

A Shorter and Simpler Church Dogmatics

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Introduction

Karl Barth is among the few theologians who have become “doctors of theology” for the whole church. He works from within the Reformed tradition, while also significantly transcending it. He is among a handful of theologians that will be required reading hundreds of years from now, assuming the church continues as a vital force in those centuries. One thinks of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Schleiermacher, and Barth who will stand the test of time in their systematic presentation of Christian teaching.

I began a project in July of 2004 to read the entire *Church Dogmatics*. I completed the task in December of 2006. My way of reading for comprehension is to take thorough notes, attempting to think along with the writer. The following material is the result of such notes.

I have had numerous responses from fellow pastors whom I told of my project. Why are you wasting time doing that? Is it an act of penance? Why? Any reading project that takes two years to complete does require perseverance in the task. I would not consider myself “barthian.” However, I am a student of theology. I believe the pastor must be the chief theologian of the local church in order to provide proper theological guidance to the church. As I have already suggested, Karl Barth is a worthy teacher of the entire church. Regardless of the theological school or tradition within which one thinks, lives, and works, we can justly stand upon his shoulders, for his view of Christian teaching, Christian life, and the church is a grand one.

To understand Karl Barth, one will need to understand several subjects well. One and most importantly, is the Bible. Karl Barth was a student of the Bible and its themes. One would do well to lead several Bible studies over the course of several years before reading *Church Dogmatics*. Two is the field of biblical theology, for similar reasons as I

just stated. Three is the subject of theology. This means familiarity with the historic creeds and the issues surrounding them. It means reading with understanding primary theologians: Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Schleiermacher. One might read competing modern theological perspectives as well, especially Tillich, Bruner, and Pannenberg. Four is the subject of philosophy. In particular, one might read Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre. Although people rightly know Barth as a theologian of the Word of God, he read philosophy deeply.

Karl Barth challenges liberal Protestants and Roman Catholic theology. His challenge is to keep bringing people back to the Word of God, meaning Christ, and to the Word of God, meaning the Bible, and to the Word of God, meaning the preached word. The church is the Church of Jesus Christ. The church does not belong to the modern age. The church ought not to take its theological categories from modern philosophy, whether it is Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, or Heidegger.

Karl Barth challenges evangelical, Baptist, pietistic, and mystical expressions of Christian faith. The point of Christian life is not our personal experience of peace with God, a warm feeling inside, union with Christ, or salvation from hell. Personal experience is a by-product of a human life focused upon Jesus Christ through faith, love, and hope. He makes an informed response to the process of sanctification that attempts to deal with concerns raised by the devotional and pietistic tradition.

Karl Barth is a challenge to the Reformed tradition. He presents a view of election and predestination that moves away from Calvin and toward what many non-Reformed Christians would think of as a more biblical view.

Karl Barth challenges those who believe in universalism. Often, such thinking arises out of the idea that the love of God will overwhelm evil. For Barth, such thinking

is gullible, for it does not take seriously the opposition that evil presents to the purpose of God. We ought not to assume that we have endless time to unite with the purpose of God.

Karl Barth challenges those who believe that billions of people will be in hell. The fact that Christ has died for every human being, and that God has raised us to new life with God in the resurrection of Christ, means that Christ is the hidden companion of every human being. God has already brought new life to every human being. The mission of Christian community is that through the Holy Spirit, God has the power to make real in this world, in this church, and in this individual life, what God has objectively accomplished in Christ.

This book is an attempt to address a perceived need. Most people will not read the thirteen part volumes of *Church Dogmatics*. This book is an attempt to put into a shorter, simpler format the argument that Karl Barth makes. Several selections from *Church Dogmatics* exist, of course, but I do not present in this book such selections. I would offer two analogies for what one will find in this book. One would be the Living Bible, a paraphrase rather than a translation of the Bible. What the reader will find, I hope, is a book easier to read and understand than the book that Karl Barth wrote. As a good German, he wrote long sentences, offered detailed exegesis of the Bible, and gave detailed criticisms of those with whom he disagreed. Another analogy I would draw is with Readers Digest versions of books. I think that *Church Dogmatics* begs for such a treatment. The extended exegesis, the detailed analysis of other thinkers, are helpful to other theologians, but much less so for the pastor and teacher of the church. The combination of these two approaches is what the reader will find in this book. I have shortened the sentence structure, I have shortened the argument significantly, and I have tried to think along with Barth enough so that this book reads like its own book. If you

read this book, you will not be reading my understanding of Karl Barth. Rather, when you complete the book, you will have read Karl Barth. The organization of this book follows that of the original text. The advantage of this approach is that if one wants to pursue the thought of Barth more thoroughly than I do in this book, then one can read the appropriate section.

I have included two of the books by Karl Barth that lay outside of the official set of *Church Dogmatics*. One is the *Lecture Fragments* published in 1969. These lectures were a stage along the way in the development of the ethical portion of his Doctrine of Reconciliation. I have offered my paraphrase and shortening of these lectures. Two is the lectures he offered in 1928-1931, and published in 1981 long after his death, entitled *Ethics*. The format of that book is similar to that of *Church Dogmatics*. I excluded the first two sections, for they correspond to his mature thought on ethics found in his Prolegomena, his Doctrine of God, and his Doctrine of God the Creator. Of course, Barth never completed the ethical portion of his Doctrine of Reconciliation. Combined, the two sets of lectures at least offer the reader a sense of the direction Karl Barth thought that theological ethics ought to go. Further, *Ethics* gives the reader a hint of what the fifth and final volume of *Church Dogmatics*, the Doctrine of God the Redeemer, might have looked like.

God has blessed the church with a thinker as thorough as Barth is. Yet, the time required to read *Church Dogmatics* will prohibit his thought from the wide readership it deserves. This book will be a way that the church can access the teaching of Karl Barth. The hope I have is that this book will enrich the student of the Bible, the student of theology, and the lover of the church.

Volume 1, Part 1 (1932)

Introduction

1) The Task of Dogmatics

As a theological discipline, dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God.

The church, theology, science

Dogmatics is a theological discipline. However, theology is a function of the church. The church confesses God as it talks about God. As it confesses God, the church also confesses both the humanity of its action and the responsibility of its action. The church has the responsibility of offering an account to God of its talk about God.

Theology is this self-examination by the church of its own talk. The church puts the question of truth to itself by its reference to the being of the church, which is Christ. The criterion for theology and its truth is Christ, who is the gracious revealing and reconciling address from God to humanity. Christian talk must derive from Christ, lead to Christ, and conform to Christ. When the church puts to itself the question of truth in its threefold form in a way that is objective, its self-examination acquires the character of a scientific undertaking that has its own place alongside other human undertakings of the same or a similar kind. However, only in practice and with reservations can we claim for theological science either its character as a science or its distinctiveness among the sciences. Theology is a science in this sense. Other sciences have not recognized and adopted the task of theology. To be sure, some have attempted to criticize and correct the talk of the church about God. However, the church requires criticism and correction in the light of the being of the church, of Jesus Christ as its basis, goal, and content. In particular, philosophers have kindly taken this aspect into account always miss the real problem by setting it within the sphere of their own sciences, judging the utterance of the

church about God in accordance with alien principles rather than its own principle. It then increases the mischief that makes critical science necessary for the church. Directly, in all the three areas of theological enquiry philosophy, history, psychology, etc., have always succeeded in practice only in increasing the self-alienation of the church and the distortion and confusion of its talk about God. There never has been a Christian philosophy, for if it was philosophy, it was not Christian, if it was Christian, it was not philosophy. The task of theology is that of the criticism and correction of talk about God according to the criterion of the church's own principle.

If theology is a science, it says that, one, it is a human concern with a definite object of knowledge; two, it treads a definite and self-consistent path of knowledge; and, three, it must give an account of this path to itself and to others who have interest in this object. The existence of other sciences reminds theology that it must pursue its own task in due order and with similar fidelity. However, theology cannot allow other sciences to tell it what theology and its method are to be. Theology should consider itself a science for three reasons. First, theology brings itself into line. As a human concern for truth, it recognizes its solidarity with other such concerns grouped under the name of science. Second, it does not resign the name of science to others. The theologian reminds the university that the quasi-religious faith of secularity is in dispute. Third, theology shows that it does not take the heathenism of their understanding seriously enough to separate itself under another name.

Dogmatics as an enquiry

The talk by the church about God has the capacity to serve as an object of enquiry and it has the need for such an enquiry.

First, dogmatics presupposes the true content of Christian talk about God and that such talk is accessible to us. Theology believes, with the church, in the revealing and reconciling work of God in Christ. Thus, theology does not invent its standards, rules, or criteria. Theology derives its standards, rules, or criteria from the church. Theology receives its criteria corresponding to the promise given the church. In this sense, it concerns knowledge of the truth. Yet, the analogy of faith suggests that theology will always be a second event in comparison to the revealing and reconciling work of God in Christ. Theological talk does not obliterate the divine action, for it seeks divine answers. The certainty and knowledge of theology is not a human construction, but given in divine action.

Second, dogmatics also presupposes that people have access to Christian talk and its true content. The conformity of Christian talk about God to Christ is ambiguous. Dogmatics never fully attains identity with the divine action. Thus, it will always be an enquiry. Part of that enquiry is testing the coherence of its own teaching and its ability to persuade others of its truth and livability. The theologian does not rely upon flashes of insight. Rather, the theologian engages in the laborious movement from one partial insight to another with the intention, not guarantee, of advance. The truth continues to come. Theological work is nothing more than a sign that it continues to come. It has not arrived. They are simply the results of human effort that will give rise to further such effort. Theology does not simply repeat propositions from the past. It does not simply recite creeds. Such an approach fails to recognize the divine and human character of the church. Divine action is distinct from human appropriation in the church and in theology and in creeds. Such human appropriation in history is fallible. The truth shown in Jesus Christ is still future for us. Even repeating, assembling and defining the Bible are not

sufficient for the theological task. Theology must keep the exegetical task in view. Yet, we humans never gain identity between our talk about God and the divine action of God in Christ. Theology asks what we must say today based on what the apostles said.

Dogmatics as an act of faith

Undertaking Christian theology as a Church Dogmatics seems to require the prior decision of faith. Dogmatics is impossible except as an act of faith, in the determination of human action by listening to Jesus Christ and as obedience to Him. Clearly, the presence of any distinctive and decisive determination of dogmatics, the decision as to what is or is not true in dogmatics, is always in a matter of the divine election of grace. In this respect, the fear of the Lord must always be the beginning of wisdom. We merely repeat the statement that dogmatics is possible only as an act of faith, when we point to prayer as the attitude without which there can be no dogmatic work.

2) The Task of Prolegomena to Dogmatics

Prolegomena to dogmatics is our name for the introductory part of dogmatics in which our concern is to understand its particular way of knowledge.

1. The necessity of Dogmatic Prolegomena

Prolegomena to a science will always consist in discussions and expositions of how it attains knowledge. By prolegomena to dogmatics is the attempt to give an explicit account of the particular way of knowledge taken in dogmatics as the particular point from which we are to look, think, and judge in dogmatics. However, we must reject the necessity of dogmatic prolegomena.

First, we reject the necessity because there is no theological foundation for the assumed difference between our own and earlier times. Every age has its challenge to what the church teaches. The modern age is not unique in this.

Second, this conception is mistaken because it carries with it a complex of problems for dogmatic prolegomena because it challenges the serious acceptance of the task of dogmatics. The church measures its talk about God by the standard of its reception of divine revelation.

Third, we must also ask whether in this conception of the necessity of dogmatic prolegomena too little justice is not done even to the concern for the responsibility and relevance of theological thinking. Such apologetics takes unbelief seriously, and therefore takes itself with less seriousness. One might think that apologetics is the task of dogmatics. Dogmatics will think its conflict with unbelief is done when apologetics does its work.

To be truly imperious, the necessity of dogmatic prolegomena must be an inner necessity grounded in the matter itself. The paradoxical fact to which we refer is that of heresy. By heresy, we understand a form of Christian faith that we cannot deny to be a form of Christian faith from the formal standpoint in that it relates to Jesus Christ, the church, baptism, Holy Scripture, and the creeds. However, in respect of which we cannot understand what we are about when we recognize it as such, since we can understand its content, its interpretation of these common presuppositions, only as a contradiction of faith. So different is the interpretation of the church from that of heretics that the menacing question arises whether they are not really dealing with different themes, and therefore whether the opposition and different faith is not really to be understood as unbelief. The conversation between the church and heretics would not be so serious if it were conducted elsewhere than under the shadow of this menacing question. In this conversation, the church must wrestle with heresy in such a way that it may itself be the church. Heresy must attack the church, because it is not sufficiently or truly the church.

The only proper prolegomena is that of the Word of God, and as that Word embraces a doctrine of Scripture. Modern theology has its source in understanding of human existence. This suggests that if the philosophy of human existence fails so does the theology built upon it. Roman Catholic theology removes the divine, free act and locates Christ in the Bible tradition, and teaching office. This approach denies the freedom God has shown in Christ to redeem and reconcile. What Barth wants to do is have a prolegomena that focuses upon Christian talk about God. The failure of modern theology is that its view of human existence (Bultmann) or of religious experience (Schleiermacher) is already theology.

2. The possibility of dogmatic prolegomena

How are dogmatic prolegomena possible as a preliminary understanding of the way of knowledge to be pursued? Such an understanding obviously presupposes a place from which this way to visible and intelligible. What is this place? The answer proposed to theology since the days of the Enlightenment and with a new urgency in our own time, the answer of Modernistic dogmatics, is that the church and faith are to be understood as links in a greater nexus of being. Hence, dogmatics is to be understood as a link in a greater nexus of scientific problems, from the general structural laws of which its own specific conditions of knowledge are to be deduced and its own specific scientific character known. This nexus of problems is that of an ontology, and since Descartes this necessarily means that of a comprehensively explicated self-understanding of human existence that may also at a specific point become the pre-understanding of an existence in the church or in faith, and therefore the pre-understanding and criterion of theological knowledge. We should not overlook the methodological relationship of Bultmann's conception to that of Schleiermacher. That theology should begin with a definition of

existence, or humanity is at root a piece of liberalism. One might have thought that the attempt to speak of believing humanity apart from God had shown itself to be impracticable. The possibility of this solution stands or falls with the answer to the question whether there really is a nexus of being superior to the being of the church, and consequently a nexus of scientific problems superior to dogmatics. Is there an existential potentiality that is different from the actuality of revelation and in the light of which one can understand the latter? Is there something generally human of which that specific human phenomena one may regard as an actualization? Prolegomena of this kind becomes possible under these circumstances. However, this presupposition has a theological character. If there is involved a statement of what dogmatics is from outside dogmatics, this is correct only to the extent that the statement is made outside a specific dogmatics, namely, Reformation and Evangelical, or indeed Roman Catholic, dogmatics, but for this reason all the more definitely within Modernistic dogmatics. We regard this Modernist faith as also Christian to the extent that the being of the church implies in fact a determination of human reality. However, we cannot regard Modernist faith as Christian to the extent that it interprets the possibility of this reality as a human possibility. To the extent that it fails to recognize that this determination of human reality derives and is to be considered only from the outside all human possibilities, that is, from the acting God. To the extent that it seeks to interpret its history, not in terms of itself, but in terms of a general capacity or of the general historicity of human existence. If this faith falls, so does this interpretation of faith, so too the presupposition of an anthropological *prius* of faith, and so finally the possibility of prolegomena of this kind. Now undoubtedly we have here a spirited and impressive effort to overcome the anthropological narrowness of Heidegger's philosophy of existence on the ground and

with the weapons of this philosophy itself. We are given a philosophical scheme in which there is no place for an anthropological *prius* of faith and therefore for the patronizing and conditioning of theology that are not overcome in Heidegger or Bultmann. Again, it must be left to philosophy to assume responsibility for the assertion that in that transcendent knowledge of human existence we have an analogy to the knowledge of God, since this assertion cannot possibly be a theological statement.

In distinction from the conception already contested, Roman Catholic dogmatics describes the place from which it ascertains its way of knowledge as the self-originating and self-grounded reality of divine revelation and the corresponding supernatural faith. Here, then, dogmatic prolegomena consist in the assertion that in the form of Holy Scripture, tradition, and the living teaching apostolate of the church infallibly representing and interpreting both, there is to be found the objective principle of knowledge. In the form of the catholic faith, which accepts revelation as proposed by the church, one is to find the subjective principle. Their presupposition is that the being of the church is no longer the free Lord of its existence. Rather, it incorporates Christ into the existence of the church, and is that ultimately restricted and conditioned by certain concrete forms of the human understanding of the revelation of God in Christ and of the faith that grasps it. It affirms an analogy of being, the presence of a divine likeness of those God created even in the fallen world. Consequently, it affirms the possibility of applying the secular "There is" to God and the things of God as the presupposition, again ontological, of that change or transformation, of that depriving of revelation and faith of their character as decision by evasion and neutralization.

On the one side, we have to say that the being of the church is a divine action that is self-originating and which is to be understood only in terms of itself and not therefore

in terms of a prior anthropology. On the other side, we have also to say that the being of the church is a free action and not a constantly available connection, grace being the event of personal address and not a transmitted material condition. On both sides, we can only ask how it may be otherwise if the being of the church is identical with Jesus Christ. If this is true, then the place from which the way of dogmatic knowledge is to be seen and understood can be neither a prior anthropological possibility nor a subsequent ecclesiastical reality, but only the present moment of the speaking and hearing of Jesus Christ, the divine creation of light in our hearts. We perceive the possible point of departure for such an account in the fact that the Christian church ventures to talk what it says is talk of God. This fact itself is obviously a part of talk about God. It says of God that the church speaks of God. This statement is as little self-evident and as much in need of explanation as all the other material statements that the church may venture to make about God. Like them, it needs to be criticized and corrected. It must be the subject of enquiry with what right the church comes to say this, and in what sense it does so. This right and sense are obviously identical with the norm by which what it says is to be measured, that is, with the norm of the remaining content of its utterance concerning God. This statement has a true content when it is related to a prior Word of God spoken to the church that speaks about God. Only when and to the extent that such a Word of God is spoken by God to the church is there any right or sense in speaking about God in the church. Only when there is such a Word of God is there a criterion, namely, this Word itself, of the correctness of such speech and therefore of the correct criticism and correction of such speech. In the prolegomena to dogmatics, we ask concerning the Word of God as the criterion of dogmatics. In so doing, we give an account of the way that we tread. The theme of dogmatic prolegomena as understood in this sense is obviously none

other than that which the older Protestant theology treated under the title of Sacred Scripture. We shall see that the cardinal statement of the doctrine of the Word of God that we shall try to develop in what follows is indeed materially the same as the assertion of the authority and normativeness of Holy Scripture as the witness to divine revelation and the presupposition of church proclamation. We shall attempt a doctrine of the Word of God, a doctrine of Holy Scripture in the context of an embracing doctrine of the Word of God.

The Doctrine of the Word of God

Chapter I: The Word of God as the Criterion of Dogmatics

3) Church Proclamation as the Material of Dogmatics

Talk about God in the church seeks to be proclamation to the extent that in the form of preaching and sacrament it directs its proclamation to humanity with the claim and expectation that in accordance with its commission it has to speak to humanity the Word of God for people to hear in faith. Inasmuch as it is a human word in spite of this claim and expectation, it is the material of dogmatics, that is, of the investigation of its responsibility as measured by the Word of God that it seeks to proclaim.

1. Talk about God and church proclamation

Human beings talk about things other than God. Humanity could do so, and I can find no reason in principle why it could not be. No genuinely profane speech exists. In the last resort, there is only talk about God. Yet, serious reflection on human talk about God must take as its starting-point the fact that this is not at all the case. We know ourselves only as the people to whom God shows mercy as people fallen, lost, and condemned. We know ourselves only as people in the kingdom of grace, of the present age between the time of creation and that of redemption. We stand under the sign of a decision constantly taken between the secularity and the sanctification of our existence, between sin and grace. We can mark of religious utterance from secular by the fact that God is an explicit theme. We might also mark it off internally by the intention expressly

or tacitly orientated to this subject, by the more or less sincere purpose to speak about God. Some human talk of God receives divine conformation and preservation.

Proclamation is the center of this human talk. Some of the church's talk is praise to God, the work of helpful solidarity with humanity in its suffering, conformation as education of youth, are all other forms of human talk about God that is not proclamation. Theology is not proclamation, but the study of it, the reflection upon it, and confronts it in criticism. Proclamation occurs when the church speaks directly to people by directing them to the Word of God. Proclamation serves the Word of God: it is a human pointer to that Word. The existing church cannot contain the Word of God fully. The church fulfills its commission to proclaim in preaching and sacrament. The biblical witness also refers to cultivating faith, hope, and love. It also commissions the church to proclaim. Such discourse must have exposition of Scripture in its background. Yet, the actual encounter with God is one that the Word of God accomplishes. Proclamation makes the promise given to the church intelligible to people today. In contrast, modern theology has little sense of this listening to God, receiving a message humanity would not know were it not for that Word.

2. Dogmatics and church proclamation

This proclamation is always a human word. Theology is an examination of that word. It begins with what the church said about God in the past in order to suggest ways that the church can continue proclamation tomorrow. It can do this as it addresses perceived needs for the next day. It is the criticism and correction of the Sunday sermon. Dogmatics is important because proclamation is human talk about God and thus a fallible work. The truth of the proclamation is not self-evident. In order for the church to accept responsibility for truth and purity, it subjects its proclamation to self-examination.

Dogmatics is also important because it senses proclamation. Although theology strives to improve the fallible human proclamation, the simplest presentation and the most unsophisticated hearer can communicate truth. Dogmatics is not the end, but rather serves proclamation. The subject matter of theology is the proclamation of the church.

4) The Word of God in its Threefold Form

The Word of God is the presupposition that makes proclamation what it is and makes the church what it is. This attests itself in Holy Scripture in the word of the prophets and apostles to whom the revelation of God spoke finally and originally.

1. The Word of God preached

The commission to proclaim derives from nothing objective in human experience or culture, for that would mean the discourse of science. It derives from no subjective desire for expression, for that would be aesthetic or artistic. Now, the event of proclamation is the function in church life that governs all others. In this event, the church continually becomes itself. Proclamation and bread and cup are a given, they are simply there. Yet, they are not there as they want to be and should be. Proclamation is human speech about God based upon direction from God. This direction transcends any human basis. If proclamation has its source in human apprehension and thought, objects of external and internal contemplation, then science, art and ethics should be enough. The theme of proclamation is the object of human perception.

Proclamation occurs through human experience, rather than in a separate sphere of divine activity. Theology and religion help humanity discourse about proper ends for human activity, rather than create a separate sphere that is spiritual or divine within the realm of human activity. The theme of proclamation suggests that God is the one who addresses us. Therefore, proclamation is not simply the result of human discourse. How can we determine if proclamation is true? Normally, the nature of its theme and the

situation and concerns of the speaker help us determine truth. What does the one who preaches know of the thing of which he or she preaches? What is your concern in speaking of it? Further, the Word of God is the event in which proclamation becomes real proclamation. Since God creates humanity, the event does not obliterate human willing and doing. In fact, part of humility is recognizing that we render obedience to the Word of God not as a Word from heaven, but that it comes through human speech. We recognize the Word of God through people no better than us. The human commissioning through ordination is different between Roman Catholic and Protestant. Both believe in apostolic succession. However, for the Protestant, no historical and legal fact, as contingent realities, can guarantee the authenticity of an office. Further, is it not true that the permanent authority of the teaching office will supplant Christ? In effect, the freedom of God to act becomes subsumed in the hierarchy of the church. The church receives its limit by Christ.

2. The Word of God written

The proclamation of the church ventures faith in past recollection and in expectation. One can preach today because God has already spoken. Preaching occurs in the context of recollection. Such recollection is not recovering something immanent in human life. God chooses a different path, that of the written Word. The text is also secondary. It is the deposit of what was once speech. It is written proclamation. The church enters into apostolic succession through the canon. The text independently precedes the church. The church does not have a direct dialogue with itself, but with the apostles. Yet, the temptation is always there to absorb the text into the life of the church. The church cannot control correct exposition, thereby setting up a norm over the norm.

The church needs to set free the exegesis of the Bible for the sake of a free Bible.

Arbitrary limits by authorities will not free the Bible to speak to the church today.

Why is this text the norm for the church? The Bible constitutes itself as such. God causes the Bible to become the Word of God to the extent that God speaks through it. The Bible is the Word of God to the extent that it becomes revelation.

3. The Word of God revealed

The Bible is not the revelation. The Bible witnesses to the revelation. The hope of future revelation has its foundation in faith toward the past revelation in Christ, a revelation occurring uniquely and universally. Witnessing suggests pointing in a direction beyond the self and toward another. Witnessing serves this other. Biblical witness points beyond itself. That is why an apostle is different from a genius. The only authority the Bible has is that it lets the revelation be itself; it is an unwelcome honor to turn the witness into the revelation. In order for the Bible to be genuinely other than the contemporary church, the respect offered by contemporary believers and church leaders is important. This means that the total witness of the biblical text, and especially the New Testament, carry great weight within the life of the church. This weight moves beyond its witness to Christ and toward its vision of Christian life and church life. The biblical witness directs itself toward the transformation of human life into what God intends. It is a faithful witness to that transformation, and not simply in the way it directly connects us to unique and universal revelation of God in Christ.

Revelation focuses upon Christ. The Bible is a human attempt to reproduce the Word of God in human thought and words. The unity of the revelation guarantees the unity of the church. We find the freedom of the Word of God in the fact that it must continually become the Word of God.

5) The Nature of the Word of God

The Word of God in all its three forms is the speech of God to humanity. For this reason, it occurs, applies, and works in the act of God toward humanity. However, as such, it occurs in the way of God that differs from all other occurrence, that is, in the mystery of God.

1. The question of the nature of the Word of God

To understand God from humanity is something one can do only in the form of Christology. No human telling corresponds to the divine telling we find in the Word of God.

2. The Word of God as the speech of God

Therefore, the nature of the Word of God is speech, whether in Jesus, or the text, or in proclamation. First, this suggests the spiritual nature of the Word of God. Even though proclamation, sacrament, and text are quite physical, the Word of God is spiritual. This spiritual word comes in the form of human rationality. The Word of God is a rational event. It has the simple spiritual power of truth. Second, this suggests that God speaks, which also suggests a personal quality. The content of this speaking is never separate from the God who speaks. God is present in this Word. The revelation is Jesus as the Son, and the Son is the Word. What we ought to doubt is that we are persons rather than that God is God.

Third, this suggests the purposeful character of the Word. Our existence is not vital to God. The Trinity suggests that God is never alone. The Word of God comes to us because God chooses to love us that much. God does not need us, but chooses not to be without us. We could not come up with this Word on our own. This Word of God aims at us to judge and to transform us. This Word is renewal of the relationship between God and humanity. This Word is a Word of reconciliation, in which God promises to be the

future of humanity. The presence of God as the Word shows the consummation and fulfillment of human history.

3. The speech of God as the act of God

We hear a sermon as simply human words. We can hear the words of the text as human speech, thought and history. We can hear Jesus as a purely historical figure. The Word of God is the act. As act, it means the following. First, it means the Word as act is contingent contemporary event. The time of Jesus is one time and the time of the apostles is another time. The time of the church is another. The only difference is periods and contexts, remoteness of centuries and millennia, and different attitude of God to people. Insight into the contemporary nature of their times underlies the unity of time.

We are contemporaries with Christ and the apostles. The people of the past unite to us in their humanity. We can respect and love these persons in the same time. However, if we eliminate this contemporary approach, we are in line with the non-historical Enlightenment. To do so is to put ourselves on the same soil as Christ and the apostles. We share their prophetic spirit. We share the same measure of inner truth in our feeling. We can discuss with them the gross and net value of their words. The piety that often leads to the personal connection with the disciples has an inherent danger. We can humanize the Word of God to such a point that it is no wonder people prefer to use it rarely. It is surprising that they have not dropped the language completely. The appreciation of these distinctions means that we can let something be said to us. Within such distinctions, we can only find togetherness with Christ and the apostles. The danger in such togetherness is that we are the ones who set the norm for this togetherness. The contemporary church speaks the last word. It stands alone and refers back to itself. To take the Word of God seriously is to say that the church is not alone. The distinction in

time is one of order. Our sense of what unites us to the apostles must not simply incorporate Scriptures into this life of humanity.

Second, the Word of God as act is its power to rule. The Word is ruling action. Therefore, we are speaking the Word of God. We must speak its power, might, effect, and the transformation it brings. The Word of God makes history. If the church says what it believes, the victory of Jesus Christ is the first word. The church will then have something to say to the world and the world will take it seriously.

Third, the Word of God as act is decision. The Word of God has a connection with history, but we must understand it first as decision. A choice is taking place. In the humanity of Jesus and the proclamation of the church, we have a human and temporal event. The choice and event make it the Word of God.

4. The speech of God as the mystery of God

Many theologians are too positive in terms of their assurance and attitude, a confidence in which the new ways are superior to the old. We think ourselves quite clever. Our progress is useless unless we become rich toward God, as in Luke 12:31: “Instead, strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” We need to, in our pen-ultimate situation, de-assure ourselves. Theology and its systems cannot gain the assurance of Logic and Math. First, the speech of God remains the mystery of God in its secular nature. The speech of God looks like other events. The church is an institution with history and culture. The sacrament is a physical symbol. The Bible is an historical record. Jesus is a rabbi. Theology uses human speech. Even miracles were interpreted in other than divine ways. We do not have the Word of God in any other way than human. Our knowledge of the Word of God is through quite human rationality. The revelation occurs in a human world, including sin.

First, the act of God both conceals and reveals. This human or secular quality of the Word is the nature of revelation as the Incarnation of the word. Incarnation means entry into this human world. If God did not speak in this way, we would not know God at all. To evade the human quality of the Word is to evade Christ. God both veils and unveils. It is good for us that God speaks in this human way. It would be fatal for us if God spoke in any other way. If God were to speak in only a divine way it would be the end of us. The way God has spoken shows that the truth is ahead of us and comes to us. We do not go to it. The human way God has spoken is a word of grace.

