Jesus Kyrios

Christology as Heart of Theology
Dedicated to the faculty, students and administrative workers of the department of theology at the University of Stellenbosch

About the title Jesus Kyrios, Lord Jesus.

‘Kyrios’ is the Greek rendering of the Holy NAME of the LORD, by which this God, in an unspeakable way, was made known to Israel. An early Christian hymn dares to apply this very Name to Jesus. Many years ago, W. Bousset wrote a book with the title Kyrios Christos. That combination of words at least somewhat shelters the affront of the confession ‘Jesus is Lord.’ For ‘Christ’ may refer to the highest ideal of humanity as well as the risen and glorified Lord. My title is not ‘Jesus Christ’ either; that would invite too easily the self-evident Lordship of so many ecclesial pronouncements. My concern is the earthly human Jesus, with his human – all too human – history. This human from first century Palestine is the one true God.
Dr. Abraham van de Beek

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Christology as Heart of Theology

SPEAKING OF GOD 1.1

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Preface

Originally I intended to write a complete and multi-volume dogmatic work. Weighing the risk of writing an 'unfinished' opus, however, led me to write separate studies about different dogmatic themes. I became increasingly aware that this is not merely a practical concern but is even more sound on fundamental grounds. Dogmatic thought occupies itself with God's relationship with us. I write about that as a finite and limited human being. Not only is my life too short and my motivation too limited to complete such a task, but I am not capable of it in my very being. It is not possible to bring to completion a study of the full nature of God's way among us; it remains a search for words, a fragmentary task. For again and again, other or further words must be spoken, and often fewer words. Therefore I limit myself to writing a number of separate studies about crucial themes of my affirmation of faith.

My confession is not isolated. It is situated in communion with the church. It is rooted there. That does not mean that we unthinkingly repeat the words of confession of the church. It means rather, that in the expression of our own faith we recognize what the church confessed all along. One of the things that more and more strikes me in my dogmatic studies, is that a critical weighing of various options more often than not leads me to a position corresponding to classical dogma. All the more reason to take dogma very seriously. These classical positions did not arise out of thin air, but grew in a struggle to give voice, in the best conceivable manner, to the deepest relation with God. That implies that in every new generation a confession follows similar fundamental traces. This is because it concerns the same God. This is why I deliberately chose to take the themes of the confessions of the early church as a key guide, and thus begin with the heart of the theological discussions of the early church: Christology. The heart of theology still lies in that locus; it is where the concerns of the Christian faith are decided.

1. None of the authors I read reflect this notion stronger than Origen. Again and again, he says that his elaborations are only proposals and contributions as part of a larger discussion. He is looking forward to others who are more capable of explaining Scripture. For example see his Princ. II.6,7; II.8,5 and the introduction to his exposition of the resurrection of all things (Princ. I.6,1).
Therefor, I plunge right into the heart of the matter. There is no point in writing long prolegomena, whether they are things that should be said ‘beforehand’, or things that should be said ‘first’; why kick in an open door? What should be said first, is that God in Christ is in our midst. And everything that is said beforehand leads us away from what we need to say. For the discussions about prolegomena are not only endless, they never will lead us to faith in Jesus Christ. If they could, one would have to conclude, after everything the theologians invested in that task, that the unfaithful are either enormously dumb or refuse malevolently to admit what they ought to concede. I have not been able to note either one or the other trait in my atheistic friends. Yet my most important reason not to treat prolegomena is that they do not help me one whit when my faith is assailed the most. At such times we look intensely for something to hold on to, and we search for any argument that can provide solid ground. But no help is given from those quarters. Given the critical distance required by abstract scholarly expostulations about prolegomena, how can one expect any plausibility for faith when in such dire straights? An outright assault is the best touchstone for the reasonableness of faith. Any and all considerations of plausibility, or even seizing upon faith as a religious activity, are of no help. The only thing that does help me through crises of faith is the very relationship with the Lord. Faith does not let go of me, just as the love of my wife does not let go of me. Before all else, faith has to do with the heart, even though subsequently we can say many reasoned and reasonable things about it. Thus, in order not to start on the wrong track, if such faith begins with the heart, we must begin to speak from that same place in theology.

2. For use of this terminology and distinction see Berkhof 1973: 1-6, 43-47 [ET 1979: 1-6, 41-45]; also Barth, KD I,1:41.

3. Fabella 1993: 212: ‘Christology is at the heart of all theology, for it is Jesus who revealed us the deepest truth about God. In his humanity Jesus revealed God as a loving God who cares for the weakest and lowliest and wills the full humanity and salvation of all, men and women alike. In his humanity, Jesus has shown us what it means to be truly human, to have life abundantly, to be saved. This christology is central and integral to any talk about God, human-God relationship and all right relationships and of any discussion about salvation and liberation.’

4. ‘Whomever reads this exposition of mine…must know first-off that my argumentation is on guard against the distortions of those who disdain to begin with faith itself, and thus, by their premature and faulty desire for apprehension, are led astray’ (Augustine, Trin. I,1,1). Jesus ‘therefore did not address (his disciples) according to their previous ideas, nor did he answer them according to the notions of those who asked questions, but according to the teaching that leads to salvation, without falsehood, regardless of the person’ (Irenaeus, AH III,5,2).
In my course of study, many theologians were discussion partners. Three have touched me differently than all the others, namely Irenaeus, Athanasius and Luther. All three of them are totally engaged and committed to their cause, regardless of costs; and all bore the consequences. As an academic scholar of the late-twentieth century they make me very nervous. When their intensity overwhelmed me I would catch my breath in the company of Augustine and Calvin. Neither one of them lack in conviction, but they display a calmer character. Besides the glow of a volcano, at times these deep quieter waters provide a blessing.

Most of the book was written in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The hospitality I received from the theological faculty was exceptional. It is to the theological department that I dedicate this study. In particular I want to mention Flip Theron, professor in dogmatic studies. Not only did he contribute much to the content of this book through discussions of the text, but our deep bond of friendship and congeniality undergirds the work. Beside him, I thank all colleagues at home and abroad for their helpful advice and information, especially Eginhard Meijering for his counsel regarding the early church.

5. Irenaeus died a martyr during the persecutions of emperor Septimus Severus (202) after an earlier imprisonment. Athanasius spent much of his life in exile or on the run. Luther lived as an outlaw under a papal and an imperial ban. To all three applies the adage: ‘Here I stand, I can do no other.’
I This God: Jesus Christ

1. We Know God in Christ

All Christians say, one way or another, that Jesus is the revelation of God. He is God’s Son, God’s representative, he makes God’s will known to us, he is the human being God intended us to be. Whether high or low,¹ all christologies say that we know God, in the deepest sense of the word, in Jesus. The Christian faith stands or succumbs by it.

It is remarkable therefore, how theologians often write about God before they address christology. Not only does one find extensive excursions about prolegomena and sources of revelation, much is said about God’s being, about God’s attributes, about God’s will, about God’s creation, long before the name Jesus is even mentioned. This seems odd to me. If we know God most clearly in Christ (not even arguing for exclusivity), we should begin with that clarity and from there proceed to what is less clear. A Christian theology that does not begin with christology is a detour.² The earliest credal statements of the church begin, therefore, with Christ.³ They find their center in the phrase ‘Jesus is Lord.’⁴

One can object that this first confession originated in an era in which religion was as common as it is now still in many parts of the world. In such a context one assumed an understanding of what God meant.⁵ The confession ‘Christ is the true God,’ then is but a further specification of that general knowledge of God. In an atheistic context, however, one would first have to clarify what the concept ‘God’ itself entails.

Such a position overlooks two things. First of all, even in the early church the proclamation of Christ is not offered to compete with the other religious options or even to enlarge them. Christ is proclaimed

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1. A ‘high’ christology speaks about Jesus as God, a ‘low’ christology focuses on his humanity. Rarely are these absoluté perspectives, but they indicate the position from which the christology begins: ‘from above’ (as God who comes to us) or ‘from below’ (as a human who expresses something or all of God). See Berkhof 1973: 281f [ET 1979 Christian Faith: 267f.].
4. Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 12:3; II Cor. 4:5; Col. 2:6.
as the unknown God, according to Paul in Athens. This is not at all meant to fill up an empty place in the world of the gods. The concept of a totally other God is at stake. As Paul says, this God is revealed as one who appointed a human being as a righteous judge by raising him from the dead. That puts aside everything hitherto said about God and gods. According to the wise men of Athens, this new message had nothing to do with God and was, moreover, religious nonsense. It is such obvious nonsense to them that no serious debate is warranted. Instead, the fool who proclaims this message is gently dismissed by making an empty offer of a future exchange of ideas about his interesting thoughts. Not without cause, Christians were in the Hellenistic world called "atheoi": people without God. The 'God' they proclaimed was disqualified as a god and was of no use within the notions of God held by others. The 'God' of the Christians did not belong in the category that was reasonably called 'god.' Secondly, there is no point in trying to conceive of such a common religious substrate in an atheistic world. For one thing, truly critical atheists will refuse to be counted among those who are incurably religious. And even if successful, we would be no better off than the situation of the early church. A religious affirmation of a highest being has little to do with faith in God as confessed by Christians.

Moreover, we should not understand Jesus Christ as a figure of a Christian theory. It would be backwards to begin with a theory and then condense it into a Name. In fact, it is just the opposite: the concern is the person of Jesus himself. The Roman bishop Zephyrinus (in office from 198/199-217 C.E.) said: 'I know but one God, Christ Jesus, and apart from him no other who was born and suffered.' That did not sit well with many. Yet I am of the opinion that we can not

8. Justin Martyr, Apologia 1,5ff; Athenagoras, Legatio pro Christianis 4,10 and 12.
9. Athenagoras, as a Christian, argues in defense that it is precisely the God who transcends all human notions and fabrications who is the most reasonable one. See note 246 in section 5 of this chapter.
11. Bonhoeffer 1962:10 [in English, see Letters and Papers from Prison, April 30, 1944].
12. Hippolytus, Refutatio omnium haeresium, IX,11. See Luther, Tischreden, WA 1:481 (no. 952): 'Ich ... will von keinen andern Gott nicht wissen denn allein von dem, der am Kreuze gehangen hat, nehmlich Jesus Christus' [I... want to know of no other God than he who was hung on a cross, namely Jesus Christ].
13. Prominent was Hippolytus to whom we owe knowledge of the citation. He did not
make do with less in Christian theology. Ultimately, at its core, faith is about a personal relationship. Without such a relationship, faith is but speculation about a possible higher being, or a final ground for our basic trust. Faith would remain but a vague feeling that one somehow ought to carry on; or perhaps, to those who want to show that they are not merely callous materialists, it is interesting. But then it would have little to do with personal trust in the relationship with a person. In the Reformation, a distinction was made between ‘considered certainty’ and ‘childlike trust.’ At most, speculations will lead to a carefully considered feeling of safety, which seems necessary in human existence. Yet it only addresses the desire for safety, and says nothing about the object of the desire. Thus it says something about us, but nothing about God.

God reveals Godself as a person who appears in our life. We are spoken to by God; God addresses us. We may trust that voice with childlike certainty. God provides a relationship that cannot break. As for myself, I more often speak of trust and encounter of partners. That offers to me an understanding of something of the deep personal bond and candidness that characterizes the relationship between God and humans according the Old and New Testament. Yet I readily understand the comparison with childhood: it is a relationship in which it is clear that our existence depends completely on the other. Parents hardly ever break the bond with their child, far less often than marriage partners do with each other. When all is said and done, however, these are but comparisons for the unique relationship that speaks for itself: the one between Jesus Christ and myself. It concerns him and no one else. It is not about my partner or my parents, and not even about myself, but it is all about Jesus. Jesus Christ entered my life and never lets me go again. He is the one who delivers rest and trust indeed. This God is the God who says: ‘Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.’ It is the only God we know, Luther says, and ‘an other God than the one who died for me, I will not accept.’

recognize Zephyrinus as bishop and, fair or not, portrays him as corrupt and greedy, with counselors who were worse (Refut. IX, 11 f.). Yet modern historians consider him a modalist; such as Heussi 1960, §17; Bakhuizen van den Brink 1965:113.
14. ‘Certitudo conjecturalis’ and ‘timor filialis’; see H. Heppe: Reformed Dogmatics XX, 39.
16. TR, WA 1:271 (no. 583).
17. TR, WA 1:271 (no. 583).
This is folly to the world. It is a nonsensical confession, and even more foolish to stake your theology on it. It is a position that will be assailed. That goes for me as well as for Luther.\(^{18}\) Again and again, I note a need within myself and with others, to make plausible the relationship with Christ and my faith, and to explain it. The most subtle explanation takes the position that ultimately it is about a God who can only reveal Godself precisely because God is God.\(^{19}\)

However, I thereby do injustice to what truly lies at the heart of the matter: God simply is within my existence. There is no ‘because.’ I can only acknowledge his presence.

When I speak about God, I speak about the One who came into my life through the stories I heard at home, in school, in church.\(^{20}\) I am not speaking about a highest being, but about a person who is beside me wherever I go. Only secondarily is this Person for me the first and the last, and do I hold that nothing can be thought without this Person. Yet a definition of God does not precede the relationship with God; instead, it depends on the latter. Thus ‘God’ depends on what I experience in my relationship with Jesus Christ. And what I experience of Jesus Christ depends on what I have heard in the stories of Scripture. They have shaped the face of God for me.

Thus we begin at the beginning: with Jesus Christ in whom we know God. The question is then, of what nature is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ the one who proclaims God’s purpose

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18. ‘Aber es ist fürwahr eine sehr grosse und schwere Kunst, da auch viel und mancherlei Anfechtung und Erfahrung zu gehören’ [But it is surely a great and heavy feat, that will also involve many a trial and temptation] (JR, WA 1.271, no. 583).
19. It is questionable whether the ‘special’ in K. Barth’s theology truly captures the contingency of the person of Jesus of Nazareth and of the concrete work of the Holy Spirit in human persons. Although, on the one hand, Barth strongly emphasizes the reality of Christ, his oeuvre does maintain an idealistic character, in which Christ is a chiffre for the totally otherness of God. This is probably due to the underdeveloped pneumatology of Barth, that causes a tendency to place God’s liberating acts in the present in a christological way, consequently obscuring the historical person of Jesus.
20. Bonhoeffer (1962: 25), who also emphasizes that we only know Christ as a person who is living and present in our existence, sees the basis of the encounter in prayer. Undoubtedly he does not mean petitionary prayer for concrete things, but the attitude of prayer. Ebeling (1979: 193-210) takes up this idea about prayer as the way to knowledge of God, and develops it further. This is understood in the sense of the ‘Gefühl schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit’ [ultimate feeling of dependence] described by Schleiermacher (1822: 23). In my opinion, here the human habitus of surrender has become the constituting factor and not the appearance of the Lord who encounters us in the hearing of the Word.
with humanity? Does Christ inform us concerning the divine being? Does Jesus himself represent something of who God is?

The christological discussions of the early church are about such questions. Therefore we seek an answer to this question of what the nature of God's revelation in Christ is, by first trying to understand what moved Christians at that early time to engage in such intense controversies regarding the person of Jesus.

2. THE CONTRAST

In the year 429, serious riots broke out in Constantinople and Ephesus. The immediate cause of the disturbances was a sermon. Back then sermons had the same newsworthy influence as popular sports do now: in the same way as the Dutch talk on Monday about soccer and Americans about sports, people in Constantinople in the fifth century talked about sermons. The regions around Ephese and Constantinople in the western part of present day Turkey had become almost entirely Christian. People were very much engaged in their faith, and intense in their expression of it. They made use of the traditions of their own culture. Thus God lived among humans, and gave immortality to mortals, except now no longer to beautiful and heroic figures alone, but to the common people. Elements from the cult of Artemis adorned the Christian daily life. Especially in Ephese this was true because no place had revered the goddess Artemis more. For the Ephesians life was unimaginable without the deep sentiments connected with this adoration. Now, as Christians, they connected this rich tradition with Mary. Mary received almost divine aspects. That was not too far-fetched: for had she not given birth to Jesus of whom the church confessed that he is God? The almost obvious conclusion presented itself: Mary was the mother of God. That expression was close to the heart of people in Asia Minor, and in equal measure to the hearts of those who lived in the cramped quarters of the new imperial capital of Constantinople.

22. Already in Revelation 12 the woman 'clothed with the son, the moon under her feet and a garland of twelve stars around her head' shows signs of Eastern mother goddesses (Charles 1920: 316).
23. This city (the present-day Istanbul) had been called Byzantium until Constantine made her the capital of the empire in 330. It is customary to call the culture of the
In that same year 429, Nestorius\textsuperscript{24} became the new patriarch of Constantinople. He was an enlightened theologian who had received his education in Syria in the Antiochene school. This center of learning was known for its thorough philosophical training. Its philosophy was Aristotelian in nature, noted for striving for clear definitions and formulations. Students were taught to be critical, and not to merely accept unexamined ideas of simple folk wisdom. They also placed great emphasis on the literal meaning of texts, bible texts as well. Likewise, they preferred the hard facts of history instead of mythic stories in the style of Homer. This Antiochene school had left behind the gods and half-gods of the Homeric pantheon who had behaved just as people do in war or in love, and even mingled with people. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, a different idea of 'god' began to take shape, more acceptable to enlightened Antiochenes. It was a concept of God as a highest Being, an independent Being, transcendent and distinct from the material, circumscribed and transitory world. It became the prevalent notion of God in subsequent Western philosophy. Faith as it took shape in the western part of Asia was completely foreign to someone trained in the Antiochene culture. It must have been an abomination to Nestorius in his new diocese to hear people speak so crudely about Mary as the mother of God, and of God as born and even buried.\textsuperscript{25} Thus Nestorius did what bishops, and certainly patriarchs, are expected to do: put things in order in the church. The confessions had to be purified and refined. It was intolerable to let paganism continue in Christian garb. That is why Nestorius gave his sermon.

The sermon dealt with the 'mother of God' (\textit{theotokos}, literally: 'God bearer'). Nestorius told his flock that this term should be used no longer. To say that Mary was the mother of Christ (\textit{christotokos}) was alright, but not that she was the mother of God.\textsuperscript{26} The effect of the prohibition accomplished the opposite. Not only did everyone protest

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Eastern Roman empire Byzantine, especially as it developed under emperor Justinian (527-565).

24. For more on the person and teaching of Nestorius, see Loofs 1914.
26. Loofs 1914: 27-37 shows that Nestorius in his sermon indeed rejected the use of \textit{theotokos}, but that he did not consider the term absolutely wrong, but did require a correct interpretation. This term became a symbol for the underlying conflict about how to approach the person of Christ: as God's presence accompanied by an ontological doctrine of redemption, or as a relationship of God and humanity accompanied by a moral doctrine of salvation.
it, but they insisted all the more strongly on using the maligned expression. It became a matter of ‘us’ over against Nestorius.

The actual arguments of Nestorius were largely ignored. Nestorius was keen to preserve the purity of both the idea of God and the human race. God is the eternal one and needs no birth. God is infinite Being, and not incomplete. God is transcendent and thus not contained even in the heaven of heavens. These are arguments that Paul used on the Areopagus against the Athenians, when he used their own philosophy to disapprove of their idolatry. 27 God does not live in temples made with human hands. He is not born or buried. When we say, ‘Jesus is the Son of God,’ we do not mean that in a simplistic sense. Jesus is God’s Son because the eternal Word of God, the Logos, was joined to him in the most intimate way imaginable. But one who is born must be human. Because humans are born; they have a beginning and are not eternal; they therefore also come to an end. But Christ is the very presence of the eternal Logos of God joined with a temporal human being. He was born human and not as God. Nonetheless, he was God’s presence in our midst. Yet not because of his birth, but because God was completely bound to this human. 28

All this kept the theological anthropology pure, not only because humans must know their limit in time, but also in ethics. They cannot call upon an ontological sacramental unity with God to acquire eternal life, but they are called to a relationship with God that corresponds to their bond with Christ. Is our life, just as the life of Christ, of such a character that it is a relationship of love for God? And Nestorius is not talking about mystical experiences, but primarily about the visible moral life, open to evaluation by others. The moral bond of love between Jesus and God demands a moral living-out of the Christian life.

Nestorius should not be called a modern man. His faith in God is too unshaken, and the Logos relationship between God and the world is too unquestioned. But it is certainly true that Nestorius is the most easily identifiable figure for moderns in the West, because the same aspects of Greek philosophy that greatly influenced the Enlightenment are also the motive for his theology.

The general populations of Constantinople and Ephese were not the only ones who rebelled against Nestorius. Cyril, the patriarch of Alex-

andria, also jumped into the fray. He had good reasons to enter a conflict surrounding his colleague across the Mediterranean.

It was not as much a personal attack on Nestorius as it was a matter of getting back at his school of philosophy and his bishop’s seat. There had been bad blood between Alexandria and Constantinople for a long time. It went back to the time that the first patriarch of Constantinople, Eusebius, had managed the exile of his Alexandrian colleague, Athanasius.29

Ever since Constantinople became the capital of the empire, each of the three major cities tried their best to influence each new succession of a bishop by proposing their own like-minded favorite, usually without success.30 These attempts clouded relationships. Alexandria was especially frustrated because its glory as the cultural and economic center of the East was gradually overshadowed by the power of the imperial capital. Moreover, while the schools of Alexandria and Antioch were diametrically opposed to each other, it was Antioch that seemed to be more successful in gaining influence in Constantinople.

Thus Cyril had his reasons to take hold of this new opportunity to trip up Nestorius. Yet that was not his only, or even his essential reason for contributing to the conflict. While his letters to and about Nestorius31 are certainly not friendly, back then it was not unusual to inveigh insults more acerbically in public than is appropriate in our day. Cyril’s behavior at the Synod of Ephese in the year 431, where he deftly manipulated decisions when the Antiochene delegation was delayed, gives an impression of him as more of a field marshal than a bishop who admonishes his brethren about a presumed doctrinal error.32 The history of this conflict is no different from so many other church conflicts: often the interests of power and truly spiritual intuitions are forever mixed. We do injustice to those involved if we reduce their participation to merely the first of those factors. Especially in theology, we must focus on the theological motives, even if they are

29. Hughes 1961:25f; Seeberg 1923:89. For more details of the conflicts between Eusebius and Athanasius see Athanasius, Historia Arianorum ad monachos.
30. Besides the attempts of the Arians in 335 to replace Athanasius with one of their own, the fact that the attempts of Alexandria to place their candidates in Antioch in 381, and in Constantinople in 397 were unsuccessful caused much irritation and frustration. (see Hughes 1961:32-33).
31. The exchange of letters between Cyril and Nestorius is found in MPG 77:9-60. Compare UC: Quod unus sit Christus, MPG 75:1257: Nestorius is ‘the brand new dragon ….with a tongue swollen with poison.’
32. Hughes: 1961: 37-48. For the speeches and addresses of the council, see ACO 1,2: 3-64.
not considered apart from power games. For such power games need their own further analyses, just as the role of theological pronouncements do.

The theology of Cyril is expressed in his thesis ‘that Christ is one,’ the title of his most important book. Cyril does not want to speak about Christ as a human person connected with the divine Logos through love. For, when stated that way, the certainty of redemption in this relationship would depend upon this love, and thus from one side completely depend on the human partner. True redemption is only achieved if Godself becomes human, not by accepting one individual human person, but by truly taking on humanity itself. All that is human has to be assumed by God. That which is not assumed is not saved. One sole individual can only keep his or her own relationship with God in good standing. Thus, only in as much as God has taken on full humanity can this humanity itself be redeemed, including death, guilt and human suffering.

Therefore, it is only when God takes all of this upon Godself, that all receive eternal life, forgiveness and an unbroken existence. It is precisely because God assumes our human existence that can one say that Godself was born of Mary. That is why she is theotokos. To deny that designation denies that God truly takes on our existence as brought into existence through birth.

Cyril’s main point is, that it is Godself who is present in Christ (because only God can save us) and that God is completely at one with human existence (‘because what is not assumed is not saved’). Salvation is therefore not a moral doctrine, grounded in the love of the human Jesus and the Logos united with him. It is a physical doctrine of salvation, grounded in God’s unity with us as it originates in the love of God who took on human flesh for our salvation. It is the love of God who wants to take part in our human existence, even if that existence is not completely oriented to God in love because it lapsed in guilt and has no life in and of itself.

33. UC, MPG 75: 1254-1362.
34. ‘Because of relation, excellence of life and will’ (Denz. 250) or ‘through the worthiness, authority and power’ granted by God to the human person. (Denz. 254).
35. Denz. 253, 263.
36. Denz. 251, 252. The term did not originate in the fifth century, but is used in a work, ascribed to Hippolytus, about the completion of the world (CM I), and according to MPG 10: 905 used by Origen, Methodius and Dyonisius Alexandrinus, and later by Athanasius (CA III, 29).
Cyril was far less optimistic about humanity than Nestorius. He knew his people. He knew the decadence of the rich in Alexandria and he knew the hopelessness and frustration of the common masses in the slums. Humanity doesn’t add up to all that much, and it won’t get better any time soon. Cyril knew more about evil than Nestorius. Within himself he knew something of evil. The way in which Cyril acted in Ephese, during the council mentioned above, was not unlike the behavior of Demetrius, when Paul first proclaimed the gospel in that city.\textsuperscript{37} In Paul’s day, Artemis was very near to the hearts of the Ephesians. When Paul proclaimed the Christian faith, the wealthy exploiters of local religion felt threatened and mobilized the crowds. For two hours the rallying cry was: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.’ It was no coincidence that the council, that had to settle the question about whether Mary was ‘mother of God,’ convened in this very city. And when the council reached a favorable decision (before the Antiochene opponents had arrived), the crowds went wild. Nightly processions were held as on the holy feastdays of Artemis. Indeed, Cyril knew of evil within himself. He knew what humans were capable of. He was convinced that true redemption was possible only if Godself took on this human existence. Therefore, he put his signature with full conviction under the curious decision of the council of Ephese to dethrone Nestorius: ‘Our Lord Jesus, slandered by him, decrees through those present at this most holy synod that Nestorius is relieved of his worthiness as bishop and any and all priestly gatherings.’\textsuperscript{38}

This conviction about humanity was not merely rooted in experiences and self-knowledge by Cyril. Ultimately it was grounded in an anthropology that strongly accentuated the finiteness of mortals. A human is not an eternal spirit occupying a body for some length of time, but a finite being. Death befalls humans. This limitation shows itself in many ways. Humans can not do everything. Humans cannot know everything. Humans have moral limits as well. They are not able to completely do good. And yet, that is what God commands. Therefore humans are always guilty, taken in by sin. A human way of being is an existence in sin and death. No one can escape. It is only God who can save them from their existence by sharing their fate. Because then it is no longer the fate of finite humans, but of the im-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Acts 19:21-40.
\item \textsuperscript{38} ACO 1,2:54f.
\end{itemize}
mortal God who clothes the transitory with divine intrinsioriness, even as God inhabited transitory flesh.\textsuperscript{39}

Behind all of this lies a very different philosophical point of view than the Antiochenes held. Unlike the Antiochenes, the Alexandrians of the fourth and fifth century begin with the real and concrete around them as they find it, and not with abstract ideas about what they encounter, not even when it comes to God. They do not first posit a well-reasoned definition of ‘God’ or even of ‘human in order to guide their thoughts about such realities. In that case, they felt and thought, an infinite God could never become a finite human. Instead, they begin with concrete reality as they find it, both in anthropology and christology.

This is most clearly demonstrated in their use of the concept of ‘nature’ (\textit{phasis}). The Antiochenes are very precise in circumscribing this concept. ‘Nature’ is the very essence of something, its essential quality or substance, carefully defined. Thus a divine nature is quite different from human nature, a distinction they do not blur. Hence Nestorius’ thesis, that one cannot say that God is born, only that Christ is born, in whom the eternal and divine Logos is bound to a human person.

Cyril does not begin by defining the concept of ‘nature’ as thoroughly. He begins by speaking of the specific and concrete Jesus Christ of Scripture. That is one person.\textsuperscript{40} He writes, ‘we do not divide the words of our Lord, as written in the gospels, in two hypostases or persons, because the one and only Christ is not binary.’\textsuperscript{41} For Cyril this means that Christ is thus one ‘nature’.\textsuperscript{42} This person carries the divine and the human in one being. Therefore, this person is ‘the one

\textsuperscript{39} MPG 77:232; \textit{UC}, MPG 75:1261. The metaphor of clothing is often used for the incarnation. Athanasius used it (\textit{CA} I,42-43; II, 7-9; \textit{DN} 3,12), as well as Augustine (\textit{FS} 6; \textit{Trin. IV},3,6). It is even older (Tertullian, \textit{AP} 27). Luther uses it (\textit{TR,WA} 6:66, no. 6599) as well as Calvin (\textit{Inst. II},12,3).

This metaphor does not mean to suggest that being human is something added on. On the contrary, the theologians who use the figure of speech are precisely those who emphasize unity, just as they do when they apply the metaphor to the unity of body and soul. (Tertullian, \textit{CC} 11).

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Mia hypostasis} (MPG 76: 93; 77:116).

\textsuperscript{41} MPG 77:116.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Mia physis} (\textit{UC}, MPG 75: 1289; 76: 1212); \textit{monē physis} (MPG 76: 93). This latter citation demonstrates that physis and hypostasis are interchangeable for Cyril, holding fast to this Athanasian notion even after the year 362 (also see footnote 118 in section 3.2 of this chapter).
incarnate nature of the Word itself. For the Antiochenes such a pronouncement was an abomination. Of course, Cyril is not saying that the divinity and the humanity are totally interchangeable. Consequently, he can speak about the two natures of Christ because ‘flesh is flesh and not God,’ yet he clearly does so without wanting to undermine the unity of the person of Christ.

Again, the Antiochenes always begin with the general, and thus the abstract, while the Alexandrians begin with the particular and the concrete. Thus the Antiochenes can think clearly and logically; yet they, like many enlightened people, are at times far removed from reality. On the other hand, the Alexandrians are close to real life and things, but have difficulty keeping crystal clear all of their philosophical notions. However, they don’t mind this consequence. They are concerned with a concrete doctrine of salvation, in which God takes on our human – our all too human – existence.

In fact, the Alexandrians dislike philosophy. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria from the year 328 to 373, even declared that philosophy should not be used in theology. His early work, ‘Concerning the Incarnation of the Word,’ still has a philosophical tone, but soon his oeuvre is marked by a constant appeal to Scripture, a hallmark of Alexandrian theology. Even earlier, Origen (leader of the Alexandrian school for catechumens from approximately the year 202 to around 230) was a biblical scholar before all else. For him using Scripture

43. MPG 76:60. See 76: 93 also: ‘the one incarnate hypostasis of the Word,’ and 77: 192f: ‘We believe that the nature of the Son is one, as of one who became human in the flesh.’

44. MPG 77:232. God is immortal; life itself, the human is mortal and subjected to suffering (MPG 77:113).

45. ‘The one... Christ is not twofold, even though he consists of two distinct manifestations of being, who are, however, united in an indivisible unity’ (MPG 77:116).

46. ‘We should not obey them [the Antiochenes with their philosophical conclusions], but keep to God inspired Scripture’ (Cyril, UC, MPG 75: 1292).

47. See especially CG 4 and 9: human reasoning is corrupted and gives rise to evil. Scripture is sufficient for truth (CG 1).

48. Berkhof 1949: 12 opposes the generally held view that this is an early work. The most important argument usually offered is that there is not a single reference to the Arian controversy. Given the fact that we find such references in every other writing, that argument still holds, I think. Athanasius doesn’t seem like the kind of man to stay silent on this subject, certainly not when the central theme is the incarnation. The counter argument of Berkhof is based on the deep maturity of the work. In my judgement that is not on target. The work does not excel in its mature views on life, but in sharp reasoning. It has the flavor of a final thesis of a brilliant graduate student. See Mei jering 1974: 104-113, especially 108.
was closely connected to allegory, although with Athanasius this feature has diminished and the text itself receives direct attention. Heresy lurks when philosophy gains primacy in theology, because philosophy is incapable of incorporating the folly of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God. "They only want to oppose the cross of Christ." If you want to use philosophy, do it only to refute philosophers with their own weapons, but not in order to make doctrine dependent on it. Accordingly, Athanasius wrote a booklet opposing Hellenistic pagans by exposing them to contradictions in their own philosophy.

Ultimately, however, theology can not lock out philosophy completely. In the year 362 Athanasius himself allowed an open door for academic lovers of wisdom. For others in the Alexandrian school that went too far. For instance, Marcellus of Ancyra (about the year 280 to 374) opposed the phrase of the Nicene creed that Jesus is ‘of one substance’ (homoousios) with the Father, on grounds that this terminology does not appear in the bible. Yet Cyril uses philosophical terms such as physis (‘nature’), hupostasis (‘hypostasis,’ or ‘person’), ousia (‘being, or ‘substance’) without restriction. Even so, he always interprets these terms in his own way in order to protect the primacy of the concrete and immediate.

The contrasts between the Antiochene and Alexandrian schools find their culmination in the conflict between Nestorius and Cyril. Nonetheless, the characteristics of these two movements are always present in the history of the church. The one movement is more ‘enlightened’ (to use an anachronism) and optimistic about human possibili-

49. Seeberg 1923:57, and 1920: 504-508 ascribes the allegories of Origen to philosophical speculations. That is not correct, I think. Origen assumed that every text and every verse had to have meaning as Word of God. With a purely literal approach (and for him it was exactly that) the meaning can not always be found, which drives one to consider spiritual meanings. Origen saw that as a plus, because it is impossible to forget that the bible is not a history or physics book, but a religious book. The manner in which he then provides a religious interpretation is of course steeped in his own context. But it is absolutely incorrect to posit that for Origen Platonism is more important than Scripture. See Van de Beek 1998a: 243f.

50. CG 1.

51. In this manner Athanasius (IncV 41) refutes the thought that God cannot assume a body. Hellenistic philosophy itself teaches that God pervades the entire body of the cosmos. Why would it matter what size the body is, somewhat larger of smaller?

52. Athanasius, CG.


54. Seeberg 1923: 95f.
ties, and it attempts to theologize in a strictly rational manner. The other draws more from religious intuitions, is deeply aware of human insufficiency, and thus fully emphasizes God’s intervention on our behalf. It is the common church folk who usually serve as a counter-weight on the side of the latter, against the conceptual supremacy of the opponents. The ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth century consistently voted in favor of the second movement, albeit not without modifying nuances. Yet their decisions never silenced the intentions of the Antiochenses in the church. This is all the more reason to carefully analyze the motives of the physical doctrine of redemption championed by the Alexandrians (and their spiritual successors).

3. AT ONE WITH THE LOST

3.1 God became human

‘And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, ...God of God, Light of Light...who for us and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate...and was made man...’

This sentence of the Nicene Creed offers the core of the Christian doctrine of God. God came unto us ‘for us and our salvation,’ because people are in need of salvation. We are so thoroughly lost, that we cannot save ourselves. We are incapable of properly knowing God, let alone love God with all our heart and our mind and our strength. We are subjected to the bondage of decay or curse of the law, says Athanasius, the most fervent defender of the above-cited phrase of the Nicaeum. And this bondage is not accidental, but is established from the beginning, even from before we existed.

55. A characteristic example from the Middle Ages is the contrast between, on the one hand the theology of Abelard, who stresses God’s love in Christ that inspires us to love him and one another, and on the other hand the theology of Anselm, who totally emphasizes the sacrifice of Christ in our stead (‘You have not yet fully considered the measure of the weight of sin’; CDH I,21). This different theological approach culminates in a personal confrontation between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux, outstripping the strife between Nestorius and Cyril, a conflict determined by ratioecination, religion and power.

56. Denz. 125.

57. CA II, 14. See also I,51.

58. CA II,14. Because a creature is finite, it cannot be perfect. Thus not only humans, but angels are fallen as well (CA I,49).
Therefore, knowledge of God is always paired with knowledge of salvation. The revelation of God would be unbearable if God did not meet us as Savior. The task to truly know God, and the call and will of God for obedience until the end, would be too heavy if Godself did not bear that lost human existence.  

Therefore, it is not sufficient if God were to inspire us by an inspired human being. Again and again, God tried that approach by sending prophets; it was of no help. The state of the world did not improve, in spite of their holiness and unsparing dedication. Humankind isn't much thus far, and won't improve any time soon.

The theology of the Antiochenes is much too optimistic for my taste. It begins with the principle of an ideal God and ideal human beings. They underestimate the depth of the swamp in which we have sunk, and the stink of it. And the more people try to rise up out of it, the worse it gets, because they can only rise at the expense of others. We cannot lift ourselves up on our own bootstraps out of the bog. Moreover, the transcendence of the Antiochene God is such that God's metaphorical hands cannot get dirty in the muck, even if God desired otherwise.

I probably am not too optimistic because, just as Cyril, I know of something of evil in myself. Athanasius, too, was convinced that even the most pious saints could not detach themselves from all evil. He had deep respect for Antonius, the desert hermit and wrote his biography. None-the-less, this pious monk was plagued by sensual visions in the desert.

This is why Athanasius insists that God did not come to morally improve the world but to bear it. Humanity is sick unto death, but Godself desires to bear those illnesses and injustices. Thus God bears our very selves and partakes of our existence in its brokenness. God bears the entire humanity and all that it entails. God is the greatest of sinners, Luther says, in the typical paradoxical manner that marks

61. Athanasius, *VA*.
63. *CA* III, 31, referring to Isaiah 53. Humanity will ultimately improve, Athanasius says, but in the *theopoieis*is, the divinization, we receive because the Living One bore our death (1,38-39). Thus, 'improvement' is an eschatological concept within resurrection (1, 43).
his style.

In that paradox the faithful recognize each other through the centuries. God’s hands are human hands of flesh and blood that touch the leper; hands that are pierced by spikes when crucified. Origen says: ‘The weakness of mortal understanding is not able to feel and grasp that one ought to believe that all the power of divine majesty, the Word of the Father and the Wisdom of Godself, in Whom all things visible and invisible were created, existed within the confines of the man who appeared in Judea; yes, the Wisdom of God entered the womb of a woman and was born as a child and screamed with the cries of little children ... and was grieved unto death, ... and finally was put to death ... When you think “this is God,” you see a mortal; when you “think it is a mortal”, you meet God returning from death with bounty after having been victorious over the realm of death ... To be able to proclaim this to human ears and to explain it in words far exceeds the power of our merit, cleverness or language. I think that it even exceeds the power of the holy apostles; yes, the explanation of this mystery will most likely exceed the understanding of the entire creation of heavenly powers.’

Athanasius wrote extensively and lived a long and active life as a theologian. However, from beginning to end, he takes notice of one crucial theme; namely, that God partakes of our life and thereby saves us. This is the official ecumenical doctrine of the church since the council of Nicea. Likewise, all the great Church Fathers of the first centuries and the Reformation taught and believed the same. However, often little credence is given to the paradoxical quality of the confession. This deserves a broader treatment.

65. Origen, Princ. II,6,2. See also Irenaeus (AH III,19,2, in a summary of all what the prophets forthtold and what was fulfilled in Jesus): ‘He was a human without magnificence and open to suffering; he rode on a foal of a donkey; he received vinegar and bitters as drink; he was despised among the people and humbled himself unto death; and all that while he is the Holy Lord, the Wonderful Counselor, glories in appearance and the Mighty God, coming on the clouds to judge all people.’ ‘He embodied humanity within him; he who is invisible became visible; he who cannot be comprehended, could be understood; he who can not suffer, allowed himself to be wounded, and the Word became a human being’ (AH III,16,6).

The paradox of the incarnation is an important theme in the early church. In addition to writings mentioned, see also Polycarp (especially his letter to the Philippians, chapter 7 and 8) and Irenaeus, AH III,19,3f.

Luther has a similar paradoxical theology. In the twentieth century, Moltmann (1972) approaches this concentration on the paradox of God as acknowledged in the Crucified.
The quality of paradox translates into an exchange when it concerns the doctrine of salvation. In Christ, God took our place in order that we may partake of God’s glory. ‘For we should know this as Christians: if God were not in the balance and provided weight, we would sink on our scale. This is what I mean: if it would be said that not God died for us, but merely a human, then we would be lost; but if God’s death and the dead God lie on the scales, then that scale sinks and we are raised as if it were a light and empty scale.’ This exchange takes place through the concrete history of Christ during his life. ‘There Christ was bound, in order that we would be unbound; deserted by God, in order that we would never ever be left without God.’

For this exchange to be meaningful, God must truly partake of our humanity. Tertullian, the early Christian author who died in about the year 223, describes how Jesus grew like any other fetus. ‘From that birth he came forth: the foulness in the womb of the reproductive organs, the dirty clods of liquids and blood; the growth of flesh among this drab for nine months; ... the womb as it grows from day to day, painfully, restless even in sleep, fluctuating in feelings of discomfort and desire; ... a woman in labor.’ Jesus grew up as a normal child and not as a superchill.

Christ’s participation in our real existence causes his suffering and limitations to be emphasized. ‘He is judged, scourged, suffered thirst, the cross and death, and the other bodily weaknesses. No human dimension can be exempted, because that dimension would then be without redemption. ‘He must, like us humans, become human in

66. For example: Athanasius, Easter letter 14 (342; MPG 26:1421): ‘For although he was life itself, he died to give us life; and although he was Word, he came in the flesh in order that the Word would teach the flesh; and although he was the well of life, he suffered our thirst.’ Also, Augustine, CR 22.

67. Luther, Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, WA 50: 590.

68. A classical Reformed Formulary for the Lord’s Supper. This text by Petrus Datheenus shows the Reformed and Lutherans were not as far removed from each other that in the sixteenth century on this and other issues as is often posited.

69. Irenaeus AH III, 18.6 emphasizes that the suffering is for real and not an illusion. Our suffering is not more real than his suffering.

70. CC 4. Compare Luther (TR WA 5:623, no. 6364), who also says as well that the annunciation is the true incarnation (TR, WA 4:310, no. 4433).

71. Luther (TR, WA 5:93, no. 5360) talks about Jesus as the carpenter’s apprentice. That is for many more problematic than the crucified man, because they are used to that truth about God.

72. Athanasius, CA III,32.
order to be able to say: God has died, God’s martyrdom, God’s blood, God’s death.  

Conversely, this also means that, if we share in God’s glory because God shares in our existence, it must have been truly God’s own human existence, God’s own flesh, and no one else’s. This existence in the flesh is God’s own existence. It is God’s flesh that suffered. God’s divinity does not mean that God’s suffering is not for real. The gospels tell us that Jesus remained silent during the hearing by the Jewish council. Often this is explained as the authoritative silence of a man who needs say nothing, who has the situation fully in hand. But Tertullian has a completely different view of this scene. When people spit in Jesus’ face, they do it, he says, because his face invites them to do it. You intuitively do not spit in the face of someone with authority, but only of someone whose posture allows it. For instance, a weakening who deserves it. Godself is in our midst, precisely in this manner.

Per definition, this paradox can not be explained. It is all or nothing. One can only proclaim this gospel and repeat it. But it does not follow that it is therefore nonsense. When we can not understand something it does not imply that we are not able to know about it. There is much that I do not understand that is very real to me none-the-less. That is especially true for love. Comprehension implies the ability to explain. Yet precisely the highest and deepest dimensions of life we cannot explain. Reasoning provides no avenue. That dimension simply is; it posits itself. The presence of God in Christ is like that. God is present, without our being able to definitively deduce why it must be so. For Godself is in last analysis the revelation in Christ. Reality has its own foundation here.

This does not mean that we cannot search for understanding at least something of the mystery, or that we should not attempt to give voice to what we do understand. Indeed, the faithful have tried to do

73. Luther, *Von den Konzilien und Kirchen*, WA 50: 590. Compare also Tertullian, *CC* 5, in a fiery address against Marcion: ‘Answer me, you murderer of truth: Was God not truly crucified? And did he not truly die just as he was truly crucified? And is he not truly raised just as he truly died?’

74. Tertullian, *CC* 18. Regarding the unity of Christ, see also Irenaeus, *AH* III,17,4.

75. *CC* 9: They would not have dared to spit him in the face ‘nisi merentem’ [if he would not have merited it]. See also Dahl 1974: 163 arguing that Jesus’ silence is ambivalent at best.

76. Justin Martyr, *Tryph*. 48: ‘It seems to me not only a paradox but nonsense’ (a view argued against by Justin, of course). See also Athanasius, *CG* 1.

77. Irenaeus, *AH* IV,20,6.
that, again and again. Their explanations do not support or originate the paradox, but they explicate the meaning of what is believed.

Irenaeus begins with the principle that the human race is lost. That disorientation, forlornness and and separation from God is fundamental; from it follows that a finite human being will never be able to restore or heal this sinful state of humanity. What is needed for salvation is a recreation of human beings. God could have done this by creating an entirely new humanity, beginning anew with another Adam – Jesus, for instance. But then it would not be the salvation of the present humanity. It would be a different humanity, one that would leave us bereft of salvation. That scenario is not worthy of a God who promised not to let go of what was begun. Instead, God provided a new Head in whom the entire old humanity was comprehended and recapitulated (recapitulatio). Obviously, this cannot be a human individual. To re-create humanity is the prerogative of the Creator, who can circumscribe all of human existence as something that is properly very much God’s own. Thus, without the incarnation of the Word, by and through which God created the world, there would be no salvation. Re-creation of our forlorn existence is a divine and not a human work. And for that reason God became truly human and suffered. Otherwise God would not have done a great thing unto us. It is Christ crucified who is our Creator who redeems us.

Athanasius, more than Irenaeus, emphasizes the mortality of humans. Mortality is for him not only about the end of our lives, but encompasses the total finitude of all aspects of human life. It is only the imperishable God who has intrinsic eternal life. Because God now

78. *AH* III,18,1.
79. *AH* III,21,10.
80. *AH* III,21,10. ‘Why did God not take some new humus, but created the second Adam from Mary? It was in order to make not another creation or save another creation, but that the very same humanity would be encompassed, maintaining equity.’ The concept of recapitulatio recurs frequently in Irenaeus’ work (for example: *AH* III,18,1; III,18,7; III,22,2; III 23,1; V,14,2; V,20,2; V,21,1f.).
81. Irenaeus (*AH* V,2,1) and Tertullian (CC 4) emphasize in their objections to Marcion’s ‘foreign God’ that God came unto God’s own creation. God is no intruder who burglarizes another’s possessions.
82. *AH* III,18,6f. Compare Athanasius, Easter letter 11 (339; MPG 26:1411): ‘If he were a creature, death would have swallowed him forever. But because he was not absorbed, according to the witness of Scripture, it follows that he is not a creature but the Lord of creatures.’
83. *AH* III,22,1.
84. *AH* V,18,3.
participates in our life, our life participates in God. Immortality participates in mortal existence and thus grants immortality to mortality.\textsuperscript{85}

For Athanasius everything revolves around immortality.\textsuperscript{86} We receive this gift through Christ. Therefore, Easter receives a particular accentuation. Easter is the heart of the life of the church in Egypt. The patriarch of Alexandria sent a letter to the world-wide church to inform everyone of the determined date of the feastday\textsuperscript{87}, and to offer a meditation concerning the feast, ever since the council in Nicea.\textsuperscript{88} We might have expected that the accent would be on the new life that has dawned with the resurrection of Christ. This is not the case, however. The full emphasis is on Jesus' dying. In almost every letter Paul's text is cited: 'Our Passover lamb was slain for us.'\textsuperscript{89} It is not about the feast itself, but about the person who was slain.\textsuperscript{90} It is his death that we remember. We call Easter a feast because it celebrates the death of Christ: 'we celebrate his death with joy.'\textsuperscript{91} For God offers Godself in death in order to let us partake of God's life.\textsuperscript{92}

As a theology of immortality, the accent of theology is placed entirely on the death of Christ. Our hope lies in the deep nadir of his suffering. We shall live with him because we on earth shall be crucified with him.\textsuperscript{93} Contrary to the idea that everything in the early church hinges on Easter as feast of the resurrection, Athanasius tells us that Christ's death is the most important piece of our faith.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{85} CA II,16.
\textsuperscript{86} The name 'Athanasius' itself literally means 'immortal.'
\textsuperscript{87} This council decided that the patriarch of Alexandria would determine the date. However, the authenticity of the text of the canon in question is contested (Heidele 1907: 467).
\textsuperscript{88} The letters can be found in MPG 26: 1339-1430.
\textsuperscript{89} I Cor. 5:7.
\textsuperscript{90} Letter 3 (331) MPG 26: 1372.
\textsuperscript{91} Letter 20 (348; MPG 26: 1431). See also Letter 13 (341; MPG 26: 1418).
\textsuperscript{92} See especially Letter 14 (342; MPG 26:1419-1422). It is noteworthy that the call to remember the death of Christ is connected to the call of self-examination in a similar manner as in the Reformed tradition. The praxis of confession in the Western church stylized this self-examination: in any case one had most certainly go to confession prior to Easter.
\textsuperscript{93} Letter 5 (333; MPG 26: 1381). Compare Irenaeus (fragments XI, MPG 7: 1234): 'The task of the Christian is no other than to consider death.' Also, Luther (TR, WA 6:711, no. 6603) and Calvin (Inst. II,15,4) say that to conform to the image of Christ consists in equal to suffering.
\textsuperscript{94} IneV 19.
God is the crucified God. God is not a God who is enthroned in highest glory and undying light, but a God who feels the pain of this world. God is not a God without empathy or a God who punishes because we do not meet his standards. God is a God who knows in the biblical sense of the word: intimately, from within and from experience and exposure to the suffering and brokeness of people.

In this way, the Alexandrian theology becomes a theology for people who have nothing to loose. It is a theology for people whose entire life is one long Good Friday. It is the theology of people who have lost every illusion that tomorrow will be a better day. It is the theology of the masses in the Nile delta, the back streets of Ephese and the slums of Constantinople. It is the theology of those who will never be the subject of their own history in Rio de Janeiro, in Bangkok and Shanghai. It is the theology that says that God is not too proud to associate with the dirty street boys in the subway of Bucharest, their abused fellow-sufferers in Manila and the girls who are abused for ‘fun.’ People rebuked Jesus for eating with sinners and tax collectors. Yet precisely that is the God of this world.

When God is linked with those who suffer to this extent, we have to ask whether we yet once again place a human stipulation upon our relationship with God, albeit not a condition of success, piety or holiness but the requirement of poverty, economic injustice or a dead-end existence. We should not dismiss the question too quickly. For God is the God who puts things right, indeed. The Magnificat is crystal clear: ‘He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.’ And in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, Jesus himself says: ‘During your life time you received good things and Lazarus, in like manner, evil things; but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.’ God is eyeing the lost in his saving acts, and not those who are not in need of salvation. Since God chose to be revealed as Savior, God clearly aims at the lost. That’s too bad for the rich, but

95. Athanasius (C4 1,61) stresses the unity to the extent that he says that not only does the Son sit at the right hand of the Father, but the Father on the right hand of the Son as well. Thus the Father receives glory from the Son as well. And not only the eternal Son, but especially the incarnate Son.
it is the reality of the true God who is not conjured up by us, but who has appeared to us.

We should be wary to apply 'being lost' to material values or emancipation only. A typical Western prejudice would then determine theology. That was, and still is, the Achilles heel of the traditional liberation theologies. They were in fact fixated on the material well being and emancipation of the West. It was seen as the highest good – and still is by many. Without recourse, one is thereby delivered to western ideology. Arguably, a theology of progress denies the intrinsic worth of other cultures and traditions.

Moreover, this approach does not allow for the kind of poverty that exists in the midst of material prosperity and emancipated freedom. People can be very wealthy and yet deeply unhappy. Moltmann has shown that the vicious circle of poverty is rooted in the vicious circle of meaninglessness and godforsakenness. Yet Moltmann remains within the realm of poverty and exploitation. Clearly, the vicious circles in which people are trapped are many and varied. Christ saves people not only from poverty and exploitation but also from vicious circles of psychic neuroses. He knows their need and carries their burden. The tax collectors of the gospels were not the poor but precisely the wealthy exploiters. The prostitutes were not slave women but the rich girlfriends of the wealthy.

The forlornness and alienation of people reaches deeper. It is also related to guilt. In my view it is there that the deepest and most basic truth of human existence lies. This is not because Western theologies put it that way, but rather the reverse is true. Western theologies (and also Greek and Egyptian church fathers) speak in that manner because it is the reality of life. Guilt is the wicked power that crushes the lives of people the most. Because of this, guilt's sharp angle stings the most in grief. Because of this, people seek to escape in diversions.

101. The woman who anointed Jesus' feet had enough money to pay expensive nard (Luke 7:37).
102. Even when the focus is on immortality, the background does not lose sight that humans have lost the entrance to eternal life through sin. Precisely the idea of free will prevents us from thinking that mortality is a fate without a way out. Humans have closed that entrance by their disobedience. This way of thinking about free will is very prominent in Origen, and is related to the human responsibility. To him, eternal life is a matter of merit of human acts; conversely, mortality is the consequence of a lack of moral goodness.
Pascal said that people seek diversion because otherwise they would be swamped in their existence.\footnote{Pascal, \textit{Pensées} (1997): 155-162.}

The kernel of our forlornness is not that we did one thing wrong or another, but it is at core our existence itself that is without proper orientation. Our greatest problem is not that we commit sins. If it were, we could make distinctions between greater and lesser sin. Quantitatively we can distinguish between the sinfulness of humans, but there is no difference qualitatively. All are sinners and fall short of the glory of God.\footnote{Rom. 3:23.} Our biggest problem is that we \textit{are} sinners.

Human existence is perverted. It is that very existence that God wants to partake in. God participates in our bondage and allows God's own execution. He is one of us in order to give us life. The crucified God is our hope. Why then, does not everyone follow this God wholeheartedly? It is not only because of the foolish paradox of the suffering God. It is also because it is difficult to surrender your life.\footnote{Augustine reproves the Neo-Platonists that they object to the humility of God and therefore reject Christ (\textit{Trin. X,29}).} Is difficult to admit or even recognize that you are lost. We want to maintain our status, state and stance with all our might. The higher status we have, the more means and need we have to maintain it, and the more we are attached to it. Thus a rich man or woman finds it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God.\footnote{Mark 10:23.} In order to heed the liberating message of the incarnate Word of God, we must first become aware of our forlornness and disorientation. Yet what is impossible for human beings is possible for God. Athanasius himself is an example of that truth. The patriarch of Alexandria was fabulously wealthy.\footnote{Hughes 1961: 34.} He could have led a very comfortable life. He preferred however, to live among the hermits in the desert. He did not hesitate to risk being banned to the end of the world, even to the opposite border of the Roman Empire, in Trier (present day Germany). Countless times he had to flee from his episcopal palace where he ruled as a pharaoh. All because he did not want to move an inch from his confession that only Godself in human form can redeem human existence. He would probably have even rejected these actions and events of his life as suggestive of a good example, and would instead point to God who raises the \textit{dead}. 

104. Rom. 3:23.
105. Augustine reproves the Neo-Platonists that they object to the humility of God and therefore reject Christ (\textit{Trin. X,29}).
Christ is truly God. It is the confession of orthodox faith. It therefore sounds good to use it, as well as the confession that all people are sinners. Yet as soon as we make ourselves dependent on our orthodoxy, we are impoverished in the same manner as those who follow material wealth. Orthodoxy itself recognizes this, and this recurring feedback reinforces the faith. However, the confession of the crucified God is the kind of story that unsettles you again and again, and you do not know what to do with it. It is not something you loudly proclaim, or pronounce confidently from a pulpit. It is more suited for a theology in pianissimo. Note that musical purity is most crucial precisely when it is played pianissimo.

3.2 No God above God

On an ancient wall in Rome a sketch of an ass on a cross is drawn. ‘Alexamenos worships his god,’¹⁰⁸ the inscription says. It is not known for sure whether the caricature is targeted at a Christian,¹⁰⁹ but nevertheless, it does indicate how some looked upon the Christians. Their God was no god. Only an ass would let himself be executed; no normal person would even allow such a thing willingly, only a stupid person. People who worship this God are just like their God. The graffiti illustrates what Paul writes about the cross as foolishness to the world.¹¹⁰

It is not surprising that among the Christians themselves attempts were made to diminish the affront, not only for the sake of others but for their own. Apologetics of the Christian faith usually serve to appease one’s own disquieted heart and especially one’s own fitful mind.

Nicea accepted the formulation that the Son was homoousios (of the same ousia, being or substance) with the Father. It was not the phrase most bishops preferred. They all had different ideas. But it was the one all could agree to with varying degrees of resistance. Only two bishops of the Arian party found the formulation too extreme and refused to ascribe to it.¹¹¹

The biggest problem with this formulation was that the same phrase had been in use earlier, and had been rejected subsequently.

¹¹⁰. 1 Cor. 1:20-25.
Paul of Samosata had said, in the sixties of the third century, that the Logos was of the same substance as the Father. Since the Logos belonged to the substance of the Father, the Logos could not be its own person. Therefore, it had to be a divine power that inspired Jesus. That was not nearly good enough for the Alexandrians and their bishop Alexander (of the same inclination as Athanasius). They insisted on a personal presence of God in Christ. As it turned out, at this synod in Nicea the concept of _homoousios_ was given a different denotation. It was now interpreted as an identity of the incarnate Logos as person after all, with the _ousia_ of the Father. Alexander and Athanasius could live with that formulation in spite of the former odious connotations of the term. As long as _homoousios_ was interpreted in a personal way, Athanasius could accept it, and in fact defended it vigorously along these lines.

This put the finger on a sore spot for those who sympathized wholly or even half-heartedly with the Arians. In one sense they could go along with the personal emphasis. It was not a problem for them to see Christ as a separate person. However, in that case the equality with the substance of the Father became problematic: how to preserve a difference between Christ and God?

The morning after the synod of Nicea, Eusebius of Caesarea and a few others rescinded their signatures. The anger of Athanasius is still palpable when he writes in defense of the Nicene decision, many years later. This is quite understandable in light of all that transpired since that time. From the very beginning, the party of Eusebius (first bishop of Nicomedia and later Constantinople) sought to weaken the Nicene confessional statement. At the peak of their influence they succeeded in banning Athanasius and place an Antiochene counterpart in that see. When he finally returned, they forced him to flee again, several times. The most extreme voices baldly stated that Christ is _anho-moios_, not equal with the Father. A more careful formulation was _homoios kat'ousian_, equal to the Father in being. Even further went the formulation _homoiousios_, of a substance equal with the Father.

113. _DN_ II,2. The Arians are fickle according to Athanasius. They seek forever changing formulations only to hide that they oppose the central notion: that Christ is of the same substance with the Father (_DN_ II,7).
114. Athanasius describes this extensively in his _History of the Arians (HA)._ 
115. Seeberg 1923: 106.
117. Seeberg 1923: 103.
Controversies within the church cooled down considerably when a new emperor arrived in Constantinople. He publicly returned to paganism and became known as Julian the Apostate. At the synod of Alexandria in 362, delegates agreed to the formulation of Nicea and maintained *homoousios*. However, it could be understood in terms of *homoiousios*: the substance of being was not the same as the Father, but equal. The problem of ambiguity of the word *homoousia* is the same in some other languages: ‘being human’ is not quite the same as ‘human being.’ Athanasius took *homoousia* to mean ‘a living human being,’ referring to an individual. The Antiochene used it to refer to ‘being human’: denoting that which all people have in common. Within the doctrine of God, Athanasius took it to mean ‘the divine being,’ the one God. Antiochenes referred to the divinity of God: that which makes this personal being God. For the sake of compromise, Athanasius agreed to the latter interpretation. It assumed a greater distance between Father and Son, but did mean that the Son was equally divine as the Father. This also satisfied the Antiochene desire to make clear distinctions and to remove the confusion about two persons who were of the same substance.\(^{118}\)

All this did not settle the battle, because as soon as a Christian emperor returned, Arianism resurfaced again as the favorite view among the elite of the capitol. Valens (365-378) was very much a radical Arian. In the year 380, when Theodosius became emperor in Constantinople, a measure of calm finally set in, both in the church and in government. The emperor certainly prized the latter.

In the year 381, the Synod of Constantinople ratified the decision of Nicea. Even so, the interpretation of the most influential theologians was consolidated in 362. The persons of the Tri-unity were made co-equal.

In this context, we should also say something about the theology of Marcellus of Ancyra,\(^{119}\) one of the most intriguing figures of the fourth century. As is usually the case with those who were tried for heresy and lost, we only have a few fragments of his writings, which complicates the understanding of his theology.

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118. For the terminology this meant that the equalization of *ousia* (substance of being) and *hypothesis* (person, appearance), until that time defended by Athanasius, was sacrificed (see Hefele 1907: 966f; Seeberg 1923: 117f). The ‘substance’ could now be understood as that which persons of equal nature had in common.

Marcellus taught that the Word of God came to us personally in the incarnation. He fully agreed with Athanasius in this, even though he opposed the term ‘homoousios.’ Marcellus added, however, that the incarnation would be undone in the eschaton and that only the eternal Logos of God would remain within the eternal being of God. The incarnation was for the sake of humankind and its salvation; the incarnation is no longer necessary as soon as the salvation is accomplished. The Trinity is therefore only an economic trinity and no ontological trinity. God is completely one in God’s being.

It looks like Marcellus wants to have it both ways: a real soteriology as well as the philosophical ideas of God as the One Being. It is intriguing that Marcellus had an aversion to philosophy. Instead, his arguments are grounded biblically. Marcellus is more to the right of Athanasius than to his left. In fact, Athanasius and Marcellus were such good friends that Athanasius never dropped him as friend even when Marcellus was repeatedly condemned. Reason for this loyalty – beside the friendship – was probably that Marcellus uncompromisingly defended the absolute unity of the Incarnate one and the Father. His condemnations took place when synods thought more along lines of homoousios, at a time when Athanasius still opposed that term vehemently (Constantinople in 336; Antioch in 341). Marcellus was a loyal ally in the struggle to resist any and all attempts to separate the Father from the Son, and thus, positively, in teaching only the incarnation of the true God. And since the latter was the focus of Athanasius’ attention, he approved of the core of his friend’s theology even though he had reservations about its other aspects.

It is questionable whether this judgement about the core of Marcellus’ theology was correct. In his opinion, Marcellus obscures the true nature of the problem. by dividing time in different eras. In the eschaton God will indeed be completely one. However, eschatologically we cannot speak about the category of time in this way. In the eschaton, time and transcendence coincide. We are faced with a reality of God that is beyond our grasp of reality. It is Marcellus’ intention to see God as fully one in the reality of eternity. For, even apart from earthly history, God is truly one being. It follows, that

120. Recently, Van Ruler (1947: 107; 1973:26) has voiced similar thoughts by positing that the reign of Christ will end. Central to him is 1 Cor. 15:28. For further exegesis, see footnote 86 in chapter II of this book, section 1.3.


122. Epiphanius, Haer. 72.4.
either God dwelt on earth temporarily, or the temporary manifestation was not a divine being. In the first case modalism,\(^{123}\) threatens, in which God is changeable and the independent existence of God as one being is not thinkable.\(^{124}\) In the second case, Christ would not be truly God, but less than divine. Either case does not take the incarnation completely seriously. In the first instance, it is but a fleeting moment in the changeable nature of God, to be forgotten in the eschaton as a concluded episode. In the second option, God in his deepest being is not sharing in our deepest humanity. The strength of the theology of Athanasius lies, however, precisely in maintaining that only the one and true God bears our fate. From eternity to eternity, this God is the God of grace. At root, Marcellus denies history as the earthly events and actions in which the very being of God is involved. Thereby one loses everything that is at stake in the struggle with the Arians. Ultimately, Marcellus proclaims a God different from the God who was born and suffered.

The synod of Constantinople explicitly rejected these thoughts of Marcellus. In the Nicene creed, the *symbolicum*, a sentence is included that says that ‘his Kingdom shall have no end.’\(^{125}\) The Son who is crucified and was raised and will come again to judge, is in eternity Godself. This agrees with Irenaeus’ thoughts about preexistence: God is the gracious God for all eternity, and as such the Son was destined to save the world.\(^{126}\) This can mean no less than a personal preexistence. If we only acknowledge the Son from his birth, we would deny that God eternally is precisely as revealed to us, namely as a God who dialogues, even within Godself. One should not diminish that truth by saying that the Word, the Son, or the Spirit are mere aspects of God’s emanations, or God’s instruments,\(^{127}\) or God’s intentions\(^{128}\). On the one hand it is too much: one cannot speak about God without Christ. On the other hand it is too little: one can not pretend that the real God is more abstract than the suffering human on Golgotha.

123. See section 4.1 of this chapter.
124. Compare Gregory of Nyssa, *CE* XII, MPG 45: 900, who notes that one cannot imagine the Father unemployed during salvation history. The Father and the Son are mutually engaged in salvation, precisely in their distinction. While the persons are distinguished, their acts in history always go together. This idea of *opera ad extra sunt indivisa* is a fixed concept in the classical ecumenical tradition.
125. Denz. 150.
126. *AH* III,21,3.
128. Berkhof 1973: 307 [ET 1979: 292] ‘God’s first and dominant thought in his plan of creation was Jesus the Son.’
3.3 Without sin

When we posit that in Jesus God bears our entire life, the question of sin arises. If God took part in our suffering, how are we to imagine that God did not also share in sin, since sin belongs so intrinsically to human existence? Isn’t the deepest ache of our life our very guilt and our struggle with the power of sin? I have to admit that I found this issue the most difficult one of all of Christology. The phrase, ‘yet without sin’¹²⁹, has bothered me for a long time.

It is an issue on which one finds little help in writings of others. Apparently, most accept the sinlessness of Jesus as a matter of course, without delving into the problem.¹³⁰ Even Luther, never afraid of paradox, maintains that Jesus is without sin,¹³¹ and does not bother to address what that means for myself as a sinner. I found the most extensive reflection on the topic in John Robinson’s work, wherein he makes a case that Jesus must have known the drive to sin and the tension of temptation.¹³² Indeed, his sinlessness would be meaningless otherwise. There is no merit in not sinning if one cannot sin ontologically.¹³³ But Robinson concludes that Jesus did not sin: ‘yet even when the crunch came, he did not fail.’¹³⁴ And that is precisely what I do not observe within myself. That pains me. Can Jesus really bear my life without bearing that pain? Doesn’t the fact that he did not fail make my guilt worse?

Can someone be truly human without this pain? In short: is not sin so quintessentially a part of being human that someone without sin is not really human?

¹²⁹. Hebr. 4:15.
¹³¹. TR, WA 1:219 (no. 494); 5: 94 (no. 5360); 5:623 (no. 6364). Sometimes it seems that Luther is quick to bring it to the fore whenever he emphasizes the regular life of Jesus (no. 5360).
¹³². Robinson 1973:96
¹³³. This thesis we find already in Tertullian (CC 16). Berkouwer (1952: 221-227) objects to the idea that the sinlessness of Jesus can be derived from his divine nature. Although not agreeing that it is impossible for Christ to sin ontologically just as a tree cannot sin, but because he relates it to a willful decision, Vogel (1949: 391) places the sinlessness entirely in the divinity of Christ (391). Worried about a liberal ethics (388-391) he does not make enough room for the uniqueness of the human will of God and ends up with a monothetical position.
Apollinaris of Laodicea (who died in the year 390) had most with this conundrum. Apollinaris acknowledged Godself came among us. The divine Logos assumed here Apollinaris (also of the Alexandrian school) agreed Athanasius. But then Apollinaris goes on to interpret ‘he a temple without soul, without reason and without will,’ the complete human existence with body and soul. Jesus human psyche, with its possibility to take initiative, its reflect, its wishing and thinking, its feeling and longing: is not human.’

He merely assumed a human body material finitude in order to be able to suffer.

This is clearly a clipped version of a human being; i no longer a human being but a body as instrument. Or think, desire, feel is very much essential for our existent choices is essential for human beings. It is as important human as our physicality. A human is not a blunt instru or a log.

If this openness is essential for human beings, it fol cannot be a necessity. If it were, the psyche would be just unintelligent computer. It would be completely prepro- ware, different in nature from hardware, but equally prec that does not square with my experience as a human bein do justice to the joy about the occasions that one does no man is not a sin automaton. It is not self-evident that we good and not self-evident that we do wrong. That is what shapes the deep dimension of being human and the cos guilt.

This is the way in which the Greek Church Fathers teach free will of human beings. In principle, the human choice. Even Augustine, in his heavy duty doctrine of pro- posits that Adam in the very beginning had a free will possibility not to sin. That possibility was lost only

136. Lietzmann 1904: 222, fr. 75: ‘ouk ara nous estin anthropopoipinos.’
137. This choice is precisely what Apollinaris denies, because it would sin (Lietzmann 1904: 243, Anacephalaeosis 9f.).
138. Irenaeus, AH IV,39,1: ‘How would [a human] possess any knowl good if he did not know what the opposite is?’
139. See Pannenberg 1972: 376f.
140. Irenaeus, AH IV,37,1.
141. CG XII,33.
sinned. The Greek and early Latin Fathers maintain that all descendants of Adam kept the freedom. They quickly add that condition such that the choice will always be wrong again. Adam, and we all humans are created as small children. They are not capable of carrying the responsibility of that freedom. The finiteness of our nature means that we are not able to do what is perfect. Thus Hippolytus writes: ‘the human being who was called into being a creature with the possibility to make decisions, but did not possess an adequate capacity for reason.’ And therefore the human race is wrong from the very beginning.

Two things are being said: on the one hand that living in a world and not fake freedom is fundamental for human existence. On the other hand that same freedom results in faulty decisions that one of which we are guilty. Tertullian, a master in pithy formulation, says ‘Sin is not material but natural.’ It is sinful flesh, but that is the same as sin of the flesh.

The difference with Christ lies in the latter: the natural state of the difference between the first and second Adam. The second Adam is the Lord from heaven who encompasses everything. The human can bear all things until the end. Therefore, Christ can resist temptation until the end.

For all of us, a moment arrives when we give up or give in. The stress becomes too great and we surrender in the fight. But Jesus perseveres. That does not diminish the temptation but enriches it. Luther writes about the temptation in Gethsemane that any of us would have gone insane if the full weight of responsibility for the whole of the world were set before him or her. Jesus can only stand because he is God. However, that makes it harder instead of easier. Endurance is much more difficult for a sick person who experiences everything with full consciousness than for a patient who slips in and out of coma. Jesus is God. He could have used his omniscience to run

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142. Irenaeus, AH IV,38,
143. Refut. X,33 More over Hippolytus in Chapter I,§ 6, 1.
144. Tertullian, CC 16: ‘Defendimus...non carnem peccati evacuam esse sed peccatum carnis; non materiam, sed naturam; non substantiam, sementem.’ See also Hippolytus, Refut. X,33: ‘Because he himself makes the decision, man being makes his own evil, as an accidens that does not reach the heart even if no real wrong deed is done.’ See also Irenaeus, AH V,14,3.
145. Origen has written exhaustively about this, Princ.II,6,3-5 and explicitly the sinlessness of Christ is not a matter of nature but a real choice. See ‘The mystery of Jesus’ (1997:402).
146. Sermon on Good Friday, 1522, WA 10,3:73f.
everything. Instead, he uses it to bear the full weight of scope and consequences.\textsuperscript{147}

This is what the text from Hebrews chapter 4 says: ‘For we have been tempted in everything just as we are, but without sinning. Then he will give in to the temptation to give up in order to remove the struggle. All other humans do, even if later it will bring the guilt.

Some may say that because of his perseverance, Jesus a pleasure of being victorious. That is concluded too quickly because as God he bears humanity infinitely, he bears it as follows. Jesus came to bear the guilt of the whole world to the end. He did not come to say, after having withstood the ‘Look, finally there is a good human being. See, it is possible makes for the difference between Robinson and Athanasis for Robinson a ‘mere human,’ a psilos anthropos.\textsuperscript{148} That him Jesus’ perseverance in trial and temptation takes on a on having completed perfection in this life. This makes him an example, giving rise to all sorts of consequences for those who are trying to follow his example.\textsuperscript{149} To be fair, though, Robinson portray Jesus as a human fulfillment of the Renaissance ide however, Athanasis says that the human existence of Jesus had intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{151} He did not come for his own sake but for others.\textsuperscript{152} He did not have to complete his life because it had end than bearing the forlornness of others. That was on because he needed no finality as God. When you have to your own life, you can no longer be fully available for. Thereby, the good you do comes under judgement of sin.

\textsuperscript{147} O’Neill 1995: 189f, says that God put aside his omniscience. This kenotic. He remains God and has recourse to all things. Yet he makes divine power in service of humankind.

\textsuperscript{148} Robinson 1973: 244.

\textsuperscript{149} Compare Vogel 1949:392: his ‘sinlessness. is not brought to light in position from sinners and the domain of the curse, the deathzone of sin!’ Sinless Jesus would be standing on the other side. However, the sin is takes forever of our life. The position of Vogel is a consequence of position of sin not in moral terms but instead as ‘the twofold distancing neighbor.’

\textsuperscript{150} Robinson 1973:70.

\textsuperscript{151} CA II,51-53 and especially 55: ‘He is not created for himself but for us.

\textsuperscript{152} CA II,55. Of course this applies only to the incarnation. If it were also eternal Logos only exists for our sake, he would be dependent on us, (CA II,30). This also refutes the notion that only an economic trinity is
to have sinned, he would at that very moment have become among all other limited human beings. It may seem that his sin would have given us some comfort (‘He also!’), but at the same time would not have been able to bear our temptation to the end. He would have acquired his own limited finality. Since Jesus bore sin itself as a final deed, but with a power transcending humans, he took with him to the grave. Thus Paul writes: ‘He who knew no sin made sin for us by God.’\textsuperscript{153} Jesus became sin itself: human existence not able to resist temptation. Jesus bore the underlying structure of sinful existence and therefore knows the depth of our existence more than I know myself, and Jesus loves me more than I, in my reproach or complaints about myself, could ever hate myself.

