spirit creates the Church, the mediating reality of these definite signs play a major role in the “subjectivity” of the Church’s mission and purpose. These “definite signs” include scripture, doctrine, and preaching (along with the sacraments). By such signs in the Church, Barth explains, “the Word which entered the world objectively in revelation, which was spoken once for all into the world, now wishes to speak further in the world, i.e., to be received and heard in further areas and ages of the world.”⁵² The definiteness of these signs is tied to the objective reality of the incarnation, to the acts and sufferings of Jesus in his humanity as a

⁴⁸ Barth, CD I/2, 216.
⁴⁹ Barth, CD I/2, 211.
⁵⁰ Barth, CD I/2, 211-2.
⁵¹ Barth, CD I/2, 223.
⁵² Barth, CD I/2, 223.
fulfillment of the hope of Israel. Because of this, the mediation of the Word in the Church’s “definite signs” happens “in a creaturely area and framework which is fixed in outline and unvarying in appearance,” in accordance with the “man-ness” of Christ, which had fixed “spatio-temporal contingency.”53 Yet because the Church testifies to Christ and receives Christ by the Holy Spirit, this mediating work of handing on Christ is a “divine act,” though mediated by human words and signs.54

In this context, Barth argues that there is a continual need for renewal in the Church’s subjective reception of Christ by means of these “definite signs” in every age: “since it is a sign-giving which awaits the seeing eyes and hearing ears of ever new men, this sign-giving must receive an ever new recognition and understanding in the Church with each succeeding generation.”55 However, this renewal must be accomplished within the context of these definite signs, as “there is no new revelation, there are likewise no new signs.”56 Here, while Barth suggests that the Church’s preaching and doctrine must be renewed in every era, he argues also that God’s revelation, and the Church’s testimony to it, has an objectivity or givenness of definite signs of scripture, tradition, and sacrament that cannot be discarded in the process of such renewal.

In his discussion of the “subjective reality of revelation,” Barth says little about whether or how this community guided by the Holy Spirit might be susceptible to error in the process of its proclamation about Christ, or about how the “definite signs” employed by the Church in its proclamation might be in tension with the Word of God present in scripture. Barth’s discussion of the Holy Spirit makes it clear that God empowers the

53 Barth, CD I/2, 224.
54 Barth, CD I/2, 227.
55 Barth, CD I/2, 228.
56 Barth, CD I/2, 228.
Church to share in revelation in an important way: while Barth states that the Church is *anhypostatic* in Christ, he also states that the reception of revelation joins one to the Church and that the revelation of Christ is mediated by the Church. If Barth’s discussion of the Holy Spirit is him at his most “Catholic,” we must temper this with Barth’s much more “Protestant” or “actualist” discussions of scripture, proclamation, and tradition in other sections of *Church Dogmatics* I/2.⁵⁷ These are also determined by Barth’s Chalcedonian understanding of Jesus as revealing God through his divinity and humanity.

II. Christology and Human Words in Barth’s Doctrine of Revelation

A. God is Revealed by the Human Words of Scripture

In Barth’s Trinitarian and actualist framework for revelation, what then makes scripture special, if God’s revelation is a free act of the Spirit that involves the renewal of the Church’s proclamation in each generation?

Scripture as a testimony to Christ constitutes God’s manner of being revealed “objectively” in Christ. In scripture “in some degree the economy of the incarnation of the Word” is “repeated or reflected.”⁵⁸ This scriptural economy is known through the Gospel of John (and thus the doctrine of Chalcedon): “the divine Word became the word of the prophets and apostles by becoming flesh.”⁵⁹ Scripture owes its existence to Christ in a twofold way: first because it testifies to the acts and sufferings of the incarnate Word, and second because Christ himself elected these particular prophets and apostles to speak

---

⁵⁸ Barth, CD I/2, 487; 463-4.
⁵⁹ Barth, CD I/2, 500.
of him by the power of the Holy Spirit.\(^{60}\) The words of scripture are special in the Church because of their closeness to the “objective reality” of revelation in the human Jesus, and scripture’s testimony to Jesus’ death and resurrection.\(^{61}\) Not unlike Aquinas, Barth roots his understanding of Holy Scripture as handing on the Word of God in Christ’s sending of the Twelve.\(^{62}\) As a revelation of God, Jesus is not “alone and therefore unhistorical.”\(^{63}\) The Old Testament shares in the New’s proximity to Jesus, due to Christ’s own use of the Old Testament, along with the use of the Old Testament by the Apostles.\(^{64}\)

However, Barth cautions against overextending this incarnational analogy, or seeing the words of scripture as divine in the same way that Jesus was simultaneously divine and human. The human words of the biblical authors are only a means of testifying to the objective reality of revelation in Christ. Identifying the Word of God and the human words of scripture too directly, for Barth, is like the Eutychian error of introducing a \textit{tertium quid} into the divine economy: this would mean that what is revealed in Christ is neither divine, nor human, but something else.\(^{65}\)

Barth emphasizes that “we cannot regard the presence of God’s Word in the Bible as an attribute inhering once for all in this book as such.”\(^{66}\) There is not an inherent quality of inerrancy or religious genius that makes the Bible the Bible, rather is God’s election to use these human words by the power of the Holy Spirit to testify to the event

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[60]{Barth, CD I/2, 500.}
\footnotetext[61]{Barth, CD I/2, 500.}
\footnotetext[62]{CD I/2, 487. This sending of the Twelve also involves being sent by the power of the Holy Spirit: Barth quotes Matthew 10:19, John 14:26, John 16:13, and Acts 2:1 Jesus, the human “objective reality” of God’s revelation, comes to human beings by human witnesses. Barth produces a list of similar biblical texts describing this reality of apostolic sharing in Christ’s mission: Mark 2:14, Ephesians 4:11, Galatians 1:1, Acts 1:3, Luke 10:16, Matthew 10:40, John 20:21, and, perhaps most importantly, John 17:8, “The words which thou gavest me I have given unto them” (CD I/2, 487).}
\footnotetext[63]{CD I/2, 487-8.}
\footnotetext[64]{Barth, CD I/2, 488-9.}
\footnotetext[65]{Barth, CD I/2, 499.}
\footnotetext[66]{Barth, CD I/2, 530.}
\end{footnotes}
of Christ. The written words of the Bible present the “possibility” for the Word to be spoken, but that this must be actualized and brought into being by the work of God in the present. Barth compares the written words of scripture to the “water in the Pool of Bethesda,” a creaturely thing which God takes up and uses to accomplish a divine work. God’s speech through scripture is a “free divine decision.” Thus Barth understands scripture to be the Word of God not in an isolated way, but only together with the proclamation of the Word in the present and the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Yet while God merely uses the human words of the prophets and apostles as instruments, Barth explains that these are the key instruments used by God in his self-revelation. God’s revelation through the words of scripture does not speak a “new” Word through the words of scripture so much as make the prophets and apostles in their words “again live before us.” The Word of God makes the biblical authors contemporary, “as men who in all the concreteness of their own situation and action speak to us here and now.” The task of the Church’s dogmatic approach to scripture is to “expect this act afresh,” to expect this contemporary Word in the human words of scripture.

---

67 Barth, CD I/2, 530.
68 Barth, CD I/2, 530.
69 Barth, CD I/2, 530.
70 I.e., Barth’s doctrine of the “threefold Word of God,” a theme of CD I/1, 98-140.
71 Barth, CD I/2, 531; see also 532-3:
   If God speaks to man, He really speaks in the language of this concrete human word of man. That is the right and necessary truth in the concept of verbal inspiration. If the word is not to be separated from the matter, if there is no such thing as verbal inspiredness, the matter is not to be separated from the word, and there is real inspiration, the hearing of the Word of God, only in the form of verbal inspiration, the hearing of the Word of God only in the concrete form of the biblical word. Verbal inspiration does not mean the infallibility of the biblical word in its linguistic, historical and theological character as a human word. It means that the fallible and faulty human word is as such used by God and has to be received and heard in spite of its human fallibility.
72 Barth, CD I/2, 531.
Scripture is the Source of Proclamation and Dogmatics

While denying that human words testify to God in any kind of fixed or permanent way, Barth affirms that God really does speak through human words. The preaching of the Church is “God’s own proclamation.”73 In reading scripture and hearing scriptural preaching, Barth explains, “what we hear is revelation, and therefore the very Word of God.”74 Following the Second Helvetic Confession, Barth affirms that the Word of God is mediated not only through scripture, but also the Church’s proclamation: “the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”75 Barth states that a proper understanding of how the Church’s proclamation could be human language but also simultaneously the “divine self-Word” depends on “reference” to “the Christological doctrine of two natures.”76

The Church, the subject of dogmatics for Barth, has a special “commission” to testify to the Word that determines its existence.77 The Word of God is “given” to the Church as “its own commission and authority.”78 Yet this Word of God also (and crucially) “confronts” the Church.79 In Church Dogmatics I, Barth posits a tension between the Word of God and the Church, animated by his belief that it is really God who speaks through the Church’s human words, which for Barth means that the authority of God must be competitive with the human words “taken up” in the revelation which takes place through the Church’s proclamation. Yet this freedom of the Word to be

73 Barth, CD I/2, 746.
74 Barth, CD I/2, 473.
75 See the small print section in CD I/1, 56.
76 Barth, CD I/1, 57.
77 Barth, CD I/1, 57; 61; see also CD I/2, 746-758 for Barth’s discussion of the Church’s inherent evangelistic mission.
78 Barth, CD I/2, 744.
79 Barth, CD I/2, 744.
spoken in new ways is always tied to the objective aspect of revelation in Christ.\textsuperscript{80}

The task of dogmatics is to guide proclamation by giving the Church a “space” of obedience to hear the Word newly. Barth considers that precisely because the human words necessary to testify to Jesus (as the human and “objectively” revealed Word of God) can go astray, the Church requires dogmatics. Thus, dogmatics is needed “so far as” the Church’s proclamation “is man’s word.”\textsuperscript{81} Dogmatic theology has the Church’s proclamation of the Word as its “presupposition, its raw material and practical goal.”\textsuperscript{82} But the result of dogmatic theology is not the production of new dogmas as new mediations of the Word, but only “questions” as to “what the Church seems to want to proclaim and what the Bible seems to want to have proclaimed.”\textsuperscript{83} Dogmatics is thus a purely human task, not a presentation of \textit{veritas revelata}, which Barth understands to be the purpose of Catholic dogmatics.\textsuperscript{84}

Barth holds that the role of dogmatics is “testing the coherence of present-day proclamation with the original and prevailing essence of the Church, and of indicating the correct and relevant lines upon which to continue it.”\textsuperscript{85} Yet since, for Barth, the “prevailing essence” of the Church is not a deposit of revelation or dogmas from the past, but the free Word of the Lord encountered through the Church’s biblical preaching, dogmatics is focused on engendering obedience to the authoritative Word of the Lord.

\textsuperscript{80} Barth, CD I/2, 746. Barth famously said in CD I/1 that “God may speak to us through Russian communism or a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog.” Yet Barth’s emphasis on God’s freedom to “speak” through various sources as revelation is an emphasis on the fact that what is revealed in such circumstances is still the “Word of God” in Jesus Christ. As Barth says further on, just because God speaks through a pagan or an atheist source does not mean “we should have ourselves to proclaim the pagan and atheist thing we heard” (CD I/1, 60-61).
\textsuperscript{81} Barth’s prologue to § 3, CD I/1, 51.
\textsuperscript{82} Barth, CD I/1, 55.
\textsuperscript{83} Barth, CD I/1, 308.
\textsuperscript{84} Barth, CD I/1, 310.
\textsuperscript{85} Barth, CD I/1, 56.
encountered in scripture rather than the testing of statements of Church proclamation by the standard of the Church’s historical doctrines. Since Barth states that the Church’s “essence” is defined chiefly by Holy Scripture, dogmatic theology as an intellectual task is a mediating work between biblical theology and practical theology. The Church exists not as a mediator of revelation or its steward, but, in Barth’s account of Evangelical ecclesial life, in an “act of obedience” to the Word of God. The clarifying and refining work of dogmatics exists to re-orient preachers to this obedience. Yet faithful preaching which “passes” the Church’s “self-test” of dogmatic theology is an event, rather than a fixed quantity. Faithful preaching cannot be measured or guaranteed in advance, but is given in the event of God’s self-revelation.

B. Doctrinal Statements Play a Role in Revelation

As should be clear, then, Barth understands the Word of God in scripture to be “autonomous and independent” of the Church’s past doctrine. Scripture is always waiting for “new and from its own standpoint better readers.” The Church, Barth explains, must either make a “decision for Holy Scripture” which breaks open its traditions, or opt for these traditions and reject scripture’s special authority (the latter Barth sees as the case with Catholic ecclesiology). The fundamental openness of the Church’s dogmas to revision or replacement “cannot fundamentally be denied.” If the Church’s doctrines are not seen as open to this fundamental reform, then, according to Barth, the Church’s

86 Barth, CD I/1, 3. Cf. CD I/2, 573-583.
87 Barth, CD I/2, 574.
88 Barth, CD I/2, 768.
89 Barth, CD I/2, 583.
90 Barth, CD I/2, 583-4.
91 Barth, CD I/2, 592.
doctrines have been given an authority that only scripture should have. Barth notes that the Church’s doctrines must be understood as being open to the “possibility that in such further discussions as become necessary they may again be questioned, transcended and corrected by the Word of God as newly read and understood.”

Do the Church’s historical doctrines then have any role in the economy of the Word? Barth would affirm that they do. He explains that the authority of the Church’s past confessions and doctrines should be understood in light of the commandment “honor thy father and mother.” Barth suggests that this “honoring” is required because of the nature of the Church as a community of hearers of the Word. Doctrine is the outcome of a “debate which comes into being because the members of the Church owe and pay one another and must receive from one another a mutual accounting, responding to the witness of their faith.” In other words, Church doctrine is the result of human wrestling with the meaning of the Word; doctrine is not the Word. The Church’s historical doctrines arise out of a “common enquiry concerning a true faith” that must “constantly” be a feature of the Church’s hearing of the Word. The Church’s confessions are the fruit of a “coming together and standing together in view of the actual coming together in proclamation.”

Yet Barth nonetheless sees these confessions as statements by the Church calling for obedient and expectant hearing of the Word, rather than mediations of the Word. As Barth notes, contrasting his approach with Catholic dogmatics, dogmas are not revelation

92 Barth, CD I/2, 584-5.
93 Barth, CD I/2, 591.
94 Barth, CD I/2, 585.
95 Barth, CD I/2, 591.
96 Barth, CD I/2, 591.
97 Barth, CD I/2, 591.
unless “by the grace of god, by dint of watching and prayer they become so.”

Dogmas are “on the way to the truth of revelation” rather than revelation itself. Furthermore, Barth brings an ecclesiological understanding of the Evangelical (Protestant) Church into an explicit role in his account of dogma in the Church Dogmatics. The key ecclesiological question that Barth claims sets the Evangelical Church apart from the Catholic and Liberal Protestant Church has to do with whether a Church community is constituted essentially by a “relationship of obedience” to scripture.

Who, then, can decide whether a “Word of God” is a genuine Word, if the Church’s doctrines are open to correction? Ultimately the authoritative affirmation of the truth of doctrine is the prerogative of God for Barth, but the handing on of any such “new Word” falls to the individual hearer of the Word. Barth understands the Word of God to come only to individuals who thereby have “responsibility” for the “interpretation and application” of the Word they hear. The Word is always addressed to the individual,

---

98 Barth, CD I/1, 308.
99 Barth, CD I/1, 308.
100 Cf. Barth, CD I/1, 316. Barth also has a strong concept of the study of theology as an ecclesial vocation. “Because the Church must again and again understand its Confession anew and because it is again and again confronted with the necessity of confessing anew, it requires Dogmatics alongside of the Confession. There is no other justification for Dogmatics. An individual can be its subject only as commissioned “teacher of the Church,” i.e. as teacher in the Church from the Church for the Church, not as savant, but as one who has a vocation to teach. The private character of the professor of theology, his views and insights as such are matters of no interest. Barth, Credo, 4.
101 Barth, CD I/2, 542. On Barth’s identification of Neo-Protestant with Catholic ecclesiology, see the long small print section on theology, canon, ecclesiology, and authority from 544-572. The Evangelical Church, Barth says, is constituted as the one true form of the Church over against Catholic and Liberal Protestant models by its commitment, one only upheld intermittently at that, to “ascribe direct absolute and material authority only to Holy Scripture and not to anything else, not even to itself.” Barth, CD I/2, 546. A Catholic understanding of the Church and of dogma, Barth says, denies the actualist or existential way in which Christ can come to the Church through the words of Scripture as a “Confronter.” Barth, CD I/1, 306. Yet, as Matthew Levering observes, Thomas Aquinas’s account of Holy Scripture (represented by his Principium, or inaugural lecture, at Paris) also emphasizes scripture’s “confrontation” of the Church, in terms of “the challenge of Christ’s call to non-idolatrous holiness in the Holy Spirit.” Levering observes that this challenge is “an exegetical one directed not merely at individuals but at the Church, built up by the Holy Spirit as Christ’s body.” Matthew Levering, Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2008), 81.
102 CD I/2, 695-6, see also Barth’s preface to §21, CD I/2, 661.
not to communities as a whole: “only as the Word which comes to me can I hear it as the Word which comes to the Church and therefore to others too.” In such hearing, the individual takes on a mission in the Church from Jesus, as the individual surrenders his or her “earthly and inner particularity to the particularity of the gift of grace.”

Yet for Barth the individual who hears the Word in this fresh way can also become a “teacher in the Church,” bringing about a school of thought or state of ecclesial existence which determines future hearers of the Word. In this Barth has in mind his own position as a member of an Evangelical Church which can trace its roots back to the hearing of the Word by the Reformers, particularly Martin Luther or John Calvin. While theologians can hear a new “Word,” and even critique Luther or Calvin on the basis of this fresh hearing, Barth notes that nonetheless for Evangelical theologians “the witness of Luther and Calvin is decisive and essential for their existence as this Church, as the Churches reformed in this way.” This is how Barth’s actualistic account of the Word of God can allow for a notion of “Church Fathers.”

**The Lutheran and Reformed Traditions as Testimonies to the Word of God**

Barth’s discussion of Lutheran and Reformed schools of Christology is a good example of the way he understands a fresh hearing of the Word to challenge or transcend past statements of the Church’s doctrine, but to take place nonetheless in an ecclesial context. He presents the Lutheran and Reformed schools of Christology as instances in which he sees this kind of renewed hearing of the Word taking place.

103 CD I/2, 703.
104 CD I/2, 705.
105 CD I/2, 609.
Barth explains that the Church’s developed dogmatic Christology, even in its highly technical or disputatious moments, is a reception of the scriptural “problem of Christology.” This problem, Barth explains, is a tension in the texts of the New Testament which propel the Church to understand and proclaim how the human Christ can simultaneously be the “eternal Word of the eternal Father.” Dogmatic Christology is an aspect of the Church’s receiving and testifying to the Word. However, Barth comments that the Word of God in scripture also challenges the presumption of a single historical “school” to speak adequately of Christ: in the freedom of the Word, alternative “schools” of Christology, alternative means of hearing the Word of God in scripture, have appeared and must simply be affirmed alongside other valid “schools” of Christology when clear resolution of contradictions is not available. In this context, Barth observes that history of the Church’s debates over the “express doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ” are essentially an extension of statements in scripture, thought through with regard to their ramifications. However, Barth also notes that there are some biblical insights or affirmations in scripture that are exemplified in minority traditions in Christian history, particularly docetism, Eutychianism, and, in the Reformation period, Lutheran Christology. Rather than reject these perspectives outright, Barth notes the problems with these perspectives but nonetheless puts them in critical dialogue with Reformed and Orthodox positions.

One of Barth’s first tasks in Church Dogmatics I/2 is to show that the development of “schools” of Christological reflection, schools which often draw on technical philosophical terminology, involves a faithful reading or extension of the New

---

106 CD I/2, 122-3.
107 CD I/2, 134.
108 CD I/2, 124-131.
Testament’s witness to Christ. Yet how can later “schools” of reflection upon Christology—Barth here has in mind, particularly, the Lutheran and Reformed schools of Protestant Orthodoxy—be related to the New Testament witness? Barth holds that they extend these two key insights or affirmations made by the New Testament itself. Barth does not accept the story told by Adolf von Harnack and others of the corrupting “Hellenism” of the Church Fathers. He argues instead that the New Testament bears witness to Christ in two core insights or affirmations which are then developed by the Fathers of the Church, and then later by the Lutheran and Reformed Christological schools, respectively.  