Second, faith acknowledges our limit. God does not surrender into our hands but keeps us in God's hands. This revelation is glory and humility, goodness and severity.

Third, the speech of God is mystery in its spirituality. Hearing and receiving occurs only in faith, or in the Spirit. Yet, no search for a method in hearing will be helpful.

6) The Knowability of the Word of God

The reality of the Word of God in all its three forms has its ground in itself. So, too, the knowledge of it by people can consist only in its acknowledgement, and this acknowledgment can become real only through itself and can become intelligible only in norms of itself.

1. The question of the knowability of the Word of God

The assumption the church makes in its proclamation and theology is that it is possible to hear, speak and know the Word of God. We confirm our acquaintance with an object in respect to its existence and nature. This confirmation makes the acquaintance true for humanity as will. The object known affects people. People exist with the object. People think of the truth of the reality of the object. The truth of the object comes home to people and becomes their own. This confirmation (not just cognizance) is what knowledge is. Knowledge involves becoming a responsible witness as to the content of

the object. The presupposition of the church is the possibility of knowledge in this sense. Our question is how at least some people can know the Word of God.

2. The Word of God and humanity

God addresses the Word of God to people and seeks to have people know it and hear it. Mediated by acquaintance is proclamation and text, it seeks to confirm its reality to them. People can then be who they are with the Word of God rather than without it. Jesus reminds us that He always addresses people in His Word.

A grasp of human religious experience in history and psychology is not the proper context for understanding an encounter with God. One cannot generally demonstrate the religious capability of humanity. Any possibility of the Word of God as an event in the reality of humanity must correspond to the event. However, what the Word of God as event creates a possibility for humanity that it would not have in this case, the object of knowledge as the Word of God determines the possibility and content rather than anything in the person. Grace is no longer grace if humanity has an orientation toward God. The revelation will always be something humanity could not figure out in its own way. This revelation will always be criticism and renewal, showing itself as people who are sinners living by grace. The revelation will always be of the Lord and Redeemer, a presence hastening toward the future. See I Corinthians 2:6-7 on p. 195. The truth of the Word of God has its ground in itself.

3. The Word of God and experience

Experience is the way in which knowledge determines individual existence. The experience of the Word of God determines the existence of humanity. Humanity cannot give this determination on its own. Humanity has a Lord. Humanity has a creature quality, as well as the quality of being a lost sinner. Humanity waits for redemption.

From an anthropology perspective, we do not need to reflect upon a specific locus, such as will, conscience, or feeling. Nor do we need to distrust such centers, like the intellect. Christianity did not think it could avoid intellect until modernism. Of course, as speech, the Word of God is an intellectual event. True experience of the Word of God is an authentic experience possible for humanity. Proclamation implies knowledge of the word of God is possible for some people. Experience of that Word makes the experience possible. Word and person relate through acknowledgment. The acknowledgment creates the possibility and the knowledge. Confirmation of its truth must be possible in a way that its truth becomes their own and they become faithful witnesses to its truth. Proclamation can be there among people and through people.

Such knowledge does not come from within human experience. People can have experience of the Word of God in that people in their self-determination can have the Word of God determine them. There are nine points of orientation in the development of the concept of acknowledgment. 1) Acknowledgment entails knowledge as speech, communication from person to person and rationality. 2) Acknowledgment expresses the experience of the Word of God as a relation between the human person and the divine person. 3) Acknowledgment relates to the purposive character of the Word of God, as Lord, Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. People approve this Word and accept its content as truth valid for him or her. 4) Acknowledgment means respect for the fact that takes place in the word of God, in its contingent contemporaneity, revelation, Scripture, and proclamation. Experience of the Word of God means the presence of God. 5) Acknowledgment means affirmation of the power of the Word of God, a power in the promise, claims, judgment, and blessing. In this, acknowledgment becomes obedience and submission. 6) Acknowledgment means decision. God determines if the Word comes

in grace or judgment. The decision is one of faith or unbelief, disobedience or obedience.

7) Acknowledgment also means halting before an enigma. Experience of the Word of God is always in a human world, with all the ambiguity of the world. 8)

Acknowledgment denotes an act or movement on the part of humanity. 9)

Acknowledgment yields to the authority of the other.

The concession is that people are self-determining. Conscience, feeling and intellect are all part of the experience of the Word of God. However, Barth believes he has arrived at the understanding of experience based upon the nature of the Word of God. Thus, the nine points are Barth's contribution to a theological anthropology. Does this mean that humanity has an aptitude for the Word of God? Barth rejects this indirect Christian Cartesianism.

First, I offer a summary. Do we seek it in human religious experience? No! We do not find the Word of God in the process of human experience. The certainty of what theology and church need are not here. My self-understanding is significant only as I confront the promise and see myself in this light. The knowledge of the Word of God becomes real as it is established psychologically. This knowledge brings personal involvement, acceptance, assent, approval, a making present of remote times, and obedience, a decision, a halting before mystery, a stipulation by inner life, a bearing of one's life on this mystery that is beyond humanity. Yet, one who experiences the Word of God does not believe something within experience made this experience possible. He or she will not claim personal involvement. The possibility for knowledge of God's Word comes from God.

If the possibility for their experiences of the Word of God issues within human experience, then how can we treat the Word with the seriousness it deserves? When the

Word of God is present to us, this means that we turn away from ourselves and towards the Word of God. We orient ourselves to the Word of God. To stand in faith means God calls to new faith. The presence of the Word and standing in faith mean having the Word and faith before one and expecting them, allowing them direct one to the free actualization of the grace experienced, clinging anew to the promise, and looking anew for the event in which the possibility of knowledge of the Word of God comes into view for us. The assurance of its affirmation is the assurance of its expectation. The assurance of the grace of faith, of believed baptism, is the assurance of the faith that constantly looks ahead in new hope. In this expectation, human beings must let go and surrender all the assurance they bring. They throw themselves completely on free grace. The assurance of this expectation is a trembling assurance. Its power lies in submission to grace or non-grace.

4. The word of God and faith

We cannot produce the possibility of knowledge of God.

First, faith as real experience is acknowledgment of the Word and put into effect by the Word of God known. He recognizes the epistemological problem here. Humanity does not bring the possibility of knowing God to the table, nor does the possibility enrich human experience. Faith has its beginning in the Word, not in human experience. The knowability of God is not an art. We can only point to the possibility.

Second, people have a real experience of the Word of God through faith. The capacity for the word of God is faith, is not a capability in humanity. In this view, Barth directly contradicts Bruner, *God and Man*, 1930, p. 55-56. Humanity has lost any capacity for God. Proclamation and theology both confess in the possibility that the

manner of this knowing corresponds to the nature of the Word of God. The Word is directed to humanity, and this is from above rather than from below.

Third, human beings exist as believers by this object. People do not create their faith, for the Word has created it. Faith is human experience and act. The believer lives his or her own life. Yet, in faith, believers regard all of this as determined by the Word of God. In the freedom of believers, believers see themselves as another person who has no power to become. The application to the problem of knowledge is self-evident. The Word of God becomes knowable by making itself known.

7) The Word of God, Dogma, and Dogmatics

Dogmatics is the critical question about the agreement of the church proclamation done by humanity with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture. Prolegomena to dogmatics as an understanding of its epistemological path must therefore consist in an exposition of the three forms of the Word of God as revealed, written, and preached.

1. The problem of Dogmatics

Dogmatic work begins by taking the proclamation of the church seriously. The church participates in theological reflection to consider the extent of its faithfulness to the Word of God.

We might test proclamation with philosophy, ethics, politics, and psychology. We might adjust it to the prevailing philosophy, or to practical needs. Theology of all stripes has its concern for the church. One's approach to the criterion of the Word of God will affect how one approaches the church. 1) How do we know if losing the Word of God as a criterion is a good thing? 2) How do we know, if we select another criterion, if we have chosen rightly? 3) How do we know we are not in error by looking for other criterion? 4) How do we know if another criterion should not cancel theological work all together? Theological modernism could not oppose modernism with a superior word. The same is true of the cultural Protestantism in Europe in the 1800's and the liberal theology of the

first half of 1900's in America. Various brands of feminism and political theology accept the radical critique of Marx on liberal bourgeois society.

The point is that the Bible always confronts church proclamation. The fact that we preach and teach the Bible suggests it is the criterion of theological reflection. The church rests on the expectation that God has spoken in the Bible. 1) The loss of the Bible as a criterion is a sign of judgment. 2) Any other criterion is a different undertaking than that of church. 3) The church has not chosen the Bible, but rather the Bible is a gift to it. Without the Bible, theology becomes human discourse. 4) Without the criterion of the Word of God, we would have to say that God leaves the church to itself and to its own resources in the present. Both the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church and modernism remove the criterion of the Word of God and has the present church determine the Word of God. The church does seek to assimilate the Word of God into its own life, but is never completely successful. The Word remains free. The Bible has its voice in the church, and thus also against the church. The failure to integrate fully Bible and church is the reason the Word of God has freedom. Both the modern and the Roman Catholic have already found the Bible present. If we live in the sphere of the church, we must pay attention to it. The Bible answers for itself. Dogma is the explanation of agreement between the proclamation of the church and the revelation to which the Bible points. The history of dogmas is an important, significant Word, but still a human word.

2. Dogmatics as a science

As a science, theology refuses to segregate itself from other human endeavors toward knowledge. Any definition of knowledge that leaves aside religion the church must protest against. Dogmatics submits its results to the church. Scientific dogmatics does three things. 1) It devotes itself to the problem of church proclamation. 2) It denotes

itself to the criticism and correction of church proclamation. 3) It enquires into the agreement of church proclamation with the revelation attested in the Bible. The theologian needs education in the arts and philosophy, but he or she must give attention to the Bible around which the church gathers. This view does not denigrate culture. In fact, one can still view theology as a cultural enterprise. Yet, theology is not a branch of the humanities. What counts is whether dogmatics is scriptural. It is being about too many other matters.

3. The problem of Dogmatic prolegomena

1) The Bible is a witness to God's revelation. 2) We must show how a human word in proclamation can become the Word of God. 3) None of this would be significant if the Bible and preaching were not about the Word of God. That revelation is of the Word of God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

Chapter II: The Revelation of God (as the Word of God)

Part I: The Triune God

8) God in divine revelation

The Word of God is the revelation of who God is. For God reveals the divine self as the Lord and according to Scripture this signifies for the concept of revelation that God in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired distinction is Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness.

1. The Place of the doctrine of the Trinity in Dogmatics

Revelation in the Bible insists on people understanding it in its uniqueness. No other revelation exists along side it. The Trinity distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian. Who is the self-revealing God? What does this God do and what does this effect? The revealer, God, is identical with the act of revelation. Although Barth does not intend it as a proof, "God speaks" summarizes revelation, for it has a subject,

predicate, and object. We will need to understand that the revelation is and how the revelation is. We will also consider the people who have received revelation.

2. The root of the doctrine of the Trinity

The Word is identical with God. One can say this directly of the Son, and indirectly of Scripture and proclamation. God mediates the Word of God through the human person who receives it. Scripture and proclamation must become the Word of God in its hearing, while the revelation of the Word of God in Jesus simply is the Word. Scripture and proclamation bear witness to the Word of God.

Revelation has no higher ground, so it is its own ground. In seeking other ground, we already deny revelation. An example would be conscience. One either obeys or disobeys; one does not find another standpoint from which to judge whether it is true. One can only stand within its self-enclosed circle.

The root of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God reveals God as the Lord. God is unity and distinction. Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God in the unity of their essence and in the distinction of person. First, the Trinity is not identical with revelation, for it is an interpretation of the church. This teaching always used concepts not in the Bible, as well as the Word itself. Second, Trinity is an indirect statement about revelation. Its truth is the fact that it is a good interpretation of the Bible. In referring to the root of this teaching, we do not identify biblical witness to God in revelation with the Trinity. The criticism and correction of the proclamation of the church will need to take place through the Trinity. We might note the following texts as important aspects of that root: Matthew 28:19, II Thessalonians 2:13, I Peter 1:3, Revelation 1:4, II Corinthians 13:13, June 20-21, and Ephesians 4:4-5. The theme of these texts is primarily the Son.

First, revelation means the self-unveiling, imparted to humanity, of the God who by nature to humanity can only be partially unveiled. Humanity cannot provide this revelation out of the experience or reflection of humanity. Humanity does have a vivid imagination. As such, humanity creates imaginative myths concerning the origin and destiny of humanity. The freedom of God to differentiate, to become unlike God and yet to remain God, is a principle to which Christianity must hold. That God reveals God as Lord is what God shows us in the Son. Inscrutable and hidden nature of God is the essence of God. Revelation is of the free loving-kindness of God.

Second, God conceals in revelation. Note in Exodus 3, “Put off your shoes.” Note the following texts as well: Jeremiah 23:23, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 6. The form of this concealing and revealing in the New Testament is the humanity of Jesus. The man Jesus is revealing of the Word of God. Jesus did not become revelation to everyone who met Him. The Godhead is not so immanent in Christ’s humanity that it does not also remain transcendent to it.

Third, we have asked where this revelation comes from. Now, we must ask where it goes. It goes to humanity. This respect for a human world is central to the way God deals with humanity. The Bible emphasizes chronology and topographical. It narrates history. To hear the Bible as witness to the revelation by God is in all cases to hear about this history through the Bible. Saga, legend, and myth are all differing historical judgments of the biblical story. Myth narrates what is always and everywhere true. History is specifically a definite event different from other events. Revelation submits to the contingency and uniqueness of history. Revelation could take place outside of the Bible. Yet, would it be identical with God in the way the Word is? Revelation is a pointer to the Trinity.

3. Vestiges of the Trinity

Since the root of the Trinity is revelation, there are no analogies to the Trinity in people, consciousness, nature, culture, history, and religion.

9) The Triunity of God

The God who reveals who God is according to Scripture is One in three distinctive modes of being subsisting in their mutual relations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is thus that God is the Lord, that is, the Thou who meets humanity “I” and unites the divine self to this “I” as the indissoluble Subject and reveals who God is to humanity as God.

1. Unity in Trinity

The essence of God as unity consists in the threeness of the persons, or as Barth prefers, modes or ways of being. The issue in Triunity is whether it is a proper understanding of Scripture. To be against the Triunity is to deny the revelation of God as witnessed in the Bible or to deny the unity of God. For example, as much as Arius wanted to honor Jesus, his rejection of the Triunity cannot avoid the idea that faith in Jesus is anything other than superstition.

2. Trinity in Unity

The problem with “person” is that it also means “mask,” which leads to Sabellianism and modalism. It also suggests in modern thought the notion of personality. Biblical revelation suggests personality and person in God as act, thought, and will. This is how God meets us in revelation. Still, Barth prefers modes or ways of being. The New Testament reference to Father, Son, and Spirit suggest fatherhood, sonship, begetting and being begotten, and a bringing forth in common with begetting and begotten. The threeness in God’s oneness is grounded in these relations. The difficulty is with the biblical text. Tri-theistic heresy and modalist heresy theology means rational wrestling with the mystery. This rational wrestling can only lead to mystery. For this reason, we find it worthwhile to wrestle.

3. Tri-unity

God's essence and work are one. God's work is God's essence. The essence of God is Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. All we can know of God are in the acts of God. The acts of God reveal the attributes of God. Barth offers a positive commendation of the ancient notion of "perichoresis."

4. The meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity

The Trinity teaches the unity of God in three modes of being or the three-fold otherness of the one God – as Father, Son, and Spirit. This teaching is exegesis of the texts of the Bible, but not contained in the Bible. The early centuries of the church did not arrive at this teaching through church and civil politics. We are not alien to the church of the early centuries. If the Trinity is heresy, we are alien to them, and they to us. Theology would bear great responsibility today if it were to come to this judgment. Reality is that on this dogma, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformed churches unite. We can justly start from the assumption that Christ has not abandoned the church in any age. The assumption is that the church can be in apostasy, but that we are not alien to these believers as they struggle with the text. If in apostasy, the early church would have nothing to say to us, nor would it concern us. If we put ourselves in the same sphere of the early church, we do so with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformation and Revivalist churches. The question the doctrine of Trinity answers regards the concept of the revelation of God as attested in scripture. The meaning of the doctrine is that God is the one who reveals God. The revelation of God is that to which the Bible witnesses. Father, Son, and Spirit are the one, single, and equal God. These three modes of being are of the same essence, and thus not tri-theism, which would suggest they are alien to the essence of God. Human community with God means communion with this Trinity. In creation, reconciliation, and redemption, we find the unity of God who wills to be our

God. Scripture poses the problem of the doctrine of the Trinity. The teaching of the Trinity must stand or fall on being an adequate view of the biblical text.

10) God the Father

The one God reveals who God is according to Scripture as the Creator, the Lord of our existence. As such, God is God our Father because God is so antecedently within God as the Father of the Son.

1. God as creator

We note the distinction between Jesus and the Father in the titles for Jesus, such as Christ, Word, or Son of God. Jesus is a pointer to the Lord whose kingdom Jesus announces and declares in word and deed in a way similar to John the Baptist. Jesus associates himself with the disciples in teaching them to pray “Our Father.” He prays to His Father and obeys His Father in John 14:28. He is the emissary of the Father in John 17:3. Yes, Jesus is Lord. Yet, what is the goal to which Jesus is the way? Whom or what does He reveal as far as He is God’s reflection or mirror? Who is the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ? Who is God the Father? The Father is the one who gives life in the midst of death. God wills our life to lead it through death to eternal life. God wills this transition. This is why Paul relativizes life and death. Note the following passages: I Corinthians 3:23, Romans 8:38, 14:8, Philippians 1:29, I Corinthians 15:53, and II Corinthians 5:4. The real Lord of our existence must be the Lord over both life and death. The Lord of our existence is creator. God sustains our existence. Of course, such confidence in God as the source and preserver of life has its source in the affirmation of the Old Testament, where God is the creator. We find this especially in Genesis 1-2.

2. The Eternal Father

God can be our Father because fatherhood is a mode of divine being or essence. We see this in Jesus. The first article of the creed is not the result of natural theology. The fatherhood of God relates to Jesus. It denotes the modes of being of God in which God is

the author of these modes of being. One cannot speak of superiority and inferiority, for then all modes of being would not be divine essence. Each of the modes of being participates in the other – Son and Spirit participate in creation, the Father participates in reconciliation, the Father and Son participate in redemption. Note that the Enlightenment emphasized the Father, Pietism emphasized Christ, and the isolated veneration of the Spirit. Eternal fatherhood protects the Father from fusion with Son and Spirit.

11) God the Son

The one God reveals according to Scripture as the Reconciler, as the Lord in the midst of our enmity towards God. As such, God is the Son of God who has come to us or the Word of God that has been spoken to us, because God is so antecedently in God as the Son or Word of God the Father.

1. God as reconciler

Who is the One whom Holy Scripture calls the Lord, who had dealings with humanity? Jesus is Lord, but He is also Servant of the Lord who proclaims the will of the Father. In this section, we must emphasize those texts that speak of the communion of Jesus with the Father. *Kyrios* translated *Yahweh-Adonai*, a fact not lost on the first hearers that Jesus is Lord. Bultmann, in “Jesus” (1926), ignored the biblical text as a whole and focused only on His sayings. The titles of Jesus are ambiguous. Christ, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God. The Son has a unity with the Father. This does not mean a human being was exalted to divinity. Nor does it mean deity appeared among us. Dibelius framed the Christology question: the way in which knowledge of the historical figure of Jesus was so quickly transformed into faith in a heavenly Son of God. This road can only end in a blind alley. Now, one could take the statements about Christ’s deity in which Jesus is a great man who, through the mystery of His personality and work, had such an effect on those around Him that they came to believe He was God. This view is Ebionite. The Ebionite sees Jesus as the peak of human history. Another way to read the

texts is to say Jesus is the personification of a familiar, idea or general truth, such as the truth of the communion of deity and humanity. This is the Docetic view. The Docetic sees Jesus as reaching from some trans-historical reality into human history. Jesus is either the highest manifestation of human life or the perfect symbol of the divine.

The New Testament tells us that the disciples went from unbelief to belief. God is found in Jesus because we cannot find Jesus as any other than God. God cannot be found in any other than in Jesus. This does not mean that people do not have a sense of the divine, as if one's individual life is carved out of the Infinite. This suggests some sense of one's dependence upon a much larger whole. Jesus is Lord because the Father wills Him to be such. Christ reveals the Father. This Father of His is God. Yet, who can reveal God except God? However, what does it mean for us as human beings to confess Jesus as the revelation of His Father and thus as His true Son? It affirms that God turns toward us, comes to us, speaks with us, wants us to hear, and wants to arouse a response. It signifies the reality of a friendship that God has established with us. The context of this relationship is not just creator and creature, finite and Infinite, but that of us being enemies of God, and thus sinners and holy.

Reconciliation says the same thing as revelation. Revelation accomplishes only what God can accomplish – restoration of fellowship between God and humanity. God in revelation treats enemies as friends, and thus revelation already is reconciliation. Revelation is not the same as creation or a continuation of it. It is a new work beyond creation. Revelation is not the completion of creation but miracle in a fallen world. The Reconciler is a second divine act, since we cannot deduce it from the fact of creation. This distinction exists in the mode of being.

2. The Eternal Son

12) God the Holy Spirit

The one God reveals God according to Scripture as the redeemer, as the Lord who sets us free. As such, God is the Holy Spirit, by receiving whom we become the children of God, because, as the Spirit of the love of God the Father and the Son, God is so antecedently in the being of God.

1. God the Redeemer

How do people come to say, Jesus is Lord? Faith is not automatic after identifying Jesus as Son and Word. Note the following texts: I John 1:1-2, II Corinthians 3:5, Mark 4:9, and Matthew 16:17. Will revelation reach its goal? This subjective side is the work of the Holy Spirit. Note the following texts: John 20:22, John 6:63, II Corinthians 3:6, I Corinthians 12:3, I Corinthians 2:13, Ephesians 1:13, 1:17, John 3:6, Romans 8:9, and Acts 19:2-3. The Spirit of God is the freedom of God to be present to humanity, and therefore to create the relationship of reconciliation and to be the life of the individual. Humanity is lost without revelation. God leaves no one alone in this world. Humanity must become open to the revelation. This is not a possibility within humanity, and thus can rely only upon God's action. The Spirit gives instruction, illumination, and stimulation of humanity through the word. 1) The Spirit brings participation of humanity in revelation or reconciliation. 2) The Spirit gives humanity instruction that people could not give themselves. The Spirit is the Lord who sets us free and by receiving the Spirit we become the children of God. This freedom is contrasted with servitude to sin, law, and self that is overcome in Christ. The Spirit makes us part of a new family. Of course, receiving the Spirit still means we are human beings. God is the Redeemer who sets us free. To have freedom and divine family is to have it in promise and Him. We believe our future being. We believe in our eternal life in the midst of death. The assurance with which we know this having is the assurance of faith, and the assurance of faith means concretely the assurance of hope. One who receives or is filled by the Spirit is in the

context of eschatology. Of course, even our talk of God and the work of God is eschatological.

2. The Eternal Spirit

The notion of the Spirit as a mode of divine being developed later in the creeds.

Barth gives a summary of the creed on p. 483. Barth considers the statement of Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XV. 28. 51 as the standard.

CHAP. 28.--THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK WITH A PRAYER, AND AN APOLOGY FOR MULTITUDE OF WORDS.

51. O Lord our God, we believe in Thee, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Truth would not say, Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, unless Thou wast a Trinity. Nor wouldest thou, O Lord God, bid us to be baptized in the name of Him who is not the Lord God. Nor would the divine voice have said, Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God, unless Thou wert so a Trinity as to be one Lord God. And if Thou, O God, weft Thyself the Father, and weft Thyself the Son, Thy Word Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit your gift, we should not read in the book of truth, "God sent His Son;"(5) nor wouldest Thou, O Only-begotten, say of the Holy Spirit, "Whom the Father will send in my name;"(6) and, "Whom I will send to you from the Father."(7) Directing my purpose by this rule of faith, so far as I have been able, so far as Thou hast made me to be able, I have sought Thee, and have desired to see with my understanding what I believed; and I have argued and labored much. O Lord my God, my one hope, hearken to me, lest through weariness I be unwilling to seek Thee, "but that I may always ardently seek Thy face."(8) Do Thou give strength to seek, who hast made me find Thee, and hast given the hope of finding Thee more and more. My strength and my infirmity are in Thy sight: preserve the one, and heal the other. My knowledge and my ignorance are in Thy sight; where Thou hast opened to me, receive me as I enter; where Thou hast closed, open to me as I knock. May I remember Thee, understand Thee, love Thee. Increase these things in me, until Thou renewest me wholly. I know it is written, "In the multitude of speech, thou shalt not escape sin."(1) But O that I might speak only in preaching Thy word, and in praising Thee! Not only should I so flee from sin, but I should earn good desert, however much I so spake. For a man blessed of Thee would not enjoin a sin upon his own true son in the faith, to whom he wrote, "Preach the word: be instant in season. out of season."(2) Are we to say that he has not spoken much, who was not silent about Thy word, O Lord, not only in season, but out/of season? But therefore it was not much, because it was only what was necessary. Set me free, O God, from that multitude of speech which I suffer inwardly in my soul, wretched as it is in Thy sight, and flying for refuge to Thy mercy; for I am not silent in thoughts, even when silent in words. And if, indeed, I thought of nothing save what pleased Thee, certainly I would not ask Thee to set me free from such multitude of speech. But many are my thoughts, such as Thou knowest, "thoughts of man,

since they are vain."(3) Grant to me not to consent to them; and if ever they delight me, nevertheless to condemn them, and not to dwell in them, as though I slumbered. Nor let them so prevail in me, as that anything in my acts should proceed from them; but at least let my opinions, let my conscience, be safe from them, under Thy protection. When the wise man spake of Thee in his book, which is now called by the special name of Ecclesiasticus, We speak," he said, "much, and yet come short; and in sum of words, He is all."(4) When, therefore, we shall have come to Thee, these very many things that we speak, and yet come short, will cease; and Thou, as One, wilt remain "all in all."(5) And we shall say one thing without end, in praising Thee in One, ourselves also made one in Thee. O Lord the one God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in these books that is of Thine, may they acknowledge who are Thine; if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by Thee and by those who are Thine. Amen.

As Father from eternity, God eternally begat the Son. God posits God's self again in the Spirit as the love that unities God within God. The Father begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit of love. In doing so, God negates absolute simplicity, loneliness, self-containment, and self-isolation. God is oriented to the other. Love is God because God is love. This love meets us in creation and reconciliation. Love holds good the work of reconciliation and creation. In the Spirit, God is not less love than Son. However, there is distinction in God in a way that does not lead to loneliness and separateness. The breathing of the Spirit is just as much from the Son as from the Spirit. The Son is also the giver of the Spirit. Love is God's reality on the Son, and through the Son. This Son of this Father is and has all that His Father is and has.

Volume 1, Part 2 (1938)

Part II: The Incarnation of the Word

13) God's Freedom for Humanity

According to Holy Scripture, the revelation of God takes place in the fact that the Word of God became a human being, and that this human being has become the Word of God. The Incarnation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is the revelation of God. In the reality of this event, God proves that God is free to be our God.

1. Jesus Christ: The Objective Reality of Revelation.

The only way to avoid the danger of a theology that is nothing more than anthropology is to recognize that the revelation of God concerns God – who God is and what God desires for humanity. The revelation attested in Scripture is the revelation of the God who is the Father from whom it proceeds, the Son who fulfills it objectively and the Holy Spirit who fulfills it subjectively. God in revelation is free for us and free in us, which leads to the question of how far in the revelation of God we become free for God. God is not prevented either by the nature of divinity or by human nature and sinfulness from being our God and having relationship with us as the people of God. For this reason, Incarnation becomes part of the prolegomena. If theology is really to correspond to the witness of Scripture, Scripture must give theology its essential forms and must determine its methods, for without these it could not be theology. Yet, this does not mean that Scripture reveals specific propositions, definite moral principle, a mystical theory, or social theory.

Even the thought and language of unbelief may have its own serious and weighty objectivity. Belief desires to understand the thought and language of the revelation of God, but not to prove it. It does not even exclude unbelief. However, where it finds faith, it does enforce a basically obedient thought and language, it excludes free thought and it excludes arbitrary theology. We must first understand the reality of Jesus Christ, and read from the tablet of this reality the possibility involved in it, the freedom of God, established and maintained in it, to reveal God in precisely this reality, and so the unique possibility that we have to respect as divine necessity.

The witness of Scripture to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ refers to a simple reality. This simply reality is once and for all, definite, temporally limited, unrepeated, and unrepeatable. This simple reality is a future event, the end of all time. Jesus Christ

who has come is also the one who is yet to come. Yet, one cannot anticipate or repeat this event. This event is the fulfillment of time. In this sense, Jesus Christ is the revelation of the deepest and final reality of humanity.

The traditional teaching of the church concerning Christ is a commentary on the text of the New Testament. We can do no more than attempt to understand the text. We can summarize the New Testament teaching concerning Christology in two statements. The Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. The discovery made by the New Testament witnesses about the reality of Jesus Christ consists either in the knowledge that the Son of God is identical with Jesus of Nazareth, or in the knowledge that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Son of God. They derived their notion of the Son from Jesus of Nazareth. They found in Him the fulfillment of the notion of the Son of God, and in so doing, discovered the notion of the Son itself. The New Testament presents Jesus with heroic, saintly, and sage characteristics, as a great man. Jesus made strong impressions upon His followers. Yet, this is not the distinctive and original thing to be found in Jesus and to be said about Him. They met God in Him. They heard the Word in Him. That is the original and ultimate fact. In this sense, the movement of thought is from above downward. They recognized the divine in the man Jesus. Their experience was that of the presence of the Son and Word of God. They took that experience for granted. Statements as Jesus is the Son or the Word became flesh are self-authenticating, analytic statements. What we hear about Jesus Christ is witness about the Son of God who became a man, about the man who was the Son of God, one related to the other.

