Addressed by the Word

The Practical, Pastoral, and Eschatological Anthropology of Eduard Thurneysen

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“Ein Mann des Gesprächs”

Image painted by the author, 2019
Preface

About four hours’ drive from where I live in the far south of New Zealand there is a Mt. Calvin. It stands resolute and unmoving in the Southern Alps beside an equally formidable Mt. Barth.¹ Karl Barth, who owed much to John Calvin, was arguably the most significant theologian of the twentieth century.² In between the two giants of Mt. Calvin and Mt. Barth, though, there is one further curiosity: snaking down from the peak of Mt. Barth is a certain Thurneysen Glacier. Named after Karl Barth’s close friend and colleague, Eduard Thurneysen, it was a respectful nod, I think, to the importance of Thurneysen’s own work, particularly in the field of practical theology and pastoral care, and to his significance for Barth’s development. He erected no “mountain” of theology, no Church Dogmatics or Institutes of the Christian Religion (though his theological corpus is nonetheless impressive!). He was first and foremost a pastor. Undeniably influenced by Barth’s theology, Thurneysen’s primary concern was different. Unlike a mountain which is unmoving and formidable, a glacier ebbs and flows. It is sensitive to the changing climate. It runs down into the valleys and the lakes — a helpful image for Thurneysen, the pastor, who always did theology from the Existenzgrund of the church.

As a recently ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, I am interested in theology from the church and for the church. For this reason, Eduard Thurneysen holds particular appeal. His biographer, Rudolf Bohren, describes him as a theologian before practitioner, but a pastor before theoretician.³ He asked theological questions of human nature from the messiness of pastoral ministry. I am thankful for journeying with him over these last three years and hope my thesis will help others to rediscover him and benefit from his “glacial” wisdom as I have.

With deep gratitude I acknowledge Knox College, Dunedin, where I resided as Ross Fellow for three years while I undertook this project. I am also thankful to the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, the Trust Board of Saint Kentigern College, and the University of Otago for their generous financial support. Finally, I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor Murray Rae for his gentle wisdom, to my father, who cultivated my wonder in worship from a young age, and to my mother, for her constant care and support.

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¹ I have heard anecdotally that these mountains were not named by Reformed Presbyterians, as one might expect in the South of New Zealand, with its Scottish colonial heritage, but by a group of mountaineering Baptists!
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Introduction

Rediscovering Eduard Thurneysen Today

Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1974) was a Swiss Reformed minister and theologian. He is most known for his contributions to the theology of pastoral care, advocating in particular a form of what is often called kerygmatic pastoral care, which emphasises pastoral care as proclamation. Three publications are of decisive importance with regard to his theology of pastoral care: Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge (1928), Die Lehre von der Seelsorge (1946) and Seelsorge im Vollzug (1968). In these three publications, he comes the closest to what one could call a “systematic theology” of pastoral care. But he was no systematist. Most of his theological works were articles, sermons, devotions, and columns that amount to almost five hundred entries in his bibliography. His theology was more responsive and occasional and must be understood in the context of Thurneysen’s pastoral ministry.

Beside his prominence in the field of pastoral theology, Thurneysen is also known as one of the founders of dialectical theology and the colleague of Karl Barth. Together, Barth and Thurneysen developed their “Theology of the Word” while ministering in neighbouring parishes in rural Switzerland. Over the next two decades, they shared a remarkably productive collegial output including three sermon volumes and the establishment of the Zwischen den Zeiten journal, the hallmark publication of dialectical theology. Thurneysen became one of the “Olympians” of dialectical theology, his name often mentioned in an impressive list that includes Karl and Heinrich Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten. Within this venerable crowd, he brought a practical emphasis on the

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1 Christoph Ramstein, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Relations with Clergy in Basel," in International Bonhoefferkongress (Basel2016), 10.
church community, choosing to reflect especially on the nature of the church, preaching, community, and Christian education.²

More than a colleague, however, Thurneysen was also one of Barth’s closest friends and confidants, keeping almost constant correspondence over two decades and reading and editing much of Barth’s work. Because of Barth’s undoubted brilliance and the lasting significance of his works for theology, Thurneysen has often been eclipsed, receding into Barth’s shadow. But this is not to say that Thurneysen had nothing important to offer, nor that he did not differ theologically from Barth in a number of respects, nor that he was not an active, contributing partner in the relationship.

Recent scholarship, particularly in the germanophone world, is beginning to acknowledge this with a number of works in the last thirty years re-engaging with Thurneysen’s theology. We can point to three broad areas of current Thurneysenian reception: historical research on Thurneysen’s contribution to the development of dialectical theology, particularly through engagement with his short work, Dostojewski;³ systematic research on Thurneysen’s Theology of the Word;⁴ and practical research on Thurneysen’s kerygmatic pastoral care.⁵

Reijer Jan de Vries offers a helpful summary of the history of Thurneysen reception, pointing to four main phases: approval in the 1950s and 1960s; criticism in the 1960s and 1970s; synthesis in the 1970s and 1980s; and reconstruction from the mid-1990s until today.⁶

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“critical” phase arose in conjunction with the emerging client-centred Seelsorgebewegung, which sought to reconceive pastoral care from the ground up on the basis of modern psychotherapeutic counselling technique. In the framework of clinical psychotherapy, Thurneysen’s emphases on the proclaimed Word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the centrality of prayer seem quite incomprehensible. While there was certainly much that was contributed by the Seelsorgebewegung, in more recent history there has been a concerted effort to move beyond such a close coupling of pastoral care with psychotherapeutic counselling. In the Anglophone world, the likes of Alistair Campbell, Eugene Peterson, Ray Anderson, Andrew Purves, David Lyall, Don Browning, John Swinton, and Lynne Baab have helped to re-establish the integrity of pastoral care as its own theological discipline. This movement has paved the way for the task of theological reconstruction in Thurneysen scholarship. My thesis is a small, but hopefully meaningful, contribution to that critical task of reconstruction.

**Why a theological anthropology of Eduard Thurneysen?**

Theological anthropology determines pastoral care and vice versa. Our understanding of being human, Thurneysen realised, will direct how we care for one another. Conversely, how we live with others in community informs our understanding of being human. The human being never exists in isolation but always as fellow human, as Mitmensch, as person-in-relationship. Because of this, the practice of mutual care becomes an important means of upholding one another in community, of actualising personhood, of celebrating and affirming our co-humanity. Through his emphasis on the praxis of the church and pastoral care, Thurneysen focuses on the intersection between the biblical and theological theory of being human and the practical reality of living in community. For him, in other words, theological anthropology is a practical and pastoral task informed by the rhythms and practices of the church.

This intersection of the theological and the practical centres on an event: the event of God’s speaking. In the act of proclamation, the living God speaks ever anew directly and personally to the human being calling them into new reconciled community with God and with others. In this event, the human being stands as one addressed by the Word of God for the sake of the Word. We are not simply created. We are created for something. The starting point for

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Thurneysen’s anthropology, then, is not the human being as they are now, but the eschatological human being as they will be in perfect communion with God and others. He begins with the new human being as part of the new humanity within the new heaven and earth; the recreated and redeemed human being destined for life and life in fullness.

And yet, Thurneysen is clear that this new human being is no utopian ideal abstracted from reality. Nor is this new human being a mere outline, the content of which is to be filled in by each generation anew according to their own image. Rather this new human being is a particular human being who lived and walked among us: Jesus Christ. In him, God’s future has broken in and disrupted human existence as it is now. The church is the community who hears the Word of Jesus Christ and responds in him by the fellowship of the Spirit. As such, the church is itself an event, a sign in the world of the new humanity in Christ, a dynamic process of human beings living in reconciled and reconciling community. Thurneysen spends much of his energy exploring the implications of the church as Word-event. Pastoral care plays a central role in this process. Like the venous system of the body, pastoral care is the complex network by which individual members communicate Christ to one another within the wider body. And yet, to pump blood through the body, the venous system is dependent on the heart. So too, for Thurneysen, pastoral care is an extension of the central act of proclamation in worship. The event of community always proceeds from the central event of God’s speaking.

Thurneysen locates the task of theological anthropology in the pastoral praxis of the church as it lives from this event. He had a lifelong interest in exploring questions of the modern human being in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. As a pastor, he constantly “connects the theological and empirical in a dialectical way”. For this reason, it is a worthwhile task exploring his theological anthropology as an experiment in theological reflection. While we may not agree with all his conclusions — he was, after all, a product of his time — he lays the groundwork for a practical theological anthropology, built on a process of critical reflection between the witness of scripture and the events of the world. To its detriment, Klaus Raschzok argues, Thurneysen reception has tended to evaluate his kerygmatic pastoral theology as pastoral technique. But it is, rather, first and foremost ecclesiology. There is a good argument, given Thurneysen’s inclination towards questions of anthropology and given the central role in his theological work of “pastoral care to the modern human being”, for

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9 Ibid., 299.
saying it is also theological anthropology. For him, the church is the *Existenzgrund* for learning what it is to be fully human together in anticipation of the coming future of humankind in Christ. Articulating the theological anthropology of Eduard Thurneysen is therefore a necessary task in properly understanding his theology of pastoral care and in reconstructing a kerygmatic pastoral care for today’s church.

**Structure**

In my thesis, I address two questions corresponding to its two main parts:

*What was Thurneysen’s understanding of being human as it developed over the course of his life?*

*What are the implications of his theological anthropology for the praxis of the church?*

I chose to arrange part one according to successive chronological periods of Thurneysen’s life. His assertions are properly understood when seen in their historical context — both the contemporary events and conversations to which Thurneysen responded as well as the chronological development of his thought over time: where he had come from and where he was going.

In chapter one, I look at his theological formation from 1906-1913, during which the foundation was laid for his lifelong practical and pastoral interest in the human being.

In 1913, he was called to his first pastoral office in the small rural parish of Leutwil-Dürrenäsch. Chapter two spans the years of his ministry there (1913-1920), in which he developed a close friendship with Karl Barth and together they sought new theological foundations. Influenced by Blumhardtian eschatology, his anthropology was characterised by unrest. The human being is one who *cries out for life.*

Thurneysen’s second pastoral office was to the industrial parish of Bruggen, an outer suburb of St. Gallen (1920-1927). Just prior to his move, he and Barth had arrived at their new theological *Aufbruch* arising from the radical dialectic that God is *ganz anders,* wholly other.

In chapter three, I look at the impact of the *Aufbruch* on Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. I argue his understanding centres on the concept of *Todesweisheit,* death-wisdom.

Thurneysen’s third and final ministry placement was at Basel Münster. He ministered there from 1927 until 1959 and then remained in Basel until his death in 1974. Chapter four covers
the early years of the Basel ministry (1927-1939). It was a period of “christological concentration” in which he conceived of the human being in light of their eschatological identity in Christ as a forgiven sinner. One is claimed by God in Christ, who is Lord and sovereign of all.

In chapter five, I analyse Thurneysen’s political anthropology during the World War II years (1939-1945). Humanity exists under the judgment of the cross. The crucified Son of Man will come again to bring God’s righteousness. The verdict of forgiven sinners becomes the ground for new reconciled community as human beings share in Christ’s way of suffering love.

In 1946, Thurneysen published his magnum opus, *Die Lehre von der Seelsorge*. The focus on pastoral theology set the trajectory for the rest of his ministry. In chapter six, I explore the theological anthropology arising from his doctrine of pastoral care. The human being, Thurneysen asserts, is “a personal Ganzheit (totality) of body and soul under the claim of God”.

Over the course of part one, we see how Thurneysen’s theological anthropology changed and develops over time, but we also see common threads emerging around the discipline of theological anthropology itself as it arises from the practical ground of the church. In part two of my thesis, I take these common threads and bring them into critical conversation with other theologians, partly to suggest areas where Thurneysen’s theology could be strengthened, but also to demonstrate that Thurneysen is of enduring relevance today.

In chapter seven, I bring Thurneysen into conversation with Ray Anderson, whose emphasis on practical theology through a Barthian lens makes him a fruitful conversation partner. Out of the dialogue, I explore what a practical theological anthropology looks like as it arises from the praxis of the church centred on the proclamation of the Word.

In chapter eight, I shift focus specifically to Thurneysen’s pastoral theology primarily in conversation with John Swinton. Swinton’s exploration of the role of practical theological anthropology for mental health care opens up new possibilities to engage with Thurneysen’s work. Swinton provides a helpful counter-voice to Thurneysen’s overwhelming emphasis on the pastoral conversation. However, I also draw on Alistair McFadyen and Trevor Hart in support of Thurneysen’s kerygmatic framework. Through Thurneysen and Swinton, I further the discussion of theological anthropology as a pastoral task, in which the ministry of holistic care to one another in community is central to our participation in the humanity of Christ.
Finally, I assess the previously unexplored connection between Eduard Thurneysen and Jürgen Moltmann, particularly in Thurneysen’s late theology. I develop the possibility of an eschatological anthropology as it arises from Thurneysen’s “pastoral care of hope” (Seelsorge der Hoffnung), in which the eschatological reality in Christ penetrates into the empirical, pastoral situation leading to concrete transformation of life.

These three orientations — the practical, the pastoral, and the eschatological — form the distinctive shape of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. All of these new orientations or directions, however, have the same starting point: the event of God’s address in the community of faith. For Thurneysen, the first and last Word of all real knowledge of human nature is Jesus Christ, in whose risen life we share by the Spirit through Word, sacrament and prayer. In the event of God’s proclamation, the human being is oriented in hope to the general resurrection and the new humanity in Christ. In hope, the human being receives comfort and courage in the present as they wait for and hasten towards the coming day.

**The scope of my thesis**

Over the course of my thesis, I hope to aid in the work of re-introducing Thurneysen’s theology to the English-speaking world; to contribute to the critical task of reconstruction through focussing on one aspect of Thurneysen’s theology — his theological anthropology; and, as it arises from my engagement with Thurneysen, to argue for a practical and pastoral theological anthropology in the horizon of hope. Necessarily, there are limits to the scope of my thesis. First, though I incorporate a lot of biographical information, this is not primarily a historical biography but a work of theology. Excellent biographical work has already been done by others (though an extensive English biography remains to be written). Second, while I inevitably engage with Karl Barth given his close relationship with Thurneysen, my focus is on Thurneysen’s theology not Barth’s. Therefore, I have invested my energies on Thurneysenian scholarship rather than trying to familiarise myself with the extensive secondary material on Barth. Third, I do not engage extensively with the critical reception of Thurneysen’s pastoral theology in the 1960s and 1970s during the rise of the Seelsorgebewegung. Since the mid-1990s, the likes of Albrecht Grözinger, Klaus Raschzok, Thomas K. Kuhn, "Einleitung," in Paul Werner Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, ed. Thomas K. Kuhn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016).

11 A full biography was written by Thurneysen’s former student Rudolf Bohren: Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen. See also: Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen.
Gol Rim, Isolde Karle, and Reijer Jan de Vries have, in my mind, adequately argued that these highly critical analyses basically misinterpret Thurneysen. Therefore I engage with this earlier reception on a more tangential basis as it pertains directly to my thesis.

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We turn now to the first chapter and the early years of Thurneysen’s formation. During this period he did not yet have a distinctive theological anthropology. Yet in these years important groundwork was undertaken for his practical, pastoral, and eschatological emphases. Already the seeds are already sown for much of what later emerges.
Part One

Eduard Thurneysen on Being Human
Introduction

Eduard Thurneysen’s theology, Karl Barth wrote in 1935, “has always grown out of the needs of the pastoral office.”¹ A pastor asks a different set of questions than a systematic theologian or a biblical exegete. That Thurneysen’s theology grows out of the needs of pastoral ministry means that he begins with the “bitter questions of life” raised by the particular men, women, and children in his congregation.² Questions of living and dying well, of death, grief, and illness, of workers’ rights and taxation, of child labour and gender inequality, of conscientious objection and patriotism, of alcoholism and marriage issues, of poverty and malnourishment — these were some of the issues Thurneysen raised in his letters, sermons, and articles during his early ministry. Rarely did he offer black and white answers, preferring instead to live in the grey. So Barth said of his friend: “the word which sums up all my impressions of him is the word: openness.”³ The characteristic served him well in ministry as he sought to offer pastoral care in the messiness of everyday life. A human being is a mysterious riddle, an unrepeatable vita, a complex psychosocial being who refuses to be confined by generalisations, abstractions, or societal norms. The pastor’s primary concern is not the biblical-theological theory of being human (though this is a vital task and one which


³ My translation. Barth, "Geleitwort [1935]," 228.
will undoubtedly inform their practice), but the practical intersection of this theory with the empirical reality of a particular human life — a life addressed by God. A *vita* is the concrete meeting point of eschatology, ethics, and psychology, Thurneysen once wrote to Barth, in which the deepest questions of life remain unresolved, pointing beyond the limits of existence to the ascepty of God.4

Thurneysen and Barth found their formal liberal theological education insufficient to respond adequately to the demands of pastoral ministry. The “bitter life questions” of the farmer, the factory-worker, and the house-wife were far removed from the intellectual quandaries being wrestled with in the academy. Before we explore Thurneysen’s anthropology during his ministry placement in Leutwil therefore, we need to take an initial step and understand where he came from. Over the course of his upbringing and theological education, we see the formation of a pastor. He was exposed to and influenced by a number of traditions, movements, and schools of thought that enabled him to move between them in critical and fruitful dialogue without being tethered to any one position. He received a “wealth of strong impressions and inspirations”5 and consequently developed “the rare gift of being able to learn from others and, moreover, to learn from a person just what is worth learning from him. He then brings it alive in his own way.”6 On the one hand, he was a product of the social and religious crisis taking place at the turn of the century. On the other hand, in their determination to do theology from the practical and pastoral ground of the church, Thurneysen and Barth were carving a new path and making a decisive break from the leading schools of thought propagated in the academy at the time. From the beginning on, Thurneysen’s understanding of human nature was *praxisbezogen* (praxis-oriented). It was not merely an applied theology of being human, but a theology in which God was presumed to speak directly and personally and therefore in which preaching, prayer, and pastoral conversation became central to the task of theology itself.

In this chapter, I focus on three central threads or traditions which Thurneysen wove together. The first is Blumhatdrian kingdom-of-God theology, which Thurneysen received through the

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5 Karl Barth uses this phrase with regard to the impressive list of people who had personally invested in Thurneysen’s formation and education, specifically Christoph Blumhardt Jr., Hermann Kutter, and Paul Wernle. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973), 110 (Letter Barth to Thurneysen 3 December 1915).
mentorship of Christoph Blumhardt Jr. Blumhardt was arguably the most important influence on Thurneysen and Barth prior to their theological Aufbruch in 1919. Even after this point, the ongoing influence of Blumhardt for Thurneysen’s theology and ministry is hard to overstate. The second is Thurneysen’s formal theological education in Basel and then Marburg, which involved exposure to some of the leading liberal theologians in Germany and Switzerland at the time. Bernhard Duhm, Paul Wernle, and Ernst Troeltsch are worthy of especial mention. The third is the Religious Socialist movement through Blumhardt, Herrmann Kutter, and Leonhard Ragaz. In looking at these threads separately, I then offer some concluding comments on how Thurneysen wove them together. First, though, I begin with a brief biographical note.

**Childhood and personality**

Eduard Thurneysen was born the younger of twin brothers on the 10th July 1888 in the municipality of Walenstadt, Switzerland. His early childhood was marred by tragedy. Only three months after birth, his twin brother died. Two and a half years later, his mother, Elise, also died giving birth to Eduard’s younger brother. His wife, Marguerite, reflected years later, after Thurneysen’s death, that “this shadow lay somehow over him his whole life long. And yet,” she continued, “his first mother also imparted to him her cheerful, sunny character.” Thurneysen’s father, also called Eduard, was a Swiss Reformed minister before him. He was influenced by the biblical realism and orthodoxy of Johann Tobias Beck. After the death of Elise, Thurneysen’s father moved the family to Basel, where he took up a hospital chaplaincy position. A few years later, his father re-entered parish ministry until retirement. Even though Thurneysen appears not to have inherited a personal faith from his father or from his confirmation classes (in fact, his early infatuation with Schiller’s dramas was a kind of protest against his father’s orthodox faith!), he nonetheless was exposed to the dynamics of ministry as is any child who grows up in a manse.

Thurneysen had an amiable and empathetic personality. He regularly expressed deep gratitude and indebtedness to his mentors, even when he disagreed with them. Years later, among his colleagues in the dialectical theology movement, he became known for — almost to the point of caricature — an irenic “Johannine disposition”. It was one of his greatest

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8 Ibid., 33.
9 The nickname "Johannine", given to Thurneysen by Lukas Christ, was a reference to Jerome’s anecdote of John the Evangelist, who, in extreme old age, would preach the same sermon to his community: little children, love one another. The comparison refers to Thurneysen’s irenic and conciliatory personality. Karl Barth -
strengths and one reason why he was so valuable to Barth, who tended to be less conciliatory in his interactions with others. Thurneysen was not so much concerned with promoting his own position. His preferred style was to critically and dialogically respond to the concerns of others. He had, Emil Brunner once wrote to him, a sense for what was “generally right” accompanied crucially by the gift of working with others and understanding them on their terms.10

He went to primary school in the suburb of St. Johann, a predominantly working class, lower socio-economic area of Basel. After that he attended a humanist Gymnasium,11 where he first learned Hebrew from Old Testament professor, Bernhard Duhm. Not long after moving to Basel, Thurneysen’s father remarried. His second marriage to Emilie Hindermann was far from happy. Emilie suffered from depression which placed stress on the marriage and had a severe impact on family life. Thurneysen struggled with his stepmother’s illness and the two did not have an easy relationship.12 Significantly though, it was through his stepmother that he first visited Bad Boll as a teenager and there met Christoph Blumhardt Jr.

**Christoph Blumhardt Jr.**

Christoph Blumhardt and his father, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, were swabian pastors who exercised a remarkable ministry, the influence of which far exceeded their scholarly output. In fact, neither were concerned with academic publications or contributing to the theoretical work of the church. Even before they were preachers, they were pastors. For Blumhardt Sr., who had emerged out the pietist movement in southwest Germany, the decisive turning point in his ministry was the miraculous healing of a girl with a psychosomatic illness in 1843. It led him to the confession that Jesus is victor — he has broken the power of sin and death through the forgiveness of sins. Karl Barth, in his short summary of Blumhardt Sr., notes that this breakthrough marked a decisive divergence from pietism in two ways.13 First, while pietism placed emphasis on the subjective conversion of the believer, for Blumhardt the primary struggle was between “Jesus and the real power of darkness”, over which he had proved victorious. The decisive fact was the objective reality of Jesus’ victory rather than

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10 Emil Brunner, "Letter Brunner to Thurneysen 1931 (Exact Date Unknown) (B38,103)," in Thurneysen-Brunner Briefwechsel (N.L.290 B37-38) (Basel: Universitätsbibliothek, 1931).
11 A Gymnasium is an academic high school, or grammar school.
12 Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 30.
one’s subjective acceptance in pious obedience. Pastorally, Blumhardt Sr. began with the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins — the absolution in the name of God — “with a quite unpietistic objectivity”. Second, Blumhardt cast his eyes beyond the present moment. The miraculous experiences of Jesus’ victory were signs of God’s future breaking in by the Holy Spirit. Blumhardt awaited a kind of second Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, when the kingdom of God would be established in fullness and Jesus would reign victorious. Blumhardt thus became “a theologian of hope”. Unpietistically, his gaze was fixed to the horizon, rather than the present moment of subjective piety. It is not pious obedience, but God’s future established in Christ which determines and shapes the present.

Blumhardt Jr. inherited his father’s theology of hope and developed it further. Thurneysen, who wrote a short work on Blumhardt Jr. in 1926, argued similarly that it was a misconception to categorise the son as a pietist.¹⁴ For Blumhardt, the emphasis lay not on my relationship to God, but on God’s relationship to me through the objective in-breaking of the Spirit.¹⁵ The subtle but important shift significantly affects how we live in the present. There is a movement away from the subjective actions of the individual as determinative of reality towards the objective and coming future of God resulting in a disposition of waiting (warten) and hastening (eilen).¹⁶ To live in waiting is to live in expectation of what is to come and so to resist the way things are now. “The ability to wait,” Jürgen Moltmann wrote in the introduction to his Ethics of Hope, “means not conforming to the conditions of this world of injustice and violence.”¹⁷ To live hastening towards God’s future is to “cross the frontiers of present reality into the spheres of what is possible in the future.”¹⁸ It is to anticipate what is coming through concrete action. This Blumhardtion eschatology is therefore less a well-articulated doctrine of the end times and more a practical attitude towards the present. It underpins Thurneysen’s practical and eschatological anthropology. Particularly in the Leutwil years (chapter two), Thurneysen’s understanding of human nature centres on the concept of restlessness (Unruhe) as one waits and hastens towards God’s coming world of life.

After the initial breakthrough revival in Möttlingen, Blumhardt Sr. founded a pastoral retreat centre at Bad Boll in Württemberg in 1852. It was a sanctuary for the oppressed, many

¹⁴ Thurneysen was reacting against Eugen Jäckh’s biography (Eugen Jäckh, Blumhardt Vater Und Sohn Und Ihre Botschaft (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1925).), which appeared a year earlier and which Thurneysen felt had painted Blumhardt as a pietist. Rudolf Bohren, however, makes a similar accusation of Thurneysen’s work, accusing him of overstating Blumhardt’s role as pastor at the expense of his political and socialist leanings.
¹⁵ Eduard Thurneysen, Christoph Blumhardt (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1926), 45.
¹⁶ Ibid., 47ff.
¹⁸ Ibid., 8.
journeying from far and wide to stay with Blumhardt and receive care from him. His son took over the operation of Bad Boll upon his father’s death and was still ministering there when Thurneysen visited as an impressionable sixteen year old in 1904. The visit was transformative for Thurneysen, on whom Blumhardt’s “religious force and vitality” made a deep impression.19 Blumhardt opened for the teenager a door to “a new world.”20 Without Blumhardt, who encouraged Thurneysen to study theology in Basel, Thurneysen would likely never have become a minister at all.21

For Thurneysen, the door to a new world was opened through pastoral conversation with Blumhardt. The pastoral preceded the theological. Or rather, through the pastoral conversation, Thurneysen was introduced to the personal and practical eschatology of Blumhardt. In this regard, Thurneysen personally experienced “the power of conversation”.22 He often recalled these transformative discussions in later years. On one occasion, he wrote to Barth that Blumhardt “simply took him very seriously.”23 Blumhardt validated the views and experiences of his conversation partners, but he didn’t leave the conversation there. Many years later in his book, *Die Lehre von der Seelsorge*, Thurneysen recalls that Blumhardt “led the conversation in quite unsought ways, masterfully and open-mindedly, *sub specie aeternitatis*, and this always meant for him, *sub specie verbum divini*.”24 Ordinary human life, the stuff of everyday discourse, “basked in a light which had fallen on it through Blumhardt’s direction of the conversation.”25 In this way, pastoral conversation became

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21 Ibid.
22 Albrecht Grözinger mentions two things in particular that Thurneysen inherited from Blumhardt. The first, his understanding of the human being in light of the forgiveness of sins, is a little too reductionist. Scheffler’s recent work has demonstrated, for instance, the impact of Blumhardt’s pneumatology and eschatology in Thurneysen’s thought. The second is “the power of conversation”. So Grözinger: “Im Reisegepäck aus Bad Boll bringt Thurneysen eine doppelte Erfahrung mit in die Schweiz zurück … Das Wissen, daß der Mensch nur dort als Mensch begriffen ist, wo er im Lichte der Vergebung Gottes gesehen wird. Dieses Wissen ist das prophetische Element im Denken Thurneysens … Und als zweites erfährt Thurneysen bei Blumhardt etwas von der Kraft des Gesprächs.” Grözinger, "Eduard Thurneysen," 279.
24 Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 123.
25 *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 112.

*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 112.

*A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 123.

*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 112.
eschatological conversation as human existence now was illumined by the light of the coming
day. Blumhardt enabled his conversation partners to adopt a new disposition of hope towards
empirical reality. It is little surprise that, given Thurneysen’s personal experience of the
transformative power of conversation with Blumhardt, he later develops the “pastoral
conversation” at the centre of his later theology of pastoral care. The pastoral visit becomes a
legitimate forum for exploring the deep questions of human nature as they arise from the
concrete situation and are placed under the objective reality of God’s coming kingdom.

In Blumhardt Jr. (and, by extension, his father, Blumhardt Sr.), the seeds of Thurneysen’s
later theological anthropology are already present: first, the determination to understand the
human being as a forgiven sinner, grounded in the biblical–realist objectivism of Jesus’
victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness; second, the coming kingdom of God by
the power of the Spirit, which gives human existence its eschatological orientation
characterised by waiting and hastening; and third, the central role of pastoral conversation for
a practical theological anthropology in which the empirical is brought into dialogue with the
theological. While the most decisive period of Blumhardt’s theological influence on
Thurneysen ended around 1925,²⁶ these three elements remained central in Thurneysen’s
theology and the basis for his practical, pastoral, and eschatological anthropology.

Thurneysen’s increasing reticence to self-identify as a “Boller”²⁷ (that is, a theological
follower of Blumhardt) reflected a conscious move away from Blumhardt’s forward-looking,
progressive eschatology and his corresponding spiritualism, and a move towards a
transcendental eschatology and a recovery of Reformed ecclesiology through Luther and
Calvin. However, rather than rejecting Blumhardt at this point, it is more accurate to say that
Thurneysen refashioned Blumhardt’s theology into this new mould.

**Formal theological education: 1907-1911**

At Blumhardt’s encouragement, Thurneysen began to study theology in Basel under
Bernhard Duhm and Paul Wernle in 1907. Two years later he moved to Marburg, where he
studied under a number of leading proponents of the historical-critical school, such as Adolf

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²⁶ Klaus Scheffler has recently highlighted Thurneysen’s indebtedness to Blumhardt Jr. (and through him his
father, Blumhardt Sr.) particularly in the development of his pneumatology and spirituality. Scheffler argues
Blumhardt’s strongest theological influence was between 1904 and 1925. However, Scheffler is right that
Blumhardt’s influence cannot be limited to this period. See: Scheffler, *Seelsorge Als Spirituelle Erfahrung*. Also:

²⁷ *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930*, 486, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 6 April
1927.
Jülicher, Wilhelm Heitmüller, Hermann Cohen, and Martin Rade. In Marburg he also became familiar with the work of Ernst Troeltsch. I give special attention here to Duhm, Wernle and Troeltsch because they had more of a direct and enduring influence on Thurneysen’s thinking. Wernle in particular is worthy of mention because of the extensive letter correspondence with his former student.

The liberal theological tradition, in which Thurneysen was schooled, suffered from a morbid disease: a “cancerous subjectivism”, as T.F. Torrance terms it. The Enlightenment resulted in a radical re-conception of reality from the starting point of the human being, whether as thinking subject (in the rationalist tradition of Descartes) or as feeling subject (in the romantic tradition of Schleiermacher). So in 1929, Friedrich Gogarten argued the central problem of modern anthropology is the existential self-consciousness of the human being as subject of history. There is no going back before Schleiermacher, he reasoned. The human being has become conscious of their personal and subjective existence in time. And so all theological anthropology today must grapple with this central problem. In modern Christianity, the existential riddle of der Mensch von heute resulted in both an entrenched religious individualism — the personal religion of the homo religiosus who searched for God —, and a progressive philosophy of religion and history which, through the development of the historical-critical method, sought to understand whole epochs of history as human beings progress towards absolute enlightenment. Duhm, Wernle, and Troeltsch were all leading representatives of this dominant tradition.

It is important to see Thurneysen as a product of his time. His theological anthropology arose out of his lifelong grappling with the problem of “modern man”. In that sense, the questions he asked and the frameworks in which he asked them were characteristic of the time and place in which he ministered. The likes of Duhm, Wernle, and Troeltsch gave him an appreciation of the social, cultural, and religious developments at the turn of the century. He was able to use the historical-critical method in his pastoral ministry in order to place the concrete human being within these larger historical and social movements. His later active interest in psychology and psychotherapy reflect his fascination with the modern human being, whose existential consciousness in history resulted in psychological angst and inner turmoil. Like Barth, Thurneysen did not advocate returning to pre-critical methods: in his

28 Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 16.
30 Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931, 31.
eyes the old dogmatic orthodox tradition in the church was just as problematic as the modern liberal tradition. However, he did seek to move beyond the historical criticism built on the “cancerous subjectivism” of nineteenth century theology. His emerging theological anthropology is a reaction against this subjectivism and an attempt to re-establish ultimate knowledge of human nature on the objective revelation of God.

**Bernhard Duhm**

Bernhard Duhm was an Old Testament scholar of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* 32 who focussed on the work of the prophets, particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah. In Thurneysen’s own evaluation a number of years later, Duhm understood that “all real religion arises from vision,” that is, “from an encounter of the human being with the deity.”33 Every ritual, doctrine, and ethic has its beginning point in the prophetic vision, or the revelation event. In Duhm’s understanding, religion can be grounded in revelation to a greater or lesser degree. There is a kind of relativity and progressive succession to religion in the context of which Christianity is the “most noble daughter and queen in the family of religions.”34 Thurneysen’s 1928 article in memory of Bernhard Duhm highlights both the lasting influence of Duhm on Thurneysen as well as where Thurneysen departed from him. In contrast to Duhm, Thurneysen maintained that the revelation contained in scripture is no general revelation alongside other revelations by which religion progresses over time. Christianity arises from the exclusivity of the witness of scripture centred in Jesus Christ. The revelation in scripture is *real* revelation (*wirkliche Offenbarung*) — nothing other than the definitive self-disclosure of God which brings all human existence to the point of existential crisis.

The enduring element of Duhm’s thinking, which Thurneysen incorporated into his own, was “the prophetic element” or the centrality of the vision. According to Duhm, prophecy is the means by which religion reforms itself (*Selbstaufhebung*).35 By its very nature, religion is

32 Paul Wernle, Bernhard Duhm and Ernst Troeltsch all belonged to the history of religions school (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*). The circle of scholars studied the origins of religion through the methodology of “historical criticism”. This meant demythologising the text in order to arrive at “the world behind the text”. It placed high value on human reason and on the reliability of historical analysis to separate the mythology from actual historical events. Christianity was viewed in relative continuity with all other religions, even if it was assumed to be the most superior or advanced religion. See: Brian Duignan, “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/Religionsgeschichtliche-Schule.


34 “…die vornehmste Tochter und Königin in der Familie der Religionen” ibid., 279ff.

35 Ibid., 289.
conservative, preserving a way of life through ritual and doctrine. It won’t reform itself of its own volition. Therefore if prophecy is to bring about change, it must initially be destructive through the communication of the hiddenness or wrath of God. If God is not truly hidden, if God is not free to truly turn away, but is bound to the positive existence of religion, then revelation is not really God’s revelation at all but a mere amplification of human ideas, a reiteration of what already is.36

In the early years, this destructive or negative prophetic element was strongly evident in Thurneysen’s thinking. Even Barth was not so critical and sought instead a more positive and constructive position.37 Increasingly as Thurneysen and Barth came to question their theological roots, they saw their joint work as a trumpet call, a prophetic “No!” that heralded the destruction of everything they had inherited.38 On the one hand, they rejected liberalism’s attempt to elevate critical human reason at the expense of divine revelation. On the other hand, they agreed with liberalism’s scepticism of “old orthodoxy”, which sought to justify and establish the revelation-principle through theological doctrine and intellectual gymnastics.39 The revelation of the free and living God through the prophetic Word is an event that cannot be contained or rationalised. Any attempt to do so merely constrains and binds God — or rather the idea of God — to the pre-existing religion. Rather the act of revelation itself must provide the vision, the new seeing (das neue Sehen)40 by which the community is judged and liberated from its own inwardness and self-justification.41

Thurneysen’s negative criticism of religion could thus be framed positively, that is, in terms of revelation and the corresponding vision that it creates. For Thurneysen, the event of revelation forms the centre of the church’s life. If there is to be any genuine church, it can only arise from the free and sovereign proclamation of God in Word and Spirit. The living God, asserted Thurneysen, really encounters people in space and time through proclamation.

36 “Denn dieses nicht wirklich Gottsein Gottes, es bedeutet ein Positivum für den Menschen.” Ibid., 288.
38 For example: ibid., 204, Letter Barth to Thurneysen 1 June 1917.
40 Eduard Thurneysen, ”Schrift Und Offenbarung (1924),” in Das Wort Gottes Und Die Kirche, ed. Ernst Wolf (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), 56.
41 Thurneysen draws on Duhm’s language of the prophetic "judgment sermon" (Gerichtspredigt) witnessed in the Old Testament that continually calls Israel to turn back to God. Thurneysen, "Offenbarung in Religionsgeschichte Und Bibel : Zum Gedächtnis Bernhard Duhms (1928)," 291ff.
In this event, the gathered community are placed under both God’s Word of judgment and God’s Word of mercy by which it is ever formed anew as a community of grace defined not by religious or pious searching but by God’s turning-toward (Zuwendung) us in Jesus Christ. In this way, Duhm’s concept of the vision provided Thurneysen with a scripturally-grounded practice in the tradition of the prophets, which enabled him to move beyond the rampant subjectivism of the modern homo religiosus towards an anthropology proceeding from the objective event of God’s divine address to the gathered community.

Paul Wernle

Paul Wernle, like Duhm a representative of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, was the professor of New Testament and church history at Basel University. According to Barth, Wernle’s brilliance “held the attention of all Switzerland”. He was “the representative of modern theology at that time.” Thurneysen introduced Barth to Wernle and developed a close friendship with his former professor through regular letter contact over twenty years. On the occasion of Paul Wernle’s 40th birthday in 1912, Thurneysen, aged 23, wrote to him in a letter: “I constantly rejoice over everything which I get a glimpse of from you.” At that time Wernle represented for him the truest and best “understanding of the gospel and the person of Jesus” — or at least the understanding which Thurneysen himself most preferred.

What Wernle did so effectively was to unite a personal and lively faith in Jesus (Jesusglauben) with historical critical methodology. He came out of the old orthodox tradition, in which he had developed a “positive-pietistic” faith. But through his education, he came to increasingly question both the rigidity of the orthodox doctrine of inspiration and orthodoxy’s “externalisation” of the Christian faith through its ceremonial practices. For the young Thurneysen, Wernle showed that it was possible to maintain a personal and pietistic faith in Jesus as Saviour and to apply the best of one’s rational and critical capacities in analysing scripture. In this way, he represented the height of modern, Christian individualism.

Despite the esteem in which he held Wernle, though, Thurneysen increasingly challenged his theological position, partly because of his association with the revolutionary social

42 For more on Paul Wernle’s relationship with Eduard Thurneysen see Thomas Kuhn’s excellent, recent edited collection of letter correspondence between Wernle and Thurneysen, including comprehensive introductions on both Wernle and Thurneysen: Paul Wernle and Eduard Thurneysen, Briefwechsel 1909-1934, edited by Thomas K. Kuhn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).
43 Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, 75.
44 Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 133, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 30 April 1912.
45 "Einleitung," 42.
46 Ibid., 39, 41.
eschatology of the Religious Socialists, who emphasised the objective in-breaking of God’s kingdom, and partly because Wernle’s religious individualism went hand in hand with a cultural Christianity that at times confused the gospel with national interests. Thurneysen felt that Wernle overlooked the social and political radicality of Jesus’ message in order to assimilate the Christian faith into his own moralistic value system and patriotic fervour.\(^{47}\) The outbreak of WWI and the support of the Kaiser’s War Manifesto by a number of their former professors caused Thurneysen and Barth to intentionally reject their modern liberal theological education.\(^{48}\) As Thurneysen began to voice his criticism of the German war effort, his relationship with Wernle came under growing strain. By the end of the War their letter correspondence became much less frequent. I consider Thurneysen’s War response further in chapter two.

Even though he largely rejected Wernle’s theology, his former professor was nonetheless enormously important for Thurneysen’s development for two main reasons. The first was Wernle’s personal encouragement of the young theology student, who often lacked confidence in his own ability.\(^{49}\) The second was that, prior to Barth, Wernle was Thurneysen’s trusted confidant with whom he worked out his own theological position. In Marburg between 1909 and 1911, Thurneysen wrote to Wernle regularly trying to make sense of Troeltsch, Herrmann, or Cohen among others. Once Thurneysen moved to Zurich and began to engage deeply with Religious Socialism, Wernle became an important counter-voice to Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz. Thurneysen was never as enthusiastic about

\(^{47}\) See for example Thurneysen’s response to Barth’s criticisms of Wernle in a letter written on 22\(^{nd}\) November 1915: “What you write regarding my thanks to the modern theologian [Wernle], I can only respond: it was much more personally meant than you understood it. For years I was Wernle’s closest student and kept daily contact with him. Therefore I cannot adopt your sharply deductive judgment out of these personal reasons; neither could I say he has given me nothing. But this only really applies to me. And I must also say, I am thankful to you that you didn’t contradict me. That you do not agree with Wernle’s theology, I understand fully. I also find it disagreeable — we are united in that. It is a value judgment theology [Werturteilstheologie] of the worst sort, which simply says: this and this pleases me about Jesus, this I can use well…” My translation. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 105, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 22 November 1915.

\(^{48}\) Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931, 38.

\(^{49}\) See for example Wernle’s letter to Thurneysen (30\(^{th}\) October 1914): “Regarding the matter, I admittedly maintain that I would like to wish that you could go your own way more, listen less to the others. You are marvellously impressionable.” My translation. Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 237, Letter Wernle to Thurneysen 30th October 1914. Or in a letter from Marburg on 8\(^{th}\) December 1909, Thurneysen wrote to his friend, Ernst Staehelin: “certainly Wernle is such a person on whom I therefore so strongly depend, because I also see in him what it means to be confident.” My translation. Quoted in: Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 43.
socialism as Barth, which can be ascribed, at least in part, to Wernle’s ongoing influence on Thurneysen. 50

Ernst Troeltsch

Ernst Troeltsch was also part of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Thurneysen only ever met him once, and very briefly, but his works made a deep impression on him. 51 On the occasion of Barth’s wedding, for instance, Thurneysen gifted Barth a copy of Troeltsch’s Soziallehren. 52 The gesture says less about Barth, who never especially warmed to Troeltsch, than it does about Thurneysen, whose letters to Wernle show that he followed Troeltsch’s work closely and spent weeks immersing himself in his Soziallehren in particular. 53 The weighty thousand page tome sought to speak into the social confusion of the day and in particular the church’s relation to it. 54 Thurneysen remarked to Wernle that he “continually delighted” in Troeltsch’s unmatched ability to dissect and analyse history. 55

In Soziallehren, Troeltsch talked about the crisis of cultural Protestantism in its failure to speak into the social confusion of his day. The social confusion was partly due to the political unification of large nation states, to modern industrialisation, to the development of a new urban working class, and to emancipation. 56 These massive social and political shifts in the latter half of the nineteenth century had created uncertainty, conflict, and new societal problems in response to which the social teaching of the church was woefully ill-equipped. Troeltsch’s language of crisis and view of history had an ongoing impact on Thurneysen. In his 1922 article, Sozialismus und Christentum, Thurneysen credits the “altogether perceptive

50 Tellingly, in a letter to Wernle on the 25th November 1914, Thurneysen refers to Barth as a Religious Socialist, but clearly does not identify himself in the same way: “Auch ist es sicher nicht so, dass Sie alles umsonst sagen, was Sie uns Jüngern zu sagen haben; ich mache mir zu schaffen mit Ihren Angriffen und Einwänden, und sie begleiten mich und ich erfahre innerlich viel Correktur und glaube gerade durch Sie einfach an vielen Punkten klarer zu sehen und sicherer zu gehen als mancher meiner relig.-soz. Freunde, Karl Barth, z.B.” Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 246, Letter Wernle to Thurneysen 25 November 1914.


52 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 3, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 23 February 1913.

53 See for instance: Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 142, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 7 June 1912.


55 Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 142, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 7 June 1912.

56 Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 1, 23.
analyses” of the theological work of Troeltsch in drawing attention to the “fragile and disjointed” theology at the turn of the century which failed to engage constructively with the emerging proletariat.\textsuperscript{57} In 1929, Thurneysen framed the social crisis of the day in terms of the emerging generation’s rejection of their religious upbringing, which had failed to address the world situation around the turn of the century. The rejection of religion, which had not only provided generational continuity but also social cohesion, marked the shattering of communication between generations as well as the fragmentation of community as a whole.\textsuperscript{58}

The social crisis and generational breakdown post World War One was an ongoing topic of interest in Thurneysen’s thinking and he came back to it time and again.\textsuperscript{59} His later pastoral concern engaged explicitly with social and cultural changes. More than Karl Barth, Thurneysen believed theology should take into account the social and psychological situation of the modern human being.\textsuperscript{60} Certainly Troeltsch was not the only cause of this ongoing emphasis for Thurneysen. Yet Troeltsch fuelled Thurneysen’s lifelong interest in critical historical analysis and in contemporary social and cultural phenomena.

However, Thurneysen was also critical of the underlying philosophy of the \textit{Religionsgeschichtliche Schule}, of which Troeltsch was a representative, because it could never move beyond its own line of historical and social inquiry.\textsuperscript{61} The crisis, Thurneysen later contended, was not simply a social or cultural crisis \textit{within} history, but an existential crisis of


\textsuperscript{60} Reijer Jan de Vries sees this emphasis not only as a distinctive of Thurneysen’s thinking, but also as a similarity he shared with Emil Brunner. While Thurneysen sided emphatically with Barth in the Barth-Brunner controversies of the 1930s, he had a sympathy for Brunner’s concerns that Barth lacked. See chapter 6: de Vries, \textit{Gods Woord Verandert Mensen}, 121ff.

\textsuperscript{61} Thurneysen, “Schrift Und Offenbarung (1924),” 38-39.
the eternal God breaking into and fundamentally disrupting history. The Christ-event, as
definitive event of revelation, is not so much the middle-point in a progressive view of
history. It is, rather the end of history in time; the eschaton; God’s eternal future breaking in.

Troeltsch also had an ongoing influence on Thurneysen’s ethics. For Troeltsch, the Christian
social ethos is neither static nor ahistorical because the church is bound to history and the
material world. Every epoch of history is a synthesis, both continuous with and discontinuous
from the epoch that came before. Absolute truth is therefore unattainable, because one is
always working within the ideals and socio-historical constraints of the time. But that is not
to say truth is entirely relative or subjective either. Absolute truth is bound to a continuous
historical ethical principle, held together in the church by the authority of the risen and
exalted Christ figure and maintained through the church’s sacerdotal and sacramental
structures. While absolute truth is unattainable in history, the Christian social ethos
nonetheless corresponds to absolute and eternal truth as history progresses and evolves
towards the “final realization of the Absolute.”

Thurneysen adopted Troeltsch’s relativistic understanding of ethics in his critique of Religious Socialism and what he perceived to be a naïve idealism at the heart of its social-eschatological vision.

**The Zurich Years: 1911-1913**

Having looked briefly at both Blumhardtian kingdom-of-God theology and the problem of
*der Mensch von heute* at the heart of liberal theology, we turn now to the final thread that
Thurneysen wove together in his early anthropology: the social eschatology of Religious
Socialism. Grounded in the expectation that God’s kingdom is coming in power impinging on
every aspect of human life, Christoph Blumhardt combined a pastoral and pietistic
individualism with a political and ethical socialism. Unlike his father, the younger Blumhardt
related the message of Jesus “with corresponding realism to the rising socio-political
movement”.

He joined the Social Democrat party and became a founding father of
Religious Socialism. Critical of the institutional church and cultural Christianity, Religious
Socialism affirmed the hopes and goals of the Social Democrat movement as consistent with
and a sign of the struggle for the kingdom of God. Across the border in Zurich, Hermann
Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz were committed to the same project of bringing Christianity and

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64 Bohren, *Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen*, 34.
65 Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 76.
socialism into fruitful conversation. It is little surprise given Thurneysen’s connection with Blumhardt that, after a short holiday in Bad Boll, Thurneysen moved to Zurich in December 1911 and quickly became involved with both Kutter and Ragaz. Thurneysen had taken up a position there as assistant secretary for the YMCA. In his role, he organised the youth squad, held talks, and published regularly in the association’s monthly newsletter, die Glocke.

Hermann Kutter

In 1898, Hermann Kutter was called to minister at the Neumünster in Zurich. Like Thurneysen, he had been highly influenced by Blumhardt’s kingdom of God theology. Kutter, taking cue from Blumhardt, saw socialism as a sign and call for the church to wake up. He published two important works: Sie müssen! (1904) and Wir Pfarrer (1907) both of which promoted the goals of socialism in anticipation of the coming kingdom and critiqued the church for manipulating and restricting the freedom of the living God. In Thurneysen’s own words, two things in particular attracted him to Kutter. First, his “relentless conscience against all social injustice”. And second, his desire for “revolutionary religion”, that is, an urgent desire for the outpouring of God’s Spirit.

Both had their roots in Blumhardt, but

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66 CVJM: Christliche Verein Junger Männer.

67 The publications from this time read somewhat like propaganda for the YMCA. With no shortage of militaristic imagery, Thurneysen emphasises the need for youth to grow into morally upright men, who are masters over their own house, over themselves, over their will, and over their mind ("Es muß einer Herr sein im eigenen Haus, Herr über sich selbst, Herr über seinen Willen, seine Gefühle und seinen Verstand." Eduard Thurneysen, "Ein Wort an Die Jungen," Die Glocke: monatl. Organ des CVJM Zürich 21, no. 4 (1913).) The YMCA, claimed Thurneysen, provided a fraternity of support in the growth to manhood, which is the goal and crown of youth. In an introductory word to their annual report, Thurneysen defined the work of the YMCA in evangelistic terms which is grounded in the slogan: “Christ our master, and we all brothers!” (“Christus unser Meister, wir alle Brüder!” "Der Sinn Unserer Arbeit," Die Glocke: monatl. Organ des CVJM Zürich 22, no. 2 (1913.).) This “brotherhood” in Christ is wider than the YMCA but includes all people. Therefore the work is never finished but requires an active programme of evangelisation and social work. Thankfully, Thurneysen quickly abandoned this style of persuasive and aggressive rhetoric once he finished his role. The enduring importance of his time in the YMCA was his engagement with Swiss Religious Socialism.

68 Translated into English as: Hermann Kutter, They Must; or God and the Social Democracy (Chicago: Co-operative Printing Company, 1908).


came to fuller and more concrete expression in Kutter. He had “something prophetic” about
him which inspired and energised Thurneysen.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{Leonhard Ragaz}

Leonhard Ragaz was somewhat of a polarising figure. More critical of the church than Kutter,
Ragaz tended to associate the struggle for the kingdom of God more closely with socialism
itself in reaction to the church, which he compared to Israel in their rejection of Jesus.\textsuperscript{72}
Ragaz began to promote these views as early as 1902 as the minister of Basel Münster (where
Thurneysen was later to minister from 1927). From 1908, Ragaz held a theological chair in
Zurich, where Thurneysen met him and attended his lectures. In comparison to Kutter,\textsuperscript{73}
who focussed on the promise of God’s kingdom witnessed to in the experience of God in history,
Ragaz emphasised the ethical demand in response to the experience of social need. While
Kutter tended to hold a critical distance from Social Democracy and never joined the party,
Ragaz was much more accepting of German Social Democracy and the revolutionary means
of socialism. He joined the Social Democrat Party in 1913. Kutter, on the other hand, could
support the end goal of socialism, but not the underlying ideology or the means of achieving
that goal.\textsuperscript{74} Ragaz went further than Kutter who largely intended in his project to interpret the
signs of the times. Instead Ragaz wanted to regard socialism as a preliminary manifestation
of the kingdom of God and in so doing began to systematise the raw energy and
“revolutionary religion” of Kutter’s call to action.\textsuperscript{75} While Kutter sounded a \textit{No!} against the
church, Ragaz voiced an emphatic \textit{Yes!} in his optimistic and energetic tackling of social
problems.\textsuperscript{76}

Thurneysen was enthused by Ragaz’s passion and the urgency of his call to action. He had,
according to Thurneysen, “a pious, prophetic mind,” with “something unique and new to
say.”\textsuperscript{77} Ragaz sought to concretely address the profound social need in Switzerland prior to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} \textit{Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934}, 226, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 7 July
1914.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Busch, \textit{Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts}, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{73} See Barth’s letter to Thurneysen in which he helpfully articulates some of the key differences between
Correspondence 1914-1925}, 31, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 8 September 1915.
\item \textsuperscript{74} “The Social Democracy is right in its demands and in its aims; though it may make grave mistakes, its
purpose is the purpose of the gospel — and our purpose is the same.” Kutter, \textit{They Must; or God and the Social
Democracy}, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Busch, \textit{Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts}, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 86.
\item \textsuperscript{77} “Ragaz habe als ein frommer, prophetischer Geist wirklich etwas Eigenes und Neues zu sagen.” Letter to
\end{itemize}
the War — something which both the conservatives and the liberals in the church had failed to do. He signalled a third way that held great appeal for Thurneysen and Barth as they honed their pastoral craft. But ultimately, as the two young ministers began to articulate their new radically dialectical concept of God, they questioned whether socialism really could achieve what it hoped to do. Ragaz reacted strongly to their new theological direction and took it as a personal rejection. Though Thurneysen tried to maintain the relationship, Ragaz, in his more aggressive and polemical manner, refused to be reconciled.78

Kutter and Ragaz helped Thurneysen to move beyond the religious individualism of modern theology and its corresponding cultural Christianity. Their social eschatology sought to give voice to the radically subversive message of Jesus’s kingdom proclamation: he was not concerned with calling individuals to a life of piety but with the establishment of his kingdom on earth and the birth of a new humanity in which peace and justice would reign. In Thurneysen we see a fusion of Wernle’s “personal religion” and Kutter’s “revolutionary religion” through the emergence of a practical and pastoral anthropology in anticipation of the coming kingdom. A pastoral anthropology, by nature, will tend to concern itself with personal questions of human nature. However, for Thurneysen, the personal must always be discussed in the horizon of the social and the political. The salvation of the individual is bound up with the salvation of all through the concrete coming of God’s kingdom into history.

**Evaluation: An irreconcilable tension**

In this brief overview of the first part of Thurneysen’s life, we see the formation of a pastor, not only in terms of theological education, but more holistically in terms of a caring disposition towards the concrete human being and of a commitment to social change informed by the kingdom hope. In Basel, Bad Boll, Marburg, and Zurich the impressionable youth received the theological grammar with which to explore the messiness of human life in the pastoral context. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Thurneysen developed an anthropological interest but always as pastor called to comfort and to communicate hope in concrete life. His theological anthropology was practical, pastoral, and eschatological in its

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78 Kuhn, "Einleitung," 74.
orientation. I offer a few concluding comments on how these early influences laid the foundations for what was to come.

As mentioned above, Thurneysen had an open, amiable personality — at times, almost to a fault. Through his rich formation and thorough education he was exposed to a veritable melting pot of theological positions: from his father’s orthodoxy to Kutter’s spiritualism, from Blumhardt’s eschatological urgency to Troeltsch’s relativism, from Ragaz’s passion to Wernle’s criticism. Thurneysen was influenced by each of these but was not firmly aligned with any of them. He developed a dialectical style, at times holding together apparently paradoxical positions. The tension was a Grundproblem in his thinking which he regularly acknowledged in his letters. For instance, he wrote to Wernle in 1915 that he found himself divided between two worlds, unable to reconcile them except in hope: this world “with its duties and realities” and that other “redeemed and redeeming world of eternity.” In an earlier letter, he noted that he felt torn between the “aggressive sect-like” position of Kutter and Ragaz on the one hand and the “more reserved ecclesial mindset” represented by Troeltsch on the other. In a third example, Thurneysen wrote similarly that he “owed a huge amount” to Wernle’s “more reformed position” and Blumhardt’s “social eschatological position”. Not only did this multi-faceted tension equip Thurneysen well in the ambiguity and messiness of pastoral ministry, it also became a foundational element in his early theology. There is a tension in existence between what is and what is hoped for. The yearning can only be resolved in God. Until then, as people of faith, we negotiate that tension in

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79 See footnote 44 above.
80 In one letter to Wernle, for instance, Thurneysen offers an exegesis of the Markan pericope of the rich, young ruler, focussing on Jesus’s response to his disciples: “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” (Mark 10:27) He writes: “With Jesus the unlimited boldness of a hope in God’s kingdom is connected with an absolute conviction in the utter powerlessness, indeed maliciousness, of human nature ... and there I arrived at the observation that precisely the radical gravity, with which Jesus thinks of the human being and the human being’s natural powerlessness, generates this absolute hope in the coming kingdom of God and its redemption from all suffering and all aching of human mortality, and just so that they both have their ground and root in his faith in God.” He continues that whoever resolves to have faith in God will be an optimist without limits “precisely because he expects nothing from human power.” “So faith in God,” he concludes, “is the key for the consonance of limitless gravity and limitless hope in the proclamation of Jesus.” With hints of his later dialectical theology, the optimism of the religious socialist hope and the “sin-pessimism” of the Lutheran tradition are here held together in tension. My translation. Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 129-30, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 23 March 1912.
82 Ibid., 147, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 13 August 1912 (exact date uncertain)
83 Ibid., 128, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle 23 March 1912.
anticipation of what is coming. Human existence, then, is defined by unrest — Unruhe — that anticipates the life of God, in whom there is rest and peace in fullness.

**Recognising the “power of conversation”**

Thurneysen was, according to Rudolf Bohren, “a man of conversation”. He devoted himself to pastoral care and was both fully present in pastoral conversation as well as industrious and gifted in his letter writing. Dorothee Hoch, for instance, remembers Thurneysen with fondness as someone who “took time” for her. In a similar way, Thurneysen looked back on Christoph Blumhardt as one who “simply took him seriously.” The pastor had first been pastored to. He had witnessed in Blumhardt a master conversationalist at work, who guided profane conversation into new territory so that it basked in a light from beyond. The pastoral conversation, I have argued was more than a practical pastoral tool for Thurneysen. It became central to his later theological anthropology through the concept of encounter. In conversation, one encounters the other and in this encounter discovers one’s own personhood. Pastoral care is a special sort of conversation awakened by the Spirit to encounter the living God through one another. In it, one is addressed in the particularity of their existence as a child of God in Jesus Christ. Blumhardt’s ministry to Thurneysen laid the foundation for what I have called the pastoral orientation of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology.

**Addressing the personal and the social**

In pastoral ministry one is called to respond to the needs of others. But in this call is a tension. For instance, in response to a factory worker facing poor working conditions and inadequate pay, should the pastor seek to comfort the individual and help them to endure suffering? Or should the pastor, rather, commit themselves to advocacy towards social change that addresses the underlying cause of suffering? Thurneysen and Barth faced exactly this problem as they ministered together in Leutwil and Safenwil. Barth, who was more disposed at the time to socialism, responded quite differently to Thurneysen, who was more inclined to pastoral work. From an early stage, Thurneysen identified with the “people of

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87 *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921*, 108-09, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 1 December 1915.
hope”, meaning the Religious Socialists, but could never fully embrace their emphasis on the social and political at the apparent expense of the personal. His reticence came through Blumhardt and Wernle. While Blumhardt was a committed socialist, his broad social concern was coupled with a pietistic emphasis on the personal working of the Holy Spirit in the believer — something which made a deep impression on Thurneysen. In a letter to Wernle from 1912, for instance, Thurneysen expressed his inability to identify with Ragaz because of Blumhardt’s “more pietistic style” which pointed beyond the purely political goals of socialism.88 Through Blumhardt, Thurneysen was careful not to lose sight in the midst one’s commitment to social and political change of the concrete human being and of personal faith. Wernle, too, helped to consolidate these views. In a letter in which he critiques both Ragaz and Kutter, Thurneysen wrote that Kutter’s religion lives

“exclusively from ‘if’ and ‘should’, ‘ought’, ‘will’ … he knows nothing of that which we’re able to simply call personal religion — in any case he doesn’t speak of it. But this is the most important thing for everyday life day to day.”89

Thurneysen saw clearly the interrelatedness of the personal and the social, the local and the global, the pastoral and the ethical. Consequently, his pastoral care and underlying theological anthropology was never simplistically ideological but grounded in empirical reality with the intention of addressing the complex need of the whole human being as they live in society.90

Centring on the “prophetic vision”

From Bernhard Duhm, Thurneysen learned that religion owes its vitality to the prophetic word. The prophetic word of judgment, which pronounces the wrath and hiddenness of God,

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88 Cf. “Ich könnte mich allerdings...niemals mit Ragaz identifizieren, denn was ich von Blumhardt her habe ist doch auch abgesehen davon, dass es gänzlich unpolitisch ist, immer etwas anderer, noch mehr pietitischer Art als was Ragaz vertritt.” Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 147, Letter Thurneysen Wernle 13th August 1912 (Exact date uncertain).

89 My translation. “Ich hatte bei einer Predigt Kutters am letzten Sonntag wieder so stark das Gefühl, Kutter lebe in seiner Religion ausschliesslich von “wenn” und “sollte”, “müsste”, “wird”. Wer ihn nur aus ein paar Predigten kennte, müsste glauben, er kenne das, was wir ganz einfach persönliche Religion heissen können, gar nicht, jedenfalls redet er nicht davon. Und doch ist dies für das gewöhnliche Leben Tag für Tag das allerwichtigste.” Ibid., 172, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle 6 March 1913.

90 Thurneysen picked up this idea in his late theology, particularly through the work of Viktor von Weizsäcker, a psychiatrist who argued for holistic healing of the whole human being as a psychosomatic unity. See especially: Eduard Thurneysen, “Seelsorge Und Psychotherapie,” Theologische Existenz Heute (N.F.) H. 25 (1950).
is necessary in order to liberate religion from its own inherent conservatism. Out of the judgment comes the vision, the new seeing, by which religion is reformed. Duhm’s ideas were reinforced for Thurneysen through Franz Overbeck’s severe criticism of theology and historical Christianity. And yet, Thurneysen took Duhm’s concept of the prophetic vision as means of self-reformation (*Selbstaufhebung*) and injected it with new content. When the scriptures are preached in the midst of people, Thurneysen contended, the living God *speaks* anew. The event of proclamation is no mere means of self-reformation but real eschatological event in which God’s kingdom breaks into time and calls into being a new people. Therefore, for Thurneysen, true knowledge of God and of humanity is also a *practical, occurring* knowledge bound to God’s speaking in the praxis of the church.

**Orienting towards the coming kingdom**

Thurneysen was profoundly influenced by Christoph Blumhardt’s expectation of the coming kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit. The “spiritualists” (by which Thurneysen meant Blumhardt, Kutter, and Ragaz), 91 expected concrete signs of the Spirit’s power in the world, from miraculous healings of individuals to the awakening of mass movements such as socialism. Blumhardt was not concerned about developing a *doctrine* of the Holy Spirit but with the actual work of the Spirit in the present.92 Likewise, Kutter and Ragaz were deeply critical of traditional Christianity and its fossilisation of God within dogma. Instead they emphasized the freedom of the Spirit of God in working in the world to address real, concrete human need. This dual emphasis, on the kingdom hope and on practical, human living, laid a solid foundation for Thurneysen’s practical and eschatologically-oriented anthropology as well as the pastoral framework that resulted from it.

**Negotiating the ethical ambiguity**

Finally, while Thurneysen affiliated in part with “the people of hope” and their vision of the coming kingdom of God, Wernle and Troeltsch kept him grounded in the ambiguity and complexity of reality in responding to ethical issues. Wernle disparagingly called the vision

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91 This was Thurneysen’s own description of Blumhardt, Kutter and Ragaz in 1925: “…der «hl. Geist» war doch wohl irgendwie unser Ausgangspunkt, nur daß wir nicht mit Kutter und Ragaz und doch wohl auch dem jüngeren Blumhardt Spiritualisten bleiben können…” *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930*, 321-22, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 26 March 1925. He seems to be using the term to refer to their emphasis on the power and personal work of the Holy Spirit but outside orthodox understandings of the Spirit’s ministry in the church.

of the Religious Socialists a dream-land (*Traumland*). He saw it as ideological, primitive, and simplistic in its conception of social development. Thurneysen sympathised with the sentiment and, indeed, Wernle’s historical-critical method was the default position against which Thurneysen tested new thoughts and ideas. In a letter to Wernle from 1912, Thurneysen quoted Troeltsch in arguing that there is “no absolute ethicisation”:

“I would never hold the opinion that the kingdom of God could be ushered into this world by us. I am convinced — to speak with Troeltsch — that our moral work, the work of our time and our generation, is only ‘a mastering of the changing situation of the world’ … ‘There is no absolute ethicisation but only the struggle with material and human nature.’ But this struggle can be more or less successful and therefore there is at best much to hope for and believe in, to yearn for and as far as possible to achieve it. And this struggle means not skimming over all reality in enthusiastic zeal.”

Thurneysen remained sceptical of the optimism of the Religious Socialists to bring about meaningful and lasting change in the world. Certainly, he wanted to emphasise that the kingdom of God is *God’s* to bring and can be ushered in neither by human moral action nor social revolution. That is not to say, however, that moral action is meaningless or that social betterment is not possible. Following Troeltsch, Thurneysen believed that responding to the needs and issues of the day can more or less correspond to the absolute ethical principle which lies beyond history. The danger with the kingdom of God theology of Kutter or Ragaz, he reasoned, is that it trivialised the complexity of current reality in the “enthusiastic zeal” for the coming kingdom. All ethical action corresponded to a future idea, a *dream-land*. For

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94 Ibid., 154, Letter Wernle to Thurneysen 24th January 1913.
95 Thurneysen responded to Wernle’s accusation that he had sold himself to the Religious Socialists: “It was saddening for me to read in your letter that you find I have learned und studied in vain in Marburg under you and under Troeltsch. Quite apart from the fact that I cannot recognise the absolute chasm between you and Zurich [Ragaz and Kutter] … I feel the sober religious upbringing of my father and the historical-critical education, which I owe to you and Marburg, as the reliable ground on which I stand and from which I go out — even if I make new journeys of discovery in uncharted territory.” My translation. Ibid., 247, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle 25th November 1914.
Troeltsch, on the other hand, ethics should not derive from some utopian ideal. The ethical task draws one into the particularity and complexity of the present to discern and to “master” the current situation to the best of one’s ability. Thurneysen found Troeltsch compelling in this regard. And yet, importantly, Thurneysen did not see an “absolute abyss” between the religious socialist and the historical-critical positions. He was excited by the revolutionary religion and urgency of Kutter and Ragaz, who recognised the real and powerful breaking in of God’s future. While it is not humanly possible to bring God’s kingdom, the kingdom is nonetheless coming, energising existence now with an irreconcilable tension and yearning for life.