One of these affirmations emphasizes the descending divinity of the Son (“God’s Son is called Jesus of Nazareth). The other emphasizes that Jesus’ human acts and sufferings suggest that he is acting as God in person (“Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Son”). These two affirmations structure several sections of Barth’s discussion of the Incarnation in Church Dogmatics §13 and §15. Barth believes that the Lutheran and Reformed schools of Christology express these one of two structuring affirmations brought to its logical end.

The first affirmation, “God’s Son is Jesus of Nazareth,” discovers Christ’s humanity in his divinity, describing Christ as the Incarnate, “descending” Son.

---

110 CD I/2, 15-6. One could also phrase these two as “God’s Son is [after the Incarnation] called Jesus of Nazareth,” “Jesus of Nazareth is [recognized by his followers and us as] God’s Son.” Barth explains that of the first of these Christological affirmations appears in Johannine texts, the second more in Synoptic texts, with both occurring at different points in Paul. CD I/2, 14. Cf. Paul Molnar, “Some Dogmatic Implications of Barth’s Understanding of Ebionite and Docetic Christology,” International Journal of Systematic Theology 2/2 (2000): 151-174.
111 CD I/2, 24. I should note that my focus in this chapter is on Barth’s interpretation of the Protestant Scholastics and the impact they have on his constructive Christology. It is a different task, and one I do not enter into here, to discuss the rightness or wrongness of Barth’s interpretation of them. For an interesting contemporary analysis of the Lutheran “school,” which focuses on its historical development, see Joar Haga, Was there a Lutheran Metaphysics? The Interpretation of communicatio idiomatum in Early Modern Lutheranism (Oslo: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).
112 Barth discusses the biblical background to this affirmation briefly in CD I/2, 18-19.
“Divinity” in this first affirmation is determined by Christ, not by abstract categories of divinity. Barth states that one can only speak what it means to be “God’s Son” on the basis of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament authors did not incorporate a previously existing concept of divinity, but upon knowing Christ found “the fulfillment of the conception of the Son of God, and in so doing, and only in so doing, they found the conception itself.” Barth believes that this affirmation, taken too far, leads to docetism or, later, Eutychianism. He also notes that this first affirmation was developed by the Lutheran scholastic school.

The second affirmation is “Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Son.” It attributes divinity to Christ on the basis of his human actions and teaching. Barth associates this affirmation with the Reformed scholastic “school” of Christology, which was contemporary with the Lutheran. Barth believes that this affirmation, taken too far, leads to either ebionitism or Nestorianism.

Barth finds that the New Testament offers these two affirmations without reconciling them or juxtaposing them in a single passage. Yet these two affirmations are the substance of the New Testament’s witness to Jesus Christ, and, as such, they cannot be reconciled by a larger theme or logical system. Though he does not say so explicitly, Barth seems to appreciate the Council of Chalcedon as striking a balance between Eutychianism and Nestorianism, demonstrating the tension between these two biblical affirmations necessary for the Church.

Barth associates the first affirmation, “God’s Son is Jesus of Nazareth,” with

---

113 CD I/2, 17.
114 CD I/2, 24.
115 CD I/2, 13, see 22-23 for the biblical basis of this affirmation.
116 CD I/2, 16.
Lutheran Christology. Lutheran Christology is typified by an innovative account of the *communicatio idiomatum* in Christ. The Lutheran school speaks of Christ’s human nature as sharing in the divine attributes. The notion of the *anhypostasis* of Christ’s human nature, that Christ’s humanity has being only through the Word (one person, thus one Son), came to be reversed in a way, so that the Word also only exists in the context of Christ’s flesh. Barth finds roots of the Lutheran position in Philip Melanchton’s commentary on the Nicene Creed, where he emphasizes an *anhypostatic* Christology in which Christ’s flesh has being only through the Word’s act. Lutheran scholasticism framed this affirmation in terms of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, by which theologians like Johann Gerhard and Johannes Quenstedt eventually went so far as to reject any notion of the Word’s existence *extra carnem*. Lutheran scholastics like Johann Quenstedt describe a “joint sharing” (*communis participatio*) of both the Word and the Word’s humanity in the divine nature. Barth worries that Lutheran scholasticism went too far in this, but notes that Gerhard and Quenstedt offered heavy qualifications for their positions, while also saying that they saw such as the position

117 CD I/2, 163.
118 CD I/2, 166.
119 CD I/2, 164. I should note that Barth never accepts kenotic Christology, a particular modern offshoot of the Lutheran school. On the crucial distinction between Barth and theologies that involve divine self-actualization in time, such as the religious philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, see Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology” in Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 190-192. See also George Hunsinger, “Election and Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth (Revised)” in Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 46-7: Hunsinger states that Barth “would never allow pre-temporal election, or anything else, to make God’s triune being depend on his relationship to the world.” While Barth does point to a “veiling” of God in Christ’s humanity, drawing on Cyril of Jerusalem, Luther, and Calvin, he adds, contrary to many kenotic theologians in the 19th century, that this does not mean that the eternal Word suffers any “lessening” of divinity (Barth, CD I/2, 38). After all, kenotic Christology would mean a denial of Chalcedon: Christ as the Incarnate Word would no longer be *vere Deus*, but something else. Barth explains that the Incarnation is not a changing of the Word into something else entirely, but the Word coming to exist so that a “flesh-ness” is added to the “Word-ness” of the Word without any lessening of the Word’s being true God.
God’s revelation pushed them towards. Nonetheless, for Barth the Lutheran position represents an affirmation that was unjustly neglected in the “early and medieval Church.” It expresses and summarizes “an immediate need of faith.”

For the Reformed (and for Aquinas), the Lutheran position on Christ would be an unbiblical affirmation that should be avoided in the Church’s reading and proclamation of scripture. Reformed scholastics rejected the Lutheran claim that the Word is present “solely” in Jesus’ humanity. They did so first because this is in agreement with the Fathers and Medieval Scholastics. Barth notes that the “Extra Calvinisticum,” a polemical term for the Reformed emphasis on the Word’s existence outside of (extra) Christ’s flesh, was not a Reformed innovation, but a “continuation of all earlier Christology.” Yet the Reformed were not merely interested in preserving tradition: they wanted to distinguish the logos asarkos and the logos ensarkos, the humanity and divinity of the Son, while maintaining one Son. Barth offers the Heidelberg Catechism, question 48, as an example, in which it is argued that “the divinity is inconceivably and

120 CD I/2, 167.
121 CD I/2, 170-171.
122 CD I/2, 170. The Lutheran or Eutychian “school” interprets the divine nature in light of the historical being and acts of the human Jesus. The human Jesus is not simply the incarnation of the Logos, but tells human beings something about the divine nature by his humanity. Though he does not explicitly draw this connection, the Lutheran school, on Barth’s reading, seems to ground many of his more “modern” statements on the Incarnation, or at least give his statements a basis in a tradition. In contemporary theology, such forms of this “Lutheran option” after Barth continue to be very lively: the theology of the Lutheran (and Barth-influenced) theologian Robert Jenson is a clear example. Robert Jenson presents his approach to the Trinity in his Systematic Theology as a particular way of thinking through the ramifications of Barth’s account of the Trinity “not as the dialectics of a self-containing subject, but as the dialectics of a self-revealing subject,” leading to Jenson’s own view in which “God is not personal in that he is trumely self-sufficient; he is personal in that he trumely opens himself” (Robert Jenson, Systematic Theology Volume One: The Triune God (New York: Oxford, 1997), 124). However, many Barth scholars would caution against Jenson as a direct extension of Barth’s project: see for instance George Hunsinger, who, in a review essay of Jenson’s Systematic Theology, argues that Jenson “lands outside the bounds of established ecumenical consensus” and goes about theology with a “rationalistic mindset.” George Hunsinger, “Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: a review essay,” Scottish Journal of Theology 55/2 (2002): 161-200.
124 CD I/12 168-9.
everywhere present” and that “it must follow that it is indeed outwith its adopted humanity.”125 Barth shows an overt preference for the Reformed school.126 He states that the “positive content” of the Lutheran position, the emphasis on the action of the Word in the event of the Incarnation, is an element that Reformed Christology should and did uphold: what it rejected was the negative aspect of the Lutheran “solely,” the assertion that the Word now exists solely in the humanity of Jesus after the Incarnation.127

However, Barth does not simply opt for Reformed Christology over the Lutheran. Barth observes that Reformed Christology (which is a more literal reading of Chalcedon’s declaration on Christ) has imperfections as well: particularly, in light of the Lutheran, it runs the danger of a “twofold Christ.” Barth was uncomfortable with the Reformed idea of a “logos asarkos.”128 For instance, Barth reproaches the Reformed affirmation of a distinction between the logos asarkos and logos ensarkos of denying the “unity of the natures and hypostatic union,” risking the “destruction of the unequivocal Emmanuel and the certainty of faith and salvation based thereon.”129 For Barth, there is either something like a union of natures in Christ – an option that violates the distinction between creature and creator – or in Christ the distinction between the natures is preserved, which Barth thinks risks admitting that Jesus is not really unified as divine and human.

Barth sees both the Reformed and Lutheran schools as receptions of particular biblical affirmations, saying that the two schools both make affirmations which much be

125 CD I/2, 168.
126 Cf. CD I/2, 166, 170-171.
127 CD I/2, 169.
128 CD I/2, 170.
129 CD I/2, 170.
received by the Church, since they are “two testimonies to one reality.”

Barth’s opting for a notion of two Christological schools, rather than a monolithic account of the incarnate union, is a sign of the larger way Barth subordinates, and thinks other theologians should subordinate, the Church’s doctrinal interpretations—which include the use of philosophical concepts to make sense of biblical revelation—to the capacity of the Word to judge human concepts and speak in fresh or new ways. In the case of Christology, Barth suggests that the Church cannot rest on a single doctrinal understanding of the incarnation. The incarnation is a reality, revealed to readers of scripture past and present, which is better understood through multiple, perhaps incompatible, doctrinal frameworks rather than a single approach which claims authority. For Barth, this better appreciates the fact that the Church’s Christology is based on its reception of Jesus himself speaking through the words of scripture, not developed lines of philosophical thinking on Jesus in terms of “nature” and “person.” The Reformed and Lutheran schools of Christology are instances in which Jesus freely testifies to himself through scripture in fresh ways in the present, to which the Church must listen and be renewed.

Therefore, it is not simply dialectical strategy or a teaching tool to pit these two “schools” against one another, but a response to what Barth sees as the nature of God’s self-revelation in scripture and the Church’s role in testifying to this Word in its doctrine. Barth believes that God’s revelation precludes definitive doctrinal words—in this case, Chalcedon’s rejection of Eutychianism—from being binding in the Church’s proclamation, as these are always provisional and revisable. Yet the complexity of Barth’s position should not be lost: while doctrines like Chalcedon are not definitive, they

---

130 CD I/2, 24.
nonetheless play an essential role in testimony to the Word of God in Christ, because the Word must be handed on in human words. Church doctrines like Chalcedon, as interpreted by various schools, help people to really know the “objective reality” of the Word of God. But these doctrines, and the schools of thought which interpret them, are always open to revision on the basis of the insight of particular individuals into scripture, such as the “new” insight of the Lutheran school.

**Conclusion**

Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* is a particular envisioning of the task of dogmatic theology as involving a critical task, not just a pedagogical or speculative one. Barth presents dogmatic theology as a critical reading of the ways theologians speak about God in light of Christian claims about the Trinity, Christology, and the relation of these to the “moment” of revelation described by the notion of the Word of God. This critical reading seeks to maintain that dogmatic theology is always unfinished and open to revision because dogmatic theology lives from the event of the revealed Word of God in the Church, not simply recollection of these events in the past. This leads Barth to claim that the Church’s historical doctrines, while possessing a proximate authority, are open to revision by future hearings of the Word.

Barth’s critical moments in his *Church Dogmatics* seem to target a number of the characteristics of the *Summa theologiae*. Does Aquinas’s framework for doctrine in the different parts of the *Summa theologiae* subject the dynamic, active biblical Word of God to a preconceived philosophical system? Does Aquinas’s approach to Church doctrine
involve receiving and handing on the Word based on the human judgments of the Church’s hierarchs rather than on God’s unique authority, as Barth accuses Catholics of doing?

In the focus of my previous chapter on Christ’s prophetic office and mediation and the Church’s participation in these in Aquinas, I hope to have suggested that there is in fact much of Aquinas’s theology of the Word in the *Summa theologiae* that agrees with Barth’s theology of the Word in the *Church Dogmatics*.

First, Aquinas sees his use of philosophy in offering a framework for teaching and mediating scriptural revelation in the *Summa theologiae* as a way of responding to the dynamic, biblical Word of God, not a way of confining it. Aquinas suggests that the Church can mediate the Word of God by using philosophical terms because the Church’s teachers and theologians can participate in Christ’s mediating work, rather than existing in competitive relationship with this work. The participation of human teachers in Christ’s doctrine is a key aspect of the nature of Christ’s doctrine as such, which was not written in a book but rather written on the hearts of his disciples and written and handed on by them. If Christ’s doctrine was fittingly mediated by the words of his disciples, why not mediate this doctrine by using philosophical or analogical terms, if these can help “beginner” students better understand God’s revelation as a whole?

Secondly, Aquinas’s account of the mediation of scripture’s meaning by the authoritative interpretations of the Church is not a lessening of the primacy of scripture or the primacy of Christ, but could be seen as a greater assertion of Christ’s primacy. For Aquinas, Jesus, as head of the Church and source of its graces, is the arbiter of whether a dogmatic mediation of the written Word of God is a legitimate or an erroneous
interpretation, not particular individuals or schools of thought. Christ guides the Church’s interpretation of the Word through the Church’s Popes and Councils by giving these a share in his prophetic office. Yet this particular mediation of authority in statements of Popes and Councils is not exercised on all matters: Aquinas allows a role for the individual hearer of the Word and a variety of individual opinions of Fathers, theologians, and preachers as well. I note also that Aquinas has a notion similar to Barth’s emphasis on the fresh hearing of the Word by individuals in the Church, which he describes as personal prophecy or private revelation.131

Yet given the tension Barth poses between the Word of God in scripture and doctrinal traditions which interpret it, we can ask (in light of Aquinas’s discussion of doctrine): how can one tell, in a Barthian framework, if the “Word” one receives is genuine? Who judges, in Barth’s account, when ascertaining whether an element of the Church’s doctrine agrees or disagrees with scripture? Who decides that the Lutheran school’s approach to Christology is a way of handing on the Word and not an erroneous doctrine to be shunned?

In the theological framework Barth lays out in his Church Dogmatics, Barth argues that ultimately God decides as to the validity of an interpretation of scripture in the event of the revelation of the Word of God. But on a practical level, Barth places this

131 Prophecy is one of the gratuitous graces, helps given by God to build up the Church in addition to sanctifying grace. ST I-II.111. 1. Response. Aquinas observes that while there is no new “doctrine” in the Church handed on by Prophets today, “at all times there have not been lacking persons having the spirit of prophecy, not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith, but for the direction of human acts.” ST II-II.174. 6. Reply 3. Private revelation for Aquinas, however, must be related to the Church as a totality: it is a communal revelation, even though it comes to the individual. Private revelation in Aquinas’s context is not really “private,” but related to the building up of the whole Church united by its reception of the Word of God and guided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For a brief reflection on the significance of Aquinas’s position on private revelation for the life of the Church see Charles Journet, The Theology of the Church, trans. Victor Szczurek (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 151-4. See also the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 67.
dogmatic judgment in the hands of the individual preacher and teacher. In the case of his own dogmatic judgments in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth himself does the work of deciding whether or not an aspect of the Church’s doctrine agrees or disagrees with scripture. If doctrine is revisable based on the freedom of the Word, then this functionally invests the individual with the authority to make all doctrinal decisions when interpreting scripture, based on one’s individual “hearing” of the Word. While Barth states that the one who hears the Word has a responsibility to discuss what is heard with the community of other hearers of the Word in the Church, such discussion is not the Word, but merely recounting its past reception. The words of the community cannot stand over and judge the authoritative Word revealed by God through scripture to the individual.

Yet if one does not understand scripture to speak in a way that is mediated by Church authority, as Aquinas does, then how can one determine whether or not one has heard the Word? In Barth’s account one cannot judge between rival claims to have heard the Word, or account for error or self-deception in hearing the Word: rather, the certainty of the Word being spoken is grounded as a possibility in the transcendent God sovereignly becoming immanent in human words, without these words ceasing to be human words and without these words having any kind of “hold” on God’s ability to be revealed. On one level, I think Barth is right to sound a warning against any account of purely human tradition which would take the place of the Word of God as the sole authority in the Church, although I think the account of authoritative doctrine in Aquinas avoids this. But if God can revoke or critically revise the Church’s historical doctrines in the moment of the hearing of the Word of God, would this tension between present and
past “words” not make God untrustworthy? Barth’s account seems to force theologians to admit that God may offer a way of appreciating the Word at one historical moment and then revise it in the future. As Erik Peterson noted, Barth’s actualist approach to doctrine evacuates theological speech of its meaning: if God can renew or change the way that the Word is handed on by the Church’s human words by fiat at any moment, then the Church cannot go about the task of theology in any kind of coherent way.

Aquinas’s position in the *Summa theologiae* emphasizes the sovereignty and “givenness” of the Word upon which theology and proclamation are based, not by recourse to a feeling of subjective certainty of hearing the Word, but by recourse to a Christological and pneumatological account of the Church’s authority to guide individual hearers of the Word.

---

132 As the mid-twentieth century Dominican theologian Charles Journet wrote, love requires “the absolute,” and not the provisional. Charles Journet, *What is Dogma?*, trans. Mark Pontifex (New York: Hawthorn, 1964), 82. As he observes, “we do not tell a Christian to act “as if” God truly became incarnate for us, “as if” Jesus gave himself bodily to us.” Journet, *Dogma*, 83. Journet associates the Church’s authoritative doctrine with a gift given by God to the Church, a gift of sure testimony to the truth about Christ. He implies that an understanding of the Church’s doctrines as always susceptible to revision provides a shaky foundation for the exercise of the strenuous demands of the gospel and the Christian life. Yet Journet notes that the Church’s doctrines do not eliminate the mystery of Christian faith, but rather “mark its outlines.” Journet, *Dogma*, 106.

133 Cf. CD I/2, 706: “in faith we always have to do with a single event, an individual decision, in which I decide in conformity with the decision of the Word of God. If in this event we link up with the fact that we have perhaps believed before, and if in this event we receive the promise that we will again believe in the future, if there is thus a state of believing which embraces past, present, and future, faith itself is not identical with this state of believing. As distinct from it, it is never something which is there already. It is always a gift which has to be seized again and again. We can have it, and the retrospect and the prospect which it gives (and what can truly be called a Christian state of believing), only as it is given to us as a gift, and as we grasp it as such.”

134 Peterson offers this critique of Barth and dialectical theology in his essay “What is Theology?,” available in the edited volume *Theological Tractates*, trans. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011), 1-14. Critiquing Barth, Peterson says “dialectical reference to God leads to the nonbinding character of a mythical narrative but not to theology, for which obedience is required” (4). He also notes that “revelation that cannot to a certain extent be known is not even a revelation” (5).
CHAPTER FIVE

AQUINAS’S SERMONS

Sermons are the most direct instance of handing on the Word in human words, an attempt to speak directly for God to a local congregation. Unlike the genres of dogmatic theology or scholarly biblical commentary, the sermon is a self-involving speech act in which the preacher attempts to speak not as an individual university professor, but as the voice of God. Preaching is a theological event: in such speech, God must in some way be present. But in what way might God be present, and what might be the effects of such a presence?