The docetic version of Christology focused upon the eternal Son being Jesus of Nazareth. The ebionite version of Christology focused upon the strong, inner emotion

into which humanity feels itself transported by God. It concerns itself with the stimulating man, Jesus, with this historical creaturely reality as such, and with the effects proceeding from it. Therefore, as gladly as it first adopted them, and without suffering any loss in actual content, it will drop the unduly lofty descriptions of Jesus as a divine being practically identical with God, descriptions that fundamentally do not quite correspond with the actual degree of human enthusiasm. The true humanity of Christ is dispensable for Doceticism. The true divinity of Jesus is dispensable for the Ebionite.

2. Jesus Christ the objective possibility of revelation

Jesus Christ is the freedom of God for us, a fact to which Scripture witnesses. We cannot regard this as a question of theological anthropology independently, and then apply it from outside to the reality of Jesus Christ. Obedience to revelation must invariably mean to let oneself be involved. To be involved must mean to allow revelation to question in a way that the question it asks becomes our question. The attempt to question ourselves and to receive what revelation tells us is not rationalism. The possibility of revelation is another area we must discuss. How in the freedom of God is it possible for divine revelation to encounter humanity? How far can the reality of Jesus Christ be the revelation of God to humanity? We ask about the actual possibility presupposed and grounded in revelation and through revelation, known only from it. We might formulate the question in another way. How far is the reality of Jesus Christ an adequate ground for the fact that the revelation of God encounters humanity, and for its effective operation? How far does the reality Jesus Christ have the power to be the reality of revelation? How far has such identity validity? If we let ourselves be told that that is answer is called Jesus Christ, and if this existence of Jesus Christ is itself the objective possibility of revelation consisting in the freedom of God, then we face the task of

understanding the existence of Jesus Christ as the objective possibility of revelation. Revelation allows humanity to know that God is hidden and humanity blind. Revelation separates God and humanity by bringing them together. By bringing them together, revelation informs humanity about God and about itself. Revelation reveals God as the Lord of eternity, as the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer, and characterizes humanity as a creature, as a sinner, as one devoted to death. Since the boundary is visible, revelation, which crosses this boundary, is also visible as a mystery, a miracle, an exception. Human beings who listen here, see themselves standing at the boundary where all is at an end. Whichever way I look, God is hidden for me and I am blind to God. The revelation that crosses this boundary, and the togetherness of God and humanity that takes place in revelation in spite of this boundary, make the boundary visible to humanity in an unprecedented way.

To the question how far the reality of Jesus Christ can be revelation of God for us, the only answer is the following: As far as the reality of Jesus Christ requires for the revelation of God to us. What we need follows from what Jesus Christ can do. He can do exactly what we need. What He can do is all that we need. We actually need to read off the possibility of revelation from its reality in Jesus Christ. At bottom, the individual explanation to which we now proceed can only be a reading and exegesis of this reality. First, His nature as God compared with our nature as human beings, does not limit Him in such a way that He cannot be God within the sphere indicated by this human nature. His majesty is so great that even in the lowliness of this divine existence of His in our sphere, it can show itself to be majesty. What is impossible for us, what might rightly appear to us as impossible with God, is possible with God. Therefore, it becomes possible in divine freedom that Christ should be our God. Second, Jesus Christ reveals Himself to

us in such a way that His Word or the Son of God becomes a human being. We needed the Word or the Son, in order that God might show divinity to us.

How in the freedom of God is it possible for the revelation of God to encounter humanity? How far can the reality of Jesus Christ be the revelation of God to humanity? How far is the reality of Jesus Christ an adequate ground for the fact that the revelation of God encounters humanity, and for its effective operation? How far has the reality of Jesus Christ the power to be the reality of revelation? How far has such identity validity?

The entrance of God into the human condition through Jesus does not remove the divine from Jesus. The majesty of God is so great that the lowly occurrence of the divine in Jesus is still majesty. This appearance is still revelation of the divine. What seems impossible is possible with God, for God is free to be for us in this way. This entrance of God into human reality through Jesus shows us a dimension of the nature of God humanity could not know with this revelation. God has become one of us through the Son. I would not want to argue that God could not engage humanity in another way. In fact, God has done so in Israel and in other cultures. However, God gave the gracious gift of a further revelation of the nature of God in Jesus.

Third, God is free for us in Christ, in such a way that the Son or Word assumes a form at least known to us, such that God can become cognizable by us by analogy with other forms known to us. In this likeness, God becomes accessible to us because God becomes visible to us. Jesus can reveal God to us because He is visible, one human being to another human being. His actual entry into this visibility signifies, let us remember, the entry of the eternal Word of God into veiling. However, this veiling has to take place in order that it may lead to divine unveiling and exaltation and so to the completion of revelation. The revelation of God without this veiling or in the form of an unknown being

from another world would not be revelation, but our death. It would be the end of all things, because it would mean the abolition of the conditions of our existence. God bends down to us by assuming this form familiar to us. God announces divine love to us in the fact that even in unveiling, He yet does not meet us as a stranger. What happens to the familiar cosmic reality now that the human nature in Christ is adopted and taken up into this unity with the Son of God, is substantially a restoration and confirmation of its original connection with God. However, it is not a linking up with a condition that it already possessed and with which we could already be familiar, but a free and undeserved distinction, based only upon grace and not at all upon nature, a distinction that happens to nature.

Fourth, God is for us in such a way that the divine Word becoming a human being at the same time is the true and eternal God, the same as He is at the right hand of the Father. The path of passion and humiliation that the Son undertook in Jesus is not a loss of divine majesty. In light of the goal of the life of the Son, it is the path of victory. We find this in a graphic way in the following text.

Philippians 2:5-11 (NRSV)

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

When we say that God becomes a human being, we also say that divinity hides itself.

These suggestions are not assumptions. They reflect upon the possibilities of what it means when Christians say that God is uniquely and universally present in Jesus as the Son of God. In this sense, I cannot offer these suggestions based upon theological anthropology. They arise from the possibility that Jesus whom the New Testament claims Him to be. The paradox is this. God becomes hidden in a human being in order to reveal with greater clarity who God is. God wills the silence of a human being in order to speak the divine word. This form of revelation is a barrier; this form of revelation is a door that opens into the divine reality. This revelation poses a problem to us; this revelation provides a solution to the problems that face humanity. We find the paradox within the human condition.

At this point, theological anthropology can assist. Humanity is puzzling to itself. What puzzles us most is our relationship with other human beings. In our first struggling attempts at relationships with other human beings, first parents and siblings and later with neighbors, we acquaint ourselves with the independence of other things and people from us. As we reflect upon others, we reflect upon what is alien to us, puzzling, and ultimately unsolvable. The world is not transparent to us. At the same time, nothing is nearer or more familiar to us than another human being. Nothing else comes closer to us, is so constitutive for ourselves, as other people in all their strangeness. To live as a human being means to be related to other human beings, to differ from them and to agree with them, to come from them and depend on them. We never are what we are except as we depend upon others. We depend upon them in a way that we are not dependent upon

anything else in the world. To see and hear is to see and hear people. The words that come to us, without which we ourselves would have no language, are human words. We discover our independence in this context of human dialogue. Disclosure comes to us through other people as a communication. The neighbor is both a barrier and an open door. The life of the other makes visible what was hidden. We may even discern the path of the divine in the neighbor, as one also made in the image and likeness of God. Humanity belongs to the world that God has made and called very good. As such, we can rely to some degree upon the intent of God in creation that some resemblance to the divine is in all persons. In that sense, the revelation of God in Jesus is a confirmation and restoration of the original intend of God in creation.

14) The Time of Revelation

The revelation of God in the event of the presence of Jesus Christ is the time of God for us. It is fulfilled time in this event itself. However, as the Old Testament time of expectation and as the New Testament of recollection, it is also the time of witness to this event.

1. God's time and our time

When we talk about God revealing who God is, we talk about an event. It means that God has time for us. Human time is lost or fallen time. Our time is separated, conditioned by the anxiety we experience in the flow of time. The time God has for us is a time of expectation and fulfillment, but in a hidden way. This hidden time is alongside the experience of lost or fallen time. The present is not stationary. The present moves forward in anticipation toward the future. This different time God has for us is one in which God continues to be God, while at the same time God becomes what we are. As John said it, "the Word become flesh." This amounts to saying, "the Word become time."

Revelation has its time. Only as revelation has its time can revelation be revelation to humanity. This also means that it must be of a year, day, and hour when it

occurs. Revelation must occur at particular time and space. In this sense, revelation creates the possibility of a new time, a fulfilled time, for humanity. In revelation, God has real time for humanity, even in its lost or fallen time. This lost time is also the time that keeps the character of creation, which declared “very good” in Genesis 1. Further, we find in Exodus 3:13-14 the revelation, “I am who I am,” a statement that seems to suggest the unchangeable character of God as the one who is the source and sustainer of life. The time God has for us is right, genuine, and real; this time is fullness and reconciliation. We know God has time for us because God takes the time to reveal who God is to humanity. To speak in this way does not mean we need a general conception of history. Frankly, Christians have already found God revealed in Christ, and view time and history in that light. The person who does not see the significance of this event of revelation in Jesus Christ will not have the sense of time expected or fulfilled. Further, revelation is not something that we unearth as we examine history. Rather, history is the veil of the revelation of God. The revelation of God in history has this hidden quality because of the nature of God having time for us as human beings. When we are aware that God has revealed who God is in history, then we live in fulfilled time, we become contemporary with it, and we become partners with Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles. This fulfilled time conditions the whole experience of time by the person who has embraced it. The time of calendar and clocks is withdrawn from our anxiety. We do not need to defend it. It speaks for itself. We cannot prove it. We ought not to want to prove it, because every attempt to prove it would be a denial of it.

We also need to recognize the human resistance to the concept that God has revealed to us what God is like. We want to come up with our own vision of truth. The revelation of God has a claim upon us, both as to the focus of our lives and the form our

lives take. We resist such accountability. The idea of God in time, God in history, is offensive to our desire to lead our lives as we wish. God in time is offending because God grips us in our sphere, in our lost or fallen time. Fulfilled time becomes the enemy that has forced itself into our delusion and confusion. Becoming accustomed to our fallen character, any revelation that shows us the way toward fulfillment and light becomes something to resist. Our focus upon self causes us to take offense at revelation. The reason is simple. Fulfilled time calls us to change our lost time into fulfilled time. In this sense, the crucifixion was an act of self-preservation and self-defense. Israel does not deserve blame at this point, for it represents the human condition.

The form revelation must take is that of the servant, as identified by II Isaiah and Paul. Revelation in hidden form is a necessity, in the sense that the human world is one loved by God. Now, if we acknowledge the revelation by God of who God is, it must be in certain texts that bear witness to it. The Bible is a servant in this sense. Revelation is not the result of the insight or skill of the writers, but by the freedom of God to be free for us and to free us from ourselves.

What is the relationship between fallen time and fulfilled time? First, fulfilled time is genuine or authentic time, in contrast to fallen time as inauthentic time. Second, fulfilled time takes our lost time away from us. This is why we have such resistance to revelation. It requires real, existential change. Third, fulfilled time is the anticipation of fulfillment. As long as the human world continues, fulfilled time can only be in a hidden way along side this human world, while pointing the way to the completion of the hidden time of fulfillment and the external course of human events. Fourth, time has its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. As such, human time has an end. Infinite time, as a continuation of the sequence of the calendar, is a myth of the time-conscious person. It

forgets the importance of revelation as the time God has for us, and therefore the fulfilled nature of time.

2. The time of expectation

Fulfilled time must have a pre-time coordinated with it. The time of this history is the pre-time to revelation. For revelation itself is nothing else than the ultimate continuation, the peak and the goal of this history. Its time is the time of the fulfilling of this historical time. We cannot avoid the hidden character of revelation in historical time. The Old Testament is the witness to the genuine expectation of revelation. The uniqueness of the history of Israel is surely not sufficient to testify to the revelation of God in the Old Testament. In reality, the revelation of God in the Old Testament looks forward to further revelation. The hidden character of the expectation of revelation is just as evident as is the hidden character of revelation itself. The arrival of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the only basis for accepting the expectation of revelation contained in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the one to whom the Old Testament looks forward. Interestingly, the New Testament is a collection of documents that arise out of what we might consider a Hellenistic religious movement. The New Testament does not consider itself a continuation of the Judaism of the day. Rather, it goes back to the Old Testament canon, and in particular, the prophets, for the context of understanding what occurred in Jesus Christ. The New Testament also reflects the influence of the apocalyptic literature of Jewish thought. The early church, the church of the middle ages, and the church of the Reformation, all considered this fulfillment of Old Testament expectation of revelation. The church rightly rejected the attempt to separate Jesus from this context of the expectation of revelation reflected in the Old Testament. We need to come to a proper understanding of the way in which this expectation occurs. We benefit greatly from the

study of religion in Israel. However, this is not the same as the theology presented in the Old Testament. If we focus upon Judaism and Christianity as religious movements, we can open up the possibility of removing the Old Testament from the canon. However, when we focus upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, we reasonably consider the ways in which God prepared the way for this revelation. We can understand this revelation as we properly reflect upon the ways of God in the Old Testament. Eichrodt and von Rad have adequately expressed this expectation. We can reflect upon this expectation of revelation in the Old Testament in the following three ways.

First, the Old Testament is a witness to revelation as the free, once and for all, specific action of God. This Now of the divine decision and revelation of God is the covenant, carried out in the flight from Egypt, introduced, made possible and led by God, proclaimed in the once and for all giving of the law at Sinai. The Torah is the instrument of divine compassion, a covenant of grace and law. This revelation is expectation of Jesus Christ. We discover several covenants in the Old Testament. We find the covenant with Abraham, Noah, the Law, David, and Levi. It appears that each covenant contains the promise of something further to come. In particular, personalities of the Old Testament, we also find mediators of the covenant. We find them in Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, II Isaiah, judges, kings, and prophets. All of this divine activity contains the promise of further revelation in Jesus Christ. The number of covenants and the succession of mediators points forward to Jesus Christ. The kings of Israel did not follow through on divine law. The priests did not fulfill their function of bringing forgiveness and reconciliation with God. The prophets related the word of God, but they were not that Word in personal presence. God works through them; they are not mediators of divine activity itself. They point beyond themselves to one who is to come.

Second, the Old Testament is the witness to the revelation of God that remains hidden. Judgment is part of the revelation, for God has worked with Israel and not with other nations settled in Palestine. This revelation of the God of Israel brought denial of the reality of the gods of other nations. This rejection of the gods of other nations also led to the suffering of Israel at the hands of other nations. From the perspective of world history, this little land between Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon is of little note. Job and Ecclesiastes reflect this suffering in the world of the righteous, as does II Isaiah. We see the rivers of eternal gentleness in this nation. Further, in the covenant between God and Israel we find the sinfulness of humanity. We see the story of human sickness and continual misunderstanding, self-will, and rebellion. The sin of Israel is the human side of the hidden character of God. God often punishes in strange ways in the Old Testament. God frequently punishes lightly some serious sins, and punishes heavily what we might consider minor infractions. Humanity reveals itself as sinful in the Old Testament, and finally in the cross of Jesus Christ. When God reveals, humanity responds with rebellion.

Third, the Old Testament is the witness of the revelation in which God is present to humanity as the coming God. God is present in the people of Israel, which looks forward to the formation of a people in every nation that knows no race, gender, or social status. God is present in the land of Palestine, which looks forward to the citizenship of the people of God in eternity. God is present in the Temple, which looks forward the future reconciliation and forgiveness God would take effect in the cross. The lordship of God in Israel looks forward to a time of lordship over the earth. The presence of God in judgment within Israel leads to the judgment of God upon humanity. Christians can say all of this for one reason. We speak after the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is fulfilled time, the fulfillment of the expectation recorded in the Old Testament.

3. The time of recollection

The time of recollection is the time of New Testament and therefore of fulfilled time. We do not have this perception of fulfilled time because of insight. Rather, the connection between the expectation of revelation and Jesus Christ is just as difficult to discern as that between Jesus Christ and the recollection of that fulfillment as reflected in the New Testament. The question arises by what right we may regard these particular documents of a religious past among so many others as documents that reflect the revelation of God. We have not understood the claim of the New Testament to reveal at all. This claim does not mean that we will decide to single out New Testament religion above all other religions on the ground of our judgments of value and taste, and so make our own its special relation to its founder. The New Testament makes no claim at all in favor of the religion documented in it. It does claim that we hear it as the witness to revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The difference with the Old Testament is clear. The Old Testament looks forward to further revelation, while the New Testament looks backward to revelation already completed and witnesses to it. How are we to conceive of this revelation in the texts of the New Testament?

First, the New Testament is the witness to a togetherness of God and humanity, based on a free self-relating of God to humanity. Only God could carry out the program as laid out the Old Testament, a program of law and grace, of adoption by God in mercy and judgment. This could happen only as God became one with humanity in Jesus Christ. In contrast to the many covenants in the Old Testament, the New Testament relates one covenant.

Second, the New Testament relates the revelation of the hidden God. We find this hidden character of God in judgment upon a sinful world. Interestingly, suffering takes on a different character in the New Testament than it had in texts like Job and II Isaiah.

We see this in the suffering of Jesus. We see in it the picture of those who bear the word of Christ. God blesses them as poor and persecuted. In persecution, they are to pray for their persecutors and move on. The menace of martyrdom and readiness to face it has a different character than in the Old Testament. Job, Ecclesiastes, and many psalms reflect an agonizing approach to suffering that we do not find in the New Testament. In the cross, one person has died for all, and thus no one needs to die alone. If one has to fight and despise the world, the world still means something ultimate to that person. The world is still a temptation and opens the person to attack. The only fight the believer needs to have is to acknowledge and confirm that Jesus Christ has already fought the fight in question. Christ takes our place, undertaking and conducting the case of God with us and our case with God.

Third, the New Testament is the witness to the revelation in which God is present to humanity as the coming God. We find this revelation primarily in the resurrection. We have this revelation behind us, and therefore in front of us. When we hear what did happen in Christ on our behalf, what is going to happen to us in the future has a determination. We are not the ones who determine that future through our estimation or capacity. Christ is always the one who stands at the door and knocks, and faith is always the decision in which people open to Him that He may enter. As people make this decision, people have Christ and all that Christ is and brings.

15) The Mystery of Revelation

The mystery of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ consists in the fact that the eternal Word of God chose, sanctified and assumed human nature and existence into oneness with God in order thus, as God and human being, to become the Word of reconciliation spoken by God to humanity. The sign of this mystery revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the miracle of the birth, that the Holy Ghost conceived Christ, born of the Virgin Mary.

1. The problem of Christology

Christology determines the whole of a church dogmatics and its parts. We can see this from the statement in John 1:14:

John 1:14 (NRSV)

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

At this point, I will touch upon Christology as it relates to the Christian view of revelation. I will first consider the question of God and humanity coming together in Jesus Christ. Then I will consider the matter of virgin birth. The focus of this section is on specifically Christian knowledge. We do not look for some higher vantage point from which we gain our perspective. We start from the vantage point of the Word of God chose, sanctified and assumed human nature and existence into oneness with himself, in order as, very God and very man, to become the Word of reconciliation spoken by God to humanity. We cannot get behind this point. We cannot derive or prove the statement. If we take revelation seriously as the revelation of God, then in any doctrine of revelation we must deal with the point that constitutes the mystery of revelation.

In the early church, we find the simple statement that Jesus Christ is very God and very man, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. J. G. Herder made the point that the union of the two natures of Christ is not something human beings can define. Yet, from a formal perspective, early theologians expended great effort to define this relationship. They sought systematic precision. It often became a brand of intellectualism, trifling, contentious, unreal, and often scholastic hair-splitting. Yet, all this effort arises from the challenge it felt as to the question of who Christ is. Later, people learned to answer this question with much less exertion, dispute, or precision. Yet, this was possible because, in a tacit way, they had simplified the question of Christology. Sadly, they learned to circumvent the riddle set forth in the New Testament. For instance,

if one regards the biography of the historical Jesus as the original and proper content of the New Testament, it will be easy to get on in Christology without meticulousness. However, such a person will also have to face the question whether his or her simple answer is not there from the outset, itself simplifying, therefore, the question put by the New Testament. Of course, observers of the process find it easy to criticize. On the other hand, from a material approach, people often question whether the early church ended up with a divine phantom walking on earth. Christology showed an interest in metaphysical speculation and in the physical implications of Christology rather than its ethical implications. In terms of the vision God has for humanity, early Christology may have unintentionally obscured the way in which Christ is the form of the purest human being on earth, where he becomes the pattern of a healthy form of life. Much of this early Christology had little interest in the ethical implications of Jesus. The focus was on salvation and heaven, rather than the present healing of the human condition. The focus was upon what Christology had to say about who God was and about the nature of salvation. As a result, it had a richer view of God and salvation, but a poverty of the change required now for human beings living within the truth of Christ. One could say that while early and Medieval Christology focused upon divine nature and salvation in Christology, modern theology has tended to focus upon the ethical (Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack) and the political (Rauschenbusch). Early and Medieval Christology preserved the mystery of revelation, while much of modern theology seeks to take the mystery away. Modern theology has a point. Some will say of Christ that He is the highest instance of what it claims to know from other sources as good, reasonable, moral and divine behavior. It will also value Him as one of the classic spiritual persons of human history, in which the light of the divine shines through. Buddha would be another

example. It will also value Him as a bit of impressive reality. Jesus is a social prophet, a mystic, a teacher, the initiator of a movement, and so on. Yet, this same theology will hesitate to view Christ as the beginning and center of Christian reflection. It refuses to say that Jesus is fully God and fully a human being. Many modern theologians will assume the cloak of humility, claiming that their modest claims for Jesus reflect the humble attitude of Jesus. I do not doubt that for most of them, this is true. However, such an approach also descends into spiritualism, moralism, and bringing forth a political agenda. The appeal to humility is, in actuality, its denial, for it strips away mystery in favor of a rationalistic, moralistic, and political enterprise. For this reason, as confusing as it may appear, the Christology of the early and medieval church is nothing other than reflection upon the implication of New Testament texts. As such, we need to wrestle with that tradition. In one sense, Christian thinking begins with the prophetic and apostolic witness summarized in the classic statement; Jesus is fully God and full human.

2. Very God and very man

I now want to deal specifically with the phrase in John 1:14, “The Word became (was made, assumed) flesh.”

In this statement, we make contact at once with the mystery of revelation. The Lord of heaven and earth, who created out of free love, who adopts humanity into the divine family, who is Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer, He is a truly loving, serving God. He is the king of all kings just when He enters into the most profound, hidden character of being meek of heart.

This “becoming” of the Word is a matter of divine freedom.

This “becoming” of the Word means that the Word is still the free Word of God. Even in becoming flesh, the Word never ceases to be the Word.

The description of Mary as the mother of God is a sensible and permissible secondary statement of Christology. However, Mariology will always be an example of diseased theological thought. The New Testament takes only a Christological interest in the person of Mary. She is a servant. Just as the office of apostle receives honor, we also acknowledge that persons do not. The person of Mary ought not to receive honor above that of the apostles. Mariology consists of liturgical and ascetic practice with legendary accretions. Many theologians treated the growing medieval interest in Mary with reserve, such as Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure. Duns Scotus led the church into Mariology. Sadly, it appears that devotion to Mary has replaced devotion to Christ. It reflects an arbitrary innovation by the church. Its innovation consists in a falsification of Christian truth. The emergence of doctrines like the Immaculate Conception suggests that Mary had to co-operate in the birth of Jesus in a way that suggests her worthiness. In this view, the church removes the grace and mercy of God. Her co-operation in the birth of Jesus, and titles the church continues to give her, generates rivalry with Christ. This also leads to the church earning merit in the sacrament.

That the Word was made flesh means He became a real human being, participating in the same human essence and existence, the same human nature and form, the same historicity that we have. The revelation of God to us takes place in such a way that everything ascribable to humanity one can ascribe to the Son.

That the Word became flesh means that He became a human being. This means that at this point, the Word became human essence, and not simply male or female. He became that which makes a human being human rather than an angel, animal, or devil. The Word participates in human nature and existence. God is present in the flesh. This amounts to genuine human being and acting. The Word is a human being, like the rest of

us. In being what we are, Jesus is the Word of God. As one of us, He represents God to us and He represents us to God. He is the revelation of God to us. He is our reconciliation with God.

That the Word became flesh also means humanity in the narrower sense of humanity as liable to judgment from God. In this sense, the Word became the flesh that rebels against God. The Word put on the side of the adversary. The Word became our opposition to God, and therefore makes contact with us and becomes accessible to us. He was not a sinful person, but inwardly and outwardly, His situation was that of a sinful person. The nature that God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with Him?

That the Word became flesh also means that He does not deny His divinity. What humanity does to rebel against God, the Word omits; what humanity omits in rebellion against God, the Word does. If this were not the case, the Word would not be a revealing and reconciling action. He would not find us, and we would not touch Him. He exists in the place where we exist. Otherwise, His action would again not be a revealing, a reconciling action. Otherwise, He would bring us nothing new. He would not help us. Of course, the New Testament portrays the struggle involved in Jesus fulfilling His office as Reconciler.

Luke 2:49 (NRSV)

⁴⁹He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Luke 2:52 (NRSV)

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

The temptation as recorded in Matthew 4 is a serious battle. Equally serious are these statements in Mark 14:34, 15:34, Hebrews 5:7-10, and Hebrews 2:14-18.

Can or will the Word of God become? Does He not surrender His divinity? Alternatively, if He does not surrender it, what does becoming mean? By what figures of speech or concepts are we to describe properly this becoming of the Word of God? “The Word became.” If that is true, its truth is that of a miraculous act, an act of mercy on the part of God. As the Word becomes flesh, He adopts, assumes, or incorporates human being into unity with His divine being, so that this human being, as it comes into being, becomes as a human being the being of the Word of God. God cannot cease to be God. The inconceivable fact in it is that without ceasing to be God, the Word is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into His own being and to that extent makes it His own being. The context in which the Incarnation occurs is that humanity bears the image of God, and that creation received the words “very good” from God. Therefore, the Incarnation represents a certain coming home of the divine in human nature, in this time and place. Yet, this occurs in a singular way, for the Son or Word is such only once and for all. The Word, without becoming unlike himself, assumed likeness to us. Now, we are to seek Him and find Him here, in this human being, Jesus of Nazareth. The stable and the cross is the place where the Word is. Every question concerning the Word that we direct away from Jesus of Nazareth is directed away from the Word and therefore away from God. The Word does not exist for us apart from the human being of Jesus of Nazareth. This view is little more than a reflection upon Luther, who clutched with both hands the view of John and Paul in his Christology. The Word became hearable. We became reconciled to God. This is true because it became true in the New Testament account of Jesus. From this view, it has a dynamic and intellectual character. This event is prior to our reflection upon the eternal nature of the Son and the relation of the second person of the Trinity to humanity from eternity.

3. The miracle of Christmas

The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is not obvious, as if part of a series of other events. However, it becomes part of the content of our experience and thought. We have the opportunity to incorporate it into our form of life through our contemplation and categories. This revelation comes to us as gift. This gift masters us. If we do not know this person, if we are unaware of the reality of “very God and very man,” we will not say this. Rather, we will ascribe to ourselves the possibility of knowing it. If we are aware of it and declare that it is true, we will also be aware that it can be manifest to us in its truth only through its disclosure to us, rather than any capacity belonging to us. That is the outcome of our Christological reflections thus far. It remains for us to make its content quite explicit and understandable.

The incarnation of the Word asserts the presence of God in our world and as a member of this world, a human being among people. It is the revelation of God to us, and our reconciliation with God. The Christmas message has the content of revelation and reconciliation. This message is the meeting of God and world, of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ as inconceivable. This reality is not given, nor is it accessible elsewhere. We do not acknowledge this truth based upon general considerations. Our experience, no less than our thought, will rather make constant reference to the remoteness of the world from God and of God from the world. It will refer to the majesty of God and to the misery of humanity. Yet, the mystery of Christmas does not have the broad scriptural support one might want from a major teaching of the church. The Bible thinly and dubiously attests it. It seems to involve factual contradiction. We need to clarify the exegetical position of this teaching. For example, neither Mark nor John mentions the Virgin Birth. Further, it is not in Paul or the General Epistles. Neither Matthew nor Luke refers to it again. The genealogies have Joseph as the father, which

would establish descent from David. Yet, both genealogies contain expressions that at least leave open the idea that Jesus was not the bodily son of Joseph.

Nevertheless, a certain essential rightness and importance in their connection with the person of Jesus Christ admitted the stories of the birth of Jesus into the Gospel tradition. The question is whether we modern persons can also sense the essential rightness and importance of these narratives of the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth teaches us that God does it all. Of course, some will say the teaching derives from Isaiah 7:14. Others will refer to borrowing from Buddhist, Egyptian, Greek, and other myths. The Virgin Birth is the description and the form in which the New Testament and the creeds speak of this mystery. Popular theology wonders whether one can be a Christian and also not believe fully in the Virgin Birth. I cannot think of any reason that someone, without affirming the teaching of the Virgin Birth, could still recognize the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ or believe in following Christ. Yet, this does not mean that the church is at liberty to convert the teaching of the Virgin Birth into an option for especially strong or for especially weak souls. This teaching stands guard at the door of the mystery of Christmas. We cannot hurry past this guard. Although we can go down a private road, this teaching warns us from going there. Those who preach and teach in the church, if they take that private road, need to show the teaching of the Virgin Birth respect by keeping silent. The phrase, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,” is an event occurring in the realm of this world. This birth is a sign. The Virgin Birth and Easter are miracles stand together. The Virgin Birth at the opening and the empty tomb at the close of the life of Jesus bear witness that this life is a fact marked off from all the rest of human life, and marked off in the first instance, not by one understanding or our interpretation, but by itself. The Virgin Birth denotes the mystery of revelation. God

stands at the start where real revelation takes place. God is there, and not some arbitrary cleverness, capability, or piety of humanity. In this Jesus, the living God has spoken to humanity in accents fail to hear. Emil Brunner objects that the teaching of the Virgin Birth means a biological interpretation of the miracle and is in fact an expression of biological inquisitiveness. Yet, the tradition knows nothing of such interest.