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With these background comments, we turn now to Thurneysen’s first ministry in the rural parish of Leutwil-Dürenäsch. There he developed close collegiality with Karl Barth and together they rejected the underlying presuppositions of liberal theology and established a new theological Aufbruch. As I have hinted in this chapter, Thurneysen’s early theological anthropology cannot be understood apart from the pastoral task. He sought to respond to the social hardship prior to and during World War I by giving voice to hope and by proclaiming the God of life who rejects the fate of this sinful, war-torn world.
The Human Being Crying Out for Life

Chapter Two: Leutwil-Dürrenäsch 1913-1920

Introduction

Not long after entering parish ministry, Thurneysen wrote to Paul Wernle that he found himself divided between two worlds, unable to reconcile them except in hope: this world “with its duties and realities” and that other “redeemed and redeeming world of eternity.”¹ The world of eternity is the new “redeemed” creation established in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. But Thurneysen also qualifies it with the present participle: it is the redeeming world because God’s eternity is breaking into history, disrupting, challenging, and healing this world now. It was, for Thurneysen, no “self-made idea”, no utopian vision, but the very kingdom of God. Its advent allowed him no rest. He lived in the tension between what is and what is coming; between prayerful waiting and urgent labouring; between his common eschatological identity with every human being as a child of God, and his duty as a Swiss citizen. This unreconciled tension drove his early understanding of what it means to be human. That is, there is an eschatological orientation, a future perspective, at the heart of his anthropology. God’s good intention for humanity is life in fullness. Because this egoistic and war-torn world with “its duties and realities” is not in accordance with God’s good intention, all human existence now is characterised by yearning. Or, as he phrased it in a wartime sermon, the human soul is nothing other than “a crying out for life” (ein Schreien nach dem

¹ Ibid., 275, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 17 September 1915.
The reality of the eschaton bears ethical and teleological implications for human living as one awakens to and strives for God’s redeeming world in the present.

In this chapter, I explore Thurneysen’s eschatologically oriented anthropology during his first ministry placement in the parish of Leutwil-Dürrenäsch between 1913 and 1920. Thurneysen, in close collegiality with Barth, was on a journey of theological discovery which culminated in their new radically dialectical understanding of God. The Leutwil years were marked by theological Aufbruch, a dismantling of the old and a starting again from new foundations. In this chapter I try to convey something of that flux and movement. I firstly explore the pastoral context in which these new theological conversations arose: Thurneysen and Barth themselves insist that their new theology sought to address concrete needs faced in the pastoral office. Next, I look at the key stages of theological development as Thurneysen and Barth sought new foundations. Finally, I analyse Thurneysen’s theological anthropology itself as it is presented in a selection of his early sermons.

Proclaiming the kingdom of God in farm-houses and under stable doors

Thurneysen’s ministry in the parish of Leutwil-Dürrenäsch lasted seven years from April 1913 until April 1920. “Consider these years,” wrote Thurneysen towards the end of his life. “They encompass an exceedingly agitated time: the First World War breaks out, severe social tremors are caused by it.” When Thurneysen arrived in the obscure Aargau parish, it was indeed an agitated time. Europe stood in the midst of social and economic crisis. Huge forces like capitalism, industrialism, urbanisation, and nationalism had revolutionised life for the majority of people. The global forces in the world at the turn of the century had created new possibilities for life to thrive. But they coincided with an unprecedented population boom and an emerging urban working class that led to rising poverty, economic hardship, and new issues of human rights. The changing Weltlage compelled Ernst Troeltsch to announce

2 Eduard Thurneysen, "Wo Liebe Ist, Da Ist Gott (Vor 1917)," in Suchet Gott, So Werdet Ihr Leben! (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1928), 111.
famously in 1896, “Gentlemen, everything is tottering!” The prevailing social question in Switzerland at the time, and indeed for Thurneysen entering pastoral ministry, was how to address the acute social and economic need among the emerging working class. Most of the members of his parish worked at one of the two cigar factories in the area. Workers’ had few rights and had to work long hours for little pay. Women earned a pittance of what men earned and child labour was common. With poor working conditions and rising poverty, alcoholism emerged as a serious social issue. When War erupted in August 1914, the social need only intensified. Many of the men were enlisted to defend the border in the case of invasion. Not only did their absence increase the financial hardship on many families, it also stagnated the demand for cigars leading to reduction of work. It was not an easy time. The material hardship as well as the corresponding internal angst and psychological distress was immense.

Following Christoph Blumhardt, at the heart of Thurneysen’s pastoral practice was a social eschatology. The advent of God’s kingdom, the idea of which allowed Thurneysen no rest, corresponded closely to the socialist vision for social and economic justice. While he refused to identify himself explicitly with Religious Socialism, Thurneysen nonetheless saw a congruence between its goals and his calling to the working class in Leutwil and Dürrenäsch. Wernle was not impressed with Thurneysen’s adoption of the Religious Socialist “wake-up call” and accused him of sharing the same idealism as Ragaz. “You have only been in Leutwyl half a year,” he chided, “and already you call out for an awakening and forwards durch Ach und Krach.” Wernle’s comment is not inaccurate. Accompanying the prophetic wake-up call in his sermons, Thurneysen also worked hard durch Ach und Krach. Alongside all the usual tasks of parish ministry — Sunday School, youth group, bible studies, regular

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6 Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 65.
7 Kuhn, "Einleitung," 62.
8 “Nach Ausbruch des Krieges erfasste aufgrund des weitgehenden Stillstandes der Zigarrenfabriken die Armut weite Teile des Dorfes.” Ibid., 64.
9 Just a few months before he moved to Leutwil, Thurneysen wrote to Wernle that Kutter’s affair was “strangely unmodern” and that he merely worked in a superficial “fresco-style.” He said of Ragaz that he had “an almost antique, seemingly primitive theory of catastrophe in place of a real picture of history.” Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 154, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 24 January 1913. See chapter 1.
10 My translation. The idiomatic phrase “mit Ach und Krach” means “with extreme difficulty” or “by the skin of one’s teeth”. “Und nun sind Sie gar erst ein halbes Jahr in Leutwyl & rufen schon nach dem Erwachen & vorwärts durch Ach & Krach.” Ibid., 204, Letter Wernle to Thurneysen, 23 December 1913.
pastoral visiting, and so on\textsuperscript{11} — he was also committed to advocacy and support work in the wider community. A few notable examples: first, he was a strong advocate for the working class through his election to the Leutwil Tax-Commission and through his role in the foundation of a Union for the factory workers;\textsuperscript{12} second, he responded to the problem of alcoholism by leading the local branch of the Blue Cross Organization,\textsuperscript{13} which offered support to alcoholics; third, Eduard and Marguerite sacrificed their own health to make the manse a place of welcome and hospitality, particularly to impoverished children.\textsuperscript{14}

Thurneysen’s social eschatology framed not only his advocacy and support work but also his pastoral work. The coming kingdom became the lens through which he saw pastoral care and social advocacy not in opposition to but in harmony with one another. In one letter, for instance, Karl Barth expressed his difficulty to offer pastoral comfort to someone suffering economic and material hardship. How could he communicate to them that things would “work out” (\textit{klappen}) when their economic and material situation so obviously wasn’t able to “work out” under the current system?\textsuperscript{15} Thurneysen saw the big picture: radical, systemic social change was needed. But such big-picture answers failed to address the particular and immediate need of the pastoral situation then and there. Thurneysen replied that at times in pastoral care he simply communicates the same thing as he does in the sermon. “Should this be impossible?” he asked. “Fundamentally I’m not a good comforter but I try to help with newer orientations.”\textsuperscript{16} Barth pressed further. Essentially, he saw himself and Thurneysen as entirely united (\textit{ganz einig}) in their theological concern. Barth, however, tended to emphasise the political, and Thurneysen the pastoral. Barth felt he often lacked the decisive words to say in the pastoral conversation. He wrote to Thurneysen:

“…you sometimes say to me that you don’t know what to argue, for example, at a socialist gathering, or rather, you wouldn’t be able to argue what you really think. For

\textsuperscript{11} “Aber im Übrigen existieren: Sonntagsschulen, Jünglingsverein, Missionsverein und Bibelstunde und Blaukreuz, eher zu viel als zu wenig des Guten. Ich brauche also da nichts Neues einzurichten.” Ibid., 180, Letter Thurneysen to Wernle, 10 June 1913.

\textsuperscript{12} Lorberg-Fehring, \textit{Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen}, 22.

\textsuperscript{13} A large abstinence charitable organisation in Switzerland at the time. See: Kuhn, "Einleitung," 26.

\textsuperscript{14} At one stage, Marguerite had to be treated for malnutrition. Ibid., 64.

\textsuperscript{15} “Aber wieso muß es nun in der individuellen Seelsorge auf einmal klappen, während wir doch den sozialen Nöten etc. gegenüber die Überzeugung haben, daß es noch nicht klappen kann? Gewiß haben wir prinzipiell die Lösung, aber die ist so radikal, daß sie praktisch, im einzelnen Fall, doch hier wie dort fast unmöglich «klappen» kann.” Karl Barth - \textit{Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921}, 44, Letter Barth to Thurenysen, 20 May 1915.

me it’s the other way around, at least to a certain extent: I am more often in dilemma beside the sick-bed and would gladly like to grasp more clearly how you do it.”

Thurneysen’s response is fascinating:

“It appears to me self-evident that a pastor also speaks to individuals about what moves him. I often have a desire here and there to speak about ‘our concern’ to a discerning soul from the small herd [the congregation]. I don’t regard such speeches about the kingdom of God whether in farmhouses or under stable doors as ‘extra-deeds’ at all.”

The exchange reveals more than a natural pastoral ability in Thurneysen. It reveals that his eschatological orientation was directly informing his pastoral practice and commitment to the empirical situation. For him, the pastoral conversation and the sermon share the same content: the proclamation of the coming kingdom. The purpose of the pastoral conversation is not to offer false comfort or meaningless platitudes but to “orient” the individual to a different reality than the one they can see. In this eschatological orientation, the sermon has a pastoral function and pastoral care a kerygmatic function. The advent of the kingdom is both comfort and assurance in the midst of suffering as well as prophetic challenge to the existing world order.

Further, precisely because Thurneysen’s eschatology is a social eschatology, the empirical pastoral situation becomes central as the concrete locus of the Spirit’s work within the immediate social relations of the local community. The kingdom of God, as Ray Anderson puts it, becomes the “therapeutic context” by which healing and liberation for a person is sought in the “social and cultural matrix” in which they live. In this sense, Thurneysen is

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19 Even at this early stage, Thurneysen hints at his later theology of pastoral care. In 1928, he defined pastoral care as “a special case of the sermon” (Eduard Thurneysen, “Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” Zwischen den Zeiten 6, no. 1 (1928): 210.); in 1946 he talks about pastoral conversation as proclaiming to the individual what is proclaimed generally in the sermon (A Theology of Pastoral Care, 11.); in 1968, he recovers an explicit focus on the kingdom of God as the content of proclamation, see chapter 3 in: Seelsorge Im Vollzug (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968).

quite right that proclaiming the kingdom “in farm-houses or under stable doors” is no extra-deed but central to the pastoral task.

**Searching for new theological foundations**

**A communistic intellectual economy**

Already it is becoming clear through my frequent use of letter correspondence between Thurneysen and Barth, that the two young pastors were developing a close friendship and mutual dependence in ministry. The two met during their studies in Marburg, but didn’t become firm friends until Thurneysen moved to Leutwil in 1913. Barth worked in the neighbouring parish of Safenwil, separated by high ridges and valleys, about four hours walk away.21 Eberhard Busch recalls how Barth would regularly traverse the terrain to Leutwil in a mere two and a half hours — even faster on his bicycle — sometimes so early that he would make it in time for a breakfast coffee.22 They kept almost constant letter correspondence over this period too. The letters are an invaluable source of how their theology developed and the extent to which it was done in a conversational and collegial way. Often the letters included a sermon draft or other pieces of work for editing and comment. The relationship was enormously important for both Thurneysen and Barth. Without this friendship neither of them would have arrived at the insights they did. On the occasion of Thurneysen’s 70th birthday, Barth remarked that it was simply not true that he was the active giver and Thurneysen only the passive receiver.23 Thurneysen introduced Barth to the likes of Wernle, Kutter, Blumhardt,24 and Dostoevsky.25 He also demonstrated a pastoral ability which he himself was

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21 Fondly remembering simpler times, Thurneysen wrote in 1921, as Barth prepared to move to Göttingen: “Wie gut auch noch und erst recht die Jahre, wo die ganze Bedeutsamkeit aller «unserer» Einsichten und Nichteinsichten sich einzig in eiligem Begehen des Friesenweges hin und zurück manifestierte und weder Jülicher noch erst Harnack, sondern höchstens die Bewohner von Holziken und Schöftland etwa bei einem Blick auf die Straße den Kopf schütteln konnten über die beiden seltsamen Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten.” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 524, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 6 October 1921.

22 Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, 73.


24 Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, 75, 84.

25 Hong Liang’s recent work shows that the earliest references to Dostoevsky were actually made by Barth. However this first phase of Barth’s engagement with Dostoevsky was almost exclusively with regard to the rise of Bolshevism in Russia. It wasn’t until Thurneysen began to engage deeply with Dostoevsky after their discovery of Overbeck in 1920 that the Russian author became an important theological conversation partner. Cf. Liang, Leben Vor Den Letzten Dingen.
hesitant to acknowledge but which, as I have shown above, Barth greatly admired. These years mark the beginning of what Barth called their “communistic intellectual economy” — a remarkably productive shared academic output that reached its highpoint in the 20s and early 30s. During this early period, I point to three key stages of their theological development in their quest for a new starting point.

The Outbreak of War: August 1914 - 1916

The first stage began with the outbreak of war, which Grenz and Olsen called the “death knell” of nineteenth century intellectual optimism. The old certainties could no longer be relied upon. The War had revealed the cracks of modernism and the teetering of the liberal protestant ivory tower that rested upon it. The resulting upheaval and anxiety begged for new ideologies and movements that could offer some sort of explanation and hope into the void of uncertainty. A decisive breaking point for Thurneysen and Barth was when two of their former theological professors, Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack, signed the Kaiser’s 1914 War Manifesto, supporting the German war-effort. For the two young Aargau pastors, the signing threw into question their whole inherited liberal theological education. It pushed them to search for a new theological starting point.

Thurneysen’s ethical response to the War reveals his eschatological orientation and the anthropological assumptions that resulted from it. His wariness of any enthusiastic and germanophile support for the War was centred on the conviction that every human being shares a common humanity before the one God. So he wrote to Barth:

“Nowhere is anything to be seen arising from the ideas that stir you and me. Just the old platitudes with new pathos. That appears to strongly be the case e.g. with Wernle. Why proclaim anew with this Elan: you shall and may conflate God and the

26 “Wenn ich deine pädagogischen und seelsorgerlichen Künste, resp. das dahinterliegende tiefere Können auf mich wirken lasse, dann kann ich eben immer nur voll Neid im schönsten Sinne zu dir steil emporblicken” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 156, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 19 October 1916.
27 Cf. Lorberg-Fehring’s helpful section on this gradual development of the new theology. Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 23-40.
29 “The Theology of Krisis is no unique phenomenon. It stands in close correlation with the principal cultural trend of the early 20th century, Expressionism.” My translation. Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 69-70. Lorberg-Fehring argues that the crisis of the First World War and the Expressionist movement were instrumental in Thurneysen’s theological Aufbruch, in particular the impact of expressionist death-literature on Thurneysen’s emphasis on the God who is beyond human existence.
Fatherland and each person shall pray for their own. Truly, we know this and do it too; but it is and remains a grim contradiction — this is the decisive thing — if one raises praying hands to the one God and raises weapons against another.”

Barth agreed with Thurneysen, acknowledging that, in this “suspension of the gospel” in favour of the German Kampfreligion, “Marburg and German culture lose something in my eyes.” The next day, Thurneysen expressed the same criticisms directly to Wernle. His argument rested on two basic anthropological assumptions: First, God’s oneness is the universalising and equalizing principle of all humanity. Every human being is created by the one God, belongs to the one God, and is destined for fellowship with the one God. Second, to pray “your kingdom come” is to anticipate God’s kingdom and to be shaped in the present by the hope of its coming. The advent of God’s kingdom, which has a social dimension, transcends state boundaries, ethnic divides, and cultural differences. Therefore it throws Wernle’s nationalistic call to pray for state and folk into deep suspicion. Thurneysen’s response to the War demonstrates the eschatological lens with which he approached ethical problems and the role of prayer in being oriented to this eschatological reality. To be a praying community is to be oriented to the one God whose kingdom is coming on earth as in heaven. And as this praying people, the church is formed first and foremost by the coming “redeemed and redeeming world” over against this world with its “duties and realities”. The eschatological orientation was, for Thurneysen, no “self-made idea”. Because it broke in from God’s future it could not be limited to a utopian ideal. In prayer, we are placed in the horizon of God’s future — not the other way around. For this reason, though he was sympathetic, Thurneysen could not accept pacifism. To hold a pacifist stance was, in

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32 Cf. “Die absoluten Gedanken des Evangeliums werden einfach bis auf weiteres suspendiert, und unterdessen wird eine germanische Kampfreligion in Kraft gesetzt, christlich verbrämmt durch viel Reden von «Opfer» etc. ... Marburg und die deutsche Kultur verliert in meinen Augen etwas, und zwar für immer, durch diesen Zusammenbruch.” Ibid., 10, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 4 September 1914.

Thurneysen’s mind, to allow a static idea or principle rather than God’s kingdom to direct one’s ethical discernment.

The question of pacifism came to a head when, in 1915, a conscientious objector was touring around churches in Switzerland. After expressing reservation, Thurneysen asked Barth what their response should be. He was undecided and his internal quandary came to fuller expression a month later in a piece to the Zurich branch of the YMCA. The article is remarkable for the way that Thurneysen subverts popular opinion in response to the conscientious objector, who had been widely denigrated as having an “erring conscience”. Thurneysen begins by arguing that an erring conscience is nonetheless a conscience, where “the kingdom of the Absolute and the Imperative begins”. He goes on to ask whether it is even possible for a conscience to err. Certainly there are people who in their conscience err, who misinterpret the Will of God, but that is not to say the conscience itself errs. Regardless it is by no means easy to ascertain in a particular situation what is right and what is wrong. Often right belief is equated with popular belief — and these are surely not the same thing.

Thurneysen then moves on to the particular situation of the War, in all its violence, suffering and death. It stands opposed to God’s world of peace, love, and life given in Jesus Christ. This conscientious objector, Thurneysen argued, simply could not do anything other than lay down arms in an attempt to break through to God’s world of life. Thurneysen hastened to add that he personally believed the hour had not yet come for such a “breakthrough attempt”. But importantly, whether the hour has come is something that must be constantly considered in the present moment.

His response to the conscientious objector provides insight into Thurneysen’s theological anthropology at the time. Alongside his social eschatological orientation, he still maintained an underlying romantic and individualistic conception of the human being as moral agent. Thurneysen rejects any ethical casuistry but he has not yet developed his dialectical and christocentric understanding of the human being. The authority for ethical action is the conscience of the individual, which functions as a kind of divine spark, a connecting thread to “the Absolute”. Because of this, the conscience, in Thurneysen’s mind, cannot err. Hope and

34 “Mir scheint, wie ich den Fall ansehe, die Frage der Ethik, um die es hier geht, liege so, daß man die Vorläufigkeit aller Dinge erkennt und das Absolute aus den Gegenwartsentscheiden zurückverlegt in die Innerlichkeit des Hoffens und Trachtens nach Gott, und daß man nur das zum Gewissen reden läßt, was nach reifer Überlegung als das im Augenblick Notwendige und Gebotene erscheint. Ich erkenne die ganze Gefährlichkeit dieser Stellungnahme” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 82, Letter Thurneysen to Barth 15th September 1915.
striving for God is not first and foremost a social reality but an inner one. At this early stage of his theology, his anthropology is a mashing together of romantic individualism and Religious Socialism. Increasingly though, Thurneysen felt that these two positions were not only incompatible but were both built on shaky foundations. And so we turn the second stage of his and Barth’s theological development.

**Seeking new foundations: Summer 1916 - 1919**

The second stage began in the summer of 1916. Up until this point, Thurneysen and Barth in questioning their modern liberal theological education had pitched their tent largely (though not without reservation) alongside Blumhardt, Ragaz, and Kutter. Yet they had not entirely rejected the presuppositions of modernism either. They oscillated agitatedly between the two. Increasingly, though, they felt that neither Schleiermacher’s romanticism, nor the historical-critical school’s rationalism, nor Religious Socialism’s idealism had solid foundations. According to Thurneysen, this was their “big objection” to everything: that it aimed to build and construct but without first laying solid groundwork. “We must throw more boulders into the water,” Thurneysen wrote to Barth, “before we can speak of foundations.”

Again, Thurneysen was clear that it was the pastoral calling that led them to ask foundational questions.

The turning point came when Barth rediscovered the book of Romans. He was particularly impressed by the biblical orthodoxy in the commentary by J.T. Beck, who upheld the authority of scripture as the Word of God. With Beck’s commentary among a host of others, Barth delved into the Epistle seeking to understand Paul on his own terms. This renewed interest in biblical studies was the foundation Barth and Thurneysen needed. “From now on,” Thurneysen recalled, “we read the biblical texts under the assumption that in them witnesses

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speak to us of the God who reaches out to his people in order to become their God.” While Barth worked on his Römerbrief, Thurneysen began work on his own commentary of Matthew’s Gospel. Though the work was never completed, Thurneysen like Barth began to approach scripture differently. What resulted, he remarked, was “a sermon filled with new content.” The intention was not to establish a new academic school of thought — the intention was simply to find words of pastoral comfort to bring to real people in the midst of deep and real existential need.

It is no surprise therefore that, alongside Barth’s Römerbrief, their sermons became the prototypical works of the new theology — experiments in biblical exegesis and theological reflection grounded in the pastoral task. Around Easter 1917, Barth floated the idea to Thurneysen of a jointly authored, collected volume of sermons, which would test the waters, so to speak, of the new theology in the wider ecclesial and academic environment at the time. The resulting volume, Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben, features six of Thurneysen’s sermons. Because his workings on Matthew’s Gospel are not extant, these sermons provide the best source of his theology prior to the Aufbruch in 1919. I discuss below some key ideas that arise from his sermons.

**Radicalisation: Spring 1919 - 1921**

The third decisive period was from the spring of 1919 until the beginning of 1921. Lorberg-Fehring claims that during this time Thurneysen’s theology underwent “a clear radicalisation of the ideas on judgment and crisis”. I will dwell more on these ideas in chapter three because the “radicalisation” coincided more or less with Thurneysen’s move to Bruggen and dominated his work during those years. Suffice to say here that the new theological departure made by Thurneysen and Barth in this period must be seen in both continuity and discontinuity with what had come before. Jürgen Moltmann, in his introduction to the beginnings of dialectical theology, wrote that the new theology consisted in “a new conception of God at the end of the paths of [the inherited] theology.” The ideas present in

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40 Ibid.
the Leutwil years are taken to their logical conclusions and pushed to the extremities of near absolute paradoxes. They were pushed to the extremities as a kind of rejection or protest “both against the people who were assured through confessional traditions, and against the people who religiously elevated and redeemed themselves.” In their seeking new foundations, Thurneysen and Barth defined their position negatively by what they were not. They knew they were not Schleiermachians or Ritschlians. They were not comfortable with Wernle’s “worth-judgment theology of the sad kind”. Nor did they subscribe to Kutter’s “dream land” or Ragaz’s pious anger. According to Thurneysen and Barth all of these schools of thought shared something in common: they began with the human being. And therefore any positive “building” or construction could only ever be a Tower of Babel, that is, a human attempt to reach up to heaven. Thurneysen and Barth were constantly wary of committing that very error in their own work. The Leutwil years show a gradual realisation in Thurneysen that neither modernist optimism nor religious-socialist zeal could inaugurate the new time so ardently hoped for. God’s “new time”, as Thurneysen reflected in a sermon, must be a time that is in no way our time at all. God’s future is entirely beyond human imagination or capacity.

His disillusionment with the human endeavour at the end of the War was echoed in the transcendental epistemology of Karl Barth’s brother, Heinrich. In March 1919, Heinrich Barth delivered a lecture entitled, Gotteserkenntnis, in which he built his argument on the Erkenntnisprinzip der kritischen Negation. For Heinrich Barth, the utter destruction of the War had revealed humanity’s captivity and subjugation to the materiality, the thingliness, of this world. “Dinglichkeit,” he argued, “is the signature of our bondage.” Humanity is bound

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43 “...aber solange sie [Hirsch et al.] es nicht in dieser «fast»-Absolutheit gehört haben, haben sie überhaupt nichts gehört” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 108, Letter Barth to Thurneysen 9 October 1922.
44 Moltmann, “Vorwort,” XI.
49 Ibid., 226.
to the systems and processes of this world and therefore so is all natural, empirical knowledge, which arises from the study of the material world. The human being exists in unfreedom. True knowledge and, it follows, true freedom must break outside of the contingent thingliness of existence. A radical breach (radikal Bruch) is needed. In his concept of critical negation, Heinrich Barth calls into question not only the reliability of the empirical object but also of the perceiving subject. Neither the object nor the subject nor the correlation between them can be the origin of knowledge. Instead he argues for the Transcendenz des Ursprungs, the transcendence of the origin, whereby the epistemic origin must lie outside this reality lest it become captive to it.  

The ethical and pastoral considerations during the War, I have tried to show, led Thurneysen to increasingly question the very base epistemological assumptions of liberal theology. Alongside Heinrich Barth’s critical negation, Thurneysen was soon to engage with a whole raft of new ideas through the likes of Franz Overbeck and Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Soren Kierkegaard. These thinkers paved the way for his and Karl Barth’s new radical dialectic in which true knowledge of God and of humanity lies beyond human rational inquiry and is dependent entirely on God’s gracious self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

**Speaking into the real problematic of real life**

Reflecting back on his entry into the pastoral office, Thurneysen wrote:

> “We [Barth and I] came equipped with the schooling of the modern theology at that time from the university into the pastoral office. But now we needed to discover, as already suggested, that our theological equipment was insufficient for our task as pastor. Tasked to preach, to instruct youth, to practise pastoral care, we stood in our congregation in the midst of people who could not solve their difficult questions of life. The real Problematik of real life surrounded us from all sides. And one expected help from us that we could not give. Week after week we found ourselves in the well-known position of the pastor at his desk and on Sunday in the pulpit needing to produce and deliver our sermon.”

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50 ibid., 238.

The need of preaching to speak into the real problematic of real life is fundamentally an anthropological problem in that it addresses the concrete need of human existence. Thurneysen’s and Barth’s sermons were, in their own eyes, very much experiments, theological explorations to try and offer comfort and hope in the midst of hardship. For this reason, I concur with Lorberg-Fehring that Thurneysen’s sermons are “the most living, most immediate, and most comprehensive expression of his Zeitempfinden, his sense of life, and his new understanding of God.” If one is to understand Thurneysen’s theological anthropology, particularly in the early years, one must look to his sermons. His grappling with the human condition is never abstract, impartial, or static. It is, rather, pastorally and practically grounded— that is to say, he is not interested in a systematic “doctrine of man” divorced from the reality of daily experience. He has an agenda: speaking hope and life to the concrete human being in anticipation of God’s coming kingdom.

Search for God and you will live: Wartime sermons

Barth and Thurneysen published their first collection of sermons, entitled Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben, with two objectives in mind: firstly, to “secure for once an objective picture of the present state of our affairs”; and secondly, “from the echo that will come back to us to draw conclusions about the present extent of the deluge.” Alongside his six contributing sermons, Thurneysen originally intended to contribute an article called, Unsere Hoffnung und die Kirche, but he lacked confidence in its quality and removed it from the final version. While exact dates of the sermons are unknown, they were each delivered after

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52 Cf. Barth’s letter to Thurneysen: “Here are two sermons from me; they are simply the last two. You will look at them not as though they were finished products but only as experiments. We are really all of us experimenting now, each in his own way and every Sunday in a different way, in order to become to some degree masters of the limitless problem both for our own sake and for the sake of our churchgoers who have now become so extremely eager.” Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 26, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 4 September 1914.


55 Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 41, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 1 April 1917.

56 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 189.

57 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 240, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 30 October 1917. The lecture was reinserted for the second edition published in 1928.
the war started and before 1917 when the first draft of the collection was compiled. While this small selection of six sermons by no means gives a comprehensive view of Thurneysen’s early theology, the sermons share common thematic threads and were chosen by Thurneysen and Barth to represent their united theological position, which the title itself seeks to convey.

Suggested by Thurneysen, the title was taken from Amos 5:4,6. It expressed both the renewed emphasis on the living God, not humanity, as the answer to the modern crisis, as well as a corresponding unsettled searching and yearning in humanity. “What do we want with this book?”, Barth asked in a draft foreword to Thurneysen. “We could answer, ‘People searching’ (Menschen suchen), people who are unsettled (beunruhigt) like us through the great hiddenness of God in the present world and church … From this restlessness (Unruhe) and from this joy, we would like to speak of that which we desire to hear.” This human search for God gets to the heart of Thurneysen’s early theological anthropology. From this starting point we can highlight a few recurring ideas, which he explores in his sermons.

We belong to God

In one sermon entitled Der tote Punkt, the great fact of life, for Thurneysen, is that all things belong to God. Our shared creatureliness under the one Creator God is the uniting and equalizing principle of all humanity. Before God, a human being is always a fellow human and a fellow creature. For Thurneysen, therefore, our belonging to God is not merely an ontological statement but an ethical and social one. I stand in relation to God in the same way that you stand in relation to God. And we both do so in the midst of society and this created

57 It seems reasonable to assume that most of the sermons were delivered after the summer of 1916, when Lorberg-Fehring places the decisive step towards a new theology (See: Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 31.). In this period, Barth and Thurneysen first voiced their need to “read the New Testament a little differently and more exactly than that our teachers” and when they "could no longer be deaf to Blumhardt and could no longer share the faith of Schleiermacher.” Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 75, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 6 October 1921. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 524.


world. To pray, “Our Father in heaven…” is to acknowledge one’s commonality with every other person, which becomes the basis for ethics.

More than that, our belonging to God is, for Thurneysen, a direct claim of God’s lordship and sovereignty over creation and human history. It is a declaration not only of status but of purpose. “We are in the hand of God like a herd is in the hand of the shepherd,” Thurneysen continued in the same sermon. “God’s victory stands firm … God’s reckoning is coming about.” Consequently, God must not become a personification of “fate”. God is the God of life who “does not will suffering, sin, and death, but joy, peace and life.” Because of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, God’s victory over sin, suffering, and death stands firm over all history and awaits its final fulfilment (Erfüllung).

**Existence as Unruhe**

Thurneysen conceived of human existence as a dynamic tension. Our life originates in God and all existence yearns for God’s coming world of life:

“…in you lives a hunger, a longing, a desire — for what? It is difficult to say. Call it happiness, call it love, call it purity, call it righteousness, call it peace — it is God, simply God! … the end of all hunger and thirsting would be in God; “God” means to have become satisfied, to find peace (Ruhe); God is life, true life; life, which serves his name, life without shadows, eternal life. Don’t we all have an untameable desire for life in the soul? Indeed what is our heart, our soul, other than a crying out for life that does not cease…”

God is life in fullness and abundance. Every good thing, whether peace, love, or righteousness, exists in God. For Thurneysen, the stubborn and resilient human tendency to continue to hope and yearn for life, even in the darkest situation, points to the living God. In a number of sermons, Thurneysen talks about current human existence in terms of Unruhe (unrest), “in us and around us … Like a rapid, this Unruhe and longing churns through the life of our days and stirs the inner (Inwendige) human being and rattles external (Auswendige)

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60 Ibid.
61 My translation. “…daß Gott nicht will Leid, Sünde, Tod, sondern Freude Freiheit, Leben.” Thurneysen, "Wo Liebe ist, Da ist Gott (Vor 1917)," 118.
things and relationships.” The inner psychological turmoil and the outer upheaval of physical hardship and war point, for Thurneysen, to a more fundamental problem: the turning away of disobedient humanity from the living God. The Unruhe of human life is the dynamic orientation towards and yearning for God, who brings life in abundance in the midst of sin and death.

Yet this Unruhe is not inherent in the human being — a casting forward of our hopes and dreams from the present into the future. The Unruhe in us and around is the unsettling work of God’s eschatological Spirit. It is the advent of God’s kingdom breaking in and disrupting the world now. It originates, then, not in the present but in the future, encompassing history like a raging storm encompasses a house:

“Where does that strange Unruhe, which sometimes comes over people, originate; as if something big stood before the door wanting to come in; as if they heard spring-storms rattling on their windows and the narrow, bare four walls in which they had lived up until then could no longer hold out? Sometimes this Unruhe comes over an individual person … Sometimes it is not only individuals but whole movements and nations that are startled awake from a long sleep through some distant light from another world — from the world where righteousness, freedom, peace, fraternity are at home. And these mass movements or nations begin to stir and rise up, cast off old shackles and desire to meet a new day of humanity.”

Thurneysen goes on to make clear that these individual and societal efforts are not themselves God’s coming life. They are first signs, not only of God’s coming, but also that God’s Spirit has not “fully died away among us”. A defining characteristic of Thurneysen’s early interpretation of human existence is an eschatological urgency that by implication assumes that God is mostly absent from the world as it is now. The Unruhe of existence is the yearning for what is coming but is not yet here. Thurneysen is even hesitant about admitting

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65 Ibid., 93.
that God’s Holy Spirit is with us. Pentecost has happened. God’s Spirit of life has been poured out. But the current Weltlage is proof that we are “far away” from such events. We peek in at the reality of Pentecost through cracks in the wall “like poor begging children before a locked garden”.\textsuperscript{66} We look up at it like looking towards a mountain peak from a deep valley. God’s Spirit wants to establish God’s Lebenswelt in power but is not able to because of human self-righteousness and disobedience. The Spirit, who “has become lost to us”,\textsuperscript{67} is, however, not lost entirely — one gets glimpses. In another metaphor, the work of the Spirit is like burning embers that refuse to go out entirely. But reality now is defined by Unruhe and a lack of life. In this way, Thurneysen’s biblical realism is primarily eschatological realism. The reality of Pentecost, like the reality of Christmas,\textsuperscript{68} is the promise and hope at the end of history and as such energises the present.

**Ethics as opening the inner self to God**

The prevailing anthropological question is therefore an ethical question in anticipation of the eschaton: *what should we do?*\textsuperscript{69} The question is the title of his final contribution to the sermon volume. How should we live as human beings today? What is the purpose of human existence in light of this coming world of life? For Thurneysen, our human existence now is characterised by Unruhe in anticipation of God’s coming life. The events of history, such as the War, are simply the external symptoms of a much deeper problem: the disobedient, selfish living of humanity for its own glory. Consequently, to the question, *what should we do?*, Thurneysen answers, we should “open our inner selves to God.”\textsuperscript{70} That is, right human living involves awakening to God’s will and living lives that humbly and obediently correspond to it. “God waits,” asserts Thurneysen, “until we do something.”\textsuperscript{71} Yet that “something” is itself an active waiting for God, alone in whom there is peace and resolution to the unrest of existence.

The corresponding activity to the Spirit’s work of Unruhe is therefore prayer, by which the individual is awakened to God’s will. Prayer heightens the tension of existence. On the one

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{68} So in his Advent sermon, Thurneysen asks whether it has become Christmas for us? It is not even Advent-time yet because the Advent-time is witnessed to through John the Baptist types who urgently await God’s arrival. Thurneysen, "Advent (before 1917),” 12-13.
\textsuperscript{69} Cf. "Was sollen wir tun, daß es geschehen kann? Da stehen wir vor der entscheidenden Frage, in der schließlich immer wieder alle unsere Unruhe und Sehnsucht ausmündet. Was sollen wir tun? Was führt uns heraus aus der inner und äußer Erstarrung? Was bringt uns vorwärts vom Suchen und Sehnen zum finden und zur Erfüllung?" "Was Sollen Wir Tun? (Vor 1917),” 135.
\textsuperscript{70} “unser Inwendiges sollen wir öffnen.” Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{71} “Gott wartet allerdings, bis wir etwas tun.” Ibid.
hand we cannot bring the kingdom of God, which is God’s alone to bring. On the other hand, the eagerly awaited outpouring of God’s Spirit will not happen until we expectantly wait for it. Human living, centred in prayer, is agitated by this irreconcilable tension and is given meaning, value and purpose in anticipation of its resolution. Human living can genuinely correspond to and indeed be a sign of God’s redeeming life, which is certain in its coming.

Yet Thurneysen’s anthropology and corresponding ethics is still at heart built on romanticism: the authority for ethical discernment is the conscience of the individual, by which one discerns the will of God. Consequently, to the question, What should we do?, Thurneysen directs the believer inwards: open your inner self to God. If our inner life is transformed in expectation of God’s coming, then the rest will follow. For Thurneysen, the cause of the War and the deep need in society was, at root, egoism and self-interest and therefore the solution to the world’s problems is conversion of the inner self towards God’s will. Thurneysen’s eschatological emphasis through the practice of prayer and his relational understanding of sin are weakened by what I see as this enduring individualism at the heart of his anthropology. At this early stage, there is a lack of ecclesiology and christology in his thinking. The structure of his final sermon is remarkably similar to another of his sermons published in die Glocke around the same time, suggesting an underlying theological paradigm by which Thurneysen understood human existence. In both these sermons, Thurneysen begins with the problematic of existence, then moves to the ethical mandate to “open our inner selves to God”, then ends with Jesus Christ, the pioneer of our faith, as the one who “stands open” before God in perfect love and obedience. For Thurneysen here, Christ is more than a mere example. In his perfect life and ministry he has opened up the way for us and, further, he has secured our status before God in eternity. And yet, for Thurneysen, Christ’s humanity is primarily for us in an individualistic sense rather than a communal one.

“The New Time”: The end of the War

The autumn of 1918 saw “everything in flux and movement.” The Spanish flu ripped through Europe claiming almost 25,000 lives in Switzerland alone. Thurneysen’s parish “lay in the shadow of sickness and death”. At its peak, he buried seven parishioners in just ten

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73 "alles in Flux und Bewegung" "Die Neue Zeit (17th November 1918)," in Die Neue Zeit, ed. Wolfgang Gern (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 72.
74 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 297, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 11 October 1918.
days. Eventually he and Marguerite also succumbed to the illness but managed to recover. Then, on the 11th November, World War One finally came to an end. Barth, himself recovering from the flu, marvelled in a letter to Thurneysen how the face of the world changed, not only referring to the historical events themselves but to the underlying meaning of it all in relation to the coming glory of the children of God. Thurneysen responded by asking where the narrow way lies that leads through all the disarray. “Wouldn’t it be the saddest thing,” he asked, “if all this toppling and breaking and rising up, which we have all waited for, does not produce ‘fruit of righteousness’?” Referring to Hebrews 12:11, the implication is that the War was in some sense a form of divine discipline in order that “we may share in [God’s] holiness” and yield “peaceful fruit of righteousness.” According to Thurneysen, God “wills” the War in the sense that, like a loving parent may allow their child to experience the full consequences of their actions, so too God allows that human sin and disobedience results in war and death. “In these recent times, the self-interest and egoism I have seen in my own congregation shows me that the current catastrophe is still not hard enough and will not be the last.”

That Sunday, Thurneysen preached a sermon entitled, Die neue Zeit. In it, he clearly articulates his hope that the end of War might somehow be a catalyst for societal change and new “peaceful fruit of righteousness”. He begins by acknowledging the significance of recent events: “We stand in the midst of the commotion over the events in Germany and our own nation,” events so great that “the world receives a new face”.

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75 Kuhn, Paul Wernle Und Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1909-1934, 331, Letter Wernle to Thurneysen, 2 November 1918.
76 Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 45, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 11 November 1918.
77 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 299.
78 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 301-02, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 14 November 1918.
79 As an attachment to a letter, Thurneysen sent Barth his sermon from Sunday 30th August 1914 on the wrath of God. In the letter he wrote: “Aber was ich in diesen Tagen in meiner Gemeinde an Selbstsucht und Egoismus sehen muß, zeigt mir, daß auch die heutige Katastrophe noch nicht hart genug ist und also nicht die letzte sein wird.” Barth responded to a claim Thurneysen made in the sermon that God did not will the war: “Die Art, wie du den «Zorn Gottes» positive fruchtbar machst, ist einleuchtend. Die Formel: «Gott will den Krieg nicht» ist vielleicht irreführend, obwohl im Zusammenhang wohl verständlich. Gott will den Egoismus nicht. Er will aber, daß der Egoismus sich im Krieg offenbare und so sich selbst zum Gericht werde.” Thurneysen and Barth see the wrath of God, witnessed in the outbreak of War, not merely as a negative rejection of human self-interest. God’s turning away from humanity serves a positive function: the turning back of the people towards God.
80 Ibid., 8-10, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 3 September 1914, and Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 4 September 14.
81 “Wir stehen ja noch mitten drin in der Erregung über die Vorgänge in Deutschland und im eigenen Volke ... Die Welt bekommt heute ein neues Gesicht.” Thurneysen, “Die Neue Zeit (17th November 1918),” 72.
Brandrede (inflammatory speech), casts a vision for a new time that aligns closely with socialist ideals. There is no going back, he reasons, to the false and unjust pre-War “peace”. Such peace was built on social inequality and the elevation of money over people. Instead he advocates a new peace, a new time, built on justice and fraternity. There is a common desire and hope (Sehnsucht und Hoffnung), he argued, for new establishments, new laws, and new systems which bring help, salvation and life. The “new time”, to which his sermon refers, is a time within history; and the “salvation and life”, for which he hopes, corresponds closely to concrete, material goals: wellbeing for the poor in society, reduced economic inequality, and rights for workers. The polemical style of the sermon, unusual for Thurneysen, generated a strong reaction, particularly from one wealthy businessman in Dürrenäsch, who complained to the parish council.

It might seem inappropriate that Thurneysen used the occasion of the War’s end to preach his socialist vision. And yet it reveals a deep connection between the two in Thurneysen’s mind. For him, as I have said, sin was a relational concept. The root of sin is egoism and self-desire, by which the individual elevates their own will and desire over God and over others. Thurneysen’s letter to Barth is confronting in that he draws a direct connection between the egoism in his own village and the catastrophe of War. Whether at the local level or on the international stage, the same egoism is at work leading to the breakdown of social relations and an isolationism. Therefore, for Thurneysen, the end of the War is no reason for celebration if the underlying cause of the War is not addressed. Thurneysen sees a spectrum: at one end, there is God’s social-eschatological kingdom, a shalomic picture of society in which justice and peace reign and all are enabled to thrive in fullness of life; at the other end, there is war — the utter breakdown of social relations resulting in death and destruction. The more we open our inner selves to God in faith and to others in love, the more we live into God’s shalomic vision. The more we close off our inner selves in self-interest, the more we traverse the path to war. For this reason, Thurneysen could not be a pacifist. For him, the War was a necessary consequence of human sin. It was not God’s good intention but it served a purpose if it could shake humanity from its egoistic slumber. The War’s conclusion provided an opportunity to press on in faith towards God’s coming kingdom in which peace shall reign in fullness.

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80 Cf. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 303, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 21 November 1918.
81 Thurneysen, “Die Neue Zeit (17th November 1918),” 75-76.
82 Cf. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 302-03, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 21 November 1918.
“Something eternal between us”: A farewell to Leutwil-Dürrenäsch

One final sermon worth considering for its pastoral implications is Thurneysen’s farewell address to his Leutwil congregation on Good Friday 1920. By now Thurneysen and Barth had arrived at their radical theological Aufbruch built upon the knowledge principle of critical negation. Barth expressed surprise but also approval at this sermon, for its “positive, openhanded, and comforting” tone which served as “an excellent defence against all the complaints concerning our customary ‘No!’”. 83 The “openhanded and comforting” tone reflects Thurneysen’s pastoral and caring disposition as well as an early commitment to lay solid foundations for pastoral work on the basis of the new theology.

In the context of his farewell, Thurneysen’s posits that what fundamentally connects human beings is neither geographical nor temporal proximity, neither sentimental memories nor shared interests and activities. Rather, our daily living, doing, and interacting is merely the external side of life (Außenseite). Most of life is lived at this superficial level, but Thurneysen argues there is also a deeper inner side (Innenseite), what he calls, the “something eternal between us” (etwas Ewiges zwischen uns). 84 It is the great life-principle (Lebenssache) which unites every human being in the givenness of life from and to God. We share the same origin, the same way, and the same goal. We are held eternally in God so that nothing can separate us, not even the boundary of death. Holy Communion, Thurneysen reasons, is a sign of this eternal communion with one another in God. We are one body in spite of differences that may divide us or time and space that may separate us.

As the eternal truth of life, the “something eternal” between us is first and foremost before us as eschatological reality. It is the great hope of life in perfect communion with God and with others in Jesus Christ, the head of the body. But importantly — and this is the pastoral implication — the eschatological reality, the “something eternal” before us, is communicated through speaking and hearing that “something eternal” between us. For Thurneysen, this becomes the ground of true relating to one another in spite of sin and the brokenness of human relationships:

“In spite of all human weakness in speaking and in hearing, something eternal remains between us … Even in all weakness, we have called out to God with one

83 Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 51, Letter Barth to Thurneysen 31 May 1920.
Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 392.
84 Thurneysen, "Abschiedspredigt (Good Friday, 1920)," 98.
another and for one another; and this is never futile. From there something goes with us — with us into our lives, into our worries, into our illnesses, into our dying, into ourselves in our sin — something forgiving, healing, liberating.”

Compared with Thurneysen’s earlier sermons, there is a discernible shift away from the individual as the bearer of divine truth through the conscience. Now the eschatological truth becomes present between persons in mutual communication. Eternal truth is something witnessed communally between us. This notion provides the basis for Thurneysen’s kerygmatic pastoral theology, in which the conversation consists in communicating the Word of God to one another as a participation in the eternal intercession of Jesus Christ to the Father.

That being said, Thurneysen’s anthropology at this point is still problematic in that, for him, our co-humanity consists in a general life-principle (Lebenssache) underneath but rather indifferent to the concrete living of daily life. The Innenseite is hidden beneath and beyond the Außenseite. Interpersonal relationships provide the occasion for the “something eternal” to be voiced, but the relationships themselves — the human and personal — merely muddy the waters in communicating the truth of life: “How much of my humanness and personality has been mixed up with the pure Truth and has impaired it!”

The underlying time-eternity dialectic, which drove Thurneysen’s early theological anthropology, prevented him from affirming the particularity of human existence as central to God’s revelatory and redemptive activity. Eventually, after the publication of Barth’s theological anthropology in Church Dogmatics III/2 (1948), Thurneysen reconceived of our co-humanity in light of Jesus Christ, the Mitmensch, who encounters us in the particularity of his humanity. In other words, the interpersonal encounter, the particularity of our being persons-in-relationship, becomes central rather than incidental to our co-humanity in Jesus Christ. Yes, there is an ontological status that unites all human beings in their relation to God. But what is lacking in this early sermon is that the ontological status is not a static principle underneath daily life, but a

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85 My translation. “Es ist ja trotz aller menschlichen Schwachheit im Reden und im Hören etwas Ewiges zwischen uns, das bleibt ... Wir haben, wenn auch in aller Schwachheit, eben doch Gott miteinander und füreinander angerufen, und das tut man nie umsonst. Von daher geht etwas mit uns, mit uns in unser Leben, hinein in unsere Sorgen, hinein in unsere Krankheiten, hinein in unser Sterben, hinein selbst in unsere Sünden, etwas vergebendes, heilendes, herausführendes.” Ibid., 105.

86 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 190-91. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 173-74.

87 My translation. “Wieviel Menschenches und Persönliches ist auch durch mich der lautern Wahrheit beigemischt worden und hat sie getrübt!” "Abschiedspredigt (Good Friday, 1920)," 103.
dynamic reality that affirms the particularity and messiness of human life in relationship as God encounters us in our fellow Mitmensch.

**Conclusion: The human being crying out for life**

In chapter one, I argued that one can begin to see the common threads that Thurneysen would intertwine in his developing theological anthropology. Specifically, I named the practical, the pastoral, and the eschatological elements in his thinking. In this chapter, I have aimed to demonstrate how these elements were cultivated in the context of Leutwil-Dürrenäsch during World War I. We could point to a number of distinctive features in particular.

**Speaking into the real Problematik of life**

By Thurneysen’s own admission, his theological development over the Leutwil years arose out of a pastoral concern and a practical need to equip himself for praxis in ministry. He sought to “speak into the real Problematik” of real life. Through his eschatological orientation, he saw a kerygmatic function to pastoral care and a pastoral function to the sermon. Whether in the pulpit, in farm-houses, or under stable doors he tried to communicate hope and to orient his congregation to a different reality. In this future orientation was both comfort and exhortation to endure suffering now as well as a prophetic challenge to unjust systems, powers, and behaviours.

**Praying as eschatological orientation**

Influenced by Blumhardt’s biblical and eschatological realism, the coming kingdom of God was a central concept in Thurneysen’s early theology. The kingdom of the risen and victorious Christ stands at the end of history as its end and goal. The Holy Spirit comes from this future breaking into the present world unsettling (beunruhigen) the way things are resulting in an unrest (Unruhe), a yearning for life in humanity. To be human is to be hoping beings who stubbornly cling to life even in the midst of hardship, war and death. It is through prayer that one awakens to the advent of God’s kingdom, opens one’s inner life to God, and thereby learns to live in anticipation of the kingdom’s coming. In this way, prayer is for Thurneysen a central humanizing act through which one is directed in hope to one’s purpose and ultimate goal.

**Advocating based on a social eschatology**

The coming kingdom of God is God’s world of life (Lebenswelt). For Thurneysen, the kingdom is a shalomic vision of justice, peace and righteousness. It is human living in
relationship with God and with one another in society. Therefore, while the locus of Thurneysen’s proclamation was the individual (in the exhortation to “open one’s inner life to God”), the vision was profoundly social. Again, Thurneysen follows Blumhardt closely here. In his advocacy work for the factory-workers in his village, he also displays the ongoing influence of Kutter and Ragaz. It was not enough to simply “speak” the hope of the kingdom in the sermon and in the pastoral conversation. For Thurneysen, the social vision revealed in the promise of the kingdom required urgent action. His work on the Tax-Commission and in the formation of a workers’ union were concrete examples of his commitment to social and economic transformation in favour of the poor.

**Curing souls as work of the kingdom**

One of the distinguishing characteristics between Barth and Thurneysen was Thurneysen’s natural pastoral manner and ability. Even in his self-doubt, he took the pastoral task very seriously. Rudolf Bohren, in his biography of Thurneysen, describes a meeting with elderly members of the Dürrenäsch congregation sixty years after Thurneysen’s ministry there. He summed up his impressions from various conversations with the following words:

“…a picture emerged of that which one has called the *cura animarum generalis*; the picture of a very hardworking pastor who conducted many house-visits, who took sides against exploitation for a fair compensation for workers. He answered the need of the time and the need of the people at the time…”

In short he gave concrete answers. He recognised that pastoral work cannot simply address the person in isolation. It must address them in the complexity of their social and cultural matrix. Pastoral comfort must be accompanied by social advocacy. Soul-care (*Seelsorge*), he would stress many years later, goes hand-in-hand with social and physical care (*Fürsorge*). The hope of the kingdom addresses the whole human being in their need because the coming kingdom is life and life in fullness.

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Throughout this process of theological discovery, Thurneysen still remained fairly closely tethered to the social eschatology of Blumhardt. By the time of his departure from Leutwil, though, Thurneysen and Barth had arrived at their new theological *Aufbruch*. In chapter three,
I turn to the theological anthropology developed during Thurneysen’s years at Bruggen. Gradually he distances himself from Blumhardt and instead finds helpful conversation partners in Franz Overbeck, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Martin Luther. Thurneysen’s strongly dialectical, negative theology paved the way for his later kerygmatic pastoral theology but it also presented challenges for his pastoral practice in Bruggen.
The Human Being & the Wisdom of Death

Chapter Three: Bruggen 1920-1927

Introduction

Thurneysen’s desire to speak into the real Problematik of everyday life had led him on a road to “the end of man.”¹ He and Barth had arrived at a new concept of God (Gotteserkenntnis) “at the end of the paths of their inherited theology.”² They had rejected the positivist foundations of their liberal theological education on the one hand, and the utopian idealism of Religious Socialism on the other. They could no longer sit comfortably at the table of either Schleiermacher or Kutter. The problem was — to borrow a phrase from Ray Anderson — that these various positions “proceeded from anthropos rather than theos.”³ They maintained the human being at the centre of reality, whether it was the human subject as rational or feeling being, or some human worldview or ideal. In Thurneysen’s and Barth’s pastoral desire to meaningfully address human nature and the human condition, they questioned whether ultimate answers could be found within creaturely existence at all. They sought a

¹ Eduard Thurneysen, Dostoevsky [Dostojewski], trans. Keith Crim (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 12. Dostojewski, 4. Auflage ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1930), 8. Here, Thurneysen is referring to the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. I apply the same words to Thurneysen himself, who used Dostoevsky as a conversation partner in articulating his own theology. In the same way that Römerbrief II was a seminal text in Karl Barth’s development, Dostoevsky contains “the theological programme (also the practical-theological!) of the early Thurneysen in nuce.” Albrecht Grözinger, "Steile, Grifflose Wände," Pastoraltheologie 77 (1988). The work begins by addressing the question of anthropology: what is man?
² Cf. “Es ging ihnen nicht um eine Rückkehr aus der modernen Theologie in die Orthodoxie konfessioneller Schulen, sondern um eine neue Erkenntnis Gottes am Ende der Wege dieser Theologie.” Moltmann, "Vorwort,” XIII.
new epistemological starting point arising not from *Menschenerkenntnis* but from *Gotteserkenntnis*. They sought a genuinely *theological* anthropology.

At the heart of the new *Gotteserkenntnis* was a radical dialectic: *God is God. Man is man.* The human being is separated from God by an unbridgeable chasm, an infinitely qualitative ontological difference. And yet, far from trivialising human existence, this ontological difference became the ground for a radically new anthropology. No longer are the ultimate questions of human nature and the human condition to be found subjectively within the human individual. God is beyond, *jenseits von uns*. Instead the groundwork is laid for a fundamentally *relational* or *dialectical* anthropology that begins neither with introspection nor empirical investigation but with God’s gracious self-revelation. It begins with God’s condescension in Jesus Christ, crossing the unbridgeable chasm, to dwell with humanity in the midst of the created world. Jürgen Moltmann, therefore, argues the new theology is appropriately termed *Theology of the Word*, rather than dialectical theology, because the emphasis is less on a dialectical *method*, per se, and more on God’s gracious relating to humanity in the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ.

Thurneysen’s project during the Bruggen years is best understood as an attempt to establish, from the starting point of God’s self-revelation, a practical theological anthropology as the basis for his praxis of ministry. That is to say two things: first, Thurneysen is misunderstood if one reads his practical-theological writing as primarily erecting a technique or method for pastoral work. He was not primarily a theoretician of pastoral practice. If one approaches his work, for instance, through the lens of the modern counselling movement, one is not likely to get far. He was, rather, a pastoral practitioner, a minister of the Gospel, committed to asking *theological* questions as they arose in his praxis of ministry. In taking this position, I am following Rudolf Bohren, Albrecht Grözinger, Klaus Raschzok, and Isolde Karle, among others in seeking to engage with Thurneysen on his own terms.

Second, Thurneysen always saw the task of theology as a distinctly *practical* theological task. Both his commitment to practical questions of ministry as well as his openness to the

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4 Cf. “‘God is in heaven, and thou art on earth’ ... The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.” Barth, *Romans*, 10.  
5 Moltmann, *Vorwort*, XII.  
empirical pastoral situation are the two characterising traits of what Albrecht Grözinger calls “the Thurneysenian way”. To argue with Thurneysen for a practical theological anthropology is to say that one comes to know what it is to be truly human as one lives into and is formed by the praxis of the church within the community gathered by the living Word of God.

In this chapter, I expound upon my thesis, first, by giving theological background to the central concept of death-wisdom (Todesweisheit) in Thurneysen’s thinking; second by offering a brief overview of his Bruggen ministry; and third, by analysing his practical theological anthropology as it developed over a few key texts.

**Todesweisheit: The Wisdom of Death**

Last chapter, I pointed to the radicalisation of Thurneysen’s theology towards the end of his time at Leutwil. Heinrich Barth’s 1919 article, *Gotteserkenntnis*, was one of the first in a whole set of texts that formed the theoretical foundation to the new theology. Alongside Heinrich Barth, Thurneysen was soon to engage deeply with a raft of new thinkers including Franz Overbeck, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the early Reformers, above all Martin Luther. Through them, he developed a “death wisdom” (Todesweisheit) at the heart of his theological anthropology. Before I turn to some of these key influences, however, it is important to see the new theology emerging from the social and cultural milieu of the time. Critical reception of Thurneysen’s pastoral theological works has often divorced his ideas from the time and place in which they were conceived and on these grounds have been unfairly dismissed.

Thurneysen’s new theological ideas reflect his Zeitempfinden, his perception or sense of the time. The early 20th century, as I alluded to in chapter one, was a time of major social, political and cultural flux resulting in a sense of crisis. This crisis gave birth to the Expressionist movement. Sönke Lorberg-Fehring makes a convincing case for seeing Thurneysen’s theological writing over the Bruggen years, especially his 1921 article, *Die

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7 Grözinger, "Steile, Grifflose Wände," 430.
8 See for example, Lorberg-Fehring’s analysis of reception history of Thurneysen’s 1928 article “Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge”. He names Christoph Schneider-Harprecht and Klaus Winkler, for instance, as guilty of interpreting Thurneysen’s early work through the lens of his later works. A number of pastoral or practical theologians writing during and after the “empirical turn” of the 1970s, looked back retrospectively from the perspective of modern client-centred counselling technique and on these grounds rejected Thurneysen. But Thurneysen was intending something quite different in his works and the whole of questions being asked by the modern counselling movement were simply non-existent in the 1920s. Such Lorberg-Fehring, *Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen*, 249ff. Since the 1990s, a number of academics have begun the task of “reconstruction”, namely Albrecht Grözinger, Klaus Raschzok, Isolde Karle, Gol Rim, Reijer Jan de Vries, among others. They are seeking to return to Thurneysen on his own terms in understanding his project as primarily a theological rather than psycho-therapeutic, methodological or technical one. See for instance, de Vries, “English Summary.”
Aufgabe der Predigt, as essentially expressionist works. Expressionism was a broad movement united by its rejection of bourgeois sensibilities and modernist certainties. The positivist-materialist worldview emerging from the Enlightenment had been shattered with the outbreak of war and with the breakdown of social and cultural institutions. Expressionists sought to look beyond the outer appearance and aesthetic of things to its inner meaning and essence. Expressionist art was typically identified by high drama, passion, vivid colour, and lack of nuance. The movement was incredibly broad. Some advocated for political revolution in line with the socialist agenda. Others were anti-political and envisaged a new utopia built on a primitivist ideology. Most, however, were united in their rejection of the old order of things and their expectation of a new order, a new epoch, through a radical break with the old.

Thurneysen was clearly familiar with these ideas. Heinrich Barth draws on expressionist concepts in his article, Gotteserkenntnis. Thurneysen also alludes to “the Expressionists” in his series of lectures on Dostoevsky. Further, a central claim in his 1921 article, Die Aufgabe der Predigt, is that the task of preaching is “to proclaim the death of the human being and everything human”. Such an assertion, Lorberg-Fehring asserts, can only be rightly understood as aesthetic, poetic language within the expressionist genre of “death literature” prevalent at the time.

Within this cultural milieu Thurneysen and Barth arrived at their new Gotteserkenntnis. It makes sense within this wider context. Unlike the bulk of expressionist literature, though, which understood “crisis” as a radical breach within history ushering in a new historical

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9 Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 67ff., 125ff.
10 Herbert Kühn argued in the expressionist journal Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung in May 1919 that “Expressionism is — as is socialism — the same outcry against materialism, against the unspiritual, against machines, against centralisation, for the spirit, for God, for the humanity in man.” (Quoted in: Shulamith Behr, Expressionism (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 9.) The 1918 Draft Manifesto of the artistic collective Novembergruppe (a collective of Berlin artists whose name derived from the November Revolution) articulated their politicised and revolutionary vision of hope as “a new, free Germany” built on liberty, equality and fraternity. (German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism, (California: University of California Press, 1993), 212.) To yearn for a new world was to actively fight for political and social change in the belief that such revolutionary activism could genuinely initiate this “new, free Germany”.
11 Peter Leu, for example, described the art of the Novembergruppe as “a flight from the realities of creation” and “antipolitical, like plants, blossoms and fruits of a higher, hitherto unknown region”. German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism, 218.
12 Barth, "Gotteserkenntnis (1919)," 239.
13 Thurneysen, Dostoevsky, 40. Dostojewski, 35.
15 Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 74.
epoch, Thurneysen and Barth saw the real “crisis” as God’s eternal Word breaking into history in Jesus Christ, the end of time in time. The historical and social crisis of their day was a mere symptom of this real eschatological crisis over all history. It was Franz Overbeck, who guided them to this insight and from whom Thurneysen took the term *Todesweisheit*.

The term alludes to Franz Overbeck’s radical critique of historical Christianity which he contrasted to the original foundation of the church established by Christ and the apostles. Christianity as it had developed over history until the present day, Overbeck maintained, had become subordinated to history, whereas original Christianity was a witness to the eschaton breaking into time. The eschaton, as the end of time in time, relativises all we know as ‘world’ and ‘history’. The Christianity witnessed in scripture therefore has its own origin history, its *Urgeschichte*, which is discontinuous from our own history and fundamentally beyond historical investigation. Overbeck’s criticism led him to claim that theology, as a phenomenon of historical Christianity, is the *Satan of religion*. It cannot create religion but can only “in the best case appreciate and strengthen a pre-existing religion but at the expense of that religion.”

Thurneysen and Barth sought to look beyond Overbeck’s critique and “return to the origin history of the church in the lifetime of Christ himself” by placing at the centre of the church’s life the revelation event which binds the church to the living witness of scripture.

Thurneysen, like Barth, was inspired by Overbeck. Just a few months prior to moving to Bruggen, he wrote to Barth, having acquired Overbeck’s *Christentum und Kultur*: “Really good!! I was delighted with his insights on the ‘Urgeschichte’”. Not long after, he wrote a sermon entitled, *Die enge Pforte*, which he called “his Overbeck sermon”, and which was published alongside a short review of Overbeck by Barth. The sermon incorporates key phrases, which became foundational for the new theology: God is wholly other (*ganz anders*); there is an unbridgeable chasm (*Kluft*) or an abyss (*Abgrund*) that divides humanity

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18 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 365, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 21 January 1920.


from God; God is beyond us (jenseits von uns), immeasurably beyond even the highest human achievement or rational inquiry. At the limits of human capacity, where everything human stops (Da wo alles aufhört), the human being is brought to the point of existential crisis (Krisis). The abyss, before which the human being stands, requires a leap into the emptiness (ein Sprung ins Leere) beyond oneself to the place where one relies entirely on the gracious act of God through the forgiveness of sins.21

While Barth introduced Thurneysen to Overbeck, it was Thurneysen who introduced Barth to Fyodor Dostoevsky.22 In his 1921 book, Dostojewski, Thurneysen applies the term Todesweisheit explicitly to the Russian novelist, though it takes on different meaning than the sense in which Overbeck used it.23 Todesweisheit, as Thurneysen uses it in Dostojewski, has to do with one’s proximity to death and a corresponding death-awareness that shatters the illusions of human self-sufficiency, autonomy, and power so that life is thrown into deep questionability. Dostoevsky’s characters, Thurneysen wrote,

“all seem sick, as from a secret wound, from the deep, penetrating question of their lives, which they are unable to answer until they finally find their true recovery in their sickness, because in this sickness they perceive the meaning of life in an ultimate question.”24

Dostoevsky’s “picture of man” explored through his characters has its foundation in Dostoevsky’s own life. He suffered from epilepsy and relayed the experiences of his seizures through his characters, namely Prince Myshkin and Pavel Smerdyakov, who also suffered from the disorder. He describes, through Myshkin, the moment immediately before a seizure as a “pre-monition”, a sublime moment, in which everything human disappears and “God is seen”.25 It is most comparable, Dostoevsky claimed, to the minutes immediately prior to an execution — an experience the author also had in a drill field in Petersburg — when one comes inescapably face to face with one’s own mortality. Dostoevsky’s life was spared just prior to the execution of the sentence. Not surprisingly, the experience had a profound effect on him. Dostoevsky’s Todesweisheit, which pervades his novels through his characters, was drawn from these liminal experiences, during which he encountered in absolute clarity life’s

21 Thurneysen, "Die Enge Pforte (1920)," 86-91.
22 Or perhaps it is more accurate to say “re-introduced”. As I mentioned last chapter, Barth was already familiar with Dostoevsky but only mentioned him on a small handful of occasions and with regard to Bolshevism. Liang, Leben Vor Den Letzten Dingen, 62ff.
24 Dostoevsky, 37. Dostojewski, 32.
transient, momentary, and fleeting nature. Human existence, stripped of all its false securities, is fragile and questionable. “He learned from death how to understand life,” Thurneysen mused.  

Thurneysen saw a common thread back in history from Overbeck and Nietzsche, through Dostoevsky and Søren Kierkegaard, to Martin Luther and John Calvin. Each in their own way voiced a fierce critique against Christendom, which had domesticated faith and established the human being at the centre of reality. The Todesweisheit of Overbeck and Dostoevsky consisted in an erosion of the certainties at the heart of modernist optimism through erecting death as a final, impassable reality that overshadows and limits human knowledge and all historical existence. The same idea emerges at the heart of Thurneysen’s first attempt at a pastoral theology entitled, Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge. Though Todesweisheit is not explicitly mentioned, he defines humanity as Todesmenschen — people of death:  

“We are truly divided, torn, split and therefore disintegrating and peaceless beings. Our condition is marked not without reason by its end, towards which we move: death … Long before the act of dying, our whole life is seized by death … so we are not people of life but people of death (Todesmenschen).”  