Aquinas’s sermons showcase his work of handing on the Word of God, testified to in scripture read with the aid of the Church’s teachers, with the aim of leading his hearers to share in this Word and hand on this Word themselves.¹ With this aim, Aquinas uses the scholastic techniques of divisio textus and distinctiones in his sermons to equip

---

¹ Dominican education in preaching was largely based on imitation of established preachers. Dominican educators in the thirteenth century sought to create a constant cycle of students hearing and proclaiming the Word of God, and had strict policies for maintaining a regular schedule of preaching. M. Michèle Mulcahey, “First the Bow is Bent in Study:” Dominican Education before 1350 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 184-5. It is useful to recall at this point that the task of the University Master was not only to teach and comment on scripture, but to preach as well (the classic three tasks of University professors of theology being lectio, disputatio, and praedicatio). The Mendicant Friars, like Aquinas’s Dominicans, were fascinated by the notion of the itinerant preacher found in the New Testament. Scholastic theologians did not only produce speculative writings but, in keeping with Jean Leclercq’s label of Scholastic theology as “pastoral,” composed a large number of texts meant to aid preachers (John O’Malley, “Introduction: Medieval Preaching” in De Ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 6-7).
his students with a “portable theology” of service to their mendicant preaching, helping
them to memorize key elements of Christian teaching using mnemonic devices.² Yet this
is more than simple memorization, but an indwelling of the hearer’s memory by the
Word of God.³ Aquinas’s sermons describe preaching, when conducted with the help of
divine grace, as a participation (given by God) in God’s speech, God’s manner of
teaching the world in Christ. With the help of grace, in handing on the Word or receiving
the Word by human words both preachers and hearers are conformed to the Word and
their lives come to resemble his. Through this resemblance, preachers participate in the
mission of the Son from the Father with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

I will use two particular sermons from Aquinas that demonstrate this idea, Exiit
Qui Seminat and Puer Jesus. In these, Aquinas suggests that preachers participate in
Christ’s mission of teaching by being sent out by the Trinity (Exiit Qui Seminat) and by
imitating Christ’s manner of study and teaching (Puer Jesus).

In Exiit Qui Seminat, Aquinas discusses the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:1-15),
which he interprets as offering a theological exploration of how our human words might

² A major literary feature of medieval academic sermons in the thirteenth century is the biblical distinctio,
where the different possible meanings of particular biblical words would be discussed in reference to the
word’s use in various biblical texts. The twelfth century saw the production of several collections of
distinctiones meant to be used by preachers (Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, “Statim invenire: Schools,
Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page” in Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, ed. Robert
Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol Lanham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982),
213). The use of the distinctio arose together with the new emergence of the thematic sermon. Sermons
would be structured by analysis of a verse from scripture, the thema, which would be divided into three or
four parts based on a distinctio of a key word in the verse (Rouse and Rouse, “Statim invenire,” 217). The
distinctio was therefore a part of sermon composition: Peter of Cornwall prefaced a distinctio collection
published to aid preachers by saying that his readers “need not so much make sermons, as to form sermons
already made for them” (Quoted in Rouse and Rouse, “Statim invenire,” 215). Early Dominican Bibles
included indexes with lists of biblical themes, for instance themes useful for preaching against the Cathars
(Rouse and Rouse, “Statim invenire,” 221). On divisio textus as a scholastic commentarial practice, see my
introduction, note 54. For a contrast between Aquinas’s “portable theology,” which relies on such
distinctiones, and the theology of the Monks, see Denys Turner, “Thomas the Teacher” in Thomas
Aquinas: Teacher and Scholar, ed. James McEvoy, Michal Dunne and Julia Hynes (Portland, OR: Four
³ Cf. John O’Malley, “Introduction: Medieval Preaching,” 3-10; Randall Smith, “How to Read a Sermon by
participate in the Word in the context of the Church’s mission of preaching. I have
chosen this sermon because of the way Aquinas interprets scripture intertextually to show
his hearers truths about the nature and mission of preaching and teaching in relation to
the Trinity. Those who participate in the Church’s evangelistic mission have, Aquinas
states, a “particular familiarity” with the divine persons: preaching is understood here a
share in the activity of God’s divine life. Because human beings are saved by the visible
mission of the Son in his incarnation, this means that those made sons and daughters in
the Son receive their own incarnational mission, that of proclaiming Christ through words
and actions.

The second sermon I will study in this chapter, *Puer Jesus*, further explains how
this participation in the Son’s “going out” in preaching in *Exiit Qui Seminat* is possible.
*Puer Jesus* offers a spiritual exegesis of the story of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple in
Luke 2:41-52. Aquinas argues that the human words of preaching and teaching share in
the Word of God because Christ fulfills the Temple by making the Church, the
community of believers joined to Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit, the place where God
dwells, and from which believers can seek to know God and love God. In this sermon,
Aquinas offers an account of the life of learning and teaching, hearing and handing on the
Word in words, as a growth in spiritual wisdom that is Christological and ecclesial, but
also focused on handing on the Word to others. *Puer Jesus* emphasizes that learning
wisdom also involves teaching others and living “incarnationally” (showing kenotic, self-
giving love) in community life.
I. *Exiit Qui Seminat*

A. The Son’s (and the Spirit’s) *Exitus*

*Exiit Qui Seminat* describes the mission and subject matter of preachers as related to the incarnation of the Word through a reading of Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. Aquinas identifies the “plant” that is sown in the Parable of the Sower with Christ’s words “I am the true vine” from John 15:1. This identification of Christ with the “vine” also reflects a deep Eucharistic subtext in this sermon. Christ is the “true vine,” wine and bread. Yet Christ is this “vine” or “seed” only, Aquinas comments, “insofar as he is man.” Why the need for this distinction between Christ’s humanity and divinity? Because the principal “sower” or “vinegrower” in the Parable of the Sower, Aquinas explains, is the whole Trinity. The “vine” to which human beings are grafted is the vine of the Son’s assumed humanity. Christ’s body is God’s “vine,” planted by the whole Trinity, and those called

---

4 This subtext sheds light on Aquinas’s understanding of the relationship between preaching and the Sacraments. For Aquinas, the joy and strength of the Church’s preachers comes from the Trinity’s work of saving and healing human beings by joining them to Christ’s body in the Eucharist. Recall that Aquinas argues that that Christ’s humanity is the “vine” which is sown by the sower. God sows this vine originally, but human beings are engrafted upon this vine and also “sow” it themselves by preaching Christ. This has a clear connection to the way that believers are joined to Christ’s body in the Eucharist. Aquinas makes this connection explicit at the start of his sermon: he observes that the Church is both a field of wheat and a vineyard, bringing forth “wine as well as bread” through the work of the Trinity, the farmer. This “wine and bread,” Aquinas comments, are “the works of justice.” (Ibid., 108). As he notes in the *Summa theologiae*, one of the virtues contained under justice is *eucharistia*, thanksgiving. The results of this cultivation of wine and bread are joy and strength, drawing on Psalm 104:15 (“for wine makes joyful…and bread strengthens a man’s heart”). Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 1948), II-II. 80. 1. Reply 4. This is observed by the translator of this sermon in *Academic Sermons*, 108 note 1. Aquinas’s mixture of metaphors in interpreting the Parable of the Sower is thus grounded in the Eucharist itself (the wheat or herb sown by the farmer in the Parable of the Sower is equated with the “vine” of Christ in John 15). This identification of the “seed” of Christ as being both wine and bread is grounded in the “spiritual fruits” of the Church, wine and bread, in its celebration of the Eucharist.


to be adoptive “sons” in the Church are saved by being grafted into it by the Trinity.

Aquinas therefore interprets the “seed” in the Parable of the Sower as denoting the Son’s assumption of humanity. Christ himself parses his parable in Luke 8:11 by saying that the seed sown by the sower is the “Word of God.” Aquinas explains that Christ in his humanity must be the seed or vine, because it is to his humanity, his body, that human beings are joined by the Holy Spirit. The “going out” of the Son in assuming human nature is the foundation for the character and growth of the Church. The Son is the original seed that is sown (by the Trinity), and the “seed” sown by Christian preachers is this same seed: testimony to Christ.

The Son is “good seed.” The Son has “gone out” by assuming human nature in order to teach human beings the truth. As Aquinas observes in the *Summa theologiae*, the Son became incarnate and taught human beings by his words and actions so that human beings “might journey more trustfully toward the truth.” Since we “cannot see the Word in its eternity,” Aquinas notes, the Son became Incarnate in order to “show us an example of each teaching of his.” Human words about the Truth are assisted by the Incarnation. Christ’s presence as the truth in person enlightens human beings, and also helps hearers test the words and actions of preachers to discern whether or not they agree with Christ. The Son is the source of “the splendor of the Saints.” Every Christian virtue comes from the Son, because “in him all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Colossians 2:3). Aquinas gives the example of the false proclamation of Jovinian and Vigilantius that the states of virginity and poverty are inherently equal to those of married life and

---

7 Ibid., 110.
8 Ibid., 110.
9 ST III.1.2. Response. Aquinas is citing Augustine here.
11 Ibid., 112.
wealth. These claims are refuted, Aquinas suggests, by the Church Fathers, who point to Christ’s own example of virginity and being “very poor for our sake.” Thus Aquinas can claim “if someone came and confronted you with a doctrine whose exemplar is not in Christ, it is not a seed of God.” And we can also imply the converse: one who studies and proclaims Christ’s example in preaching is thereby offering hearers a true “seed of God.”

Aquinas’s sermon has a strong emphasis on the sending of the Son: what about the role of the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is less emphasized in this sermon than the Son. Despite having an understated role, Aquinas’s theology of the Holy Spirit is present throughout. Drawing on Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas states that the Son has sown “truth” in the world, while the Spirit sows “love.” Aquinas describes sowers in the Church as sowing gifts which he attributes to the grace of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa theologiae*: the Angels and Martyrs sow fortitude and strength, confessors sow justice, and virgins sow temperance. Aquinas explains that the Holy Spirit “has the freedom from the Father and the Son to blow where he will,” in calling members of the Church to proclaim the Gospel. Drawing on Gregory the Great, Aquinas calls the Holy Spirit a “master artist,” one who has transformed a boy into a Psalmist, a shepherd into a prophet, and so on. Though most of my discussion below focuses on the role of the mission of the Son, and this follows Aquinas’s emphasis in this sermon, readers should recall that for Aquinas the life of preachers is defined by the mission of the Holy Spirit as well as that of the Son.

---

12 Ibid., 113.
13 Ibid., 112.
14 Ibid., 110.
15 Ibid., 118.
16 Ibid., 118.
B. The Exitus of Preachers

If Christ is the Truth in person, how could preachers hope to proclaim him fittingly? Can individual preachers hope to convey the meaning of the incarnate Word through their words? Preaching Christ is possible for Aquinas because the salvation of the world is a divine act, accomplished by the Trinity. The nature of salvation is such, Aquinas says, that while salvation is first and foremost God’s act, God enacts this work among fallen human beings using mediators. One of the most important mediators of salvation is preachers of the faith.

Preachers can speak of the Son because the preaching they do, in a certain sense, is not “their” work but God’s work, because their preaching arises from God’s sending. Aquinas illustrates this elegantly in this sermon (and gives preaching a Christological basis) by relating the Church’s mission of preaching to the Son’s mission from the Father. The Son has “gone out,” in the sense of being visibly sent into the world, assuming human nature, thereby becoming the “vine” upon which believers in the Church are grafted as adoptive children of God. Through his human acts and sufferings, the Son has made human beings adoptive “sons.” The exitus of the Son prompts a powerful response on the part of those engrafted into the “vine” of Christ. The Trinity has sown Christ, therefore “you too, sow!” Aquinas urges, “let us sow an example for the people.” Because of the “great seed” sown in human beings through Christ, preachers have a responsibility to so “precious” a seed to share in the “effort of the sowing.” This means, Aquinas explains in this sermon, that preachers not only imitate the Trinity in

17 Ibid., 109.
18 Ibid., 109. My emphasis.
19 Ibid., 109.
“sowing” the preached word, but also imitate the Son in being sown or being sent, in “going out.” Those who are engrafted into Christ share in Christ’s “going out” in various ways, all of which are related to preaching.

1. **Exitus by Manner of Life**

Preachers are first made capable of proclaiming Christ through sharing in the power of Christ’s Passion. The chief work accomplished by the Son’s mission, Aquinas notes, is the justification of sinners. This work begins with the preacher. The most important *exitus* a preacher can make, the most important share they can have in the salvific missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, is to be saved and made holy themselves. The Church’s preachers do not “go out” from sin by their own merits, but rather they do so by going out to Christ crucified, sharing in the redemptive power of Christ’s passion “outside the city gates.” Aquinas observes that the salvation of the preacher is paramount to a life of preaching. By “going out” from sin, preachers live a manner of life that agrees with the Gospel they proclaim, making their testimony more convincing. Human beings share in the Son’s “going out” by first and foremost “going out” from a state of sin.

Preachers are also called to “go out” and proclaim the Word by dedicating their lives to preaching Christ. In this sermon, Aquinas’s focus is on describing such a dedication of life in terms of religious orders. But Aquinas also intentionally speaks in a broad way in this sermon. He never mentions the Order of Preachers by name, for

---

20 Ibid., 115.
21 Ibid., 115.
instance. Aquinas’s discussion of a life of preaching is expansive enough to be applicable to all orders, and even perhaps to lay people. The central point Aquinas makes is that the “exitus” of preachers must be total. In embracing the Truth in Christ, one’s manner of life is changed dramatically. Aquinas describes this by saying that preachers are called to “leave the world.” “Leaving the world” does not mean hatred or abandonment of human society or created realities, but leaving behind “the cupidity of the world,” “the affections that accompany it.”22 Here Aquinas also cites Christ’s call to the perfect to sell all they have and follow him.23

Preachers are called by Christ to “leave the world” not because the world is inherently evil, but in order to live a life of joyful preaching, to receive the goods gained by following Christ. Aquinas encourages his hearers to follow Christ’s call to “go into the whole world,” preaching the gospel “to every creature.”24 The preaching of the Church fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy that the seed of God’s Word will “fill the face of the earth.”25 Aquinas notes that many are called to preach, regardless of age: young people follow the example of the Sower in Christ’s parable of “going out” “early in the morning,” while aged preachers fulfill Ecclesiastes 11:6’s injunction to “let your hand not be inactive in the evening.”26 Against objections to calling young men to a life of preaching, Aquinas points again to the example of Christ, the “holiest boy,” discussing the passage treated in Puer Jesus, Luke 2:41-51.27 Those who live a life of preaching and study from a young age (as Aquinas himself did) follow the example offered by the Son himself. Aquinas states that “leaving the world” in this manner is an extraordinarily fruitful means of

22 Ibid., 116.
23 Ibid., 116.
24 Ibid., 121.
25 Ibid., 121.
26 Ibid., 121.
27 Ibid., 121.
“sowing” the Word of God, producing a “hundredfold crop” of spiritual goods not only for the preacher’s hearers, but for the preacher as well.\textsuperscript{28}

2. \textit{Exitus} by Preaching the Word

In addition, the very intellectual acts involved in preaching share in the Son’s mission, and thereby share in a certain way in the life of the divine persons. For Aquinas, preachers must first “draw in contemplation” what they will “pour out later on in preaching.”\textsuperscript{29} This movement from contemplation to preaching “is very similar to the Savior’s going out from the secret dwelling place of the Father to the public area of what is visible.”\textsuperscript{30} Preachers receive, contemplate, and love God’s Truth, the eternal Word, which is sent to them in Christ. But just as God seeks to teach the truth to rational beings, and elevate them to the level of divine truth, so preachers, “possessors” of the Word as it were, are motivated to share the truths of the faith which they enjoy by preaching to others. The \textit{exitus} of the Son calls preachers to make a similar \textit{exitus} by proclaiming truths about the divine persons.

God leads the preacher by the hand in “sending out” the preacher just as the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. Aquinas reads the Song of Songs as a guide for preaching: the one contemplating God (receiving the Word) rejoices, saying with the

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 127-128.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 120. In the \textit{Summa theologiae}, Aquinas distinguishes between the invisible missions, by which the Son and Holy Spirit are sent into the hearts of believers by grace, and the visible missions, by which the Son was Incarnate and the Spirit visibly poured out at Pentecost. Cf. ST I. 43. See also Gilles Emery, \textit{“Theologia and Dispensatio: the Centrality of the Divine Missions in Saint Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” The Thomist 74} (2010): 515-61.
bride of the Song of Songs, “my beloved is mine, and I am his.”

God calls to the preacher, in the words of the bridegroom of the Song of Songs, saying “come, my beloved, let us go out into the field.” Aquinas explains that the one contemplating must not “always be here” in terms of dwelling alone with God. The preacher, following the sending of the Son, must also be sent forth into the “public area of what is visible,” the public field of preaching. God tells the preacher, “let us remain in the country houses,” which Aquinas explains as meaning those who are “open” to preaching.

Yet the preacher’s proclaiming of what has been contemplated is not a purely human action. Rather, preaching is a divine action involving the preacher as an instrumental cause. Aquinas comments that preaching involves a “particular familiarity” with God. Aquinas emphasizes the use of first person plural in the passages from Song of Songs which he relates to preaching: “let us go out in the field,” “let us remain in the country houses.” Aquinas explains that preaching happens with God “inspiring,” and the human being so inspired “preaching.”

Preaching involves, thus, the help of God’s “inspiration,” that is, the invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. These missions sanctify preachers, giving them truths which they know and love, and motivating them to teach these truths to others and inflame their love for these truths. Yet these truths are none other than the divine persons themselves.

---

31 Ibid., 120-121.
32 Ibid., 120.
33 Ibid., 121. While this might seem an arbitrary exegesis, the translator of this sermon suggests that Aquinas is thinking about Luke 10:5-9 here, Christ’s sending of the Seventy, and Christ’s discussion of preachers “remaining” in houses which are welcoming.
34 Benoît-Dominique de la Soujeole notes that Aquinas, in the *Summa theologiae*, applies language of instrumental causality to the work of preaching, terminology which he also uses to describe the role of Christ’s human acts and the Sacraments in the salvation of the human race. B.-D. de la Soujeole, “La mystère de la predication,” *Revue Thomiste* 107/3 (2007): 355-374. Aquinas’s discussion of the cause of faith in the *Summa theologiae*, for instance, references the “preachers of the faith” as the way most (though not all) hear the things to be believed in faith. *ST* II-II.6 art. 1.
36 Ibid., 121.
With the help of God’s sending, preaching is the work of God bringing believers into fellowship with Christ’s body, the true “vine.” The “particular familiarity” of the preacher with God is thus a double “familiarity”: preachers are not only friends of the divine persons through grace, but also share in the mission of the Son by “going out” to teach.

II. Puer Jesus

If *Exiit Qui Seminat* discusses the nature and mission of preaching as conformity to Jesus as the Word “sent” from the Father, then *Puer Jesus* describes the preparation for preaching as following a model provided by Jesus himself as an exemplar for human beings, a model for how preachers must grow in wisdom. A key assumption in *Puer Jesus* is that because Jesus is the divine Word and divine Son, he also takes the role of being the most fitting teacher with regard to the life of adopted sonship and the life of hearing and proclaiming the Word of God. Aquinas's sermon *Puer Jesus* is about the Word and the Church or, put another way, the Son and his adopted children. The Word incarnate models the kind of hearers that the Church must be; the Son incarnate models the kind of “sons” that the Church must be. Since the Son grew in wisdom in Christ, this provides an example for the growth and handing on of wisdom that must be performed by the Church’s preachers. This insight structures *Puer Jesus*’s homiletic discussion of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple in Luke 2:41-52.
A. Children of God Must Grow in Wisdom

Jesus shows that an essential task of God’s children is that they must, like him, grow in wisdom. Aquinas’s sermon text in Puer Jesus, Luke 2:52, describes Jesus as growing in knowledge and grace: “the boy Jesus advanced in age and wisdom and grace with God and the people.” “Wisdom” here is more than the accumulation of information; rather it is being conformed to God as a child of God. In this sermon, growth in wisdom is presented as an exitus-reditus, a “going out” to the Temple in Jerusalem in seeking wisdom that is followed by a “coming back” in teaching others what one has learned, as well as by living faithfully in community.

Aquinas responds to Luke 2:52 with astonishment: “truly, all these progresses are amazing, yes, even full of astonishment and amazement.”37 As Aquinas notes, in the Gospel of John, Christ is described as being “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), the Father’s only Son. If Jesus is truly the Son, the Wisdom of the Father, how then can he advance in age, wisdom, and grace? Aquinas explains Christ’s progress in age by appeal to Chalcedon’s Christological definition. Aquinas observes that in Christ, “the eternal Son of God willed to become temporal,” and that on account of the hypostatic union it can truly be said that the Son of God advances in age.38 Advancing in age does not present a particular difficulty to the theologian, then, because one can assert with Chalcedon that the Son assumed a truly human nature. Thus saying that the Son advanced in age means, properly speaking, that the Son advanced in age in his humanity.39 Yet

38 Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 89.
39 Ibid., 89.
Aquinas observes that the other modes of progress besides aging, particularly Christ’s advance in wisdom and in grace, “contain a greater difficulty.”