The question of sinlessness demands close scrutiny. In Christ we are concerned with our liberation from sin that is at the core of life in death. If we place Jesus too much in the realm of sin, he becomes a sinner just like us and has to carry his own guilt. If we put him too far away from sin, he cannot bear any of it. He commits no individual sin. Yet we need to go further. The manner in which Johnson describes how Jesus did not fail, implies that he knew temptation from within. When the woman dried Jesus’ feet with her hair, he have experienced the sexuality of that touch.\textsuperscript{154} Yet Jesus did not come in to his desires. But he did them. However, ‘does the version, often connected with the choice between right and wrong, already imply sinfulness? Is the battle I fight not the very struggle against my sinfulness and rebellion, making it difficult to make the right choice? Is the right choice not each time a victory over myself, and the tension not an indication of my sinfulness? Does sin become a temptation only when it finds a point of contact in my heart?’\textsuperscript{155}

The central point is, that Jesus not only did not commit sin, but that with him there was no occasion for sin. That is something separate from ontic sinlessness. It concerns the inner goodness of a person who can not be bound to sin, not because of ontic goodness, but because of moral integrity.\textsuperscript{156} Only such a person can truly bring

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153. 2 Cor. 5:21.
156. O’Neill 1995:189 argues that Jesus was neither ontically sinless nor pos self-evident consciousness of sinlessness. The temptations in which he did were for real. For O’Neill that steadfastness belongs to his divinity because forbade himself to use the power and knowledge he possessed to fulfill his
tion to sinners. ‘Who can be victorious over sin, other who is righteousness itself?’ When I struggle with taken a hold in my life, it is a liberation to find someone can bare my heart without being rejected. That requires is not of the same ilk, such as a highly moral person — s: who understands and accepts me. If, however, I would wards that my confessor understood me as well because the same predicament (‘he too!’), I would be deeply dis be even more forlorn and further disoriented. How man not experienced that scenario with their own pastor? Wh need is to be known and accepted by someone who is co within. Thus, at the very moment that final accountabil play, every confessor must leave me to my own dev person can support me, but not replace me. That is the d ence Christ makes: he was not made to sin, he was made my sinful state; he partakes of my sinful self so I may the fullness of his goodness. This, because my being is i

This is saying far more than that it would be merely to shares in the concrete sins of humankind. Say, for argu behalf of concrete sins, that Jesus committed a murder murderers would have affinity with him. However, as for a killer myself. But I do confess to having told a lie. Thus be a liar to be able to console me as such. Likewise, to o he would have to be a thief, adulterer, blackmailer, etc. H to have done everything that others have done. Ultimate reference would it make? Maybe it would console us a even that is questionable: Jesus would be so preoccupied feelings of guilt brought on by his sins, that more likely for our understanding. And understanding alone does guilt.

It is similar to bearing diseases. When it is said that o our diseases upon him, it does not imply that he must AIDS, TB, cholera, a hernia, Crohn’s, bilharzia, etc. It Jesus has born the root of illness, of being sick.

Bearing humanity is like that. It does not mean that Je incarnate as a member of all body types, or that he can

salvation.’ Here, O’Neill attempts to find a middle way between and a denial of the true incarnation of God.

those who look just like him. The Savior does not have to be
Arian to save Caucasians, black to save blacks, female to save
blond to save blonds, Dutch to save the Dutch, American to save
Americans. 158 What matters is that Jesus is a true human being,
that Jesus bears his being human for the sake of all humankind.
‘Human’ means that he bears real humanity, which is far different
bearing some ideal of humanity.

This was the issue in my problem with the sinlessness of Imma-
that it did not seem to satisfy the need for Jesus to stand with
truly am. Now it is clear to me that it is not important that he has
the same as I, with every frustration I have, but rather that Jesus
knows what it is to be human, live a human life, and bear what is
in a human heart. 159

This notion is rendered in the word anhypostasis: the human
has no hypostasis of his own. 160 This means that we cannot

y that Jesus
wits’ sake on
in that case
be, I am not
Jesus has to
er all sins,
would have
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158. Irenaeus comes close to accepting this notion by thinking it necessary for
have gone through all stages of life. He argues at great length that Jesus
been about fifty years old, so that he also shared in the life of the aged (Ad
6).

Augustine argues likewise about Jesus’ birth from a woman. Because
the appearance of a man, he was born from a woman for the sake of
2 genders (FS 9). This is consistent with Augustine’s inclination to ascribe
Mary that is very close to Jesus’ stature.

159. Cyril (UC, MPG 75: 1261-1269) addressed this problem extensively. It
think ‘that the Word became flesh in the same way as curse and sin’
1265). For he was made sin in order not to sin. But he became flesh
save the flesh. Therefore, he negated sin by bearing sin in sinful flesh
bears sin indirectly: it is by bearing flesh and the full responsibility for
ity, and everything it entails. By bearing the consequences the power of
flesh was broken.

160. See Van de Beek 1980.

161. This misunderstanding about anhypostasis is prevalent, recently in
1990: 345.
long to their family. Just imagine, a prince as your brother! However, Jesus is not our brother in law, not even our brother. Jesus is every bit me, myself. Singing ‘A little closer, a brother,’ does not sufficiently express our relation to Jesus. Jesus is much more truly at one with us.

This is the furthest amplitude of the unio personae between God and human in one. He is totally God, God in his divine person along side another divine person (the opposition of the term homoiousios), but fully God in person is not a human person along side all other persons. He has humanity in person. Jesus Christ is of the same flesh with me, just as Jesus Christ is homoiousios with God. The term homoiousios would not be quite sufficient in either case, for it would not bear my life, but become someone be it how close as a brother. And if we say only ‘like a human being’ will not escape the moralism of ‘I want to be like Jesus.’

All this does not mean that Jesus does not have a distinct identity among people, with his own history and his own face. If he is with the Father does not mean that Jesus does not have a distinct identity for his own face (persona, in Latin) next to the Father.

4. THE ALMIGHTY GOD

The previous statement introduces a new problem: if Jesus is a true God, does it then follow that God is totally superior to human existence of suffering and guilt? Can a God who has to rise above the suffering of life and still be Life itself, who has to rise beyond suffering and death, then they cannot be considered God. That would fly in the face of the confession of the early church theologians.

162. Sermon on Christmas Day 1529, WA 29:643f. Compare J.C. Leibnitz: “I have committed the sin that Martinus did.” The sins I have committed, and will do in the future, Christ made his own sins. See also Athanasius, CA II,56: ‘For if he were a creature then he was not created for us; but if he were not created for us, he not be created in him; and if we were not created in him, but only have him as a teacher from whom we receive.

163. Hymn 166 in Liedboek voor de Kerken [the Dutch ecumenical Churches]. It is not wrong to sing about Jesus as our brother, to leave it at that.
Two answers have been given to this problem in theological circles. One draws upon the distinction between the Father and the Son, and the other is the *extra calvinisticum* (the Calvinist term for God beyond or beyond human categories).

### 4.1 The Son is not the Father

One movement in the early church at the end of the second century indeed allowed that God in Christ was completely subsumed in the relationship with humankind. Jesus was God’s appearance of creation, albeit hidden, and who prior to creation had been present only unto Godself. In this way of thinking, the ways of God were only different ways (modi) of one and the same being. Sabellius was the most famous proponent of this so-called modalism. The same notions had been proposed by Praxeas and Noetus.

Modalism is very close to the early church movement that championed Christ as the appearance of the one true God, as seen in Tertullian and Athanasius. Yet the orthodoxy of the church vigorously opposed modalism.

The first objection is that in modalism God becomes indistinguishable as human history. There is nothing to hold on to. In 20th-century objections as was raised against Marcellus of Ancyra, there is no sufficient adequacy of God’s eternal being is ignored. He is the most forceful opponent of modalism, accuses the modalists, followers of Heraclitus, who had taught that nothing is ever said that God submerges in history. Seeberg puts it this way: ‘The place of God in heaven remains forever true if God were completely subsumed in human Christ.’ As a consequence, God would be so complete...

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164. Little is known of Sabellius. He arrived in Rome in the year 197 as leader of the modalist movement.

165. Disputes against their thoughts can be found in Tertullian (*Apologeticum* (AP) and *Confessiones* (CN)). We know about their ideas only from their opponents, who referred to the information about the controversy. According to Tertullian, the modalistic heresy was brought to Rome from Asia Minor (*AP* 1). If Tertullian had been modalistic in these passages, he would have been easy to detect, as the term comes from the heresy.

166. Hippolytus *CN* 16. Compare Athanasius *CA* I,45: the Father is not the incarnated.


changes in the world, that God can not possibly set us free from its transience. That is the problem when God does not extend beyond creation. The most radical inference is pantheism, with its notion that the entire creation itself is the presence of God. Hippolytus reproaches Noetus as follows: ‘the creature becomes Creator, and vice versa.’

Somewhat more modified we find the same idea in kenotic theories, in which God empties Godself of all divine power and thus makes room for humanity. Originally this concept (derived from Philippians 2:7) was meant to reflect the incarnation, but since the Enlightenment is has been used for creation as well. Here God is to have made space within Godself for creation.

The Church Fathers resisted this train of thought. To them, God did not create the world within Godself, but as something over against Godself – of course without at all diminishing God’s glory and omnipresence. Creation and God are qualitatively different categories. God will always be the eternal Other in relationship to the world. That remains true even in the incarnation. God is known in two persons, the Father and the Son, without ceasing to be the one God.

The second problem with modalism is that it is the complete opposite of what we read in Scripture about the relationship of Jesus and the Father. The modalist view can be under-girded only by a philosophical theory about divine participation in the world, apart from any understanding of Scripture. Thus Hippolytus was not wrong, when he pegged the modalists as followers of Heraclitus, and not of Christ proclaimed in Scripture.

Usually the focus of these debates is upon the theme of suffering. According to their opponents, the modalists were patri-passiants, ‘father-sufferers.’ I think it wise to keep saying that it was the Son who suffered and not the Father and that there is a difference. For it

169. Refut. 4; compare CN 10.
171. The most extensive classical refutation is Tertullian’s Adversus Praxeum, which is also the first theoretical exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity (see section 5 of the current chapter).
174. Refut. IX,10; CN 9.
175. Tertullian, AP 29.
176. Tertullian AP 29. Usually Zephyrinus is considered a modalist as well. I think that is incorrect. Hippolytus says that, in addition to the sentence: ‘I know one God, Je-
is the Son who shared human existence. If we think of the Father as suffering also, as Moltmann does, we retrace the problem of a God who is subject to the changes of human existence. Then we need a God beyond such a God. Rejecting this view does not mean that the Father is not affected by suffering, because that would imply denial of the unity of God. It is a better approach to rely upon the classical idea of the perichoresis of the operations of the persons of the Trinity: what is ascribed to one person in particular, always involves the whole of the divine being. When we surrender the uniqueness of the persons, and attribute the suffering of Christ to both (or all three), we forget that the words ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ are symbols to indicate the different aspects of the divine being. They are not descriptions of individual relations such as exist between humans. Athanasius warns us already that we should not attach any associations to the word ‘Father’ for God that are not found within the doctrine of the Trinity. It is crucial to say that Christ is of the same ousia as the Father, because he came from the Father. That does not warrant the conclusion, however, that God gave birth, or that a birth of Jesus took place within our timeframe instead of in time eternal (and thus denying him eternal being). Likewise, it also means that the fatherhood of God does not present arguments for the relationships of people among themselves, such as between fathers and children, or men and women. If we do, we do not acknowledge the qualitative difference between God and humans. Then we make not only the Son, but also the Father ‘our brother’ to whom we should conform.

Sus Christ, and absolutely no other than the one who was born and suffered,’ Zephyrinus also is to have said: ‘The Father did not die, but the Son’ (Refut. IX,11). Hippolytus uses the quotes to show that Zephyrinus is not only a heretic, but also a charlatan because he makes contradictory statements. However, the two statements are fully in line with the doctrine of the trinity as espoused by Tertullian, Irenaeus and Athanasius. Hippolytus himself also says: ‘But in whom is God except in Christ Jesus, the Word of the Father, and the mystery of salvation?’ (CN 4).

177. Moltmann 1972:230. The Father does not suffer in the same way as the Son, Moltmann says, but the weight of the suffering is the same. ‘The Son undergoes dying, the Father undergoes the death of the Son. The pain of the Father is of the same weight as the death of the Son.’

178. ‘The reciprocal penetration and inhabitation of the three divine persons’ (Schmaus1963: 274).

179. Ca 1,28. See Origen, Princ. 1,2,4.

180. Calvin, however, does make this connection, albeit by pointing out that any relationship is understood in relation to the relationship of the Father and the Son (Inst. II,14,7)
4.2 God is greater than a human

‘But isn’t Christ with us always, as he promised us? He is the majesty, grace and Spirit he is not absent from us for an instant in his human nature Christ is not now on earth.’

This question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism briefly and to the point affirms a real and not imaginary ascending to heaven bodily, but that does not mean that God is greater than the human existence of Jesus confined by his humanity and God is not confined to the flesh. That is true after the ascension, according to the catechism applies to the period that Jesus was among us of ‘God always greater,’ is a classical adage. It also applies to who bears and sustains all things as the divine Word.

The divine person of Christ is thus also a person human existence. This is the source of the use of the term. Clearly, it should not be understood as referring to ism has besides the rest of the Christian tradition an appurtenance or surplus, and thus irrelevant in con sions.

In fact, what is expressed in the extra calvinistic notion in Christian thought. All the important Church it. Prior to the incarnation Christ was the Logos, incarnate Word. They all emphatically say that begin with the birth of Christ, but that the Word him. He was always in the world and remained present God even when he became a human being.

185. Irenaeus, *AH* III,18,1; IV,6,7; Athanasius, *IncV* 7-10; Augustine 3; *CR* 19.
186. Origen, *Princ.*, IV,29-31; Athanasius *IncV* 17. Augustine II,5,7-9). He emphasizes to such an extent the unity of the thus the notion that the opera ad extra are not separated), involved in sending the Son. The eternal Son, together with Spirit, sends the human son. A sending out of the eternal cause he cannot be sent to that where He is present already presence. This heavy accent upon the difference between causes tension for christology (see also note 303 of this chapter thought the distinction between persons almost disappear.
The Lord Jesus Christ is one, the only begotten Word of the Father, who became flesh without ceasing to be what he was. For in humanity he remained God, and in the form of a slave he remained such, and in our differentiation he kept the fullness of God, a weakness of the flesh he remained Lord of Hosts, and in the fullness of his own humanity he surpassed the entire creation. But if the Logos was involved with the world before the arrival of Christ, the suffering of the Son is not limited to his earthly life. God suffers in the sins of the world long before Christ, Irenaeus says. The Heidelberg Catechism wants to, likewise, express that the love with which God has loved us unto death, continues to surround us even after the crucifixion. This God is always with us, and was always with us as well. He is present in another manner than when the Lord bore our guilt and suffering in the flesh. There is no other God than this God. The Son did not cease to be God when becoming human, but the same line of thought. God did not change from one being to another, but as the Son assumed human existence.

The theological phrase, extra calvinisticum, originated in the seventeenth century when controversies brewed between Calvinists and Lutherans. It was generally thought that the Lutherans tended to narrowly bind the Word of God to the incarnate Word, while Calvinists allowed more room for the activity of the Word. This may be somewhat true as a nuanced observation, but clearly not much difference between Luther and Calvin that is. Certainly, Calvin does not speak about the Word without restraint.

Augustine gives the impression that he teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, and yet at the same time, he has little use for it. His work, De Trinitate, is an eloquent plea for the unity of God. This stance is not a problem for him because of his early period, when arguing against neo-platonism and with pneumatologists against the pelagians. To him, there is really only one God that made the world and that acts within it, and upon whom we are dependent. The incarnation is the connection with a human being, in which we shall make the sacrifice for the sins already committed (now not seen), and in order to provide an example in humility for us.

188. AH III, 20, 1-2.
189. Tertullian CC 3; Ap 27; Origen, MPG 13: 1816. Athanasius CA II, 6, 19; Augustine, Trin. IV, 18-24; CR 22; Calvin, Inst. 14, 1.
190. See Ulrich 1995, who cites further literature.
Christ, and conversely, Luther did not hold this view of Christ's bodily existence.\footnote{Luther, too, says that Christ as Creator comes to his throne and majesty as the Father (TR, WA 1:220, no. 494; 6:178).}

The confession that Christ is God indeed lays the extra calvinisticum. The phrase derives its paradox that the high and mighty God bore death itself, and that the one who bore unto guilt of humankind is the high and mighty God expressed in the nineteenth century Sarum plainsong rum, ‘Creator of the Stars of Night... to the rug away the sins of the world.’\footnote{See Von den Konzilis und Kirchen, WA 50:590: ‘Gott werden sterben’ [God, by his nature, cannot die]. It can only mean God and human being in one person.}

Therefore, we must maintain both facets. Christ is the eternal God, circumscribed by nothing but divine strength, and, on the other hand, humbled unto death. Neither side can have the form ‘what is not assumed is not saved,’ and ‘who do deem.’ That is why the proponents of a real defend tenaciously the reality of both natures. We say Cyril, beside his notion of one nature, also speaks of Christ. Luther distinguishes between two natures with Athanasius we even find extensive expressions of the qualities of the divine and the human nature.\footnote{Meijering 1996a shows that Athanasius continuously relies upon the constructus without using the word physis as a key term. Lilium to deny authorship of CA III to Athanasius, contra Kausen.}

The Alexandrians avoid speaking of a divine Godman. They persist in saying ‘the one man Word.’ A ‘divine man’ nature would indicate a confusion that would blur the mystery and wonder of human flesh. The term ‘god-man’ is used in a mystic opinions about humanity, where the distinction humankind is considered not too great.\footnote{Terms such as ‘theandrikos’ and related notions such as consistently since the rise of Byzantine culture in the 13th century (MPG 77: 1157; 1160). Pseudo-Caesarius (MPG 77: 1157; 1160).}
God was locked into all meaning without usefulness from the human existence unto the suffering and This paradox is also, Creator alme side-cross affixed, bore the one hand, Christ, who bears every-nd, Christ is human, y restriction. Again, s not God cannot re-stine of salvation de-vade already seen that ks of the two natures as well. And itions of the peculiar nature. It is remarkable that man, or of Christ as a ture of the incarnate admixture or even a of God who assumes the language field of options between God and concept appears espe-

cially in the Byzantine period. At stake at that time, in the powerful church, is the issue of a Christ who makes man of God in the world. Even contemporary use of the term of the West is more concerned with the exaltation of the church, or the elevation of the world through Christ, than of God. 196 Maintaining this peculiarity of divinity and humanity, not contradict the Alexandrian thought that it is the Logos that suffers. Just as much as when considering the specific natures, one must maintain that we speak about but the same person, who is one without restrictions. Any separation made between the divinity and humanity of Christ opens a bottomless abyss in which humans would sink without salvation.

To give voice to this unity, Luther applies the idea of _communicatio idiomatum_. 197 This phrase expresses, that character of human nature can be applied to the other nature as well. One can has suffered, and one can say, 'This human has demons.' God truly participates in our suffering existence as a figure of speech. Thus, in the _communio idiomatum_ 'God has suffered' is not an abbreviated way of a person who is God suffers in God’s human nature,’ but a speech about God’s being. For it is precisely as such a God in Christ. Likewise, we speak idiomatically when we...
demons are subjected to humans and that sin.

In the same way that the extra calvinisticum Calvinism, the communication idiomatum is a basically Lutheran idea. Calvin supports the idea, but the meaning, the idea is already found with Augustine. Most Church Fathers, including the Latin ones, knew who was born and who died.202

Yet at the same time, it has to be pointed out that the communicatio and idiomata implies that both the divine and the human (idiomata), and the need for communication is the same. The phrase captures the complete principle, therefore, to use terminology such as idiomatum and the extra calvinisticum in order to capture the differences between Luther and Calvin. Both cornerstones

Somewhat of a philosophical idea of God and the extra calvinisticum. The emphasis upon the role God resonates with the thought of one Supreme Being in all philosophies. That need not be denied. Not in the sense of philosophy. However, it should never dictate that when used correctly, the application of a philosophical idea of God is not determined by the experience of faith. It is by the experience of faith that God is the Manifestus to us always and everywhere. Before all else, that

198. Schoonenberg 1986: 220-224 applies the concept in the doctrine of the trinity to christology, where the mingle without losing their identity. The accent lies to who both natures belong. The unity of the distinction of both natures. These thoughts come clearly defended by Cyril.

199. Inst.II,14,1; compare II,12,2.

200. Athanasius (CA 1,45) gives an exposition that same intent. See also Irenaeus AH III,18,3-4.

201. Princ. II,6,6. Origen essentially connects the two iron. Iron is heated by fire in an oven to the point from fire. In the same way the human soul of Christ, perfect love of the presence of the Logos, precisely and transcends any boundary.

202. Hippolytus CN 6; Tertullian, CC 3 and 5. The basic idea also about the communicatio idiomatum.
humanity has conquered

is not a peculiarity of
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words of the catechism
perichoresis’ (commonly used
it originated. Both natures co-
upon the one person of Christ
is more essential than the dis-
to the idea of ‘one nature’ as

much like Luther’s, with the

ases in a metaphor of fire and
hat it cannot be distinguished
not distinguishable from the
because that love is infinite
about theotokos is essentially

are words of trust: God will not desert us, least of all in our life in Christ. The roots are more oriented to religious thought, than that they are derived from Aristotle.

4.3 The face of the Byzantine emperor

In the year 553, a new council gathered in Constantinople to become the fifth ecumenical council. There were no previous councils to warrant a call for such a large gathering. Of course, some perennial quibbles about aspects of christology hardly something new. Since the previous council, two hundred years earlier, the disagreements had not been so intense that a council became necessary. At the council, a new way of thinking was introduced either. Reading the minutes is the most soporific chore imaginable. Most of it consists of quotations of earlier church fathers. The minutes are filled with phrases such as, ‘as the holy father Cyril said,’ or ‘as the holy father Athanasius said.’ Yet, it became necessary to reconvene only to affirm that the conclusions of earlier councils of Nicea and Constantinople were still valid and needed to be reaffirmed. Clearly, that was the very last thing people wanted. The council was one prolonged manifestation of faith and orthodoxy of the past.

At the end of day, a formulation was drafted that was used by a council before, namely, that Christ, born of the Holy Trinity. That, in fact, is what Athanasius and Cyril already had taught and what the council so diligently by the council. But the formulation was

cise.

Even so, Constantinople did write history, not because of logical formulations, but because of the intentions for the definitions, and because of the reasons for convening the council at all. The salient reason was that the emperor had built the new church. Not brand new, to be precise, but built on a scale so massive and grand than the earlier building, that one could

203. For example, see Ps. 139; Isa. 40:12-31; Matt. 28:18.
204. ACO IV.1.
205. Denz. 424, 426, 432.
new church, named the Hagia Sophia, the Holy Wisdom.206 The church was dazzling indeed, full of gold and splendor. The crown of her beauty was a beautiful fresco on the inside of the enormous cupola. It portrayed Christus Pantokrator: Christ who reigns over all. It was the risen, glorified Christ, the highest Wisdom and greatest Power. And this, amazingly, could be seen on earth and from earth, in a building made with human hands: One of the Holy Trinity, visible in the flesh.207

Whoever entered the Hagia Sophia soon forgot that this One had suffered as well. He had won over death. He was the Mighty One. And this Might dwelled in the court chapel of the emperor, for that was what the Hagia Sophia was as well. The emperor and the patriarch, ever closer to each other since the days of Constantine and Eusebius, now lived under the same roof. The patriarch abided with the emperor in a lustrous church that belonged to the latter.

God became human. Irenaeus, Athanasius, the desert hermits and the combative Cyril all had said so. And now it was stated again: ‘God became human.’ God has a human face.

However, it is no longer the face of the blind bishop at the council of Nicea, who had lost his sight in persecution by the emperor. It is not the face of the Crucified one, without form or majesty. Here it is the face of one of the Holy Trinity in full glory. And that glory reflects on him who owns this face: emperor Justinian. God is visible among people. You can see God’s appearance. There, way up high, God shines upon you. God is high, so high that it hurts the eyes and causes pain in your neck to keep looking at the exalted One. Provided, of course, that you would ever receive permission to enter the imperial domain. You had to be a person of some standing; criminals and beggars need not apply.

Yet even a person of high standing can suffer. That became painfully clear to Justinian when his wife, upon whom he relied completely, died. In the suffering of the Holy Trinity, Justinian must have recognized something of his own suffering as ruler. The glory is preeminent, but does not exclude suffering.

The council of Constantinople in 553 has the same problem as the one

207. ‘And he is also after the incarnation one of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ’ (MPG 86.1: 1000).
in the year 381, but in a greater measure. The formulations are just fine, but how do those to whom they apply experience them? What are they for? The effect of the council of 381 was that the Christian faith became *salonfähig*, a philosophy for the elite, which outshone the scandal of the cross. The council of 553 is a manifestation of the new era that began under the Byzantine emperor. The autocratic power of state and church came together in the tri-unity of emperor, patriarch and general. This scheme would dominate the East for centuries, and proved to be extremely recalcitrant.

We can speak orthodox words and phrases, but do they serve to free people without hope in this world? Or do they serve to support the power of those who are powerful already? Do they serve to lift up people who are down and out, or those who have no inkling of what either of those positions are like? It can happen in many guises. The Byzantine emperor can have the face of a Reformed elder or a fundamentalist pietist who proclaims with absolute authority that we are all damned sinners. He can have the face of a repressive dictator and a fanatic freedom fighter. It is the face of our own righteousness and demand for rights, to whom the other must submit, because we do not want to yield ourselves.

Yet not all words are the same. Justinian himself wrote some theology. He took the orthodox theology and rewrote it as a theology of the court. The changes are not obvious. No citation can illustrate the shifts perfectly. They are very subtle, such as for instance, in a slight nudge from the phrase ‘the Word of God,’ to ‘one of the Holy Trinity.’ It seems to be saying the same thing, but it is not quite the

208. See next section of this chapter, footnote 234 and following text.
209. When I wrote my dissertation (Van de Beek 1980) I was not as aware of the stake that people have in this. That is why I took special notice of the words and language, and concluded that no true difference exists between the council of 431 and 553.
210. MPG 86.1: 945-1152.
211. Justinian is concerned with ‘the right faith and the status of the church... This is our primary concern. We therefore believe also that in our era the emperorship is given to us and protected by God, and that the enemies of our state will be subjected’ (MPG 86.1: 947).
212. The manner in which it is done can be demonstrated in Justinian treatment of Origen. Justinian accuses Origen of subordinationism (see his writing against Origen and the matching anathemata: MPG 86.1: 945-989= *ACO* III,1: 189-214). He gives the impression that the Logos is lower than God. That is only concluded because Justinian cannot imagine that obedience belongs to God.
same. The attention moves from the suffering of Christ to his glory. ‘He is the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Holy Trinity, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is glorified.’ Here Easter moves from a feast of death to a feast of Light, that would become the dominant aspect of Byzantine liturgy. As we saw earlier, even here we cannot reduce everything to mere political interests, but religious motives are mixed with political ones.

Once the orthodox theology became so clearly an imperial theology, it was time to resolve a few of the philosophical problems of the Alexandrian school. A court theology cannot allow aspects of life to lack sufficient clarity from a stance of reason. One of those problems was the vagueness in the theology of Cyril (and thus of the council of Ephese) concerning the relationship of nature and person. How could two natures be together without compromising the unity of a person, since the natures express themselves in persons?

This knot was untangled by the theologian Leontinus of Byzantium, in the time of Justinian. It is true that natures receive a face in hypostases or persons (in the patristic meaning of concrete appearance), but not all hypostases have a single nature. There are combined hypostases with two natures. A good example is a human being itself, which has a soul and a body, and thus possesses a psychological and a material nature in the one human person. A nature can thus be anhypostatic, ‘impersonal,’ without its own form of appearance. Such a nature is pure abstraction. A nature can be hypostatic with a proper form of appearance (such as the nature of a dandelion taking on the form of a concrete dandelion). However, a nature can also be enhypostatic, ‘in-personal,’ in which it receives a form of appearance of the hypostasis of another nature. Thus, the human nature of Christ appears as the person of the Logos. In this way the human Jesus has no own separate hypostasis with its own finality (which would make Jesus a human like all other humans, and thus not the Savior of all), but Christ is nonetheless personally real in the person of the Logos. Without the union with the Logos, the human nature of Jesus would be a pure abstraction, anhypostatos. But enhypostatically in the Logos, Christ receives his appearance; i.e., we can never speak about the human Jesus without speaking about him as the incarnate Word.

213. Justinian: 86.1: 999.
214. See earlier section 2 of this chapter, especially footnote 41 and following text.
215. His works are found in MPG 86.1: 1193 – 86.2: 2016.
The solution of Leontinus – to compare the two natures in the incarnation with the unity of soul and body – seems obvious. It is not a new idea at all.\textsuperscript{216} Yet in that very obviousness of Leontinus lies the problem. What had been a paradox for the fourth and fifth century, a paradox that expressed the unimaginable mercy of God, now was presented as a quite natural union of God and human. Cyril says that the manner of the union is completely incomprehensible.\textsuperscript{217} That is why he only can give an example.\textsuperscript{218} Leontinus gave it philosophical perspicuity. Things now add up in a rational way. As obviously as soul and body belong together in humans, so likewise God and humanity belong together. This is ‘the glorification and the reasonableness of the unity of Christ.’\textsuperscript{219} That is the Byzantine reality, and that is the reality of much of Christendom.

5. TRI-UNITY

As we have seen, Christological discussions are part and parcel of the trinitarian field of problems. Actually, we should phrase it the other way around, because the doctrine of the Trinity has its roots in Christology. This does not mean that the Trinity itself is dependent on Christology, but that our thinking about the Trinity has its origin in our thinking about Christ.

When the very early church began confessing that Jesus is God, the question arose what that meant for the relationship with the One whom Jesus, according to the gospels, called Father. We are clearly speaking about two persons. That is, we cannot abide answers to that question that deny the distinction (modalism) or that ultimately let the distinction disappear (Marcellus of Ancyra). Any answer must do justice to the distinction of the persons without undermining the unity of God. The modalist reproach of dytheism or tritheism will have to be refuted.

The first one who put his mind to this issue in writing is Tertullian, a sharp Roman lawyer. In his work, \textit{Against Praxeas}, he opposes modalism and develops a doctrine of the Trinity that remains nearly

\textsuperscript{216} Origen, \textit{Princ.} II.6,1-3; Tertullian \textit{CC} 11-13 (compare also \textit{DA} 27), Augustine, \textit{Ench.} 36; Cyril, UC, MPG 75: 1292.

\textsuperscript{217} UC, MPG 75: 1292.

\textsuperscript{218} UC, MPG 75: 1291f.

\textsuperscript{219} Justinian, MPG 86.1: 1013.
unchanged in orthodoxy until now. Tertullian considered himself to be not only guided by his acute mind and rhetorical gifts, but by the Scriptures and by the gift of the Holy Spirit itself that he had experienced in the charismatic church community of the Montanists.  

Tertullian does three things: he disarms objections that argue that ‘one’ cannot be ‘three’ at the same time; he explains the reasonableness of plurality within one God; and he develops tools to conceptualize the Trinitarian doctrine.

In order to explain how one and the same being can take on various forms, he uses metaphors from nature. A tree has roots, branches and fruit. The sun is a glowing globe in the firmament, but also radiates light and lets us bask in warmth. When I say, ‘I am sitting in the sun,’ I clearly am not sitting inside a fireball. But the figure of speech is not wrong, because it really is the sun that is present with its radiance and its warmth. Likewise, water comes in the form of a well, a river or the sea. It is the same water, yet all three are certainly distinguishable. Obviously, Tertullian does not intend at this point to prove the Trinity itself; or even to infer such an entity. He merely wants to clarify to his opponents that it is not nonsensical to speak about something that has one and the same nature in three different configurations.

This rather loose framework is worked out in much broader and deeper detail through the concept of monarchy. The modalists had made the most of the idea of the monarchy of God in the sense that one and only one God can have all power and be the source of all things. Tertullian limits this concept to the notion of power. For him, monarchy means that only one has the power. Yet what happens when the king has a son, who shares in that power? The son agrees with his father in all things, and together they stand as one; does this mean the end of monarchy? No one would think that! Indeed, a completely unified front in exercising the power rather tends to affirm the monarchy. To cling to power narrowly is to admit that that power is threatened and thus not truly of one accord. On the other hand, where power is shared without fear, true monarchy reigns. The Tri-unity is not an undermining of the monarchy of God, but rather a confirmation. The

220. AP 2.
221. CC 8 and 13. We find the same comparisons in Hippolytus, CN 11 and Augustine, FS 17; Origen uses the image of sunlight (Princ. 1,2,7); Augustine also refers to fire and glow (SC 8).
222. AP 3-4.
modalists, who are so fearful that the power of God is compromised, must have a notion in the back of their minds about another power that threatens the might of God. In this light, who then are the true proponents of the complete unity of God as One who rules over all?  

This leads to the second intention of Tertullian: to set forth the reasonableness of trinitarian thought. Here he explicitly refers to human reason and language. Humankind has the ability to reason. The reasoning process creates a subject and an object. Every thought is something of me, to which I react with a subsequent thought. This is the very process of thought: within myself exists something else. To think is, in some way, talking to myself. If we do not want to deny the capacity of ‘thought’ to God, then God must likewise know of this twofold dynamic (and even a threefold one, given God’s wisdom). It is in the Logos (as ratio) that God has such ‘an other.’ This truth appears to us as the Word at the very moment of creation as the operative Logos. A word is not merely a puff of air, but it is efficacious. That is true for a human word; it is even more true for God’s creating Word. It creates the very reality in which it can be heard. The Word is its own creative reality even when there is not yet an ear-drum to register any movement of air. Whoever denies this, will have to resort to thoughts akin to Gnostic speculations, in which endless movements originate with God but do not go out from God’s own self. In such a case, we would in fact arrive at pantheism with various ranks and levels. We would thereby deny the creative Word of God as the very Word of the Father, and therefore deny as well the reality of creation as a reality outside Godself. It is precisely the doctrine of the Trinity that safeguards the Christian faith from relapse into polytheistic paganism.

Tertullian utilizes in his expositions terminology that gained regular currency. That is true for the term Trinity itself, but also for substantia (being or substance) and persona. God is one in sub-

223. His battle with Marcion (AM I,2-7) clearly shows that Tertullian maintains the unity of God. Just as he had to maintain the notion of plurality over against Praxeas, he had to defend unity over against the duality of Marcion.
224. AP 5-7. Augustine FS 4 gives a similar exposition.
225. AP 3 and 5.
226. Literally ‘Three-hood,’ and not Three-oneness.’ In the conflict with the Modalists the attention went to the plurality and not the unity.
227. The translation of persona into ‘person’ or equivalents became common in modern languages. Actually, this poorly represent its meaning in the early church. Originally a ‘person’ was the mask or the role of a stage actor. Had it remained in that denotation, Tertullian would not have had to oppose modalism. The modern word
stance, condition and power, and is distinguished in degree, form and aspects. 228 Even talk about a first, second and third person is already found in Tertullian. 229

Following Augustine, later Western theology often uses the image of the human spirit. That facilitated an interest in preserving the emphasis upon the unity of God. This accent upon the unity did put pressure on the notion of ‘person’ in the doctrine of the Trinity. On the one hand the term gained connotations of ‘an individual willing person,’ and on the other hand Tertullian’s proposal of his three forms seemed to be saying too much. Other terminology was suggested, such as ‘way of being,’ 230 which tended to modalism, however.

The Western emphasis upon unity is without doubt a shift in focus from Tertullian, who needs to accentuate plurality in his debates. It is a typically Western trait to find it difficult to live with a unity that is manifested in plurality. It is not true for Tertullian, in spite of his analytical manner of thinking so typical of Western theology. It does not apply to Hippolytus either, who speaks openly about God as polus, 231 (many), and goes on to say that the unity does not lie in the persons, 232 but in the dunamis 233 (power). These early church fathers could find peace with the concepts in a way that would be denied to the West after the great migrations of nations and the fall of the Roman empire.

In contrast with the West, later Eastern theology accentuated plurality. We have seen that the synod of Constantinople ratified the Nicean decisions. The interpretation of the theologians of this synod were in line with the agreement of 362, with ‘nature’ as a general concept. 234

‘gestalt’ [‘configuration,’ ‘shape,’ ‘image formation’] is probably closer to Tertullian’s meaning. God is one being (including God’s personality, acts, power, and will) in three instantiations. Because the word ‘person’ is commonly used in theology, a substitute is moot. It is better to explain the word. Indeed, each new term would evoke words with other associations that in turn require corrections.

228. AP 2.
229. AP 13. See Bouglakof 1943:13, who compares the three persons of the Tri-unity with the first, second and third person in the grammar of language.
230. Barth KD 1.1: 379 prefers this term.
231. CN 10. Hippolytus has a doctrine of the Trinity that come close to that of the later Cappadocians, and a christology that is in tune with Chalcedon. Both the unity of God and of Christ are under pressure in his thought. As a Greek, living and working in Rome, he thus embodies the extremes of either side.
232. CN 14.
233. CN 8.
234. See previous section 3.2 of this chapter.
The persons of the Tri-unity were placed side by side, which required a broader exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. After the conflicts with the Pneumatomachenes, it was made clear that the Spirit had an equal divinity and personality as the Father and the Son. God’s presence after the ascension and as creative power in the world is as much the presence of Godself as God’s appearance in the Son. It is Godself who is with us. In this manner, the three persons could be imagined as equals along side each other. However, in contrast with the intention of Nicea, the image grew more toward portraying the three persons as three gods. Three great Cappadocian theologians at the end of the fourth century, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianza, extensively thought and wrote about this issue. They do not give short thrift to the unity of God. However, they do not seek the unity in the persons, but in the ousia (being, or nature) They use metaphors of family, or of persons who are in total solidarity with one another in a common cause. The unity does not center in the personal being but in the undergirding communion. This approach comes close to Tertullian’s expositions about the monarchy.

This is the doctrine of the Trinity that dominated the Eastern-Orthodox churches. The West has always been troubled by it. This depends, I think, on how one interprets the texts of the Cappadocians. Some have interpreted them as being concerned with three gods. They deny this conclusion explicitly themselves, and it would be doing them an injustice to say that in the end they teach a tritheism. One can also interpret them to say that these three together are the one and true God, and that we cannot speak about this God other than in the redeeming acts toward the world through the Father and the Son. That means that the ecumenical Trinity, the Tri-unity we come to

235. Literally ‘Spiritcombatants’: those who opposed the divinity of the Spirit. Their leader was Macedonius of Constantinople (died ±341) giving rise to their other name, macedonians.

236. Synod of Alexandria (362), ratified at Constantinople in 381 (Denz. 150).

237. The attention is spread out more evenly, also quantitatively, in the Symbolum (Denz. 150) than in the brief phrase at the end of Nicea, ‘and in the Holy Spirit’ (Denz. 125).


239 Gregory of Nazianza (Oratio 31,11:MPG 36: 144f.) compares the Tri-unity with the family of Adam, Eve and Seth.

240. Basil sees the unity in a common will, the task at hand, in the same manner that Paul, Timothy and Silvanus together deliver the gospel (MPG 32:773).

241. This metaphor is used explicitly by Gregory of Nyssa in marking the unity of the persons, not only of the Father and the Son, but of the Sprit also (EST 15).
know in God’s communion with us, is at the same time God’s very being.

However, we can also interpret the Cappadocian texts to say that God is revealed to us in three persons, yet that they all correspond to the same communal being. That communal being thus becomes a sort of fourth hypostasis, encompassing the three persons of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{242} The tendency to understand things in this way is suggested by the stress placed upon the need for apophatic speech about God: God can never be defined.\textsuperscript{243} Our formulations at most can only say what God is not. At best, the phrases only point to the actual mystery of God. Karen Armstrong explains the Cappadocian theology in this manner.\textsuperscript{244} It is a tendency that accompanies the acceptance of the term \textit{homoiousios}. This is intensified when one loses sight of the strict limitation that made the Nicean formulation acceptable, and no longer understand \textit{homoiousios} as ‘equal to’ (\textit{homoousios}), but as ‘similar to’ the Father.

The idea of a divine being to which the three persons correspond, opens the door to the idea of God beyond God, so that the revealed God is not really God, and thus God does not reveal Godself. This also introduces subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity. The latter charge is usually aimed at Origen, but can also be addressed to aspects of the ideas of Tertullian and Hippolytus. A typical target would be Tertullian’s comparison of the monarch and the son. That is why Tertullian maintains that the Spirit operates \textit{through} the Son,\textsuperscript{245} in contrast to the later Western tradition that holds that the Spirit does not only come from the Father but also from the Son. In the formulation ‘through the Son,’ the subordinationism seems to extend to the relationship of the Son and the Spirit. The expression ‘through the Son’ can be understood in three ways:

\textsuperscript{242} In Greek, one uses the word \textit{trias}, which literally means ‘threeness.’ The Latin \textit{trinitas} has the same meaning. Thus, the English word ‘trinity’ is to be preferred to the translation in most continental European languages, which usually have ‘Trinity.’ [footnote, amended by author in ET]. Yet the Western tradition clearly favors the connotation of the latter, while the East emphasizes the ‘Threeness.’ See Van de Beek 1987: 294-299.
\textsuperscript{243} ‘Apophatic’ is contrasted with ‘cataphatic.’ The latter posits: it describes what God is like. The former is a manner of speech that seeks to preserve the mystery by saying what God is not. It is a form of a negative theology.
\textsuperscript{244} Armstrong 1994: 133-139.
\textsuperscript{245} \textit{AP 4}. 
a) Philosophically.
One assumes a notion of God that is separate from the incarnation, and poses that God is plural within Godself. In order for God to have a relationship outside Godself, an outward movement is necessary that is not identical with the inner being of God (because otherwise God would be fully present in that extension). The very idea of creation thus necessitates plurality in God. Otherwise there is no real creation, but only a pantheistic self-manifestation of God. Thus, if we believe in God, it is reasonable to assume plurality in God, who has a relationship with creation via Spirit and reason or Word (Logos).

Tertullian’s reasoning concerning the Logos as other-than-God moves along these lines. Except that for him it is not proof of Trinity. As with so many of the early Christian authors, philosophy is used to defang the counter arguments of opponents. When the modalist say that plurality in God is unreasonable, Tertullian shows that their own ideas about the Logos should lead them to conclude instead the very affirmation of its reasonableness. The Trinity is not less reasonable than the negation of it, on the contrary. However, Tertullian finds the grounds for the confession of the Trinity in Scripture. For him the reality of revelation precedes the possibility of philosophy.

b) Christologically/philosophically.
The train of thought is the same as above, but the Logos here is not understood as abstract worldly reason, but as the person of Christ. Christ is the glory of God upon earth, and the Christian faith knows true reality because Christ is the mystery of creation. The Christ who the proponents of this view have in mind is the true – that is, the ideal – human being. Variants of this idea recur frequently in Christian theology. 246 We find this idea also in the Byzantine doctrine of the

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246 In certain respects, the early Apologists can be listed under this rubric. For them, the meaning of the world is given in the incarnate Logos, because everything is created in him. Yet I am inclined to place them in the third category. That is certainly true for Origen, with his concentration on Scripture. However, even in Justin Martyr and Athenagoras the relationship between Greek wisdom and Christian faith is far less smooth than is often supposed. They in fact proceed as follows:

a. they show that the prophecies from the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ. A fulfillment of a prophecy is a strong argument for truthfulness. Here we find a truly positive argument, based on the Old Testament.
b. they debunk the accusation that the Christian faith is nonsense; for instance, by saying that a God who can create the world could certainly also raise the dead. This does not prove the resurrection, but its negation is opposed with the internal rationality of a creation faith.
Trinity, which sometimes seeks a mystical movement toward the horizon of knowledge of God, and sometimes proclaims that the glory of the church and state manifest some of the glory of the Pantokrator Christ. We find it as well in contemporary philosophical theologies in which Christ is understood as a mediator in creation; for example in Teilhard de Chardin\(^{247}\) and Arthur Peacocke.\(^{248}\) Even Barth's doctrine of the Trinity belongs in this category. For Barth sees Christ as the inner ground of creation. As inner ground of creation is Christ is its reason and its meaning.\(^{249}\) Therefore, the Christian congregation avows the meaning of society along lines of a theology critical of socio-economical issues.\(^{250}\)

c. the Greeks are combated with their own irrationalities and nonsensical ideas. Of course, proving them wrong does not mean that the Christians are right.
d. they acknowledge that the Greeks sometimes say things that agree with true faith, for instance, that there is one God. However, that is hardly an original notion with the Greeks. All the Greeks who taught this did so after having visited Egypt, where they learned of the teachings of Moses (Justin, \textit{CG} 14 and 30). The truth of Greek thoughts is thus derived from a revelation elsewhere.
e. they do not say that everything Greek is invalid, nor everything that is proposed by the Barbarians. However, their knowledge is not knowledge of God but earthly knowledge.

The Apologists are not really all that positive toward pagan philosophy, but rather very critical. They make use of their learning only to combat the Greeks. A good example is Athenagoras who did research at the \textit{Mouseion} in Alexandria in order to oppose the Christians, but who with equal vigor after his conversion used his knowledge to do battle with Greek philosophy (Malatry 1995a: 213f.). The intent is completely different from contemporary enlightened theologians who seek connections between faith and culture.

The difference in interpretation can be clarified using the idea of the \textit{logos spermatikos} in Justin Martyr (\textit{Apol.} 11,13). Often this idea is interpreted to mean that the Logos, incarnate in Christ, is already sown, or still sowing its truth among all the peoples. This would mean that, wisdom from outside the Christian faith has the same aim as faith itself. However, Justin uses this notion in a critical manner. The knowledge among the heathens is fragmentary, like shards of knowledge strewn about by the logos; they are not nonsense (thus Christians can utilize them), but they are mere splinters suited for a limited, finite, earthly existence. It is in Christ alone that we can see the whole truth of God. Justin thus does not intend anything other than Reformed theologians who say that there is still a certain order in the world because of God's goodness. This notion is close to Athanasius when he says that all earthly words can be broken up in syllables, but that the one Word of God is whole (\textit{CG} 41; \textit{CA} II,35). At stake is not congruence but contradistinction.

250. Barth 1946.
In all these instances Christian rationality is the idea to which the world must give an account. It is a model of Christian idealism, in the same way that the first category is a model of the philosophical idealism.

c) Christologically.
The beginning lies with the history of Christ on earth. Because Christ is God’s revelation to us, we know no other God that is revealed to us. Therefore, we know God through the Son. Conversely, the Father teaches us about God through the Son in the work of the Spirit. We know the Father through the Son, and the Father reveals Godself through the Son. Philosophical speculation is replaced by the revelation of the witness of Christ through the Scriptures.

This is the model of Athanasius and kerygmatic theology.\(^{251}\) In view of the whole of his theological work – and his stance over against philosophy – this is also the position of Tertullian.

This strong tie to salvation history leads some to observe that in the classical doctrine of the Trinity, the outpouring of the Spirit through the Son is not an incarnational but an eternal generation issue. It seems that the concern is not as much the economic or revelational Trinity as with the immanent or ontological Trinity. However, such a distinction between aspects of the Trinity implies that we can know something about the ontological Trinity without revelation. That would take us back to a philosophical image of God. Historically, it would also be off the mark, because it is precisely the incarnation that led to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity itself. For instance, the idea of the ontological Trinity was developed to resist the notions of Marcellus of Ancyra who was of the opinion that God was not trinitarian in his essential being. Clearly, we only know God in a triune revelation, and that is his identity. We know of no other God, and we trust that Godself came among us in Christ. That is the only basis for our salvation and our knowledge of God.\(^{252}\)

From this sort of double image, in which another idea of God is placed beside God in Christ, we can explain the filioque ['and the Son']: the Holy Spirit proceeds form the Father and the Son. The

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251. Here we must be mindful that not everything that calls itself kerygmatic limits itself to the message of the apostles.
252. Compare Hippolytus (\textit{CN} 16): we have only limited information about the incarnation, so for the eternal generation we must limit ourselves to the fact that there is an eternal Son. Whomever wants more, wants to see the face of God.
Western tradition has, foremost, a philosophical notion of God in which the model of the Trinity functions as listed in the first of the three models above. At the same time, it also uses the third model of the salvation history and the Christological approach. Since there is only one God who works in the world through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit must be one and the same. However, this Spirit is mediated in two ways, straight from the Father, and yet also via the Son. The more orthodox theologians in the West are the most attached to the filioque. That is understandable, because the filioque phrase highlights the role of the Spirit of the self-revealing God in Christ. Yet the little word ‘and’ serves to keep the first model viable as well. The only remedy is to return to the phrase ‘through the Son,’ as used by Tertullian and Athanasius: we know no other God than the One who came among us in our suffering.

This clearly sets before us the problem of the subordination of the Son, but also does provide an answer. In both of the first two categories of thought as presented above, the Son is part of the movement of God toward the world; to be precise, in that part of the movement that shares in eternity. They deal with the divine Logos and the divine Spirit. But the movement is a descending one. This suggests a hierarchy in God. The risk is, that the Logos and the Spirit are here a little bit less than God, and thus more or less seamlessly fit in an ever expanding hierarchy of angels and other heavenly beings. We see this in Pseudo-Dionysius the Aereopagite. Here, the Father becomes the real God, while the Son receives a derivative, albeit abundant, glory. Even if that idea is avoided by keeping a strict separation between God and creatures, it remains tempting to see the purpose of the Son as the expression of God’s final ideal and ultimate glory in creation. This way of thinking leads to a theologia gloriae without the paradox and the scandal of the cross. This type of subordinationism was rejected by Origen.253

The problem becomes much more defined when we closely link the Son in the Trinity with Christ, the one born and crucified. Here we do not have an ideal revelation of God, but a paradoxical reality.

253. Princ. II,7,3, in which he explicitly states that the Spirit should not be understood as a general manner of God’s acting in creation. At most, he gives it a slight nod (II,7,2; in I,3,5 not at all) but sees the specific uniqueness of the Spirit in the renewal through Christ. A natural pneumatology too easily leads to all sorts of heresies.
Moreover, the Scriptures of the New Testament make abundantly clear that Jesus submits to the Father and must learn obedience through suffering. Therefore, the most powerful argument for subordinationism lies in Scripture. Then why is it precisely the thoroughly scriptural theologians, such as Tertullian and Athanasius, who developed a doctrine of the Trinity in which the identity of the Father and the Son (homoousios with the Father) is predominant?

This is only possible because, in their understanding, obedience belongs to the divine being. God is not only power, but also dependent in communion. And such dependence is no less divine than God’s might. The will of the Father is the will of the Son. If the Son is completely obedient, not only externally but also internally, then the will of the Son is identical with the will of the Father. The obedient will of the Son is therefore identical with the will of God. Precisely because the obedience of the Son is entirely perfect, the will of the Son is divine will. Only in doing the will of the Father is the Son expression of the divine Being. Thus, the salvation-historical relation of dependency is essential for the glory of God. If the Son had a will other than the will of the Father, he would not be at one with the Father. Then the unity of the divine being would be divided. But in doing the will of the Father, the Son is the expression of the completion of God’s will and thus of the glory of God; God’s will commands, and it stands! The early church exegesis of Psalm 40: ‘See, I come to do Your will,’ is seen as support for the pre-existence of the Son. This obedient Son is therefore of the same power and majesty as the Father who calls him. Together, they are the one true God, joined with the Spirit who is sent by the Father and who partakes of the work of Christ. The Son is not less than God because the Son does the work of the Father, and the Spirit is not less in glorifying Christ. God is God, precisely in the fullness of the three persons. This is the ‘subordinationism’ of Ori-

256. Tertullian (AP 4) uses the very same text that is the locus probans (proof text) for Marcellus and Van Ruler when they pose that, respectively, the Trinity and the incarnation are dissolved (1 Cor. 15:28, see previous footnote 120, and Chapter II, section 1.3, footnote 86), to show that the distinction between persons does not diminish the monarchy: ‘He who subjects, and he to whom all things were made subject are necessarily two persons.’ The equality of power is not impaired in the monarchy.

See also AM III,4 where Tertullian argues that the appearance of Christ in the eschaton will reveal no other God than revealed in the incarnation. The Judge is none
gen. Before all else, he maintains steadfastly that the Son is completely equal to the Father. The eternal generation is truly eternal. There is no gap in time between the being of the Father and the Son. The Son does not arrive after the Father. To introduce such succession, by replacing the sequence of time by a sequence of logic, is not permitted either. The Fatherhood of God is as eternal as the Logos. However, the relationship of the persons infers obedience of the Son. It is precisely in absolute obedience that the Son is completely at one with the Father, and thus do they share one-and-the-same will. In this manner the Son is mediator of creation as the Almighty. 'It is through the Son that the Father is Almighty.'

The paradox is not only applied to the incarnation and the Incarnate One, but also to Godself, completely consistent with the idea that the Incarnate One reveals God. Obedience is just as divine as power. Now it becomes clear why the church fathers can say, both that God does not suffer and that God suffers. We cannot resolve the apparent conflict between these two theses in a scheme such as 'according to his humanity — according to his divinity.' Doing so would divide the unity of Christ. This is all the more reason to understand clearly what is meant when it is said that God cannot suffer.

other than the Savior. If Marcion were consistent, he would have to conclude that the good God of Christ would later be trumped by the Judge.

258. Princ. I,2.2. Augustine uses the same argument to express the equality of Father and Son (SC 8)
259. Princ. I,2.2.
260. 'Persons or hypostases, whatever that means,' says Origen frankly (Princ. II,3,8).
261. The difference between Tertullian and Origen lies in Tertullian’s emphasis upon thought in the comparison with the human spirit: the Logos is the thought of God that becomes Word. For him, power is thus a royal power displayed in the subjection of opponents.
Foremost for Origen, the Logos is the expression of the will of God. (Princ. I,2,6).
The Logos is completely of one will with God, and works (energeia, I,2,12) in the same manner. That is why the power of Logos is not authoritarian according to Origen, but manifest in that humans want to become of one will with God (I,6,1 and 3).
Hence, the text of I Cor. 18:25, ‘that all things will be subject to him,’ prompts Origen to think about an inner submission, and thus a conversion of all.
Origen places such emphasis on the mission of the Son as originating in the will of God, in order to cut off any and all ideas of emanation (I,2,6). He has this opposition to emanation in common with the Platonic thought of his day (see Dörrie, 1965: 135-141; Armstrong 1979: 61-66; Meijering 1996: 150).

263. Athanasius, DN III,8 (God is not pathētikēs).
Later scholastic theology connected the question with the idea of God as *actus purus*. God is always a first mover and never a second. Here the thesis that God does not suffer is interpreted as, ‘in God is no passive tense.’ That is not at all what the church fathers mean, however. In the distinction between the Father and the Son the passiveness of God is already a given: precisely the perfect obedience of the Son expresses the essential unity with the Father. It follows that God is not only *actus purus*, but also *passivum purum*, since the Son is as essential as the Father. It is a consequence of the notion of perichoresis that we cannot neatly divide *actus* and *passivum* among the three persons. It is enough to say that the Father is primarily act, and that the Son is primarily obedience. As long as God is alone, without a creation, God is only moved by Godself and the unity in Will is perfect. There is *passivum*, but no *passio* (in the sense of suffering). This changes when there is a creation that does not completely coincides with God’s will. In the disobedience of the creation we find God’s receptivity for suffering. Since the receptivity first belongs to the Son, suffering first becomes his suffering. The Son suffers the experience of the disobedience of the world even without the incarnation. The incarnation means that he begins to bear our suffering.

The church fathers see something similar between body and soul in anthropology and between God and humans. We can conceive of the soul as activity and will. But we can also understand it as receptivity. Our suffering originates precisely in that receptivity to the pain of hunger, of wounds. Athanasius says that the soul is immortal and thus cannot suffer as such. That does not mean that it cannot be receptive. Yet the soul meets no resistance when it is alone with its own will. Resistance results from experiences of the world outside us by means of our bodily senses. Since the soul never exists without body, what is most essential of the soul is characterized by that resultant passivity. Tertullian, once again, has a pithy formulation: ‘The soul of soul is sense’ (that which we experience). Thus a soul suffers, even though it cannot suffer in and of itself. Human existence is

265. See earlier this section, in Tertullian’s arguments.
266. Irenaeus, *AH* III, 20, 1, 2.
268. CC 12: ‘Animae anima sensus est,’ ‘Nihil animale sine sensu, nihil sensuale sine anima.’
truly a suffering existence. It is the soul of our life. The Son of God united with this soul in order to experience our suffering. Therefore, Apollinaris was rebuked, and Origen stresses the unity of the Logos with the soul and not with the body.\textsuperscript{269} Without the road via the human soul the bodily suffering would be directly connected with God and it would thus lose the awareness of the human suffering. The soul is conscious of the experiences of bodily wounds as true human suffering, and in that manner is experienced in God’s receptivity as God’s own suffering, because God bears humanity in person. It is not because of God’s lack of passivity that God does not suffer as Godself, but because there is no disobedience. But God suffers in communion with the disobedient, suffering world that God bears in the Son. Origen says: ‘We must truly consider whether this is why the Only-begotten is seen as the soul of God, because Godself entered into this region of grief and this vale of tears.’\textsuperscript{270} Echoing Tertullian’s idea of the soul, we could even say, ‘The God of God is suffering.’ That is what Zephyrinus means when he says that he knows no other God than the one who suffered. At the same time one could insist that the Father does not suffer: one cannot be ambivalent if the primacy of God’s will is at stake.

In summary, one could conclude that the orthodox church fathers say that God is receptive within Godself, but does not suffer because the Son is never disobedient. At the same time they say (and that is at the core of their anti-gnostic thought) that God experienced suffering in a genuinely human manner.

In later theology, Origen’s thoughts are usually construed in terms of a philosophical form of a subordinate doctrine of the Trinity. That is encouraged by theologies of the Antiochene tradition, who appealed to him to defend their theology in which the divinity of Christ as the Incarnate One was weakened. This is an anti-Alexandrian use of Origen.\textsuperscript{271} The council of Constantinople in the year 553 made short thrift

\textsuperscript{269} Princ. II,6,3.

\textsuperscript{270} Origen, Princ. II,8,5.

\textsuperscript{271} This is already the case with Eusebius. In the sixth century, this sort of interpretation commonly used fifth century writings (of Ibas of Edessa, Theodorus of Mopsuestia, and Theodoretus of Cyrus) that were introduced to diminish the equality of Christ and the Father and the unity of their natures. The more moderate Antiochenes, in their attempts to construct a philosophically attenuated theology, consistently tried to utilize Origen’s extremely delicate theological analyses (that had led himself again and again to much more tentative theological solutions). Especially popular was the uncertainty in Origen’s designation of the manner of relationship between the Spirit and the Father and the Son (Princ, Praefatio 4). In the
of these theologians. Even so, just to be sure, Origen was condemned as heretic as well (even though his doctrine of the Trinity was not the foremost issue). This verdict meant that his writings could no longer be quoted as a reliable source.\(^{272}\)

In my opinion, we cannot call the Cappadocians subordinationists either,\(^{273}\) in the sense that they would call the Son a lower deity; neither do they assume a God above God. Like Tertullian, they oppose a numerical understanding of unity.\(^{274}\) Their concern is with the quality of power and honor, equal will and operation. Moreover, they explicitly emphasize the equality of the persons.\(^{275}\)

With the Cappadocians, we do encounter a new way of doing theology, however. The formulations of the Cappadocians miss the intensity and the edginess of Athanasius. Christ as the incarnate Word is not tied as closely to the Father. Yet they are in line with Athanasius who later in life, when he made room for philosophy, allowed *homoiousios*, the 'equal' being.

Yet a fundamental shift may indeed have taken effect. While the formulations of Constantinople were just fine, in and of themselves, they took on another character when placed in the open field of philosophical speculation. When I read the writing of the Cappadocians, I enter a world that is very different than the world of thought of Athanasius. Here theology has become fashionably elitist and esoteric. It opens doors to a trinitarian philosophy of someone like Hegel, be-

meantime, it is clear that Origen may well have been inconclusive about the nature of the relationship, but never about the level of that relationship: the Spirit is as much God as the Father and the Son are God (Princ. I.3.2, closing). See Van de Beek 1998a.

272. Canon 11 (Denz. 223). I think that the condemnation of Origen was in error, and that he comes very close to Tertullian’s classical doctrine of the Trinity. Origen was no less a biblical theologian than Tertullian; like the latter, he used philosophy (albeit of a different character) to keep the philosophers at bay. Like Tertullian, Origen was more of a radical than a liberal. See also Malaty 1995b: 281-288.

273. Compare Seeberg 1923: 128 ‘Subordinatianische Züge waren bei unseren Theologen an sich durch ihre prinzipielle Stellung ausgeschlossen’ (subordinationist tendencies were excluded by our theologians because of their principal assumptions).

274. Basil, Epist. 8.2, MPG 32: 248f. ‘For a number relates to quantity, but a quantity is connected to a bodily nature; a number, therefore, has a bodily nature.’ God as Creator is beyond bodies and thus numbers (MPG 32: 249). Compare Gregory of Nazianza, orat. 30,20, MPG 36:129.

cause the Trinity is the structure of reality. That is possible, because for the Cappadocians and their ilk the word ‘God’ has become the name of a concept and class by itself. The word no longer refers directly to the One who is made manifest in three. These three are ‘equal in nature,’ in which ‘nature’ is the general concept. When, in this manner, the divine becomes a general concept, it becomes possible to extend some attributes to humanity, allowing them to participate in what is divine. This opens the way to speak of Christ as a ‘Godman’ a few centuries later. Humans can partake of divine nature, as in divinization (not deification).

In my judgement the one little iota is crucial. You cannot write homoousios and then say that what you really mean is homoioustos. Not because it is linguistically impossible, but because now theologically something else is said. It creates a gap between Jesus Christ and God, and that is unacceptable. Again we must remind ourselves of the saying of Zephyrinus: ‘I know only one God, Jesus Christ, and no one else than the One who was born and did suffer.’ That is the crux of the matter for Athanasius and for Luther. Here, the paradox is left intact. For God – and God alone – can save us by bearing our entire existence. Everything depends on our confession to know God in Christ alone. It is the criterion for good theology, Luther says. ‘If you under-

276 Basil, Epist. 9,3, MPG 32: 271.
277. See previous footnote 195.
278. This explains why the doctrine of the Trinity in the Cappadocian fathers is interpreted in various ways. Seeberg 1953: 128, posits that this doctrine is not subordinationism, and Loofs 1959: 203 argues that a remnant of ‘Inferiorismus’ remains, albeit not in a strict sense. I think that Seeberg is correct in principle. However, that what is ‘of God’ is no longer connected to the One God, but to a general conceptualization, with properties that can be described. These attributes are partly the same and partly different (‘properties,’ proprietates or idiotieis) for the persons of the Tri-unity. But the boundaries with human attributes have become seamless, opening the door to the ‘theandrikos’ of the sixth century (see earlier this chapter, note 195). See also the use of the comparative case ‘more godly’ (theioteros) by Pseudo-Caesarius (MPG 38: 872). All this reinforces the impression that the uniqueness of the Father, from whom all things flow, is most properly Godself, and that the Son and the Spirit are somehow a notch below that. The same thing happens when the general properties of humans are described in order to distinguish them from (other) mammals, which at the same time brings to light differences between humans. It then becomes very difficult to avoid the impression that some humans are more properly human than others. If one would say: ‘the essence of a human being is rational thought,’ the most intellectual human beings quickly will be seen as more ‘human’ than others. The only way to avoid this outcome is to see all human beings as persons of equal worth, regardless of their attributes: personhood is more important than qualifications.
stand and interpret Christ in this manner, ... then it will be easier and more clear to discern what to think of all sorts of situations, religions and worship ... If you do not have this view of Christ, or if it becomes obscure, no doubt a wild and disorderly state of affairs will ensue.\footnote{279}

6. CHALCEDON AND WESTERN CHRISTOLOGY

6.1 The Western accent in theology

'Two natures, without confusion and change, without division and separation in one person.'

This formulation of the council of Chalcedon\footnote{280} (in the year 451) is often stated as the core of orthodox teaching. If you want to know whether someone has an orthodox faith, ask about his or her view concerning Chalcedon. Yet the emphasis on Chalcedon is not self-evident. Only in the West does it have this status. The Eastern-Orthodox Church is much more attached to the Nicean formula, in which Christ is 'God from God, Light from Light.' Chalcedon is a council of the West; much more so than all the other ecumenical councils. The texts of its resolutions were prepared by the bishop of Rome, Leo I.\footnote{281} In those resolutions it is stated that the bishop of Rome has primacy over the entire church.\footnote{282} From that moment on, the bishop of Rome can properly be called 'pope'; it really is an anachronism when applied to an earlier period. While Rome was in its last days as a political power, the ecclesiastical power in the old capital of the Roman empire only grew. The church received the Roman inheritance.

Certainly, that became apparent in western theology. Philosophically, Rome seems to hold a middle position between Alexandria and Antioch. Unlike Alexandria, the West has not shunned philosophy in its theology. Western theologians do not hesitate to use philosophical

\footnote{279 TR, WA 1: 270f. (no. 583).}
\footnote{280 Denz. 302.}
\footnote{281 Hughes 1961: 62-75. See especially the June 13, 449 letter from Leo to Flavian, patriarch of Constantinople. The letter is referred to as Tomus (MPL 54: 775-782; \textit{COD} 77-82).}
\footnote{282 Denz. 306. Originally, the pope objected to the resolution as a whole, not because of the primacy of Rome, but because Constantinople received a second place of importance as 'the new Rome,' surpassing Antioch and Alexandria. For correspondence concerning this issue between pope and emperor, see Hefele 1908: 839-857.}
concepts such as ‘nature’ and ‘substance’ and other philosophical distinctions. However, unlike in Antioch, such concepts are for the West not eternal ideas. Rome, much more than Antioch, was concerned with practical clarity.

At the root of this stance lies Roman jurisprudence. It was no coincidence that the first great Christian writer of the west, Tertullian, was a jurist. In order to prevent confusion and untangled knots of thoughts and human relations, utmost clarity had to be created. Thus foremost in importance is the crafting of clear definitions. ‘Trustworthiness of terms assures proper conferral of attributes.’ For instance, one must clearly distinguish between Christ as human and Christ as God. Since these terms are applied to the same person, the distinction is not less but all the more important. Not to distinguish aspects or functions of a person would only confuse issues. Suppose that in some city one person, Mr. Johnson, is a baker but also a city council member. This person should not let these two functions intermingle with each other. It would lead to a con-fusion of interests and could easily lead to injustices. Whether such separation is truly possible depends on the integrity of the person. The person must truly be one. This one person must keep the two functions strictly separate. Otherwise, issues of the other function will interfere at uncontrollable moments. When others speak about a person they, properly speaking, should observe the same rule. We would not say, ‘the baker reads the minutes of the council,’ but ‘the councilor reads the minutes.’ We do not say that we buy our bread from the council member (that would immediately beg the question about our own issues), but from the baker. That both functions are united in one person is far less important than that they remain strictly separate.

The West treats Christology in the same vein. The formula of Chalcedon is rarely referred to as the unio personalis but almost always as the ‘two-nature doctrine.’ This ‘two’ is much more important than the ‘one.’ The four additional enumerated qualifications of the relationship between the two natures in the Chalcedonian formula bear out this emphasis. The one best known among those four is the restriction ‘without confusion.’ One should not jumble the two natures of Christ. That they are inseparable is less germane, in the same manner that it is less important that Mr. Johnson remains also a baker even when he is a good councilor.

283. ‘Fides nominum salus est proprietatum,’ Tertullian, CC 13.
Against this juridical background one can understand the formulations of Chalcedon as they began essentially to take shape as early as the year 200 in the Latin church. Tertullian says that we must clearly distinguish between the humanity and the divinity of Christ as well as between the Father and the Son. The Father did not suffer, but the Son. Not the divine nature of the person suffered but the human nature.\textsuperscript{284} Thereby a double safety is brought into play against a possible decay of divine nature in a story of human nature. Not only patristicism is explicitly rebuffed, but theopaschitism is checked as well.

Hippolytus thematized the distinctions sharply, making use of both the thoughts of his mentor Irenaeus and of thoughts similar to Tertullian's. According to him we must begin by making a clear distinction between the Father and the Logos: there is one \textit{alongside} the Father.\textsuperscript{285} Moreover, there is a distinction between the Logos still in heaven who had not yet become flesh (the Logos \textit{asarkos})\textsuperscript{286} and the Incarnate one. The latter one, in turn, can again be distinguished from the Logos who spoke and worked through the prophets.\textsuperscript{287} The Logos in the flesh ascended into heaven, in the flesh. However, one must keep in mind that this was a sacrifice to the Father, to redeem guilt. The flesh does not belong to Christ's being, but to the \textit{oikonomia}, the order of salvation.\textsuperscript{288} It is not part of the nature of the Logos to bring flesh into heaven, but an act of the will.

The crucial points of Western Christology over against an Alexandrian understanding are clearly set forth in a work ascribed to Hippolytus, \textit{Against Bero and Helix}.\textsuperscript{289} In the extant fragments of this work, both the manner of thinking as well as the conceptual tools used during and after Chalcedon are found.

\textsuperscript{284} \textit{AP} 29. The cry of Jesus on the cross: 'My God, my God why have You forsaken me?,' does for Tertullian not have the paradoxical meaning it has in the Lutheran tradition ('\textit{Gott von Gott verlassen},' [God forsaken by God]; compare Gollwitzer 1970: 258). He ascribes it to the flesh (\textit{AP} 30).

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\textit{MPG} 10:864, fragment 4.

The work is dated as being from the sixth or seventh century (Bardenhewer 1914: 570f.) because its language field is strongly anti-mono-physitic. It explicitly resist the notion that Christ would have had only one 'energy.' This makes likely a date during or after the monergistic strife (see following section 7.2 of the present chapter) at the beginning of the seventh century. In any case, it is not younger than the middle of the seventh century, because it is often cited in sources after that date.
Pseudo-Hippolytus draws stronger demarcations concerning the incarnation than the Alexandrians. Since the divine nature is unchangeable and infinite, it is impossible that God would distance Godself from those qualities. Kenosis is therefore impossible.

Likewise, human nature remains true to itself. We are dealing with two natures that are unchangeably together in only one hypostasis. In the same way that soul and body are distinguished in human beings, God and human are distinct in Christ. Each of the natures acts true to its own nature. The author accuses his opponent Bero of teaching *sunchasis*, con-fusion. He is against *communicatio idiomatum* for the same reason. It is one and the same who acts as God and acts as a human being. The author comes very close to the Nestorian idea of two persons in Christ (in the sense of distinct means of expression). Even though the language makes a later dating necessary, it is not surprising that this work is ascribed to Hippolytus. It certainly fits the tradition of emphasizing the distinctions. It is surely in line with Hippolytus who, as we saw earlier, had little use for Roman bishops such as Zephyrinus who spoke about the one God who suffered. Tensions escalated to the point that Hippolytus founded an alternate church. Only just prior to his own death (after Zephyrinus and his friend and successor Callistes had died already) did he reconcile himself with the official church. The opponents equally detested Hippolytus. They accused him of dytheism, because of the strict distinction of the Father and the Son.

Different versions of the formula of Chalcedon also illustrate the difference between East and West. The traditional Latin version renders: 'the true God, the true human being.' In Greek it reads, 'truly God'

290. *CBH* 5.
291. See especially *CBH* 6 and the end of *CBH* 1.
293. *Refut.* IX,11
294. The text of Denziger edition 34, based upon the Codex Veronensis, renders: *'Deum vere et hominem vere'* (Denz. 301), and not, as usually is quoted: *'vere Deus, vere homo.'* The previous editions, based upon the Codex Vaticanus, rendered: *'Deum verum et hominem verum'* (Denz. ed. 33: 149); using an adjective instead of an adverbial form. Decisive is the much older version of the Codex Veronensis (*ACO* III,2: 1). However, textual variants must be given a voice. The Greek text has the adverbial form *'Theon aléthos kai anthropon aléthos.'* A deviation would be a *lectio difficilor*, a more problematic reading. A later harmonizing with the Greek text is much more likely than assuming that a change was made in such an official version. A further reason to assume that the adjectival form in Latin is original is the agreement with the text of *Tomus* of Leo (Hefele
and truly human.\textsuperscript{295} By speaking of the\textsuperscript{296} true human' instead of ‘truly human’ the Latin version nudges toward Nestorianism. A certain idealizing trend is set in motion in which Christ is the true human: i.e. a touchstone for our own humanity. Thereby, when the ideal is to be like Jesus, Christology becomes the measure for anthropology.\textsuperscript{297} Such idealism pervades the entire Western theological enterprise. The Greek text assumes that we already know what it means to be human and divine. It only matters how we interpret those realities. This leads to an interpretation of the earlier schism between Rome and Alexandria and the later one between Rome and Byzantium as follows. The West does not know who is human (nor God); the quest is for an ideal human, a true human being. Such a ‘true human’ does not conform to

\textsuperscript{295} Qui enim verus est Deus, idem verus est homo’ (MPL 54: 767; COD 79). The Greek version in MPG renders the adverbial ‘aléthos’ here as well. See also MPL 54, 763 (COD 78; Denz. 293), where the Latin also has adjectives and the Greek has adverbs. During the council no discussion focussed on this text of Leo, while other details were very much debated (such as whether Jesus was a person in two natures or from two natures; Hefele 1908: 719-724, see also 723, note 1). As in many other church resolutions, it is not impossible that ambivalence was allowed on purpose.

However, even if the original reading indeed were ‘Deum vere et hominem vere,’ the official text of the later Western church none-the-less rendered ‘Deum verum et hominem verum.’ That is the way in which the West thinks about the character of the divinity and humanity of Christ. Taking the different versions into account, people were aware of the distinctions and maintained ‘the true human.’ The Nicæanum has an adjective in the Greek as well (very God of very God: Theon aléthinon ek Theou aléthínou, Denz. 125) but there it was only used for the divinity of Christ and the adjective emphasized precisely the unity of the Father and the Son. In the Chalcedonian coupling phrase ‘God – human’ the Greeks could not read aléthinon twice because it sounded too Nestorian to their ears, and therefore twice choose an adverbial form to maintain the coupling. However, the Alexandrians could not accept such repetition because it implied equality of God and human, and also because the adverb was not suited to God. An Alexandrian would have preferred ‘The true God and truly human,’ (Theon aléthinon te kai anthropon aléthos). And even that phrase does not sound the same as ‘the one person of the incarnate Word.’

By translating ‘wahrer Gott, wahrer Mensch’ Barth (KD, IV,1: 146 [CD IV,1: 126]) firmly takes position in the classical Western tradition. It is remarkable that he quotes the Latin version as ‘vere Deus, vere homo’: even a wrong translation preserves the Western meaning.