He is drawing here, not on Overbeck or Dostoevsky, but on Martin Luther. Of all the Reformers, Thurneysen claimed, it is Luther who gives us a personal view into the journey of his tortured soul. Luther could not find peace in himself. He was a conflicted human being, divided between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit, to use Pauline language. Within himself he could never be sure of his worthiness, his justification before God. It led him to his famous realisation that we are justified by grace alone in Jesus Christ. There is no aspect of the human being that remains untouched, uncorrupted, by sin and death. And yet, because of this, the gracious justification of the human being through the death and resurrection of Christ is the only ground of true pastoral assurance and holistic peace for the human being before God, in community, and within one’s self.  

Thurneysen takes Overbeck’s concept of Todesweisheit and through Dostoevsky and Luther develops it in a pastoral way at the centre of his knowledge of the human condition. He begins and ends with the pastoral concern — he never ceases to be a pastor: How does one

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bring peace to a restless human being, beset by physical hardship and disturbed in their soul? How does one offer comfort and care to the person on the fringes of society, stripped of power and influence, and subjected to the corruption and injustice of social and economic systems? The pastoral concern, however, points to an underlying anthropological consideration: what understanding of the human being could do justice to the Problematik of life now? The Todesweisheit at the heart of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology is not so much a particular worldview as it is a rejection of all worldviews and human ideologies, which all fall short of addressing life’s deep mystery and questionability. Todesweisheit is not a prerequisite idea that precedes true Gotteserkennnis, otherwise it would just erect another human ideal at the centre of reality. Rather, Todesweisheit expresses a radical negation at the heart of human knowing and living. It preserves the boundaries and limitedness of human rationality and experience. In so doing, it paves the way for a genuinely relational anthropology, that is, an understanding of the human being that is relationally, dialectically, defined by God’s gracious relating to us.

So for Thurneysen, true knowledge of the human condition begins in our justified reality in Christ as forgiven sinners. Revelation and reconciliation come together in the same act of divine mercy. Or to put it like Ray Anderson, “it is precisely by starting with humanity as it comes under the most radical judgment of God and as it experiences the most radical grace of God that the original form of the human is revealed to us.”28 For Anderson, as for Thurneysen before him, a genuinely theological anthropology can have no other genuine starting point lest it simply be another anthropological anthropology. Thurneysen’s Todesweisheit paves the way for developing a praxis of ministry on fundamentally relational grounds. The human being is no isolated individual but only comes to truly know of oneself as one is drawn into the reconciling work of God the Father, through Christ, by the Spirit in the community of faith. In this way, theological anthropology grounded in the justified reality in Christ is no mere indifferent or impartial doctrine. It is saving knowledge. It is practical and pastoral knowledge as the human being awakens to and lives into a new reality. Death-wisdom, in this way, becomes the starting point for a new life-wisdom.

**From one sickbed to another: Bruggen, St. Gallen**

Shortly after Thurneysen moved to Bruggen, Barth took up a lecturing position in Göttingen. The respective moves highlight a key emerging difference between the two: Barth’s more

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28 Anderson, On Being Human, 16.
“professorial” inclination and Thurneysen’s more “pastoral” one. While Barth never returned to pastoral ministry, it remained Thurneysen’s lifelong vocation. For both, theology was a task emerging from the church and for the church. Yet while Barth carried out this task with “explosive” energy primarily in the academic sphere, Thurneysen tended to view the task as a practical theological problem. It could be said that, in comparison to Barth, Thurneysen’s countenance was more “implosive”, his energies directed internally at his own identity and praxis in ministry. According to Lorberg-Fehring, “his interest applied particularly to the practical paradox of their [his and Barth’s] activity”.29 Thurneysen, in his own words, bore “the yoke of the church directly” and consequently noticed the “precipices” on either side of their narrow road more acutely than Barth.30 To push Thurneysen’s metaphor a little further, it is as if Barth had his eyes fixed determinedly on the horizon while Thurneysen, the practitioner confronted with the messy realities of pastoral ministry, had his gaze cast downward at the treacherousness of the road they travelled. His unique contribution as well as his greatest challenge was that he always did theology from the Existenzgrund of the church.31

Ministry from the Existenzgrund, the actual context, of the Bruggen-Straubenzell parish was not an easy proposition in the years immediately following the War. It was a heavily industrialised, suburban neighbourhood populated by the poor working class at a time of high unemployment. The correspondence between Barth and Thurneysen leading up to his move to Bruggen suggests Thurneysen was not overly enthusiastic about the imminent pastoral burden awaiting him.32 Barth did little to alter such negative perceptions, calling Bruggen a “carp pond” in which Thurneysen would need to be “a fierce carnivorous fish” in order to make any headway at all.33 Just prior to the move, Thurneysen confessed to Barth that the relocation felt like moving from one sickbed to another. The pastoral task was indeed enormous. Between 3000 and 4000 people were on his visitation list. After three years he was still meeting families for the first time and felt he was failing in his pastoral duty.34 The pastoral need only intensified during his tenure. In 1925, he wrote to Barth:

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29 My translation and italicisation. Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 65.
30 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 312, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 1 March 1925.
31 Barth, "Geleitwort [1935]," 227.
32 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 352, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 14 November 1919.
34 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 139, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 13 February 1923.
“…the whole situation here is bleaker than ever. The embroidery industry is collapsing more and more and unemployment is the order of the day. I do not know anymore how things would look and be in a congregation with normal economic conditions. Distress, hardship and sighing surround from every side almost daily. And one is powerless. It is also becoming clear how little modern man is mentally equipped to deal with this pressure.”

Thurneysen’s *Todesweisheit* was an attempt to speak into this need through a radical critique of human power. Whether it be the bourgeoisie who *had* power or the socialist working class who *wanted* power, both were united in their desire *for* power. Sin, which Thurneysen defines in *Dostojewski* as the “Promethean Rebellion” of humanity against God, is nothing but the assertion of the human will over the divine. In stark contrast to the Leutwil years, the revolutionary aims of socialism are now, for Thurneysen, another sign of human sin and the quest for power. God, on the contrary, does not move at the centre of society where human will and power is asserted. Rather God moves precisely at the fringes of society, among the powerless, sick, and needy. It is those who are confronted with the limitedness of creaturely reality and the weight of human suffering and need who, in their proximity to death, are paradoxically closest to God’s coming world of life.

It is questionable however whether Thurneysen’s new theology, for all its good intentions, spoke adequately into the pastoral need in Bruggen. Far from being the big fish, he appears to have floundered in the “carp pond”. His initial enthusiasm for the new theology began to waver when the pews visibly thinned on the Sundays Thurneysen was rostered to preach. Eventually the parish council intervened, not antagonistically, but out of pastoral concern for both Thurneysen and the congregation. In 1922, he wrote to Barth dejectedly: “I am no

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37 “...die neue Theologie zwar aus der Praxis heraus entsteht, aber scheinbar ohne praxisrelevanten Anspruch auftritt.” *Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen*, 81.


40 *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930*, 139, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 12 February 1923.
longer at ease in the pulpit; even in my dreams it has become for me a place that is full of ambiguity and distress, and the long, long road and the many, many Sundays until the end of retirement take on a questionable enough aspect for me.” Thurneysen, as I have already mentioned, began to notice the “precipices” on either side of his and Barth’s narrow road. In reflecting on his 1921 article, *Die Aufgabe der Predigt*, he wrote: “The last few days I myself had the seasick feeling that one gets when one pays attention to the fatal swaying of their own boat.” This apparent lack of confidence in his own work was compounded by feelings of loneliness and isolation in Bruggen. He developed a friendship with his socialist-leaning colleague, Samuel Dieterle, but their theological stance was quite different and so he found little support for his theological project there.

Meanwhile, in the academic world, the new theological *Aufbruch* was gaining momentum and had attracted a small, but committed group of theologians in Germany and Switzerland, including Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Friedrich Gogarten, and Rudolf Bultmann. In 1923, Barth, Gogarten, and Thurneysen founded a journal for forwarding the ideas of the new theology entitled, *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Edited by Georg Merz in Munich, the journal gained an enthusiastic readership. Caught up in the collective energy generated by the shared project, Thurneysen felt torn between his pastoral “works of duty” and his academic “works of inclination”.

How do we account for this tension and apparent disparity in Thurneysen’s ministry during the Bruggen years? Do his challenges — even his failures — to meet the pastoral demand not invalidate the new *Aufbruch* and present an insurmountable barrier to his practical theological anthropology? I offer three extenuating factors that do not resolve the tension but help to

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42 My translation. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 68.  
43 See for example: Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 453, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 10 December 1920.  
45 “…sodaß ich oft ganz verzweifelt vor dieser Kollision von Pflicht- und Neigungsarbeit stehe…” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 339, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 11 June 1925.
place it in context: the first epistemological, the second theological, and the third methodological.

First, if Lorberg-Fehring’s thesis is correct that Thurneysen’s theological project over this period was more a creative and expressionistic reconceptualisation of pastoral ministry, then it is no surprise he encountered some practical problems in its implementation. Lorberg-Fehring posits that Thurneysen’s intention was to ask a new set of questions rather than to provide answers. In keeping with the general tenor of the Expressionist movement and his emerging death-wisdom, Thurneysen desired to challenge the old certainties. As I have argued he wanted to build an epistemology on *Gotteserkenntnis* rather than *Menschenerkenntnis*. Such a radical reframing of things necessarily involved an emphatic rejection of anthropocentric epistemologies. It was not that he believed he had all the answers but that he saw the existing models as inherently problematic. Above all he raised one question: the question of what it means to be human which, for him, dialectically points to the question of God.

Second, one needs to read this period of Thurneysen as a step in an on going journey between Leutwil and Basel. In Leutwil, his understanding of the human being was still largely built on his inherited theological education. In Basel, he and Barth moved from a dialectical to a dogmatic way of thinking and from an existentialist to a christocentric anthropology. Ray Anderson articulates well the theological problem of the Bruggen years when he says:

> “When the human person is the one who makes the final determination as to what is the nature of the human, both religious and atheistic anthropologies end with a question rather than with an answer. Even though the existentialist is most painfully honest in making ‘kerygmatic’ utterance out of the question, the intrinsic tragedy of the human cannot be shaken off.”

Thurneysen had raised the question. The existential *Krisis* at the heart of his death-wisdom had led him to make a “kerygmatic utterance” — but he was still hesitant to say more. It was this failure to say more that straightjacketed his Bruggen ministry. Anderson goes on:

> “The knowledge of ourselves as human beings must be determined by and be correlated with our knowledge of God as the one who reveals himself finally and completely through Jesus Christ. A theological anthropology such as we seek to

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develop, then, will be critically limited and determined by the dogmatic assumption that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Logos of God, the enfleshed Word, fully human and totally divine in the unity of his person.\(^48\)

It is important to recognise that Thurneysen’s existential questioning over the Bruggen years was a necessary step in the journey towards his emerging christocentric anthropology\(^49\) and a praxis of ministry positively built upon it.\(^50\) The deconstruction (Abbau) had to take place before the construction (Aufbau).

Third, at the heart of Thurneysen’s early practical theology was an irresolvable paradox. On the one hand, we cannot speak of the God who is beyond everything human. On the other hand, we dare to speak of God nonetheless because we have been called to do so.\(^51\) For Thurneysen, this tension resists any methodological and technical outworking because to do so would be to reduce apostolic ministry to just another human art rather than something that is only possible by the grace of God alone. In his mind, Christian education is therefore not pedagogy. Homiletics is not rhetoric. Pastoral care is not psychology.\(^52\) And yet, as Albrecht Grözinger points out, Thurneysen still wants to talk positively about practical method. “This verbum alienum,” Thurneysen wrote of Christian education, “must be put into, worked into the life of the child.”\(^53\) The ungraspable is, by the grace of God, truly grasped. God’s ministry to the child happens through the service of our words in the power of the Spirit. As the Word of God claims us in the concreteness of our lives we are, then, called to use the best of our human capacities in the service of the Word. But Grözinger rightly notes that Thurneysen does not develop this further but instead simply reinforces the old models of doing things but under a new theological premise. “The practical theology of Thurneysen is silent precisely where its word would be most necessary. It is aporetic…”\(^54\) In this failure to develop a new method in Bruggen, Thurneysen struggled to gain significant traction in his ministry.

**Todesweisheit as Lebensweisheit: Laying practical foundations**

Partly because of his struggles in the Bruggen context and partly because of an enthusiastic commitment to the new Aufbruch, the 1920s were a productive time for Thurneysen’s

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 18-19.  
\(^{49}\) See especially chapter four.  
\(^{50}\) See especially chapters five and six.  
\(^{51}\) Thurneysen, “Die Aufgabe Der Predigt (1921),” 97.  
\(^{53}\) My translation. ”Konfirmandenunterricht (1925),” 137.  
\(^{54}\) Grözinger, ”Steile, Grifflose Wände,” 440.
academic output. While a full-length commentary on Matthew’s Gospel remained unfinished, he produced an impressive array of articles, lectures, and shorter works that gained him a reputation as one of the founding fathers of dialectical theology. Thurneysen also completed short works on Fyodor Dostoevsky and Christoph Blumhardt Jr., a second sermon volume with Barth, and released an edited selection of his early essays entitled, Das Wort Gottes und die Kirche. Paul Althaus called the latter “a serious, joyful, bold word about the church” at the centre of which was a “recognition of the church as community (Gemeinschaft)”, which in his mind had been largely absent from dialectical theology up until that point.

To restate, my argument is that Thurneysen in the Bruggen years was developing a practical theological anthropology as the basis for his praxis of ministry. Out of his critical negation of human knowing, he sought to re-affirm human knowing and living but on radically new grounds: the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. I highlight four key works which trace the central ideas in the development of Thurneysen’s thinking of this period.


58 Christoph Blumhardt.


A new edition in 1971 changed the original order significantly, removed Vom Wesen der Kirche and Der Kirche des Wortes, and added Die Aufgabe der Predigt (1921), Der Prolog zum Johannes-Evangelium (1925), Predigtanfang, Predigtfortgang und Predigtschluß (1950), and Erwägungen zur Seelsorge am Menschen von heute (1968).

Die Aufgabe der Predigt (1921)

At Barth’s encouragement, Thurneysen contributed an article to a special edition of a Swiss journal in pastoral theology. The article was entitled, Die Aufgabe der Predigt and was Thurneysen’s first publication in a renowned journal. He agreed to the task with some reluctance.\(^\text{62}\) As a contribution to dialectical theology, the article’s wider influence was very limited.\(^\text{63}\) But it was significant for Thurneysen’s own development in setting the trajectory of his future emphases in practical theology and ministry.\(^\text{64}\) In it he establishes a radical dialectic at the heart of preaching:

“There is a deep abyss between that which is said and that which is intended … between the word of the preacher and the Word of God … The Word in the word: that is the central mystery and the central problematic that arises from every sermon. But this abyss is so deep that no bridge can lead over it, for it is as deep, as unfathomable, as the abyss between heaven and earth, between this side and beyond, between God and the human being.”\(^\text{65}\)

The preacher is a paradox: unable to speak God’s Word because of this unfathomable abyss, and yet called to do so anyway. He continues:

“Only the one who knows that God’s Word can lie on no human lips will receive the Word of God on the lips … the task of preaching is the death of the human being and of everything human. Wherever this sermon really resounds — there God answers with the word that signifies — and is — resurrection and this resurrection-word is then the Word in the word.”\(^\text{66}\)

Thurneysen is speaking the language of expressionism.\(^\text{67}\) The outer aesthetic of our human words, ideas, and actions must be stripped away. We must be brought to the limits of human

\(^\text{62}\) Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 62.
\(^\text{63}\) Ibid., 91ff.
\(^\text{64}\) Ibid., 91.
\(^\text{65}\) My translation. “Es ist eine tiefe Kluft befestigt zwischen dem, was gesagt wird, und dem, was gemeint wäre, um es kurz auszudrücken: zwischen dem Wort des Predigers und dem Wort Gottes, das in seinem Worte zu Worte kommen sollte. Das Wort im Worte: das ist das zentrale Geheimnis und die daraus entspringende zentrale Problematik jeder Predigt. Diese Kluft aber ist so tief, daß keine Brücke hinüberführt, den sei ist genau so tief, so unergründlich, wie die Kluft zwischen Himmel und Erde, zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits, zwischen Gott und Mensch nun einmal ist.” Thurneysen, ”Die Aufgabe Der Predigt (1921).”
\(^\text{67}\) Rudolf Bohren, Predigtlehre (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1972), 446.
existence in order that God may speak. Precisely as “the grave of all human words”, the pulpit witnesses to resurrection, to new life with God.

The issues raised by Thurneysen’s *Todesweisheit* are brought to the fore in the act of preaching, because it is in the sermon that the church professes to proclaim the word of God. If it is to truly be what it is professes to be, if it is to truly communicate *Gotteserkenntnis*, the sermon must consist in a radical rejection of *Menschenerkenntnis*. On this basis, Thurneysen explicitly rejected any attempts in the sermon to address the “needs of the congregation”. The sermon is no place for “life-experiences” or for “personal-psychological-biological interests”. Such psychologising should be avoided in one’s exegesis of scripture as well: the theme is God and God alone. There seems little room in these stark assertions for the empirical pastoral situation or even for recognition of the particular community to which one preaches. His comments perhaps explain why Thurneysen’s sermons at times failed to inspire his Bruggen congregation!

A sermon proceeding from *Menschenerkenntnis*, he reasoned, could never move beyond the sphere of human knowledge and existence. Its beginning point is fundamentally misplaced and so the proclamation of the Word of God would simply be an elevated human word.

It is important, though, to acknowledge the underlying pastoral concern of Thurneysen’s radical dialectic. He was wary that preaching had become a mere *Begleitmelodie* (accompanying melody) to the situation of the day. In the War, the church had been guilty of preaching militaristic and triumphalistic *Kriegspredigten*. When peace came, the church attempted to find religious language to justify the new period of peace. The sermon was reduced to a kind of religious or pious commentary — an elevated voice — that simply reinforced the status quo, the popular opinions, and the dominant political voices. As such, preaching became a vehicle for justifying the human being — but naturally not the human being “as he is.” Rather, the sermon as *Begleitmelodie* justified a particular ideal, or norm: “the qualified human being — the religious, or churchly, or pious, or moralistic, or praying human in the human being.” The criticism of justifying a “qualified” human being could, in

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68 “Die Kanzel sei das Grab aller Menschenworte...” Thurneysen, "Die Aufgabe Der Predigt (1921)," 101.
69 Ibid., 102-03.
70 *For instance*, Thurneysen delivered two sermons entitled, *Die Neue Zeit*. The first, in 1918, proclaimed God’s new time in terms of a concrete social vision. In the second, the new time is eternity “beyond and hidden from all times.” The socialist vision is replaced by a transcendental eschatology that is internalised through the Holy Spirit “setting eternity” into the hearts of believers. Thurneysen, "The New Time (1920)," 36ff.
72 Thurneysen, "Die Aufgabe Der Predigt (1921)," 105.
73 My translation. Ibid., 99.
Thurneysen’s mind, be directed against both the old orthodoxy in its social and moral conservatism as well as the liberal progressivists in their nonconformism and faith in human reason. Thurneysen’s claim that the pulpit is the “grave of all human words” is a radical critique of the status quo, the social hierarchies and the norms of his day. Certainly, one cannot be free of social norms: one is always a product of one’s culture. Yet one can actively desire to become aware of one’s prejudices, to “put them to death”, to be shaped instead by the words of scripture, in order that the Word of God might speak. The communication of the living Word of God is the “impossible possibility” of preaching, which we could never ourselves curate because of our captivity as sinful and limited beings bound by time and space, but which we nonetheless anticipate in hope and dare in faith.

The sermon as Gotteserkenntnis and Gottesverkündigung (proclamation of God) is an eschatological speech in that it witnesses to “the coming, the in-breaking, the wholly other, new world of God.” It brings everything human, whether personal or social, under God’s radical judgment. And yet, in this is its pastoral significance. The human being is neither judged according to any social or cultural norms, nor any moral code or religious legalism. Before the judgment of God, we are all sinners forgiven in Jesus Christ. One is justified “as he is”, not because of any moral righteousness but due to grace alone. Further, the sermon as eschatological Word is a stumbling block to the situation of the day, whether there is war or peace. It is no Begleitmelodie (whether consonant or dissonant!) to the existing world, but the proclamation of the end of this world and the inbreaking of an entirely new world.

For Thurneysen, the death of all human righteousness, justification by grace alone, is the basis for true human living in the light of the resurrection. “Todesweisheit” he argued, “is Lebensweisheit (life-wisdom) … a pastoral theology built on this insight would admittedly look different, very different, than the current direction among us.” At this point, he does not expand upon the idea. But the comment helps to put the next seven years at Bruggen in context. He attempts to develop a life-wisdom, a theological framework for the church’s praxis, emerging from his Todesweisheit. How now do we live as a people no longer defined by social norms and power hierarchies but by the radically equalizing grace of God in which each person is justified “as he is”? We have been put to death, baptized into new life with Christ, and that means living as new human beings reconciled to God and to one another.

74 My translation. Ibid., 104.  
75 My translation. Ibid., 100.
The extreme dialectic at the heart of *Predigt* presented a difficult problem with regard to Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. Namely, he desired to establish a theological anthropology that proceeded from the new *Gotteserkenntnis* proclaimed in the sermon. However there is no way to step outside of human existence. Human beings are limited creatures bound by space and time. Any theological anthropology has no choice but to begin with human existence and within the confines of human words and concepts. In his utter rejection of any human words, Thurneysen risked rendering humanity deaf and mute. How can we say anything concrete at all? Barth challenged him on precisely this point. The word of the cross, he wrote to Thurneysen, “must extend beyond the offering of the absolute paradox”. That is to say, in Christ the abyss of death has been traversed. There is no longer an absolute distance between humanity and God because Christ has died in our behalf. The claim of his resurrection is the word of life uttered from beyond the grave. Barth’s point is that in Christ, *but only in Christ*, we must be able to say something concrete about God. We are not merely rendered deaf and mute by the absolute paradox of death. Thurneysen agreed:

“… your suggestion of the satisfactio vicaria touches on a point which I have also encountered with a number of reflections on Dostoevsky. With him [the vicarious satisfaction] is expressed through that peculiar, gracious, yet entirely transcendent light that falls on the world.”

Thurneysen’s comments reflect his pastoral concern. On what ground can we affirm this reality in all its distortion, suffering, sin, and death? On what ground can a *life-wisdom*, a praxis for human living, be developed which does not simply entrench the liberal positivist mind-set? Through his reading of Dostoevsky, which we turn to now, Thurneysen established a dialectical affirmation of this life.

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76 Anderson puts it well: “A theological anthropology has no starting point but human existence itself ... The problem of a non-theological anthropology, it turns out, is not that the human person is the starting point, but that the human person seeks to have the final word, the decisive judgment, as to the nature of humanity.” Anderson, *On Being Human*, 15-16.


Dostojewski (1921)

Thurneysen delivered a lecture on Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky at Aarau Student Conference in April 1921. The revised lecture, entitled Dostojewski, was published just months before Barth’s ground-breaking second edition of the Römerbrief as the first skirmish in a “united spring offensive” of the new theology.79

The production of Predigt and Dostojewski overlapped so that Lorberg-Fehring sees the latter as the second half of the former. Having erected an absolute transcendental separation between God and humanity in Predigt, Thurneysen now desired to affirm erring humanity as the object of divine grace.80 He put it in this way to Barth:

“I will conclude my lecture on Dostoevsky with considerations about human love as love to the individual, to the erring human being. Precisely in virtue of the dissolution of everything human there occurs in Dostoevsky a peculiar turning-back to the human being himself, and not only to the idea of the human being, but to the empirical, concrete human being. His whole corpus bears witness to that, a tremendous turning-back from every distance, the heavenly and the hellish, back to earth — under the sign of the resurrection.”81

This “turning back to earth under the sign of the resurrection” is Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective through which he engages with “the empirical, concrete human being”. As such,

79 Ibid., 456, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 28 December 1920. Dostojewski earned Thurneysen a reputation as one of the leading voices of the new dialectical theology. At the time it was widely read. For a breakdown of reception history see: Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 131ff. Barth was delighted with Dostojewski calling it a “quick and thoroughly efficient motorcycle” alongside his own “clumsy motor truck”, Römerbrief II. Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 59, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 3 August 1921. For a large part of its reception history, it has been viewed as a mere “illustration” of Römerbrief II (Thurneysen himself judged it as such: Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 499, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 24 June 1921.) More recent scholarship however has attempted to engage with it as a work in its own right. Hong Liang and Katja Tolstaja in more recent years have done work on Dostoevsky. See: Liang, Leben Vor Den Letzten Dingen. Tolstaya, Kaleidoscope: F.M. Dostoevsky and Early Dialectical Theology.

80 My translation: “Die Aufgabe der Predigt is less a representative account and more an attempt at an interactive dialogue. Primary attention is given to the negation and destruction of what is known and what is habitual. This move to utterly reject everything human (un-menschliche Abbruchbewegung) remains unfulfilled if there is no resulting movement to begin again with humanity (mit-menschliche Aufbruchbewegung). This resulting movement is the sense and purpose of Dostoevsky, which emerges immediately after the sermon essay.” Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 112.

it is immensely important for understanding his early theology of pastoral care. Through his aesthetic perspective, Thurneysen lays the groundwork for a *praxis of reflective reading* at the heart of pastoral ministry. Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective, I believe, enabled Thurneysen to take seriously the empirical, pastoral situation, but not to be bound by it. That is to say, he sought to be a realist, engaging with the particularities of day-to-day life while avoiding metaphysical speculation, philosophical abstraction, or ideological reduction. And yet, he engages with the empirical situation “under the sign of the resurrection”, which is to say, our reality now is seen in dialectical relationship to the transcendent world of God breaking in at every moment. This world of God cannot itself be speculated upon — it is discernible only as a negation from this side of things. But it gives to the pastoral conversation an eschatological orientation, a dialectical tension, by which the reality of the empirical situation points beyond itself to a wholly different reality and leads the person to “a new outlook on life”.  

Thurneysen, I have argued, was concerned with developing a genuinely *theological* anthropology. It is this question that drew him to Dostoevsky, whose novels raise and explore the question, *what is humankind?* The obvious problem with this question is that it is always asked within social and cultural norms. *Menschenerkenntnis* can never be free of its historical and cultural relativity. Anderson puts it this way:

“The implicit social paradigm is the precritical mass out of which social theories are developed and with which cultural anthropologists and philosophers work. If this assertion is accepted, then it means that all theories as to the nature of ‘man’ in the generic sense of human being are culturally relative.”

Is it possible to get behind this “precritical mass”, as it were? Thurneysen sees this as Dostoevsky’s peculiar strength. Certainly, he was a product of his time like everyone else. Yet his novels are thought experiments that challenge the underlying assumptions of his day, plumb the depths of human existence, and subject human life to radical questioning — as such they enable the reader to ask the question “*what is humankind?*” in a totally new way. So Thurneysen begins his book:

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85 Admittedly, *even this* line of existential and individualistic psychological inquiry and the attempt to move “behind” one’s culture is itself a product of modernist Europe. But the enduring popularity and significance of Dostoevsky’s novels *globally* is a witness to his genius and his ability to ask questions of human nature that transcend cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries. Perhaps the reason behind his lasting significance
“Whoever comes to Dostoevsky from the regions of secure humanity, of the pre-war period for instance, must feel like one who has been looking at such domesticated animals as the dog and the cat … and then suddenly sees the Wild before him, and without warning finds himself face to face with the yet untamed animal world.”

The analogy suggests a loss of familiarity, predictability and presupposed coherence. Thurneysen, who was writing post-War at a time of cultural crisis, saw Dostoevsky’s novels as a challenge to the certainties provided by the modernist optimism which placed the human subject at the centre of reality. In Dostoevsky’s existential questioning, the very epistemological presuppositions, on which modernism was built, were thrown into question. Sigurd Baark suggests,

“Dostoevsky’s form of writing, in which a series of scenarios that radically question the implicit self-image of the modern human subject play themselves out, was meant to make the reader confront a particular limit or border.”

Consider Rodion Rakolnikov, for instance, who commits murder as a Promethean rebellion, an attempt to absolutize the self and take the place of God. Or consider the brothers Karamazov who, rather than absolutizing the self, absolutize the sensual or erotic, personified in Grushenka. In their objectification and their attempts to possess her beauty, they idolize “the immediacy of life” and confine ultimate meaning within material reality. Consider finally, the Idiot, Prince Myshkin, who, in his innocence, foolishness, and lack of social awareness is an affront both to the rich, powerful conservatives and also to the young, nihilistic revolutionaries. He plays the holy fool revealing the equivocal nature of life in the face of death, unveiling the illusions of human power, and in so doing preserving the eternal distances.

is that he asks the questions of our human condition but never proceeds to offer answers. He moves beyond the “precritical mass” but only in the form of a question. 

Thurneysen, Dostoevsky, 7. Dostojewski, 3.

Baark, The Affirmations of Reason: On Karl Barth’s Speculative Theology, 123.

Ibid., 124.


Dostoevsky, 30. Dostojewski, 27.

Katja Tolstaja is critical of Thurneysen’s analysis of Dostoevsky’s characters. She argues he does not adequately take account of the complexity of the characters and their polyphonic perspectives. In her reckoning, Thurneysen flattens and abstracts the empirical situation of the characters and imposes his radical dialectic on the novels. Tolstaja, Kaleidoscope: F.M. Dostoevsky and Early Dialectical Theology, 285, 177ff. While she is quite right in her critique, I do not believe this is reason to question the ongoing value of Dostojewski. It is not first and foremost a work of literary criticism as it is a creative theological reflection through dialogue with Dostoevsky’s novels. Hong Liang views Thurneysen as a “creative recipient” of
Dostoevsky, Thurneysen contends, leads his readers to the limits. And it is here that God is pointed to in the form of a question. The word of forgiveness and grace is present in Dostoevsky’s novels, breaking in at the fringes rather than the centre. It is spoken on the lips of the powerless and the foolish rather than the powerful and the wise, whose power and wisdom consists in their preserving the human being and not God at the centre of reality.

Sonia the prostitute, Myshkin the idiot, Alyosha in his childlike faith — each witnesses to God at the edge of Dostoevsky’s literary worlds. But redemption only ever breaks in to Dostoevsky’s novels as a new perspective, “a new outlook on life”, rather than an actuality. At the end of *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, little has materially changed. There is no happily ever after. The novel ends with Raskolinkov, consumed by guilt, turning himself in. He is accused of murder and sent to Siberia to serve his life-sentence. And yet he is not even fully repentant or reformed. He turns himself in to save himself from his gnawing guilt rather than because of any genuine conversion. For Thurneysen, this is precisely the point. To offer a penultimate resolution would be both to trivialise the complexity, the injustice, the evil of human existence now as well as to shorten and limit to some humanly realisable possibility the extensive, uncontainable, full and total forgiveness of God.

The “new outlook on life” is precisely what is meant by Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective, his “turning back to earth under the sign of the resurrection”. His aesthetic perspective consists in a “refounding of the world and of life in the knowledge of God”, which is the basis from which he re-affirms empirical reality now:

“Where this world is recognized in its this-worldly quality and, precisely for the sake of this quality, is not rejected, because it is in its earthliness that there lies testimony to the eternity that encompasses all that is temporal and transitory, there this world can, yes, must be loved for the sake of that testimony in all its this-worldliness.”

Thurneysen takes his bearing from Expressionist art. The Expressionists, he contended, were not concerned with well-proportioned or anatomically correct depictions of their subjects. Rather they have “seen something of that deep tendency of life toward the beyond.”

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Dostoevsky, who brought his own ideas into active dialogue with the novelist. Liang, *Leben Vor Den Letzten Dingen*, 29. In my analysis, I have chosen to follow the perspective of Sigurd Baark, who sees Dostojewski as “the most straightforward example” of “the poetic aestheticle expression of death” at the heart of the new dialectical theology. Baark, *The Affirmations of Reason: On Karl Barth’s Speculative Theology*, 122. In this understanding, Thurneysen is undoubtedly using Dostoevsky’s works as a means to expand and deepen his own dialectic thinking and his expressionistic aesthetic.

paintings, in order to appear well-proportioned to the viewer, correspond by strict relationship to a vanishing point. Such a relationship defines the painting’s perspective. But these Expressionist works are different. Far from being grotesque aberrations or exaggerations, Thurneysen argues, they correspond to an infinite vanishing point beyond the frame, a new perspective outside of any human perspective. In other words, it is precisely in the distortion and ugliness of the figures that they witness to a reality beyond all current worldly existence. For Thurneysen, though the Expressionist works appear distorted, they are actually more realistic than perfectly proportioned and aesthetically pleasing works. Perfect proportionality, in fact, means that the perspective of the painting is simply another human perspective. In a similar way, societies, groups, and individuals create worldviews, ideologies, and systems in order to make sense of the world. We live in a bubble, an echo chamber; we live life through a lens to create meaning and to order the world in a way that we can comprehend. The “eternal” perspective critically negates the ideological distortions resulting in a new view of life that is mysterious, questionable, unsettled, and pointing beyond itself to God.

But — and here is the decisive point — the critical negation does not mean that Thurneysen is left with pure mysticism or apophatic nothingness. Again Sigurd Baark:

“The negation is precisely a negation that confines the thinking and acting of the human subject to this life and this world — but without the ideological supplement that positive notions or assertions concerning states of affairs beyond the radicality of death provide.”

So for Thurneysen, we are not left saying nothing of human nature. On the contrary, his aesthetic perspective means that we are directed back to empirical reality to explore the question, “what is humankind?” He seeks, like Dostoevsky, to be “a realist in a higher sense”. That, however, is not to eliminate God from the equation by virtue of God’s empirical unprovability. Through his critical negation of human ideologies and worldviews, Thurneysen reengages with empirical reality but preserves the deep mystery and questionability of life now, which precisely leaves open the possibility of God.

The insight is critical for his pastoral theology. With this aesthetic perspective, the pastor is concerned with this world and this life — in short, with the empirical reality of the person whom they meet. The pastor must not foreshorten the eternal distance, offer easy answers or

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96 Baark, The Affirmations of Reason: On Karl Barth’s Speculative Theology, 128.
pastoral platitudes, or impose a predetermined theological agenda on the situation. But that is not to say the pastor is rendered mute either. There is genuine discernment, active counselling that takes place, in so far as the pastor accepts empirical reality but not necessarily the self-imposed ideologies by which the person makes sense of and proportions reality. The process of discernment that takes place over the course of the pastoral conversation helps the person re-enter their empirical reality but from a new perspective that breaks open new possibilities for reconciliation, for redemption, and for peace. In short, the conversation partners awaken together to reality “under the sign of the resurrection.” God’s eschaton, which for Thurneysen is beyond all human actualisation, is nonetheless witnessed to through the corresponding sign of human life awakening to God. In this way, concrete change will indeed result from the “new outlook on life” and really correspond to the coming Kingdom.

Before moving on, a final word needs to be said about prayer as “the awakening of God-consciousness”. True theological anthropology has its own pedagogy. “To pray is education,” Thurneysen wrote, quoting Dostoevsky. And yet prayer is more accurately a kind of anti-education in that it is not a means of obtaining content but a means of being stripped of all human knowing. We are to become like children, filled with wonder and marvel at this life. We are to become innocent of all the prejudices that shape us over time. Prayer is the practice that corresponds to the eternal perspective. When one prays, one is becoming conscious of God and learning to understand one’s own identity and life in relation to God. Prayer does not remove one from the world but leads one back into reality with a new perspective.

**Schrift und Offenbarung (1924)**

The obvious problem with Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective is that it still presupposes the possibility of a transcendental vantage point from which one “turns back to earth”. Dostoevsky may preserve the eternal distance in his novels — but from what privileged position is he able to do so in the first place? Again, the problem arises, how can one arrive at true Gotteserkenntnis without it immediately becoming yet another form of Menschenerkenntnis? The moment we begin to conceive of God or a reality beyond the

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97 Thurneysen scathing accusation against the church is that, in its well-meaning desire to comfort people, it domesticates God and brings God within the conceptual frame. It takes away the mysteriousness and questionability of life, the unconfirmability of faith, and in so doing creates yet another human ideology in place of God. Thurneysen, *Dostoevsky*, 55. *Dostojewski*, 49-50.

98 *Dostoevsky*, 81. *Dostojewski*, 75.

frame, we instantly bring God into the frame and within the limits of human conceivability. How can divine revelation genuinely be *divine* revelation?

Thurneysen addressed this exact problem in 1924, in an article entitled, *Schrift und Offenbarung*. In it, he argues that God’s revelation has an exclusive correlation with the witness of scripture. Divine revelation, which is beyond human knowing, he contended, must satisfy three requirements. First, its content must lie “in the most exclusive sense *outside* the world of human knowing.” Second, it must enter into this world of human knowing and being, otherwise nothing has actually been revealed. Third, in entering into the world of human knowing, it must somehow resist becoming a mere object of human knowing like any other knowledge. God would then be reducible to a mere conceptual idea:

> “In order to succeed in its communication, the hidden, otherworldly ‘Object’ must become the ‘Subject’ that communicates itself … in the same act of self-communication of this content, our [human] knowledge is also led into a total Krisis and is transformed in this Krisis towards a new knowledge, which knows what it could not know *before* this Krisis and seen from the Krisis.”

The exclusive correlation with scripture fulfils this third requirement. It ensures that the content of God’s revelation is not subjected to “free-floating speculation” or to a general *religious a priori* that relativises all religious and metaphysical thought. God’s revelation, Thurneysen asserted, is bound to the story of God’s salvation history through the people of Israel culminating in the person of Jesus Christ. In this story, grounded in particular,
historical events, God’s eternal life is witnessed in time and as such becomes knowable. Scripture is not itself the Word of God in an unqualified sense — again, that would be to limit God’s revelation to particular human words — but scripture is the exclusive witness to God’s Word. In the canon of scripture, God’s Word is genuinely encountered as *verbum alienum*. The dialectic between the world of the Bible and the contemporary world means that God’s Word cannot be sublated or dissolved into more general knowing. The eternal Word maintains its otherness, addresses us, and in so doing throws all our modes of knowing into radical question.

In this way, Thurneysen’s aesthetic “eternal” perspective — the transcendent eschatological orientation of empirical reality — is necessarily accompanied by a “*praxis of reflective reading*” by which one receives the new eternal perspective. I take the phrase from Sigurd Baark, who uses it to refer to the way Barth and Thurneysen engaged with biblical texts. Their praxis-oriented approach means that one does not read scripture from a detached, purely objective standpoint. Rather, one is practically and personally engaged in the reading of scripture so that, in the encounter, one’s own circumstances are addressed and brought under radical questioning. For Thurneysen, this praxis is itself the work of the Holy Spirit. The historical continuity between our time and the time of scripture is broken down so that the events of scripture directly confront the events of our own lives. The historical asynchronicity (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) remains — this is the important reminder of the historical critical school. It would be inappropriate to extract universal principles from scripture that can then be applied to every time and place. But there is at the same time a synchronicity through the Holy Spirit in which one’s time is directly addressed by the *Urgeschichte* of scripture. This synchronicity (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) is always a *praxis*, never a theory; always an event, never an idea; always a dynamic movement, never a static reality — it occurs ever anew as the Holy Spirit calls the church into being, proclaims the Word, and awakens faith in the believer.

Thurneysen appeals to John Calvin’s pneumatology as developed in Book III of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is worth reproducing a couple of key statements from the *Institutes*, which Thurneysen expressly has in mind; firstly from, III/2,1:

“No it is now proper to consider the nature of this faith, by means of which, those who are adopted into the family of God obtain possession of the heavenly kingdom. For the accomplishment of so great an end, it is obvious that no mere opinion or

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persuasion is adequate … great numbers, on hearing the term [faith], think that nothing more is meant than a certain common assent to the Gospel History; nay when the subject of faith is discussed in the Schools, by simply representing God as its object, they by empty speculation … hurry wretched souls away from the right mark instead of directing them to it. For seeing that God dwells in light that is inaccessible, Christ must intervene.”

And secondly, from III/1,3:

“…until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed, because we view him coldly without us, and so at a distance from us … for it is by the Spirit alone that he unites himself to us.”

First, knowledge of God through faith, is not its own end but the means by which we are “adopted into the family of God” and share in “the heavenly kingdom.” Second, and linked to the first, it is a different sort of knowing. The knowledge of faith is no metaphysical speculation through cold and dispassionate rational assent. It was not that Calvin doubted the capacity of human reason to investigate and understand earthly phenomena, but God is entirely beyond the material world, dwelling “in light inaccessible.” Therefore, true knowing of God involves communion with God by the Spirit through whom Christ “unites himself to us” and adopts us into the family of God. Revelation involves reconciliation and vice versa. Once again, knowledge of human nature in light of God is a practical and relational knowing as we are adopted into the family of God.

In Schrift und Offenbarung, Thurneysen places a praxis of reflective reading at the heart of his theological anthropology. It requires a critical, dialectical, balancing act so that neither the empirical pastoral situation nor the eschatological reality witnessed in scripture fall short. For Thurneysen, the question of what it is to be human is explored in the dialectical conversation as the events of scripture address and confront the events of daily life. This conversation, this dialogue, occurs in the Holy Spirit within the community of faith, so that true knowledge of the human being is revealed as we are reconciled to God and to one another. But, for Thurneysen, this dialectic does not imply a dualism between the world of scripture and the contemporary world as if the two ran parallel to one another and as if the truth could be found by merging the two or by establishing a middle ground. For Thurneysen, the definitive truth

105 Ibid., 465, III,1.3.
of all human existence is revealed in Jesus Christ through the witness of scripture. In the incarnation, the eschatological life of God has broken into history, the end of time has disrupted time, the future has been inaugurated and the world anticipates its coming in fullness. The dialectical tension, therefore, is not a static dualism, but the dynamic breaking in of the eschaton in time which is the grounds for both affirming empirical reality as well as yearning for its healing and redemption.

Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge (1928)

Finally, we come to Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge, which Thurneysen wrote in the transition period between Bruggen and Basel. It marked the beginning of Thurneysen’s focus on theology of pastoral care, which lasted the rest of his life and for which he is most known today. Rechtfertigung establishes the basic premises of his pastoral theology, which he develops extensively in his magnum opus, Die Lehre von der Seelsorge, published some eighteen years later. Consequently, the 1928 article has received a lot of critical attention as a seminal text in what became known as kerygmatic pastoral care, of which Thurneysen was a key representative.  

The problem is that many of the criticisms of the key claims in this article are framed by the terms of debates in pastoral theology that didn’t emerge until forty to fifty years later. Further, I have argued, with Grözinger, Raschzok, Lorberg-Fehring, and others, that Thurneysen’s earlier works in the Bruggen years are more aesthetic and poetic in their language than scientific. Firstly, he was speaking the language of expressionism and, secondly, he was speaking in order to articulate the underlying theological reality of pastoral ministry rather than to develop a practical technique. Stylistically and formally, it is a very different piece of writing to Die Lehre. At the time of Rechtfertigung’s composition, Thurneysen and his dialectical colleagues were still trying to establish the ideas of the new theology and so tended to use more polemical and persuasive language and to frame things in strong dialectical statements intended to generate a reaction. By the time he wrote Die Lehre in 1946, the theology of the Word was well established at the centre of the germanophone theological world; Thurneysen was a renowned practical theologian at the University of Basel and Senior Minister at the Basel Münster; and so there was less need for sharp polemics and vivid expressionistic language. All that to say, Rechtfertigung must be taken on its own terms and seen in continuity with Thurneysen’s other early dialectical works.

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106 Nauer, Seelsorgekonzepte Im Widerstreit: Ein Kompendium, 21ff.
107 Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen, 213.
In *Predigt*, Thurneysen mentioned in passing that a pastoral theology built on the insights of *Todesweisheit* would look very different than the prevailing models of his day.\(^{109}\) In *Rechtfertigung* he turns his attention explicitly to this task, conceiving of pastoral care both *practically* as an extension of the proclamation of the Word in the sermon and *theologically* in terms of the doctrine of justification. Both aspects should come as little surprise given what we have already seen in *Predigt*, *Dostojewski*, and *Schrift*. Thurneysen takes it as uncontested that the sermon has to do with justification, which is “nothing other than the declaration of righteousness (*Gerechtsprechung*) of the sinner through the free grace of God”.\(^{110}\) The sermon as a concrete instance of this public declaration therefore properly belongs to justification. Pastoral care, Thurneysen argues, shares the same concern as the sermon but, whereas the sermon is addressed to the whole community, pastoral care is “the proclamation of the word of grace to the [particular] sinful human being. So understood, pastoral care is a special-case (*Spezialfall*) of the sermon.”\(^{111}\) Not surprisingly, such a definition has received a fair amount of criticism. Defining pastoral care as a “special-case of the sermon” could suggest an authoritarian view of pastoral care that at best does not take seriously the concrete situation and at worst could classify as spiritual abuse.\(^{112}\)

Thurneysen, however, was not suggesting that the pastoral conversation was a place for sermonising or preaching *at* someone. In *Die Lehre*, he tried to avoid this particular accusation by drawing a distinction between proclamation more generally and the sermon as a particular instance (albeit the central instance) of proclamation. But, given what we have seen, Thurneysen’s claim is in keeping with his practically oriented theological anthropology. First, knowledge of human nature and the human condition, for Thurneysen, consists in a dialectical relationship between empirical reality and the eternal Word of God which is breaking into empirical reality, throwing it into radical *Krisis*. The aesthetic perspective, which gives life its eschatological orientation, its God-consciousness, its dialectical tension, is awakened through the proclamation of God’s Word in the Holy Spirit according to the witness of scripture. In this event of proclamation, the living Word of God addresses us anew bringing all aspects of human nature under the judgment and grace of God. Second, if *Todesweisheit* is to become *Lebensweisheit*, the justifying Word of God must reach into every aspect of human living. We must be redirected to the “concrete, empirical human being under

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109 Thurneysen, “Die Aufgabe Der Predigt (1921),” 100.
111 My translation. Ibid., 210.
the sign of the resurrection.” This is the concern of pastoral care. Therefore Thurneysen sees direct continuity between the central event of proclamation in the sermon and the decentralised pastoral conversations that take place during the week among the messiness and complexity of everyday life. As Eugene Peterson puts it, pastoral work is about giving voice to the eternal word and will of God in the midst of “the idiosyncrasies of the local and the personal”.113 It “narrates and models the biblically described exchanges of grace between God who is ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever’ and the person who inherits old Adam’s sin and experiences new Adam’s salvation”.114 Peterson understands pastoral care as retelling and sharing in the “exchanges of grace” between God and the human being, who exists in contradiction simul justus et peccator. Pastoral work, in Peterson’s understanding, sees the human being as a forgiven sinner, as one defined by God’s word of grace. Here we come very close to Thurneysen’s own definition. Thurneysen in no way wants to deny or trivialise the “idiosyncrasies of the local and personal”, but these idiosyncrasies are seen from a new perspective. Or in his words: “Pastoral care has to do with a new seeing and understanding of the human being; a seeing and understanding of the human being from God.”115 In this framework, the pastoral task is to discern together what it is to be fully human before God in the particularity of one’s life. Pastoral care communicates and discerns theological anthropology as our concrete lives are shaped and addressed by the eschatological reality of God in Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that, while Barth was generally affirming of Rechfertigung, he suggested two corrections both of which Thurneysen more or less rejected.116 Each bears implication for Thurneysen’s practical theological anthropology and so I consider them briefly here. Barth’s first criticism was that Thurneysen’s emphasis on justification came at the cost of an adequate doctrine of sanctification. In his determination to assert that one is saved by grace alone, Thurneysen challenged the conceptualisation of sanctification as a temporal process. For Barth this was problematic:

114 Ibid.
“Does it need to be contested that sanctification is a process? Calvin quietly construed it as such and it is probably prudent not to deny this. If it [sanctification] is simply found, as you rightly say, in faith and in obedience, then all self-sanctification is ruled out, and then one can and must admit that God is here with the human being on the way, as one de facto presupposes in pastoral care.”

Thurneysen’s insistence arose in reaction to pietistic and Roman Catholic models of pastoral care which, as he understood them, placed the emphasis on human obedience to the law. His concern was that justification and sanctification should not be separated from or overlook one another. One’s justified and sanctified reality in Christ is part of the one movement of grace in the power of the Holy Spirit as it becomes concrete in the life of the believer. He accused pietism of having a progressive view of sanctification, in which sanctification is a “process of purification (Entsündigung)”. In other words, through pious obedience, one becomes less sinful over time. Justification is still important, but only as the initial launching pad to enable the believer to live a self-sanctifying life. According to Thurneysen, the Reformed view rejects any suggestion that one becomes less sinful over time. We are simul justus et peccator. Sanctification, he says, is nothing other than the concrete act of faith (in which the sinner takes hold of grace anew) and of obedience to the law (by which grace takes root in one’s concrete life). But there is little sense of an ongoing process. Rather one grasps grace “ever anew” (immer neu). Barth’s point is not that Thurneysen is wrong in his assertion, but that he erects a false dichotomy. Just because one rejects a self-sanctifying progressivist view does not mean that one must also deny sanctification as a concrete process within human living in time. Sanctification is concerned with holy and right living before God. Therefore one can, as one’s life is placed ever anew under the justifying Word of God, genuinely live into a sanctified and sanctifying life with God.

By 1946, Thurneysen develops a stronger doctrine of sanctification, particularly through use of Book III of John Calvin’s Institutes. At this earlier stage, however, the overwhelming lens through which he approaches pastoral care is Luther’s doctrine of justification. It is important to acknowledge the good pastoral intention here: Thurneysen wanted to establish a praxis for the church, a wisdom for living, which arose from the grace of God alone. And yet — does

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118 Thurneysen, “Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” 203.
his wariness of any notion that sanctification is a process not undermine that same pastoral intention? Is wisdom for living not directly concerned with the practical process of living every day in response to God? After all, human existence is bound by space and time. Empirical human life takes place in time. We can experience it no other way. For grace to take root and become concrete in human living requires that it manifests itself in our living in space and time. Sanctification may not be a linear and progressive process but it is a process nonetheless, concerned with the transformation of real human living.

Second, Barth critiqued Thurneysen’s trichotomous view of the human being: body, soul, and spirit. According to Thurneysen:

“Certainly, we are body, we are spirit, whereby the ‘soul’ … is also included in the spirit, and whereby it is not to be forgotten that this spirit is only created spirit; the spirit is creature and not creator.”

Barth takes exception to what he calls Thurneysen’s ‘anthropological’ use of the spirit-concept. For him, the spirit is a soteriological concept associated with justification and sanctification. The danger, as he sees it, is that Thurneysen comes too close to the romantic position of an enduring divine element inherent in the human being, a “soul-spark” (Seelenfunk) that must simply be awakened. He knew Thurneysen was not suggesting this (earlier in the article Thurneysen explicitly rejects romantic theological anthropology as epitomised in Schleiermacher) but, in his opinion, it is better to avoid an anthropological use of “spirit” altogether. Interestingly, Thurneysen maintains a trichotomous view of the human being his whole life. He expounds upon and nuances his view further in Die Lehre.

In Rechtfertigung, his definitions of “soul” and “spirit” are still vague. It is unclear why he chose not to take Barth’s advice. But it does not change his material point: that we are fundamentally Todesmenschen, people of death, divided, torn, and split to the very depths of our being: body, soul, and spirit. We do not have the capacity within ourselves to be at peace. Peace must come from beyond as an act of forgiveness, an act of grace. No soul-spark is enough. It follows that pastoral care (Seelsorge) must be more than care for the soul of the human being. It is, rather, care for the whole human being as living soul. The human being is ultimately defined as a forgiven sinner, who is claimed in one’s totality through the death

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119 Ibid., 207.
120 My translation. Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 563, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 12 March 1928.
121 Thurneysen, “Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” 204-06.
122 See chapter six.
123 Thurneysen, “Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” 209.
and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Theological anthropology, therefore, does not begin with some pre-established knowledge of the constitutive parts of the human being (even if these concepts are taken from scripture). It begins with the saving work of Jesus Christ, in whom one learns to see oneself — body, soul, and spirit — as one who is called to life, wellness, and peace with God, with others, and within oneself.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that Thurneysen developed during the Bruggen years a practical theological anthropology. The deepest questions of human existence cannot be answered through rational inquiry and therefore any attempt to establish a universal theory of human existence is a deeply flawed project. But that is not to say one is reduced to apophatic muteness. One can embark on the task of developing a theory or doctrine of the human being but, for Thurneysen, such theological work must forever arise out of the lived praxis of the church. It is constant dialogue as empirical reality is addressed by the eternal Word of God through the direct and personal presence of the Holy Spirit. In 1925, Thurneysen articulated a conscious shift to do theological work from the assumption of the provision of the Holy Spirit in the church:

“It cannot be otherwise than that our ship *nolens volens* approaches the doctrine of the church as though it were a new continent; I, too, see it no differently and actually it must be so, for we cruised about in the waters of the third article of the creed since the beginning; there, one might say, lie our home port and ancient coaling station, for the ‘Holy Spirit’ was perhaps somehow our starting point; only we cannot remain spiritualists with Kutter and Ragaz and perhaps also the younger Blumhardt but have to push on further to the point from which the Holy Spirit comes: to the church as the bearer with its doctrine and Scriptures.”

A practical theological anthropology is an understanding of the human being that ventures out from the “home port” of the Holy Spirit’s work in the praxis of the church. Here empirical reality and the world of scripture come together in immediate, dialectical relationship: the latter bringing the former into radically new perspective.

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*Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930*, 321-22.
If my interpretation is faithful to Thurneysen’s own theological project, then the criticism that he did not take empirical reality seriously is misplaced and unfair. Admittedly, he had not yet developed a thorough method or technique for pastoral work that corresponded to his *Todesweisheit* but his basic theological starting point is sound: We learn what it means to be truly human as we come into relationship with God in Jesus Christ. I also suggested that, at this stage, Thurneysen had not yet moved beyond the existential questioning and the radical negation of the ‘kerygmatic utterance’ towards a thoroughly christocentric anthropology. That shift is the focus of my next chapter. However, the key foundations for his future theological anthropology and the pastoral praxis built upon it had been laid. We turn now to Thurneysen’s ministry at the Basel Münster where he transitioned from student to teacher, and from someone raising questions in an expressionistic and poetic style to someone beginning to hazard answers. He began to *construct* a christocentric anthropology grounded in the lived praxis of the church.
Introduction

_Lebensweisheit_, practical wisdom for human living, begins with the event of God’s speaking. When we humans presume to know how best to live, when we erect our own ideology or worldview in the place of God, we go astray. God is the Lord. The deception that we are our own lords is, in Thurneysen’s eyes, a wisdom that leads to death. Therefore, at the centre of his practical anthropology is the presupposition that the Lord God speaks to human beings inviting them into new community and to obedient living. Further, the Lord God speaks to us in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God’s lordship is established on earth and among humankind. “Who is Jesus Christ?” Thurneysen asked on his first Christmas Day service at Basel. “He is the Lord.”¹ For Thurneysen, the proclamation of the angelic host to the shepherds is a promise that awaits fulfilment. The helpless child in a manger is a _Verkleidung_, a disguise, of his future glory as master over all powers of darkness.² The decisive fact of human existence and of human nature, then, is the eschatological future established in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. To be human is to be claimed by Christ

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² Ibid.
the Lord as a forgiven sinner and child of God. It is to live freely in response to that claim —
to live either in obedience or disobedience to the promise.

The question, who is Jesus Christ?, posited in his Christmas Day sermon of 1927, sets the
trajectory of Thurneysen’s theological enquiry during his early years ministering at the Basel
Münster. Reijer Jan de Vries has recently drawn particular attention to this period, calling it
Thurneysen’s “christological concentration”. The period is largely unstudied in Thurneysen
research. However, de Vries sees it as a time of necessary deepening and concretisation in
Thurneysen’s thinking. Over these years we see the development of a christological
eschatology at the heart of his theological anthropology. His resulting pastoral care proceeds
from the event of Christ’s claim (Anspruch) over the whole of human life. In this chapter, I
explore the christological concentration of Thurneysen’s theology between 1927 and 1939,
especially the recurring connection between Christ’s eschatological lordship and the
corresponding command on human life now. I begin with a brief introduction to
Thurneysen’s christological eschatology. Then, I reflect on the effect of that eschatology on
his early ministry at the Münster. Third, I discuss two debates emerging out of the Zwischen
den Zeiten group that centred on issues of anthropology and natural theology. Finally, I point
to three contributions Thurneysen made during the German Church Struggle in the 1930s.
Here, in response to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and an increasingly polarised
political landscape in Switzerland, he develops a theological anthropology oriented to the
claim of Christ’s lordship over the whole of life.

**Christological Eschatology**

I take the term “christological eschatology” from Jürgen Moltmann, who uses it to describe
the Reformed political theology of Karl Barth as it arose in response to the German Church
Struggle. I apply the same phrase to Thurneysen because of the closeness of his and Barth’s
theology during this period. For both Barth and Thurneysen, God’s victory in Jesus Christ
over sin, death and the devil is the decisive fact of history. The struggle between the regnum
Dei and the regnum diaboli has already been decided. The whole world is already in Christ
and subject to his rule. Therefore, the eschatological future of humankind “can only be the

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3 de Vries, “English Summary,” 304.
5 *Ethics of Hope*, 20.
universal and manifested epiphany of that which in Christ is already ‘finished’. 

Christ’s lordship is the dominant christological image in Die große Barmherzigkeit, the third sermon volume by Barth and Thurneysen. A number of Thurneysen’s contributions specifically develop this theme. In 1934, Thurneysen published another sermon entitled, “The mystery of the gospel” (Das Geheimnis des Evangeliums). “A mystery,” he wrote, “is something which is hidden, covered, which must be unveiled and brought to light as if from a deep well.”

The victory of Jesus Christ is the fact of life hidden underneath all our being and doing. His glory is in disguise (Verkleidung) and must only be unveiled. Our task is not to accelerate its coming but to witness to it and to bring it to light in order that Christ may reign now as he does in eternity. In this assertion, there is a decisive shift in Thurneysen’s eschatology which we have already seen developed in the Bruggen years but which comes to fuller expression in Basel. The future of humankind no longer stands at the end of history as Blumhardt held, but above history as transcendental truth breaking into the present through the event of God’s proclamation. God’s Word is the eternal Word, the eschatological Word, disturbing historical existence and illuminating human life under the victorious lordship of Christ.

Thurneysen’s christological eschatology is articulated most clearly in his 1931 article, Christus und seine Zukunft. In it Thurneysen interprets eschatology in terms of christology rather than christology in terms of eschatology. That is to say, the eschaton is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in whom “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near”. The end of time breaks into time in the person of Jesus and therefore the future, the time beyond time, is distinctly Christ’s future. To say that Jesus’ life is the end of time breaking into time is to say two things: first, that his life is a genuinely human life bound by time as is common to all humanity. His life is a historical life; he is the one who has come (der Gekommene). When one speaks about his future, it cannot be reduced to myth or abstract

6 Ibid., 21.
And: "Matthäus 14, 22-33 (April 1932)."
And: "Johannes 2, 1-11 (September 1932)," ibid.
10 Again I am here drawing on a distinction made by Moltmann between Barth’s christological eschatology and Moltmann’s alternative: an eschatological christology. In contrast to Barth who “carried eschatology into Christology”, Moltmann presents his christology in “messianic dimensions”, which is to say, “the beginning of the coming consummation of salvation has already taken place in the coming of Christ”. Christology, in other words, is the beginning of eschatology. Cf. Moltmann, Ethics of Hope, 37-38.
speculation — it is truly historical, in continuity with all time (including ours) and therefore pertinent to time. Second, however, as the eternal Son of God the Father, he is primarily the “future one”. Thurneysen is using “future” in a specific sense. Christ’s futureness is not to be conceived in a linear way according to the modern view of time — a view which itself is still bound by time. Yet Christ’s future is genuinely future in that it is really coming in time (as is our future). He is not simply the eternal one sitting on a parallel plane to time. He is the coming one (der Kommende), the eternal in time, the future here and now. In this way, Thurneysen is arguing that Christ is the future of all history, of every time and place, and as such is Lord of all. All our being and doing, our coming and going, our becoming and passing away is relativized and disrupted in its orientation towards Christ’s future. But, for Thurneysen, this future cannot be spoken of other than with reference to Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension — the great “christological determinations” of all time. “Other than eschatologically,” Thurneysen wrote, “Jesus Christ cannot be spoken about at all.”12 The opposite is equally true: other than christologically, the eschaton cannot be spoken about either. Our future is Christ’s future.

His christological eschatology determines theological anthropology. To be human is to be a creature bound by time. One exists in time and experiences time in a linear way in which the future and the past stretch infinitely away from one’s present — the forward-moving dot on this line. In time, one is an acting agent who can in some measure control or alter one’s future. And one is also acted upon so that one is also fundamentally dependent and limited — a fact foreshadowed by the inescapability of death. Yet, in light of Christ’s future, one’s self-consciousness in time is completely reoriented. One’s life is subject neither to fatalism and passivity, nor to individualistic autonomy, neither to nihilism and meaninglessness, nor to progressivist optimism. Rather, for Thurneysen, the Christian life, our existence in time, is characterised by hope, which is “the content of this [Christ’s] future”.13 To say hope has or “is” the content of the future is to say that hope is not some abstract idea, wishful thinking, or subjective vision: “hope” has particular content. It is the concrete coming of Christ’s future to us in time. In this way, hope is subjective, but for Thurneysen it is firstly objective: hope is the proclamation of the coming kingdom in Jesus Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection. This proclamation creates and inspires our subjective sharing in that hope.

A further anthropological consequence arises from Thurneysen’s eschatology. He rejects any doctrine of the immortality of the soul that equates the soul’s immortality with eternal life. “Eternal life is in no way in continuity with life here.” But there is, he claims, “a correlation between here and there.” That is to say two things: First, one cannot talk about eternal life as some separation between soul and body, whereby the soul lives on in infinitude. Such a conception for Thurneysen is simply bound by our linear view of time and does not take seriously either the finality of death, which is the limit of our existence, or the possibility of bodily resurrection. To understand one’s humanity christologically is to affirm the bodily resurrection, which is to say the whole person (Ganzheit), body and soul, is resurrected with Christ. Without the ensouled body, and without the embodied soul, the human being is not a human being.

The resurrection for which we hope is the resurrection of this human being, this life in all its particularity and uniqueness. The correlation consists between here and eternity, not because of some inherent divine spark in the individual but because in Christ, God’s future has really come to us. He is concerned with the redemption of this world. Christ’s future has become our future as we are drawn into his redemptive life and ministry by the Spirit. In this way, Thurneysen is wanting to affirm one’s personhood and the particularity of one’s existence — I am not simply dissolved or sublated into Christ’s future life. Yet the affirmation of one’s existence is never by virtue of its own merits or because of some inherent property within the human subject. It is dialectically tied to Christ’s life and vicarious humanity and through Christ to others. It follows that the church is not concerned with establishing some cultural ethic within time, a kind of moral code concerned with the pious elevation of the individual. The only “programme” is the continual orientation to Christ’s future, through which one’s personhood is affirmed and redeemed as a member of the new humanity in Christ. Right human living is therefore concerned with a new disposition (Haltung) within the waves of history towards the great eternal fact of life, Jesus Christ.

14 Ibid., 206-07. It is interesting to compare this passage with a footnote in his 1946 book, Die Lehre von der Seelsorge, in which he explicitly talks about the immortality of the soul. Here, Thurneysen argues that we should not deny the immortality of the soul simply because Platonism affirms it. The soul’s imperishability here refers to “the invisible spiritual reality to which man belongs”. In my mind, Thurneysen does not make a convincing argument for the soul’s immortality. However, he is still clear that the soul’s immortality does not mean that “man possesses the eternal life of God.” Without the body, the human being as unity of body and soul is completely called into question, regardless of the soul’s immortality. Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 56.

15 “Christus Und Seine Zukunft,” 192, 211.
**Christ the Lord of his church and of the state**

Unsurprisingly, Thurneysen’s focus in ministry centred on the event of God’s address in Jesus Christ. Christ speaks to his people by the Spirit, revealing himself as Lord and calling them to follow in faithful obedience. Thurneysen’s at-times single-minded focus on the event of proclamation is best understood in the context of the zeitgeist from which it emerged. In Europe, the era spanning the 1920s and 1930s was strongly ideological. There was a war of words. In my earlier chapters, we have already been introduced to a number of the prevalent ideologies at the time: the opposing traditions of Kant and Hegel that dominated the academy; the romantic subjectivism of Schleiermacher; the rigid dogmatism in the institutional church to the right and the sway of Marxist socialism in the church to the left; the zealous and patriotic war rhetoric during World War One and the corresponding anti-establishment disillusionment among younger generations. It was the age that, in conjunction with the austerity of the Great Depression, gave birth to National Socialism and gave Hitler a ready platform from which to deliver his rhetoric of hate and patriotic fervour. A human being was defined by the ideas to which they gave their allegiance. In this context, Thurneysen proclaimed the death of all human ideologies: Christ is Lord and he lays claim to the whole sphere of human life. We see the practical relevance of this assertion in his early ministry at Basel.

**Christ the Lord of his church**

Thurneysen was called as the Senior Minister to the Münster in the very heart of the Basel city in 1927. Almost every congregation in the Reformed Church in Basel during the time of Thurneysen’s ministry there was divided into ideological factions known as *Gemeindevereine*. These divisions were deeply entrenched at the Münster, which carried institutional and political significance in the city. It was the seat of the bishop prior to the Reformation and then, from 1530-1911, was the residing place of the *antistes*, the highest office in the synodal governance of the Swiss Reformed Churches at the time. First among equals, the *antistes* presided over the regional Synod. Even though the Senior Minister of the Basel Münster no longer carried such formal influence, the pulpit still “stood higher here than in other churches of the city.”