When we consider the phrase, “born of Virgin Mary,” it states that the free will of God is the meaning and solution of the enigma. Like all biblical miracles, the Virgin Birth is a sign. This teaching is a judgment upon humanity. As a sign, it points to God as Revealer and Reconciler. However, it does not provide the condition for it. “Of a virgin” is inadequate for understanding Jesus as He is. Even apart from Joseph, He has a connection with sinful humanity on His mother Mary’s side. This teaching has nothing to do with a negative evaluation of sexual activity. In fact, if the problem were the sinfulness of the sexual act, a far better response would have the sanctification of sexual activity through an elect and especially blessed married couple, giving birth to the Son through the protection of grace. The point of the Virgin Birth appears rather in the affirmation that no human willing, achieving or creative activity on the part of humanity could bring about the Revelation and Reconciliation that God wanted to bring in Christ. We need to consider the significance that Jesus does not have a father, and thus omitting the role of the male. Just as the eternal Son does not have a mother, the Incarnate Son does not have a father. Man and woman share their common humanity.

Now, we need to consider the clause, “conceived by the Holy Spirit.” This states that the conception of Jesus was the work of God the Holy Spirit. Parallels with myths are not helpful here. The similarity is never more than verbal. The divine agents in such births are not God in the full sense, but at best gods. This clause means that we must omit

speculation about physics and biology. God is the sign author of the sign of the Virgin Birth. Therefore, it is not a natural possibility, even when we are tempted to do so with the theory of natural parthenogenesis. Why is Holy Spirit named here? The Holy Spirit is God present in freedom exercised in revelation, to dwell in individuals personally. Through the Holy Spirit, humanity can be there for God, be free for the work of God on individuals. The Holy Spirit opens the possibility of true participation in the revealing and reconciling action of God. Through the Holy Spirit, the claim of God to be our Lord, teacher, and leader becomes effective. Through the Holy Spirit, a church that ministers the Word of God can exist. The Holy Spirit gives freedom to the church as the children of God. The ground of this freedom is the way in which the Holy Spirit is present in the Incarnation; a unity of human nature with the Son made possible through the Spirit. The Word and Spirit come together. The Spirit allows humanity to be there and free for God. This clause states that Jesus had no father according to His human existence. The Holy Spirit takes the place of the male. Yet, this does not imply that the Spirit does what the male does. No marriage took place between the Spirit and Mary. Because Jesus is the true Son, and this fact is a mystery, the Virgin Mary conceives Him through the Holy Spirit. The miracle testifies to the mystery.

Part III: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

16) The Freedom of Humanity for God

According to Holy Scripture, the revelation of God occurs in our enlightenment by the Holy Spirit of God to a knowledge of the Word of God. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the revelation of God. In the reality of this event consists our freedom to be the children of God and to know, love, and praise God in the revelation of God.

1. The Holy Spirit the subjective reality of revelation

The one true God and Lord in the person of the Holy Spirit is the revelation of God for us. The Holy Spirit, in unity with Father and Son, is the revealed state of divinity

for us. What is the meaning of revelation as the presence of God? To what extent is there in this occurrence, a revealed state of God for humanity, and to that extent a human receptivity for the revelation of God? This is what the Bible means by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In what freedom that belongs to humanity is it real that the revelation of God teaches humanity? How does this freedom in humanity become real? God does not leave us to our own field of inquiry. God with us is the key. If it does exist for us, then we have to listen to it and acknowledge it very much in the form in which Scripture tells us of that occurrence from the side of God that is its objective presupposition. Not God alone, but God and humanity together constitute the content of the Word of God attested in Scripture. God and humanity confront one another as the Lord confronts the servant, the Creator confronts the one created, the Reconciler confronts the pardoned sinner, and the Redeemer confronts those who look forward to redemption. We realize the adequacy of the Bible at this point as the source of our knowledge. We submit to our bondage to scripture. We submit to become content with it. We do so because humanity is in the presence of God. The Bible recognizes the difference between the objective and subjective. The Torah is the objective, while the prophets and wisdom writings represent a subjective dimension. The church has had a long dispute that we can summarize as Jesus or Paul. In the Reformation, the Psalms and Romans were favorites. Luther focused upon the justification of the sinner, and Calvin emphasized the sanctification of the sinner. Revelation does not encounter humanity in a general way. Revelation has its own time. To this objective particularity in revelation corresponds a subjective element. The people who receive it are special people. They are special in their visible, outward position. In the Old Testament, they belong to Israel, the nation God has made the covenant, and therefore under both judgment and promise. In the New Testament, they

belong to the church in which Jesus Christ is present as the real acting subject, as the head of all the members gathered in the church with their definite tasks and functions. Yet, the texts check and shame those who boast of their membership instead of boasting in God. The texts give a sign of judgment to those who within this membership do not become recipients of revelation. The texts make clear the freedom of grace, which humanity so easily forgets and so lightly treasures. To do this, every now and then there turns up, at least in the Old Testament, a heathen who standing in his or her own place has nevertheless heard God and obeyed God. The universal church arose out of the national community. God created such places where people could experience the subjective dimension of revelation. The church exists first, and then believers. God is not bound to church or synagogue. Yet, the recipients of revelation are bound to a community. This significance of the church for the subjective reality of revelation is a teaching of the Bible and therefore belongs to global Christianity. The church is not a chance or arbitrary construction. Where the church is, there also we have this particular church rather than the universal church. The work of the church is always the work of sin and apostasy as well. Humanity searches after God. In Christ, revelation and reconciliation between God and humanity took place. People do not become Christians because of their reason, will, or feeling.

That the church has its origin in Christ means four things.

First, it derives from the Word that became flesh. That God made the Word flesh has meaning for the world of flesh. In Jesus Christ, human nature and divine nature come together in the Son. The church is the body of Christ, which at this point means that the existence of the church involves a repetition of the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ in that area of the rest of humanity that is distinct from the person

of Jesus Christ. Second, this life of the children of God is always a life for the sake of Christ. The foundation of the church is also its law and limit.

A second meaning of the description of the church as the body of Christ is undoubtedly that the repetition of the incarnation of the Word of God in the historical existence of the church excludes at once any possible autonomy in that existence.

Third, seeing that the life of the children of God is a dependence upon the incarnate Word, it is a common life. It is the life of a community. A church community or congregation has its ground in the essential being of those who are united within it. However, they are what they are from and by the Word. Their existence is none other than that of the Word. Therefore, they are one, as surely as the Word in which they exist is one. Their separation could occur only without the Word. The unity of the church has its foundation in the one Christ. The church as the body of Christ also means those who live within the circumference of which Christ is the center do not constitute, but they are as such a single and indivisible whole. Each in their own place, as a member, is drawn into the identity of the body with its head.

Fourth, the life of the children of God, and therefore the church, the subjective reality of revelation, is divine and human, eternal and temporal, and therefore invisible and visible. It is also human, temporal, and visible. As the body of Christ, the church as a further point in common with the incarnate Word of God. As distinguished from the eternal nature of God, it has a spatial and temporal form and extension. It is therefore visible in the same way as any other body. In Him and through Him, the church is the wholly concrete area of the subjective reality of revelation. The church is not a human production. It is in the world, and thus does not owe its existence to this world. We are in the church. The church is the reality of the revelation of God for us. It is in strict relation

to the revelation of God to us. If we tried to say anything else, we should have grievously misunderstood the biblical image that so far has served as our main statement, that the church is the body of Christ. Since it is a sign-giving that awaits the seeing eyes and hearing ears of each new generation, this sign-giving must receive recognition and understanding in the church with each generation. It must do so in such a way that the church does not master it, as if it has learned what Christ really wants for us in the apostolic testimony, and what preaching and sacrament ought to be. It must do so in such a way that at any time the church, with respectful consideration given to tradition, accepts the challenge to render an account to its generation. We shall see to it that with revelation itself God always makes the signs of it new, as much because they are the act of God as because they extend to the church that lives in time. We shall also see to it that as there is no new revelation, there are likewise no new signs. We need none of them. There is no way in which we could have any knowledge of them. We have no need to inquire about them. We shall have all our cut out to apprehend and understand both revelation itself and its sign-giving.

The church as the sphere in which the revelation becomes subjectively real has this objective side. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is that by which the objective reality of revelation becomes a subjective reality. When we consider how objective revelation reaches humanity, we acknowledge that it takes place through the humble means of the divine-sign-giving. In this sign-giving, objective revelation is repeated in such a way that it can come to humanity in genuinely human form. Yet, this presupposition remains a mystery. All that we know is that God uses this medium, and therefore the signs show the objective revelation.

To the question how revelation reaches humanity, our first finding enables us to give only a penultimate and not an ultimate answer. The showing of the objective revelation in such a way that humanity sees it is by the free grace of God. We have no insight into the exercise of this grace, and therefore we can never say the last word on this matter. When we have described the objective side of the church, the need for a leap in thought still faces us. In this before and behind, God wills that humanity offer love and praise to God. What lies between them we can never express or state because God has not revealed it to us. The indispensable means of grace are scripture, preaching, and sacrament is on the one side and the indication of humanity, who by the goodness of God can discover that he or she is a child of God. When we do these things, we declare that the leap is not something that we can learn from others. No one can make a leap or challenge others to make it. All that we have to consider is that here the leap has already been made, the unheard of and to us impossible leap from God to humanity. In that fact, revelation is already a reality. In this work of conviction, materially they do not think of anything but the work of divine sign-giving, the work of the prophetic and apostolic word in Holy Scripture, the work of preaching and sacrament. The conviction about which we are thinking means simply that this work attains its goal. We may be tempted to think that it means something else as well.

By the testimony of the Holy Spirit, we may be tempted to understand some hidden communication of the content of revelation in addition to and beyond the divine sign-giving. We may be tempted to find in this material addition of an immediate spiritual inspiration the very essence of the divine conviction. However, if we are, then it can only mean that we are again casting eager side-glances away from objective revelation as it reaches us in the divine sign-giving. We are trying to find a something

better that God might have told us, instead of looking at the supposedly less good that God has actually told us. We may later harmonize this something extra with the divine sign-giving. Yet, whatever starts in that way is a concealed or open sectarianism. It forgets that the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father, but also of the Spirit of the Word. It forgets that the Holy Spirit does not come to an independent road that bypasses the Word and the prophetic and apostolic witness to that Word. Rather, the Holy Spirit comes to us by the Word and the witnesses to that Word. Pietism is quite right. We speak of real revelation only when we speak of the revelation that is real for us. It is the revelation that is attested to us. It is the revelation that we adopt when it is attested. It is the revelation that reaches us. An objective revelation as such, even in the objectivity of scripture, preaching, and sacrament, becomes nothing more than an idol if it does not reach into humanity. This taking up of humanity into the event of revelation, because of which humanity sees itself as children of God, is the work of the Holy Spirit or the subjective reality of revelation. Clearly, the subjective revelation is not the addition of a second objective revelation. Subjective revelation consists only in the fact that objective revelation, the one truth that cannot be added to or bypassed, comes to humanity and is recognized and acknowledged by humanity. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. About that work there is nothing specific we can say.

The work of the Holy Spirit is that our blind eyes are opened and that thankfully and in thankful self-surrender we recognize and acknowledge that it is so. We cannot say anything else about this work; we cannot speak about it in any other way than by repeating over and over the Amen that the Spirit has put into our mouths by this work. Here, too, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. He is not a Spirit side by side with the Word. Through Christ, we will never be

anything else than just what we are in Christ. When the Holy Spirit draws and takes us right into the reality of revelation by doing what we cannot do, by opening our eyes and ears and hearts, He does not tell us anything except that we are in Christ by Christ.

Therefore, we have to say, and in principle, it is all that we can say that we are part of the family of the Son of God, hearers and doers of the Word of God. As long as the Word is there, and we are here, Christ remains external and we continue in separation. Christians recognize that the impartation of the grace shown in Christ demands that He be not only there, but also here. He has to become our own. He has to dwell in us. He and we are no longer two but one. This is what occurs when we believe this Gospel. The work of the Holy Spirit is nothing other than the work of Jesus Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit within us, occurring through faith, generates our oneness with Christ.

2. The Holy Spirit the subjective possibility of revelation

How in the freedom of humanity is it possible for the revelation of God to reach humanity? God opens our eyes and ears for God. In so doing, God tells us that we could do it ourselves, because we are blind and deaf. To receive the Holy Spirit means an exposure of our spiritual helplessness, a recognition that we do not possess the Holy Spirit. We can give only one basic answer to the question how in the freedom of humanity it is possible for the revelation of God reach humanity. This is that it is possible in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We have now to develop this statement.

First, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible for the revelation of God to reach humanity in freedom, because in it the Word of God is brought to the hearing of humanity. The work of the Holy Spirit means that there is an adequate basis for our hearing of the Word, since it brings us nothing but the Word for our hearing. It means that there is an adequate basis for our faith in Christ and our communion with Christ,

because the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the subjective possibility of revelation because the Spirit is the process by which the objective reality of revelation becomes subjective in the life of the body of Christ, the operation of the prophetic and apostolic testimony, the hearing of preaching, and the seeing of that to which the sacrament points. If we want truly and properly to investigate the subjective possibility of revelation, and therefore to understand the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit, we must look at the place from the Spirit comes and at what the Spirit brings. We must look at the contents of the hand of God stretched out to us in the Spirit. We must look at the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit. We must look to the objective possibility of our communion with Christ. We must therefore look at Christ himself. It is Christ, the Word of God, brought to the hearing of humanity by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who is the possibility of humanity being the recipient of divine revelation. The Spirit does not come from any place other than Christ. Second, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible in the freedom of humanity for the revelation of God to meet humanity, because in it humanity the Word of God explicitly tells us that humanity possess one possibility of his or own for such a meeting. Humanity lacks something that humanity ought to be, to have or to be capable of in relation to God. Humanity is sick. Yet, looked at from another perspective, humanity lacks everything. Humanity is dead. This fallen and lost condition was the reason for Christ.

To be human does not mean that we dwell with God. Humanity cannot be together with God in the way in which equals dwell together, or in the way in which individuals connect with themselves, or the way in which humanity is part of the natural world. In this respect, humanity is not free. To become free for God we must be convinced that we are not already free. We must make room for the miracle of

acknowledging the Word of God. Even John Calvin says that knowledge of God seems to have a foundation in self-knowledge. Before we begin to be satisfied with ourselves, we cannot long for God. Self-satisfied persons rest upon themselves and have no need of God. How do we achieve real self-knowledge? Real self-knowledge comes only in the presence of God. This involves at least the possibility that we may have a bad conscience, that we may be disappointed in our arbitrary imaginings, even to the point of complete disillusionment. It involves the possibility of a collapse, and of our knowledge of the collapse, of all our ideologies and enterprises, the possibility of despair, the possibility that we may find in despair the controlling factor in our existence. In other words, it involves the possibility of a negative determination of our existence, a possibility that is integral to humanity, an immanent anthropological point of contact with the revelation of God. Indeed, this possibility of a negative determination of our existence might objectively be identical with the wrath and judgment of God and therefore subjectively, as our own experience, at least a necessary indication of it, and something that we should have to see and know as such. Therefore, to the extent that revelation is the manifestation of wrath and judgment, it comes in answer to an existing possibility of our own, in answer to what humanity himself can already know about itself. A negative determination of existence is not as such identical with the saving exposure of our radical need of redemption. Moreover, the saving exposure of our radical need of redemption need not consist in a negative determination of our existence. On the contrary, if the need for redemption is the exposure and therefore the foolishness, poverty, and humility of which the New Testament speaks, it does not have its basis in a more or less negative determining, in an immanently anthropological limitation or even overthrow of our existence. To these latter, when we have exhausted every other aid, we can always react

with irony with skepticism, with apathy, with the greatest of all illusions, a so-called lack of illusion, and finally with suicide. Third, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible for humanity in its freedom to be met by the revelation of God, because in it the Word of God becomes unavoidably becomes the master of humanity. Only the children of God know their need for God.

Through God, humanity is free for God. We will now try to analyze the event.

First, to have our master in Jesus Christ means always to have found someone over against us, from whom we can no longer withdraw. We can withdraw from everything else that is over against us, whether it is the world or people. It is at once our misery and comfort, the source of our most serious aberrations and the help of which we simply must avail ourselves from time to time, that repeatedly we can withdraw to an inward solitude. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit makes this withdrawal impossible, at any rate in relation to the Word of God. People do not become different persons when they receive the Holy Spirit. Why should they? However, as the people they are, they cannot flee from this specific partner to any solitude. As the people they are, they stand in a specific relationship that they can no longer leave. In this specific relationship, they must be secretly responsible. They must reckon with the fact that they are always engaged in a dialogue, whatever content of that dialogue may be.

Second, if we have Jesus Christ as our master, it means that we have discovered the supreme authority of Christ. In all our obedience or disobedience, we are always responsible and subject to our master. To other authorities we may make the most profound surrender. We may accept the strictest discipline in relation to them. However, over against all of them, we can remain independent, at the deepest and truest level of

reality. Such persons have not become another person by receiving the Holy Spirit, and yet they are other persons, as far as they stand in this relationship.

Third, to have our master in Jesus Christ means that we are subject to a command, in face of which there can be neither subterfuge nor excuse. We can find excuses and subterfuges for the commands of all other masters, even when we obey them in whole or in part. We can have doubts about their meaning. We can insist that we did not hear or understand. We can reply that we have already fulfilled them. Alternatively, we cannot fulfill them, at any rate in the strict sense. However, in face of this command those devices are impossible. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that people have received an order, by which they can now mark off their very existence.

Fourth, to have our master in Jesus Christ is to exist in an ultimate and most profound irresponsibility. In our participation it is foreseen that we are people, and disobedient people, and therefore quite unsuitable for the work. Our participation does not depend upon our fitness for this work. We participate in spite of our unsuitability. It rests upon the forgiveness of sins. It is grace. It is a participation in fear and in love to the God who has mercy on us in that God calls to it and permits it. That is just why our participation is not a participation that involves anxiety and worry whether we can really do what we are required to do. Of course, we cannot do it. That is the presupposition of our participation. Only one thing is required of us. As those who cannot do it of ourselves, and never could, we have to participate when the Word does it. It is a matter of the receiving and adopting of humanity into participation in the Word of God. That the will of God should be done in all things is what one can and should pray when the other burden seems likely to crush one, and then it will not crush one. However, the very prayer, "Thy will be done," is in fact an admission that I need not worry about it, because

that is not my business. I am not responsible. This burden, the burden of my own others' sins, does not lie upon me. The burden lies solely and entirely upon Jesus Christ, upon the Word of God.

Fifth, to have our master in Jesus Christ is to have God subject us to a definite formation and direction. The master acquires a pupil, a servant, a scholar, a follower, in whom one finds oneself repeatedly and assists others in finding. This direction is from the Spirit, from the new birth and toward the Word. It is the object of an attraction, a formation, a leading by the Word. From the standpoint of the being itself, this is, of course, inconceivable. It does not deserve it, nor can it contribute to it or cooperate in it. The aim of the action of the Spirit is that out of human life there should come a repetition, an analogy, a parallel to the being of the Spirit, that they should be conformable to Christ. Conformable to Christ means that in all His humanity, for Christ's sake and in Christ, He is a child of God. It means that one is directed away to the one for whose sake and in whom one is a child of God. This directing and integrating into Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, and in it one can hear and receive the divine revelation. The possibility into which we have been inquiring is to be found in this actuality.

Sixth, to have our master in Jesus Christ means finally and comprehensively that we have no concern of our own, but that the concern of Christ becomes our concern.

17) The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion

The revelation of God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the judging but also reconciling presence of God in the world of human religion, that is, in the realm of attempts of humanity to justify and to sanctify itself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God. The church is the locus of true religion, as far as through grace it lives by grace.

1. The problem of Religion in theology

Religion is simply one of the problems that confront theology. The church as a religious fellowship and faith as a form of personal piety are simply among the problems that confront theology. The problem with approaching theology, church, and Christian life in the manner of all religion is that it assumes that the human beings engaged in this pursuit in religion involve themselves in a free investigation of the truth in relation to God and the things of God. The problem is that persons do not engage in free theological investigation of truth. Such investigations often arise from criticism of perceived inadequacies of the biblical text and the traditional teaching of the church. They arise from a decline of faith and the rise of uncertainty regarding the proclamation of the church. When our comparison is Christianity and other religions, we have already made a judgment concerning the revelation by God. Of course, we cannot ignore the anxieties and hopes of the present. However, a theologian cannot become the champion of the predominant interest of the present. Yet, the wedding of church and culture is precisely what occurred in much of European theology in the 1700's. Humanity made itself the center, measure, and goal of all things. Theology needs to investigate the human condition and the end toward which humanity trends. Theology does not need to baptize the movements of the present to do so. Sin is unbelief, in that it is the failure to accept Christ as one our One and all, and somehow secretly dissatisfied with His leadership of the church and the peace He brings. The real catastrophe of the liberal theology of the 1800's was that theology lost the uniqueness that revelation brought to it. Therefore, it lost the seed of faith with which it could remove mountains, even the mountain of secular culture. Theologians willingly placed revelation on the same level as all religion. Clearly, God is present in the world of human religion. However, what we have to discern is that this means that God is present. The basic task is so to order the concepts revelation and

religion that we can again see the connection between the two as identical with that event between God and humanity in which God is God. This God is the Lord of humanity. This God is the one who judges and justifies humanity. God adopts humanity and receives humanity through judgment and goodness. The Incarnation is the only reason Christianity can speak of the abolition of religion.

Where we think that we can compare or equate revelation with religion, we have not understood it as revelation. Revelation is understood only where we expect from it, and from it alone, the first and the last word about religion. Revelation is the sovereign action of God upon humanity, or it is not revelation. Humanity as revelation shows humanity to be the only humanity that theology can take seriously. The problem of religion in theology is not the question of how one can bring religion into an orderly and plausible relationship with the theological concepts, revelation, faith, and so on. The theological question is this: What is this thing which from the standpoint of revelation and faith is revealed in the actuality of human life as religion?

2. Religion as unbelief

Theological assessment of religion will need caution and charity. Religion is an activity of human beings whom God loves and in whom resides a trace of the image of God. It will not help if we stand aloof from religion as if we already know everything. It will not help if we participate in relativism and impartiality of historical skepticism. Tolerance shows itself unattainable by the fact that it cannot take religion seriously. It rather patronizes religion. From a Christian perspective, religion falls under the admonition of tolerance with the forbearance of Christ. One way to express this generosity toward all religious activity is that an element of harmonious co-operating of humanity with God occurs. Religious institutions, beliefs, and experiences are the

outstretched hand toward God. Revelation is the disclosure of God toward humanity. This disclosure occurs as an act of prevenient grace available to all. Christianity addresses humanity that has already experienced dimensions of the revelation of God. It addresses a spiritual need that constitutes the human condition. In the Old Testament, we find the prohibition of idolatry and images. We find the continual battle with Baal and other gods. Yet, the Hebrew people freely borrow moral legislation, sacrificial system, and the priesthood from surrounding religious institutions and beliefs. The account in Genesis from history before Abraham, the hero of the Hebrew faith, and the time after Him, is a pattern followed by other ancient historians in Greece and Mesopotamia. Many hymns in the Psalter have the root in non-Hebrew expressions of worship. To a historically developed deity worshippers usually assigned a whole complex of more or less sharply emphasized functions, many of which might impinge upon those of others or overlap them. Thus, the Hebrews expanded the God of Israel to be also the author of the fertility of the land. They also saw Yahweh to be the God of creation even if the people did not realize this at first. Extensions of the zone of influence of a specific deity are hardly peculiar to the religious history of Israel. In Israel, they form the framework of the transition from monolatry, the worship of a single God, which in Israel was based on the ancient concept of Yahweh's jealousy, to monotheism, the conviction that only the one God exists.

The danger of relating to God through magic is present in all religious practices. The worshipping community achieves its essence when worshipers look away from themselves and to the deity. This dedication to deity finds expression in sacrifice or in simple service that it offers to the deity. Dedication is also the point of religious ecstasy in the ritual dance, in meditation, or in devotion. Each can be made into a means of

gaining control over divine power, into a technique whereby to secure the self against the divine claim or to gain security for personal existence. The reality of the deity that is above the specific means of its manifestation may lose its transcendence in favor of fixation on the particular form. When this happens, perversion takes place. It localizes the deity by tying it to the presence of deity in ritual. Death is the penalty for violation of the holy. When one marks off a sacred area from the secular world, it means that outside that area people may go about their own affairs comparatively unconcerned. The same applies to the appointment of sacred times at which to reverence the deity, and think about it. Sacred times and places restrict the deity and service of the deity to the spheres of life that are thus appointed. Marking off sacred areas makes the rest of the world and everyday conduct profane. Sacred times and places in religious festivals give meaning to the whole life of religious people. They can also make it possible to worship the gods, not for their own sake, but because they guarantee the preservation of the state and the well-being of individuals. Religious people want to live out their secular lives as well in terms of the divine truth that they enact and celebrate in the worshipping community. Magic first deliberately uses the sacred for profane ends and subordinates it to these ends. Worshipping community often inextricably intertwine the ecstasy of worship and its corruption into a magical rite. This applies to the religious practice of Christians as well. Perverting worship into an act that they must perform, and in this way transform it into a magical act, is favored by the making of secular life into an autonomous sphere, at least in the early stages of this development. The radical secularization of the world into a world without God can also be the starting point of a reaction of turning to God. The religious relation always stands under the threat of the ambiguity that the self might be the main concern in the relation to deity. The starting point for this is the finitude of the

sphere or form in which the deity manifests itself and which the worshipping community can bring into our comprehensive associations and localized there. In the process, what is missing is actually the infinity or absoluteness of the deity.

We can further distinguish between the religious relationship to God and the mythical relationship to God. Myth recounts the acts of the gods and the ritual enacts what myth recounts. Myth places these acts in the inconceivable time when the orders of nature and humanity were established. This is the reason why mythical awareness has so narrow a view and why the attestation of the gods and their action by ritual practices focuses on what happened in primal time. This is also why mythical thinking and the related ritual practice involve control over the working of divine power. Eliade has shown that by clinging to primal mythical depictions of all that has happened people can gain security against the uncertainty of the future. The contingently new thing that the future brings myth either suppresses as an anomaly or occasions a revision of the picture of the primal mythical time.

As regards the basic form of mythical awareness, the biblical tradition of faith involves a profound change, a change that one might link to the nomadic roots of the God of Israel in the God of guidance, but which affected the whole understanding of the world when combined with belief in creation. Israel remembered that the people's origin was a historically contingent event of election, and prophecy taught that the God of Israel is the one who acts historically in the events of contemporary experience both in the history of Israel and in the rise and fall of empires. Finally, the historicity of the action of God in the experiences of judgment on the people of God was seen to move on from the older saving acts to a promised future that would surpass all that had gone before. In the eschatological sects of the postexilic centuries, they could finally ascribe normative

significance to the future of the rule of God rather than to the basic primal time of myth. With the turning away from the mythical orientation to primal time and the turning toward the future of God in eschatological expectation, Israel did not simply abandon interest in the permanently valid order of life and society. However, the institutions of the worshiping community and the monarchy could also be outdated in virtue of their integration into salvation history.

Finally, Christianity claims that the eschatological fulfillment has come with Jesus of Nazareth. It has come in the form of a historical event that at once became the past for the community. For the Christian church and its members, this time is also the anticipation of the still awaited eschatological future and consummation of history. They derive their significance from a frame of reference in salvation history. It is important to note, however, that Christianity does not eliminate myth, but integrates and transcends it. God as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer of the world embraces all the dimensions of the reality of life and abolishes the distinction of sacred and profane in terms of the eschatological consummation. What is normative for the Christian understanding of God is the self-demonstration of the deity of God in the process of salvation history. Christian theology will have to show that the making finite of the infinite that characterizes the religious relation of humanity to God, while the worshiping community of Christians does not overcome it, transcends it in the event of the revelation of God. The religious relation to God works itself out through the consciousness of faith, in the life of Christians and the church, the human relation to God is set right by faith.

Religion is unbelief. Religion is a concern of godless humanity. We know this from the revelation attested in the Bible. Barth points to two elements of that revelation that make this clear to him.

First, revelation is the self-offering and self-manifestation of God. Revelation encounters humanity on the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that attempts of humanity to know God from his or her own standpoint are futile. In revelation, God tells humanity that this God is God, and that as such this God is Lord. In telling humanity this, revelation tells humanity something utterly new, something that apart from revelation humanity does know and cannot tell himself or others. This “coming to us” of the truth is revelation. It reaches us as religions people. In view of God, all our activity is in vain even in the best life. We are not in a position to apprehend the truth, to let God be God and Lord. The genuine believer will not say that he or she came to faith from faith, but from unbelief to faith. From the standpoint of revelation, religions of humanity are simply an assumption and assertion that contradicts revelation, for only through revelation can truth come to humanity. When truth comes to humanity, we must listen; religion talks. We receive this truth as a gift; religion takes something for itself. We let God become the mediator between God and us; religion ventures to grasp God. For this reason, religion is the concentrated expression of human unbelief. Religion is an attitude and activity that is directly opposed to faith. It is a feeble and defiant, an arrogant but hopeless, attempt to create something that humanity could do, but now cannot do, or can do only because and if God creates it for humanity, namely, knowledge of the truth and knowledge of God. In religion, humanity bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing that God has to give. Religion is a complete fiction that is not related to God. In the Old Testament, the rejection of heathen religion is directed with a surprising onesidedness against its idolatry. Whatever god it may apply to, idolatry is to be rejected. They are other and strange to the God revealed to Abraham and Moses.