For Aquinas, what is most important about Christ’s “advance” in wisdom is the example he offers to others, especially the context of his “advance” in wisdom and grace in Israel’s Temple, as recorded in the story of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple in Luke 2:41-51. Aquinas reads Luke 2:52’s account of Christ’s “advances” together with John 13:15: “I have given you an example, that whatever I have done you may do likewise.”

Aquinas states that “all the things together that the Lord has done or undergone in the flesh are salutary lessons,” including these four “advances.” Since these advances occur at age twelve, they are especially an example “for adolescents.” Yet Jesus provides an example of growth not only for adolescents, but for all who he calls to be adopted children. God’s adoptive children in the Church are always “adolescent,” despite their actual age, because all people are always in need of the three spiritual “advances” Christ makes in Luke 2:52: advance in wisdom, grace with God, and grace with others. Aquinas

40 Though Christ is truly human, Aquinas asserts, as he does in the Summa theologicae, that Christ’s soul was “full of every grace and truth” (John 1:14) from conception. In the Summa theologicae, following Chalcedon and Constantinople III, Aquinas claims that while Christ shares in the fullness of the divine knowledge as the Son, his humanity participates in this knowledge with a created, rather than an uncreated, knowledge. Thus Christ has “two knowledges,” divine and human (ST III. 9.1). While most human beings grow in knowledge as they age, Aquinas suggests that this cannot be the case with Christ, since as the Word Incarnate Jesus is “himself the truth.” (Academic Sermons, 88-9). Thus, for Aquinas, Christ did not really “advance” in wisdom in Luke 2:52, but only advanced in terms of the perception of his wisdom among those around him. Aquinas is attempting to negotiate different biblical texts, particularly reading Luke 2:52 in light of John 1:14, but this negotiation is not always successful, as we see with this aspect of Aquinas’s sermon. Aquinas appears to have realized later that this attempted negotiation in Puer Jesus was unsuccessful, because he changes his mind on this point in the Summa theologicae. In his treatise on Christ’s knowledge, Aquinas argues that Christ actually did learn in terms of gaining acquired knowledge, citing Luke 2:52 as an authority in his sed contra. Aquinas appears to have grown in wisdom and offered a more sensible reading of Luke 2:52 in the Summa theologicae. He seems to have realized that his position on the deceptiveness of Christ was indeed docetic and unworthy of Christ. Cf. Summa Theologiae III.12.2, and the role of Luke 2:52 in Aquinas’s sed contra and reply.

41 Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 87.
42 Ibid., 87.
43 Ibid., 87.
defines adolescence in terms of being in periods of “growth and progress.” All those called to be children of God are “adolescent” in relation to these forms of progress, since all need growth. After all, as Aquinas emphasizes at the start of his sermon, there is “not any age from which the way of salvation is absent.”

B. Growth in Wisdom Comes Through Contemplation “In the Temple” and “Among the Doctors”

For Aquinas, Jesus is himself Wisdom, “himself the truth.” Jesus is also the true Temple. He is teaching those who are in him. There is an ecclesiology in Aquinas’s discussion of Jesus’ “going up” into the Temple that is also a spirituality. Christ’s human acts and words, mediated by scripture and preaching, show one how to receive and ascend in the divine Word.

Why is it important that Christ “advances” in wisdom in the Temple? How or why should one advance in wisdom like him? Through emphasizing a connection between contemplation and Israel’s Temple which he finds to be disclosed by Christ in Luke 2:41-52, Aquinas offers an account of contemplation of God as a fundamentally ecclesial reception of the indwelling God. Contemplation of God arises from the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, to which human beings respond by knowing and loving. The Temple prefigures the visible missions of the Son and Holy Spirit by being the place

---

44 Ibid., 87.
46 Ibid., 88.
48 See Matthew Levering, Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), chapters 1 and 2.
“where God dwells,” a place where, with the Psalmist, one can find fulfillment by “seeking God’s face” and “living in the house of the Lord.”  

Now, with the advent of Christ, the Church is the place where one can “seek God’s face” and “live in the house of the Lord.” Christ’s actions in the Temple show how he fulfills the Temple as the incarnate Word. Thanks to Christ’s acts and sufferings, the “Temple” in Jerusalem is not abolished, but now freely available everywhere in the form of contemplation of God. A building is called a templum, Aquinas explains, “by reason of the contemplating that takes place in it.” Christ’s presence in the Temple “shows us” that “by the Temple contemplation is signified.” Christ fulfills the Temple because, as the Word, he now fills human beings with wisdom by joining them to his body, the Church. Because the Word is Incarnate, believers can now “seek God’s face” and “live in the house of the Lord” by seeking wisdom through contemplation, as Christ did. Believers can now “go into the Temple” in an inner way. Believers “live in the house of the Lord” by contemplating God through faith, hope, and charity, on account of the New

49 Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 99. In the Prima Secundae Pars of the Summa theologiae, Aquinas explains that the Temple in the Old Testament was fitting not because God was confined to a specific place, but so that human beings, who learn through created realities, might worship God with greater devotion, and also to signify Christ’s future fulfillment of the Temple. ST I-II 102. 2.

50 Aquinas understands “wisdom,” thus, not only as an intellectual virtue, but also as a gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of wisdom, in contrast to the intellectual virtue of wisdom, produces a kind of “connatural” knowing that conforms believers to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Matthew Levering discusses Aquinas’s sacra doctrina as “wisdom” (referring to the first question of the Summa theologiae) in terms of these two interrelated kinds of wisdom in Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 28-39.

51 Ibid., 99.
52 Ibid., 99.
53 Ibid., 99.
54 Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s fulfillment of the Temple should not lead one to think that he conceives of contemplation or worship as purely interior. In his treatise on liturgy as an aspect of justice in the Secunda Pars of the Summa theologiae, Aquinas emphasizes that, due to human nature, human worship of God requires sensible signs and actions. See Levering, “Aquinas on the Liturgy of the Eucharist” in Aquinas on Doctrine, eds.Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 183-198.
Law of grace.\textsuperscript{55} Now one who “truly goes and sees the Temple” is one who seeks to “contemplate God’s will.”\textsuperscript{56} The Preacher of Ecclesiastes observes, “I have surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem” on account of having “contemplated many things wisely.”\textsuperscript{57} Christ similarly calls believers to “surpass those in Jerusalem” by contemplating God as a member of the incarnate Word’s Spirit-filled body, the Church.

This growth in wisdom through contemplation of God is also connected to one’s manner of life. After all, believers must not only follow Jesus by growing in “wisdom” but also by growing in “grace with God and others” as well. In Aquinas’s spiritual reading, Christ’s example in Luke 2 shows that “going up” in contemplation of God must be prefaced by “going up” to the spiritual Jerusalem. Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, “goes up” to Jerusalem before entering the Temple.\textsuperscript{58} For those following Christ, this “ascent” involves the grace of the Holy Spirit and with it the infusion of the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first step of this progress in divine grace is the gift of fear, which Aquinas indicates by citing Sirach 1:14, “the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{59} Those seeking to “go up” to wisdom must also participate in Christian “customs” [\textit{consuetudines}], practices which help control the desires of the flesh, as Jesus went up to Jerusalem “according to the custom [\textit{consuetudo}].”\textsuperscript{60} Christ’s “ascent” to Jerusalem signifies going up to “peace,” which Aquinas explains is the etymological meaning of the

---


\textsuperscript{56} Aquinas, \textit{Academic Sermons}, 99.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 94-6.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 94. Cf. ST II-II. 19. 7 and 9, on fear as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 96-7.
word “Jerusalem.” Christ’s “going up” to Jerusalem represents the ascent to the spiritual Jerusalem, in which the flesh is submitted to the spirit by charity, whose effect is peace. The search for wisdom must thus begin with progress in grace, which means one’s desires being transformed by the love of God.

The wisdom which Christ teaches provokes love for the truth because, as the Holy Spirit is sent by the Son, so also Love follows Truth. Thus the growth in wisdom discussed in this sermon is not only about knowing, but also loving. Aquinas describes a powerful affective desire for wisdom in this sermon. Christ’s disciples are called to desire and love wisdom, which is incarnate in Christ, more than anything else. Quoting from Sirach, Aquinas explains that one hoping to be wise must “love to listen.” Those who love to listen do not attend lectures “in passing.” Aquinas complains about listeners who are not engaged in hearing lectures on a passionate level: “their heart is not there.” In contrast, Aquinas points to the example of Christ, listening in the Temple “constantly.” Aquinas exhorts his hearers to “inquire diligently” after wisdom. Aquinas describes this diligent inquiry as involving a kind of love, a powerful desire: waiting for wisdom “is not satisfying,” since those properly formed are willing to “travel over mountains and seas” for wisdom.

---

61 Ibid., 95. Aquinas does not dwell explicitly on this, but the “custom” followed by Mary and Joseph is the Feast of Passover. Christ’s parents were travelling to Jerusalem to share in the Passover sacrifice, because the Temple in Jerusalem is the site of this sacrifice. Aquinas may be implying that, since Christ is now the Temple, those who seek wisdom similarly “go up” to Jerusalem making Passover sacrifice through sharing in Christ’s body by divine grace.
62 Ibid., 94. Aquinas discusses peace in relation to grace in this way in ST II-II 29.
63 Ibid., 94-6.
65 Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 100.
66 Ibid., 100.
67 Ibid., 102. Proverbs 3:15, “wisdom is more precious than all jewels together, and all the things that people desire,” is in the background of Aquinas’s discussion here.
C. Growth in Wisdom is Communal and Ecclesial

Aquinas’s account of progress in the spiritual life as a growth in wisdom and grace is not solipsistic; it rather has to do with the prophets of Israel and saintly Christian teachers as necessary helps for growth in the spiritual life.\(^{68}\) It also implies the “synchronic” community life of the Church. Through portraying Christ as standing among the Doctors in the Temple “filled with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,” Aquinas describes the study of theology as an encounter with the graces given by the Holy Spirit to human teachers, by which the Church grows in wisdom.\(^{69}\) Aquinas states that the work of the Holy Spirit has produced many teachers in the Church with complementary gifts for those seeking wisdom. Because all of these graces come from Christ, learners must “listen open-heartedly,” since “wisdom is so profound that no one is by himself sufficient to contemplate it.”\(^{70}\) Through Christ’s sending of the Holy Spirit, “there are different graces” among various teachers: Gregory the Great “knew morals very well,” Augustine is good at solving intellectual problems raised by the faith, and Ambrose is “good at giving the allegorical meaning of sacred texts.”\(^{71}\) Students ought to “labor for wisdom” by seeking out teachers, not only living ones, but also those available through the “abundance of texts” of the Church Fathers. Aquinas suggests Augustine and

---

\(^{68}\) While Aquinas does not address the books of the Old Testament specifically as he lists the names of particular Church Fathers, *Puer Jesus* has quite a number of citations from biblical wisdom literature, especially Sirach. There are many more citations from Sirach alone than citations of the Church Fathers in this sermon. Cf. Lawrence Boadt, “Thomas Aquinas and the Biblical Wisdom Tradition,” *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 596-608.


\(^{70}\) Ibid., 100.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 100.
Ambrose for reading especially. One should seek wisdom through “the contemplation of creatures” as well.

Christ also helps believers to learn as a community, avoiding dissension. The fact that Christ is incarnate Wisdom is what makes the ecclesial aspect of the search for wisdom possible. Because Christ, “himself the truth,” stands in the “midst” of the Doctors in the Temple as “a just judge,” this shows that human beings are free to search for Truth and not accept the opinions of Masters as equal to truth itself. Without Christ standing in the “midst” of various opinions as their judge in his Wisdom, the community could be divided among various teachers. Because Christ is the criterion of truth and not the opinions of the Masters, the community is free to choose various theological Masters in its search for wisdom: one can thereby, Aquinas notes, have fondness for a teacher but disagree with him over the truth at the same time. Aquinas is concerned about divisiveness among those who attend the lectures of the Magistri, and warns against having “a friend in truth” when “we ought to cling only to the truth.”

This point about Christ supporting seeking wisdom in the midst of faithful community life connects to a crucial theme of this sermon: the believer’s “ascent” to God through progress in wisdom and grace must be accompanied by various “descents.” One who “goes up” to God must also “come down” by imitating Christ’s kenotic love. The first motive of the Incarnation was that the Word might teach human beings the Truth as human. These “descents” follow the example of the Word, as God’s Wisdom, in not only possessing knowledge for oneself but endeavoring to share with others. Christ not

---

72 Ibid., 102.
73 Ibid., 102-3.
74 Ibid., 101.
75 Ibid., 101.
76 Ibid., 101.
77 ST III.1.2. and ST III.40. 1.
only grew in “grace with God” but also in “grace with others.” Thus Christ left the Temple and showed love and obedience to his parents in returning to Nazareth. Drawing on a gloss on Luke 2:51, Aquinas suggests that Christ’s obedience not only involved leaving the Temple and following his parents home to Nazareth, but delaying his public ministry in order to labor with his family and provide for them while it was necessary.\footnote{Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 107. The gloss says “they were righteous and honest people [Mary and Joseph], though poor and in need of necessary things, as is witnessed for instance by the manger of the child to be adored; they sought the physical necessities of life by continual labor, and Christ toiled with them.” Aquinas draws this point from “a certain Graecus.”} Aquinas complains that some of his hearers only want to become advanced in knowledge and wisdom and grace for themselves, but not for the sake of sharing with others. The true goal of seeking wisdom should also involve becoming “subservient people” \textit{[subditi]} rather than “highly placed people” \textit{[praelati]}\footnote{Ibid., 107. Because “Christ was subservient to the people,” so also students interested in learning wisdom are also called to “be subservient.” Quoting Augustine, Aquinas says “let the proud man blush with shame, because God has become humble.” Aquinas also quotes Gregory the Great as saying “He never loses whatever by his progress advances obedience.” Ibid., 106.}. Following Christ’s example of “advancing” in humility and obedience in Luke’s Gospel, those seeking wisdom must “go up by a spiritual progress” but also “go down by devotion to our neighbor.”\footnote{Ibid., 106.} Because Christ is Truth incarnate, his progress in grace with others shows that the contemplation of God inherently involves a community life defined by self-giving love.

Yet Aquinas suggests that the “descents” one makes in acts of humility and obedience are hidden “ascents:” those who share wisdom with others thereby progress in grace and wisdom. For instance, Aquinas notes that teaching is a crucial way to grow in wisdom.\footnote{Ibid., 103.} Just as Christ, who is the fullness of wisdom, endeavors to teach others, so also those enlightened by Christ in the Church must share their wisdom with others.
Aquinas calls this an “obligation” that requires those who learn to teach others.\textsuperscript{82} Yet one’s teaching must be “prudent,” as Christ’s answers to the Doctors in the Temple were amazingly prudent.\textsuperscript{83} One should not teach what is beyond one’s ability, and one’s teaching must be in proportion with one’s listeners.\textsuperscript{84}

Aquinas also presents a deep understanding of the Church in its Marian dimension in this sermon. Mary models, in an exemplary way, the human response of receiving the Incarnate Word. Aquinas’s discussion of Mary is not surprisingly connected to discussion of Christ and his fulfillment of the Temple, since Mary is where the fullness of God, God’s “name,” first dwells through Christ.\textsuperscript{85} Mary “conceived” the Word bodily, Aquinas notes, but this conception was the beginning of a continual process: Mary later “conceives” the Word in her heart when, as Luke says, she “kept all these words with her in her heart” (Luke 2:51).\textsuperscript{86} Mary’s “conception” of the Word is exemplary for human response to the Word, in that her contemplation involves the recognition of Christ’s divine nature. Aquinas explains that Mary, upon contemplating, recognized that Christ is not merely a “boy” or a “man” but “God.”\textsuperscript{87} Like Mary, those called by Christ must also “conceive” the Word within themselves by recognizing Christ’s human acts as the Son’s acts. Mary exemplifies the response of the Church to the teaching of Christ in the story of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. While Christ has the fullness of wisdom and truth, human beings must receive the truth and contemplate it as Mary “kept all these things in her heart.”\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{85} See Levering, \textit{Christ’s Fulfillment}, 94-6.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 104.
Mary is the model of the Church’s response to the mission of the Son. Aquinas’s discussion of Mary recapitulates his entire discussion of growth in wisdom in *Puer Jesus*. Members of the Church, like Mary, must also “conceive” the Word within themselves by receiving the gifts of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like Mary, the intellectual task, if we put it that way, of God’s children in the Church is to proclaim, love, and meditate on Christ’s teaching by word and example. Describing Mary’s contemplation, Aquinas explains that it was “complete,” “profound,” and “fruitful.” The members of the Church must not only know, but also love wisdom. Aquinas remarks one must not approach wisdom “superficially.” Rather, one must love wisdom, love Christ, in a “profound” way. This makes one an imitator of Mary, who not only “kept” Christ in her memory but, Luke notes, in her “heart.” Yet the path to proclaiming and loving wisdom is to “keep” the Son’s teaching, like Mary, by absorbing the wisdom taught by the Son through “frequent meditation.” Ruminant mediation, like Mary’s “keeping,” makes wisdom fruitful. This Marian ideal is striking for a preacher and theologian who is at times mistakenly accused of over-rationalizing the faith. For Aquinas, the ideal example of one who grows in wisdom is not Aristotle, but Mary keeping Christ’s words and actions in her heart.

**Conclusion**

While Aquinas’s sermons seem to have been written for Dominican novices, he also refuses to be tied specifically to the order by name: one result of this is that

---

89 Ibid., 104-5.
90 Ibid., 105.
91 Ibid., 104-5.
92 Aquinas draws on the classic metaphor of meditating on scripture as analogous to “chewing” food to obtain its nourishment. Ibid., 105.
Aquinas’s sermons speak to the evangelistic mission of the Church as a whole, and not only to Dominican preaching and spirituality. While I cannot claim to know what Aquinas was thinking in composing these sermons, I cannot help but think that this was an intentional move. Aquinas is not merely offering a “how-to” guide to preaching and study. Rather, Aquinas is offering a biblical account of the Church’s reception and proclamation of the Word. Growth in theological wisdom in these sermons is a prayerful, even liturgical, reception of truth, accomplished through a communal discernment which takes Christ as its exemplar, and which has its telos in handing on truth to others in preaching, which is also a form of sharing in Christ.  

Aquinas’s approach to scripture in his sermons meant to bring about a transformation, through a person’s memory and intellect, whereby a person is made holy and brought to adhere more closely to God, with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas saw the explicit knowledge of God offered by the Church’s preachers (though preaching on scripture) as a participation, proleptic but nonetheless real, in God’s divine life, when

---


94 As Simon Tugwell puts it, Dominican works in the thirteenth century “become exciting only if we are prepared to undertake the intellectual work they expect of us,” a note useful for approaching Aquinas’s sermons. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, 2-3. F. C. Bauerschmidt notes that Aquinas’s preaching has a certain aesthetic quality to it if we read it in this context, if one follows Aquinas in seeing beauty as an aspect of truth. Bauerschmidt notes that the “division and subdivision, rational ordering, and the making of distinctions” in scholastic sermons “also had a certain rhetorical force” associated with “the sheer beauty of order, proportion, and clarity; the same sort of beauty found in Gothic architecture.” According to early biographical accounts, Aquinas’s preaching elicited a profound emotional response from his hearers. F. C. Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 172.
received in faith. This participation is possible because Christ fulfills the Temple by making the Church, the community of believers joined to Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit, the place where God dwells, and from which believers can seek to know God and love God. This preaching, in Aquinas’s sermons (given to Dominican novices) also inherently involves a “call” from God, mediated by the preacher, for the hearers of preaching to themselves become preachers.

I believe that these sermons are supremely important among Aquinas’s works in other genres for understanding his theology of the Word, because his sermons show the connections between the Church’s doctrinal understanding of the Trinity (especially the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit), scripture and contemplation, and evangelistic mission in his thought. In the framework offered by these sermons, the “outward”-focused exitus or mission caused by the Word itself involves an expansion of the hearing of the Word: after all, one must not only discern the Word God is speaking to oneself through scripture, but also to one’s hearers. The case of the preacher applying the Word to one’s congregation is an example of this: the preacher’s confession of the Word becomes a new “reception” or hearing of the Word as discernment is applied to hearing the Word in a new way for one’s new audience. Thus growth in the Word is closely tied to the preaching of the Word to the community. The audience (ideally) in turn practices this same handing on and reception, as they are inspired by the Word to hand on the Gospel further with their words and actions. Thus the preacher is not only receiving the Word of God first and then handing it on as a kind of conduit, but freshly receiving the Word precisely in the act of handing it on. The preacher is being preached to in the very

---

act of proclamation. The Church thus grows in its understanding of its Lord, growing in wisdom and contemplation—including growth in understanding the mystery of the Trinity—as the Church preaches in new contexts throughout history.96

In these sermons, Aquinas also gives a special role to the way that the Word transforms human philosophical words, and the role of philosophy in the Church’s “growth” in the Word which accompanies its handing on the Word. Aquinas highlights this when he argues that one grows in wisdom not only by listening to theological teachers, but through “contemplation of creatures” as well.97 Analogical speech about God, for Aquinas, is grounded in the knowledge of God available through creation, God’s work. We should also recall that the ideal image of this philosophical reception of the Word or reception of the Word as a spiritual exercise in Aquinas’s Puer Jesus is Mary “treasuring” the Word in her heart.