For this reason, the position was fiercely contended and politically fraught. It required careful navigation and pastoral sensitivity. The factionalism

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ran so deep that Leonhard Ragaz, who preceded Thurneysen at the Münster from 1902-1908, said once in a sermon: “in our church there is not even a foot-breadth of space for a man who does not want to belong to either party. We are not Christian communities. We are only party-communities.”\(^{17}\) The two parties were the traditionalists, called *die Positiven*, and the liberals, known as *die Reformer*. The schism ran right through the community from its governance to its worship. For elections to the Synod and to Parish Council, for instance, voting members were given two lists of candidates, each list corresponding to its respective *Gemeindeverein*.\(^{18}\) There were *positive* representatives and *kirchlich-fortschrittlich* representatives. Nowhere was this factionalism more obvious, however, than during the celebration of Communion, which affiliates of a particular faction would only attend if “their” minister was presiding.\(^{19}\)

Given the context, there is little surprise that Thurneysen’s election was controversial and drawn out. The traditionalist *Gemeindeverein* had become aware of and were impressed by Thurneysen when he delivered a lecture for them in early 1927. When the position for Senior Minister became available, his name was shortlisted as a possible replacement. Other more logical successors fell through and so Thurneysen unexpectedly became the favoured candidate. The initial vote for Thurneysen proved inconclusive so that the electoral commission decided to extend the process, this time presenting his name alongside another, liberal candidate. Thurneysen was genuinely surprised by the divisive result having preached well for the call.\(^{20}\) The main resistance came from the liberals, who saw Thurneysen as a Barthian and were adamant that they wanted “no such person in the sacred Münster pulpit!”\(^{21}\)

The process became malicious and personal when Thurneysen received an anonymous postcard with a poem:

> “Andere tragen den Bart,
> Doch du wirst vom Barthe getragen
> Blendend gleißt er
> Und drum irrlichtelirerest auch du.”

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\(^{17}\) My translation. Quoted in: *ibid.*, 136.


\(^{19}\) Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 3) 1930-1935, 3, 271, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 18 September 1932.

\(^{20}\) “Ich hatte einen strahlenden Sonntag, das Münster war voll, die Kanzeltreppe wurde erstiegen, ich sagte mein Sprüchlein ... ich wurde scheints in der ganzen Kirche gut verstanden, und nachher war jedermann überzeugt, die Sache sei nun im Blei.” *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930*, 476, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 23 March 1927.

\(^{21}\) *ibid.*, 475, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 23 March 1927.
Eng und steil ist die Treppe, 
die zur Münsterkanzel emporführt. 
Doch der begeisterte Clan 
baut den bequemeren Lift.”

Incensed on his friend’s behalf, Barth advised him to walk away. The advice came too late. With a sense of stoic resignation, Thurneysen wrote: “the sermon was held, I was engaged, and everything rolled with uncanny speed towards its end.” The final vote was 896 for, 213 against. All that remained was to actually go.

Thurneysen saw the contentiousness of the election less as a personal attack against him and more as the symptom of a deeper conflict at the Münster between “the gospel and humanism”. None other than the great humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, is buried in the Münster, and the humanist tradition, which Thurneysen saw in direct continuity with post-enlightenment liberal theology, was well established there. For Thurneysen, the conflict was concerned with nothing less than what stood at the centre of the community: loyalty to human words, ideologies, and traditions on the one hand, or faithfulness to the living and sovereign Word of God on the other. Not long after Thurneysen arrived, Erasmus’ epitaph was moved to a position directly opposite the pulpit in the nave — a powerful symbol for Thurneysen of the struggle between gospel and humanism. He was concerned that the ever-present resistance of the “Basler Herren” against “the good teaching” of the gospel would gain fresh sustenance from Erasmus’ new elevated status opposite the pulpit. Whether or not

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22 My translation:
“While others wear a beard 
you are worn by Barth 
brightly he glistens 
and therefore you too most jack-o-latarn-like. 
Narrow and steep are the steps 
that lead up to the Münster pulpit 
But the enthusiastic clan 
Builds a convenient lift.”
Ibid., 477, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 23 March 1927.


24 My translation. “Jener dein späterer Rat, doch in die entschlossenste Opposition zu gehen und alles liegen zu lassen, kam schon zu spät. Die Predigt was gehalten, ich war engagiert, und alles rollte mit unheimlicher Schnelligkeit seinem Ende entgegen.” Ibid., 486, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 6 April 1927.

25 Ibid.

26 In a letter to Barth, he wrote: “Und dann wird alles wieder beigesetzt, und – das ist die Hauptsache – an dieser Säule gegenüber soll das an einem verlorenen Pfeiler angebrachte Epitaph des Erasmus als an seinem ursprünglichen Orte wieder angebracht werden, so daß ich künftig nun den Erasmus als direkten Partner von der Kanzel aus mir gegenüber haben werde und alle Predigten an dies Epitaph zu halten sind … Hoffentlich stützt der tote Gegenspieler die Basler Herren nicht in ihrem immer wahrzunehmenden Widerstande gegen
Thurneysen was fair in his judgment of Erasmus is beside the point. Erasmus had become a symbol of humanistic optimism and the liberal theology built upon it. The saga concerning the epitaph is a penetrating illustration of the challenge that lay ahead for Thurneysen and highlights his often oppositional approach to it.

At Basel he entered into a divided community built on longstanding traditions and deeply rooted ideologies. Despite the challenges, however, he grew into the role. “Eduard Thurneysen,” Barth noted in 1935, “is in the best sense a bishop-like appearance.” In praise of his friend, Barth placed Thurneysen in the direct line of previous Basler antistes’ — an impressive list that originates with Johannes Oecolampadius. The transition to this “bishop-like appearance” was not without irony. In 1917, Thurneysen had lamented to Barth that the prophetic way carved by Pietist, David Spleiß, who was so powerful in his witness, amounted to nothing but a promotion to antistes. With the move to the Münster imminent, Thurneysen confessed to Barth the irony that he himself had taken a similar path. Barth responded that, despite their reluctance, Basel opened up more opportunities for them than they were earlier willing to admit. He made two biblical references: firstly, to the book of Jonah, suggesting Basel was Thurneysen’s Nineveh, to which God was calling him in spite of himself; and secondly, to 1 Corinthians 13. It is unclear which verses Barth is exactly referring to, but the implication seems to be that the years of the early dialectical theology emphasised prophesying truth, but at the expense of love. Certainly, the comparison seems apt when considering the strongly negative, dialectical preaching of Thurneysen’s Bruggen ministry. When talking about the transition to Basel, Barth may also have had verse 11 in mind: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” Barth’s possible insinuation here should not be thought of as a rebuke — the reference was directed against himself as well — so much as a recognition that they could no longer work at the fringes of the church, offering negative

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28 “Spleiß war doch anfangs auf dem prophetischen Weg, aber nicht entschlossen genug ... Es machte doch einen seltsamen Eindruck, wenn man seine Zeugnisse aus den Jahren der Kraft liest und dann weitergeht und sieht, daß es zu nichts Stärkerem kommt als eben zu einer Erweckung und Anstaltsgründung und endlich zum Antistes.” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 214, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 17 July 1917.
29 “Weißt du noch, wie wir im Aargau dachten über die staftfähig gewordenen Pietisten? Und nun sind wir selber so weit!” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 474, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 4 March 1927.
30 Ibid., 489, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 7 April 1927.
prophetic words from the edge. They were coming of age as it were. Their path took them into the church to serve it in humility and love — even in its fallibility and division — because it is (by no virtue of its own!) the community elected by God in Jesus Christ.

Thurneysen, in his ministry, sought to be faithful to the claim that the church is the church solely because God speaks and acts in its midst. Consequently he refused to be confined either by restrictive dogmatism to the right or rational positivism to the left. In his very first letter to Barth upon arriving in Basel, Thurneysen noted he heard his liberal colleague, Täschler, preach “to the left”, while a visiting preacher delivered a “highly positive sermon” “to the right.” The implication is that he saw himself holding a middle ground. That middle ground was not so much an ideological position as a refusal to be defined by any one faction. If he did follow a particular way, it was to give the proclamation of the Word centrality. Its centrality was preserved in the preaching of the sermon which is itself nothing but exegesis of scripture. As such it is “a book bound speech”. The sermon’s sole authority is the witness of the Bible in the words of which we encounter the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

Christ the Lord of the state

The Münster, with its prominence in the city, played an important civic role. Consequently, in issues of public theology, Thurneysen no longer had the freedom to operate prophetically and critically at the fringes of the institutional church. As he said in one treatise from 1932: “we should be peaceful: we are heard in what we say much more than we think — even from those who never sit in our pews. Outside in society, it is well known what the church says or does not say.” As the political climate in Europe intensified, the question of the relation between church and state came increasingly to the fore. The most obvious example, which I discuss more below, was the response of the church in Germany to the rise of National Socialism. However, the political situation in Switzerland was also deeply divided between far-right and

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31 For a helpful analysis of Thurneysen’s word-centred ecclesiology, see chapter 2 in: Rim, Gottes Wort, Verkündigung Und Kirche : Die Systematisch-Theologischen Grundlagen Der Theologie Eduard Thurneysens, 55ff.

32 “Zwischendurch hörte ich meinen Kollegen Täschler an zur Linken, und zur Rechten eine hochpositive Predigt des berühmten Fezer aus Tübingen am Missionsfest...” Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 510, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 22 July 1927.

33 Barth and Thurneysen articulate “their” way in the introduction to their third combined sermon volume: “Es ist jener Weg, den nach unserer Überzeugung die Predigt der Kirche in der Gegenwart immer bewußter und entscheidener gehen muß, den Weg fort von jeder Art Themapredigt und hin zur reinen Auslegungspredigt.” The preaching of the Word, which stood at the centre of his understanding of ministry, was nothing other than an attempt to faithfully exegete scripture. Barth and Thurneysen, Die Große Barmherzigkeit, 3. See also Thurneysen’s definition of the sermon as “a book-bound speech” in: Eduard Thurneysen, "Die Drei Homiletischen Grundregeln," Zwischen den Zeiten 11, no. 6 (1933).

far-left ideologies. Thurneysen was clear that the church must not side with any one ideology. Its task is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and to call the whole of society to repentance.

On 9\textsuperscript{th} November 1932, an aggressive anti-fascist protest ended catastrophically when parts of the Swiss Army, including some inexperienced recruits, fired live rounds into the crowd of demonstrators. Thirteen were killed and 65 were injured. At the time, Thurneysen was part of “The Social Study Commission of the Swiss Reformed Ministers’ Union” — a commission to explore issues of public theology and make recommendations to the church. A special meeting was called to address the events of the 9\textsuperscript{th} November regarding whether the church should offer a public response. Other than Thurneysen, the membership “almost entirely consisted of Religious Socialists”.\textsuperscript{35} Thurneysen drafted the letter on behalf of the Commission. The letter still had a religious-socialist leaning, which Barth criticised, but Thurneysen was aiming to moderate the situation which already “lent much too far to the left”.\textsuperscript{36} However, after the initial draft received a negative reaction from their French-Swiss colleagues who wanted to publish a “patriotic counter-declaration” alongside the initial \textit{Rundbrief}, Thurneysen removed himself from the process, not wanting to continue marching while “flanked by an entirely crooked, nationalistic announcement.”\textsuperscript{37}

Thurneysen’s drafted letter in response to the Genevan fusillade provides concrete insight into his political ethics at the time.\textsuperscript{38} His emphasis lies not on the church’s prophetic criticism from the fringes of society, but on the \textit{pastoral} responsibility of the church in the midst of and in service to the state.\textsuperscript{39} A couple of years later he argued that the state is the sphere in which the Word of God is proclaimed. From this starting point, the state exists “for the church” to proclaim the reality of Christ’s lordship over all human life.\textsuperscript{40} Conversely, the church serves the state as it proclaims the gospel. Influenced by Barth’s political theology, Thurneysen takes a typically Reformed position that sees church and state as separate but in complementary roles ordained by the sovereign Word of God. The state is a sign of sin in the world: the law is necessary to provide order so that human living does not descend into anarchy and violence — and yet the state must itself employ the use of violence in order to keep the law.\textsuperscript{41} State-sanctioned violence is a tragic distortion of God’s good ordering of

\textsuperscript{35} My translation. Ibid., 316, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 22 December 1932.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 367, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 16 February 1933.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} For a script of the letter see: ibid., 924ff.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 930.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 186.
human community. However, the state is also a sign of the reality of grace and the forgiveness of sins.\(^{42}\) The state demonstrates the lordship of Christ in that, even in our current sinful, violent existence, human beings are able to live in relative order for the good of all. Through the faithful witness of the church, the state is called time and time again to order society in anticipation of what is coming: the new polis, the new kingdom when Christ will reign in glory.

Consequently, the church walks a fine line in relation to the state. On the one hand, it must avoid aligning itself with any one political ideology or any one sector of society over others: the church is not sectarian but is for all people. In Thurneysen’s mind, while the tragedy of 9\(^{th}\) November was clearly the result of a failure of the state, the specific political and military leaders who oversaw the operation were not the only ones to blame. The events of the Genevan fusillade were the result of social and political tensions and growing intolerance from both sides of the political divide. The specific events of 9\(^{th}\) November were, for Thurneysen, a symptom of a widening rift in society and a deep “cluelessness and confusion” (\textit{Ratlosigkeit und Verworrenheit}).\(^{43}\) Rather than pointing the finger at particular individuals or at the government therefore, the church’s task is to call society back to Jesus Christ in whom there is order, abundant life, and peace. On the other hand, as was the case with the Confessing Church in Germany, there were “real confession situations” when the church was called to resist the state. These confession situations arose when the state no longer recognised the limits imposed on it but erected an absolutist claim over the whole of human life. The pastoral role of the church becomes one of resistance as its absolute allegiance to Christ the Lord brings it into direct conflict with other absolutist claims.

Thurneysen’s grappling with the issue of the relationship of church and state has an effect on his theological anthropology. By seeing the church within the state and as part of the state, Thurneysen sees a correlation between the ordered life of the faith community and the ordered life of human society in general. Both are ordered by the living Word of God under the lordship of Christ. The church carries out a missionary and vicarious ministry as a witness and sign in the rest of human society to what is universally true. On this basis, he is able to talk not only about Christian living in response to Christ, but about human living as Christ’s lordship is awakened to and established in all sectors of public life. The polis of the new humanity in Christ witnessed in the church bears a correlation to the polis of the state, which

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^{43}\) Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 3) 1930-1935, 3, 930.
itself is a “sign of the reality of grace through which God continues to preserve the sinful world.”

The locus for Thurneysen’s eschatological anthropology is the local church community. The church is an eschatological sign of the coming kingdom and the new humanity in Christ when we will be reconciled to God and to one another and when peace will reign in abundance. Even in its division and factionalism, the church continues to be this sign by virtue of the Word it proclaims. The faith community is the practical and pastoral context for learning what it is to be human before God and with others in right relationship. It is both a pastoral and a political community as the whole round of human life is claimed by Christ: pastoral, because in the church the individual is addressed by the Word as a child of God and called into new life-giving community; political, because this new community is a sign of the coming kingdom and the reign of Christ whose victory is the end of all powers and dominions. In the church, these pastoral and political elements come together in the formation of the new humanity. For Thurneysen, then, a theological anthropology must hold the personal and social together, neither emphasising the individual over the communal nor the communal over the individual. We have seen how Thurneysen embodied his christological convictions in his early ministry at Basel. Within the Münster community and in the public square he sought to place the command, the Anspruch, of God’s Word at the centre of all human life. We turn now from the practical outworking to the theoretical theological conversations occurring concurrently in the Zwischen den Zeiten group.

**Deconstructing the Menschgott**

The Zwischen den Zeiten journal (1923-1933) emerged out of a holiday conversation between Karl Barth, Eduard Thurneysen, and Friedrich Gogarten in the summer of 1922. At the time it was a product of the gathering momentum and growing collegiality of the new theological Aufbruch. Reflecting back on its inception, Barth wrote that the original intention was to promote a “theology of the Word of God” in opposition to the “liberal-positivist theology of neo-Protestantism” with its “Menschgott”. The contributors of the journal were united in their rejection of the presuppositions of modern theology and in their desire to honestly hear

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the Word of God, but they differed in their approach as to how to move forward. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the group began to fragment and theological differences emerged particularly with regard to anthropology. The subjectivist *Menschgott* needed to be deconstructed. There was no question among them that the truth of God was revealed by grace alone through Jesus Christ. Contestable though were the implications of this for modern anthropological problems. “What else did we actually want,” lamented Thurneysen, “other than to honestly hear the Word of God again? But even this honest hearing is evidently an entirely impossible, impenetrable thing.”

Invariably, Thurneysen aligned himself closely with Barth in the debates, however, because of his pastoral “Johannine” disposition, he played a vital mediating role. We see this with regard to both Gogarten and Brunner. In a letter to Barth regarding Gogarten, for instance, Thurneysen tried to look past the differences to the common ground they shared: “You don’t need to sit at the same bench as him [Gogarten],” he wrote to Barth, “but neither is he the most unpleasant guest at our theological table.” In this one metaphor Thurneysen both confirms his solidarity with Barth — they share the same “theological table” — while also encouraging ongoing dialogue with Gogarten who, fundamentally, sits at the same table. Even though Barth and Gogarten did not agree, Thurneysen contended that they were certainly not adversaries. He took a similar approach in response to the widening schism between Brunner and Barth. To Barth, he was openly critical of Brunner’s eristic theology, his infatuation with the Oxford Group, and his book *Natur und Gnade*. However, to Brunner he was more measured in his response. That it is not to say that Thurneysen was two-faced or insincere: Brunner was under no illusion that his friend did not agree with him. But, in contrast to Barth, Brunner felt like he had a friend in Thurneysen with whom he could talk honestly. He phrased it this way in a letter to Thurneysen:

“…you have in eminent measure the quality which is necessary for such new and dangerous things: a certain ‘instinct’ from the starting point of faith for what is generally right and wrong. I have often observed this and marvelled at it with a certain

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46 *de Vries, Gods Woord Verandert Mensen*, 135.


envy … in this you and Karl Barth are very similar, but you also have the gift which he lacks: to work together with and understand others."50

This “working with and understanding others” was more than a reflection on Thurneysen’s character. As I have argued in chapter one, Thurneysen’s own positions often emerged out of engaging in dialogue between contradictory viewpoints. He preferred to keep conversation with guests around the “theological table” — even the unpleasant ones! With Barth and Brunner for instance, he was able to acknowledge the strengths of the Oxford Group, not from a theological basis (for Thurneysen it could neither be justified nor rejected on doctrinal grounds), but from the perspective of pietistic praxis.51 As a pastor, he could recognise not only why it was such a popular movement but also why it was of value to the church and theology as a reminder that it serves a living, uncontrollable God. It was from this practical starting point that he sought common ground with Brunner.

Eventually though, Thurneysen’s loyalty to Barth led to his eventual estrangement with both Gogarten52 (in 1933) and Brunner (in the mid-1940s). In a heated letter following a confrontation in Wipkingen in 1942, Brunner wrote cuttingly:

“With Barthians collaboration is impossible … you are always good when you can be yourself and don’t need to play the bodyguard of Barth and Vischer. Then, honestly, you are the most intransigent of all three. It appears now to be your fate — why?”53

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50 My translation. “…du hast im eminenten Maß die Qualität, die für solche neuen und gefährlichen Dinge nötig ist: den sichern «Instinkt» aus dem Glauben heraus für das generaliter Richtige und generaliter Falsche. Ich habe das oft beobachtet und mit einem gewissen Neid bewundert … darin bist du und Karl Barth sehr ähnlich, hast aber auch die Gabe, die er nicht hat: mit anderen zusammenzuarbeiten und andere zu verstehen.” Brunner, "Letter Brunner to Thurneysen 1931 (Exact Date Unknown) (B38,103)."
51 Eduard Thurneysen, "Letter Thurneysen to Brunner, 3 February 1933 (B37,20)," (Basel: Briefwechsel Thurneysen-Brunner (N.L.290 B37-B38), Universitätsbibliothek, Basel Universität, 1933).
52 In response to the Deutsche Christen, the Zwischen den Zeiten group were divided. Barth and Thurneysen felt compelled to erect an unambiguous sign against the Deutsche Christen and any support for National Socialism. And so Barth initiated his withdrawal from Zwischen den Zeiten during a meeting attended by Thurneysen, Lempp (publisher) and Merz (editor). Gogarten was the only original contributor not present. The meeting ended not only with Barth’s and Thurneysen’s withdrawal but with the journal’s cessation. Gogarten was furious that he had not been invited to the meeting. Thurneysen tried to explain the original intention was purely about Barth’s withdrawal, but from then on his friendship with Gogarten had all but been severed. For a fuller account, including the minutes from the final meeting, see: Göckeritz, Friedrich Gogartens Briefwechsel Mit Karl Barth, Eduard Thurneysen Und Emil Brunner.
Brunner’s accusation reveals an ongoing tension in Thurneysen and perhaps one of his enduring weaknesses. His at-times blind loyalty to Barth veiled his naturally Johannine disposition — one of his greatest strengths — and stymied theological avenues he might otherwise have explored.54

No way from an anthropology to christology: In conversation with Gogarten

Between 1928 and 1932, Barth and Gogarten had an ongoing debate about anthropology. It began with Gogarten’s review of Barth’s Kirchliche Dogmatik im Entwurf (1927), in which he claimed that Barth lacked “an actual anthropology.”55 Then, a few months later, in 1929, Gogarten published in Zwischen den Zeiten an article entitled, Das Problem einer theologischen Anthropologie in which he argued that modern theology, in order to avoid “metaphysicisation” or “moralisation” of the gospel, must “place the problem of anthropology in the centre.”56 The “problem” to which he refers is the self-consciousness of the human being that had developed in the age of modernity. Theology, therefore, while its content is bound to scripture as the witness to Jesus Christ, responds to and holds at its centre a modern problem. Barth’s reply came in a substantial footnote in his first volume of Kirchliche Dogmatik (1932), which concluded with the assertion:

“…to understand God, ‘starting from man’ signifies either a thing impossible in itself, or one such as can only be described in the form of christology but not in the form of

54 Frank Jehle takes a rather unsympathetic view towards Thurneysen: “Thurneysen goss oft Öl ins Feuer und sprach herabsetzend über die wirklichen oder auch nur eingebildeten ‘Feinde’.” Frank Jehle, "Thurneysen, E.: "Das Römerbriefmanuskript Habe Ich Gelesen”," Theologische Literaturzeitung 142, no. 4 (2017): 395. His comment is not entirely justified. It is true, he often spoke critically, even scathingly, of Brunner’s and Gogarten’s theology to Barth but he always advocated maintaining dialogue and relationship. Regarding avenues that Thurneysen may otherwise have explored, see Rudolf Bohren’s interesting section on Thurneysen’s engagement with Jeremias Gotthelf: Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 110ff.


56 My translation. Gogarten sees a unique development in human history since modernity, which has fundamentally changed the way we view our humanity: “the consciousness of one’s own, inner, personal being-alive, the knowledge of the historicity of the human being”. Consequently all human life has undergone an “anthropomorphisation” (Vermenschlichung) and faith has undergone a “personalisation” (Verpersönlichung). He sees Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “anthropological orientation of all theology” as the first attempt to recognise this. His theology is therefore “of epoch-making significance”. While Gogarten is clear that he does not believe one should follow Schleiermacher “one step on his way”, neither can one return to before Schleiermacher and simply get around the whole anthropological problem of modernity. It follows for Gogarten that, while theological anthropology has its own content bound to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it must proceed with the modern anthropological problem at its centre. Gogarten, "Das Problem Einer Theologischen Anthropologie," 504-05. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher’s The Christian Faith which begins with “religious self-consciousness”. He does not deal explicitly with Christology and soteriology until page 374! Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H.R. Makintosh and J.S. Stewart, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928).
Both Gogarten and Barth wanted to uphold a dialectical understanding of God and humanity, namely, that because of Christ, who is fully God and fully human in one person, one cannot understand the human being apart from God; and likewise one cannot talk of God apart from the human being. Barth, however, took exception to Gogarten’s claim that one can “already” understand humanity prior to knowing God. The dialectical knowledge of our humanity, Gogarten reasoned, does not preclude prior knowledge of our humanity through philosophy but rather includes and takes account of it.

Thurneysen’s own response to Gogarten’s anthropology came in his inaugural address as a lecturer in practical theology at the University of Basel shortly after Gogarten’s work was published. My reason for saying so is partly conjecture — Thurneysen does not mention Gogarten by name. However, Thurneysen was aware of the ongoing conversation between Barth and Gogarten and had read Gogarten’s article. For a lecture on christology and ecclesiology, he spends a lot of time addressing questions of anthropology, explicitly rejecting Schleiermacher’s anthropological orientation to theology which Gogarten saw as “epoch-making”. The title, Christus und die Kirche, is highly suggestive of Thurneysen’s position: for him, anthropology — the question of human existence — must arise from the church and its witness to Christ. There is no theological anthropology that precedes Christ. Rather christology and ecclesiology are the proper grounds for understanding the human being as a forgiven sinner before God. Any theological anthropology is “church anthropology” but as such it is never less than christological anthropology.

Thurneysen begins by asking what the church is from a phenomenological perspective. It is a people searching for an answer to the one, great mystery of life, which is generically called “God”. This “great question”, this “deep questionability of existence” is universal to humanity. It arises from the Lebensproblematik: the deep need and suffering of existence...
now. On purely phenomenological grounds the church is no different from any other religious
group or general philosophy which seeks to give expression to this searching for the ultimate
meaning of human life and existence. The starting point is notably pastoral. Thurneysen
sought to speak into the real problematic of life for concrete people of his day. He regularly
reflected on and wrote about *der Mensch von heute* (the modern human being) — perhaps
reflecting the lasting influence on Thurneysen of Troeltsch’s philosophy of history.63 The
answer to the *Lebensproblematik* is only to be found in one place. Drawing on the Reformers,
Luther and Calvin, Thurneysen argues that the exclusive claim of the church is that “God is
only to be found in one place: in the place which is called and is Jesus Christ. Only there, in
this highly concrete place of Jesus Christ can the human question of the ultimate purpose of
existence really come to rest.”64 No phenomenological, philosophical, or religious grounds
can validate this claim. And yet the exclusive claim of scripture that God is revealed in Jesus
Christ is a stumbling block to all human knowing.65 God is not a possibility at the end of a
long human searching. Rather the church arises from the “exclusively asserted reality of the
already-found answer.”66 It is “already-found” because it is *already given*. The exclusivity of
God’s gracious self-revelation also reveals our utter inability to speak of God from the
starting point of our own humanity. By crossing the chasm, Christ reveals the wholly
otherness of God who is entirely beyond human knowing other than by grace.

According to Thurneysen, this is a “critical anthropological insight”. Humanity, in its quest
for meaning, is not only defined by a still-not-knowing (*Nochnichtwissen*), which leaves open
the possibility of knowing through some intellectual effort, but also by a final being-cut-off
(*Abgeschnittensein*) “from God and from the entire purpose of existence, which comes to rest
in God”.67 Not only is our knowledge of God dependent on Christ, but also true knowledge of
ourselves. “The entire purpose of existence”, the ultimate answers to the human condition, lie

63 See for example:
"Von Der Stellung Der Heutigen Jugend Zur Religion," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 7 (1929).
*Ders Mensch Von Heute Und Die Kirche*.
"Kirche Und Offenbarung," *Die Furche* Jg. 22, no. H. 1 Jan/Feb (1936).
*Die Verkündigung Des Wortes Gottes in Unserer Zeit*.
64 My translation. “...daß Gott nur an einer Stelle zu finden sei, an der Stelle, die Jesus Christus heißt und ist.
Nur dort, nur am diesem höchst konkreten Orte Jesus Christus kann die Frage des Menschen nach dem letzten
Ziel seines Daseins wirklich zur Ruhe kommen.” *Christus Und Die Kirche*, 178-79.
66 “...sondern es geht aus von der behaupteten und zwar exklusiv behaupteten Wirklichkeit der bereits
67 “Nicht nur ein Nochnichtwissen des Menschen um den in Gott verborgenem Sinn des Lebens also handelt es
sich, ein Nochnichtwissen, das durch tiefer dringende Erkenntnisarbeit aufzuheben wäre, sondern um ein
endgültiges Abgeschnittensein des Menschen von Gott und den in ihm ruhenden Sinn, des ganzen Daseins, ein
beyond the limits of human knowing and sensing. For Thurneysen, sin is humanity’s “no-longer-standing-in-relationship-with-God” (Nicht-mehr-mit-Gott-in-Beziehung-Stehen). There is an “absolute eclipse” (absolute Verfinsterung) in our knowing. The “absoluteness” of sin cuts to the very heart of our humanity. On these grounds he rejects the theological anthropology of the 19th century which came to fullest expression in Friedrich Schleiermacher. This anthropology, he contended, had diluted the effect of sin so that the chasm between God and humanity was only “almost un-bridgeable”. There remains in humanity an “original, somehow ‘creaturely’ (Schöpfungsmäßig) continuity of the human being with the God enthroned beyond all sin”.68 The “soul”, in this understanding, is the residual divine spark in each of us, the original “God-in-us” which remains untarnished by sin.

There is much at stake here for Thurneysen: nothing less than the very personhood and aseity of God. If there were some inherent continuity in the human being with God, God would no longer be free and sovereign but bound to our human searching, an object of investigation. God would be reduced either to a mere impersonal ground of being (Wesensgrund) or to a super-ego (Über-Ich) of the human being — a mere amplification of our own reason.69 Rather, argues Thurneysen, God is “himself” and in this “being-himself”, in his “aseity”, God is person: “his own, powerful and acting divine ego.”70 By the phrase “powerful and acting divine ego” Thurneysen emphasises the aseity of God, whose being and acting is not contingent on human being and acting. God enters into relationship with humankind in God’s loving freedom.

While Thurneysen does not explicitly mention Gogarten, he is clear on his position: if one’s anthropology is grounded in anything other than Jesus Christ, the theological implications are immense: “everything rides on anthropology.”71 Thurneysen wants to preserve God’s otherness, God’s freedom, God’s personhood and in doing so wants to affirm something central to our humanity, that is, our own personhood as beings created for communion with God. There is no true knowing of God — and therefore no true knowing of ourselves — apart from being persons in relationship. For Thurneysen, therefore, instead of some modern

68 “...eine letzte ursprüngliche, irgendwie «schöpfungsmäßig» gedachte Kontinuität des Menschen mit dem jenseits aller Sünde thronenden Gotte bestehen bleibe.” Ibid., 186.
69 Ibid., 186-87.
70 My translation. “Nun aber ist Gott hier ... weder unser Wesensgrund noch unser Über-Ich, sondern er ist sich selbst, er ist in diesem Sichselbstsein, in seiner Aseität Person, sein eigenes, mächtiges und handelndes göttliches Ich.” Ibid., 187.
71 “Es ist nochmals die Anthropologie, auf deren Boden sich hier alles entscheidet.” Ibid., 188-89.
anthropological problem, everything becomes centred on God’s turning-towards us (Zuwendung), God’s revealing himself (Sich Offenbaren) in Jesus Christ, through whom humanity is reconciled to God. Revelation is itself reconciliation — true knowledge is bound up in our new relationship with God through Christ.

Typically for Thurneysen, he finishes by pointing to the pastoral implications. If one begins elsewhere than God’s coming to us in Christ, elsewhere than God’s reconciling work, then true knowledge is ultimately dependent on some special human effort: an intellectual ascent of reason or a mystical descent into oneself. Rather, the mystery of the church is not at the end of some impressive intellectual quest or pious searching (a mystery which would then be out of reach to most people), but in the midst of ordinary life where God meets us: “the mystery of the church is communion with Jesus Christ himself.”

It is “real communion” and that means for Thurneysen, communion that takes account of and takes place in the full reality of human existence in all its humbleness, its banality, its veiledness, and its frailty.

The humilitas of justification, the hiddenness of faith: In conversation with Brunner

While Gogarten was driven by the problem of anthropology as it arose from philosophy of religion and philosophy of history, Brunner was concerned much more practically with the subjective faith experience of believers. In what way could one’s faith experience be a reliable witness to God’s salvific work in the world — for ourselves and for others? In 1932, Emil Brunner attended a meeting of the Oxford Group in Ermatingen and there got to know its founder, the American Evangelist Frank Buchman. He was greatly enamoured by the movement and wrote enthusiastically to Thurneysen shortly after the meeting. From Brunner’s perspective the movement did not suffer from moralism or legalism like other pietistic awakening movements. Everything is seen, he said, “from the reconciliation of Christ” and yet proceeds with a distinctly Reformed emphasis on the energeia tu Christu and the new creative power of the Spirit. The central concern, Brunner claimed, was the real becoming new (Neuwerden) of the believer through the insertio into Christ by the Holy Spirit.

For Brunner, something real and genuine was occurring in the movement, which he

73 In the early 1930s, the Oxford Group, founded by the American Evangelist Frank Buchman, rose to prominence and became particularly active in Switzerland. The movement, later known as Moral Re-armament, was not itself an organised church but rather a gathering of like-minded individuals from a range of churches, whose meetings focused on confession, Christian conversion, and God’s active guidance through the Holy Spirit. See: Bohren, Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 156. And: de Vries, Gods Woord Verandert Mensen, 122ff.
could only compare with the healing ministry of Blumhardt Sr. in Möttlingen decades earlier. The movement was concerned not so much with doctrine about the Holy Spirit but with the real transformation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals resulting in concrete change.

Thurneysen’s initial response was, unlike Barth, “very, very restrained and amiable”, in short, “Johannine.”\(^{75}\) Barth saw the Oxford Group, with its emphasis on human experience and moral betterment, as elevating subjective experience to the same order as the scriptural witness and as trying to make the gospel plausible. In his short 1936 work, *Kirche oder Gruppe*, Barth drives a clear wedge between the church and the movement.\(^{76}\) Thurneysen, however, wanted to be more accommodating, which he was in two ways: first, he saw the movement as an important rebuke against the “intellectualism” of his and Barth’s theology — “and this carries weight!” Thurneysen wrote.\(^{77}\) Secondly, as mentioned above, he argued the movement could not be accepted or rejected on theological grounds because theology is concerned with doctrine that responds to the Word of God in scripture and proclaimed in the church. The experiences witnessed to in the Oxford Group genuinely “happen”, but “in the moment” and so cannot be qualified or used as the basis for a doctrinal theory. It is “pietistic praxis”, spiritual experience, which is to say, a reminder that the Christian faith is a living, personal, practical faith awakened in believers by the living Spirit — but that is the most that can be or should be said of it theologically.\(^{78}\)

Thurneysen’s refusal to even try to theoretically justify or reject the Oxford Group, was based on a theological conviction of how one’s subjective experiences relate to the work of the Holy Spirit. While Brunner wanted to maintain a direct connection (and thereby open up the possibility of making *theological* claims on the basis of experience), Thurneysen maintained the connection is only indirect. He calls this the *hiddenness of faith and the humilitas of justification*.\(^{79}\) That is, one perceives one’s lived experiences in faith as caused

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\(^{75}\) Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 3) 1930-1935, 3, 260, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 11 September 1932.


\(^{77}\) Eduard Thurneysen, "Letter Thurneysen to Brunner, 8 September 1932 (B37,19)." (Basel: Briefwechsel Thurneysen-Brunner (N.L.290 B37-B38), Universitätsbibliothek, Basel Universität, 1932).


\(^{79}\) “Aber, aber: das wissen wir doch, und das darf noch keinen Augenblick vergessen werden, und das wird doch unsern Jubel über solche Ereignisse zum Mindesten nicht so eindeutig laut werden lassen ... das auch
by God, but there is no way to empirically prove it. Just as there is no way from anthropology to christology, so there is no way from subjective experience to pneumatology. A miraculous healing does not prove conclusively that God caused the healing — that is a matter of faith for the believer. In this sense, we live and genuinely experience our being forgiven sinners, justified in Christ and being born again by the Spirit — but only ever in the unquantifiable moment. The movement of God’s Spirit can never be enshrined in our human experiences but only encountered.

Thurneysen’s reservations came to fuller expression in an article entitled, Führung: Zur Frage der Geistesleistung. Like Barth, Thurneysen argued that if one can genuinely talk of the Spirit’s guidance, it must proceed on the foundation of the scriptural witness rather than one’s subjective experience. Human history does not stand in continuity with the biblical witness, rather all history stands opposite (gegenüber) the biblical witness, oriented towards it and addressed by it. The pastoral implications are significant: if the distance between our history and biblical history is relativised or dissolved altogether, then scripture loses its unique authority as containing the Word of God. Our experiences are placed on the same level as those of the scriptural stories so that “God’s guidance of the human being is only a possibility” within “a sea of human happenings”. Consequently there must be a distinction between the history of scripture (Apostelgeschichte) and the history of God’s victory in Jesus Christ (Siegesgeschichte). Apostelgeschichte has no extension into history because of its uniqueness in containing the eternal revelation of God. But God’s Siegesgeschichte certainly extends into all history insofar as people awaken to and live in light of (and therefore really experience!) the victory of Jesus Christ, whose victory stands over every time and place. In that sense, one’s experiences are genuinely a sharing in God’s Siegesgeschichte but only insofar as they witness as a sign to God’s being-with-us in Jesus Christ. The scripture’s authority in claiming that God has indeed come to be with us is dependent on its being a verbum alienum — a word from outside our human experiences. Only as such is it the ground of both comfort and assurance over the entirety of human life. God’s being with someone is


Ibid., 91.
not somehow dependent on or limited to their subjective “mountain top” experiences of the Spirit. God is with them in mundanity and suffering as well.

Thurneysen wants to affirm the particularities of one’s life. He wants to affirm God’s presence in the ordinary and the mundane. It is truly the concrete human being who is led by God. And therefore God’s leadership is no abstract or intellectual fact removed from day-to-day existence. God’s active guidance is a thoroughly practical and grounded truth. Like Brunner, Thurneysen is concerned with the believer. But, unlike Brunner, Thurneysen fiercely guards against egocentrism or any attempt to understand God from the starting point of one’s own experience. “There are not so much experiences which we people make with the Bible,” Thurneysen wrote, “rather there are experiences which the Bible makes with us people.”82 One cannot, in other words, co-opt scripture to validate one’s own lifestyle or worldview. Rather scripture, as containing the Word of God, reveals God’s good will and intention. God’s guidance by the Spirit conforms the believer — “takes the human being into his service” — to God’s missional intention which is the coming kingdom of God on earth. God’s guidance therefore has particular content and a particular agenda. God is not interested in serving my purposes. In being led by God, my life becomes an extension of God’s Siegesgeschichte in history, a sign that “documents” God’s coming kingdom in time.83 As such my life, in all its particularity, is brought into “order” (Ordnung). I am enabled to live into my identity as forgiven sinner in Jesus Christ.84 This being brought into “order” means that one’s life is shaped, conformed, structured according to God’s will. Understood correctly, it is unfair I think to accuse Thurneysen of not taking the empirical situation of the individual seriously. One’s subjective experiences are important for him — but they cannot be the starting point for understanding God or one’s own humanity. Rather one’s own experiences are given meaning and validation under the light of the gospel through the awakening power of the Spirit. Again, the truth of one’s humanity is a living, practical, relational truth grounded in the life of faith before God.

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The discussions with Gogarten and Brunner are important for providing the theological background out of which Thurneysen’s christological anthropology emerged. In both

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82 “Es sind sozusagen nicht so sehr Erlebnisse, die wir Menschen mit der Bibel machen, sondern es sind Erlebnisse, die die Bibel mit uns Menschen macht...” ibid., 98.
83 “…Ereignisse, die den Fortgang der Siegesgeschichte des Wortes Gottes auf Erden dokumentieren.” Ibid.
84 “…daß trotz allem und allem mein Leben in Ordnung gebracht ist und immer neu gebracht wird in der Vergebung der Sünden.” Ibid., 100.
conversations he proceeded on the same christocentric grounds as Barth while also upholding and validating the real, lived experiences of Christians within the community of faith. In his deconstruction of the Menschgott, Thurneysen challenged modernist individualism which placed the thinking and feeling human subject at the centre of reality. In place of an individualistic conception, Thurneysen advocates a fundamentally relational conception of the human being as person-in-relationship. For Thurneysen, true knowledge of human nature is dialectically bound to the living and personal God through the person of Jesus Christ. We learn what it is to be human as we are addressed by God and invited into relationship. In this way, his anthropology is from the ground up a practical anthropology while not being held captive to what is empirically verifiable through human experience. The proper beginning point for theological anthropology is neither the existential questioning nor the subjective experiences of the individual — the proper beginning point is the real communion “with Jesus Christ himself” in reality.85

Under the claim of Jesus Christ: responding to the German Church Struggle

As the situation in Germany worsened, Barth became deeply embroiled in the German Church Struggle. He felt compelled to unambiguously oppose the Deutsche Christen and any theology that endorsed the authority of the Nazi state. This conviction, shared by Thurneysen, led to their withdrawal from Zwischen den Zeiten and initiated the journal’s dissolution in September 1933. Barth’s reason for withdrawing was that various contributors to the journal espoused views that were either sympathetic to or explicitly aligned with the Deutsche Christen. “With Gogarten, for example,” Barth commented during the final meeting, “the critical heretical claims as I see them have been there all along. The decisive political assertion … is the identity of the law of God with the law of the present German State.”86 In Barth’s mind, one can no longer even sit down at the same theological table as such people.87 In contrast to his earlier attempts to maintain dialogue, Thurneysen is now in staunch agreement with Barth:

87 “Mit solchen Leuten kann man nicht mehr an einem Tisch zusammen zu theologischer Verhandlung sich niedersetzten.” Ibid.
“I am of the opinion that a sign must in fact be erected that unequivocally shows what the struggle is about. And I also see the sole possibility to erect a sign as the exit from the common house [Zwischen den Zeiten] … where such assertions appear in such unambiguity, they must be contradicted, there are no agreements, there is only sharp dissociation.”

Earlier that year Barth published as a supplement to Zwischen den Zeiten a manifesto entitled Theologische Existenz Heute, which he wrote against the political ideology of the Third Reich. The manifesto was remarkably successful and in the space of months went through numerous editions. Initially it was planned as a stand-alone piece but as it gathered momentum, Barth and Thurneysen released it again as the first volume in a monograph series by the same name. The new series was edited jointly by Barth and Thurneysen until 1936 and then by Thurneysen alone until 1939. Thurneysen’s major involvement both in the decline of Zwischen den Zeiten and in the establishment of Theologische Existenz Heute is important for understanding his “christological concentration” during these years. He very much saw himself fighting the same cause as Barth and he did so in two main ways: first, by offering support to Barth and the Bekennende Kirche in Germany through contributing theological works and through editing the monograph series; second, by facilitating similar conversations across the border in Switzerland.  

For Thurneysen the Anspruch of Christ stood in direct contradiction to the Totalitätsanspruch of the German State. His contributions to Theologische Existenz Heute explore the practical outworking, the Lebensweisheit, of human life lived in response to this claim. With what remains of this chapter, I look at three publications in which Thurneysen develops this theme.

**Die Kraft der Geringen (1934)**

Significantly, Thurneysen’s first contribution to Theologische Existenz Heute was neither a political manifesto nor even an academic article but a collection of three sermons. It should come as no surprise: for Thurneysen, the pulpit is the political arena in which the coming

88 My translation. “Ich bin der Meinung, dass in der Tat ein Zeichen aufgerichtet werden müsse, das unzweideutig anzeigt, um was heute der Kampf geht. Und auch ich sehe als einzige Möglichkeit, ein Zeichen zu errichten, den Auszug aus dem gemeinsamen Hause ... Wo solche Sätze in solcher Eindeutigkeit auftreten, da muss widersprochen werden, da gibt es kein Paktieren, sondern nur scharfe Abgrenzung.” Ibid., 403-04.


90 "Lebendige Gemeinde Und Bekenntnis,” 5.

91 Die Kraft Der Geringen: Drei Predigten.
kingdom is heralded. As such a sermon is deeply political. In each of the sermons, Thurneysen erects the eschatological reality in Christ as the decisive fact of existence. God’s victory in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins is the hidden mystery of all life that is revealed in the event of proclamation.\textsuperscript{92} The corresponding disposition of human existence to this revelation is praise. The crying out (Schreien) of the human being is no longer a yearning for the God who is absent, as it was in the Leutwil years, but a childlike and inarticulate cry of praise to the God who is present and who reigns as Sovereign.\textsuperscript{93} In the midst of creation, the human being is called to give praise to God the Creator and Redeemer. As the community awakened to God’s sovereignty, the church therefore exercises a priestly and vicarious ministry, voicing the praise of all creation and pointing in hope to the day when all creatures on heaven and earth will join in the cacophony of praise. The praise offered in the church is a participation in the ministry of Christ to the Father.\textsuperscript{94} Christ is the true human being who, in his faithful obedience, offers his life to God as a self-offering of praise. Through his condescension into the depths of human existence and ascension to the throne of God, the whole of human life has been sanctified and lifted up with Christ as an offering to God. In an article published the following year, Thurneysen put it in these words: “Through this way [of Jesus Christ], we are, in the whole extent of our life-needs, connected to our home in the light.”\textsuperscript{95} The liturgical response of praise, arising from the lips of the meek, is a sharing in the life and ministry of Christ to the Father and as such is the source of both pastoral comfort and political resistance in the midst of suffering and evil. In the act of praise, the community is lifted with Christ by the Spirit into communion with the Father. We becomes tethered to our eschatological identity, our lives hid with Christ in God. From this tethering point, we are able to re-engage with the real needs of life without being consumed by them.

**Lebendige Gemeinde und Bekenntnis (1935)**

Alongside praise, the human being under the claim of Christ the Lord is called to confession. Initially an address delivered to the positive Gemeindeverein at the Münster, Thurneysen published an article in 1935 entitled, *Lebendige Gemeinde und Benkenntnis*.\textsuperscript{96} The piece was strongly influenced by the recently released Barmen Declaration, in the composition of which Barth had a central role. The first half reads like a practical-theological exposition of the

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\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{96} Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 3) 1930-1935, 3, 815, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 21 January 1935.
Declaration while the second half, which makes explicit mention of Barmen, involves a particular discussion of the Swiss situation. According to the Barmen Declaration, Jesus Christ is the assurance (Zuspruch) of the forgiveness of sins and as such is the claim (Anspruch) of God over the whole of life.\(^\text{97}\) So too, Thurneysen talks about the total claim (totalen Anspruch) of the truth of Christ over the lives of Christians, which is a direct challenge to the Totalitätsanspruch of nation and state.\(^\text{98}\) The total claim of Christ also arises from the knowledge of forgiven sin.\(^\text{99}\) In that sense, “confessing” is firstly confession of sin before the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, in whom forgiveness is assured. Thurneysen emphasises that confessing (Bekennen), which necessarily follows a knowing (Kennen), is not only something intellectual and cerebral. It is “something practical, something which reaches into life, something which the whole human being participates in”.\(^\text{100}\) In that sense confession is the ongoing process of living (Lebensvorgang) in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins.\(^\text{101}\) Here for Thurneysen, knowledge and ethics go hand in hand. To truly know oneself as a forgiven sinner and a child of God is to live according to that reality within the church, the community of forgiven sinners.

This practical truth — that one is a forgiven sinner — is also a deeply relational truth in that the knowledge itself reconciles human beings to God and to one another creating real community. In this consists the faith community’s livingness. The church is a community that is continually created as the truth of Christ is proclaimed.\(^\text{102}\) The revelation is itself reconciliation of the people with God and one another. So the sermon leads to sacrament:

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97 Cf. These II: “Wie Jesus Christus Gottes Zuspruch der Vergebung aller unserer Sünden ist, so und mit gleichem Ernst ist er auch Gottes kräftiger Anspruch auf unser ganzes Leben.” “Barmer Bekenntnis,” www.barmen34.de/barmerbekenntnis.

98 “Man redet heute von dem Totalitätsanspruch, der in der politischen Sphäre von Volk und Staat her an den Menschen ergeht ... Aber eines ist gewiß: rechte Christen haben das, was ihnen in Christus geschenkt wurde, nie anders verstanden als so, daß die Christuswahrheit mit Recht und in Wirklichkeit einen solchen totalen Anspruch an sie richtet.” Thurneysen, “Lebendige Gemeinde Und Bekenntnis,” 5-6.

99 Cf. Ibid., 8.

100 “Bekennen ist also ganz gewiß nicht nur etwas Intellektuelles, etwas Geistiges, sondern etwas Praktisches, etwas, das ins Leben eingreift, etwas, bei dem der ganze Mensch beteiligt ist.” Ibid., 4.

101 Ibid., 8.

102 It is interesting to note here another exchange between Thurneysen and Brunner in 1934 on ecclesiology. Brunner argued that, while Barth and Thurneysen believed the church is only there where the Word of God is proclaimed, the church is only there where the Word of God is believed. For him, the emphasis shifts to the subjective response of faith. In his reply, Thurneysen wanted to emphasise faith no less emphatically than Brunner. But for Thurneysen, the proclamation itself creates the faith community. Therefore it always precedes the response of faith. With the practice of baptism, for example, Thurneysen argued that of course it is by far preferable if there is a receptiveness of faith to what is happening in the baptism. But he would never deny baptism because of a perceived lack of faith: the baptism itself has a converting power. If this converting and awakening power of the creative Word of God is removed from the centre of the faith community, then there must be some other, more fundamental ground on which the community exists prior to proclamation. For Thurneysen this is an untenable position. Cf. Emil Brunner, “Letter Brunner to Thurneysen 16th June 1934
“The sermon is not an inflammatory speech (Agitation) for a religious programme and the community which gathers around the sermon is no political party following a leader (Führer). Rather: the faith community is a crowd, a people, which lacks any leader and any programme because God himself in so far as he is proclaimed, places his truth among the people in the power of the Spirit … this becoming-present of God among his people … is the coming-together of the community before their God and with their God in sacrament and prayer … here communion with God occurs. …In sacrament and prayer the community confesses: reconciliation is not only promised, it has occurred and it is occurring.”

This remarkable passage highlights the political and ethical implications of Thurneysen’s Christo- and ecclesiocentric anthropology. In the service of Word and sacrament, the truth that one is a forgiven sinner is proclaimed creating radically new communion with God and others. There is no hierarchy here because God himself guides and gathers God’s people calling them to confess Christ as Lord and Saviour.

**Bergpredigt (1936)**

*Bergpredigt* is of a piece with *Lebendige Gemeinde und Bekenntnis* in that both arose in response to the Barmen Declaration in the context of the wider debate on law and gospel in Germany at the time. Philip Ziegler argues that *Bergpredigt* can be viewed “as an attempt to vindicate Barmen II as an honest republication of the essential evangelical truth of the Sermon on the Mount.” Thurneysen’s exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount was published the year before Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s well-known *Nachfolge* (1937). Both argue for a christocentric interpretation against any moralistic or legalistic reading of the sermon. For Thurneysen, the definitive interpretive key for the sermon is who delivers it. It is none other than Jesus Christ, the Bringer of God’s kingdom and the Fulfiller of the Law. As such, the sermon is not simply a sharpening or completion of the Old Testament law, enshrining a

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103 "Und darum ist die Predigt nicht eine Agitation für ein religiöses Programm, und die Gemeinde, die sich um diese Predigt schart, ist nicht eine Partei, die einem Führer folgt, sondern: die Gemeinde ist eine Schar, ein Volk, be idem alle Führer und alle Programme fehlen, weil Gott selber, indem von ihm gepredigt wird, seine Wahrheit in der Kraft seines Geistes unter die Menschen stellt ...dieses Gegenwärtigwerden Gottes unter seinem Volke ... ist deas Zusammenkommen der Gemeinde vor ihrem Gott und mit ihrem Gott im Sakrament und im Gebet ... hier Gemeinschaft mit Gott stattfindet ... In Sakrament und Gebet bekennt die Gemeinde: es wird Versöhnung nicht nur verheißen, sondern Versöhnung hat stattgefunden und findet, indem sie verkündigt wird, immer wieder statt." "Lebendige Gemeinde Und Bekenntnis," 12-13.

104 Ziegler, "Not to Abolish, but to Fulfil," 282.
moral code of right living before God. It is, rather, gospel “in the form of law”. To say that Christ fulfils the law means that Christ accomplishes it for us, on humanity’s behalf. In his earthly life, from crib to cross, Christ lives in perfect obedience in response to God’s will. “He has erected the sign of his life’s obedience among us,” Thurneysen writes. “In this way he proclaims and brings us the thing itself to which his obedience points as a token [Zeichen]: the coming reign.” In other words, Christ both establishes God’s kingdom on earth, reconciling humanity with God, and also offers the true human response on our behalf, his obedience a living out of his perfect communion with God by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Thurneysen talks about Christ’s faithful obedience as “a sign” or “token” [Zeichen] of the coming kingdom. Every aspect of his lived humanity, which is lived for us, is a witness to and assurance of the reconciled communion between humanity and God through Christ. The sign is not just an indication of an abstract or general truth. The sign is itself the concretisation of human life in perfect union with God. His human life as “sign”, effects the very reality it witnesses to.

Thurneysen speaks of our lives as signs too, though in a secondary sense:

“We should not think that we could and would have to erect once again for our own part this thing [token] erected by him and him alone. But we should profess this token [Zeichen] of his, the token of his life’s cause, the token of his life’s obedience. And that will of necessity mean that the struggle of the coming kingdom of God against the kingdoms of this world has laid hold of our own life and now calls for tokens coming from us, erected by us in our life, as tokens [Zeichen] of our being requisitioned by the token [Zeichen] of Jesus.”

The purpose of human living, then, is not moral — to do the right thing before God, to fulfil the law, to imitate Christ — but missionary — to be, by virtue of God’s grace, a witness and a sign through our lives of God’s kingdom coming near. In this language, Thurneysen upholds the importance of obedience, but not for its own sake, or rather, not for the sake of one’s own salvation. Our whole lives are requisitioned, claimed (ergriffen), by Christ, and therefore one’s obedience is “on the basis of grace”. Does the language of “sign”, however,

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107 Translation by William Childs Robinson, Sr. Here he translates the word “Zeichen” as “token”, which elsewhere translates as “sign”. The Sermon on the Mount, 74. Cf. the original German: “Die Bergpredigt,” 48.
rob one’s life of any real significance? And in what sense is a “sign” a real instance of the thing itself? Or does God remain somehow absent? On the contrary, the “sign” is an indication of the real presence of the thing signified. In the same way that a tree moves and sways as a sign of the wind, so too a person’s life lived in generous and selfless obedience is a sign of the Spirit’s awakening and reconciling power, bringing one “under the fulfilment” of Christ. The Christian is never anything more than a sinner, but a sinner laid hold of by grace who is at every moment, by faith, enabled to live as a witness to that grace. In this way, our lives become a *demonstration*, that is, “an action that comes from and points to the entirety of our life laid hold of by this obedience of Jesus, testifies to it, answers and corresponds to it on our human, sinful plane.”

As *demonstration*, one’s living is deeply political as it becomes a living sign of the struggle of the coming kingdom [*Reich*] against the kingdoms [*Reiche*] of the earth.

*In these three publications, Thurneysen explores life-in-community as a sign of the eschatological new humanity in Christ. In response to the *Anspruch* of God, and through the liturgical acts of praise, confession, and obedience, the church becomes this witness and sign in the world.*

**Conclusion**

The human being in Thurneysen’s understanding is one addressed by God, claimed by Christ, and called to life with him in the communion of the Spirit. It is important to understand Thurneysen’s anthropology in light of his christological eschatology. For him, the starting point is the fulfilment of God’s future for humankind, established in Christ and disturbing the present through the proclamation of the Word. This is not to deny the real power of sin, suffering, and death — Thurneysen did not advocate a kind of theological escapism. Instead, we are to seriously engage with the stark reality of life now but from the perspective of hope. We engage with the present because we know where we are heading. Because true knowledge of human nature is not empirically observable but is a truth hidden in Christ, theological anthropology is, for Thurneysen, bound up with the kerygmatic and missionary task of the church in the world. The church is to proclaim the lordship of Christ and to live as a witness and sign of his coming reign through its liturgy of praise, confession, and obedience. In this chapter, we have explored this theme from a number of different angles:

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Thurneysen’s ministry in the fractious community at the Münster; his contributions to the theological debates on anthropology in *Zwischen den Zeiten*; and his response to the German Church Struggle.

The next chapter is an extension of the discussions started in this chapter. I look at Thurneysen’s ministry in the WWII years as a concrete example of Christ-centred *Lebensweisheit* in the midst of suffering, fear, and death. The Word of God through the illuminating and empowering Spirit orders human life according to the good will of God the Father. Rather than a call to revolution, Thurneysen calls the church to a liturgically ordered life through joyful obedience and thankfulness in suffering.
Introduction

After the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Thurneysen preached a couple of sermons from Jesus’ so-called “Little Apocalypse” sermon in Matthew 24-25. Matthew’s apocalyptic imagery, drawing on the prophet Daniel, describes Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man, who will come on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. Immediately foreshadowing Jesus’ crucifixion, the apocalyptic image paints a striking contrast: the one who will suffer and be judged to die by the powers of the world is the one who will come again as the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus’ life-history (Lebensgeschichte), in which God has revealed Godself as for-us, is his suffering-history (Leidensgeschichte), his passion, as he enters into the full depths of human suffering and takes upon himself the weight of humanity’s sin and guilt. For Thurneysen, the human being is one who lives as a forgiven sinner under the judgment of the crucified Christ. Under the lordship of the crucified Christ, the wisdom of life is nothing other than the wisdom of suffering. In contrast to survivalist “worldly-wisdom” (Lebensklugheit), Thurneysen calls the wisdom of the cross

scandalously practical (unerhört Praktisches) because it calls the human being, in the whole sphere of their life, to endure suffering patiently and to commit to the way of peace, even when that way requires costly sacrifice.

In this chapter we explore Thurneysen’s Lebensweisheit as the wisdom of the cross. I look particularly at Thurneysen’s theological and practical response to antisemitism and the Jewish refugee crisis in Basel during the War. Then I turn to two collections of sermons which were edited into practical biblical commentaries: Der Brief des Jakobus, consisting of sermons delivered between 1940 and 1941, and Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper, containing sermons from 1942 and 1943. First, however, I offer an introductory word about Basel during the War.

**Basel during World War Two**

When war broke out once more in 1939, it came inevitably to Basel’s doorsteps. Though Switzerland maintained an uneasy neutrality, the threat of invasion from Germany to the North and the Allies to the West could never be ruled out. Maintaining neutrality demanded compromise. Switzerland continued to benefit economically from a relationship with Germany, supplying weapons and other goods across the border throughout the war. The Basel Badischer Bahnhof, then known as the Basel Deutsche Reichsbahn, continued to operate as a Reich train station in the heart of Basel (to this day it continues to be German territory on Swiss soil). It was not used as a military base but was a hub for transportation into Italy and France. In the eventuality of a declaration of war, however, it was the likely launching pad for a German invasion into Switzerland. Neutrality by no means meant that

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4 Alfred Ernst, "Die Militärische Bedeutung Der Stadt Basel Im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in Basler Stadtbuch (Christoph Merian Stiftung, 1964), 116ff.
6 There has been a recent discovery of an extensive catacomb network beneath the Reich-operated Badischer Bahnhof that stretches underneath a large area of Basel City. It is uncertain exactly what the purpose of the catacombs was, but in the event of an invasion the network would have enabled Nazi troops to move quickly and secretly from the train-station as far as the Rhein River. Basel authorities were wary of an invasion and saw the Badischer Bahnhof as a likely place from which a Nazi occupation of Switzerland would begin. Swiss authorities arrested a number of German-troops assigned to the Badischer Bahnhof because of suspected espionage. There was also the possibility that Basel would be bombed by the Allies in order to destroy the Reich-operated train station. See: Simon Erlanger, "In Katakomben Unter Dem Badischen Bahnhof Trafen Sich Die Nazis," BZ, [https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/basel-stadt/in-katakomben-unter-dem-badischen-bahnhof-trafen-sich-die-nazis-129807997#](https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/basel-stadt/in-katakomben-unter-dem-badischen-bahnhof-trafen-sich-die-nazis-129807997#).
Basel could continue to live as if the War across the border were not happening. The effects of war were deeply pervasive. For Basel, perhaps the most pressing issue, alongside the ever-present threat of invasion, was the intensifying refugee crisis. Rudolf Bohren notes that, at the War’s outbreak, there were approximately 7000-8000 refugees in Switzerland — 5000 of them Jews. By 1942, there were almost 90,000 refugees. Basel, because of its proximity to the border, stood at the front line of the crisis. The growing wave of people seeking refuge from Germany met with tight border control and highly restrictive refugee policy. From August 1942, the government restricted the policy further. Most refugees were simply turned away at the border even when going back meant almost certain death. The policy divided Basel and led to mass protest.

Immediately prior to and during the War in Basel there was, according to Eberhard Busch, a “trinity of prominent preachers”, who, in the face of mounting opposition, sided with the refugees and particularly the Jews in advocating open borders. These three were Walter Lüthi, pastor at the Oekolampadhaus, Wilhelm Vischer, minister of St. Jakobus (Barth’s local church in Basel), and Eduard Thurneysen, at the Basel Münster. Each of them attracted impressively large congregations. They were close friends and enjoyed a productive working relationship for the few years they were all in Basel. Each was involved in aiding, from Switzerland, the work of the Bekennende Kirche in Germany. As we shall see below, Thurneysen’s sermons were a central means to dismiss antisemitism and to call his congregation to action in support of the Jewish people and of refugees. Responding in love to

7 Christoph Ramstein reports on a three day series of events in Basel ten weeks after the beginning of the War. On 16th November 1939, two German planes violated Basel airspace. On the 17th, propaganda destined for France was dropped by a German plane in the city. On the 18th, German air defence missiles exploded in Basel and Riehen (a neighbouring village), seriously injuring two people. Ramstein, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Relations with Clergy in Basel,” 1.
8 See footnote in: Bohren, Prophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen, 169.
9 Ramstein, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Relations with Clergy in Basel," 16.
10 “Barth particularly enjoyed going to hear Vischer’s sermons in the old church of St. Jakobus ... Barth also occasionally went to hear Thurneysen in the cathedral, and he also heard the other member of the trinity of prominent preachers in Basle at that time [Walter Lüthi].” Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, 269. Each had a different style. Barth preferred Vischer’s narrower interpretation of scripture, through which he presented one particular message. He also greatly admired Lüthi’s “exemplary form of good Swiss-Reformed theology” and his gift for application. Interestingly, of the three, he was least enamoured with Thurneysen, who, in his eyes, attempted “to say everything about the text with great thoroughness”. See: ibid.
11 Walter Lüthi was minister in Basel from 1931-1946. During this time he developed a close friendship and working relationship with Thurneysen, which they maintained well after Lüthi left.
12 Vischer, an Old Testament scholar, held a post in Bethel, Germany, where he was involved with Barth and the Confessing Church in opposing National Socialism. In 1933, he was forced to resign and leave Germany, ministering first in Lugano and then, from 1936-1947 in Basel.
13 Vischer, in particular, was so popular that extras trams had to be scheduled on Sundays to deal with the crowds going to St Jakobus. Cf. Ramstein, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Relations with Clergy in Basel," 13.
this “real confession situation” was, for Thurneysen, a concrete outworking of the lordship of the crucified Christ in the world.

**A Real Confession-Situation: Responding to the Refugee Crisis**

Around the time he delivered his sermons from Matthew’s “Little Apocalypse”, Thurneysen penned two lectures entitled *Das Kreuz Christi* and *Die Wiederkunft Christi*. They were published as one piece in *Theologische Existentz Heute*. Thurneysen begins with the famous crucifixion scene on the central panel of the Isenheim Altar triptych. In it, John the Baptist points to Christ with an outstretched and oversized index finger as if to say: “this dying one, this judged one, is the Lord — indeed, the Lord of lords, the Kyrios.” To proclaim him Kyrios meant in the religious and political parlance of the time that the crucified Christ is “Diktator” — a direct challenge to the authority of Caesar in first century Israel and, indeed, to every dictator and lord in human history. Christ is the lord over all powers and dominions. And yet, his kingdom is established not through power and violence but through suffering love, not through domination but through humble service. In the crucifixion of Christ, the judgment of God has been revealed once and for all. God is for-us. Our sins have been forgiven. The cycle of violence has been broken. Death has been defeated. The verdict (Urteilsspruch) awaits final execution (Urteilsvollstreckung) — all of history is drawn into this “great process” between verdict and execution. The powers and dominions of the world still stand but, to draw on the apocalyptic dream in Daniel chapter 2, “the stone is rolling”. The shape of this world will pass away.

As we saw in chapter four, Thurneysen’s understanding of human nature and world history is shaped by his christological eschatology. Here, though, through the apocalyptic Son-of-Man imagery in Matthew, Thurneysen emphasises the connection between Christ’s future lordship and his way of suffering and death. His future judgment as the suffering Lord places “every generation on earth before the question of decision (Entscheidungsfrage): either we recognise that this crucified man is Lord of all and suffer alongside him with the oppressed and downtrodden — or we join in the cries for his execution and perpetuate the way of violence and sin that leads to death. In light of our eschatological identity as children of God and forgiven sinners, we become human as we live in reconciliation with one another and live in

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14 Thurneysen, “Kreuz Und Wiederkunft Christi.”
15 My translation. Ibid., 4.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 25.
18 Ibid., 21. Referring to Daniel 2:34.
hope of the abundant peace to come. Conversely, human beings become inhuman when they elevate themselves over others assuming the place of God, when they commit inhumane acts that dehumanise other humans, and when they participate in violence, domination, and killing. Jürgen Moltmann, whose short work on anthropology also centres on the Son-of-Man imagery, draws on Daniel chapter 7 to make a similar point. Daniel, he argues, sees the history of the world in a dream. Four beasts, each representing a different empire, rise out of the chaos. In these dominions, “it is not human but ‘animal’ relationships that dominate”.19 By contrast, the ‘son of man’ comes not from the chaos of the world, but from God: “the humanity of man comes to its reality in the human kingdom of the Son of Man”.20 God becomes human in order that we might truly be human.