Second, revelation is an act of grace, by which God reconciles humanity to God. Humanity cannot help itself or bring deliverance to itself. The purpose of the universal attempt of religions is to anticipate God, to foist a human product in place of what God has said. Religion creates human images of the One whom we know only because God chooses to allow humanity to know God. The practical content of religion is an attitude and activity that contradicts the revelation of God. We lock the door against God. We alienate ourselves from God. We come into direct opposition to God. The pious effort to reconcile God to us is an abomination to God. The New Testament is not a book of religion. Rather, it condemns religion and proclaims the justifying and sanctifying work of God. Only by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, can we characterize religion as idolatry and self-righteousness, and in this way show it to be unbelief. We find religion abolished by revelation. This approach is different from the approach that calls religion into question from within.

3. True religion

Christianity is a religion, and as such stands in need of the same discerning approach as to the extent to which it embodies the revelation of God. It does not have inward worthiness, except as it bears faithful witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Christianity has significance only as it responds to the grace of God. The Christian conception of God, worship, forms of fellowship and order, morals, poetry and art, and attempts to give individual and social form to the Christian life, need constant renewal through contact with the grace of God. After all, every human effort can become little more than idolatry and expressions of unbelief. Christianity can become helpless and arbitrary, just as any other religion. The difference is that God has entrusted the church with the specific revelation of grace in Jesus Christ. When it turns from that grace,

Christianity commits serious sin. In conversation with other religions, the church needs to remain faithful to the apostolic witness, which communicates grace sufficient for us. If we look elsewhere, we look to mist. Resisting and conquering other religions places Christianity on the same level as other religions. Every religion has some claim to truth and power of the religious self-consciousness. Yet, the Christian is strong only in weakness. The Christian stands with grace, and nothing else. The history of the church suggests abundant evidence of Christianity becoming unbelief. The church contradicts its own origin in grace. To believe is to rely upon God to justify us. Justification of the sinner and ungodly is precisely the heart of the gospel message. Yet, the grace of God already operative in human life and community can find expression in individuals and communities. Every human activity of piety and worship contains the taint of sin and rebellion. Yet, these same acts contain traces of the divine. The fact that God works through such imperfect human vessels suggests the continuing love God has for a human world. It also suggests that will work patiently, even through the imperfection of religion, to accomplish the goal God has for the world. The church has its origin in Jesus Christ and exists solely because of Jesus Christ. Further, the God has chosen the church for bearing faithful witness to this Christ. The church becomes a truthful witness in virtue of divine justification and forgiveness of sinners, including the church. This forgiveness is also a judgment upon the church of its own sinfulness. The church can have its self-confidence and health only as it looks away from itself and to the God who alone can justify it. A close connection exists between this justification of the church and the sanctification of the church. When the church looks to its own piety, works, and perfection, it looks in the wrong direction, for it will never have any of these without traces of sinfulness and rebellion.

18) The Life of the Children of God (or, The Life of the Church)

Where people believe and acknowledge the revelation of God in the Holy Spirit, the revelation of God creates people who do not exist without seeking God in Jesus Christ, and who cannot cease to testify that God has found them.

1. Humanity as a doer of the Word

In this section, I want to deal with revelation in the aspect of its relation to humanity. Therefore, the theme of this section is humanity as a recipient of revelation. In the humanity of the Son of God, all those who believe in Him God takes into unity with Him and into the unity of the body of Christ on earth. They become partakers by grace of the divine Sonship that is proper to the Son by nature. That is the full meaning and content of revelation made in Jesus Christ as the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. However, none of this depends upon a psychology of the Reconciler or the reconciled. Christianity is true only in virtue of Jesus Christ as the hidden act of divine grace, as well as creation, election, justification, and sanctification. The actual revelation that we receive in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit never ceases to tell us that we are sinners. In the context of this judgment upon humanity, humanity finds reconciliation and sanctification in Jesus Christ. God directs the Word of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit to humanity. The light of revelation falls upon humanity in this context. Christians are the body of people who have welcomed this revelation. We find a good text that relates to this theme in James.

James 1:21-25 (NRSV)

²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

The Word of God has the power to save souls. The God who has spoken this Word has the power to save. Yet, God implants this word into the person who believes and confesses it. Something new or alien has entered into this human being. Yet, this word is also as near as the self of the person, as we find from Paul.

Romans 10:8 (NRSV)

⁸ But what does it say?

“The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

This receiving means a definite humbling of humanity. In receiving, one excludes self-righteousness and discovers meekness, which can do what is right in the presence of God. This implanting of the Word becomes the consummation or fulfillment of the life of the person who receives it. This implanting becomes the way individuals can become the person God intended them to become. Surrender to this Word means we become doers of it. To fail to do it is confession that we have not genuinely heard or had the Word implanted in us. If we only hear the Word, we isolate this Word from our lives and become judges of the Word, maintaining our autonomy from the Word. To fail to do this Word brings us to a life of delusion, in that we do not treat it as the Word of God and we resist the work of grace in our lives, which in itself becomes judgment upon us. This Word lays claim upon our lives. It calls upon us to confess it. It demands our hearts. We give ourselves to obeying this Word. In this sense, “work” as a positive significance for Paul as well: Romans 2:6, 2:13, I Corinthians 3:9, 3:13, 16:10, Philippians 2:12-13, and I Thessalonians 1:3. Human work is not a rival to the power of God, but the confirmation of that power in human life. Human work has no rivalry with faith, since both have as their object Jesus Christ.

All of this raises the question of a theological ethics. I want to give in this context a general outline of such an ethic. The fact that God has entered human history and disclosed who God is as well as what God intends for humanity opens the dimension of enquiry of what we are to do with our lives if we are to welcome this Word into our lives. It raises the question of what it means for us to shape our lives in conformity with this Word. In fact, it commands our obedience. The liberal Protestant approach of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, von Harnack, and others, suggested that the object of Christian theological study was the believing experience of Christians. Clearly, we cannot agree to limit theological enquiry in this way, for the primary object is the study of Christian theology is nothing other than the turn toward humanity God has taken in Jesus Christ. Yet, believing experience becomes a theme within our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the theme Christian life is simple: Christ, not me; Christ, not us; Christ the Lord; Christ, for us. We can speak of our participation and union in Christ only in a secondary or derived sense, for Christ is the second person of the Trinity, and we are human beings. We are not God. Heaven and earth have not yet united. Further, when we think of Christian life, we can think in terms of the distinction between being and doing, between the inward and outward aspects of human life, and between the isolation and fellowship of human life. With the language of the New Testament, we might draw similar distinctions between regeneration and conversion, justification and sanctification, faith and obedience, the children of God and the servants of God. In terms of the “being” side of this equation, we recognize that Christian life cannot exist without the Christian seeking God in Jesus Christ. The Christian has no other being, inner life, isolation, regeneration, justification, faith or adoption as children of God, apart from becoming a

seeker after God in Jesus Christ. The Christian has salvation in Christ and pardon as a sinner in Christ. The activity of the Christian is as a seeker after God in Christ, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. This is nothing other than the love humanity owes to God, and thus becomes the being of the Christian life who has risen with Christ.

In terms of the doing of the Christian life, the outward and social aspect of Christian life, is one in which the Christian testifies that God in Christ has found him or her. The being of the Christian leads to a definite doing. The Christian cannot suppress, conceal, or keep it as a private possession. In prevenient grace, God has sought the Christian. God has found the Christian. The life of the Christian consists in nothing other than proclaiming, attesting, and affirming what God has done. In this decision, the Christian now lives. Therefore, the Christian lives in the praise of God. The praise of God is the action laid upon us when we live our lives in the freedom of children of God rather than in the autonomy of one without God in Christ. The life of the Christian is love for God and the praise of God. The children of God are those who seek after God and find their answer in God. In the unity of this seeking and finding, Christians are what they are and do what they do. They ask because they already have the answer. They answer because God has already addressed them. Here are the twin principles of theological ethics. Love to God is the being of the Christian and the praise of God is the doing by the Christian.

2. The love of God is the being of the Christian.

Here is the inner life, isolation, regeneration, justification, faith or adoption as children of God.

The Christian life begins with love. It also ends with love, as far as it has an end as human life in time. Prior to love, the Christian has no other being, doing, or becoming. Even faith does not anticipate love. As we come to faith, we begin to love. If we did not begin to love, we would not have come to faith. Nothing is beyond love. We will never leave love behind us and graduate to something else. Love is the essence of Christian living. Love is the condition of Christian life. Wherever the Christian life is good before God, the good thing about it is love. Every moral act of the individual is part of Christian life only as far as it is an act of love, and one does it in love. We can see this approach in several passages in the New Testament: I Corinthians 13:6-7, Romans 13:10, John 15:10, Mark 12:29-30, II Thessalonians 2:10, Ephesians 4:15-16, and I Corinthians 8:1. If love is the essence and totality of the good demanded of us, how can we know that we love? We do so only because we can say something else, namely, that God has first loved us. The love of God for humanity precedes the Christian life, if as we have said the Christian life is to begin with love. We might direct our attention to Romans 5.

Romans 5:1-11 (NRSV)

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In the death of Christ, God has turned toward humanity in love even while we were sinners. We find the same theme in John.

1 John 4:10 (NRSV)

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

John 15:9 (NRSV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

We also find this theme in other letters: Ephesians 2:4-5 and Galatians 2:20. We find a similar theme in Deuteronomy 30:6 and 6:5. Love is our being and doing. The essence of the life of the children of God and of the life of the church is love. The possibility of human love is neither simply a divine work nor human work. Rather, the possibility of human life is a result of the prevenient grace of God at work within human life and experience, bringing humanity to the place God intends it to be. However, if we are to know what love is, we first consider the unique love of God for us. What our love is will necessarily appear when we ask about our response to this love of God for us and the confirmation and acknowledgment that we owe it.

I now want to consider an outline of the love of God which the basis for our understanding of our love to God. God is love. God loving us, we can look into the heart of God. The fact that God loves us means that we can know God as God is. Yet, such statements have truth only as they refer to the being of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. The love of God for us is an overwhelming, overflowing, free love. Several passages in the Old Testament provide a hint of this love of God: Hosea 11:1, 4, Jeremiah 31:3, Deuteronomy 7:8, Deuteronomy 10:14-15, Psalm 11:7, and 33:5. We also find a similar theme in the New Testament: I John 3:1 John 15:13-14 Ephesians 5:2, and Romans 8:37. The love of God to us as a theme in the Bible is the language of election, guidance, help, and salvation. The

self-sacrifice of God in the Son is in fact the love of God to us. God gave the Son, which means that God gave the Son into our human existence. Given to our existence, God is present with us. Present with us, God falls heir to the shame and curse that lay upon us. As the bearer of our shame and curse, God bears them away from us. Taking them away, God presents us as pure and spotless children in the presence of the Father. We find this theme present in Paul.

Romans 8:31-34 (NRSV)

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

The love of God for us is the love of our Creator. The one who says, in Christ, "I love you," is the one to whom we owe life. The creator of all things loves us. Creation is an act of the love of God to us. God is the one who loves the world and holds no good thing from it or from humanity. God has looked at the sinfulness and imperfection of human life and has loved it enough to give the Son into human existence. When we think of the misery humanity brings to itself and to the world God has created, we can do little other than marvel at the continuing love of God for it. Of course, when we consider the matter of our loving, we all think we know about human love. Yet, the love of God to us, as shown in Christ, ought to give us pause when we consider human love. The text we want to consider is the following, because it is the most explicit from of this saying.

Mark 12:29-31 (NRSV)

²⁹ "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

We might note that the address of this commandment is not to humanity in general, but to Israel as part of the covenant. The presupposition of the statement is that God is one, and will thus offer this commandment to humanity. "You shall," suggests a commandment from this God. The object of the commandment is God. In loving God, humanity has a partner in God, who loves humanity as well. To love means to become what we already are, those loved by God. To love means to choose God as the Lord, the One who is our Lord because Christ is our Advocate and Representative. To love means to be obedient to the commandment of this God. In every case, love is an accepting, confirming and grasping of our future. In it, this future is identical with the reality of God, who in the fullest sense of the word is for us. This God is our future. People who love God will let themselves be told and will themselves confess that they are not in any sense righteous as ones who love. They are sinners who even in their love have nothing to bring and offer to God. The love of God for them is that God intercedes for them and represents them even though they are so unworthy, even though they can never be anything but unworthy and therefore undeserving of love. God is accepted, confirmed, and grasped by this love of God to them. In it are both their future and the commandment of God. How can that have any other meaning than that they are driven to repentance and held there? They can love and will love only as this loving allows this to happen. To love God is to seek God. They rejoice that they have not sought in vain. They are what they are as genuine seekers after God by giving a Yes that comes from the heart, soul, mind, and strength, even when they find God. When the love of God reaches its goal, they hear, feel, and taste afresh that have an incomparable Lord. When they find God, grace meets them, which they then accept into their lives. Grace shows what God does for them. Grace shows that in themselves they are poor, impotent, and empty. It shows that they rebel against God.

Grace points them away from self and toward Christ who is the promise of what they can become. Grace does not allow arrogance. Grace reveals the rebellion and imperfection of even the best thoughts and undertakings by humanity.

3. The praise of God is Christian doing

This refers to the outward and social aspect of Christian life. With the language of the New Testament, this refers to conversion, sanctification, obedience, and the servants of God.

Praise of God is serious only in the context of the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The praise of God is obedience to this commandment. The fact that this commandment is like the commandment to love God does not mean that we can replace love for God with love for humanity. After all, to say this amounts to saying that we make God in our image. However, we can make the point that as human beings we live in an historical and social context ordered by God. If we are to love God, we must also love what God has created. We honor and love God when we honor and love what God has created.

To love God and to love the neighbor are both commandments of the one God. The commandments are for those who receive this love of God as shown in Jesus Christ. In both commandments, what concerns us is the claim of the one God upon the whole person. What concerns us is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The commandment to love the neighbor in the time and world that now is and passes, we are in fact dealing with a first and a second commandment, a primary and a secondary, a superior and a subordinate, commandment of God.

What does it mean to love the neighbor? The neighbor is the person within the circle of significant relationships we have as social creatures. The neighbor is also the

stranger within the gates, the one seemingly ignored by our circles of significant relationships. In the context of Luke's version of the two great commandments in Luke 10 and 11, we have the example of the love to neighbor in the story of the Good Samaritan and of love to God in the story of Mary and Martha. Clearly, Luke views the two commandments as separate. The story of Mary and Martha reminds us that love to God includes practices of meditation, contemplation, prayer, and worship. My neighbor is an event that takes place in the existence of a definite person definitely marked off from all other people. My neighbor is my fellow human being acting towards me as a benefactor. Every human being can act towards me in this way in virtue of the fact that he or she can have commission and authority to do so. However, not everyone acts towards me in this way. Therefore, not everyone is a neighbor to me. My neighbor is the one who emerges from among all human beings as this one person in particular. I must hear a summons from Jesus Christ. I must be ready to obey the summons to go and do likewise. I have a decisive part in the event by which a human being is my neighbor. That suffering human being in need of help directs the children of God to the task that God has appointed for them. God does not will the many griefs, sufferings, and burdens under which we people have to sigh. God wills their removal. God wills a better world. Therefore, we should will this better world, and a true worship of God consists in our cooperation in the removal of these sufferings. Therefore, our neighbor in his or her distress is a reminder to us and the occasion and object of our proper worship of God.

To love means to enter into the future that God has posited for us in and with the existence of our neighbor. Therefore, to love means to subject ourselves to the order instituted in the form of our neighbor. To love means to accept the benefit that God has shown by not leaving us alone but having given us the neighbor. To love means to

reconcile ourselves to the existence of the neighbor, to find ourselves in the fact that God wills us to exist as the children of God in this way. To love means to find ourselves in co-existence with this neighbor, under the direction that we have to receive from the neighbor, in the limitation and determination that the existence of the neighbor actually means for our existence, and in the respecting and acceptance of the mission that the neighbor actually has in relation to us.

One may flee from love to God to a wrongly understood love of the neighbor. The children of God renounce all movements of flight. The life of the children of God is fulfilled in a rhythm of this twofold love, and there is nothing more senseless and impossible than to play off the one against the other. The children of God abide in love. This applies to both, because they know that, once they have fled to God, they can flee to no other place.

Further, the living out of this faith is the witness to which the neighbor has a claim and which I owe the neighbor. It will be as well not to connect the concept of witness with the idea of an end or purpose. Witness in the Christian sense of the concept is the greeting with which I have to greet my neighbor, the declaration of my fellowship with my own brother or sister. I do not will anything that I may not will anything in rendering this witness. I simply live the life of my faith in the specific encounter with the neighbor. The strength of the Christian witness stands or falls with the fact that with all its urgency this restraint is peculiar to it. Neither to myself nor to anyone else can I contrive that someone will actually give help to one in need. Therefore, in my testimony I cannot follow out the plan of trying to invade and alter the life of my neighbor. A witness is neither a guardian nor a teacher. A witness will not intrude on the neighbor. A witness will not handle the neighbor. The witness will not make the neighbor the object of

activity, even with the freedom of the grace of God, and therefore respect for the other person who can expect nothing from me but everything from God. It is in serious acknowledgement of the claim and our responsibility that we do not infringe this twofold respect. I only declare to the other that in relation to him or her I believe in Jesus Christ, that I do not meet the neighbor as a stranger but as my brother or sister, even though I do not know that he or she is such. I do not withhold from the neighbor the praise that I owe to God. In that way, I fulfill my responsibility to my neighbor.

I want to offer three forms of this witness.

One is that I do not grudge my neighbor the word as a word of help in his or her need, nor in my need. We can fail to bear true witness. One way to do so is to talk about our own sin and need as such, for I am not saying anything helpful to the neighbor at that point. In fact, the narration of such a story runs the risk of placing myself at the center of witness rather than Christ. Another way to fail in witness is to focus upon some experience of help, rather than upon the God who provided the help. In both cases, we are never at a loss for words when we come to speak of our sin and our positive experiences. Either way, we seem to have a rich and certain knowledge. How easy to confuse this knowledge of ourselves with the much less intimate and tangible knowledge of the help itself.

Two is giving assistance to my neighbor as a sign of the promised help of God. Any help we give to the neighbor has the objective of directing people to the God who has helped us.

Three is that I substantiate to my neighbor by my attitude what I have to say to the neighbor by word and deed. By attitude, I mean the disposition and mood in which I meet my neighbor, the impression of myself that I make on the neighbor in speaking to the

neighbor and acting on behalf of the neighbor. The only attitude that we can regard as consistent with witness is the evangelical attitude. If my words and acts are real witness to Jesus Christ, then my subjection to Jesus Christ will permeate them, in particular of the comfort of forgiveness by which I live as a child of God.

Chapter III: Holy Scripture (as the Word of God)

19) The Word of God for the Church

The Word of God is God in Holy Scripture. For God once spoke as Lord to Moses and the prophets, to the Evangelists and apostles. Now, through their written word, God speaks as the same Lord to the Church of Jesus Christ. Scripture is holy and the word of God, because by the Holy Spirit it became will become to the church a witness to divine revelation.

1. Scripture as witness to divine revelation

The theme of Christian theology is the question of the Word of God in the proclamation of the Christian Church. Further, the theme is the agreement of the proclamation of the church with Holy Scripture as the Word of God.

Confession of Holy Scripture as a witness to divine revelation is necessary to the extent that questions arise concerning our attitude to it. Such questions always come. One source that questions our attitude toward the Bible is the Scripture itself, which always wants us to know what we are doing when we obey it. Another source of questions is people, who propose that we should take up some other attitude. They want to know whether we are aware of the meaning and the consequences of what we are doing. Another source of questions is we who read the text, inasmuch as obedience and disobedience are constantly at war with each other especially in us. Therefore, the confession of Scripture is a necessary part of obedience to Scripture. We order ourselves by this confession by clarifying and expressing the character and value peculiar to the witness of revelation as such. As a witness to revelation, we distinguish the text from the divine revelation. A witness is not identical with that to which it witnesses. This is a limit

on our understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. Yet, revelation comes to us mediating and accommodating itself to us who are not the direct recipients of the one revelation of God. We are not prophets, historians, or apostles. Prophets, historians, and apostles are alive for us as they are the immediate recipients of this revelation. A good witness lays before us that to which it witnesses. The fact that this witness may lay before us something that feels quite alien to us does not excuse us from listening and obeying.

2. Scripture as the Word of God

What we hear is revelation, and therefore the very Word of God. However, is this really the case? How can it be? How does it come about that it is? I want to clarify the meaning and scope of the question itself as the positive side of the basic principle that Scripture is the witness of divine revelation.

If we say that Scripture is this witness to divine revelation, we say this in and with the church. The church has discovered and acknowledged as Scripture the canon. It is not for us as individuals to constitute scripture, for the church has already constituted the canon. An individual such as Luther can question whether Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation ought to be in the canon. Yet, the individual has no right to dismiss these texts, for the church as a body discovers, acknowledges, and constitutes the canon in which we discover the primary witness to divine revelation. Luther thought the test of every Scripture is whether it sets forth Christ. If a text does not teach Christ, it is not apostolic, even if an apostle taught it. Discussion of the constitution of the canon arises as a practical concern as an action of the church. Such a discussion comes in the form of an orderly and responsible decision by the ecclesiastical body capable of tackling it. Individuals can think and say what they like on theological and historical grounds. However, what they think and say can have only the character of a private and non-

binding anticipation of the action of the church. So long as the church does not revise it by restriction or broadening, we have to respect the canon as it is. Such a decision is by a quite normal human process that is always open to further discussion. The constitution of the canon did not drop out of heaven. Human beings, under the guidance and direction of the Spirit, and yet still as imperfect human beings, made the decisions.

When we have to do with the canon, the Scripture that the church has defined and present believers recognize, when we have to do with this body of writings as a witness to divine revelation, we have to do with the witness of Moses, historians, prophets, writers of gospel, and apostles. The Old Testament looks forward in anticipation to Christ, and the New Testament looks backward in recollection to Christ.

We might consider to what extent the church must recognize these particular writings as Scripture. First, this decision rests upon the uniqueness and contingency of the revelation attested in it. It rests on the true humanity of the person of Jesus Christ as the object of its testimony. What else is the Bible but the proof of the existence of the historical environment of this reality? The Bible is the only text in world literature that can do this. The witness of Holy Scripture to itself consists in its witness to Jesus Christ. The content of the Bible, as understood in this setting, has a definite form, which we cannot separate from it as this content. We cannot speak about the covenant of Yahweh with Israel without speaking at once of Moses and the prophets. In the New Testament, there are the figures of disciples and apostles, those called by Jesus to witness to the resurrection and to whom He promised the Holy Spirit. Scripture attests itself in the existence of these specific people and these specific religious communities. Scripture has in view the function in which passively and actively these people were what they were as shown in their writings. Passively, they were those who have seen and heard the unique

revelation as such, and seen and heard in a unique way, fashioning their historical environment. However, the function of these people has also another active side in that they were those who have to proclaim to others, and therefore to us, revelation as they encounter it. These people are holy people and the authors of Holy Scripture in this function and office alone.

Revelation is the theme of the biblical witness. Therefore, we cannot free ourselves from this witness. These texts bind us to them. Modern theological historicism has focused upon the text as though the interest in antiquities is the only legitimate interest one can have in these texts. Yet, the question of the truth to which they witness escapes this approach. These texts need investigation for their own sakes to the extent that the reader seeks in them the revelation to which they attest.

Scripture cannot stand alone as the Word of God in the church. Scripture needs proclamation by preaching and sacrament, for it wants others to understand it as the Word of God. If the church wishes to live by the Word of God and therefore really be the church, it cannot overlook and ignore these texts. When the church has suffered seriously, it does so because it has lived to little under the Word of Scripture. The church has become increasingly strong, self-conscious, and bold. It has produced heroes, geniuses, and benefactors. It has been able to establish comfort and hope for all people, even outside of the church. It does all of this when it has a humble mind by laying its life alongside Scripture.

Holy Scripture has this priority over all other writings and authorities, including the creeds, confessions, and doctrinal formulations of the church. The Scripture is the original and legitimate witness of divine revelation and is the Word of God. The church ventures to do so in thankfulness for what we remember we have already heard in

Scripture and in hope of what we may expect to hear again. Our explanatory statements about the recollection and expectation, in which alone we can know and say anything about this present, can be genuine exposition when they are related entirely to this center. It is round this event that the whole teaching of Scripture circles, and with it all of Christian teaching, and with it, all preaching and sacrament. If our thinking and speaking is with the doubt and uncertainty that comes from ceasing to circle around this event and speak only historically or eschatologically, we do not think and speak in and with the church. We begin speaking of something other than what constitutes the center of the Bible and the church. The exposition offered by the church concerns this center. Some people want to treat this present as a created human present we can seize and control. Some people in the church have no patience with maintaining this center in faithful exposition, recollection, and expectation which, encountered in this present, is our place, portion, task, and comfort. I can think of two texts that people normally refer to when they think of the witness of the Bible to itself. The first is from II Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NRSV)

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Because of the inspiration of the text by God, it has the power to do that to which the author attests. The other text is from II Peter.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (NRSV)

¹⁹So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Both passages remind us of the center around which Scripture revolves. Inspiration by God does not violate the humanity of the authors. It does refer to the special attitude of obedience that the authors had as they wrote. Further, it describes the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Bible in such a way that the whole reality of the unity between the two the Holy Spirit safeguards no less than the fact that this unity is a free act of the grace of God. Therefore, the content is always a promise. If we say that we believe the Bible is the Word of God, the word “believe” involves recognizing and knowing. Believing is not an obscure and indeterminate feeling. Believing involves a clear hearing, apperceiving, thinking, and then speaking and doing. Believing is also a free human act conditioned and determined by an encounter and challenge, an act of lordship that confronts humanity and that humanity cannot bring about itself. Believing is not arbitrary. Believing does not control its object. Believing is a recognizing, knowing, hearing, apperceiving, thinking, speaking and doing that experiences mastering by the object of its belief. Belief that the Bible is the Word of God presupposes that this mastering has already taken place in that the Bible has already proved itself the Word of God. All we do is recognize it as such in belief. This situation means the impossibility of proof. Faith as an irruption into this reality and possibility means the removing of a barrier in which we can only see a miracle. We cannot explain a miracle apart from faith. We cannot maintain or defend the reality and possibility of this miracle apart from faith and the Word. We have no assurances apart from faith and the Word. We cannot attribute to ourselves any capacity or instrument for recognizing the Word of God in the Bible or elsewhere. If we are serious about the true humanity of the Bible, we obviously cannot attribute to the Bible as such the capacity in such a way to reveal God to us that by its very presence, by the fact that we can read it, it gives us a hearty faith in the Word of God

spoken in it. Rather, the Bible is always a sign, a human and temporal word, and therefore a word that is conditioned and limited. It witnesses to the revelation of God. That does not mean that the revelation of God is now before us in this text with any kind of obvious revelation. The Bible is not a book of oracles. The Bible is not an instrument of direct impartation. Rather, the Bible is genuine witness. As this witness, the Bible is in its humanity a product of the Hebrew, Israelite, and Jewish community. It breathes of the Jewish spirit. If we are to listen to the Word of God, people of all nations will need to honor the Jewish foundation of the text in which we hear this Word of God. When people reject the Jew, they also reject the God who has turned toward humanity in the Old Covenant and in the New Covenant. If the church lives by the Bible because it is the Word of God, it means that it lives by the fact that the Bible reveals Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. That means that it has no power or control over this work. It can grasp at the Bible. It can honor it. It can accept its promise. It can be ready and open to read, understand, and expound it. It prays that the Bible may be the Word of God here and now. It prays that there may take place that work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore a free applying of the free grace of God. Another text to which we might turn in order to show the importance of this criterion is from Paul.

2 Corinthians 3:4-14 (NRSV)

⁴Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside.

Paul makes it clear how he wanted the Christian congregation to read the Old Testament as a witness to Jesus Christ. The Old Testament has its glory, even as the ministry of reconciliation given to apostolic ministry and by extension to the church of the ages has its glory. An interesting parallel occurs in another text from Paul.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 (NRSV)

⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷ But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

¹⁶ “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

Here, Paul speaks of his own address in speaking and writing in the same way as the previous passage speaks of the Old Testament. From this discussion, we get a picture of how the function of a witness to revelation appeared on both sides at any rate to Paul according to its true character and limits. With all other people, the witness stands before

the mystery of God and the benefit of the revelation of God. God has revealed this mystery to him. He can speak of it in the miracle of his existence as a witness. The content of these two passages are commentary on the texts from II Timothy and II Peter. Yet, the literature of the early church tended to emphasize the latter two passages. This discussion limited inspiration to the written text. Inspiration extended to individual phraseology and grammar, rather than focused upon the organizing center of the text. It tended to interpret inspiration in a way that removed mystery and faith. The teaching concerning Scripture acquired the character of a description of a phenomenon of history and nature that is certainly remarkable, but which one can still establish and study neutrally, which as such could in the last resort be the phenomenon of the origin of the documents of any sort of religious foundation. The Reformation could speak of verbal inspiration and dictation by the Spirit. However, it could also focus upon the content of the witness and the work of the Spirit required in order to recognize the Word of God. The growth of Protestant orthodoxy in the 1600's and 1700's led to gradual growth of uncertainty in the knowledge of sin and justification of humanity as well as the judgment and grace of God. This led to growth in natural theology and an increasingly supernatural understanding of the inspiration of the Bible. This view arises from secularization of the period. The Bible as the Word of God became a statement exposed to human enquiry and brought under human control. Knowledge of the Bible as the Word of God became part of the natural knowledge of God which people believed one could have apart from the free grace of God. The Bible became a paper pope. In reality, the Bible as the Word of God is a statement about the free grace of God brought about by the power of God, to which God gives insight and assurance.