\textsuperscript{296} Theon aléthos kai anthropon aléthos.

\textsuperscript{297} Unlike some other languages, in English the difference between the adjective form ‘very’ or ‘true’ and the adverbial form ‘verily’ or ‘truly’ is clear; ‘real’ is not the same as ‘really.’

\textsuperscript{298} See Barth 1946, where the Christengemeinde (the Christian community) already knows what the path should be for the Bürgergemeinde [the civic community].
the actual everyday humans but is what any human really ought to be. The West has problems with God as well: its ‘true’ God can only be known through revelation. This ‘true God’ does not agree with the current images and ideas we have of God, and therefore again and again escapes our reality. The Byzantine believers already know what true divinity and true humanity entails (truly God and truly human: corresponding to our ideas about God and humanity), and their glorious God pervades all that exists. As for the Alexandrians, they know what it means to be truly human: living with suffering and guilt, in the grasp of death. But they know themselves depending on the manifestation of the true God, as confessed in Nicea. 298 This is the God who is bearing broken human existence by becoming human and thus saving humanity.

Having said all this, the contrast between East and West should not be exaggerated. The issues concern differences in accent. In contradiction to a catholic tradition, only heretics persist in pushing consequences of one single point of view to extremes. 299 Such catholicity implies that the breadth of the faith spectrum is kept in view, and that its doctrine has room for various approaches in different situations and cultures. Thus the differences are not absolute but always differences in accent. Even when the conflict rose to great heights at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third, each of those involved can suddenly say surprising things that seem more fitting to the opponent. We already mentioned that at one point Zephyrinus also said that it was not the Father who suffered. Conversely, both Hippolytus 300 and Tertullian 301 wrote that God is born and suffered, in spite of all their warnings not to confuse the issues. Hippolytus even wrote a terrific piece in which he sums up, in Athanasian fashion, all the paradoxes of the work of Christ. ‘Therefore he does not refuse to take on what humans undergo, although he was proven to be God,

298. See previous note 294, third paragraph.
299. Hippolytus (CN 3) reproaches the heretics for one-sided Scripture reading.
300. CN 6.
301. CC 3. Tertullian is always a difficult case because he, as a Roman jurist, continuously makes use of the methods of classical rhetoric. In that discipline it was less important to be right than that it was to come out right and win. In building his case against Marcion and the gnostics concerning the actual flesh of Christ (deemed by them unsuited for a relation with God), Tertullian shocks with his statement that God was entirely born as a human being, needed nursing and actually died. In his brief against the modalist Praxeas he stakes everything upon the distinction of the Father and the Son.
since he experiences hunger and hardship and suffers thirst and weariness. He flees in fear, sorrows in prayer and he, who as God has a nature that does not require sleep, slumbers on a pillow... And he, who knew who Judas was, was betrayed by Judas. And he who had been worshipped as God, was denigrated by Kaiaphas...And he who fixes the heavens with a staple, is affixed to the cross....And the side from which abundant life flows for all, is thrust through with a spear. And he who raises the dead is wrapped in linen and placed in a grave, and on the third day raised by the Father, even though he himself is the resurrection and the life. 302

Moreover, we should not lose sight that ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ are not strictly bound to geography. One can live in the West and have an Alexandrian theology. Luther is a perfect example of this.

When all is said and done, it remains that differences in approach lead to differences in accents. More than the other councils, Chalcedon placed the accent upon duality. In the history of reception by the West that emphasis is accentuated by the one-sided reference to the issues as ‘the doctrine of two natures.’

6.2 Being human alongside us

The western pre-occupation with the difference between natures easily leads to dividing the actions of Jesus in a scheme ‘according to divinity – according to humanity.’ 303 This can easily endanger the unity of

302. CN 18.
303. This is very clear in Augustine. For instance in FS 9: according to his divinity Jesus admonishes Mary at the wedding in Cana (John 2:4) and according to his humanity Christ says to John to take Mary as his mother (John 19:26). See also Ench. X,35. More technical is the distinction as expounded in Trin. I,11-13, addressing a question raised in I,8,15 about the subjection of Christ to the Father as mentioned in I Cor. 15: 27-28. Augustine’s exegesis states that Christ as a human being is always subject to the Father, but not Christ as God (see also previous note 186).

Calvin takes a striking middle position in his Christology. His point of departure is clearly Chalcedonian, rejecting both Nestorianism as well as Eutychianism (Instr.II,14,4). Calvin also agrees with Augustine in calling Christ our brother (Instr.II,14,7). Christ is the Son by nature, we are adopted children of God (Instr.II,14,6). On the other hand, Calvin explicitly rejects a distribution of Christ’s work in human and divine categories (II,14,2). The unity of the person of Christ is paramount. Indeed, Calvin supports the communicatio idiomatum, and applies it in his exegesis of I Cor. 15:28 (II,14,3). This is why Calvin speaks in favor of the idea of Mary as the mother of God (II,13,3) ‘of our Lord’ II,14,4). At times, Calvin seems to presuppose the anhypostasis: for instance where he sees Christ as the new
the person. While the entire ecumenical world acknowledges that God is God and that a human is a human being, the West accents the phrase much more strongly. Christ suffered as a human being and healed as God. As a human being Christ wept, and as God Christ was raised from the dead. Such apposition risks losing sight of the unity of the person. The West has a tendency to see the humanity of Jesus as an identity of its own, one who is somehow connected to God, one way or another. While in the doctrine of the Trinity one then does not need to dwell as much on the distinction of the persons, in Christology there is a tendency toward a Nestorian separation or an adoptionist independence of the human being.

We see traces of this very early in the terminology. The Greek church had a preference for the formulation ‘The Word became flesh.’ This was not only a biblical expression, but also could express the anhypostatic character of the human nature of Christ. When they said that the Logos became human or entered into humanity they meant that he had assumed everything that was human. He had assumed humanity: that is, all flesh.

In the Latin church we see, besides the notion that Christ assumed flesh, also the expression that Christ became a human being. The concreteness highlights the individuality. This is especially true for Augustine (which makes sense against the backdrop of his emphasis of the unity of God in his doctrine of the Trinity). Yet Hippolytus,

Adam (II,13,4) who has assumed the person and the name of Adam (II,12,3). Christ did acquire no merit for himself (II,17,6); in other words, Christ had no finality other than to be the Mediator for others. Likewise, Calvin’s emphasis upon the royal office of Christ (acting over and on behalf of us all) as the essential office instead of the priestly office (acting in place of us) or the prophetic office (addressing us) follows this line of thought (II,15,2, explicated in II,15,2-6). As a whole, Calvin is much closer in his Christology to Luther and Athanasius than to Augustine.

More recently the distinction between the natures was developed very strongly in an article by K. Rahner (1964a), in which he even made a distinction between the divine and human consciousness of Jesus. Here the unity of the person is under enormous stress.


305. FS 8: He has assumed ‘the entire human being’ (totum hominem). That does not mean the whole of humanity, but the human person as a whole: not only the body and soul, but also the human spirit. See also Enchir. X,36 and 40; CR 22; Trin. X,29.

Augustine also uses the notion of the assumption of the flesh, yet it is usually colored by the biblical language of John 1:14. He understand ‘flesh’ explicitly as ‘human being’ (Enchir.X,34; see also Trin.II,5,9). The expression does not have the weighty connotation of the assumption of the whole of our human existence. For
who has a much more formidable doctrine of the Trinity also knows – beside the idea that the flesh has its subsistence (sustasis) in the Word\textsuperscript{306} – the expression that a human being was assumed.\textsuperscript{307}

This does not imply an adoptionist Christology. Hippolytus explicitly says that the human being with whom the Word was united was formed by the Logos. In final analysis Augustine does not argue against the unity of the person of Christ. At the end of the eighth century in Spain, however, history would prove that this tendency to objectify the human being could easily lead to adoptionism.

Felix of Urgel\textsuperscript{308} and Elipandus of Toledo,\textsuperscript{309} who were the most prominent representatives\textsuperscript{310} of this Spanish adoptionism, connect these tendencies with Islamic influences. In the encounter with Muslims it was important to present the unity of God as much as possible, and to do little to accent the divinity of Christ. The Spanish mozarabic\textsuperscript{311} liturgy speaks of the ‘adopted human being’ (adoptivus homo). God had adopted this man as Son and granted him divine glory.

Spanish adoptionism was condemned at a synod in Frankfurt in 794.\textsuperscript{312} This teaching contradicted too directly the established orthodox ecclesiastical tradition. But the tendency that it champions remained a permanent strain in the West. Here, Jesus is not human because God has taken humanity into Godself and therefore bears the humanity of all human beings, but Jesus is a human being alongside us. Most Western believers will more readily say that Jesus is their brother than – as Luther says – Jesus is me. In the first case, soteriology does not say that Jesus bears our entire being, including our guilt, but rather implies that Jesus saves us as our substitute, in our place; or – even more adoptionist – Jesus exemplifies our salvation for us.

A characteristic example of the difference in thought process is the comparison of two discourses by Athanasius and Hippolytus; they

Augustine the anhypostasis is essentially limited to the notion that the human Jesus did not already have – apart from the unity with the eternal Son – an existence unique to himself in which he would have gained the merit that founded the unity (Ench. X,36; DP 24,67).

\textsuperscript{306} CN 15
\textsuperscript{307} MPG 10: 864, fragm. 4.
\textsuperscript{308} Died around the year 818; writings MPL 96:882-888
\textsuperscript{309} Lived from 717 to around 800. Writings MPL 96:859-882, 916-920 (including the Symbolum of Elipandus) and MPL 101: 1321-1331.
\textsuperscript{310} See Seeberg 1953: 58-61
\textsuperscript{311} Literally ‘arabicizing’
\textsuperscript{312} Denz. 612-615.
begin in parallel ways, yet ultimately diverge radically.\textsuperscript{313} Both begin by explicating that God has often attempted to improve the human race through prophets and commandments. But those attempts have been in vain. Finally, the Logos became flesh. At that point, Athanasius states that God did not come to heal humanity (that already had been proven hopeless), but for Godself to bear humanity itself. Godself participated in the redemption. In turn, Hippolytus states that God came in the flesh so Godself could show us righteousness. God lived it out for all of us to see, and now we can follow in like manner.

Clearly, Hippolytus thinks that Christ is other than we are. We must clearly distinguish Christ from ourselves. This notion can lead to a completely Pelagian doctrine of grace. Here our lives must be saved \textit{along side} the life of Jesus. Taught by him, we should do similar good works. Pushed to an extreme, this means for modern individualism that substitution has no place, and that only inspiration remains a viable option. In 1959, a Reformed professor at Leyden University, P. Smits, stated that no one can bear the guilt of another and that he thus refused to take advantage of such a doctrine.\textsuperscript{314}

Instead, Augustine stated disapprovingly that, according to Pelagianism, we are left to save ourselves. However, he is caught in the very same scheme: it is \textit{either} God \textit{or} me; a notion remains\textsuperscript{315} of competition between God and humanity. Since Augustine does not believe that a human being can save him or herself, a strict doctrine of predestination results: we are entirely dependent upon God’s choice. In that choice of God we must carefully distinguish between election and rejection.\textsuperscript{316}

\textsuperscript{313} See Hippolytus, \textit{Refut.} X,33 and Athanasius, \textit{CA} III,31

\textsuperscript{314} This issue flared up spectacularly in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands on Good Friday, 1959; see Rasker 1986: 511, note 45.

\textsuperscript{315} The exclusivity of responsibility is a general feature in Western thought. The one who fails must bear the guilt; when the guilty one has been punished, the same misdeed cannot be charged against another. Yet exceptions are made, such as in public office. If a bureaucratic mistake is made, the head of the office is finally accountable, regardless of punitive measures against the specific bureaucrat who made the mistake. A tendency to not hold the office holder in charge responsible, and to blame only the specific (lower) official involved, illustrates the ongoing loss of corporate sensibility in recent times.

\textsuperscript{316} Calvin continues Augustine’s line of thought. However, he does so along lines of a strong Christology. Whereas for Augustine Christology is subordinate, for Calvin it belongs to the heart of theology. The religious emotionalism one detects in Augustine when he thinks about God as Creator in his \textit{Confessiones} comes instead to the fore in Calvin when he speaks about Christ (\textit{Inst.} III). We must ‘fix our eyes and hearts on Christ alone’ (\textit{Inst.} II,16,3). The distance between God and us is
It is worth noting that here also, Christology does not play a large role for Augustine. In his early work Christ is only named sporadically. Augustine is much more interested in human beings. To accept the Christian faith meant for him first of all to believe that God had created the world and that the world is therefore good. Later, in the disputes concerning the doctrine of grace, he opposes the notion of a human being as supposedly independent from God. Just like Athanasius, he is concerned with the relationship of God and human beings. A human being can only be saved when understood as creature and because God leads toward what is good through the Spirit. But in contrasts to Athanasius, who Christologically fills the salvation of the human with the Spirit as Christus praeens, the accent lies for Augustine more on pneumatology proper. His Christology is initially limited to teaching humility as a mark of a true humanity. Christ is the Mediator who makes God know to us. Later he adds that the sacrifice of Christ has redeemed the sins of the past. Augustine exegetes the text 'Christ is made sin for us' in such a way that the meaning becomes that 'Christ is made a sin-offering for us.' Christ was offered in our stead. The deep anhypostatic meaning is not acknowledging a cornerstone of a Reformed doctrine of grace. Yet in Reformed pietism the distinction between the Spirit and human self is clearly drawn. I cannot be sure that my faith is the work of the Spirit: it could be my own imagination. Later, when rationalism grips Reformed theology, there is no way out. Theologically, this mode of thinking fosters more and more distinctions in order to bridge the unbridgeable, and spiritually it leads to deep anxiety.

It is easy to understand why in the New Era semi-pelagianism found fertile ground, even in the Reformed tradition. Early on in the Reformation it led to a schism with the Remonstrant party, later it arose in Methodist, Baptist and Evangelical movements. Here God did everything in Christ, offers it to us, and we must now choose. Evangelicalism is much more influenced by the New Era than is Roman-Catholicism. Placing all emphasis upon the individual leaves him or her stranded without a strong sense of the church as a communion of saints, and thus the church as an entity of its own, a body that can bear the lives of the faithful.

317. Thus in Confessions God is addressed as Creator, usurping all Augustine’s attention.

318. Conf. X,43; FS 6. See also FS 3: God is made know in Christ. That does not mean that Christ is merely an exemplary human being (as Augustine thought originally; Conf. VII,19) but that Christ as the Word of God takes on the lowness of flesh to teach us humility (Conf. VII, 18). It is striking how faith takes shape entirely in works, according to FO. Compare Augustine’s ‘Teach me and heal me’ (Conf. X,43) with the thought of Athanasius that Christ did not come to heal but to bear (CA III,31). Compare also Augustine, CD XXI,15.

319. Enchir. 41. Note that also in this late work (that serves as a survey of doctrine (Retr. II,63)), Christology plays a limited role.
edged. Christ, as the other one along side us,\textsuperscript{320} takes on the guilt of our past; and as to the future, we live in Christ’s humility. This is only possible because the Spirit who is really in us, guides us – the elect only – that is.\textsuperscript{321}

Semi-pelagianism has walked a middle way more carefully. It holds that we remain dependent on the salvation of Christ. However, with the blessing of this salvation, mediated through the church, we are compelled to apply it ourselves. Here, election means being placed in a space in which we can do good.\textsuperscript{322} This is the model that dominated Roman-Catholicism (with great variety), and that was so fervently defended by Erasmus on the threshold of a new era. Free will is no longer, as in the early church, a fate that dooms limited people to failure, but is deemed a possibility for independent individuals enabling them to work for good along with and for God.

The distinction, made between Jesus and the believers, makes it clear why much more attention was given to ethics in the West than in the East. In the West, the work of Christ has no ontological meaning for the existence of a new humanity that is incorporated into Christ’s humanity. After Christ fulfilled all things for our sake and in our place (or after Christ showed us how to live), we are not the same as Christ. Therefore we are called to live in gratitude (or imitation). In the East people live entirely out of the indicative of the manifested salvation. While the West maintains the indicative in addition to the imperative, it usually is only left with the imperative whenever the distinction between God and human beings (or Christ and the believer) is pushed to extremes.

It is not only in Christology that the West has trouble with unity. Throughout the entire Western theological enterprise similar dualities appear: church and state, nature and grace, revelation and experience.

\textsuperscript{320} In \textit{Enchir.} as well, Christ is the Mediator who bridges the gap between God and human beings (58). The unity with Christ is not found in anhypostatic union with human flesh, but in the separate act of our baptism (41) which is our cross (52).

\textsuperscript{321} Characteristic is a sermon of Augustine about the \textit{Credo} preached to catechumens. The Son became flesh in order to heal our pride through his humiliation (\textit{SC} 6). His cross is an example to remain faithful to God, even unto a martyr’s death (9). More extensively than the suffering of Christ, the suffering of Job is expounded upon as an example to us (10). We receive forgiveness through baptism, and those baptized receive it through prayer and penance (15-16). In \textit{Pat.} Augustine speaks in a similar manner about patience in suffering, in which he explicitly states that it is a gift of God to bear, and not a source of pride (\textit{Pat.} 12).

\textsuperscript{322} See Jonckheere 1995.
It is a weakness of the West not to be able to give proper form to unity. Thereby an inclination is fostered to let two aspects stand side by side, without influencing each other all that much. Sometimes this loss is turned into a self-justifying virtue; at other times only one single aspect is allowed, while repressing or ignoring the other.\textsuperscript{323}

Conversely, it is a weakness of the East that distinctions are easily confused. Specific uniqueness is missing, and the surprise and creative tension of the unity gets lost. One would wish for the East a bit more benefit of the clarity of the distinctions of Roman jurisprudence, with its resistance to entanglements of interest and issues.

7. MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

7.1 In one single nature

The formulation of Chalcedon clearly poses the distinction between the natures. In and of itself, that did not need to be a problem for the Alexandrians. Athanasius and Cyril had taught the same as well. The formula of Chalcedon could have been part of their writings. The problem for the Alexandrians was the one-sidedness. Their problem was not what was said, but what was denied: that Christ would have had only one nature from God in human flesh.

The Alexandrians did not accept Chalcedon. It led to the first great schism of the church. It did not concern outright heresies but differences in accent. I can even understand that to the Alexandrians the proponents of Chalcedon were sectarians. They did not keep the faith whole and undefiled. They did not allow the full expression of the different aspects of God’s relationship with humanity in Christ.

The Egyptian church went her own way, and soon was almost completely forgotten by the Western church. The consequences were disastrous for Christianity in the Middle East. The Christian East was

\textsuperscript{323}. These tendencies were strengthened when after the Enlightenment the desire for practical distinctions were connected to classical Greek concepts as used by the Antiochenes. Conceptual distinctions (originally designed to address eternal ideas far removed from earthly realities) were brought to bear on reality (which Rome understood to only cover practicalities). The resulting absolute separations caused in philosophy the end of metaphysics, in politics the separation of church and state, in theology the awareness of the absence of the transcendent God, and degraded further in virulent expressions of ideologies such as colonialism, fascism and communism.
divided. Subsequently, the patriarchies were subjected by a new and powerful religion: Islam. Before they conquered Constantinople, the West had made a significant contribution to the conquest of Constantinople by Islam when the Western crusaders sacked the city on the way to the Holy Land.

Chalcedon is a tragedy from a political perspective. One could argue that the patriarchs of Alexandria invited the disaster. Cyril and his successor, Dioscurus, played a power game. To play that game, you have to know how to play to win. Their strategy consisted of short-term victories. By avoiding conversation with opponents, Cyril quickly forced a decree in 431 in Ephesus. Then, in 449, during a synod meeting, Dioscurus planned for a gang of monks with cudgels to force the delegates of Constantinople to subscribe to the Alexandrian point of view. The patriarch of Constantinople was severely battered, and died of his wounds.324 This may be a way to win a battle but it will lose a war, especially a moral one. Hence the Alexandrians lost.

Politically, the emperor did not play the game any better. He allowed his empire to be split. He distanced himself from the Egyptians, and was never able to draw close again. For in Egypt, the patriarch of Alexandria exercised power over more than religion alone. In Alexandria religion and politics were inseparable; everything was of one cloth. Without the patriarch the emperor had not formally lost Egypt, but certainly virtually. The official loss was a matter of time.

The only victor in the conflict was the bishop of Rome where the emperor had become already insignificant. The Roman bishop played the classic divide-and-conquer strategy of the earlier emperors very well. After Chalcedon he emerged as a winner with the official acknowledgement of his primacy.325

For this reason, it is possible that the discussions in Chalcedon did not penetrate the problems sufficiently. It was too superficial to look to the words only, and to neglect their deeper meaning: i.e. that some people taught that Christ had one single nature. That was self-evident for the Alexandrians. For nature has to do with a concrete person. Besides the notion that there are two natures (for there is truly a God and there are truly human beings) one must at the same time speak

324. Hughes 1961: 60. Leo I wrote to empress Pulcheria about this synod (known as the Robber synod of Ephesus) "non iudicium sed latrocinium" (not a judicial session but a rogue set up), MPL 54: 943.

325. Denz. 306.
about the one nature of Christ, or else Christ is not truly a person. For each person has his or her own character, and thus a particular nature. And this nature determines what sort of person we are facing. If the person of Christ is God and human (and everyone agreed on that much), then there is for the Alexandrians only one single nature, namely the Incarnate Word. To deny that, is to disavow that Christ is God and human. To negate that is for them to gainsay the one incarnate nature and therefore at the same time to disallow the two natures.

Even in the example of Mr. Johnson, who is both baker and council member, it is possible to note a much closer connection than Roman jurisprudence wants to acknowledge. For it is unavoidable that his being-baker influences his being-council member. Because he is a baker, he may well find it difficult to think clearly at meetings when the hour gets late; and, because he is a council member attending late meetings, the ovens may be lit a little late some mornings. As a baker he can be a good council member who understands the position of self-employed citizens, and understand the specific problems they have. That is a good thing. It makes him a good council member. The point is not that both facets of his life may not connect (it is unavoidable and even desirable), but that he has unimpeachable integrity. The two aspects should serve the people and not harm them. Thus, the Romans begin with a clearly categorized jurisprudence that can never be entirely true to reality, and the Alexandrians begin with a reality in which everything depends on the integrity of the person. In the case of Christ that is a reasonable assumption. Christ knows everything about the problems of being human, but instead of misusing or abusing it, that understanding is used to serve humanity to the fullest. With Christ we need not fear the hesitations that Mr. Johnson might experience now and then.

Alexandrian theology is completely dependent on the person. The Roman approach provides more order with clearly defined limits and inviolable boundaries. Distinctions, categories and divisions provide control.

In Chalcedon, two cultures clash that can scarcely understand each other, even when they have the same deep religious desire, namely to be reconciled with God. A broad enough catholicity of the faith should have been able to deal with the crux of the problem. Instead, the immediate cause for the conflict was addressed, fostering a superficial treatment of the larger issues.

The immediate cause was the vigorous defense of the one single
nature of Christ by Eutychus, a monk in Constantinople. Eutychus did not have the Alexandrian understanding in mind, but an approach rooted in Antiochene philosophy. He began with the idea of ‘nature’ in an abstract sense. Two of such natures were joined in the one nature of Christ. His way of thinking clearly was not: there is a God – who has a nature; there are human beings – they have a nature; there is Jesus Christ – who has a nature that is both God and human. No, instead, his approach is: there is a divine nature; there is a human nature; these two come together in one single nature that is manifest in Christ. The divine and the human are united in Christ.

Whoever does not begin with the concrete person of Jesus, the suffering one, loses the paradox of God’s union with a human person. If what is divine and what is human were to flow together in a general way, that which is human would disappear in the overwhelming superabundance of the divine. This is exactly what Eutychus concludes. According to him human nature is a drop of honey in the sea. That which is human is dissolved into the divine and can not be retrieved. It is consumed by the divine glory. For Eutychus, Christ is a glorious, divine Christ, suited for pious adoration by idealistic monks. This Christ has little to do with Jesus of Nazareth, has little in common with the people in the slums of Alexandria, and not much even with the politics of the emperor.

This Christ was rejected in Chalcedon. Because the game was played with the ‘one-single-nature’ card of Eutychus, views of others were thrown in with Eutychus even if they had little in common with

326. The difference is explained by Cyril (UC, MPG 75: 1293). First he pleads for the one nature of the concrete Christ of the Scriptures. He compares this one nature to the one nature of a human being, who is both body and soul. This begs the question whether the one nature becomes a mixture or an alloy in which the human nature is subsumed in the divine nature. Cyril replies that we should not think philosophically but Scripturally. He does not pose one single nature of the divine Son after his incarnation from which the unity with humanity could be derived, just as the infinite always includes the finite. In such a case the finite human nature would not amount to anything compared to the divine majesty, and be overwhelmed and consumed. However, God was willing to accommodate to what human nature could bear. God could do so precisely because of his divinity. God is not bound to our concepts. Therefore God’s divinity did not consume his humanity, just like the fire did not consume the burning bush that Moses encountered on mount Horeb.

Compare also Cyril SV 14: mingling or transformation is rejected, as well as synousiosis, a co-being, because then Christ would be neither God nor human.

him. If the game would have centered, not on this particular phrase, but on the issue of ‘salvation-of-lost-humanity,’ the rulings of Chalcedon most likely would have turned out differently.

In Chalcedon, the proponents of the notion of the one nature, the *mia physis*, were all painted with the same brush. It is a persistent misunderstanding, perpetuated in the West, to call the Egyptian, Coptic Church monophysitic. From one point of view this is correct: they confess the one nature of Christ. However, they confess this in a very distinct manner, namely as a proclamation of the specific man of sorrows.

7.2 A quest for unity

In Chalcedon, Constantinople stood with the West. They even granted Rome primacy in order to win their feud with Alexandria. But a great many differences between Constantinople and Rome were not addressed. Obviously this was part of the power plays. When the Byzantine empire blossomed in the sixth century, the patriarch of the city increased in stature and power. Yet many inner conflicts remained unsolved. Constantinople felt little affinity with the mindset that demanded clarity of distinctions so favored by the West.

In an effort to go beyond the neutral term ‘in one person,’ movements arose again and again that tried, one way or another, to re-establish in Christology the word ‘one’ to mean ‘one unified one.’ People had a desire to formulate the nature of the unity. The quest for unity in Christology was highlighted in the year 553 when the second ecumenical council of Constantinople unanimously affirmed the theology of Cyril. Of course, Cyril had not formally been condemned at Chalcedon in 451. On the contrary, his council of Ephese in 431 was recognized as an ecumenical council. Constantinople was not arguing against Chalcedon, and nothing new was added or restored in 553. Only the context and the intentions were different. The pendulum was beginning to swing in the other direction.

Tensions flared up when people tried explicitly to formulate the content of the unity. Two options were discussed intensely: *mia energeia* (only one ‘operation,’ ‘vigorous activity,’ or ‘active doing’) and *hen thélēma* (only one will).

328. Rome received the primacy in Chalcedon, but Constantinople gained a definitive victory over Alexandria in the East. As the ‘new Rome’ it would rank second after the old mother-city. See previous chapter note 282.
The first option was that Christ acted ‘through one single divine-human action center.’\(^{329}\) The problem of this idea of the one operation was that comparable notions had already been used in the doctrine of the Trinity: the three persons were one in strength, will and action.\(^{330}\) Using this vocabulary in Christology drew the human nature of Christ within the divine nature. That did bring not only the monophysitic theology of Eutychus to mind, but also recalled Apollinaris of Laodicea who had proposed that Jesus was a divine ensoulment in a body. Moreover, the uniqueness of the two natures was diminished by these inferences. Is a human nature still human if it does not act in human ways? Pseudo-Hippolytus succinctly summarizes the rejection: ‘For who accepts an identical operation (\textit{taoutourgian}) of different natures, introduces at the same time a mingling of the natures and a separation of persons, because their natural manner of existence will be completely unrecognizable by the transfer of attributes. … But if the flesh did not receive the same nature, it also did not receive the same operation (\textit{energeia}).’\(^{331}\)

The fight about the ‘operation’ of Christ escalated to the point where the emperor finally decreed a prohibition of the debate.\(^{332}\) Obviously, that did not settle the disagreement but moved the participants to find another word. They found it in ‘will’: Christ had one divine human will. However, when understood in a dynamic way (clearly the intent of the proponents), the concept had all the same drawbacks of ‘operation.’ One objection became even more evident: what did it mean for Jesus to be human without a human will? If not the expression of a true human will, was his obedience due to something god-like? And what was God’s love for us if it was not the expression of his divine will, but of something vague between God and us? Moreover, the word ‘will’ felt like another denotation was brought into play as well. For this term had been used by Nestorius to indicate the unity of Christ, not only in a dynamic sense as expression of the one person, but to indicate the relationship that brought the unity into existence.

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331. \textit{CBH} 6 and 7.

Precisely to those who wanted to strongly emphasize the unity, the use of the word ‘will’ was an unfortunate choice.

In the year 681 a third council in Constantinople finally officially rejected monotheletism, the doctrine of one will. That did not mean that the tension between a Western and an Eastern oriented Christianity was resolved.

7.3 May God be depicted?

The Decalogue is very clear: make no graven image of God. Judaism and Islam are very strict with regard to this commandment. However, it gave rise to further discussion in Christianity. It is one thing to say that God may not be portrayed, but does that prohibition still hold after Godself has been revealed in human form? Could a portrait of Jesus not have been made? One might argue that such a portrait would only partially present Jesus, because only his human nature would be shown. However, that is not a valid argument for two reasons.

First of all, the objection is true for any portrait. Even a picture of your mother does not disclose everything about her. Nonetheless, such a photo depicts her, her entire person to which the photo refers. Secondly, in the case of Christ it would be a poor Christology if we said that a picture only portrays his humanity. Because it is precisely the meaning of the incarnation that God is seen in this very person.

Byzantine Christendom began to make portraits of Jesus. They express God’s presence among us. If that is the case, some said, it should be acceptable to kneel before them and pray to them. These were the same people who placed strong emphasis upon the unity of both natures. God is truly in our midst in visible form.

Others reacted with resistance to this. This simply brought God too close. In the thoughts of many in the East, the practice did not do justice to the apophatic character of theology. In the West they said that the distinction between God and human work was not sufficiently observed.

In the year 787, the seventh ecumenical council, held in Nicea, discussed the matter. At long last it was decided that icons could be crafted and be venerated and even kissed, but that they could not be adored.

333. Denz. 553-559.
334. Aléthiné latreia, true worship, was not allowed (Denz. 601).
Icons deal with the real presence of God among us. That is the strength of the ‘icon worshippers.’ However, if Jesus had lived in an era of photography the three wise men could have taken pictures of Jesus for their travel records, but not the shepherds, because they would have had no money for photographs. Therein lies the problem: icons belong to someone. They give religious power to that ‘someone.’ It may not seem much of a problem if the icon belongs to a church. For in that case it is no private possession, but belongs to all the faithful. However, the church also has power of stewardship of a given congregation. There are people who govern the church, and when the divine receives visible form in some manner it is those who are in charge that have power over access to the divine. The keeper of the icons and statues, the priest or the bishop stands between God and the common people. And that, in turn, creates dependency. The church as institution is always apprehensive of any democratization of the holy; for instance, when someone has a statue of Mary that weeps. Only if it can be made functional for the institution does it find approval. In short: images confer power.

Icons present divine presence. This presence began to take on glorious forms: Christ surrounded by gold. Thus icons express the tendency made commonplace since the council of 553: the glorified Christ is the appearance of God. This glory confirms the authority claim implied by the icon. Byzantium accepted the icons in glory. It illustrated the distance between common people and the exalted church and emperor. Contrariwise, since the gothic era in the West, the commonly displayed tormented figure of Christ on a crucifix portrays much more of Christ’s participation in suffering. One should not forget, however, that such development demands the service of highly skilled artisans and is therefore also elitist.

The portrayal of Christ creates an even more fundamental problem. For we are not dealing with a photograph of an acquaintance, but an object of religious functionality. Any such portrayal is a form and figure of theology. The icon emphasizes the Christ who is there. Christ is near us, for us, across from us. Yet the deepest accent of Christology, that Christ is not an object but bears our own lives, is overlooked. Iconolatry and anhypostatic Christology do not go together. Christ is not our brother, not our brother-in-law, nor our icon; but Christ is us, our very selves. The icon does not show a lack of distance but too much distance. We can venerate icons, we can even

adore them, but in both cases we pass by the God who has born our entire existence, our own bodily identity.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that the Western church accepted statues after all, as apprehensive though it was of mingling the divine and human. Indeed, it went even further than the East. The East has only two-dimensional icons: from our perspective God loses depth and everything becomes flat. The West, kataphatic in its theology, made three-dimensional statues. Initially, the West concerned with a Christ of power and might, also depicted figures of the exalted Christ. This was not with gold and glory as in Byzantium, but through simple statues that wanted to express the power of the Lord in times of turmoil. In the gothic era, the attention shifts to the human person who seeks consolation in suffering from the Crucified One. God’s might is much farther removed from the consciousness of the people. God becomes unreachable, even; in such a situation even statues don’t help any longer. The Reformation threw them overboard of the ship of the church and returned to a theology in which God is directly related to humanity. Christ is the Savior of totally lost people, and is not their inspiring example. This does not mean that the Reformation remained free from iconolatry. The human desire to get a hold of palpable things is too great, certainly in the West. The Reformed churches took a configuration most suited to their tradition: that of the Word. The fixation upon literal bible texts and confessional standard formulations that seem to purchase a grip to some in Protestantism have the same function and the same effect as the icons in the East and the statues in the Roman-Catholic church. They provide something to hold on to, and they give power.

Against the background of the anhypostatic character of the mainstream theology of the early church, it is clear why statues were met with a hesitant attitude. God can not be represented in the manner that pagans do. The true God can not be depicted. For the mystery of God is the paradox of God bearing human flesh. That is not one individual, but that is humanity itself, in the person of God in our midst. We cannot grasp God with our hands, but God has grasped us completely within Godself. The figure of God is in the heavens; and our life is there as well, safely held by God.

For this reason I will treat the doctrine of the sacraments not in Christology but in pneumatology. The sacraments are visible signs of an invisible Spirit.

Thus far, we have spoken about depictions of Christ. Just as with the iconoclast disputes, the destruction of statues in the sixteenth century also concerned the portrayals of Mary, the apostles and other saints. I have limited the discussion to Christ, because the issue of idolatry quickly enters the picture. The crucial question is then easily overlooked; the issue is not the figure of a god next to God, but the issue is how God is present in the world.

The worship of saints is the pneumatological cast of issues regarding the Christ statues: it bespeaks the special operation of God’s Spirit in these persons. The portrayal of saints is thus the molding of the Spirit. The problematic of capturing the Spirit in such portrayals is analogous to the one of the depictions of Christ.

8. CAN WE MAKE DO WITH A LITTLE LESS?

8.1 The Son did it

From its beginning, the church confessed that it was the true God who came in Jesus. The popular notion that Jesus of Nazareth as a regular human being was gradually hellinized into God in a process of a few centuries with Chalcedon as capstone, is sheer nonsense. The earliest writers in the church, such as Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen, who through the sizeable extent of their work allow a reasonable opinion of their work, not only teach the incarnation of God, but are all fully aware of the paradox involved. The great movements of the second century, even those who later were dismissed as heresy, also never disputed the idea that Christ is God. The much more prevalent question was whether Christ was truly human. The entire principal flow of developments in the church of the second century, heretical or non-heretical, presumes the divinity of Christ.

That was precisely the stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. Most of the literature is therefore devoted to that discus-

337. Luther, TR, WA 5:207 (no. 5514): ‘Aber alle Ketzer lei ßt wider den anderen Artikel. Der Sohn hat gesündigt, der muss sich leiden, den wollen sie nicht haben. Den Vater lassen bleiben Türken und Juden, aber der Sohn hats gethan, darüber ist viel Bluts vergossen worden.’ [However, all heresy flows via the other article (the second article of faith). The Son has sinned and must suffer, this they find not acceptable. Those who leave it up to the Father remain Turks and Jews; but that the Son has done it, about that much blood has been shed].
sion. Historically (and theologically as well according to Paul\textsuperscript{338}) the developments had as result that Christianity became a religion that propagated especially among the pagans. Therefore, the discussions about the foolishness to the Greeks are far more extensive than those about the stumbling block for the Jews.\textsuperscript{339} The debate with the Greeks was of course held in the Greek language. It also explains why the early texts are colored by Greek philosophy. Yet all of that does not say anything about the content of the confession that Godself came in our midst in Christ. That was a problem for people in the first centuries, and it remains a problem until this day.

The discussions were held only to a small degree with people outside the church.\textsuperscript{340} Most of the theological creativity was addressed to inner-church debates. For precisely within the church the confession causes difficulties. All objections brought to bear on the matter from the outside are the same challenges that arise within the church, and are even stronger because the cause is nearer to the heart.

Those debates do not concern themselves with the existence of God, nor even about whether being God is expressed in some form or another. To say that there is a Logos as a creative, regulating and inspiring principle is not a problem. The real problem is that the human being, Jesus, is God. God is not the problem, but God’s Son who is God on earth. ‘The Son did it,’ says Luther.

This foolishness is so enormous that, again and again, people in the church have tried to say a little less than that. The attempt has three variations: Jesus is the presentation of God, but doesn’t get his hand dirty in his human existence; Jesus is truly human, inspired to be sure, but is not God; or Jesus is a sort of in-between being, between God and mortal. All three variants occur throughout church history, although the first was more prevalent in the first centuries, and the second variation occurs especially in the last few centuries.

8.2 Christ: the God with clean hands

In the middle of the second century, a radicalization of Christianity

\textsuperscript{338} Rom. 11:11-32.
\textsuperscript{339} A classic is the \textit{Dialogue with the Jew Trypho}, by Justin Martyr.
\textsuperscript{340} Important works concerning the dialogue with non-Christians are: Justin, \textit{Apologia}; \textit{Cohortatio ad Graecos}; Origen, \textit{Contra Celsum}; Athanasius, \textit{Contra Gentes}; Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}. In more recent times, with the demolition of the \textit{corpus christianum} in the West, new dialogues began, both there and elsewhere, with Jews, adherents of other religions and atheists.
took place. Leader of the movement was Marcion, a merchant from Anatolia, who later established himself in Rome. Marcion taught that Jesus was God among us. The God revealed by Jesus is pure love. All Christians agreed with him on that. Yet Marcion went further (and many Christians did not agree): this God is another one than the God who created the world. Clearly, the Creator bungled the job. That is painfully obvious. It is the work of a half-baked God, in contrast to the perfect God of love. According to Marcion, the Creator-god was the same as the God of the Jews and the Old Testament. This God governed through commandments, became angry, was tough and held out expectations of a better future here on earth. The God of love in Christ by grace delivered an existence away from earthly flesh in heavenly communion with Godself. We await the deliverance of our pure soul from our bodies.

To undergird his theology, Marcion used a purified version of the Gospel according to Luke and the letters of Paul. The rest of the bible belonged to the Creator-god.

In spite of his overwhelmingly large following, the church condemned Marcion. It did not want to let go of the notion that the Creator is the Father of Jesus Christ. The love of God is precisely that God loves this world and not an ideal world. Creation is good, no matter the problems we have with it. For we may desire a God with clean hands, but the theological problems such an idea causes are no small matter. This problem is not simply the soteriological consequence that not we are saved, as regular human beings on earth, but an idealized version of ourselves instead. It also is a problem to have to deal with two gods. Making the Creator a lesser God does not work, because that makes the Creator subordinate to the perfect God. Yet Marcion wanted the perfect God not to be connected to creation.

Moreover, if the good God has nothing to do with creation, why would this God bother? God would be a burglar, making claims upon what belong to another. The opponents of the early church asked furthermore: ‘Is the God of Marcion all that good? This God obviously left humanity alone with the Creator before finally entering the scene. How can it be called ‘love’ not to intervene when victims are in

341. The most important information about him is found in Tertullian, AM, Irenaeus AH 1,27 and Hippolytus, Refut. VII, 29-41.
342. Irenaeus, AH V,2,1; Tertullian CC 4.
the hands of the executioner?343 And why is this God not willing to save our bodies?344

Every quest for an ideal God evokes new questions about such a God. We may want to object to the idea that God somehow is involved in suffering and say that God couldn’t possibly be part of it,345 but as soon as we say what God is like instead, other question arise. Whoever seeks ‘another’ God, Irenaeus writes, will search endlessly, and will never be right with the true God.346

Marcion was condemned, but his ghost continues to haunt the church. The idea that God is only good is commonplace in large parts of the church, just as it was in the second century. People are more moderate now. They no longer say that this world is the work of a lesser God, but simply acknowledge that evil exists. God has nothing to do with it. It is the same for Israel. No one says outright that the God of the Jews is lacking. Yet people think in terms of salvation history and assume that God was only revealed in Christ. People do not say that the Old Testament should be discarded, but they do continually contrast the testaments. People no longer say that only Paul got it right (on the contrary), but all the same use only a selection of the gospels to demonstrate the good God of good people.

The big difference with Marcion is that he saw Jesus as the appearance of God, and that contemporary Marcionites often see Jesus as an exemplary human being. The ideal God goes with an ideal human being. Much closer to Marcion himself is a theology in which the unio personalis is maintained, and in which Jesus remains the revelation of the true God as well as the true human being. Von Harnack once compared the early Karl Barth to Marcion for that reason.347 Barth does not say exactly the same as Marcion. His theology is too nuanced for that. But some of the traits are present. On the other hand, Barth speaks expressly about the one God who created the world. Indeed, for him the entire world is even created in Christ. But at the same time the question must be asked, ‘which world is Barth talking about?’ Is it the concrete world as we now experience it, or is this an ideal, a theological world?348

343. Irenaeus AH, Tertullian AM III,4.
344. Irenaeus AH V, 4.
345. Troost 1993: 140f.
346. AH IV,9,3. Compare Luther also, TR, WA 6:65 (no. 6596).
347. Harnack 1923: 15.
348. Compare also Barth’s conception of Nothingness (Nichtige) as ‘die von Gott
Clearly it is a tough sell to say that God – as Creator and Savior God – participates completely in this world and bears responsibility for it until the end.

‘From this I am wandering, in exile.’ Hippolytus uses these words of the Greek poet Empedocles to represent the theology of Marcion. They are even better suited for gnosticism. Gnosticism was a spiritual movement at the beginning of the Common Era that reached much farther than Christianity. It was a movement in the culture that appeared in all kinds of forms. Characteristic is at any rate that human beings have a divine origin and are trapped in matter. They can be delivered by true gnosis, which is not a rational knowledge but an inner enlightenment. The divine Oneness has nothing in common with earthly matter. Yet we, at least when we become enlightened human beings, seek to be united with this Oneness.

Gnosticism bridges this tension through conjectures of countless intermediate beings, aeones. As a religious system it becomes more and more complicated, and is useless to most modern people. The intermediary beings are usually personified ideas such as Wisdom, Reason, Will and Human Archetype.

One of these mediaries is the Logos. In Christian gnosis, the Logos can be the redeeming aeon who enlightens us and returns us to our eternal source. However, most of the gnostics, and certainly the Valentinians (one of the most influential branches), use the name Christ. This Christ should not at all be confused with the earthly human being, Jesus, upon whom the Logos at best descended at baptism (only to leave before the crucifixion). For we must be delivered from the earthly realm, and if this Christ were too involved, he would not be able to purify us. Yet even Jesus has a heavenly origin, before he was born on earth.

vorübergegangene Möglichkeit’ [the possibility passed over by God]. Evil, as threat of the good creation that exists for real, is what God does not want, because God’s will, even his not-willing, is always effective (KD III,3: 406). Hippolytus says that in God there is no not-willing (MPG 10:861, fragm.2). His opponents, the Marcionites and the Gnostics, apparently taught otherwise.

350. See Hippolytus, Refut. VI,6-VII,28; Irenaeus, AH I and II; Tertullian CV, for disputes against the gnostics in their day.
351. Irenaeus, AH I,2,5; V.intro, 3; Tertullian, AP 27. According to Hippolytus (Refut. VII,31-43) Prepon, Karpokrates and Cerinthus taught this as well.
352. Tertullian, AV 27; Hippolytus, Refut. VI,32.
Gnosticism is esoteric. Yet, since it caters to basic religious sentiments, it is also attractive. That is true in a heightened sense in the first centuries of Christianity, but time and again something like it sparks up in the culture and thus in Christianity.\textsuperscript{353}

Just as in Marcionism, gnosticism is problematic because it denies that creation is the work of the highest God. Especially in gnosticism, one has to add the adjective ‘highest’ to God. It is hard to determine whether all the intermediaries are divine or not. At any rate, they mediate. The distance between God and fallen world is not bridged by an act of God, but by mediaries. This gives rise to the impression that the true God is not moved by what matters. That in itself is already enough not to make it acceptable to the Christian faith, not only because of its belief in creation by Godself, but also because this God loves precisely this world. The invention of mediaries does not help to suspend the qualitative fissure between God and world. More and more intermediaries must be fashioned.\textsuperscript{354} Their endless expansion may give rise to the impression of no relationship, but the fact of the relationship cannot be undone.

Using abstract ideas such as ‘light,’ ‘perfection’ makes it possible to see the world in terms of failure and gradual decay. More and more the light is dimming. Yet it does not help to describe the concreteness of matter, and it does not explain how there even could be darkness alongside absolute light. Matter and darkness are distinct realities that are more than shortcomings alone.

The same situation occurs when one acknowledges that a divinity who we can somewhat still know and describe, though sullied and limited, requires some idea of a God beyond this God. Whether they are our own representations or true hypostases does not matter, because we saw that the hypostases of gnosticism are condensed concepts. If we think about ‘God beyond God,’ we are not stretching connecting links in a chain between God and us, but merely are extending the chain further at one end. Yet even such a God beyond the limits of human thought is but a conceptualization, albeit more abstract; etc. ‘God beyond God’ will never get us to the true God.\textsuperscript{355} Thus the true God never touches our existence if the God we know is not the true God.

\textsuperscript{353} See Schmitt 1903 and 1907.
\textsuperscript{354} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} IV.9,19.
\textsuperscript{355} Irenaeus. \textit{AH} II.1,4; IV.19,1-3.
Therefore, the notion of the transcendence of God should not be explained by saying that the true God is unknowable, and that we only design our images of God. For what could such designs – that are of a qualitatively different order – say about a God who is per definition unknowable and undefinable? Rather, transcendence lies herein, that the God who meets us can never be entirely captured in our representation of that encounter. This is true for any encounter. Everyone I know is more than my idea of them. Yet that does not mean that such a person did not really enter my life. With regard to the person whom I encountered in the deepest way in my life, I especially know that I can never capture her completely. That is most true for God. God came in Christ into the world of matter and dirt. God has dirty hands. I know this God, and I am known by this God. And yet this God is far more than all I can imagine. If we speculate about ‘God beyond God,’ our reasoning evaporates in the nothingness of endless space.\textsuperscript{356} When I think about my encounters with the stories about Jesus, the true God who exceeds all reason astonishes me.\textsuperscript{357}

Because the gnostics connect the doctrine of salvation with the appearance of Jesus, salvation is connected to a bodily figure. However, since the pure gnosis obviously cannot be polluted by soiled flesh, it stands to reason that Jesus had a body that was not real. He looked like a bodily form, but he was not really one. This idea we call doceism (from the Greek dokein, shine forth).

It is not clear how far docetism reached beyond the gnosis.\textsuperscript{358} Precisely the fight against this notion by Hippolytus\textsuperscript{359} gives a good idea of the nature of docetic thought. This removes us somewhat from the extremely pejorative judgement that contemporary theology usually heaps upon docetism.

According to Hippolytus docetists taught that Christ had two bodies.\textsuperscript{360} The first body was formed because the heavenly Son descended

\textsuperscript{356} Tillich 1952 (1988: 228-230); 1961 (1992: 417-421). Tillich intends not a super-god when he speaks about the idea of ‘God beyond God,’ but the true God who exceeds any and all concepts. He includes the historical appearances (revelations) in these conceptualizations. Thus for him, only the mystical ground of being remains.

\textsuperscript{357} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} IV.20,4-6.

\textsuperscript{358} Tertullian, \textit{AM} III.8 shows that Marcion also thinks docetically. The whole battle of the church fathers with Marcion shows that his teaching was considered close to gnosticism.

\textsuperscript{359} \textit{Refut.} VIII.8-11.

\textsuperscript{360} \textit{Refut.} VIII.3.
from heaven and assumed a body through Mary; Christ assumed what was born from Mary. To save us, 'he came into the world, unnoticed, unknown, obscure and not believed,'361 Jesus allowed his baptism in the Jordan river and during the baptism another, spiritual body appeared from the waters, and was linked with him. This union was dissolved before Jesus was crucified. The first body was crucified and the second one ascended to heaven and took with it the soul that was captured in the body.

This teaching is an attempt to express the unity of God with us, without relinquishing divinity. The duplication of the body serves, on the one hand, to connect suffering and glory, and on the other hand, not to fuse them. Yet the One who had been one with the glorified was truly crucified. The first body cannot simply be identified with the human nature of orthodoxy, for it was already connected to the heavenly Son, and especially because it did not ascend to heaven. Likewise, the other body is not simply the same as the divine nature, because the point is that it has no body, yet is connected to being human from the very beginning. However, what is similar is the intention to express participation and at the same time to preserve the divinity.

In final analysis, docetism did not go far enough in recognizing that God is abiding among human beings. It also is too embedded in all sorts of gnostic speculations. The deepest problem is that the body of glory is not the same as that of the Suffering One. Docetism meant not merely that the body was only a semblance, but that suffering was mere appearance. Thus, God did not truly share in the depth of our existence. That is because the docetists find the human body and matter inferior. According to them we are redeemed from the body and not as a whole human being. The latter makes docetism not acceptable: it repudiates that the Word became flesh for us (enfleshed beings) and our salvation.362

Even so, the movement is not easily dismissed with a simple wave of the hand, as so often happens when one says that docetism is about Jesus having only a pretense body.363

361. Hippolytus, Refut. VIII,10.
362. Irenaeus, AH V,14,1
363. Notice that, according to Irenaeus, one of the crucial errors of the Valentinians is that 'they exclude the flesh from salvation' (AH V,1,3). He does not speak of a pretense body. Hippolytus says that according to the docetists Christ was born 'of Mary,' ek Marias (Refut. VIII,9), through a joined action of the aeons, in which the demiurg was also involved (Refut. VI,35). However, Tertullian (AV 27; CC 19) says that the Valentinians teach the Christ is not born e virgine (from a virgin), but
8.3 Christ: the human being with clean hands

The counterpart of docetism is usually presented as adoptianism. Little is know about adoptianism in the early church.\textsuperscript{364} It was a far less strong and thus less threatening movement than docetic gnosticism or the related Marcionism. However, especially in contemporary theology, a strong adoptionist tendency is prevalent.

Classical adoptionism assumes that Jesus was a normal human being. Yet he lived a perfect life and was adopted as Son by God. Cause and consequence can be interchanged in this last sentence. If we say: ‘He lived perfectly and \textit{therefore} is adopted by God,’\textsuperscript{365} then God really plays no role in salvation, but only this man who showed us the way. That the adoptionists in Rome around the year 200 did not think along those lines is evident by the important role the baptism of

\textit{per virginem} (through a virgin). That point of view was later disseminated by the Anabaptists, not only by the radical ones but also through Menno Simons, for instance (Theron 1988: 159). Calvin maintains over against these ‘new Marcionites’ that Christ is not born \textit{per feminam}, but \textit{ex femina}, ‘grown in the seed/blood of his mother’ (\textit{Inst.} II,13,3).

One must take into account that within a broad movement such as gnosticism, with all sorts of tributaries that were not gnostic in a strict sense, divergent points of view exist. The church fathers treated those points that related to their immediate context or that they considered most important.

Moreover, the Greek word ‘\textit{dokēin}’ is not only related to ‘semblance,’ but also to ‘glory’ (\textit{doxa}). ‘Semblance’ can be understood quite negatively, but can also simply mean ‘appearance,’ in the manner in which people in South Africa in the midst of their poverty paint and decorate their humble abodes. Not all appearances are idle, nor is all glory vain. ‘Seemingly’ and ‘seemly’ are quite different in meaning. In docetic Christology the term aims to say that Christ wants to look just like we do.

‘Docetic’ is used as an invective by Tertullian. Yet the description of Hippolytus suggest that the adherents called themselves by that name: ‘\textit{Hoige heautous dokētas} apēkalesan’ (\textit{Refut.} VIII,8). To them it would rather mean ‘glorified persons,’ or something like that. That fits the opening shot of Hippolytus’ attack upon them, telling them that they should first remove the beam from their own eye before assailing others about their specks of dust (\textit{Refut.} VIII,8). Docetists gave the appearance of being elevated.

\textsuperscript{364} At the end of the second century a gentile-christian movement arose in Rome in which Theodotus the Tanner and Theodotus the Moneychanger played an important role among others (details in Hippolytus, \textit{Refut.} VII,35f. and Eusebius, \textit{HE} V,28). In addition there was the older, jewish-christian movement of the Ebionites (Eusebius, \textit{HE} III,27 and V,8).

\textsuperscript{365} According to Eusebius (\textit{HE} III,27), this was the case for some Ebionites. Others acknowledged the virgin birth, but denied the pre-existence. According to Hippolytus, Theodotus acknowledged the virgin birth, yet considered Jesus a common human being (Eusebius, \textit{HE} V,28).
Jesus had for them. At baptism Jesus was imbued with the Spirit. Thus, inspired as a human being, the God-given tasks could be fulfilled. This may imply that the Logos descended upon Jesus and united with him. Except the Logos is here not a person alongside the Father, but is represented as a divine force.

In the middle of the third century (around the year 260), Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, further developed adoptionism in the direction of orthodoxy. He did not merely see Jesus as inspired by the Spirit at baptism or at birth, but as a person in whom the eternal Logos abided. The Logos or Wisdom of God inspired this person to such an extent that he was united with God in complete love. Through his love-filled life Jesus brought salvation for humanity upon earth, and through being completely filled with the Logos he was God to us. Paul of Samosata is an early representative of the Antiochene school, and thus a precursor of Nestorius. On the one hand, Nestorius ascribed to an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, yet on the other hand posited that the Logos (the second person of the Tri-unity) was united with the human Jesus in love. To many contemporary theologians, the theology of Paul of Samosata offers an attractive alternative to orthodoxy, in the same way that, by-and-large, modern enlightened people find the Antiochene tradition congenial. Paul, with his idea of complete inspiration by God and the presentation of the good life as a call upon all humanity is even more attractive than the double-person notion of Nestorius. However, at the same time it starkly clarifies that God does not bear and save our life, but that as inspired human beings we ourselves must live out our life before God. Both Antiochene and modern optimism are fully exposed.

Adoptionism keeps a keen eye on the unity of God and the distinction between God and human beings. It does not evoke the paradoxes of orthodoxy and lacks the speculations of the gnosis. It is a level-headed theology. Yet in final analysis, it does not succeed in clarifying how it is that our existence is saved by an inspired human being who was faithful unto death. Such redemption only makes sense if God accepted the sacrifice to reconcile with all of us. People in the first centuries possibly understood that, but modern people find that just as incomprehensible as the incarnation and the anhypostasis. Therefore, the doctrine of salvation in adoptionism usually is under-

367. For example, see Berkhof 1973: 304; less explicit in 1979 English edition: 289.
368. For Paul of Samosata the 'good life' was rather extravagant, which did not help the position of his theology in the early church (Eusebius, HE VII,30).
stood as follows: Though the complete faithfulness of Jesus, inspired by the Logos, it has been revealed what love is. That love calls us and we receive his Spirit or inspiration to fulfill that love.

The adoptianist type of Christology is therefore optimistic: humanity will improve. It eminently suits our present era, but I have no faith in it, just as Athanasius, Cyril and Luther did not believe in it.

8.4 Christ: something between God and human beings

Repeatedly, efforts were undertaken to find a middle way between adoptianism and docetism without totally embracing the paradoxical theology of the early church. A more reasonable solution was sought.

One of those efforts was made by Apollinaris of Laodicea (±315-±392), mentioned earlier. Apollinaris presumed the complete divinity of Christ. He also accepted that God bore suffering and needed a body. But did God have to have a human soul to do that? For it is through the soul that a human being has a center of will, which would lead to a doubling of wills. Apollinaris wanted only a divine person with a divine will who suffered, and thus only used certain limitations of the human body. However, this Christ of Apollinaris is therefore not a true human being because of the lack of a human psyche, even though his body is very real.

Apollinaris never found much acceptance of his ideas in the church. It was a very different story for his counterpart, Arius. Arius presumed that Christ was entirely a creature. That did not mean that Christ was a common human being, on the contrary, Christ embraces all people and even the entire cosmos. According to Arius, Christ was the incarnation of the Logos, who was the first of all creatures. The Logos was a creation from and by God, from which everything else has its existence, meaning and coherence. While belonging to creation, Christ was the immanent basis of the cosmos. In the language of Stephen Hawking, Christ was ‘the last formula,’ that in

369. See Mühlenberg 1969.
370. Augustine records that his friend Alypius for some time favored notions similar to Apollinaris (Conf. VII,19).
371. Arius (±250-336) was presbyter in Alexandria. His Christological ideas were the reason to convene the council of Nicea. Arius was a rigid ascete and demanded high moral standards. Unlike Athanasius, he was of the opinion that these standards could be kept by the power of the Logos.
which everything is comprehended\textsuperscript{372} not as a transcendent God but as immanent reason in the world.

This Logos assumed the flesh in Christ to purify the flesh and to renew it as a new existence before God. God’s purpose with the cosmos thus becomes visible in Jesus. Because the Logos itself bears the suffering, the past is purified.

The theology of Arius actually looks very much like the theology of Athanasius. Both came from Egypt. However, there are two fundamental differences. In the first place, Arius, just like Apollinaris, assumed that the human being had not its own soul but that the Logos replaced it. This had fewer consequences in the theology of Apollinaris than it did for Arius, because according to the latter the Logos was part of created reality. Christ was the enfleshment of the meaning of the world. Secondly, and more importantly, Arius denied that this Logos was God. One could say that Arius was almost completely an Athanasiian except for one small point: his Logos was all encompassing and bore everything, but stopped short of being God. Athanasius fought his entire life about that small opening of space, and was banned and exiled because of it. It is the space between the finger of God and the finger of Adam on the fresco of Michelangelo’s \textit{The Creation}, albeit now related to the incarnation. Such a space shows that God is not quite fully connected to this world. And if Godself does not save us, we are lost forever.

Arius is convinced that it is enough if but the meaning of the world is revealed. He was a strict man, an ascete who wanted people to lead their lives in useful ways. And he judged that people could indeed do so, inspired by the Logos of God who had born humanity and purified it. He was not an optimist of the type of the adoptionist movement. Rather, he was an extremely serious man, who believed that a human being should seek the deepest meaning of his or her existence. One would succeed in this by keeping one’s eye fixed on the figure of Christ and Christ’s preaching.

Arius kept his notion of God also pure. Yet the point was not that God should not be touched by earthly dirt. After all, God’s Logos was placed in creation. Arius was more interested in the transcendence of God. God is the one who indeed is so far beyond this world that from eternity to eternity the gap in space remains as depicted by Michaelangelo. God is absolute transcendence; yet Arius does not

need gnostic mediation because God gave form to the world by calling the Logos into being through the Word, and not through touch.

Nearly the entire contemporary enterprise of western theology supports Arius in his opinion that God is pure transcendence. This is most clearly expressed in the debates about theological language. All our talk of God is speaking about 'above and beyond,' and can only make use of metaphorical and symbolical language. Contrariwise, the real incarnation means that talk about God is language that indicates real experiences. The language of the gospel is the language about experiences with God in our midst. It is the experience of the crucified God. That is the difference between Arius and Athanasius. The world is saved only because the true God became truly human.

9. GOD'S SALVATION, BOUND IN TIME AND SPACE

Christianity of the first two centuries almost unanimously agreed that Christ was God. Adoptionism was too insignificant to pose a real threat to orthodoxy. The difference between heresy and orthodoxy came to the fore elsewhere: heretics denied that Jesus was a human being of flesh and blood. For orthodoxy, Jesus' humanity was equally essential as his divinity. Only because Godself became human is the world saved.

Irenaeus argued that it would have been inappropriate for God as Creator not to have saved the human race. Since human beings could not save themselves, God became human. Tertullian also says that 'nothing is as suited to God as the salvation of humanity.'

Both of them make an attempt to provide some insight into the paradox of the faith. The risk is of course, that this sort of reasoning makes the incarnation a necessity. From the premise that God created the world, and the premise that God could not very well let that action be a failure, a deduction is made that God therefore had to save the world. It is not necessary then, to appeal to the notion of the love of God. The church fathers are careful here: they do not say that salvation by God is necessary, but that it would not have been suited to

373. AH III,21,10.
374. AM II,27,2; see also II,26,2.
375. Calvin (Inst. II,12,1) is of the opinion that the incarnation was not necessitas absoluta (absolute necessity) but dependent upon the gracious will of God, and thus necessary given this will (necessitas hypothetica).
God to make an entirely new world. The young Athanasius is willing to go a bit further: it was due to God’s consistency that the Doctor and Savior came into the world to heal broken existence.\textsuperscript{376} Tertullian usually hesitates to take measure God by our concepts. We too easily construct a heretical God. When Marcion thinks that it would be undignified (\textit{indignum})\textsuperscript{377} for God to appear in a human earthly body, Tertullian rebuts that such an argument measures God by our opinions of God.\textsuperscript{378} What is appropriate for God, only God can determine. If God would have seen fit to be born from a pig or a cow, it would have been up to God.\textsuperscript{379} How could we as limited and finite human beings possibly say what God cannot and should not do?

Of course, Tertullian knows that it is we who do not think it appropriate. Our rational mind can not fathom that God was born from a woman and grew in her womb from conception to birth. Yet precisely because it is not convenient to reason it must be believed. This thesis of Tertullian captures some of the paradox of faith itself, which is always foreign to human reason; God’s presence is paradoxical presence. In my opinion, another aspect carries even more weight for Tertullian: because it is inappropriate no one would have been foolish enough to entertain such an idea. If you want to attract followers and adherents, such a story simply doesn’t wash. That is why Tertullian continues: ‘The Son of God is born; you are not ashamed of it because you ought to be ashamed. The Son of God died; it is believable because it is not appropriate. Though buried, the Son of God arose; it is certain because it is impossible.’\textsuperscript{380} Whenever something is seriously proclaimed that is theoretically \textit{that} impossible, it only makes sense if it really did happen. No one would have gone through with it if it were not true.\textsuperscript{381}

\textsuperscript{376} \textit{IneV} 44.
\textsuperscript{377} On this, see Meihering 1977: 45, 130, 154, 157.
\textsuperscript{378} \textit{CC} 3-4.
\textsuperscript{379} \textit{CC} 4. Over against the movement in Hellinism to curb the arbitrariness of the Homeric gods by emphasizing a reasonable view of God (see Dreyer 1970), Tertullian poses the freedom of God. This does not mean that Tertullian seriously considers the notion of incarnation from a cow. He expresses the freedom of God by scoring rhetorical points. Later, when Osiander seriously considers whether God could have ‘taken upon himself the nature of an ass,’ Calvin rightly rejects ‘that monstrous idea’ (\textit{Inst. II,12},5). Speculating about what God might have been able to do, is idleness; what matters are the things God actually did.
\textsuperscript{380} \textit{CC} 5.
\textsuperscript{381} This is why the brief formula ‘\textit{Credo quia absurdum’ [I believe because it is absurd] is accredited to Tertullian. Compare also Augustine, \textit{CD XXII,5}: the fact.
Yet reason cannot simply be dismissed. Even if we are of the opinion that God is free to act and that we cannot rationally understand all God does, it remains true that we are creatures. It is precisely through the Logos, the Word of God (according to Tertullian better translated as the ratio of God) that everything has been made. That implies that a human being participates in this work of the Logos. Others may object to this by saying that the human mind has been so clouded by sin that we can no longer think clearly, and certainly not about God.

Yet then it must also be said that the Logos came to save human kind by becoming part of it. The Logos loved the human body so much that the Logos did not want it to be lost; consequently we should not despise it, says Tertullian. But if that is true for the body it is also true for the mind, because it applies to the whole human being. The Spirit of Christ clears our mind to understand something about the mystery of God, which consoles us and enables us to love God. Thus we can serve God, not only with all our might but also with our entire mind. The situation of the Christian is one of fides quaerens intellectum, faith in quest of understanding.

Tertullian correctly argues that not all nonsense can be uttered at will. When the monarchians contend that the Father is self-originated and is his own Son, Tertullian points out that there can be no Father if there is no Son; one presupposes the other. If God only changed into another being (the ‘Son’), then there would be no Father. ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are relational concepts and therefore always presuppose each other. If such a relationship does not exist, concepts other than ‘father’ and ‘son’ should be used to make the distinctions between the entities before and after the change.

Now again, one may object that this may be true for our logic, but not necessarily for the logic of God. To God all things are possible. God as Father could change into God as Son. Alright, Tertullian says, let that be true. ‘God could have given me wings to fly like a red kite bird for my salvation...God could have destroyed Praxeas and all heretics in one fell swoop.’ Yet God does not do everything that God could theoretically do. God’s ability is limited by one thing:

that an unlikely happening, told by unlearned folk, is yet believed by so many, is in itself a sign of God’s work.

382. AP5.
383. CC4.
384. AP10.
385. AP10.
God’s will. God cannot do what God does not want to do. Clearly, it is completely irrelevant to speculate about abstract abilities of God instead of contemplating what God has concretely done. This takes us back from the abstract and general to the concrete and specific history.

Christian faith finds its orientation in Christ Jesus. Before all else, such faith is concerned with the history of Christ Jesus as the history of God in our human world of places and dates, of space and time. The New Testament brings us the closest to that history. That will be the topic of the next chapter.

386. AP 10; CC 3.
387. Like Tertullian, Athanasius (CA II,26) already defends the thesis that Barth placed in the limelight in our days, stating that ‘reality precedes possibility,’ in contrast to the Arians who ask ‘how is it possible?’ (CA II,34).
II Ad Fontes

1. Jesus is the Lord

1.1 Continuity?

We cannot merely turn to the person of Jesus in order to see who and how God might be among us. The authors of the New Testament stand in between Jesus and us. We can establish that, certainly from the second century on, people confessed that Jesus was Godself in our midst. However, did the people who lived closest to Jesus, those who became the first generation of the church, confess the same?

It is not necessary for us that they confessed this. We do not need their approval to believe in Christ as God. Indeed, we cannot allow ourselves to be dependent on their consent. If this were necessary, then the manner in which God affects us would be an indirect touch of Godself. In theological terms: their consent would be taking the place of the Holy Spirit. Our faith relies necessarily upon being inwardly convicted.

Even so, we must ask ourselves whether the writers of the New Testament agree with us or not. We need to discern whether we are truly at one with them, and therefore correctly apply the name ‘Christians’ to both them and us. In case no continuity can be found in the central confession that in Christ Godself came among us, we should not call ourselves Christians if the first followers of Jesus confessed precisely that; or vice versa. In such a case we are dealing with different religions. To refer to an analogy: someone who does not confess “God is great,” and does not acknowledge Mohammed as his prophet, should not claim to be a Muslim. For neither religion is first and foremost a cultural pattern of values that shift in content throughout the centuries, but they each speak of a relationship with the one God. Those, who answer the question about who God is and how we are to know this God in fundamentally different terms than the first Christians, must be honest enough not to insist upon a same identity. Since faith is not something one merely chooses but what compels, we can not be offended by his or her religion. Yet we can insist on openness and honesty.
1.2 Method

In recent New Testament research two developments have simplified the relationship with dogmatics.

First of all, a shift in method has occurred. For a long time the emphasis was upon detailed analyses, a search for differences among authors, and upon tracing separate concepts. Lately, the movement has shifted in a different direction. Now we look at what different traditions, words and writings have in common. 'What in the first century is the commonality in Christianity that makes it different from other religions?', is a question viewed with a fresh eye. In spite of all the differences between Pauline and Johannine Christianity, something of a common Christian confession must exist.¹ This is a question of fundamental importance to dogmatics: 'What is it that establishes in the earliest church the Christian faith as Christian faith — and what does not?' Clearly, the New Testament authors placed limits upon the multicolored spectrum of Christian faith. The first stake of this change of course in New Testament studies was planted by N. Dahl. Dahl argued that in order to gain insight into a movement we must first make a synchronous cross section and only subsequently take a look at how the picture gained by this method relates to what preceded and followed.² M. de Jonge reinforced this approach by placing even more explicit emphasis upon 'multiple attestation'³ (i.e. that which is recorded by several authors). One searches not for differences but for similarities among different authors. De Jonge correctly states that similarity in and of itself does not mean that it originates with Jesus.⁴ Peter or someone else could be its source. Even so, most New Testament scholars are of the opinion that such similarity does imply an early date. I think that such a conclusion is not necessarily warranted. It would be so only if the different traditions evolved entirely independently. However, all sorts of interaction occurred between Chris-

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1. 'We must realize that the period in which the Christian Bible received its form was also the period in which the Christian faith was summarized in formulations of what was considered the core of the preaching of the apostles and thus the rule of faith and truth' (Dahl 1991: 168).
3. De Jonge 1990: 23 and especially 104-111. In De Jonge 1988: 205 it is still one of several criteria. He did not dismiss the other criteria, but the importance of 'multiple attestation' increased significantly.
tians in the first century. Thus Johannine Christians could easily have adopted an aspect first put into words by Luke. Something that is recorded often, indicates that it was something that helped many different congregations to express their faith. From the perspective of dogmatics this makes the ‘multiple attestation’ even more important. For it is not a historical phenomenon that moves autonomously through time, but it illumines the role of people: people in different contexts could express their faith in certain words, themes and stories. They were clearly important to all of Christianity.

This does not imply that what is specific to a given author is thereby not part of the Christian tradition. What matters is that the whole of the tradition, as expressed for many in repeatable ways, can also be painted in other colors. It gives rise to a mosaic in which everything can find a place. It is by taking the entire constellation into account that we receive a fuller picture of the Christian faith in the first century, without letting everything depend on one or two texts. The picture in its entirety is not changed by a dubious exegesis of an individual text in the same way that a complex mosaic does not lose its image if a few pieces are misplaced or missing. Ultimately, there is much more unity in the Christology of the first century than had long been assumed.

Most New Testament authors let it be known what did not belong to the mosaic of the church under any circumstances. Some forms of confession faith could not abide with their confession of faith.

1.3 God in our midst

The second shift in New Testament studies is that even critical authors are no longer quite as afraid to find themselves in agreement with

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5. Certainly, until the destruction of Jerusalem, one must assume that the congregation in this city exercised a central function (for example, see Acts 11 and 15). Moreover, preachers such as Paul and Apollo traveled about, and Corinth apparently had a group of Christians influenced by Peter (1 Cor. 1:12). It seems prudent to assume that centers such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Ephesus continually exchanged views.

6. Berger 1996:9 thus speaks of an open mosaic, unsuited for simplifications. ‘No, I have no clear image of Jesus. Just as I have no image of my wife and find it important that I do not know right away what she will say when she opens her mouth … Jesus was not this or thus, even though the direction is fairly clear in a broad sense’ (Berger 1996: 10).

church dogma. ‘Polemics against the trinitarian dogma are no longer part of their agenda.’

The New Testament speaks of Jesus as the one who is sent by God in a special manner. This comes to the fore most clearly in John; even so, he is clearly in line with earlier writers. Jesus is more than the prophets. He is even higher than the angels. Jesus does the work of the Father and through Jesus the Father is known. Jesus is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. In Jesus, God encounters us to liberate the poor and for the people’s salvation.

This glory precedes his earthly existence. He is pre-existent, and through him all things are created. Christ is from God and from the

8. Dahl 1991: 167. See also Macquarrie 1990: 46. O’Neill 1995: 190 goes even further: ‘These dogmas about the trinity and incarnation were...no late developments in Christian thought, new ideas sneaked into the church, not shared by Jesus and his disciples. Nor did the dogmas of the Trinity and incarnation develop ideas that were at best implicit and completely undeveloped in the experience of Jesus and his disciples. I argue that the ideas were completely explicit and put into words of established teaching before Jesus was even born, and I maintain that his disciples lived in the belief that these clear expectations as taught, were fulfilled in Jesus.’ Compare this position with Hahn, who in his survey of titles of Jesus does not even give one paragraph to the confession that he is God. Hahn therefore reads John 1:18 as ‘Son’ (1963: 329). Even in Hahn 1995 this has not changed. This does not mean that all New Testament scholars are as willing to be open to classical dogma. Some are part of a school preoccupied with Jesus as a historical figure and his place in his society. This research is summarized with the term ‘the third quest.’ After the ‘old quest,’ which positivistically searched for the historical Jesus apart from supernatural miracles, and the ‘new quest’ which focussed upon Jesus as teacher, the focus of late is upon the social meaning of the figure from Nazareth, who is usually portrayed as subversive. See Boring 1996 for an overview. In my opinion this latest quest, just as its precursors, takes too little into account the entirety of the New Testament and, even for its own time, its astonishing thought that God manifested Godself in human form, who, moreover, was crucified, a notion explicitly taught by John and Paul. Each of these quests in turn survey a selection of the New Testament that is more prompted by the cultural setting of the scholars themselves than by the texts that seem so strange to us.

9. Especially see Dahl 1991, De Jonge 1996 and even more vocal, Hengel 1995. The texts that are indicated in what follows only provide a mere sketch of the way in which the New Testament speaks about the majesty of Jesus. Presenting a complete picture reaches far beyond the purposes of this writing; hence the literature references.