Because our humanity is imaged in the crucified Christ who was judged by the powers of the world, right human living is characterised by solidarity with those who are judged and condemned. On this theological ground, Thurneysen strongly rejects antisemitism and calls for solidarity with the Jewish people through advocacy, financial aid, and physical help. On the 20th November 1938, only eleven days after Kristallnacht, Thurneysen rebuked the argument that the Jewish people somehow deserve to be discriminated against because of their rejection of Christ. If that were grounds for judgment, then, Thurneysen asserts, the Christian church is just as guilty. Rather, he reminds his congregation, the Anointed One of God, Jesus Christ, came from among the accused Jewish people. Despite their rejection of him, Christ remains their Messiah and they remain God’s people. “Jesus Christ,” he proclaimed, “is given as the Saviour to them and to us. It means that in these times where judgment against Israel arises throughout the world, we must know solidarity with this Israel, with these Jews.”21 In his sermon from Matthew 24, delivered soon after the outbreak of war, Thurneysen again makes explicit reference to the Jewish people. The “great afflictions” of the Jewish people are, if anything, a clearer sign that Christ died for them too and that the resurrection reality of Easter is theirs as well.22

Thurneysen not only used his sermons to challenge antisemitic sentiments, he also exhorted the Münster community to suffer alongside Jewish refugees and prisoners in offering

20 Ibid.
concrete support. In one sermon, he implored his congregation to offer financial support to Jews and Jewish Christians who had been arrested in Baden and Württemberg and sent to a camp in the Pyrenees. The affliction of the Jews was, according to Thurneysen, “the significant thing of our time” (das Große an unserer Zeit) that, “not only shows its severity and frightfulness but also brings to light the other side, the great mercy of Christ.”23 It was the real confession situation of their day which both revealed in starkness the evil in the world and also demanded a concrete response of mercy and compassion from the church as a sign of God’s coming kingdom. In another sermon from the later Philippians collection, Thurneysen urged his congregation to support the refugees even if it meant their own suffering:

“Among us we still hardly know anything of serious suffering for the sake of Christ. If one wanted to ask me: where do you see among us something of opposition and resistance to the gospel?, I would actually only be able to name one single point at the moment — and that is the Jewish question. There, in the rejection of the Jewish community, in antisemitism, — there something of this resistance to the gospel of Christ erects itself among us. Where this resistance becomes loud, there the faith community today may not retreat. But it should not have anxiety either. If you must suffer because of it, because you take a stand with the Jewish people, then it is a sign of salvation for you but a sign of perishing for the others.”24

The church community may not retreat, he wrote. These two extracts highlight the concrete nature of the Anspruch of God for Thurneysen. Obedience to Christ meant in this instance advocacy as well as material and financial support for Jewish refugees and prisoners. There are no generalities or abstractions here; no dodging the question. Thurneysen is explicit: if you must suffer for it, then suffer — for that suffering is nothing less than a sign of our salvation, the promise of God and the nearness of God’s kingdom.

On 30th August 1942, in the context of tightening border control against refugees, Walter Lüthi responded to a right wing nationalist politician at a large national Christian youth gathering (die Junge Kirche). The politician compared the refugee crisis in Basel to a lifeboat that is full. The lifeboat cannot save everyone, he reasoned. The only humane thing to do is to warn those trying to get in against any false hopes. Lüthi called this attitude “lovelessness to the highest degree”. So long as thousands of dogs are well-nourished in Basel while refugees are turned away because they are “not manageable for us”, a policy of closed borders is simply inexcusable. A few days later, Lüthi attended a gathering of Basel ministers at which his protest of government policy was heavily criticised and deemed by the majority of those gathered to have been highly improper. Lüthi recalled the event many years later at Thurneysen’s funeral:

“Toward the close of the sharp argument, someone stood up and declared: ‘But of course, the present case without doubt is concerned with a real confession-situation and thus has to do with divine call to resistance even against the highest state authority and the majority of the nation.’ And this speaker and advocate in need was the colleague Thurneysen of the Basler Münster.”

Thurneysen’s response is unambiguous. The refugee crisis presents the church with nothing less than a “real confession situation” in Jesus Christ as Lord. Belonging to Christ is a political statement as much as a theological one and therefore contains an ethical mandate that, at times, transcends state authority and popular opinion. For an idea of what this “real confession situation” meant for Thurneysen, one need only read his 1935 article, Lebendige Gemeinde und Bekenntnis. Thurneysen argued that the confessional statements of the church


26 Ibid., 170.


28 There is some similarity here with Thurneysen’s early comments on conscientious objection during WWI, particularly the contention that the Christian faith may at times lead one to a contrary stance against the state and popular opinion. The key difference, though, is that in 1915, the way in which one discerned right or wrong was, for Thurneysen, according to one’s own conscience. Now, no mention is made of conscience. One discerns what is responsible living insofar as one is addressed by the proclaimed Word and comes under the order of the living Word. See: Thurneysen, "Irrendes Gewissen?."
are historical “milestones” or “waymarkers" (*Wegmarken*), erected signs that distinguish the
church from the world and reorient it to the revelation of God in scripture in opposition to the
spirit of the age. The “real confessional situations”, which called for confessional statements,
were genuinely events of history as the church responded to the particularities of its age. But
as historically-bound confessions they were also signs of the church’s eschatological origin,
the breaking in of God’s kingdom in time over and against all kingdoms and authorities on
this earth. “With us [in Switzerland] the moment could also come,” Thurneysen mused in
reference to the *Bekennende Kirche*, “when a few people meet together and, in their own
words arising from the struggle of the time, establish boundaries against the error and the
superficiality which has also gripped and paralysed our church.”29 For Thurneysen that
moment had come in the refugee crisis.

Confession, though, is more than words. For Thurneysen confession is something *practical*
that “reaches into life” and involves “the whole person”.30 To advocate for refugees, for
instance, required concrete action. He became involved with aiding the work of the
*Bekennende Kirche*, helping to support refugees who had crossed the border into Switzerland
and ensuring their safe escape. There is one particularly fascinating exchange between
Wilhelm Vischer and Thurneysen between 1939 and 1940. Vischer wrote to Thurneysen on
23rd August, 1939:

> “…today in Zurich we had the meeting of the aid-work (*des Hilfswerks*) for the BK
> [Bekennende Kirche]. … Vogt has no more money in the account for the refugees, but
> invoices as much as a few thousand Francs need to be paid. He says you once offered
> that, if worst came to worst, one should turn to you. That moment is now here.”31

Thurneysen began a substantial fundraising effort which, over a few months raised over 5000
Francs. In July 1940, whilst on holiday, Thurneysen updated Vischer on the latest from a
substantial fundraising effort:

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29 My translation. “Es könnte der Augenblick kommen, wo auch bei uns ein paar Leute zusammentreten und in
eigenen, aus dem Kampfe der Zeit herausgebornen Worten die Abgrenzungen vollziehen müssen gegen den
Irrtum und die Verflachung, die aus unsere Kirche ergriffen und gelähmt haben.” "Lebendige Gemeinde Und
Bekenntnis," 25.

30 “Bekennen ist ... etwas Praktisches, etwas, das ins Leben eingreift, etwas, be idem der ganze Mensch
beteiligt ist.” Ibid., 4.

31 My translation. “...heute hatten wir in Zürich die Sitzung des Hilfswerks für die BK. ... Vogt hat kein Geld
mehr in der Kasse für die Flüchtlinge, sollte aber Rechnungen in der Höhe von einigen tausend Franken
bezahlen. Er sagt, Du habest ihm einmal angeboten, wenn Not an Mann käme, solle er sich an Dich wenden.
Der Augenblick ist also jetzt da.” Wilhelm Vischer, "Letter Vischer to Thurneysen, 23 August 1939 (B334,9),"
“… yet again, over 700 Francs … of contributions from the faith community to our community-help (Gemeindehilfe) have arrived in my account … I have given thanks in your name for each gift … In any case the faith community has really not deserted us and with that have also given us proof of their trust in our whole work.”

He goes on to give an update of two refugees who had made it safely to Morocco and Montpellier respectively. The overwhelming support of the faith community is not insignificant and not unrelated either to Thurneysen’s success as a preacher at that time in Basel. As mentioned, Lüthi, Vischer and Thurneysen all preached to large congregations — their preaching clearly struck a chord and bore fruit in their communities, who “did not desert” their ministers but trusted and supported their work with refugees. At a deeply divisive and tense time in Basel’s history these three “outstanding preachers” brought an unashamedly prophetic word to the crisis of the day and empowered their communities to share in the prophetic action that the word demanded.

**Scandalously Practical Wisdom: Preaching the Epistle of James**

The human being, for Thurneysen, is a forgiven sinner under God’s judgment of grace given in the crucified Christ. We have seen how this assertion has practical and political significance as we become people of grace, reconciled to one another by the love of Christ. For Thurneysen, this was no abstract truth but a command to live in solidarity with Jews and with refugees through concrete action. It is perhaps little surprise, then, that Thurneysen published a collection of sermons on the Epistle of James, famous for its insistence that faith without works is dead. The central concern of the book, Thurneysen argues, is “the relationship of gospel and law, of justification and sanctification.”

The letter of James, with its emphasis on practical wisdom, lived faith, and good works, is the ideal book for Thurneysen to further develop the ideas expressed in *Bergpredigt* (1936). He wants to offer practical, lived wisdom to the community of faith as it arises exclusively from the reality of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

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Delivered between 18th August 1940 and 20th July 1941, the sermons in Der Brief des Jakobus were originally intended for Thurneysen’s congregation at the Basel Münster. The collection is consciously not an academic commentary and the content is clearly intended to address the specific time and situation in which it was written. However, for Thurneysen, this is entirely appropriate: Jesus Christ, who is the resurrected one from the dead, is no mere historical figure who can be studied from a distance, but “the Lord, who himself wants to speak to his community through the Word of his message, today no less than back then.”

Jakobus is a work of practical theology as the concrete human being is addressed by the living Word.

Notably, Emil Brunner thanked Thurneysen for sending him a copy, calling it “good food on which one can live well spiritually.” He saw this commentary as an example of Thurneysen’s “being himself” rather than a mere bodyguard of Barth and Vischer (at which times he could, according to Brunner, be “the most intransigent of all three”). Interestingly, though, Barth’s appraisal was equally positive. In the preface to Kirchliche Dogmatik II/2, he wrote:

“It is an excellent thing that I can place this volume alongside the books of my two friends, Eduard Thurneysen [Der Brief des Jakobus]… and Wilhelm Vischer …., both of which appeared some six months ago. The three books are of independent growth and quite different in form, but at the same time they belong closely together in purpose and content.”

The two opinions are perhaps not irreconcilable. It is, rather, confirmation that the commentary is an example of Thurneysen’s own unique emphases being voiced. Though relative theological unity remains with Barth and Vischer, the “independent growth” and “different form” is distinctly Thurneysen’s own, highlighting his practical and pastoral wisdom developed in and for the concrete faith community.

His commentary begins with a reflection on the root of one’s call to obedient living. Obedience to Christ, he argues, arises from joy, not from moral obligation. It does not come

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34 “…so wahr Jesus Christus … von den Toten auferstanden und also nicht eine historische Figur ist, über die man in Distanz reden könnte, sondern der Herr, der jetzt und heute nicht weniger als damals und einst zu seiner Gemeinde selber reden will durch das Wort seiner Boten.” Ibid., 5.


from some human capacity but only from the eschatological breaking in of God’s kingdom in time. The starting point is therefore not God’s absence but the fullness of God’s presence with us in Christ by the Spirit. Christ himself, who is both the destination and the way to the destination, is the root of life (Lebenswurzel), the very sustenance of wisdom for living.

Christian living, therefore, is characterised by joy as a response to Christ’s presence in the world. In Jakobus, Thurneysen calls joy the living word (Lebenswort), which precedes all others in the letter (and from which all other words must be interpreted).³⁷ Later, in his Philippians commentary, he calls joy “a movement which we enter into with our whole life.”³⁸ Wisdom is a product of the living and moving in the joy of Christ’s presence, rather than a kind of moral code for correct living. Thurneysen is not equating joy with happiness or contentment. He is very aware of the hardships of the War years. Far from avoiding or trivialising suffering, joy is awakening to and realising God’s redemptive and victorious presence precisely there in the depths of suffering. It leads one into life under the promise of resurrection, rather than out of it.

Following James’ lead,³⁹ Thurneysen contrasts between two types of wisdom: wisdom from above and wisdom from below. In Thurneysen’s German translation, James describes wisdom from below as irdisch, sinnlich, and dämonisch. Thurneysen attends to each adjective in turn: irdisch means that we live “as if there were no God above us.”⁴⁰ Each is their own lord. One’s neighbour is no longer a fellow son or daughter of God and a fellow brother or sister in Jesus Christ. Wisdom from below, in other words, is wisdom that does not arise from our common humanity before God, seeking the common good. It is a Lebensklugheit (a worldly wisdom) arising from the survival instinct within the individual and the resulting need to elevate their own wellbeing above the wellbeing of others.

Therefore, this worldly wisdom is also sinnlich, which is to say “our feelings dominate and determine everything.”⁴¹ There can be no harmony between people where the determining factor in one’s interactions with others is one’s own satisfaction and benefit. Finally, worldly wisdom is “demonic” because such self-centredness ultimately leads nowhere except into unresolvable conflict, violence, and death.

³⁹ James 3:13ff.
⁴¹ My translation. Ibid.
It is, ironically, wisdom from above — not wisdom arising from the harsh dog-eat-dog reality of daily existence — which is deeply practical. Far from something academic, intellectual, or abstracted from everyday life, God’s *Lebensweisheit*, is rooted in the incarnational and kenotic ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a self-emptying and sacrificial way of living that leads to the cross rather than a way hell-bent on self-survival. We have already mentioned that Thurneysen calls such wisdom *scandalously practical* (*unerhört Praktisches*) for its subversion of the hierarchical ordering of the world and its practical concern for reconciliation and healing in human relationships. The theory of wisdom from above “immediately becomes praxis.”

Put differently, Christ’s life becomes a *liturgical paradigm*, a shape for living. The gathered community becomes the new humanity in Jesus Christ as it rejoices in his victory. Our lives are conformed not to the present reality, but to the promise of what is coming in him.

Again following James, Thurneysen argues wisdom from above is characterised by meekness (*Sanftmut*) and is directed towards peace. Meekness, he asserts, is not weakness. Further, a community characterised by meekness will continue to have conflict. Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing — it is an inevitable and healthy part of human living as independent persons-in-relationship. But importantly, for Thurneysen, healthy conflict should arise out of a shared commitment to follow the way of Christ and to work towards peace and the flourishing of all. Christ’s life orders the life of the church as a community of meekness in a world disordered by violence, chaos, and self-preservation.

Faith in Christ works patience in suffering. For Thurneysen, that does not mean helplessness or passive acceptance of violence in the world. Rather, patience and endurance in suffering is the hallmark of a non-violent presence in the world committed to peace-making. Faith in Christ and hope in his future coming is, for Thurneysen, a kind of tethering point, by which generous, patient, nonviolent living becomes possible:

> “Exactly translated, [patience] means: to be generous, broad-hearted, to have a large, capacious heart. And a large, capacious heart is a heart which swings wide and free like the pendulum of a clock, held by a point outside, above itself. This widely, freely

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swinging heart is the heart which knows no final darkness and obstacle and which can therefore never be entirely without hope.”

Because one’s life is tethered to the reality of Jesus Christ, who is the Lebenswurzel, one is freed from anxiety in the midst of suffering and freed for generous and selfless living. Such generous and selfless living is the corresponding Lebensweisheit to Christ’s real presence. It is an ethic for life; a wisdom that enables the believer to discern the way of peace and life in every daily struggle.

One can see the influence of Barth’s covenant theology (substantially developed in Church Dogmatics II/2, which was published within months of Jakobus) in Thurneysen’s underlying anthropology here. Living according to wisdom from above consists in the ordering of one’s life according to the Word of God. Thurneysen defines the human being, therefore, in relation to the Word:

“…the human being is the being [Wesen], which receives and hears this Word of God and with that is able to enter into communion with God. With this the human being becomes the noble, royal being, which towers above all other creatures … all animals are subdued through the human being … this power of the human being has its foundation in that the human being has been created and blessed to hear God’s Word, to be able to answer God, and in that to be God’s partner.”

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The human being is not simply one addressed by God, but one who is addressed in order to enter into communion with God, to be God’s partner in and for the world. In the address is a claim, a corresponding call to obedience in the whole of life.

On this basis, Thurneysen sees a fundamental connection between the event of proclamation and the whole living of life. In communal worship on Sundays and private worship during the week, one hears again the address of God and is invited to respond in prayer and praise. The liturgy of the Word frames and orients one’s whole life. Thurneysen was all too aware in his day of the power of words:

“…because our tongues continuously burn in their own fire, the whole world burns … some Führer says to his people that a certain goal must be achieved … and under this word the groaning and crying of whole nations breaks out, nations who must die and perish for the sake of this word.”

By contrast, Thurneysen erects prayer as the language of humble and obedient response to God. In this way, the liturgy of the Word and of response to the Word becomes deeply political: a rejection of the coercive and propagandist words of the world and a humble participation in the way of peace. Prayer, as response to the Word, orients human beings to God’s will and, in being conformed to God’s will, to one another in love. The act of prayer in this way transforms our thinking and our doing so that our lives become prayerful action, obediently living the way of Christ in the world.

**In Jesus Christ: Preaching the Epistle to the Philippians**

The practical life wisdom we have seen in Thurneysen’s Jakobus is an exploration of what it means to be doers of the Word, to live under the Anspruch of God in faithful obedience. And yet, Thurneysen is abundantly clear: we must avoid any legalism when it comes to speaking of good works. Our obedience arises firstly from the joy of God’s presence with us in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. Responding in love is an outflow of the forgiveness that has already been given. The scandalously practical wisdom of the incarnate Christ is not so much a manual for living as it is an invitation to share in the liturgy of reconciliation, which Christ offers to the

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46 My translation. “…weil immer wieder unsere Zunge brennt in ihrem eigenen Feuer, darum brennt die ganze Welt. … Irgendein Führer sagt seinem Volk, daß ein bestimmtes Ziel erreicht werden müsse ... Und unter diesem Wort bricht auf das Stöhnen und Schreien ganzer Völker, die sterben und verderben müssen um dieses Wortes willen.” Ibid., 129-30.
Father on behalf of a sinful and violent world. It is the liturgy of service, of suffering, and of humility as the church is called to walk the way of the cross.

In *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper*, Thurneysen continues in this direction through delving into the mystical Pauline phrase “in Christ”, who is “the most human of all human beings” (*der allermenschlichste der Menschen*). In the kenotic movement of Christ, God has come to us — not so that we can become gods, but so that we can become fully human as Christ is fully human. For Thurneysen, the self-emptying of Christ in the well-known liturgy of Philippians 2:5-11 is the grounds for living by grace, for living in reconciliation with one another, and for living sanctified in radically new human community. Human life, in all its ordinariness, becomes holy in the midst of a world which has been called holy by the God who dwells in its midst.

As with his interpretation of James, Thurneysen sees joy in suffering as a central theme in Philippians. He reminds his readers in the foreword of his commentary that Paul writes his letter in immense hardship, held imprisoned and under the threat of death. And yet, “the great power of comfort given in Jesus Christ breaks through all worries and radiates joy.” Like *Jakobus*, Thurneysen’s chief concern is once more the concrete and obedient living of the faith community in response to Jesus Christ, even in the midst of fear, suffering, persecution and death. Again, the commentary is quite clearly derived from sermons in its contextuality and practical emphasis. *Philipper* is notable for its preoccupation with ordinary, concrete human existence and the redemptive and reconciling work of Christ in the midst of it. While the eternal kingdom of God cannot be contained by time, its presence in time will result in real transformation on earth so that Thurneysen now talks about the “movement” of the kingdom of Christ on earth “progressing” (*vorwärtsgehen*) in the world through human action.

Early on in his Bruggen ministry, Thurneysen was impacted by Dostoevsky’s “peculiar turning-back” to the concrete human being “under the sign of the resurrection.”

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48 My translation. “...aber die große Kraft des Trostes, der in Jesus Christus gegeben ist, durchbricht alle Kümmernisse und läßt Freude aufstrahlen mitten aus Kerker und Banden und drohender Todesnähe heraus.” Ibid., 7.
49 Cf. “Gott braucht Menschen, die sich an ihn halten. Er braucht sie, damit seine Sache auf Erden vorwärtsgehe, damit sein Tag näherücke ... Gottes Reich macht im Leben eines solchen Menschen einen Schritt nach vorwärts ... Es ist jetzt nur eines wichtig, daß die Bewegung des Reiches Christi, die in eurem Leben begonnen hat, vorwärtsgehe.” Ibid., 50-51.
50 Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 1) 1913-1921, 479, Letter Thurneysen to Barth 21st March 1921.
years later, Thurneysen explores in greater depth the implications of this turning-back to concrete human life. *Philipper* begins with an affirmation of the holiness of human life in all its ordinariness. Paul, Timothy, and the Philippian community to whom they write are thoroughly ordinary people. Their humanity, Thurneysen asserts, is no different from our own, nor are they separated from us by some kind of super religious piety or faith experience. Thurneysen dispels the myth that the biblical reality is therefore somehow irrelevant to us or removed from us. However, there is a mystery contained within the lives of the biblical people witnessed through the eschatological urgency with which they conducted their lives in anticipation of Jesus’ imminent coming again. Paul’s words and behaviour in prison seem quite incomprehensible to us. Paul and the Philippians faced ordinary, everyday problems (for example, around money or conflict) but the resurrection-reality cast all these issues in a new light and utterly transformed how they approached them. Their lives — and this is their mystery — are illuminated by a light from above. They are set apart, not because of anything special about them per se, but because, in their ordinariness, they have been laid hold of by God “in Jesus Christ”. In Christ, the ordinary has become holy. In taking on flesh, he has entered into the full depths of human existence in perfect obedience to the will of God. It is this response to God that makes him the “most human of all human being”. And yet, he does not cease to be the eternal Son of God the Father, the Holy One in our midst. In him, ordinary human life, from birth to grave, is sanctified. The *holiness*, then, of the Philippian community is not due to any righteous living, but is purely a state of being “in Jesus Christ”, who makes human life holy. And yet, Thurneysen contends, the same is the case for us. We too live in the mystery of life under the light of resurrection. But precisely because it is a mystery, we cannot “know” it in the way that we know other things. Even as it is revealed to us, it remains mystery insofar as it is neither empirically quantifiable nor historically measurable. The mystery of being “in Christ” must be continually revealed to us, not unmediated as it was with the early church, but mediated through the proclamation of the words of Paul and the rest of scripture. In this way, Thurneysen affirms the holiness of *all* human living, not because of anything humanity does, but in the sense that all things have been blessed, laid hold of by God in Jesus Christ at the incarnation, and destined for re-creation through his death and resurrection. This is the case for *all* human life, not just those within the church. The church, however, is the place where this reality is awakened to and concretely realised. By asserting the holiness of all life under the light of God’s coming day, Thurneysen now affirms human living and action in a way that would have been scarcely imaginable during the Bruggen years. In *Dostojewski*, for instance, his affirmation of life is a paradoxical
affirmation “of that which is, as it is, for the sake of that which it is not.” In Philipper, the whole cosmos is now affirmed “in Jesus Christ”:

“In him, ‘in the Lord’, everything, everything is reclaimed and saved so that, invisibly and inconceivably yet entirely really, all things visible and invisible are permeated, governed and carried from the power of his sovereignty.”

In interpreting Philippians 4:8-9, Thurneysen argues that there are genuine signs in the world, both in the church and importantly outside it, that witness to Christ’s redeeming victory and sovereignty over all:

“The world outside has received something from him [Jesus Christ], or better, it has received something of him, even if it does not know it. Its deep godlessness must be taken seriously, but it is to be taken even more seriously that the Saviour has embraced it in its godlessness with his great peace; he has embraced it and bears it with his hands also pierced for it.”

Again, for Thurneysen, the eschaton is the decisive fact and great mystery of life. God’s salvation in Jesus Christ is cosmic in scope and imminent in its coming. Because of this secret claim to ownership, even the most unholy things of the world stand under the promise of redemption. But it is a mystery of faith — and certainly not empirically verifiable when one looks at the horrors of war-torn Europe. And so the religious searching for God from the human side of things — the striving for the highest good, or the pursuit of ultimate truth — cannot be successful. Christians like all people share in this searching for higher meaning but the reality of sin and “the shadow of death lies over everything”. Human knowing and human doing is therefore genuinely good but not because of some inherent property within the human being that remains untainted by sin. It is genuinely good, and can be recognised as

51 Thurneysen, Dostoevsky, 70.
Dostojewski, 64.
54 My translation. “Liegt nicht der Schatten des Todes über allem?” Ibid., 149.
such, because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ who “is justifying and renewing everything”.\textsuperscript{55}

The whole cosmos is bound up within God’s dynamic and redeeming work in Jesus Christ. God’s working (\textit{wirken}), God’s \textit{energein}, is the movement of his love into the world through Christ’s descent into the depths of human existence, and his ascension back to the eternal throne of God.\textsuperscript{56} In this working, this divine energy, all things are being made new according to God’s good pleasure, bound up with Christ’s reconciling and redeeming life. In Christ, God has elected to work in and through humanity. Christ’s sanctifying humanity is the redemption of all human living and doing insofar as we are drawn into his saving work. Therefore our own willing and acting (\textit{Wollen und Vollbringen}) “in Christ” is awakened by and corresponds to God’s willing and acting in us and through us. The \textit{Energie} of humanity is both solely caused by the \textit{energein} of God as well as entirely human action. Unlike twenty years earlier, Thurneysen no longer sees human action and divine action as dialectically opposed. He no longer sees a dichotomy, but a unity “in Christ”. The claim that one’s faith is entirely God’s action in no way denies free will. Thurneysen would rather ask, what one means by free will. “Free will”, popularly conceived as the ability to make independent and autonomous choices, is clearly not true, even from a non-theological perspective. One’s will is imprisoned, bound to systems and powers of our world, Thurneysen remarked, drawing on Luther.\textsuperscript{57} True freedom, by contrast, is never freedom outside of loving relationship. Freedom is no longer living imprisoned by sin but as a child of God. It follows for Thurneysen that true freedom is freedom \textit{for} something: “I am free for him [God] and his will and therefore finally free to obey him, free in my willing and my acting to do that which is pleasing to him!”\textsuperscript{58} Far from denying or trivialising my own being and doing, God’s work in and through me brings my personhood to fulfilment, frees me so that I can learn to live in selfless and loving relationship before God and for others. Thurneysen speaks in this section of the \textit{Ordnung} of Jesus Christ in contrast to the \textit{Unordnung}, the chaos and violence of the world.\textsuperscript{59} The ordering of one’s life according to Jesus Christ (which is to become central to Thurneysen conception of pastoral care), is not a legalistic framework that denies freedom.

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. “Ihr kennt \textit{Jesus Christus}, und in ihm ist sie ja geschehen, die große Umdrehung des Lebens von Gott her, die Wendung des Erbarmens, die alles rechtfertigt und neu macht.” Ibid., 150.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 76-77.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{58} My translation. “Er will es, er will, daß ich frei sei, sein freie Kind, an ihn gebunden, nicht mehr an meine Begierden, frei für ihn und seinen Willen und darum endlich auch frei, ihm zu gehorchen, frei in meinem Wollen und Vollbringen dessen, was ihm wohlgefällt!” Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 74.
Quite the opposite, the *Ordnung* of God, is the way of life corresponding to and sharing in God’s reconciling and redeeming life in the world.

In *Philipper*, the cosmic scope of Thurneysen’s christology comes increasingly to the fore. One can see this in his ambiguous use of the phrase “in Jesus Christ.” In one passage, it is the faith community who is living “in Christ”. In another passage, the whole cosmos is “in the Lord” and has received “something of him”. Christ is both above us, the point to which our swinging pendulum is attached, as well as with us and in us. The light of God’s coming day shines on life from above and is also witnessed to in the midst of life through our lives which are signs of its presence. It seems that Thurneysen wants to distinguish between what is eternally true and what is becoming true — the actualisation of that eternal truth in time. On the one hand, the whole world is “in Christ”, embraced by him in his risen and ascended life as Lord of all. The cosmos already hints at this reality — it has something “of Christ” in it, even if it does not know it. The church, however, is “in Christ” in a particular, intimate way. The eternal reality above becomes true in the midst of the concrete community, so that we can genuinely live “in Christ”, obediently following him who is himself the way and the destination. The church’s being “in Christ” has two distinct, yet complementary elements: first, the proclamation, the revelation of the eschatological truth of God; second, the response through faithful living and loving service as a vicarious response on behalf of the world. In the church, human beings are addressed and invited to respond. In this dual action of call and response, God’s eternal kingdom through the presence of Christ becomes witnessed in time through the concrete living of human lives.

**Conclusion**

Thurneysen’s theological anthropology during World War Two can be described as a liturgical life-wisdom arising from the suffering love of the crucified Christ. At the outbreak of the War, Thurneysen interpreted the events of world history from the perspective of Christ’s judgment: the verdict on the cross awaits final fulfilment at the end of time. God’s reign breaks into the present through the Word of forgiveness, the declaration of the verdict. Wherever the Word is proclaimed, Christ’s lordship is established on earth in the midst of the church as a sign of the new humanity. In Christ, the new human being is a forgiven sinner called to life in reconciliation and hope. We have seen how Thurneysen explored this call to

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60 Ibid., 140ff.
life through the practical wisdom of James and through the mystical incarnational theology of Paul.

We turn now to the post-War years in which Thurneysen developed a theology of pastoral care. His seminal work of pastoral theology, *Die Lehre von der Seelsorge* was published in 1946 after a drawn-out and often disrupted process alongside his feverish work in the congregation in the lead up to and during World War II. Therefore what we have seen in chapters four and five is very much the context out of which his pastoral theology was birthed. His pastoral theory, which has been called *kerygmatic* pastoral care, developed out of the pastoral experience of those tumultuous years. It is *kerygmatic* because, unsurprisingly, his focus is on the proclamation of the Word. In the strongly ideological age of the 1930s, one can understand Thurneysen’s emphasis. Yet his insights should not be dismissed as purely contextual: he bases his pastoral care on a profound truth of our human existence. As one addressed by the living God, the human being is created for relationship with God. From this foundation, Thurneysen builds his theology of pastoral care.

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The Human Being as Personal *Ganzheit*

Under the Claim of God

*Chapter Six: Basel 1945-1974*

*Introduction*

So far we have seen a number of trends emerging in Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. His preoccupation with the question of what it means to be human arose from pastoral and ethical concerns within the practical context of the faith community. He was responding to the very real life needs confronting his congregation during deeply unsettling and tumultuous times. His developing theological anthropology, therefore, could never be extricated from the praxis of the church and attention to the concrete human being and the empirical reality of one’s existence. This lived and practical emphasis consisted of more than simply applying a prescribed theology. Jesus Christ is “the first and last Word of all real knowledge of human nature.”¹ Because he continues to live and minister today to his people, Christ the Word is a dynamic word, an occurring truth, who addresses us in the messiness of pastoral ministry. To say Jesus Christ is first and last Word is not to suggest he is the static beginning and end point. Rather he is the defining parameter from which all our pastoral conversations at every moment take their reference. “Eduard Thurneysen,” Barth reflected on the occasion of his friend’s 70th birthday, “has perhaps become a bit more ‘pastoral’ and I on my part a bit more

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¹ *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 63.  
*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 55.
‘professorial’.”² He was talking about more than mere aesthetic or stylistic differences between them. Rather each had his own “particular mission”. Thurneysen’s focus was on the becoming-concrete (Konkretwerden) of one’s justified reality in Jesus Christ within the church. And so, for him, theological anthropology must always engage deeply with and seek to speak into empirical existence. Yes, theological anthropology is always christological anthropology; but far from trivialising concrete human life, the incarnational ministry of Jesus Christ led Thurneysen to take one’s concrete circumstances more seriously as the sphere in which the redeeming kingdom of God is breaking in by the Spirit.

In this final chapter of part one, I look at the “mature” years of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology, during which he developed his theology of pastoral care. His distinct pastoral interest, initially evident in his 1928 article, Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge, receded into the background during the years of the German Church Struggle and his consequent christological concentration. But the year after WWII, Thurneysen published his masterwork of pastoral care, Die Lehre von der Seelsorge,³ for which he is most well-known and which set the trajectory for the rest of his career. The central suppositions posited in 1928 and developed in 1946 provided the framework for what was to follow. However, materially, he continued to refine and mature his theology, particularly in response to the rapidly changing world of the 50s and 60s. Notably, his theology of pastoral care became the catalyst for engaging in a number of interdisciplinary discussions, especially with psychology⁴ and psychotherapy,⁵ but also with medicine⁶ and social work.⁷ The common base from which he initiated these conversations was an anthropological claim, grounded in the Hebrew understanding of nephesh, soul. The human being is a personal Ganzheit (totality or whole) of body and soul under the claim of God. Each of the various disciplines, including pastoral care, has a responsibility to the whole human being, body and soul. It is on the ground of holistic care for the human being that Thurneysen sees fruitful interdisciplinary conversations emerging. In this chapter I explore that central anthropological claim and its implications under four subheadings: first, Thurneysen’s interest in the empirical human being in the context of twentieth century society; second, his theological basis for the human being as

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² Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 72.
³ Thurneysen, Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge.
⁵ “Seelsorge Und Psychotherapie.” See also: Chapter 11 of Die Lehre.
⁶ “Arzt Und Seelsorge in Der Begegnung Mit Dem Leidenden Menschen.”
⁷ Fürsorge - Seelsorge.
Ganzheit of body and soul; third, the personal and dialogical aspect of his anthropology centred on the concept of encounter; and fourth, his emphasis on sanctification as the living of concrete human life under the claim of God.

Thurneysen’s pastoral theology through the lens of theological anthropology

It is not incidental to my thesis that I discuss Thurneysen’s pastoral theology as an expression and outworking of his theological anthropology. “Tell me what you think of man,” Thurneysen quipped, “and I will tell you what kind of pastor you are!”8 Because pastoral care (Seelsorge) is care for the human soul, one must explore and penetrate the deep mystery of the human being, both in practice and in theory, when one engages in pastoral work. In the sphere of the church, pastoral care and theological anthropology cannot be separated. Indeed, Thurneysen’s pastoral theology was more a practical theological reflection of human nature than it was an instruction manual for pastoral practice. Here I place myself in the company of Albrecht Grözinger, Klaus Raschzok, Gol Rim, Reijer Jan de Vries, and Klaus Scheffler in the “reconstruction” of Thurneysen’s own project from the basis of his fundamental theological concerns.9 In the 1970s, with the rise of the client-centred counselling movement, the “empirical turn”, and the Seelsorgebewegung that aligned itself with modern therapeutic technique, Thurneysen’s pastoral theology was largely rejected “as the projection screen of everything we didn’t want.”10 It was perceived to be authoritarian, mystical, unempirical, and clerical. According to Raschzok, however, Thurneysen has been unfairly caricatured and misunderstood because he was assessed through the lens of the methodology of modern counselling. After the “empirical turn in practical theology”, he reasoned, “Thurneysen could no longer be understood.”11 There was a translation issue. Not only was Thurneysen trying to do something quite different, but the modern Seelsorgebewegung had inherited a methodology founded on empiricism so that constructive conversation with Thurneysen’s work became almost impossible. Thurneysen, and alongside him, Hans Asmussen and

8 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 66. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 58.
9 The task of “reconstruction” is first introduced by Albrecht Grözinger in a special edition of the Pastoraltheologie journal celebrating Thurneysen’s theology in order to commemorate the centenary of his birth: “Es wäre eher der Versuch einer Rekonstruktion seines Interesses, die seine Fragen aufnimmt, zugleich jedoch nach anderen Antworten sucht, als er sich selbst und seinen Zeitgenossen gegeben hat.” Grözinger, “Steile, Grifflose Wände,” 444.
Helmut Tacke (the other representatives of “kerygmatic” pastoral care), were not academic practical theologians and they did not intend to develop a practical theology “in the empirical sense”. Rather, so Raschzok contends, Thurneysen was developing a “theological programme for the praxis of the church”. That is to say, he was a “parish minister who reflected on his praxis primarily theoretically and not so much methodologically.” In 2000, Gol Rim argued on similar lines that Thurneysen research has, to its detriment, largely been reduced to his practical theology without adequate attention being given to his systematic foundation centred on the Word of God. De Vries and Scheffler have both published books on aspects of Thurneysen’s theology, respectively his concept of change and his pneumatology. Each of these authors, among others, agree that Thurneysen’s value goes above and beyond the practical technique of pastoral care. They are seeking to “reconstruct” Thurneysen’s theology from the rubble left by the modern client-centred counselling movement.

That does not mean, however, that the problematic aspects of Thurneysen’s pastoral theology can somehow be justified and remain unchallenged by best pastoral practice today. First, he was a product of his age and espoused views and positions typical of that time that would no longer be popularly acceptable. That in itself is no reason to reject them off hand. But, given the practical nature of pastoral theology, Thurneysen was engaging theoretically with concrete issues within the accepted norms and common understandings of his day. He was a product of his time and that means critical theological work must be done to discern what is of enduring value today and what is best left as a relic of history.


de Vries, Gods Woord Verandert Mensen.

Scheffler, Seelsorge Als Spirituelle Erfahrung.

See also: Karle, "Seelsorge Im Horizont Der Hoffnung: Eduard Thurneysens Seelsorgelehre in Systemtheoretischer Perspektive." And: Lorberg-Fehring, Thurneysen - Neu Gesehen. And: Liang, Leben Vor Den Letzten Dingen.

Isolde Karle makes particular mention of his sexual ethics and his theological connection between sin and illness, whether physical or mental. Karle, "Seelsorge Im Horizont Der Hoffnung: Eduard Thurneysens Seelsorgelehre in Systemtheoretischer Perspektive," 180.

In chapter seven, I argue that Thurneysen lay the foundation for a practical paradigm for theological anthropology. He demonstrated in his writing and his pastoral ministry a live dialogue between scripturally-based theological convictions and modern attitudes and behaviours. The outdated aspects of his theology are therefore, I believe, an argument for his ongoing relevance in so far as he was cultivating a kind of theopraxis in the context of pastoral ministry.
Second, he himself engaged deeply with other disciplines, especially psychology and psychotherapy, and adapted his pastoral practice to be consistent with the latest research. There is justification, then, in Thurneysen’s own self-reflective practice for critiquing outdated elements of his pastoral theology. While he asserted pastoral care is its own discipline, he was at the same time cognisant of and in constant conversation with other disciplines. He did not see these other disciplines as a requisite in acquiring theological truth, but neither did he see the natural and human sciences as oppositional to theological truth because the Word of God is “the basis of all knowledge”. For that reason, in Thurneysen’s mind, there is no such thing as “Christian” psychology. On the contrary, psychology as its own discipline is a necessary “auxiliary science” at the pastor’s disposal.

Third, while those committed to the task of reconstruction have tended to emphasise (as I have) that Thurneysen’s theological writings — especially his earlier expressionistic works — are more poetic, aesthetical, and dialogical, we need to keep in mind that Thurneysen, like Barth, saw theology as a science. One cannot, therefore, excuse Thurneysen’s more controversial claims with regard to pastoral care on the grounds that they are expressionistic metaphor. Die Lehre von der Seelsorge and his later pastoral works are an attempt to develop a systematised and scientific approach to pastoral theology with its own method and case studies. Further, he clearly tried to establish an integrity to pastoral care as a discipline to be reckoned with alongside psychology, psychotherapy, and modern medicine. There are still poetic elements to his work — he never ceases to be a pastor using language to point to and yet preserve the uncontainable mystery of God — but I would argue this is more attributable to the methodology that corresponds to the unique subject matter of theology, which is the living Word of God. In my mind, Thurneysen’s ongoing importance lies precisely in the fact that he intended to develop an applied science of pastoral theology that is uniquely theology and not simply christianised psychotherapeutic counselling. The Word of God becoming concrete in the faith community is, for him, no poetic metaphor (though there is obviously a poetic element to such a phrase). Rather the Word of God is really forming God’s

20 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 206.
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 187.
21 Klaus Scheffler places Albrecht Grözinger, Sönke Lorberg-Fehring, Rudolf Bohren, and Klaus Raschzok together in espousing this view to greater or lesser degree. Isolde Karle could also be added to the list. Scheffler, Seelsorge Als Spirituelle Erfahrung, 92.
23 See for example, Trevor Hart: “...all theology, no matter how ‘scientific’ and precise its aspiration or achievement, is nonetheless also ‘poetic’ and contingent upon acts of deep human imagining from the outset.” Trevor Hart, Between the Image and the Word, ed. Trevor Hart Jeremy Begbie, Roger Lundin, Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 13.
people in space and time through the work of the Holy Spirit. Pastoral and practical theology develop a unique methodology that corresponds to the event of God’s becoming-present among us in Jesus Christ. True, Christ’s becoming-present among us is no mere historical and empirically verifiable event. But that is not to say it is any less real. In fact, for the church it is the defining event by which we encounter what is most real: the living God. In this is Thurneysen’s enduring critique of any theology of pastoral care that is reduced to mere therapeutic or counselling practice. By interpreting his pastoral theological works as a kind of practical and pastoral anthropology, Thurneysen continues to offer much today.

**Caring for the soul of the human being today**

The “human being today”

A recurring theme in Thurneysen’s work was how to respond pastorally to contemporary issues. As we have seen, he lived and ministered in a time of massive social, political, and economic change. From his very early days, Thurneysen was influenced by Troeltsch’s philosophy of history and pronouncement of social and religious crisis caused by industrialisation, urbanisation, and the rise of the new working class. In Leutwil, the young pastor responded to social need intensified through the outbreak of WWI. In Bruggen, Thurneysen’s works showed the influence of existentialism and expressionism that captured something of the emerging self-consciousness and angst of the human being in the early 20th century. Moving to Basel in the 1930s, he reacted to the rise of national-socialism and immersed himself, from afar, in the German Church Struggle. He was then committed to the pastoral need in Basel during WWII and in responding to the ethical demand placed on the Swiss people with the refugee crisis. In light of all this, the latter part of his career and life seem remarkably settled. By now “Dr Bedittend”, the Eminent One, was well-established at the Münster. Besides a few teaching engagements, there is not a lot to report in terms of significant life transitions with the exception of his retirement in 1959. He remained active in ministry, teaching and writing well into the 1960s. After gradually slowing down, he died peacefully of old age in 1974.

And yet, during these latter years of his life, the face of the world was changing as was the human being who lived in it. Further, these external changes had a huge impact on the church, which found itself vying for attention and relevance in an amorphous “mass

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24 Basler German for der Bedeutende. According to Rudolf Bohren, this was the affectionate nickname bestowed upon Thurneysen by the Münster community. Bohren, *Phrophetie Und Seelsorge: Eduard Thurneysen*. 

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society”\textsuperscript{25} that both depersonalised and atomised modern urban living. Thurneysen’s focus on pastoral theology arose in deep conversation with these societal changes. He was trying to work out how the church is to minister in such a world. Underlying these ecclesiological and missiological considerations were anthropological questions: how do we understand the human being today? How do we minister to and care for the human being today? How shall we live as human beings today? The end of WWII marked the beginning of the nuclear age which gave birth to the Cold War and the ensuing fear of nuclear apocalypse. The 1960s saw the outbreak of the highly contentious Vietnam War as well as emerging social issues, such as sexual freedom, civil rights, and the breakdown of social institutions like marriage and family. There was a growing awareness of the global impact of Western colonialism including extreme poverty in the, so-called, “Third World”.\textsuperscript{26} All of this contributed to what Carl Jung called “an epoch of helplessness, anxiety, confusion and ideological disorientation of the greatest measure”.\textsuperscript{27}

The human being, living through these massive societal shifts, was also changing. Thurneysen names three trends in particular. First, the pressures of the time corresponded to an inner need and life-anxiety. To deal with the “immense psychical [seelisch] helplessness”\textsuperscript{28} of the time, people were increasingly turning to psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors. There was a rise in neurotic and psychotic illnesses as well as less severe but nonetheless prevalent mental insecurity and anxiety. Jung claimed that a growing number of clients went to him because “they found no purpose to life”.\textsuperscript{29} Jung saw this as a religious problem as much as a psychological one in that religion concerned itself with questions of meaning, purpose and belonging. Thurneysen saw a correlation and, in the correlation, a need: As religion declined and secularism increased, these wider mental health issues increased as well. The church had a responsibility to respond to secularisation, not defensively, but with compassion and a pastoral heart as it sought to witness to Christ in whom there is ultimate meaning, belonging, and new life.

Second, in his 1968 work, *Seelsorge im Vollzug*, Thurneysen described the human being of his day as *homo faber*, the “creating-man”, wholly uninterested in ultimate questions of


\textsuperscript{26}Cf. “Erwägungen Zur Seelsorge Am Menschen Von Heute (1968),” 217.


\textsuperscript{28}My translation. “...ungeheuren seelischen Ratlosigkeit...” *Seelsorge Am Menschen Von Heute*, H. 7, 2.

\textsuperscript{29}My translation. “...weil sie in ihrem Leben keinen Sinn fanden.” Carl Jung quoted in: ibid., 3.
God. There is no need for the divine creator, so the illusion goes, when the human being can now create technology to master the hidden power of nature, to open up new possibilities for human living, to solve the life problems that hitherto had been handed over to God to sort out. In short, the secular human being doesn’t need God because the secular human being has taken the place of God. Turned entirely to this material world and its comforts, the human being of his day, Thurneysen argued, is a “technocrat” and materialist.

Third, Thurneysen made regular reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s well-known language of the “areligious human being” of the modern day, who, according to Thurneysen, “does not want to simply be preached at anymore. The human being today has no ear for pious words anymore, which, however right they may have been, do not touch his existence.” God, for this human being, is a mere hypothesis and one which is tangential, if that, to the daily living of life.

**The church’s call to care for the “human being today”**

In this climate of the secularizing world and “areligious man”, Thurneysen sought to make sense of the church’s shifting place and role in society. The church, he asserted in 1964, is in a diaspora situation which resembles the situation of the early church. In Thurneysen’s mind, the increasing psychological need in society was a pastoral problem. The soul of the secular human being hungered for a comfort which only God could provide. Psychotherapy and medicine could cure the human being of mental or physical illness. But they could not of themselves bring holistic healing of the whole person before God. Psychology could analyse the complex human mind and explain phenomena of human existence. But it could not go beyond the phenomenological or at least, if it tried, it entered into pure metaphysical speculation. In short, for Thurneysen, psychology and modern medicine are critical disciplines in modern society but they have their limits. They cannot fundamentally answer what the human being is, whose the human being is, and to whom human existence is oriented. Thurneysen, therefore, framed the church’s mission in pastoral terms. The church is

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30 He takes the term from Max Frisch’s novel of the same name. Cf. Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 15.
31 By this term, Thurneysen is referring to the work of Harvey Cox who talks about the “city without God”, whose inhabitants find comfort and meaning in material goods and humanity’s own creative and technological development.
33 *Der Mensch Von Heute Und Das Evangelium*, H. 75, 3. And: *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 12.
called to care for the soul of the human being today — to remind the human being whose it is. In its ministry of care to society, the church shares in the comforting ministry of the incarnate and risen Christ who, entering into the depths of human existence, suffering alongside us, sharing our humanity with us, and dying for us is the true carer of souls. In order to take Christ’s incarnation seriously, and in order to proclaim him to “areligious man”, the church must develop “new forms of proclamation”, which point to the Christ “in the midst” of concrete life rather than to a Christ pushed to fringes of life. In the epoch of “helplessness, anxiety and confusion” in which people found “no purpose to life”, the church was called to proclaim the hope of the coming kingdom and to comfort the human being who, in the midst of deepest need and confusion, is held in the hand of God.

**What was at stake:** Eduard Thurneysen and Fritz Buri

In all of this change, Thurneysen was highly critical of the “modern church” and the liberal theology it rested upon, not only in failing to address the need in society, but by actually further *entrenching* the illusion of human self-sufficiency through “the devastating impact” of natural theology. As an illustration of this struggle, it is worth looking at Thurneysen’s fraught relationship with his liberal colleague, Fritz Buri. On Thurneysen’s 60th birthday, Barth wrote in the *Basler Nachrichten* that his friend had not had it easy the last two decades at the Münster, naming especially the fact that Thurneysen had to work in the midst of opposition from “two antiquated factions”. Thurneysen, it seems, was unable to overcome the deeply ingrained factionalism at the Münster. While the post-War years were the most stable of his career, that is not to say they were easy. Ministry at the Münster was a lonely experience. Once Walter Lüthi and Wilhelm Vischer left Basel in 1946 and 1947 respectively, he found himself increasingly isolated. In 1951, he bemoaned to Vischer that a gathering of Basel ministers was now dominated by liberals. Fritz Buri was such a liberal. Inducted to the Münster’s sister congregation, St. Alban’s, in 1948, he was elected to the

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35 This is quite a shift in emphasis from Thurneysen’s early dialectical where God is encountered precisely at the limits of life and not at the centre, which is dominated by human will and power. *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 22.
37 Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 93.
Münster itself in 1957 and ministered there until 1968. Thurneysen was fiercely against Buri’s coming and led the election campaign for the Positiven. In was a hotly contested affair, even more so than Thurneysen’s own election. He accused his liberal colleague, Wolfer, of “the most improper tactics”, while his positive colleague, Oskar Moppert “completely malfunctioned.” Despite an extremely close vote which gave Thurneysen some consolation, Buri was elected to St. Alban’s. The split vote had its repercussions however. Buri was forced to rebuild the congregation from a remnant and, according to Odilo Kaiser, even had to literally struggle for a key to the church. In spite of these circumstances, Buri enjoyed a long and “undeniably successful” ministry. Thurneysen’s retelling, though, is less favourable. He saw the remnant at St. Alban’s as Buri’s failure to attract children and families. The “liberal” percentage of the whole Münster community was a minority, meaning that the pastoral load for Thurneysen had increased. In 1952, Thurneysen wrote to Vischer of retirement. On the one hand he didn’t want to work another ten years as Barth planned to do; on the other hand he “needed to hold the pulpit a little longer from Buri until the right successor comes along.” All of this doesn’t show Thurneysen in a particularly gracious light. He comes across as spiteful, confrontational, and appears to have fuelled the fires as often as he put them out.

Why such a sharp reaction from Thurneysen? Can his opposition to Buri be justified? It is easy in hindsight and in a very different ecclesial climate to say, no. However it is important to see what was at stake for Thurneysen. Influenced by Bultmann’s demythologisation thesis, Buri went further, advocating a dekerygmatisation of the church’s proclamation. He wanted to provide an existential interpretation to the traditional biblical language and concepts. The scriptural language provided symbolic power for expressing the “self-understanding of actual existence.” Interestingly, both Thurneysen and Buri were sympathetic to the personalist I-Thou philosophy of Martin Buber but, through his dekerygmatisation thesis, Buri interpreted Buber quite differently. At the centre of Buber’s philosophy is the assertion that one becomes

43 Ibid.
conscious of one’s subjectivity in relationship. The *I* is always determined by encounter with
the other as either *I-Thou* or *I-It*. We understand ourselves as we interact and relate with the
world around us. Therefore, the subjective human being is always a *dialogical* rather than a
*monological* being. Thurneysen interpreted Buber through Barth’s christological concept of
*Mitmenschlichkeit*.\(^45\) In Christ, God relates to us as *Mitmensch*, fellow human. On this basis,
the living God is the hidden “first partner” of the human being, present and active in every
pastoral conversation. We find and encounter God through one another. By contrast, Buri
offers an existentialist interpretation of the interpersonal encounter focussing not on the
objective coming-near of God, but on the subjective awakening of the self. In the encounter
with another, one becomes aware of one’s own existence. In one’s “being-ness” (*Ist-sein*),
one touches existentially on the mystery of being. Therefore, encounter in existence is a
transcending act. It cannot be quantified, measured or grasped. It must simply be
experienced. In this understanding, God is an impersonal ground of being and the centre of
reality is the individual and their experience of existence.

In 1968, Thurneysen wrote explicitly against this theology of existence. He does not mention
his colleague by name, but it is easy to imagine Buri as the intended target of his criticisms.
In his mind, the theology of existence had removed the living God from the equation so that
one is left “deserted” in this world bound by its enslaving systems and institutions.\(^46\) There
is no real help. The witness of the New Testament, however, is not only concerned with a
change of one’s individual worldview. In fact it is not concerned with a mere “worldview” at
all. Rather it is concerned with the transformative power of the living God breaking into
history, bursting open all old and new worldviews. If one *dekerygmatises* worship, taking the
living Word of God out of proclamation, then the church ceases to witness to the living God
and in so doing ceases to be the church at all. Instead it is a mere social institution
functioning as an echo chamber of our subjective and contemporary worldviews. For
Thurneysen, the church is nothing more and nothing less than the people called into being by
God’s Word and sustained by God’s powerful Spirit. For this reason, whether justified or not
in his behaviour, Thurneysen felt compelled, for the sake of the pastoral ministry of the
church to the human being of his day, to resist Buri and his existential theology.

\(^45\) Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 81-82.
\(^46\) “Sondern wir schauen aus nach einem Ausbruch aus den Fesseln aller Strukturen und Institutionen dieser
Welt und ihrer Gesellschaft, in denen wir gefangen liegen...die neue Theologie der Existenz uns an dieser Stelle
A mix of empiricism and theology

What unites Buri and Thurneysen, however, was their shared commitment to pastoral ministry. Each in their own way sought to minister to the human being of their day. For Buri, this involved a fundamental rethink of the content of the gospel to align with existential philosophy. For Thurneysen, it meant, on the theological basis of the incarnation, developing a dialectical method between biblical theology and empiricism at the heart of his praxis. Albrecht Grözinger points to Thurneysen’s commitment to the empirical reality of day-to-day life as the decisive element of “the Thurneysenian way”. Thurneysen and Barth shared the same goal of laying new theological foundations but Thurneysen always comprehended this as a practical-theological task. “For the sake of dogmatics and the faith community this practical-theological reflection is, according to Thurneysen, essential.” His commitment to the pastoral reality of everyday experience is the “empirical dimension” in Thurneysen’s thinking which was always present. In 1935, Barth summed up this aspect of his friend’s style of doing theology in one word: openness.

Even in his criticism, Thurneysen showed an active interest in popular ideologies and movements, seeking to understand them on their own terms. He often wrote about “the human being today”, desiring to make sense of the zeitgeist in order to better proclaim the gospel to the people in his midst. Besides this he also exerted a lot of energy in writing against popular movements that he saw as contrary to the gospel, such as anthroposophy, which was very influential in Basel at the time. His later pastoral interest is, in my mind, simply the culmination of this life-long interest to bring theology into conversation with the world of his day in order to care for the concrete human being.

Caring for the soul: Two images

Thurneysen uses numerous images and metaphors to talk about pastoral care. There are two, in particular, that he employed regularly to elucidate the role of the pastor. Pastoral care is

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50 Barth, "Geleitwort [1935]," 228.
51 One vivid illustration of this is a letter in Thurneysen’s Nachlass from a woman who is leaving the Münster community after more than 20 years because she felt Thurneysen’s theology was inconsistent with anthroposophy (Unknown, “Letter to Thurneysen, 6 October 1946 (Ba6,15),” (Basel: Briefwechsel Thurneysen-BaseI, 290, Ba6, Universitätsbibliothek, Basel Universität.). Thurneysen wrote explicitly against anthroposophy on a number of occasions, especially: Eduard Thurneysen, "Etwas Von Den Anthroposophen (1929)," in Christ Und Welt (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt AG., 1950). And: "Was Sollen Wir Als Christen Von Der Anthroposophie Halten?,” Gemeindeblatt für St. Leonard und St. Paulus Jg. 4 (1929).
care for the whole human being as soul and therefore the pastor must come to understand not only human nature in general but also the specific human being they encounter. The first image, then, is of “deciphering” (dechiffrieren) the concrete pastoral situation of the person. Thurneysen takes the language from Viktor von Weizsäcker, a founder of psychosomatic medicine and modern medical anthropology. He got to know Weizsäcker through his friend, Richard Siebeck, an internist who advocated a holistic understanding of human care and healing. The language of “deciphering” in relation to pastoral care first appears in 1949 in Thurneysen’s address to the Swiss Reformed Ministers’ Union entitled, *Psychologie und Seelsorge*. Modern psychology had demonstrated that the human body and mind are intimately and complexly related. Bodily and external processes affect one’s mind and feelings and vice versa. They are united and yet distinct. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung had revolutionised modern psychology in their discovery of the “unconscious” mind. The human mind and the mind’s relationship to the body is far more complex than the superficial reality of one’s conscious thoughts which are merely the tip of the ice-berg, so to speak, of the mind’s activity. Weizsäcker, therefore, talked about “deciphering” the empirical symptoms of one’s illness to arrive at the underlying cause of illness in order that holistic healing can take place. One does not simply *have* a sickness. One *is* sick in the entirety of their being. And therefore consideration of one’s healing or wellbeing must involve the whole human being as a psychosomatic unity.

Thurneysen takes Weizsäcker’s image and applies it to pastoral counselling. Just as the doctor will seek to understand external symptoms *holistically*, so too the pastor seeks to understand the whole psychosomatic human being *spiritually* as one who belongs to God and whose purpose is to live in communion with God. This belonging takes place *in Christ*, in whom one learns to see oneself as forgiven sinner. Consequently, the empirical reality of one’s life points to the hidden mystery that one is claimed by Christ for God. Thurneysen puts it this way: “…not only the bodily but all, all events and processes in the sphere of human nature … contain a cipher (Chiffre), a trace, a sign that points to the fact that here an existence is lived, over which the light of a great, divine compassion lies.”

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53 My translation. “…nicht nur die körperlichen, sondern alle, alle Vorgänge und Abläufe im Raum der menschlichen Natur … tragen eine Chiffre in sich, eine Spur, ein Zeichen, die darauf hinweisen, dass hier eine Existenz gelebt wird, über der das Licht eines grossen, göttlichen Erbarmens liegt…” “Psychologie Und Seelsorge,” 59. Compare Thurneysen here with his much earlier work from 1921 on Dostoevsky in which he wrote: “the triviality and banality of this life is latent with the secret of a wholly other life.” Dostoevsky, 15. In 1964, he also draws on a similar idea through the image of a seedling growing beneath the snow. The snow is
“deciphering” implies that the pastor begins (practically but not theologically) with the empirical situation and then, over the course of the conversation, reframes together with the individual his or her particular circumstances within the wider story of God’s reconciling and redeeming work in expectation of the coming kingdom. One’s life is deciphered, made sense of, comprehended as a life under the promise of resurrection. That is the riddle, the mystery, to which all life points.

A second image that Thurneysen uses for the pastor is that of translator. It first appears in 1946 in his reflection on the importance of psychology as an “auxiliary science” for the pastor. He likens this translation or “transition” of the gospel to crossing a river from one shore to another. In order to land safely, one must not only know the nearshore (the gospel contained in the scriptures) but also the far shore to which one is heading (the empirical human being). Thurneysen is exhorting pastors to take seriously the task of understanding the human being of their day through the pastors’ own personal experiences, their relationships with others, as well as through reading widely in fictional and scientific (especially psychology) literature. One must become a “diagnostician” who holds a wealth of life wisdom in relation to the human condition. In other words, the pastor is not only a translator of the text of scripture but also a translator of the text of the contemporaneous human being. Thurneysen’s meaning here is not that the gospel has to be somehow applied as if the Word of God were not efficacious without the crucial work of the pastor. The metaphor does stray dangerously in this direction, particularly given that he does not develop that particular image further.

However, Thurneysen seeks to take seriously the Word of God as verbum alienum. It is genuinely a word from outside that must be revealed to us directly and personally through the spoken word of another. Therefore there is necessarily “translation” work that takes place alongside the “deciphering” of the empirical human situation. Read alongside other key passages in Die Lehre, it is safe to qualify Thurneysen’s image with the following remarks. The pastor never “has” the Word of God which they then must translate. In fact, no one ever “has” the Word of God as a static or dead text. Though the Word of God is contained in

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melting, the spring growth is coming. In the same way, our lives now anticipate God’s coming kingdom. Der Mensch Von Heute Und Das Evangelium, H. 75, 13.


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scripture, one cannot simply throw bible-texts at someone and expect they will be changed.\textsuperscript{55} For Thurneysen, the proclamation of the Word of God is always event, saturated in prayer, grounded in scripture, and enabled by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{56} Because the Spirit is with us in a personal way, the proclamation of the Word is always a \textit{direct} address that speaks to us in the particularity of our lives. We are awakened to our active participation in the reality of God’s kingdom witnessed to in scripture. And yet, that is not to say that one is not called to apply all their skills, knowledge, and practical wisdom into the pastoral conversation. The Word of God really speaks through our words. And the Spirit of God really moves in us employing the whole person in the Spirit’s service.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, striving for excellence in “translation” is not to eliminate the need for the Spirit but rather to take seriously both the affirmation in the Spirit of one’s human capacities as well as the personal and direct nature of God’s living Word to each individual. Understood in this way, “translation” work in the conversation is not a prerequisite for the Spirit to reveal God’s Word. The translation itself is the Spirit’s moving in the conversation enabling both partners, in the particularity of their existence, to be addressed anew by the living God.

\textbf{The Soul of the Human Being: Thurneysen’s pastoral anthropology}

As mentioned above, Thurneysen’s pastoral interest was always an interest in the human being. \textit{Seelsorge} means literally “care” for the “soul”. And yet, as he defined it in 1928, “soul-care is not care for the soul of the human being, but care for the human being as soul. And by this we mean: the human being is, on account of justification, seen as one whom God addresses in Christ.”\textsuperscript{58} Pastoral care requires more than caring for one aspect of a compartmentalized human being. Pastoral care, and the theology underlying it, has to do with care for the whole human being under the address of God. What he began in 1928, Thurneysen develops further in \textit{Die Lehre von der Seelsorge} (1946) by placing the anthropological question front and centre. He devotes a whole chapter to “the soul of man as the object of pastoral care”. The chapter is his most extended discussion of theological


\textsuperscript{56} Cf. \textit{A Theology of Pastoral Care}, 179ff. \textit{Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge}, 162ff.

\textsuperscript{57} Cf. \textit{A Theology of Pastoral Care}, 202. \textit{Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge}, 184.

anthropology in which he addresses many of the traditional topics for a classical “doctrine of man” such as the human soul, the *imago dei*, and the human being’s creatureliness. Reijer Jan de Vries devotes a significant amount of energy to this chapter and has produced an excellent comparative study between Thurneysen, Barth, and Brunner on their theological anthropologies during this period.\(^{59}\) My aim here is not to replicate his work, though, in my discussion of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology, I will point to some of the key differences that distinguish Thurneysen’s own understanding of the human being as the subject of pastoral praxis.

For Thurneysen, inquiry into the soul of the human being is a distinctly *theological* task.\(^{60}\) An ongoing concern for him in *Die Lehre* is to establish pastoral care as a science to be reckoned with alongside other modern human and natural sciences and applied sciences. Underlying this is a further concern to establish *theological* anthropology (as the theological basis of pastoral care) on its own grounds apart from the emerging discipline of general anthropology

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\(^{59}\) Thurneysen’s chapter on anthropology appeared in *Die Lehre* in 1946. At that time, he only had use of the first part of Barth’s doctrine of creation in *Church Dogmatics* (III/1). In the second part, not published until 1948, Barth addresses theological anthropology explicitly. In later publications, Thurneysen draws heavily on III/2, especially Barth’s concepts of the *Mitmenschlichkeit* of Jesus Christ and the human “being-in-encounter”. However, in other ways, Thurneysen continues to advocate his own distinct views, for example, the trichotomy of the human being and the use of Genesis 2:7 as a key scriptural starting point for anthropology. With regard to Brunner, Thurneysen was familiar with *Man in Revolt*, Brunner’s work of theological anthropology published in 1937. He refers to it sparingly in 1946 but clearly favours Barth’s *CD* III/1 as a more authoritative work (see: *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 65.). De Vries points out that Thurneysen appears to have been influenced by Brunner’s understanding of the *imago dei* as consisting in human *responsibility* before God (see: de Vries, *Gods Woord Verandert Mensen*, 137.). Certainly, there is congruence here between Brunner and Thurneysen, who defines the *imago dei* in terms of “responsible personhood” (see: Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 60.). But whereas Brunner places the emphasis of the *imago dei* on the *responsibility* of the human being, Thurneysen’s emphasis is on the *personhood* (see Brunner’s definition of the *imago dei* as “responsibility from love, in love, for love”: Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Wyon Olive (London: Lutterworth Press, 1939), 99.).

De Vries also argues that, in contrast to Barth, Thurneysen was sympathetic to Brunner’s *Anliegen* for the modern human situation. There is truth to this claim. In *Die Lehre*, Thurneysen engages deeply with modern psychology and psychotherapy, particularly as represented in the *Tiefpsychologie* of Jung and Freud. He brings the biblical-theological view of the human being into conversation with psychological knowledge of the human being and, in an effort to justify the integrity of pastoral care, seeks a synthesis between the two. While Thurneysen argues that any underlying metaphysic or philosophy of psychology must be rejected, he believes the empirical data gained from psychology is entirely consistent with biblical-theological anthropology and therefore one can move fluidly between the two. Martin Jochheim is rightly critical of Thurneysen’s attempt to interpret psychological categories as illustrations of biblical realities (Martin Jochheim, *Seelsorge Und Psychotherapie Historisch-Systematische Studien Zur Lehre Von Der Seelsorge Bei Oskar Pfister, Eduard Thurneysen Und Walter Uhsadel* (Bochum: Winkler, 1998), 114ff.). At times, for instance, Thurneysen makes the modern concept of the *psyche* synonymous with the biblical concept of soul. Here, he makes the same mistake as Brunner, who argues that biblical revelation “does not in any way contradict what can be known of man in and through experience”, rather it “incorporates this knowledge gained by experience.” (Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, 61.) It is precisely in the act of *incorporation* that Thurneysen encounters difficulty — a mistake that Barth takes pains to avoid in 1948.

\(^{60}\) Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 54. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 46.
and its burgeoning set of sub-disciplines (e.g. medical anthropology, biological anthropology etc.). Theological anthropology proceeds from entirely different presuppositions than any scientific anthropology (by which he especially means biological and psychological). One cannot begin “from below” with biological or psychological phenomena and from there ascend to a theological doctrine of the human being. Or rather, one can try, but one’s efforts can never result in anything more than metaphysical speculation.

Thurneysen is also very wary of any “philosophic anthropology”, by which Thurneysen is thinking specifically of materialistic and idealistic anthropologies. Materialistic anthropology emphasises the materiality of the human being at the expense of the immaterial, i.e. the soul. What can be said about the human being, in other words, can only be known through empirical study of natural phenomena. The “soul”, thoughts and feelings, can be reduced to naturalistic definitions and bio-chemical processes. Idealistic anthropology, following Greek philosophy, emphasises the reality of the soul over the body. The material realm is a mere projection of the mind. In both of these philosophies one ends up with an absolute dualism of body and soul, with the result that one is emphasised at the expense of the other. Each of these anthropologies, whether scientific or philosophic or a mix of both, are ultimately problematic for inquiry into the ontology and teleology of the human being. Thurneysen did not want to develop yet another metaphysical anthropology based on speculation. He sought a properly theological anthropology, which, he contended, must begin with God’s revelation in scripture. In this way it is not concerned with metaphysical speculation but with the concrete realm of human existence in which God meets us and is made known.