I will now try to form propositions that we can believe about the inspiration and divine nature of the Bible, particularly in light of the Bible as the Word of God.

To say “the Word of God” is to focus upon the divine source of the text. It speaks about a being and even that are not under human control and foresight. That we have the Bible as the Word of God does not justify us in transforming the statement that the Bible is the Word of God from a statement about the being and rule of God in and through the Bible into a statement about the Bible as such. When we have the Bible as the Word of God, and accept its witness, the text summons us to remember the Lord of the Bible and to give God the glory.

To say “the Word of God” is to focus upon the text as the work of God. The text asks us to watch an event, and an event that is relevant to us, an event that is an act of God, and act of God that rests on a free decision.

To say “the Word of God” is to focus upon the text as the miracle of God. The Word of God is not something old in that we could have discovered without this communication from God. Rather than being continuous with us, it brings the end of all other events that we know.

To speak of miracle in this sense does not remove the offense of the form and content the text takes. The writers can be at fault in any word, and have been at fault in every word. Yet, according to the same scriptural witness, God justified and sanctified them by grace alone, and they have still spoken the word of God in their fallible and erring human word.

We can recollect that we have heard in the book the Word of God. We recollect, in and with the church, that we have heard the Word of God in this entire book and in all parts of it. Therefore, we expect that we shall hear the Word of God in this book again,

and hear it even in those places where we ourselves have not heard it before. A genuine, fallible human word is at this center the Word of God.

As to when, where, and how the Bible shows itself to us in this event as the Word of God, we do not decide. Jesus Christ as the Word of God decides, at different times in the church and with different people confirming and renewing the event of instituting and inspiring the prophets and apostles to be witnesses and servants of Jesus Christ. In their written word, they again live before us, not only as people who once spoke in Jerusalem and Samaria, to the Romans and Corinthians, but as people who in all the specificity of their situation and action speak to us hear and now. We can remember that the Bible has already been for us and for others the place of this act. We can and should expect this act afresh. We can and should cling to the written word, as Jesus commanded the Jews, and as the people of Berea did. We can and should search the Scriptures asking about this witness. We can and should pray that the Scripture make this witness to us. However, it does not lie in our power but only in the power of God that this event should take place and this witness of scripture be made to us. God absolves us from trying to force this event to happen. Of course, this does not allow us to be unfaithful or indolent. The Word of God is so powerful that what we can discover and value as the divine element, the content, or the spirit of the Bible does not bind it. It is not so powerful that it will not bind itself to what we think we can value lightly as the human element, the form, the letter of the Bible. God absolves us from differentiating the Word of God in the Bible from other contents, infallible portions and expressions from the erroneous ones, the infallible from the fallible, and from imagining that by means of such discoveries, we can create for ourselves encounters with the genuine Word of God in the Bible. God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific

inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their Judaism. God adapted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when God wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness. It is mere self-will and disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible. God absolves us from having to know and name as such the event or events, in which Scripture proves and confirms itself to us as the Word of God.

This text in all its humanity, including all the fallibility that belongs to it, is the object of this work and miracle. Verbal inspiration means that the fallible and faulty human word God uses and one has to receive and hear in spite of its human fallibility.

One cannot reduce the inspiration of the Bible to our faith in it. To believe in the inspiration of the Bible means, because of and in accordance with its witness, is to believe in the God whose witness it is. The statement that the Bible is the Word of God is an analytical statement. It does not derive from other propositions.

20) Authority in the Church

The Church does not claim direct, absolute, and material authority for itself, but for Holy Scripture as the Word of God. However, we can objectively determine actual obedience to the authoritative Word of God in Holy Scripture by the fact that those who in the church mutually confess an acceptance of the witness of Holy Scripture will be ready and willing to listen to each other in expounding and applying it. By the authority of Holy Scripture on which the church has its foundation, authority in the Church is restricted to an indirect, relative, and formal authority.

1. Authority of the Word

Holy Scripture attests to the church and through the church to the world, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the Word of God. The power in which it does so is the power of the object to which it bears witness and which has made and fashioned it as that witness. Those who hear this Word, hear Christ. Those who wish to hear Christ must hear this Word. This is the Protestant principle of Scripture. How does obedience to the Word of God in Holy Scripture arise? It arises in relation to obedience to the attestation

and mediation of this revelation, in relation to the Word of God in Holy Scripture, we have to distinguish between an objective and a subjective element, between an outer and an inner determination of this obedience. We have to consider both the authority and the freedom if we want to reply to the question, how we arrive at obedience to God in Holy Scripture. Authority is the external determination under which this becomes possible for humanity from God. Freedom is the internal determination, the determination under which it is possible for God from humanity. Obedience to the Word of God in Scripture is primarily a matter of the authority and freedom that belongs to Holy Scripture itself in the church. Either way, it is a secondly a matter of the authority and freedom of the church as such, subject to Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is the ground and limit of the church, but for that very reason, it constitutes it. Having authority and freedom in the church, it lends that authority and freedom to the church. We are now asking genetically how it happens. We now consider the mediation and attestation of revelation in the context of authority and freedom.

When we speak of authority in the church, we mean that in the church an authority exists in relation to similar authorities stands in a loser relationship to the basis and nature of the church. The church has a greater part in its historical and material origin, which has a claim upon to hear it more closely and regard it as normative even in the presence of other authorities. Authority in the church is an authority that has precedence because of its more primitive nature. Scripture itself is such an authority in the church. It is so in this general sense because it is the oldest record of the origin, basis, and nature of the church. The prophets and apostles are recipients of revelation in the sense that revelation meets them as the master and they become obedient to it. Since there are obedient, they become prophets and apostles. Since there were obedient, they have

the Holy Spirit. Since they were obedient, God appointed and commissioned them to be the witnesses of Christ to others, both to the earliest church and to the world. The church of Jesus exists when it repeats this relationship of obedience. The existence of the church of Jesus Christ stands or falls with the fact that it obeys as the apostles and prophets obeyed their Lord. The church cannot evade Scripture. It cannot try to appeal past it directly to God to Christ or to the Holy Spirit. It cannot assess and adjudge Scripture from a view of revelation gained apart from Scripture and not related to it. It cannot know any normal dignity, which as to sanctify Scripture as the earliest record of its own life and make it its norm. It cannot establish from a possession of revelation the fact that Scripture too is a source of revelation. Scripture confronts it commandingly as Holy Scripture, and it receives revelation from it in an encounter that is just as concrete as that which originally took place between the Lord and the witnesses to the Lord. The church obeys Scripture. The church does not obey as though it obeys some long deceased people and their theology. The church obeys the One whom it has pleased to give certain long-deceased people a commission and authority. The church serves the Word of God in the sign and guise of the word of these people. As it hears them, it hears the Word. The incarnation of the Word of God and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit have happened, is happening, and will happen for the church and through the church to the world, in every age. This witness occurs because the church receives its authentic witness, accepts it, and transmits it, as authentic witness to the revelation of God. Without this Word of God, one can have an ineffective church, even if it is quite orthodox. We find in Roman Catholicism an attempt to identify Scripture, church, and revelation. It recognizes that the Bible is insufficient from the standpoint of the developing teaching of the church. One can point to the Trinity and infant baptism as teachings that have development in

tradition. The Bible is difficult to interpret. Roman Catholicism rightly has concerns for subjectivism in one's readings and interpretations. It concludes that one needs a secondary authority to regulate the understanding of Scripture. What Catholicism has done is typical of all heresies. In the exposition and application of Scripture, it thinks that outside of Christ and the Holy Spirit as self-attested in Scripture it can claim a Christ whom it may know directly and a Holy Spirit who it can receive and works and works directly.

The Word of God in the revelation of it attested in Holy Scripture is not limited to its own time, the time of Jesus Christ and its Old and New Testament witnesses. In the sphere of the church of Jesus Christ it is present at all times, and by its mouth it wills to be and will be present at all times. This is the Protestant confession of faith.

First, the confession includes a confession of the reality of a fellowship of the church in space as well as time, a unity based upon the Word. This Word the church has within itself in past, present, and future. The church has a unity in faith and proclamation, a unity of that which it receives in the gift that constitutes it and of that which it does in fulfilling what God has enjoined upon it.

Second, this confession includes a confession that the witness of the presence of the church has a definite authority to the extent that it is the witness of the living and present Word of God, and takes place in that response to its transmission and in recognition of its definite authority. We have to insist that an authority exists in the church that is also an authority over the church. This authority is itself the basis of all authority in the church, from which it has its definite value and validity and without it would not possess it, without which it never has said and never will really exercise it. However, this authority limits and defines the authority of the church. By this Word, the

authority of the church finds its direction, so that whenever one hears the authority of the church this authority of the Word we also need to hear with it as the decisive word. An authority in the church exists that one cannot transform and dissolve into the authority of the church, or identify with it.

How can we speak of an authority of the church in this two-fold sense? It arises as far as the existence of the church, which possesses and exercises this authority, is a unitary act of obedience, an act of subjection to a higher authority. It is in this act of obedience that it is what it is, the church. The church is not the church apart from this act. The church is not the church if it repudiates this obedience. To do so is to commit the church to self-government, the essence of both Catholicism and liberal Protestantism. In Catholicism, the final decision rests with the teaching of the church that comprises Scripture and Tradition, expounding them with unchallenged authority and identifying itself with revelation. In liberal Protestantism, the final decision rests with the less tangible authority of the self-consciousness and historical consciousness of humanity in modern society. It makes itself like God, and therefore ceases to be the church. I might suggest that the church needs to decide in favor of a church of obedience as opposed to a church that is self-governed. This decision arises from the fact that the Christian church cannot reflect on its own being, or live by it, without seeing itself confronted by the Lord who is present in it but as its real Lord, with a real authority that transcends its own authority. Its Lord is Jesus Christ, who has called the church into life and maintains its life. In Christ, it believes. The church proclaims Christ. The church prays to Christ. The church relates to Christ, even as the Incarnation testifies that divine and human meet on friendly turf in Jesus. He brought humanity into His divinity. The church looks up to Christ, as Christ is present to it, and it partakes of the Holy Spirit as the gift of Christ. He

alone has divine glory and authority in the church. The church would not exist without Christ, just as living things would not live without their source of life in the Father. The Protestant church persists in differentiating between Scripture on the one hand and the teaching of church on the other. It does so because it believes Jesus Christ is graciously present in the Word. Jesus Christ is the Master of the flock in which He alone is Shepherd, as well as the King of the kingdom. The church does not have the option of becoming its own master, shepherd, and king. The Word is that which the church has to hear, proclaim, serve, and by which it must live. For that reason, the church cannot subsume the Word into the present word of the church. The church cannot assert its word against an independent Word. This Word is always new to the church in every age; the church must newly encounter it. Its form as the word of the prophets and apostles is the safeguard of its independence and newness. This form gives Scripture healthy strangeness it needs if this Word is to speak to the church of every age as the Word of its Lord. The form of the Word creates and maintains the healthy distance from the church of every age that the church needs if the church is to hear it before and as it itself speaks. This form allows the church to serve the Word as it takes its authority and promises on its own lips. The church must do so if it is live by the Word and lives its own life. These human beings speak the Word of Jesus Christ to the church. They have to speak it in a way in which the church could never speak it to itself. It can speak it to itself and the world only as a repetition of their word. The church has its foundation on their word: Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. This primary sign of revelation, the reality of the apostles and prophets, has the form of book and letter in which the apostles and prophets continue to live for the church. In this form the Word of Jesus Christ they too are prevented from being assumed and subsumed into the spirit, power, and life of the church today, in which

form they can always confront the church as an identifiable authority, and therefore as the source of the authority of the church. The written nature of this primary sign cannot prevent it from being in the church of every age a real sign, a sign just as powerful and definite as was once the personal existence of the living prophets and apostles to the growing church of their day. However, its written nature is also its protection against the chance and self-will to which people would expose the Word of God without this written word. Its written nature makes it a sign that is still unalterably there over against all misunderstandings and misinterpretations of it. It is still the same. It can always speak for itself. One can always question and examine it as it is. It can control and correct every interpretation. Its written nature guarantees its freedom over against the church and creates for the church freedom against itself. If there is still the possibility of misunderstanding and error as regards this sign in virtue of its written nature, there is also the possibility of the Word recalling the church to the truth. The Word offers the possibility of the reformation of a church that some interpreters have led into misunderstanding and error. The Word can always find new and better readers and obedience in these readers. The thankful recognition that the church is not alone, that it does not have only its own discussion and especially that it does not have only itself. Because Holy Scripture is the authority of Jesus Christ in the church, the church does not need to smooth out its own anxieties, needs, and questions. The church does not need to burden itself with the impossible task of wanting to govern itself. The church can obey without having to bear the responsibility for the goal and the result. Because Holy Scripture is the higher authority established within it, the church has a higher task than that which is at issue in those party conflicts, namely, the task of confession. Such confession can only be a thankful confirmation of the fact that the Lord is among it in

witness to Christ. Under the Word, which means Holy Scripture, the church must and can live, whereas beyond or beside the Word it can only die.

2. Authority under the word

Under the Word and therefore under Holy Scripture the church does have and exercise genuine authority. It has and exercises it by refraining from any direct appeal to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in support of its words and attitudes and decisions, by not trying to speak out as though it were infallible and final. Rather, the church subordinates itself to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the form in which Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is actually present and gracious to it: prophets, historians, apostles, and teachers. The church exercises this authority in the humility that consists in the recognition that in Holy Scripture it has its Lord and Judge. This factor reminds us of the incompleteness of the knowing, acting, and speaking of the church, and therefore its continual openness to reformation through the Word of God that constantly confronts the church in Holy Scripture. I mean by this genuine human authority in the sense of the sign to which the natural order is consecrated and exalted in the sphere of the people of God. Such authority is there and has its place in the same way as among people it is there and has a place in the natural authority in all human communities, beginning with the family and extending to the nation. At its common level, this genuine authority is simply a remarkable and doubtful instance of relationships in all human communities. Theologically, this genuine authority of the church is a sign of the subordination to the Word of God in which the church itself lives. Church authority is a reflection of the authority of God in the revelation by God in Jesus Christ. Genuine church authority consists in its obedience, living under the Word of God. The church abandons genuine authority when it exercises authority belonging only to God.

Human authority has its foundation in the fatherhood of God as shown in Jesus Christ. The authority of the church reflects divine authority. Because of this revelation in Jesus Christ, we have human authority. Human authority exists because of the authority shown by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The authority of the church is not open to question like other human authority.

This genuine authority arises because people hear and receive the Word of God. One response of this hearing and receiving is confession. The church has a common or communal confession. The voices of others in the church reach me in specific agreements and common declarations, and as such precede my faith and confession. Confession in the general sense is the accounting and responding which in the church we owe each other and have to receive from each other in relation to the hearing and receiving of the Word of God. Confessing is the confirmation of that common action. We hear, receive, and make confession as a member of the body of Christ. Before I make a confession, I must have heard the confession of the rest of the church. In my hearing and receiving of the Word of God, I cannot separate myself from the church to which God has addressed this Word. If my confession is to have weight in the church, my hearing in the church balances it. If I have not heard the church, I cannot speak to it, for I have excluded myself from the fellowship of the confession of the church. The confession of the church is superior to my confession, for it becomes before me and they are with me in the body of Christ. I see a reflection of the superiority of Christ in the confession of the church. In honoring the church as a sign of the authority of God, I honor and love the Lord of the church. Of course, the rule of Christ in the church is still ruling sinners. I must reckon with the possibility of falsehood and error in the church. Yet, this acknowledgment of sinfulness is secondary. It is not the primary response to the church. I cannot begin with

mistrust and rejection. We begin with trust and respect, and therefore with obedience. I have not primarily to criticize the confession of the church as it confronts me as the confession of those who were before me in the church and are with me in the church. There will always be time and occasion for criticism. My first duty is to love and respect it as the witness of my ancestors in faith. This is how the authority of the church arises.

The confession of the church consists in several strands. One is the totality of voices that together make up the chorus or choruses of our ancestors in faith. They are witnesses to others as to how others have heard and received the Word of God in the church. These choruses arise out of the debate that comes into being because the members of the church owe and pay each other and receive from each other a mutual accounting, responding and witness of their faith. It has the common end of the common proclamation of the Word of God heard and received, which is the task laid upon the church with this gift of the Word of God. Its debate stands under the binding purpose of union in relation to a true faith. The immediate goal of this debate is coming together and standing together in proclamation. As a work of people, this confession is subject to several reservations. The agreement on which it rests can never be more than a partial agreement. This kind of agreement can never lay claim to more than a preliminary significance. In joy and thankfulness at such agreements, the church cannot escape the possibility that in such further discussions as become necessary people will again question, transcend, and correct them by the Word of God as newly read and understood. The Word of God consistently questions such human confession. Such a limit does not hinder the fact that in this limitation they have authority. Such confession has precedence, even if the confession is quite human, partial, and preliminary. They are signs of the basic questioning of the whole church within the church.

The form authority in the church takes is the history in its confused, varied juxtaposition of many different and neutralizing factors and constructs, traditions, and customs, as well as personal and general developments and influences. We cannot enumerate the authorities that have church authority. We do not have the option of developing a catalogue of church authorities. Yet, we can deal with some of the specific historical forms this authority takes.

First, we assume that between the church today and the church yesterday exists a unity of confession in respect of the compass of Holy Scripture as canon. The fixing of the canon is the basic act of church confession and establishes church authority.

Second, we assume that between the church today and the church yesterday exists a unity of confession respect of the teachers of the church. Their word has emerged from all other expositors and preachers and spoken to the church of their day and of a later day, and still speaks to the church today, in a way that one cannot say of other teachers.

Church fathers and mothers have a definite authority. However, we cannot add such persons lightly to the list of genuine teachers of the church. This genuine guidance given to the church, one worthy of trust from the church, is rare in history. We need to consider closely what we demand of self and of the church by affirming someone as a teacher of the church. If Holy Scripture is the divine teacher in the school called the church, we will want to have fellow-pupils, cooperating with them as older and more experienced fellow-pupils. We cannot be a member so the church, obedient to the Word of God, and refuse to listen to these fellow-pupils. For this reason, we must reject all forms of Biblicism.

Biblicism makes the grand appeal directly to Scripture against the tradition, while at the same time adopting the spirit and philosophy of the age, majoring in his or her own favorite religious ideas, which in turn become the tradition of the body of adherents the

Biblicist teacher enrolls. Many teachers of the church exist. Yet, not every teacher has the calling to be a teacher of the church. What would qualify someone as a teacher of the church? First, one becomes an expositor of Scripture who has helped the church of his or her age and of succeeding generations to understand the Word of God rightly. Second, we need to consider how the proposed teacher of the church relates to the ecumenical councils and to the confessions that arose out of the Reformation. Third, a genuine teacher of the church takes seriously the church of which the teacher is a member. Fourth, a genuine teacher of the church will speak a word that succeeding generations find challenging and calls for decision.

Third, we assume that between the church today and the church yesterday exists a unity of confession in respect of specific declarations of the common of faith. A church confession is a formulation and proclamation of the insight that common deliberation gives the church in certain directions into the revelation attested by Scripture. We might consider some of the basic elements of such a confession. One is that a confession involves the formulation and proclamation of a definite ecclesial understanding of the revelation of the attested in Holy Scripture. The confession and its authority are under Holy Scripture. The confession is not direct revelation. Nor is the confession the source of revelation for the church that listens to it. The confession is not the bearer of revelation different from that attested in Scripture. It does not confess God in history or nature, or by individuals who they see God in a new way. The confession does not confess a particular element of church tradition and custom. It confesses Jesus Christ as attested by the apostles. It confesses the one Word of God. It makes this confession in a definite historical situation, in answer to definite questions, contradicting and explaining in a definite antithesis. It speaks on the ground of Holy Scripture and its truth. The confession

of the church explains, expounds, and applies Scripture. The confession is a commentary on Scripture. As such, it does not replace the role of Scripture in the church.

Second, the confession of the church involves the expression of an insight given to the church. Holy Scripture is the source of the knowledge the church has of divine revelation. The church will need to give an account of its faith to itself and the world in the confession of the church. The confession speaks for and to the one universal church. Those who offer a confession have the danger that they will have the witness of Scripture in their favor, but that in the rest of the church they will speak to deaf ears. Their church will consider them heretics, oddities, unauthorized innovators or even invincible reactionaries. Yet, they must dare to speak to the whole church in the name of the church. The courage to accept the risk involved is a test of the genuineness of their enterprise and action. A confession is not a church confession that seeks only to represent the importance of one group in the church or to declare and prove the equal justification of particular interests that may perhaps represent only the local and national peculiarity of one part of the church that is supposed to be the will of God.

Third, the confession of the church involves an insight that is a gift to the church. The church discovered its content in Holy Scripture and as a gift of the Holy Spirit. A genuine confession can speak authoritatively. It cannot simply publish its findings as a subject for discussion and free choice. What the confession formulates and proclaims claims to be church teaching.

Fourth, the confession of the church always involves definite limits. This limitation does not contradict the intended universality of the confession or the certainty proper to it as a teaching of the church. In fact, this limitation makes it universal and church teaching with the force of church authority. Confessions have geographical and

temporal limits. They also have the limit of a definite antithesis and conflict. It consists in controversies in which the existing confession of the common faith and therefore the existing exposition and application of Scripture is called in question because the unity of the faith is differently conceived. There is such different teaching based on the existing unity that the unity is obscured and has to be rediscovered. A confession is an invitation to all existing opposites. They arise out of occasions in which it deals with error. The confession is not simply the exposition of a genuinely comprehensive insight. If it were, the confession would have preceded the error. Normally, the confession comes too late. It attempts to cover well when some children have already drown and the wasting of the church already occurred. The late quality of the confession makes it a human and limited insight. The error has determined the theme of the confession. To confess is to react. The thesis contained in the confession will actually include the error it addresses.

Fifth, a confession is a formulation and proclamation reached based on common deliberation and decision. The origin of the confession lays in the majority of the church. It demands publicity, since it is a word of the whole church to the whole church. It replies to a question raised in the church. It derives from the witness of divine revelation directed to the church and through the church to the world. What a herald proclaims must be important. It must accept responsibility and think it worthwhile to go before the Christian world and the world at large to claim the hearing and attention of everyone. Every confession will exert pressure on the rest of the church and through the church to the world. Every confession can expect a reaction on the part of the church, world, or both. A genuine confession challenges to decision as to a definite understanding of Scripture. It tests the accuracy of the understanding of Scripture the reader has. Scripture must test the doctrine and life of the church in a way that brings judgment upon the thought, speech,

and life of the church and world. If a confession is to stand, everything depends on whether the temptation produced by this counter-pressure is recognized and overcome as such. The temptation naturally consists in the possibility of abandoning the confession. As a theory, it is quite harmless, indeed comforting even to those who do not agree with it. Ultimately, there stands only the desire that the confession should be a mere theory. Yet, where the fear of God is greater than fear of people, people have already overcome the temptation. Where the church lives genuinely, the genuine church hears the confession in this distinctive way. Where the church is, it does stand in this responsibility. It is to that extent a confessional church in that the responsibility to the confession determines the church.

Churches are confessional in different ways and degrees. The concept of responsibility embraces the binding, imperative, and authoritative character of the confession of the church. The confession is a first commentary upon Scripture. Individuals do not have to make its theology or its exposition of Scripture our own. We can be loyal to its direction and still think that in detail and seen as a whole, as our confession, we would rather have it put otherwise. We can still think that we have to repudiate certain of its detailed and statements. Even a positive attitude to the confession can be a genuinely critical one. This confession has a relative significance. The church offers praise to God who is moving the world toward its final destination. Therefore, infallibility is an eschatological concept, to which no present actualization corresponds, to which every reality of church confession, everything we now know as dogma old or new, can only approximate. We regard every church confession only as a stage on a road that a further stage in the form of an altered and successive confession can make it

relative. Therefore, respect for its authority has necessarily to be conjoined with a basic readiness to envisage a possible alteration of this kind.

21) Freedom in the Church

A member of the church claims direct, absolute, and material freedom, not for himself or herself, but only for Holy Scripture as the Word of God. However, obedience to the free Word of God in Holy Scripture is subjectively conditioned by the fact that each individual who confesses his or her acceptance of the testimony of Scripture must be willing and prepared to undertake the responsibility for its interpretation and application. Freedom in the church is limited as an indirect, relative and formal freedom by the freedom of Holy Scripture, on which the church has its grounding.

1. The Freedom of the Word

Christians are those who are alive through the Word and love of God, the genuine human being, able to love God in return, standing erect just because they have been humbled, humbling themselves because God has raised them up. Just because in the church there is no mere mastery and compulsion, there is in it a real master and compulsion. Just because there is authority in the church, there is also freedom. The Word of God comes to people in Holy Scripture and exercises its sway in the church through free obedience. We have to discuss the question of freedom in the church, which primarily and properly means the freedom of the Word of God. We have to show that there is not only authority, but also freedom in the church. We find both authority and freedom under the Word. This genuine freedom comes to humanity, which is commanded and necessary. This being the case, we obviously have to understand freedom in specific terms as the freedom of the Word of God. Only as such is it truly freedom as immediate, absolute, and meaningful. By it, the freedom assigned to humanity finds its establishment in the church. As human freedom, this freedom is genuine because the former limits it as an indirect, relative, and formal freedom. When we speak of freedom in the church, in the first instance we mean generally that in the church, without prejudice to its authority as order, normative, guide, and direction, we also find the choice of humanity. Since the

church consists of people, freedom exists in the church. Where we find no choice, decision, determination, and resolve, we have no human form of life. In thinking of these people in the church, we think chiefly of the apostles and prophets. They belong to the succession of people who have believed and attested the Word of God. By becoming subject and obedient to the Word of God, they have gained a share in its freedom. In their freedom, the church must recognize and honor the freedom of their Lord in which the freedom of its members as the body of Christ has its ground. Scripture rules within the church and its members only if they share in the movement in which Scripture was born and in virtue of which even today Scripture is in its written character is Spirit and life. The true freedom of humanity in the church, freedom under the Word, consists in this following of the God who at all times precede us all in Scripture, and in adherence to the action that God takes by Scripture. I now want to discuss the freedom of the Word.

First, the freedom of the Word of God and of Scripture consists in the simple fact that it has a theme of ineffaceable distinctiveness and uniqueness. This theme constitutes Scripture as a subject that distinguishes itself from all other subjects, and has its own position and activity in relation to them. We can refer to the confession of Peter as an example of the primacy of this theme.

Matthew 16:16-19 (NRSV)

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The emphasis in this text is upon the revelation required to come to this confession. We find a similar theme in the writings of Paul: Galatians 1:1, 1:15-16, 2:20, I Corinthians 15:10, II Corinthians 12:9, and Philippians 4:13. We also find John providing the same

theme in John 1:14. Therefore, to recognize the freedom of the Word of God means to recognize the subject created by the revelation of God as the biblical witness. This subject meets us in the most varied forms as a single and unique being that requires people to hear it in a single and unitary way. The subject of the biblical witness meets us in specific human beings, whether Peter, Paul, or John.

Second, we might note the decisive insight into the peculiar power of this subject in its opposition and relation to all other subjects. Freedom means ability, possibility, and power. Although the Bible contains some powerful literature, we must be careful of submitting to the demonic magic of the Bible. We submit to the Word of God, rather than become impressed with good literature. Our concern is with the Word of God in the humiliation of its majesty, the Word of God in the world where there are powers beside and against it, where it stands until the end of time confronting and opposing these other powers. For example, we find in Jeremiah 23:28-29 that the Word of the Lord is against the prophets who have dreams to tell. The text compares this Word to a fire and a hammer that breaks in pieces the rocks. Hebrews 4:12-13 compares the Word of God to a two-edged sword, critically piercing human existence. We run the risk of comfortable quietism when we think that the Word of God no longer has opposition in this world. Its own offensive power is greater than the offensive that the world mounts against it and from which must suffer. A painful and tragic destiny does not overtake the Word of God. In the face of its enemies, and even in the company of its friends, as long as we have a human word, the Word of God has to be worsted, pushed into a corner, repulsed, denied, distorted and spurned as the weaker principle. On the contrary, as in the passion and death of Jesus, this is the divine will. The unfortunate part of the Augustine image of the conflict between the city of God and the city of earth is that it fused the victorious city

of God with the suffering, struggling and triumphant Catholic Church. As a result, the transcendence of the Word of God became the justification and argument for a specific outlook and policy, the supposed superiority of the cause of one human party, the church, over another human power, the political state. We abridge the hope provided in the concept of the Word of God enduring forever when we think of its power actualized, where the church looks at itself and affirms this hope instead of looking at the transcendent Word of God and believing it. The genuine city of God on earth we find in the rule of the one nailed to the cross. For the followers of this crucified Lord, this means the rule of Scripture and the faith in which such a rule finds obedience. Obedience to this rule does not mean triumph precisely at the point where Jesus and the apostles experienced suffering and death. Faith will rest for support on its works or to the human structure of the church as if the church and the society it influences are the kingdom of God. Faith will expect this structure to be always in jeopardy, liable to destruction, and to find destruction, as did the Temple in Jerusalem. In order to enter into its glory, the body of Christ had to die and be buried. The church must really be content to recognize the hidden quality of the truth of the freedom and transcendence of the Word of God. Even through the visible form the church takes, its destiny has a hidden quality. Only so can this truth be the comfort of the church and the inexhaustible source of its life. It is true that we cannot expect to see its victory in events, forms and ordinances that are unequivocally recognizable in this sense. The leaven is truly hidden. The grain of wheat must really die. All that is humanly visible must always be a picture of this dying and not the picture of a triumphant, divine, world principle. Our faith alone will be the victory that has overcome the world: I John 5:4. However, it must not be forgotten that with this faith of ours we stand in the midst of the world. Scripture is in the world. Therefore,

specific relationships subsist between the Word of God and the powers of this world. Real contacts and reactions take place in which the freedom of the Word of God, which we recognize by faith, demonstrates and establish its reality. Jesus Christ victoriously attacks the real world. The world is under a promise that cannot fail. It is dark in that it is the arena of the crucifixion of Jesus. However, this world is also the place of the light of resurrection. It is the same world, yet not the same, for the Word of God is the superior power in this world.