15. Luk. 1:51-55; 68-79.
beginning God works through Jesus. And Jesus returns to God in the glory Christ had before the world was.\textsuperscript{17} Thus Christ is above all and everything, from before the world came into being throughout all eternity, and belongs in the sphere of God, and comes from God and returns to God.\textsuperscript{18}

Therefore, the earliest church gave Christ many exalted titles. He is the master.\textsuperscript{19} He is the Son of Man who shall carry out justice on behalf of God, according Daniel 7. He is the Son of God. Christ is identified with God. The identification with God is expressed in three ways:

a) The early church speaks of Jesus in the same way as it speaks about God in the Old Testament. According to the gospels, Jesus moves on the water just like the way of God goes through the sea.\textsuperscript{20} He is 'the First and the Last.'\textsuperscript{21} He claims the authority to go beyond Moses and says, 'It is said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, 'do not resist an evildoer.'\textsuperscript{22} The point is not whether the content of the rule is new or not, but the authority that Jesus claims beyond the God-given Torah. He has authority to determine the commandment of God in the same way that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, which is also a prerogative of God.\textsuperscript{23} In the gospel of John, Jesus is called the

\textsuperscript{17} John 17:5.
\textsuperscript{18} The application of the concept of 'Logos' to Christ has particularly expressed this. This Logos christology is not a result of later non-Jewish speculation, but originates with Hellenic Judaism (Schweizer 1979:75). The delineation between Hellenic and non-Hellenic Judaism is not at all sharply defined. It will not do to merely contrast Palestine and Hellenic Judaism. Even Palestine was Hellenized to a large extent. Many Jews were Hellenistic (Hengel 195: 384). What is usually called 'Palestine Judaism' is the Judaism that took on form in the rabbinical tradition after the fall of Jerusalem. Ultimately the origin of the term 'Logos' is not primary but that what the term intends to convey. The Logos is Godself in a manner in which God can be known by humans. In Christ this God is now present in our midst as person as well as bodily (Dunn 1980: 248). He did not become a person only at the incarnation, but was pre-existent a person as well, according to John (De Jonge 1992: 1849).
\textsuperscript{19} This title is not divine, but is what a recognized teacher is called. The titles of exaltation cover a wide spectrum and variety, from a certain respect to an ascription of divinity.
\textsuperscript{20} Mark 6:45-52. See Van de Beek 1991b: 128-146.
\textsuperscript{21} Rev. 1:12-19. 'The First and the Last' recalls verse 1:8, where God is called 'the Alpha and Omega.' In Rev. 22:13 Christ is called the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. The title is connected with 'who is and who was and who shall come' (1:4 and 8; 4:8; 11:17).
\textsuperscript{22} Matt. 5:38f.
\textsuperscript{23} Mark 2:1-12.
good shepherd\textsuperscript{24}, the Light of the world,\textsuperscript{25} the bread of life.\textsuperscript{26} By themselves these metaphors are multifarious. However, they are bound together by the unifying and formal ‘I am.’ Over against those who capture him,\textsuperscript{27} Jesus thereby expresses his glory with the unspeakable Name of God as found in Exodus 3:14.

b) In Revelation 1:13, Jesus is called the Son of Man.\textsuperscript{28} Jesus is thus the one who dispenses judgement. The same Son of Man is described as an Ancient of Days in Daniel chapter 7. What is said in Daniel 7:13 about the Son of Man is connected to what was said in verse 9 about God. This Son of Man is at the same time the divine commissioner. He therefore sits on the throne of God.\textsuperscript{29} There is no throne for Christ next to the throne of God (such thrones are brought in for the elders\textsuperscript{30}) but only one throne for God and the Lamb. In the eschatological judicial process there is no separation between God and Christ.\textsuperscript{31}

This identification is born out by the texts about the day of the Lord. In the Old Testament it is the day of the definitive intervention of God. In the New Testament, ‘of the Lord’ can refer to Jesus as well as God.\textsuperscript{32} When the ‘last of days’ arrives, they who call on ‘the Name of the Lord’ shall be saved, said Joel.\textsuperscript{33} In the book of Acts the Name of the Lord is the Name of Jesus.\textsuperscript{34} Only in his Name is salvation. The

\textsuperscript{24} John 10:11, compare Ps. 23:11; Ezek. 34:15.
\textsuperscript{25} John 8:12, compare Ps. 27:1; 36:10 and also I John 1:5.
\textsuperscript{26} John 6:35, 41, 48; compare Ex. 16:15; Is. 55:1f.
\textsuperscript{27} John 18:5 and 8.
\textsuperscript{28} See De Jonge 1996: 232f. (and references to further literature).
\textsuperscript{29} Rev. 3:21; 4:6. The throne is thus not only the throne of God but ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:1, 3).
\textsuperscript{30} Rev. 4:4; 11:16.
\textsuperscript{31} In the final victory, the faithful in Christ will be seated on his throne (Rev. 3:21); compare Rev. 5:10; 20:11. However, their rule is ‘upon the earth,’ and there is no indication that they will share directly in the throne of God. They rule only indirectly via the throne of the Lamb (Rev: 3:21). At stake is the participation in the glory of Christ and in the authority over the powers of the world who are conquered in Christ. They who remain faithful until the end will render a verdict about the world. See the plural in Rev. 20:4.
\textsuperscript{33} Joel 2:32 (in the Hebrew text 3:4)
\textsuperscript{34} In Acts 2:21 a passage from Joel is cited. The day of judgement now has come. In Acts 4:12 Peter says that there is no other Name by which one is to be saved than the Name of Jesus. Therefore, the Name of Jesus is called upon (Acts 9:15f., 21; 22:16). It should be noticed how much importance is given to the Name in Acts, and what the Name of God evokes, it is even more pronounced than the ‘I am’ texts from the gospel according to John.
apostles, as witnesses of the eschatological breakthrough manifested in Christ, are therefore sent by Christ as well as by God. Paul specifically distinguishes this from a calling by a human being.\textsuperscript{35}

This identification in the path breaking eschaton of Jesus and God extends further, to the subsequent use of the title 'Lord' (\textit{kyrios}). In many texts in the New Testament letters it is difficult to tell whether God or Jesus is meant. He is Lord just as God is Lord.\textsuperscript{36}

The title 'Savior' (\textit{soo}tēr, Redeemer, Deliverer) is also transferred from God to Jesus. Isaiah speaks of God as the Hidden One, the God of Israel, a Savior.\textsuperscript{37} The New Testament speaks about Jesus as our God and Savior.\textsuperscript{38} God is spoken about as Savior, and in one and the same sentence we also hear of Christ Jesus as Savior.\textsuperscript{39}

c) All this culminates in calling Jesus 'God.' Yet the confession of

\textsuperscript{35} Gal. 1:1: 'Paul, an apostle — sent neither by human commission nor by human authority, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.' Compare 1:12: 'not from a human source… but from a revelation of Jesus Christ,' and 1 Thess. 2:13: 'Not as a human word but… as God's word.' See also 1 Thess. 4:8.

Also note the commonly addition of the word 'the Father' to God when the Father and Christ are named together in the opening greeting of letters (Gal. 1:1; I Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 1 Peter 1:2, where the Spirit is mentioned as well).

\textsuperscript{36} See Hengel 1995: 164.

\textsuperscript{37} Is. 45:15.

\textsuperscript{38} Tit. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; in 2 Peter 2:11, 2:20 and 3:18: Lord and Savior (\textit{kyrios kai soo}tēr). The background of this title is usually sought in Hellenistic titles for kings or wise men (Foerster 1964). That could certainly have influenced New Testament usage, but it does not exclude an Old Testament backdrop. Fohrer 1964: 1013 correctly observes that soo\textit{tēr} is never a technical term in the Septuagint. Moreover, Mosi'ah is not even always translated with words that relate to the root soo\textit{tizoo} (e.g. Is. 49:26). That does not mean, however, that the authors of the New Testament who used the Septuagint did not think that title specifically related to Israel's God. Especially Isaiah 45, where the noun is used twice in the Septuagint (vs. 15 and 21), has so many analogies to the texts from the pastoral letters that mere coincidence is ruled out in favor of purposeful citation. Precisely the combination of God and Savior, or Lord and Savior, establishes a close relationship with Isaiah 45, a chapter that also played an important role in even earlier Christology (Phil. 2:9-11). Especially the contexts of Tit. 2:11-14 (grace for all people) and Tit. 3:4-7 (righteousness) recall the end of Isaiah 45 (all the ends of the earth; the righteous God and a Savior; there is no one beside me: vs. 21f.). See also 1 Tim 2:3-5: 'one God,' as it relates to Isaiah 45:22. An Old Testament background is also likely in Acts 13:23 where the entire context of the message to the Jews refers to the Old Testament. Here the earthly Jesus, just as in Luke 2:11, is seen as the saving appearance of Israel's God.

\textsuperscript{39} Tit. 1:3f.; 3:4-6.
divinity does not depend on these explicit texts.\textsuperscript{40} Even if it were not explicit anywhere, the entire mosaic of the New Testament shows that we must identify Jesus with God. The careful use of the title strength-ens the power of the testimony. One can feel the tension it evokes. In the gospel according to John this is felt the strongest. M. Hengel\textsuperscript{41} analyzed the prologue of this gospel as poetry. It begins with the Word that is with God and that is God. That Word became flesh. The poem ends with the *inclusio* that the ‘only begotten of the Father’ sets before us the God no one had ever seen. God as the Creator, as the Word that created and as the Light of the world, is born in Christ as God in the flesh. In Christ, the new creation later will be completed when Jesus says: ‘It is finished’\textsuperscript{42} – after which the new Sabbath begins.\textsuperscript{43} The entirety of the gospel embraces, with an even wider inclusion, the life and death of Jesus in the confession of Thomas at the end: ‘My Lord and my God.’\textsuperscript{44}

Yet in recent New Testament studies the distinction between Jesus and God is clearly maintained. Even the loftiest denotation of Christ remains theo-centric, that is: not only is the Son distinguished from the Father, but Jesus from God as well.\textsuperscript{45} There is a threshold that may not be crossed if one does not want to surrender monotheism. I think this is not justified. This can be demonstrated by taking note of the prayers to Jesus. Properly, prayer and worship are only directed toward God. Repeatedly, however, worship of Jesus is mentioned.\textsuperscript{46} It is found most strikingly in Luke, both in gospel and the book of Acts. Worship of people\textsuperscript{47} or the devil\textsuperscript{48} is not allowed. Only God is to be worshipped.\textsuperscript{49} It is telling that, precisely in such a context, Luke ends his gospel with the disciples worshipping Jesus.\textsuperscript{50} In Revelation, the four beasts and the twenty-four elders (the entire creation and the entire people of God) fall on their knees before the Lamb when it is

\textsuperscript{40} John 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Tit. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John5:20. Probably Rom. 9:5 as well because of the parallell between ‘flesh’ and ‘God.’ Hengel 1995: 367 mentions a great many instances in Ignatius.

\textsuperscript{41} Hengel 1995: 365-372.

\textsuperscript{42} John 19:30.

\textsuperscript{43} Hengel 1995: 372.

\textsuperscript{44} John 20:28; see Hengel 1995: 366f.

\textsuperscript{45} Very lucid on this: De Jonge 1997: 101-108.

\textsuperscript{46} See O’Neill 1995: 85f.

\textsuperscript{47} Acts 10:25.


\textsuperscript{49} Luke 4:8.

\textsuperscript{50} Luke 24:52. Not surprisingly, a few of the text variants reject this version.
announced that he opens the mystery of history. 51 One ought to kneel only for God 52 and not before an angel, yet it is deemed appropriate to kneel before Jesus. 53 The elders carry bowls full of incense to honor the Lamb; these are the prayers of the saints offered to the Lamb. 54 For God and the Lamb are worthy to receive praises and glory and honor and power, and thus the elders worship him, and thus does the whole creation cry, ‘Amen.’ 55 The congregation prays in the Name of Jesus 56 in the same manner that the faithful in the Old Testament call upon the Name of the Lord. 57 What takes place is truly service of worship (latria) before Jesus. 58 It has been observed correctly that many of the texts in which Jesus is called ‘God’ are found in a context or language of worship. 59

When Jesus is so godlike, the question of ditheism arises, as it does repeatedly in recent New Testament studies indeed. 60 As long as Jesus

51. Rev. 5:8.
52. Rev. 19:10.
53. Other texts about ‘kneeling before’ Jesus: Matt. 2:2; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9 and 17; Mark 5:6. That for the synoptics proskuneo is more than a tribute to a mere human is shown by Luke in Acts. Not only do we read of the rebuke of Cornelius by Peter and the negative judgement about worshipping false gods (Acts 7:43), but also the positive occurrences in which the royal official from Ethiopia and Paul come to Jerusalem to ‘worship’ (Acts 8:27; 24:11).
Outside the language filed of the synoptics it is no different. Concerning worship of Jesus see John 9:38; Hebr. 1:16; about worshipping God: John 4:20-24; 12:20; I Cor. 14:25 and a great many texts in Revelation.
54. Rev. 5:8.
55. Rev. 5:13f.
57. Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9. In the Septuagint ‘epikaleoo epi tooi onomati’ (call upon the name) or more often ‘epikaleoo to onima’ (call on the name). Compare also Acts 2:21; 22:16.
58. This is not a separate worship service for Jesus next to one for God. According to Revelation people receive a mark on their forehead that indicates to whom they belong definitively. That can be the mark of the beast (13:16; 20:4); they will drink the cup of wrath of God (14:9). Instead, the faithful receive the mark of God (7:3; 9:4). That can also be the mark of God and the Lamb (14:1). They will be glorified and will serve him with the Name on their foreheads (22:4). In view of what preceded it matters no longer whether it is the Name of the Lamb or of God. Both receive the glory in the heavenly worship service. The honor given to Jesus is at the same time bestowed upon God the Father, who is served in the gospel of the Son (Rom 1:9). The service consists of serving the Word (logikê latrieia) by living as a new creation according to the will of God (Rom. 12:1f.).
was an exceptional human being this was not a serious problem, despite the many titles of exaltation that were bestowed upon him. However, if God’s throne is Jesus’ throne, the situation is different. This is why modern New Testament scholars go to some length to emphasize the place of the Father. This is not because of the glory given to Jesus in and of itself, but arises out of concern for the glory of God. 61

Already the same problem manifested itself in New Testament times. In the Gospel according to John we are told that the Pharisees reproach Jesus. They say that he, although human, made himself equal with God. 63 And according to the synoptic gospels the condemnation of the High Council centered on exactly this issue: blasphemy. 64

Usually, simply positing that Jesus is not identical with God seeks to solve this problem. A certain distance remained between them by saying that Jesus was not really worshipped. Furthermore it is pointed out that Jesus says specifically that ‘the Father is greater than I’. 65 Here Christology and theology belong together but they are not identical.

I think that on this issue something has remained of the old fear of the classical dogma in which Jesus is truly identified with God. 66


62. Macquarrie 1990: 47-377 surmises that even the early Christians were troubled by this, in view of the relatively few sparse occurrences in the NT where Jesus is explicitly called God.


64. Matt. 26:65; Mark 14:64; Luke 22:70f. See John 19:7: ‘He claimed to be the Son of God.’


66. To give a specific example: this tension surfaces at the interpretations of John 1:1 in which usually a distinction is made between ho theos (the Father) and theos (the Logos) (Dunn 1980: 250; Hengel 1995: 367-369). The Father is Godself, the Son is ‘God’ in name. This is supposed to thwart modalism (Dunn 1980: 250), despite the fact that modalism is absolutely not at all at stake in John. On the other hand, by interpreting ‘Theos’ as ‘divine’ without any (definite or indefinite) article as a generic name, we move toward the di- or poly-theism of gnosticism that the church fathers so energetically denounced. There is but one God, and all sorts of divine mediating beings only obfuscate the view of this One.

Even from a linguistic point of view this thesis has no support in John 1. In verses 6 and 13 the reference is to God, yet the article is missing. In verse 18 it is the opposite order of verse 1: here the article is placed with the Son and omitted by the Fa-
However, this leads to the opposite of what the New Testament intends: that God desired to abide among human beings and has surrendered to death for our sake. By continually fretting about the upper border of Christology one keeps an eye on the honor of God. Jesus can come quite close, but some distance is required. Thus the attention is not only directed at the absoluteness and loftiness of God, but also upon the exaltation of Jesus who reaches almost as high. The opposite tack goes as follows: fully acknowledge that Jesus is God, which in turn leads to the viewpoint that God became human. For the latter is the truly scandalous obstacle. And if we orient ourselves in this way, we can give full attention to the realization that God was not unwilling to become a crying child and a man who had to flee and was deserted by friends.67 'It is not about deification but incarnation.'68 Then becomes clear what it means when the one who says 'I am'69 lets himself be arrested and subsequently is made a spectacle with the words 'See, truly a human being.'70

This does not mean that the problem of two-gods has disappeared. A modalist solution is impossible, for the distinction in the New Testament between Jesus and the Father is too clear. Ultimately the trinitarian path is the only way. The New Testament has intimations of this. Repeatedly we find parallel formulas of God and Christ. One of the most direct statements is I Cor. 8:6: 'There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' By incorporating Jesus in the unity of the Shema of Deuteronomy 6, Jesus is placed on one plane with God. The parallelism is not along side God, but in God. Even stronger is the explicit trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19.

How we may interpret this may be clarified by looking at John 5:18-47. Here Jesus defends himself against the reproach that he called God his Father, and thus was seen as making himself equal with God. It is possible to interpret the defense of Jesus as arguing that he is not God because the Father is greater than he.71 However, it can also be interpreted as follows: Jesus answers the reproach by rejecting that

[References]

69. John 18:5,8.
70. John 19:5.
it is he who *made* himself equal to God. The one who *is* God already can hardly be blamed for being just that.

According to this section of John’s gospel, Jesus says that he does what he sees the Father do. Yet no one can see God except the Son. Thus the Son also does the work of the Father. The Father raises people from the dead, and so does the Son; the Son brings to life whom he desires, and only God has such life within Godself. Moreover, the Father delivered the entire judgement to the Son, and receives the same glory. This is possible, because the will of the Son is completely equal to the will of the Father. The Son does not start up his own business separate from God’s work. For the Son has come in the Name of the Father. Yet we humans would rather have someone who comes in his own name: a religiously inspired human being who seems quite divine, but cannot be the living Word of God itself, for that would unmask the world.

Jesus is thus at one with the Father in will, in acts, in glory, in authority and in judgement. That is exactly what the classical trinitarian doctrine of Tertullian and Athanasius intends to express. Since others were arguing against their position, they used language that their opponents understood. Therefore they speak of ‘substance’ and ‘person.’ Yet they equally often utilize John’s language such as acts, Father and Son, authority. The notion of ‘substance’ seeks to get also to the heart of the matter: that God has authority, receives glory, and acts in the world. That is God’s very nature.

Because Jesus does what he sees that the Father does,72 we may speak of a ranking of sorts. The Father is at the head - ahead of the Son; the Son receives the commandment of the Father.73 Yet it is not a commandment that originates elsewhere, from another source; it is the commandment to the *disciples* that they love one another.74 Jesus received this commandment from the Father because he came from the Father. And the Son explains it to us as being of the very nature of the Father:75 God is Love.76 That does not exclude the obedience of the Son but presumes it; yet not in such a way that the Son could choose not to love. For the Son can not do anything of himself but only what the Father does. The Son is in our midst precisely in his

75. John 1:18.
absolute submission. For if anything at all stood between the Father and the Son – for instance even a prohibition to pray to the Father – then the Father would not have given the Son everything, and the Son would not have received everything. Precisely because the Son received all things, the Son is God as the Son. Thus the complete emphasis for John is upon the fact that Jesus is such a Son: the One who does the will of the Father in everything. It is not about deification but revelation. Jesus is God in the way he reveals himself in our midst – and that is the true Light, the true God and the eternal Life.

Jesus is God because he is lifted up on a cross. We learn about the real God, says John, as the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. On the cross it is revealed that Jesus is truly God’s Son. For Jesus is the One sent of the Father to do entirely the Father’s will, even if the Father delivers (literally: betrays) him unto death. But the Father does it for us all because he loves the world. Sending the Son is thus not for his own sake, but for our sake. This was expressed in later Christology with the word ‘anhypostasis,’ just as the unity with the Father was expressed with the word ‘homoousios.’

77. De Jonge 1992: 1848 writes: ‘Jesus, the exemplary emissary, in complete obedience to the will of the One who sent him, in loving unity with the Father, speaks and acts as the Father. Therefore ‘the Father and I are one’ (10:30) and ‘who has seen me has seen the Father’ (14:9, compare 12:45); yet it is self-evident that ‘the Father is greater than I’ – the Father to whom the Son returns when his task is accomplished (14:31). All this can be explained as an elaboration and intensification of the missionary Christology adopted by John from the Christian tradition.’ It is exactly what Origen (see Van de Beek 1998a) and Tertullian (AP 3) meant in their doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore I see no reason why De Jonge would not concur in this understanding of the Trinity, unless the doctrine would be understood as a mere parallel existence of competing or exclusive persons or hypostases. The latter is certainly not meant or implied in the earliest doctrine of the Trinity. On the contrary, a ‘mutual indwelling’ is signified of the persons with one another, just as De Jonge finds to be the case in John’s gospel between the Father and the Son (1992: 1847; 1996: 235).


82. John construes the exaltation as the crucifixion (see especially 12:32f. and 3:14-16).

83. John 1:29. He is the Light of whom John the Baptizer testifies (John 1:8), and who is the only begotten God who makes God known (1:18). Compare Irenaeus (AH IV, 20,21), who – referring to John 1:18 in the original version – says that he is the First and the Last (Rev. 1:17), the Lamb that stands as slain (Rev. 5:6).

84. Mark 15:36.

85. Rom. 8:32.
As a rule the notion that Jesus remains submitted to the Father concentrates on a few verses of 1 Corinthians 15:27-28. Prior to this passage Paul argued that everything shall be subject to Christ. The text then continues: ‘But when it says, all things are put in subjection, it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things under subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.’

The text has been used in the history of theology to demonstrate the temporary and thus relative character of the sovereignty of Christ, and from it often concludes even the inequality of the Father and the Son. 86 This one text by itself is limited in significance. It is easy to oppose it with other texts in order to take away its sting. At the annunciation of Christ’s birth the angel said that his Kingdom would have no end. 87 Jesus’ reign is an eternal Reign. 88 Even the martyrs will reign as kings in all eternity; how much more true is this of their Lord. 89 Hence there is no reason to emphasize this text in and of itself. Even so, precisely because the issue of the subjection of Christ is brought explicitly to the fore in this text, it does make sense to focus upon it. For if Christ indeed reigns for all eternity, it raises the question of what the meaning of subjection could be. I think that Tertullian is right when he says that it is precisely the subjection that indicates the unity and the equality of the Father and the Son. 90 The Son does

86. For the thought of Marcellus of Ancyra on this issue see Chapter I, section 3.2. More recently, Van Ruler 1947: 107; 1973: 26 took up the notions of Marcellus, however without assimilating the idea of the end of the Trinity. For him it indicated only the end of the incarnation. However, if Jesus is not an eschatological person, the incarnation is stripped of its real nature, because – in eschatological perspective – history would then lose the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Concerning this idea of Van Ruler see also Van Hoof 1974: 65-84 and Velema 1962: 52-62. Calvin, Inst. II,15,3-5 is more careful, and interprets the return in terms of the completion of the work of redemption without losing himself in Trinitarian speculations. De Jonge 1996: 230 sticks much closer to the text and notes the subjection of Christ to the Father; he therefore maintains some space between Christ and God, not only as person but also in divinity.


88. Hebr. 1:8; 2 Peter 1:11. See also the message of the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15-17, where for all eternity the reign of God and Christ are together in an unbreakable bond.

89. Rev. 22:5.

90. Tertullian AP 3f. See also Origen, Princ. I,2,10. See Chapter I of this book, note 256 and 261.
not only exclusively do the work of the Father as One who is Sent but also as One who is Judge. And the Son’s final judgement on the last day must agree with that of the Father. It cannot be the case that even the tiniest bit of distance remains between the judgement of the Father and the Son. Indeed, even if such a gap does not exist in actual fact, a mere anxiety about such a possible distance would evoke polytheism, Tertullian says. Just as there can have been no time in the beginning that the Son did not exist and that the Father was without Son in pre-existence, it can likewise not be the case that in the eschaton a judgement of God can deviate from the judgement of Christ. In the way that Christ judges, God judges. This is true in the present, in the past and in the future. For it concerns eternal life and not a temporary judgement. The whole purpose of the argument is to take away any tentativeness and uncertainty. Incorruptibility is at stake, for otherwise we do better to merely eat and drink till we die.

Thus the texts about the subjection and obedience of Christ should not be placed over against his divinity, but his perfect representation of God should be seen precisely in his subjection and obedience. Only in

91. AP 3. See the treatment of Tertullian’s view in Chapter I, section 5 of this book.
92. In the equality of the Father and the Son in John the unity of the judgement plays an important role (5:22; 5:30; 8:16). The judgement on humans is that they have not believed in Jesus (3:18f.). Compare Luther, WA 21: 467: ‘Denn das kann der Teufel noch leiden, so man allein an dem Menschen Christo hengtet und nicht weiter feret, ja er lesst auch die wort reden und hören, dass Christus wahrhaftig Gott sey.’ [For the Devil does not really care if one merely clings to Christ as human and goes no further, yes he even allows the word to be spoken and heard that Christ is truly God]; ‘Aber da wehret er, das das hertz nicht könne Christum unter den Vater so nahe und unzutrennet zusammen fassen, das er gewislich schliesse: sein und des Vaters Wort sei ganz und gar einerley wort, hertz und wille. Wie denn die unverstendigen hertzen dencken: Ja ich höre wol, wie Christus den betrubten gewissen freundlich und tröstlich zuspricht – Wer weis aber, wie ich mit Gott im Himel daran bin?’ [But this he cares about, that the heart will not hold Christ and the Father so closely and inseparably together that it decides with complete certainty that his and the Father’s Word is totally and completely one single word, heart and will. Then the unsteady heart will think: Yes, I can hear that Christ speaks kindly and comforting to the sorrowful – But who knows how I will be treated by God in heaven?].
93. This is why I do not agree with Origen in his reflections on I Cor. 15:28 that give rise to the notion of the apokatastasis pantoon (the resurrection of all things). Origen assumes a final inner subjection of all to Christ; therefore – since it would not be fair that everyone would receive eternal life without merit, and moreover the bible speaks of hell – that notion calls for a successive existence in which we, through another life, have another chance to do better in the judgement in the next round (Princ. 1,6,3).
94. I Cor. 15:32; compare Is. 22:13; 56:12.
this way is he the true God and not another God who begins his own world. The texts should be read as anti-agnostic and anti-marcionist. There is no other God than the one God, and there is no glory to be gained without this concrete human being who did the will of God. That is what the pericope from I Cor. 15 leads up to: level-headedness and no more sinning, just as the entire chapter leads up to: be steadfast in the work of the Lord. It is impossible to befuddle the judgement of God who has raised Jesus the Righteous One, and through which God established Jesus as Judge. It will be revealed definitively that he and the Father are one at the end of judgement day.

When Jesus ascended he promised another Comforter or Advocate. After his glorification he fulfills these roles himself in heaven, but on earth he has given his Spirit. The relationship between the Spirit and Christ can be likened to the one between the Son and the Father. The Spirit will not speak about, or on behalf of, his own. The Spirit shall glorify Christ. The Spirit is Christ-self in our midst, for the Lord is the Spirit. Even so, this does not mean that Christ is absorbed into the Spirit in such a way that both the life of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit fade into an idealistic presence of divinity. Rather, it means that everything that Jesus is, does, wills and makes known, is now established as present in the Spirit in the midst of the congregation. This does not make the congregation part of the divine nature in the same way as Jesus. The thrones of the elders remain standing around the throne of God and the saints govern with Christ and not as Christ.

The New Testament gives a trinitarian view of God in which the Son is the full representation of the Father and the Spirit the full representation of the Son and thus equally of the Father. The Spirit is also the Spirit of God therefore, even when not speaking of self but speaking of Jesus. That is said in one sentence with the formula 'who

95. See also Hengel 1995: 163-165 and 382.
96. I Cor. 15:34.
97. I Cor. 15:58.
101. 2 Cor. 3:17.
103. Rev. 4:4.
proceeds of the Father through the Son.’ In my opinion the *filioque* of the Western church is difficult to defend biblically in final analysis. For at stake is not the view that the Spirit proceeds from the Son also, but that the Spirit is thought to proceed on its own from the Father. This would imply a Spirit who proceeds from God outside the Logos. That would make it an ‘illogical,’ an unreasoned ‘wild’ Spirit of God whom we can allow to take on many forms. Surely within no time at all it will be a Spirit of our own nature or of nature as such. This sort of Spirit is not guaranteed by the Logos of God, who is Love and Light, who is the Word of God. And ‘outside Christ the mystery of creation contains only dread.’\(^{105}\) The *filioque* assumes an autonomous creation, apart from the Word, and thus limits Christ to propitiation and the church. That would ignore everything that the New Testament says about the all-embracing exaltation of Christ: through him all things are created\(^ {106}\) and all things shall be put under his feet.\(^ {107}\)

‘I believe in one God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, who was incarnate for us and our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son,’ seems to me an accountable way to render the New Testament doctrine of *God*. For in this lies the agreement with the New Testament scholars who refer to the meaning of the doctrine of God in Christology: it is not about a Christology for its own sake; it concerns God, in order that the Father is glorified through the Son in the work of the Holy Spirit.\(^ {108}\)

The Christology of the New Testament is concisely laid down in Philippians 2:5-11. This text is probably a hymn of the early church incorporated by Paul in his letter. It is striking how close it comes to later Christology. It matters little whether *morφè* (form) or *phusis* (nature) is used.\(^ {109}\) The nature of existence is at stake in both cases. In human existence, Christ was faithful unto death. That is why Jesus received the Name above all Names: the Holy NAME of God. Because the quote is from Isaiah 45:23 one can not read ‘Lord’ in any other way than as the Name of God.\(^ {110}\) Every tongue shall ultimately confess that *Jesus* is LORD. Please note that it does not speak about

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106. John 1:3; Col. 1:15; Hebr. 1:3.
110. See on this especially Stauffer 1957: 130-146.
Christ as LORD, but Jesus as LORD: the human being who was faithful unto death.\textsuperscript{111}

At the same time it is said that Jesus is \textit{given} this Name. That indicates that God the Father is more than Jesus. Yet Jesus can not be any other than God because it is said specifically in Isaiah 45 that God will not give his honor to any other.\textsuperscript{112}

The key to understand this lies in the word ‘therefore’: it is because Jesus has humbled himself that he receives the Holy Name. This life unto death is worthy of being called ‘God.’ And ‘God’ is not the name of a species. God is one.\textsuperscript{113} This life is Godself, the Holy Name. And when all tongues and knees honor Jesus, they are therefore honoring God the Father.\textsuperscript{114} These two can not be separated.

Yet no one should think that a good trinitarian doctrine of God is the same as kneeling before God the Lord. For the knowledge of this God means that the ‘mind’ of Christ Jesus is the same as your own.\textsuperscript{115} Whoever begins to use the doctrine of the Trinity or of Christology as a means to exercise power, or to bolster one’s own position over against others, has not yet understood what is at stake. People of God are called in humility to regard others better than themselves and

\textsuperscript{111} This is why I do not follow the interpretation of Bousset 1921: IV, who concentrates entirely upon the proclaimed Christ. ‘Kyrios Christos is essentially Jesus of Nazareth as the in the liturgy exalted Lord of his Church.’

\textsuperscript{112} Isaiah 42:8; 48:11.

\textsuperscript{113} Athanasius (\textit{CA} I,44) takes the ‘therefore’ in verse 9 to refer back to verse 6: because he was God he is exalted again, for God can not be emptied unto death. This conclusion is too quickly drawn and formulated. To me it seems better to take the entirety of verse 6-8 as the leading note for verse 9, however in such a way that 6b-8 can be an explication of verse 6a (that is the form of God; see also the present participle of \textit{huparcheo}, over against the aorist participles in verse 7 and 8, i.e. the form of God is not something that changed at a certain moment, while the appearance in the form of a human being is indeed an event), which then leads to the exaltation in the following verses (it is \textit{this} exaltation we honor). This is indeed entirely in line with the theology of Athanasius.

\textsuperscript{114} Philip. 2:11. ‘That the acclamation ‘Jesus is Kyrios’ is pronounced ‘to the glory of God the Father’ shows that the title ‘Kyrios’ and the title ‘Son’ are intimately connected’ (Hengel 1995: 382).

\textsuperscript{115} Schweizer 1979: 76-79 therefore emphasizes that the idea that Christ is God does not belong in a general theory, but a notion that belongs to doxology. Your personal engagement is at stake. It is not about finding sacramental safety but about an ethical calling. In my view that does not mean that the confession does not belong in dogmatics, for when all is well a hymnody sings in dogma also and in it the life of the church is expressed. Compare Dahl 1991: 181, who also emphasizes that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a matter of interesting logical paradoxes but is about how to live as baptized people.
therefore place themselves in service of others. Even that stance can in turn become an ideology to rid us of the scandal of a God who died. To be a Christian means that no ideology is ever comfortable. Any confessing of the Lord causes dislocation. We are therefore Christians in fear and trembling.\textsuperscript{116} We thus work out our salvation, not because we dogmatically or ethically convict ourselves, but because God enables our will and our work.

When we are mindful that Philippians 2 is probably one of the earliest Christian writings, it is astonishing to see how much it agrees with the later tradition. More change came about in the first twenty years than in the next twenty centuries.\textsuperscript{117} The church never could do without the understanding that Godself was present in this human form, and the confession always remained: ‘Jesus is the LORD.’ Who is this person, who allows people around him to confess this and who throughout two thousand years has gathered people who confess the same?

2. God’s Immanence

2.1 How do I get to know the Lord?

We know about Jesus almost exclusively from the gospels. The other texts of the New Testament have much to say about the significance of Jesus, yet very little about his life. Except for his crucifixion, which is mentioned repeatedly, mere scattered remarks are made and they can only be understood against the backdrop of the gospels.\textsuperscript{118} Extra-biblical literature about Jesus is just barely sufficient to independently establish his existence,\textsuperscript{119} not counting the apocryphal gospels and fantasy stories that much more likely are derived from confessing the faith than that they are establishing it.

It is not possible to retrace much detail prior to the gospels. It has repeatedly been attempted to reconstruct the life of Jesus. Again and

\textsuperscript{116} Phil. 2:12f.
\textsuperscript{117} Hengel 1995: 383. The core of the Christian dogma, that Christ is both God and human, was formulated in a time frame of barely fifteen years (Hengel 1995: 389; Macquarrie 1990: 44-47). Dunn 1980: 61 views it as a more gradual development from an eschatological to a pre-existent Christology.
\textsuperscript{118} Such as 1 Peter 2:21-24 about the patience of Jesus in his suffering and 2 Peter 1:16:18 about the glorification.
\textsuperscript{119} For details, see Berger 1996: 22-25.
again this has shown to reveal more about those who do the research than about Jesus. The superego of many a scholar has been sketched in such attempts. What can be said with absolute certainty is minimally not much more than that Jesus lived and most probably was crucified. We need to learn to accept that even the most modern research tools and methods will not penetrate the person of Jesus more thoroughly than the evangelists do.

We shall have to learn to read the gospels in a manner in which we read a biography: the authors are captivated by this person and want to sketch the meaning of his life. This is not done by distancing oneself from the person and simply presenting facts but by painting an engaging impression of a portrait of the person. This makes a gospel a work of art. It presents more than raw material. It also conveys the impression the person has made upon the artist. And it also evokes specific responses in the reader. A good biography does justice to the life of the person who is described. This is the very criterion for the gospels: do they do justice to Jesus? We are not able to judge that without their assessment. Nonetheless, people of their own generation were indeed able to evaluate the picture. And the fact is that they cherished these books as holy literature. They are not speaking in isolation from each other but perform as four witnesses in his name. Whether these witnesses are trustworthy ultimately depends on their ability to convince. We have no external checks. All we have are their words, supported by the other writings of the bible. This is what the Reformation called the *autopisty* of Scripture: truth can not be confirmed from the outside but only because its authority convicts us of the truth.

Just as in the case of the confession of Jesus’ divinity, a few scattered verses will not form a picture of this person. Here too, the total picture that the multiple witness of the evangelists presents comes into play. This does not imply that the details do not matter. It is precisely the details of someone’s life that can represent meaning in surprising ways. Next to multiple witnesses are singularities that lend the picture a character of trustworthiness; this is, for example, what Tertullian

120. Schweitzer 1913 has thoroughly unmasked such portrayals of Jesus. Even so, this did not put an end to further such tempts. See also Berger 1996: 14-16.

121. See Macquarrie 1981: 30. The person is described in the same way we describe art. Thereby we not only present less than the person (who can never be fully grasped in words) but we present also more: the meaning of the person is presented in a concentrated form in a ‘recognition of the essence.’

122. See Van de Beek 1998b: 49-52.
said about the resurrection: because it is so absurd, it must be true.\textsuperscript{123} As a rule this criterion is only utilized within the entire scope of the portrayal: it must fit the picture.\textsuperscript{124} When I was a student the story was told about a professor who gave an oral examination while he was watching television with his back turned to the student. It is an absurd story. Yet it may be believable concerning one professor but not another. In this case I believe the story because it quite fits the image of the particular professor.

We must be careful in saying too quickly: ‘But this I cannot believe!’ We may have a completely erroneous picture of someone, and may get a much better understanding precisely because of a story that does not fit the image at all. Often we do not want the truth because it may force us to change our own life. We may well have an entirely wrong picture of all of reality, such as one in which we simply can not imagine that the dead will revive. We may not want to believe it either, consciously or subconsciously, because it would totally change our view of our existence. This is why it is sometimes safer to view the absurdity as an anomaly. We say that we believe yet we do not let it affect our daily reality and life. That is the character of a great many of our religious opinions.

Just as was the case in the question about real and not real, I am therefore inclined to follow Berger\textsuperscript{125} by not even asking the question whether something could possibly have happened or not, but to ask for the meaning of the act or the event. The total picture of the gospels is what matters, the remainder of the New Testament against the backdrop of the Old Testament included, as well as – after some scrutiny – later texts that are not fiction. What is the portrait of this person who the church began to confess as her God and Lord?

\subsection*{2.2 Jesus’ conduct\textsuperscript{126}}

We do not know much about Jesus. His year of birth probably goes back a few years before the beginning of our calendar, and his date of death lies around the year 30 CE. He was born in Bethlehem and was raised in Nazareth. Apparently he later lived in Capernaum\textsuperscript{127} – or at

\textsuperscript{123} CC 5.
\textsuperscript{124} See De Jonge 1988: 204f.
\textsuperscript{125} Berger 1996: 17.
\textsuperscript{126} Stauffer 1957 gives a level-headed overview of the life of Jesus.
\textsuperscript{127} Mark 2:1.
least stayed there often. About his youth we are only told that he went to the temple at age twelve and stayed behind to talk with the scribes. His father was still around even though his mother does all the talking, but we never hear from that man again. Most likely Jesus was never married. Whether he had friends before he had disciples, or in addition to them, we do not know. Whether he ever committed sin we can not determine historically. It can only be a theological conclusion based upon his resurrection by God. Even so, sinlessness was undoubtedly expressed in other thoughts and deeds than those we would deem correct. We also do not know which language he customarily spoke. Since Galilee was very much Hellenized it will often have been Greek, certainly in the cities. Perhaps he spoke that language to his disciples. This would have been hard to swallow for Simon the Zealot, the Jewish radical guerilla fighter, yet it would have been difficult for Matthew the tax collector if it were Aramaic. All sorts of details of his life that we might find interesting are of absolutely no concern to the evangelists. They are interested in what this person signifies as God’s intervention in the world.

At about thirty years of age Jesus began to preach and to heal people. These activities revealed that he was an extra-ordinary person. His word possessed authority. People could not imagine that he was merely a carpenter’s son. He affected people in such a way that large crowds gathered to listen to him, although they often equally quickly dispersed when the heart of the mysteries of God came into play.

Besides preaching he healed people: the lame, the paralyzed, the blind. He even walked on water and constrained the force of waves. He was a man with power, bringing people to ecstasy – both to enthusiastically proclaim him king as well as in bewilderment: ‘Who then is this?’ It caused his opponents to stigmatize him as

130. John 20:30f.
132. Mark 1:22.
133. Mark 6:33; Matt. 13-55.
135. Mark 6:45-52; Matt. 14:22-33; John 6:16-21; it is one of the few stories that the synoptics and John have in common, although Luke does not include it.
137. John 6:15.
demonic\textsuperscript{139} and to seek to get rid of him.\textsuperscript{140}

He spoke about himself as one who would establish the kingship of God definitively. He would judge the world in God’s name. He identified himself completely with God. This was a reason for his disciples to confess him as Lord, for those in need to pray to him and for his opponents to kill him.

His disciples ascribed a multitude of exalted titles to him because of the extra-ordinariness of his person. Ultimately they acknowledged this human being as God. Even so, the synoptic gospels especially are quite reserved. Only on one occasion is the glory of Jesus clearly apparent.\textsuperscript{141} That occurs in the middle of the gospels, ‘when we were with him on the holy mountain,’ Peter would write later.\textsuperscript{142} This is immediately after Jesus has announced that his journey to Jerusalem will mean death.\textsuperscript{143} Only three disciples are with him. They see Jesus surrounded by heavenly light, speaking with Moses and Elijah who are not beings from the past but alive in glory. For a brief moment the meaning of Jesus as the fulfillment of law and prophets seems very clear. The disciples catch a glimpse of it. They want to cling to it and build tents as an abode for God in the world. But a cloud came and a voice said that they had to listen to Jesus because he is the beloved Son. When they came down, they find themselves in the midst of the possessed world of a desperate father and his handicapped son.\textsuperscript{144} ‘Father and son’ look very different in the world than in the light of glory from above.

Both the words and the deeds of Jesus cause one to think because they are just a bit different than what one might expect. That is clear in what follows the pericope about the transfiguration. After the healing of the disabled son, a conversation about divorce ensues with the Pharisees.\textsuperscript{145} Pharisees have a narrow interpretation of the law. Jesus had earlier reproached them for placing burdens on people that were heavy,\textsuperscript{146} while he called the weary unto himself to give them rest.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{139} Mark 3:22; Matt. 10:25; 12:24; Luke 11:15.
\textsuperscript{141} Mark 9:2-8.
\textsuperscript{142} 2 Peter 1:18.
\textsuperscript{143} Mark 8:31-33.
\textsuperscript{144} Mark 9:14-29.
\textsuperscript{145} Mark 10:2-12.
\textsuperscript{147} Matt. 11:28.
The question is whether divorce is permissible. Jesus refers to Moses (who had just appeared in glory). Moses allowed divorce if a proper letter of divorce was given. The other had to be able to show proof of freedom. But Jesus is radical. Moses may indeed have said that, but it was only to be able to deal with the hardened hearts of people. God’s true purpose is otherwise. You absolutely may not divorce.

This pronouncement appears to be a moral commandment if the gospels are read as loose proof texts of judicial rules or religious morals. However, the real point is the story about Jesus. At the end of chapter nine Jesus had said that one should give up everything for the sake of the Kingdom, even your eye or foot if need be.¹⁴⁸ No ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’ are proffered. God demands all. If you want an example of such an unconditional commitment you do well to look at marriage. No love comes closer to God’s love, or is greater. Yet even here it is impossible to persevere. Total sacrifice and self-surrender can not be found in the world and is too much to ask of a human being. Moses allowed for that. However, God’s true intention for being human from the beginning, Christ, has now appeared. He follows the path unto death. That is what Jesus had announced in the previous chapters.¹⁴⁹ Chapter 10:1 says that he rises up and goes to Judea and the Transjordan. And he goes to where he is called without reservation. While this section seems to focus morally upon divorce it really is concerned with the Lord himself. Here the depth of his love and faithfulness is shown. In the Old Testament God’s relationship with Israel is frequently compared with marriage. The book of Hosea particularly elaborates it.¹⁵⁰ There too, the theme is God’s faithfulness in contrast to the faithlessness of the people. Thus, who is Jesus? He is the one who remains so faithful that he binds himself unconditionally to his unfaithful partner without an escape clause. Ask any person who lives with such a partner in such love what that means.

Making this analogy does not mean that we have dealt with the issue. To live with Christ means to die with him. It is about a righteousness that goes beyond that of the Pharisees.¹⁵¹ It is not about a rule of morality but about a new way of existence, a life that does not fit in this world. To be a Christian means to lose oneself. The passage that follows in Mark, chapter 10, teaches us that. The only ones who

¹⁴⁸. Mark 9:45-47.
¹⁵⁰. Hosea 1-3.
understand something of it are children, who are completely dependent on their parents and who put their trust in them even if they do not understand them. An adult takes on a critical distance, a child will submit to the command of the parent.

According to Mark, the rich are placed in contrast to this. The rich person has put everything in order. Even the commandments are obediently kept. Now all he seeks is a guarantee for eternal life. He addresses Jesus as ‘Good master.’ Jesus says to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’ At first impression Jesus rejects this mode of address. Yet the question has two layers. ‘Why do you call me good while only God is good?’ The attentive reader is made to think; then is Jesus God? To gain eternal life you have to follow him and let go of all else. That is not easy to do when you are rich. Even so, it shall come to pass that God allows the impossible in a human life, that people will confess with their lips that Jesus Lord and that his disposition enters into them.

If we think now that we can portray Jesus according a model of sacrificial love, we are rebuked at once. The gospel according to Luke is viewed as the gospel of compassion par excellence. Yet when the disciples filled with enthusiasm point to the beautiful temple building, Jesus rudely brings them down to earth: ‘Not one stone will be left upon another.’ Even more shocking is the manner in which he deals with a foreign mother who begs him to heal her ill daughter. ‘It is not prudent to throw children’s food to the dogs,’ is his reply. Imagine someone saying that about your child. The mother’s love for her child endures this rudeness and goes the second mile with the man from Nazareth. And such love conquers. This, too, is God in our midst: the One who can deeply hurt your feelings. So much love is needed for people that you can plead with God to save them. We have a God who requires us – for the sake of the people we love – to persist in pleading for their salvation, without ‘ifs’ and ‘buts.’ The only ‘Yes, but’ is brought against his dismissal. The Gentile, Syrophoenician woman is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament foreigner, Job, who equally did not relent from speaking to God. Jesus is not a

152. Mark 10:13-16.
156. See Van de Beek 1992.
decorous citizen: not with his disciples, not towards people who need his help, and certainly not towards his opponents. Cyril of Alexandria could have learned a thing or two from the names he calls them: ‘White-washed tombs, full of bones of the dead.’\textsuperscript{157} ‘You have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and hindered those who were entering.’\textsuperscript{158} Jesus attends banquets with tax collectors and sinners,\textsuperscript{159} appreciates a good glass of wine\textsuperscript{160} and is continuously among the crowds who do not know the law\textsuperscript{161} and thus don’t care about God and God’s commandments. Jesus must have been a terrible affront for the pious people of those days. God is a stumbling block to the very faith in God by in this way coming among us, a stone of scandal that crushes.\textsuperscript{162} And it falls upon us from on high.

Jesus can not be pigeonholed. He is ‘the man who blows up all schemes.’\textsuperscript{163} Even his mission is not a matter of course or easily discerned. The gospels address the theme of God’s hidden presence especially through the miracles of Jesus. On the one hand Jesus does miracles that are signs of the breakthrough of the Kingdom of God: the deaf hear, the blind see, good news is preached to the poor. However, as soon as people want to regulate these signs, Jesus refuses to perform. He then refers to Moses and the prophets. They are God’s revelation and they are sufficient.\textsuperscript{164}

This restriction is also aimed at the people who have been healed. They participate in the blessing of the sovereignty of God over the powers while at the same time they are forbidden to speak about it.\textsuperscript{165} Those who know of the Kingdom must be silent about it. The same is true when the disciples confess Jesus as the Christ for the first time.\textsuperscript{166} The Messianic status of Jesus is expressed as a messianic secret.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{157} Matt. 23:27.
\textsuperscript{158} Luke 11:52.
\textsuperscript{159} Mark 2:15f.; Matt. 9:10; 11:19; Luke 5:29f.; 7:34.
\textsuperscript{160} Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34.
\textsuperscript{161} John 7:49.
\textsuperscript{162} Luke 20:18.
\textsuperscript{163} Schweizer 1979: 18.
\textsuperscript{164} See on this issue: Van de Beek 1991b: 107-113.
\textsuperscript{165} Matt. 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9; Mark 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Luke 8:56; 9:21. The demons are forbidden to make him known as well (Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41).
\textsuperscript{166} Matt. 16:20; Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21.
\textsuperscript{167} The term ‘messianic secret’ became quite popular after Wrede 1901, who was of the opinion that the evangelists say that people had to be silent about Jesus in order
Jesus is present as God in the paradox of the mystery and of the rude dismissal. Therefore, the utmost is required of human beings: loving that which is hidden. Precisely that is true love: not to be oriented to the other because of evident advantages, but because the other speaks to the heart in a way that overcomes all resistance, in spite of contradiction and in spite of doubt. At the very moment that Jesus asks, ‘Do you also want to leave?’, the answer is: ‘Lord to whom shall we go. You have words of eternal life.’

The entire life of Jesus is like his parables. Who has ears to hear, hears. It is only granted to the disciples to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom. That means that no one can come to Jesus unless drawn by the Father. Only they who learn to understand the mystery of God in Jesus are attracted to him as followers. But for most people his speech is too difficult. Their ears are hard of hearing, so they listen but do not understand. They do not understand the parables because they do not understand Jesus as the presence of God in his hiddenness. That is not the hiddenness of the transcendent glorified God but the hiddenness of that odd man from Nazareth who does not fit any scheme. The stories about him and his words continue to intrigue us. We only know him indirectly; that too, belongs to his hiddenness. We do not have the Opera omnia, the Collected Works, of Jesus of Nazareth. We have to make do with stories of others that nonetheless intrigue us to such an extent that he does not let go of us. In the words of others, his speaking comes alive for us to such measure that he has become the Word of God and Godself in our existence.

This is but to say that Jesus is the Word of God. True, He also proclaims God’s word, but it is only one of the many facets of his person. Liberal theology is inclined to largely see Jesus’ proclamation as that which is most essential about him. Here, at best, his exem-

to give an account of why people spoke of his extra-ordinary deeds after his death only. The stories about the miracles are fictions of the congregation as a way of pronouncing the faith in his person. The position of Wrede finds little support any longer, but the question of the messianic secret remains.

172. Bultmann 1958: 45: ‘(It) means that his significance lies neither in the teaching that he brought, nor in some modification of the idea of the Messiah. Rather, it means that the coming of Jesus itself is the decisive event.’ Jeremias 1971 still begins his theology of the NT with an extensive section about the proclamation of Jesus. However, this is a reconstruction of what lies behind the
plenary life plays a role as an illustration and his death as an extreme consequence.

I am of the opinion that thereby no justice is done to the gospels, including the synoptics. First of all, the entire structure of the gospels is oriented to the cross and resurrection. Early on in the synoptic gospels a moment arises in which Jesus purposefully sets his face to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{173} The events that unfold are the purpose of his coming.\textsuperscript{174} Moreover, the gospel according to Mark almost entirely ignores the meaning of Jesus as a teacher. Jesus is first pointed out as God's presence by exorcising demons, by forgiving sins and by displaying power over the waters. Subsequently it is this very Person who travels to Jerusalem. When Luke and Matthew indeed do portray Jesus as teacher, we ought to properly diagnose the nature of this portrayal.\textsuperscript{175} In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus does not just present an alternative way of life but places himself above Moses. Only God can do such a

present texts that are proclamation about Jesus. We find exactly the opposite in Cullmann 1957, Hahn 1963 and Fuller 1965, who give full attention to the titles ascribed to Jesus, but thereby do not allow the concrete history to come into its own right.

174. Compare also John 17:4 and 19:30. Jesus is the one who is sent to make God known among humankind. That work is completed at the moment he dies on the cross. That is the glory of God.
175. Contemporary NT scholarship assumes that the words of Jesus in Matthew and Luke have its origin in a common source, called Q. Because this source is deemed to contain the words of Jesus, the theology of this reconstructed source is often taken to be the genuine Christian doctrine. (E.g. see Borg 1997 and even more strongly Powelson and Rieger 1997:33: 'Q is of course both a door to the world of early Christianity as well as a window onto the soul and spirit of Jesus') On this, Lietaert Peerbolte 1998:8 is correct when he says that such a position forgets that this reconstructed source is not a direct report either, but the proclamation of a congregation. Moreover, it is anything but certain that the congregation in which a possible Q source originated held to this as its sole theology. Sayings of Jesus could very well have been collected in a congregation with a much broader interpretation. Most likely, the Christians who wrote the Thomas gospel had more to teach about Jesus than that he was a teacher. It is not obviously the case that Jesus' teachings should be the very essence of his person, not even in the 'Q-congregation.' A person is more than what he speaks. Finally - and most importantly - the position of Borg does not take into account that the items in Q presently are enfolded in Matthew and Luke. In the same way that one can not interpret in Matthew everything that agrees with Mark exactly like it is done in Mark itself, this cannot be done with Q either. It is still a matter of how Matthew and Luke use Q and thus a matter of an interpretation of the gospels as we now have them. These gospels serve as a basis for a Christian theology and not as a reconstructed source that is only an ancillary tool for interpretation.
thing. That is why Jesus does not say, as the Old Testament prophets do, ‘Thus says the Lord,’ but ‘And I say unto you.’ His speaking with authority is not the preponderance of an authentic personality but the authority possessed by Godself. Moreover, the content of Jesus’ proclamation is of such a nature that it is no practical way to live. Who can raise their children by counseling them to turn the left cheek when they are hit on the right cheek? In our world that is asking for a battered life. It is equally cruel to ask victims to love their enemies. Yet we dismiss these texts too quickly if we understand them only eschatologically as a heavenly ideal. Nothing else is at stake in the words of Jesus than the life he must fully lead. To bystanders this seems demon possession while in fact the overlord of such a world has no use for this Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is the paradoxicality of God’s presence in the world, absurd and doomed to die. God wants to be among us in this manner, and in this way Moses is fulfilled, because God turns the other cheek and loves his enemies. To follow Jesus is to follow him in carrying that cross.

2.3 Jesus’ baptism

Jesus is the human being in whom God is in our midst. That raises the question: where did he come from? At its most fundamental level the question has already been answered: Jesus came from God. Yet such an answer evokes a new question: ‘How did Jesus come from God?’ In what manner did God come on earth? In the history of theology answers point to two events: Jesus’ baptism and his birth. As a rule, the two views seesaw relative to one another: those who emphasize the baptism pay little attention to Jesus’ birth and vice versa.

In the New Testament, as well as in later history of theology, the baptism of Jesus (including the descending of the Spirit and the voice from heaven linked to it) is seen as a moment at which his extraordinary significance is made clear. Opinions diverge over whether the

179. Matt. 5:44.
event causes his exceptional role or whether it is only an expression of it.

The first view is argued especially in circles that advocate a Christology from 'below.' For them, Jesus is a man chosen and called by God to be the Lord's representative. To empower him to carry out that role, the Holy Spirit is given to him in an exceptional manner. In the early church a large number of the adoptionist were of this opinion.\textsuperscript{183} The number of theologians who support this notion has grown significantly in the last few centuries. That lends a certain decisiveness to the idea.\textsuperscript{184} 'Undoubtedly the synoptic gospels view this series of events as the cause of the great change that occurred in Jesus life when he was about thirty years old.'\textsuperscript{185}

The most important support for this thesis is found in the gospel according to Mark. This gospel has no stories about Jesus' birth or youth. After a short preamble concerning John the Baptist, he plunges right in. 'And in those days Jesus left Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'\textsuperscript{186} Matthew and Luke also speak of the Holy Spirit given to Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.\textsuperscript{187} Filled by the Spirit that is given to Jesus, he goes out to preach, just as later Stephen would be full of the Holy Spirit and would be ready to die.\textsuperscript{188} Elsewhere many other parallels can be drawn of the connection between the outpouring of the Spirit and being sent by God.\textsuperscript{189} Jesus completely fits this category.

I think that we can agree with all this, and yet I think more needs to be said. First of all, the version in the Gospel according to John has

\textsuperscript{183} Origen, \textit{Comm. in Lucam} 1 (MPG 13:1816) says that the Jewish-Christian Ebionites taught this; Eusebius, \textit{HE} V, 28,18f., ascribes the notion also to Theodotus, who according to him also denied the virgin birth (although Hippolytus, \textit{Refut. VII}, 35, asserts the opposite).

\textsuperscript{184} For example, see Seeberg 1920: 70.


\textsuperscript{186} Mark 1: 9-11.


\textsuperscript{189} 1 Sam. 10:10f.; Is. 61:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2.
a different account. The meeting with John the Baptist is mentioned, but is silent about baptism.\textsuperscript{190} Baptism has no theological meaning for John because he fully emphasizes the pre-existence of Jesus in the Logos. Nevertheless, he does speak about the Spirit descending on Jesus. Indeed, it is precisely that aspect of the account of the synoptics that is important for an adoptionist Christology. The descending of the Spirit and a theology of pre-existing are clearly not mutually exclusive. The same author can give more than one depiction of the special person of Jesus.

The same can be seen in Matthew and Luke. Prior to the baptismal scene they have already indicated that Jesus came into the world through a special act of the Spirit of God. The descending Spirit at he Jordan is for them not the beginning of Jesus’ special position but – just as in John – is an affirmation of that gift.\textsuperscript{191}

This brings us back to Mark who gives no articulation to Jesus’ commissioning prior to baptism. Furthermore, unlike in Matthew, the voice is not addressed to the bystanders but to Jesus himself. Jesus is not the beloved Son by proclamation but in Mark he is called as such.\textsuperscript{192} This does not warrant the conclusion that Mark views this moment as the beginning of Jesus’ extra-ordinary relationship with God. That would misinterpret Mark’s gospel. The lack of a birth narrative in Mark has to do with the messianic secret. Mark tells the special acts of Jesus in order that people will ask: 'Who then is this?' This gospel does not itself provide the answer but allows those who listen to draw their own conclusion. Who has ears to hear, hears. That is why Mark ends his work abruptly. Jesus has died and is buried. A youth in a white robe says that he lives. And there the narrative stops.\textsuperscript{193} Here, no appearance of the Lord reveals the true secret mystery. When you have read the narrative of the evangelist about the empty tomb and the young man, you have to draw your own conclusion. And this is also true for the beginning of the gospel. Jesus is full

\textsuperscript{190} John 1:29-34. Berger 1996: 37 therefore places a question mark by the baptism in the Jordan.

\textsuperscript{191} See also Sevenster 1946: 106-108; Stuhlmacher 1992: 63f.

\textsuperscript{192} According to Matt. 3:17 the voice is addressed to the bystanders, according to Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 to Jesus, and according to John 1:33 (in a preceding message) to John the Baptizer. Den Heyer 1986 emphasizes these differences, but the Lucan version after the extensive birth narrative is in conflict with the theory that the call is the beginning of Jesus’ special relationship with God. If the baptism scene is a mere affirmation, the version of Luke does not interfere.

\textsuperscript{193} Mark 16:8. The summaries of appearances from verse 9 on were added later.
of the Spirit and the messenger (John, ‘the angel who was sent before My face’) has announced the coming reign of God.\textsuperscript{194} Where does this Spirit-filled being come from? Whoever reads the rest of the book will have to draw his or her own conclusion. The Christology of Mark is not less higher than John’s, except that it is a concealed Christology. To infer from the absence of birth narratives that Mark did not know about them or did not consider them important is as foolish as concluding that Mark knew nothing of the resurrection or deemed it unimportant.

Therefore, in view of the birth narratives in Luke and Matthew and the mention of the descending of the Spirit in John, it seems to me more reasonable to understand the baptism scene as expressing Jesus’ commissioning instead of the initiation of it. That raises the question as to the meaning of the event. This is true for both the baptism as well as the descending Spirit and the voice that sounds.

The meaning of the baptism is made clear in the Gospel according to Matthew.\textsuperscript{195} John protests against the request of Jesus to be baptized. Why would someone sent by God need the baptism of repentance and the washing of sins? Jesus’ argument is that it is necessary ‘to fulfill all righteousness.’ Righteousness has to do with the judgment of God.\textsuperscript{196} If Jesus is the representative of all, not only of God among human beings but also of humanity before God, he carries the judgement of all. That means that he, on behalf of them all, is submerged in death, in the form of water. For water is the sign of chaotic powers. Jesus is submerged as head of humanity and is raised up as a new creation. The descending dove recalls the story of Noah: after coming through the flood the dove is harbinger of the resurrected

\textsuperscript{194} Mark 1:2. Remember that ‘messenger’ and ‘angel’ are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew. Moreover, also in Mark 16 the angel is referred to obliquely. Only the white robe of the youth in the tomb is suggesting that he may be an angel. In Mark, angels do not act publicly, unlike in Matthew and Luke. Only in the hiddenness of the desert do they serve Jesus (1:13). Not until he comes in glory shall the angels appear (8:38; 13:27).

John the Baptist has said that Jesus will come after him and will baptize with the Spirit. Only God can bestow the Spirit of God. Whether Jesus is the one who shall come will have to become clear in what he does.

\textsuperscript{195} Matt. 3:13-15.

\textsuperscript{196} The preaching of John is about the coming judgement. Because the day of judgement is at hand everyone should repent and be cleansed of sin. That is why he ‘came in the way of righteousness’ (Matt. 21:32). It is the righteousness that arrives in Christ as a verdict upon the former existence (Rom. 1:17-2:11) and at the same time as salvation because he fulfills the righteousness of God (Rom. 3: 5-30; 4:25-5:1) on the cross (Gal.3:10-14).
creation.\(^{197}\) The Spirit is present in this form, here not as an invisible power but in bodily shape, indicative of the bodily form of the Son of God who is more than Moses and the prophets.\(^{198}\) Baptism and bestowal of the Spirit indicate the new humanity made present in the Son sent by God. This does not merely begin at the moment of Jesus’ baptism any more than that redemption does not begin until the crucifixion. Rather, they are consequences of the sending of the Son in order to save the world.\(^{199}\)

The voice from heaven asks for the confession of Jesus as this Son. In Matthew that is explicitly addressed to the people.\(^{200}\) In Mark (and apparently adopted by Luke) this is done indirectly,\(^{201}\) as is typical for this evangelist. Here, others say to Jesus who he is: they acknowledge his significance. At first it is the Father,\(^{202}\) then the demons,\(^{203}\) and later the disciples.\(^{204}\) This is not to be shouted from the rooftops. Actually, it is strictly forbidden.\(^{205}\) It is pronounced only to the three


198. In adoptionist theologies little attention is given to the fact that here the Spirit appeared in bodily form, unlike we find with other bestowals of the Spirit. Notably Luke, who accentuates the Spirit so much says not merely that he appeared in the form of a dove, but underscores ‘bodily form’ (3:22).

199. Compare Justin Martyr, Tryph. 88: Jesus did not receive the Son for his own sake but for us, just as he did not bear the cross for his own sake but for us.


201. Mark 1:11.


203. Mark 1:24; 3:11.

204. Mark 8:29.

205. Mark 8:30.
most intimate disciples in the seclusion of the transfiguration on the mount. God does not take to the streets with loud shouts but only suggestively. This sort of praise calls for affirmation in the same way that the entire Gospel according to Mark is a question that invites an answer. But who do you say that I am? Only in court, where Jesus is judged on behalf of all, he publicly states: 'It is I.' From then on, Jesus himself becomes the heavenly judge.

2.4 Born of the virgin Mary

Unlike his baptism, the birth of Jesus is included in the ancient Creed of the Church. This is an expression of the confession that the Spirit is bound to Jesus from the very beginning upon earth. God is present in Jesus from birth.

However, the likely reason for including Jesus' birth in the Creed was not his divinity but rather his humanity. When the Gnostics and the Marcionites elevated Christ high above earthly and earthly existence, the church wanted to confess explicitly that Jesus was born from a woman, a human being among human beings. Over against the gnostics who wanted to confess no more than that Jesus was born 'through a virgin,' the Church posited that Jesus was born 'from a virgin.' Thus, before all else, this section of the Creed attests to his concrete humanity.

In our day and age the notion of the virgin birth immediately evokes questions about its historicity. Even so, a girl who would say that she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit would not have found willing ears in the first century either. Confronting the question of historicity, it is first of all helpful to establish that the birth is not at stake but the conception. 'Born of the virgin Mary' does not mean that Mary remained a virgin after birth nor that she remained a virgin forever. It means that she was pregnant with Jesus without having had sexual contact with a man. Whatever goes beyond that phrase does not belong to Christology but to Mariology.

207. Mark 14:62: 'Ego eimi' – I AM, the NAME of God. The judgement that condemns Jesus to death because he is God is the verdict on the world who condemns him.
208. On this see also Van de Beek 1980: 137-142.
209. On this, see Brown 1977: 517f.
210. According to Brown 1977: 518 the first traces of virginity after birth are already found in the Protevangelium Jacobi 19f. Yet it will not be until the third century
Three possibilities are worthy of consideration regarding the cause of Mary's pregnancy: a) Jesus was simply a son of Joseph, b) Mary had a relationship with someone else, and c) a virginal conception.

The idea that Jesus was a child of Joseph and Mary is found among the Jewish Christians in the second century. These Ebionites ('poor,' 'needy') lived as Jews, faithful to the law. They believed that Jesus as well as his family were law-observing people. 211 Joseph and Mary's faithfulness to the law is affirmed by the gospels; for example, Joseph was a righteous man, 212 and they brought their purification sacrifices according to the law, as prescribed for the poor. 213 They were faithful Jews who did not have money to buy a lamb. Thus the Ebionites saw Jesus as someone who belonged to their own circle. Yet outside their group no one speaks about Jesus as just another child of Joseph. 214 This is the possibility least supported by early sources.

Mary was said to have been unfaithful to Joseph. Non-Christian authors report this possibility from about the year 200 on. 215 It is not clear to what extent these accounts are independent, or whether it is their interpretation of gospel stories enriched by fiction. At any rate, the idea of unfaithfulness was making the rounds. This supposition might be behind the rejoinder of the Judeans to Jesus in John 8:41: 'We are not born illegitimately' – with the emphasis on 'we.' Intimations of this suggestion were heard earlier when they asked, 'Where is your father?' 216 In some versions of the gospel that suggestion is intensified because it is preceded by the story of the woman who is caught in adultery. 217

that it is widely spoken of in the church. Tertullian (CC 23) still understands the birth from a virgin to imply virginal conception (and sees that as humiliating for Mary), while two centuries later Augustine already describes her as 'virgin until her death' (CR 40: 'Virgo concepiens, virgo pariens, virgo moriens' [a virgin in conception, in giving birth, in dying]; compare Enchir. X,34).

211. Irenaeus AH III,21,1: Eusebius HE III,27 and V,8.
214. In Luke 2: 48 Mary says that she and his father were looking for Jesus. Not only does that way of phrasing make sense within the family circle, even if Jesus were not Joseph's son, but more tellingly, a correction follows immediately: it is more important that Jesus is Son of God than son of Joseph. Compare also Luke 3:23: 'the son, as was thought, of Joseph,' and the indirect mode of speech in Matt. 1:16: 'Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.'
215. Brown 1977:534-537. Especially the story that Mary was impregnated by a Roman soldier named Panthera is repeated often.
216. John 8:19.
Being born of a virgin only occurs in Christian authors. In the first century that means Matthew and Luke. Later authors clearly depend upon them.  

The first possibility is the least likely. It would make the third possibility a theological fiction that indicates the special character of Jesus’ birth. However, in that case better scenarios could be developed. Not only would the presented view leave itself open to the risk of ridicule but – perhaps even worse – it would invite the risk of confusion with pagan legends about gods who had intercourse with young women. The God of Israel would then come very close to Zeus. To concoct a birth from a virgin within a proper marriage of observant Jews seems a poor basis upon which to exalt Jesus. Moreover, the historic material that supports this conception is minimal.

Much more likely is the alternative between the second and third possibility. Especially because it is easy to imagine how the one may evoke the other. A story about a virginal birth would irrevocably be interpreted by unbelievers as adultery; conversely, believers would be inclined to cleanse any account of a birth resulting from adultery. We are confronted with a stalemate. Ever since New Testament scholarship began to make a distinction between what is historical and theological, we have found that same divide among theologians as well. Which way the decision goes largely depends on the theological position (or the worldview underlying that theology). The theological argumentation usually decides the historical outcome of the debate. The following considerations are found regarding the virgin birth:

a) it is testimony that Jesus is the Son of God. Here the idea is that God’s Son cannot be born by mediation of a man. 

218. The idea of Den Heyer (1991: 220) that this notion originally was contained to the area between Samaria and Antioch seems untenable to me. First of all this makes it difficult to explain the Lucan version. Moreover, the time span between Justin Martyr and say, Irenaeus and Origen, is so small that it is difficult to assume that the notion only spread at a later time. Evidence that the notion of a virgin birth is wide-spread and found in very different traditions, as well as the opinion arising in the third century that Mary remained a virgin even after the birth, is more likely an indication that this concept was a general part of the church tradition at an early point in time.

219. The thought that the Spirit took over the role of the human father is always explicitly rebutted by the early church (Tertullian, Apol. 15 and 21; Origen, Cels. 1,37).

220. See also Berkouwer 1953: 102-143.

221. Both Barth (KD I, :510; and Brunner (1950: 415f.) point out this ecclesial ‘public faith.’
b) it is testimony of God’s extra-ordinary initiative toward human beings. A new act of creation by God is at stake. Believers spoke about the virgin birth ‘because they believed that God had made a surprisingly new beginning, a new life by conquering death.’

c) it is testimony of the purity of the coming of God.

d) it is testimony of the paradox of God’s coming into the world. It seemed likely that God would come in purity, yet God chose the way of the skandalon.

e) if Christ was born of a virgin, he is not a human being as we are. Therefore, the notion of a virgin birth should be rejected.

f) precisely the unfaithfulness of Mary showcases the love of God all the better. God is not above having been born of generations that include Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.

g) God does not intervene physically but reveals by way of natural events.

h) what is at issue are theological stories and to that purpose history is completely irrelevant.

The latter two considerations move on a theoretical level and thus are far reaching. This is exactly why they are not unimportant. If it were true that God does not intervene physically, then God does not intervene at all, not through Word, nor through Spirit either. For every word, every thought, every motion of our emotion, has not only physical and thus historical consequences, but a physical and chemical

222. Den Heyer 1991: 222. It is striking that Berkhof, who also speaks of Jesus as a new act of creation by God (1973: 302; E.T. 1979: 286, 292) finds the virgin birth hardly relevant (and non-historical) and regrets that it was placed in the Creed (1973: 308; E.T. 1979: 293). This hesitancy is caused by the lack of credulity of modern humans who have a different worldview than the biblical writers. Nonetheless, Berkhof does not acknowledge that a new creative act of God is, in turn, equally difficult to believe. The same is true for Den Heyer who doubts the historicity of the virgin birth but does view the resurrection as a new creative act of God (1991:22). The latter view is further complicated by the problem of the continuity of the earthly body and the resurrection body.

223. Athanasius Inev 8. Brown 1977: 530: this has been taught from Augustine and Ambrosius through Karl Barth. In contradistinction Tertullian argues (CC 4) that while it is obvious that God desires purity, God does the very opposite, however.

224. Tertullian CC 23; Luther WA 29: 646-648.


228. Den Heyer 1991: 222: ‘Natural scientific, medical and historical questions are not dealt with at this point and are thus out of order.’
component as well. 'Ohne Phosphor keine Gedanken' [without phosphor, no thought].\textsuperscript{229} God reacts (also) physically or God does not react at all. Enlightened theologians in particular should see this logical consequence of the Enlightenment. The world is either a completely closed system, or the world is open to another reality. In the latter case the world must be open to all sort of aspects. We ought to cease speaking of God if this God can not intervene. One should not wait to say 'it is not possible' until a problem arises such as the virgin birth but should begin by saying this already at the very moment we say 'God.' For \textit{God} is the real problem of the Enlightenment whenever we take the word 'god' to refer to a living person.

The last consideration on the list above is closely related to this. It is an attempt to navigate around the problem of God and history. Whenever we have problems with the Great Flood we declare it to be a theological flood; we make Jonah a theological Jonah, and the fish a theological fish. Likewise, the virgin Mary becomes a theological virgin and the resurrection a theological resurrection. Before long everything has become theological and no longer historical. This used to be called 'spiritualizing' the matter. I am not saying that everything in the Bible must be read in a literal and historical manner. However, we can not simply dismiss the historical problem. For the story of God has to do with concrete people and their history.\textsuperscript{230}

Of course it is rarely possible to absolutize any concrete singular occurrence in history. Events always take place within a larger, more coherent framework. As with the texts of the New Testament, it is a mosaic. At stake is the total picture. It is fully possible that an occasional text is wrongly interpreted. Likewise, not everything has to be historical; some things can be non-historical or historical in a different manner than we think. In turn, what we view as fiction may well be historical. Even so, it will not be possible to declare everything non-historical without completely losing theology as well. For that would jettison the entire mosaic of God's presence in the world.\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{229} Moleschott 1853: 120.
\textsuperscript{230} Macquarrie 1981: 27: 'For if it is a gospel addressed to people who live "in the flesh" and struggle in the midst of the concrete actuality of history, it seems to me that the gospel itself must partake of history.'
\textsuperscript{231} Theron 1996 correctly shows that the characteristics of faith are different from the process of determining a number of historical facts. 'Or do you have the feeling that your life will break down if it was proven that Jan van Riebeeck landed in Gordonsbaai after all?' (and not in \textit{Tafelbaai}, Tablebay; 406). We do not lose sleep over an historical inaccuracy. But we very much do so over unfaithfulness of a
Viewing the historic presence of God as a mosaic implies that we are not concerned with facts for their own sake but with facts that contribute something to the mosaic. It also implies—in the same way as in a biography of a person—that we must be open to counter-information: the unexpected acts that unhinge our life. When we are eager for what is extra-ordinary (in the way that some people take it for granted that God does miracles) we lean toward a science fiction that will only further such religious ideology. The truly extra-ordinary turns our life upside down. It is about that which does not fit in our way of thinking. Moreover, the imagery of the mosaic implies that we will not have to bear the burden of the arguments from precedents given voice by such statements as: ‘If you let go of this, you will also lose the resurrection.’ Conversely, it also means that each facet that sparkles into view will be like a piece that enhances the whole of the mosaic. That is why the historical is so important to theology.

This brings us back to the first six considerations of the above list, all of which are specifically centered on the birth from a virgin. Is the virgin birth historical or not, and what would either conclusion mean? And at the same time, its meaning determines our judgement about the historical question.