The Ganzheit of body and soul

Unsurprisingly then, Thurneysen begins his theological anthropology with a passage of scripture, namely, Genesis 2:7 in which the human being becomes a “living soul” through the in-spiring, animating act of God. In keeping with his definition from 1928 of the “human being as soul”, Thurneysen uses this passage as justification that “when we speak of the soul of man, we have to understand it to mean the whole man, man’s unity and totality in the duality of his body and soul.”\footnote{A Theology of Pastoral Care, 55.} Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 55. Thurneysen wants to give equal weight to both the distinction between and the totality (Ganzheit) of body and soul. The human being can only be understood as a unity of this duality. That is to say, everything the human being does, from each individual act to the totality of one’s existence, involves the full participation of body
and soul. One’s soul cannot exist other than as an embodied soul. Conversely, the living human body is always a be-souled (beseelt) body — that is precisely the body’s livingness.

This starting point proves important for the rest of Thurneysen’s argument in a number of ways. First, it is the ground from which he engages in interdisciplinary conversations. In 1946, he was already immersing himself in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy through Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, and in the field of medicine through his friend, Richard Siebeck. As I mentioned above, it was through Siebeck that Thurneysen became familiar with the work of Viktor von Weizsäcker and the emerging disciplines of psychosomatic medicine and medical anthropology. There was an increasing recognition in the human and natural sciences that the human being needs to be treated holistically, in health as in sickness. A doctor can treat the human being as an objectified problem that needs to be fixed. They can reduce the patient to a diagnosis. Indeed, the doctor may even “fix” the problem and cure the client of illness. But that is not to say the person has been healed in body and soul. Likewise, a pastor who ignores the physical needs of a patient in hospital or a pensioner in poverty fails to recognise the deep connection between one’s physical need and one’s psychic and spiritual state. Sickness is holistic as is wellbeing. On these grounds, Thurneysen argues for the integrity of pastoral care alongside medicine, psychology, and psychotherapy, which are all committed in their own way to the wellbeing of the whole human being before God. Medicine focuses primarily on the body, psychology on the human psyche, and pastoral care on the whole person, body and soul, before God.

Second, the Ganzheit of body and soul allows Thurneysen to affirm the material world of the body and to save it from gnostic dualism. Interestingly, he does not deny the immortality of the soul as Barth did. And yet, neither does the immortality of the soul have any decisive importance in Thurneysen’s anthropology. In his reckoning, the immortality or imperishability of the soul does not suggest the human being in any way possesses the eternal life of God or that it is a distinct entity to be separated from the body. The word “imperishable” simply characterises “the invisible spiritual reality to which man belongs, in

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62 Thurneysen begins an address in 1959 on the complementary roles of the pastor and the medical doctor with the claim that interdisciplinary relationships have improved immeasurably over the past two decades for precisely this reason. Pastors, doctors, and psychologists for the most part, he maintained, acknowledged a mutual dependence in their shared commitment to the wellbeing of the human being. “Arzt Und Seelsorge in Der Begegnung Mit Dem Leidenden Menschen,” 259.


addition to and beyond his physical reality.”

And yet, even in affirming this, Thurneysen is clear that “man is man only so long as he lives in the unity and totality of body and soul.” In death the human being truly dies. One is no longer a person. Their very existence as a human being is completely called into question. The properly Christian hope, therefore, does not consist in the immortality of the soul but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him our hope is the resurrection of the whole human being, body and soul.

Third, that one never acts other than as body and soul, means that sin is not merely a characteristic of the body. One sins as a whole person, an ego, who is fundamentally torn (zerrissen) from God to the depths of one’s being. For Thurneysen, before sin is a moral category, it is a relational one, defined by the human relationship to God. The human being, created in God’s image, is one addressed by God for relationship with God. And therefore sin, the turning-away from God, is the self-willed isolation of life lived apart from God. Because God will not let this happen and indeed in Christ has undone the power of sin and re-established relationship with humanity, human existence is now characterised by grace. That is to say, the human being is not only created for fullness of relationship with God but is also enabled to live into this purpose through the gracious movement of God to be with us in Jesus Christ.

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The in-spiration of God

Thurneysen places high significance on the act of God’s inbreathing in Gen 2:7. “Man is not simply a being who has a body and a soul,” he argues, “but as God breathes into him the breath of life, he becomes man, who in body and soul is one whole.” The human being is constituted by God’s Spirit, not as an initial creative act which is now complete, but as a continuous act of creating and sustaining. One lives one’s life “as a life borrowed from God,”

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65 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 56. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 48. 
66 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 56. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 48. 
67 In his later book on practical pastoral care, Thurneysen addresses the immortality of the soul again in his discussion of pastoral care to the dying and grieving. Again, he does not explicitly deny the immortality of the soul but is clear that in death the human being dies. A bodiless soul and a soulless body is no person. Therefore, there is no comfort in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The future of human being in Jesus Christ is bodily resurrection. This our hope, our comfort, and the end or goal of Christocentric anthropology. Praktische Seelsorge, 2nd ed., Gütersloher Taschenbücher Siebenstern (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1970), 140-41. 
68 See Thurneysen’s earlier development of this theme in: “Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” 206ff. 
69 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 63. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 55. 
70 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 55. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 47.
utterly dependent on God’s loving and free choice to sustain and nourish all things. The creatureliness of humanity consists in its dependence on God’s gracious will and work. Consequently, for Thurneysen, the decisive ontological fact of human existence is not some static and absolute distinction between body and soul. Rather it is the relationship of the whole human being to the pneumatological life-giving act of God, by which we are constantly becoming human as body and soul. One’s whole existence is a participation in God’s in-spiring, animating work. Thurneysen is speaking against any perception that the soul is an uncreated divine spark in the human being. In this view of things, the human essence is not fundamentally relational but individualistic and independent. Human existence is oriented towards self-awareness and self-autonomy rather than towards God in faith and others in love. It is concerned with one’s ascension towards the divine rather than the divine condescension in Jesus Christ as an affirmation and restoration of our creaturehood.

The general creative and sustaining act of the Spirit anticipates the special act of God by which the divine Word addresses humanity as partner. Or to phrase it as Barth did, creation is the external basis of the covenant. And the covenant is the internal basis of creation. Thurneysen clearly shows the influence of Barth’s covenantal theology in his discussion of the imago dei, in which the human being is set apart from all other creatures. Like all creatures, the human being lives by the Spirit and yet “in a quite different way.” It is set apart by a “new special act of God.” For Thurneysen, the imago dei consists in two aspects: a status and a disposition. One is addressed by God as God’s covenant partner. And therefore one is called to live as God’s faithful partner. In being directly addressed by the great “I am”, one is awakened to one’s own personhood. The peculiarity of our humanness lies in our being called into relationship, which implies not only a passive ontological status but an active ontic disposition towards God (partner is a relational term), in affirmation or in denial of which one can live. For Thurneysen, then, the imago dei can be defined as “responsible personhood”.

In contrast to Brunner, the emphasis for Thurneysen is on personhood, the

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71 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 56. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 48.


73 Thurneysen points to God’s in-breathing in Gen 2:7 as representing this new special act of God. There is nothing in this verse in particular that sees what this new special act consists in. For that, Thurneysen turns to Genesis 1:26ff. And yet, for him, the special mention of God’s in-breathing into humanity anticipates and presupposes the special relationship between God and humanity witnessed to in the story of scripture. Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 57. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 49.

74 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 60.
status, through the unconditional grace of God, rather than responsibility.\textsuperscript{75} And yet that status is always accompanied by the corresponding disposition — the call to right living.

Interestingly, Thurneysen uses this understanding of the \textit{imago dei} to argue for a trichotomous definition of the human being — body, soul and spirit. Barth, notably, advocated a dichotomous view a couple of years later.\textsuperscript{76} He asserted that the human being “has spirit” or, even more accurately, the human being is, “as the spirit has him.”\textsuperscript{77} He wants to emphatically reject any notion that there is an eternal or divine spark inherent in the human being. All creation lives \textit{from} the Spirit but it never owns or possesses divine spirit as an inherent constituting element. Thurneysen says more or less the same thing. However his reason for arguing for a \textit{trichotomy} seems to be that he was less concerned with speaking against liberal and natural theology here (he does this in many other places though!). At this point in his argument, he is more concerned with establishing a \textit{theological} ontology of the human being apart from other non-theological ontologies. There is broad consensus across all disciplines, he reasons, in recognition of the duality of human existence. The ontic reality of the human being quite clearly has an inner, psychic aspect and an outer, physical aspect. This duality is demonstrable through natural phenomena with or without knowledge of God. The unique contribution of biblical-theological anthropology, however, is that it goes beyond this static affirmation of humanity’s duality and “proceeds to ask whether or not man … lives under God’s call.”\textsuperscript{78} The pneumatic and kerygmatic basis of human existence provides a purpose, an orientation, a meaning to human living that cannot be garnered from empirical research alone. For Thurneysen, though, this does not mean that theological knowledge merely follows on and completes profane knowledge. Rather the \textit{theological} knowledge of the human being is the starting point and end point by which all universally accessible data about the human condition coinhere and make sense. In my view, Thurneysen does not need to assert a trichotomy in order to make this point. In fact, a dichotomous view potentially allows for more congruence and fruitful discussion with other disciplines in the human and natural sciences. Thurneysen himself believed that empirical knowledge of the human being should not contradict biblical-theological anthropology but rather confirm it.\textsuperscript{79} However, for

\textit{Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge}, 52.
\textsuperscript{75} See: Brunner, \textit{Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology}, 70-81, 96-99.
\textsuperscript{76} Barth, \textit{The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1948)}, III/2, 354-55.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 354.
\textsuperscript{78} Thurneysen, \textit{A Theology of Pastoral Care}, 61.
\textit{Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge}, 53.
\textsuperscript{79} It was on this assumption that he was able to move fluidly between the Hebrew concept of \textit{nephesh} and the modern concept of the \textit{psyche} used in psychology. See: \textit{A Theology of Pastoral Care}, 201-02. And: “Psychologie Und Seelsorge,” 50ff.
the purposes of understanding Thurneysen’s theological anthropology correctly, it is important to make clear that “the spirit” is no third “part” of the human being like the body and soul. Instead, it is “the action of God”, “God’s Spirit and Word” in whom the human being is constituted, sustained, and personally addressed. Thurneysen asserted this as a distinct third element in order to give ontological significance to the telos of human existence before God.

**Jesus Christ:** The first and last Word of human knowledge

Jesus Christ is “the first and last Word of all real knowledge of human nature.” Thurneysen makes this point at the end of his chapter on theological anthropology rather than at the beginning. Unlike Barth, whose radically christocentric anthropology “deviates widely from dogmatic tradition,” Thurneysen’s argument proceeds in a more conventional manner. And yet, Thurneysen is clear: all biblical-theological anthropology is always christological anthropology. Christ is the last Word with regard to human nature because he lives perfectly under God’s address as the true human being. As the incarnate Word he is both God’s Word of address to humanity and humanity’s perfect response. In the totality of his body and soul, he lives as the responsible person before God. Or, to put it differently, he is the pneumatic man, the one who is one with God in the bond of Spirit, taking part in the nature of God, and sharing communion with God. In Jesus Christ, “God remains God and man remains man” but in perfect union. As the “pneumatic man”, Christ fulfils the telos of human existence. For Thurneysen, it is not enough to understand human existence simply in the duality of body and soul. Biblical-theological anthropology, he reasons, goes beyond (but does not contradict!) biological-psychological anthropology. It presses further to the God

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80 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 63. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 55.

81 Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1948)*, III/2, ix.

82 Thurneysen’s structure is more “conventional” in that he deals with some of the typical topics for theological anthropology (for instance, the soul, the image of God, creatureliness), drawing particularly on the book of Genesis, and then proceeds to Christ. He structures his chapter in the following way: 1. The human being as Ganzheit of body of soul; 2. The creatureliness of the human being through the inbreathing of God’s Spirit; 3. The human being created in the imago dei; 4. The human being as forgiven sinner in Jesus Christ. Notably, Christology is not dealt with in any depth until the end of the chapter. For Barth, everything is built on Christology from the ground up. Each section begins firstly with Christology and then with anthropology in relation to Christ. See especially: §44-46 *ibid.*


84 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 61.

85 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 63. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 55.
who calls us into being for loving relationship. Christ is therefore the last Word, the eschatological Word, the fulfilment of human nature.

For Thurneysen, though, more needs to be said. Christ is not simply the last word, the crowning glory of all human knowledge and reason as it were. He is also the first Word in that he restores the image of God which has been corrupted because of sin. True knowledge of human nature proceeds from the risen Christ, the new and recreated human being in whom the old human being is forgiven. Therefore “whole knowledge of man is knowledge of grace”\(^86\). Christ is the true and original image of the invisible God. Importantly, for Thurneysen, knowledge of grace precedes knowledge of sin. The starting point for understanding the human condition is not the corrupted image, but the restored image, the eschatological human being in Christ. The human being seen in the light of Christ, who is the first and last word, is always one who is forgiven. Only after this first word, do we rightly understand human sin and evil. We truly engage with the very real tragedy of sin and the fallen human condition, but we engage in hope and under the sign of resurrection as people whose fate is bound up with Christ in God.

Thurneysen draws on the pastoral implications. “We are not only created by the Word,” he argued, “but also for the sake of the Word.”\(^87\) The human being cannot be adequately described by biological and psychological processes as a psychosomatic being. That is not to take away from this knowledge. But it does not tell the whole truth of human nature. Inherent in being human, by virtue of God’s address, is a designation of purpose, a telos, for relationship. The image of God is both status and corresponding disposition. Because the purpose of pastoral care is to communicate the Word of God to one another, pastoral care becomes a form of restoring the image in one another, of actualising our personhood. We become persons in relationship. For Thurneysen, the general proclamation necessarily leads to person-to-person pastoral conversation because “personhood is the category of one’s existence as man”.\(^88\) Such knowledge cannot be gained alone. Personhood is a relational term. One is only a person in relationship. The truth of human nature is therefore a verbum alienum that must be communicated. The Wortcharakter of the truth lays the groundwork for the centrality of the church’s pastoral ministry. In Thurneysen’s understanding, pastoral

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\(^{86}\) A Theology of Pastoral Care, 64.  
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 56.  
\(^{87}\) A Theology of Pastoral Care, 66.  
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 58.  
\(^{88}\) A Theology of Pastoral Care, 66.  
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 58.
conversation is not merely a fruit of the Word’s proclamation. It is itself an integral means of communicating Christ in and with one another as the first and last Word of our being human.

**Becoming human through encounter**

Encounter (*Begegnung*) is a central concept for Thurneysen’s later theological anthropology. The language becomes especially prominent from 1959 and comes to fullest expression in *Seelsorge im Vollzug* (1968), Thurneysen’s practically-oriented sequel to *Die Lehre*.\(^{89}\)

In *Die Lehre* from 1946, the language of “encounter” has still not developed, though he places high value on human conversation as an event of proclamation that “proceeds from the Word of God and leads to the Word of God”.\(^{90}\) The conversation leads to “a breach” (*Bruch*) through which the whole field of human life is brought under the judgment of God.\(^{91}\) In his chapter on “pastoral care as conversation”, he affirms with romanticist Adam Müller\(^{92}\) that “man’s articulateness points back to his responsibility before God”.\(^{93}\) Further, the *imago dei* as responsible personhood consists not only in one’s election to fellowship with God but also with one’s neighbour in community. Therefore human articulateness as the basis for communication is “a decisive sign of our humanity.”\(^{94}\) However Thurneysen departs from Müller’s romantic idealism by denying the inherent effectiveness of human eloquence. Instead he emphasises the abyss of sin which *prevents* genuine encounter not only with God but also with fellow human beings. Apart from “the action of the Spirit of God in our speaking,” he argues, “we remain by ourselves; we do not reach God, and we do not even reach one another.”\(^{95}\) Without conversation awakened to God, we do not remove the “mutual loneliness” nor move beyond reciprocal self-expression to genuine encounter with the other. Our words, then, must be “usurped” by the alien Spirit and Word of God if they are to be transformative. Consequently, Thurneysen holds the pastoral conversation — as Spirit-awakened conversation — in immensely high regard. “Pastoral conversation,” he wrote, “is the prototype of true conversation, actually bringing us together and redeeming us. And so understood, the romanticist is right: Such a conversation is one of the greatest events we may

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\(^{90}\) *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 115. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 104.

\(^{91}\) *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 131. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 119.

\(^{92}\) He also draws on Friedrich Schleiermacher and Alexander Vinet in his discussion of human conversation.

\(^{93}\) Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 103. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 92.

\(^{94}\) *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 103. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 92.

\(^{95}\) *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 110. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 99.
experience.” Though he wants to take seriously the reality of sin, Thurneysen, it seems, is still operating from a rather romanticised and idealised conception of the pastoral conversation that is hard to justify on an empirical level. On a theological level, however, he makes an interesting point: pastoral care has to do with the sanctification of all human communication as we live as persons-in-communion before God and awakening to God’s reconciling and redeeming presence in our lives. The pastoral conversation is a “prototype”, not necessarily because every session of pastoral care involves a life-changing spiritual experience, but because it is ordinary, profane conversation grounded in prayer and sensitive to God’s living and direct address to us through one another. As such it is the prototype of what all human relating-to-one-another should be like. It hints at, even anticipates, the fullness of communion with God, others, and the world around us.

In 1946, however, Thurneysen’s conception of the pastoral conversation tended to emphasise its distinction from regular “profane” conversation. His pastoral theology was still tightly bound within the framework of justification. He was hesitant to allow for any naturally acquired knowledge of God and, it followed, any natural human eloquence that could communicate such saving knowledge. After 1946, Thurneysen’s understanding continues to broaden and change in response to the world around him and in conversation with others, especially Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

After 1948, Thurneysen had access to Barth’s theological anthropology in Church Dogmatics III/2. Barth structured his anthropology quite differently from Thurneysen in Die Lehre. A notable difference is that, while Thurneysen begins with the constitution of the individual human being as body and soul, Barth only turns to the constitution of the human being after first establishing the basic form of humanity in terms of the Mitmenschlichkeit (co-humanity) of Jesus. Jesus is the true human being living with and for humanity in an exhaustive and exclusive way. While Jesus’s humanity is unique in his selfless being-for-others, all humanity consists in being with and for others in a relationship of reciprocity. This relating to one another is not firstly in a general or an abstract sense i.e. the human being in pluralistic relation to a group or to the abstract idea of “humanity”. It is firstly a personal relationship of

96 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 111. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 100.
97 By calling the pastoral conversation a “prototype”, Thurneysen is supposing that “our speaking, even when it concerns the most common things of life, can be done on the basis of the Word of God and with reference to the Word of God. Every conversation can show this care for man before God, therefore for his soul, as is proper in pastoral conversation.” His vision is for all profane conversation to become “liturgical conversation” as a lived response to the Word of God in our whole lives. See: A Theology of Pastoral Care, 111-12. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 100.
one with the other. The human being, Barth contends, “is not in isolation, and it is in pluralities only when these are constituted by genuine duality, by the singular on both sides.” For Barth, this is confirmed in the fundamental duality of male and female witnessed in Genesis 2. The human being is always fellow-human (Mitmensch). To be human is to be-in-encounter. Through encounter, the human being is not static, but dynamic, active, responsive. “It is not an esse but an existere.” We exist. We have a history in relationship. Thurneysen’s pastoral theology draws heavily on this language of Mitmenschlichkeit and of Begegnung (encounter), for establishing the importance of pastoral conversation specifically and human conversation generally as a central practice of one’s becoming human.

Alongside Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer became an important reading partner for Thurneysen. Confronted with the secularizing world of the late 1950s and 1960s in Switzerland, Thurneysen found in Bonhoeffer’s language of the “mature” and “areligious” human being in a world “come of age” a perceptive commentary on the changing times to which the church must respond. Bonhoeffer’s insights were accompanied by a recognition of God in the midst of life and a corresponding affirmation of this-worldliness.

I see Bonhoeffer’s influence on Thurneysen’s concept of encounter in three main ways. First, Thurneysen realised that the modern human being did not want to be “preached at” anymore. He was clear that this phenomenon did not illegitimate the preaching of the Word as the central life-forming act of the church. The church is called into being and defined by the Spirit speaking God’s eternal Word in time and space. But it did challenge outdated and moralistic forms of proclamation that failed to address the complexity of contemporary living. Proclamation that does not directly address and genuinely encounter “modern man” — whether in the pew or in the living room — is ineffective. All proclamation must become pastoral, just as pastoral care’s effectiveness is dependent on proclaiming God’s Word.

98 Barth, The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1948), III/2, 244.
99 Ibid., 248.
104 Thurneysen addressed this connection between proclamation and pastoral care a number of times. Especially: "Seelsorge Als Verkündigung: Als Festgabe Zum 70. Geburtstag Von Fritz Lieb." And: Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 28.
Thurneysen, the *dialogue*, the personal encounter in conversation from person to person, was an essential form of evangelistic proclamation, in this new environment. It was an antidote to the amorphous “mass-society” of urban living; it addressed the human being directly in the particularity of their life situation; and it was demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus himself and in the pastoral call placed on his disciples.105

Second, Thurneysen increasingly stressed that God in Christ is *with* the God-distant (*Gottfernen*) and those alienated from the faith. God is *already* present in the world. Genuine pastoral conversation encourages mutual “discovering” (*aufdecken*) of the God who is already present rather than “presenting” (*hinaustragen*) something previously absent.

Third, Thurneysen asserted that, though the content — proclaiming the hope of God’s coming kingdom in Christ — remains the same, the form of the pastoral conversation may “bear an entirely *worldly* form.”106 The conversation in its *concreteness* and sensitivity to the empirical situation may not have any explicit proclamation at all. And yet, it can nonetheless be pastoral conversation because of its basis in prayer and its underlying intentionality (from one or both conversation partners) to proclaim and receive hope in a concrete way. Through Bonhoeffer, Thurneysen came to more readily affirm the transformative power of God’s Word in and through profane, non-theological language. For this reason, “every human encounter [is] so mysterious and so deep.”107

In *Seelsorge im Vollzug*, Thurneysen devotes a whole chapter to framing pastoral care within the concept of “encounter”. The pastoral conversation, like human conversation generally, consists firstly in encounter “with a neighbour”. The act of encounter has a “transformative power” in that, through it, one transitions from a stranger to a neighbour.108 More than an aesthetic change, when one encounters another as neighbour, one awakens to one’s own life as a living and acting “I”. One becomes a *person*. Human encounter, then, cuts to the heart of personal human existence. Thurneysen, like Barth, agrees with Martin Buber: the human being is a *dialogical being* (*ein dialogisches Wesen*). “Through conversation with one’s fellow human, with the environment, the human being learns to recognise himself and to communicate with others.”109 Encounter is the decisive event of existence through which one

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105 Interestingly, Thurneysen interprets Matthew 9:36-38, the call to collect the harvest, as a call to pastoral care in the world, just as the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is a call to mission. *Seelsorge im Vollzug*, 24.
106 “…ein ganz weltliches Gepräge an sich trägt.” Ibid., 94.
107 “Das macht jede menschliche Begegnung so heimnisvoll und so tief.” Ibid., 96.
108 Ibid., 77-78.
has a history. One does not simply be. One exists in time and space as persons in relationship.\textsuperscript{110}

While in 1946, Thurneysen’s emphasis lay on the discontinuity between pastoral conversation and regular conversation, now in the concept of “encounter” the continuity is emphasised. All human encounter involves transformation (Verwandlung) with another. The distinctiveness of the pastoral conversation, though, is that it involves a second encounter “with and under” this first human encounter — encounter with God. And yet, in saying that God is with and under our human encounters, Thurneysen is in no way aligning himself with the existentialist philosophy of Fritz Buri. God is neither a cosmic entity, nor a ground of being, nor a code of existence. “God wants to say his Word to us in the sphere (Raum) of our co-humanity (Mitmenschlichkeit).”\textsuperscript{111} The God who speaks is none other than the God who speaks all creation into being, the God who addresses humanity as covenant partner, and the God who enables our corresponding answer as responsible persons. In encountering the human partner, one encounters the living God, who is the “first partner”, the original partner, of the human being.\textsuperscript{112} There is now no oppositional language of being “usurped” by God’s Word. Rather there is a sacramentality to creation (and to human encounter specifically) through which the living God encounters us: “the encounter with God does not occur somewhere outside, but inside creation.”\textsuperscript{113} Whereas the early Thurneysen framed our humanity in terms of a great question of a God who is absent and beyond, now our lives, our whole existence, and every human interaction and encounter, are an outflow of God’s Word and Spirit in the midst — a participation in the conversation of life, which God “conducts from the beginning over Him[self] and with Him[self]”.\textsuperscript{114} Rather than a question, our lives are thus an answer — admittedly a good or a bad answer — but an answer nonetheless to the Word of God from whom we live, move and have our being. The pastoral conversation is distinctive by its active awareness of encounter through one’s conversation with the living God, who is the origin and ultimate goal of every human encounter.

This active awareness is not something inherent in us but something given in the Holy Spirit according to the revealed Word of God in scripture. The pastoral conversation is therefore

\textsuperscript{110} Here, Thurneysen draws on the work of Hans-Rudolf Müller-Schewe, a practical theologian whom he got to know in Hamburg. Thurneysen filled in for Müller-Schewe as guest lecturer in 1960, 1961, and 1966.
\textsuperscript{111} My translation. “Gott will uns im Raum unserer Mitmenschlichkeit sein Wort sagen.” Thurneysen, Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 81.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} “…die Begegnung mit Gott nicht irgendwo außerhalb, sondern daß sie innerhalb der Schöpfung sich ereignet.” Ibid., 82. Again Thurneysen references Martin Buber as well as Karl Barth’s CD III/2.
\textsuperscript{114} “…daß Gott das Gespräd, das er von Anfang an über ihn und mit ihm führt…” ibid.
also distinct because of its content. Encounter with God and the communication of the kingdom hope do not simply consist in an amplification of one’s own personal hopes and desires or of achieving existential self-consciousness. That is why, for Thurneysen, pastoral care in no way replaces the sermon but flows from it. The proclamation of the Word as witnessed in scripture is “the superordinate” (das Übergrenzete) and the “real doing” (eigentliche Tun) from which pastoral care is a continuation, an outflow.115 As the Word of God lays claim over the entirety of one’s life it proceeds from general proclamation in the community to particular proclamation to the individual. Thurneysen’s whole theology of pastoral care proceeds on this basis. And it is necessarily so. Otherwise, it is one’s empirical circumstances or one’s subjective perception that predetermines knowledge of God and of human existence. For Thurneysen, this must be rejected in the strongest possible terms. In short, there is a connection for him between the Word of God and human words but this connection is entirely dependent on God’s gracious self-revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Our human words have been and are being sanctified even in their ordinariness, as Christ lays claim over the whole of life. In this way all human conversation can point to, and be a sign of, our sanctification in Christ. Yet it is not possible to therefore arrive at divine insight from the starting point of regular profane conversation. Human encounter is a sign of and response to the original divine encounter — not vice versa. The sign only makes sense in light of the original image to which it bears witness.

Finally, divine encounter “under and with” human encounter is always eschatological. The presence of God (Anwesenheit Gottes) is always the presence of God’s future which is coming in Christ. That means, for Thurneysen, that God’s presence is not something static; a kind of fact or ground of life. And the pastoral proclamation is not so much proclamation of particular information as it is proclamation of hope in Jesus Christ. Over the course of the conversation one is oriented towards the coming kingdom; one learns to see their empirical circumstances within God’s salvation plan; one sees oneself and sees the other according to their eschatological identity as children of God; we become what we are not; we are liberated from the bonds of sin in which the ego is placed at the centre of reality; and for the first time we encounter the other as true neighbour, as brother and sister in Christ before God the Father. What is given particular expression in the pastoral conversation is the promise which is over every human encounter: that we belong to God together as fellow children of God. What begins in the pastoral conversation can, for Thurneysen, become the ground of all

human relating as our way of viewing others is transformed and as we awaken to God’s presence in the Spirit, who is sanctifying all human life.\footnote{116 {Seelsorge Im Vollzug}, 82-83.}

\textit{“Becoming-concrete”: Living under the claim of God}

So far I have summed up Thurneysen’s anthropology in two ways: first, the human being is a \textit{Ganzheit} of body and soul through the continuous inbreathing of the Spirit; second, the human being is a \textit{person}, in-spired by the Spirit for communion with God and with others. One is personally and directly \textit{addressed} by the Word and in the address is awakened to one’s personhood and is thereby enabled to respond as an active “I”. I have already touched on the third decisive element in Thurneysen’s anthropology, particularly in the language of “responsibility”: the human being is a personal \textit{Ganzheit “under the claim of God.”}

Thurneysen, the pastor, is not so much interested in the idea of the human being. He is concerned with the concrete human being whose whole life has been called to obedience. The human being is a responsible being, called to obedient living through faith and love. Pastoral care is concerned, then, with sanctification, with right and holy living before God in the world. While theological anthropology is the theological \textit{base} of pastoral care, the sanctification of the human being is pastoral care’s \textit{purpose}. Communicating true knowledge of the human being in pastoral care anticipates the becoming concrete of that knowledge in the life of the believer. Chapter three of Die Lehre, concerned with the understanding of the human being, finishes with the explicit goal of the pastoral conversation: to call the human being in the totality of their existence to new, sanctified life before God through the grace of Christ.\footnote{117 {A Theology of Pastoral Care}, 67. {Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge}, 59.}

The melding together of theological anthropology, pastoral care, and sanctification arises out of Thurneysen’s commitment to articulate theology from the perspective of the third article of the confession of faith.\footnote{118 The article pertaining to the ministry of the third person of the Trinity and of the church. \footnote{119 Barth and Thurneysen, \textit{Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925}, 218, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 26 March 1925. \footnote{Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 2) 1921-1930, 321.}} As early as 1925, Thurneysen wrote to Barth of feeling drawn to the doctrine of the church having “cruised about in the waters of the third article of the creed since the beginning.” As late as 1964, he still asserted that everything has to do with the article of the Holy Spirit “in which the first and second articles are also naturally
included. ¹²⁰ In practice, this meant that his theology always proceeded on practical theological grounds. While that did not mean beginning epistemologically with the subjective experience of believers (he rejected Brunner and the Oxford Group on precisely this point), it did mean proceeding from the great proviso of the Holy Spirit here and now in concrete reality. For Thurneysen, the church is dynamic event (Ereignis) through which the living God calls God’s people into being at every moment.¹²¹

With regard to his doctrine of pastoral care, one sees a distinct emphasis emerging from 1946, particularly when contrasted with his 1928 article. In 1928, he defined pastoral care exclusively in terms of the doctrine of justification, our being made right before God through the death and resurrection of Christ.¹²² In 1946, the framework for pastoral care is now sanctification, our holy living before God in Christ by the Holy Spirit.¹²³ This is not so much a contradiction as it is a shift in emphasis. For Thurneysen, sanctification and justification are two aspects of the same reality: our being forgiven sinners in Jesus Christ. The theological starting point is still justification by grace alone. We are forgiven. But whereas before the emphasis was on the proclamation of one’s justified status, now Thurneysen is concerned with the practical outworking of that reality, with sanctification, with one’s ongoing living in new life with Christ. As pastor, he wants to address the individual believer within the community of faith and so his focus is on Christian living.

While Thurneysen drew heavily on Martin Luther in Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge (1928), now he draws on John Calvin to orient his thinking.¹²⁴ First, he places pastoral care within Calvin’s concept of church discipline, quoting extensively from Book IV of Calvin’s

¹²¹ “...die Kirche ist bei Eduard Thurneysen Ereignis.” Barth, "Geleitwort [1935],” 228.
¹²² Thurneysen, "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge,” 197.
¹²³ A Theology of Pastoral Care, 54. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 46.
¹²⁴ There are multiple reasons for this gradual shift in emphasis. In the earlier years, Calvin was an important influence but Thurneysen mainly refers to Calvin in establishing the presupposition of the living Word of God i.e. the revelation of God is the beginning of all knowledge of God and of the human being. However, given the emphasis in early dialectical theology on existential crisis as well as justification over sanctification, Thurneysen favoured Luther in his early theology of pastoral care. Later, as he sought to develop a systematic framework of pastoral care within the church as an outworking of the ministry of proclamation, Thurneysen found Calvin’s language of “church discipline” to be fruitful. Calvin’s emphasis in the Institutes of sanctification and the Christian life enabled Thurneysen to further develop his practical “life wisdom” at the heart of pastoral care.
Understanding pastoral care as a practice of discipline may seem rather archaic and draconian. Further, “discipline”, coming from the Latin word *disciplina*, “to school”, has educative connotations at best and punitive connotations at worst. Is this really the best frame within which to conceive of pastoral care? I discuss this aspect of Thurneysen’s thinking more in chapter seven, but it is important, here, to understand Thurneysen correctly on this point. In his introductory summary of the chapter on discipline, Thurneysen asserts:

“…pastoral care is a means of leading [the] individual to sermon and sacrament and thus to the Word of God, of incorporating him into the Christian community, and of preserving him in it. So understood, it is an act of sanctification and discipline by which the visible form of the community is constituted and kept alive and by which the individual is redeemed and preserved in spite of his degeneration and corruption.”

He continues, arguing that pastoral care is:

“wholly related to the Word, required by and grounded in the Word, and oriented toward the Word. Here the concern is not with some fostering of piety, but with preserving the Christian community as a community of the Word, as a community guided by 'the teaching of Christ.'”

Notably, *sanctification* (and by implication pastoral care) is understood in a communal sense. The individual is incorporated into the Christian community and preserved in it. One’s holy and right living before God is neither individualistic, pietistic nor progressive. So too, pastoral care is directed towards the incorporation of the individual in community. One becomes holy “in spite of his degeneration” in so far as one is preserved in the community of grace living in God’s Word by the power of God’s Spirit. “Church discipline”, then, is “the shape or the external form which the community assumes if it is constituted by the Word and the sacraments as the people obedient to Christ their King.”

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126 *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 27-28.

127 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 32.

128 By this term I mean the idea that one becomes progressively holy or less sinful over time. Thurneysen uses the term *Entsündigung* to articulate this progressive view of sanctification.


*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 41.
discipline”, Thurneysen is not advocating an authoritarian system for holding people accountable in the church. Rather, it is “the external form” of a community constituted and living by the Word. It is the outward shape of a community, and of the individuals within it, whose lives are claimed by God in Christ. Thurneysen is concerned, as Raschzok terms it, with establishing a “theological programme” for the praxis of the church. Or, as Gol Rim argues, Thurneysen’s “Word of God” concept is the interpretive key for the whole corpus of his work, including his practical theology. For Thurneysen, “proclamation” is the dynamic basis of the church’s ex-spiriting and in-spiriting life. Pastoral care occurs within the sphere of the church as a participation in the ministry of proclamation of the Word and the ministry of response to the Word. Like Calvin, Thurneysen was concerned, not only with the “vertical” aspect of grace between God and the individual, but also with the “horizontal” aspect between fellow humans as the Word of God takes root, becomes concrete, in our life together. Pastoral care find its integrity as well as its limits within this broader concept of the community being addressed and constituted by the Word.

The second way that Thurneysen draws on Calvin is less explicit but nonetheless important. De Vries argues that, alongside Barth’s covenant theology, Calvin’s doctrine of “double grace” is a central theological concept undergirding Die Lehre. By this term, De

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131 Rim, Gottes Wort, Verkündigung Und Kirche : Die Systematisch-Theologischen Grundlagen Der Theologie Eduard Thurneysens, 14.
132 Here it is important to distinguish in Thurneysen’s later thinking between “proclamation” as the object of practical theology and “the sermon” as a special function of the church. A number of critics of Thurneysen’s pastoral theology argue that he confuses and conflates pastoral care with the sermon. Yet, Thurneysen is quite clear that the pastoral conversation is genuinely conversation. In fact he increasingly warns against “sermonizing” in pastoral care. But pastoral care is to be understood within the dynamic proclamation of God’s Word into the world as it takes root in concrete reality and transforms lives. See: de Vries, "English Summary," 302.
133 It is not christianised psychotherapeutic counselling, nor pietistic self-help guidance. It serves a particular purpose defined by proclamation.
134 In Die Lehre, Thurneysen draws heavily on “the Reformers”, by which he primarily means John Calvin, Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and Heinrich Bullinger. However he relies on Calvin above all.
135 Calvin’s doctrine of double grace refers to the dual benefit of the grace of Christ received by the Holy Spirit in faith. The first is regeneration by faith through repentance and a life of holiness (sanctification). The second is justification by faith. Both are dealt with in Book III of the Institutes, cc. 3-10 and cc. 11-18 respectively. Thurneysen does not explicitly quote this part of the Institutes in Die Lehre, though he frequently claims support more generally from Calvin and the other Reformers in his discussion of different models of sanctification (chapter 4, Die Lehre). What is intriguing is that Calvin deals with sanctification before justification. That is not, however, to place the individual’s subjective decision of faith before that of God’s salvific work in Christ. For Calvin, everything is effected by the Holy Spirit through participation in Christ. And yet, for Calvin, the pastor, the benefits of Christ are obtained through new birth in the Holy Spirit. So he begins Book III (which corresponds to the third article of the Creed) with regeneration by faith, with call to repentance and to discipleship. Thurneysen, with his thesis on pastoral care, similarly focuses on the sanctification of the believer, the call to repentance, and one’s ongoing living in the community of faith by which one is sustained
Vries is referring to Calvin’s discussion in Book III of the Institutes on the benefits of the grace of Christ obtained through the Holy Spirit. The first is regeneration by faith and the call to new life in Christ (chapters 3-10). The second is justification by faith through God’s definitive and gracious judgment of humanity revealed in the death and resurrection of Christ (chapters 11-18). Notably, Calvin begins Book III (which corresponds to the Third Article of the Creed) with the believer’s regeneration through the Spirit and the ensuing call to new life in community. Sanctification precedes justification, not theologically but pastorally. One’s concrete living in the grace of Christ begins with the personal work of the Spirit in the life of the believer so that they may hear God’s direct proclamation of the kingdom, the ensuing call to repentance, and the corresponding invitation to follow in faith. One’s sanctified living and preservation in the faith community is the means by which they come to know they are justified in Christ. Or, put differently, “justification” is not a static truth one can grasp. It is an occurring truth, a dynamic truth, as one encounters and is nourished by the living God in community.

So too for Thurneysen: there is no dividing line between justification and sanctification. They are simply two aspects of the same reality. “Sanctification,” he asserted, “is nothing but making concrete” (Konkretwerden) the knowledge of being a forgiven sinner. In this Konkretwerden, Thurneysen brings theological understanding of human nature into conversation with empirical reality. It is not enough to simply assert that one lives under the claim of God. One must press further: so what does that mean for living and dying? What does it mean in every particular circumstance of one’s life? How now do we live as people defined by grace? Pastoral care concerns itself with these practical and grounded questions of human life in all its ordinariness. It is not interested in creating pious Christians but in helping people to become more fully, more authentically human before God and with others.

and nourished in the reality of Christ. He advocates at the end of chapter four of Die Lehre that pastoral care must learn to see the human being from the perspective of baptism, of one’s new birth in Christ by the Spirit.

Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 73.

Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 67.

Chapter four of Die Lehre is structured by erecting “the Reformed line” — as represented by Calvin et al. — as the default position against which Thurneysen rejects other models of sanctification and their corresponding pastoral praxis i.e. pietism, Roman Catholicism, liberalism, and the spiritualism propagated by the likes of Johannes Müller and Rudolf Steiner, who founded anthroposophy. Each of these models in their own way, Thurneysen contended, placed the individual rather than Jesus Christ at the centre of reality. Sanctification in pietism, for example, places its weight on the individual’s response to Christ, rather than the reality established in Christ. See chapter four: A Theology of Pastoral Care, 68ff.

Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 61ff.
For Thurneysen, the becoming-concrete of the Word of God, “the responsiveness of the human being to the forgiveness of sins,” involves a paradoxical affirmation: on the one hand, “faith is entirely transcendent since it is the work of the Spirit of God”; on the other hand, “it is entirely immanent since it wholly becomes a work which I am called to do.” Both realities are affirmed in the Holy Spirit who elects the human being and draws them through Christ into communion with the triune God. The reality of the incarnation, means that our humanness is affirmed and integrally involved in God’s saving work in the world. Christ, in his whole person, lives in perfect response to God in the power of the Spirit. He is fully God and fully human and therefore always acts in the fullness of his humanity which we share by the Spirit. In him, it is true to say both that God’s Spirit is fully at work and also that Christ responds to God in his full humanness. In Christ’s person, human will and divine will become one while remaining distinct. So it is with the Pentecostal reality of the Spirit who is in us and joining us with Christ. It is possible to say that an individual’s response to God in the power of the Spirit consists in both a free choice on the part of the human being as well as a work enabled and empowered by God. By proceeding from the third article and the language of sanctification, Thurneysen is able to affirm both the theological reality in Christ and the empirical particularity of the individual’s existence. One’s personal circumstances are not trivialised by his “top-down” theology. Rather they are seen according to a new perspective and redeemed in the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In spite of one’s sin, one is able to respond in faith by the Spirit, through whom one is constantly being reborn into Christ.

To be human is to live and to die as one who belongs to God. Reminding people of that is the subject matter of pastoral care. Thurneysen’s theological anthropology sought to be a practical and pastoral anthropology. One must meet people time and again in the midst of their living and dying and ask, what does it mean that this particular person is a child of God in this particular situation? Thurneysen employs a number of practical case-studies in his theological works. Part Two of Seelsorge im Vollzug (1968) deals expressly with concrete pastoral situations, covering three main areas: marriage, sex, and singleness; pastoral care to the sick; and comfort to the dying and grieving. As I will discuss in part two of my thesis, Thurneysen was a forerunner in developing practical theology as its own theological discipline. It is no mere application of “real” or “pure” theology. Neither is it just the

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138 See chapter 9, “Man’s Responsiveness to the Forgiveness of Sins”. A Theology of Pastoral Care, 179ff. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 162ff.
139 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 189. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 172.
development of methods or techniques for pastoral work. Practical theology is always theology emerging from the third article of the Creed; theology that is neither bound by dead and inflexible doctrine nor a mere theological justification of modern ideologies and movements. A practical “doctrine of man” will ask different questions and proceed on quite different grounds than a systematic doctrine or an exegetical study on scripture. I hope to show in part two that Thurneysen is of enduring value today in this regard.

**Conclusion**

Using Thurneysen’s definition from 1946 of the human being as “a personal Ganzheit under the claim of God”, I have drawn out three main themes of his later theological anthropology: first, the human being is a totality of body and soul through the sustaining work of the Spirit; second the human being is a person, created for fellowship with God and with others; finally the human being is called to holy and right living before God in community. All three aspects are linked. Sanctification is nothing other than the living into and fulfilment of genuine personhood. To be called to holy and right living is in no way to deny the body, or to shun society, or to progress on a path of personal piety — it is to be fully human as Christ is fully human, to live in body and soul as persons who belong to God.

Thurneysen, as Bohren said, was a “theologian before he was a practitioner” and a “pastor before he was a theoretician.” His major works on pastoral care, I have argued, do not so much provide a technical manual on pastoral care. They are firstly works of theology arising from the messiness of pastoral ministry and seeking to give a solid theological basis to pastoral care. His anthropology over this period emerges out of his practical and pastoral theological reflections. It is therefore a practical theological anthropology. Even though we see snippets of a more systematic exploration of being human — for instance, chapter three of *Die Lehre* — Thurneysen dwells on the praxis of the church as the “theopraxis” (or perhaps better still, the christopraxis) of our learning to become human before God and with others. As God speaks to us in and through one another, we do not simply learn about being human. We participate together in the life of the risen Christ, who is the true human being.

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140 Here I follow Thurneysen’s own language in his letter to Barth from 1924. See: Barth and Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth–Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925*, 217-18, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, 26 March 1925. That is not to say that practical theology does not also emerge the first and second articles. It is to recognise, however, that for Thurneysen, any theological activity is always in response to the ever-occurring event of God’s speaking in the church. God’s truth is “an occurring truth” through the illuminating ministry of the Spirit, uniting with us the Son, who lifts us into communion with the Father. On this basis, the church’s task of practical theology always proceeds in the power of the Holy Spirit as witnessed to in the Third Article.

We share in his humanity as, by the Spirit, we are reconciled to God and to one another in love.

This concludes part one of my thesis in which I have tried to sum up Thurneysen’s theological anthropology at each major stage of his life and ministry. Part two consists in a more sustained discussion of three emerging threads from his work that I believe have ongoing value today. Thurneysen was constantly interested in questions of human nature. And he always asked these questions in the context of pastoral ministry with the intention of communicating comfort and hope to those to whom he ministered. In this way, Thurneysen laid the groundwork for a practical, pastoral and eschatological orientation for theological anthropology. By recovering and reconstructing Thurneysen’s theology in conversation with more contemporary theologians, he can continue to speak to the church today as we discern anew what it is to be fully human before God and with one another.
Part Two

Theological Anthropology

in New Orientations
Theological Anthropology as Practical Task

Chapter Seven: In Conversation with Ray Anderson

Introduction

The human being is one personally and directly addressed by the Word of God. Before this is an intellectual proposition, it is a practical and occurring reality. Its veracity depends on the act of God’s speaking personally and directly to human beings today. As they sought to find their feet in ministry, Thurneysen and Barth advocated a return to this basic presupposition. The event of proclamation in the local congregation was, in their eyes, the real “arena of the kingdom of God”.¹ Here, in the midst of ordinary people, in the real problematic of real life, God speaks. While a systematic theologian focusses on the content of this speaking, the practical theologian attends to the act of speaking itself.² While Barth tended towards the former, Thurneysen tended towards the latter. For him, the deepest questions of human nature unfold through lived response to God’s eternal Word breaking in. Theological anthropology is always practical, pastoral, and eschatological anthropology as the kingdom of God is revealed and takes root in the life of ordinary people. The trajectory of his thinking as it developed over the course of his life, arose from and returned time and again to its kerygmatic origins. Having traced the development of his thinking in part one, we now deal

¹ Barth and Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925, 231, Letter Barth to Thurneysen, 23 June 1925.
² Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 9.
explicitly in the part two with the practical, pastoral, and eschatological orientations of his anthropology.

In the remaining chapters, I explore the implications of the “Thurneysenian way” in conversation with three, more contemporary theologians: Ray Anderson, John Swinton, and Jürgen Moltmann. I will explain at the beginning of each chapter why I chose each respective theologian. However, a few more general introductory comments are necessary at this stage.

First, by bringing Thurneysen into conversation with more contemporary theologians, I hope to demonstrate that he is still a voice worth hearing today, and not merely as an echo of Karl Barth, but as someone whose commitment to pastoral practice gives him a unique perspective and emphasis.

Second, two of the three conversation partners (Anderson and Swinton) are from the Anglophone world and the third (Moltmann), while German, has been translated into English and all his major works have been made widely available. In bringing these three theologians into conversation with Thurneysen, I hope to encourage renewed interest in Thurneysen’s work outside of Germany and Switzerland.

Third, this is not the place for an extensive analysis or even a comprehensive summary of the three chosen conversation partners. Instead I focus on one or two key works of each that I see as particularly pertinent to Thurneysen’s own theological anthropology. The intention here is, through dialogue with Anderson, Swinton, and Moltmann, to draw out the three above-mentioned orientations in Thurneysen’s work and explore their implications.

Fourth, I recognise the intercultural and cultural issues arising from choosing three male interlocutors from a Western perspective. I chose each interlocutor to discuss the implications of the key threads in Thurneysen’s thought as they arose from part one of my thesis. The purpose of the thesis was to understand and evaluate Thurneysen’s theological anthropology rather than to develop a more general theological anthropology for today. For that reason I prioritised theologians whose work illuminated specific concepts in Thurneysen’s work rather than a diversity of voices. However, my hope is that this thesis serves as a launching pad for future discussions that bring Thurneysen’s ideas into critical conversation with a plurality of perspectives.

In this chapter, through bringing Thurneysen and Anderson into dialogue, I begin by defining a praxis-oriented theological anthropology. Then, I point to a number of distinguishing foci of the praxis-oriented approach in the work of Thurneysen (in conversation with Anderson):
the act of proclamation, a dialectical hermeneutic, a liturgical paradigm, the context of the congregation, the sanctification of human life, and the empirical situation. First, though, I offer an introductory remark for why I chose Ray Anderson.

In conversation with Ray S. Anderson

In an obituary for Ray Anderson (1925-2009), Christian Kettler writes that Anderson’s body of work is remarkable in its ability to “awaken both theology and the church to a theology that actually intersects with the ministry of the church and a view of ministry that dwells in a deep place of reflection.”

Anderson was a pioneering thinker in the field of practical theology seeking to rescue it from the modernist assertion that theory precedes practice. In the preface to his book, The Shape of Practical Theology, he wrote:

“…the traffic on the bridge connecting theory and practice now flows both ways … a new breed of practical theologians is emerging and the shape of practical theology is rapidly changing. The line between ‘pure theology’ and practical theology, as well as the demarcation between theory and practice, no longer is drawn so sharply and definitively.”

Already there is congruence with Thurneysen’s own approach decades earlier. His assertion, with Barth, that all theology is a response to the living address of God’s Word in the church challenges or at least relativises such traditional distinctions and ordering. Thurneysen proceeds with a praxis-oriented approach, which places at the heart of theology not a theory but a practice or, more specifically, an event: the proclamation of the Word of God in the community of God.

It should, perhaps, come as little surprise that Thurneysen and Anderson make fruitful conversation partners. Anderson was a student of T.F. Torrance, who was in turn a student of Karl Barth. Through Torrance, Anderson was highly influenced by the theology of Barth. While he does not regularly mention Thurneysen, Anderson’s emphasis in practical theology and ministry arising especially from his familiarity with Barth means that one does not have to look far to find consonance between the two. In this chapter, I draw on two of Anderson’s works: his 1982 collation of essays on theological anthropology, On Being Human, and his 2001 book, The Shape of Practical Theology.

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4 Anderson, The Shape of Practical Theology, 7-8.
Towards a praxis-oriented theological anthropology

Thurneysen and Anderson are in agreement that all theology — or, perhaps, all good theology — should be praxis-oriented. In 1925, Thurneysen posited that theology is, in the most fundamental sense, practical in nature. “What does that mean?” he asked,

“It means that, in strict contrast to all theoretical-objectivizing knowledge, it is a knowledge that generates action, which has arisen from and continuously arises from an action and therefore directs itself towards action.”

This praxis-oriented knowledge arises from the act, or the event, of God’s Word proclaimed:

“We shall not and cannot speak directly of God, whether speculatively or experientially. Rather, we can do so only in constant reversion to the fact that there is only one Word that really speaks of God and that is God’s own word.”

The living truth of God’s Word is true “only as it becomes true”, which is to say, it refuses to be bound by theoretical-objectivizing human ideas and concepts but is encountered in the event of revelation. “It is an ‘occurring truth’,” Thurneysen later remarked, “insofar as God ever anew makes it come true.”

Anderson, too, talks about theology arising from the activity of God in the ministry of the church:

“All ministry is God’s ministry … God’s initial act, and every subsequent act of revelation, is a ministry of reconciliation. Out of this ministry emerges theological activity, exploring and expounding the nature and purpose of God in and for creation and human creatures. Theology thus serves as the handmaid of ministry.”

He presses further, arguing the “practice” of ministry is itself theological activity:

“Ministry cannot be construed solely as the practical application (or technique) that makes theological knowledge relevant and effective. Theological activity must emerge out of ministry and for the sake of ministry if it is to be in accordance with the

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5 My translation. Thurneysen, ”Konfirmandenunterricht (1925),“ 119.
6 My translation. Ibid., 120.
7 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 12.
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 10.
8 Anderson, The Shape of Practical Theology, 62.
divine modality. The ‘practice’ of ministry, then, is not only the appropriate context for doing theological thinking, it is itself intrinsically a theological activity.”

Anderson’s ordering of theology from ministry is familiar. “Theology because of the church,” Thurneysen and Barth used to remind each other. While Barth committed himself to carrying out this task primarily in the academic sphere, Thurneysen did his theological thinking from the Existenzgrund of the church. His writings as a practical theologian were not so much concerned with practical application or technique of ‘pure’ theology. They were primarily theological reflections on the practice of ministry, which is itself theological activity. A praxis-oriented approach to theology requires historic, systematic and practical theologians: the demarcation lines are still present, though blurred. Each discipline arises from and returns to the concrete faith community as it attends to the scriptures and is drawn ever anew into God’s reconciling work in the world. With regard to theological anthropology — the study of the human being from a theological perspective — this praxis oriented approach suggests that the practices of the church not only provide the appropriate context for thinking about human existence theologically; the practices of the church, as embodied theological activity, themselves communicate and realise what it is to be truly human before God and with one another. Theological anthropology is traditionally a sub-topic within systematic theology. Both Anderson and Thurneysen are heavily influenced by Barth’s ground-breaking work in theological anthropology developed in Church Dogmatics III/1 and III/2. Here, Barth conceives of the human being from the starting point of Jesus Christ. Our humanity is determined by his humanity rather than vice versa. Barth argues that theological anthropology confines its enquiry to the nature of the human being who stands in relationship to God as one addressed by God’s Word. Because its foundation is God’s Word and not any human words or knowledge, it does not arise from studying the phenomena of human existence, but from the act of God’s self-revelation: “As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our knowledge of the nature of man as created by God.” For Barth, however, the humanity of Jesus Christ is no idealisation of humanity. He is not the “ideal man” but “real man” who, in his particularity and concreteness, lives according to God’s original and final determination for the human being as covenant partner of God and fellow human (Mitmensch) to other humans. The incarnation, therefore, is not

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9 Ibid.
10 Barth, The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1948), III/2, 41.
about the *christianisation or idealisation* of humanity, but about the *Vermenschlichung* (humanisation) of humanity. Drawing on Barth, Anderson wrote of the incarnation: “humanity in its concrete and historical form as creaturely existence is brought back into its contingent relation to God and to the other as the concrete neighbour.”

Being human as a determination of God does not consist, then, in an abstract ethical ideal but in concrete, historical existence of human life in right relationship with God and with others. It is *practical* knowledge: knowledge that is not so much comprehended as it is *lived into*. The local, concrete church, as it proclaims Jesus Christ and is conformed to him by the Spirit, becomes the restored and renewed humanity, reconciled to God and to one another. It lives by grace from the forgiveness of sins. In this way, it is formed by and constantly conformed to a new way of living in and for the world. The Christoform and Spirit-empowered life and ministry of the church orients believers to God in faith and to one another in love. As a reconciled and reconciling community, it is a *humanising* community.

Here, theological anthropology crosses the bounds from systematic theology to practical theology. Thurneysen certainly saw the need for a systematic theological anthropology, calling its foundation and development “one of the most important tasks of all theology.” (Not surprisingly, he names Barth’s *CD III/1* and *III/2* as preeminent examples of this “most important task”.) But Thurneysen’s own project lies in the *interplay* between doctrine and empirical reality, especially in the field of pastoral theology. He focuses on the practices of the church themselves, by which the empirical human being is conformed to Christ in the power of the Spirit within the community of faith and in so doing comes to know what it is to be truly human with God and others.

**The act of proclamation**

A praxis-oriented theological anthropology, I have suggested, will see the practices of the church not merely as a means of conveying ideas or concepts about being human. The practices are themselves embodied theological action by which the church shares in Christ’s risen and ascended humanity by the Spirit. In this way, the ministry of the church is first and foremost the ministry of Christ. Christ’s ministry to the Father on behalf of the world is a twofold ministry: the ministry of revelation in which Christ represents God to humanity, and

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11 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 139.
*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 57.
the ministry of reconciliation in which Christ represents humanity to God; the ministry of the Word and the ministry of response to the Word.

With regard to theological anthropology, it is the latter, the human response to the Word, that concerns us here. Both Anderson and Thurneysen place the human responsiveness to God at the heart of what it means to be human. The *imago dei* is the divine endowment that arises from God’s address. Our humanness lies in our capacity to respond to God as covenant partner. Yet this capacity is no “innate disposition of the creature,” says Anderson. “Adam does not bear the divine image because he is human; he becomes human as a result of the divine fiat, portrayed as a divine inbreathing (Gen 2:7).”

13 God’s Word and Spirit, in other words, creates and enables the responsiveness, the *personhood*, which makes us human.

Thurneysen, too, points to the divine inbreathing as the key event of the giving of the *imago dei*. “The act of God animates him [man].” But distinct from the animals, the inbreathing of the Spirit into the human being in Genesis 2:7 denotes “this responsible personhood of man before God.”

14 Our humanness consists in our personhood. We are not only created. We are created for intimacy of relationship with God and with others. Christ is the true image of God, not in the sense of replacing the old, destroyed image, but in the sense of fulfilling and restoring the image universal in every human being. Christ in his incarnate life offers the true human response to God.

Because the church shares in the life and ministry of Christ to the Father on behalf of the world, it shares in his dual ministry of revelation and reconciliation centred in the act of proclamation. In Anderson’s words, “revelation and reconciliation are reciprocal movements of a single event.”

16 The revelation itself creates the occasion for response. The Word calls the church into being. God creates *ex nihilo*. Put differently, the Word is “self-authenticating in its demand for recognition and response.”

17 A similar idea is present at the heart of Thurneysen’s theology of revelation. In *Schrift und Offenbarung* (1924), he asserted that revelation, “creates the ears that alone can hear and the eyes that alone can see.”

18 In *Bergpredigt*, the law is no secondary response after the gospel. The assurance contains the

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14 Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 60.
15 *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 52.
17 Ibid.
18 My translation. Thurneysen, "*Schrift Und Offenbarung* (1924)," 38.
command. We are called to obedient living, but on the basis of grace and under the fulfilment of Christ.\textsuperscript{19} For Thurneysen, the act of proclamation of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ itself enacts what it proclaims. Revelation is reconciliation. In the address, the gathered community really becomes the community of forgiven sinners, a reconciled and reconciling community in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Anderson helpfully distinguishes between \textit{poiēsis} and \textit{praxis}.\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Poiēsis} is an action that does not include the \textit{telos} of that action, for example the making of a chair. The making is a means to an end. \textit{Praxis}, by contrast, is an action that includes its \textit{telos}. It is not a means to an end but its purpose lies in the doing itself. The act of proclamation is \textit{praxis}. As the church proclaims the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ it becomes reconciled humanity in him. In this understanding, pastoral care is also \textit{praxis} rather than \textit{poiēsis}. In the event of interpersonal encounter, in the mutual act of caring, pastoral care effects what it proclaims.

By my lights, Thurneysen is more faithfully understood when his theology of the pastoral conversation is seen as \textit{praxis} rather than \textit{poiēsis}. If the pastoral conversation is \textit{poiēsis}, then it is a means to an end and its success is dependent on achieving that end i.e. the healing of the human being or the repentance of sin. Thurneysen can and has been read unfavourably as suggesting that the pastoral conversation consists in the communication of particular content by an authority figure (i.e. the ordained minister) in order to effect a “breach” in the conversation. The conversation, in other words, is a means to an end. But, as Albrecht Grözinger points out, while one can read Thurneysen in this way, it is not necessarily fair or accurate to do so.\textsuperscript{21} For Thurneysen, the pastoral conversation, as an instance of proclamation, effects what it proclaims. It is \textit{praxis}. In the conversation one listens for the Word of God in and with the other. And in the listening one becomes once more addressed by God as a forgiven sinner in Jesus Christ. Pastoral conversations are concrete instances of the ministry of reconciliation in the church as the community is continually formed by the Word and returns to the Word. While the content of the conversation is important, for Thurneysen, so is the conversation itself as interpersonal dialogue. In the conversation the two partners relate to one another in mutual care and hold each other before God within the reconciling community of the church. Forgiveness of sins is embodied in the conversation itself as much as it is communicated through explicit content.

\textsuperscript{19} The Sermon on the Mount, 65.
\textquotedblright Die Bergpredigt,	extquotedblright 43.
\textsuperscript{20} Anderson, \textit{The Shape of Practical Theology}, 49.
\textsuperscript{21} Grözinger, \textit{Eduard Thurneysen}, 289.
As a concrete instance of reconciliation, Thurneysen reasons, we should be “audacious” in pastoral care.\(^\text{22}\) We should expect that the Holy Spirit will effect real transformation in the life of the individual. We should expect that one’s identity in Jesus Christ will take hold of them in a tangible way resulting in actual change (whatever that change looks like in the particularity of their life situation). But importantly, whether this concrete change takes place or not, does not validate or invalidate the pastoral conversation. The conversation’s effectiveness lies not in one’s subjective response but in the actualised affirmation of one’s life in Jesus Christ which takes place in the conversation itself.

I have argued that, in the act of proclamation in the church, the church shares in the reconciled humanity of Christ in whom we learn what it is to be human. That is not to suggest, however, that those outside the church are any less human. Every person is fully human by virtue of the imago dei, the status endowed upon the human being through the inbreathing of God’s Spirit. But even as we are human, we can nonetheless commit inhuman and dehumanising acts, which is true for Christians and non-Christians alike. We still are the imago dei, but the imago dei is corrupted to its very core. Christ fulfils and restores the imago dei and as such is the true image of God — but he is not more human than anyone else and, so too, the church which participates in his humanity by the Spirit is not more human than anyone else either. Christ’s perfect humanity does not consist in some added dimension that we lack but in his perfect lived obedience according to God’s good intention for all human beings to be the covenant partner of God and fellow-humans to one another.

In this assertion lies the missiological dimension to a praxis-oriented theological anthropology. Both Anderson and Thurneysen understand the act of proclamation not primarily as a proclamation to the church but as proclamation to the world. “Ministry precedes and determines the church,” Anderson asserted.\(^\text{23}\) Practical theology is critical reflection into the “praxis of the church in the world and God’s purposes for humanity”. Its primary purpose is “to ensure that the church’s public proclamations and praxis in the world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God’s continuing mission to the world”.\(^\text{24}\) This missional element of practical theology, while somewhat muted in Die Lehre, finds voice for Thurneysen as well in Seelsorge im Vollzug when he highlights two presuppositions to pastoral care. First, pastoral care is a mission of the laity, the whole laos of God, as it

\(^{22}\) Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 188.
\(^{23}\) Anderson, The Shape of Practical Theology, 62.
\(^{24}\) My italicisation. Ibid., 22.
participates in Christ’s caring ministry for the world. Second, pastoral care is proclamation to “angesprochenen Menschen”, the addressed human being, which includes “every person in the expanse of the world.” The object of God’s address is therefore not the Christian or the church-goer, but every human being as a person created for relationship with God.

The church, as the community reconciled by God’s Word of forgiveness, is witness and sign of God’s purposes for all humanity. What is concretely realised in the church does not withdraw the church from the rest of the world. Rather, the concrete realisation of God’s forgiveness in the church pre-empts Christ’s coming-again in fullness and the final redemption of all things in him. The act of proclamation consists in the sending of the church into the world as a missionary people. By the Spirit it is drawn into the servant ministry of Christ, the true human being, in perfect obedience to the will of the Father. By grounding theological anthropology in the act of proclamation, the knowledge of being human does not simply consist in ideas and concepts but in reconciling service in and for the world in accordance with the life and ministry of Christ.

**A dialectical hermeneutic**

In chapter three, I discussed Thurneysen’s aesthetic or eternal perspective which is most explicitly presented in his work on Dostoevsky. At the heart of his Todesweisheit was a radical negation of human knowing through an absolute transcendent metaphysic. Far from rejecting reality, though, Thurneysen sought to re-engage with reality as it is, stripped of all human ideologies, subjective worldviews, and metaphysical speculation. Through expressionist and poetic language, Thurneysen spoke of a turning-back to the empirical concrete human being under the sign of the resurrection. There is a dialectical affirmation of life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who crosses the divide between God and humanity and affirms human existence on the basis of grace.

Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective is developed in his theology of pastoral care through a dialectical hermeneutic. For Thurneysen, pastoral counselling does not merely proceed within the limitations set by the person who is being counselled. Through active listening, the conversation partners will “read” or “interpret” the person’s concrete situation by voicing realities. But this interpretation will not simply echo back the internal monologue of the person. Over the course of the conversation the “world” of the person will be brought into the dialectical relationship with the promise of God witnessed in scripture. The concrete situation

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is “interpreted” under the promise and sign of the resurrection, which is not to say empirical reality is in any way trivialised or ignored. Rather, over the course of the conversation, discernment will take place out of which the person counselled is encouraged to re-engage with empirical reality but with a new outlook, a new way of seeing. The discernment process will open empirical reality to new possibilities for healing, reconciliation, redemption, and peace — in short, it will seek to voice hope in the midst of hopelessness. This is what Thurneysen calls “the breach” in the conversation, under which the whole of human life is brought under God’s Word of judgment and Word of grace. The “breach” is the opening up of new possibilities oriented to God’s coming future in Jesus Christ, rather than the future that one may or may not be able to imagine for themselves. The pastoral conversation “crucifies” our false views of the world by which we create our own realities and invites us to re-engage with real life according to God’s will and good intentions.

Anderson can further elucidate what Thurneysen was saying. Albrecht Grözinger claimed that the early Thurneysen “ultimately formulated methodological questions of practical theology aporetically.”26 He was wary of developing a pastoral technique on the basis of his aesthetic perspective for fear it would curtail the sovereign freedom of God. The paradox at the heart of practical theology proved an insurmountable barrier for the early Thurneysen. Even later, the language in Die Lehre of “the breach” in the pastoral conversation continued to reflect a theological reality through expressionistic metaphor. Critics of Thurneysen argue that his pastoral theology imposes a top-down methodology or fails to develop a methodology at all by simply defaulting to prayer and the unquantifiable work of the Holy Spirit.27 Anderson helps us to move beyond this criticism. He complements Thurneysen’s forays in practical and pastoral theology with a scientific methodology for theological discernment. Anderson gives Thurneysen’s pastoral approach credibility in today’s clinical environment by suggesting two models for practical discernment: christopraxis and eschatological preference.

Anderson’s model of christopraxis is adapted from Don Browning’s model of practical reason. Browning centres his model on the actual experience of an individual or community. He seeks to integrate theory and practice through a continuous process of action and reflection. But this “inner core” of theological discernment takes place within a wider context that includes “interpretive paradigms, experimental probes, historical consciousness and

27 Ibid., 289.
communities of memory.” Anderson’s adaptation places this process of discernment within the triune ministry of the Son to the Father through the Spirit. All ministry of the church, we have said, is a sharing in ministry of the risen and ascended Christ by the Spirit. Therefore Anderson places “christopraxis” at the heart of his model, rather than human experience. It presupposes that Christ is already a present reality ministering in the world.