First, the Word of God demonstrates its freedom and supremacy in the world in the fact that it has the power to maintain itself in face of the open and secret, direct and indirect, attacks upon it.

Further, the Word of God demonstrates its freedom and supremacy in the fact that it possesses the power to isolate and distinguish itself from the elements of the world that crowd upon it and affix themselves to it. Church history is the history of the exegesis of the Word of God and of the recurrent menace of doing violence to it. However, church history is also the history of the criticism that the exegesis of the Word of God brings and always will bring to bear on all its interpreters. We must note the remarkable independence of this book comes through all its better and worst criticism. Its independence comes through in how carefully even serious misinterpretations cancel each other out. We see its independence in how the occasional arbitrary and one-sided exegesis usually has a short lease of life. We see the independence of the text in how quickly and thoroughly these texts are usually able to free themselves even from the worst bondage under which people confine them. There is good reason to ask whether this conflict of exegesis in church history is a spiritual law that the Bible itself dictates. The frailty, weakness, imperfection, and sinfulness of humanity arise when we discuss

the ways human beings interpret and apply this text. Scripture is exposed, but not delivered over to, the understanding and misunderstanding of the world. Scripture is in the hands, but not in the power, of the church. It speaks as people translate, interpret and apply it. However, Scripture itself speaks.

Further, Scripture demonstrates its freedom and supremacy in the fact that, beyond the power of resistance and criticism, it has the power of assimilating and making serviceable to itself the alien elements it encounters. This includes historical factors that separate the present church from the long history of the Bible. Yet, nothing human is alien to Scripture. This is the history of the Word of God in the world. It is not only a history of struggle, but also one of election and grace. It is a history of remarkable transmutations, in virtue of which even in the midst of the hostile and corrupting world there is still a genuine translation, interpretation, and application of Scripture. In this the affirmation and unfolding of its original sense takes place in such a way that human language, institutions, and personalities really come into their own in this use and service. This is not because of any particular character of their own.

Finally, the Word of God demonstrates its freedom and supremacy in the fact that it can change its own form and therefore its effect upon the world. We have a false understanding of Holy Scripture if we regard it as a fixed, inflexible, self-contained quantity. God is the living God. God is this from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, God is also Lord of our temporal world, as the One of whom prophets and apostles spoke. The text as writings of these human beings did not become the grave for God. The text of the Bible is not a stone mausoleum, in which historical scholars can pay God honor. The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, being the forward and backward looking testimony to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the living Lord of the church and of the

world. However, if this is true, the form assumed by the Word of God in the human word of prophets and apostles is not a grave for God, but the organ of the rule of God, moved by the living hand of the Spirit of God and therefore itself alive. Therefore, we can expect that further study will bring to light many a hidden meaning and connection in these documents. In the same way, excavations will unearth many important and interesting conclusions concerning the life of those who have lived in the near or distant past. The Bible is a living think, so that from the study of it we can expect new truths to meet us. These truths were not accessible to the most conscientious enquiry of yesterday or the day before yesterday, because the Bible itself has not yet brought them to light. What is true of the content of Scripture, that it is unique in essence, is true also of its form. The prophets and apostles utter their word once for all. However, this does not prevent it in any way from changing and renewing its form, range, and effectiveness, continually presenting itself to different ages and people from new angles, in new dimensions and with a new aspect. What we call the investigation of Holy Scripture and its results is not at bottom our efforts and their conclusions, of which we usually think in this connection, but rather the self-initiating movements of the Word of God.

Third, this power of Scripture has a special sphere of influence in the church. The sign of its divinity is the fact that its power within this world has its own peculiar sphere. Side by side with this sphere, there is the sphere of that which is not the church. The division is provisional in a double sense. It is provisional because of the provisional nature of the whole present state of the world, in which it is not yet identical with the kingdom of God, but only limited and relativized by the now imminent Kingdom. It is also provisional because of the provisional character of the present, visible demarcation between the church and what is not the church. The Word of God chooses, defines,

claims and conquers the church as the special sphere of its effective power, not for the sake of the church itself, but for the sake of God and the world. It is not an absolute and rigid, but a flexible boundary that divides it off from that which is not the church. In this Word, God speaks to the church and in the church. God does so in order that through the church, God make speak to the world and cause the church to grow in the world. In this antithesis of two peoples, God speaks with the world. God speaks with it in such a way that the Word creates the church first, and then by the ministry of the church, it becomes a Word to the world. There is no occasion for the impatience that despises and bypasses the church for the sake of the Kingdom of God, or demands of the church what one can only anticipate as reality in the Kingdom of God. The church can have a continual awareness of the relativity of its boundaries and therefore of its whole existence in antithesis to what is not the church. The most passionate missionary spirit and sensitivity to the need and longing of the world cannot alter the dividing line between belief and unbelief. Nor can it alter the fact that for our human eyes this boundary is determined by the distinction between the service and contempt of the Gospel, between clear and distorted proclamation, between a willing and an impenitent hearing of its message, so that, humanly speaking, it is defined by the boundaries of the church. In the interests of the Kingdom of God, or our missionary spirit, or our understanding of the need and longing of the world, we may want something other than that there should be a church and we ourselves members of it. However, if we do, how can it be in anything but arrogance, in secret or open opposition to the freedom of the Word of God? How can this arrogance and opposition really serve the Kingdom of God?

The freedom of the Word of God is its freedom to found for itself a church. This means that it unites with itself and among themselves people of every time and place, of

every type and destiny and training, of every kind of natural and spiritual disposition, and in it all of every form of sinfulness and mortality. It does so in such a way that it procures from them the hearing of obedience. The Roman Catholic view that the church has the power to rule itself because of this deposit of truth committed to the church is surely in error. The Word of God does not effect only the founding of the church, but also assures the preservation of it. It means the grace of rebirth and new creation spoken by the Word in the midst of the created world. It means the effectiveness of this Word in its continuous attestation from the faith of the prophets and apostles to the faith of the church. Called into existence by the Word of rebirth and new creation, it cannot remain alive except by this Word. In the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word has power to affirm itself in this world and to maintain itself unspotted from the world. However, it also has power to draw the world to itself, and continually to express and give itself in new forms.

From this inner life of the Word flows the life of the church. The church is alive for these reasons. It is the theater of this life of the Word. It participates in the movements of this life. By faith, it says Yes to these movements, seeking its own salvation only in the fact that they take place, imitating them in so far as its worship and fellowship, preaching and confession occur in the following of these movements. Because this happens, the church can perish as little as the Word of God itself. From a human standpoint the preservation of the church depends on the fact that Scripture is read, assimilated expounded and applied in the church that this happens tirelessly and repeatedly, that the whole way of the church consists in its striving to hear this concrete witness.

The freedom of the Word of God is its freedom to rule the church. The mistake of liberal Protestantism sets humanity on a plan that dispenses with the horizons of the accomplished atonement and the coming redemption. The former has become a dim historical memory. The latter has become a vague goal of a gradual progress in the direction of this memory. Neither of them has any real significance for those who exist in the interval. This reliance upon present faith becomes little more than religious observance. The present believer becomes his or her own master. To say that Jesus Christ rules the church is equivalent to saying that Holy Scripture rules the church. How else, then, can the church be ruled except by this witness? Any other rule can only turn the church into that which is not the church. Any other rule can only lead the church back to the sovereignty of humanity, as it is autonomous in the strength in the strength of its false faith. The horizon within which the church of Jesus Christ exists is as we see and grasp it in the recognition of Holy Scripture as the specific bearer of church government. Scripture as the proper organ of church government will not destroy the immediacy of the relation between the church and its Lord, and will not impose on the church the rule of law. This will not occur as long as we remember the following points. One is that we need to remember the distinction between Scripture itself and all human conceptions of it. Two is that we need to remember to give constant attention to Scripture, in the unbroken discipline of its reading and exegesis, allowing it to take continual precedence of all human theories in order to follow it faithfully.

Three is that we need to remember the importance of the church taking seriously the government and being of the church as ruled by Scripture. The freedom of the Word of God concerning the government of the church means that in all circumstances, the

church walks in the way that yesterday Scripture indicated, which it must trod today, and which tomorrow will again Scripture will have to indicate.

2. Freedom Under the Word

The apostles describe an authentic appreciation and understanding of their followers and congregations of the revelation to which they attest. Such responses include overflowing love, knowledge, and insight; spiritual wisdom, understanding, bearing fruit to every good work, mature in Christ, encouraged hearts and united in love, and full of goodness: Philippians 1:9, Colossians 1:9-10, Colossians 1:28, Colossians 2:2, Romans 15:14, and Ephesians 3:18-19. For all the distance that separates humanity from God and the dependence of humanity upon God, it becomes and is not only the affair of God, but also the affair of humanity. One cannot receive the testimony of Scripture unless members of the church are willing and ready to listen to each other. Correspondingly, one cannot receive this testimony who unless those who accept it are ready and willing to assume the responsibility for its interpretation and application. This readiness and willingness to make one's own the responsibility for understanding of the Word of God is freedom under the Word. This freedom is the freedom of conscience. Freedom under the Word as the freedom of conscience of individual members of the church has boundaries. This counterpoise of human freedom and authority points beyond itself to the common origin of both without which there would be neither authority nor freedom in the church, nor indeed any church at all. The original basis, limitation and determination of human freedom in the church is the freedom of the word of God. The joy, earnestness, and dignity that it imparts to us, the duty that it enjoins upon us, the whole independence of human being and doing that it confers upon us, cannot fall outside the framework of prayer. In the same way, the self-determination that we carry through in the fulfillment of

this being and doing cannot fall outside the framework of divine predestination. Although our way of life is so different from that of the prophets and apostles, it is now required of us that we hear their Word and take it up into our own particular situation, seeing that in Holy Scripture it has already entered into our situation. We can understand the same process as a gift made to us, a possibility actually opened up to us. The Word of God for our sakes stepped forth out of the unapproachable mystery of its self-contained existence into the circle of those things that we can know. Our self-determination, spontaneity, and activity are engaged in the service of the Word of God. Being a creature and the perversion of sinfulness limits this self-determination. However, this self-determination is the characteristic essence of our humanity. This does not mean that in virtue of this humanity we have a disposition towards the service of the Word of God. The Word of God still comes to us even as those who are not disposed for its service. Here at the end and goal of the process in which the Word of God comes to us as a human word, it is the individual human being who is what he or she is as a human being and therefore identifies with the decision made about him or her in the Word of God. The individual is a member of the body of Christ and a member of the church.

We must bear in mind a third characteristic. The individual becomes clear to himself or herself in the individual decision in which self-identification with the divine word takes place. In this event alone, he or she becomes clear to himself or herself. Jesus Christ reveals me to myself as one who in the totality of my existence Christ receives and accepts. I shall then accept this revelation as one accepts revelation in faith. I will accept it with thankfulness and prayer. However, apart from faith, and therefore apart from Jesus Christ, this truth is always hidden from me in its totality. Our witness to this faith does not concern faith-incidents as such, which we can certainly see in our lives, but only in

the greatest ambiguity. Our witness to this faith does not concern any humanly demonstrable actuality as such. The Word of God asks us about ourselves. This Word asks individual concerning him or her. This Word asks us about certain particular events of our life in which the hidden totality of our life in God becomes visible to faith. F. Kohlbrugge, when asked when he was converted, had the laconic reply: On Golgotha. To mention and discuss some of the human possibility in which it becomes evident that human freedom is actively engaged in this event, I want to direct attention to the following points.

First, if members of the church have a responsibility towards Scripture, this clearly means that the founding, maintaining, and governing of the church by Scripture does not happen in such a way that the members of the church are only spectators or even objects of this happening. It takes place rather in such a way that in their specific place and function they become subjects of it. To hear, received, and believe the Word of God, and so in one's own life to become a human being directed and consecrated by the Word, is the objective. To take seriously and understand as the responsibility one has of the effective operation of the word, this word being continuously expressed and heard, this word being continuously proclaimed and made fruitful, is part of what it means to be in the church. The Word of God wills always for the people of the church to hear it newly and to have more people hear it. Beyond the church lays the world, where by the church it also wills to others to hear it. Because of this freedom which is grounded in this Word, a member of the church cannot retain a passive, indifferent and merely waiting role in face of this will of the divine Word, as though anyway, in its own time what has to happen will happen.

Second, the necessary and fundamental form of all scriptural exegesis that is responsibly undertaken and practiced in this sense must consist in all circumstances in the freely performed act of subordinating all human concepts, ideas, and convictions to the witness of revelation supplied to us in Scripture. Subordination is not opposed to freedom. Freedom means spontaneous activity in relation to an object, such as is characteristic of human conduct and decision, as opposed to merely passive conduct determined from without and subject to necessary development. Scriptural exegesis rests on the assumption that the message that Scripture has to give us, even in its apparently most debatable and parts hardest to assimilate, is in all circumstances truer and more important than the best and most necessary things that we ourselves have said or can say.

Third, from the establishment of this basic rule, we come to the individual phases of the process of scriptural interpretation. The first aspect of the process is the act of observation. In this phase, exegesis is entirely concerned with the sense of the word of Scripture as such. Scriptural interpretation is still entirely a question of explanation, the unraveling or unfolding of the scriptural word that comes to us in a rolled up form, thus concealing its meaning in terms of what it has to say to us. To this situation there does not belong only the speaking of the prophets and apostles. As its decisive determination, there belongs also that which they speak. The image that their words conjure up reflects a certain object. Again, therefore, exactly as I do in regard to the words of other people, I shall try to reproduce and copy the theme whose image is reflected in the picture of the prophetic and apostolic words and controls those words, for they relate to it. In this phase of presentation in the process of scriptural exegesis, everything will immediately depend on whether, in the literary and historical examination that underlies the presentation, we really form an accurate picture of the object mirrored in the prophetic and apostolic word.

Fourth, the second aspect of the process of scriptural interpretation is the act of reflection on what declares to us. The one act of scriptural exegesis considered now in the moment of the transition of what it says into the thinking of the reader or hearer. We only hear with our own ears and see with our own eyes. We can apprehend by means only of our own understanding, not of that of another. If we do not do so, we have no understanding at all.

In attempting to reflect on what the biblical text says to us, we must first make use of the system of thought we bring with us. How do we do that?

First, when interpreters use the scheme of thought they bring with them for the apprehension and explanation of what Scripture says to us, they must have a fundamental awareness of what they are doing. Every scheme of thought is different from that of the scriptural word which we have to interpret. Our philosophy stands in contrast to that of scripture. It can only participate in biblical modes of thought as we open our philosophy to what the Bible has to say to us. Our schemes of thought do not uniquely fit to apprehend and explain the word of Scripture. We would be better to assume that our modes of thought are not suited to Scripture. We need to maintain an appropriate distance between our scheme of thought and our interpretation of Scripture.

Secondly, the use of the manner of thought we bring with us in reflecting upon what scripture has to say can have only the fundamental character of an essay, and the use of our philosophy for this end can have only the fundamental character of an hypothesis. We participate in scriptural exegesis and apply thought to the problems of Scripture in an exploratory, experimental, and provisional manner. I can then reflect upon the degree to which my mode of thought can serve Scripture.

Thirdly, the use of a specific mode of thought and philosophy brought to the task of scriptural exegesis cannot claim independent interest in itself. It cannot become in any way an end in itself. At this point, we have to remember the danger that philosophy has always involved in the matter of scriptural exegesis. It becomes a danger when we neglect the genuine difference between our philosophy and the world of the Bible. It becomes dangerous when we view the consistent presentation as end in itself. It becomes dangerous when we have greater loyalty to our mode of thought than to Scripture. We no longer allow the true God to come through in Scripture. At this point, we do not distinguish between good philosophy and bad philosophy, for all of it needs to recognize the difference between itself and the Bible.

Fourthly, in the necessary use of some scheme of thought for reflection upon what Scripture has to say, there is no essential reason for preferring one of these schemes to another. The freedom of the Word of God shows itself in a simple fact. A system of thought or philosophy may explain quite clearly a portion of the text, while an opposing philosophy may explain clearly another portion of the Bible. Interpreters of Scripture should not allow any one approach so to dominate their thinking that they close themselves from other approaches that may prove valuable. Philosophical reflection is always a contingent activity when engaged with the biblical text.

Fifth, the use of a scheme of thought in the service of scriptural exegesis is legitimate and fruitful when it is determined and controlled by the text and the object mirrored in the text, contributing to reflection on the text. The object mirrored in the text determines the truth of our reflection and is the master of our thinking. Our mode of thought needs examination in light of Scripture. Theology is the fulfillment of a human way of thought and therefore a form of philosophy. Theology participates in the

hypothetical, relative, and incidental character in the exposition of Scripture. No mode of thought should assert itself over the Scripture. We must not make an ultimate commitment to any system of thought. We need both caution and openness as we engage in exegesis.

Fifth, the third individual moment in the process of scriptural exposition is the act of appropriation. No appropriation of the Word of God is possible without critical examination and reflection. There is no possibility of a valid and fruitful examination of what Scripture says or reflection upon it, unless it develops into appropriation of them. Without this, observation can be only a historically aesthetic survey, and reflection only idle speculation, in spite of all the supposed openness to the object in both cases. The proof of our openness to the object is that our observation and reflection on what is said leads to its assimilation. Because the Word of God meets us in the form of the scriptural word, assimilation means the contemporaneous, homogeneous and indirect identification of the reader and hearer of Scripture with the witness of the revelation. Assimilation means assuming this witness into our own responsibility. It wills not to be without us, but to be in communion with us, and in this communion to be what it is for us. It wills for us to appropriate it. It wills not merely to master our thinking about it, but our thinking and life generally, and our whole existence. When we assimilate something, this implies that we make it a part of this system. We consume it. We assimilate it to ourselves. We begin to do something with it. We utilize it in accordance with what we are and what we are not, with what we like and what we do not like. We cannot use the Word of God along these lines. When we appropriate the Word of God, it means that each individual who hears or reads it relates what it says to himself or herself as something that it does not speak generally or to others, but to this particular individual. Instead of our making use of

Scripture at every stage, Scripture itself uses us. The exposition of Holy Scripture does not finally issue in the answering of the so-called provocative questions of the present day. One carries out exegesis in serene confidence that it will in fact do this. However, we must leave to Scripture how it will do this. We cannot try to lay down impatient conditions or ultimatums in this respect. We cannot boast about a present-day point of view that it must take into account or to which it must correspond. We must not wish to determine what is interesting, salutary and understandable to the person of a modern civilization. If we do, it can mean only that although we may appear to be eagerly laying ourselves open to it, in fact we are shutting ourselves off from it. The inevitable result will be that it will conceal itself from us. It will evade and escape us as it did when we insisted on apprehending it according to the pattern of some philosophical preconception. In this respect, we cannot trifle with the freedom of the Word of God. In face of it, we cannot know beforehand what the real present is, what are its provocative questions, who and what we are, our generation, the modern person, and so on. Truly, this will not appear until the Bible opens up before us, to give us correct and infallible information concerning ourselves and our real questions, concerns and needs. Precisely in order that one may really appropriate what scripture has to say, the reader and hearer must be willing to transpose the center of attention from self, from the system of one's own concerns and questions and turn toward the scriptural word itself. We need to allow this word to lift us out of ourselves and into its concerns and questions. It is only from this perspective that light can ever fall upon our lives, and therewith receives the help we need for our lives. How can that happen, if we insist on remaining rigidly at the focal point of our lives, as though this could give any illumination? Everything depends on the fact that this looking away from self and to Scripture should not be a preliminary stage

that we have to leave behind us, but that for the sake of redeeming our life we abide by faith and therefore by this looking away from self and looking to Scripture.

Chapter IV: The Proclamation of the Church

22) The Mission of the Church

The Word of God is God in the proclamation of the Church of Jesus Christ. As far as God gives the church the commission to speak about God, and the church discharges this commission, God declares the revelation of God in those who bear witness to God. The proclamation of the church is pure doctrine when the human word spoken in it in confirmation of the biblical witness to revelation offers and creates obedience to the Word of God. Because this is its essential character, function and duty, the word of the church preacher is the special and immediate object of dogmatic activity.

1. The Word of God and the Word of Humanity in Christian Preaching

To state the problem, we must begin with the affirmation that, by the grace of revelation and its witness, God makes a commitment with the Word to the preaching of the Christian Church in such a way that this preaching, at a basic level, is a proclamation of human ideas and convictions. Yet, this proclamation becomes like the existence of Jesus Christ, like the testimony of the prophets and apostles, in that it is the proclamation of God. Of course, people speak here. Yet, people who speak this Word must not lose heart, as though in their humanity they spoke only human words rather than the Word of God. The people who proclaim cannot become impressed to their human word. We cannot ignore the humanity of these words. However, we can think meaningfully and practically about it when we consider that, they speak as members of the body of Christ and in the name of the church, to whom God has entrusted the Word of God.

Many theoretical and practical difficulties connect themselves with the fact that the preaching of the church is the Word of God. From a human perspective, the idea that people could speak the Word of God is impossible. This impossibility of the proclamation of the church consists in the impossibility of human beings speaking of

God. Yet, the church attempts this impossibility. This impossibility covers preaching, sacraments, prayer, worship, confession, and instruction. The activity of pastors and the activity of theologians is equally impossible. Every activity of the church has the intention that others shall participate in the equally impossible task of hearing God. God has chosen weak and timid persons to be witnesses, servants, preachers, prophets, and so on, in the church. The speech and activity of such persons is still all too human speech about God. It cannot attain its purpose on its own. We need awareness of the relativity of our situation, its human fallibility and sinfulness. Yet, we ought not to go down to speechlessness. If we do, we reveal that we have not understood that God contends with us, and we have not submitted to the true judgment of God. On the cross, God has passed conclusive judgment, exposing all people as liars and stopping every mouth. Truly, only God can speak of God. God gives the church the task of speaking about God.

First, this means the church cannot afford to fall into arrogance or to surrender itself to any self-assurance when in the fulfillment of its ministry it speaks of God. Inevitably, the presumption of a clericalism for which miracle ceases to be miracle, grace to be grace, and venture to be venture, is the enemy against which the church has to contend more fiercely than any other.

Secondly, the fact that the church speaks about God will have to mean the need to take the task incumbent upon people in the church as seriously as one can take any human task. In the church charged with this ministry, the commitment of the member is beyond computation. There is no possible place for idleness, indifference, or lukewarmness. The members of the church, in all their humanity, God invites to share in the work of God in the world through proclaiming in word and deed the Word of God. These members cannot become obstacles to our believing in this positive truth and to our

accepting the vocation it implies and holding ourselves in readiness for the service it involves. If they do become obstacles for us, this shows our failure to understand them. They are not the great attack of God upon us, from which they derive when they have power. They do unmask the skepticism that often comes from false piety concerning those who proclaim the Word of God.

2. Pure Doctrine as the problem of dogmatics

Christian preaching is speaking about God in the name of Jesus Christ. It is a human activity like any other. Its life as a human activity derives from the fact that this work of God takes place within it, and from the fact that members of the church believe in this promise. However, it is a human activity. Its essential character, principles and problems are the same as any other human activity. One can perform it thoroughly or superficially, conscientiously or carelessly, well or badly. Even in the presence of divine action, humanity is still humanity. Although by the divine promise those who speak the Word of God have relief from anxiety about the success, justification, and sanctification of this action, such persons still have responsibility for their participation in this human action. God calls people into the ministry of preaching. Such persons have the promise of divine grace miracle. They cannot retreat into the audience from which they can watch comfortably watch the operation of grace and miracle of the work which God performs. God calls them to be on the stage for their work of proclamation.

Preaching is not simply speech about God, but an encounter with the Word of God. Preaching is part of the life of the community. Preaching arises out of the cultural setting. Preaching is part of the moral education of the human race. Preaching is part of the intellectual culture to the extent that it considers the nature of the realm of the divine. Yet, if preaching is only these things, it declares itself in advance as superfluous. For

example, moral education takes places in spheres of psychology and philosophy, often in better ways than in the pulpit. Justification for preaching must arise from its source in the call of God. The point is that people make a decision to cooperate in the realization of the work of God as God has determined it.

Doctrine is not theory.

First, theory presupposes a human individual, observing and thinking in their own power and responsibility, forming their interpretation of a specific object in the whole freedom of reciprocity between humanity and object in which humanity will always be the stronger partner. As against this, doctrine reflects upon an object that transcends the scope of human observation and thought. Further, a theory has its value in itself. Doctrine directs itself toward others. Doctrine is debatable. Doctrine is the expression of insights. Doctrine intends to state the whole truth. It makes a difference whether or not one expresses it. Its nature demands application to one's neighbors.

Sacraments witness to a truth that they can attest more effectively than the word of the preacher, for by nature they are words, but actions. Protestant worship will need to restore the wholeness intended by both Luther and Calvin. The divorce between preaching and sacrament is meaningless.

Doctrine means teaching, instruction, edification, and institution. Christian preaching performs this function. Its instruction is for those called to hear the Word of God. The task of doctrine is to instruct such called persons in hearing the Word of God. The human task of proclamation always points beyond itself. When the person called to preach turns to hearers and desires that they hear this Word, the concern is not that they hear the person, but that they hear the Word of God. The aim of preaching and doctrine is that hearers and readers would hear God speak. The audience will become fellow pupils

in the school of God and of scripture. Everything the preacher says about God will arise out of what the preachers hears in the Word of God. Preaching is an attempt to incite and inspire the hearers to hear for themselves what the Word of God has to say to them. It will be an attempt to put before them the movement of faith responding to the revelation from God.

I hope I have shown the appropriateness of considering the problem of Christian preaching under the concept of pure doctrine. If the human word of Christian preaching is to perform the service of leading to the hearing of the Word of God, it must have the quality of creating obedience to the Word of God, as it is itself obedient. Preaching must be a selfless human word, a human word that will not say this or that in a spirit of self-assertion, but devote itself to letting the Word of God say what it must say. Like a window, it must be a transparent word. Like a mirror, it must be a reflecting word.

I will need to define the essential character, principles and problem of Christian preaching in this way: preaching is what it ought to be and can be if it is pure doctrine. God speaks the Word of God in the proclamation of the church. Therefore, we can set up this criterion of pure doctrine, that is, of the human word completely yielding itself to the divine Word. If Christian preaching is pure doctrine in this sense, it will not be the result of human attainment and merit, but of the grace of the Word of God, which in fulfillment of the promise is pleased to acknowledge, and has acknowledged, the human word, and has thus itself provided for the necessary purity of the human word.

When we have done all that was required of us, we must add that we are unprofitable servants. If we infer from this that we might equally well allow ourselves to be idle servants, we are not trusting in the grace of the Word of God. The task of

dogmatics is the effort and concern of the church for the purity of its doctrine. Its problem is essentially the problem of Christian preaching.

At this point, we might quite justifiably speak of theology as the unity of biblical, dogmatic, and practical theology. Biblical theology is a question of the foundation, practical theology is a question of the form, and dogmatic theology is a question of the content of church preaching and its agreement with the revelation attested in Scripture. When the church asks this question, when it submits to the critical inquiry concerning what it preaches, its concern is for the purity of its doctrine, and therefore for the right fulfillment of the service incumbent upon it. The church puts this question to itself, realizing that the only source from which it can learn the answer is scripture. Dogmatics includes exegesis. Exegesis precedes dogmatics. We ask this question in view of the proclamation laid upon the church. Therefore, practical theology is already included in dogmatics.

To teach dogmatics does not mean repeating certain traditional principles, to lay down some new ones, to sketch and explain a specific view of Christian matters, to outline and present a system. It means taking up the work of the church in the direction of pure doctrine, to advance it and deepen it, to carry it out in a new period in the face of new problems. Dogmatics intends the results of its studies to stimulate. It consists in an active concern for the question of pure dogma in which gratitude for previous dogmatic teaching is no constraint on independence. Dogmatics will furnish the necessary preparation for preaching. Proclamation as the pure doctrine of the Word of God will not take place without reflection. However, it will not become real in reflection, but through the effective operation of the grace of the Word of God.

The church is a teaching church. It makes decision concerning the purity or impurity of a teaching church. In its preaching and instruction, in its pastoral work, in its administration of the sacraments, in its worship, in the discipline that it exercises towards its members, in its message to the world, and in its concrete attitude over against state and society.

The task of proclamation cannot be identical with that of dogmatics. The church pursues dogmatics in order that its preachers may know what they have to say. Yet, the church has some hesitation when it approaches dogmatics. Dogmatics and theology seem aloof from life. The end or goal toward which innumerable formal reflections, distinctions, and limitations, as well as the indissolubly connected objections and negations, is difficult to determine. The Bible is simpler than dogmatics. Surely, preaching and teaching should be far simpler than dogmatics and theology tend to be. One might want to avoid the rough and difficult terrain of theology and dogmatics. We might suspect that theologians introduce unnecessary refinements and difficulties only to, at a later stage, artificially resolve them. The practical analysis and synthesis in which theologians engage may have a strong vein of humanistic aesthetic that has no connection with the seriousness of the theological task of the church. Frankly, the theologian needs to have friendly unconcern with such questions.

However, the relationship between theology and philosophy becomes a burning issue. This is the classical point for the invasion of alien powers, the injection of metaphysical systems that has taken place, which are secretly in conflict with the Bible and the church. Where this has taken place, it has separated the Bible and the church. After lending to dogmatics a certain false independence, philosophy has caused its

disintegration and that of theology generally, at first inwardly and very soon outwardly as well.