The first one on the list seems unimportant to me, although perhaps it is the most obvious one to many. Here, Zeus comes quickly to the fore. The God who can raise up children of Abraham out of stones has sufficient possibility to make Godself visible among human beings. The One who assumed humanity through the blood of Mary could have also assumed it from her egg and the seed of Joseph or a partner. For the trustworthiness of such a relationship is not established discursively but rather intuitively (407). Even so, this example itself shows that we cannot do without historical facts either: the cohabitation of two people who love one another is expressed in deeds and events. Surely, some things do not always make sense or can be misunderstood—with or without conflict—but the overall picture cannot be docetic, a-historic. Without a landing of Dutch people at the Cape there would have been no African Boers at all.

232. This is why the argument of Pannenberg (1972: 142) doesn’t fly. He suggests that Jesus became God’s Son when Mary became pregnant and that this idea is not compatible with the idea of pre-existence. However, pre-existence and being born of a virgin can in fact both be held, even if the separate authors of the New Testament do not do so. In principle the pre-existent Son can enter the world in whatever way God chooses. The reasoning by Pannenberg (and by Den Heyer and others who discuss the relationship of the sending of the Spirit and the virgin birth—see discussion that led to previous footnote 198 in this chapter) depends on the assumption that the extra-ordinary meaning of Jesus can be expressed only once.
Roman soldier. However, the point of Jesus’ coming is not about God’s possibilities but about humanity that is assumed.\textsuperscript{233}

The notion of virginal purity on the above list is also not important for Christology. Although early Christianity was far less attached to marriage ideals than the Judaism of its age, and virginity was certainly an ideal,\textsuperscript{234} it was not grounded in purity but in hallowed dedication to God. The combination of this third consideration and the first one on the list gave rise to the Roman-Catholic notion that the acquiescence of Mary played an essential role in salvation.\textsuperscript{235} Both considerations, just as the perpetual virginity, belong more properly to Mariology than Christology.

Next, the consideration that Jesus would not have been a human being like us if he were not born in the same way we are, is as invalid as the argument that he would not be like us if he were not born in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{236}

The next perspective on the list – that Jesus, to his credit, was born of a woman of questionable standing – seems an attractive view to many modern people. For God clearly seeks those who are lost. However, the problem is that the biblical texts do not give any credence to this view.\textsuperscript{237} Instead, Joseph and Mary are portrayed as observant,

\textsuperscript{233} Brunner 1950: 416: ‘Usually too little attention is paid to the fact that these accounts are specifically not about the eternal Son of God becoming a human being, but about the genesis of the person of Jesus Christ.’ This outlines a conflict with the position of Barth who very much sees the virgin birth as proof of God’s initiative because ‘God stands at the beginning where true revelation occurs’ (\textit{KD} I,2: 199). For Barth the accent lies entirely upon the coming of God and the exclusion of human beings (\textit{KD} I,1: 510; IV,1: 226f.). Because Barth at the same time excludes any notion of replacing the human father by the Holy Spirit or a holy marriage (\textit{KD} I,1: 510; IV,1: 226) his Christology takes on docetic traits. Here too, a kinship between Barth and Marcion comes to the fore. For God does not enter the continuing of our history (\textit{KD} I,2: 204).

\textsuperscript{234} Rev. 14:4; 1 Cor. 7:25-40; Acts 21:9.

\textsuperscript{235} This concept is called the \textit{Fiat-doctrine}, derived from Luke 1:35:’Let it be unto me (\textit{fiat mihi}) according to your Word.’ Compare John Paul II: ‘May Mary, who gifted Jesus, the Liberator, to the world, through her voluntary \textit{Fiat} ...assist us’ (homily at the 46\textsuperscript{th} Eucharistic Congress in Wroclaw, May 25 – June 1, 1997; http://www.kongres.wroc.pl/-ge/zaloze/kongpap.htm). Mary is ‘she who through her ‘fiať’ assumed the incarnate Word and offered it to all of humanity’ (John Paul II in a homily prior to the Angelus prayer at the eucharistic celebration on the occasion of the declaration as saints of Bernard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner, held in the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on June 23, 1996, http://kirche.kath.ele/pip/akte/vel126.22.htm).

\textsuperscript{236} See earlier in this book: Chapter I, section 3.3, referent to footnote 158.

\textsuperscript{237} The only immediate cause could be that some sort of sexual peculiarity involves
poor Jews. Luke, who very much elaborates upon Jesus’ association with sinners, does not even hint at such an interpretation of the virgin birth. And Matthew, while aware of the negative impressions of her pregnancy, records a scriptural quotation spoken by an angel to Joseph to overcome the impact of such views.238

Why does Matthew rectify these views? Not in order to save the incarnation. After all, Matthew and Luke could have come up with the same ideas as we about a birth that resulted from unfaithfulness, namely: how great the grace of God is. I cannot think of any other reason for Matthew and Luke to do what they did and wrote than that they tell it as it is. Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit of God, who conceived life in her womb. If we cannot accept that, we deny the character of the biblical authors. We have seen what the alternative leads to: infidelity or virginity. As to the first, I have never observed that biblical authors cover up the unfaithfulness of people. Quite the opposite: it is brought out in the open. For only the truth sets free. It would be God-awful if at the very moment of God’s definitive liberation the truth is obfuscated. That is why I do not believe the story of unfaithfulness at all, and will have to come to terms with the much more difficult story of the virgin birth.239 So why do I find it difficult to believe? Because it blows my academic schemes out of the water.240 Yet precisely this makes it perfectly clear that theology is not about theoretical possibilities but about reality. God does strange

all the other women who are named in the genealogy in Matthew 1. ‘The only thing they seem to have in common is the questionable nature of their sexual relations’ (Robinson 1973: 59). In my opinion this is a wrong interpretation of the text. The Old Testament narratives about these four people view them either as heroines (Rachel, Ruth) or place the guilt on the man involved (Judah, David). As a consequence we then should deal with the infidelity of Joseph; and the text contains not the slightest reason to do so. Prejudice against women and sexuality leads to this sort of exegesis. The context clearly shows that it is the common pagan heritage that is important. A genealogy is precisely about that: heritage. It is entirely consistent that after the four pagan women in the narrative, the wise men come from the East and discuss the place of Jesus’ birth instead of his descent.

239. Compare Stuhlmacher 1992: 189, who notes that the story is hardly a success story but again and again has been in need of a defense against attacks.
240. It makes no sense therefore, to seek a reasonable explanation for the virgin birth; for example by pointing out that parthenogenesis occurs in the animal kingdom (already by Origen, Celsus 1.37; compare Pascal (1997): 101 (no. 227) and 386 (no. 882) also pointing out that chickens lay eggs without a rooster), or even a recent account (that could not be disproven) of a girl in England who claimed parthenogenesis. If it were that simple it would dissolve the unsettling character the strangeness of the virgin birth intends to convey.
things, and we must take account of that. That may also disquiet the hearts of those for whom the virgin birth is as self-evident as the paving stones of a sidewalk.

We have a tendency to approach the words about acts of God with a certain diffidence. The virgin birth seems just too strange, or it is safeguarded desperately. Either attitude is completely unsuited to receive the astonishing news that God begins anew with humanity. The radicality of God is evident in a willingness to grow from the womb of a young girl. This is so strange, that I have to agree with Tertullian: 'it just has to be true.' It highlights once again that it is God who is so foreign to us. For the existence of God is even more peculiar than the birth from a virgin. God is indeed, and this God touches my life; God bears my life and I will never be without this God. That is reality, and if I want to establish that on anything else, the entire world will lose its luster and will evaporate in the bottomless abyss of nothingness.

Because reality precedes theory, the virgin birth is not necessary, theologically speaking. It is not even necessary in order to come to a knowledge of the mosaic of God’s salvation, unlike the theological necessity of Jesus’ death and his resurrection. It is one of those pretty stones in a mosaic that catches our eye because it intrudes on the pattern we expect. Whoever is not disturbed by this story – in the same way that some people find any work of art unremarkable – has no feel for the strangeness of God’s work. They will never be able to enjoy art either.

All this makes the question of the meaning of the virgin birth only more interesting. I feel at home with a combination of the ideas of Tertullian and Irenaeus that are related to the fourth and sixth consideration on our list above. Irenaeus says that Jesus was born from a virgin because it makes clear that this is a new creation of God. Just as the first Adam was not born in a normal manner, neither was the second Adam.241 Irenaeus adds that this is a sign.242 It is not salvation itself anymore than the healings performed by Jesus. We do not believe in miracles and we do not believe in the virgin birth, we believe only in the Lord.

At the same time, according to Irenaeus it is a birth from a virgin because God wants the continuation of the old humanity. The new

242. *AH* III,21,4-6; see also Tertullian *AM* III,13.
existence is born from the same genus of the Adam that is saved. Jesus grew entirely in and from Mary, flesh of flesh, blood of blood, born not conjured up, who became human for us humans and for our salvation. The manner in which this happened is a stumbling block for fastidious people, Tertullian says. It is scandalous to moral propriety because Jesus was not born of a properly married lady. A pregnant virgin is too much the opposite of a virgin. It is the same for people who expect proper rationality. It is too weird to be true, and that is why it is certain, albeit exclusively so to those who are affected by this story.

I have treated the question of the virgin birth more extensively because it illustrates so well the problem of history and theology. On the one hand, it is a sensitive issue; and on the other hand, if Matthew’s and Luke’s birth narratives were missing, the Bible would not cease to be the Word of God sufficient for our salvation. That is exactly why it is so beautiful that they contain these narratives. They are jewels in the polychromatic mosaic of God’s salvation. I think that the same is true for many other Bible stories. Taking each one separately, we could do without many of them and no one can properly study them in isolation. Yet together they are part of the one great work of art of God’s presence in the world. Therefore I would be loath to have to do without any of them. Even so, I always run the risk of putting a piece of the mosaic upside down by reading it historically as fiction (and thereby not as timeless truth or nonsense, but historical in another way) or vice versa.

2.5 Who has suffered

The phrase ‘who has suffered’ follows immediately upon the birth in the Creed. In the earliest versions of the Apostolicum this formula

243. AH.
244. CC 23.
245. CC 5 (related to the crucifixion and resurrection).
248. Even though the book Max Havelaar by Multatuli is a work of fiction about Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, it does not mean that he does not write history in a specific and penetrating way. ‘I know, and I can prove, that there were many Adinda’s and many Saidjah’s’ (Multatuli (1860) 1950: 255).
249. E.g. Hippolytus (Denz. 10). Seeberg 1920: 216 has made a reconstruction of the oldest Roman form of the Apostolicum.
is missing and immediately continues with ‘crucified under Pontius Pilate.’ The explicit mention of the suffering of Christ became important when gnostic and Marcionites movements denied the reality of the incarnation. Over against them it was explicitly confessed that suffering belongs to God’s presence in the world.\textsuperscript{250} This suffering primarily relates to Christ’s entire existence.\textsuperscript{251} When God comes into the world, it is in the manner of suffering. A pure receptivity (that undergoes everything and excludes nothing) experiences continuous pain, unfaithfulness, resistance, – everything that makes people victims, everything that shatters unity and love. What God experiences most fundamentally in the world is that its people do not want to accept this God.\textsuperscript{252} God is present in the world as the Unwanted One. God is born as an unwanted child. The mother’s first reaction to her pregnancy was ‘How can this be?’\textsuperscript{253} As slave of her Lord she only could do what was according to God’s word,\textsuperscript{254} just as Hagar\textsuperscript{255} and Bilha\textsuperscript{256} and Zilpa\textsuperscript{257} in earlier times. Mary’s household was hardly romantic. The man who would raise Jesus wanted to leave his fiancée when he noticed her pregnancy.\textsuperscript{258} It took a dream and an angel to keep him with her. Jesus was not wanted and he was not granted a place to find rest.\textsuperscript{259} He was and remained a stranger, just as God has always been a stranger in this world. His disciples will experience the same.\textsuperscript{260}

When Jesus had grown to be an adult all this found expression in a great many conflicts. Front and center are the conflicts with the de-
mons, conducted by their leader, the devil. Jesus has power over them, but ultimately their boss makes clear who rules them in this world. 'The ruler of this world is coming and has no use for Me.' And the followers of Jesus must realize that this ruler prowls about in the world as a roaring lion. However, because he has such chameleon colors, we think that the stories about him are fables.

A second circle of conflicts with those who have power in the world is the arena of the political and religious leaders. Herod tries not only to kill him immediately, but later this political fox advocates his passion as well. The conflict with the priests and scribes is described in great detail in the gospels. They have made the Father’s house — a place of prayer — into a den of thieves.

Was the life of Jesus nothing but trouble? Was there never laughter and never joy? Whether Jesus laughed or not is not recorded anywhere in so many words. However, I would think he did because he was a human being with normal human feelings. Certainly Jesus knew joy, and thanksgiving as well. For people who were tired and heavy laden found rest in Jesus: the very one who accepted everything and bore everything. And, at the very moment that a crying woman dries the feet of Jesus with her hair, you can just about see the staring faces at the head of the table.

Then there were friends, the people who traveled everywhere with him and who had become true friends with whom he could share everything. But in just such a situation you become most vulnerable. For when it mattered most, they deserted him. That is suffering. It is especially so when you foresee what will happen, even as your friends vigorously insist that they will help. The one who betrays you is not

261. See Mark’s pericopes, especially beginning with Mark 1:24.
263. John 14:30. The ruler of this world will be conquered paradoxically (John 16:11; 12:31) because Jesus will be thrown out of the world on the cross.
264. 1 Peter 5:8.
268. Umberto Eco made this question a motif of his book *The Name of the Rose* (Eco 1983).
even the worst one. Besides, you already know how it goes when people cheer you on with their hurrahs. As the hymn says, ‘Now it’s “Hosanna,” “Crucify” is next.’\(^{274}\) The existence of God in this world is suffering itself, with sometimes a moment of deep joy for people who are comforted, and sometimes (when a messenger comes from heaven\(^{275}\)) a moment of encouragement when the Father makes known that he is present – even though it is more like an e-mail, and is not the Father with his thousands of angels.\(^{276}\) God is so feeble in this world that even one modest angel brings encouragement. And even such encouragement lasts only a moment, for Jesus is deathly afraid a minute later.\(^{277}\)

‘Jesus wept.’ It is the shortest verse in the Bible.\(^{278}\) In the weeping of Jesus, the character of God’s presence in our midst is expressed. A singular explanation will not suffice. Perhaps he is grieving for a dead friend.\(^{279}\) It is, at any rate, anger about the grief of people caused by the power of death.\(^{280}\) It is bitterness over the lack of understanding of people who do not understand that the resurrection is not something of ‘some day, one day.’\(^{281}\) It is disappointment over people who do not fathom that he himself is the resurrection and the life.\(^{282}\) It is confronting everything that can be summed up in that one word ‘death.’ In the encounter with death, the Living One, the Lord who has suffered, weeps. It is no fun to be God on earth.

2.6 Crucified under Pontius Pilate

The name of Pontius Pilate places Jesus in the midst of world history. It places God in the middle of world history. More than any other phrase in the Creed it is this sentence that resists any form of gnostic speculation about redemption by heavenly beings. It is about concrete history; it is about \textit{this} concrete history. When God is in world history, world history officially condemns God. For Pilate appears as judge,

\(^{274}\) \textit{Liedboek voor de Kerken} (Dutch ecumenical hymnal for the churches), hymn no. 173:5: ‘heden hosanna, morgen kruisigt Hem!’ (W. Barnard).


\(^{276}\) Matt. 26:53.

\(^{277}\) Luke 22:44.

\(^{278}\) John 11:35.

\(^{279}\) The joy of raising him soon thereafter (John 11:15) does not preclude tears.

\(^{280}\) John 11:33.

\(^{281}\) John 11:24.

\(^{282}\) John. 11:25.
and as such in the name of ‘the whole world’ (as the Roman empire was called in those days). The world’s official authority condemns him to death.

It is remarkable that, according to all the gospels, Jesus was condemned twice: once by the High Council and once by Pilate. Led by the high priest, the High Council renders God’s verdict. Even though the members are not aware of it, they do so nonetheless. When the high priest said that it was better for one single man to die than that the entire people be brought to ruin, he meant that it was best to sacrifice Jesus in order to avoid such a turmoil in Judea that the Romans would intervene violently. However, John gives us the deeper background of these words: because Caiaphas was high priest he said it in the name of God. In God’s name the One is put to death for all. Through Israel’s high priest God pronounces redemption for all.

The accusation in court is one of blasphemy. Jesus is condemned because he had said that he was God’s Son. It was true. Yet this does not make the verdict an unjust conviction. For it is precisely as the Son of God that he was condemned to death in God’s name. It is God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. God does this on earth through God’s official representative: the high priest. However, in terms of world history the Jewish Council has no independent authority. Thus an authority on behalf of all nations is needed. Israel does not stand for itself but is the place where God meets all the nations. Hence the judgement of Pilate. It is not a matter of Israel alone but of the entire world carrying out what Israel’s God has decided. Pilate crucifies Jesus as King of the Jews. In the language of politics, culture and religion (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) it is written above Jesus’ head on the cross. Pilate condemns the king of Israel and thus Israel and Israel’s God. And in his judgement over God Pilate carries out God’s decision. He has no other power than what God gave to him. He could put Jesus to death on the basis of that authority alone. For God wants to be in the world as the One who is judged.

283. Compare Luke 2:1: ‘all the world,’ the empire as ‘oikoumenè.’
286. Rom. 8:32.
The judgement that the high priest unwittingly speaks in the name of God extends to the entire world, which unwittingly confirms God’s judgement. The superscription on the cross is essentially a confession of faith.\textsuperscript{289} Inadvertently, the world serves only the One who has all power.

It is an official verdict. And through that very verdict of God the world renders its own condemnation. For without God the world is dead. This is true for Israel, which already knew that they were ‘being killed all day long because of the NAME of God,’\textsuperscript{290} even though they were not always aware of it. Now it is truly extended to all the nations. The Roman empire signs its own death warrant. Pilate is doing it, and before long Constantine will be doing it when he appropriates the paradoxical cross as a sign of victory, and Theodosius will intensify it when in the year 380 he turns the subversive religion of Christianity into the state religion. In his verdict Pilate pronounces the death warrant for all worldly powers. For the Kingdom of God is of another order.\textsuperscript{291}

The world dies with Jesus in the condemnation of the God of Israel. The world is unaware of this. Only the congregation of believers knows of it, just as the evangelist rightly sees the true background of Jesus’ trial. Because the congregation truly knows what has happened, it undergoes baptism in the Name of Jesus in order to be buried with him in his death through that baptism.\textsuperscript{292} And that is exactly where the people of God are resurrected: having died together with God in the world, they live.\textsuperscript{293} For it is God who has life within and of himself. This God lays down life exclusively for the sake of others, in order to take it up for the sake of others. This God remains life itself in the midst of death.\textsuperscript{294}

Jesus did not merely die a common death. He is crucified. That gives special meaning to his death. Crucifixion was a shameful death. The Romans applied it as punishment for serious criminals and failed seditionists.\textsuperscript{295} It was a clear sign that showed that your life and your plans had utterly failed. It was not only a terrible death, it was a

\textsuperscript{289} Compare John 1:49.
\textsuperscript{290} Ps. 44:23.
\textsuperscript{291} John 18:36.
\textsuperscript{292} Rom. 6:3-11.
\textsuperscript{293} Gal. 6:10; compare Col. 2:14f.
\textsuperscript{294} John 10:17f.
\textsuperscript{295} Very clear on this: Den Heyer 1991: 32-34.
shameful death. That was made even more visible by letting you die naked, slowly and publicly, for all to see. It is a shameful end of a failed life.

What saving grace can there be in such a death?

Various answers can be given to that question. All of them center not around the death by crucifixion in general, but focus on the death of the crucified Jesus.

First of all, his crucifixion shows that Jesus was ready to go to the bitter end. He persevered even when the most horrible thing was asked of him. He persevered on behalf of his friends. He especially persevered with regard to the call God had given to him. God had sent him to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, not only in words but with deeds. God took a stand with the sick, the poor and the sinners. Jesus did not want to betray either them or the Father who called him. Here we find a human being who not only perseveres when a crowd of people cheers him on, but also when deserted in the most difficult situations. And that is where true faithfulness is revealed.

It is fair to say that faithfulness unto death is a miracle. It testifies to true love. However, it does not yet make immediately obvious how others can thereby be made whole. Thus a second aspect of the death of Jesus comes to the fore: it is the death of a righteous person. That appears later as soon as God raises him from death. God affirms this life. And a righteous person does not die in vain. The awareness that a righteous one could suffer and die to reconcile the culpability of others already existed in Judaism of the time of Jesus. It was not self-evident, but God could accept such a death as a sacrifice of reconciliation for guilt. With Jesus, who was sent to save the world, the significance extends even further: God gave him up as a sacrifice of atonement. Precisely that was his calling, and he remained true to it. He suffers a terrible death for a terrible guilt. This is what God de-

296. For this interpretation of Jesus’ death, see especially Kahlefeld 1981: 202-225.
299. 4 Macc. 6:28f. ‘Accept our punishment on behalf of them. Make my blood a sacrifice of purification for them.’
300. Rom. 3:25f. See also 2 Cor. 5:18f.
sired. That is why Christ had to suffer. The initiative came from God who gave his Son because he so loved the world.

That the death of one can mean the reconciliation of another can only be explained by realizing that persons are not disconnected individuals. Only in cooperative connectedness can one suffer for another. It is impossible to believe in substitutionary suffering from the standpoint of the notion that everyone is only personally responsible before God. Clearly, the biblical authors do not share that notion. Actions of people always have significance for others. This is true negatively: people suffer from the evil of others and can even be blamed for it. This is also true positively: people are saved by healing actions of others and share in the joy that brings. The Bible sees human beings as people who are all linked and therefore are also all responsible to and for one another.

Jesus’ dying and death affects everyone indeed. He is the new human being, the second Adam. He is bearing the life of all people. God gave him as such, and God called him as such: to exist for the sake of all. God did not merely love a few friends of Jesus but he loved the world.

Jesus knows himself bound to all human beings. He remains faithful to his calling for all people. He suffers a suffering that is reconciling for all human beings. That is an inhuman task. That is why he dies an inhuman death. Even so, we keep asking: who is ever able to bear the weight of the sin of the world? I cannot even bear the weight of my own sin. That conviction shipwrecks every thought of Jesus as an example or inspirational source. For even if I would live from now on

301. In the gospels it is Jesus himself who repeatedly says that the Christ has to suffer (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 12:50; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44, 46; John 3:14). This shows that he was not only aware what awaited him, but also that it was his Father’s will. Also compare his prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 4:35f.; Matt. 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42).

302. John 3:16; 1 John 4:9f. Because of what follows in 1 John 4:10, it is impossible to use the text ‘God is love’ in isolation and place it in a context of one’s own choosing. God’s love is shown in the deliverance of the Son and not in some other way.


304. This is powerfully expressed in the second commandment of the decalogue (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 5:9).

305. That is why the emphasis upon the personal responsibility of every human being in Ezekiel 18 is not contradiction to the conviction of corporate unity. The point is to oppose the view that evil is a fate that cannot be halted. For just as evil touches everything, it is possible to further what is good by doing good for the benefit of all and to save the whole people. See Berger 1996: 210.

306. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22,47. See Ridderbos 1966: 52-55 on this.
in complete faithfulness to God and all people, I am stuck with my guilt for the past. It is precisely because I now have such love that I feel all the more the pain of my lack of love in the past. Much of the past I do not recall. Once in a while something surfaces. Even a small mistake seems so terrible, then. You can not change the past. You can only change your present behavior. Yet especially when love is genuine you notice that it falls short again and again. You never surpass yourself. After all, you are mortal, an earthling—and yet totally responsible, without excuses. Adoptianism is superficial when it ignores such a problematic reality.

Who can bear all my guilt? Who can bear all those things under which people collapse and that cause them in despair to end their lives? Who is able to bear all those things with which people struggle and that cause such depression that they are paralyzed? Who can bear all pain and frustrations? And who can bear the responsibility of all consequences of tyranny: of war criminals, of rapists in war and of exploiters at home? Who can bear to truly take in the meaning of it all? To bear it entirely means to realize completely what you have done. It means to be fully aware of the suffering of the victims and to feel their pain. Thus only one single victim is sufficient to cause complete panic over being unable to undo what has been done. Then even bearing the cross is not sufficient punishment to atone for it. Yet Jesus bears everything. And Jesus can bear all things because he is Lord.

‘The first Adam is of the earth, earthly; the second is from heaven,’ Paul writes. He writes about the Resurrected One, but it is equally true for the Crucified One. The Lord from heaven bears all guilt. The suffering does not diminish because Jesus is Lord; in fact it can now be plumbed in the fullness of its depth. God’s omnipotence does not serve to surpass the boundaries of suffering. It implies that God knows all and sees all. God lays down life itself, not out of despair or ignorance but because God judges that a human being no longer deserves to live with this guilt. It is not despair but a judgement that Caiaphas and Pilate unwittingly, but officially, pronounce.

307. Compare HC answer 13: ‘actually, we increase our guilt everyday.’
308. 1 Cor. 15:47.
309. See footnote 147 in Chapter I and its referent.
310. It is remarkable that in New Testament scholarship a close connection is hardly ever made between the titles of exaltation of Jesus and his reconciling suffering. That is undoubtedly caused by the customary separation and discontinuity between the earthly and the glorified, as though it does not concern the same person. Now that many presently think more in terms of continuity, it should again become very
Godself is crucified in the crucified human being of Jesus, the Lord from heaven. God bears the shame. He undergoes our lot, our guilt and the suffering of human beings. The letter to the Hebrews has especially developed this theme. The letter begins on a high note: Christ is the matrix of the essence of God, God’s character elevated above all and everything. Yet this exalted one has been tempted in every way as we are as human beings. The Son learned obedience by what he suffered. Christ offered himself as a reconciling sacrifice that includes all and everything because this is not an offering of an animal by a priest who is himself limited, finite and guilty, but the offering of the very self by the eternal High Priest. This book ends with the place of God in this world; it led to death, outside the camp. Christ is the least of all people, an outcast from the society of humankind. Following this God shows you your place: ‘Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.’ For our God is a scorned God. Our God is the crucified God who is dragged down the streets, who allows clothing to be torn off and who is killed. Still, this is God. At Christ’s disposal was a legion of angels that could have put an end to the mockery. A single word to the Father would have been sufficient. But Christ does not flinch. For it is this God, a God of human beings, who bears their life, their suffering, their guilt, their death.

The depth of the meaning of the theology of the cross is delineated most thoroughly by Paul. That happens because Paul connects the notion of the shameful death on the cross in the Roman and Hellenic world with the Jewish law. Deuteronomy 21:23 says: ‘cursed is eve-

clear that it is precisely the Lord who suffers. It is not a human being who earned the resurrection but it is the very Lord who bore sin as one sent from God. Even Berger 1996, who explicitly says that he wants to make no distinction between the earthly one and the resurrected one, continues in his soteriology the idea that the chain of self-evident guilt is now broken, and that we now can follow Jesus, aware that sin is not universal. (208-211).

312. Hebr. 4:15.
313. Hebr. 5:7f.
317. Outside the Pauline corpus and the passion narratives in the gospels the New Testament rarely speaks of the cross. It is a typical Pauline motif that is closely connected with his interpretation of the cross in light of Deut. 21:23. Stuhlmacher 1992: 156 suspects a Jewish background for making this connection with Deut. 21.
ryone who hangs on a tree.”

318 In Deuteronomy that refers to someone who is hung on a gallows for committing a crime. But Paul links it to the cross. Therefore, the cross is a curse. Christ dies as one who is cursed. But he does for our sake. He bears our curse. As the Lord from heaven this is not born for mere individuals, but actually as the curse itself. He did not become a cursed one but became the curse itself, just as he who committed no sin became sin itself for us. 319 The curse itself is nailed to the cross. The handwritten record of our sin is nailed to the cross. 320 The essence of curse and sin dies on Golgotha. In the Pauline view of the cross the crucified God is the cursed God. And that places the letter to the Hebrews very close to Paul. For ‘the place outside the camp’ is a concept borrowed from the cultic realm (as is most of Hebrews). It is about the scapegoat who had to be set outside the camp. 321 It was the goat for Azazel. 322 It was the goat sent into the desert, the domain of death and devils.

However, a curse has a subject. Who pronounces the curse? Who utters the condemnation? That was done by Caiaphas and Pilate. Even so, as we have seen, they did so in God’s name. Godself pronounces the curse. God utters condemnation over the beloved Son. God speaks condemnation upon Godself. Godself assumes all responsibility of humankind. God became human to curse God.

‘Alexamenos adores his God.’ We have become accustomed to speak about the cross as signifying salvation. We have lost touch with the scandal of preaching the cross. However, it is a scandal to proclaim anything but Jesus Christ and him crucified, as Paul did, 323 and as the congregation is yet called to proclaim.

Paul arrives to proclaim the unknown God, 324 who comes to what is God’s own. But to bring this news in such a form! It is ridiculous to speak of a crucified God. To all Greeks it is sheer folly. For the Greeks only know about gods of power; not a single one of them is linked to the symbol of a ludicrous failure. Still, it is even worse to

318. That is the version quoted by Paul in Gal. 3:13. In Deut. 21:23 it reads: ‘Anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.’
319. 2 Cor. 5:21.
320. Col. 2:13f.
322. Lev. 16:8-10. It is unclear what ‘Azazel’ really means. But the purpose of the goat is clear. It is sent into the desert because of the sins of the people. That is also in Hebrews the concept regarding Christ’s death outside the camp.
323. 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2.
speak of a condemned God who self condemns. That is no longer hilarious, it is pure blasphemy. It is a stumbling block for anyone who has even the slightest sense of what is at stake in Jewish law. It is not merely that you cannot believe it, you cannot even bear to hear it. Paul has seen both sides: it was he who persecuted the earliest congregation. That is, until he discovered that the Crucified was indeed the God of Israel. Then it is not sufficient to say that God was willing to bear the curse. God became the curse itself.\textsuperscript{325} And that was justified because it was God’s own verdict. And the verdict of God is always justified. God does not crucify Godself because the world is beyond hope and redemption, but because God justifies both self and the world. In the Old Testament the story of Job ends by God returning to Job double of all that was taken from him.\textsuperscript{326} According to God’s own law this is the appropriate settlement for what was taken unjustly.\textsuperscript{327} God acknowledges that Job’s suffering was unjust.\textsuperscript{328} Paul takes the last step: God does not only take responsibility for the suffering of humankind but also its guilt. God acknowledges God’s own culpability.

Between God and humans exists a conflict. This conflict goes to the bitter end, unto death. In that conflict one of the parties dares to take the responsibility. And it truly requires an ability to respond. God, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth takes it on. The possibilities of redemption open up at the very moment that guilt is accepted. And in redemption, true love is revealed. It is not superficial love but love that is true unto death, love that passed through suffering and conflict. It is the love that has learned to accept that not accepting the other as other was too much to ask, and thus is willing to accept everything.

That does not end the narrative. We can say that God has born every condemnation, and we can even sing about it. Even so, atonement has to do with relationship. How does the other react when one party confesses and accepts guilt – indeed all guilt for everything? The way of Jesus shows what happens. The crowds cried as loudly as they could: ‘Crucify him.’ They very much liked a Messiah who enters the city on a royal donkey.\textsuperscript{329} Yet it is wise to distance oneself as quickly

\textsuperscript{326} Job 42:12; compare 1:3.
\textsuperscript{327} Ex. 22:4.
\textsuperscript{328} More extensively on this, see Van de Beek 1992: 90-92.
\textsuperscript{329} Riding a female donkey (Mark 11:1-10; Matt. 21:1-9; Luke 19:28-38; John 12:12-16) says something about the nature of the kingship of Christ. He does not come with horses and carriages but as the humble one (compare Zach. 9:9). Nonetheless,
as possible from a God who allows captivity and judgement. When all is said and done, we do not want such a God. That is clearly the case with those who laugh openly or who are openly annoyed. At least they are honest. The worst are those people who deny that it was God’s fault and who feverishly attempt to show that they will fix it or even maintain that it was all their own fault. Such people do not take God seriously. They do not take God seriously at the very moment at which God reveals the conflict publicly and that Godself claims responsibility. They offer superficial replies such as: ‘It isn’t that bad,’ or ‘That’s not true at all, you always did your best.’ No, God assumes the guilt of the world and that says it all.

Rather than denying God’s fault, acknowledging our own guilt is quite enough of a burden. For even when God bears all guilt, that does not mean that we have no part of it. In a truly deep conflict guilt cannot be sorted out among the parties. That would keep the outcome in the petty realm of ‘No, I didn’t; yes, you did,’ and ‘But then you did that!,’ etc. This would not be a true meeting but a battle that draws new lines of demarcation. A truly reconciling meeting implies that all parties take full responsibility for the entire conflict. God has taken such full responsibility. God’s question to us comes through a messenger. ‘In the name of Christ we ask you: be reconciled to God.’ For ‘All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.’

Do you want such a reconciliation? That means: will you accept the estrangement from God and other people as your guilt and die with Christ?

The atonement for sin is that God and human beings die together because of the sin of the world. This happened in Christ. If we confess Christ as Lord, we acknowledge that his humanity is our humanity, his death our death, his curse our curse.

That Jesus carried his cross does not mean that we should not carry it. Jesus is followed by a man who carries the cross. Simon of Cyrene is dragged into all this by Roman soldiers who act as unwittingly as their boss in his judgement upon Jesus. It is not his own cross the arrival on a female donkey is a sign of royal dignity (1 Kings 1:33, 38, 44).

330. 2 Cor. 5:20, 18f.
331. Rom. 6:3-10.
that he carries but the cross of Jesus. Whoever follows Jesus has to take up his cross daily. In other words, it is daily that you suffer the guilt of the world. To carry the cross while following Jesus means more than the saying ‘everyone has his own cross to bear.’ It is not about the suffering that befalls each one of us; it is about the judgement of God. It means to daily accept the condemnation of the world and to accept the verdict of God. Fundamentally, it means to accept the judgement of God about oneself. It means having to live with a God who does not have clean hands but is willing to be totally responsible for everything of this world, for everything that happens, has happened and will happen. We share in that judgement of God and together agree that the lost world belongs to God, a world so loved by God. In this way we discover the depth of God’s love in the midst of death. The guiltiness of the past remains guilt, our own included. But the sting has been removed: it can surface and has surfaced. All righteousness has been accomplished. We can bear it because we drowned together with God in Christ and in that death met the living Lord who loves us in the midst of death. And we love God in Christ in the midst of all the questions of theodicy. For this God is our God. The world can laugh about this strange couple, or can be annoyed, but it manifests the deepest love that that strange prophet Hosea also portrayed.

2.7 Dead and buried

After all this, why do we still have to say that Christ is dead and buried? It is in order to avoid fashioning all this into an exquisite theory that has nothing in common with the concrete earthly reality. Again we see that the Creed resists a gnostic idealistic conceptualization. Jesus really did die. The suffering God is not merely an idea, but a reality. God is dead and buried. Jesus is not immediately glorified and lifted from the cross as some gnostics opined. A stone was rolled before the entrance to the grave and was even sealed. Within the boundaries of concrete earthly reality we must realize that this is the

334. Hos. 1-3. Compare Irenaeus AH V,2f: God came unto this broken world as his own, for his power is made manifest in weakness.
335. Compare HC, question and answer 41.
337. Mark 15:46; Matt. 27:60.
end. We should not fashion illusions about God's kingdom or a re-
newed world of peace and justice. It ends with the grave. It ends not
only with the human grave, it also ends with the grave of God. The
ideals of a secular world cannot replace that. For that world is as
dead as the Crucified who bore the world on the cross. We ought not
to have any illusions about a world without God, nor of a world with
God if we think of it as immanent history. For the mystery of history
is given in Jesus. In Revelation 5 the scroll of the mystery of the world
is given in the hands of the lion of Judah: the king of Israel. And that
lion is perceived in the form of the Lamb that is slain. The King of
the Jews is the crucified Jesus. This is the presence of the Lord in the
world. We must daily be reconciled to that presence, at least if we
want to look beyond the daily delusions.

Only when that has sunk in may we notice that it was a new grave.
That means that the life of Jesus was new from the beginning to the
very end. He was born of a virgin, as a new creation who received life
from the body of a common human being. As this new human being
he goes through history – till death follows. And as a dead human
being he is buried, in a new grave hewn from rock of the old earth.

3. GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

3.1 Of a different order

Jesus' preaching, his signs, his birth, his baptism, his suffering, cruci-
fixon, death and burial, are all events that took place visibly in the
world. In principle they are open to regular historical research. The

339. Compare Pascal 1997: 76 (no. 165): 'The last act is bloody, however fine the rest
of the play may be. At the end they throw dirt on your head and that is the end of
it, forever.'

340. In the sixties of the last century, the view that the disappearance of faith in God as
person would be a gain for faith was in vogue for a while. It was thought that in
the secular world the immanent ideals of humanity and justice would gain strength
if they were released from their religious bondage. See especially Van Buren 1963,
Meanwhile, it has become clear that Christian ideals evaporate without their reli-
gious context, and that therewith the impact of Christian faith on society will only
decrease. When faith does not implicate or effect transformation of people, the
cause is not the overabundance of religious speech but it is the deficit of religious
faith.

341. Rev. 5:1-10.
virgin birth is at the edge of history. To a likely degree it can be determined that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor of another man. Something unusual was going on with his birth. Nonetheless, historical means can not determine that God was involved. It is a conviction of faith. The same is true for all the other things Jesus did and suffered. As facts they can be determined with a certain degree of plausibility; yet that it was God in our midst can only be taught by the Spirit who touches us in the narratives about Jesus.

In the subsequent phrases of the Credo we have a quite different situation. It no longer speaks of experiences that can be addressed by regular historical investigation. Here we encounter the world of God. Wherever that world touches our existence, the best we can do is to observe that something unusual has taken place that can not be traced any further. God can not be determined by methods of historical research. It is similar to the events where – according to the New Testament – God speaks to someone. The one who is addressed knows that God has been encountered, but the bystanders hear a thunderclap – or wonder, is it perhaps something supernatural?\(^{342}\) – they see a bright light or hear an unintelligible voice; it is not even clear whether it is a light or a voice.\(^{343}\) It remains an open question, without understanding what happened.

The descent into hell, the resurrection, the exaltation and certainly the coming again of Jesus are not facts like the battle of Waterloo, and also not facts like the cross on Golgotha. We deal with narratives in a world that is unlike our own. The Bible narrates events differently. The gospels manage to tell the story of the resurrection on the last page. Beyond that lies the proclamation of the church, which through faith in Jesus has come to know him as Lord, and which – on the basis of the (often visionary) experiences of Israel and the church itself – speaks about a reality that surpasses our earthly continuity. The stories about the resurrection thus display another structure than those about the crucifixion.\(^{344}\) The resurrection narratives are suggestive and are about brief appearances, without continuity.

3.2 Descended into hell

Death and resurrection are usually closely linked together in New

\(^{342}\) John 12:28-30.
\(^{344}\) Jeremias 1971: 301.
Testament scholarship. In the last century the resurrection received even a heavier accent than the cross. The Credo inserted a brief phrase: ‘descended unto hell.’ That happened rather late. The church confessed Christ for a long time without these words. That does not mean that they are unimportant. The suffering of Jesus had been inserted later as well, but that does not mean that it is not crucial, for us and for those people who were Christians without having that phrase in their Credo. It appears in the creed when it is no longer a matter of course: over against gnosticism it became important to confess that Jesus truly suffered. Furthermore, the Credo says nothing about the Kingdom of God either. Attention to that notion was only paid when it was no longer self-evident that God is King over all in the Europe of the Enlightenment.

Why then, did the ‘descended into hell’ become part of the Credo? It was for reasons very much like the rest of the Christological part of the Credo: it countered those people who did not take seriously God’s participation in the guilt of the world to the bitter end – and who thereby thought too optimistically about human possibilities. The descent into hell shows us that not only human reality and God’s reality exist, but the reality of darkness as well. It is a reflection of the experience that evil goes beyond us and precedes us. It also deals with the power of death that rules over us. We are subjected to that power. We are delivered to it. In the Bible this is described in a three-fold manner: the heavens, the earth and that what is under the earth; or sometimes as heaven, earth and sea. The sea is symbol of chaos, downfall, the powers of evil and death. All this is summarized in the word ‘hell.’ To translate it as ‘realm of the dead’ is much too lame. That expression is merely the duplication of ‘deceased’ ones, itself a weak term for dying. ‘Descended into hell’ means: delivered to the powers that are stronger than humankind, that are beyond us in a wicked way and that infiltrate our life in such a manner that we submit to them when our historical existence has run its course. It is the inheritance of our existence in the flesh – flesh that also has meaning beyond mere bodiliness. It is our only future because of the breach

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345. In the enumeration of formal confessions by Denziger, the first occurrence of the phrase is found by Rufinus around the year 400 (Denz. 16). The phrase is not found in Augustine (Denz. 21), in the Nicene Symbola (Denz. 125) and at Constantinople (Denz. 150).

346. See Calvin, Inst. II.8.

347. See Bultmann 1948: 15f.

with God. Those who do not believe are already condemned. 349 Hell is the consequence of a life in the flesh under the judgement of God.

It is to this reality that God delivered Jesus. Thus the Son of God participates not only in the historical human lot of guilt and suffering, but also in their transcendent downfall into evil and in their final judgement. God has gone to hell for them. This was necessary, for many people could be found there at the very hearth of evil.

Yet even there it remains true that God came to those who belonged to God. Psalm 139:8 says that God is everywhere: ‘even if I made my bed in Sheol, You are there.’ God is everywhere; and everywhere God is present as the Mighty One. For there is no power that is of an equal caliber with God, not in origination, nor in degree. The early church wanted nothing to do with an anti-divine power that would not ultimately fall under God’s reign. 350 The phrase may have been placed in the formal Credo fairly late, but in the very early church the confession is made from the very beginning. Everything that is in heaven and on earth under the earth, confesses Jesus as Lord. 351

When the Lord goes to hell, a lot of people are present. The Lord meets an entire world from before the Great Flood. 352 In the midst of the powers of death and evil that overwhelm the people, the Lord preaches and brings the good news those in prison: Godself shares their lot. Godself bears the forlornness and has power over what is lost. This changes the nature of hell, just as the character of the world changed when Jesus came. The old is gone, everything is made new. The demons still rage on the earth and the devil still roams like a roaring lion looking for prey. The cave still exists, but it is being cleaned out by the One who has power over the demons.

That is why ‘descended into hell’ stands at the edge of the depth of Jesus’ humiliation and at the height of Jesus glorification. For there

350. For example, see the meaning of the sea in the Revelation of John. The sea is created, just like the earth and the heaven (10:6; 14:7). At the same time, the sea is just like death and Hades; it is the place where the dead abide (20:13). At the end of time there will be no more sea (21:1) just as there will be no more death (21:4) because it will be thrown into the lake of fire along with Hades (20:14). The double significance of the sea is also evidenced in the eschatological image of the sea of glass; i.e. a sea that has lost its chaotic character by becoming completely transparent (15:2, compare 4:6).
351. Philp. 2:10f.
the last powers, the devil and death, are defeated. And Jesus is the Victor.

Calvin demythologized the descent into hell. According to him this event refers not to something after Jesus’ death, but it concerns the hell during his earthly life, and in particular the experience of god-forsakeness on the cross. Where God is not, there is hell. One could demythologize this completely by limiting hell to psychic consciousness and awareness of experiences alone; then, when one no longer believes in God, one experiences hell. Calvin does no go that far. For him, God remains a reality outside of us, but hell is not a place. Taking into account the medieval paintings of hellfire and torturing devils, such a sober view can be evaluated positively. Hell is not a phenomenon in and of itself, apart from God. It deals with God’s judgement and with abandonment.

Even so, demythologizing brings a risk to the fore: we could easily forget that hell deals with a reality. It concerns a different way of being; one that is completely turned toward darkness. Here is a reality that is not separate from the world but somehow connected to it, just like heaven. And sometimes is seems that the link withhell is shorter than the connection with heaven.

On the other hand, demythologization makes clear that hell is of another nature than the earth. That which is ‘above’ and ‘below’ has more to do with a different sort of reality than with merely a reality of another place or of another time. This is not only true for hell but also for heaven. Thus, it is not only true for the descent, but also for the resurrection, the ascension, the return and the final judgement. Our historical categories of space and time do not apply to them.

Because hell is of another order than the world, the demythologization also makes clear that the struggle and victory of Christ does not have to be repeated once more in another place after his death. The decision is made once and for all on Golgotha. There the devil is defeated. It is there that Jesus gives a final accounting to the demonic reality. The phrase about the descent into hell intends to say that the death on the cross reached farther than earthly relationships and pow-

353. Inst. II,10-12. HC, answer 44, follows him in this. The demythologization in Calvin is applied to maintain the seriousness of judgement and death (II,8f.) and to avoid that the realm of the dead becomes a sort of temporary holding place of souls.

354. About the meaning of the significance of the symbols of evil, see Ricoeur 1963; Van der Hoeven 1998.
ers only. 355 Athanasius already explains the cross in that manner when he says that evil spirits were circling in the sky above the cross 356 and that Jesus completed his task in such an environment. 357 Only when we believe that all powers were defeated on the cross can we understand that – according to John – Jesus says before his death: 'It is finished. '358

After his death, when all is finished, Jesus can enter the very home of evil and proclaim redemption to those who were imprisoned by the power of the devil. It is the first place where Easter is celebrated. Just as the demons were the first ones in the world to recognize Jesus as the Holy One of God, 359 it is the realm of evil that first hears the news of Jesus' victory. He personally delivers the message. For it is his own domain, and not one of another God, in the same manner that even the wood of the cross is also created by the Lord. 360

3.3 On the third day, risen again from the dead

The resurrection of Jesus is one of the central themes of the Christian faith. Together with his death on the cross, it makes up the core of what the early church said about Jesus. The resurrection can not be dissociated from the cross; it establishes the confirmation of the meaning of Jesus' death. Without Easter, the cross would remain an open question.

Even so, however central the resurrection may be, the confession of this belief confronts us with a number of difficult questions. They involve five aspects:

a) the very possibility of the resurrection from death
b) the events themselves that gave rise to the confession
c) the nature of the resurrection
d) the meaning of the resurrection
e) the relationship to the ascension.

a. The possibility
It is hard to believe that someone was raised from the dead. It is in-

356. Compare Eph. 6:12.
357. Inc. 25.
358. John 19:30. Note the perfect tense; the situation of a new reality has begun.
360. Irenaeus, AH V,18,2.
credulous not to modern folk alone. However, events are not about what can possibly happen but what has actually happened. We have to remind ourselves of this, again and again when we deal with the acts of God within the world. Yet we also must remember that the normal order of things is totally disrupted. What happened has turned our lives upside down. When the resurrection of Jesus does not imply such an upset, we don’t really believe it at all. If the confession of the resurrection were a means to find a more secure lodging in orderly church life, one would have failed to recognize how odd this event really is. Nor would he or she fully realize the ramifications of what is involved in a human existence that incorporates death and that is subjected to sin. A victory over these self-evident realities is more unimaginable than I can truly fathom. Therefore, the celebration of Easter largely consists of listening and prayer: imagine if all of this were really true!

b. The events
According to the New Testament, two sorts of occurrences formed the direct cause of faith in the resurrection of Jesus: a number of people who found the grave empty, and a number of appearances of Jesus. Usually the latter are considered primary and the former secondary expressions of experiences. I do not think that that is right. The stories of the open grave are a substantive part of the Easter narratives in the gospels. The gospel that is commonly dated as the earliest, Mark, has no accounts of appearances at all. That is why I think that it began with the experience of the empty tomb.


362. Those who think that the appearance narratives – and even more the empty grave stories – are expressions of the belief that Jesus’ death was not the end, must take into consideration that such concrete depictions disturb, rather than support, an idealistic account. For example, in gnosticism it was much easier to imagine that Jesus was raised spiritually while leaving his body in the grave, rather than that he was raised bodily. If someone intended to promote a spiritual continuation of Jesus’ life, that would most certainly not have been packaged as a story about an empty tomb in the Hellenistic culture of the day. The narrative is subversive over against the regnant culture of that time and is only significant for people who are strongly attached to bodily realities. Precisely the latter hardly meant to imply a mere spiritual resurrection. See also Van de Beek 1991b: 259-264; Stuhlmacher 1992: 175-179.
The empty tomb by itself does not imply that Jesus is raised. Grave robbing or bribing of Roman soldiers by followers of Jesus is more likely. Finding an open grave only implies a question: What is going on? According to John, only those who believe in Jesus are motivated by the empty tomb to think about the mystery of the Living One.

The other gospels focus on the emptiness of the grave as well. An open tomb is not where the living Lord can be found. According to the synoptics the angel says explicitly, 'He is not here.' The tomb is not the place where Jesus is. It is a place of death, and Jesus is the Living One. The empty tomb is much like a photographic negative of the Easter story.

In contradistinction, the appearances are like the proofs of positive photographic prints. People really encountered Jesus; not only his disciples, but others as well. First of all, a number of women are witnesses of the risen Jesus. Soon after, a few followers from the wider circle around Jesus experience the same. Only later, on the evening of the first Easter day, his closest disciples have their turn after a separate encounter with Peter took place first. The denial of Jesus by Peter warranted such special treatment: the last shall be the first. That also applied to Thomas, for he is the one who had said that they all would die collectively with Jesus, even before Peter had vowed his loyalty. It is the same Thomas who is missing in the company of the confounded disciples. He returns to them somewhat later. Even so, he is the first one who formulates the confession of the congregation: 'My Lord and my God.' According to Paul, many others saw Jesus as well. Most of them are still alive when he writes his letter; they can be questioned about it. Finally, Paul himself saw Jesus as well.

364. John 20:8. Here, belief still stands over against knowing the Scriptures (and thus understanding the true significance). Just as in John 21:7, it is John who is described as being most open to the resurrection of Christ.
374. I Cor. 15:6-8.
As was true for the stories about the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus should not be spiritualized. At stake are real encounters that totally changed people’s lives. From a band of dispersed, fearful people, most likely full of feelings of guilt, they become witnesses who do not waver. That does not mean that their faith is not assailed. Matthew mentions such a temptation explicitly in the Galilean appearance narrative. When the disciples saw Jesus, they worshipped him. Just like Thomas, they pay Jesus divine homage, ‘but some doubted.’ That is exactly what makes it credible to me. In an ideology doubters are not permitted. However, when it comes to giving witness of what has been an unimaginable experience, it makes perfect sense that doubts surface now and then. That happens even when the Lord is present, and (thus) is even more likely when the Lord is not present. It is such witnesses that have to go and teach all nations. Indeed, it worked out quite well.

The uncertainty about the appearances is bolstered by the manner in which the evangelist tell the stories about them. Their witnesses can not be harmonized. Luke places full emphasis upon Jerusalem and Mount Olivet, while for Matthew the highpoint lies in Galilee. John combines both, but also describes an event along the shore, and not, like Matthew, an appearance on a mountain. The experiences of the women in the very early morning all follow a different pattern. That can be partially ascribed to a conscious theological presentation by each evangelist. For instance, Mark guards the Messianic secret by mentioning only one angel (you need two witnesses for a reliable account) and, moreover, is merely suggestive by speaking of a little boy in white clothing. These theological intentions make it more

378. The appearance on the evening of Easter seems to flows seamlessly (Luke 24:36-53) into the ascension from Mount Olivet. However, in Acts 1:3 Luke assumes a period of forty days between Easter and Ascension.
380. The first version of John has an account about Jerusalem (John 20:19-31). The second ending in John 21 tells the story of the appearance at the shore, while Matt. 28:16 speaks of a mountain in Galilee. Even so, these accounts do not at all exclude one another.
381. Two angels were present according to John (20:12); Matthew has a sole angel (28:2,5); Luke mentions two adult men, andres (who together make valid witnesses), who wear dazzling clothes (astraptousos, 24:4) and are interpreted as angels by the women (24:23). Mark has merely a neaniskon, a little boy (not even a neanias, a young boy) who wears a white (leukos) stole (16:5). This gospel ends
difficult to reconstruct what happened exactly. We should not say that
the evangelists did not care about that. They very much want to be
precise. However, they do so with an eye toward the meaning of what
happened, as distilled events that concurred with the message. From
among the chaotic accounts that undoubtedly surfaced in the first
hours of Easter, each of them in their own way fashioned a report
about the living Lord in order to teach the peoples just as Jesus had
commanded them. In all of this the reality of his resurrection is not
questioned, but the details may vary just as they do in every important,
unexpected event as told by different people to different listeners.

c. The nature of the resurrection

Jesus was raised bodily. The New Testament leaves no uncertainty
about that. Jesus took on our humanity and was raised with our hu-
manity. Especially Luke and John describe Jesus physicality very
concretely. To make absolutely certain that his resurrection is no fan-
tasy, or the experience of a ghostly appearance, Jesus asks for some-
thing to eat in his first encounter with his disciples on that Easter eve-
ing. He eats a piece of fish. That shows how concretely physical is
his resurrection.

At his encounter with Thomas, Jesus invites him to put his hands
on the scar of his wound in Jesus’ side and his fingers in the scarred
hands. In the description by Luke, attention is also drawn to the
hands of Jesus. This means that Jesus was raised with the same
body he possessed before his death. He does not inhabit just any body,
or even one that was carefully chosen, but the body with which he was
crucified. In the resurrection Jesus brings along his earthly history.
And it is clear from the conversations with his disciples after the res-
urrection that Jesus is present with experiences imprinted on his
soul. Peter is visited separately for a reason.

At the same time, Jesus’ physicality is of an order other than be-
fore. People frequently had trouble recognizing Jesus: Mary Magda-

by saying that they did not tell anyone for they were afraid. The difference from
the other three gospels is considerable, especially with Matthew. This is in ac-
cordance with the Messianic secret: it may not be told to anyone (Mark 1:44; 5:43;
7:36; 8:26; 8:30; 9:9).

len, who surely had etched the image of her Lord on her soul, the pedestrians on the way to Emmaus, and Peter from a fishing boat on the water. Furthermore, Jesus enters a room when all the doors are locked. He simply appears, and disappears equally suddenly.

Paul thought intensely about this seeming discrepancy, as shown in 1 Corinthians 15. That Paul asserted that Jesus was raised bodily is not open to doubt. The entire argument with the Corinthians concerning the resurrection would have been unnecessary if Paul intended to speak of a mere spiritual resurrection. His opponents would have been pleased if he had meant the latter. The eternal spirit who was already raised (or even better, would not even need a resurrection), would undoubtedly live on. Yet the problem was precisely the body. Jesus was seen, Paul writes at the beginning of this section. There are eyewitnesses. The physicality itself is for him at the core of his argument. In what follows, only the nature of that physicality is open to discussion. It is a physicality of another order, compared by Paul to the relationship between a seed of grain and a new plant. It is the same grain in a different form. He uses other examples as well to illustrate that materiality can have different kinds of qualities. There are many kinds of meat and different sorts of heavenly bodies who all are distinct on different levels. In the resurrection we are dealing with the same body in a different quality: heavenly versus earthly, spiritual over against natural. We must watch against seeing the heavenly or spiritual body as a kind of manifestation of light. Paul would undoubtedly have judged that much too vague. It does not correspond to the last section of the gospels and the testimony of the eyewitness that Paul mentions. We are dealing with a material body that is glorified.

All this does not mean that we should imagine the resurrection as a scenario played out on the first Easter morning. The angel did not come down to roll away the stone in order to let Jesus out of the tomb. He who was victorious over death did not need an angel to clear away a stone. He who entered through closed doors could also leave a closed grave. Jesus was raised in a manner different from the way we

391. About this see especially Beker 1980: 152-170.
393. 1 Cor. 15:5-8. The Greek word oophithè [he was seen], relates a visible appearance.
394. 1 Cor. 15:35-49.
get up out of bed, and Jesus left the tomb in another manner than we leave our bedroom. Jesus was raised on the other side of death. He did not return to normal earthly life as did Lazarus, the boy from Nain or the daughter of Jairus. He passed through death into eternal life.

As described by Matthew, the appearance of the angel only serves to strike the soldiers with fright. The kind of power that thinks it is capable of safeguarding death has become utterly ludicrous. And the stone is rolled away only to show us that Jesus is not among the dead. Salvation should not be sought in the categories of life subjected to decay but is to be found with the living Lord.

d. The meaning of the resurrection
At first blush, the meaning of resurrection is that death is not always victorious. The seemingly self-evident subjection of everyone to death is not true. Yet this is only an observation from a distant perspective that does not go to the heart of the matter. In fact, it does not even touch upon this event at all. For earlier in the Bible there is talk of resurrection of the dead. Enoch and Elijah did not even die, but were taken up to God while alive. We can only understand the meaning of the resurrection if we take notice of the fact that it is the resurrection of Jesus.

The meaning of the resurrection is complementary to Jesus’ person and work. We saw earlier that his death can be interpreted as the death of a righteous one. His resurrection is a confirmation of that, for the righteous shall live by faith. His being raised from death is a con-

395. John 11:44.
399. In addition to the texts about the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus, see 1 Kings 17:7-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Luke 7:11-17.
400. Gen. 5:24.
401. 2 Kings 2:11.
402. Rom. 1:17. The text is a quote from Hab. 2:4. Following Luther, this is usually interpreted as pertaining to the justification by faith. Then the righteous one is the justified sinner. However, that differs from Hab. 2 where it speaks of the law-observant Israelite who is saved. In light of Rom. 1:4 it makes more sense to read Rom 1:17 in light of the same meaning that it has in Hab 2. Then ‘the righteous one’ pertains to Jesus who lives because he has been faithful. The following chapters further clarify that all have sinned and thus are sinners, but that they are made righteous through the faithfulness of Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26), who is the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21). That is why ‘pistis,’ faith, in Rom. 3:21-30 is used for both
firmation by God of this life. And when Jesus has prayed for the perpetrators it is the confirmation that his death is accepted as reconciliation. 403

Above all, however, Jesus is Godself among us. Godself bore human existence. With the resurrection, God brought human existence out from death. In this lies the deepest meaning of Easter. Human existence is remitted from death. Godself brought it out of the power of death. Hence death and hell have no defense against this second Adam, who appears in a heavenly body because he is from heaven. And the sting of death is removed from death because Jesus died unto sin. 404 Made sin for us, 405 Jesus took sin with him to the grave and rose as the eternal Living One to bring eternal life to all who died with him in baptism. 406

Thus it does not matter whether we say that Jesus was raised or whether he arose. 407 The Father raised the Son, but the Son also rose by his own power. We saw earlier that Sonship consisted of the full unity of the will and the work of the Father and the Son. That is not limited to earthly life or to the incarnation. It is true for their entire relationship, in the resurrection as well. God and Jesus are no competitors. That is why the discussion about a difference between rising or being raised bypasses the heart of the meaning of Jesus. The Father and the Son always desire the same and always act the same. What the Son does, is done in name of the Father, and what the Father does is done through the Son. When the Father raises Jesus it is done through Jesus resurrection. Jesus remains Lord of life, even in death. No one can take it away from this Lord. Only Jesus can lay it down and can take it back again in the midst of death. 408

Jesus proved to be Lord of life and thus Lord of death. His resurrection is not merely a static interruption of the self-evidence of death. It means that the One who was crucified and bore the guilt of the world possessed the keys of death and hell: 409 the Alpha and Omega

the faithfulness of Jesus as well as the faith of the congregation. Especially in 3:22 both meanings touch upon each other.

404. 1 Cor. 15: 55f.
405. 2 Cor. 5:21.
407. The passive form can be used in a ‘middle voice’ in Hellenistic Greek (Bib.-Debr.-Rehk. §78).
who loves the world to death. It is not necessary to have a third party involved in allocating to us the benefits of these great acts. Godself is in charge. This one person shall judge the world because God has raised this one person from death. \footnote{Acts 17: 31.} Easter means that the end has begun. \footnote{Schweizer 1979: 55-57.}

e. The relationship to the ascension.
Jesus was raised on the other side of death. It seems obvious to conclude that this means: raised in an existence with God. Then Easter and Ascension coincide. Many scholars agree to just that. For them, the scenario of the ascension is merely a way to express the power of the risen one.

However, this eschews the fact that Easter and Ascension are described as two separate events in the New Testament. Luke offers the most extensive accounts. Yet even in John, where Easter, Ascension and Pentecost seem to be concentrated on Good Friday, \footnote{See Van de Beek 1997a.} it is Jesus who forbids Mary Magdalene to cling to him because he is not yet ascended. Moreover, there are distinctions to be made between the appearances as narrated in the gospels and by Paul. The former are much more earthy, ‘human,’ than the heavenly light that surrounds Paul and that throws him and his companions on the ground. The latter displays heavenly Majesty.

Jesus is in heavenly glory after the Ascension, but between Easter and Ascension he appears as the glorified human being, different but on the same plane; he is not subject to the usual categories of space and time, but is present in space and in time nonetheless. A difference remains between glorification and eternal life on earth and in heaven. That agrees with the vision of Revelation in which a new earth and a new heaven is created. It means, therefore, that heaven will change also. The work of Christ relates also to heavenly realities. Thus the Ascension is not only a symbol of the power of Christ, but also a realization of the work in a reality beyond it (though accomplished on earth), in a similar way that the descent to hell was a realization of that work in the reality below the earth.

The different texts together paint a picture as follows: after his death Jesus went to hell. Even there the extra-calvinisticum applies: in the midst of death Jesus is the Lord who cannot be captured by any-
thing. Death can not hold Jesus because he is the Monarch of life. And this has freed humankind from the powers and principalities. The first place where this was celebrated in fear and trembling is the domain of Evil itself. Jesus is on earth between Easter and Ascension. He is not staying somewhere specifically – such as with friends in Bethany for instance – in order to make an appearance elsewhere now and then. He is present without us being able to pinpoint him, unless Jesus shows himself to confirm that he lives. On earth this is celebrated – and feared. At the Ascension Jesus is glorified in heaven. Is there nothing but jubilation, or do we have to say that Satan is still among the sons of God, albeit as a conquered power? The glory of the Son in heaven is not a foregone conclusion. It must be confirmed there just as much as it was on earth and under the earth. The entire creation has to learn to bow before Jesus, just as Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered.

This is how the Son’s path in transcendent reality is confirmed, in order that all shall confess Jesus as Lord: who is in heaven, on earth and under the earth so that every knee will bow before him. Finally, the Son will give all his power to the Father. For the Father and heaven are not identical. God is beyond heaven as well. There will be a moment in which the total work and the total sovereignty will be celebrated among the Father and the Son – without any fear, for perfect Love knows no fear. The perfect unity of the Father and the Son, without any distance or restriction, will be celebrated.

That is not to say that all else is forgotten. In every new phase in the transcendent path of Jesus his work on earth remains the subject of the celebration. In hell, liberation is preached. On earth, the victory over death in the destruction of sin is celebrated. In heaven, the Son is glorified for the work that he finished. Thus all confess Jesus as Lord. And the intimate relationship of the Father and the Son is in the Spirit who is the Lord; the Lord who is life and makes life. In the eschaton the Trinity is not suspended and history is not suspended but are celebrated in the Son begotten of the love of God.

It goes without saying that we must think and speak about these things with reserve. It concerns matters that are too great for us. Nevertheless, it must be thought about, not only to avoid all sort of mindless speculations and far-out scenarios, but also to fathom – or at least have an inkling – of something of the great mystery of the work of

413. Compare Job 1f.
414. Hebr. 5:8.
Christ. We are capable of learning only one small lesson at a time as mere humans – yet God wants to abide with such as us and for such as us has born our life.

3.4 Ascended into heaven

Ascension is the enthronement of Jesus. He receives ‘the glory that I had before the world existed.’ Even so, Jesus receives this glory in a special manner, namely as the Lamb that bore the sins of the world. All the titles of exaltation converge. In the New Testament the words of Psalm 110 are usually used when referring to the exaltation of Jesus: ‘The Lord says to my Lord. “Sit at my right hand.”’ Jesus did not go to heaven to merely take up a place alongside everyone else. His place is next to God, on the very same throne. The Credo kept this connection between the ascension and ‘sitting at the right hand of God.’ It especially expresses the power of Christ. Psalm 110 continues: ‘until I make your enemies your footstool.’ In the East the one who has the power is also the judge. There is no separation of powers. The interest lies not in the sharing of tasks and competencies but in justice. A good ruler is a righteous ruler. And a righteous ruler is one who does not acquire riches to the detriment of the subjects. It is also a ruler who sees to it that others don’t enrich themselves by harming people who are weaker. That is why power is so important: the ruler has to have the highest power in order to straighten what is crooked. A righteous ruler does not have just any kind of enemy, but has enemies in those who do injustice. They will be humbled.

Jesus is a righteous ruler. He has given himself for all. He has all power and might, and shall exercise it upon all his enemies. He rules from heaven: unassailable to earthly manipulations. Mary wanted to cling to him on earth. People like to hold on to Jesus. They even would like to sit on the same chair with him. Again and again, the church has an inclination to think that this is so, indeed. Then the church forgets that Jesus ascended into heaven and shares the same throne with God, the Father Almighty. On earth, Jesus is not replaced by the church but by the Spirit who will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. The church only plays a role in so far as it proclaims the death of the Lord; it thereby daily, for the sake of the world, is willing to be crucified by disregarding all power, even

415. John 17:5.
though one little word of the Lord would be enough to settle everything.

Ascension is a critical event. All those who have power should take another good look at how their power is exercised. And all those who confess the Lord should take another good look at whether they are not trying to cling to Jesus for their own sake by what they confess. For the ascension is not the last word about Jesus. That may serve as a wake-up call for those who think that God is trapped in God’s own transcendence, and thus can do no harm.

3.5 Who shall come again to judge the living and the dead

The ‘coming again’ has no central place in most dogmatics. Much thought is given to the other moments of Jesus’ work: his birth, crucifixion, even ascension and also to the sending of the Spirit. They have a place in the church year. But the return is somewhat detached from all this. The last Sunday of the church year is not a feast day that comes even close in importance to the others. At most, it remains a remembrance of the loved ones who have died. However, without eschatology, everything else loses its meaning. To New Testament authors it is unthinkable to speak of an atoning death, resurrection, or pouring out of the Spirit, without the eschatological context. For all of those aspects have to do with the Day of the Lord. The entire New Testament is eschatology.  

Earliest Christianity had grown in the context of apocalyptic Judaism. Only from within that context do the events, words and symbols make sense. The expectation of the day of the Lord is central in apocalyptic thought. Some day God will intervene definitively. Then all things shall be made right on earth. It will not be through a velvet revolution but with cosmic violence. The established structures of heaven and hell will collapse. The oppressor will be crushed and the righteous shall be liberated. That day will bring forgiveness of sins for those who waited on the Lord. Those who died hoping in the Lord will be raised in glory and those who dismissed the Lord’s righteousness will receive their just punishment, whether they live or died a long time ago. That is not only true for Israel but for all the nations. For the God of Israel is the God of all peoples. On that day all the nations will

come and bow down before Israel’s God, either to ask for mercy or because God’s verdict subjugates them. It will be day of darkness, of fire and fear. People will hope that the mountains will cover them so as to be hidden from the face of the One who sits on the throne: the judge of heaven and earth.

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of himself and about his work in terms of such a judgement. Many parables address the coming of the Lord or are concerned with the kingdom of God. Often we might better read it as the kingship of God. It is about the reign as was described above: the righteous Ruler who will vanquish enemies and will judge the people. The notions of peace and happiness in the texts about the kingship of God are often given prominence, while forgetting that these are embedded in a context of judgement. The latter predominates in the proclamation of Jesus.\textsuperscript{419} It was not for nothing that John the Baptizer said about the arrival of Jesus that the axe was at the root of the tree and that every tree that would not bear good fruit would be cut down and burned.\textsuperscript{420}

Jesus sees his coming again in that light. He frequently calls himself ‘the Son of Man.’\textsuperscript{421} This harkens back to Daniel 7:13. The vision in Daniel 7 is about the divine judgement. Thrones are positioned as seats of judges. The carrying out of the judgement is entrusted to one who is as a Son of Man. By identifying himself with this Son of Man, Jesus makes clear that his presence is one of an eschatological judge before all else.\textsuperscript{422} The highpoint of this is reached during the process before the High Council. Wherever judgement is meted out in the name of God, it will appear that it is the Lord who judges. ‘From now


\textsuperscript{420} Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9.

\textsuperscript{421} About this title much literature has appeared. Among others, see Sevenster 1946: 78-96; Cullmann 1957: 138-198; Richardson 1961: 128-146; Hahn 1963: 13-53; Tödt 1963\textsuperscript{2}; Fuller 1965: 119-125; Conzelmann 1967: 151-156; Hooker 1967, Colpe 1969; Jeremias 1971: 245-263; Stuhlmacher 1992: 107-125. Part of the discussion is about whether Jesus used this title for himself and what it could have meant to him. There is no reason to deny that Jesus applied the term to himself even in the broadest sense of its meaning. See De Jonge 1988: 172; 1990: 75; Stuhlmacher 1992: 124. Stauffer 1957: 122-124 even sees the title as the central self-identifier of Jesus, hence making it taboo for Christians (in a positive sense) and for Jews (in a negative sense).

\textsuperscript{422} Even without this identification this conceptual field remains essential for Jesus’ behavior. See De Jonge 1990:93.
on you will see the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.\textsuperscript{423}

When Jesus rose from the dead, the resurrection dawned. In that context it could mean nothing else but that the great day had dawned. The dead do not simply arise in glory. It is possible only because the day of the Lord has arrived. It begins at the moment of Jesus’ death, and in his own resurrection it is clear that it is because of Jesus that the Day now has begun. It can therefore not remain limited to the resurrection only; it cannot be seen isolated from the day of the Lord. Now everything will unfold. Now the Spirit shall be poured out. Now the world shall collapse with cosmic violence. Now forgiveness of sins occurs, and now the wall crumbles between Israel and the peoples. And above all: now the judgement begins. Everything what is being said about Jesus can only be read within that framework. Jesus is the coming Judge in the divine trial. In Jesus’ death, Jesus was a judgement in the world\textsuperscript{424} upon all those who did not gave their life in love unto death. And Paul later adds that they have all sinned and therefore will fall short of the glory of God.\textsuperscript{425} Hope can only lie in the embrace of the love of Jesus, and that means following Jesus by leaving everything behind.

However, the day of the Lord is not a day in the normal sense of the word. The key is that it is the Lord’s intervention. As to their meaning, all moments coincide; yet human beings may very well experience it as a phasing-in of some kind. However, such phases are irrelevant in view of the coherence of the one event of the day of the Lord. The condemnation of the council and Jesus’ death do not coincide. It is with his death that the resurrection of the dead begins. Yet Easter is not until the third day. And his enthronement takes place after forty days. God acts at decisive moments: the third day is the day of God’s decisive intervention.\textsuperscript{426} Forty days is the period of waiting, the time of the desert, the time of the temptation.\textsuperscript{427} On the fiftieth day the Spirit comes. It is the day of the giving of Torah.\textsuperscript{428} Now the Spirit will write the law in the hearts of the people, just as Jeremiah had

\textsuperscript{423} Matt. 26:64, compare Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69.
\textsuperscript{424} Jesus says that is why he came (John 9:39).
\textsuperscript{425} Romans 3:23.
\textsuperscript{426} Stuhlmacher 1992: 172.
\textsuperscript{427} Gen. 7:4, 12, 17; 50:3; Ex. 16:35; 24:18; 34:28; Num. 14:33; 32:13; Deut. 2:7; 8:2-5; 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10; 29:5; Matt. 4:1-3; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2.
\textsuperscript{428} Pentecost was in Israel both a feast of the Law as well as a feast of the first bread of the new harvest.
promised for the future days.\textsuperscript{429} Thus the day of the Lord becomes for us ‘the last of days.’ Even so, all this symbolic significance does not undermine the unity and the intensity of the events. This also holds true for the time after Pentecost. On Pentecost, Peter speaks in cosmic terms of blood and fire and smoky fog.\textsuperscript{430} Yet flames are only upon their heads, without singeing a hair, and the blood that is mentioned is only the blood of Jesus. Pillars of smoke rise only from the sacrifice that is offered in the temple, as always. Still, the gift of the Spirit is at one with the cosmic changes in the same way that the fire of the burning bush\textsuperscript{431} was none other than the devouring fire of Sinai when God gave the law to Israel.\textsuperscript{432} When the resurrection has begun and the Spirit has arrived, the cosmic collapse will come as well — and forget not: the judgement as well.

When after some time people begin to mock again, just as on Pentecost, and say that Christianity is a drunken tale,\textsuperscript{433} Peter again brings to mind that God’s day is not measured by our sense of time. One day is for the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.\textsuperscript{434} However, that is not a reason to take the day of the Lord less seriously: it is actually the day of the Lord that lords over the years and centuries.\textsuperscript{435} It is fortunate for the human race that God grants us time; it provides time for an opportunity to repent.\textsuperscript{436} Time is repentance-time, whether it is the morning of Pentecost, or of the years and centuries of the present.\textsuperscript{437} We live in the last of days and thus in the middle of the reign of God that is breaking through. And the reign of God is judgment. Let everyone be aware of that.