Could Barth’s sermons be anything like these of Aquinas? Aquinas’s sermons emphasize that hearing and preaching the Word are a participation in the Word of God itself, a share in the Trinity and a growth in wisdom. Barth understands preaching as a participation in the Word of God spoken in Jesus Christ, particularly by searching in scripture for ways that the incarnate Word has assumed and transformed human words, including religious words. Barth speaks of participation in Christ in the “word” of preaching in a way that parallels Aquinas’s assertion of a “particular familiarity” brought about between the preacher and Christ through the mission of preaching.98 Indeed, while

97 Aquinas, Academic Sermons, 102-3.
98 This parallels the way that Barth, while critiquing the concept of deification, nonetheless holds that believers in some way do participate in Christ, and thereby participate in God. Cf. Bruce McCormack,
Barth’s homiletic style and concerns are very different from Aquinas and his medieval scholastic context, I will argue in my next chapter that the basic theological understanding of preaching is the same for both Barth and Aquinas.

CHAPTER SIX
BARTH’S SERMONS

Can the Word of God really be present in the human words of everyday preachers? In his *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth comments that preachers must “creatively strain” at the words of scripture to hear the authoritative Word of God for their contemporary situation. Barth offers a rich Chalcedonian account of preaching as a theological event in his *Church Dogmatics*, saying that human words can be simultaneously divine as part of the “threelfold Word of God,” God’s self-revelation in Christ.¹ How is this “event” of the Word of God played out when Barth himself is the preacher? When we turn to his actual sermons, what kind of role does the “Chalcedonian” logic for the Word of God in Barth’s other works play?

Barth’s sermons argue that the Word’s history, in the events of the earthly ministry of Jesus, is a history that also affects today.² They demonstrate Barth’s

¹ On this, see Barth’s discussion of the “Preached Word of God” in *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: T&T Clark, 1955), 98-111, and CD I/2, 743-884 on “the Proclamation of the Church.” Barth gave a seminar on sermon preparation while he was a professor at Bonn in 1932 and 1933, entitled “Exercises in Sermon Preparation” and published in English as *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Donald Daniels (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991).
² I believe that Barth’s sermons (along with those of Aquinas) can be retrieved as a powerful form of resistance to the “politics of translation” which Stanley Hauerwas describes as predominating in contemporary American preaching, in which the profound testimony of Christianity to redemption in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is adumbrated in the process of helping individual members of congregations find “meaning.” Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 13. For more on the timeliness of Barth for issues in American preaching and
assumption that all persons, and indeed all created things, always already have a share in God’s speaking of the Word in the acts and sufferings of Jesus Christ. Christ can speak to human beings authoritatively, but also fittingly and sympathetically, because Christ is divine and human. The Son speaks because he has taken human existence into himself and sanctified it. The Son speaks in these sermons by his human actions, either by his death and resurrection, or by acts and sufferings during his earthly life that foreshadow his death and resurrection.

Certain themes emerge: first, there is a theme of Christ’s assumption and transformation of human experience. Because Christ assumed and transformed humanity in himself, this means that the Son, in his humanity, has assumed the conditions of human suffering, including the condition of estrangement from God. The Son “assumes” and “transforms” these aspects of human suffering or separation from God. Barth mentions multiple examples of this: the human desire for acceptance, the experience of being a prisoner, and an erroneous piety which seeks to keep God at a distance. Christ “assumes” these different modes of estrangement from God and transforms them though his human acts and sufferings.

A second theme is the participation of God in human life. Barth emphasizes that it is not important for human beings to seek God: God has already found them in Jesus Christ. Believers should not seek God beyond created realities, but turn towards God’s concrete presence or “objectivity” in Jesus. God has always-already acted on behalf of

---

3 A similar theme to this appears in Barth’s discussion of “Parables of the Kingdom” in Church Dogmatics IV/3, trans. G. W. Bromiley, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004), 112-118. George Hunsinger presents a synthesis of this aspect of Barth’s thought in his late dogmatics in How to Read Karl Barth (New York: Oxford, 1991), 234-280.
human beings in Christ. The requirement of Barth’s hearers is only to recognize and find rest in this fact. This, obviously, has ecclesiological and moral ramifications. Barth does not have the same emphasis as is found in Aquinas on the Church’s active “ascent” or *reditus* towards God in his sermons.

To the end of discussing these themes in Barth’s preaching, in this chapter I will examine two sermons by Karl Barth. The first sermon is written in 1918. While it was written before Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, this sermon, like his *Epistle to the Romans*, makes “Chalcedonian” points in continuity with his later dogmatic writing. After this sermon, I will analyze one of Barth’s later sermons, written by Barth near the end of his life, after he had written much of the *Church Dogmatics*. This sermon continues the first one’s theme of Christ “assuming and transforming” human beings. This second sermon was given to the inmates at the prison in Basel, one of Barth’s “prison sermons.”

---

4 This language calls up the issue of whether or not Barth taught “universal salvation” (and many would say “no”) – see for instance George Hunsinger, review of Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity by Tom Greggs, *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 356-358). There are certainly undertones of universal salvation in these sermons, but Barth also, as I will show, does speak of the “response” of human beings to Christ in these sermons, mostly in the language of “thanksgiving.” For a complementary discussion of themes in the sermons I will discuss in this chapter as they also appear in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, see Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 40-57.

5 Karl Barth’s sermon output has roughly three stages. First we have Barth’s pastoral preaching, at first occasionally as assistant Pastor in Geneva (his first sermon preached there on September 16, 1909), and then regular Sunday sermons from 1911-1921 in Safenwil, a small town in the Aargau Canton of Switzerland. After this we have a long period during which Barth preached occasional sermons, but not regularly in a local parish. Some of his sermons had a significant impact, however. For instance, on December 10, 1933, while he was still a Professor at Bonn, Barth preached a sermon on Romans 15:5-13 in which he strongly emphasized the role of the Jewish people in God’s election and in Christology. Barth sent a copy of his sermon to Hitler (!). This second stage has been analyzed extensively by Angela Hancock, *Karl Barth’s Emergency Homiletic, 1932-1933: A Summons to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman’s, 2013). Barth also composed twenty eight sermons near the end of his life in occasionally substituting himself in the pulpit of the chaplain of the Prison at Basel, Martin Schwarz, over a period from 1956 to 1964. Beyond preaching, Barth saw his role in the holding of religious services at the chapel, usually accompanied by the Eucharist, as a very important task. Barth thought it important to know his audience personally and visited the prisoners in their cells. For autobiographical texts on this prison ministry, cf. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 414-415. For a comprehensive analysis of themes of Barth’s theology related to preaching, drawing both on his sermons and on his other academic
I have chosen these two sermons in particular for a few reasons. First, they are available in English translations for further study. I also thought it useful to find sermons by Barth which were preached before real communities, not guest lectures or sermons given to academic audiences. While Aquinas’s sermons were academic and had a formal style, they were also given before an actual community, with the aim of building up that community through speaking about Christ. Having similar “community” sermons from Barth in mind helps facilitate comparison.

I also hope by these two particular sermons to show, as I have in my chapters on Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* and *Church Dogmatics*, that there is substantial Christological continuity between the “early” and “later” Barth. The “early,” “dialectical” Barth is also Chalcedonian (and, in fact, “dialectical” because of Chalcedon). I have chosen an early (1918) sermon and a late (1955) sermon to offer a diachronic portrait of Barth’s Chalcedonian preaching. These two sermons also feature some of Barth’s most focused discussions on the relationship between the “being” of Christ and the “being” of the Church; they provide the best parallel to Aquinas’s sermons, and they raise interesting questions. The first sermon is on Christ’s baptism in Luke 3:21-22, and the relationship between Christ’s baptism and the adoptive sonship offered to members of the Church. The second sermon is on a part of Christ’s “Farewell Discourse,” John 14:19: Christ’s words “because I live, you will live also.” Both of these are key texts for the connection between Christ and the Church, and between Christ’s human acts and the Sacraments.

---

*works, see Hartmut Genest, *Karl Barth und die Predigt: Darstellung und Deutung von Predigtwerk und Predigtlehre Karl Barth* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995).*
1. “You Are My Son” 1918

As the Word of God, Jesus takes on the human words of desire for acceptance but also estrangement from others and transforms these words, giving them new meaning through himself. The first sermon by Barth which we will look at is a homiletic anticipation of Barth’s criticism of liberal Protestant Christology on the basis of his understanding of Jesus as the “objective reality” of God’s self-revelation, as the Word of God. This sermon is from 1918. I have given it the title “You Are My Son.” This sermon begins with themes which sound reminiscent of the liberal Protestantism typified by Friedrich Schleiermacher, in terms of an emphasis on the “feeling” of the congregation in terms of acceptance before God, but then Christ “assumes” and “transforms” these feelings in a surprising reversal about halfway through the sermon.6

The Desire for Acceptance

Barth’s sermon text in “You Are My Son” is the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 3:21-22), where a voice from heaven proclaims: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”7 Barth’s focus in this sermon is really the last part

6 Friedrich Schleiermacher made a significant impact not only on the German academic world, but also on German preaching. Schleiermacher was pastor at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Berlin, a flagship congregation meant to unite Reformed and Lutheran factions into a new Prussian state Church (cf. Hughes Oliphant Old, The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 6 The Modern Age (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 76). Schleiermacher saw the goal of sermons as the awakening of religious consciousness or sentiment (Old, 96). Yet the sermon for Schleiermacher should not be a site of scholarly inquiry but primarily about edification and growth in devotion. The sermon is meant to engender the religious feeling that systematic theology studies.

7 I have given this sermon this title which reflects its subject matter (“You Are My Son”). Barth’s Safenwil sermons are named only by date. His Basel Prison sermons (in Deliverance to the Captives) have titles, like “You Will Live Also.”
of Luke 3:22, where God declares himself to be “well pleased” with Jesus Christ. Based on God’s affirmation about being “well pleased” with Christ, Barth reflects on the desire for acceptance as such. It is this desire for acceptance that Christ, by his baptism, assumes and transforms.

Barth opens his sermon by saying that all human beings desire that God would be “well pleased” with them. All people act out of a desire for acceptance: Barth states “there is simply that in a human being that wants and waits to hear such a voice, a voice that would say to oneself, with you I am well pleased!” Barth speaks of this desire as a hidden undercurrent of human existence: both “good” and “bad,” “pious” and “unbelieving” are acting out of a desire for acceptance, in one way or another.

The desire to be accepted by others, Barth notes, is a hidden desire to be accepted by God. Barth suggests that the “differences” between persons (alluding to philosophical and religious differences) comes from the “different ways they all want the same thing,” the acceptance of others and God’s acceptance. Barth suggests that this desire for others to be well pleased with us is a basic root of all human action. In this desire, “all people are alike,” and differences between people “only come from the different ways they all want the same thing, strive for the same goal.” The desire for approval from God is at the root of our engagement with other human beings, a “quiet and shy intention” behind all human interaction.

This desire for acceptance is not selfish: a person who could feel this acceptance

---

9 Barth, Early Preaching, 37.
10 Ibid., 37.
11 Ibid., 37.
12 Ibid., 38.
and incorporate it into their lives would be a “blessing” to their “whole region.”\footnote{Ibid., 37.} This is because they would be able to move beyond the poisonous and anxiety-producing thoughts that most people have, their feeling of not being accepted. Such a person would have a certain attractive “glow” which could “dry tears,” “turn hostile faces into friendly,” “and “hard hands into open hands.”\footnote{Ibid., 37.}

Barth observes that this desire for acceptance is not a foolish or flighty desire. The desire for acceptance is a real need in human beings. If human beings knew with certainty that God is pleased, they would replace the “many wild, agitated, restless voices we usually hear.”\footnote{Ibid., 38.} Hearing from God “with you I am well pleased” would really fulfill something basic to human nature. “No greater power” can come to a person besides this certainty of acceptance.\footnote{Ibid., 39.} This acceptance, Barth notes, would allow people to face difficulty in the world with a resolve otherwise impossible. A person certain of their acceptance by others could “to be kind to everyone,” to be “friendly to difficult people,” and even able to “resist strong and intense temptations.”\footnote{Ibid., 38.}

Barth asks his hearers to imagine themselves in the story of Christ’s baptism, to imagine God saying “to me you are just right the way you are! I acknowledge you, I like you!”\footnote{Ibid., 37.} For Barth, this common human desire for God’s acceptance is “something wonderful.”\footnote{Ibid., 37.} He asks that his hearers imagine that they felt the words “with you I am well pleased” with certainty and “tranquility” in the depth of their hearts, as if God spoke
these words to them as God spoke to Jesus at his baptism.  

Note the focus of the sermon so far: Barth has not yet brought in any language of Christology or sin or salvation. For several paragraphs, Barth’s sermon presents this discussion of God’s acceptance as something good that humans earnestly want for themselves. Barth sounds even something like a modern day prosperity gospel preacher: offering a message of acceptance so people can live a healthier emotional life.

**Christology and God’s Acceptance**

However, Barth adds a Christological edge to his discussion of acceptance. “The Savior,” Jesus Christ, had God’s acceptance. There exists only one person with whom God is clearly and definitively “well pleased,” and Barth observes that the Bible points to this person “on the Jordan with John the Baptist.” Barth notes, additionally, that the story of Luke 3:22 teaches as a corollary that human beings can “neither imitate nor seize for ourselves” this acceptance from God.

The signs accompanying God’s statement of being “well pleased” with Christ at his baptism show that this acceptance is something unique. God’s acceptance is something miraculous, a break with the natural order of the world. Barth explains that this is why Luke records the theophany at Christ’s baptism, the audible voice and the descending dove. These are Luke’s way of saying that “no human can be reared or

---

20 Ibid., 38.
21 Ibid., 39.
22 Ibid., 37.
23 Ibid., 39.
24 Ibid., 39.
Barth also explains that God’s acceptance of Christ is fundamentally a mystery. Barth notes that “we hear nothing about how the savior came to know and be obedient to God.”26 He states that the only thing we know of Christ’s self-understanding as it relates to his knowledge of God’s good pleasure is Luke 2:52: “the boy Jesus increased in divine and human favor.”27 Barth describes this “favor” as the basis of all Christ’s actions and relationships in the world:

This good pleasure was said of his speaking before he opened his mouth to speak, of his hands before he stretched them out to do something, of his steps before he went here and there. It stood behind him and it went before him. It was the home from which he went out and into which he ever again returned. It was the source of his life. Because such a divine good pleasure was upon him, he could become what he became.28

The supernatural signs accompanying Jesus’ baptism, and the mystery of Christ’s “increase” in grace with God, show that God’s acceptance of Christ is pure gift. It is grace. A “seed of grace” gave Christ his knowledge of God’s acceptance, not the fact that he was “reared well” or that he “dwelled in serious thoughts.”29

Barth also suggests that the baptism of Jesus is a proleptic anticipation of Christ’s suffering and its redemptive power for humanity. Christ “assumes” the experience of being estranged from God, but transforms it by the power of God’s grace, by this “seed” of acceptance, through his cross. By his cross, Christ assumes and transforms human suffering: “he reached deeply into human distress and showed us that there is something other than the curse of sin and death under which we still suffer; the exceedingly great

25 Ibid., 39.
26 Ibid., 39.
27 Ibid., 39.
28 Ibid., 39.
29 Ibid., 39-40.
victory in which he, on the cross, finally broke through the prison walls of the present.”

In his death and resurrection, Christ is one to whom God has said “you are right, you must be as you are. I wish to have you just as you are.”

Barth breaks with the liberal Protestants in this sermon by emphasizing the uniqueness of Christ, and the fact that Christ’s “acceptance” before God is a mystery. Jesus’ baptism, in fact, demonstrates that acceptance is something that human beings lack, and that this is a crippling lack. Thinking about the fact of God’s acceptance of Jesus calls forth, in Barth’s mind, the fact that God has not accepted us, and we are not accepted by others. Christ is “so wonderful” because, in looking at his acts and sufferings, “we feel and know that from the beginning he had something that we do not have.” By Christ, we learn that “God does not find us well pleasing,” and that “for God we are not right.”

However, Jesus is still a “human being, like we are.” This makes the revelation of God’s acceptance of Christ even more poignant: Jesus is not a divine being present in humanity in some docetic fashion, but a human being who is nonetheless “almost completely unknown and almost fully closed to us” in his acceptance by God. God’s being “well pleased” with Christ is more “astonishing” than the appearance of a dove and the voice of God.

What makes Jesus uniquely suited to receive this acceptance, and what makes Jesus reveal our lack of acceptance before God? According to Barth, God rejoices in

---

30 Ibid., 40.
31 Ibid., 40.
32 Ibid., 41.
33 Ibid., 40.
34 Ibid., 41.
35 Ibid., 41.
36 Ibid., 41.
“what comes from God.” God blesses “the one who has his origin in God.”

Jesus is the “Son of the Father,” present among human beings. Christ’s mission is his “secret,” what makes God “well pleased” with him: “he comes from God.”

God sent the Son because “it was as if God wanted to say: ‘I can no longer stand seeing nothing but strange faces on earth…I can no longer hold back my good pleasure, for I so much want it in a human being.’”

Christ’s closeness to God, as the Son of the Father, shows our separation from God: his “origin” in God shows that while “we too come from God,” “so much has come between us and God.”

God’s acceptance, God’s salvation, is revealed in the uniqueness and unsurpassability of Christ. God’s acceptance and salvation are not found in the development of inner human potentialities: Christ’s grace is a mystery, it owes to his unique origin as the “Son of the Father,” “found as a human being, as one of us.”

Because Christ is divine and human, salvation is available through him.

**Participation in Christ**

Christ is sent so that God’s acceptance can be shown to human beings rightly:

“here you have one who shall tell you and show you that the human being belongs to God!”

Christ vicariously receives God’s “acceptance” for others, just as Christ vicariously suffers for human beings on the cross, so that sinful human beings can hear God say “with you I am well pleased” to them through Christ. In Christ, God “assumes”

---

37 Ibid., 41.
38 Ibid., 41-2.
39 Ibid., 41.
40 Ibid., 42.
41 Ibid., 41.
42 Ibid., 42.
43 Ibid., 42.
and “transforms” the human desire for acceptance. Christ transforms this desire for acceptance by revealing the fact that human beings cannot earn God’s acceptance for themselves. Barth explains that the human desire for God’s acceptance, in light of Christ, is really an experience of a lack. Christ shows that our lives are defined by the attempt, and the frustration of this attempt, to have the approval of all, especially God. God’s acceptance of Christ is meant to “awaken in us that deeper, other reality,” allowing sinful human beings to see themselves in Jesus Christ as in a mirror.

Yet Christ did not want acceptance “only for himself.” God’s acceptance of Christ at his baptism thus reveals God’s vicarious acceptance of us as adoptive children through Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. In Jesus Christ, God says “You are my Son, with you I am well pleased” to human beings. Christ wills to have God’s acceptance for others, to be the “firstborn of many brothers and sisters.” Through participation in Christ, Christians are made adoptive children in the Son, and are God’s “beloved” through Christ. By “looking deeply” at Christ, Barth explains, human beings can hear God saying “You are my beloved children” to them as well. In Jesus Christ, God says “You are my Son, with you I am well pleased” to human beings.

The human desire for acceptance that Barth describes in the first section of his sermon now looks different since Christ assumes and transforms it. God accepts Christ. One can have acceptance before God by turning to Christ: “the Savior will not stand

---

44 Ibid., 40.
45 Ibid., 43.
46 Ibid., 43
47 Ibid., 42-3.
48 Ibid., 43.
49 Ibid., 43.
50 Ibid., 42-3.
alone: we should all stand where he stands.”51 Believers must not say “there is the Savior, and here we are, far away from him.”52 Rather, Christ calls believers to find rest in the fact that God has already come to them, so to speak, in Christ. This is Barth’s Christological subversion of the liberal Protestant emphases of his teachers. Human beings desire God’s acceptance, but the only route to this acceptance is through Christ. This affirmation involves a negation at first, a realization that only Christ has this acceptance, but this negation leads then to something positive: the claim that one can share in God’s acceptance through Christ.