Aloofness from life and concern for its subject matter will always have some justification as a complaint against theology. Yet, the interaction of life and subject matter will always be part of theological reflection. In dogmatics, one must shape personal schemes of thought in accord with the word of the Bible, which is not to become the word of the church. Our personal schemes of thought do not become the stable elements of the church in opposition to the Bible. No church can maintain such a scheme of thought as a norm over against the preaching of the church rooted in the Word of God. So long as dogmatics has heeded the warning, it can and must go forward in this respect too with a good conscience.

We now attempt briefly to outline its general task. One cannot do this work properly except in so far as the dogmatic theologian both assigns to prayer a much more important place in the solution of the problems confronting him or her, as well as participates in the prayer of church for the correctness of its liturgy and the purity of its doctrine. The task of dogmatics is not that of the “devil’s advocate, putting such questions to the church from a general view of truth or reality. It will have the duty of warning the church about the character of such questions. However, there are some human questions facing Christian preaching that necessarily arise from the being of the church as the greater or less purity of its doctrine, its greater or less suitability for the service of the Word of God. Only God can give absolute purity of doctrine, a reality for the future. It can ask for greater degree of purity.

Dogmatics asks on what grounds the church speaks in this way or that. It asks whether and how far the manner in which it speaks corresponds to these grounds and is

or is not meaningful. Thus, it goes back beyond what one says to what one means. As the church occupies itself with dogmatics, it acknowledges that it is aware of the transformation in which its preaching constantly finds itself, in spite of the formal and neutral identity. It acknowledges that this transformation constitutes a problem. It acknowledges its fear that this transformation might be for the worse, but it acknowledges also its hope that it might be for the better. Finally, it acknowledges that it cannot leave this matter to fate, or to the course of an immanent and inevitable development that it can comfortably watch as a spectator, but that it has itself a responsibility in this matter.

Here are the questions with which dogmatics must deal.

First, it concerns the dogmatic norm or objective possibility of the proclamation of the church, the question of the criterion or standard with which it is to conduct its examination.

Second, it concerns dogmatic thinking or the subjective possibility of the proclamation of the church, facing the question of the right use of this criterion and standard. The reality of the proclamation of the church is the Word of God.

3. Dogmatics as Ethics

The question we raise here is whether ethical reflection is part of our dogmatic reflection, or whether theological ethics is a separate discipline from dogmatics.

Theological ethics as an independent discipline tends to make certain assumptions. It assumes that the goodness or holiness of Christian character is something that one can perceive and demonstrate directly. Therefore, one can set it up as a norm. Christian character becomes a distinctive form of human conduct generally, relying on a general anthropology separated from revelation. The opposite position is that the holiness

of the Christian character is a hidden reality in Christ. Where ethics secures independence from revelation, it often leads to ethics taking over theological reflection entirely, and therefore dismissing revelation. Theology becomes little more than applied anthropology. The standard for theology ceases to be the Word of God. The general idea of the good controls this independent investigation into the goodness of Christian character.

Therefore, the Word of God becomes intelligible as the historical medium for this idea of the good. The church that sanctions this theology has subjected itself to an alien sovereignty. Examples of this approach to ethical reflection would be Basil of Caesarea, the rule of Benedict of Nursia, the *Imitation of Christ* of Thomas a Kemis, Ambrosius, and Thomas Aquinas. Luther and Calvin make the outlook of independent ethics inherently impossible. Dogmatics is ethics as well. We cannot limit dogmatics to the theoretical content of Christian preaching and ethics to the practical aspect of Christian preaching. Rightly understood, we cannot sustain the typical distinction between theory and practice. To do so would turn dogmatics into an idle intellectual frivolity. Dogmatics would then become aloof from life and of doubtful value for its pure intellectualism. If we maintain such a separation, we justly retire dogmatics in favor of ethics. Dogmatics, in order to be true to itself, will need to draw the question of ethics into itself in order to be true to its nature as the critical inquiry into the content of Christian proclamation. It cannot be otherwise, for Christian proclamation has to do with the relationship founded and completed in the Word of God, and therefore in humanity as an active agent in the world. We cannot pursue dogmatics without also pursuing ethics. We cannot mark off ethics from dogmatics.

In dogmatic reflection, the Word of God is the intended point of departure. This Word is the Word addressed to humanity, heard by humanity and intended for continual

hearing. This Word reaches humanity, claims humanity, and absorbs the attention of humanity. Humanity in its existence thinks, lives, acts, and suffers. Existence absorbs the actuality of a human life. Only the doer of the Word is its real hearer, for the Word of the living God addresses itself to the living person absorbed in work and action in his or her life. If people do not hear the Word in the actuality of their existence, if they do not exist as hearers, then they do not hear it at all. Human beings do not first exist and then act. They exist in that they act. The question whether and how far they act rightly is the question whether and how far they exist rightly. The theme of dogmatics is always the Word of God. However, the theme of the Word is human existence, human life, volition, and action. This Word of God challenges human existence, questioning it as to its rightness, and brought into the right way. For this reason, human existence acquires theological relevance. It does in fact acquire it by the Word of God. Its problem so forces itself upon theology that it cannot be true to itself if it is not genuinely ready at the same time to be ethics. Our task is to include ethics within dogmatics. One can undertake this task in various ways. A direct inclusion of ethics in dogmatics has the advantage of greater consistency, certainty, and clarity.

23) Dogmatics as a Function of the Hearing Church

Dogmatics invites the teaching church to listen again to the Word of God in the revelation to which Scripture testifies. It can do this only if for its own part, it adopts the attitude of the hearing church, and therefore itself listens to the Word of God as the norm to which the hearing church knows itself to be subject.

1. The Formal Task of Dogmatics

The distinction between the teaching and the hearing church is a guiding thread of this section. It originates in Roman Catholic theology. The church is first a hearing church, and only afterwards a teaching church. Dogmatics is a function of the hearing

church, and stands under the Word of God as the norm to which the church in its fundamental character as a hearing church is subject. In consequence, it must itself seek to listen. Its primary function consists in inviting and guiding the church in its second character as a teaching church to listen afresh to the Word of God. Of course, dogmatics is also a function of the teaching church, of which the Word of God is the standard and the subject matter. From this point of view, it can approach the church in the service of teaching.

This distinction does not mean two mutually exclusive classes of people, the ecclesiastical teaching office in the form of episcopate and papacy, and the remaining members of the church. The church in the totality of its members is both a hearing and a teaching church. The goal of the dogmatic task is that the human word of church proclamation should be unequivocally pure doctrine, that there should no longer be various opinions about what people say to each other in this matter, but that one should say and hear it as the Word of God. The circumstances are that in the proclamation of the church people undertake to impart to other people communications about God and the relationship of humanity to God, instruction and advice about this relationship and therefore about their own inner and outer life. This is done with a reference to the Bible and a dependence on its received interpretation, but also under the conditions of the external and intellectual historical situation in which they and their hearers are placed, under the conditions of their own personal being and willing, experience and insight, and subject to the limits thus imposed upon them.

The ambiguity arising from these circumstances arises from the fact that even under the most favorable personal and historical conditions the reference to, and dependence on, the Bible may rest upon and consist in an illusion. Instead of the

proclamation of the Word of God, a very human error may be the secret of the whole process. We might acquiesce in the ambiguity of this phenomenon, if the proclamation of the church were not involved, and if the church had not received the promise that the Word of God should be identical with this phenomenon. The church cannot acquiesce in a type of reflection that consists only in conversation with itself. In fact, both itself and its proclamation are not confronted by a Word of God, different from it and yet pressing towards identity with it. The church faces the unavoidably acute question, whether it will serve or not serve the Word of God. Dogmatics now becomes necessary as a critique of this ambiguous phenomenon. Dogmatics disciplines and honors both preachers and their hearers by telling them that they do not do their work alone. The object of this critique is that church proclamation should speak of God better. Dogmatics is a call to the realization of the happening that transcends church proclamation as such. God has spoken, speaks now, and will speak again. Dogmatics consists in the reminder that beyond the content of all human speech and its possibility, what the church says today has already been said in the past will be said again in the future. Dogmatic work, the construction of formulae, dogmatic teaching and systematization, consists in the reminder of the necessity for this realization in church proclamation. The church teaches. Dogmatics has neither the authority nor the capacity fundamentally to transcend this fact. Within the framework of the church that teaches, and in complete solidarity with it, it reminds the church that there exists prior a church teaching within which it carries out its teaching. The objective possibility of pure doctrine is untenable in practice; the reflected promise is itself meaningless, doubtful, and in any case unrecognizable, if the transcendent Word of God does not stand over against the church, as something to which one can make appeal. The Word of God has a first form in revelation, and a second in the

Bible. Therefore, the Word of God has a third affirmation in proclamation. For this reason, the critical question addressed to proclamation in every age is the extent to which human words serve the divine Word of God. Dogmatics is a call to order and unity in the church. Dogmatics is first a call to the teaching church to hear, listening to Jesus Christ as attested in the Bible. The teaching of the church is a human action. As such, the teaching of the church, like any other human action, has no guarantee against slipping from obedience into disobedience, from the doing of the Word of God into the doing of human will or fancy.

The church exists in a human world. Even in the genesis of this form of doctrine, the church partially hears the Word of God and the church partially does not hear this Word, different voices drowning it out. The church does not attain pure doctrine. Instead, a fluctuating struggle occurs between various, greater and smaller, more or less visible, more or less dangerous ambiguous qualities. At all periods, a continuous embarrassment between various types of doctrine characterizes the historical reality of the teaching church. What distinguishes these various doctrines is not black and white, but the fact that in the action and reaction of their formation the Word was heard more or less. Every doctrinal formulation has more or less admixture of these alien factors.

The redemption of church proclamation consists in its purification. Its purification consists in hearing afresh its own proclamation. It takes place as the church that teaches Jesus Christ turns from teaching Christ to hearing Christ. This is the necessity that dogmatics has to represent. The task of dogmatics is to summon the church to an active consideration of this necessity.

Dogmatics has an especially difficult and ungrateful a task and part to perform. It is natural for people, and for the church, to prefer to be undisturbed in their proclamation.

Dogmatics can give this summons with so much the more authority and emphasis the more it realizes its own solidarity with the teaching church. The fresh hearing of the Word of God consists in this. The Word of God became flesh. The church has proclaimed the prophetic and apostolic witness in the world. The church itself has its origin and continuity in history based on and in the power of this happening. Therefore, the church has the promise that Jesus Christ wills to be present in its midst and to speak through it. This presence and voice of Christ is to be its life. Living in Christ and through Christ, the church is to be the light of the world. To give effect to this promise and to be this church is its only duty and the only necessity of its life.

Before such a thing as heresy in the church exists, the possibility exists of forgetting that even the church that teaches correctly cannot teach in its own name and competence, or from the resources of its wisdom and self-determination. Once the church forgets this, the position that Jesus Christ occupies in its midst becomes an honorary one. Christ ceases to be the actual ruler of the church. The church has to listen in order that it may combat this forgetfulness at the central point where Jesus Christ reminds the church of the central position that Christ holds. Before heresy arises, the church that teaches correctly trifles with the work of proclamation. Before heresy arises, a false moralistic earnestness will dominate proclamation.

The formal task of dogmatics has particular relevance to such pre-heretical deviations. Dogmatics reminds us of the possibility of listening to the voice of Jesus Christ. To react clearly and sharply against the possibility of pre-heresy at the right point and in the right sense to oppose to them the other possibility of listening is the proper art of dogmatics on its formal side.

The final assumption of dogmatics is that the teaching church will hear the Word of God afresh. In all its human frailty, dogmatics views the teaching office of the church of Jesus Christ as not forsaken by the Holy Spirit.

Dogmatics must use the experiences and decisions of the past concerning ancient heresies. It will remind the teaching church where it stands with reference to this past, especially as it may develop in a direction in which it betrays itself. Protestant dogmatics will involve opposition to both Roman Catholicism and to liberal Protestantism. It will unfold this opposition at every point. However, the unfolding of this opposition can never be more than a means to the end of awakening the church to a new obedience to its Lord and new loyalty to itself. The business of dogmatics does not consist in establishing and proscribing a new heresy. It does not consist in stigmatizing individual personalities and movements in the church as heretical. It does not stand outside the church of the today. If dogmatics has to oppose polemically certain types of teaching, personalities, and movements, it does this only as it discloses in them the danger of deviation and of the emergence of a new heresy. Often, dogmatics will do this by showing that they are a renewal and repetition of old errors the church rejected long ago. Dogmatics summons the teaching church to listen again to the voice of Jesus Christ. Its business is to issue a warning whenever it sees a threat to the obedience that church proclamation must render. Its warning must be loud and clear. In face of possible aberrations, it must show the threatened consequences and indicate the necessary decisions. It must not allow itself to shrink from this task.

2. The dogmatic norm

In its desire to summon the teaching church to a fresh act of listening, dogmatics cannot speak to the rest of the church as if to an inferior. Writers of church dogmatics can

only place themselves along side the preacher. They can do only what the preacher does. They can bring about the confrontation of the human word of church proclamation with the divine Word of revelation in the Bible only by themselves appropriating this human word.

Dogmatics distinguishes itself from preaching in that it makes the content of this preaching its subject, and therefore is shift from an outward focus to an inward focus. Dogmatics is a summons to listen anew to this proclamation, bringing teaching and listening into the closest possible proximity. Schleiermacher fails at this point. The result of his teaching is that the teaching church has a dialogue with itself. The teaching church does not have an address from God made to the church and to which the church is accountable. For him, the writer of dogmatics appeals only to the present preaching and piety of the church. The function of dogmatics is this. Within the teaching church as it is the human word of church proclamation, it needs to become a sign and witness of the presence and validity of the Word of God, whose service alone the human word receives its qualification and attestation. The norm of which dogmatics must remind church proclamation is the revelation attested in the Bible as the Word of God.

The first requirement made of dogmatics is that its investigations, formula, and demonstrations must have a biblical character. In adopting the attitude of biblical witnesses, we mean that orientation of their thinking and speaking that is still that of witnesses to the revelation of God, even though their speaking experiences the human finitude of history and biography. They are witnesses. Yet, dogmatics is not itself biblical exegesis. Dogmatics is the examination, criticism, and correction of the proclamation to which the teaching church addresses itself based on the Bible by applying and in some measure producing it. Dogmatics is not itself directly concerned with the biblical text, but

with the word of church proclamation founded upon its testimony. The church ought not to expect dogmatics to achieve what is the business of a biblical theology. Dogmatics must have the freedom to take up questions and concerns that one cannot answer directly either by individual phrases in the Bible, or by reference to specific biblical contexts of thought, or by exegesis. Dogmatics must also deal with matters confronting the church today as it listens to the voice of scripture and teaches on this basis.

The second formal characteristic of dogmatics is the requirement of a confessional attitude. Dogmatic thinking and speaking must be distinguished from undefined religious thinking and speaking, not only by its orientation to the canon and text of the Bible, but also by a right connection with the history that has molded this church and the confession that prevails in it. Where dogmatics exists, it exists as dogmatics of the ecumenical church. This will mean due attention to the creeds, to the ecumenical councils, to the confessions of the Reformed tradition, and to the various articles of religion and doctrinal statements in the various evangelical churches.

The third requirement regarding the norm to which dogmatics must submit arises from the fact that it must listen in a definite way to the teaching church of today. Dogmatics must have a church attitude. Along with the teaching church, it must throw itself into this contemporary situation, entering into the position and the task of the teaching church in face of this situation, and seeking to listen attentively to the Word of God, as spoken to the present in the present. Seeing the problems, concerns, difficulties and hopes, which in this present hour claim and absorb the attention of church administration, it must realize its absolute solidarity with the church of the present, thinking and speaking from out of this solidarity. Dogmatics must go with the teaching church in the fellowship of prayer, out of the past, through the present and into the future.

With the teaching church, dogmatics must thank and praise God for the benefits of the revelation of God and atonement. With the teaching church, it must do penance before God for all the failings of which the whole church is constantly guilty in face of these benefits. With the teaching church, dogmatics must pray for the Holy Spirit, which means for the possibility of a new, better, and more decisive hearing and proclamation of the Word of God. Dogmatics will enter into this solidarity with the action, labor, struggles and sufferings of the church of the present. A church attitude precludes the possibility of a dogmatics that thinks and speaks timelessly, for it will never reach completion or perfection. The church attitude precludes the possibility of a dogmatics that thinks and speaks aesthetically, as if pleasing speech and writing is the goal. The church attitude precludes the possibility of a romantic dogmatics that thinks of some of idyllic past and seeks to transport into the present. The church attitude precludes the possibility of secular dogmatics, serving the whims of present culture.

24) Dogmatics as a Function of the Teaching Church

Dogmatics summons the listening church to address itself anew to the task of teaching the Word of God in the revelation attested in Scripture. It can do this only as it accepts itself the position of the teaching church and the Word of God therefore claims the church as the object to which the teaching church as such has devoted itself.

1. The material task of dogmatics

The hearing of the Word of God does not exhaustively define the life of the church. Due to this hearing, the church that hears the Word of God also has the calling to teach. What does it really mean, in terms of the will and activity, that the church hears the Word of God? Hearing the Word of God involves itself in the questionable character of all human activity. Therefore, even in this activity it is not exempt from questioning or in no need of warning. The Word of God, when people hear it, demands the service of the church. It calls on people to proclaim it and make it known. Since it wills to be made

known to human beings, it demands human speech. Because it demands genuine service, and wills people to proclaim it and make it known in, the first requirement is that people should continually hear it. It demands service. "I believe and therefore speak." Only when hearing produces this consequence have people genuinely heard the Word of God. The Word of God longs after humanity in order that human beings may believe and that believing may live by the Word of God, finding acquittal, sanctification, and salvation. However, in order that human beings may believe the Word of God, it must have come to them. They must have heard it, and someone must have spoken it to them. It belongs to the nature of this object that people proclaim it.

2. The dogmatic method

Essentially, the dogmatic writer can do only what the preacher does. In obedience, dogmatic writers must dare to say what they have heard, and to give out what they have received. With the intention and purpose of summoning the hearing church to new exertions in teaching, dogmatics for its part adopts the attitude of the teaching church, makes the task of teaching its own, and attempts to offer an exemplary performance of this teaching task. The content of dogmatics can only be an exposition of the work and action of God as it takes place in the Word of God. We have seen that because the work of theology takes place in the Word of God, it wills for people to hear it, and as people hear it, it will people who will proclaim it. No work of human beings can accomplish this work of God. Dogmatics participates in this human limitation. As far as the Word of God actualizes the work of God in the world and is present to the church in the biblically attested revelation of God in Jesus Christ, dogmatics can testify to it. This means that it can describe and explain it in the light of its presence. This is the one task of church proclamation. For its inspiration, confirmation and stimulation, it is the exemplary task of

dogmatics. It still cannot arrogate to itself the character of a command. Under no circumstances can it present itself to others as anything but a free decision that as such can only challenge others to make similar free decisions. Dogmatic method relies solely upon the encounter with the work and activity of God. It must be a decision made in obedience, and as such may claim to have for others the character of a challenge, a suggestion and a counsel. If dogmatics can be flippant with regard to the choice of its method, it is open to serious question whether in its most intimate personal character where it demands its entire inward obedience, it does not finally rest upon an arbitrary decision.

If we approach the problem of dogmatic method with this insight, we already have our answer to the preliminary question, whether dogmatics has to unfold and present the content of the Word of God in the form of a system. As understood by all those who in philosophy and theology have attempted and created something of the kind, system means a structure of principles and their consequences, founded on the presupposition of a basic view of things, constructed with the help of various sources of knowledge and axioms, and self-contained and complete in itself. If dogmatic method consists in the freedom in which it practices its obedience, and of the obedience in which it has to prove its freedom. The subject of this dogmatic exercise will have to attend to this analysis and so in that way build up the system, thus being relieved of the duty of obedience in other respects. The question is whether this obedience to this principle corresponds to the Word of God.

In dogmatic systems, the presupposed basic view acquires inevitably the position and function that according to all our previous considerations one can ascribe only to the Word of God. However, the church cannot replace the Word of God even vicariously by

any basic interpretation of the essence of Christianity, however pregnant, deep and well founded. The simple reason for this is the while its content is indeed the truth, the truth of the reality of the work and activity of God taking place within it. As such, one cannot condense the work and reality of God in any view, idea, or principle. One can only report concretely the work and activity of God, in relation to what is at any given time the most recent stage of the process or action or sovereign act of which it is the occurrence. One cannot make this report the business and function of the object of dogmatics. In proportion as dogmatics replaces the Word of God, dogmatics shuts and separates itself off from its true object. Dogmatics is not a confession either of the church or of an individual. Its function is to confront church proclamation with the Word of God, and in doing this, it must not substitute for the Word of God the confession either of a church or of an individual. If it does, it cannot call with complete authority the church to either hearing or teaching. It will be only the function of a self-centered and self-occupied church. The establishment of specific, irrevocable, fundamental articles will block the way to freedom both for itself and for the church. It will also block the onward course of the Word of God within the church.

One must not understand confession as constituting an obstacle of the kind that a systematic presentation of dogmatics might present. In all seriousness, dogmatics must realize that it may not understand the confession in this way, but that its function is to point to the Word of God itself. Otherwise, it is not open to hear the Word of God. It cannot challenge and guide the church to a right teaching of the Word of God. In a church dogmatics, the position usually occupied in dogmatic systems by an arbitrarily chosen basic view belongs by right to the Word of God, and the Word of God alone. It does not belong to a conception of the Word of God. It is ready for new insights that no former

store of knowledge can really confront on equal terms or finally withstand. Essentially, dogmatic method consists in this openness to receive new truth, and only this. It consists in unceasing and ready vigilance to see that the object is able to speak for itself, and that its effect on human thinking and speaking is not disturbed. If there is no self-evident view in dogmatics, we recognize the foundation and center in the Word of God that presupposes itself and proves itself by the power of its content. It becomes quite evident that there can be no dogmatic system in that context. In this work, we have to do with the question of truth. It is inevitable that as a whole and in detail the aim must be definiteness and coherence. We might also hope that we will disclose the definiteness and sequence of the truth.

However, this being the case, it seems inevitable that something like a system will assert itself more or less spontaneously in dogmatic work. In fact, it may be that a system is not so abhorrent. If a system asserts itself spontaneously in this way, we might forgive the dogmatic writer. It may be that a law against systems should not frighten us away from this result. A system that asserts itself in this spontaneous way may signify obedience and is therefore a shadow of the truth. Dogmatics proceeds from the periphery of the circle, from the self-positing and self-authenticating Word of God. The Word of God gives the basis of dogmatic work, which is the event of the work and activity of God, does actually speak in all directions. Like the periphery of a circle, it says something in all directions that people can and must hear and repeat. We turn now to our task, the exposition of the dogmatic method I will follow.

Our starting point is the fact that the work and activity of God in the word is identical with what we have described as the first form of the Word of God in the self-revelation of God. In revealing God to us, God has dealings with us. Church

proclamation has to give an account of this, which is also the material task of dogmatics. However, the self-revelation of God, and therefore the work and dealings of God with us, is Jesus Christ as the positive relation that God has effected between God and humanity: the gracious lordship of God over humanity. The revelation of God stands in a definite victorious relationship to human darkness. The gracious lordship of God consists in an overcoming of human rebellion and human need. Therefore, revelation is in fact the same thing as atonement: the act of God in which God triumphantly transcends the human contradiction and thus turns the need of humanity to the salvation of humanity.

In the account that church proclamation and dogmatics have to give of the work and activity of God their business is with the work and activity of God in the Son, Jesus Christ. The Father reveals himself in Christ alone. The Holy Spirit reveals the Son alone. Therefore, dogmatics could actually be Christology alone. Yet, Jesus Christ is the Word of the Father. The dealing of God with humanity is reconciliation.

One cannot legitimately subordinate or assimilate the doctrine of God to these other elements of the doctrine of the truth of God. It may be very tempting to set it systematically above them, but the only genuine alternative is to set it alongside and coordinate it with them, taking care not to destroy their independence.

The same applies to the truth that God is creator. Where else is it to be recognized, but in the reconciling action of God? The doctrine of creation enables us to construct a concept of humanity and the destiny of humanity. It may be in cosmic terms or individual, in naturalistic or spiritual, in idealistic or existentialist, with or without regard to the I-Thou relation, with or without natural theology. The doctrine of creation will also give us a doctrine of law.

Now, it obviously remains to consider the final truth: God is redeemer. The One who has made humanity and reconciled humanity to himself, encounters humanity in the Word of God in order that God may be the entire future, fulfilling, and consummating what is promised in the creative and reconciling work of God. Again, one has to recognize this in the action of God as creator and reconciler. It is only here that God meets us clearly as the God of everlasting faithfulness, who neither seeks us, nor allows God to be sought by us, without allowing us to find God.

We can understand Jesus Christ in the New Testament only as the Savior who is to come. If God is not the one who comes, God is not the one who has already come. If we do not understand the atonement that has taken place in God in the future tense, we cannot understand it in the perfect tense, which means that it cannot be understood at all. Our regeneration, justification and sanctification, the church and the sacrament, the whole existence and the whole work of Jesus Christ in the present are eschatological, that is, they are actual only in the coming Redeemer.

A system can be constructed of which the central fact is that the action of God is that of One who is not yet present and the kingdom of God is only future. The church becomes distinctive only as contrasted with this coming kingdom, the life of the church and believers becomes a mere expectation and hastening forward, the whole reality of the atonement is the precipitation of humanity into a state of longing that is never more than longing. Faith becomes a vacuum and nothing more. Viewed from an eschatological center of this kind, creation recedes into the dim distance, perhaps in a very distorting light, with the fall and the present need in the forefront. From this point of view again, the doctrine of God inevitably acquires the character of a massive postulate. The doctrine of redemption cannot become the center of a system. For this reason, the doctrine of God

must accompany it, as well as the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of atonement. It must be coordinated with them in a real union due to their common origin and end in the Word of God.

At all four points, the Word of God itself provides the basis of our knowledge, and similarly the coherence of the lines that we have to draw from these four points. At the center, in the Word of God itself as the original point from which they diverge, they are one. In these circumstances, it is almost superfluous to state and explain or inability to approve the course adopted by many modern dogmatic writers, who, with more or less inward justification and consistency, have constructed their dogmatics according to a Trinitarian plan. Here is a brief survey of the contents of dogmatics, as I understand it.

First, in the doctrine of God, we shall examine and expound the content of the Word, the whole work and activity of God in the Son, Jesus Christ, from the standpoint of an investigation of the characteristic being and attributes of God as Subject. Our theme will be the deity and sovereignty of God. I want to consider four sets of questions. First, the question of the reality, possibility, and actual realization, of a genuine knowledge of God founded upon revelation. Second, the question of the statements in which the content of this knowledge is to be expressed as a knowledge of the reality of God. Third, the question of the unfolding of the Christian insight into the fundamental attitude of God toward humanity as grounded in the freedom of God shown in the election of grace. Fourth, I will consider the question of the relation of God toward humanity shown in the divine command, and therefore the foundation of theological ethics.

Second, the doctrine of creation concerns itself with the understanding of the Word of God and thus the Son as the Word that concerns and confronts us in our existence as human beings. Everything that is not God, God creates, maintains, and

controls through the sovereignty of God means the origin from which we come, no matter what may become of us, and what we may make of ourselves, as those who once were not, now are, and one day will be no more. I will consider three great circles. First, the being and activity of God as creator in relation to the creatures God has made and to the creation in general. Second, I want to consider humanity as the creation of God, the destiny of humanity as the focal point of creation, and the lost righteousness of humanity through human freedom, corresponding to the position of humanity in creation. Third, beginning theological ethics, the absolute authority with which God claims and commands humanity, because the command of God is the command of our creator, because we are claimed already by the very fact that we exist, and because this claim determines our existence, and therefore affects already our being and life as such.

Third, with the doctrine of atonement, we come to the real center of dogmatics and church proclamation. God the mediator is the present, in which we find ourselves as hearers of the Word of God. Four great circles concern us here. First, I will consider the covenant between God and humanity that God ratifies and confirms. Therefore, we begin with the doctrine of grace and its corresponding shadow of sin. Second, I will consider the objective fact of atonement in the person and work of the divine and human mediator, Jesus Christ. Third, I will consider the human, subjective appropriation of the atonement by the presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit within the sphere of the church. In particular, we will consider baptism and the Lord's Supper as signs of this presence of Christ, and then consider the calling of God, justification, sanctification, and perseverance. Fourth, I will consider theological ethics in a second turn. The command of God makes a claim upon humanity, for at this point we are under the judgment and grace of God, coming to as the Law of God, exposing and punishing our sin, while leading to

our healing and restoration. In the church, our fellow human being becomes our neighbor, who in his or own need has for us the significance of a duty and an aid, declaring the commandment of God.

Fourth, in the doctrine of Redemption, we must let the Word of God the Son speak to us as the Word of the God who is the end towards which we move. As the Word of redemption, this comprehends humanity from the standpoint of the eternal, as completed and consummated in the lordship of God. We find human existence illuminated by the resurrection of God as the revelation of the life of God, the promise of resurrection, and the eternal life towards which humanity may now advance. We need to draw three circles here. First, we consider the circle of the life of humanity in hope in which the objective content of faith, Jesus Christ, is present. Second, we consider the circle of the content of this faith as the content of the promise and its future realization. Third, we consider the circle of the attainment of the goal of theological ethics as the claim made upon humanity by the command of God. We can do this because, according to the promise, we are heirs, expectant of eternal life in the kingdom of God. By this command of God, the promise holds out the consummation, ascribed and appropriated, because the command of God summons us to live and bow before the Word of God as we advance towards a genuinely better future.

In all four stages of the development of this church dogmatics, it must always remember that this work can legitimately speak only of the God and the work and activity of the God who is the revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.