The eschatological meaning of the coming of Christ has been weakened in various ways:

\textsuperscript{429} Jer. 31:31-34; compare Hebr. 8:8-12.
\textsuperscript{430} Acts 2:19, citing Joel 2:30.
\textsuperscript{431} Ex. 19:18.
\textsuperscript{432} Acts 2:13; 2 Peter 3:3; Judas: 18: the mockers are people who do not have the Spirit.
\textsuperscript{433} 2 Peter 3:8.
\textsuperscript{434} Ps. 90:2-4.
\textsuperscript{435} 2 Peter 3:9.
\textsuperscript{436} Because of this unity of God’s acts, the problem of the so-called delayed parousia is only a problem if we think about history in a strictly linear fashion, in the sense of chronos (clock and calendar time) and not of kairos (event-time: now is the hour) See also Van de Beek 1996: 221f.
a) by existential narrowing
This view of eschatology is typical for modernity. Because we can no longer imagine that a metaphysical God can intervene physically, the eschatological claim is transferred to ethics or a stand-alone decision of faith. The latter is especially advocated by Bultmann: we ought to strip faith of all factual orientations and live by faith alone, without relying on anything observable. Not only can we not rely on our own achievements to bolster our faith and trust (that would be a rather small concession), we can not rely on any of the events in salvation history. Faith is pure trust in God and God’s perfect grace. Others often reject theism less thoroughly and adopt a view of the eschaton as a powerful expression of the ethical imperative. Here the decree has divine authority and does not allow any pretense because the commandment demands complete purity and allows for no fudging.

b) by vapid religiosity
This type of eschatology limits itself to remembering those who are deceased. The finitude of existence is somehow related to an infinite underlying reality. It involves a faceless God who does not act in concrete deeds. It is possible to view the notions of Bultmann as an extreme concentration of such a religious eschatology.

c) a narrowing by church or believers
The last judgement is taken seriously in this case, but it is made clear in advance where the dividing lines will fall. The believers are acquitted and the unbelievers are condemned. Such faith can be colored in individually (such as through conversion, a Protestant type) or collectively and ecclesiologically (such as in a Roman Catholic type where one is baptized into the ark of preservation).

d) history-as-process idea
The kingdom of God is understood as the progress of the world. Human beings play an important role, whether inspired by the Spirit, or not. Often this school of thought overlooks that eschatology includes all of reality, including the past that is also judged and justified.

439. This is a theological fashioning of the famous postulates of Immanuel Kant’s Praktischen Vernunft, his practical reason (Kant, [ed. Schmidt], o.J., 169-185).
440. That is why he can not do without the concept of ‘God,’ even though it is stripped of any attributes. See Bultmann 1948: 48 and the reaction to it by Jaspers 1954. On the other hand, Bultmann is a typical example of modernity, contrary to the later, more post-modern, religious sensibilities.
Moreover, it forgets that eschatological judgement in the world is present in the very way of the process of Jesus. The entire world is judged on the cross, not only the world of the past but also the world to come. Temporary progress in the world is very much possible, but that is something entirely different from the eschatological judgement of God.

e) fundamentalist scenarios
Here the notion of the intervention by God is preserved. Yet it is forgotten that all the deeds together form one single event. It is fancied that painstaking calculations will reveal in detail the path of earthly history up to the new day. Especially the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation are favored in developing such a time-line. This completely overlooks that these books, even more than the gospels, do not presume a chronological historical order at all, but narrate moments of God’s intervention. The gospels enlighten us about the life of Jesus in the manner that students tell stories about their teacher; that is, led by themes and aspects rather than by chronology. The same is true for apocalyptic works. They are about themes and aspects of God’s definitive acts without much regard for historical order. Sometimes it is held to for a moment, but then it is dropped just as quickly. Moreover, the apocalyptic narratives are told in symbolic language. The stories are symbols that seek to signify God’s intervention.

f) a Marcionite view of God
Because God is pure love, such a God would never ultimately condemn human beings. How everything and everyone will fare is not all that relevant, for it all will work out in the end, they say.441 We are in God’s hand, and that is enough. Here it is too often forgotten that this hand of God is God’s right hand that smashes the opponents.

Most of these approaches by themselves are aspects that play a legitimate role in eschatology. However, we should not limit ourselves to any one of them. Even the sum total of these facets is not yet New

441. Often Origen is cited in support because he speaks of the resurrection of all things. Origen has an entirely different view of God, however. For him God is absolutely omnipotent. Thus, if God wants to create human beings in order to be honored by them, they shall honor such a God. Moreover, God is completely just, and therefore people will not blithely enter heaven upon their death. One enters a pool of fire and burning sulfur in order to see if repentance is for real. And how frequently such testing may have to be repeated is an open question. For it is not at all easy to be saved! Concerning Origen’s thoughts about judgement, see Van de Beek 1998a.
Testament eschatology. At stake is a total, drastic intervention in the world, not only in the present but also in the past. This is expressed in the credal phrase, ‘the living and the dead.’ The entire world is swept up in the one judgement of God. This God is no other God, but it is the God who created the world. It is also the God who bore the world, and bore it in its totality. God bore that world in the judgement.

Through the cross everything appears to have been turned for good. Yet eschatology, facing the cross, means: ‘They will look on the one whom they have pierced.’ Those who condemn Jesus will see the Son of Man sitting on the throne of God. We all will appear before the throne. Then it will appear what the living of our life is worth (straw – or still something like precious stones?). The first sermon held in the church is quite different from a typical sermon preached in an average church, no matter where in the world. Those who listened to the first sermon were cut to the heart when they heard it proclaimed: ‘This Jesus, whom you have crucified, was made Lord!’

In the last judgement, the books are opened. There stands recorded what people have done. In them, everything is found. It is, therefore, a day of wrath. No one should have any illusions about that. Even so, yet another book is opened as well. At the very moment that everything seems to have come to an end, one more book is brought in: the book of life. This book of grace is worn and abused a thousand times. But if it were not present, all would be lost.

446. Rev. 20:12, 15.
III Jesus in Every Culture

1. A Person Encounters Us

1.1 Doctrine and person

The Christian faith confesses that God came to us. Every culture will have to express the meaning of that encounter in its own language and life. It will not suffice merely to repeat what has been said about Jesus earlier or elsewhere. For it is not a formal conformity to certain formulations that is at stake, but the relationship with God. This God came into the world through a Person and is made known through this Person. Therefore, the concepts and expressions we use to denote the relationship with Jesus are not goals in themselves nor are they unchangeable. They reflect the continuously changing perspectives from which, and through which, people relate to Jesus.

Since we are dealing with a person, it is also insufficient to ascribe differences in expressions as mere translations. For that would imply the existence of a fixed number of themes and topics of faith that can be translated into other words or actions. If this were so, the original doctrines (and rituals) would be the essential ones, while the translations would be derivative. Indeed, the acculturation of the Christian faith often has been understood in exactly that way: translating the existing teachings into another culture. As a rule it was the Western formulation of Christian faith that had to be translated (more or less) into the cultures of the East or the South. Such a form of acculturation is always repressive. For the thematic of the original sets the tone, while by default the other one becomes derivative.

Yet the problem is even more profound. At stake is the very understanding of the teachings of the Christian faith as such. For if the essence of faith were mere doctrine, even the best of translations would be exclusive. In such a perspective, whoever subscribes to the teachings (whether the originating version or whatever sort of translation) belongs to the church, while those who diverge from the doctrine are excluded from the church. The focus would be on the one who con-

1. See also Van de Beek 1997b.
fesses the formulations of faith. Whoever accepts them first will be accepted within the church.

However, when dealing with a person it is an entirely different matter. A person can accept us without any pre-condition. A person can love us even if we do not love that person. A person can become part of our lives even if we reject him or her. The presence of such a person would indeed be a critical presence but nonetheless does not cut off the relationship. This is exactly the point in Christian faith: Christ enters our life in person, and speaks to us. In this relationship, therefore, the first and most relevant question is not whether we have given our heart to the Lord. Primary is the question how the Lord has spoken to us, and if we have heard his voice – whether as a voice of judgement or as a voice of liberation.

The voice addresses us through the Word. We encounter Jesus in stories about him, in explanations of the Christian faith, by reading or listening. Observing how other people live their lives can play an important role in the process of convincing us of truth. Nevertheless, even the most inspiring Christian life will only lead to a relationship with Jesus if such a life is explicated through the Word; only then it will become clear that is about him, for faith comes through Christ. Merely receiving words is not sufficient. What matters is that words are the medium through which Jesus is a living reality for us. What matters is the relationship with Jesus as a person. It may be compared to a biography; a good biography can bring someone to life in such a way that the subject becomes near and dear to us. Then it is as if the person comes to life through the written words, and as if the person comes near to us and speaks to us. This is even more so in the case of faith. Here the Lord comes to us indeed: it is God’s own Spirit that speaks to us and effects a living relationship.

3. The word ‘person’ is masculine in the Dutch language: hij, ‘he.’ That is noteworthy, because it is feminine in the original Latin. All other modern languages stayed with that understanding, grammatically. As far as I know, the Dutch language is the single exception. In as much as language is an expression of culture, this should give pause to those who speak Dutch. [Tr.: footnote in original]

4. ‘Die menschliche und religiöse Erfahrung ist der bevorzugte Ort, von dem her die Afrikaner Christus begegnen und erkennen können’ [human and religious experience is the preferred place from where the Africans can encounter and get to know Christ]. (A. Ngindu Mushete quoted by R. Luneau 1989: 16).

5. Rom. 10:17; See also 1Cor.14:14-19.

6. Martey 1993: 84: at stake is the ‘Jesus of history.’ This does not refer to the historical Jesus but to Jesus as he takes on form in the concrete history of people in the here and now.
In such a situation we do not need to repeat the words that others have spoken about Jesus, but we ourselves must give voice to what this relationship means. We arrive at our own form of confession and shape our own contours of Christian life. The Lord is within our own existence and we proclaim who the Lord is by expressing Christ’s significance in our own culture, in our own society and in our own economic terms.\(^7\) I therefore much prefer the use of the word *enculturation* instead of *acculturation*.\(^8\) Acculturation gives the impression that an existing body of values has to be adjusted for the sake of another culture. It is a word that suits too easily the notion that traditional western Christianity is the proper form which – to a certain extent – could or should be adjusted. A similar objection is attached to the word *contextualization*. Context presumes a text. Contextual theology by definition places much emphasis upon a given context. However, the result is often that it is less clear what is being contextualized. Implicitly or explicitly, the focus is on a theory, on a doctrine or on a basic concept, such as freedom. At best, it is concerned with the gospel as presented in the Bible. Even then, it has to be made clear that what matters is not that a new doctrine is set before us in the New Testament.\(^9\) Rather, it is all about Jesus: the core of the proclamation in the book of Acts is that the listener hears Jesus proclaimed.\(^10\) Thus, what is contextualized is not a text but a person.\(^11\) This person enters into the existence of human beings, and subsequently they all speak in their own tongue of the great acts of God. One could even say that they heard these acts already performed in their own language.\(^12\) For at the very moment that the preaching touched the people, it impinges

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8. Bediako 1992: 305f has trouble with the word ‘indigenization’ for the same reasons.  
9. When Paul brings the gospel of Jesus (Acts 17:18), the philosophers in Athens assume that he brings a new teaching (17:19). Doctrines can be discussed. However, Paul brings the announcement of an event involving a person (17:30f). They have no interest in that.  
11. Compare De Jonge 1988: 212-214: behind every Christology lies ‘the One with Whom it all began.’ *Christ in Context* would have been a more suitable title for his book than *Christology in context*.  
12. This is the work of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-11). The question of which language the apostles spoke on Pentecost does not really matter, nor whether technically it was a miracle of hearing or speech. The point is the reality that people heard of God’s deeds in their own tongue and felt addressed in such a way that they began to believe in the one Name.
upon them in such a way that it is no longer a foreign word but a language they understand, the language of their hearts.

In this chapter, I would like to sketch a number of cultural, societal and economic situations in which people have attempted to express the meaning of Jesus in their world. I expressly want to state that the Christologies of western theologians are such cultural expressions also. Too often the notion reigns, that contextual theologies are mostly from the East or South, or address minority issues in some society. Theologies of the West and theologies by majorities are enculturations of the One Name. They have no surplus value — nor a lesser value — than other forms of enculturation. Cultural expressions of the faith should not be judged by whether they are carried by majorities or minorities, or by those who are socially powerful or weak, but by the question whether they give a good testimony of Jesus.

1.2 A stranger enters in

We may wonder whether the Christian faith can enter any and all cultures. It would be a relevant question if the translation of mere doctrine were at stake. Conceivably, the possibilities of expression in a specific society could be so limited that it would be impossible to properly translate the nuances of the Christian faith. Or one may even be tempted to think that the Christian faith is captive to a specific culture. Indeed, too often the proclamation of the gospel has been understood as bringing it as an intrinsic part of Western civilization.

However, when we understand that what matters is the coming of Christ in person among us, no culture is excluded from such an encounter. Christ came to all people, regardless of their culture, societal structure, economic stature or whatever other distinction there may be among human beings. Jesus did not come for a specific kind of people, but for all people. People of a Western culture have no preferential status compared to people from other continents. After all, Jesus first appeared in Asia, where the first forms of Christian theology were developed. And African theologians dominated the setting of theological academic exercise before Europe began carrying the banner of faith. The most ecumenical confession of Christian faith, the Nicene Creed, bears the marks of Alexandrian theologians. That is why it is incorrect to assert that in the early church the pure Christian faith was disfigured by Greek concepts. Christ is as much Lord of Greek as of Jewish culture. Moreover, from the very beginning it was
the Hellenistic Jews especially who propagated the faith. It matters not who can claim the most ancient lineage; at stake is the question whether we properly put into words the meaning of Christ in our own culture.

Perhaps one could say that this task is easier to accomplish in one culture than it is in another. A language with many nuances, and a culture with rich resources of expression, may be preferable over a language that is not as well developed and has limited forms of expression. But the former can be treacherous as well. Care must be taken not to overshadow the mystery of the Stranger who comes unto us with mere forms of beauty. For me, the deepest expression of the love between two people is still the simple sentence in which an elderly man expressed his grief over the loss of his wife: ‘She always darned my socks.’ No famous poet or libretto could put it better.

Christ has come to every culture. Yet at the same time, Christ is critical of every culture. For Jesus is not named ‘the Savior’ for nothing. We must be saved; that is the way Christ comes to us. Something is not right with us. We are dependent on someone who darns our socks. Indeed, everything is wrong. Because to be saved by Jesus means that you are lost without Jesus’ intervention. At the same time, this Jesus comes as God: Emmanuel. The world with all its fullness – its cultural fullness too – indeed belongs to God; yet it is also the same world that did not accept its Lord. That is why the Lord enters every culture critically. Even for Jesus’ own culture that is true. Jesus directed the toughest pronouncements against those who culturally were closest to him: Pharisaic Judaism. Everything must change completely. Those of ancient times, the cultural testators, may have said a great deal, but Jesus has other things to say. For all cultures it is true: the old has gone, the new is come. And it is true in all cultures that every rule and every word is taken up by Christ and placed into service of the glory of his love, whether they are Greek poets or military or judicial Roman structures.

14. Matt. 5:21, 33. By using the word archaiot, ‘old ones,’ for those to whom the law was addressed, the accent is moved from the divine Word to the recipients of the tradition. Such a move relativizes the authoritative status. Compare Matt. 9:3-9; Mark 10:3-9; Gal. 3:19.
16. Not only the movement of Romans soldiers has contributed much to the spread of Christianity; the public trials and executions of Christians also made a tremendous
Any enculturation should be clear that it is about the concrete person of Jesus. Special vigilance is needed to make sure that it does not become an ideology in which Jesus’ name is attached to the propaganda. Two safeguards are:

a) a continuing conversation with other Christians from other situations and other times. Encounters with other believers and a reading of texts from far-away lands and eras allow us to break through the limited circle of our local or provincial interests.

b) feedback to the historical person of Jesus. The previous chapter tried to make clear that I see little purpose in traditional reconstructions of the life of Jesus. We can not go back to realities prior to the New Testament. Yet at the same time – in as much as he was a first century Palestinian Jew – we can not do without the concrete person that is described. The historical question can not be evaded. In that sense he will always remain the Stranger who comes among us, and thereby breaks the self-evident assumptions of our own world. If an Asian Jew from the first century is the one whom you love the most, it can not possibly leave your life unchange. This is true, even if your life in your own culture is totally accepted, – or better: because your life in your culture is totally accepted. It testifies to a mentality that demands a change in our attitude in the direction of a total openness of others. ‘Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus ... who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.’

2. ANSELM: RECONCILIATION THROUGH SATISFACTION

One of the best known models representing the meaning of Christ states that Christ has made satisfaction for our guilt. For many in the West, there was a time when this notion was the only form even in which Christian faith could be legitimately expressed – and for many it still is. It may therefore be wise to explain the cultural and social context of this model, and at the same time sketch it as one of the many specific expressions of life with Christ that are determined by time and place.

impact. As martyrs they gave the most important testimony of truth and goodness during their trials and sacrifice.

17. Phil. 2:5-8.
2.1 Longing for order

The classical doctrine of reconciliation that became dominant in the West since the Middle Ages in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was developed by Anselm of Canterbury, especially in his book, *Why God became human*. Anselm lived from 1033 to 1109. The preceding centuries had been chaotic. It had taken a long time before the various peoples in Europe had established their permanent home after the great migrations. Charlemagne had brought a period of stability. However, after him, the battle for hegemony among the new groups of people truly exploded. At times there would be a strong regional ruler, but then again it would seem that unfettered competition would prevail, causing terror from ransacking knights or strongmen with their troops. Especially the Western part of France suffered greatly in the eleventh century from marauding bands. At the end of that century people were tired of the chaos and arbitrariness. People were looking for some order in their existence. We have to place Anselm’s theology against that backdrop. Various factors play a role:

a) Some knights in Western France had risen above selfish knighthood. They aimed for justice and security in their realm. Gradually they gained more influence. They established laws that applied to themselves as well. They made keeping them a matter of honor, and derived their nobility from it. With these people one knew what to expect. They kept their agreements and eschewed arbitrariness. They had their fill of all that. No one was to be privileged or disadvantaged without good cause. Their power did not lie in threats but in their ability to provide safety. They were true nobles, and such noblesse obliged. Conversely, nobility demands honor and respect. Only a cad would attack a decent nobleman.

b) Roman law still existed. Western Christianity had always absorbed aspects of the Roman judicial system, and it came in handy in this newly developing order.

c) Improved agrarian methods brought rural economic wellbeing.

21. Note the frequent use of honor and related concepts in Anselm (CDH; see Evans: 1984: 645f.).
That, in turn, promoted mercantile and monetary trade. This latter development made trading more accountable and increased a sense of order.

d) At the same time, cities grew as food became more plentiful. The congregation of this many people, living in such close quarters, with a specialization in differing vocations, called for regulations and necessitated order for its own sake.

e) An awareness of one’s own personal responsibility began to grow. Here too, elements from Roman judicial philosophy played a role. The growing differentiation in the cities increased this trend of individualization. The person as individual increasingly came to the fore.

f) The encounter with Islam led to new impulses for academic endeavors. Perhaps it is too much to say that the rise of scholasticism was caused by Islamic influences, but certainly the cultural climate was ready for it. Even so, contacts with Islam functioned as an important catalyst. Not only society was in need of order, so was the realm of thought.

Putting it all together, we see the development of new, reasoned, sensible order, with dependable rulers, and subjects who are personally accountable and responsible. That is the ideal on which Anselm’s theology is established. The God of Anselm is a God of Order and thus trust-worthy.

2.2 Anselm’s method

Anselm’s method is strictly rational. His theses are proven by arguments that are generally valid and perspicuous. For instance, he wants

24. Anselm repeatedly called the domain of God ‘the heavenly city’ (civitas, e.g. CDH I,18). This obviously corresponds with the usage of his favorite author, Augustine.
27. Note the definition Boethius gave for ‘person’ in the sixth century: ‘Individua substantia rationalis naturae’ (MPL 64: 1343).
28. Little of that is seen in the eleventh century. In the twelfth century, the theology and personality of Abelard give clear evidence of this process. The awareness of persons as individuals with their suffering and loneliness breaks through in the gothic style (Mertens 1997: 109; compare also the origins of the minstrel ballads).
to prove the reasonableness of the incarnation without taking the actual reality of the event into account. He wants to construct the arguments 'without Christ, as if we never knew anything of him.'


It would be an anachronism to ask whether this is an internal, reasoned verbalization of faith or rather a proof of truths of faith by using only natural reason. The point is to demonstrate, on the basis of reasonable arguments and by using generally accepted truths of his time, that God had to become human.

The steps of the discourse do not rest on formal logical conclusions but on the weightiest argument: if counter arguments can not sufficiently convince otherwise, it is reasonable to assume that the original choice is the best over against other possible choices. To do otherwise would be unreasonable. Clearly, this is about reasonableness rather than logic. Instead, the method is judicial, with strong influences of Roman law, such as: no confusion of categories, no punishment of one for misdeeds of another. These rules are not derived from strict logic.

Considered generally acceptable are such presuppositions as: God is the Creator of the world, God is just, humans are created for the glory of God, angels exist, humans and angels have fallen, and forgiveness of sins is possible. These axioms are not self-evident for many people in our age. Nevertheless, they were valid to Anselm and his contemporaries. Within this field of thought he wants to demonstrate that, reasonably speaking, God had to become human. This is not because God is subject to a higher law that coerces the Lord to do so. God is completely free. However, it would be contrary to God's being to let go of something God desires, namely, creating human beings that will honor God. What matters is the trustworthiness of God. We must be able to trust God. The necessity of the incarnation is

30. CDH, Praefatio.
31. Thus Barth 1931.
32. See Fairweather 1956: 54 and Müller 1928.
33. In essence this is Christian philosophy. Anselm certainly does not want to say that this treatise will proof the truth of the Christian faith. Faith does not depend on such proof (CDH 1,1: II,15).
34. CDH 10.
35. For example, see CDH I,8; II,6.
36. CDH II,6; II,8.
37. Therefore, Anselm is able to pose the provisional status of his argumentation (CDH 2). Formal logic is incontrovertible, reasonable arguments are open to weightier considerations.
38. Compare CDH 10.
39. CDH I,4.
not an absolute necessity (necessitas absoluta), apart from any earlier decree. That would imply that God is not free. Therefore, it is a necessity that depends on the condition (necessitas hypothetica) that God desires people to honor their Creator. Because God chose that path, God is committed to it. That is not a necessity from without, but is in concordance with God’s own nature. It would be contrary to God’s nature to betray uncompromising divine trustworthiness.\(^{40}\) It is therefore possible to read Anselm’s entire address, ‘Why God became human,’ as one long plea for the trustworthiness of God.

2.3 The treatise

Many moments in the discourse of Anselm already appear in earlier Latin church fathers, especially Augustine, and also in Origen.\(^ {41}\)

The basis of the treatise is that God created human beings to honor their Creator. Honoring God is not an undifferentiated adoration but consists of obedience. People should do God’s will. That is why the commandments are given to us. We do not honor God at our discretion but in keeping the commandments.\(^ {42}\) Sin is breaking the commandments.\(^ {43}\) It is out of free will that human beings transgress the law of God. It is a conscious act of the will.\(^ {44}\) If it had happened against their will it would not be counted against them; they would have been overpowerd.\(^ {45}\)

\(^{40}\) CDH I,12; II,5.

\(^{41}\) Origen also wanted to the utmost degree to think through the questions of faith (see Van de Beek 1998a). Because Origen, just like Anselm, takes as point of departure the will and the demands of obedience, the two theologians have much in common, even though their conclusions are quite different. For example, while Anselm thinks that punishment is a sufficient compensation for disobedience, Origen holds that the will of God is fulfilled only when human beings voluntarily and thus inwardly submit themselves as well. That is why Anselm has no problems with a definitive punishment, while Origen sees difficulties. On the other hand, Anselm argues for compensation to ameliorate wrong deeds while Origen, just like Abelard (see later section 2.5 of this chapter), finds it sufficient if people ultimately submit themselves to God.

\(^{42}\) See Anselm’s epistle EI, ed. Schmidt II,8f. CDH I,11. Compare HC, Q and A 91. Overall the HC follows Anselm on many issues. See especially HC, Sunday 3-6.

\(^{43}\) Compare HC Q. 3: ‘How do you come to know your misery?’ Answer: ‘The law of God tells me.’

\(^{44}\) CDH I,7; CP, 3f. See also Fairweather 1956: 58f.

\(^{45}\) That is why speculation about the devil does not solve anything according to Anselm. Humankind should obey the law of God more than it obeys the devil. Being in the clutches of the devil may be a justified punishment for our disobedience but it does not entitle the devil to any say over us. We are simply stolen away from
The entire discourse has a strong juridical character and demands clearly defined aspects: a well-formulated law and conscious decisions. Only in this way can guilt or innocence clearly be established. Anselm is someone who lives in an era that is wary of all that is uncontrollable and unreasonable and weary of bearing the consequences of such an environment.

That view is also true for the doctrine of God. God reacts to actions of human beings with strict justice: someone will have to pay satisfaction. If such a demand were not operative it would make no difference whether someone is just or unjust; and that would not be fair. Fairness demands satisfaction. That can take the form of voluntary compensation for suffered injustice toward God who is our Creator and thus our Lord, or it will take punishment. 46 We can not delegate it elsewhere, to the angels, for instance. If it is a human being that has sinned, it is a human being that will have to do penance.

It so happens that the sin of humankind is no small thing. It put aside the will of the Lord of lords, who is above all and everything. It is precisely the righteousness of the righteous Ruler that has been vitiated. There can never be an argument to justify that offense. For any and all arguments that one could think of would never be able to outweigh the will of God. Indeed, any argument we could bring to the fore would already have been foreseen. Thus we were asked not to seek refuge in them, but instead to listen to God. Nothing outweighs our sin. The entire world (and all other possible worlds besides) is insufficient counterweight. Anselm lines up a host of arguments, all of which make the point that we, as humans, have taken an infinitely large guilt upon ourselves. No finite being could ever pay the debt. 48 Even if one were to devote one’s entire remaining life to God, it would be insufficient. For such devotion would merely be the carrying out of one’s duty and would not result in any compensation for one’s

46. CDH I,12.
47. CDH I,21. A connection may possibly be drawn with the idea of crimen laesae maiestatis [the indictment of denigrating rulers] from Roman jurisprudence (compare Bredero 1987: 20).
48. Those arguments do not need support from each other. Any one on its own would carry sufficient weight, according to Anselm (CDH I,24).
infinite guilt. The human being cannot put in overtime to compensate for what is due to God.

Thus a payment must be made that matches the enormity of the guilt: a payment that weighs more than the entire world and all possible worlds combined. That can only be a payment by Godself. However, if God were to do that, someone else would be paying for the guilt of human beings. That would be unfair, for it is humans who have sinned. Thus only a human being can make payment. Therefore, the only One who could pay is someone who is both fully God and fully human; and that is only possible if it is one and the same person. Therefore, Anselm binds himself strictly to the formulation of Chalcedon. It is not surprising that its dogma is at the heart of his treatise, because – as we have seen in an earlier chapter – Chalcedon must also be read against the backdrop of Roman law. When God asks for satisfaction it is not because of emotional vulnerability but because of righteousness. Therein lies God’s goodness. In a society in which so many lords abuse their power, justice is a greatly desired trait. The goodness of the Lord of heaven is that this Lord is completely just. For Anselm mercy and justice are not quite as opposite as they are in the Heidelberg Catechism.

It is not possible for Christ to pay ransom by leading a good life. Jesus is a true human precisely because he already devoted his entire life to God. However, since his entire life is devoted to God he would not have to die. For death is the wage of sin. Without sin there would be no death. Therefore, no one can justifiably take the life of Jesus. He lays it down voluntarily. That is an extra-ordinary gift. Thus, the actual satisfaction is the death of Christ. Since it is not just anyone who

49. CDH I,20.
50. CDH I,21.
51. CDH II,6.
52. CDH II,6f.
53. See this book, Chapter I, Section 6.1.
54. Proslogion 9-11.
55. Question no. 11: ‘But isn’t God also merciful?’ Answer: ‘God is certainly merciful but he is also just.’ Between Anselm and the Catechism lies an entire era in which the Inquisition ‘justly’ applied justice to people who offended the highest majesty. If the hellfire that awaits sinners who acted wrongfully against God is a thousandfold worse than the stake of fire here on earth, the justice of God becomes terrifying. Only the grace of Christ can prevail against this and give us some hope. Compare the hymn Dies irae, dies illa [Day of wrath and doom impending] usually ascribed to Thomas of Celano.
56. CDH II,11.
gives his life but is the same person who is God, nothing can prevail against this gift. The unio personalis is crucial, therefore. This infinitely great deed of goodness demands a reward. However, Jesus cannot be rewarded with anything at all since, as God, everything is already his own. Yet a reward is necessary and fair. Thus God reckons it for good unto other human beings because Jesus wants them to receive it.  

What Jesus does with the earned reward is his own free decision, just as it would be for any other human being. For instance, no one can forbid me to give my salary as a gift to the poor.

The latter part seems to contradict the principle that it is the perpetrator who has to pay. That is not the case according to Anselm. For humanity is a unity. People are not created as independent, unconnected individuals but belong to one and the same human root. That is why the redeemer had to be a human being from the old root of Adam and not a new being solely created by a new act of God. This makes very clear why the battle about realism was so crucial in scholasticism. At stake were not abstract speculations but the very heart of reconciliation: if humanity were not a real unity, the work of Christ could not be reckoned unto us. Jesus did not take on individual personhood, but humankind as such. While there are people with all sorts of qualities (just as there are horses in all sorts of shades), people essentially form a unity (in the same way that being a horse is different from what shade of color hide it has). In Jesus the entire human race is present, just as it is in every other person. Except that no other human can do penance for the guilt of the whole world. It is impossible for ordinary humans, not only because they themselves are sinners, but also because they are not God and cannot earn an infinite reward. Because we are present in Jesus with our entire existence, Jesus is our brother. That is so, real, that Anselm can call Mary his own mother. She is not only mother of God, but also mother of redeemed humanity and in that sense the one who gave me life.

57. CDH II, 19.
58. CDH II, 21.
59. CDH I, 15; II, 8. On the other hand, Berkhof 1973: 302 [ET: 1979: 286]. does see the birth of the person of Jesus as a new creative act of God. The continuity between Jesus and other humans is thereby placed under severe pressure (see Van de Beek 1980: 121f.).
60. That is why angels can not be saved. They are all created individually (CDH II, 21. See also I, 17).
61. EI, Schmitt II: 10; Monol. 79.
62. OM, Schmitt III, 23.
In this realism of the human race, Anselm brings to the fore the same intent we find in the theology of Athanasius: Jesus did not come for his own sake, but for our sake; in Jesus, God bears our entire human existence. The core of Christology is not that we are given a good example to stir us on to emulation, but that Godself bears our life.

2.4 Questions for Anselm

The discourse of Anselm is very rational. If we try to follow Anselm in this mode, especially when we take the particular nature of Anselm’s ratiocination seriously, we discover omissions – as almost always in this sort of argumentation.

Anselm argues that disobedience of the will of God results in a guilt that nothing can erase. Yet, how is it that a finite human being can mar the glory of an infinite God? Isn’t the glory of God infinite and unassailable? Anselm is aware of that issue and therefore says that not Godself is harmed but rather the established order of the universe ordained by God. However, thereby the argument that the guilt is infinite is no longer valid: it is now the finite universe that has been damaged. The accounting of sin and merit is unbalanced in Anselm: when it comes to human sin the infinite consequences are emphasized, while on the side of merit finitude is highlighted. If I were an attorney for the defense I certainly would make use of that loophole. This is not to say that all other arguments by themselves are not sufficient to still exclude the possibility that human beings could save themselves. Even so, overall it is a major weakness that the most developed argument is not valid in its details.

At the end of the treatise is a loophole as well. It is argued that Christ acquired infinite merit through his death; all the sin of the world can not outweigh it. The merit deserves to be awarded, which happens by allotting it as credit to sinners. However, the merit was greater than all sin. Moreover, there are still unbelieving sinners who are being punished in hell. This implies a surplus of the merit acquired by Jesus. Where does that show up on the books? Should God leave those merits unapplied?

A second problem with Anselm is that he places much emphasis on the distinction between the natures of God and Jesus. To be sure, this is very much in line with the rest of the Western tradition. Al-

63. Compare Job 7:20.
64. CDH I,15.
though he strictly and fully maintains the unity of the persons (and necessarily so, in order to keep his argumentation cogent), he places the divinity and humanity opposite of one another.\textsuperscript{65} He goes so far as to say that in his death the humanity of Christ is offered to the di-vine,\textsuperscript{66} (even though Anselm himself finds the idea that the Son offers himself to the Father more accessible). The contradistinction lies not only within Christ but also between God and human beings. The relationship between the two reaches no further than the realm of guilt.

As a consequence, only the death of Jesus has real meaning. His life is necessary only to make it possible for Jesus to die as a divine human being. For his life is but a common human life that is committed to God. As long as Jesus keeps the commandment of God during his life, it does neither matter very much how long that life lasts, nor what is done exactly during that life. At bottom, the Christology of Anselm is completely Nestorian: an obedient human being committed to God. The \textit{unio personalis} is only important in his death. That Jesus has born our entire life (is born into it, and grows up in it, and thereby redeems our existence) – such an important idea in the early church – is missing in Anselm. Although he mentions the issue in the begin-nig,\textsuperscript{67} no trace is left of it in the conclusion.

The distance between Jesus and us is strengthened by the use of the language of ‘paying.’ Utilizing the concept of payment tends to make guilt an objective reality, an entity of itself, apart from the persons involved. The relational aspect of reconciliation is overshadowed. Emotions are repressed. Here lies a remarkable difference between the theology of Anselm and contemporary Christologies. This is not to say that Anselm had no emotions. They are very much in play in his prayers to Mary.\textsuperscript{68} However, the foundation of salvation can not be built upon emotions but makes necessary the solid ground of ratioc-ination.\textsuperscript{69} Most Christians today are no longer accustomed to speaking in that manner about God’s relationship with human beings. Against the backdrop of the society of the eleventh century we may understand

\textsuperscript{65} For example, see \textit{CDH} I.8; II.6. Compare also the emphasis between male and female in \textit{CDH} II.8.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{CDH} II.18. Compare the notion of Augustine that in the incarnation the person of the Logos itself created Jesus as a human person (\textit{Trin.} II.5,7-9; see Chapter I above, footnote 186).

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{CDH} I.3.

\textsuperscript{68} MPL 158: 942-966; Schmitt III: 13-25.

\textsuperscript{69} According to Anselm, theology must not be painted in air or on water (\textit{CDH} I.4).
Anselm, but that does not mean that we must follow him in every detail. After all, people in his own era didn’t either. Only after the church at large found use for his sense of order would his system find broad acceptance. In our own era we have to try to develop a Christology in which God figures as One who saves us and who can be trusted. For many people in contemporary Western culture, this will have to center upon relational love. What we should not say though, is that Anselm’s design is flawed. It is but one way to speak about Christ. It is a way that already has roots in the New Testament. It is not the only way, however.

2.5 Anselm: a bridge too far

The basic outlines of Anselm’s Christology became the dominant ones in Western orthodoxy. This is not to say that they were not disputed. His own students did so already. The best-known is the opposition of Abelard (1079-1142).

Abelard’s response goes right to the heart of Anselm’s argument, namely that the death of Christ will outweigh all the sins of human-kind. He agrees that the death of Jesus is more grave than all those sins; however, that made sin even worse than it had ever been. Anselm was aware of that problem but defended his position with an appeal to Luke 23:34: ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ While the executioners at the cross were not aware of what they were doing, Jesus’ deliverance of himself was very much a conscious act. That is why the thrust of the latter is greater

71. The attempts to portray the center of New Testament soteriology as a doctrine of juridical justification is as simplistic as the denial of any indication for such teachings in the New Testament. It is indeed one of the ways in which the meaning of Christ is portrayed in the NT, albeit not the most comprehensive one (Schweizer 1979: 99). Stuhl macher 1992:311-348 radically defends the primacy of the doctrine of justification; he provides an overview (239-243) of the opponents. Others (for example, M. de Jonge 1988: 170-183, Sanders 1981: 502, H.J. de Jonge (1998) view this approach as one of the expressions of the meaning of Christ.
72. Since Anselm himself often places several arguments side by side, he thereby also already indicates that one does not have to speak about the work of Christ along one single line of thought. To him this is the most rational approach, and thus best suited to silence any mocking unbelievers; he does not reject other models such as the ones that were developed in the early church (CDH I,3f.)
73. See his commentary on Rom. 3:19-27, MPL 178: 831-239.
74. MPL 178: 835.
75. CDH II,15. ‘No one would ever, at least consciously, want to kill God.’
than the former. However, Abelard thinks along less rational lines; for
him the emotions of the heart bear more weight and that is why for
him the blind murder counts for more.

Abelard totally focuses on the action of humankind in Jesus’
death: humans have killed the Son of God. On the other hand, Anselm
focuses on the act of Jesus: he voluntarily gave his life. That differ-
ence can be explained against the backdrop of different notions of the
two natures.

To Anselm, human nature was its own reality. He was a realist.
God and humankind were realities who coincided in the one person.
The more that was emphasized, the closer one would come to Nestori-
anism.76 Abelard moves in a different direction. He is closer to a
nominalist position. Human nature is not something that exists of
itself. ‘Nature is not a thing.’77 The divine person takes on human
qualities that remain attributive. This extreme anhypostatic position
means for Abelard that, before all else, Christ is God who comes to us.
We have killed this Son of God. How can an act such as this ever be
propitiated if a small trespass such as eating fruit of a forbidden tree is
punishable by death?

Therefore, Abelard is not looking for juridical considerations.
Guilt would only increase by such logical deliberations. Abelard looks
for the emotions of the heart. If God is willing to be in the world in
this way, and when we encounter such sacrificial love that all our
opposition against God is broken and that we are moved to love such a
God, then how could we not love such a God and embrace such love
in guilt and with penance? Touched by the infinite love of God, peo-
ple become changed people, filled with a heart of love.78 They will
live out this love toward God and one another.79

For Abelard, reconciliation is not satisfactio but reconciliatio, re-
uniting, making peace. Both parties are again united. Subjectivity and
feelings are stronger in this model. Individuality is also strengthened

78. Commentary on Rom. 3:19-26, III. Solutio.
79. One should not assume that the new life was not important to Anselm. For him as
well, the sacrifice of Jesus has an exemplary function (CDH II,23). However, it is
not sufficient for our salvation. Likewise, later adherents of Anselm’s model usually
underscore that they do not deny the renewal of the human person either. Whenever
Anselm is attacked, it is almost always as a caricature that does not do justice to his
intentions and his nuances. The central idea is not that people should not be re-
newed to live a life of love (on the contrary) but that only an act of God can save us
(compare Athanasius, CA II,31).
in this more nominalist approach. Since the beginning of the twelfth century these tendencies increased more and more in Western culture and they are reflected in the Christology of the era.

On the one hand, the emotional subjectivity is also brought to bear on the doctrine of God. God’s feelings are hurt by the sin of human-kind. God gets angry and must be pacified. God must be placated (reconciliation as placatio). The terminology of sacrifice was especially suited to this. Through the sacrifice of the blood of Christ, the anger of God would be stilled. This was often tied in with the satisfaction doctrine of Anselm: God had to be paid with the blood of the Son. From there it is but a small step to: ‘God wants to see blood,’ which in turn feeds the image of a vengeful God. That image has roots in Scripture as well. Yet that train of thought derails if it is presented – entirely against his intentions – as the most reasonable and rational language field of Anselm and is used to sketch an image of an angry God. That image belongs to the language field of emotions, which is exactly what Anselm tried so hard to keep out of the doctrine of God. 80 Over-against wrath as an emotion stands not rational payment in blood but an equally emotional love that embraces the sinner. 81 The terminology of sacrifice may be helpful, but is not necessary. 82 One should guard against confusion of different fields of terminology. Especially in orthodox Protestantism one can find a tendency to pile up the ‘harsh’ aspects of the different language fields that underscore the weight of sin and the costliness of reconciliation. Thereby sin becomes most dark and grace most glorious – as we have seen, a tendency not foreign to Anselm. But it becomes a real risk that people will no longer recognize the face of God who loves us in Christ.

On the other hand, the increasing prominence of the individuality of human beings caused problems for the general validity of the payment of Christ. How can someone else pay for me in my stead? 83 In the Middle Ages this was enfolded into notions of the sacramental

80. ‘Not because Thou feel’s emotion.’ The pity of God is only an effect toward us (Prosli. 10).
81. As an example of this, see Hosea 1f. and 11.
82. Compare the resistance to the cultus of sacrifice in Psalm 50 and Amos 4:4f.; 5:21-26, and the critical acceptance in Psalm 51:18-21.
83. Fairweather 1956: 57f emphasizes that the soteriology of Anselm is not a theory of substitution. On the one hand that is correct, because for Anselm the corporate unity of the human race is a presupposition of the reasonableness of reconciliation. On the other hand, Christ and the baptized are to be distinguished because it is through the will of Christ that the earned merit is counted toward us.
unity of the church in Christ; in the sacrament one participates in the sacrifice of Christ. The Reformation used the language of monetary exchange by Anselm and used the concepts of guarantee, security or bail to explain the substitution. Jesus pays in our stead. However, as soon as the objectivity of money is replaced by the blood of Christ, problems arise in a culture of individuality. How and why would I ever want to be saved by the blood of another? Should I not, in final analysis, stand before God as an individual? Here another language field is needed: a grammar and vocabulary of sacrificial love, in order to make the grace of God at least somewhat understandable.

The model of Anselm has proven its power in the history of the church. At the same time, its limits have also become clear.

3. JESUS: THE FIRST OF THE ANCESTORS

3.1 In communion with previous generations

Redbad, king of the Frisians, was to be baptized. He had already put one foot in the baptismal font when he had one more question for the bishop: ‘Will my forebears now enter heaven as well?’ The response of the bishop was a categorical ‘No.’ Redbad pulled back his foot.84

It is not clear whether the story is factual. Nonetheless, it illustrates the problem of the relationship between individual choice and connectedness with a community. On the one hand, faith is a personal decision in which we surrender everything, our family as well.85 On the other hand, people are not isolated individuals but are embedded in a larger community. The tendency is to emphasize the former in the West86 while in the East and South more value is attached to the latter.87

86. The idea of corporateness is not absent in the West. The notion of the unity of the human race in Anselm’s model, and the doctrine of original sin as well, clearly are corporate. And prior to the Latinization through the arrival of Christianity, the Germanic culture was not any less corporate than many cultures in Africa and Asia. ‘To the Germanic tribal person, happiness was inconceivable without including forebears and relatives’ (De Rek 1977: 105).
87. The sense of corporateness in Asia and Africa is far from uniform. Especially in changing societies it often deteriorates into collectivism. In that case it is not the corpus, the body as a whole that is central, with care for each separate member, but a collective that profiles itself over against other collectives. Whenever this collec-
Generally speaking, the corporate aspects received more attention in the church with regard to the next generations than with regard to the forebears. One of the strongest motives for infant baptism is that God receives us as we are in our entire existence, inclusive of our children. Even the Canons of Dordt, setting forth a strong individualistic doctrine of election, assert that believing parents may be assured of the salvation of their children who died as infants. The ‘oikos-texts’ in the New Testament are often cited over against the opponents of infant baptism: people who became believers were baptized with their entire oikos, their household. That this household did not only include the children and the grandchildren but also the living and the deceased parents is usually forgotten.

The situation is quite different for people from the East and South. For them, our life can not be imagined without those who came before. God is not only the God of the future but also the God of the ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Abraham and Isaac, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of father David. When Abraham is called, it is in order to be a blessing for all the peoples to which he is connected through the roster of the descendents of Noah. That is why people are not only baptized with their children but also include their deceased family. They are baptized on behalf of
the dead, Paul writes. If one’s entire existence is taken up in Christ, it really has to be just that: the entire existence including all social and family relations. And when Christ enters our existence, Christ enters our entire existence, as a reality in our life as we live it.

For most people in Africa and Asia such a total reality of existence includes as matter of course the presence of the ancestors. Those who died, live on; not only in memory but as a real presence. The real forebears are the dead who are remembered and thus influence life directly. Sometimes, the attached stipulation is that they lived a morally good life. They are ‘the living dead.’ However, they are embedded in an invisible community of people who once led an existence similar to ours but who now have passed into another state of being. They are not dead in an absolute sense, but live in another manner.

Missionaries and many non-western Christians, especially evangelicals, have vigorously opposed this belief in ancestors. Such forebears were symbols of the past, of heathenism that ought to be forgotten and left behind, thereby forgetting that the ancestors belonged to the actual existence of many people. They shaped the way of life of descendants. Life is either a life with ancestors, or it is no life. Negat-

98. 1 Cor. 15:29. To most exegetes this text is a conundrum. One of the problems is that hardly anything is mentioned elsewhere about such a practice in the early church. That does not necessarily mean that it was unknown. It could be that it was a matter of course, hardly worth discussing. The same argument is often used in defense of infant baptism and the oikos-texts. In 1 Cor. 15:29 the practice itself is not discussed either. It is about something that is generally accepted and can therefore serve as an argument for the notion of the resurrection of the dead. It is striking that Mbiti does not make much of 1 Cor. 15:29, even though he presupposes the idea of a mental change after death in the New Testament (1971: 175). He limits its meaning to the idea that people cared about the fate of the dead, but continues with the question of having contact with the dead. Mbiti ignores the question whether they are received by the Lord into the communion of saints through baptism.

99. Compare also 1 Cor. 7:14: the unbelieving partner of a Christian is ‘sanctified’ (that means: received into communion with the Lord) because parents and children can not be unbound. Thus, even a living human being who consciously chooses to be an unbeliever, unlike his or her partner, is still part of the communion.


104. Concerning distinction between the spirits of the dead in general and the specific ancestors see Mbiti: 1969: 85; Dickson 1984: 68.

105. ‘The dead people continue to live’ (De Carvalho 1981: 23).
ing the ancestors and the living relationship with them would mean the negation of the life of persons in the here and now. Then, apparently, Christ can not enter their actual life. Of course, Christ’s coming means that life changes, and thus the relationship with the forebears changes also. But that consequence is quite different than banning outright something that belongs to the very crossbeams of life, its supporting structure and sacred canopy. Not only do we do injustice to real life and the embracing power of the presence of the Lord, but we also introduce a double-world existence. On the one hand is a suppressed world with ancestors we intuitively and emotionally love (albeit forbidden), and on the other hand a world of a life with Christ that is open and public, but one that fails to touch the deepest levels of our identity. To people who live in communion with their ancestors, Christ enters their concrete existence; the meaning of Christ must be expressed in terms of that existence.106

The role that ancestors play can be very different for various people. For some people, the forebears watch and protect us.107 The thought of ancestors who surround us provides a feeling of safety in some cultures.108 In other cultures it is fear that prevails. Here, ancestors are jealous and watch continuously to see to it that they receive sufficient veneration. Forebears are no different than parents and other people: they can be sympathetic or unsympathetic, and the characterization of them can be very ambivalent.109 A strong ancestor culture in many communities typically guarantees morality and order.110 Those

106. ‘At the bottom of that search for the human Jesus there is the faith in our ancestors’ (De Carvalho 1981: 23). Here too, that does not mean that this is the only way of doing Christology. Neither is it necessary that everyone in Asia or Africa subscribes to an ancestor Christology. That certainly goes for those who (came to) belong to another culture. At the same time, they too, just like the people in the West who hardly have any feel for even conceiving of Redbad’s question, need to consider whether a reflection on the meaning of ancestral generations is not desirable.


108. Dickson 1984: 177; Kabasélé 1989: 78. Compare Gen. 50:17: the God of father Jacob has to make sure that Joseph will not take vengeance on his brothers. This makes not only God a presence but the deceased father as well.


110. Dickson 1984: 69f.; Wanamaker 1997: 287-289. Even where the specific ancestors have been relegated to the background, the heritage of their wisdom can play an important role. Here lie connections with the idea of Christ as the wisdom of God. Singgih 1997: 249-251 has elaborated this with regard to the Javan idea of ngelmu. That refers not only to practical wisdom of experience but also relates to the mystery of deeper layers of reality.
who do well, and keep to the path set out by the tradition handed down, will meet with good because of the ancestors. Those who leave the right paths will find them in opposition. Most often you will be targeted precisely where your very own future lies, namely with your children. Illness or death of children is often linked with the anger of ancestors. Here also, the past and the future of your existence are tied closely together. A future that deviates from the paths of old is no future.

Moreover, through ancestors we are connected with an even larger company, with a reality that does not belong to our visible and tangible world. Indirectly, our forebears put us in touch with God. That is why ancestors often play a larger role in the praxis of daily life than Godself: the communication with Him or Her is indirect and proceeds via the forebears. The more important an ancestor, the greater her or his influence in the invisible world. The remembrance of some of them lasts for centuries. This remembrance that spans the centuries reflects a transcendental power that belongs to the invisible world that is beyond us and yet impinges upon us. In this way of life it is almost unavoidable that Christ receives the title of the greatest ancestor. Christ is the ancestor par excellence, the forebear of all ancestors. Christ is beyond them in space and time. Christ has an influence greater than any other and has the final decision regarding our existence. Among all of the forebears who protect our lives and complement our lives in a critical manner, Christ has the central place.

A Christology in which Jesus has the title of first ancestor fits the New Testament better than a Christology of substitution or satisfaction because corporate aspects play a key role from the beginning. Anselm had to wage a philosophical battle to establish the realism of humankind as a whole. The notion of Christ as the first ancestor incorporates this unity. This immediately invokes early church notions of Christ as the second Adam. Christ is a new head of humankind.

115. Nyamiti 1984: 21: Christ has an intrinsic meaning in our life, the ancestors an extrinsic meaning.
117. See especially Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49 and Irenaeus thoughts of recapitulatio. Compare Kabasélé 1989: 73.
Just as the first human being brought misery collectively into the world, so this new human being brings grace collectively. That is only possible because this new being is greater and prior to what we usually call the first. The first human being is from the earth, the second is from heaven. Jesus’ origin reaches beyond an earthly birth. Ultimately, people of the earth will be received into the supra-earthly reality. Yet Jesus belongs to that reality from the outset. From the beginning he plays the primary role, for Jesus is the Lord. That is why his ancestral claim is higher and prior to the claim of all other forebears, even the first human beings on earth. Christ is the firstborn of all creation and all things are from him and through him and for him. Everything comes from him and should be oriented to him. That is the reality of our existence. You may want to distance yourself from that, but then you disengage yourself from the foundations of life.

Because Christ is the first who surpasses all others, Jesus also enfolds all families, tribes and nations of the earth. Jesus is the human being who precedes all people. He is the ancestor who is above all regional forebears. That is why Christ can never be the exclusive possession of a single people. Ancestors foster exclusivity in many cultures. They even clamor for enmity, because the life of defeated enemies, their heads, their hearts or their foreskins benefit them. However, when Jesus is the head of all, such distinctions fall away. Then all human beings are one people, all brothers and sisters in communion with the one ancestor.

Against this background we should understand Paul’s opposition to genealogies. In his day, people tried to trace back their ancestry in order to derive religious or societal prestige from them. Paul does not deny the potential importance of one’s ancestry. He himself is an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin and that is not irrelevant. Yet it is only relevant in order to show that Christ has subjects among all peoples, Israel included. What matters ultimately is that every family

118. 1 Cor. 15:47.
120. ‘A Christocentrism of this type is bound to be deeply linked with pneumatology and the Trinity, and is as such radically opposed to a purely secular form of Christianity’ (Nyamiti 1984: 148).
121. 1 Sam. 18:25-29.
122. 1 Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9.
123. Rom. 11:1.
takes its name from Christ.\textsuperscript{124} He is the ancestor of all. Whichever forebear you want to name, behind that person stands the archetype for whom everyone on earth is named: Christ.\textsuperscript{125} His beginning is prior to all other beginning; Christ is the Alpha and the Omega.\textsuperscript{126} Prior to him and after him nothing can be named. It is Godself, known through a long line of bearers of tradition, who at the same time are still among us, comprising the visible in bodily form and the invisible in the Spirit.

3.2 The crucified forebear

The cross is a vexation for most people. For many African and Asian Christians this is not so. It is the cross of their brother, the greatest of the ancestors who really participates in their existence. Jesus is one of them, precisely through the cross. They know of no other life than a life of blood and wounds. Life as such is not glorified; it is bitterness. However, the participation with Jesus in that life is the glory of his cross.\textsuperscript{127}

Here lies a close affinity between contemporary Asian and African Christologies and the theology of the Asian Irenaeus and the African Athanasius.\textsuperscript{128} In an article on Christology, Emilio de Carvalho emphasizes the true humanity of Jesus as participation in the concrete existence of African people and their forebears.\textsuperscript{129} Precisely as ancestor Jesus partakes of that. This emphasis upon the human nature seems far removed from the emphasis placed by Athanasius upon the divinity of Christ.\textsuperscript{130} But upon closer inspection, the conformity is great.

\textsuperscript{124} Eph. 3:15.
\textsuperscript{125} He is ‘the first ancestor from whom the whole tribe takes its name’ (De Carvalho 1981: 23).
\textsuperscript{126} Rev. 1:8, 11; 22:13.
\textsuperscript{127} ‘And yet for us it is when he is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
and open side, like a beast at sacrifice:
When he is stripped, naked like us.
Browned and sweating water and blood in
the heat of the sun,
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist Him’
(Gabriel Setiloane, in Dickson 1984: 196).
\textsuperscript{128} See also Bediako 1992. The similarities between the inculturation in the first centuries and in present day Asia and Africa are far from merely formal.
\textsuperscript{129} De Carvalho 1981.
\textsuperscript{130} Oduyoye 1991: 11.
What matters to both De Carvalho and Athanasius is that Jesus, as the origin of our life, is not an idol but has the face of one of us, suffering human beings that we are. Thus, Athanasius resisted Arianism and Gnosticism as representatives of a culturally or religiously elevated ideal of humanity, while De Carvalho combats an ideological and abstract form of Christianity in a high and mighty Western culture.

The cross of Jesus is not a place of a lonely death. He was crucified with others. It may well be that those others are people who have been written off by their own society, but precisely at the cross a new community comes into being. The cross is an event that creates community. It not only creates communion between those crucified today and those crucified on Golgotha. It is also a communion of those who are alive now and those who have died. They have died from the suffering and death of the world. In that way they became participants in the reality that enfolds the visible reality. The communion of human beings is the community of the living dead and the dead who are alive. The entire life of a Christian involves being mindful of the communion with death. And the whole process of dying is participating in the life that surpasses our limited, visible existence.

Amidst the lives of wounded and bleeding people stands the center of true humanity. Here is the earthly human we know so well. This human being can never be erased from memory. He is the dead person who lives, always. Therefore, the cross is the symbol of true human existence. On the Molukkan islands of Indonesia, the family house is supported by a central pole, the *tiang laki laki*. This pole connects the presently living members with their ancestors and with the original soil from which they came: the island Ceram and especially the holy mountain of Nunu Saku. This pole bears the cross beam of life. In an ancestor Christology the cross is the *tiang laki laki* that bears the cross beam of life. There we are comforted. There the way of true humanity is pointed out. There we are healed, not by a perfect Greek

132. Compare Irenaeus, fragm. 9, *MPG* 7: 1234.
133. ‘The African believes that death binds up relationships in society, revitalizing the living and underscoring their sense of community. Paul’s language about the cross clearly adumbrates this kind of understanding’ (Dickson 1984: 196).
half-god, but by someone who bears and knows our grief. Our Healer
is mortally wounded. 137

The presence of Christ in the middle of our existence does not leave
our existence untouched. Any and all relationships are affected, in-
cluding those with all other ancestors. When true humanity has the
face of the Crucified, we can no longer put on a mask of power. When
Jesus gave himself unconditionally, we can no longer take advantage
of one another. Christology is always critical.

That is also true with regard to our relationship with our forebears.
When they place demands upon us that hinder the unfolding of life,
they are called to order by the ancestor who precedes them all. A feast
of the dead in Toraja in Indonesia is a grand affair. It provides struc-
ture for life and keeps the traditions alive. Even so, when in a chang-
ing culture the demand for the number of water buffalo exceeds the
ability to deliver, it is time to recall that the first-among-all-dead emp-
tied himself, and did so as head-of-all taking on the form of a slave.
Nevertheless, the link between everything that ancestors claim and
what Christ means is not a self-evident, straight line. For all the an-
cestors share in the guilt of the world and contribute to it. Christ is not
only the first ancestor, Christ is also the opposing ancestor. 138 Just as
misery unto death entered the world through Adam, through the new
Adam grace and life enters in. 139 The latter is the one who is faithful to
death in order to bear the life of others.

That is why an ancestor Christology should not reinforce fear. In
many cultures people are afraid of their ancestors. 140 Jealous, demand-
ing, and vengeful, they can surround our lives. It does not help to deny
this reality, for ancestors can be all that. Except, they are subject to
Jesus. Even if they take on the form of demons, Jesus exorcises such

138. One may be inclined to use the word ‘anti-type’; however, it does not correspond
to the customary use of the word in the early church. Paul uses ‘tupos’ in Rom.
5:14. In the New Testament, ‘Antitupos’ is used for the relationship between tab-
ernacle and heaven (Hebr. 9:24) and of the ark and baptism (1 Peter 3:21). In the
Greek of the early church, the combination with ‘Antii’ has more of a comparative
meaning (‘in place of’) than an adverse meaning (‘over against’); and thus is more
an intensification of tupos than an undermining of it. See Lampe 1982: 159.
139. Rom. 5:17.
140. Many people in the West are also afraid of the dead. Their fears can be so real that
some adults are afraid to leave their room at night, fearful of their deceased father,
or are scared because they hear their deceased mother knocking on the door. All
this can seem so real that they can not imagine that it may be a dream.
demons. Angry ancestors should watch themselves more than that we have to watch out for them. For soon all the living and the dead shall appear before the Lord, and we have to give an account of our deeds: good or evil.

This is why ancestors cannot come between us and Christ. They can only be indirect mediators at most, for Christ is the direct mediator with God. And the direct Mediator is the highest love. Anything else after that is less. That is why ancestors, even if they take on the form of saints, cannot be worshipped. We can honor them in the communion of all saints. We may well feel connected to them, in life and in death. Even so, we do not need them in order to live our lives comforted by our Brother who loved us first and the most, the one who has decisive authority over our life. Whenever the dead have to fulfill a mediating function between the transcendent world and us, something is not right with the relationship between God and us. We deny God’s nearness in the human being who died on the cross as our brother. ‘Not one (of the old gods), not even one of my own clan, can make itself a goal of the worship of any person. All must direct their worship to God through Jesus Christ. Let us put that into practice.

142. De Carvalho 1981: 23 argues that ancestors were venerated in the traditional cultures of Africa, but were not adored as God. They could be mediators, but not replacements. See also Mbiti 1969: 9. It may seem to Westerners that praying to ancestors is the same as petitioning them. That is not the case. The function of prayer in Africa often is no other than talking out loud (Mbiti 1975a: 44). If we call such conversations with the ancestors ‘worship,’ we should do the same with Westerners who talk out loud and sometimes seem to address others who are not physically present, dead or alive. See also Wanamaker 1997: 284 and Nyamiti 1984: 22.
144. When many people in Africa address themselves more to the ancestors than directly to God, they do not do so because God is denied or unimportant, but because of God’s majesty. It is too dangerous to come near God. Guilt plays an important role in that as well, for God will not be mocked. Typical is a legend of the Khoisan people that tells how God called on the baboons to obey Him (Miller 1979: 14). The baboons, at that point, still look like humans, act like them and speak with human tongue. They refuse to obey God. Then, when the Son of God arrives on earth, they mock him and finally hang him on a tree. God raises his Son and punishes the baboons by turning their language into gibberish, altering their body pose and behavior, and giving them tails. Disobedience and guilt play an important role in the relationship between God and human beings, coupled with fear of punishment by the highest Majesty.
by trustingly calling on Jesus when we bring people to Him. 145 At a
time when we need others, we have cut ourselves of from an encoun-
ter with the true God by our own thinking in terms of power, 146 or else
by the powerful in church and society who have obscured our view of
the crucified God. Often the latter presented their own ancestors as the
only true ones, in the way that Europeans and Americans bring their
culture to the entire world. That results in an unclear world of undif-
erentiated voices of the past, who chirp and mutter 147 and only make
us more restless. These others can only tell us that their existence is
what will await us. 148 In such a chorus where competing voices fight
among themselves to give meaning to our existence, it is a relief when
the One who is the Word begins to speak: ‘Come to me, all you that
are weary and are carrying a heavy burden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and hum-
ble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy,
and my burden light.’ 149

Christology is equally critical of an ancestral cult that sanctions
existing structures at the expense of people within the community.
Wherever ancestral traditions are used as an excuse to oppress women
and mutilate girls, it has to made clear that Christ is the firstborn of
all, and that in Christ all men and women are equal. 150 Inculturation of
Christ should never lead to maintaining old structures of oppression.
For Christ makes all things new, including the relationship between
men and women.

Around the cross of Christ, people should not lay crosses on others
but only bear each other’s cross. True community is found where the
crucified are singing a song of communion, holding hands around the
cross. That is the final verdict on the world of power and anti-power.
To many the ideal theophany is the end of Mozart’s opera Don Gio-

146. A biblical example is Saul. Through disobedience he is estranged from God (1
Sam. 13) and is subsequently afflicted with an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:14), who turns
him into a jealous, fearful potentate. In such a situation there is no longer contact
with God and a conversation with the dead is his last resort (1 Sam. 28:16).
147. Is. 8: 19.
148. 1 Sam. 28:19.
150. ‘Unlike John Mbiti and Kwesi Dickson (who do not take a critical view of the
oppressive patriarchal structures in both church and society), Mercy Oduyoye …
takes a very critical look at the oppressive gender relations in both church and so-
ciety, as well as elements in African religious culture that dehumanize women.’
(Martey 1993: 114).
vanni, where the man of stone comes on the scene to drag Don Giovanni to hell because he humiliated women and killed men. Sometimes such a God seems desirable. However, who then will escape judgement? The true judgement is better enacted at the end of Verdi’s Aida. Here two people, condemned to death after having betrayed each other and others, are singing ‘Addio’ in their dungeon; that is how we meet God. It is purged of romanticism. Here their ‘Adieu’ is no farewell but an entrance into eternal life. Verdi was not a romantic but a fighter for freedom, with an eye on his own people in Italy and mindful of the peoples of Africa and Asia. Aida was composed on the occasion of the opening of the Suez Canal, the symbol of the partitioning of Asia and Africa by European superpowers. Being more critical than this opera is hard to imagine. Even so, the ruling powers loved this opera. The poor priestesses in the temple of Ptah did not bother them because the high priest sang: ‘Glory to he gods, they govern all that happens.’ And after Verdi’s rousing triumphal march the privileged in the audience were in such ecstasy that they hardly heard the rest. At most, it met with their approval that the traitor Radames, guided more by love than by power, received the death penalty. ‘Addio’ is not understood by the powers. Only those who are destroyed by them understand it when they meet at the foot of the cross. For that cross is the cross-beam of the world.

Just as in any other form of Christology, the confession of the divinity of Christ is of essential importance. In this sort of Christology, when all is said and done, nothing else can be prior to Christ or rank above Christ. Truly, Christ must be the First. Only then can we be certain that an even self-declared higher power will not dismiss all beautiful thoughts about love and compassion. Only then are we assured that no further competing claims can be made. Christ comes before any and all, not only the suffering but also the powerful, not only the poor but also the wealthy, not only women but men also, not only children but parents and forebears as well. In Christ the entire cosmos is but one unity. 151 Such a confession may very well sound uncritical in a luxurious Western salon. However, in the hovels of the refugee camps and

151. ‘In light of the African worldview, some African theologians such as Efoé-Julien Pénoukou have seen Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the cosmo-theandric relationship in the world – that is, a Christological vision in which God, humanity and the world are united symbiotically’ (Martey 1993: 81). In many Asian theologies this cosmological aspect is also central, even when viewed apart from ancestors.
of the poor in Africa it is the highest criticism and at the same time the greatest liberation. God asks for the redemption of all of life and of all relationships.

Africa seems a lost continent. Its problems are gargantuan and the suffering incomprehensible. Every story among the millions of stories of victims is unspeakably awful and unbearable. Life in Africa is hell for many. And usually — in a manner totally other and more concrete than in Europe’s existentialism — it is other humans that are that hell; too often they are the very ones that ought to be most loving. Here it becomes clear what it means that Jesus has descended to hell. Jesus was there, and still is. Jesus is there as good news to the people of today, for the hopeless future of today’s children and for the bitterness of the past.

In 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 we are told that Christ went to hell to proclaim the gospel to the dead. The people of ancient times, those who drowned in the Great Flood, may greet the Savior. The bishop at the baptismal font at Redbad’s planned baptism did not understand how far the love of Christ reaches. That love reaches into hell. Jesus does not come to liberate the victims of the tortures of this world. According to Revelation they wait under the altar in heaven until God does justice. They have had enough hell. In that hell stood the cross of the wounded Healer.

In the hell under this world are the giants of the past, those ‘warriors of renown’ who were not mindful of the difference between God and human beings; those who thought that God could only think in terms of the same bragging power as their ancestor Lamech. They sit there, together with the giants of recent history, who — again like Lamech — brought technology and highly developed culture to light. Even so, the first born among humans, the second Adam appears as Lord from heaven, even to people of this ilk. Everyone shall behold Jesus, even those who pierced the Lord, even those who inflicted wounds to the hearts and bodies of others. Jesus comes to proclaim his power; and it is the power of the cross. That is why the proclamation to the ancestors takes the form of proclamation of the gospel. It is

158. 1 Peter 4:6. From this, Mbiti 1971 draws the conclusion that changes are still pos-
the gospel of the cross that provides hope. Hope, even for the Caucasians from the West who divided the world as if it were an unclaimed piece of land, and hope as well for the men from Africa (and elsewhere) who forgot that women are human beings also.

4. JESUS: INSPIRER FOR A BETTER WORLD

The image of Jesus as First Ancestor is oriented toward the past. The present, however bitter it may be, is embedded in the past in communion with all who preceded us, and is borne by Christ who preceded everyone.

However, for many in Africa and for most people in Asia, this orientation to the past is itself past tense. The afterglow still lingers on isolated islands such as Ambon, or in the mountain area of the Toraja’s on Sulawesi, yet for most the belief in ancestors is passé. Especially in Asia, eyes are fixed on the future. And future is understood to mean progress. Christianity is also understood as being part of that outlook. John Titaley, one of Indonesia’s leading theologians has said: ‘If Christianity does not offer us progress, why then should we still be Christians?’ This thought fits seamlessly with the economic developments in East Asia. The notion is also prevalent in Western culture which since the Middle Ages has been increasingly oriented to progress.

4.1 Progress

Thompson, in a description in the introduction of his book on modern Christology, has appropriately characterized the meaning of Christ in a world of progress. What matters, is to present the divine as that which sets our lives free in order to optimally unfurl our potential.

159. In a lecture at a congress of Molukkan theologians in Amahusu on Ambon, September 1997.
160. Titaley’s address was delivered just before the currencies in East Asia came under tremendous pressure.
Thompson does most certainly not limit such a stance to individuals. The notion that a human being as a single individual can shape his or her life is pure fiction. Every person is embedded in a larger community and is offered possibilities by that community. By deploying those possibilities he or she in turn offers opportunities to others, as gift or as inspiration. The divine is present in our world as the highest inspiration and as the greatest gift by allowing us to actualize our lives to the fullest. Divinity was present in Jesus in extra-ordinary measure, as it was present in other religious leaders as well.

Thompson is representative of what is called pneuma-christology: Christ is an extra-ordinarily inspired person who in turn inspires others. Such a pneuma-christology is usually distinguished form a pneumatological Christology: the Spirit of God takes on form in the person of Christ as a personal presence of God on earth. What matters in a pneuma-christology is a quantitative distinction in which Jesus is more, but not differently inspired than others. What matters in a pneumatological Christology is a qualitative distinction: Jesus is the personification of the Spirit. The latter closely follows the ideas of the early church in which the Spirit or Logos of God rested on Jesus and gave his life direction. Nevertheless, the distinction is only relative. Even a pneuma-christology is far from implying that the Spirit only appears in the form of a human being. What matters is that the Spirit

163. Thompson 1985:5f.
165. Thompson 1985: 40-42. In my view, Thompson is correct when he says that ideas from the Christian tradition can be found elsewhere as well. About anything of which has been said: ‘This is typical and unique for Christianity’, a non-Christian parallel can be found. However, I do differ from his view that ideas are constitutive for the Christian faith. Only the relationship with Jesus is constitutive. And this person is not interchangeable: love for Jesus cannot be exchanged for love of any other person.
166. See Van de Kamp 1983 on this type of Christology. A very nuanced form, which tries to do justice as much as possible to classical dogma, is found in Schoonenberg 1991, who nonetheless wanted to continue to uphold a Logos-christology along side of it. Even earlier (1986:215-220), Schoonenberg had argued that, possibly, the aporia of the Christian dogma are insoluble and that the dialectic of ‘true God’ and ‘true human’ has no stable resting point.
167. Van de Kamp 1983: 157-174. See also Congar 1980: 219-228, although he advocates even more than Schoonenberg a Logos-christology (1969: 7-38) in addition to the inspiration model; even the proclamation by John the Baptist is connected with the Word, and not the Spirit (1969:8). Weiss 1895: 94f. calls his interpretation of Christology also a pneumatological Christology, but its content represents a type that corresponds with what is now called a pneuma-christology.
rests completely on a human being. It is a difference between what is limited and what is total. A pneuma-christology emphasizes that the Spirit rested more upon him than (most) other human beings, even that it totally rested upon him. As a rule, the adherents of a pneuma-christology will say that not one part of his life was uninspired, and conversely, what matters in a pneumatological christology is the fulfillment of God’s presence in the human existence of Jesus. The point in both cases is the total inspiration through God, through which humanity receives the form that is intended. Exactly in this person we see what it means to be truly human. We all should be like that and correspond to God’s intention for us. In this way, Christology becomes the hitching post for anthropology. Jesus is the ideal human being, as intended by God. He is the person God had always envisioned. The idealistic tendencies of Western culture find a clear expression in such a Christology. A world in which people live corresponding to their destiny lies in store for us and history is the road in time to that end. Progress is a matter of getting closer to this destiny.

The sort of language in which these notions are put into words depends on the context within Western thought in which the various

168. According to Schoonenberg 1991: 73-75 and passim, throughout this work, the Spirit can be considered interchangeable with the Logos.
169. That is why it is easier for a pneuma-christology to engage in a conversation with other religions, although a pneumatological Christology does not preclude such a discourse. The divine could possibly have been incarnate several times to inspire others.
170. Schillebeeckx 1975 does not use the terminology of pneuma-christology but of hypostatic union. Something of God is manifest in other people, but God is manifest completely in Christ. ‘This means for Jesus that his relationship with the Father makes him in his humanity the Son of God. In the same analogue manner we call every human being a person, but in the language of faith we say – without denying the previous affirmation but indeed indicating the very ground of this personhood – that this personhood is entirely ‘of God’. Jesus, as a human being, is this person because he is precisely as such completely ‘Son of the Father’ and he is so, of course, without any loss of humanity, whatsoever. On the contrary: his personhood contains, a fortiori, a human personal way of being through confirmation and fulfillment of all positive human perfection.’ (1975:534 [ET%%%], Compare also Schillebeeckx’s concise 1966 article. In spite of the different language, the correspondence with pneuma-christology is strong. That is also evident in Schillebeeckx’ denial of a personal pre-existence of the Son (1966: 285; this in opposition to the pneumatological Christologies of Kasper 1975 and Congar 1980). Christ is human, but a unique human being, in as much as here God’s presence is made personally manifest in the world.
171. Küng 1957 especially elaborated Christology in this mode.
authors operate. However, that does not diminish their common orientation.

Teilhard de Chardin, who worked as a paleontologist, viewed Jesus as a new and decisive step in evolution. To him, Jesus is the fulfillment of the process of evolution.\textsuperscript{173} Karl Rahner initially orients himself by using an evolutionary model,\textsuperscript{174} but subsequently – by connecting existential philosophy and classical Roman-catholic theology – manages to develop a model in which persons are oriented toward fulfilling their own existence.\textsuperscript{175} This can take on as simple a form as desiring something.

Yet such aspirations are always part of a greater goal. Consciously or subconsciously, every person is oriented by a final goal as the total fulfillment of life. In the world, this total destiny of personhood is found in Jesus; through participating in Christ we live toward our fulfillment that is reached perfectly in the death of the fulfilled life: this life was finished. This participation can be a conscious one in the community of the church, but is also present anonymously whenever people through their actions live out the fulfillment of life as found in Christ.\textsuperscript{176}

Paul Tillich\textsuperscript{177} also uses notions of existential philosophy, yet does so coming from a German Protestant background. He speaks of the unity of existence and essence in Christ. Our concrete, daily existence (\textit{Dasein}) demands a sense of meaning, an orientation upon the coherence and essence (\textit{Sein}) of the separate elements of our existence. With us, much remains senseless and without purpose, but in Jesus the concrete moments of life and ultimate purpose are intricately intertwined. Thus in Christ we find the meaning of our life.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{173} Teilhard de Chardin 1955: 324-332.
\textsuperscript{174} Rahner 1964b.
\textsuperscript{175} Rahner 1984. A similar approach is found in Kasper 1975: 284-330, who emphasizes, more than Rahner does, that a human being can only find fulfillment through the grace of God.
\textsuperscript{176} Denis Edwards linked the notions of Rahner to the ideas of Anglo-saxon theologians of science such as Prigogine, Polkinghorne and Peacocke. This results in a model in which Jesus is the self-transcendence of the cosmos in God, and the resurrected Christ is seen as the moving force in the cosmos. See Edwards 1991.
\textsuperscript{177} See especially Tillich 1957.
\textsuperscript{178} The theology of Tillich is often exclusively judged – both by opponents and followers – with regard to the aspect of human self-actualization. This perspective often forgets that the backdrop of this theology lies in the alienation of human beings through death, guilt and senselessness, and that the way out of that state only comes into view through revelation. (Tillich (1952) 1988: 221-226). The above paragraph deals more with the reception of Tillich’s theology than with his own world
Currently, process philosophy is most influential in this type of theology, and is also clearly a main factor in Thompson’s thought. This is the philosophy of liberal thought in America. John Cobb,\textsuperscript{179} the most important process theologian sees the universe as one large process. At the same time, new impulses provide possibilities that could never have been realized in older stages. All such possibilities of the past and the present are from God. God is immanent in the world by what God provided in the past and by what has already been realized. It is the world of God’s processed possibilities. God is present as the immanent Spirit. Christology faces new possibilities that are given to us, coming from the transcendent realm of unknown possibilities of God. The existing process and the new impulses together are the calling upon us from the one God who invites us to the future, in which what is not, will yet come to be. Jesus is a human being in whom both aspects of God’s call are fully unfolded.\textsuperscript{180} Jesus has used everything that the Spirit gave to him with an eye to the future, just as he realized all the possibilities that God gave to him. God as beckoning and inspiring factor in the world and God as coming into the world, received a face. Following Jesus, we are called to realize our possibilities and to have them enter in the future of God’s creation.