II. “You Will Live Also” 1955

*I Live: the Son’s Assumption of Humanity*

In this second sermon, Barth argues that God does not exist as God without Christ’s humanity, because the Son, the second “mode of existence” of the Trinity, is both divine and human. Human participation in God’s divine life is possible because God has “participated” in humanity in Christ. Since Christ was executed as a criminal, this means that God has participated in the experience of being a criminal, but participated in this experience so as to assume and transform it. Barth as a preacher only has to point to this fact of God’s assumption and transformation of the human experience of estrangement and punishment which occurred in Jesus’ earthly life to make Jesus present. In this sermon, Barth thus closely connects the possibility of proclaiming Christ in human

51 Ibid., 43.
52 Ibid., 42.
words with the fact that God is revealed through the Word’s becoming human and suffering as human. It should be noted again that this is one of Barth’s prison sermons, given at the chapel of the prison in Basel.

Barth’s sermon text is John 14:19: “because I live, you will live also.” Barth opens his sermon by observing that Jesus is telling Barth’s hearers “I live,” speaking to them directly. He links this verse with Matthew 18:20: “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” Barth emphasizes that it is in Christ’s name that the prisoners in Basel are gathered, through Christ paying the “highest price for our companionship with him.” Through Christ’s “call and act,” Barth explains, “he has created a fellowship on earth, where at all times and in all places he is the Lord.” Barth adds further: “because this is so, he is in our midst even here and now, testifying to the truth: I live.” Barth describes the hearing of Christ’s words in preaching as a place where God is present. Christ’s words “I live” have a contemporaneity established through the universality of the “mighty act of his entire life and death.” The power of Christ’s life and death establishes a community in which Christ is always Lord, despite changes in time. Barth tells his hearers: “forget about everything else and stick firmly to this fact:” Jesus says “I live.”

What then does this mean, “I live?” What kind of life does Jesus live, what kind of characteristics make it different from the lives of others? Barth’s draws on Chalcedonian Christology at this point. Barth explains that Christ’s statement “I live” 

---

54 Barth, Deliverance to the Captives, 29.
55 Ibid., 29.
56 Ibid., 29.
57 Ibid., 29.
means “I live as a true man my divine life.”

58 Christ’s human life, as the incarnate Word, is the life of God. Christ’s life is “the life of the eternal and almighty God who has created heaven and earth and is the source and fullness of life.”

59 The Word of God does not share in the divine life by “keeping and enjoying it” for himself, “like a rich man likes to lay hold on his possessions.”

60 God exists as God and simultaneously for others in Christ. God “refuses to be for himself and by himself but wills to be and is our God, sharing with us all the riches of his life.”

61 This is shown in the incarnation of the Word, the fact that God does not want to “enjoy” God’s divine life without sharing it with humanity.

62 Thus, for Barth, Jesus’ statement “I live” does not only describe the effect of the resurrection or continued bodily existence as such. Rather, Jesus’ “I live” is a statement about God’s Triune nature and the event of the incarnation of the Word. Barth parses Jesus’ words thus:

I live. When spoken by Jesus this means: “I live my divine life for you. I live it fully by loving you. Without you I do not care to be the Son of God or to enjoy my divine life. I live it fully by pouring it out. Without reticence or reservation I give it away for you. I live my divine life by taking your place, the place that is allotted to you. I become what you are (not just some of you, but all of you), a prisoner, a convict, sentenced to death.

63 Barth here connects the “life” of the Son as the divine and human Word to his death and resurrection. The Son not only assumes human nature, but also assumes and transforms the place of sinners, “taking your place,” and transforming it.

64 The Son, through his cross, has shared in the life of “prisoner,” “sentenced to death.” Through his

---

58 Ibid., 30, his emphasis.
59 Ibid., 30.
60 Ibid., 30.
61 Ibid., 30.
62 Ibid., 30.
63 Ibid., 30, his emphasis.
64 Ibid., 30.
sufferings, the Son thus assumed the situation of Barth’s hearers, the inmates in the Basel prison, in order to transform it. Through Christ’s suffering, “the sin and guilt” of human life is “extinguished and annihilated.”  

Christ did not “reserve” any “better part” of divinity for himself, or desire to escape his humanity or face it with a stoic withdrawal. Rather God, in the Son, fully chose to life the “life of a weak, of a solitary, of a tempted man dying in shame.” God truly wanted “to be like you,” Barth tells his hearers, as “the neighbor and brother of the most needy…one who lives from God’s mercy alone.” The Son became human in order that he might carry the burdens of human “folly and wickedness,” “anxiety and despair” and thereby lift these burdens from human beings. Jesus “converts,” “renews,” and “baptizes” people through his obedience to God, transforming their “sin into righteousness,” their “death into life.” In an echo of his older sermon “You Are My Son,” Barth adds that Christ’s obedience calls human beings to share in him so that “you may grow in me into men with whom God is well pleased.”

You Will Live Also: Christ’s Transformation Of Human Nature

The second half of Barth’s sermon seeks to show the consequences of the Son’s assumption of humanity: “you will live also” is Christ’s own “proclamation” to those in

---

65 Ibid., 30.
66 Ibid., 30.
67 Ibid., 30.
68 Ibid., 30-31.
69 Ibid., 31.
70 Ibid., 31.
71 Ibid., 31.
the Basel prison.\textsuperscript{72} This announcement of life – “you will live also” – is not an “obligation” put on the hearers in the prison, but rather a “promise,” “an announcement referring to the future.”\textsuperscript{73} “You will live also” is not an “offer” of eternal life, rather it is a proclamation of eternal life, a description of “our future.”\textsuperscript{74} Christ brings about a new present that undoes one’s previous being and identity, including the wrath of God against sin, through the way Christ’s life, as a “divine life poured out for us,” sanctifies human life and lifts it up to God.\textsuperscript{75}

In this sermon, Barth proclaims that human beings are able to participate in Christ not through a choice they make, but rather through the offer of participation in Christ given before they were born. Because the Son was incarnate, died, and was raised from the dead, he is now “our present.”\textsuperscript{76} This “present” in Christ is transformative: it brings with it a negation of whatever people “hold against ourselves and probably against others as well.”\textsuperscript{77} Accepting the new being, the new life in Christ, only requires receiving Christ with confidence and joy. Christ’s “I live” provokes a human response: the response that says “I may and I can and I want to live!”\textsuperscript{78}

Barth ends his sermons with two pastoral exhortations that build off of his discussion of Christ’s “divine life.” Barth explains that because of God’s initiative in Christ, “it is all-important now that not one among us consider himself excluded, either too great or too insignificant or too godless.”\textsuperscript{79} Barth explicitly uses language of sharing or participation in Christ in this context: “it is all important that each one of us consider

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 33.
himself included, a partaker of God’s mercy in the life of our Lord as revealed in his resurrection from the dead on Easter morning.”80 But the givenness of a share in Christ’s life is an unforeseeable gift that requires no prior act on the part of its recipient, save the disposition to receive it. In Christ “we only need to accept the already established order.”81 In response to Christ “we only need to open and stretch out our hands.”82

A second pastoral exhortation involves Barth calling his hearers to the Lord’s Supper. Barth’s prison sermons are in the context of the celebration of Communion. Barth explains that the Lord’s Supper is “quite simply the sign of what we have said: Jesus Christ is in our midst, he, the man in whom God himself has poured out his life for our sake and in whom our life is lifted up to God.”83 Communion for Barth is a profound sign of the reality of sharing in Christ’s life he has been discussing in this sermon. It is a sign of the sharing that human beings have in Christ’s mediation: “the Lord himself gives us strength…from one bread and from one cup, because he is One, he the One for us all.”84 Barth ends by inviting his hearers to Communion, saying that he and his hearers are bound together through Christ’s life.85 Through Christ, those who hear the Word of God are now “brothers and sisters,” and, though “poor sinners,” are now “rich through his mercy.”86

80 Ibid., 33.
81 Ibid., 33.
82 Ibid., 33.
83 Ibid., 33.
84 Ibid., 33.
85 Ibid., 34.
86 Ibid., 34.
Conclusion

While Barth has no particular theological interlocutors in these sermons, and he was addressing congregations and not professional theologians, these two can nonetheless be seen as engaging in larger theological arguments. The first sermon engages in dialogue with sentiments reminiscent of liberal Protestant Christology, and more broadly, the twin modern spiritual dangers of “rationalistic ideas of progress” and “sentimental pietism.” Rather than condemning these points of view, Barth shows how Jesus assumes and transforms them with his sermon. The desire for acceptance by God and others can be fulfilled in Christ, since he is the Son, a sharer in God’s divine life, present among human beings as human. The second sermon addresses a mistaken conception of God’s transcendence: God does not “hoard” God’s life, but freely shares it with human beings in the sending of the Son. Thus God is not distant from believers, but near to them and shares in their sufferings in Christ. Because the Son was Incarnate and suffered, the Son has “assumed” the situation of being a prisoner. Christ not only transforms this situation by being raised from the dead and giving hope of eternal life, but also by showing solidarity with humanity in living out his “divine life” as an executed criminal on the cross.

Barth’s work in a pastoral situation leads him to emphasize a different aspect of his understanding of the relationship or tension between the Word and human words. Barth’s discussion of the Word of God in his sermons is much more positive in terms of

---

87 In autobiographical statements, Barth observed that the overall mentality in Safenwil and the Aargau canton, where he was a pastor before beginning his university career, combined both. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 164.
being focused on the connection of the Word and human experience and culture than in his *Epistle to the Romans* or his *Church Dogmatics*, but Barth accomplishes this without reversing any of the crucial points of negative theology made in those works. Barth’s sermons can even rightly be called “analogical:” Barth shows in concrete ways how the events of Christ’s life can relate to all people, whoever they are.

Christ in these sermons is understood in a roughly “Nicene” and “Chalcedonian” way as the divine and human Son of God, a revelation of God’s Triune being. Yet the relationship between scripture and the Church’s historical doctrines in these sermons does not involve rote repetition of past dogmatic formulae. Rather, dogmatic formulas such as Chalcedon’s affirmation of Christ’s humanity and divinity aid the Barth’s dynamic engagement with the Word of scripture. Barth’s sermon “You Will Live Also” is a helpful example of this: Barth argues there that, on the basis of Chalcedon, one can preach to a congregation of prisoners that God in Jesus experienced what it is like to be an imprisoned outcast. This is a new and timely “Word” found in scripture with the aid of the mediation of the words of later doctrine (Chalcedon).

A certain logic of participation in God by preaching is common to both Aquinas and Barth: they both suggest that preaching can be nothing other than participating in Christ, the “history” of what has been accomplished by incarnate Word. While there are significant differences in sermon composition between Aquinas and Barth, I hope to have shown that there is substantial continuity in the theology of the Word of God underlying their sermons. In a way that parallels the Fathers of the Church and Aquinas, Barth’s sermons offer a pattern of assumption and transformation wherein the Word assumes a particular situation faced by his congregation and transforms it for them. Barth’s sermons
are Chalcedonian in both form and content; he sees Christ as speaking through the biblical words and his human words, and he understands the significance of Christ in the biblical words through the lens of Chalcedon’s definition of Christ as fully human and fully divine. I point to this use of Chalcedon in Barth to note that the Church’s historical doctrines, along with biblical words, are playing a role in Barth’s homiletic engagement with the Word of God. These elements of continuity suggest a significant way into a *rapprochement* between Thomist and Barthian theology. I turn to discussing this continuity further (while also noting where discontinuity between Aquinas and Barth lies) in my final conclusion.
Yves Congar describes Barth’s actualism as being a variation on an older insight, namely that the hearing of the Word is itself an “act of God.” For Congar, Barth’s actualism is a recognition of a truth about the Word’s presence in human words that goes back to Origen: “the Word of God is the divine Word himself. Scripture, the word as preached—and we may add, sacraments and traditions—are only means whereby God’s Word reveals and acts, loci into which the Word, that is, the Word as a living Person, has come and continues to come.”¹ Barth’s actualist theology of the Word “consistently and systematically” affirms this patristic principle.²

On the basis of this similarity between Barth and Origen observed by Congar, to what degree can we speak of an ecumenical theology of the Word? Congar himself admits that in speaking of the “actualizing” of the Word of God in the Church he would “prefer to invoke Origen” over Barth because of the role that tradition plays in Origen’s thought.³ Yet Congar’s suggestion is tantalizing from an ecumenical perspective: how “patristic” is Barth’s discussion of the Word of God? Is Barth’s theology of the Word (and its mediation) usable by Catholics, or would his criticism of the analogia entis and of the Catholic notion of authoritative and irrevocable dogma forestall any real dialogue

---
² Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 281
with his thought?

My approach to the works of Aquinas and Barth in three genres has sought to contribute to this conversation, whose importance Congar already appreciated in the early 1960s (and whose importance Balthasar recognized in the 1940s). In this conclusion, I summarize the central similarities and differences between Aquinas and Barth on the mediation of the Word that I have studied in this dissertation. My purpose is to foster the ongoing development of a Catholic and ecumenical theology of the Word. My focus on three genres shows how Aquinas’s approach to typically “Catholic” positions regarding scripture, doctrine, and preaching has biblical and evangelistic aspects to it that are more congenial to Barth’s thought than are the works of Catholic dogmatics that Barth criticizes. This could not have been sufficiently shown had I examined only the *Summa theologiae*, as so often is the case in Thomistic studies. In a similar way, my reading of Barth’s biblical exegesis and sermons, in addition to his *Church Dogmatics*, helps to highlight the ways in which that Barth’s typically “Protestant” approach to these issues has elements that should be congenial to Catholics, as shown here by their convergences with Aquinas’s way of thinking.

*Where Aquinas and Barth Can Agree*

1) *God Speaks Contemporaneously Through Scripture “Actualized” By the Holy Spirit*

Clearly Aquinas and Barth will not agree on all issues, but they agree that human words cannot exhaust the divine Word. Nonetheless, they both believe that Jesus guides
the Church and speaks contemporaneously to it.\footnote{While both Aquinas and Barth understand God to “speak” the Word in the context of various human words in the Church, they both also argue that there is only one “Word,” namely, the person of Jesus Christ (the incarnate Son) to whom the various human words of the Church testify. Pope Benedict XVI identifies divine revelation with the person of Christ in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est: “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, December 25, 2005, § 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html). The accounts of the Word of God in Aquinas and Barth espouse this same kind of insight: revelation, in its essence, is not the handing on of particular principles or ideas, but an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ by means of human words (both authors also understand the revelation in the Old Testament to be a key aspect of this encounter).}

For both authors, this speaking occurs first and foremost through the human words of the biblical authors. In the chapter on Aquinas’s Lectures on Romans, I showed that Aquinas understands Jesus to be present in scripture by means of the participation of the biblical authors in his body by the Holy Spirit, particularly by the testimony of the Apostles and their participation in Christ as the source of their apostolic mission.\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, trans. Fabian Larcher, ed. Jeremy Holmes (Ave Maria, Florida: Aquinas Center for Theological Renewal), ch. 1, § 61.} In a broader sense the Word is “deservedly called the subject matter of the Holy Scriptures,” with regard to both the Old and New Testaments, because the Word is God’s Wisdom and this Wisdom inspired the Old Testament authors.\footnote{Aquinas, Lectures on Romans, § 29.}

I showed that Karl Barth’s approach to scripture in his famous Epistle to the Romans is similar. The “Word” with which readers of scripture are confronted in Paul is “existentiality of divinity” shown by the death and resurrection of the Son of God.\footnote{Karl Barth, Epistle to the Romans, trans., Edwyn Hoskyns (New York: Oxford, 1969), 276.}

Through Paul’s words as a herald, the event of Christ makes a claim upon the reader. Historical-critical exegesis and liberal Protestant spiritualizing risk enervating this claim. In his Church Dogmatics, as we have seen, Barth develops this idea, rooting scripture’s authority in its apostolic testimony to Christ (without neglecting the role of the Old Testaments).
Barth explains that scripture involves a human testimony, in history, to the Word made flesh, the Word made history: yet this history is empowered by the Holy Spirit’s creation of subjects who can receive the revelation of Christ rightly. Scripture is thus a testimony of those who have firstly and definitively received the revelation of God in Christ. Aquinas parallels this line of thought in Barth in his discussion of the participation of the Apostles (and the apostolic authors of scripture) in Christ’s prophetic office in the *Summa theologiae*, particularly in his discussion of Christ’s doctrine “written on the heart.”

Both authors also hold that the scriptural words in one way or another need to be “actualized” in order for the Word of God to be fully present and active in them. For Aquinas, actualization of the biblical Word means the participation of the hearer of the Word in the Word’s own act of teaching by grace. Aquinas describes in his *Lectures on Romans* how believers participate in Paul’s own (biblical) mediation of the gospel by their own confession of the Church’s whole faith (mediated by later doctrines), a confession which is a public proclamation (a kind of sermon). The believer, like Paul, comes to share in the Word by handing on the Word they have received by their confession. Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* describes how this actualized participation of believers in the Word is established through the Church’s doctrinal mediation, because the Church is part of Christ’s body and shares in his grace. Aquinas’s sermons are an instance of Aquinas’s own actualization of the Word in his local context, an attempt to actualize the Word for his hearers and lead them to their own confession of the faith in “going out” and preaching.

---

The thematic fullness of Aquinas’s understanding of the “actualized” presence of the Word in scripture is most apparent when we read Aquinas’s works in the other genres in light of his sermons. For Aquinas preaching as a word which “actualizes” scripture in the life of the believer does not only involve the passing on of biblical knowledge, but receiving Christ mediated by scripture, “himself the truth,” with greater love in the Holy Spirit." As he observes in his sermon *Puer Jesus*, growth in grace and participation in the Church are the conditions for growth in the wisdom conveyed by the Bible. *Puer Jesus* clearly describes growth in wisdom—the goal of the handing on of truth in Aquinas’s biblical commentaries and the *Summa theologiae*—as growing in the Word, or growth in knowledge and love of the Word. In each of his works, Aquinas assumes that growth in wisdom can involve strenuous study, both scriptural study and philosophical study, with the latter based on the contemplation of creatures. For Aquinas, such study is required, even though wisdom is a gift of God by the Holy Spirit as well as an intellectual virtue, because in his account of the “interplay of nature and grace,” the “truths revealed by metaphysical reasoning are not displaced by the infusion of revealed knowledge.” Aquinas thus holds that the study of philosophy is a major part of the way the scriptural Word can be “actualized” in the life of the believer.

---

7 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 1948), I.1.6.: “sacra doctrina is especially called wisdom,” *Puer Jesus*: “at a time when a sign of wisdom normally appears for the first time in a human being, Christ manifested his wisdom…so that the truth of the human nature in him would be acknowledged and in order to give us an example of advancing in wisdom” (Aquinas, *Academic Sermons*, 90).
9 This philosophical aspect of growth in the Word in Aquinas does not refer to philosophy as a circumscribed practice as an academic discipline at universities, but rather the expression of the general human desire to know, the human attitude of wonder towards created realities, exercised in light of the divine wisdom offered to human beings by Jesus Christ. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 14 September 1998, § 5, § 30; J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal
Barth’s approach to scripture also involves discussions of scripture’s “actualizing” in the life of the Church. Barth believes that scripture’s human words are a transformational summons to obedience by the Word when the Holy Spirit acts freely through the mediation of scripture to point a person to Christ. In Epistle to the Romans, Barth argues that God reveals the ways that Christ has assumed and transformed the existential situation of scripture’s hearers when one “creatively strains” at the “sinews” of scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit. God thus speaks to persons through humans performing such “creative straining” with the human words of scripture (and doctrine) in the Church, and speaks to those reading and proclaiming what they have read in this manner when their effort is assisted by the Holy Spirit. Barth develops this actualist understanding of how scripture speaks in the Church in his Church Dogmatics into a coherent account of divine revelation based in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, as I have shown in my fourth chapter. In this account, the Word is not only written, but is also preached and revealed: the Word of God is “spoken” in the event of the preaching of the gospel, when the Holy Spirit creates subjects ready to hear this preached biblical Word in faith in the moment of preaching. Karl Barth wrote his Church Dogmatics out of a desire to renew Protestant dogmatic theology through returning to God’s self-revelation in the Word of God as the basis of the Church’s speech. This involves examining the Church’s historical doctrines because such doctrines are instances of or reflections on past times in which the Church has heard this “actualized” Word of


Barth, Epistle, 8.
With the Second Helvetic Confession, Barth proclaimed that “the preaching of God is the Word of God,” and sought to bring about the confrontation of the Church with the Word testified to in scripture in his own sermons. Barth’s sermons show that the actualizing of the Word is a fully “divine and human” process, in that God speaks through the work of the preacher (in this case Barth himself) engaging with scripture and finding how Christ has always-already assumed and transformed the situation of his congregation. Yet Barth claims in his *Church Dogmatics* that the revelation of the Word of God as a real “Word,” real revelation, depends on a special act of the Holy Spirit and not on the skill or subject matter of the preacher.