Through his concept of christopraxis, Anderson establishes a similar dialectical hermeneutic as Thurneysen between the world of scripture and contemporary reality. On the one hand, scripture is “a normative, apostolic deposit of truth” and as such remains critical for a “hermeneutic of Christopraxis”. On the other hand, the ministry of Jesus “is as authoritative and revealing of God as the teaching of Jesus. Thus Christology as an academic discipline must also be correlated with Christopraxis as a discipline of practical theology.” Anderson argued that the concept of christopraxis “upholds the full authority and objectivity of the divine Word as written in holy Scripture but only because Scripture itself is contingent on the being of God as given to us through the incarnate Word. Should one wish to dissolve this contingency into a Word of God that exists as a sheer objectification of truth detached from God’s being, it would be done at the peril of idolatry, in my judgment.”

If Anderson’s thesis is correct, then it erases the false dichotomy between the authority of scripture and the empirical reality of the pastoral situation. The accusation laid against Thurneysen that the empirical situation is undermined through his biblical realism does not do justice to the ongoing and dynamic ministry of the triune God in the world. Proper discernment does not involve imposing fixed biblical principles on any given situation. Rather it involves a continuous process of bringing our experience of what God is doing into critical dialogue with the God revealed in scripture. The decisive hermeneutical criterion is neither a biblical principle nor subjective experience, but the resurrected Christ himself.

The second model Anderson proposes proceeds from the liberating ministry of the Holy Spirit in anticipation of the coming eschaton. Anderson begins by asking which epoch of history is normative for theology. In his reasoning, it is neither the 1st century C.E. nor our current time. In other words, the church is neither bound to a past time (a mere relic of history), nor is it a product of its own time (simply reflecting the Zeitgeist). Anderson

29 Ibid., 30.
30 Ibid., 53.
suggests it is the end time, the eschaton, which is normative for theology because the Spirit comes to us out of the future. He therefore argues there are two principles that drive our discernment in the present. The first is eschatological preference which describes the liberating ministry of the Spirit to challenge oppressive cultural practices and restrictive traditions in anticipation of God’s liberating future reign. Anderson points to various instances in the book of Acts where “eschatological preference was seen to prevail over historical precedence.” He reasons that, if the same Holy Spirit is active in the world today, “should we not expect the praxis of the Spirit in our day to operate with the same freedom?”

Yet Anderson is clear that this is not theological justification to relativise biblical authority to the level of subjective experience. Just because one feels that something is the movement of the Spirit, does not mean it is. Such reasoning would lead to a kind of spiritual anarchism where anything goes. The second principle, then, is biblical antecedent. Anderson distinguishes between biblical precedent and biblical antecedent. Biblical precedent takes more of a legalistic view of scripture in which the church is bound to the historical precedent set by the early church. Such an approach is problematic with regard to a number of ethical issues where certain passages of scripture contradict other passages or when contemporary concepts and definitions are eisegetically imposed on biblical texts. Biblical antecedent, by contrast, begins with what the Spirit appears to be doing in the present and then looks to scripture for theological antecedent. “As nearly as I can see, for every case in which eschatological preference was exercised by the Spirit in the New Testament church, there was a biblical antecedent for what appeared to be revolutionary and new.” Anderson is not wanting to suggest that the church simply uses scripture to find theological justification for contemporary worldviews and ideologies. Our century is no more normative for theology than the 1st Century. Rather, he wants to develop a process of critical, reflective discernment at the heart of the church’s life as it awakens to the coming Kingdom and as it navigates by the Spirit its existence “between the times”. The present moment is oriented in hope for the future, which is grounded in the promise of the past.

Anderson’s concepts of christopraxis and eschatological preference help us to understand Thurneysen’s *aesthetic perspective* as an attempt to introduce a critical, *eschatologically-oriented* dialectic at the heart of pastoral ministry. The dialectic, understood within the triune ministry of Christ to the Father by the Spirit, takes empirical reality seriously as the living

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31 Ibid., 107.
32 Ibid., 106.
33 Ibid., 109.
setting in which the risen Christ is at work. There is critical discernment that occurs in pastoral conversation that orients a person, in their particular circumstances, towards possibilities of healing, restoration, redemption, and peace through the liberating ministry of the Spirit in anticipation of fullness of life with God. The critical dialectic is of central importance to a praxis-oriented theological anthropology, which addresses questions of human existence as a process of biblically-grounded, relational discernment in the present moment.

**A liturgical paradigm**

In his discussion of the pastoral conversation, Thurneysen uses the passing phrase “liturgical conversation” to articulate the responsive element of pastoral care to God’s Word as the conversation partners dialogue prayerfully together:

“…when this dialogue between two [persons], started perhaps entirely on the profane level, succeed in submitting the partners to the authority of the Word of God, then a true pastoral conversation has been achieved. Then the conversation becomes quite unintentionally, yet necessarily, liturgical conversation in the proper sense. In such pastoral conversation, the Bible is opened, the Word of God is read and interpreted, there is prayer; God is praised and thanked.”

For Thurneysen’s critics, this assertion may sum up their unease with his model as seeming to confuse the dialogical and non-authoritative nature of pastoral conversation with the authoritative proclamatory nature of the sermon which calls forth a response of praise. As a theological concept however, Thurneysen hints at something very important regarding the christological and liturgical significance of pastoral care. Unfortunately, he does not develop the phrase further, but Ray Anderson can help us to broaden our conceptual horizons beyond what Thurneysen himself said.

In his 1982 book, *On Being Human*, Anderson includes a chapter towards the end entitled, *A Liturgical Paradigm for Authentic Personhood*. His basic premise is that the liturgical practice of community is immensely significant for the reinforcement of authentic personhood. Personhood, we have seen, is a relational term as one belongs and is validated in community. Every culture, Anderson asserts, has “rites of passage” or rituals that enact a

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*Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 98.

transition and confer status on a person within the community to which they belong. These rituals can be secular — take, for example, birthdays, graduations, or anniversaries —, or they can be religious — for example, confirmation, bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah etc. They can be positive, personalising rituals that authenticate and reinforce one’s sense of self, or they can be destructive, depersonalising rituals that diminish a person. Importantly, every culture will have rituals and narratives (“liturgies” in the broadest sense of the term) by which one’s personhood is authenticated (or unauthenticated) in community. Within the natural life cycle of birth and death, rites of passage give meaning and structure to one’s life in community. They give expression to our basic human need to belong and to be valued, and are a distinctive characteristic of intentional human community.

In Jesus Christ we learn that one’s personhood is not simply a possibility that only comes into existence through healthy, functioning relationships. It is an actuality. One is a person by virtue of God’s address to humanity in Jesus Christ. We are created for relationship and community. A human being, in other words, is ontologically a relational being. The actuality of personhood, Anderson writes, “becomes actualized in our own lives through the experiences that may be called ‘rituals of reinforcement’”. The actualisation occurs in a general way in every human community as we live as persons-in-relationship. However, because personhood is firstly a theological reality, posited by the Word of God, the liturgy of the church is the fullest and truest authentication of human personhood in community. The liturgy of the church is the eschatological sign of the new humanity in Christ as it is drawn into communion with God the Father by the Spirit — in this is its universal significance and relevance for every culture, time, and place. That is to say, on a purely sociological level, the religious ritual of Christianity has no special claim. Only on a theological level can we make such an assertion.

For both Anderson and Thurneysen, the liturgical practice of the church is first and foremost the liturgy of the risen Christ. The church shares in his ministry of reconciliation to the Father by the Spirit. In his representation of the people to God, Christ is the true leitourgos, the high priest, who serves in the sanctuary of God. But, in Anderson’s words, “he is the liturgist, who chooses the fields, the shops, and the streets as his sanctuary in which to render service to God.” In the gospels, we read of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation through restoring

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36 Anderson, On Being Human, 179.
37 Ibid., 180.
38 Quoting Hebrews 8:2.
sinners to the kingdom of God. He authenticates the personhood of people who have been rejected or outcast by society. In this way, Jesus practises his liturgy of reconciliation, authenticating personhood through “rituals of reinforcement” (e.g. touching the sick). The authentication of personhood is not simply a by-product of Christ’s liturgical action — it is central to it. The priestly liturgy sets aside and offers up that which belongs to God. Through the liturgy the people are sanctified, set apart for God, which is to say the people are reconciled with God. In this sanctifying and reconciling action, the people are restored to health and wholeness, drawn into renewed relationship, and reassured of God’s non-abandonment and invitation to life.

The liturgy of Christ, we have argued, is the liturgy of reconciliation leading to the authentication of personhood. In the church, this liturgy begins in the central practice of baptism. For Anderson, baptism is the definitive “rite of passage” by which an individual transitions into the community of faith and is conferred status as a child of God through the death and life of Jesus Christ. The same can be said for Thurneysen, who asserted:

“We need a pastoral care which sees man in the perspective of baptism. For baptism is the sign that man in and with his whole double nature, his conscious and his unconscious, in short his totality or, to quote once more from the Catechism, ‘With body and soul, both in life and death, is not his own, but belongs to his faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.’”

The critical point is that one now belongs to Christ. One’s personhood is authenticated in the new community of Christ in which one is valued and given equal worth around the Eucharistic table. Through unconditional belonging in Christ, one is free to truly be oneself. Crucially, Thurneysen’s understanding of pastoral care proceeds from this starting point. What begins in the act of worship and in baptism continues with Christ, who has made the whole world his sanctuary, into shops, streets, and homes. On this basis, pastoral care is a liturgical practice of reconciliation that authenticates one’s personhood in the people of God. In Thurneysen’s words, it is properly liturgical conversation. It is a ritual of reinforcement. Whether or not the conversation takes on a formally liturgical nature is beside the point — here, we push further than Thurneysen. Martin Nicol is right in his assertion that pastoral conversation is a fundamentally different communication form than the proclamation of the

40 Ibid., 179-80.
41 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 97.
Though he did not make the point convincingly enough, Thurneysen would agree: pastoral care is *formally* and *materially* conversation.\(^4^3\) However, Thurneysen’s basis premise is right: pastoral conversation is liturgical conversation in so far as it is a lived human response to the living Word of God. It is liturgical conversation by virtue of Christ’s liturgical ministry of reconciliation and sanctification in the world in which we participate by the Spirit. As individuals meet together in an act of mutual care, affirming the personhood of the other, and drawing them back into community, they are sharing in the liturgical offering of Christ to the Father.

A practical and pastoral anthropology will inevitably concern itself with questions of personhood, of self-worth, of belonging, of purpose. Anderson provides us a platform for understanding the liturgical practice of the church (centred in baptism) as fundamental to this practical and pastoral task of authenticating personhood. Thurneysen helps us to focus further on the pastoral conversation as liturgical action and ritual of reinforcement. In pastoral care, the more general liturgical movement of the church in worship encompasses and becomes particular to the concrete life of an individual person. Because of this, pastoral conversation plays an integral role in the church’s ministry of reconciliation through Christ to the Father. In the intimacy of the conversation, a person is authenticated and valued as a beloved child of God.

While Anderson’s liturgical paradigm helps us to find renewed significance in Thurneysen’s theology, it also reveals a weakness. As mentioned above, the phrase “liturgical conversation” is only a passing phrase which Thurneysen does not develop in any theological depth. His kerygmatic paradigm for the church inevitably placed emphasis on the proclaimed Word rather than the corresponding human response to the Word. His focus was the sermon rather than the liturgy. His theology of the sacraments was largely underdeveloped and primarily conceived of as an extension of the ministry of the Word in the sermon.\(^4^4\) Through

\(^4^2\) See fn. 35 above.

\(^4^3\) Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 102. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 91.

\(^4^4\) When I say “underdeveloped”, I do not mean to suggest that Thurneysen did not have a theology of the sacraments. However, he appears to more or less reflect a standard orthodox position with little critical theological engagement. Compared with entries pertaining to preaching, confession, Christian education, and pastoral care, his extensive bibliography only contains a small handful of short writings on the Lord’s Supper and (so far as I can tell) no extensive engagement with baptism. See: “Das Abendmahl (1929),” in *Christ Und Welt* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt AG, 1950). And: “Gemeinde Und Abendmahl,” *Kirchenbote für Basel-Stadt* 3, no. 2 (Ostern 1937) (1937). And: “Abendmahl (1947),” in *Du Sollst Mich Preisen*, ed. Walter Lüthi Eduard Thurneysen (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt AG., 1951). And: “Das Abendmahl,” *Basler Predigten* 20, no. 12 (1957). Also a number of his contributions to the sermon volumes, *Du Sollst Mich Preisen* (1951), and *Der Erlöser* (1961) end with an invitation to the Lord’s Table.
exclusively framing pastoral care in terms of *kerygma*, he never explores the possibilities of pastoral care, for example, as *koinonia* directed from and to the Lord’s Table.45 His Word-centred paradigm gravitates towards a more *cerebral* form of knowing at the expense of whole-person knowing and belonging in community.

To an extent, Thurneysen’s self-imposed limitations reflect the time and place in which he wrote. Liturgical renewal in the germanophone Swiss-Reformed Church only began towards the end of Thurneysen’s life. The Church of Scotland and the francophone Swiss-Reformed Church were more proactive in this regard due to a closer affinity with John Calvin rather than the German-speaking Reformer, Huldrych Zwingli.46 While Thurneysen depended on Calvin’s theology more than any other Reformer’s, the prevailing liturgy of the German Swiss-Reformed Church was more Zwinglian in its overwhelming focus on the sermon.47 It is perhaps telling that, while dozens of Thurneysen’s sermons survive, there appear to be no

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45 In 1988, Hermann Eberhardt sought to move beyond the polarisation between “kerygmatic” and “client-centred” models erected by Richard Riess in 1973 (as a result of his categorisation, Riess rejected Thurneysen’s kerygmetic model which, in his mind, utterly failed to take the client seriously). Eberhardt argues that it is possible to conceive of pastoral care under different *Leitkategorie* (leading categories). Thurneysen placed it under *kerygma*. But the ministry of the church is also described in the New Testament according to *diakonia* and *koinonia*. So Eberhardt reconceives of pastoral care in terms of *koinonia* as the foundational concept of the church. Hermann Eberhardt, "Seelsorge-Lehre Nach Eduard Thurneysen: Jenseits Des Bannes Der Lehr-Tradition," in *Evangelische Akademie Iserlohn* (Iserlohn: Evangelische Akademie Iserlohn, 1988), 3. Eberhardt’s reconceptualization is a helpful counterbalance to Thurneysen’s model. However, because Word necessarily leads to sacrament, *kerygma* and *koinonia* (and *diakonia*) necessarily belong together within the same ministry of Christ, in which the church participates by the Spirit. I do not see Eberhardt as an *alternative* to Thurneysen so much as a complementary voice.

46 See, for instance, Donald M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957). Baillie delivered these lectures around the time of the height of Thurneysen’s influence as a practical theologian. Although the comparison is rather selective, it does highlight the way in which liturgical renewal and sacramental theology were active topics of conversation in Scotland. If similar conversations were taking place in Basel, they did not appear to be on Thurneysen’s radar.

47 Anecdotally, I have had heard from a number of Swiss-Germans that “the sermon” was an all-encompassing term for a service of worship, so that one would say, “*Ich gehe zur Predigt*”, *I am going to the sermon*, rather than, *I am going to worship*, “*Ich gehe zum Gottesdienst*”.

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extant liturgies. Consequently, it is uncertain whether or to what extent he produced his own prayers, or what his services of worship even looked like. The worship book in circulation in Basel at the time of his ministry was published in 1911.\textsuperscript{48} It mostly incorporates prayers and liturgies from older worship books suggesting that the prevailing common prayers used in Basel during Thurneysen’s time were not contemporary.\textsuperscript{49} In the worship book, the liturgy of the regular Sunday worship service is simply divided into “pre-sermon” and “post-sermon” prayers, reinforcing the perception that everything centred on the sermon.

While we cannot be sure, it is likely that Thurneysen was not overly creative in his liturgies. As mentioned, it is his sermons, not his prayers that survive. His practical theology focussed on homiletics, Christian education, and pastoral care. In 1934, Thurneysen was involved in a commission tasked with producing a new edition of the 1911 worship book, which would compile more recent prayers and liturgies. Notably, however, it was \textit{not} tasked with more thorough liturgical renewal and theological deliberation.\textsuperscript{50} The commission never completed its work. When liturgical renewal did take place in the late 1960s, it appears to have originated primarily in Zurich, not Basel. A new liturgy for the whole Swiss-German Church was not published until 1972, just two years prior to Thurneysen’s death.\textsuperscript{51} In 1964, Thurneysen acknowledged the growing prevalence of “noteworthy recommendations” for liturgical renewal but lamented the comparative lack of attention on the sermon.\textsuperscript{52} All this paints a picture of someone who did not fully see the creative possibilities for liturgy to become paradigmatic of the living of the whole of human life before God. It might seem a bit of a side-track from the main thrust of this chapter, but it highlights, I think, a missing link (or perhaps an underdeveloped link) in the chain of Thurneysen’s otherwise-solid practical-theological approach to theological anthropology. A liturgical paradigm creates a direct connection between the inner liturgical core of communal praxis in the event of worship and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[48] \textit{Kirchenbuch Für Die Evangelisch-Reformierten Gemeinden Der Kantone Basel-Stadt Und Basel-Land}, (Basel: Buchdruckerei J. Frehner, 1911). The worship book is split into two parts. Part One contains prayers for regular Sunday worship and prayers for special liturgical services. Part Two contains liturgies for special occasions i.e. baptism, confirmation, preparation for Communion, and Communion etc.
\item[49] Most of the prayers and liturgies seem to originate in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which means, during Thurneysen's ministry at Basel, they were between half a century and a century old.
\item[50] See footnote 18, \textit{Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel (Band 3) 1930-1935}, 3, 856, Letter Thurneysen to Barth, Good Friday (19 April) 1935.
\end{footnotes}
the outer liturgical framing of the whole of human life as prayerful and embodied living before God and with one another. Anderson provides an important corrective to Thurneysen’s work in this regard.

**The event of community**

For Anderson, liturgy is not so much something the church does as something the church *is*. The community is an event, an enactment and re-enactment of personhood as we become the community reconciled in Jesus Christ:

“What we call community is the liturgical expression of that personhood experienced as co-humanity. Community takes place, and personhood is enacted and re-enacted; it is reaffirmed, supported, and reinforced … Community is more than a social event, it is the re-enactment of the personhood of Christ himself (his body), and the manifestation of his own service (*latreia*). This ongoing ministry of Christ through his humanity continues through the human community as his body. This is the ontological grounding of the church as the people of God.”

The event-nature of the community has implications for a praxis-oriented theological anthropology. The community is not simply the background context in which one comes to self-understanding before God. Rather, one comes to self-understanding as one actively participates in the enactment and re-enactment of community. The reconciled community in Christ, is itself the living truth of being human as persons-in-relationship.

Thurneysen, too, understood the church in terms of the re-occurring event of the communication of the Word. God’s Word has an inherent word-character (*Wortcharakter*),

which is to say, we hear God’s revelation *through* the words of our fellow human beings. In this way, the Truth does not simply consist in communicating particular content. Rather it is bound up with the act of communication itself, through which one discovers one’s own personhood as a *Thou* addressed by an *I*. One not only hears *about* Christ through the other, one actually encounters Christ himself *in* the other.

So the church is the concrete enactment and embodiment of the humanising and personalising humanity of Christ in the world.

Understood within this paradigm, a pastoral conversation cannot be seen in isolation. Rather it is a *particular instance* of enacting personhood through communicating Christ with one

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54 Thurneysen, “Die Drei Homiletischen Grundregeln,” 487.
55 “Dieser Andere ist Gott selbst.” Ibid., 493.
another. The pastoral conversation sees the person not as an isolated individual, but as an integral member of the new humanity of Christ, a person-in-relationship, who is being constantly reconciled back to the people of God in which one’s personhood is affirmed and celebrated. In Thurneysen’s words:

“The form of pastoral conversation is determined by its claim to see even the remotest human concern in its relationship to God and his Word as established by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it is a conversation within the church. It is a constant listening to the Word of God and constant listening to man who only in the light of the Word can come to a true understanding of his life.”

For the likes of Richard Riess, who saw Thurneysen’s model of pastoral care as dialectically opposed to a client-centred model, it is difficult not to see Thurneysen’s “churchly, especially parochial pastoral care” as breeding resentment among people seeking pastoral comfort. In his reckoning, Thurneysen’s critical limitation of pastoral care im Raum der Gemeinde (in the sphere of the church) reinforces dependency of a person on the authority of the church (usually represented by the usually male ordained minister). For Riess, then, there is a patriarchal and hierarchical structure at the heart of Thurneysen’s model. If the church is merely a human institution, then Riess’ concern has some validity. Thurneysen’s determination to see pastoral care in terms of church discipline and in terms of one’s preservation in the church does have — if one chooses to interpret it this way — a rather authoritarian ring to it. But if the church, as the new humanity in Christ, is the living event of Christ’s humanity in and with us by the Spirit, then pastoral conversation rightly belongs in the church. Every pastoral conversation is part of a complex interconnected matrix of persons learning to become the people of God with one another. God does not simply call an abstract mass of people to be the church. The church is a community of persons-in-relationship. For this reason, the general proclamation in the sermon, for Thurneysen, necessarily has its correlation in the pastoral conversation as a particular instance of communicating Christ to one another, of authenticating one another’s personhood, and of drawing one another back into community — back to the Word — where we become fully human with one another as we are addressed by the living God.

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56 My italicisation. Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 115. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 104.
58 Ibid., 186.
Before moving on, a final word should be said here about interdisciplinary dialogue in a praxis-oriented theological anthropology. In his definition of practical theology, Anderson maintains that the practical theological task as inquiry into the praxis of church must come into “critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge.”\(^{59}\) Thurneysen, too, in his pastoral theology, engages actively and enthusiastically with other disciplines i.e. psychology, psychotherapy, and medicine. As we saw in chapter six, this critical dialogue was a significant focus for Thurneysen during the late 1940s and the 1950s.

Controversially, he stated that “the relationship of psychology to pastoral care may be defined as that of an auxiliary science *(Hilfswissenschaft)*.”\(^{60}\) Again, Thurneysen’s critics see this as a subordination of psychology to pastoral care and a trivialisation of genuine interdisciplinary dialogue. Isolde Karle, however, rightfully challenges this perception. For Thurneysen, it is not a question of the elevation of one discipline over others but of critical differentiation between them and protection against a “harmonising and unrealistic convergence of perspectives” at the expense of their genuine differences.\(^{61}\) In other words, by placing pastoral care exclusively within the sphere of the church, Thurneysen is both critically delimiting pastoral care as well as establishing its integrity as a discipline in its own right.

Take, for example, Thurneysen’s engagement with Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. He found their empirical discoveries in psychology and the development of *Tiefpsychologie* immensely helpful in articulating his pastoral care at a psychological level. He took exception, however, to their inclination to extract from their empirical findings an underlying metaphysical philosophy of the human being. He rejected Freud’s “naturalistic-mechanistic” philosophy on the one hand, and Jung’s “idealistic” or “mystic-religious” worldview on the other.\(^{62}\)

The point is important with regard to theological anthropology. The *theological* claims about human existence are not to be seen in opposition to claims made by other disciplines (so long as these other disciplines do not attempt to establish a phenomenologically-driven metaphysic). Scientific and cultural anthropologies, sociology, the psychological sciences, anthropological biology, and so on, study the phenomena of human existence within the limits set by their respective disciplines. They tell us something true about human existence in all its diversity, complexity, and depth. Consequently, the idea of “Christian” psychology

\(^{59}\) Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 22.

\(^{60}\) Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 202.


is fundamentally problematic. There is simply psychology. The pastor will engage with these other disciplines while also recognising the differences. Pastoral care does not consist in a christianised form of clinical counselling or psychotherapy. It is, rather, a practice that corresponds to its own theory of theological anthropology. And conversely, theological anthropology as a theory corresponds to the practice of pastoral care in the church. Precisely because of this, pastoral care is not a client-centred discipline in the sense that its primary purpose is to serve the needs of the individual. It is a Christ-centred discipline, sharing in Christ’s life and ministry to the Father. It is directed not in the first instance by “the client” but by God’s redemptive and healing purposes for the world through Christ by the Spirit. Counselling and psychotherapy may play a vital role in one’s healing and wellbeing. Pastoral care is certainly not to replace these other important disciplines. But it is the purpose of pastoral care to situate this healing within the wider story of God’s good intentions for the whole integrated person, body and soul, within the new humanity of Christ.

**The sanctification of human life**

So far in this chapter, through conversation between Anderson and Thurneysen, I have suggested that a praxis-oriented theological anthropology will centre on the act of proclamation; will be framed by the lived response of the community ordered by the Word; and will actively incorporate the person into the reconciled community in which one’s personhood is authenticated and celebrated. All this leads us to one final assertion: that a praxis-oriented theological anthropology will seek to critically reflect upon the actualising sanctification of human life according to God’s good intentions. In this way, theological anthropology should not be a purely intellectual discipline but a discipline deeply grounded and involved in the concrete transformation of the whole human being by the Spirit.

Anderson, like Thurneysen, wants to remove any sense that sanctification is a moral or ethical value:

“Sanctification is first of all a positive liturgical act. It is the separation unto God, who is the Holy One, of that which is merely created and creaturely. The original sanctification, by which all creation received its true value, is expressed in the verdict the Creator himself rendered — it is good (Gen. 1) … Holiness is goodness, considered from the standpoint that God is good. Goodness is therefore not first of all an ethical value but an ontological value. For our personal life to have meaning and purpose is good; for it to be empty and meaningless is not good. To count for something or someone is good; not to count is bad. Those who make an ethical value
out of religion gain this value by excluding those who don’t count. This is what confounded the Pharisees in what Jesus did: he enacted the reality of the kingdom of God by restoring persons to full value in God’s sight. He did this not by mere teaching, for that would have been a platitude, but liturgically.”

Anderson makes the same substantive point that undergirds Thurneysen’s exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon is not first and foremost teaching. It is not moral instruction. Rather, it is to be interpreted exclusively in light of the one who delivers the sermon: Jesus Christ, the fulfiller of the law and the bringer of the Kingdom. As such, the Sermon on the Mount is “gospel in the form of law”. To say, with Anderson, that Jesus liturgically restores persons to full value in God’s sight is to say one’s true value consists in participation in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ rather than anything one could do in one’s own power. Jesus does not erect a new pharisaical code for us to follow. He instead establishes a new community of sinners and outcasts, who are sanctified by Christ’s presence with them.

As we saw in chapter six, the sanctification of the human being is, for Thurneysen, the purpose of pastoral care. He defines sanctification as a designation of ownership (Eigentumsbestimmung). “The concept says that we do not belong to ourselves but to the one who has bought us at a price. We are owned by Jesus Christ.” The old self has died and we are reborn into the new humanity of Jesus Christ, which is the church. Consequently, Thurneysen further defines sanctification in terms of church discipline. One is sanctified as one is “incorporated” and “preserved” in community. Finally, as one is conformed to the humanity of Christ within the people of God, one’s identity as a forgiven sinner and as child of God, becomes concrete (Konkretwerden). Sanctification is nothing but the ongoing process of living a fully human life in community in conformity to the real and true humanity of Jesus Christ. In this way, sanctification is about humanisation and about personalisation. A praxis-oriented theological anthropology will critically reflect on this living, empirically-grounded process of sanctification. Here, the groundwork is laid for Thurneysen’s “pastoral anthropology”, which is the focus of the next chapter. The pastoral conversation is the primary context for critical, prayerful reflection into becoming fully human in the empirical reality of one’s existence. Upheld in prayer and in the light of scripture, the pastoral conversation is a process of discernment, whereby the conversation partners seek to

64 Thurneysen, Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 43.
understand what it means to participate in the humanising and personalising humanity of Christ (both in terms of caring for and being cared for). As a process of awakening to and understanding our humanity in Christ, pastoral care is much more central to the life of the church than is often realised today. It is not simply a product or fruit of a church which is already thriving. By placing it as an extension of proclamation, Thurneysen brings pastoral care to the centre of the church’s life. Again, the church is not a static entity. It is an ever emergent, regenerative event as the Word and Spirit calls persons into relationship as the new humanity in Jesus Christ.

**The empirical situation**

One of the challenges of kerygmatic pastoral care, as we have already seen in the concerns of Thurneysen’s critics, is ensuring the empirical pastoral situation is not subordinated or subsumed into an inflexible theological framework. The word “authoritarian” has been applied to Thurneysen’s model and, even though I believe it is an unfair assessment, one can see how such a conclusion could be reached. Once again, Anderson can help us to reframe Thurneysen’s project in a more sympathetic light with regard to the empirical situation. In his book, *On Being Human*, Anderson includes a chapter entitled, *A Theological Paradigm for Authentic Personhood*. Anderson does not begin with theological categories but with existential questioning, naming a number of universal existential needs:

“…one must come to terms with the ambiguities of human existence: the need for affirmation, for belonging, for restoration and healing, for being a significant person, and for not being forgotten.”

Anderson moves from these general existential categories and looks for “theological paradigms” to frame them. The purpose of his task is “a fundamental integration between the basic human social and psychological needs and the core of the theological curriculum.”

For instance, he frames the “affirmation of the self” in terms of the doctrine of election; the “relatedness of the self” in terms of covenant theology; the “healing of the self” in terms of soteriology; and the “significance of the self” in terms of eschatology. It is notable that he begins with psycho-social realities and proceeds from there to theological understanding. Does he not commit the very error that Barth and Thurneysen so fiercely guarded against? i.e. the fundamentally flawed attempt to build a theological anthropology on the basis of

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66 Ibid., 162.
universally accessible existential phenomena? Not necessarily. Anderson is not interpreting and limiting theological doctrine in light of existential categories. Further, he is clear that these theological doctrines are not the only doctrines that correspond to an understanding of personhood. He is not advocating a fusion or homogenisation of theological doctrine into pre-established existential concepts (as, for instance, Fritz Buri’s existential theology tried to do). Instead, he advocates a kind of open dialogue, a dialectic, by placing questions of universal human experience within scripturally-grounded theological frames.

Thurneysen displays a similar inclination. While he builds his theological anthropology from the person of Jesus Christ, the realities of pastoral ministry mean that one does not begin with the theological but with the empirical. A key difference between Thurneysen and Barth can be illustrated here by comparing Römerbrief II with Dostojewski. While Barth, in Römerbrief II, busied himself with serious, sustained theological exegesis, Thurneysen turned instead to popular literature and the existential questioning in Dostoevsky’s novels to develop the new theology. Dostojewski is a theological sketch that shares methodological similarity with what Anderson advocates in his essay. Thurneysen and Barth had a united theological position, but their approach and inclination was quite different.

In chapter six, I discussed Thurneysen’s comparison of pastoral work to “deciphering” a code. The pastor begins with the pastoral reality and the psycho-social questions that the person brings to the conversation. Through the conversation, the pastor helps the person to interpret their life situation, to decipher their circumstances, in terms of God’s healing and redemptive purposes. Like Anderson, he suggests a number of theological paradigms as representational models through which to interpret reality. The paradigms become interpretive frames for understanding the diversity of human experience within the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. Thurneysen advocates three theological paradigms that correspond to the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed: first, the doctrine of election; second, the doctrine of salvation from sin by grace; third, the doctrine of eschatology. Their relevance for our becoming human is grounded in Christ’s humanity:

“In that he, the Son of God, himself became human, that he too entered into psychosomatic existence of a human being, it becomes clear what being human and what creatureliness is, what reconciliation is, and what resurrection and eternal life is.”

Thurneysen then goes on to explain how these paradigms might affect the pastoral conversation, for example, in situations where severe illness has irreversibly changed one’s circumstances, throwing one’s self-identity into question, in situations where one is hoping for physical healing, or in situations where one is facing the stark reality of a terminal illness. Using Anderson’s existential categories, we can see a similar pattern in Thurneysen’s approach of using theological paradigms in pastoral care. The doctrine of election in pastoral care is a helpful paradigm for affirming the self as a beloved child of God; the doctrine of reconciliation for the healing and restoration of the self as a whole person — even in ongoing sickness; and the doctrine of eschatology for the eternal significance of the self in the face of meaninglessness and death.

Content-wise, there is not much new in what Thurneysen presents. Its significance lies in the methodological approach to pastoral care which rests on an assumption. The assumption is that one’s empirical reality is grounded in the creative, reconciling, and redemptive work of the triune God in the world. One can proceed from one’s experience to theological truth not because of some analogy of being but precisely because there is an analogous relationship established by faith in the saving life and ministry of Jesus Christ. By framing a pastoral situation in light of a theological paradigm, one is not simply “theologising” what is essentially a non-theological situation. One is rather awakening to the fundamentally theological nature of all life. Every situation, every moment, conveys theological truth if we are taught to see things in that way. One should expect over the course of a pastoral conversation to see natural connection points between daily experience and the truth of all reality revealed in scripture. The pastoral task is to make those connections and to engage in a theologically-informed discernment process responsibly, prayerfully, and thoughtfully. If this process is carried out well, there is little chance of an authoritarian abuse of power. The concern is not the preaching of dogma but the authentication of one’s concrete personhood in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.

**Conclusion**

How does the particularity of one’s *vita* witness to and participate in the purposes of the triune God for humanity? What does it mean in one’s concrete existence to become a person in fullness of relationship with God and with others? What does it mean at every stage of our living and dying to be affirmed, to belong, to find healing and significance — even in the

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midst of pain, suffering, frustration, meaninglessness, and death? These are the concerns of a praxis-oriented theological anthropology and the concerns which drove Thurneysen’s pastoral ministry. My intention in this chapter has been to explore some of the dimensions of such a practical theological anthropology. In dialogue with Thurneysen and Anderson, I have highlighted five aspects: the act of proclamation, the dialectical hermeneutic, the liturgical paradigm, the concrete sanctification of human living, and the importance of the empirical situation. Anderson both offers a healthy critique of Thurneysen’s underdeveloped areas or blind spots and develops ideas already present in Thurneysen’s work. I have also shown that Thurneysen’s thinking is not obsolete. His kerygmatic framework gives integrity to pastoral care as a vital humanising practice in the church through which we communicate to one another our identity in Christ as fellow members, co-humans, in his new reconciled and reconciling humanity. We turn now to pastoral care more explicitly in conversation with John Swinton.
Theological Anthropology as Pastoral Task

Chapter Eight: In Conversation with John Swinton

Introduction

In chapter seven I explored the practical basis of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. Knowledge of the meaning and purpose of human existence cannot be reduced to a philosophical thought experiment. It must be lived in community as one becomes a person-in-relationship. The practical basis of the doctrine of human nature lends itself to the emergence in the church of a pastorally-oriented anthropology. The basic form of the human being as fellow-human, Mitmensch, is actualised in interpersonal encounter. The pastoral conversation is a particular type of human encounter through conversation. It is distinguished by its prayerfully-grounded intentionality and often distinctive content which is bound to scripture. Precisely as ordinary human conversation, it is conversation that not only establishes horizontal relationship between persons, but awakens the conversation partners to their vertical relationship before God. In this way, it is conversation which, in its ordinariness (and at times apparent failure to effect change), is nonetheless a concrete instance of our becoming persons-in-relationship with God and with one another. In the awakening to and living into new Christ-formed community, the pastoral conversation constantly emerges from and leads back to the gathered community of faith. In its purpose to restore a person to community in which their personhood is preserved and celebrated, pastoral conversation becomes an eschatological sign of the new humanity. It is a sign not because it is pious or super-spiritual conversation, but because it is ordinary human conversation conducted in light of God’s
coming kingdom within the community of faith. As such, it points to the significance and redemptive possibilities of every human relationship as an integral part of being human.

In this chapter, I have chosen John Swinton as Thurneysen’s main conversation partner. Both develop a practical theological anthropology with an emphasis on pastoral care. In my first substantive point, I also draw on Alistair McFadyen’s theology of personhood and Trevor Hart’s work on the generative capacity of conversation to expand on Thurneysen’s theology of conversation. Over the course of the chapter I discuss three distinctive characteristics of a pastorally-oriented theological anthropology as they arise from the dialogue between Thurneysen and Swinton: first, a relational understanding of the imago dei and a theological understanding of interpersonal encounter in which caring becomes a fundamental characteristic of imaging God with and for one another; second, the conception of well-being in terms of the social-eschatological vision of God’s coming kingdom, in which both the concepts of neighbour and friend become eschatologically significant in our becoming human; third, a holistic understanding of health, wellbeing, sickness and the role of pastoral care in the process of healthy human living before God and with others.

In conversation with John Swinton

Like Ray Anderson, John Swinton is a practical theologian who has made important contributions to the breakdown of the modernist dichotomy between “pure” and “applied/practical” theology. The two theologians have been significantly influenced by one another. In The Shape of Practical Theology (2001), Ray Anderson liberally quotes Swinton’s book From Bedlam to Shalom (2000).1 In turn, Swinton makes use of Anderson’s 1982 book, On Being Human.2 Though Swinton makes less explicit use of Karl Barth than Anderson does, he nonetheless writes out of the Reformed theological tradition and shows in his theological-anthropological assumptions an indebtedness to Barth. Given this shared influence on the theology of Karl Barth, Swinton, Anderson, and Thurneysen represent three different generations of practical theologians whose respective theologies overlap in a multiplicity of ways. Because of this, they make fruitful conversation partners.

An ordained minister in the Church of Scotland, Swinton is also a registered mental health nurse and has worked in ministry and healthcare chaplaincy. His research foci include

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1 As if to emphasise its importance, Anderson quotes Swinton’s book on the first page of his introduction. Anderson, The Shape of Practical Theology, 11-12.
2 See especially chapter two: John Swinton, From Bedlam to Shalom (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 17ff. Anderson also wrote the foreword to Swinton’s book.
pastoral care and counselling, theology of disability, and theology of mental health. Certainly, there is a shared interest with Thurneysen, particularly in the areas of pastoral care and mental health care. Swinton’s ground-breaking work in theology of disability provides an important critique of Thurneysen’s theology of the Word. Given the massive advances made since Thurneysen’s death in the area of mental health care as well as a growing awareness of issues for people with disabilities, Swinton helps to bring Thurneysen’s theology into the 21st century. Instead of rejecting Thurneysen’s work, by bringing Swinton into constructive conversation with Thurneysen, I hope to contribute to the task of reconstructing Thurneysen’s praxis- and pastoral-oriented theological anthropology for today’s context.

Swinton’s book, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, is particularly pertinent to our discussion. The work carries the subtitle: “towards a practical theology of human nature, interpersonal relationships, and mental health care.” Like Thurneysen, Swinton endeavours to move beyond pastoral care technique towards a practical theological anthropology, which informs and is informed by pastoral practice. Every practice is grounded in a particular theory. A model of mental health care, for instance, will bring with it certain assumptions about both health and illness as well as their relation to the human self within their social and environmental context. If the church’s ministry of pastoral care is not to be appropriated by secular worldviews and anthropologies, it must be grounded in its own theological anthropology, which is subjected to a constant process of critical, theological reflection.

Further, for Swinton, a practical theological anthropology is always grounded in the church with the purpose of enabling the church in its ministry to the world.3

The general structure of Swinton’s *Bedlam to Shalom* is remarkably similar to Thurneysen’s *Die Lehre*. Both works begin with a broad discussion of practical and pastoral theology. Then they move on to a theological discussion of human nature followed by a model of pastoral care in the church that is built upon it. Finally, they explore in depth the implementation of pastoral care itself. Thurneysen chooses to focus on certain scriptural concepts in relation to pastoral care, for instance, “confession” or “exorcism”. Swinton explores a number of case studies with specific regard to mental health care. While their pastoral models differ quite significantly at times, their underlying anthropological assumptions, which we turn to now, share a common base.

3 Ibid., 1.
The imago dei and interpersonal encounter

In *Bedlam to Shalom* and *Die Lehre*, both authors dedicate a chapter to theological anthropology. Neither author assumes that the insights they draw are comprehensive or definitive. Swinton asks whether embarking on the task of presenting a “definitive” theological anthropology is wise or even possible given there is no unified theory of human nature in the Bible. Like Thurneysen, he wants to preserve a dialectical mystery at the heart of the theology, which is “as much an exercise in humility as it is a quest for revelation.” That being said, Swinton goes on to highlight the doctrine of the *imago dei* especially as bearing significance that “far outweighs the amount of space it occupies in scripture.” In his reckoning, the doctrine of the *imago dei* in humanity and Christ “underlies, clarifies and defines” all doctrine of human nature.

While Swinton denies the notion that the image of God consists in a physical resemblance to God (for example, bipedality), he does not want to deny that there is a certain physicality, or *embodiedness*, to the image. Like Thurneysen, he takes his bearing from Genesis 2:7 to briefly discuss the Hebraic concept of a *living soul*. Swinton, with his particular focus on mental health care, asserts before anything else that the image of God “has to do with the whole human person rather than fragmented aspects of them.” The human being is a totality, a psychosomatic unity, who lives and acts as embodied soul and ensouled body. One does not so much *have* a body as one *is* a body. Therefore, when considering what the image of God consists in, one must deal with the whole human being as totality of body and soul. The church’s pastoral ministry as care for the human *soul* is therefore a calling to serve people in the full complexity of their humanity in body and soul.

As early as 1928, Thurneysen argued similarly. In *Rechtfertigung und Seelsorge* he is determined to lay the foundation for a model of pastoral care in contradistinction to the

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4 Ibid., 17.
5 Ibid., 18.
6 Ibid., 22.
7 It is notable that both Thurneysen and Swinton establish before all else the *physicality* as a vital aspect of the totality of human existence. Barth discusses this too of course, but in *Church Dogmatics III/2* he establishes humanity’s *Mitmenschlichkeit* before moving on to the ordered composition of the individual human being (Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1948)*, III/2, sections 45-46.). One could certainly read too much into this different structural priority — both Thurneysen and Swinton also emphasise the *relationality* of being human no less than the physicality. But it does reflect, I think, the circumstances out of which each wrote: Swinton, with his particular focus on theology of disability; and Thurneysen, in reaction to prevailing romantic and gnostic views of the human soul. Both are concerned with dignifying the human body in the hope of the bodily resurrection of Christ as well as redeeming the church’s pastoral ministry from a kind of gnostic spiritualisation of care.
prevalent models of his day, especially the romantic model, which tended to reduce the soul to a “spark” within the human being.\(^8\) Pastoral care resulting from this understanding will tend to overlook the physical and social needs of a human being. By contrast, Thurneysen argued, *Seelsorge* is better understood as care for the *whole human being* as soul, rather than care for the soul of the human being. Thurneysen and Swinton, then, are in agreement: whatever the church’s ministry of soul-care consists in, it deals with nothing less than the whole human being — body, soul, and spirit — who is created in the image of God. Christologically speaking, any model of pastoral care within the faith community must reckon with the embodied and holistic nature of Christ’s incarnate and resurrected life, and the promise of salvation in and through him.

Alongside an embodied understanding of the human being, Swinton favours a “relationist perspective” of the *imago dei*. The human being is a living soul like every other living organism — this is humanity’s creatureliness. Yet unlike any other creature, the human being is called to a particular type of relationship with God. The image of God refers to the unique designation of every human being as created for responsible relationship with God. As well as the vertical dimension of human relationality before God, Swinton asserts that “human relationality which authentically images God also has important horizontal aspects.”\(^9\) Here, he draws on Anderson’s *On Being Human*, which in turn draws on Barth’s *Church Dogmatics III/2* and the concept of *Mitmenschlichkeit*. “Human existence,” Swinton concurs, “is therefore seen to be co-existence, a fact that is revealed paradigmatically in the primordial co-existence of male and female.”\(^10\) Like Thurneysen, Swinton grounds the *imago dei* in one’s responsible personhood. To be made in God’s image is to be a person-in-relationship, which implies call and response. It is both an ontological status: a human being is addressed by God. And it is an ethical mandate: a human being has responsibility to live in light of God’s address. Because it is an ontological status basic to the human being, the image cannot be lost by any lack of capacity or responsiveness. In other words, those who, for whatever reason, cannot respond because of their physical or mental circumstances are not excluded from the *imago dei*:

“… a person’s basic humanity is *not* defined by their temporal relationships or their ability to respond to God or to others. God’s relational movement towards humanity

\(^8\) Thurneysen, "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge," 204ff.
\(^9\) Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, 30.
\(^10\) Ibid., 31.
precedes any potential response. A person’s humanity is defined and maintained by God’s gracious movement towards them in love.”\(^{11}\)

In this way, one’s humanness cannot be lost by anything a human being lacks. One is fully human by virtue of God’s covenant faithfulness towards them in Jesus Christ.

**Swinton: pastoral care as caring-in-relationship**

By placing human relationality at the heart of their theological anthropology, Thurneysen and Swinton lay the theological groundwork for the significance and integrity of the church’s pastoral ministry. One’s personhood is actualised in interpersonal encounter. One becomes human as one is encountered as a living and acting subject. Likewise, one is dehumanised when one is objectified and reduced from a *Thou* to an *It*.\(^{12}\) In this framework, the church’s pastoral ministry is a deeply *humanising* ministry as a person is encountered and accepted, their selfhood is affirmed, and they are incorporated, preserved, and celebrated in the community of faith. We have already seen in chapter six how Thurneysen draws on Barth’s language of *Begegnung* and *Mitmenschlichkeit* as the basis for his understanding of what occurs in the pastoral conversation.\(^{13}\) Swinton, too, proceeds from a similar premise but takes a different direction. He establishes a critical reflective dialogue at the heart of his practical theological anthropology:

> “Biblically speaking, an adequate understanding of what it means for humanity to be in the *imago Dei* must be tested against the impact which particular formulations have on the marginalized and least powerful members of society (i.e. those who normally have no voice in theological construction). In other words, the authenticity or otherwise of any theological anthropology cannot be worked out on a purely abstracted and theoretical basis, but must be carved out in constructive dialogue with the ways in which it works itself out within the praxis of the church and the world.”\(^{14}\)

This critical method of Swinton’s approach provides a vital test which every theological anthropology must undergo. He is not advocating the subordination of scripture to some other set of values. Rather, this test is a kind of safeguard against any *anthropological* anthropology

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\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Thurneysen was influenced by the holistic medical ethics of Viktor von Weizsäcker, who sought to see the patient as a human being rather than an “*it*” e.g. “broken leg in Ward 3”. The same is the case, Thurneysen argued, for pastoral care. In formal pastoral counselling, the “*client*” is not just a problem to be diagnosed and fixed, but a person, whose spiritual wellness is tied to their mental, physical and social wellness. Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 87.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 77ff.

\(^{14}\) Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, 26.
posing as theological anthropology. If human beings are basically defined by some predetermined property of the human being — for example, particular physical properties, the capacity for reason or the ability to create — “this inevitably leads to the exclusion and alienation of the weakest members of society.”15 Those who fall outside the perceived “norms” of human existence are silenced. The inevitable consequence is an implicit assumption that, at best, they are somehow less human and that, at worst, their very humanness has been lost altogether. The ethical implications are huge.

Swinton’s critical method poses a problem for Thurneysen’s theology of pastoral care which overwhelmingly centres on the pastoral conversation conducted through spoken human speech.16 Further, Thurneysen’s understanding of the pastoral conversation is tied to the communication of particular concepts leading to a cognitive acceptance of one’s dependence on the grace of God, followed by consequent repentance and obedient living. Subjected to Swinton’s inquiry, we might therefore ask, what implications does Thurneysen’s theology have for deaf or dumb people for whom dialogue may not take an auricular form; or people in a comatose state, who cannot communicate at all; or people for whom severe mental disability limits their capacity to hold a conversation or to communicate in usual ways?

Despite a similar relational and embodied understanding of the imago dei, Swinton casts a wider net than Thurneysen’s narrower focus on conversation as the central means of encounter. Instead, he finds fruitfulness in Jürgen Moltmann’s social trinitarianism which Moltmann develops in the context of political theology and which Swinton then applies in the context of pastoral care.17 Following Moltmann, Swinton defines the trinity in social terms as “a perichoretic community of love; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,

15 Ibid.
16 While Thurneysen is critical of the romanticists to a point, his theory of human conversation and speech is still informed by romantic linguistic philosophers and theologians like Adam Müller, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Alexander Vinet. On this point, Martin Nicol is rightly critical of Thurneysen, whose “pastoral conversation” bore more resemblance to the “existential conversation” of the romanticists than the “therapeutic conversation” of, say, Oskar Pfister, one of Thurneysen’s contemporaries. Consequently, in NicoI’s reckoning, Thurneysen had not adequately thought through the difference between the authoritative nature of the proclamation of God’s Word and the non-authoritative nature of conversation according to modern expectations (Nicol, Gespräch Als Seelsorge, 146.). I agree with Nicol that, at the point of pastoral technique, Thurneysen’s conception runs into difficulty. However, the romanticist concept of “existential conversation” opened possibilities for Thurneysen to explore the intersection of pastoral care with his transcendental eschatology through the kerygmatic utterance. As a theological exploration of the pastoral conversation, Thurneysen’s work continues to offer a lot today — even when we take Nicol’s criticisms on board.

Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 101ff.
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 90ff.
inextricably interlinked in an eternal community of loving relationship.”¹⁸ In this understanding, God’s relationship with the world is not one of an omnipotent, monadic monarch who coerces creatures into obedience. Rather, humanity is created from and in loving relationship for loving relationship. The God, who encounters humanity in history in order to love and be loved, is the God who suffers for and with His people: “to be open, accessible, vulnerable is not the sign of passive impotence but the precondition of active historical life … one who is not empowered with suffering is not able to love and vice versa.”¹⁹ On this basis, Swinton asserts that “to be made in the image of God is to have the propensity to experience both love and suffering with, in and for a suffering world.”²⁰

From here, Swinton searches for a concept that embraces the characteristic attributes of God’s relationship with humanity which the imago dei reflects. The character of this relationship is marked by “passion, sacrifice, commitment and the need to respect the individuality of the other, whilst at the same time joining with them in solidarity and community.”²¹ Appealing to Genesis 1:26, Swinton suggests the concept of caring. Humanity is created in order to care for, to steward, God’s creation. From this biblical foundation, Swinton arrives at his central thesis of framing the horizontal dimension of the imago dei as “caring-in-relationship”. The word “care” has a broad semantic range, which Swinton finds helpful. Following Jeffrey Blustein, he highlights four main meanings: to care for (to value); to take care of (to provide for), to care about (to invest in), and to care that (to have concern about). Applied to the God revealed in scripture, one could argue that God cares for human beings; God cares about human beings. God takes care of human beings and God cares that they shall come to know God, and remain in right relationship with God and with others.²² Human beings bear the image of God as they are cared for by God and in turn are called to care for others. This theological understanding is deeply congruent with lived human experience: “From the cradle to the grave,” Swinton points out, “human beings have a basic need to be cared for.”²³ We need to be needed, so to speak; to be valued, to be missed, and to belong in community.

¹⁸ Swinton, From Bedlam to Shalom, 40.
²⁰ From Bedlam to Shalom, 43.
²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid., 46.
²³ Ibid., 48.
Precisely because of the universal need to be cared for, pastoral care as a ministry of care finds an integral place, not only within the life of the church but within society as a whole. Later on in the book, Swinton defines the church as “caring-in-community”, a community which embodies the incarnational love of Jesus Christ with one another and for the world.\textsuperscript{24}

The significance of Swinton’s model is that he establishes a broadly-encompassing, yet robust, theological foundation for the task of pastoral care as a profoundly humanising act. Even those who are unable to speak, hear, or communicate in the usual ways can still be cared for and, in their own way, care for others. And even those who live with severe mental or physical disability to the extent that they are only able to receive care (whether temporarily or permanently) still exercise an important ministry for those who are doing the caring. In the act of caring, the personhood of both carer and recipient is actualised. We become human as we care-in-relationship. We should avoid romanticising such a notion, however. Sometimes caring for someone is gruelling, messy, and tiring work — but human living which seeks to image the incarnational and kenotic life of Christ will not shy away from such work. Rather it will actively recognise that genuine love and care necessarily involves suffering.

Swinton’s model of “caring-in-relationship” broadens Thurneysen’s more narrow conversational focus. The kerygmatic model, which Thurneysen espouses, is challenged to move beyond a cognitive preoccupation towards a more embodied and incarnational understanding of communicating God’s creative and redemptive Word. That being said, I argue that, placed within Swinton’s broader conceptual framework, Thurneysen’s focus on the pastoral conversation continues to offer a lot today. Here, I turn to Alistair McFadyen and Trevor Hart to aid in our discussion.

\textbf{Thurneysen: pastoral care as conversation}

The “relationist perspective” of being human, which both Swinton and Thurneysen (as well as Barth and many other theologians since) accept, owes its inception (at least in its contemporary form) to Martin Buber’s personalist philosophy.\textsuperscript{25} Buber described the human being as a “dialogical being” (\textit{ein dialogisches Wesen}).\textsuperscript{26} We are \textit{response}-ible persons — a concept conveying not only humanity’s basic ability to respond to God’s call but also a \textit{responsibility} to respond according to God’s good purposes in rightly ordered and loving relationships. Human beings never exist in isolation. We exist with others and we become

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\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 101ff. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Alistair I. McFadyen, \textit{The Call to Personhood} (Cambridge: University Press, 1990), 5. \\
\textsuperscript{26} Thurneysen, \textit{Seelsorge Im Vollzug}, 79.
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conscious of our own subjectivity in relationship. The primary form of communication is therefore never simply “I” — that is, a monological word spoken into a vacuum. The primary form of communication is either “I-Thou” or “I-It”. In both of these primary communicative words, the “I” has a different identity. “The I,” Alistair McFadyen sums up Buber, “is constituted by the form of its response in which others are intended either as co-subjects of dialogue (either Is or Thou) or as manipulable objects (Its).” Our self-identity is always shaped in relationship with other persons within the created world. Consequently, the self is fundamentally an eccentric structure, which is communicative in nature. The ability to communicate oneself is central to one’s personhood and selfhood. We are created to be dialogue partners of God and others.

This self-communication between persons happens in community. One’s individuality is integrally linked with one’s social context. Again, McFadyen:

“Interpersonal relations take place within a given social context. They are therefore interpersonal exchanges conducted within a communication code (social ‘language’) given with that context. The communication code is a semantic system regulating exchange values within a moral order”.

Language is a prerequisite, then, for human community. Through language, a complex semantic system of communication, a group of people can find shared meaning and cohesion through common ideas and ways of being and behaving. Human communication through language is common to every society. While most languages are primarily oral i.e. articulated through speech, this is not universally the case as with, for example, sign language, braille, and so on. One’s belonging is accepted and affirmed (or rejected and denied) in conformity to shared common identities. The church is no different:

“The presence of Christ as Word is community because the communication, and therefore reality, of that presence through proclamation and sacrament are themselves forms of communication which build up community in and of themselves. The Word

27 “We have become monological people.” Interestingly, Thurneysen saw this as a problem of the breakdown in society during the 1920s and 1930s. Societal and technological shifts had led to a schism in generational continuity and a fundamental miscommunication between generations. The sense in which he uses it is at a more generational, societal level. But the essential point is the same. When dialogue ceases between human beings, so does relationship and community, which is at the heart of our being human. “Die Stellung Der Heutigen Jugend Zur Religion,” 549.
29 McFadyen, The Call to Personhood, 122.
30 Ibid., 73.
is not something individually possessible, but the subject of communication within community. That is why the Church is not simply the place where Truth can be heard, where the presence of Christ is witnessed to; it actually is the presence of Christ for us, ‘Christ existing as community’.”

The church as human community has an analogous relationship with every human community: its own particular social ‘language’ enables communication of ideas and concepts that allow for common meaning, shared identity, and social cohesion. Unlike other human communities, however, the church is formed not by a human word, but by the Word of God. Interpreted in this way, Thurneysen’s emphasis on church discipline and order (Ordnung) as the framework of pastoral care is in no way authoritarian. He aims, instead, to articulate the relational and personalising nature of the redeemed and recreated humanity in Christ. The Word that orders the life of the faith community is a reconciling and healing Word that itself creates and sustains that community. McFadyen uses the word “recontextualisation” to articulate the same thing. Through baptism into the church community, the individual is decontextualized from their old social context and its limiting categories and norms, and recontextualised into the new social context “in Jesus Christ”, in whom there is neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. One becomes an integrated and whole person through integration into radically new community.

Brought into conversation with Swinton, we can go further. Because we bear the image of the God who is love, right human relationships are characterised as relationships of care. The church, Swinton reasons, is a dynamic process of caring-in-community through participation in the life of the triune God. We might therefore say that the church community is “ordered” by love and by mutual care. Reconceived through Swinton’s emphasis on the church imaging the social trinity, church “discipline” loses all punitive connotations. It becomes a positive affirmation of our being conformed to the image of Christ and coming to care for one another in and through Christ by the power of the Spirit. The communicative framework of care provides the social context for interpersonal encounter to take place through one-on-one caring relationships. Word and sacrament, in other words, create the liturgical context for one-on-one pastoral care, enabling these personal conversations to take place within a wider narrative of reconciliation and redemption. In this way, Thurneysen is entirely right in

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31 Ibid., 62.
32 Ibid., 55.
following John Calvin to see pastoral care within church discipline according to the community-forming Word.

A person must be understood in the context of social relations. One is a dialogical being whose personhood is tied to eccentric self-communication. On this basis, Thurneysen asserts: “Human speech is the point at which encounter with God takes place”, and therefore man’s articulateness is “the event which really makes [man] man, man before God.”  

In light of Swinton, we would be right to challenge Thurneysen’s narrowing of both human communicative ability down to oral speech as well as pastoral care down to human conversation. It is not human speech itself that makes the human being human; rather it is one’s communicative and dialogical nature as one addressed by God. But we should not therefore entirely reject Thurneysen’s model. His basic presupposition is correct, even if he is slightly reductionist in his conclusions.

Further, it does not mean that people who have limited or no ability to communicate are dehumanised. Like Swinton, Thurneysen has a holistic understanding of care whereby the whole human being is restored to wellness as an integrated person-in-relationship reconciled to God and others. In a situation of therapy for a severe mental or physical disability, there may well be a period where care for a person is almost entirely one-sided and their responsiveness is negligible or even non-existent. The aim of therapy, however, should never be to create a perpetual state of dependence, but to restore and affirm the selfhood and independent subjectivity of the person, even in significantly changed and reduced circumstances. In situations of permanent severe disability, one’s personhood is in no way thrown into question either. McFadyen puts it this way:

“The indwelling of Christ and the possibilities of participating in a relation conformed to and mediated by Him are not constrained by mental capacities. Where the level of communicative competence is too low for another to explicate his or her understanding … one has to ‘stand in for the other’. This means attempting to reconstruct an understanding from an imaginary, empathetic ‘indwelling’ of the other’s identity and social location.”

In most cases, for example with young children or the extremely elderly, some form of communication is possible. But where this isn’t the case, one can still care for another with

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33 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 110.
34 McFadyen, The Call to Personhood, 179.
the view to dignifying their person — “standing in for the other” — even in undignifying circumstances.

Thurneysen talks about our indwelling in Christ through the concept of Calvin’s *insertio*. The individual is “in-planted” (*Einpflanzung*) into the body of Christ.²⁵ A person is no longer defined by a particular aspect of their identity (e.g. a diagnosed illness), but according to their baptism into the death and new life of Jesus Christ. In this way, as individuals we indwell Christ as members of his body. And through the Spirit, Christ indwells us, enabling us to relate to one another in and through him. Where needed, this will involve a “standing in” for someone where they can’t care for themselves. All this is to say that people, whose communicative ability is significantly impaired, are still held, affirmed, and celebrated by the shared identity of the Christ-formed community.

In this context, the pastoral conversation receives its proper place. While conversation is not the *only* form of pastoral care (here we take exception to Thurneysen), it is nonetheless the central and prevalent form of pastoral care. It is a concrete instance of interpersonal dialogue through which personhood is affirmed, care is expressed, and the dialogue partners are awakened and conformed to their common identity in Christ. In an essay entitled, *The Grammar of Conversation*, Trevor Hart talks about the imaginative role of conversation in fostering and enhancing community. Hart’s theory of conversation goes beyond anything Thurneysen would say, but like Thurneysen he is influenced by the personalist philosophy of Martin Buber. Hart engages with English philosopher Michael Oakeshott, who talks about *conversation* in a particular way (he is not talking about human conversation in a general sense, but “conversation” as a specifically defined form of dialogue with another). Oakeshott distinguishes conversation from inquiry or debate. A debate intends to convince the other, to compose an argument built on sound reasoning. A conversation, on the other hand,

> “is essentially plural, open-ended and in a proper sense playful; we join it for the sake of participating rather than to secure some predetermined … goal or output, and any benefit we gain from doing so (besides the enjoyment of the conversation itself and as such) arises serendipitously, from the unpredictable interplay or collision of difference.”³⁶

The playfulness of the conversation should not be considered frivolity, however. For Oakeshott, there is a riskiness to genuine conversation. One exposes oneself to otherness and

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does not seek to convince the other but seeks to enter into an imaginative, shared space with
the other without defensiveness. In order to genuinely encounter the other in this space, one
must risk being *changed*. This riskiness to the self is a prerequisite for genuine listening and
caring.

Hart then turns from Oakeshott to C.S. Lewis, who observes “that the power of literary or
poetic imagination has in the first instance to do with meaning rather than reality.” For
instance, one can read a novel and know that it is not literally true but can nevertheless
commit imaginatively to the story of the novel and find meaning through it. Hart talks about
an aesthetic disposition with regard to art, in which the difference between empirical reality
and the “world” of the artwork is preserved. He posits that imagination is therefore a
prerequisite of meaning. “Imagination,” he argues, “is more concerned to suggest playfully
*What if it were thus?* than to convince us that in fact it *is* (even though it may in fact be).”

Art and literature, he continues, “will not be isolated in some hermetically-sealed ‘alterity’ set
in apposition to our lived reality, but continually break in (or break out) to modify our ways
of experiencing that same reality, for good or ill.”

While Hart is not writing with pastoral care in mind (his intention is to explore the
possibilities of conversation as imaginative discourse in the sphere of interreligious or
intercultural dialogue), his conclusions are not so far removed from Thurneysen’s own and it
is an interesting exercise to apply these ideas to pastoral care. Thurneysen would, I think, be
uneasy with Oakeshott’s understanding of conversation as plural and open-ended with no
goal other than the conversation itself. The goal of pastoral conversation, in Thurneysen’s
understanding, is communication of the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of the
person into the community of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the pastoral conversation has certain
boundaries and limitations. It is conversation informed by and in a sense bound to the world
of scripture. It traverses the full breadth of human experience but always in light of the God
revealed in Jesus Christ. That being said, there are a few synergies between Hart and
Thurneysen that are worth explicating.

First, Thurneysen’s “aesthetic perspective”, which we discussed in chapter three, bears some
similarity to Hart’s “aesthetic disposition”. Engaging with empirical reality “under the sign of
the resurrection”, as Thurneysen put it, is an imaginative act. That is not to say it has no

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37 Ibid., 112.
38 Ibid., 113.
39 Ibid., 114.
grounding in reality. The “aesthetic disposition” of the pastoral conversation is the movement of the person beyond their own worldview or circumstances to imagine new possibilities for redemption: *what if it were thus?* C.S. Lewis’ question with regard to art and literature applies equally to the pastoral situation. In pastoral care, however, the question, *What if it were thus?*, is critically bound on the one hand to the revealed and redemptive life and ministry of Jesus Christ and on the other hand to the empirical pastoral situation. *What if God’s kingdom were breaking in to this situation? What does redemption mean in this moment? Where is hope in this circumstance?*

Second, the imaginative space of the conversation is a risky space where both partners are open to being changed. Thurneysen has been criticised that on the one hand he wants to maintain the equality of both partners in the conversation and on the other hand there is an inevitable power imbalance between the counsellor (clergy) and the person being counselled. In a formal counselling situation, there is necessarily a power imbalance and one-sidedness to the relationship (so-long as this is temporary, it is entirely appropriate — say, for example, when one goes to the doctor). Thurneysen’s assertion, however, is that, even in these formal situations, both partners are subject to and discern together God’s Word in a particular situation. In comparison to Oakeshott, then, the conversation is not simply an imaginative space that is purely the product of two (or more) communicative selves (and therefore limited by the worldviews of the conversation partners). The imaginative space is a given and revealed space, awakened prayerfully by the Spirit to the Word of God. Anderson’s hermeneutic of the resurrected Christ is helpful here. The living Christ himself is present in the conversation through the other. He is the original and living partner, whom one encounters in one’s fellow human being. In this sense, the imaginative process of the pastoral conversation actually involves a conformation to the mind of Christ awakened by the Spirit and guided by the words of scripture.

Third, while for Oakeshott any benefit from the conversation is purely “serendipitous”, Thurneysen would want to go further. Given the great proviso of the Holy Spirit, we should expect that in the pastoral conversation, healing and transformation will take place. In chapter seven, we distinguished between *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Praxis* contains the *telos* of the act. For Oakeshott, that is certainly the case: the conversation is itself the point regardless of any other benefit. For Thurneysen too, we have argued, pastoral conversation is praxis. Yet, for

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41 See chapter seven.
42 Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 81.
Thurneysen the content of the conversation is not separable from the act of undistorted, caring encounter. Communication of forgiveness of sins occurs in the conversation itself, through which one is encountered and validated as a person in and through Jesus Christ. The conversation, then, is itself a reconciling act — but for Thurneysen such conversation arises from and returns to the source of our reconciliation: the proclamation of God’s forgiving Word in the community. Therefore the conversation’s benefits are not purely serendipitous but are integral to the conversation as an instance of insertio into the community of Word and sacrament.

Given our discussion so far, we can conclude: Swinton and Thurneysen are in agreement that our being human consists in our being persons-in-relationship. We are dialogical, essentially communicative beings. Human communication, though, is far broader than speech and conversation. For this reason, pastoral care must broadly encompass the full spectrum of the communicative ability of the whole, embodied human being as the church carries out its ministry of caring-in-community. However, language is a distinctive aspect of human communication and one which is necessary for the formation of community. Even where persons cannot communicate with language, they still belong to a social context which is shaped by a common language and culture. Human conversation has a generativity and productiveness through the communication of oneself to the other made possible by the complex, semantic system of a shared language in any given society. Conversation, we can therefore conclude, while not the only form of pastoral care, is nonetheless the central or prevalent form of pastoral care. It not only plays an integral role in the acceptance and affirmation of one’s personhood, but also in one’s conformation and preservation in the community to whom they belong and are celebrated.