It is difficult to underestimate the influence of process theology as the theology of the culture of modern America. It is given form in theological theories of language, in social and ethical theology, and in pastoral work. Outside of theology, process philosophy appears like a red thread in the natural sciences. The nuances can be very different in the various enterprises, and likewise in theology as well. Some place the emphasis especially on the immanent process and minimize the significance of the divine inspiration. It is also possible to strengthen the significance of the person of Jesus by emphasizing his coming in the world: changes were brought through that decisive move in history of ideas. See also text and footnote 310 in the last section of this chapter.

180. Compare the Gnosis in which Christ was also viewed as the heavenly person and Jesus as the earthly person on which God’s presence rested. Cobb and the Gnosis have in common that to both Christ is a personification of a heavenly idea. On the other hand, there is a big difference because Cobb is adamant about the realization of God’s possibilities in the concrete and material reality. However, even then an idealistic notion remains, because what matters to him is the continual self-realization of God’s old and new possibilities, which remain in continual movement toward total realization in the ever-expanding process of God. Cobb’s language and terminology differ, but even so, show evidence of the strong correspondence with Hegel’s idea that history is the self-realization of the Spirit.
so that the Christian life is the real future of the world that ought to be propagated. With regard to the latter, process thinkers and evangelicals touch upon each other.

Process thought is easily linked to imperialism and oppression. Isn’t it true that any actualization by some people is at a cost to others? Obviously, process thought can indeed be used along those lines, in which case progress means that the best must grab their chances, for the future belongs to them. However, that is entirely opposite to the genuine intentions of process philosophy and theology. Whitehead, the father of process philosophy, as early as the nineteen twenties, gave extensive attention to Asian thought and integrated it in his own design.181 His intent was a truly ecumenical and world-wide philosophy that would serve as an ecumenical theology at the same time. The divine manifests itself as an inspiring reality in manifold ways. This sort of holistic way of thinking is also typical of later process theologians. Part of the cosmic process is that everything and everyone can self-unfold in connection with all the other parts. Ecological and pastoral theology is at its most powerful at this nexus. That is why process theology is a social theology that is not focussed on care for the poor but on a divine right of all to be involved in self-realization. Therefore, everyone should receive optimal chances and conditions to do so. I rarely have met a more socially concerned human being than John Cobb.

Thus modern process philosophy has a very different character than the old theory of evolution. The latter was suited to a colonialism that lived according to the right of the strongest, and by a mighty Christ of Western Christendom, a corpus christianum. Process theology knows of a Christ who offers himself to the world, and provides the possibility that no one has to live by taking anything away from another because Christ is an inexhaustible source of new, God-given chances. What matters here is not the right of might but the right of all to evolve optimally.

4.2 Changes

Not all theologians, who see Jesus as the ideal human being in whom God’s intentions are completely brought to light, consider history as a process (whether or not delayed and sidetracked by sloth, mishap or unwillingness). Hendrikus Berkhof posits that the human being that

181. See especially Whitehead 1926.
God had eternally intended came into the world because of a new act of creation by God.\textsuperscript{182} The world had failed; even Israel, God’s experimental garden for the world, had failed.\textsuperscript{183} That is why God had to begin anew. What matters is renewal of the human being by the Spirit of Christ and what matters is renewal of the world.\textsuperscript{184} Even in the subsequent history the powers of the old make themselves so strongly manifest that a (relatively) new beginning was necessary. We cannot conceive of Berkhof’s theology without World War II and the period of rebuilding that followed. The aim was to build a renewed Europe that was socially more just than before. The ideals of true humanity and reason, as taught by the Enlightenment, would be given shape in new ways in order that not a few but all would benefit. It would not only be true for Europeans but for all the other peoples in the world as well.\textsuperscript{185}

Berkhof and others advocated this ideal in the World Council of Churches and heavily influenced the notions and concepts that guided the Council in subsequent years. Against the backdrop of a chaotic world that needs to liberate itself from the consequences of world wars and from colonialism as a degenerate form of Europe’s values, the true ideals of the Enlightenment – liberty, equality and solidarity – were to take on new forms in the Spirit of Christ.\textsuperscript{186} The first decades were particularly focussed on development. Later, awareness grew that liberation was at stake for everyone – whether they had a voice of not – within a coherent view of the entire creation. What matters is

\textsuperscript{182}. Berkhof 1973: 302 [ET 1979: 286].
\textsuperscript{183}. Berkhof 1973: 258-260 [ET 1979: 244-246].
\textsuperscript{184}. Berkhof 1973: 442, 520 [ET 1979: 423, 499].
\textsuperscript{185}. Closely related to these notions is König 1980, who also has an optimistic view of the future in which evangelical elements play a role even more than they do for Berkhof.
\textsuperscript{186}. Berkhof has been much criticized for his idea of ‘Europe’ as a model for a just world-wide society. (1973: 531) [ET 1979: 510ff.]; but note a more moderate expression in the fifth Dutch edition (1985: 497) of Christian Faith. I think that much of the criticism misses the point by not taking into account that ‘progress’ is the central category of his thought. The spirit of progress is aptly put into words by Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence: every person has an inalienable right to ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’. This concept shaped the culture of North-America. Even when we later speak of progress in Indonesia or Korea, the American influence is clear. One might ask though, whether thinking in terms of ‘progress’, liberty and ‘happiness’ is ‘European’, or whether it is rather more properly English, in which elements of French culture and German ‘Bildung’ (formation according to an ideal) are incorporated, and then reshaped in America into human rights that are as universal as this constellation of cultures.
peace, justice and the integrity of creation as the ideal of a new world that may view the person of Christ as its first representative.

4.3 Critique

Common to all theologians of progress is that they see Christ in light of the Enlightenment. Some see the progress of the world in continuity with its beginning, others as a new beginning through an act of God. When reading such Western theologies, it is striking how little variation they show. The various positions are only relative within the bounds of thought in terms of progress. They all are variants of one and the same inculturation. Here, Christ is the one who helps us along, and whose coming shall change the world. Christ is the ideal of the reasonable, socially concerned human being. Christ is the pre-eminent Despot of the Enlightenment. Christ rules by way of completely serving the world yet as its king, nonetheless. The term ‘kingdom of God’ thus became a favorite expression in Christian theology. It was seen as the basic concept in the proclamation of Jesus. Now the royal Christ, who calls the world into service in the name of God, came to the fore instead of the orthodoxy (inspired by Anselm) of the self-sacrificing, priestly Christ who died for the sins of the world. The emphasis shifts from the cross to the resurrection, from death to life. Subsequently, the prophetic Christ overshadowed this royal Christ, since what matters is that it is we as human beings are called to effect the realization of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is understood as an ideal state of peace (shalom) and of living together in justice. In my view that bypasses the translation of basileia tou theou in the New Testament as ‘kingship of God’. God has always been king, praised in songs in the Psalms. However, now God’s kingship enters the world in the person of Jesus. Now it is clearly made manifest how God is king. The proclamation is made to the world on the cross above Jesus’ head. Jesus’ misdeed in

187. Even critical theologian such as Barth (see especially 1946), Schillebeeckx (1975) and Moltmann (1989) do not escape thinking in terms of progress. With Barth it shows in his political notions, with Schillebeeckx in the realm of social and ecclesiological issues, and with Moltmann in social and ecological ways.

188. The nineteenth century theologians who saw Jesus as the ideal of humanity, such as Rothe and Ritschl, were in no way in an oppressive sense representatives of an imperial Christianity (see Berkhof 1982:78; 123-134). On the contrary, they saw in Jesus the ideal of human solidarity. Their student, Albert Schweiter, put it into practice in an inimitable way.
the world is this: being king of the Jews. 189 Jesus is king of the people who had been singing for centuries: ‘The Lord is King.’ This kingship is not of this world. 190 In this world such a kingship is a crime punishable by death. That is why this king’s followers suffer persecution in the world, 191 and why this king’s servants do not fight back in defense. 192 God’s kingship reverses the face of usual lordship. 193 That radical thought is clouded by speaking about the kingdom of God in terms of justice, peace and integrity of creation. The latter is a fundamentalistic interpretation of the eschatological visions of Isaiah, Micah and Zechariah. The Kingdom will be revealed at the end of the world and has been hidden throughout history in contradiction; to name but one: in being thrown to the lions by present rulers. The hiddenness of the Kingdom should not be narrowed to the idea that only God is hidden.

Theologians who abide by an ideological Christology lack the same notion that Anselm puts to Boso, his partner in a conversation: ‘You have not yet noticed the weight of sin.’ 194 Not only is sin worse than we think, it is also more insurmountable. Things will not be any better tomorrow. How often have people thought that things would get better after a revolution or after a war has ended? Anyone who thinks about the dead of Cambodia, Central-Africa or Bosnia must let go of any hope. And one does not have to be a Protestant Christian to be somber when looking ahead to the future. Sober reason dictates that the expected overpopulation will lead to destructive wars, world hunger and epidemics. If we think we can avoid that scenario in what lies before us, it will be far more likely on the basis of a belief that God can give strange turns to history than on the basis of sober reason.

A theology of progress is a good theology for people who have possibilities of progress. In Africa I have not yet met any theologians, other than among whites in South Africa, who teach such a theology. Asia has a few, Europe has some also, but they are particularly found in North-America. That corresponds to the situation in the early church with regard to similar Christologies. Paul of Samosata is often mentioned. However, because of his luxurious way of life he was suspect among other Christians. 195 Many similarities with the Arians.

190. John 18:36f.
193. Luther especially emphasized this idea. See Weier 1967: 178-181; 185-190.
194. CDH 1:21.
can also be detected. They too, taught that Jesus was the highest ideal of creation, who inspired other human beings. Also note that Arianism was at first the theology of the Christian Roman imperial era. At the beginning of this chapter we posed the question whether Christ could enter into any and all cultures. We then answered that question in the affirmative. The Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung places the question before Western cultures in a somewhat other form. She asks, is a conversion of white, Western men possible? She leaves the question open-ended. I would like to answer this question also with an affirmation. That is, I would want to, but I really cannot. Yet I do so because of faith in Christ who came for the sake of a lost and broken world. Even so, that does not dismiss us from the duty to sketch the problem.

First and foremost, Christology of progress is a theology of the West, and particularly of the ‘advanced’ Western social upper crust who are still — or again — religious without distinguishing sharply between one thing or another, and between religiousness and irreligiosity. It is a theology suited to people who are able or desirous to ‘make it’ in the world. At the same time, it is a theology that is far removed from the theology of the martyrs of the early church, and also from the One who said that those who seek to keep their life will lose it. We fight to maintain our lives, and strive for allowing it to let it take its course, and for recognition. We fight for our ego. Just as in High School I compared the marks on my report card with those of others, I still do the same with the evaluation reports at the university. And I do not have the impression that I am the only one.

The problem of Western culture finds its fiercest expression in Nietzsche. He exposes the tension between striving toward the Übermensch and the awareness that the Christian faith finds it center in the One who was willing to be led to the slaughter like a sheep. Nietzsche dares to face this conflict head-on. It would have driven him crazy, if he had not been so already. Normal people, normal Christians included, do not let things get that far out of control. They merely live with opposites and ambiguities. They live by compromises and concessions. They make adjustments in the image of Christ until it becomes

196 It is remarkable that Berkhof explicitly opposed the ideology of the German Christians in the period around the Second World War by choosing the theology of Athanasius over against the moderate Arian, Eusebius of Caesarea. Later he moves away form Nicene theology and shows more sympathy for Christologies with an Adoptionist bend that better suit his optimism about the changing the world. See Meijering 1997b.
palatable. They adjust their lives to maintain elements of some afterglow of a Christian life.

In Western culture the problem remains that Christ does not fit in. For Christ comes to seek the lost. Should the question of Chung ultimately be answered in the negative? That is not the case only if we begin to view our Western culture as our greatest poverty. We ourselves are the problem. Even such a pronouncement could easily become a mere trick by us in order to justify ourselves. It will be authentic only if our life continually is a life of the cross for us in this culture. And even then, it can turn to moralism and thus become a new source of self preservation. For this latter way of living, thinking and feeling is in our blood; it is stronger than the feelings a traditional African has about his or her ancestors. Ultimately, we nail ourselves to our own crosses and we do not know what to make of ourselves. What does it mean to lose oneself, to experience oneself as lost? When I confess Christ as Lord, I confess that even a European can be saved.197 Although, whenever I think about this concrete Dutch person that I am – not only as an individual but along with the entire context in which I live and work – I don’t know whether that is true any longer; or I hope I don’t know for sure. For I do know this: Western people have killed God long ago and their churches are nothing but cemeteries.198 I would like to escape from the West but I can not do so, not only because I love my home, but also because I am a Westerner and take that with me everywhere.

5. JESUS: THE LIBERATOR

5.1 Radical reversal

Progress theologians assume that the world is good and will get better. There will be setbacks, but those are seen as challenges to self-actualization. Liberation theologians199 also think that the world is

197. At the end of the story of the rich young man (Matt. 19:16-26), Jesus says that it will be difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. When the disciples ask perplexed who then can be saved, Jesus answers that what is impossible for human beings, is possible with God. That seems to provide a way out, but we forget too soon that by then the rich young man had already left. In spite of the possibilities of God he left, no matter how sorrowful he was.


199. For literature see, among others, Alves 1969; Boesak 1976 and 1978; Bonino
good. Or rather, they think that it could be good in principle. In actuality, it is in bad shape. It is a good world in a bad condition. That is why the situation has to change. Thus, liberation theologians also believe in progress, but they do not believe in continuous development. Nor do they believe that the problems can be solved by a few improvements. A radical change is needed. Speaking of ‘improvement’ might give the illusion that the structure is good but that some correction is needed. This is the concept used in the ‘development’ of the third world, or when social support and welfare are provided for poor laborers. This notion overlooks the fact that the point is justice: because the world created by God is good their poverty thus is an injustice. Barth’s complete change in thought is typical. Trained in a liberal theology of progress, possessed of a socially engaged attitude, and inspired by religious socialism, he worked as a parish pastor among poor textile workers in Safenwil. It was there that he came to understand that what truly matters is not merely the provision of needs and the improvement of circumstances but a radical reversal that involves everything. Not simply another society is needed but also another theology. That has remained the starting point of every liberation theology. And a new theology means another Christology: which Christ are we talking about?

5.2 Political and societal liberation

Classical liberation theology has a political orientation. What matters in situations of oppression is the liberation of those who have no voice. Those are almost always also the poor, for the rich maintain their positions of power by political means. In the eyes of those who oppose oppressive systems in the name of God, it is Jesus who takes on the demeanor of a political liberator.

The simplest form of a liberator Christology is one in which Jesus is a revolutionary. Many liberation theologies place Jesus close to the


party of the Zealots, a Jewish liberation movement that opposed the Roman occupation. At the same time, the difference with the Zealots is pointed out. Zealots were conservatives who aimed to restore old values, while Jesus is oriented to a future with a just society. In their conservatism, Zealots were also focussed upon their own group and they themselves wanted to be the ones in power, while Jesus wanted freedom for each and everyone.

Therefore, most liberation theologians go further than viewing Jesus as a revolutionary. Jesus came from God to proclaim justice and to grant freedom. Jesus is the presence and the will of God through which we are called to a total reversal. In Jesus, God is not revealed as the God who sanctions the existing, oppressive structures but as the wholly other God who desires a totally different societal order. What ultimately matters is an eschatological, all-embracing liberation. Even so, in history such liberating acts of God take on the form of political and social liberation. It is the historical figure of the reign of God. That means that God chooses the side of the poor and oppressed. Jesus came to seek the lost, to proclaim good news to the poor and to fill them with goods and to send the rich away empty. God dethrones the mighty. Thus, God chooses one-sidedly. The rich have had their share and God is the One who will set things right. That is why in this world we know Christ in solidarity and in community with the poor.

Nonetheless, liberation is the liberation of all. For the mighty and rich it is also a liberation to be freed from their power and wealth. Who is more free: the dictator who is continuously surrounded by bodyguards and bulletproof glass, or the poor farmer in a rural area? Do not the rich live in continuous fear of losing their possessions? The rich are liberated from the need for self-preservation at the very mo-

206. Gutiérrez 1974: 137. Gutiérrez argues that neither of the two forms of liberation can be reduced to each other, even though they do relate to each other. When we reduce eschatological liberation to the political expression, we enclose God in the historical process. However, when we make political liberation dependent upon the eschatological acts, we take away the incentive for changing the here and now. The union between the two expressions lies in faith in the liberating God who even now acts in (political) history and ultimately will act in the eschatological liberation of another order. The latter then function as the hitching post of historical liberation. See also Moltmann 1989.
207. Gutiérrez 1974: 146-152.
ment that they lose their power and wealth. Thus, a struggle for lib-
eration is a struggle for the liberation of all.\textsuperscript{208}

One could point out that in this way others are telling the rich what
is good for them. How does that square with true freedom? The reply
could be that this is justice in final analysis because for too long the
rich have told the poor what was good for them. Yet it goes deeper:
even the poor have to be told what is good for them. The eyes of ev-
everyone must be opened. For the poor themselves do not have the dispo-
sition to be freed from their lot. As with the Enlightenment, liberation
means leaving behind perspectives that went unexamined for too long
through one’s own fault\textsuperscript{209} – perspectives that we very much like to
preserve because they avoid the issue of our own responsibility.
Moses’ own people reproached him for asking Pharaoh for freedom.
A theology of liberation begins with compassion for others. Two ap-
proaches are possible. Most liberation theologies grow in the praxis of
liberating actions. While on such a path of action, you discover the
way of the Messiah and your own praxis as the praxis of Christ. The
people whose circumstances you share, and for whose rights you fight,
are the very people for whom the Messiah fought and whose lot Christ
shared. As a rule, Marxist models of society are used to analyze the
praxis. The models do not replace revelation but are instruments to
determine how the mechanisms of oppression work, and how they can
be exposed in order to discover what the liberating love and justice in
God’s name means. Thus, we do not learn the content of Christology
through doctrine but from the praxis of critiquing society. In that
praxis it often becomes obvious that the first ones who have to be
shown the way of justice are the very ones who have been rendered
apathetic victims.

It is also possible to begin with revelation, as Barth did. God rad-
ically revealed Godself as the wholly Other in Christ. That places all
existing structures under judgement. By hearing the Word we learn to
become aware of reality because we know of the true reality of God.
This reality is recognized by the congregation, and must be rendered
valid by the whole society.

\textsuperscript{208} Tutu 1995: 44: ‘Let us be open to that Holy Spirit and share our fears and anxie-
ties.’ Rodrigo 1993: 193: ‘If development is truly de-envelopment, the removing
of the envelope of bonds, then true development and liberation coincide in the re-
lease of the broken, and in transformation, not in mere reform of the oppressive
and exploitative economic, social, political, cultural structures into a new society.’
See also Grant 1991: 104.

\textsuperscript{209} Kant (1964): 53.
In both cases, Christology is a socio-critical Christology that places all existing structures in question. Jesus brings society into crisis. Those who have vested interests in maintaining the existing order will always resist such queries. Even so, at first everyone shares that reluctance. Everyone hesitates to step on the uncertain path of change. Both poor and rich, oppressors and victims, must be made aware of their situations, and both have to learn that change means salvation, not only for others but also for themselves.

5.3 Liberated – and then?

If political liberation is the goal of theology and the proclamation of the church, a problem arises at the very moment that the goal is realized. What is next? It doesn’t seem right to merely divide leadership positions among friends. Moreover, what does one do with a Christology of Jesus as Liberator when those who proclaimed Christ as such have now gained power themselves? Many liberation theologies find themselves in crisis after a change of power has taken place.

Such a crisis is made worse by the aftermath of the struggle for freedom. Such a struggle involved acts of resistance against the ruling power. In one way or another it almost always was entangled with violence on some level, often even armed violence. This violence depraves the perpetrators. During the struggle for freedom it seems justified to take on this fate for the sake of others. However, after the liberation this proves to undermine the new societal life. Violence is a power that will not let us go. Neither does such fighting get out of our blood: people who derived their identity from the fight for freedoms have to sustain the old antagonisms in order to maintain that identity. Freedom fighters rarely are able to leave the new society in the hands of a new generation. That is why the new society lives with images of old and new enmity.

In order to maintain the status quo, other problems are not easily rectified. For the process of oppression is much more complex than merely political. It is increasingly clear that attention for political changes alone provides only a one-sided perspective on reality. Op-

211. Earlier (Van de Beek 1986), I have argued with regard to the Kairos document that sometimes one has to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the others and bear the dehumanization of violence. In hindsight, I believe that Buskes 1975:13 was right. Looking at Africa one notices that violence does not stop with a political reversal but is a fungus that spreads with each feeding.
pression is an entire structure of oppressive mechanisms that take away people’s humanity. The image of Jesus as political liberator proves to be inadequate whenever this complexity is acknowledged. Jesus is then understood to be the One who brings to human existence a much broader and more radical liberation. Jesus also pays attention to those who were forgotten by the political freedom fighters. This Jesus is attentive to the poorest of the poor, those who do not benefit of the revolution. Jesus is mindful of the women who are objectified and who are made slaves of their situation.  

Women in Africa especially, demonstrate that the various mechanisms of oppression are connected. Their fate will not change if only one area of life changes. The role of women can only be free from oppression when there is full participation in education, economic health and political influence. The road to that goal is long. The means are meager. To gain influence you have to have some influence to begin with. What to do, if you have nothing to work with in seeking to actualize yourself? ‘We are nothing but poor Ethiopian women and people do not think much of us. We can not trust the high and mighty to come to our church, but you are the great master, much greater than master Lincoln; you are not ashamed to love us, Africans.’ Jesus shares in our life. That is essential. In our world – in which only those receive who have, and in which is taken from those who have not – there is One who is trustworthy and who gives of Self completely. That is our God. Here is no program to believe in, no hope for a better future, only love. But this love empowers faith and hope. This One is the Lord who is bearing our life into the future.

5.4 A program, yet again

A tendency perdures through time to translate such empowered hope into a program that people like to control. This inclination arises especially when a clear ideological program exists as an alternate, or when the opinion takes hold that the ideal can indeed be reached (and that therefore the crisis has been overcome in principle).

The first dynamic is demonstrated in the resistance against the National Socialists in Germany and against apartheid in South Africa.

After the upheaval caused by the collapse of German idealism in the First World War, when only a quest for something entirely different remained, alternative programs arose that propagated restoration. The National Socialists positioned themselves front and center in the ideological vacuum. Only as a reaction to the ascendant ideology, the Bekennende Kirche (the Confessing Church) posited the alternative of obedience to the one Lord. Jews had already been discriminated against in Europe for a long time; only when discrimination became a political program did opposition arise. A similar situation developed in South Africa. Here too, discrimination against blacks was nothing new. However, as a political ideological program it provoked a program to combat racism. We can learn from this that structures of hidden oppression are difficult to bring to light. The awareness of suffering of women in East Asia grew much more through perversive tourism than through the desperate cries of the women themselves.

The second dynamic is exemplified by the European ‘theology of the apostolate’ after the Second World War and also by the earlier American social gospel movement. In American society, after the abolition of slavery and the end of the Civil War, a renewal took place that was also reflected in theological themes. During the Great Depression this fervor collapsed, and in the wake of the New Deal of Roosevelt, the Niebuhrs came on board to bring about a far-reaching sense of justice to American society. In Europe, after World War II and the victory over National Socialism, Barth published his brochure Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde and Berkhof his book Christus, de zin der geschiehenis. As Western Europe achieved greater affluence for more people, their European model became increasingly a programmatic ideal for an entire world, not only for theologians but for politicians as well. People failed to notice that this created a new form of imperialism, nor did they see that other forms of oppression (such as discrimination of women and the under-educated) were not brought to light, or, worse, were even strengthened.

216. The most important works: Reinhold Niebuhr 1941; Richard Niebuhr 1951.
217. Barth 1946; Christian Community and Civic Community.
219. The one-sidedness of the ideal of political liberation is most easily seen in the various other forms of liberation theology that it originated. For instance, Mugambi emphasizes that the beginning of Jesus’ ministry took place in a farmer’s society (Mugambi 1989: 91-95). Well educated Caucasian women in the
Therefore, a program of liberation must be an all encompassing program. Initially, Barth tried to make such a program a cornerstone of his theology. What matters is a world that in every respect is obedient to the Word. Any and all claims that people make on God for their own goals are exposed as instances of human religiosity that stands over against God’s wholly other revelation. It is possible to read Barth’s theology as an all embracing liberation theology. The problem is that such an encompassing theory is so non-specific that it floats suspended above reality. Such indeterminacy invites the establishment of priorities. Thus, South African theologians appealed to Barth for the purity of the Word over against black theologians, since the latter imported religion from their own culture within Christendom, while black theologians appealed to Barth also in their struggle for freedom. I think that the latter were actually closer to Barth. 220 For him, political and social liberation had priority as well. His opposition to religion was actually a resistance to the kind of religiosity that sanctioned existing power, ecclesiastical and political. However, such divergent appeals do illustrate the problem: the impossibility of an all encompassing liberation theology.

That brings us to the real problem of liberation theology: the limitations and sinfulness of humans. Just like the theology of progress, liberation theology does not acknowledge how deeply sin has corroded human existence, nor that every aggression originated with an aggressive human being, even when such a stance is seemingly used for good purposes. In final analysis, liberation theology assumes that the world can be improved. That is true even for the theology of Barth. Barth does not say that a human being can improve him or herself. Yet because of the calling of God, a person lives in freedom. As the absolute free One, God has the first Word. But it demands a free response from a human being. Ultimately, Barth opts for a view of free, accountable human beings who consciously make choices. Christ has come to redeem the world from its lost state. When all is said and done, freedom is freedom ‘from’ even if we say that it is about freedom ‘to,’ such as freedom to serve. This example illustrates exactly that, again and again, freedom turns into a new law. With

West emphasize the liberation of women. Ecclesiastical minorities battle for a legitimate place in their respective communities of faith by appealing to the Truth.

220. The interpretation of Barth by Mofokeng 1983, in which Barth is primarily seen as a liberation theologian, seems correct to me in light of Barth’s biography. The important turns in Barth’s thoughts are always closely connected to social and political changes.
Barth it is very clear that his ethics are grounded in dogmatics. The foundation for true humanity lies in the doctrine of the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. True humanity is Christian humanity because Christ is the true human being.

This brings us back to the discussions of the council of Chalcedon: is Christ the true human being (as the West posits), or is Christ truly human (as Egypt advocated)? If Christ is the true human, then the world ought to be transformed according to Christ’s example. That means we will need programs and strategies to flesh it out further. That is the Western tradition. Liberation theologies are also Western theologies, just as communism is a Western ideology.

On the other hand, if Christ is truly human, then God shares our human existence, broken and unworthy as it is. Then Christ shares the existence of people who again and again turn good purposes into the opposite. Then Christ shares the life of people in a world that is not any better today than yesterday; a world where progress also means progress in the instruments of death. “When sin came into the world, the Son thought, then I will come also!” 221 And the Son did not come to improve the world. More than sixteen hundred years ago, Athanasius already said that all clamor for improvement has not helped. 222 I do not have the illusion that human beings have changed in any essential way in those sixteen hundred years. Fortunately, Christ came to bear the world.

5.5 Jesus only

Is liberation theology wrong then? It is both right and wrong. It is more right than the theology of progress. It is right in its analyses of society and in exposing structures of oppression. They are even worse than liberation theologians have shown. They are rooted deeper than the encompassing theology of Barth and reach further than Grant’s troika of racism, sexism and class differences. 223 A hermeneutic of suspicion is the only justifiable way to analyze human society. That is where liberation theology is more correct than the theologies of progress.

Equipped with such an analysis, we may try to bring about change. Yet we need to be suspicious as well of doing just that. The relative

222. CA III, 31.
usefulness of whatever means utilized to effect change must be kept in mind, just as the limitations of the results. The best weapon is a critical and sober realism. Otherwise, we fall prey to new oppressive ideologies or to disappointments that cause us to lose heart. A critical and sober stance serves society best. That often means choosing the lesser of two evils, only to find out half of the time that we underestimated the damage it could do. We may even use the name of Jesus when implementing means to a good end. Jesus does not object to that. He does not even object if we use his name for ill. Do not think, however, that using his name is the heart of Christian faith, even when used for good. It is the society that has to change to make it as livable as possible. You don’t have to be Christian to want that. Combating oppression is not the prerogative of Christians but a quest for all people, whether or not they believe in a God. And indeed, in practice it seems to work out that way: both atheists and theists engage in the struggle for liberation — and both atheists and theists seek more power to stay on top.

Even so, isn’t the proclamation of Jesus not an important source of inspiration for liberation? Did Jesus not come into the world for just that purpose? Jesus preaches in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. He reads Isaiah 61: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ After the reading Jesus says: ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ The people of Nazareth (from where nothing good could be expected according to others) finally get to hear that the year of the Lord’s favor shall come — and shall come from their midst even. They are quite pleased at this.

Liberation theologians often cite this passage of the gospel. They even point out that the proclaimed liberation reaches further than

224. Luke (4:16-30) places this account specifically at the beginning of Jesus’ journey. The reading of Isaiah 61 and the interpretation connected to the stories of Elijah and Eliah play a central role for him especially, while the other evangelists do not mention this. Compare Matt. 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6.

225. As recorded in Luke 4:18f. The citation is not exactly the same as the words in Is. 61:1f. As is the case more often in the synoptic gospels, prophecies of Isaiah are collated; for instance, in this case the phrase about the blind is derived from Is. 29:18 and 35:5.


their own circle: it also applies to other peoples. Nevertheless, they overlook that Jesus continues by saying: ‘There were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah...and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.’229 This is like saying that your own circle has plenty of problems, no less than other groups, yet God gives freedom to your opponents. That is how Jesus appears in his own society. The people will not accept that and Jesus departs from them. He doesn’t even perform a single sign. Jesus healed many sick in his days, but he also allowed many of the sick to die. Jesus saved the wedding in Cana, but many marriages in his day fell apart. What Jesus does are signs of God’s reign. Jesus has divine power even over the demons. Jesus uses it just enough to show that indeed he does possesses that divine power. Yet he does not do more than that. He brings no rose garden on earth; he never promised one either. On the contrary: in the world you will undergo persecution.

Does this mean that we should simply accept all suffering? Should we just let things be what they are and leave them alone? Certainly not. First of all, we do not have to do everything the way Jesus did it. After all, we have our own human feelings and brains. Moreover, we see that Jesus exposes evil, just as the prophets did. Jesus’ appearance serves discovery.230 That is what the signs are about. Through the healing of one sick person the illness is stripped of its inevitability. Illness is not inevitable and is not invincible. Therein lies the true evil of illness. The same is true for death and sin. Jesus demonstrates that suffering and sin are not unavoidable. He also keenly exposes the hypocrisy of people and shows that different social relationships and attitudes are possible toward tax collectors, prostitutes, children, women, Roman soldiers, the crowds – anyone who socially did not meet certain elite standards. Even for the elite themselves, Jesus demonstrated that other sorts of relations were possible, and he let them see the rudeness of their actions and thinking. Therefore, the acts and words of Jesus are also political. Whoever says that Jesus does not get involved in politics, has no insight in how Jesus is exposing all evil.231

231. Song 1986: 92 shows that especially the hidden presence of God’s Kingdom in people (202f.) – as invisible as a mustard seed and as impossible as the task of be-
And politics avoids such exposure like the plague. During the process and trial of Jesus, all those who wield power stand exposed.

All this did not make Jesus beloved. They killed him for it. And it did not help them one bit. Jesus laid bare the sins of the world. If you want to follow the Lord as a Christian, you must see through the structures of injustice and oppression. It is crystal clear to you: you are suspicious of others because Jesus has laid bare the sins within yourself to begin with. To know yourself in that way makes you less surprised to find that someone else has flaws. That is why people are afraid of those who know a little of evil and who know of it within themselves. It is even more threatening if such persons let it be known to others that they are aware of what this evil is. Oppressors are more afraid of someone who has become aware of evil within than of victims who complain. Oppressors of all stripes will work together to keep someone like that on a short leash. Yet whoever has seen his or her own wrongs by looking in the faces of victims, is thereby life threatening to the perpetrators. No one wants to hear about such self-discovery and about having seen through the posture of the perpetrators. Only once in a while, a pawn is sacrificed in order to preserve a good front. After all, a little bit of a confession of guilt looks good. Even so, don’t dare to touch the system as a whole.

However, you can and must expose what is wrong. You can no longer remain silent, and – just like the Lord – you do it for the sake of the victims. It is a good thing that women in Africa and Asia open their mouths. It is good that they bring to light their conditions of suffering. That they speak out will not be appreciated. And it will not change the world. For the entire Western advertising industry makes money by exploiting women. We are quite willing to condemn a poor black man in a camp near Kaapstad (Capetown) because he killed his even more destitute wife – as long as we can keep watching television. I know: calling attention to this won’t help. In the West we do not expel people from the tribe. We scheme to turn them into false and frustrated moralists who cannot see beyond their noses. The Western economy is the culmination of sexism, racism and social exploitation, and it is given visibility and a face through advertising.

ing leaven (183-186) – is threatening to any modern state that wants to be great (183f.).

232. Fabella 1993: 216; Chung 1993: 225. See also Plaskov 1980, who states that the sin of toleration hurts life as much as the sin of pride.
Jesus discloses the sin of the world, just as a good sociological or psychological analysis along the line of Marx or Freud does. Yet this does not imply that Jesus liberates you from sin, suffering and death. Jesus came to bear our sin, even though we wish he came to carry it away.\(^{233}\) We would like to have a world free from evil, first of all our own. For then we would be good. And before you know it we would take credit for it and boast in it.

The biggest problem with any kind of liberation theology (just as with progress theology) is that Jesus becomes a means to an end that we desire, namely to be an ideal human being or a free human being. Ultimately it is very questionable whether Jesus is suited to such a purpose. At least until now it has helped very little. In spite of countless sermons about neighborly love, Christians have little love for their neighbors, never mind their enemies. On this issue too, they cannot be distinguished from non-Christians.

Liberation theology as theology has a tendency to absolutize itself and to make absolute identifications of right and wrong.\(^{234}\) The socially necessary renewal is seen as a mandate from God. For God desires justice and righteousness; when Jesus comes, he comes because the Kingdom of God is at hand. Thus, Jesus brings justice and righteousness. His disciples follow Jesus in this, and thus fight for justice and righteousness as well. As such, they fight in the battle of God; their enemies are God’s enemies. If they are victorious, (a piece of) the Kingdom of God is realized. However, all this is much more complicated in reality. Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but it turns out that the Kingship of God has the shape of the cross.

\(^{233}\) The Greek word aiρεοι in John 1:29 can be translated with ‘to bear’ as well as ‘to carry away.’

\(^{234}\) Compare Heyward 1991: 137. ‘Christian truths are rooted in the connections between various particular, human experiences (including experiences of Jesus of Nazareth), in relationship to the Holy, that what provides purpose, value, dignity and hope to and in our lives.’

In essence this connection between social injustice and the holy is a problem for any genitive theology, a theology of something. The social problem is real. However, it is elevated to theology by which it accrues absolutist aspects because the God of a genitive theology is an absolute God who completely identifies with the oppressed in skewed social relationships. By theologizing the problem, every other theology is ideologically portrayed as reactionary, which is not necessarily the case. I take very seriously the problems that the genitive theologies place before us. They demand societal changes. They can also serve theology to increase a critical consciousness, and identify and bring to light genitive qualities of theologies that claim to be without them. Even so, the social problems should not be identified with God’s essence. That is a fall into idol worship.
Jesus proclaims justice and righteousness, yet does not thereby bring about a liberating change. His followers are not called to enforce justice and righteousness but to practice it. Indeed, they should practice it. The trouble is that they practice it hardly often enough to make it unnecessary to question whether Christendom makes any difference with regard to righteousness in the world. Moreover, no sooner when Christians have power, they quickly forget what liberation in God’s Name means for those who are subjugated. It is forgotten that the royal Lion of God’s reign in this world appears in the figure of the Lamb who bears the sin of the world.

In this situation we are called to remain faithful, to prophetically proclaim that God commanded justice and righteousness, and to devote our lives to it in a priestly manner. Yet the days are rare that Moses, Elijah and Jesus – the law, the prophet and the Messiah – appear in glory, and when they do it is outside the public arena. Losing sight of that makes you arrogant when successful, frustrated when disappointed, leading finally to becoming resigned.

In final analysis, Christian faith is not about improving the world but about faith in Jesus. What matters is Jesus, the person. When Jesus is in our life, the bad is good. Then flowers bloom in concrete and we glow with happiness in bitter cold. If Jesus is for us, what could hurt us? What matters, is the person as such, and not what is gained by it. Bonhoeffer spoke in lectures to his students about Melanchton’s notion that to know Christ is to know his beneficence. Bonhoeffer does not agree. A good deed can be done by an evil person. You can never tell whether a demon really isn’t driven out by Beelzebub instead. Yet a good person will always do good. Jesus’ acts are good even if you do not understand them because it is Jesus who did them. We love Jesus for who he is. If Jesus were a means to a goal he could be exchanged for some other means. In that case we only need him as long as he serves our purposes. If he liberates us, well, great; if he does not free us, we’ll find someone else. If he does not make our ideas a reality, how easily can our ‘Hosannas’ to the ‘One who comes in the name of the Lord’ turn into ‘Crucify him.’ True love keeps on loving even if the ideals are not realized. There is love in my life because Jesus is in my life. Nothing is more important. Therefore I am free, not ‘from’ everything as though he took everything away from

me, and not free ‘to’ something, but simply free to be free. The freedom of this love alone makes it possible that all that burdens us can no longer undo us.\textsuperscript{237}

Ultimately, Christology is about a Person. This Beloved never promised us a rose garden. Rather, he warned us about much suffering in the future. And the more you know of this Person’s love, the more it grasps and grips you. That is why you rejoice and perhaps relax a little when there is some person who, maybe not without self-interest, does an act of love for another. That is why you may be happy if someone else defends you, even if circumstances do not change because of it. You can certainly be happy for some time when you live in an orderly society with a certain amount of justice. However, do not make the mistake of thinking that you’re halfway to the Kingdom of God. Before you know it, such orderliness is used as a theology of oppression. You may well be happy that you are free to engage in all sort of action. Such liberty and fortuity distracts from having to face the enormous guilt of the world. For if you allow everything to affect you, you will suffocate. I cannot bear to continue to think about the poor woman in the camp who was killed along with her unborn child by her own husband. I cannot keep on thinking about the children killed in so-called muti murders, in which the tongue is cut out or the lips are cut off while the victims are still alive. I cannot keep on thinking about the boys in Indonesia who fell into the hands of some murderous Dutch young men. And I cannot keep on thinking about what the perpetrators might be thinking afterward. I cannot... ‘Distraction is a good thing,’ said Pascal, writing about diversions. That is why work is efficacious according to him.\textsuperscript{238} Sometimes, the act of liberation works even better. At least it helps you to continue to live in a world lost in guilt. The Lord was not into sports. Jesus did not have a paid job. Jesus spearheaded no action committee. Undistracted and undiverted, he saw through everyone and everything. With such unwavering dedication, Jesus bears the sin of the world.

6. \textsc{Does God Intervene?}

The relationship of God to history has been a problem in theology since early times. If God is able to intervene in history, why is there so

\textsuperscript{237} Compare Gal. 5f.
\textsuperscript{238} Pascal (1997), 55-59, no. 136.
much evil in the world? In modern times, the ideas of modern science has intensified this problem. Is it still possible to imagine a transcendent power that intervenes in the world from outside that world? Many people will answer that question in the negative. However, both a Christology based upon the notion of progress as well as a Christology of liberation theologies assume that, one way or another, God guides or turns events in the world. That is why we do well to take a closer look at the question of the meaning of Christ for history.

6.1 The myth of God’s intervention

Rudolf Bultmann, the German theologian, drew radical consequences from modern thought. According to him, God does not intervene in history. The world displays an internal coherence of causes and consequences, and there is no room for supernatural intervention.\(^{239}\) Moreover, it does not matter whether our worldview is true or not, only that we have one. In modernity, people have no choice but to think in terms of causes and consequences. This way of thinking determines all our actions. It gave rise to modern technology, to our economy and to medical sciences. None of these are independent realms of our reality but are rather expressions of reality as we know it.

Whenever we limit interventions by God to spiritual inspiration only (as did many theologians in recent centuries), such a strategy merely covers up the problem. After all, spiritual inspiration is a form of interference as well. More seriously, to limit God in such a way does not do justice to the biblical proclamation concerning Jesus, based as it is on an eschatological intervention of God.\(^{240}\) Such eschatology is at the heart of the New Testament; it can not be ignored or negated. Therefore, no direct line can be drawn from Jesus’ message and the apostles to theology in the modern world.

In the New Testament, the proclamation of Jesus and the apostles is presented in the form of a mythic story. To many people ‘mythic’ means untrue. That is not at all what, for instance, a theologian like Bultmann has in mind. He insists that it matters very much how people relate to truth in terms of their own worldview in a given period of

\(^{239}\) Bultmann 1964a: 12f.; Bultmann 1948.

\(^{240}\) Bultmann 1964a: 7-11 shows how deeply people were shocked in 1892 when Weiss argued that the proclamation of Jesus was not to be understood as ethical guidance only, but as radical eschatology as well.
time. A mythic worldview was used in biblical times, just as in our
day we tend to use our modern-scientific worldview. Back then they
could not think otherwise than in their own view, just as we can do so
only on our own terms. However, the New Testament is not about a
worldview; it is about the proclamation of Jesus. Therefore, we must
translate Jesus’ message – told to us in a mythic worldview – into a
modern worldview. What matters is not a removal of myth but the
task of interpreting it.\footnote{241}

In terms of the worldview back then, we are told that a pre-existent
divine person came down from heaven and was born of a virgin. This
person performed miracles and preached; after his crucifixion he was
raised from the dead and gloriously ascended into heaven from where
he shall return to judge the world. It was expected that this return and
judgement would be imminent.

For people at that time, these sort of happenings were a part of normal
history; they were woven into earthly events and had the exact same
reality value. Their faith was expressed in a form of facts that de-
scribed God’s acts. That could be a resurrection from death, but also a
battle in which God’s people were victorious. It is impossible for us to
express our faith any longer in such a manner, Bultmann says.\footnote{242} For
the resurrection does not fit our worldview; this is similar to accounts
of some battles that never actually happened as historical research
discovered, or some claimed victory that was proven to have been a
defeat. However, faith is about something different. Faith has to do
with the awareness that we encounter a transcendent call: a calling
that gives meaning to our existence.\footnote{243} The preaching of God’s es-
chatological intervention in Christ is geared exactly to that end: Christ
has come to judge, therefore you can not procrastinate. How do you
lead your life? Who are you? Jesus’ eschatological preaching about
nearness of the God’s Kingdom calls you to your senses and to a de-
cision that allows no postponement. And we are able to understand that
call very well from within our own worldview. If we do not hear it, it
has nothing to do with our worldview, but with our unwillingness or
our sloth in making a decision. In our lives we are all too willing

\footnote{241. Bultmann 1964a:16: ‘Entmythologisieren’ – ein sicherlich unbefriedigendes Wort. Ziel ist nicht das Entfernen mythologischer Aussagen, sondern ihre Auslegung. Es ist ein Deutungsmethode.’ [‘Demythologizing’ - certainly an unsatisfactory word. The goal is not to discard mythological expressions but to explain and interpret them. It is a method by which to operate.’]}

\footnote{242. For more on this difference, see especially Bultmann 1964a: 7-20; 1948: 16-21.}

\footnote{243. Bultmann 1964a: 24-33.}
merely to trudge on. By reading the New Testament stories as myth we can postpone a decision. We focus on the past and, if need be, devote all our energies to determine exactly all that has happened, when and how, according to the apocalyptic texts. We observe also that the return of Christ has not come about quickly at all, and that it will likely take longer than our days.\(^{244}\) Conversely, if we demythologize the message of Jesus, the question about an immediate decision is before each of us in terms of our own worldview. What kind of person are you, in a final and definite judgement of your humanity? Holding on to the myth would keep the urgency of the message at bay.

The apostles experienced, within their worldview, the risen Jesus. By this expression they indicated that the eschatological decision of God has already come. God’s verdict is not a moment in the future but has become reality in the judgement about Jesus. Faced with the proclamation of the resurrection, we can no longer avoid a decision. It is a decision that judges: in our old life we did not take God seriously enough as a decisive question. This new realization also provides a liberating decision: God is for real, and this God is the final ground of our existence, thereby giving meaning to our life. This decision is a daily decision, for what matters is not God in the past but God in the present. To be ready always, is what matters. We find certainty in such a readiness for the presence of God. Such certitude is of an entirely different nature than historical certainties; it is outside the realm of our reality-myths about faith in facts. It is not faith in the facts that matters but faith in God’s call.\(^{245}\)

With Bultmann, the full emphasis lies upon the proclamation with its relevance for the here and now. Facts are not important. One must realize, that this also holds true for present facts. We can not view them as acts of God either. This is true for rain that falls and for the course of history. The liberation from the Nazi’s in Europe is not due to God’s acts, but came about because the armies of the Allies were stronger. After May 5\(^{th}\), 1945 – the day of liberation of the occupancy of the Netherlands – we should not preach about ‘God’s enemies perish,\(^{246}\) but merely put in the paper: ‘America’s enemies lost.’ Above

\(^{244}\) Bultmann 1964a: 11.

\(^{245}\) This is why Bultmann places all emphasis on proclamation: both the proclamation of Jesus and the proclamation of the apostles is at stake. In his book about Jesus in the synoptic gospels (Bultmann 1964b) he does not even offer a discussion of the cross and the resurrection, for they belong to the proclamation of the congregation.

\(^{246}\) K.H. Miskotte preached on this text on May 9\(^{th}\), 1945 in Amsterdam (Miskotte 1945).
all, we should preach about the personal call upon us to discern the final and definitive meaning of our life. For that does not depend on Germans or Anglo Saxons.

I think that Bultmann has a strong case in thinking that God does not intervene in the world. The most important aspect is not only that such action does not fit in our modern worldview (although we should not underestimate the power of such a worldview in our thinking and feeling). 247 Much more important to me is the observation that we would not notice God’s intervention even if we wanted to. Where was God in Auschwitz? Where was God in Rwanda? Precisely the absence of obvious answers are an excuse for people to think that God is unable to intervene; for if God could have intervened, how can we possibly have any respect for such a God? That is why people prefer to think about God as the transcendence of our existence that places us in the position of having to make a decision. Or – as Van Gennep has put it – that ‘God reigns through God’s commandments and promises.’ 248 God is only present in the world as a question of responsible action. Thus, Auschwitz and Rwanda are not blamed on God but on human beings who act irresponsibly.

Even so, I do think that even Bultmann dismisses the problems too easily, although he faces the question radically. First of all, the idea of God can not be rescued from a mythic field of language. In a modern scientific worldview ‘God’ is as strange as the ascension. Secondly, the idea that God makes a claim on human beings is also a form of intervention. Physical and moral issues cannot be untangled that easily.

More importantly, how Israel and the church think about God’s acts in history are so essential for this tradition that they far exceed the particular worldview of the first century Bultmann describes. God has to do with the experiential world. While the problem this insistence presents did not escape the attention of people in earlier eras, it did not

247. Theoretically, we can say that the denial of God’s intervention is a form of reductionism (true in the same way it would be for an act of human volition) by assuming that we can explain any action completely from a chain of chemical and physical processes of the body. On that level, the phenomenon of ‘will’ is nowhere to be found. The difference is, that the will of a human being is presupposed continuously, while the existence of God has sunk below the horizon since the Enlightenment.

cause them to drop this claim altogether. It was part and parcel of their faith that God truly liberates people, and that God will truly make things right on earth. They certainly noticed that it is difficult to persevere in faith, and that the history of Israel was a history of failure. Yet it did not cause them to say that faith itself was a failure anymore than that the early Christians called their own faith a failure (when the Lord did not return immediately, and when they died a martyrs death without God’s intervention). Surely, Israel and the church have seen the problem—but they did not walk away from it.

Therein lies the difference with modernity. The crux is not that we now have another worldview and thus can no longer believe in God’s intervention. Rather the reverse is true. It is not the modern natural sciences and technologies that are the cause of our modern way of thinking, but instead it is modernity’s doubt about the meaning of the notion ‘God.’ Since ‘God’ can not simply be certified, everything began to be in doubt. The only thing that could be salvaged from this doubt was human reason, by which a reasoned coherence of the universe can be constructed. Since that has produced visible results of progress, it is hard to bypass its claim on the reality of its way of thinking. Its success is demonstrable. The success of God is not.

Thus, atheists may well prove that God does not exist on grounds of the internal reasonable coherence of the cosmos; while pragmatic atheists and agnostics may well shrug their shoulders. Christians who want to save the idea of God may well seek to demythologize God, but thereby the real problem escapes them. For Jews and Christians believe that God should intervene in history, saving and judging us, and that God is not doing it. Or, at best, we can say that the Lord only minimally sufficiently keeps the problem alive by doing signs that are not to be broadcast, or by providing signs that only affect a few individuals, or by touching people in the Spirit. The fire remains within us, but where is God to be seen? The problem of Christian faith is that we confess that God has already intervened in Christ, without convincing the public at large of this, and by believing that God could intervene in history, but that God does not actually do it. In such a situation it is called ‘faith’ if you do not bid God adieu, neither as a relationship nor as a concept, but that you bring faith as a question into the relationship. Fundamentally, faith is tempted and assaulted faith.

6.2 The self-evident intervention of God

It is against this backdrop of a sorely tested faith that the evangelical movement\(^{250}\) in Christendom ought to be comprehended similar to how we view Christian existentialism. Except, these two schools of thought propose opposite escape routes: the latter by completely divorcing the meaning of existence from facts, and the former by considering the facts themselves as possessing meaning.\(^{251}\) That is why evangelicals (to use the British word for a more rigid subset of the larger evangelical movement) adhere to the absolute sanctity of facts even more than positivists do. Everything – your faith, the meaning of everything – stands or collapses on this basis. Since meaning and facts are equivalent, the interpretation of the facts is completely univocal and all lines are clearly drawn.\(^{252}\)

For fundamentalist evangelicals, the virgin birth, Jesus' miracles and the facticity of the resurrection and ascension may not be put in doubt. A similar simplicity applies to the divinity of Christ; for it is no longer a paradox in human existence but has become self-evident.\(^{253}\) The meaning of Jesus' death on the cross is presented in terms of Anselm's classical idea of payment of debt. Except: humanity is no longer a corporate unity but people are clearly separate and distinctive individuals for whom Jesus paid with his death.\(^{254}\)

As far as content is concerned, this Christology offers little that is new with regard to the orthodoxy of the Western tradition.\(^{255}\) Even the intentions are the same as those in classical Protestant theology.

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250. About the roots, uniqueness and views of this movement, see especially the clearly written book by McGrath 1995 and also Cotton 1995.
251. 'The evangelical movement is an alternative to our easy accommodation to the Enlightenment but nevertheless purposes to speak to contemporary man' (Inch 1978:18).
253. 'Between the Creed's affirmation of belief in God the Father and in Jesus Christ the evangelical pauses only long enough to catch his breath' (Inch 1978: 33). See also Greet 1975: 20f.
254. McGrath 1992: 89-91 presents this model as an example to explain as clearly as possible that the objective reconciliation of guilt is at stake.
255. McGrath 1995: 94-96. That is not to say that all evangelicals adopt everything from orthodoxy. Often a part from a dogma is selected that immediately applies to personal faith as a choice for the Lord. That is why one cannot say that every evangelical is a fundamentalist; nor that every fundamentalist is an evangelical. Generally speaking, fundamentalism is a retrograde variant of evangelicalism with fluid connections internally as well as to other streams of tradition. See McGrath 1995: 112f.
Evangelicals are clearly Protestants, by championing the idea that salvation is an objective reality, outside of us, in God’s acts in Christ. The absolute certainty of the Word of God stands over against all uncertainties of modern life and the temptations of modern science. That Word provides strength: your faith is not built upon ideas of mere human beings but solely on the Word of God.\(^{256}\) Similar to the Reformation itself, evangelicals emphasize that we are very personally involved in faith. Neither the church nor tradition provides participation in Christ, for it is a personal relationship.\(^{257}\)

Everything is pinned down much more specifically than in the earlier tradition. That is also true for a personal relationship. This movement insists that our faith must be certain and completely unambiguous because there is a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers. The last judgement will only affirm what is the case already in the here and now. Thus, in the present the personal faith decision is most relevant. The facts of the past are determined: Jesus paid for our sins and is risen. The facts of the future are also already determined: the believers shall be saved at Jesus’ return and the unbelievers will go to hell. The only thing that remains for the present time is whether you are a believer or not. That decision is taken here and now.

Here, the evangelicals come close to Bultmann: what matters is the present choice. The difference is that the choice is more clear-cut for the former. For Bultmann it is an always-progressing movement without any point of orientation. Decisions are made in order to accept an uncertain existence as a gift and a charge. For the evangelicals, the decision is about accepting the facts of the past and the future; do you believe in them or not?\(^{258}\) That is clear. Thus an evangelical, much like Bultmann, does not see the relevance of modern sciences for his or her faith. The difference is that Bultmann accepts scientific research as such, while the evangelicals reject it if it does not support the biblical facts.

The evangelical movement, with all its variations, is the fastest growing movement within Christianity.\(^{259}\) It offers certainty. It is noteworthy that it is not tied to one specific social class. Many people who are touched by this movement do not belong to the established

\(^{256}\) See Van de Beek 1991a.
\(^{257}\) See McGrath 1995: 72-75.
\(^{258}\) Most literature from evangelical sources is focussed on this. Christology is hardly a topic of discussion. It is assumed to be a self-evident content of the faith.
\(^{259}\) See McGrath 1995: 186-190.
order. Over against the convictions relied on by the powerful, they have another confidence instead. While others put their trust in this life, they know of eternal life that they shall receive when the Lord returns. This return of the Lord is the bedrock idea of evangelicals from which everything else follows. That origin has sometimes been pushed in the background because so much attention is given to charismatic gifts, personal choices and active Christianity. Nonetheless, the charismatic movement began with the idea of the return and the last judgement. God will presently do justice to us. Those attracted to this movement did not choose an earthly liberation theology but heavenly glory. That is why the wealthy can also be evangelical. For some, earthly wealth ultimately does not satisfy; for others, heavenly certainties are acquired in addition to earthly security. It is even possible to use the notion of a thousand-year reign to erect an intermediate form; i.e., even in this world an era of prosperity shall arrive for the children of God.

The notion of the evangelicals – that what ultimately matters is salvation of another order than earthly life – is not far from roots of early Christianity. The same is true for the idea that a distinction should be made between people who belong to Jesus and those who are shut out. Exclusivism has been part of general Christian faith from the beginning. What is problematic in later developments is the positivist certitude attached to it. Nothing may be doubted. That is why no critical questions can be allowed. Evangelical believers know the truth and they therefore determine how to be critical of all else. The same is true for a search for language and images to give expression to

262. Anderson 1979: 195 sees clear connections between the choice of millennialism and social class, albeit not the sole factor. Certainly, theologians with a theology of progress are often quite receptive to an idea of a temporary, immanent reign of God. For example, see König 1980: 169-179 and Berkhof 1959: 145-162; [ET: 143-163] neither one of them advocates a literal interpretation, yet they favor the idea of a rule of Christ in this world. See Berkhof for further literature.
263. McGrath 1995: 143f. How crucial the resistance against doubt is becomes clear when McGrath (1992: 93) states that on the cross Christ was victorious over sin, death and doubt. Here doubt is viewed as being of the same order as sin and death. Here liberation from doubt, sin and death replaces the liberation from the law, sin and death (the classical formulation of the theology of Paul; see Weiss 1902) However, McGrath sees the liberation from doubt by making space for the tension between the 'already and not yet.' Doubt is part of human existence and a long process of healing is needed (1992:91-94). In this, he differs from many other evangelicals whose viewpoints on this are more radical.
God’s mystery. A theological model becomes an unassailable truth. In addition, a direct relationship exists between prayer and answers, which makes it possible to test faith by outcome.

As for my own stance, I would like to incorporate a much greater uncertainty at every turn in theological thinking. We are searching for the right words and our faith is tested. For we believe that God acts in history yet we do not know how. The stories of the bible relate experiences but then are expressed through dense narratives by the people who were involved and who put into words an entire realm of experience, faith and hope by relating events and telling stories.

To me, the most important problem with evangelicals is their view of the nature of God’s acts. They believe that God intervenes. I believe that as well. However, they think that God’s intervention can be positively identified as factual salvation history. This I do not believe. I do not mean that salvation history is a mere shadowing of history. I mean that salvation history and history ought to coincide but in reality trace a history of failure instead. Prayers are rarely answered and Christians rarely become active and selfless servants of humanity. And God did not save the very people who cried out for the Lord God to intervene or offer a helping hand. Just as I say to Bultmann: ‘God can indeed intervene,’ I have to say to the evangelicals, ‘but he doesn’t’ (or maybe especially to the latter less specifically: ‘but all we can do is to keep asking the question in the margins of our existence’).

Evangelicals think of Jesus as the mighty God. Jesus is the Lord who determines our lives. Too easily they lose sight of the truth that this Lord was present in this world as the Crucified. That cross was not merely a payment for our sin but is as well the figure in which God is present in this world for the believers. His resurrection is on the other side. What has become visible of this Lord totally confuses all of us as human beings, believers included. For the edges of the glory of God surround the life and death of Jesus. Here, we find God in the darkness of a lost human race. Only in such forlornness do I meet God, and the edge of light blinds my eyes and only deepens my darkness. My faith in God makes the world less transparent rather than clearer and more distinct.

6.3 Proof of God’s intervention

While evangelicals posit that God in fact intervenes, Wolfhart Pan-

nenberg claims that he can prove it. These are two different approaches to gaining certitude. Even so, because they do not really need his arguments, the evangelicals feel that Pannenberg provides merely some support at best. They already knew the truth of God's intervention. When someone wants to prove that as well, it gives the impression that it might have been debatable to some extent.

Pannenberg certainly does enter the discussion regarding the historical certainty of the stories about Jesus. The crucial question is the resurrection. The issue is not the fact of Jesus' resurrection in and of itself but the proof of the divinity of the God of Israel. In final analysis, Pannenberg maintains that the latter must be, and can be, determined through objective scientific investigation. For Pannenberg totally agrees with the evangelicals in this: faith is not a matter of private convictions but rests on facts.

According to Pannenberg, the gospels and the letters of Paul allow us to deduce that the apostles really met the risen Lord. It is not necessary to mindlessly accept everything that is written in the New Testament as historical to reach the conclusion that the appearances and the empty tomb were realities. At the same time, these events must be viewed in the context of those days. After all, historical research cannot be carried out a-contextually. In the context of the Judaism of those days the resurrection signified that God vindicated Jesus' life; his preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God was confirmed in the resurrection. To a Jew in the first century, the resurrection of Jesus – seen against the backdrop of his history – meant that the Kingdom of God has begun and has been confirmed in Jesus. To Hellenists in those days, a resurrection from the dead would have signified a breaking through of temporal existence. There is eternal life indeed, and that means divine life. Now that this has come to light in Jesus, it demonstrates that the God of Israel is the true God, the One who has power over transitoriness. According to Pannenberg, the significance of the resurrection has been powerfully summarized by Paul: 'He was declared to be the Son of God.' Because academic historians cannot remove this event from its context, Pannenberg arrives at his thesis

266. Pannenberg 1975: 78.
that unprejudiced historical research should lead to the affirmative conclusion of the divinity of the God of Israel.

Yet no event is meaningful in and of itself, and its coherence cannot be clarified without a relationship with other events. Ultimate significance will only appear in a total coherence of history.\textsuperscript{271} Only on the last day will everything receive its meaning. Since the resurrection of Jesus is a resurrection from death in the context of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and eternal life, a prolepsis of the eschaton has taken place.\textsuperscript{272} In this foretaste is becoming visible what the definitive and all determinative outcome of history will be: that the God of Israel will be God indeed. It is this God who will have the final decision regarding the world. All provisional victories ought to be viewed in light of the definitive victory of God.

I agree with Pannenberg – over against Bultmann – that God cannot be divorced from history. At the same time, I also agree with him that the New Testament writings give a reasonable account of the conviction of the apostles that the resurrection of Christ really happened, and that for people in those days only a single conclusion was possible: here God has decided. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but not in the revelation of God in that event, was for people in those days simply not an option.

However, I have other considerations beyond those affirmations. First of all, the conviction of the apostles that Jesus was risen does not yet imply that others have to think it to be true within their own context. Jesus appeared only to a few people, and at that for the most part to people who had a relationship with him already. Only Paul is a clear exception. Who is to guarantee that they speak the truth and are not the victims of an uncontrollable illusion? Most Jews did not believe them; and at the Areopagus in Athens we learn of the reaction of the Greeks. The point is not that they draw another conclusion, but that they simply do not believe that it is true that Jesus was risen.

Secondly, it might have been true for \textit{them} as a crystal clear conclusion, but that does not yet imply that this is the case for people in the twenty-first century. Historians work with a principle of analogy. This is a particularly poor tool for history with its contingent events; yet no other criterion is available. We judge by what seems reasonable. When unreasonableness grows we begin to doubt, and when the

\textsuperscript{271} Pannenberg 1967: 66-78, especially 69; 1975: 79.

\textsuperscript{272} Pannenberg 1975: 81.
unreasonableness is too overwhelming we begin to deny the truth of events. The level of reasonableness is determined by what we presently assume to be likely to have been the case in the past. As such, we do not judge differently from the Jews and Greeks back then.

In addition, the problem of the distance between fact and meaning has become much greater. Even if you can prove that Jesus was raised from the dead, it would not automatically follow that God had done it. It could have been an extraordinary piece of fortune for Jesus that he returned form the death. At best, the story gives you food for thought. Pannenberg’s argument is valid only when you judge the witnesses to be reliable and have accepted their way of thinking about an intervention by God. And that means you have already entered the circle of faith. From within the Christian tradition that accepts the words of the evangelists and the apostles as trustworthy and believes hat God intervenes in the world the resurrection of Jesus is a real event. Viewed from inside the texts those narratives cannot be dismissed as merely metaphorical language. They refer not only to the apostles but also to what happened to Jesus. Yet in my view Pannenberg’s arguments do not have sufficient validity for those who do not believe in a resurrection from the dead or the message of God as one by which one orients one’s life.  

Another consideration that brings Pannenberg’s approach into question is that the very best of learned investigators would have the most faith if he or she were correct in assuming that unprejudiced research could prove God. That is exactly the opposite of what the New Testament writers say about faith: it is foolishness and it is scandalous, and for the wise and the intelligent it is hidden. It is a message for the fools of the world, those who have no success. This fits the manner in which Pannenberg speaks about the resurrection. He treats that event as one among other events in immanent history. Undoubtedly, the resurrection had some of those aspects:

273. It should be pointed out that Pannenberg finds such a positioning of Christians not right. It would imply that we would ensconce ourselves in a storm free zone (1975:84f.). Pannenberg says that we then make a distinction between the event and a ‘fromme Deutung,’ a pious meaning. He thereby overlooks that even if the crux of the matter were ‘facts,’ these would not be accessible for everyone anyway.
274. 1 Cor. 1:18-25.
276. 1 Cor. 1:27-29.
277. Pannenberg appeals for this to faith in God as the Creator (1967: 77). That is why ‘rechte theologische Durchforschung ... historische Einzelforschung nicht durch
the tomb was visibly empty and something truly happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Nonetheless, at the same time, these events make present the transcendent world of God and they transcend common events. Of course, Pannenberg will say that this is precisely why such events are proleptic of the eschaton, but that acknowledges that categories of common historical investigations cannot grasp the actual significance. Thus even the most unprejudiced historian can at best reach the conclusion that a verdict must be postponed because the tools are inadequate.

That brings me to the last and most essential objection to Pannenberg’s position: his concept of God. God is the one who decides definitively about the world. God is the one who has the last word. But that word is not the closing word of history, as Pannenberg supposes, but the transcendent judging word on history. The final power in the world may well be judged the most negatively in God’s verdict. That would fit the apocalyptic model of the Old and New Testament much better than Pannenberg’s Hegelian idea that embraces all of history. On the basis of the proclamation of the resurrected Christ who is expected to return from heaven, it may be concluded that the value judgements are the reverse of those regularly held in secular history. What is deemed success now, will be later be judged as loss. Definitive success will become definitive loss. One who achieves absolute control of the world will be the first candidate for the pool of fire and sulfur.

For Pannenberg, the story of God and of humankind gradually coincide in his model of history. Prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection there is still a dialectical relationship with the Sonship of God. Jesus is confirmed as God’s Son only in the resurrection. We are swept up as human beings in that movement. The Sonship of Jesus is the fulfillment of human personal-being, in a becoming-as one with God. Christ is the new being from the beginning. The kingship of Christ is the end of history. That kingship is portrayed by Pannenberg as glory. That the slaughtered Lamb will open the scroll of history and that the Crucified has fashioned creation is not a notion that is acknowledged. Suffering means to Christ and to us only that everything,
such as it is, is only a portal to something else.²⁸² Pannenberg ends his Christology with the almighty Christ who is the Creator.²⁸³ This is the Byzantine Christ of the dome of the Hagia Sophia.

Now we can return to the end of the previous subsection in a more nuanced way: God can intervene, and indeed does so, only in a reverse figure: in the cross of Christ and in the suffering of the gathered believers among the sufferers throughout history. The pattern of God’s judgement in the historical process is that God has no success and that prayers are not being answered – or are at least only sufficiently to keep alive our supposition that prayer has some effect. That does not mean that we should not pray anymore, for the nature of God’s reverse figure becomes real especially because of our faith in God’s positive intervention that orients our prayers. God exists, but does not help us out of our misery, while we would expect otherwise. The question of faithfulness is therefore: ‘how can you bear such a negative presence of God?’ Such faithfulness is only possible in your relationship with the Lord who prayed – yet without success – that the cup might pass by. For the will of God in this world is the way of death on the cross.²⁸⁴

7. COMMUNION

7.1 Christ: head of a cosmic unity

South Asian christologies often present Christ as the center of the cosmos.²⁸⁵ This idea of a cosmic Christ is linked biblically and theologically with notions from the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians. Christ is the Head of all.²⁸⁶ In Christ everything is gathered into one: all that is in heaven, on the earth and under the earth.²⁸⁷ In this way Christ becomes a cosmic principle of unity and movement.

The core of this body of thought can also be found in many theologies in the West, especially process theologians. That is no coincidence since Whitehead, the father of process theology, admittedly

²⁸⁵. For example, see Sarmatha 1970.
borrowed much from Indian philosophy. Moreover, some have argued for a kinship between modern physics and Hinduism.288

When the idea of the unity of the cosmos is linked with the idea of progress, a typical progress Christology appears. 289 Even if that is not the result, many questions nevertheless arise from the initial concepts. Because Christ functions here as a principle, Christology is to a large extent dissociated from the Person. Even if the concepts are developed with an eye to the present, they orient themselves more to the principle than to contemporary individuals. The human face of an individual easily disappears behind the façade of the cosmos that is so much larger than human society.

This is true for Christ as a person as well. It is too easily forgotten that the Christ of Colossians and Ephesians is the one through whom we have redemption through the blood of the cross, 290 bringing salvation from sins.291 Moreover, before all else, Christ is the Head of the church292 which is buried with Christ in baptism.293 In fact, both letters are critical of philosophies of unbroken unity that were quite popular in some Hellenistic circles of those days. The apostle maintains that everything has been split apart by sin. Only through the cross of Christ has a new union been established between Jews and Gentiles, between one person and another, and between God and humankind. Unity can only be found around the cross. 294

7.2 Unity around the cross

That is why a Christology that sees Christ connected to those who bear their crosses in this world is much more in line with the letters of the New Testament. An example is the Minjung-theology form Korea. 295 Minyung is like the ‘crowd’ of the New Testament, the poor people who have no voice in politics or the economy. Christ abides among them as the living Christ. The Korean poet Kim Chi Ha wrote *The Gold-Crowned Jesus*, a play about a beggar and a leper who turn

289. For example, see Jung 1993.
291. Col. 1:14; Eph. 2:1
293. Col. 2:12. Compare Eph. 4:5: the one Lord is connected with the one baptism.
to a statue of Christ wearing a golden crown. But the statue of cast concrete material does not answer. His stone mouth cannot speak. Some of Christ’s tears begin to fall only when the leper speaks of his own dire need. Then Christ speaks and says that the beggar released him from the concrete dungeon in which he was imprisoned by the institutional church and by all those who wished to see Christ wear a golden crown. Jesus says to the poor: it is you who have set me free. Christ comes to life in the embrace of the Minyung. The metaphor can be explained in two ways. Some authors seem to understand Christ to represent the people themselves. Because the crowds of the poor speak out, they set Christ free. Thus Christ becomes a principle that then becomes the subject of the people. This makes the connection to Jesus as a person of the first century in Israel rather loose and merely formal.

If the metaphor is interpreted as the liberation of Christ from an unrecognized identity, the connection with the actual Jesus is much stronger. Christ can no longer be recognized in the concrete Christ and the fossilized formulation of ecclesiastical structures. God’s presence is revealed in a whole new light only when and where discouraged people come to Christ. Only then it is really understood who Christ is, namely the Living One with a heart and a mouth that speaks words of comfort. Christ is the one who knows the tears of the sorrowful.

It is this Christ that matters in most of the theology of the poor. That is readily apparent from the many times that the Christ of the Bible is placed over against the Christ of dogmatics, or of the church. The intent is not to create one’s own Christ, nor becoming

296. I have followed the description of Song 1993 and Byung 1993.
297. For instance, Byung 1993: 170, who emphasizes Christ as a collective instead of a single person.
298. This is closer to the interpretation by Song 1993.
299. Nolan 1976; Oduyoye 1991: 13. See also Song 1993: 148: ‘The real Jesus is a matter of prayer and not a matter of dogma.’ This contradistinction of the living Christ and dogmatics can also be utilized to create a Christ of one’s own making and precisely thereby avoid being criticized. Especially in the nineteenth century that was common practice. To dismiss church and dogmatics can be just as spiritually arrogant as the claims to power are by that same church and its theology. Some sort of dogmatics as systematic theology is a necessity. Even those who appeal directly to the Bible create a new systematic theology by verbalizing their findings. Moreover, a confession of faith is not made in isolation but made together with all those in the present and in the past who have tried to put into words who Christ is. Good dogmatics always keeps an eye on the Christ of the Scriptures as the living Lord. Dogmatics can take the form of
the living Christ, but the desire is to meet the living Christ. That had become impossible by the fossilization of Christ that took place when people petrified the Lord because that gave more weight to their power.

Christ has been used in countless ideologies. Christ has been utilized in the exercise of power. Theologians of progress have used Christ. Christ has been used by the established order. Christ has been used by liberation theologians. Christ has been used by parents to infantilize their children, and by men to oppress their women. Christ has been used as cheap grace in order to avoid repentance. Wherever Christ was used, people managed to maintain their own selves and ideals. They felt strong enough to manage Christ. I think that my feelings of discomfort with many christologies can be traced back to this: Christ is being used, Christ is a means to an end. What is at stake is not Christ but our own self-interests. In such a case we are not dealing with love but greed.

7.3 Our situation

With the above reflections I have come to the circumstances in which Christ takes shape in our midst in our own time, having crossed the threshold of the millennium. I denote this situation with five words: oppression, guilt, anger, suffering and superficiality.

oppression
In the last few decades this theme has received much attention in theology. The inter-relatedness of the various forms of oppression and dependencies has increasingly been brought to light by these studies. Political repression, poverty, racism and sexism form a complex that – precisely because of its complicity – offers no opportunity for escape. For instance, political liberation of a group will not guarantee the liberation of women. Growing consciousness of women in the West ignores problems of women in Asia. Improvements take place in one place, only to see a collapse in another place. The oppressed of yesterday become oppressors following achieved changes. If a single thing has become clear in the twentieth century – the age that was touted as the century of progress – it is that there is no progress. Much has been

prayer (for example: Anselm, Prosl.; Augustine, Conf.) and a prayer can take the form of dogmatics. That does not mean it always happens, just as the church has not always been a place where the sorrowful could meet the Comforter.
achieved technologically, but morally no improvement has occurred. One hardly needs to have a big heart to be bewildered by all the things people inflict on each other and by what people have to suffer. When I read the newspaper it overwhelms me, and often I just scan the headlines. And the images on television are burned in our mind’s eye because they are so awful. There is no all-embracing view of history that can justify all of them or draw meaning from them. A baby with a face covered in flies, who lies next to its dead mother along the road in Rwanda, cannot and should not fit into a larger coherent whole. If it is to be part of a larger picture, it can only be that we view the baby lying there while a stream of refugees passes by. The tendency is to quantify the suffering of countless people by asking, ‘how many are dead?’ However, ‘two dead’ still merely renders a bare number, not to mention one hundred dead or even millions of dead. Yet the death of one dead person is qualitative, for now the corpse has a face. And it would be unbearable to know the faces of all the many dead, their history and their relationships. For it is already unbearable to know of even the one victim.

‘Oppression’ denotes this suffering. It refers to every woman, man and child individually, who leads a suppressed life. It means that someone powerful takes something from their life, and often takes much of their life, indeed takes their life itself, and more often takes even more than life itself by forcing upon them a manner of living that is no life. And the complexity of the situation is truly a conundrum. The one who oppresses is often a victim of earlier oppression, whether in the present or in a past that will not go away. Victims themselves engage in oppressing others, sometimes the very ones that oppress them.