### 2) Integration of Scripture, Doctrine and Preaching

Aquinas and Barth also agree that biblical exegesis, synthetic or dogmatic theology, and preaching must be integrated: work in one genre must not be sealed off from work in others. For Aquinas, scripture is important in the life of the Church because of the Holy Spirit’s special prophetic grace given to the prophets and apostles for “the building up of the faith.” Aquinas approaches commenting on biblical texts such as the letter to the Romans with the help of a framework made up from the whole of divine revelation (and the Church’s dogmatic reception of it): thus he discusses the Trinity and the hypostatic union in commenting on Romans 1:3-4. John Boyle’s description of the *Summa theologiae* as “lab work” is apt, because Aquinas discusses the Church’s dogmatic reflection on Christ in order to have a better grasp of the reality of Christ

---

11 Barth, CD I/2, 590-593.
12 Aquinas, *Lectures on Romans*, § 60-61, § 971.
precisely as discussed by Paul in Romans. Aquinas’s synthetic theology in the *Summa theologiae* involves biblical exegesis of a kind as well, in the form of his engagements with scripture in his *sed contra*, along with his use of scripture in key objections and responses, alongside the way that scripture funds the basic principles and questions which make up the work of “*sacra doctrina*” as a whole. In addition, both Aquinas’s *Lectures on Romans* and his *Summa theologiae* are related to preaching, as Leonard Boyle famously observed that Aquinas’s theology was meant not only to guide speculation but also to give preachers a synthetic account of Christian doctrine as a whole fitted for a life of handing on the Word and sacramental ministry. Aquinas is not afraid in his sermons to be catechetical or dogmatic. His focus is not on bringing about a profound emotional experience or a conversion to Christianity, but steady growth in the Word which he takes to be constitutive of the life of the preacher of the Word. This homiletic catechesis

---


15 In this Aquinas provides a particular inspiration for a response to John Cavadini’s call for a “renewed pedagogy of the basics.” Cavadini argues that this does not mean eschewing intellectual rigor, opting for repeating past formulas or authorities. Rather, this involves forming students to the point of seeing the Church’s way of speaking as “sophisticated and articulate.” Such a renewed “pedagogy of the basics” inherently involves intellectual rigor and creativity because such pedagogy does not simply present past theological ideas or formulas, but undertakes to show the meaning of these formulas, or why they matter. Such creativity faithful catechesis would “stretch our horizon for inquiry and action to a consummation as unbounded as the mystery they [the Church’s doctrines] represent.” John Cavadini, “Ignorant Catholics: the Alarming Void in Religious Education,” *Commonweal*, April 9, 2004, 13-14. For a classic statement of a similar point, see Robert Louis Wilken, “The Church’s Way of Speaking,” *First Things*, August/September 2005. As Avery Dulles similarly observed, dogmatic theology cannot progress “unless its students have been thoroughly catechized in the doctrine of the Church.” On this basis, Dulles suggests that those teaching theology should focus on renewed presentations of the basics of theology, incorporating insights from biblical studies and historical theology (especially historical insight into patristic theology) into the framework of an understanding of theology as wisdom, a form of receiving the Word. Avery Dulles, “Wisdom as the Source of Unity for Theology” in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, eds. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 69.
draws on scripture read through the frame of Aquinas’s synthetic and sapiential view of revelation as a whole (which includes scripture and later doctrine).

This integration of scripture, sapiential or dogmatic theology, and preaching in Aquinas’s theology has eroded in modernity, to the point where such integration now seems impossible. The Barthian theologian John Webster observes that modern historical criticism, despite its many strengths, severed the link between the Bible and dogmatic theology, and the same modern critical spirit separated preaching and catechesis from both of these as well. Theology is no longer understood as stewardship of the Word of God, but now relegates reception of the biblical Word to scholars with specialist training. The focus is not on receiving the Word, but subjecting human words to modern methods of critical inquiry, ignoring or bracketing out their role in divine revelation and salvation. Ecclesial preaching and exegesis have been relegated to a kind of “domestic status” in comparison with more rigorous academic research.

Webster argues that Barth’s works were attempts to reinvigorate theology by reintegrating the three genres, crafting a “literary art” that involved rigorous, structured inquiry but whose “ persuasiveness” was more like that of sermons than academic essays. Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* recovered scripture as doctrine, that is, in his commentary Barth eschewed strictly historical-critical approaches to scripture by directly engaging with the ramifications of Paul’s words about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Israel, and the Gentiles for pastors and theologians speaking about God in the present. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth crafts a dogmatic account of the Bible and its exegesis that

---


steers between liberal Protestant spiritualizing and a literalist approach by locating scripture dogmatically in the context of the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation. In the Church Dogmatics Barth is also engaging with the meaning of the Church’s historical doctrines in light of Christ as known by scripture. Barth’s preaching, rather than raising religious sentiments or seeking to instill profound feeling in his hearers (the homiletic approach of Schleiermacher and the liberal Protestants), seeks to show how the very religious sentiments of his hearers are already judged and fulfilled by the same Jesus discussed exegetically and dogmatically in his other works. The “bait and switch” of his 1918 sermon “You Are My Son” is a standout example of this. Barth’s writing in each of the three genres is united by his understanding of the Word as sovereign and active by means of the Bible’s testimony to Jesus. Nonetheless, a number of scholars both Protestant and Catholic (including Webster himself) have pointed to the continued value of Aquinas as a resource for reintegrating biblical scholarship, dogmatic theology, and pastoral practice as well.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{19} Webster also holds up Aquinas as a model in his more recent book The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason (New York: T&T Clark, 2012). Nicholas M. Healy argues that Aquinas’s approach to scripture in the context of scholastic practices of lectio and disputatio is helpful, since Aquinas does not reduce scripture to a mine of truths or to a singular meaning: instead, Aquinas receives scripture in the context of Churchly work of “see[ing] to it that the Church and its members live the Christian life more apostolically, in greater obedience to Jesus Christ.” Healy recommends a renewed form of Aquinas’s mix of lectio and disputatio be practiced in the context of the Church’s biblical scholarship and catechesis today, rather than simply appealing to “authorities and traditions and councils.” Nicholas M. Healy, “Introduction” to Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 19-20. Similarly, the Baptist theologian Stephen Holmes suggests that Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s humanity as an instrumental cause of salvation provides a useful theological lens for understanding the inspiration of scripture in tandem with modern historical scholarship (which emphasizes the “humanity” of the biblical texts). Stephen R. Holmes, “Christology, Scripture, Divine Action and Hermeneutics,” in Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, ed. Andrew Lincoln and Angus Paddison (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 159-170.
Areas Where They Do Not Agree

Aquinas and Barth both emphasize that God speaks through scripture “actualized” in the life of the Church, and that the human response to this process of actualization involves three interrelated genres: biblical commentary, dogmatic theology, and sermons. Given these areas of important agreement, my study also shows the significance of Aquinas and Barth’s disagreements about the mediation of the Word in human words. In a certain respect, of course, these disagreements are well known to scholars. But my focus on comparing Aquinas and Barth’s work in three genres adds to scholarly appreciation of the significance of their disagreements. Comparison between Aquinas and Barth in these three genres especially raises the question of how human persons, fallible as they are, might mediate the Word in their very capacity to think and speak as human. With Aquinas, I wish to emphasize this human aspect of mediating the Word, but without negating Barth’s strong emphasis on the Word of God as being a divine act in the Church. In fact, hope to show how Aquinas’s account of human mediation can be compatible with Barth’s actualism.

1) The Role of Philosophy

Aquinas approaches speaking of the Word, and handing on the Word in human words, with a developed ontology of the divine nature as well as created natures, including human beings. This impacts his reception of the Word in different genres of theological work: as I noted in my chapter three, his synthetic approach to doctrine in the
Summa theologiae relies heavily on analogical terms and notions for speaking about the divine nature. For Aquinas, analogy is a presupposition for “meaningful discourse on God” because it allows one to posit that “some things can be said of God and other things cannot.” While Aquinas does not use a large number of analogical or ontological terms in his Lectures on Romans or in his sermons, Aquinas’s metaphysical understanding of divine and human natures is nonetheless present in these works. Recall Aquinas’s discussion of the hypostatic union in response to various heresies in his commentary on Romans 1:3-4, or his references to the consequences of the hypostatic union for thinking about Christ in Exiit Qui Seminat and Puer Jesus (especially for Christ’s knowledge in the latter). Aquinas’s understanding of analogical predication frames his understanding of the way philosophical terms can be applied to God: real speech about God is possible outside of God’s speaking of his Word in the incarnate Lord, and philosophical speech can be used to assist the Church’s understanding of its Lord.

As is well known, this last point from Aquinas is precisely what Barth rejects. As I noted in my chapter on his Epistle to the Romans, Barth claims that the fact that God is revealed through the “existentiality” of Christ’s death and resurrection suggests that Christ reveals truth beyond any capacity of human knowing (because all human knowing exists as characterized by the fact of death). Barth rejects the idea that philosophy conveys truths about God independent of explicit Christian revelation based on his reading of Paul’s testimony to the lordship of the crucified and risen Christ. Even so, in his Church Dogmatics Barth does not reject the notion of analogy as such (even if he

---

does strongly reject the “analogy of being”), and in fact analogy of a kind plays a major role in this understanding of the Church’s speech about God. While the word “analogy” appears rarely in CD I/2, reading CD I/2 in light of CD I/I shows that Barth’s entire approach in his whole doctrine of revelation is based on his understanding of the analogy of faith.” Barth’s analogy of faith involves the affirmation that God has sovereignly elected to sanctify or take up particular human words to testify to Christ.22 The language of Chalcedon as employed and expanded upon by the Lutheran and Reformed schools of Christology is an example of this: Barth uses these schools to help preachers understand how to appreciate Jesus in scripture and proclaim him in the present, because these schools represent “words” from the Word in the past. Barth will use philosophical concepts and terms in his dogmatic theology extensively, and even speak of divine and human nature or essence, language of “ontology,” but always under his basic declaration that one must speak of God, human beings, and the world only on the basis of God’s sovereign Word spoken in the Church.23

22 Barth describes the difference between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith by recourse to a brief exegetical discussion of the reference to “analogy” in Romans 12:6:

We thus do not oppose the Catholic doctrine of the analogy of being by a denial of the concept of analogy. But we say that the analogy in question is not an analogy of being, but according to Romans 12:6 the analogy of faith, the correspondence of the thing known with the knowing, of the object with the thought, of the Word of God with the word of man in thought and speech—it is the divine act of knowledge, performed not through man but upon man, which distinguishes him whose knowing is grounded in the love of God and so in real fellowship with him, in the presence of God (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: T&T Clark, 1955), 279).

The ability to speak analogically of God is not “an inborn or accessory attribute of man” but “the sole work of the actual grace of God” (Barth, CD I/1, 280). Barth discusses analogy in greater dialogue with Catholic theologians, particularly Gottlieb Söhngen, in Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics II/1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, J. L. M. Haire, eds. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004), 222-225; 230-243. For a Catholic (appreciative) reading of Barth on analogy, cf. Emery, Trinity, 94-7. Further comparison of Aquinas and Barth on analogy is offered in George Hunsinger, “Created Light: From Irenaeus and Torrance to Aquinas and Barth” in Evangelical, Catholic and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 56-84.

23 Barth finds that a considerable amount of ontological language or analogical speech about God has been necessary in the Church’s history of handing on the Word. This is the bulk of Barth’s argument, for instance, in CD I/2 § 15.1, “the Problem of Christology,” 122-132. Barth speaks about the being or nature
Barth’s approach to philosophy in all three genres is determined by his assumption that God is sovereign mystery, and that, because of this, philosophical words do not have any kind of hold on God. Better words may be “taken up” by God in future acts of self-revelation. To put it differently, there is no philosophical speech about God that obtains without God’s sovereign election to be revealed by means of such words. Even though the Church or individuals might use particular bits of philosophical language as part of participating in the Word—such as the philosophy of Kierkegaard or the scholastic terminology used by Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy—Barth believes that such language may be superseded or improved upon by a new hearing of the Word in the future.

Does Barth’s rejection of the *analogia entis*, or the ability of philosophical terms to speak about God without an actualist understanding of revelation undergirding them, forestall of any further dialogue between Thomists and Barthians on the role of philosophy in revelation? I suggest that future dialogue follow lines of thought in...
Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* and his sermons, rather than his *Church Dogmatics* (in which the condemnation of the *analogia entis* appears on its first few pages).  

Barth’s dialectics in his *Epistle to the Romans*—dialectics that is in fact philosophy of a kind—arises from his exegesis of Paul’s own dialectical theology; it is a part of his work of submitting himself to the authoritative words of scripture. Barth cannot avoid drawing on philosophical language in commenting on Romans. Barth finds, famously, that Søren Kierkegaard’s “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and human beings is the best philosophical expression of the God-human relationship in Romans as it is determined by Paul’s critique of idolatry. Barth composes a partly philosophical “figure of negation” in his *Epistle to the Romans* as a consequence of his exegesis of Paul, one in which “God may only be known by this difference, experienced as the negation of everything that counts as specifically human—but, so it is claimed, it is exactly in this complete negation that is the way that God’s presence in human life becomes real.”

There was “room within Barth’s analogy of faith for the analogy of being” (Rodney Howsare, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of His Theological Style* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 90). However, Keith Johnson has argued that Barth would not agree with Balthasar’s claim that his central problem with Catholicism was actually pure nature and not the *analogia entis*. Barth rejects the *analogia entis* (as presented by Erich Przywara), and the assumptions about the role of philosophy in Catholic dogmatic theology that go with it, on theological grounds (Cf. Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogy Entis* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011). Even though the invocation of the Fourth Lateran Council’s statement on God’s transcendence by Przywara and Balthasar might seem to have an affinity with Barth’s thought (with its strong emphasis on God’s transcendence and sovereignty), Barth would be loath to speak even of an affirmation of God’s transcendence that can be ascertained in some way separate from God’s Word spoken to the Church in Christ. Even in his *Epistle to the Romans*, as I have shown, Barth seeks to ground his understanding of God’s transcendence not in philosophical principles, but in the fact that God is revealed through the “existentiality” of the crucified and risen Christ. See also George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 175-180, which draws extensively on Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

25 Barth, CD I/1, x.


not an independent finding on his own part, but arises from his submission to the
authority of the biblical Word and his attempt to present that Word freshly to scholars
and pastors in his context. This dialectical philosophy was not composed \( ex \ nihilo \): it
comes from Barth’s close reading of theological notions in Paul.\(^{28}\)

Barth’s sermons hold another key to approaching Barth on philosophy: in these,
rather than putting the words of the Bible in the procrustean bed of a philosophical or
political framework (i.e., the modern approaches of Schleiermacher or Hegel), Barth lets
the Bible teach him philosophical concepts, or transform his existing ones. As I showed
in my chapter on his sermons, in Barth’s homiletic practice he searches for ways that
Christ has already assumed particular human “words” of self-understanding or self-
expression and transformed them through his incarnation, death and resurrection. For
instance, in the sermon from 1918 which I examined in my chapter, Barth offers a kind of
philosophical account of human nature and culture as determined by the desire for
acceptance, the desire one has for others to be “well pleased” with oneself. But Barth
finds this account of human nature in the process of reflecting on the story of Christ’s
Barth simultaneously finds and subverts this philosophy or psychology of human nature
by stating that the desire for acceptance can be fulfilled only by sharing in Christ’s
acceptance by God in the Church. Barth thus finds a kind of philosophy in scripture, but

\(^{28}\) Recalling his manner of writing in his second-edition Romans commentary, Barth observes “I had to
speak in those gruesome terms about the transcendence of God, about the tangent and the “line of death”
and so on…but I didn’t just foist it on him [Paul]. It’s there in Romans” (Eberhard Busch, \textit{Karl Barth: His
life from letters and autobiographical texts}, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005),
120).
this philosophy is Christocentric: it comes from Christ and is fulfilled by Christ.

Turning to the use of philosophy in scripture can be a way of finding a common position between Aquinas and Barth on the mediation of the Word by analogous or philosophical concepts, as the authoritative words of scripture themselves involve the use of some philosophical concepts. For example, the Bible makes philosophical claims about God, at times drawing on Hellenistic thought about divinity (while, of course, also judging the words of Greek wisdom in light of the cross, i.e., 1 Cor. 2:1-2). Aquinas, along with many of the Fathers of the Church, perceives that the very objectivity of God’s Word revealed in Jesus and the Bible’s testimony to Jesus already involves particular philosophical claims about God that should influence the Church’s later discussions of philosophy in relation to biblical interpretation and doctrine, such as John 4:24, “God is spirit.”

While the uniqueness and “surprise” of God’s being revealed through the acts and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth should not be deemphasized, I also think that Barth plays down the degree to which the authors of the New Testament precisely did interpret Jesus in light of pre-existing categories and conceptions of what divinity or a “Son of God” might be like. Barth argues that the authors of the New Testament did not speak of Jesus as the divine Son or Word on the basis of a previously existing concept of divinity, but

---


rather found in Christ “the fulfillment of the conception of the Son of God, and in so doing, and only in so doing, they found the conception itself.” Yet the work of more recent biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright and Richard Bauckham shows how Jesus became incarnate in a Hellenistic context that provided a number of concepts “ready made” for understanding him which were deployed in the New Testament. I think further engagement between a Thomist theology of the Word and a Barthian theology of the Word on the mediation of philosophy is possible if one considers that philosophical reflection of a kind is itself a substantial part of biblical revelation, a fact that Barth appreciates in his biblical commentary and in his sermons.

2) The Mediation of the Word by Doctrines

What is authoritative doctrine, for Aquinas, and why is it a part of Church life? I take Aquinas’s description of Paul’s authorship of Romans as paradigmatic of his account. If we recall that the Bible itself is for Aquinas the premier instance of doctrine—sacra doctrina—this suggests a framework for approaching the Church’s later doctrinal declarations as well (even though Aquinas claims that the Apostles had a fuller possession of the truth by their fuller reception of the Holy Spirit). As I noted in my

31 Barth, CD I/2, 17.
33 Aquinas holds that the revelation of the truths of the faith per se is not an ongoing process, but was “completed by Christ; with regard to the essential matters of the faith, we may therefore neither subtract from nor add to his teaching.” Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Sentences, III.25. 2. 2. 1. Reply 5. Quoted in Per Erik Persson, Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas, trans. John MacKenzie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 80. Through close contact with the teaching of Christ, and the special outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostles have a special fullness of faith: “the apostles stand at the highest point” (Persson, Sacra Doctrina, 80-82). Although the Church may offer accounts of its doctrine that include refinements to avoid errors, any later doctrinal formulations only make explicit what is implicit.
first chapter, Aquinas claims that Paul wrote Romans as a response to his experience of divine grace, of which Paul had a twofold gift: salvation and apostleship. In Aquinas’s framework, biblical inspiration does not occur in a divine dictation model in which Paul becomes a kind of passive stenographer. Rather, Aquinas notes that Paul’s experience of the transformation of his life by God’s grace (the work of the Holy Spirit) gives him unique insight into divine grace, making his whole corpus of letters a kind of extended treatise on grace. Paul hands on the Word with the aid of the Holy Spirit in a way particular to himself, as Paul.

Additionally, Aquinas shows by his commentarial practice that he thinks that Paul’s words can be supplemented by other texts of scripture and by statements of the Church’s later doctrines without doing any violence to him as an author. This is because, as I noted in my first chapter, for Aquinas the words of scripture, as the transmission of Paul’s apostolic teaching about Christ’s death and resurrection, have a kind of

in the Apostles’ teaching (Persson, Sacra Doctrina, 82-3). Aquinas explains that this is due to the fact that human beings are social animals. This human social existence, which involves the possibility of error, requires the presence of infallible doctrine (making explicit what is implicit in scripture) to guide the Church’s reception of scripture. Cf. Leo Elders, Sur les traces de saint Thomas d’Aquin théologien: Étude de ses commentaires bibliques, Thèmes theologiques (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009), 22.

Aquin, Lectures on Romans, Prologue § 4, ch. 1, § 60-61.

Ibid., § 4. In my mind this suggests that Aquinas’s account of doctrine, while noting doctrine’s origin in God’s work of being revealed, allows for a historical account of doctrine as well (in which doctrine develops in the context of the messiness of human concepts in history) even though Aquinas did not develop this historical account when speaking of the inspiration of doctrinal declarations by Popes and Councils. On the modern “transition to historical mindedness” and its impact on the continued reception of Aquinas’s theology and philosophy, cf. Benedict Ashley, “The Transition to Historical Mindedness” in The Ashley Reader: Redeeming Reason (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2006), 13-25; Thomas Joseph White, “The Precarity of Wisdom: Modern Dominican Theology, Perspectivalism, and the Tasks of Reconstruction” in Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, eds. Matthew Levering and Reinhard Hütter (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 92-123. Aquinas’s approach to doctrine also resonates with the “dialogal” character of revelation as described in the dogmatic constitution Dei Verbum, which prefaces its declarations by suggesting the process of its “hearing the Word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith.” Second Vatican Council, Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. November 18, 1965, § 1. For more on this “dialogal” character of Dei Verbum, see Nicholas Lash, Change in Focus (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 10-12.
sacramental structure. As Aquinas observes, the words of the gospel have “power” when aided by the Holy Spirit, power to bring about the relationship to God by faith, and Aquinas sees the faith handed on by all the voices in the New Testament and in the Church as a whole as existing in a unity.\(^{37}\) Aquinas shows in his exegesis of Paul how he thinks the Church’s historical doctrines regarding the Trinity and Christology actually help one understand Paul’s words more fully. Such progress in understanding of Paul is not simply the satisfaction of an academic curiosity, but a serious spiritual matter with regard to the faith of believers, who are called to follow Paul and confess the same gospel which he hands on. Fundamental errors in understanding the very Son of God who Paul proclaims (cf. Romans 1:3-4) threaten the Church’s saving faith and proclamation. The approach in Aquinas is not one of two sources or authorities—of authoritative dogmas and authoritative scripture in tension—but rather is one of authoritative dogmas guiding readers towards a greater appreciation of scriptural realities.

Authoritative doctrine, then, is necessary in the Church’s life as a way of bringing persons into contact with Jesus by faith. This contact requires the mediation of the Apostles’ teaching by Church doctrines in which errors in the interpretation of the Apostles are avoided.

In this context, what is the significance of Aquinas’s discussion of the Church’s teachers as participating in Christ’s unique mediatory and prophetic office in the *Summa*

---

\(^{37}\) Cf. Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 51-76: “the sixteenth-century Carmelite mystic St. John of the Cross writes: “As our faith grows more intense, so does our union with God.” In this short phrase, the Doctor of Carmel captures the Church’s common teaching that theological faith introduces the human creature into a personal relationship with God. Indeed, as long as the Christian abides in this world, he or she can enjoy an authentically personal encounter with the Trinitarian God only through the exercise of theological faith…in order to enjoy a truly personal union with God, such as only the theological life affords, a person requires instruction in the Church’s authoritative teaching on faith and morals” (49). See also my discussion of implicit and explicit faith in Aquinas’s commentary on Romans, drawing on the work of Edgardo Colón-Emeric, in my first chapter.
theologiae? I believe that we can read the *Summa theologiae*, in light of Aquinas’s discussion of Paul and Romans in his *Lectures on Romans*, as an attempt by Aquinas to connect all mediators in the Church, including Apostles and Popes and Councils, to Christ. We see this in key questions, which I studied in my third chapter, on Christ’s prophetic knowledge, grace and headship of the Church, Christ’s doctrine, and Christ as mediator. It is well known, as Yves Congar notes, that Aquinas does not have a separate treatise “de ecclesia” in his *Summa theologiae*: nonetheless the whole Secunda pars and/or the Tertia pars can be seen as Aquinas’s “ecclesiology.” In my chapter I focused on the “ecclesiology” of the Tertia pars. What is Aquinas’s goal in speaking of the Church there? Aquinas’s “lab work” in these questions is seeking to accomplish a number of goals, most explicitly the *Summa theologiae*’s overall goal of an ordered portrait of Christian teaching: thus Aquinas structures his account of Christ in the Tertia pars by contemplating the incarnate union first and then thinking through its many ramifications for the Church’s understanding of Christ. But the *Summa theologiae* has a number of ancillary goals, minor and major threads of conversation throughout. One such thread I have discussed in my chapter is Aquinas’s attempt to ground the Church’s mediators in Christ as a unique mediator. The teachings of the Church, and the graces which help the Church receive and hand on these teachings, all come from Christ as head. As I have shown, Aquinas employs a Dionysian account of hierarchical mediation in relation to a Chalcedonian and Constantinopolitan (referring to Constantinople III) understanding of the instrumentality of Christ’s human acts and other human agents joined to him. Aquinas does so in order to understand how human beings could hope to

---

speak infallible truth as humans, while maintaining the primacy of Christ. This is not so much meant to ground or justify the Church’s hierarchical mediation in some final way, as to give an account of its intelligibility: how might it make sense to say that Paul’s words, or the words of the Council of Nicaea, can really be “infallible” speech about God? I find Aquinas’s Christological answer to this question convincing.

If the Lectures on Romans involve Aquinas trying to hand on Christian doctrine with Paul, and the Summa theologiae involves Aquinas trying to understand the reality of Christian doctrine in relation to Christ, what then is Aquinas trying to do in his sermons with regard to doctrine? The specific sermons studied here are not simply preaching the gospel in its basic form, as Aquinas’s implied audience seems to be made of relatively faithful but young believers. Aquinas’s focus, instead, is on engendering a spiritual exercise in his hearers by means of doctrine in the form of scripture as interpreted with the aid of the Church’s teachings. Aquinas preaches in Puer Jesus that members of the Church must grow in wisdom “in the Temple” and “among the Doctors,” that is, in the Church with the mediation of the Church’s teachers and preachers. The portrait of doctrine in Puer Jesus is not that of a monolithic body of propositions, but of a diversity of insights distributed according to the individual human personalities in Church history, from the inspired authors of sacred scripture to later doctors. Aquinas’s practice of offering biblical distinctiones suggests his understanding of the simultaneous unity and breadth of scripture in its capacity to speak definitively about the spiritual life. Those seeking to grow in wisdom and to teach wisdom to others must draw from the various gifts distributed among particular Church teachers, not picking one alone: in speaking of the Church Fathers, Aquinas notes that Gregory the Great “knew morals very well,”
Augustine is good at solving intellectual problems raised by the faith, and Ambrose is “good at giving the allegorical meaning of sacred texts” (interestingly enough, though, Aquinas focuses here on doctors and not doctrines).\textsuperscript{39} In \textit{Exiit Qui Seminat}, Aquinas argues that the preacher, by preaching, is sharing in the Son’s \textit{exitus} from the Father: the Church’s receiving and handing on of the Word is a participation in the Word’s original act of teaching, as the Church’s preachers are “engrafted” into the “vine” of Christ’s humanity in the Church.\textsuperscript{40} Aquinas draws on the Church’s authoritative doctrine on the Trinity as well as particular Fathers like Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Bernard of Clairvaux to paint a portrait of the Parable of the Sower as a comprehensive guide to the theological life of preaching.

Barth treats doctrine in a much different way, and yet he too values the Church’s doctrinal words. As is clear in his \textit{Epistle to the Romans}, Barth considers scripture to speak authoritatively in the Church, challenging all other voices, theological or philosophical, by its authoritative doctrine. Yet Barth suggests that scripture’s meaning is not necessarily obvious or clear; preaching and teaching Romans, he notes, involves work to find the \textit{Sache} or subject matter in Paul.\textsuperscript{41} Thus while emphasizing the transcendent authority of scripture, Barth suggests that this authority nonetheless must be interpreted and applied—a human work—for it to be a real authority. The Church’s biblical interpretation, as a form of handing on authoritative doctrine, occurs in hope rather than as a defined and clearly regulated reality. Barth does not suggest that his particular

\textsuperscript{39} Aquinas, \textit{Academic Sermons}, 100.
\textsuperscript{40} Aquinas, \textit{Academic Sermons}, 108-9
\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Barth on the “meaning” of Romans in \textit{Epistle}, 6-7. John Webster, “Karl Barth” in Jeffrey Greenman and Timothy Larsen, eds., \textit{Reading Romans through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth} (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 215-220.
approach to Romans has final authority.\textsuperscript{42}

I have also shown that Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* anticipates his later (Chalcedonian) rejection of ebionism and docetism in *Church Dogmatics* I by (1) refusing to argue that Jesus was simply a fulfillment of human spiritual potential (with Schleiermacher and the liberal Protestants, and (2) by affirming that Jesus’ cross and resurrection, events which befell his humanity, involve the “existentiality of divinity” being truly shown in the crucified Christ. While Barth emphasizes the authority of scripture over later doctrines, such as the Nicene Creed or the Confession of Chalcedon, his *Epistle to the Romans* is never unorthodox.

In his work in the genre of dogmatic theology in his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth’s task is much like of the *Tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*: seeking to show how the Church’s many human words connect one to Christ as the authoritative Word of God. To put it differently, Barth is seeking to give an intelligible account of how human words can authoritatively connect one to Christ at all. And, like Aquinas, Barth’s approach to this issue draws on Chalcedonian or Constantinopolitan lines of thinking: human words can connect one to Christ because Christ, as human, can be spoken of historically and in historical words.

Yet Barth has a practical task different from that of Aquinas which inflects his work, which is the practical task of leading theologians and pastors to perform a “self-test” of their language by the standard of the Word of God revealed in the acts and

\textsuperscript{42} In fact, he suggests later in life that his reading of Romans was appropriate to his particular time (the heyday of liberal theology), and that if written later he might have more strongly emphasized the humanity of Christ in Romans. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 38-45.
When Barth claims that the Church’s historical doctrines have only a proximate and revisable authority, this is because Barth is trying to focus on the source of these doctrines—the divine and human Christ—as the basis of the authority of the Church’s speech. As I hope to have shown in my chapters, Barth’s works in all three genres studied here have a central “Chalcedonian” motif that goes along with this motif of “actualism.” Yet, as I noted in my conclusion to chapter four, this approach to doctrine in the context of Barth’s understanding of the Word of God in Church Dogmatics I/2 skews in an occasionalist direction. It is not simply the case for Barth that theologians and pastors can study scripture and speak about God rightly by their own industrious effort. Rather, for Barth, faithfulness in speaking about God can be guaranteed only on God’s side, rather than any particular human approach to scripture. The Church can only receive the Word of God in its preaching by a special act of God in each instance: the Word must be “revealed” as well as written (in scripture) and preached.

43 Barth, CD I/1, 2.
44 Despite Barth’s assertion of the fallibility of the Church’s doctrines, this does not mean that he thinks they are useless: as George Hunsinger observes, Barth uses the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon especially, but also Nicaea and others, as “regulative frameworks” in his scriptural exegesis, preaching, and dogmatic theology. George Hunsinger, Evangelical, Catholic and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 160-162; 294-295. God is free to be revealed, but this freedom is bound to the objectivity of Christ: God’s self-revelation is always “fixed” on the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Chalcedon’s affirmation of Christ’s true divinity and true humanity, as a doctrine involved in the Church’s testimony to the Word, is indispensable for Barth because it regulates the Church’s speech about Christ in a way which has not been surpassed. While Barth notes that Chalcedon’s doctrinal formula for describing Christ (“two natures, one person”) can perhaps be superseded, Barth also claims that its rejection of ebionism and docetism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism cannot: these binary alternatives rejected by Chalcedon are ways human beings usurp God’s authoritative Word in the divine and human Jesus. While Barth thinks that the Word of God can be spoken to new and better hearers, he does not think that this will ever involve, for instance, a docetic “word.” The centrality of this Chalcedonian motif in Barth’s writing in multiple genres suggests that Barth has more in common with the theology of the patristic period than may seem apparent, even though Barth is obviously appropriating or approximating patristic themes in a way particular to him. I think this shows that the theology of the patristic period is not for Barth simply a relic of an age of “classical metaphysics” that can be dispensed with in the era of Hegel. Cf. Lewis Ayers, Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology (New York: Oxford, 2004), 384-429.
Barth’s sermons are not catechetical in the same way as those of Aquinas. However, Barth uses traditions of later Christian doctrine as guides to his theological interpretation and application of scripture in his sermons. As I have sought to show, Barth’s sermons operate on a principle which is reminiscent of the patristic “formula of exchange” which was crucial to the development of Chalcedon: the incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth transforms all human life, and humans can look to the Bible’s testimony to Christ to learn of God’s transformational work accomplished in him. This shows that Barth’s interest in the relationship between the Word and human words is pastoral as well as theoretical or speculative. Barth’s 1918 sermon on Christ’s baptism addresses human anxieties about being accepted by others by reference to the inner life of the Trinity as it is shown in the acts and sufferings of Jesus. Barth uses explicitly Chalcedonian thinking in his 1955 prison sermon on John 14:19 to great pastoral effect: “you will live also,” because in and through Christ God’s divine life involves and transforms the experience of human suffering and persecution, because the Word is divine and human.

*Three Genres and the Way to an Ecumenical Rapprochement on Doctrine*

Aquinas’s thought on the mediation of the Word by doctrines in some ways resembles that of Karl Barth, since he sees Jesus as the source of the Church’s doctrine, with all doctrine participating in Christ’s unique mediation between human beings and God. While Barth’s occasionalist approach to doctrine suggests that the Church’s

---

45 Daniel Keating offers an extremely helpful discussion of the biblical roots and historical development of this concept of the “formula of exchange,” and its role in the theological concept of deification, in his book *Deification and Grace* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007).
historical councils like Nicaea or Chalcedon are not ultimately binding for him, Barth nonetheless uses the teachings of these councils consistently in regulative ways in his works in each genre studied here. While Barth does not adopt a Dionysian account of hierarchical mediation as Aquinas does, Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* and his *Church Dogmatics* (and presumably his sermons) proceed on the assumption that the biblical authors (as inspired) are authoritative windows into the reality of the crucified and risen Christ, in other words, that the Bible—despite being composed of human words—truthfully and irrevocably testifies to the Word of God.\(^{46}\) Barth holds therefore that some human words can infallibly hand on the Word of God, in the case of Paul and other biblical authors.

I argue that Barth’s work in the genre of biblical commentary and preaching is where he is at his most “Catholic.” In his *Epistle to the Romans* and in his sermons, early and late, Barth is much more “sacramental” in the sense of understanding the Church and the Church’s teachers to participate in Christ’s salvific and doctrinal work by their human words (i.e., Paul’s authoritative transmission of the gospel in *Epistle to the Romans*). Barth also has a rich understanding of the mediation of these biblical words by human interpreters: Barth’s emphasis throughout his prefaces to *Epistle to the Romans* is that Paul must be creatively interpreted, again and again, in every age so as to hear his authoritative Word, the *Sache* or subject matter of Romans, clearly. In his sermons, Barth does not slavishly or literally repeat scripture, but offers creative engagements with scriptural themes which draw on his extensive theological learning along with a

\(^{46}\) Barth claims in speaking of Paul’s words in his *Epistle to the Romans* that his approach has affinities with the doctrine of verbal inspiration, and this should be understood not as leading to a literal account of biblical exegesis, but maintaining that Paul speaks authoritatively about God, even when Paul challenges modern sensibilities. Barth’s discussion of the Apostles in *Church Dogmatics* I, as I noted in my fourth chapter, has some similarities with Aquinas’s understanding of the Apostles as handing on their first hand experience of Christ’s doctrine with the aid of the Holy Spirit.
perceptive “reading” of the situation of his hearers. Since Barth sees preaching as the Word of God, his practice of preaching, the work which brings scripture into sermon, involves human mediation of the Word. While this emphasis on interpretation and mediation by human words which I find in Barth’s works does not justify for Barth a tradition of authoritative and irreversible later doctrines declared by the Church, like that which Aquinas holds, it does put forward an account of the mediation of scripture as being a part of the Church’s task. Barth’s exegetical approach in Epistle to the Romans and in his sermons is expressly more than simply clearing away heretical impositions to allow the written Word of God to speak: real mediation in terms of creative application to the contemporary situation is needed. Thus, my argument is that Barth’s polemical emphasis in the Church Dogmatics on the revocability of doctrine against Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants arises from his particular reception of the Reformed tradition more than being an extension of the logic of his theology of the Word as shown in his works in other genres.47

I would also add that even Barth’s polemical moments against Catholic dogmatics in the Church Dogmatics can be helpful for Catholic theologians. This requires again paying attention to genre; in this case, paying attention the genre of the Church Dogmatics compared with the genre of the Summa theologiae. The Summa theologiae is meant to give an ordered presentation of sacred doctrine: Aquinas’s discussion of the Church’s participation in Christ’s prophetic office is folded into his scientific, orderly presentation of the truths necessary for salvation. Barth’s goal in his Church Dogmatics, however, is not to be orderly, or even to present Christian doctrine as a whole. Dogmatics

---

47 Note the way Barth grounds his discussion of the role of tradition under the Word in an expressly Reformed and Evangelical context, CD I/2, 573-584.
for Barth has a critical task; as I noted above, it involves the Church’s “self-test” of its language. Barth’s goal is not to offer an orderly, structured understanding of forms of mediation in the Church. Rather, Barth’s goal is to remind theologians that their speech in the Church lives from God’s act, from God’s revelation, not from the fulfillment of particular spiritual principles immanent in human nature. Barth’s point is profoundly correct.

Barth did not intend his *Church Dogmatics* as a genre to lay out an organized, philosophically rigorous presentation of all Christian doctrine, but to fund a new theological “school,” a renewed form of Protestant dogmatics with the rigor of the Protestant scholastics but operating in dialogue with contemporary voices. One of the key motivating questions in his *Church Dogmatics* is this: how far can an emphasis on God’s freedom to act in the context of the Church’s speaking about God in human words go? This question was partly speculative for Barth. I think that part of what Barth was doing in the *Church Dogmatics* was to pose this question and leave it open, and I suggest that we can see the current debate over the extent of Barth’s commitment to the theology of the ecumenical councils between different “schools” of North American Barth interpretation as the fruit of a tension Barth himself left in his *Church Dogmatics.*

Barth was trying to push theologians to think more deeply about the nature of the Word of God in the life of the Church, the way God is active in the Church’s human words. Barth was

---

attempting to put forward a comprehensive account of the primacy of God’s sovereign act of being revealed in the process of the Church’s doctrine, though not a systematic account: as comprehensive rather than systematic, Barth’s theology is open-ended, calling for extension and exploration of his insights.

The main contribution of my book has to do with exploring whether Catholic theology can accept Barth’s focus on the primacy of the sovereign act of God’s speaking his Word as a critical insight into its understanding of the Word of God. I hold that Catholics can and must accept his basic emphasis on the divine act of God in and with the Church’s human speech. Indeed, I have presented Aquinas’s works in all three genres as crucial resources for making precisely this rapprochment with Barth’s concerns, while maintaining a Catholic position on the authority of the Church in interpreting and mediating scripture with authoritative guidance.

Aquinas and Barth have both heard the Word of God and testify to the Word in their works. Despite the differences between them, particularly the question of doctrinal mediation on which there is a major difference, they both inspire the reader to a love of scripture, and a desire to think through the realities of the Christian faith in their wholeness and interrelation. They both recognize that theological reflection must also lead to a renewed preaching of the Word. They both model a missionary spirituality that highlights the scriptural source of the Church’s preaching and affirms the rigor and critical thinking that go hand in hand with the Church’s theological reflection. In sum, let us follow Aquinas and Barth in seeking to grow in that wisdom which comes from Jesus Christ, and to proclaim this wisdom to others: “we have seen the Lord!” (John 20:25).
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:


Aquinas, Thomas. *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 4-12: Summa theologiae* Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1888-1906.


Barth, Karl. *The Humanity of God*. Translated by John Newton Thomas and Thomas


*Secondary Sources:*


Paddison, Angus. “Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis of Romans 9-11 in light of Jewish-


Staudt, Jared. “Sin as an Offense against God: Aquinas on the Relation of Sin and


Webster, John. “Karl Barth.” In Reading Romans through the Centuries: from the Early


White, Thomas Joseph. “Kenoticism and the Divinity of Christ Crucified.” The Thomist