This complicit tangle of suffering and the harm people inflict on each other determines the face of the twentieth century for me. What is most oppressive is that no escape seems possible from the vicious circle in which we are caught. The optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Enlightenment is absurd. In fact, its ideas often appear to be part of the repression, as we saw in the debacle of Vietnam in the sixties of the previous century. No one can dream any longer of a better world with any credulity.

guilt
The counterpart to oppression is guilt. It is the perspective of the perpetrator. We might wish that perpetrators always act fully aware in order that we can hold them accountable for their deeds. Yet all too
often they are well meaning, idealistic persons. Guilt is something that happens to us. We may want to act otherwise, but we cannot. Even at the very moment that we change something, we fall into a new trap. For instance, I could quit my job because I know that someone else would like to have it. But if I were to do that, I would conspire to feed the desire of another. Moreover, I would only do it because it makes me feel better, even superior to those who do not take such a step. Even so, both considerations make good excuses to not do anything at all. This example is insignificant compared to all the other things we have to struggle with. We know that our lives should be different, but we can not escape from the powers that dominate us. Those forces can be psychological in nature, or sociological, economical, political or cultural. We are held captive by all sorts of powers that make us feel guilty. Sometimes it is pointed out that our feelings of guilt do not matter but that our guilt ought to be made visibly concrete so that reparation is possible. However, I am fully convinced that I am guilty of more than I am aware of, and that much of what causes most of my guilt was done inadvertently. I am not aware how many victims I make. And even if I were fully conscious of it, what could I offer to undo harm and suffering? Even if I would never again fail my wife, that would not take away the pain of all the things I have put her through in the past.

The vicious circle of guilt that Paul describes in Romans chapter 7 is all too real, even for people in the twenty-first century: the good I wish I do not do, and when I want to do what is good, that what is not good appears.\textsuperscript{300} This is true for personal relationships, as well as with regard to world problems, everywhere and always. And those who think that they can rise above it by judging others, become the first ones to oppress others. By condemning someone else you admit to some form of familiarity in recognizing the act of the other; moreover, your condemnation is a put-down of the other. 'In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself.'\textsuperscript{301} No one escapes that lot. All have sinned. If we had not already learned it from Paul, no one can any longer be an optimist since Sigmund Freud.

When we look back at the end of the twentieth century we acknowledge that we exist in a world of complicit and implicit guilt that cannot be resolved. Here too, things will not be getting better tomorrow. Even if they did, we would not be able to undo our yesterdays.

\textsuperscript{300} Rom. 7:14-23.
\textsuperscript{301} Rom. 2:1.
anger
A situation of oppression and guilt renders us powerless. This powerlessness expresses itself in anger. It can be turned against ourselves through depression and neuroses. It can also be turned against others in violence. In the best scenario such anger is creatively applied to effect changes in the situation. All these three expressions are abundantly present in our day. The consultation rooms of psychiatrists and psychologists are much frequented. People can no longer carry on in their lives weighted down by the burdens of what they have repressed in their lives. Aggression is nowhere more terrifying than where the oppressed turn their anger on those who are even weaker victims. Poor African black women and their even weaker daughters could tell us about that. Too often, anger is directed to the wrong address. But even if it turns to the correct address, it destroys one’s own life. Aggression perverts your being. That is even true when anger is creatively used to bring about changes. Chung has said that the anger (han) of Asian women should be summoned to improve their situation.302 That is a positive initiative. Yet at the same time it damages people. It is threatening to me as a Western man, not because I am directly threatened by her, but because I acknowledge the roots of her anger within myself. She is right. And thereby she makes me even more powerless than I am already. Her anger multiplies within me and will seek an outlet in my life also. I have discovered that, just like aggression, even creative anger hardens us. It requires us to close off the deepest and most tender parts of ourselves. We have to deny our deepest longing for true communion with others. Thus creative anger destroys our life also. It may be the channeling of anger that is the least wrong but nonetheless it confirms our existence as lost and broken.

The twentieth century and the beginning of the new millenium is full of anger, sometimes visible, usually repressed and therefore even more powerless.

suffering
Not all suffering is caused by other human beings. However, we must allow that the harm of natural disasters is not of the same magnitude as that of moral evil. Yet we cannot ignore it, for it is not only part of what we face but in our day and age also of what we watch on our televisions. We hardly count the suffering of natural disasters any more. Eight thousand victims of an earthquake or ten thousand victims

of a flood are figures that hardly make the front page of the newspaper if it does not immediately affect our own society. Only when the numbers run into the tens of thousands does the coverage change. Meanwhile, another great evil afflicts people: contagious diseases. To the Western world these plagues are still on the margins of the news, but in Africa these diseases make the rounds in terrifying cycles. Zambia has a special program to build morgues everywhere solely to provide places to pile up the victims of AIDS. Tuberculosis and malaria are gaining ground against those who fight these diseases. From the African perspective, diseases are an evil that equals the evil of oppression. And again, these are interdependent, weaving together guilt and circumstances.

superficiality

The above paragraphs can be portrayed as gloomy and dispirited. Indeed, I am not an optimist. But how could I be one? Can one truly know oneself and be an optimist? Can one be an optimist when listening to a homeless person who has no place to put his head and who asks for a blanket for his pregnant wife who has to sleep outdoors? Can one be an optimist when one hears of all the kidnapped children? Can one be an optimist after reading about the fate of girls in Bangkok — and still claim to be a fellow human being, regardless of whether one is female or male?

Is it a wonder that we do not dwell on these things? For it is superficiality that is stronger than all the other aspects of evil at the end of the last century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Superficiality can express itself in many ways. Some people limit their existence in the world to their own kitchen and living room. Sometimes they seek diversion in sports. Many people don’t want to be bothered with any further problems or issues. Superficiality can also manifest itself in boundless optimism. Some people consider themselves to be quite good. Others think that the world is running reasonably well. Optimism can also have a religious face. That is true for liberal Christendom as well as for evangelical Christendom. In the first instance we are considered as doing not all that badly; in the second case at least the true children of God are good. This sort of optimism of progress is covered collectively in the blessing, ‘God bless America.’

The world suffers of boundless optimism. Perhaps that is a blessing, for the burden would be unbearable if everyone took everything seriously to heart. The superficiality of others leaves room for diversion. And my own superficiality allows me to take care of daily life.
However, too often it seems that superficiality is the surface of *nothing*. Nothing appears underneath; there is no depth where questions are churning and struggles are waged about the ultimate sense of things. It is as though people think that when the first question has been asked the last questions have been addressed as well.

The end of the twentieth century seamlessly moved into the new millennium. The face that the world shows is one that gazes at temporary goals and finds them sufficiently enchanting. Some consider further goals not achievable, others have never even cared to look to an ultimate goal. This superficiality is useful in keeping all other problems in check. At the same time, I have to go on record by noting that even if superficiality were not so pervasive, we would not solve the deeper problems. Human beings at the beginning of the third millennium are powerless.

### 7.4 Christ with the hopeless

Jesus is present in situations of powerlessness. He is not first and foremost present in order to change everything but to share in it. Jesus is present for those who are without hope and for those who hold no illusions.\(^{303}\)

Christ is with me to bear my stressed and oppressed life. Christ shares my sorrow and my loneliness. Christ is with me as an older brother, as a mother. Christ is not with me to represent any category of the world. Christ is not present as a male or as an Asian. Christ is present as a *human being*; and in that human being Christ is present as God. `The solidarity between the divine and the human in Jesus assures us of Christ’s solidarity with us, human beings. Christ is one of us and Christ is God, the source of our being.`\(^{304}\) Christ is present as ultimate love, calling us in a fellowship that makes everything else relative. Christ bears my life with its hopelessly entangled knot of guilt. Christ bears the anger that I feel within me, and bears my depression and aggression. Christ accompanies me on new paths of hope and is present when I am again disappointed by others and in myself. Christ is with me in illness and in facing death. Christ is with me when I move through life superficially. Christ prays: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.”\(^{305}\)

Christ is there. Christ could change everything, but doesn’t. Christ could destroy all oppressors, but doesn’t. After all, who could survive? Christ could make my life perfect, and not just my life but also that of others; yet it doesn’t happen. Christ could still my anger so it would become tender love, but allows it to toss and turn in my inner being. Christ could heal all the sick and bring all superficiality to an end. For the Lord is God. Yet Jesus elects to share our life. Jesus does not make us superman and superwoman, for God loves common human beings. Jesus does not solve all problems, for Jesus does not ask for a perfect world but for love. Jesus wants to be with us in our forlornness and our misery. For God is a God of human beings.

Jesus bears his cross amidst all the crosses we bear. It is the cross of humankind. Jesus does not bear it for himself but for us. For Jesus Christ is the Lord from heaven, without sin, without powerless anger, who sees all there is to see. Even so, because Christ Jesus bears the cross for us, he also bears it for Godself. For the Lord will not and cannot be God other than in just this manner. That means that God also takes responsibility for the cross. God takes responsibility for our suffering. God’s justice allows Godself to be sentenced to death with the cross as scaffold. For God takes responsibility for the woman who was tortured to death. Thereby God even takes responsibility for her husband who committed the crime. In righteousness, Jesus Christ is willing to be executed as one who is Lord of the executioners and who takes full responsibility. Christ Jesus does not pay the fine for the sin of the world because, after all, the resources of God’s grace are unlimited, but in order to take responsibility for that sinfulness. Jesus is sent by the Father into the world to make known the Name of the Father. That was his task. And his task is completed when he is hung upon a tree: the gallows of the cross. Thereto he was sent, and thereto he sends us to take responsibility for the guilt of the world. Collective guilt does not get distributed among the many but makes the guilt of the many my own. That is why we, bearing our cross, follow Jesus and die with him, baptized in his death. We meet each other at the cross of suffering and guilt, in communion with people who are expelled from the community, who have nothing left to

306. Compare Amos 5:18: one who thinks that God should put things in order may well be very surprised if God would actually do that.
share than what they are subjected to in the vicious circles of guilt and death.

Tillich has described the ground of being human as anxiety: anxiety before death, anxiety before guilt, anxiety before meaningless-ness. Christ enters our existence in order to share it. That does not mean that death, guilt or meaninglessness is taken away. Rather, it means that the anxiety regarding those things is taken away. Because Christ shares our life, death threatens us no more, even though our lives remain as finite as they were before. Guilt is no longer the same threat, even though none of our deeds of the past are undone. Meaninglessness no longer threatens us, even though everything we do is ultimately relative. Even if we do not call our forlornness anxiety but hopelessness, and even though other aspects of our situation have perhaps become more critical than the ones Tillich named, the significance remains the same. What matters ultimately is the loss of self. The threats to our existence overwhelm us and our selves are out of our control without being able to escape from the vicious circle. That is why the above threats essentially are all figures of death, the all-embracing category of not-being. Yet in that loss of self we encounter Jesus the Christ. It was horrible to be alone in our forlornness, with no one to turn to, least of all to ourselves. Our forlornness becomes most acute within ourselves. Yet when we face ourselves in that frightening way, we are touched by Jesus: ‘I am with you.’ When he was captured and everyone deserted him, he remained. And Jesus is with us when we are captured and everyone deserts us. Jesus is even with us when we flee from ourselves. For Jesus was, before I was, and will be after I cease to be. The Lord is God, the first and the last. Christ Jesus is the first and the last of my life and of the world.

When Tillich was confirmed, all confirmands had to choose a bible text. What text would this promising young man choose? Tillich chose Matthew 11:28 as an orientation for his life: ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’ That motto stayed with him all his life; and it is the motto of untold others who find rest in Jesus alone, tired of all the demands of activists of the left and of the right, tired of the moral pressure and demands of conformity, tired of enduring all the suffering and oppres-

310. Tillich 1952.
sion, ultimately tired of the self within. The story of Jesus began to speak to their situation in such a way that Christ took on a face as the living one who entered into the midst of their life. God comforts us with a love that surpasses the understanding of our mind but not our heart, a love that never deserts us, not even in and through our death, not even in the last judgement. For Jesus Christ is the last verdict on our life. That is the essence of the phrase that to be a Christian means that you accept that you are accepted.\textsuperscript{314}

We come together as a crowd around the cross. It is not a cozy get together. The cross is too eerie, especially to those who know what the cross is. We gather around the cross, scattered as we are around the whole world, running off in all directions in our fear and our guilt. And yet we know we belong to Jesus Christ; and in Christ Jesus we are linked to one another. This is where we meet: the rich white middle-aged man from the West and the angry Asian woman. We share our powerlessness, even when her anger consumes me, or because of it. And we are united with all people whose only hope is in Christ. We even know ourselves to be connected to all the superficial people, even though they shake off the world’s misery as a duck sheds water. Who am I to judge an other human being?\textsuperscript{315} My own misery gives me enough to deal with, and I am glad to meet someone else at the cross of Jesus who understands me without a need for many words. For the deepest friendship does not need words but knows nonetheless, just as we are known by Christ.

When we speak of the depth of our communion with Christ, the question of cheap grace always arises. We may well gather as lost sheep around the cross, but shouldn’t we go out and try to change something in the world? Of course, much needs to change; only those who have tried know how difficult that is. People meet one another at the cross because they limp or even have died of misery precisely because they have tried to change things and have failed. They are broken in the attempt to battle the evils they deplore. How could anyone ever think lightly about such evil? If there is only a mere chance to kick the head of a snake, you will not refrain from trying. We cannot find any more powerful fighters against evil than those who have been killed by the snake. If you have lost everything you do not have to cling desperately to anything. You do not have to prove anything to anybody because

\textsuperscript{314} Tillich 1952: 217-221.
\textsuperscript{315} Matt. 7:1; Rom. 14:4; James 4:11f.
you have no illusions. Even so, you know that the snake does not have the last word, for Jesus has tasted death because the ruler of the world had no use for him. Jesus knows and we know what the snake has brought about. Jesus is the wounded healer. Jesus is the Living one who died and who makes the dead come alive.
IV Christ and the Religions

1. The One Name and the Many Traditions

To emphasize that Christ is the true God in our midst, as we did in the preceding chapters, is to press home the question of what that means in relationship to the non-Christian religions. Does this heavy accent on Christology imply a rigorous exclusivity? It will not do to pre-empt the question by saying that exclusivity has no value. As we noted earlier, Christianity included exclusive traits from the beginning. It is not an a priori that we may not be exclusive. In countless scenarios the exclusion of certain options is generally upheld, such as the thesis that one should not kill to rob someone. We condemn anyone who is of another opinion on this even though they may never practice what they preach. Whether exclusivism is demanded in the case of the Christian faith will need careful scrutiny. If the answer turns out to be affirmative the nature of such exclusivity needs to be elucidated.

1.1 Comparing religions

The comparison of doctrinal systems is not infrequently on the agenda when discussing the manner in which religions should relate to each other. In this approach religions are considered a collection of ideas, expressed in concepts such as grace, obedience and unity of God. One then can look for agreements in doctrines. A well-known example is the doctrine of grace: many similarities are found between certain forms of Zen Buddhism and Protestant ideas on that issue.¹ In this approach, the more ideas look the same, the more the religions would be akin to one another.

Practically speaking, comparing religions on the basis of ideas is proving to be a precarious task. Saying, ‘Here is a notion that truly distinguishes Christianity from all other religions’ invariably results in finding an idea that functions differently elsewhere in one way or another. The same holds for Judaism in the midst of a Semitic religious culture. Finding similar occurrences of certain ideas would not be a reason to conclude that the religion of Israel is but a variation of an

¹ Ashizu 1989, concerning Shinran as a ‘Japanese Luther.’ Another example is the comparison of Krishna and Jesus (such as in Mohammad 1993).
amalgam of Semitic religions (that in turn belong to a larger network of religions). The religion of Israel has its unique identity, but it does not lie in the idiosyncrasy of its ideas, rites or statutes.

This approach overlooks the fact that much more is at stake in a religion than doctrinal systems. Religions affect the entirety of life, and many other elements besides rational concepts play a role. One might even argue that they play a relatively small role in religion. That means that a true encounter of religions hardly occurs on a conceptual level, and that a systematic discourse has little impact in such an encounter. It is life in its entirety that lies in the balance.

In order to acknowledge this reality I use the concept of ‘symbolic universum’. A symbolic universe is the entirety of experiences and thoughts that persons carry with and within themselves. It is the world as personally experienced, formed by impressions of the past and ever changing as new experiences and thoughts occur. Those experiences can be encounters with people, the observation of plants and animals, eating food, hearing stories, reading books, dreaming. It is the world in all its abundant variety as it displays itself to a person without and within. It will not be the entire world, for in any encounter more and other things present themselves than were experienced or recognized before, but it is the world as it is constituted for the person at that moment.

In such a symbolic universe the concept of ‘God’ can also find a place. There may even be a specific referent for that word. It could be an extraordinary experience, it could be the awareness of the entirety of experiences, or the notion that reality is infinitely greater than everything in my symbolic universe. Not all people carry the notion of ‘God’ with them in their symbolic universe. And the nature of that denotation can be very different. Therefore even the manner in which the language symbol ‘God’ is charged by experiences from one’s life can itself be vastly different.

If ‘God’ is understood in the manner of conceptual truths, communication along the lines of rational discourse will be quite uncompli-

2. Samartha 1993: 117 justifiably pleads for prominence of cultic, mystical and esthetic characteristics rather than a dominance of prepositional ones in religion. He does not want to ignore the prepositional aspects, but clearly opposes their central role.

Compare also Panikkar 1978:30-34, who posits that the inter-religious conversation is more than a theological symposium, and is certainly not a philosophical congress.

cated. However, as claimed above, the notion of ‘God’ rarely consists exclusively, or even mostly, of rational concepts. God has to do with feelings, with experiences, with relationships, with music, with dance, with smell and rays of light, with stories and sounds. Even when dealing with texts, the way they sound can be more important that their conceptual content. In the encounter with religions it becomes clear that there can be a significant overlap of people’s symbolic universes through the elements that constitute their religion. That is already the case when two believers of the same religion meet. In such a case there will be much that is recognized, but also some peculiar uniqueness will remain. No two Christians experience their relationship with God in the same way. The same symbols may even have a different function. There is always both recognition and peculiarity. The same is true in the encounter of believers of two different religions. They will recognize an experience of total surrender, or the call for justice and love. There will also be particularity that causes a Hindu in one country to experience the divine differently from a Christian in that same country.

As a rule, adherents of the same religion will have a higher degree of commonality in symbols and their functionality than adherents from different religions. That is not at all a matter of course, though. A Christian mystic may have a far greater overlap with a Buddhist mystic than with a very rationalistic Christian. We therefore can not use the degree of overlap to make a neat sociogram of believers. The salient characteristic of religions apparently does not correlate with the degree of overlap in symbols.

That is precisely why a great degree of openness to symbols of other religions is possible. They will only enrich our own symbolic universe. The more open our symbolic universe is, the richer our existence becomes and the more symbols we have to express what moves and motivates us, in religion as well. The encounter of religions can lead to a strengthening of each tradition, not by opposing one another but by being open to the richness the other has to offer.

What then is the uniqueness of a religion if it does not consist in the degree of uniqueness of the symbols? This question cannot be answered in a general way. For it is integral to the uniqueness of religions that the character of the uniqueness, as a revelation of ultimate concern, is experienced differently. The uniqueness of Christianity is

5. Sugirtharajah 1993:5.
that, from among all symbols, one is central in orientation for all the others: the person of Jesus. That means that a limited historical moment determines the core of the religion. Christianity is always concerned with Jesus as the Christ. Hinduism does not have such a central historical moment. The unique nature of Hinduism lies in experiencing the all-embracing reality of being itself as ultimate concern. It is this sort of difference in the very character of distinctiveness that makes the conversation between religions so complicated. Two religions with a strong historical orientation, such as Christianity and Islam, are more likely to understand each other. Yet the exclusivity of their historical events will also more likely cause them to stand over against each other than when a religion with a historical orientation encounters one with a pan-theistic bent. To the degree that Christians relativize the meaning of the historical person of Jesus for the sake of the totality of all actual and possible symbols, to the same degree the conversation with Hinduism will go more smoothly. Generally speaking, the inter-religious conversations will be more simple in proportion to the degree that the persons of Jesus and God are less directly identified. All this implies that the Christology I have developed, in which the historical person of Jesus is the one true God, puts a great deal of pressure on inter-religious conversations. I will have to give an account of my stance in such dialogue.

1.2 How unique is Jesus?

Panikkar distinguishes three ways to sketch the relationship of Christianity to other religions:

a. Exclusivity: the Christian faith is the only way to God.

b. Inclusivity: the way of Christ is the only way to God, but some people are on this path without being aware of it. They live according to the call of Jesus Christ in love and service to their neighbor and the world, but are not aware of this inspiration. They are not called Christian even though they live the life to which a Christian is called. They are anonymous Christians.

8. The most well-known theologian arguing this position is K. Rahner. Riesenhuber 1966 gives an analysis of it. See also Roper 1966 and Schreiter 1981. Küng 1976 also gives tribute to an inclusive point of view through his thesis that to be a Christian is the true form of being human (594) [ET %%%%].
c. Parallelism: Many paths go to God and humans can find their ultimate destination in many ways. The Christian faith is one of those paths. Panikkar finds all three dissatisfying, but the exclusivist one the most of all three. To him, exclusion in advance makes discussion with other religions impossible. This position can only be taken seriously in a negative way. Mutual influence is of crucial importance for Panikkar. That makes parallelism too non-committal. History shows it to be contrary to what actually happens. Religions emerge and grow by ongoing interference. He therefore prefers the term pluralism: several movements that are connected through a network of interaction and influences and that thereby together find the way.

Even though such schematic divisions oversimplify the complexity of reality, they are useful to indicate the main directions that various approaches take, and allow to sketch some fundamental positions. I will therefore utilize Panikkar’s classifications, replacing parallelism with pluralism as a more apt description.

An inclusive approach seems to me the least suited to do justice to healthy relationships of mutual respect. At first it may seem like a magnanimous stance of openness to others from the Christian side. However, magnanimity is exactly the problem. Not intended formally, but hidden as an essential presumption, it suggests that the Christian faith is the right path. Others are brought into the circle in order not to be seen as small-minded. Yet such inclusion betrays paternalism. It is also paternalistic because it presumes to know others better than they know themselves, even when they protest explicitly. The anonymous Christian is denied to be who she or he wants to be. This negation of the other is the exact opposite of the Christian attitude claimed as a basis for the notion of an anonymous Christian. It is precisely a Christian, of all people, who should accept others as they are and not negate them. To call someone else an anonymous Christian is not a Christian thing to do according to the very criteria of inclusivism itself.

A second problem is it seems to give the impression that religion is narrowed solely to actions, even though in reality religion is a much

more complex entity including confessional statements, rites, songs, and such.\textsuperscript{11}

In that line lies the objection that Christian faith has to do with the \textit{person} of Jesus Christ and that such faith cannot be limited to a theory about a manner of life. The entire approach is rooted more in a sense of the final meaning of life than in the question about the relevance of the meaning of Christ as personal presence. Christian theology cannot circumvent that question.

Pluralism presumes the universal importance of the transcendent final meaning of human existence. That is, being human finds its completion in the total integration of being itself toward which it is intended. In this completion it rises above the randomness that makes our action and life meaningless. Religions provide a way to discover this unity and to participate in it. They offer the possibility – and if all goes well the reality – of participation in the divine ground and destiny of all that is. Christianity is one of the possibilities of such participation in true being.

Pluralism is an option that obviously suits best the heavily plural societies in which various religious traditions have to coexist. Especially in India, connecting with ancient pluralistic traditions in Hinduism, a robust theology addressing this issue has been developed.\textsuperscript{12} This has found wide response in the Anglo-Saxon world. This is not only because of the pluriform culture of America, but also because classical ideas about civilization evolved into notions of a global culture in England of the nineteenth century that were in turn incorporated in modified form in America. In the same way that English is a global language, Anglo-Saxon theology and philosophy require a global theory.

Therefore, in my opinion, pluralism is not free of imperial traits. It shows similarities to religion in the Roman empire in which local gods were identified with Jupiter and Zeus, where, undergirded by Stoic philosophy, everything could find a place in a religion of a highest divine being that gave foundation and meaning to the world. In Indonesia this unity of the world configured in one divine being took shape in the notion of \textit{Pancasila} with its first principle maxim: ‘faith in the

\textsuperscript{11} The argument regarding ethics is the same as for propositions (see Samartha 1993: 117, and chapter note 2). In much of Christian theology ethical factors are even stronger than dogmatic ones.

\textsuperscript{12} For the political significance of unitive thinking see Samartha 1993: 108-110.
one exalted God. From this, a unity is created in the nation-state, based upon this unity of all in faith in one God. In this application, pluralism is nothing but a liberal variation of fundamentalism in which political motives are also closely tied to religion.

The problem with pluralism is that the presupposed unity is nothing but an idea. It is an abstraction beyond the historical mien of the religions. Even a religion that teaches such unity, such as Hinduism, cannot suspend the existence of its own historical boundaries. No one can guarantee that its idea refers to a concrete historical reality.

Moreover, this approach requires the inclusion of the entirety of reality, leaving no place for the ontological essence of evil. No separation is possible between good and evil. Even opposing components, such as light and dark, in fact shape up to be only complements within the one reality. From the perspective of time, any sort of resistance is a challenge to attain greater self-realization. That links easily with Western theology of progress and the Hindu idea that lack of realization of human destinies is not sin but avidya (ignorance). Here, deficiencies get in the way of perfection but are not fundamental fractures in the world. Such views keep things together but lack the notion of intrinsic good and evil.

It seems to me that thereby one of the fundamental convictions of the Christian faith is not taken into account, namely the radical abyss within the world and between the world and God. It does not do justice to the presence of God in Christ as paradoxical presence, neither to the distinction between finite and infinite, nor to the distinction between good and evil. Likewise, it does not do justice to the existential experience of the difference between executioner and victim. The negative is not merely negative: it is wrong.

Also along these lines lies the problem of underestimating the importance of the historical appearance of God in the world. In a superficial form of pluralism, the historical can evaporate into the idea of unity. This is avoided by more balanced models. There, unity consists of the union of all historical manifestations in their coherence by the propelling force that founds that very unity. In that sense one can say that Jesus Christ is unique. However, Jesus is unique in the same

13. Steenbrink 1995: 3 See also Darmaputra 1988: 146-194 for the background of this Pancasila notion.
14. Steenbrink 1995: 8 therefore speaks of the Pancasila as a 'civil religion.'
16. 'History concretizes the eternal' (Amaladoss 1993: 94), See also Richard 1981: 139.
way you are or I am: as one's own contribution to the whole. Therefore, Jesus is indispensable. But Jesus is indispensable in the same way that I am essential: without my own unique historical appearance the All would not be what it is. My moment may be smaller than that of Jesus and his uniqueness may reach further than mine, but the historicity of Jesus is not about absolute being itself. He is a way to God but not Godself. Jesus is a historical appearance precisely as the incarnate one, Samantha writes, and therefore must be distinguished from divine being itself.17

That is the reason that pluralist theologians usually make a clear distinction between Christology and theology. Christology is a means to theology. Speaking about Christ provides a way to speak about God. This is a theocentric Christology.18 Christ may be the way for Christians, but even so, Christians should not confuse the path with the destination. Among Christologies, pluralists prefer Christologies from 'below,' in which Christ is a historical, limited figure who testifies in his own unique manner to the unity with God.

This is why Amadoloss seeks a middle way between pluralism and inclusivism.19 For him inclusivism is too paternalistic and pluralism too non-committal. He finds a middle way by distinguishing between Christ and Jesus.20 Jesus is the historical person, Christ is the healing and unifying reality of God. Christ was made manifest in Jesus but is not limited to Jesus. This idea is comparable with the distinction that is made in the extra calvinisticum. What pertains to the divinity of Christ in the latter, Amadoloss refers to with the title 'Christ.' This view can be found also in the tradition of the early church. In the Johannine letters of the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the incarnation of Christ.21 A similar notion is found in the gnosis.22

At the level of history Christianity is connected to Jesus while on the transcendental, supra-historical level it pertains to the eternal Christ as salvation from God.23 This salvation reaches further than

20. Amadoloss 1993: 93-96. 'When we speak of the theological universality of the Christ we have to take in account the whole cosmic breadth of the action of Christ and not to limit it to its manifestation in the historical Jesus' (94). 'Jesus becomes the Christ in fullness in the process of salvation history' (96).
22. Hippolytus, Refut. VII.
historical Christianity. It includes other religions. This shows, that at
the supra-historical level we are dealing with inclusivism and at the
historical level with pluralism.24

In my view this distinction does not solve the problems. First of
all, it is essential to Christology that the supra-historical becomes
historical in a fully complete manner. Jesus is the total incarnation of
Christ according to John, and is therefore true God and eternal life.25
John is aware of the distinction and uses it critically to teach the com-
plete unity of both. Thus Amaladoss continues the line of the gnosis
rather than John.

Just as in pluralism, the notion of the cosmic Christ appears to be
an important pillar on which the argument rests. This concept espe-
cially is found in the background of the letters to the Colossians and
the Ephesians.26 Christ is the one who will gather everything into one
and will be the Head of all things. In these letters also, such notions
are used in a critical manner. Apparently, opponents speculated about
the unity of the All. The letters posit over against this that the unity of
everything is found in the crucified Christ. The chasm between God
and humanity was bridged through the forgiveness of sins in the blood
of Christ. The wall of separation is broken down. Therefore the cos-
mic is upheld by the historical, and not vice versa.27

Problems remain even if one accepts the distinction between Jesus
and the Christ. The transcendent Christ is essentially nothing but the
transcendental destiny always advocated by pluralism. Such pluralism,
even in the form of a simplified parallelism never intends a plurality
of destinies, but rather the exploration of one destiny along many
paths. All the objections to pluralism continue to exist. In fact, they
are augmented with those of inclusivism, as well; for example, why
should we entitle the supra-historical unity ‘Christ’? If one were to
choose a different name or title for ‘Christ,’ the effect of the distinc-
tion between Christ and Jesus would no longer provide an advantage
over pluralism. The model therefore does not as much offer a solution
as register the search for an answer.

We cannot escape the problem that religion is either a general
religion of orientation to the all encompassing divine being (in which
historical religions are no more than historical expressions of this

25. 1 John 5:20.
26. See e.g. Panikkar 1978: 82.
27. See Chapter III, section 6.1.
idea) or a historical configuration which itself teaches and lives out the unique way to or of God. Because the first notion itself is only seen in a limited historical configuration, it is not superior to the others. It cannot claim a supra-historical point of view but only a religion with claims upon truth besides others. Pluralism does not shrink the number of religions with ideas of supra-historical unity into one but increases the number with one more.

That takes us back to the historical configuration of Christianity as bound to the historical person of Jesus and to the question about Jesus’ relation to the other religions.

1.3 Christ as ultimate concern

The above makes it look like the third possibility – exclusivism – inescapable. Yet I cannot accept that position without further discussion. My problem with exclusion is not that it is ‘not done’ or politically incorrect in a global pluriform world. After all, it has quite a few proponents. The problems I have center around a few consideration of a general nature, and – more importantly – a number of intrinsically Christian thoughts. The Christian faith cannot endure a simplistic exclusivism. Thereby I do not mean to say that the Christian faith implies universal salvation. Tat assertion is also posited by the most radical revival preachers will affirm.

My first comment about exclusivism is that, as a rule, insufficient attention is given to the distinction between ‘ultimate’ and ‘all-embracing.’ Those who confess that Christ is their ‘ultimate concern,’ the last and deepest reality to which our existence is affixed, do not thereby confess that Christ is the absolute unity of all that is. It is about my relationship with Christ. My relationship in and of itself does not preclude relationships that others have with realities that are of ultimate concern for them. It may even imply that Christ is truly

29. For example, see Hick 1995.
30. Panikkar 1978: xvii correctly points out the danger of hubris by assuming a meta point of view regarding the concrete religions.
31. Compare Amaladoss 1993:89: ‘I am not talking here of the obvious pair – the Absolute (God) and the relative (the human person). I am, rather, talking of the absoluteness of faith as the commitment to the Ultimate and the relativity of its expression in religion.’ Thus the relationship with God as Ultimate is absolute without automatically implying that God is the absolute. Amaladoss does not deny that God is absolute, but that it does not logically follow from the fact that God is Ultimate. It merely reinforces that the relationship is absolute, ‘particularly because it is a relationship to the Absolute.’
worthy of my complete surrender. Thereby, it is not merely my faith and love that makes Christ my God; it is Christ’s reality that upholds my faith and love without claiming that no other kinds of relationship to God can exist. Christian thoughts about the Trinity and predestination bespeak a fundamental plurality in God’s being and how God relates to the world. This prevents an easy identification of the confession of Jesus as Lord and a philosophical doctrine of God as the one undivided being on whom all things depend. This is even stronger in the semi-dualist concept of the Satan.

With regard to pluralism, conversely, the relationship between ultimate and absolute means that – if we acknowledge that there is such a thing as the all-embracing unity of being as a final destiny – we can not regard Jesus as ultimate concern and at the same time avail ourselves of a many-path-model. If Christ is ultimate concern, then there can be no ultimate beyond this ultimate. Last has to mean last. It has been accurately stated that the confession of the divinity of Christ can not coexist with pluralism.32

A second problem is that exclusivism elevates itself to a supra-historic point of view in order not only to judge its own relationship with God, but also the relationship of others to God.33 It looks at the total picture of reality and judges the relationship of everything to the all-embracing being. It thereby makes the same mistake as pluralism and inclusivism: it wants to deliver a final verdict, even though that is impossible within the relativity of history. While there is every reason to trust in Christ as the one who carries us beyond the boundaries of historical existence, it does not follow that the believers themselves are able to survey the totality of what is.

That leads to an intrinsic Christian objection to exclusivism. Judgement is in the hands of God. When God is properly called LORD because we cannot think anything higher, we must acknowledge the limits of our knowledge. We do not have to judge in God’s stead. It is only God who judges me, Paul writes.34 I am not dependent on the judgement of another in what I know to be true in my conscience and heart; and even that is not the final arbiter of judgement: that is God alone.35 And who am I that I should pass judgement on the servant of

32. Richard 1981: 112f. ‘Now it has been claimed that Christology, at least since Nicea, has made Christianity one of the world’s great exclusive religions.’
33. Panikkar 1978: xv therefore speaks about the hubris of exclusivism.
34. 1 Cor. 4:3-5.
another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall, and not before me. 36 We must not judge those outside. 37 That is completely in line with what Jesus says: 'do not judge that you may not be judged.' 38 With the measure you judge you will be measured. 39 If you think you can make absolute claims then you will be judged by them. Such judgement will not go well for a limited human being. By judging another we often reveal a hidden uncertainty within ourselves, Paul writes. 40 Judging another by their lack of faith in fact condemns one’s own doubt. That befits the observation that exclusionists are often more preoccupied with their own faith and that of others than with the Lord who deserves their complete love and full attention.

That leads me to my own position, stated positively. As a boundary of the three approaches discussed, I would like to describe my position as unicism. The crux of the Christian faith is a unique relationship with a unique person. In this historical person we meet God. He is our ultimate concern. Samartha is right when he says that we do not take the incarnation seriously if we do not take the consequences of this historicity seriously. 41 In Christology we cannot make claims of absolutism. 42 That is true in a double sense: we cannot pass final judgement on others and we cannot identify Jesus with a final meaning of all that is. 43 Even the Son does not know about that hour and that day. 44 God

36. Romans 14:4; compare James 4:12.
37. 1 Cor. 5:13.
40. Rom. 2:1
42. The impulse to connect religion with the absolute is pervasive. That is completely contrary to the notion of the incarnation as the appearance of God in the historical, contingent reality. Usually there is no objection if the incarnation is only presented as the one manifestation of the divine being. That the historical might be Godself however, is counter to the usual concept of God. From that perspective the Christians in the early church were already called atheoi, atheists. To the Roman state as a unitive force, bolstered by an umbrella religion, the position of Christians was threatening. Religion was a factor of power in the state. Fascist regimes always show a tendency to seek roots for their state and culture in a religious realm (compare Classen 1929), whether by excluding minorities (as in Nazi-Germany or under the apartheid rule in South-Africa), or by inclusion on the highest level (such as in the Roman empire or neo-colonial America). Whoever does not want to place what is regional under the umbrella of greater unity does not only threaten religious but also political unity. Thinking about religion in terms other than of power is ignored.
43. In the end Samartha does connects Christ again with an encompassing unity (1993: 108).
can not be known other than within the limitations of the temporary existence of what is begotten.\textsuperscript{45}

This also means that we cannot have a discussion in order to prove, or even make plausible, that Jesus is God indeed. At the beginning of this book it was maintained that we confess Jesus as Lord because we know ourselves to be addressed by him. It is not an indicative or imperative but a vocative case. In order to prove this confession, a verification point would be required great enough to render a verdict. That would preclude Jesus from being God from the outset, because the verification point as highest ideal would be God, leaving Jesus only as possibly the best mediator.

Other discussions center on questions such as which religion contributes the most to peace, to well-ordered societies, or to liberation. The question presupposes an instrumental meaning of religion instead of understanding religion as an orientation to a final good. Such discussions make peace, society or freedom themselves a divine principle, a highest good by which all religions are measured.

It is Godself who proves God as an ultimate concern in our lives. That is so not on the basis of deliberations but is self-evident. I do not believe because logic dictates that I should, but only because the appeal by Jesus has touched me in the most profound way. There is not any higher reason by which that can be judged. Thus, I do not believe because I must, but solely because Jesus addresses me.

This is not merely true for me but for others as well. If I had to tell others that they must believe in Jesus then my words would be decisive. To say to others that they must believe is just as useless as to say to them that they must love. You don’t love someone because you have to. One who speaks about love that way betrays that he or she does not understand what love is. One who speaks about faith that way has not yet understood what faith is. One who speaks about religion in such a manner does not yet understand what religion is. This exposes the error of exclusivism: to bring faith before others as an imperative. This is only possible if you experience your own faith in that manner. However, faith does not spring from an imperative but from the vocative presence of symbols in stories and persons that impact us ultimately – embedded as those symbols and stories are in the entire complex of possibilities of which a religion consists.

\textsuperscript{44} Matt. 24:36; Marc.13:32.
\textsuperscript{45} Compare John 1:18.
We believe that Jesus saves us because our lives are touched. That salvation does not depend on our faith but on the fact that Christ bears our unbelieving existence. We are not saved by our faith but because Godself shares our human existence. That is the final orientation of our life.

To live as a Christian is to live with the person of Christ, joined by the love that bears our humanity. To others I only have to testify of it. We speak of Christ in the same way we speak of someone who means everything to us. We speak to Christ as one in whom we place our ultimate trust. That is an invitation to others. It is not coercive. It is more like contagious enthusiasm. Such enthusiasm is not limited to words but is expressed in an attitude of service to others. Likewise, I am fully willing to listen to enthusiastic stories of others that will enrich my life. I hope that others experience in their religion the freedom and joy that an existence in Christ provides. I cannot really imagine that, because then I would deny my relationship with Christ. Yet I do not have to judge others. I can only share with them.

That is the mission of the church: go and tell all peoples and make disciples. The mission is not the sharing of imperatives in the name of the Ruler, but proclaiming the liberating word that the Lord bears our lives; as sinful, as condemned, as ignorant and as suffering they may be. It is about gospel, good news, glad tidings. It is a good word for the disenfranchised, but foolishness for the righteous, the judges, the worldly-wise and the successful in the world. With them I feel inadequate and lame, and — having died to the world — not at home. The conversation with believers from other traditions would be hampered if the result of that conversation has to be a compromise. It is also impeded if the conversation partners jointly must conclude which religion is best. Yet there is no speech impediment at all if the

46. Samartha 1993: 116 correctly says that an invitation can only be genuine if there is not threat. In my view that does not have to be true in situations of dialogue alone, but can also take the form of a 'one-way proclamation,' provided it does not have the characteristic of an imperative. If Samartha intends to say that we must be open to one another, I fully agree.
49. In the discussion about the question whether the church exists for mission or dialogue, I expressly choose mission. However, I make clear that any notion must be dismissed of a supra-historical position that would allow a judgement about those to whom the message of Christ is addressed, whether explicit or implied. The concern is purely about proclaiming what moves our hearts.
50. Matt. 28:19.
conversation intends to mutually enrich one another with symbols in which we experience our faith, and if we bare our hearts to speak of those things that are closest too us. We then leave one another completely free because we know that faith cannot be forced by violence. If violence and violation were to happen, it would not be about faith but about misuse of religion for political ends.\textsuperscript{51} Samartha correctly says that religion is not the cause of war in religious wars but an instrument of those who abuse it.\textsuperscript{52}

2. JESUS AND ISLAM

2.1 A special relationship

From a Christian perspective one cannot speak in the same manner about Islam as, for instance, about Hinduism or Buddhism. The kinship between Christianity and Islam is far greater and demands separate reflection.\textsuperscript{53} Both religions have a monotheistic doctrine of God and a personalist understanding. Both have their roots in the Semitic world. Both are wed to a historical person who acts as a mediator of God's Word to human beings. Moreover, Islam from its beginning repeatedly and explicitly addresses the relationship to Jesus who is honored in the Koran.

Another aspect of the relationship is the fact that, unlike other world religions, Islam (in its explicit form at least) came into being after Christianity did. That makes it impossible to see the relationship between the two religions as an evolution through time with Christianity as the culminating point. Such a view was not unheard of, especially in the nineteenth century. Some who still try to rank Christianity as the highest form of religion cannot use arguments from chronology but rely solely on internal qualities. However, to measure this quality one must determine a criterion. This therefore subjects faith to a higher authority, such as its humane character (however defined). Thereby, God is not the final arbiter but another criterion. Whomever wants to rate religions on a scale and proclaim their own as the best

\textsuperscript{51} Samartha 1993: 108.
\textsuperscript{52} Samartha 1993: 108, with a quote from A.A Engineer. 'Bombay – Bhiwandi Riots in National Political Perspective' in Economic and Political Weekly 1984: 1134f.
(otherwise one would likely choose the better one) disqualifies that religion from the outset: again, to pose something (a principle or quality) higher than God is idolatrous. Since the time factor is not valid either, no Christian can rightly argue that Christianity surpasses Islam. Such an opinion could only be confessed as one’s own conviction, and not from reasoned arguments but as response to the appeal upon human beings by God in Christ Jesus.

2.2 God is great, merciful and gracious

If we want to know what Islam is about we must listen to their best representatives. Often Islam is portrayed as fundamentalistic, repressive both internally and externally, aggressive and a threat to the world. Just look at what the media report. Measuring Christianity along the same lines shows a similar picture through the centuries. The only way to be fair to both is to look at the deepest intentions and the richest expressions of believers as well as the carefully formulated respective theologies.

When we do the latter it is obvious that much of Islamic literature is kindred to much of Christian writings. That is especially true for the doctrine of God. God is great. God is the Creator of all that is. God is not a fatum, determining everything. With frequent repetition the Koran says that God is the merciful one and the gracious one. That is indeed the experience of the faithful Muslim. God, as a merciful Father, provides for humanity. God’s mercy is even greater than a mother’s caring concern for her children. Even if we sin, as long as we return to God, we are met with God’s grace and forgiveness. While we slowly stumble toward God, God rushes to meet us. The presence of so much suffering in the world should not be blamed on God but rather should cause us to look at our own sloth in properly using the abundance of gifts God has given us. If someone goes to hell, it is of their own choice not be without God. This is not an arbitrary judgement of a dictator but does justice to what people chose themselves.

Everything said by classical western Christian theologies about God is also said in Islam. The Pakistani Ahmadiyah-Islamitic theologian Zia Ullah wrote a book about God. It is surprising how much of

its content reads like similar classical Western works such as the Confessiones of Augustine or the Prologion of Anselm. Christology hardly plays a role in these two works by Christians. The focus is the greatness and goodness of God with regard to creation. If on a Sunday morning a reading from Zia Ullah's book would be offered, I do not think that people in many churches would notice that it came from an Islamic author and they would be edified by it.

The considerable agreement of many Christian and Muslims about the doctrine of God is true for liberal Christians but possibly even more for orthodox Christians who espouse a strong doctrine of providence. The Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism could be an Islamic text. 'Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hands, heaven and earth and all its creatures, and so rules them that ...all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand....We can be patient when things go against us, thankful for when things go well and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.' Such a Christian text also emphasizes that we do not live by fate but that the love of a caring Father upholds us.

Without Christology, the theology of Islam and Christianity are not essentially distinct. For many Christians, Christology is but an appendage to their daily experience of faith. Listening to sermons, and even more to expressions of believers I encounter in pastoral work, I would be led to believe that no serious obstacles would prevent a merger. The religious existentialism of Christians in the West has been nurtured by the Confessiones. Too often we forget to place Augustine in a North-African Semitic context, with its strong accent upon the almightiness of God and the dependence of human beings. It has the same background as Islam and shares the same sensibility in religious experience.

The close relationship between Christianity and Islam with regard to the doctrine of God was even more strengthened in the Middle Ages, both through direct contacts between Christians and Muslims,

58. See Frend 1952: 230f. e.g.: 'Augustine was first and foremost an African' (230). Compare also Lepelley 1986-1994: 182. In the year 389 Augustine upbraids Maximus Madaurensis in a letter for denying his Punic background and forgetting that he is an African writing to Africans, because 'we are both shaped by Africa' (MPL 33: 83).
as well as indirectly through Islamic interpretations of Aristotle. The scholastic expositions of God as the absolute One, and the reasonableness of God’s relationship with the world, can not be understood without taking these influences into account.

2.3 Jesus

The tide appears to turn as soon as we speak about Jesus.\(^{59}\) However, we have to proceed taking many nuances into account. On the one hand, a Muslim will not agree with a high Christology, but on the other hand he or she certainly will not dismiss Jesus either. The Koran speaks repeatedly about Jesus in quite loving ways, ascribing high titles to him. He is ‘worthy of esteem in this world and the hereafter and is one of those near to God.’\(^{60}\) He is led by God, a prophet, God’s apostle, messiah.\(^{64}\) God elevated Jesus into His presence.\(^{65}\) For many Muslims the virgin birth of Jesus is less a problem than it is for many Christians.\(^{66}\) It is mentioned explicitly and implicitly in the Koran.

The Islamic reflections on Jesus can be maximized or minimized. At a minimum, Jesus has titles as of a prophet who does not play a particularly important part in daily religious life. His role may be compared to Jeremiah in Christianity: he is one of the great prophets but for their edification people generally would not first turn to a text from the book of Jeremiah. Some try to maximize Jesus’ role in Islam. Zaehner has argued that what the Koran says about Jesus can be traced back to a Nestorian Christology, which taught that Christ is God and human without maintaining the unity of the person. According to Zaehner loose sayings can be found about both the divinity of Christ

59. For literature see Malik 1993; Parrinder 1966; Rudvin 1978; Zaehner 1958; Zwemer 1912.
60. Sūrah 3,44. The English translation of (the meaning of ) the Koran is by Marmaduke W. Pickthall as published in the 1992 edition (revised) of Everyman’s Library,
61. Sūrah 6,86.
62. Sūrah 2,136; 4,163; 33,7.
63. Sūrah 4,171; 5,75; 61,6.
64. Sūrah 3,44; 4,171; 5,17; 5,72; 5,75; 9,13.
65. Sūrah 4,158, compare 3,54.
67. Sūrah 3,44-46.
68. Sūrah 4,156.
and the regular humanity of Jesus. This overlooks the fact however, that such sayings concern the negation of the divinity and the affirmation of the humanity of Jesus. Usually such options are more inspired by what one wants to find than by the reality of the actual religious life. A level-headed attitude seems desirable: Jesus is a special prophet in Islam and as such teaches us the way of God. A similar level-headedness is needed in Christology. It will not do to suddenly accord emphasis on Christology when speaking to Muslims if outside that conversation the faith does not reach much beyond what is stated in Lord’s Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Likewise, the special meaning of Jesus should not be diminished for the sake of a conversation with Muslims. Cross and resurrection are simply too important for Christians. It does not make sense to agree on a minimalist level with Muslims if the reality of faith is otherwise.

In the attempt to structure the discussions between Muslims and Christians three approaches can be observed:

a. some, such as Zaehner, are trying to value the meaning of Jesus to the highest degree.

b. some are trying to relativize the meaning of Jesus in Christianity. It is striking that it is not rare for Western Christians to do this on the very issues that are of less relevance to Islam. In that case, that what is intended to serve a better understanding is itself founded on misunderstanding the other. This is the case when, for the sake of the inter-religious conversation, special moments in the life of Jesus are explained away, such as, for instance, the virgin birth, the miracles Jesus did, or the resurrection. 70 Such action testifies more to the problems the West has with these accounts than Muslims do. For them, since Jesus is a prophet, the performing of miracles, and a virgin birth are not problematic. Likewise, the resurrection is less problematic than the death of a righteous man.

It is not problematic for Islam to see Jesus as an expression of what it means to truly being human in obedience to a divine calling. To me, the Christological notions that underlie a Christian inclusivism in which Christ in the name of God actualizes in this world the true living before God, seem, on that score, to make possible an Islamic confession of Jesus. The paths diverge only when the bearing of guilt and the divinity of Christ enter the picture.

70. For instance, see Montgomery Watt 1983: 101-104.
c. some are trying to demonstrate that in regard to Mohammed a similar movement was or is taking place in Islam as took place in Christianity regarding Jesus, who gradually over time was pulled into the realm of divinity. Indications of such movements can indeed be observed.\textsuperscript{71} It does injustice to Islam, however, to say that it is all about deification of Mohammed. It is rather the case that Islam seeks to advocate his exceptional meaning as a prophet who mediates God’s will to us. If a comparison with Christianity needs to be made on this score, it should be done with Mariology. Mary has a most honorable place because Christ came into the world through her and because she devoted her life in service to this end. She can be greatly exalted and receive the most elevated titles. In popular faith she sometimes is venerated to such an extent that she seems to be entirely in the sphere of God. Yet no Christian theologian will say that Mary is God. Likewise, no Islamic theologian will say such a thing about Mohammed.

In essence, such accommodations or accentuations do not do justice to either religion. They do not foster the sort of true conversation\textsuperscript{72} that is best served by sober level-headedness. Theology must give voice to what is truly believed. Caricatures or simplifications should be cleared up as much as possible; they should not be created, albeit in an opposite direction.

Moreover it should be clear that even though closer approximation is possible, this does not mean that the religions are one and the same. This applies to Christology, or to the discovery that some Muslims have a higher Christology than many Christians, or to the observation that the latter have a doctrine of God that does not differ much from classical Islamic confessions. Much mutual understanding has been gained in the fundamental confession of God. Yet true agreement between believers is not primarily found on the level of conceptual cognition but lies in religious recognition. The deepest level is a mystical experience that can be one and the same. Usually this consists of the entirety of religious rites, prescriptions and expressions. It is in all these together that religion is ‘sensed’ the most. Unity is found in the unity of religious life. Therefore, even when one recognizes unity in diversity, history appears to play an important role. For the name at

\textsuperscript{71} See Malik 1993: 78, who discredits its validity, by the way.

\textsuperscript{72} See Malik 1993: ‘But these interpretations and apologetics have not gone very far, except to give a little confidence to Christians that their religion is not as bad as the Muslim depicts.’
the center of a given religion is not inter-changeable: even if we were to give a similar description of Jesus and Mohammed, and their function in the two faiths were somehow identical, they would remain two different persons. It is not possible to have two equally central mediators of the mystery of God. After all is said, a choice must be made.73

2.4 God who bears the sins of the world

In an earlier chapter we argued that Christ is not as much a representative of true humanity or the human mediator of God’s Word, but that Christ is Godself in a historical human form, devoted unto death. In my view, here lies the essential difference with Islam. Here we are not only concerned with rites, prescriptions and expressions, but the doctrine of God itself is at stake. The confession of Jesus who was crucified and died as God is an insurmountable problem for Muslims. Perhaps even the Trinity is not the most sensitive trigger point.74 For with some effort, one could find in the Islamic doctrine of God something akin to a certain differentiation in God in divine names and attributes, without fashioning an explicit trinitarian doctrine. Much more critical is the incarnation, and thus the economic trinity. The Christian faith is not about a human being who became God. That is blasphemous in Christian theology as well. It is about God becoming human. That is at the heart of Christian theology and that is for Islam a blasphemy. For, according to the latter, it demeans God. God is great; great in power and great in mercy. The mercy of God cannot be doubted, but that God would become visible in a human being and would die — it is impossible.75

The reason for his death — bearing the guilt of the world — is impossible also. Islam does not know the idea of a substitutionary bearing of guilt. It simply is not necessary. For God is the merciful One and the gracious One who is always willing to forgive any sinner who comes to Him. God forgives totally and demands no satisfaction.76 To

73. That is true, for example, in Küng 1984 who is most respectful of the uniqueness of religions, but in final analysis is unwilling to return to pre-Enlightenment and Hegelian modes, and therefore holds the conversations on the basis of a doctrine of God that in its orientation is entirely colored by Western liberal Christianity. Leuze 1994 proceeds more carefully, but along the same line.
Christians sin has a different meaning: sin brings about another reality, of guilt, of death. There is no escape from that reality. Zia Ullah says something similar about the judgement to hell of the godless; namely, that God does not punish arbitrarily but leaves them in the reality in which they have placed themselves. In Islam people can always repent, however. Christianity is less optimistic about that because the proscription of evil is so far reaching that no escape is possible. It is only because Godself bears it and participates in our lost existence that we participate in God.

The difference is not only in the doctrine of God but also in anthropology. Both God and human beings are much more deeply involved in the realm of life perverted by sin. In fact, this difference in anthropology relates directly to the doctrine of God. That Islam is more optimistic about anthropology has everything to do with their understanding of the goodness of God who, as the magnanimous One, offers to humans all space and every opportunity for right living, calling them away from other choices and willing to receive them back.

To me as a Christian, God and humans are much more compromised by evil. That means that God has no clean hands. The plaint of Job concerning the governance of our existence is real. It involves God in suffering and guilt. In Christ God bears that explicitly. Therefore, according to the Christian faith, it is not enough for God to send a prophet to heal human beings from unbelief, but Godself has to come to bear their lost lives.

2.5 Living together

Within the doctrine of God lies an unbridgeable chasm between Islam and orthodox Christianity. That is not the same as saying that they cannot coexist very well. It is not necessary to enlarge the religious abyss with all sorts of other political, social, economic or even military chasms. Such intensifications of differences are unholy – in every sense of the word.

It is quite possible to live well together as Christians and as Muslims. Because both religions write justice and righteousness high on their banners, they have much in common. A just society is highest

good for both. Many of the conflicts between Islam and Western societies spring from experiences of injustice. It should be clear to (post)-Christian Western nations that we should strive together with the Islamic countries to achieve national and international justice between humans and peoples. However, that means that we must be willing to look at the injustices we commit and perpetuate.

Faith in one Creator of all that is (a faith shared by both Christians and Muslims), can also be a healing factor. In this, Pancasila is correct. Only one God created us all. I therefore am not allowed to harm another who belongs to God, and certainly may not kill. And together we are called not only to treat with care and love the world of God in which we live but to protect it from pollution and ruin. We are called to tend the beauty of creation in praise of God.

We could also give each other full space and freedom to exercise our respective faith. ‘Islam’ means ‘submission’; true submission is a calling for all of us: a life completely dedicated to God. Before we call one another to conversion to an other religion it may be more meaningful to call each other to task concerning conversion within our own respective religion. Do you truly live in submission to God, the merciful and gracious one? Do you truly live with Christ who gave his life to bear the life of others? Do you really do justice to the justice of God as confessed in your own religion?

We cannot force each other into faith. Where that is tried, faith in God is essentially denied, whether Muslims or Christians do it. For God does not ask for the semblance of submission, but requires total love and desires submission of our entire life. That can never be compelled by violence. To demand by force faith in God, damages knowledge of that God. The oppressed will understand your God as a demanding God who harms people. Demonstrating a life lived out of the love of God gives people food for thought about God. Faith becomes winsome when it expresses the love of God in life-style and by story telling. That cannot be forbidden for it is precisely the expression of faith. In that sense mission and faith (as submission) always belong together. This is true not only for Christianity but also for Islam.

It remains to be said that extortion by force can happen in many ways. It can happen through a holy war and also by social, economic and political repression. Cultural repression encroaches the most, because religion is extremely sensitive to culture. Usually repression

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78. Malik 1993: 79. See also Slob 1994 and his summary of important Islamic thinkers who are engaged in a more just and righteous society.
in one realm causes a reaction elsewhere. I think that Crusades as well as current Islamic fundamentalism have to do with that dynamic. Cultural pressure flows through open channels of human communication and renders powerless those who are suppressed. This powerlessness expresses itself in an anger that can be channeled into a holy war; it is holy precisely because that what is most holy – our faith – is being defended.

3. JESUS AND ISRAEL

Jesus has a special relationship with Israel. The relationship is of such a nature that, with regard to Christianity and Judaism, we must ask whether we can properly speak of two different religions. Without Israel, the meaning of Jesus cannot be understood. Jesus is the Christ: the Messiah of Israel. That means that a Christology is not complete unless Israel is discussed. A theology of Israel is not an optional subject in dogmatics (usually skipped) but belongs to Christology, and thus to the very heart of the confessing faith.

Precisely because this central meaning has been rediscovered fairly recently, I hope to write a separate study about this topic. It should be seen, however, as integral to the present book.
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1. SHINING MORE LIGHT ON SOME CONCEPTS

ACTUS PURUS – (Latin, ‘pure act’) the notion that no passivity rests in God.

ADOPTIANISM – a church movement that teaches that Jesus, as a human being, is adopted as Son of God; most often this adoption is related to the descending of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism.

ANHYPOSTASIS – (Greek) the idea that we cannot speak about Jesus as human separate from the incarnation of the Word. Jesus’ human nature has not a hypostasis (‘underlying concrete existence’) of its own, but derives it from the person of the Logos.

APOCALYPTIC – a body of thought that assumes that God shall return (soon) to intervene definitively in the world, after which judgement shall be rendered upon all human beings. Most often this coming of God is portrayed through a scenario of catastrophic events that preceded and surround it.

APOPHATIC – (Greek) a way of speaking about God in which nothing is definitively posited, but only indicated, especially in terms of what it is not (contrary to a kataphatic expression).

APOKATASTASIS (PANTOON) – (Greek: ‘the resurrection of all things’) the entire creation, demons included, at long last shall be saved and reach the destiny intended by God.

ARIANISM – notions in line with those of Arius (about 250-336, presbyter in Alexandria), who saw in Christ, as the highest of all creatures, the one in whom God’s will was brought to complete expression, without being God.

ATHEOI – (Greek, ‘the godless’) a reproach upon the Christians (and Jews) in Hellenism because they did not worship the gods and images that served to signify beings of the highest order. This stance broke with a culture of religious solidarity.

AUTOPISTIC – the notion that Scripture should not be believed because the Church says so, or because of any other external reason, but solely because Scripture presents itself to us as God’s Word.

BEKENNENDE KIRCHE – (German) communion of Christians in Germany who broke with the German Christians that greeted Hitler as a gift from God.
CAPPADOCIANS – a group of theologians from Cappadocia in Asia Minor at the end of the fourth century. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianza are especially known as such. They laid the foundation for a type of theology that builds a bridge between orthodoxy and philosophy.

CHRISTOLOGY FROM BELOW – a Christology that begins with Jesus' humanity.

CHRISTOLOGY FORM ABOVE – a Christology that begins with the incarnation of the pre-existent Son of God.

CHRIST PANTOKRATOR – (Greek), Christ as Ruler, to whom all power has been given.

COMMUNICATIO IDIOMATUM – (Latin) the exchange and sharing of attributes of both natures in Christ, making it possible to speak of God's suffering, or of Jesus as human miracle worker.

DEMYTHOLOGIZE – to purge faith from mythic representation. Currently usually understood as a call to translate the myth in modern categories.

DOCETISM – the idea that Jesus must have had only an apparent body, or that otherwise the eternal Son of God could not be identical to the Crucified.

EBIONITES – Jewish-Christian movement at the beginning of Christianity, with special attention to Jesus as a righteous and law-abiding Jew.

ECONOMICAL TRINITY – the notion that the Trinity is only valid for the order (the economy, Greek oikonomia) of salvation in God’s saving relationship with the world, but will cease in the eschaton when Christ will return Kingship to the Father. Condemned at the council of Constantinople (381).

ENHYPOSTASIS – (Greek) the positive side of anhypostasis: the human nature of Christ receives his underlying concrete existence (hypostasis) in the person of the Logos.

EUTYCHIANISM – a form of mono-physitism, claiming that the human nature of Christ was subsumed into the divine and became one nature.

EXCLUSIVISM – the idea, in the relationships between the religions, that only one’s own religion brings salvation.

EXTRA CALVINISTICUM – the notion that the divinity of Christ remained ubiquitous even after the incarnation.

FIAT-DOCTRINE – a doctrine in Roman-Catholic theology that Mary’s permission was necessary for the incarnation of Christ, just as
in faith the concurrence of the human being is necessary. Derived from Luke 1:38.

**Fides Quaerens Intellecutum** – (Latin, ‘faith seeking understanding’) faith is not founded upon reason, but wants to be understood by reason.

**Filioque** – (Latin, ‘and of the Son’) according to the Western tradition, the Holy Spirit does not only proceed from the Father, but from the Son as well.

**Genetive Theology** – a theology that is developed from a specific context and serves a specific goal, e.g. feminist theology or liberation theology.

**Gnosticism** – a spiritual movement in which the human spirit is seen as a moment of the eternal divine Spirit, and thus temporarily abides in inferior matter from which it needs to be saved.

**God Beyond God** – the notion that the true God exceeds all representations of God. It holds that the true God does not coincide with theistic images of God that arise out of revelations.

**High Christology** – a Christology that emphasizes the divinity of Christ.

**Homoiousios** – (Greek) of the same being (as the Father), in which ‘being’ is understood as ‘nature’, a self.

**Homoousios** – (Greek) of the same being (as the Father), in which ‘being’ is understood as a concrete identity.

**Hyposasis** – (Greek) a form of appearance of one’s underlying concrete existence. Often synonymous with ‘person’, albeit understood in the same literal vein, as ‘mask’, and not understood in the modern sense of willful subject. Note that a tree or a table is also a hypostasis or person. For Alexandrian theologians ‘hypostasis’ is also identical to *ousia*, and sometimes to *phusis* (nature) as a personal identity.

**Inclusivism** – the idea in the relationships between the religions that people of other religions who live according to Christian principles are Christians in an anonymous manner.

**Kairos** – (Greek, ‘time’, as an event or moment); a point in time that offers chances, choices and decisions.

**Kataphatic** – (Greek) a way of speaking about God in a positive formulation about God and God’s attributes (in contradistinction to ‘apophatic’).
KENOSIS – (Greek, ‘emptying’) the notion that the Son of God put aside his divine attributes in order to become human. Derived from Philippians 2:7.

LOCUS PROBANS – (Latin, ‘place of proof’) prooftext in the Bible for a dogmatic or ethical assertion.

LOGOS – (Greek) originally a personification of the Word of God or the reason of God. Therefor: God’s highest thought and the ground of Creation. In Christology, usually understood as pre-existent person originating with God and as such identified with the Son of God who became flesh. The Logos-Christology is the usual type in orthodox theology.

LOGOS ASARKOS – (Greek, ‘Logos ‘unfleshed’) the pre-existent Logos prior to incarnation.

LOGOS SPERMATIKOS – (Greek, ‘Logos as seed sower’) the notion of Justin Martyr, in which the Logos sows fragments of wisdom among the peoples.

LOW CHRISTOLOGY – a Christology that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus.

MARCIIONITE – following Marcion (middle of second century) by making a distinction between the God who created the world and the Father of Jesus Christ. A modern form often denies that God is almighty, in order to allow one to continue to see God as pure love.

MESSIANIC SECRET – a phrase derived from the prohibition of Jesus, according to the Gospel of Mark frequently repeated, to speak of the healings He performed.

MILENNIARISM – a doctrine of a thousand-year reign: a period within earthly history in which a peaceable Kingdom shall be established under the reign of Christ. The notion is derived from Revelation 20.

MODALISM – a doctrine of God according to which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not eternal persons of the one divine being, but subsequent modes (modi) of appearances of God in time.

MONERGISM – (Greek, ‘one operation, or act’) the doctrine that states that Jesus acted according to but one (divine-human) act or operation.

MONOPHISITISM – (Greek) the doctrine that states that Jesus has but one nature. In the Alexandrian (Coptic) theology this means that Christ is not divided as God and human being, but that the divine Logos completely assumed the humanity. In the mono-
physiism of Eutyches (condemned in Chalcedon), it meant that the divine nature completely absorbed the human nature, and that the human nature is completely subsumed within the divine nature.

**Monothelitism** – (Greek) the doctrine that states that Jesus had but one (divine-human) will (*thelēma*). Condemned at the Council of Constantinople (681).

**Montanism** – a movement named for Montanus, especially popular at the end of the second century, that taught that after the era of the Son the era of the Spirit had come, and that prophecy in congregations continued. It championed a more radical Christianity than orthodoxy.

**Multiple Attestation** – plural witness: accounts of Jesus that are found in writings by more than one author. As a rule, it is presented as a strong argument for early origin and for authenticity.

**Negative Theology** – the concept that one can not posit anything for sure about God. Thus not who God is, but only who God is not, can be said with some certainty.

**Nestorian** – like Nestor, making a sharp distinction between the divinity and humanity of Christ as consequence of which not sufficient justice is done to the person of Christ.

**Oikonomia** – (Greek, ‘abode laws’) the act and order of salvation by God toward the world.

**Ontological Trinity** – (Greek, ‘*ontis*’, being) the notion that the Trinity is part of the eternal being of the Godhead and that God is Trinity before the creation of the world and after the final end of time. Codified on the council of Constantinople (381).

**Opera ad Extra Sunt Indivisa** – (Latin, ‘acts directed outward are indivisible’) in the acts of God directed to the world, all three persons are together involved. For instance, one should not place Creation over against Redemption as to God’s acts and persons.

**Ousia** – (Greek, ‘being’) in Alexandrian theology equal to *hypostasis* (underlying concrete existence); to Antiochenes that what beings of a same category have in common. See also: *physis*.

**Parallellism** – the idea, in the relationships between the religions, that the different religions are but parallel paths to God.

**Patrissians** – (Latin) people who, according to their opponents, said that God the Father had suffered.
PELAGIANISM — (Pelagius, ± 400) the doctrine that teaches that people return to God through their own free will. Sin is not a human inner state, but is learned behavior. Human beings can also turn away again from God (see also semi-pelagianism).

PERICHORESIS — (Greek, ‘to step in, and through and around each other’, as in a dance or choral piece) originally used in Christology, but later usually in the doctrine of the Trinity. In Christology it meant the mutual penetration of the attributes of the two natures of Christ, in the doctrine of the Trinity it teaches the mutual penetration of the attributes of the persons of the Trinity.

PHUSIS — (Greek, ‘nature’) as a rule, the common nature of beings of the same category, and thus aims for the common identity; for Cyril of Alexandria especially, also that which is most characteristic of a person (this, for him, aims at the personal identity). See also ousia.

PLACATIO — (Latin, ‘placate’) reconciliation because the wrath of God has been averted. Usually related to the notion of a sacrifice for sin.

PLURALISM — the idea, in the relationships between religions, that the patterns of traditions are woven together on the common path toward God.

PNEUMA-CHRISTOLOGY — a Christology in which Christ is considered as a human being completely led by the Spirit, and as such God’s representative on earth.

PNEUMATIC CHRISTOLOGY — a Christology in which human beings who are united with the Word of God are completely led by the Spirit.

PRE-EXISTENCE — the doctrine that the Son of God exists for all eternity before the Son became flesh in Jesus.

PROLEGOMENA — considerations offered prior to, or at the beginning of, a theological treatise, before the treatment of the actual topic begins. Sometime these considerations serve to forge a path to faith, at other times they take stock of the relative position of one’s faith amidst other fields of human endeavor. They usually also encompass a theological epistemology (i.e. philosophical ideas about the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity).

PROLEPSIS — (Greek, ‘jump ahead’) an event that foreshadows the significance of a larger event prior to the latter’s occurrence.
Especially used for the resurrection of Christ as a sign toward, and of, the beginning of the eschaton.

**PROPRIETATES** – (Latin) the specific attributes of each of the persons in the Trinity.

**Q** – The common material in the Gospel according to Matthew and Luke to the extent that it does not appear in Mark. An assumption is posited that this material leads back to a common source Q (from the German *Quelle*, ‘source’) that is now lost, but contained mostly sayings of Jesus.

**QUICUMQUE** – (Latin: ‘whoever desires to be saved…’) also know as the ‘Athenasian Creed,’ a misnomer, because it has a Latin and not a Greek origin. It is a confession that originated in the sixth century, and places special emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity.

**RECAPITULATIO** – (Latin) the notion by Irenaeus that in Christ humanity has received a new ‘head’ (*caput*) as a second Adam wherein and wherefore humanity receive new unity and life.

**RECONCILIATIO** – (Latin) atonement as repair and recovery of relationship.

**SATISFACTIO** – (Latin) atonement through satisfaction: a satisfaction fulfilled to take away the guilt of humanity.

**SEMI-PELAGIANISM** – the view that a human being will be redeemed on the basis of a new life, lived by the power given by God (see Pelagianism).

**SUBORDINATIONISM** – the idea that the Son is lower in rank of being than the Father (which is not at all the same as the obedience of the Son to the Father but equal in divinity).

**SYNOPTIC GOSPELS** – the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke, who all have a comparable structure (Greek *syn-optic*, ‘same view’).

**THEOCENTRIC** – having God (the Father) at the center of thought. As a rule used in contrast with ‘Christo-centric’, or ‘anthropocentric’ (having humans at the center).

**THEOLOGOUMENON** – (Greek, ‘theological notion’) Unlike a dogma, which is supported by an entire ecclesial community, this word may be used to refer to the personal opinion of a theologian.

**THEOPASCHITISM** – (Greek) the idea that God can suffer.

**THEOTOKOS** – (Greek ‘god-bearer’) mother of God; originally meant Christologically to indicate the divinity of Christ, later more
often used in Mariology as an honorific title to indicate the exalted status of Mary.

**TWO-NATURE DOCTRINE** – Christ is but one person in two natures, true God and true human. The natures are without confusion, change, division and separation (Greek, asugchutoos, atreptoos, adiaretoos, achooristoos). Codified at the council of Chalcedon (451).

**ULTIMATE CONCERN** – highest and final orientation of our life.

**UNICISM** – in the midst of other religions, the person of Christ is unique, and a central orientation.

**UNIO PERSONALIS** – (Latin) the unity of the person in which both natures of Christ are united. Codified at the council of Chalcedon (451).

**VALENTINIANS** – a Gnostic movement of the second century.
2. THE SEVEN ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

325 NICEA – Christ is of the same substance (homoousios) as the Father. Condemnation of Arius, who taught that Christ was the firstborn of all creatures.

381 CONSTANTINOPLE I – Codified the doctrine of the Trinity. Condemnation of Macedonius who taught that the Spirit was not God, and of Marcellus of Ancyra who posited that the Trinity is only true from our perspective of the order of salvation (economic Trinity) and does not hold true for God’s own nature (Immanent Trinity).

431 EPHESUS – Christ is truly one person, who, as such, is God in the flesh. Condemnation of Nestor who taught that two persons were united in Christ through love.

451 CHALCEDON – Codified the doctrine of two natures. Christ is but one person in two natures, true God and true human. The natures are without confusion, change, division and separation. (asugchutoos, atreptoos, adiairetoos, achooristoos). Condemnation of Eutychus who taught that Christ had but only one nature, for the human nature is subsumed in the divine nature as a drop of honey in the ocean.

553 CONSTANTINOPLE II – Christ is one of the Holy Trinity. Strong emphasis on the divinity of Christ. Condemnation of Origen and neo-originism because it taught a subordinate Christology.

681 CONSTANTINOPLE III – Christ has two wills and two ways of acting: human and divine. Condemnation of both monenergism and monotheletism, in which it was taught that Christ operated and willed, in all things, through but one divine-human center of act and will.

787 NICEA – Icons may be honored (‘venerated’) but not truly ‘adored’ (in the way we adore God). Condemnation of iconolatry in which icons received divine adoration.
Abbreviations and Bibliography

1. ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of specific works of authors are listed by author in the bibliography.


COD  J. Alberigo e.a., 1973. Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Instituto per le Szienze Religiose, Bologna, ed. 3.

Denz.  H. Denzinger/A. Schönmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum, Barcinone, etc.

Unless otherwise indicated, the 34th edition has been used (1967).

HC  Heidelberg Catechism.

MPG  J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, Garnier, Parisiis.


2. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Only the larger systematic works are listed of the Church Fathers and Luther. In the case of letters, orations, commentaries and fragments, the footnotes cite MPG, MPL and WA directly.


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- **HA**: Historia Arianorum ad monachos, MPG 25: 691-796.
- **IncV**: De incarnatione Verbi, MPG 25: 95-198.
- **Easterletter**: Litterae Heortasticae, MPG 26: 1360-1444.
- **VA**: Vita Anthonii, MPG 26: 838-976.

**Athenagoras**, Chr.: *Legatio pro Christianis*, MPG 6: 899-972.

**Augustine**, CD: *De civitate Dei*, MPL 41: 13-804.
- **CG**: De correptione et gratia, MPL 44: 915-946.
- **Conf.**: Confessiones, MPL 31: 659-868.
- **DP**: De dono perseverantiae, MPL 45: 993-1034.
- **Ench.**: Enchiridion ad Laurentinum de fide, spe et caritate, MPL 40: 231-290.
- **FO**: De fide et operibus, MPL 40: 197-230.
- **FS**: De fide et symbolo, MPL 40: 181-196.
- **SC**: De symbolo ad catechumenos MPL 40: 627-668.
- **Pat.**: De patientia, MPL 40: 611-626.
- **PS**: De praedestinatione sanctorum, MPL 44: 959-992.
- **Retr.**: Retractiones, MPL 31: 583-656.
- **Trin.**: De Trinitate, MPL 42: 819-1098.


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- *SN: De Symbolo Nicaeno* (Epist. 55), MPG 77:289-320; ACO 1,1,4: 49-61.


Hippolytus, *CBH*: see Pseudo-Hippolytus.


Refut.: *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, MPG 16.3: 3009-3454.1


1. *Refut.* was initially ascribed to Origen, which is why it is found in the volumes concerning Origen in MPG. The English translation by S. D. F. Salmond (1870) in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Clark, Edinburgh, contains chapters that are numbered differently because in MPG the consecutive numbers include the titles and chapters at the beginning of the books earlier ascribed to Origen, while the translation does not. Thus the latter enumerates fewer chapters.


- *Confessio rectae fidei*, MPG 86.1: 993-1035.


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Tertullian, AP: Adversus Praxeas, MPL 2: 175-220.


– CC: De carne Christi, MPL 2: 797-838.


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