Through Trevor Hart, we have seen how conversation is an imaginative discourse enabling self-transcendence. It plays a distinct political function through enabling people to imaginatively transcend the limiting identities that distinguish them from “the other”. Conversation, by genuine listening and a shared process of imaginative meaning-making, can lead individuals beyond mere toleration towards acceptance and love of the other. Hart’s comments prove insightful for the pastoral conversation too. In light of our discussion between Swinton and Thurneysen, we can point to the pastoral conversation as critically important for the local congregation to become a dynamic process of caring-in-community. While Thurneysen and Hart are not entirely in agreement, Hart’s suppositions help us to re-engage with Thurneysen’s assertion that pastoral conversation can be a profoundly transformative event. Thurneysen’s claim that pastoral conversation is a “prototype of true
conversation” and is therefore “one of the greatest events we may experience”, may seem more than a little generous and overly romantic. But on further consideration, his assertions are not as farfetched as they initially appear. As noted earlier, pastoral conversation is not special because it is super-spiritual or pious, or because it leads to miraculous objectively-identifiable transformation on every occasion. More often than not, the pastoral conversation is entirely ordinary, mundane, and may appear not to have any lasting impact at all. Its prototypical importance does not consist in anything it achieves per se, but in its being an instance of interpersonal encounter “on the basis of the Word of God and with reference to the Word of God.” It is a sign of the redemptive possibility of all human conversation and the entirety of human living-in-relationship as our lives are awakened to and ordered by God’s Word. The imaginative self-transcendence of pastoral conversation is, for Thurneysen, no existential stepping outside of oneself (as an existentialist theology might advocate). Rather, one transcends the self in and through Christ, through whom one encounters the other freed from sin and freed for love. We no longer see the other as a projection of our self-understanding but as one who is a Thou, created for relationship with others as a fellow child of God and brother or sister of Christ. As a concrete instance of relating to one another in Christ, the pastoral conversation is genuinely transformative for the individual and formative for the community.

**Towards peace in Christ**

So far we have seen how pastoral conversation, as a central element of the church’s ministry of care, not only affirms the selfhood of a person-in-relationship but also plays an instrumental role in the formation of community. For Thurneysen, pastoral conversation shares a paradigmatic relationship with the general proclamation in Word and sacrament. The church is ordered by the Word of God as it takes root horizontally in the interconnected lives of people. As the underlying paradigm of the church’s life, the Word is not only a general word delivered to an amorphous mass. It is a personal and direct word even in its general and proclamatory form. By the Spirit, the Word enables and sustains a complex network of relationships between persons through the common identifying principle of being “in Christ”. Through insertio into this community of Jesus Christ by baptism and Holy Communion, one becomes ordered by the Word. One’s selfhood is affirmed as one is brought into radically

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43 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 111. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 100.
44 *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, 111. *Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge*, 100.
new relationship with others. Affirming the selfhood of the other through caring relationship “in Christ” affirms one’s own selfhood as the two partners enter into free and non-coercive relationship through mutual dependence.

For Swinton, this new community in Christ is oriented towards God’s coming shalom. Like Thurneysen, Swinton understands the imago dei christologically as the image fulfilled and restored in Jesus Christ. The image of God in the human being is not as it should be, Swinton reasons. We can see this in the destructiveness and malformation of human relationships. While we are inherently relational, human relationships are full of conflict, selfishness, and coercion at a personal, local, societal, and structural level. Swinton defines sin as relational disconnection between God and others.45 One enters into relationship on their own terms placing their will over and above the other. Thurneysen similarly talks about the mutual loneliness of all human communication.46 Though we can maintain genuine, meaningful, loving relationships, every relationship is marred by sin. There is always a limit to our ability to fully express ourselves, to really hear and be heard, to move beyond mere “reciprocal self-expression”, and to encounter the other as a true Thou and not as mere projection of our own self-understanding.

While both Swinton and Thurneysen affirm the common humanity of every human being through the inalienable possession of the imago dei by virtue of God’s covenant faithfulness, they also assert that this knowledge is essentially knowledge of grace. We come to know ourselves as persons-in-relationship only in light of Jesus Christ, the true human being, who lives in perfect communion with God and with others in the embracing power of the Spirit. Christ, in his vicarious humanity, exercises a reconciling ministry in the world, healing and transforming relationships of human beings with God, with one another, and with the whole cosmos. Swinton emphasises the cosmic nature of Christ’s reconciling ministry. Salvation in Christ is not only a personal experience but a cosmic process bringing about a new creation. The church, as the body of Christ in the world, is a witness to and sign of this new reconciled humanity in creation.

The imago dei, therefore, carries personal, interpersonal, social, and cosmic dimensions. The restoration of God’s image in Christ is bound up with the recreation of the whole cosmos. Swinton points to the biblical vision of shalom, God’s peace, in which all creation is one,

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45 Swinton, From Bedlam to Shalom, 53.
46 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 110. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 99.
living in harmony and security for the wellbeing and flourishing of all. Shalom encompasses more than absence of violence. It is wholeness, completeness, and wellness in the fullest sense of the terms. The Old Testament idea of shalom is maintained in the New Testament through the life and ministry of Christ, who brings peace in his very person.

“Shalom is not something which can be understood outside of its true context in Christ. It is not a political or ideological possibility. It is not a vision which inspires humanity to try harder. In fact the empirical reality of the human condition would suggest that it is not even a sociological possibility. Shalom is a personal gift from a relational God to His fallen creation. It is a re-creative process that has been set in motion by the resurrected Christ.”

As the church participates in Christ, it will reflect (or image) something of this shalomic presence in the world. Here, again, the ministry of pastoral care becomes far more integral to the church’s mission than is often acknowledged. Through caring-in-community, the church becomes a shalomic presence committed to reconciliation and holistic peace within individuals, between persons, and in communities and societies.

**Swinton: Friendship as bearer of shalom**

Swinton takes an innovative turn when he relates these new interpersonal shalomic relationships to the church’s ministry of mental health care at the congregational level. He argues that “alongside justice, righteousness, wholeness and salvation, the relationship of friendship forms an integral aspect of God’s coming shalom.” Swinton advocates a recovery of a theology of friendship as a particular sort of human relationship built on freedom, mutuality, reciprocity, inclusivity, and caring. He highlights two ways in particular that friendship can be a “bearer of shalom” as revealed in the life of Jesus. The first was Jesus’ commitment to and solidarity with those whom he called friends. He enters into a “deeply intimate, yet totally open and inclusive relationship” with his friends, sharing with them his knowledge of the Father. Yet, for Swinton, friendship in light of Jesus is “supplemented and deepened” by the theme of sacrifice exemplified in Jesus’ journey to

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47 Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, 59.
48 Ibid., 77.
49 Ibid., 81.
50 John 15:15
death on a cross. Again, Swinton draws on Moltmann: the church, as it shares in Jesus’ solidarity with and sacrificial relationship for others, is “an open fellowship of friends.”

For Swinton, one of the distinctive marks of friendship is its dependence on freedom. A friendship arises from the free choice of both partners to invest in the relationship. The friendship is maintained through mutual freedom and preserves the freedom of the other. If the free, subjective agency of the other is denied, the integrity of the friendship is thrown into question. For Swinton, then, friendship, at least in an ideal sense, is characterised by equality and mutuality.

The freedom of friendship, he argues, has both a positive and negative aspect. Positively, we can choose to be friends with whomever we wish (obviously respecting their mutual desire for friendship!). The radical nature of Jesus’ friendship is that he chose to befriend those whom no one else wanted to befriend. In befriending the friendless, friendship can be a deeply counter-cultural and subversive relationship that defies social norms. Negatively, we can choose not to be friends with others. The “principle of likeness” with regard to friendship is the principle that human beings tend to be friends with people who are like them. We see this in intensified and amplified form through social media today. We create echo chambers where our own thoughts and feelings are reflected back at us through our “friends” and therefore reinforced and justified. As a community of friends, sharing in Christ’s sacrificial life, the church is a community moving beyond “the principle of likeness” towards a new, radically open and inclusive friendship. We could say, there is still a “principle of likeness” but it is the principle of Christ-likeness that is the basis for friendship in the church. In this way, friendship in the church contains a distinctly eschatological orientation in anticipation of God’s coming shalom in Christ.

**Thurneysen:** Pastoral care as proclamation of the kingdom of God

Both Thurneysen and Swinton ground their models of care in the eschatological horizon of hope. Both are clear that the church’s pastoral ministry is a participation in the restorative and reconciling work of the triune God in anticipation of what is to come. And both centre the eschatological vision explicitly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Yet, while Swinton frames pastoral care eschatologically through the concepts of shalom and friendship, Thurneysen establishes his eschatological orientation with different language, framing pastoral care in light of the coming kingdom of God and the church’s proclamatory witness to

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51 Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, 81.
52 Ibid., 82-83.
it. For Swinton, the eschatological concept of shalom as holistic peace is a natural starting point for discussing wellness in the context of mental health. He defines friendship in light of shalom as “bearing” shalom to one another in mutual care. For Thurneysen, whose primary concern in the 1930s was to establish the lordship of Christ over the entirety of human life, the coming kingdom of God is the dominant eschatological image. The kingdom inaugurated by Christ is the sphere of God’s power over “all other spheres of power between heaven and earth” — especially the power of man. Within this framework, Thurneysen never developed a theology of friendship, instead preferring the term neighbour, which he took from Barth. In the pastoral conversation, one encounters one’s neighbour — an affirmation of our co-humanity in Christ and the inherent worth of the other as a citizen of the kingdom and a member of the new humanity through Christ, the firstborn from the dead.

Both terms, friend and neighbour, are to be understood christologically: in the incarnation, Christ becomes the Mitmensch and the friend of humanity. Through their respective emphases, Swinton and Thurneysen point the comprehensiveness of the reality of the incarnation in its breadth and depth. We have already seen how Swinton reconceives of friendship in light of Christ. Christ shares his peace with “his own”, caring for them, inviting them into intimate communion with him as he shares communion with the Father. Likewise, Thurneysen defines neighbour through Christ. He understands the church’s pastoral ministry as a sharing in the incarnational ministry of Christ, who is the true pastor and carer of souls. Through Christ, one enters-into (Hineingehen) the depths of human need and suffering. One journeys-with (Mit-ihm-Gehen) one’s neighbour in their disorientation and lostness. And yet one does so in anticipation of the journey home through Christ, our Mitmensch, to God the Father. For Thurneysen, the key principle of care is not intimacy (as is the case with friendship), as much as solidarity and non-abandonment. Through the universal scope of the term neighbour, Thurneysen maintains the expansiveness of the eschatological hope in which the church conducts its pastoral ministry. On this basis, in the 1960s, Thurneysen’s attention shifts to the missional aspect of pastoral care to persons outside the church. The focus, for him, is always on the direct and personal pastoral conversation. And yet this intimate setting.

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53 See especially chapter 3 of Seelsorge im Vollzug, entitled “Reich Gottes als Inhalt der seelsorgerlichen Verkündigung”. Thurneysen, Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 36ff.
54 "Die Bergpredigt," 31. Ibid., 15.
55 Thurneysen, Der Mensch Von Heute Und Das Evangelium, H. 75, 11.
56 Admittedly, solidarity with someone is also a characteristic of friendship. However, Christ lives and dies for us not only as our friend, but even more basically as our fellow human. The universal significance of his atoning life and death is dependent on his taking on the fullness of human nature in this most fundamental sense.
keeps the universal horizon in mind. The local becomes the starting point for societal and structural transformation as the church proclaims the coming kingdom of God in the world.

Swinton and Thurneysen are complementary here in helping us to conceive of pastoral care as imaging Christ to one another as both friend and neighbour. Both terms say something distinct about the church’s pastoral ministry in light of the coming kingdom. A friend is a particular type of human relationship that connotes a certain level of intimacy and familiarity as well as free choice. Neighbour is broader. It articulates the universal commonality in the human being as a Mitmensch, or fellow human. That is not to say, however, that neighbour is not also a highly particular term. In the neighbour, the universal and the particular come together. One recognises in another person one’s common humanity. There is no “ideal” human being that is “behind” or “above” every concrete instance of the human being. Even Jesus Christ is not an ideal. He is the true human being both in his particularity as a first century Jew. In the particularity of his humanity, he lived as the true human for God and for others. He encountered people, and continues to encounter people, as Mitmensch, as neighbour, rather than as some generalised abstraction of the perfect human being.

In the pastoral conversation, one encounters the other as both neighbour and friend. Both Swinton and Thurneysen affirm the humanising telos of pastoral ministry, though in a different way. The church’s pastoral ministry must keep both in mind: the intimacy and voluntarity of friendship and the universality and inalienability of being a neighbour. The purpose is not to become more pious Christians but to become more fully human. Our humanity consists in both our common humanness and responsibility to and for others (neighbour) as well as our free agency to enter into intimate, suffering relationships as a subjective self and in so doing authenticate the selfhood of the other (friendship). A pastorally-oriented theological anthropology will seek to see the human in light of both aspects. The church’s pastoral ministry has both a universal scope and an intimate depth.

Wherever Thurneysen’s kerygmatic pastoral care opens itself up to the accusation of authoritarian top-down proclamation, Swinton offers a welcome counter-perspective. Through his concept of friendship, Swinton draws attention to the eschatological significance of the relationship itself. As a community of friends, the church is really bearing shalom to one another through mutual care. And yet Thurneysen reminds us that this shalomic community arises from and is ever returning to the event of proclamation and the communication of the coming kingdom. Thurneysen was acutely aware of a deep pastoral need in the human being of his day. People were no longer turning to the church for answers.
— a trend that was, in Thurneysen’s mind, entirely understandable, even justifiable given the church’s lack of confidence in its own witness. Yet, the fact that people no longer attended church in no way lessened the pastoral need. The internal psychological angst, resulting in a rise in people seeking psychiatric or counselling services, was compounded by wider societal shifts, the breakdown of traditional values and institutions, as well as political tensions and the threat of nuclear war. Local communities were dissolving into a mass, amorphous society which bred social isolation and increased the vulnerability of persons already on the fringes. Such an environment heightens the need for friendship and for the church’s ministry in society as a shalomic fellowship of friends. And yet it also heightens the need for the church’s proclamatory witness of hope, of justice, and of peace. Out of this proclamatory witness the new community gathered around Christ’s table becomes a sacramental sign of God’s coming shalom. Through this narrative of hope, grounded in the expectation of the coming kingdom, the church offers a deeply needed counter-narrative in a world that so often defaults to narratives of despair, anxiety, and fear. Thurneysen recognised that the mental wellbeing of an individual was bound up with wider social and environmental factors. We are shaped by our society and the cultural narratives told in our communities. Certainly, Swinton recognised this as well, but his book focuses more specifically on the theological function of friendship for mental health care. Thurneysen keeps the broad vision front and centre. In his concept of pastoral care as proclamation of the kingdom of God, Thurneysen sees the personal as bound up with the social, the pastoral as bound up with the missional, and the particular as bound up with the universal.

**Health and illness**

A pastorally-oriented theological anthropology begins with the particular context of one’s neighbour in community. It does not lose sight of the social and the cosmic dimensions of God’s coming kingdom, but it will concern itself primarily with the care of an individual human soul in the concrete circumstances of their life. Swinton argues that personal health and wellbeing, and even more specifically mental health, is a “sub-system” of health within God’s intentions of shalom. The coming kingdom of God consists in the redemption of every aspect of existence as all things are redeemed and re-created through the resurrected life of Christ. In this shalomic movement towards the kingdom, a person is not only

57 Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 49.
58 Ibid., 65-70.
59 Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom*, 65.
integrated into community, they are integrated as an *integral whole*, at peace in body, soul, and spirit.

Thurneysen’s understanding of health and sickness changes over the course of his pastoral writings. Dorothee Hoch rightly notes that 22 years lie between the publication of *Die Lehre* (1946) and *Vollzug* (1968), a period which spans massive social change and significant advances in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, and medicine.\(^{60}\) While there is continuity in Thurneysen’s assumptions, there is also development. A sympathetic reading of Thurneysen will see his thought maturing contextually in line with the advancements made in these other disciplines at the time. He was engaging with the latest trends in psychology and medicine — an impressive feat that highlights his ability to move between disciplines. And yet, his work can consequently seem dated in precisely these cross-disciplinary areas. Some of what he writes should be rightly dismissed today in light of contemporary understandings of mental health and illness.\(^ {61}\) He has been challenged by a number of practical theologians on these grounds.\(^ {62}\) Others have tried to take Thurneysen’s fusion of revelation theology with depth psychology and develop it further.\(^ {63}\) In *Die Lehre*, Thurneysen was highly influenced by the depth psychology of Freud and Jung, particularly the notion of the unconscious. From 1949 onwards, the psychosomatic medicine of Richard Siebeck and Viktor von Weizsäcker became important for his concept of the human being as an integrated *Ganzheit*. In 1951, Karl Barth published his *Church Dogmatics III/4*, in which he defined health and sickness in light of God’s command to live life.\(^ {64}\) Thurneysen’s section in *Vollzug* on pastoral care to the sick, proceeds from this Barthian position.

According to Barth, health is “the strength to be as man.” It is the “capability, vigour, and freedom” to live human life through the “integration of the organs for the exercise of psycho-physical functions.”\(^ {65}\) Sickness is understood negatively in relation to health as the partial impotence to exercise the psycho-physical functions that are central to human life. However, crucially, Barth does not reduce health and sickness to opposite poles on a linear spectrum.

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\(^{60}\) Hoch, "Offenbarungstheologie Und Tiefenpsychologie," 8.


\(^{62}\) Martin Jochheim is especially critical based on the accusation that Thurneysen interprets the psychology through theological categories. See: Jochheim, *Seelsorge Und Psychotherapie Historisch-Systematische Studien Zur Lehre Von Der Seelsorge Bei Oskar Pfister, Eduard Thurneysen Und Walter Uhsadel*, 114ff.

\(^{63}\) See for example: Hoch, "Offenbarungstheologie Und Tiefenpsychologie."

\(^{64}\) Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation (Die Lehre Von Der Schöpfung, 1951)*, ed. T.F. Torrance G.W. Bromiley, vol. III/4, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 356. For his definition, Barth draws on Richard Siebeck, whose work was also instrumental for Thurneysen.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 357.
The purpose of health is to have the vivacity to live human life as God intended. While in one sense sickness means a lack of health, being sick does not mean that one no longer has the strength to be human in the midst of that sickness. In this way, Barth reasoned, even a sick person can be healthy in so far as they have the strength and courage to face life in the midst of struggles, sickness, and even imminent death. For Barth, God’s command to live (which is the necessary condition to exist as person-in-relationship) has not been revoked despite the presence of suffering and sin in the world. The goodness of God’s creation is distorted by sin — but it remains inherently good, created for communion with God. On these grounds, to live in harmony with the will of God is to will to live in defiance of sickness. It is good, then, to actively seek health in body, soul, and spirit, as well as in the integration of these.

And yet, we should not hold on to life obsessively. Existence is naturally limited according to the will of God the Creator. Normal and natural life begins and ends and therefore health is only a relative concept bracketed by the naturally imposed limits of life. Health (and by implication, immortality) is not the goal of life. Rather flourishing and thriving life before God is the goal of health. Unlimited, uncontained life is beyond our current existence and so health, as an ideal concept, is essentially an eschatological concept, rooted in Christ’s shalomic life beyond the grave. Resurrection, Christians believe, only comes through death and therefore life now is not to be held onto as if death had the final word.

Both Thurneysen and Swinton use Barth’s definition as a basis for their own understanding of health. Swinton rejects other models of health as inadequate, for example, health as “the absence of illness”, a “statistical norm”, a “social ideal”, or a “utopian vision”. Barth’s definition of health, by contrast, maintains an eschatological horizon, a holistic vision of the whole integrated person in community, and a framework in which sickness is taken seriously but not absolutized as the negative of health. From this starting point, Swinton unpacks the power of friendship in the process of mental health. Friendship should not replace clinical psychotherapy or psychiatry where illness is severe. Yet in our current professionalized and atomized social climate, the opposite is more likely to be the case: that illness is treated as a medical problem to be solved in a hospital or a clinic rather than understanding illness (and thus also healing and health) holistically within the social, physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of the ill person’s life. Friendship, Swinton argues, has both theological and empirical support as a vitally important relationship in our being human. Social support

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66 Thurneysen, Praktische Seelsorge, 95. And: Swinton, From Bedlam to Shalom, 72.
through friendship both “acts to protect or to buffer people from particular stresses within their environment” and “offers a person support in times of stress.”

This social element of health is lacking in Thurneysen’s thinking. In Die Lehre (1946) and Seelsorge und Psychotherapie (1950), he not only sees the process from sickness to health as rather linear but also as individualistic. The purpose of pastoral care, in other words, is to restore health and peace within the individual in order to establish peace in their outer life. In Thurneysen’s theology, the process for holistic healing is rather mono-directional from inner peace towards outer peace. By contrast in Swinton’s understanding, the process of healing involves the dynamic integration of the whole person in the whole of their world. While Swinton’s concern is to authenticate the ministry of the whole people of God in mental health care, Thurneysen’s focus is on specialised pastoral counselling. A central concern for Thurneysen was to establish the integrity of pastoral care as a discipline alongside other healing disciplines, such as psychotherapy and medicine. Given the influence of the depth-psychology of Freud and Jung at the time, Thurneysen shows little awareness of the wider social element of mental health, which is so central in Swinton’s book. Instead, his understanding of pastoral counselling was based on the prevalent model of psychotherapeutic conversation at the time, which sought to plumb the depths of the human psyche. His metaphor of “deciphering”, which we looked at in chapter six, highlights this inclination. The pastor’s duty is to decipher the situation of the human being in order to uncover with them the underlying spiritual reality of separation from God through sin, and to lead them to repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

The psychological discovery of the unconscious mind revealed that human beings had far less control over their lives than they had previously thought. For Thurneysen, this was confirmation of the basic theological reality of sin: the human being is separated from God to the depths of their being so that they are a person in conflict. Neurosis and psychosis, in depth-psychology, occur as a loss of control to the chaotic unconscious forces of the mind. Healing, consequently, involves re-establishing order and control in the individual. For

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67 From Bedlam to Shalom, 95.
69 For example, Thurneysen begins chapter one of Seelsorge im Vollzug with a discussion of pastoral care as a ministry of the whole people of God (Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 9ff.). It strikes me as no accident that Thurneysen begins with this assertion given that Die Lehre von der Seelsorge is overwhelmingly focussed on clinical pastoral counselling that presupposes an ordained minister or at least a trained lay pastoral carer. His beginning of Vollzug is a necessary corrective. However, in the second half of the book on “Konkrete Seelsorge” he continues to write with an ordained minister in mind (his opening pages of part two begin with practical advice on how to decorate the minister’s office!). See: ibid., 97ff.
Thurneysen, pastoral counselling was similarly concerned with the right ordering of the individual, not in terms of self-autonomy, but in terms of establishing Christ’s order in the life of the individual through the realisation of forgiveness of sin. In the same way that a mentally ill person was understood to be captive to the unconscious mind, so too, Thurneysen reasoned, the person living in unforgiven sin is captive to their sin. Realisation of forgiveness, then, consists in the liberation from sin in order to live freely for God and others.

Martin Jochheim rightly expresses his concern over Thurneysen’s interpretation of psychological insights through a theological lens. By drawing such an explicit link between sickness and sin through interdisciplinary dialogue with psychotherapy, Thurneysen strays into dangerous territory. The disorder of sin to the root of human existence, Thurneysen reasoned, “takes the form of illness.” Understandably, Jochheim sees Thurneysen’s association of sickness with sin as trespassing beyond mere illustration into “real manifestation”. The empirical reality of sickness becomes confused with the theological reality of sin. Realising the danger of his own position, Thurneysen softened his original assertion that there is a causal relationship between sin and sickness: “we had better not speak of causality at all, but be satisfied with the stating the (spiritual) correlation between sickness and sin.” Even here, Thurneysen is not explicit enough in rejecting a direct relationship between sickness in one’s life and unforgiven sin. His main point, however, is that the natural biological and psychological fact of sickness generally is a symptom of humanity’s turning away from God. Without God, the human being is divided, torn, fragmented, disintegrating, and without peace. The natural reality of sickness is a result of the deep metaphysical disturbance of life without God. Human life to its very root is disrupted by sin and disordered by violence, sickness, and death. Even as we are born into the life of the new Adam, we continue to exist as the old Adam. For Thurneysen, sickness is a distortion of God’s good ordering of the world. In other words, there is a general correlation between the tragedy of sickness and the sinful state of humanity. However any explicit connection between a particular “sin” and a sickness needs to be utterly rejected. Thurneysen does not make this mistake but, as Jochheim points out, he comes dangerously close and is not explicit enough.

70 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 223. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 204. 
72 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 224. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 205. 
73 "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge," 207.
With Jochheim’s critique in mind, we can nonetheless affirm some other aspects of Thurneysen’s approach. First, the correlation Thurneysen makes between healing and forgiveness is appropriate when understood in light of the eschatological new creation in Christ. One’s recuperation to physical and mental health is in accordance with God’s command to live flourishing lives in right relationship before God, with others, and within the world. This reality of true human living is the eschatological reality of Christ’s resurrected life, in which we participate by the Spirit. As eschatological reality, its full realisation and enjoyment lies beyond the limits of this life. We must all experience suffering, sickness, and death. Physical and mental healing should be sought as an affirmation of life — but even as it is sought, healing is only a sign of the eschatological reality to come. When healing is lacking, or when people endure lifelong terminal illnesses, we continue to affirm life through the hope of God’s coming world of life, when all will be redeemed and sickness and death will be no more.

Second, Thurneysen’s enthusiastic use of the insights of Siebeck and von Weizsäcker with regard to the whole integrated human being is congruent with the Hebraic concept of soul. He is right that pastoral care must treat the whole human being and see the psychical, physical, and spiritual dimensions as intimately related and mutually dependent. Thurneysen’s work is strengthened by Swinton’s social emphasis. Care for the human being is not just care for the Ganzheit of body and soul. It is care for the whole human being in the whole of their worlds.\footnote{Swinton, \textit{From Bedlam to Shalom}, 67.}

Third, in this understanding, it is appropriate to speak of “deciphering” the situation of the human being. Dorothee Hoch furthers Thurneysen’s attempt to bring revelation theology and depth psychology together. According to Hoch, in the incarnation of Christ, God has made the human being the “object” of theology. Because of our shared humanity with Christ, our Mitmenschen, psychologically-determined approaches in pastoral care have theological relevance in helping us to understand the whole of human life in connection with the eschaton and with Jesus Christ.\footnote{Hoch, "Offenbarungstheologie Und Tiefenpsychologie," 52.} Thurneysen was clear that the pastor is not a psychologist and that great damage can be done should the respective roles be confused. Both the psychotherapist and the pastor begin with the situation of the concrete human being. And both depth psychology and revelation theology share a commitment to uncovering what was previously hidden. But here they depart. Pastoral care, through the breaking in of God’s
eternal Word, seeks to decipher the concrete human situation in light of God’s reconciling and redemptive promises.

Fourth, Thurneysen’s later theology of care to the sick and grieving (after the publication of Church Dogmatics III/4) can be seen as a practical attempt to implement Barth’s concept of health as the strength to be human. In this context, physical or mental healing may take place, whether through natural means (i.e. medicine or therapy) or through apparently miraculous events. In either case, the goal of the pastoral conversation is to help the person to understand their healing through the lens of faith as a sign of God’s redemptive power in the world. And where healing does not take place, the pastoral conversation will seek to comfort the person in their struggle and to orient in hope to God’s coming salvation. For Thurneysen, the goal is not healing as such, but the right attitude towards life in both health and sickness. It is the conformation of one’s will in every circumstance to the will of God. The goal is to share in the obedient life of the suffering and crucified Christ and to learn to pray with him, not my will but yours be done.

In accordance with this understanding, the pastoral visit at the sickbed should, in Thurneysen’s mind, attempt three things: first, to affirm the identity of the person as a beloved child of God who is encompassed by God’s mercy. In other words, the pastor accepts and validates the selfhood of the person. They attempt to reaffirm one’s humanity and personhood in what can often be dehumanising or isolating circumstances. Second, in light of the eschatological orientation towards God, the pastoral conversation should attempt to empower the person in waiting. Often healing is a slow, drawn out process. Often healing from sickness never eventuates. The pastor will orient the person to God’s eschatological promise to bring healing and shalom, avoiding fatalism or defeatism on the one hand and the absolutisation of penultimate healing on the other. Healing in this life points to and foreshadows the final healing beyond the grave. Third, the pastoral conversation will attempt to instil hope and assurance in the person by casting their vision beyond their sickness which, in a hospital ward, can seem all-encompassing. The pastor will re-situate the person within their wider social setting and in this way remind the person they are more than their illness. Even in their sickness, they are remembered and held by their church community, which prays for them.

A pastorally-oriented theological anthropology is confronted by these concrete concerns for healing, for health, and for holistic, flourishing human life in relationship with God and with

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76 Thurneysen, Praktische Seelsorge, 112.
others. It does not simply ask, *what is the human being?* It asks, *who is this particular human being I encounter?* And, *what does it mean to accept, affirm, and restore their humanity in the concrete circumstances of their life and in anticipation of God’s coming kingdom?*

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explored some of the broad dynamics of pastoral anthropology through dialogue between Swinton and Thurneysen. We have framed pastoral care within the eschatological coming of God’s kingdom. While in pastoral care, the personal and the interpersonal inevitably become the focus, it is important to keep these aspects of our being human within the larger social and cosmic dimensions of God’s redemptive work. Both Swinton and Thurneysen, with their unique emphases help us to do so. As an eschatologically oriented ministry, pastoral care is concerned with our becoming human through reconciliation between persons and reconciliation within oneself. First, a human being is a *dialogical being*, whose selfhood is actualised in self-communication and embodied in caring for others. Second, human existence anticipates and is dynamically oriented towards God’s shalomic recreation. The church, as the community sharing in Christ’s risen life by the Spirit, is called to new human relations that are both universal in scope (neighbour) and deeply intimate (friend). Third, the human being is intended for full and healthy life in order to live generously for God and for others. According to God’s good purposes, the telos of human existence is affirmed through the human choice for life, community, and wellness. It is consequently denied through the non-decision for death, isolation, and defeatism in response to illness. In these three key areas, the pastoral ministry of the church becomes immensely important, not only as a humanising practice but as the concrete setting for exploring questions of theological anthropology. In the pastoral conversation, the messiness of human existence is oriented towards God’s eternal and redemptive life.

We have already touched on the eschatological-orientation of Thurneysen’s anthropology. His early dependence on Blumhardt and his engagement with Moltmann towards the end of his life, mean that hope becomes a central theme in Thurneysen’s work, which is worthy of its own attention. In the final chapter, we turn to this eschatological dimension of his thought and its implications for theological anthropology.
Introduction

In this final substantial chapter, I turn to the eschatological orientation of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. By necessity, we have already begun to consider the eschatological dimension of his thought in chapters seven and eight. In chapter seven, I highlighted Thurneysen’s *aesthetic perspective* as central to his practical theology. It describes the dialectical hermeneutic at the heart of his theory of discernment, whereby one “turns back” to empirical reality under the sign of the resurrection. The eternal and transcendental future of the resurrected Christ breaks into the present moment granting a “new seeing” and opening up new possibilities for redemption in concrete reality. In chapter eight, we explored how the pastoral conversation can become a sign and anticipation of shalomic relationship in Christ. The human being is created for right and flourishing relationship with God, with others, within oneself, and with the wider cosmos. We can therefore speak not only of being human, but eschatologically and teleologically of becoming human as we live into and in anticipation of God’s peace through becoming integral and whole persons-in-community.

Because all anthropology is *christological* anthropology, it is necessarily also *eschatological* anthropology. It is Christ’s future, not our own, which is determinative of all human existence, which critically limits and encompasses existence, and to which all existence is
oriented. With this base assumption, Thurneysen’s pastoral and practical anthropology has, we could say, an eschatological perspective. He sees the pastoral situation in the “horizon of hope”. Here, eschatology is less a clearly defined doctrine of the end times and more a “resurrection” disposition towards the present, which pastoral care can help to awaken. Jürgen Moltmann expresses similar ideas. Eschatology, he posits, “is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set.” With particular regard to anthropology, Moltmann asserts:

“Communion with Christ, the new being in Christ, proves to be the way for man to become man. In it true human nature emerges, and the still hidden and unfulfilled future of human nature can be sought in it.”

For both Thurneysen and Moltmann, there is a basic eschatological orientation to being human. One cannot speak of being human apart from the future of humanity in Christ and our participation in that future by the Spirit.

The practical and pastoral dimensions of Thurneysen’s anthropology are critically determined by his eschatological orientation. The breaking in of God’s future is the concrete event at the centre of the church’s practical and pastoral life. But what exactly did Thurneysen mean by “eschatology”, “future”, and “kingdom of God”? Depending on which period of his theology one explores, one will come to quite different conclusions. As we have seen in part one of my thesis, Thurneysen’s changing eschatology had a decisive impact on his anthropology: from Blumhardt’s social, forward-looking eschatology in the 1910s, through Overbeck’s death-wisdom and the corresponding time-eternity dialectic in the 1920s, to the christocentric eschatology emerging from Barth’s Church Dogmatics in the 1930s and 1940s. Moltmann is a helpful conversation partner because his seminal work of eschatology, Theology of Hope (1964), arose out of and in reaction to the dominant Barthian theology in the mid-20th century. He provides a critical lens with which to view Thurneysen’s model of pastoral care and the theological anthropology it was built upon. Further, Thurneysen engaged critically

1 “Diese seine Zukunft umfließt uns und unsere Zeit in ihrer ganzen menschlichen Unendlichkeit und Weite, so wie das Meer eine Insel umschließt. Das heißt aber: Unsere ganze Zeit in ihrer ganzen menschlichen Unendlichkeit hat eine Grenze an dieser Zukunft, eine Grenze also nicht nur in sich selbst, sondern eine wirkliche Grenze, eine Grenze, jenseits der nicht wieder nur eine neue, eine sozusagen verlängerte oder verlegte menschliche, sondern jenseits der eine ganz und gar andere Welt und Zeit beginnt, ein neuer Himmel und eine neue Erde. Diese, diese Zukunft, das ist die Zukunft Jesu Christi.” “Christus Und Seine Zukunft,” 193.
2 Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 61.
4 Ibid., 196.
with Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* when it was published in 1964 and which had, along with a range of other sources, a cumulative impact on Thurneysen’s late theology of pastoral care.

In this chapter, I begin by tracing some connection points between Moltmann and Thurneysen and suggest that Thurneysen’s later term “pastoral care of hope” was less of a new Moltmannian concept and more of a natural progression of ideas, which had long been present in Thurneysen’s thinking, and which Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* helped him to articulate and awaken. Second, I explore three central aspects of Thurneysen’s practical and pastoral anthropology “in the horizon of hope”: a restless character, *insertio* into the communal history of promise, and a universal scope.

**Thurneysen and Moltmann: an unexplored connection?**

Though they were of different generations, Thurneysen and Moltmann shared similar theological roots. At the time when Thurneysen was at the height of his influence and the Theology of the Word was the dominant theological force in the germanophone world, Moltmann was completing his theological training in Göttingen. The faculty at the time was strongly Barthian. Moltmann reflected that it was hard to imagine what was left to say post-Barth — he had said everything and said it so well: “after the Barth worship, which I had experienced in the three-star constellation of [Hans] Iwand - [Ernst] Wolf - [Otto] Weber, I thought there could be no more theology after Barth”.\(^5\) Moltmann familiarised himself with the Theology of the Word. During this time, he engaged with Thurneysen’s work, not merely as a shadow of Barth, but as an important voice in the dialectical theology movement. In 1962 and 1963, Moltmann edited a two-part volume called, *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, which compiled significant early texts from Karl and Heinrich Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, and of course Eduard Thurneysen.\(^6\) He included in his compilation three Thurneysen works: *Sozialismus und Christentum* (1923), *Schrift und Offenbarung* (1924), and *Offenbarung in Religionsgeschichte und Bibel* (1928).

It was not simply through Barth and dialectical theology, however, that Moltmann shared common ground with Thurneysen. Moltmann names Christoph Blumhardt Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as pivotal influences in the development of his post-Barthian kingdom-of-God theology, which culminated in the publication of *Theologie der Hoffnung* in 1964.\(^7\) Moltmann

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\(^7\) Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 97.
mused that “with Bonhoeffer’s ‘new worldliness’ and Blumhardt’s hope, I was on the move towards new horizons away from the Barthian ‘centre of theology’.” Thurneysen never felt the need to move beyond the Barthian ‘centre’ out of which he had developed his kerygmatic pastoral care. However Blumhardt and Bonhoeffer were nonetheless important voices for him too — Bonhoeffer from the late 1950s and Blumhardt, as we saw in chapter one, ever since Thurneysen visited Bad Boll as a sixteen year old.

Like Moltmann, he found Bonhoeffer’s “new worldliness” helpful in making sense of the church’s shifting place in society. He took up Bonhoeffer’s call to develop an “areligious interpretation” of the word of scripture in order to communicate to the secular human being of his day. For Thurneysen, Bonhoeffer’s insights pointed to a heightened need for intentional pastoral conversation as an integral form of communication for the church’s proclamation in the world.

Blumhardt’s pastoral influence on Thurneysen was lifelong. It was through the ongoing Blumhardtian approach to pastoral care that Thurneysen began to revisit aspects of Blumhardt’s hope-driven kingdom of God theology, which he had consciously departed from after the theological Aufbruch. The renewed engagement with Blumhardt found ready connection with the ideas Moltmann presented in Theologie der Hoffnung.

Another less direct connection between Thurneysen and Moltmann during the 1960s was through Rudolf Bohren. Bohren was a student of Thurneysen in Basel and became a prominent practical theologian in Germany in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in the areas of homiletics and pastoral care. He wrote Thurneysen’s biography in 1982. Moltmann and Bohren were colleagues in Wuppertal from 1958 and developed a close friendship. The year before Moltmann’s publication of Theologie der Hoffnung, Bohren published a book entitled, Predigt und Gemeinde. It contained a chapter called, “Seelsorge — Trost der Seele oder Ruf zum Reich”. In it Bohren grounds the church’s pastoral care in the

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8 Ibid., 78.
9 He first actively incorporates Bonhoeffer’s “areligious man of today” into his pastoral theology from 1959: Thurneysen, “Arzt Und Seelsorge in Der Begegnung Mit Dem Leidenden Menschen,” 271.
10 Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 26.
11 While Thurneysen referred to Blumhardt substantially a number of times in Die Lehre von der Seelsorge, it was still within the framework of communicating the forgiveness of sins in the pastoral conversation. As early as 1950, he was already beginning to reframe the content of pastoral care as “the kingdom of God”, of which the forgiveness of sins was an important part. He started to re-engage with Blumhardt’s kingdom of God theology. See: “Seelsorge Und Psychotherapie,” 10-11. By Seelsorge im Vollzug, Blumhardt’s language of hope had become much more entrenched in his pastoral theology. See: Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 59-61.
12 English translation available: Rudolf Bohren, “Pastoral Care: Comfort of the Soul or Call to the Kingdom?,” in Preaching and Community (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965).
pastoral ministry of God through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This pastoral care is nothing less than *eschatological pastoral care*:

“Jesus’ care is limited temporally and spatially; it is only partial. But it does not bear the stamp of dilettantism and mediocrity, rather the stamp of hope that looks to the eternal, universal, and whole … it bears the mark of hope, it is a sign of the future. Jesus’ care is therefore strictly eschatological care.”

Based on the assumption that our pastoral care is a participation in the eschatological care of Christ through the Spirit, Bohren reframes pastoral care as “anticipation of the kingdom”. Thurneysen’s 1964 essay, *Der Mensch von heute und das Evangelium*, which was written prior to the publication of *Theologie der Hoffnung*, is already talking about pastoral care in terms of eschatological hope and promise grounded in the incarnational ministry of Jesus Christ. The content is highly influenced by Bohren’s chapter, which receives explicit mention. The same chapter continues to feature as a key source in Thurneysen’s *Seelsorge im Vollzug* (1968). Given Bohren and Moltmann’s close working relationship in the early 1960s, and the high synchronicity of their ideas, one is justified in concluding that Moltmann’s emphasis on hope was infused into Thurneysen’s theology through Bohren. Significantly, Bohren developed Moltmann’s theology of hope in the field of pastoral care and so it was in this sphere that Thurneysen, too, explored the significance of hope for human existence and the power of pastoral care in communicating hope.

In *Seelsorge im Vollzug*, Thurneysen brings multiple sources together: Blumhardt’s kingdom-oriented pastoral care; his own kingdom-of-God interpretation of *Bergpredigt* (1936); Bohren’s conception of pastoral care as “call to the kingdom”; and Moltmann’s theology of hope. Without doubt, Moltmann and Bohren influenced Thurneysen but the way in which Thurneysen assimilated their ideas in conversation with his own earlier work on the kingdom of God suggests a synergy with, rather than a thorough reworking of, his earlier pastoral theology. In *Die Lehre*, he developed the ideas in *Bergpredigt* through the language of gospel and law. His emphasis was still on the breaking-in of God’s eternal Word of judgment and grace directly from above. In *Vollzug*, with the aid of Moltmann’s and Bohren’s forward-

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13 Ibid., 112.
14 Ibid., 114.
15 Thurneysen, *Der Mensch Von Heute Und Das Evangelium*, H. 75, 10.
16 See especially chapters 3 and 4 of: *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*.
looking kingdom-of-God focus, he revisited the christological eschatology of *Bergpredigt* through the language of hope and promise.\(^{18}\)

**Moltmann’s critique of transcendental eschatology**

Thurneysen and Moltmann share some common assumptions when it comes to eschatology, but there are also some significant points of divergence. Moltmann only quotes Thurneysen once in *Theologie der Hoffnung*. He refers to Thurneysen’s 1931 essay on eschatology, *Christus und seine Zukunft*, to support his argument that Christian eschatology speaks specifically of Christ and his future.\(^{19}\) Thurneysen and Moltmann are in agreement on a number of aspects of this future: first, the resurrection of the crucified Christ anticipates its own future which stands in fundamental contradiction to reality now; second, Christ’s future is imminent in its coming; third, human existence now is characterised by tension between the promise of the future inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ and its universal and final fulfilment at his coming again; fourth, the faith in the coming future of Jesus Christ is inevitably accompanied by a hope in anticipation of its coming. This hope consists in both an objective and subjective aspect: it is objectively grounded in the future of Christ becoming present by the Holy Spirit and it is subjectively experienced and participated in through the Spirit.

The key differences emerge in Moltmann’s critique of Barthian transcendental eschatology. Given the closeness of Barth’s and Thurneysen’s theology, the criticisms apply to Thurneysen as well. Moltmann’s central argument is that Barth reduces eschatology to a ‘transcendental eternity’, which sits above and beyond history, breaking in as the ‘eternal present’. Barth’s eschatology is derived, Moltmann reasons, less from the Hebraic understanding of promise and history and more from the Greek concept of *logos* and *epiphany*. For Barth, the revelation of God is not revelation of a future as such. It is always self-revelation. The Alpha and the Omega are the same thing. Through the vertical dialectic of time and eternity, ‘“end” came to be the equivalent of “origin”, and the *eschaton* became the transcendental boundary of time and eternity.’\(^{20}\) Christ’s coming again consists in an *unveiling* of his already-established lordship, rather than a final fulfilment of the promise inaugurated in his resurrection.\(^{21}\) Barth derived his understanding from the neo-Kantian tradition through his former teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann — a tradition, which Moltmann

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\(^{18}\) See especially chapter 3: *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 36ff.

\(^{19}\) Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 192.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 228.
claims owes more to Platonism and the ‘god of the epiphany’ than to scripture and the ‘God of the promise’.

The same transcendental eschatology is, of course, present in Thurneysen’s theology as well. The “aesthetic perspective” in Dostojewski does not see redemption as a process within history but as a vertical awakening, a new perspective from above. The resurrection breaks in as a sign of what is coming, not primarily in order to transform penultimate reality, but in order to empower one to endure it in anticipation of ultimate reality which is beyond current existence. The social consequences are significant as Thurneysen himself noted:

“Dostoevsky never lost this respect for the humble people at the bottom of society, and he expected more from their hidden power than from all social and political reforms and revolutions. That is his faith in the people, that is his conservatism.”

Dostoevsky was fiercely conservative and nationalist. He did not advocate social transformation or political revolution, but instead pointed to the “hidden power” of the humble people at the bottom of society. In his reckoning, they are the ones who, in their poverty and suffering, are closest to Christ.

What pastoral model results from this? One that encourages the marginalised to be content in their suffering? One that merely comforts but does not seek to transform one’s material circumstances? One that essentially serves the structural injustices in society? Thurneysen was critical of Dostoevsky’s social conservatism to an extent — but he did not reject it, and instead saw in it a hidden radicalism that is in fact to be commended. Thurneysen individualised pastoral care, understanding its purpose as reconciliation.

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22 Thurneysen, Dostoevsky, 75.
Dostojewski, 69.
23 Dostoevsky, 76-77.
Dostojewski, 70-71.
24 In Christus und seine Zukunft, Thurneysen imagines Christ’s future as a sea, which encompasses our reality like an island. He talks about history not as a progression, but as a wave, which relativises historical events. Here Thurneysen wants to reject the progressivist philosophy of history as one sees, for example, in Ernst Troeltsch. However, instead of reconceiving the progression of history in light of the promise in Jesus Christ (as Moltmann does), Thurneysen rejects the idea of progressive history altogether. For him, Christ’s future is above and beyond our reality which has no “absolute end”. "Christus Und Seine Zukunft," 200.
and peace within the conflicted self, rather than a holistic peace of persons-in-relationship. Ultimately the pastor is therefore concerned with one’s inward acceptance of the forgiveness of sins regardless of one’s social or economic circumstances in history. In *Die Lehre*, this tendency in Thurneysen was reinforced by Freudian and Jungian *Tiefpsychologie*, which led to a refashioning of the pastor in the image of the psychotherapist, and the pastoral visit in the image of the clinical counselling session.

Thurneysen’s reaction to *Theologie der Hoffnung*

Given Moltmann’s explicit criticisms against Barth, Thurneysen (like Barth) maintained a wariness of the new theology of hope. Moltmann recalls that both Barth and Thurneysen read *Theologie der Hoffnung* shortly after its publication. While Barth was stimulated and excited by Moltmann’s work, which engaged with eschatology better than Barth thought he himself had done, he could not entirely accept Moltmann’s account of things. He wrote critically to Moltmann: “isn’t your *Theology of Hope* just a baptized version of Herr Bloch’s *Principle of Hope*?” Barth goes on to reflect: “You know that I also once had it in mind to strike out in this direction, but that I then decided not to touch it.” Moltmann posits that Barth decided “not to touch it” because he made a decisive turn away from Blumhardt’s kingdom-of-God theology. Under the influence of Franz Overbeck, “he viewed such eschatological theology as too radical and because, on the other hand, Blumhardt was still very much imprisoned in the nineteenth century’s faith in progress.” Blumhardt had been replaced by Overbeck, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky.

We see a similar response in Thurneysen. In *Vollzug*, he positively adopts Moltmann’s eschatological focus on the coming kingdom of God as the content of pastoral proclamation. However, in an essay from the same year, he is more critical in his evaluation of the new theology of hope movement:

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25 "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge." 208-09.
30 Moltmann, *A Broad Place*.
31 Ibid., 110.
32 “…lassen wir bei Moltmann: «Die eigentliche Mitte und der ständig verwendete Grundbegriff der Eschatologie liegt in dem, was als «Reich Gottes» und «Gottesherrschaft» verheißen und erwartet
“But now today there is that other theology, the ‘theology of hope’ which ultimately results in a ‘theology of revolution’ … This whole theology is correct in taking seriously today’s world situation with the Vietnam War, the negro-question [sic.], world hunger, global poverty in the third world, and the constant threat of nuclear war. We would be able to assent to this theology if it were not threatened by a severe reduction of the biblical message.”

For Thurneysen, the theology of hope movement, in which he includes Moltmann, Ernst Feil, Rudolf Weth, and Harvey Cox, risked reducing the kingdom of God to a humanly achievable goal that could be built by human effort. He appeals to the elder Blumhardt’s eschatological language of waiting and hastening (warten und eilen) to properly ground a theology of hope in the power of God alone.

“What will help us is not only a new plan for life like the philosophers establish, whether Heidegger, Bloch, or Marcuse. A new power would need to come over us, a power of salvation for all people as promised in the gospel.”

One wonders in this evaluation how carefully Thurneysen actually read Moltmann’s Theologie der Hoffnung. At least, by including Moltmann here in a general critique of a “theology of revolution”, Thurneysen is grossly unfair to him. Central to Moltmann’s argument is that eschatology is the future inaugurated by the resurrection of the crucified Christ and coming in the power of the Spirit. As such, it stands in contradiction to current human existence and creates its own history determined not by some general philosophy of history and time but by the promise of God’s salvation and the eventual fulfilment of God’s salvation. Christ’s future kingdom is breaking in by the power of the Holy Spirit (not by some general progression of history brought about through revolution or social improvement) urging the church onward in hopeful anticipation of the general resurrection of all through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the church’s existence in the world is missional, seeking the
transformation of lives, communities, and societies in accordance with God’s coming world of life. In light of what Moltmann actually argued, Thurneysen’s critique sounds like something he re-hashed from the 1920s when he initially departed from Religious Socialism. Perhaps that is the point: Thurneysen and Barth were unable to fully accept Moltmann’s thesis because their original theological Aufbruch was a reaction against the social eschatological position of Blumhardt, Kutter, and Ragaz. Their whole emerging transcendental eschatology was an attempt to liberate God’s sovereignty and salvation from the progress of history and the achievements of humanity. While Barth and Thurneysen respected Moltmann’s treatment of eschatology, his re-engagement with the progressiveness of history marked for them a reversion back to the optimism of nineteenth century liberal theology.

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In this very brief analysis of the relationship between Moltmann and Thurneysen we see, on the one hand, the shared assumption that the human condition must be understood from the starting point of Christ and his future; and on the other hand, a divergence as to how to understand that future (and consequently history and human existence). Moltmann’s critique of Barth’s transcendental eschatology also offers a penetrating critique of Thurneysen’s theology of pastoral care, which centred on the present event of God’s eternal sovereign Word addressing the empirical human being. But that does not mean Thurneysen’s kerygmatic model is thereby invalidated. On the contrary, in 2003 Isolde Karle wrote an article in which she argues that Thurneysen’s pastoral theology can be positively reconstructed as pastoral care in the horizon of hope. This was a project that Thurneysen himself embarked on in later life after he began to engage with Bonhoeffer, Bohren, and Moltmann. His Seelsorge im Vollzug (1968) is distinguished from his earlier Lehre von der Seelsorge (1946) on precisely this point. In Vollzug he reframes pastoral care in terms of hope and in light of the coming kingdom of God. When Thurneysen’s kerygmatic pastoral theology takes account of his later emphasis on hope (and, indeed, his early Blumhardtian influence), new possibilities emerge.

36 Ibid., 224ff.
The restlessness of human existence

Because all human existence is determined by Christ and his future, theological anthropology is necessarily eschatological anthropology. For Moltmann, the eschatologically determined reality in Christ is not so much one element of Christianity. It is, as he phrased it, “the key in which everything is set.” For Thurneysen, we could say the same. The “horizon of hope” is the vanishing point to which all present reality corresponds. It is not the risen and victorious Jesus who stands in our horizon. Rather we stand in the horizon of the risen and victorious Jesus, whose kingdom is coming to us in the power of the Spirit. Anthropology in the horizon of hope, then, has more to say about how we live in the present than about the future. It does not speculate from the present to some future utopian ideal but rather agitates and unsettles the present from the perspective of the future determined by Christ. For Thurneysen, then, eschatological anthropology is always practical and pastoral anthropology: it has firstly to do with a disposition towards life and a way of living life now.

Both Blumhardts described this eschatologically-unsettled attitude to the present in two words: waiting and hastening (Warten und Eilen). Human life awakened to God’s coming future both waits patiently for what only God can bring and also hastens towards its coming through anticipatory and corresponding human action. The Blumhardts’ practical eschatology was deeply formative for Moltmann, who explored what waiting and hastening might mean for an ethics of hope and for political theology. Thurneysen asked a similar question with regard to pastoral care. In the Leutwil years, he preached frequently about the Unruhe, the restlessness, of human existence that yearns for abundant and flourishing life. Pastoral care that corresponds to this restlessness will both comfort through assurance of the coming kingdom and also advocate for social and political change in anticipation of its coming. We saw in chapter two how Thurneysen tried to hold together this tension between pastoral comfort and prophetic advocacy.

Even after Thurneysen departed from the forward-looking social eschatology of Blumhardt, his pastoral theology continued to give voice to the eschatological restlessness of human existence. The temporal forward-looking urgency of human existence gave way in Thurneysen’s theology to the existential crisis of God’s eternal Word breaking in from above. And yet the eschatological horizon, whether at the end of or above history, continued to

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38 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.
39 Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 61.
define and shape his pastoral practice. For Thurneysen, right pastoral care “proceeds only when it stands in the horizon of hope.” Its purpose is to communicate the hope of God’s coming kingdom to one another in order that our lives might be unsettled; in order that we might become discontented with the way the world is; and in order that we might be liberated from despair and complacency and for reconciling love. Within this framework, the pastoral ministry of the church becomes a central means of concretely voicing and exploring questions of theological anthropology not only in terms of who one is now but in terms of who one is becoming and will be in the fullness of time through Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. Such a practical and pastoral anthropology in the horizon of hope will: firstly, expect God’s Word and Spirit to disrupt the present, awakening a restlessness in the human being; and secondly, be grounded in prayer as the corresponding human action through the Spirit that shapes and conforms human living to eschatological reality.

The breach in the pastoral conversation

Central to Thurneysen’s pastoral theology is what he called the “breach” (Bruch) in the pastoral conversation. The breach is Thurneysen’s word for describing the fundamental disturbance that occurs when the conversation is placed under the judgment of the Word of God. The whole sphere of human life and the human judgments, interpretations, and evaluations pertaining to it are thrown into question. For Thurneysen, all psychological analyses, legal codes, moral systems, and societal norms are subjected to a higher authority and a higher realism. These things continue to matter but they are recognised as provisional and penultimate in light of the eschatological reality of human life in accordance with God’s pre-judice (Vor-urteil) in Jesus Christ. The breach is the voicing of hope, the possibility of redemption over every human experience. “Nothing other is intended with the much maligned language of the breach in the pastoral conversation,” Karle asserted, “than this perspective of hope.”

41 Thurneysen, Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 61.
42 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 131ff. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 119ff.
43 My translation. Karle, “Seelsorge Im Horizont Der Hoffnung: Eduard Thurneysens Seelsorgelehre in Systemtheoretischer Perspektive,” 171. For a critical perspective on Thurneysen’s concept of breach, see Nicol, Gespräch Als Seelsorge, 141ff. In Nicol’s reckoning, Thurneysen’s model confuses the “communicative structure of conversation” and the “authoritative structure of proclamation”. The content of that proclamation, Nicol maintains, is predetermined by the pastor’s prior meditation on scripture so that the pastoral conversation is no genuine dialogue at all. The dialogue merely serves as the pretext for the communication of the authoritative and predetermined word of the pastor. From the perspective of pastoral technique, Nicol draws attention to an aspect of Thurneysen’s model that needs more careful explication. But
In *Die Lehre von der Seelsorge* (1946), when Thurneysen develops his concept of the *breach*, he does not use language of hope, instead preferring the language of judgment and grace. By 1968, however, the language of hope had become much more prominent:

“In the Holy Spirit, ‘the future has already begun!’ even now. A pastoral care corresponding to this knowledge will be *eschatological pastoral care* [endzeitliche Seelsorge]. It places people in hope and calls them to move towards the coming kingdom of Christ … real pastoral care will fundamentally be a *pastoral care of hope* and so will not be satisfied with all manner of false assurances [Beruhigungen] about the suffering of the world. Rather it constantly grapples anew with the impossible, which becomes more and more possible for the one who believes.”

Pastoral care is now explicitly *eschatological* pastoral care. The church’s pastoral ministry is practised *because* the future of God is breaking in by the power of the Spirit. The “breach” in pastoral care serves to “place people in hope”, to orient them to the coming kingdom. Consequently, in pastoral care one does not offer false comforts (*Beruhigung*) but agitates and unsettles (*Beunruhigung*) the heart for true rest (*Ruhe*) which is found in God alone.

A pastoral care of hope will maintain the tension, the *Unruhe*, of existence and the wayfaring character of human life oriented to God’s future. As such, it will challenge and seek to remove hopelessness, which in contrast to the dynamic movement of hope denotes stasis and docility. According to Moltmann, hopelessness takes two forms: *presumption* and *despair*.

“Presumption is a premature, selfwilled anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Both forms of hopelessness, by anticipating the fulfilment or by giving up hope, cancel the wayfaring character of hope. They rebel against the patience in which hope trusts in the God of the promise.”

Both presumption and despair consist in a foreshortening of our human expectations in God’s future. Presumption is contentment with the sinful state of the world. Despair is resignation at the sinful state of the world. Hopelessness exists wherever the present state of affairs becomes all-encompassing; when one’s present reality becomes detached from the promise of

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he fails to grasp that Thurneysen is less concerned here about technique and is more concerned about the theological reality that occurs in the pastoral conversation.

Ibid. Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 57.

God in the past and the fulfilment of God’s promise in the future. One becomes content with or resigns oneself to the way things are.

What is the goal of pastoral care in this understanding? It is to communicate hope, which consists in disrupting the futureless present; in breaking open the limiting worldviews by which one makes sense of one’s reality; in imagining new possibilities for healing, and freedom and life. This disruption, this breaking open, this new imagination, this breach leads to a struggle (Kampf) in which one’s interpretation of reality is challenged, expanded, even threatened as it is subjected to the higher realism of the coming eschaton in Christ.

God’s eschatological Word of judgment, Thurneysen says, effects a double movement of repentance: a turning away from (weg von) the destructive powers of our world, which lead to death and dying, and a turning towards (hin zu) God, in whom there is hope and life. The breach both disorients and reorients, both exhorts and comforts, both admonishes and reassures. Depending on the pastoral situation, the conversation may lead in any number of different directions. When a person is in the throes of despair, anxiety, or depression, for example, the pastoral conversation will simply seek to encourage, to comfort, to restore selfhood and agency. Conversely, when a person is engaging in destructive or harmful habits (to themselves or to others), the pastoral conversation may gently challenge, ask probing questions, or explore problematic aspects of cultural and social narratives or personal worldviews. Whatever the situation, the breach is not signified by “preaching at” someone. It is better conceived as “a highly active listening” in which the primary task of the carer is to listen through the lens of hope and in this way to ask questions that open the pastoral situation to redemptive possibilities. Thurneysen’s concept of breach seeks to articulate this transformative process of active listening that takes place at the heart of pastoral care.

**Pastoral care as prayer**

The defining practice of human existence in the horizon of hope is prayer. Prayer is by nature eschatological because we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the risen and

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46 Thurneysen’s vision of hell in Dostojewski comes to mind: “...that will be hell, some eternally smoky corner in our world which has fallen out of relationship to God and has become totally meaningless.” Thurneysen, Dostoevsky, 64. Dostojevski, 58.
47 Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 62ff.
48 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 132.
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 120.
49 If this is the case, it might seem odd that I only address prayer now. My reason for doing so is that, while prayer was utterly central in Thurneysen’s pastoral praxis, he does not reflect theologically on prayer in any great depth. Similar to the sacraments, Thurneysen simply does not develop a comprehensive theology of prayer underpinning his pastoral theology. In Rechfertigung und Seelsorge, for instance, prayer is the resigned
ascended Lord of all. So central is prayer to pastoral ministry that Thurneysen stated emphatically: pastoral care is prayer. Thurneysen grounds his claim in Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17. There the work of Christ is interpreted as “pastoral care”—i.e. the deliverance and preservation of “his own”—through his vicarious prayer to the Father. Just as Jesus shares communion with the Father, so the church shares communion with Christ in the Spirit. For Thurneysen, then, pastoral care flows from the eschatological and vicarious ministry of Christ, who sits at the right hand of the Father in eternity. Our own prayers, in which we pray for the deliverance and preservation of ourselves and of one another, are a sharing in Christ’s intercessory ministry by the comforting and advocating Spirit. In this way, prayer is not only the true basis of the church’s pastoral care, it is also what makes pastoral care truly eschatological. In caring for one another, we are sharing in Christ’s life and ministry for the world. Our ministry of care originates in the future with Christ and so it is dynamically oriented towards that future.

Because of its eschatological origin, Thurneysen argues that there is basically only one prayer: the petition for the Holy Spirit.

“Although prayer extends to a multitude of concrete concerns, they all converge in the supplication for the intercession of Christ Jesus in our behalf with the Father, in whose presence alone the comfort and counsel we need is imparted. To ask for this presence of the Father in the Son means to ask for the Holy Spirit.”

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50 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 190. Eugene Peterson argues similarly, defining the cure of souls as “the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups, in settings sacred and profane.” Peterson goes on to draw a direct connection between the personal language of prayer and of conversation. Both consist of language to and with someone. The pastoral ministry of the cure of souls arises from this language precisely because it is personalising and humanising. In this sense the mode of communication is itself vital for one's understanding of what it means to be human. Eugene Peterson, “Curing Souls: The Forgotten Art,” Leadership 4 (1983). Based on Peterson’s insights, Lynne Baab has recently developed a series of questions that guide her pastoral conversations around the practice of prayer: 1) in what ways do you pray about the situation you’ve just described? 2) Are there other ways you could pray about it? 3) Could we brainstorm some of those new ways? She then suggests that the conversation partners pray “at some length about the situation, using old and new ideas for prayer.” Baab, Nurturing Hope: Christian Pastoral Care in the Twenty-First Century, 12.

51 Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 192. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 174.
This petition for the Holy Spirit, this crying out to God, is itself a “helpless gesture” in that prayer neither effects salvation nor compels God into action. Rather, in crying out to God for the Holy Spirit, one is placed in hope, placed in the trajectory of the great promise in Jesus Christ. One is already accepted by God. But in prayer, one validates and realises this reality. One takes hold of one’s true identity in faith. One prays in Jesus’ name as a child of God and in so doing one’s prayer bears the “promise of fulfilment.”\(^5^2\) In prayer, one is placed in eschatological history — a history between promise and fulfilment, between resurrection and coming again. This history is being realised by the power of the Spirit and so, by sharing in this history of the Spirit through prayer, one should expect to witness the healing and transformative power of the Spirit in one’s life. At times this may result in “miraculous” signs of the kingdom breaking in e.g. a miraculous healing, but whether or not this occurs is not the primary purpose of prayer.

In prayer, the practical, pastoral, and eschatological dimensions of Thurneysen’s anthropology come together. For him, we learn what is to be truly human as we awaken to God’s creative and redemptive purposes in the world for right and flourishing life, and as we live in light of those purposes. Our true human identity is eschatologically and inalienably hid with Christ in God: that is, we are children of God created for free and loving communion with God and others. It is through prayer that one is awakened to and is conformed to this coming reality. For this reason, prayer and pastoral care (in so far as pastoral care leads to and is shaped by prayer) are not merely practices for becoming Christian. They are humanising practices that place the circumstances of our lives “in hope”, opening up new redemptive possibilities through the re-creative power of the Spirit.

“One lives as one prays,” Thurneysen quipped.\(^5^3\) That is, as one prays and cries out for the time of redemption (Erlösungszeit), one is lead into a new way of living in the world characterised by waiting for and hastening towards that redemption. Thurneysen employs the German word “wandeln” to articulate this ongoing living of one’s life in the horizon of hope. Wandeln has a helpful ambiguity which Thurneysen plays on.\(^5^4\) It means both “to convert”, “to change”, “to turn around”, as well as “to wander” or “to walk”. Jesus’ call to the kingdom leads to repentance (metanoia), turning-around (Umkehr), as well as a corresponding walking by faith. Wandeln, therefore, points to both the moment of turning from sin towards God and

\(^5^2\) A Theology of Pastoral Care, 193. 
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 175.  
\(^5^3\) My translation. Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 42.  
\(^5^4\) Ibid., 42, 54.
also the consequent walking in the way of God. Here, the event of the “breach” that occurs through prayer and the whole living of one’s life are seen as one ongoing and indistinguishable process of human existence in the horizon of hope. Prayer is the centre out of which one lives in the world. Conversely one’s living in the world is the context which grounds and informs one’s prayer and leads one into prayer. In Eugene Peterson’s words, “prayer is the connective tissue between holy day proclamation and weekday discipleship”.55 Prayer tethers the whole of human life to the eschatological promise given in the corporate event of worship in anticipation of the universal fulfilment of that promise.

**Human existence in the history of promise**

Restlessness, we have seen, is the characteristic of human existence in the horizon of hope. It is the characteristic of living in tension (*Spannung*), of participating in a history between promise and fulfilment. Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* highlights that Israel discovers God’s truth in the “hope-giving word of promise” rather than in the Greek “*logos* of the epiphany of the eternal present”.56 That is, the covenantal relationship of God with the people of Israel has a particular *history* — the history of God’s unfolding promises and God’s proven faithfulness to those promises. For Israel, knowledge of God is always knowledge of the One who leads the people into a future when the promise will be fulfilled. Moltmann notes, however, that the peculiar character of the Old Testament promises is that they are not resolved over the course of Israel’s history — whether by fulfilment or non-fulfilment. Rather “Israel’s experience of history gave them a constantly new and wider interpretation.”57 In the history of the unconditional faithfulness of God, the promises never exhaust themselves but continue to expand as the people are lead into a new future. Here, “the horizon of hope” is a term relative to the situation of the people. They never arrive at the horizon, but, as they move onward, new vistas continue to open up. The horizon is ever in sight but always out of reach, refusing to be contained, and always over-spilling their expectations.

The promise given in Jesus Christ is both in continuity and in discontinuity with the Old Testament promise. The New Testament eschatology speaks specifically of Christ and his future, Moltmann concurred with Thurneysen.58 As the Messiah of Israel, the promised Son of Man, he opens up a new eschaton which is both the fulfilment of the old covenant and inauguration of a new covenant. And so we see, after the event of Jesus’ resurrection and the

57 Ibid., 104.
58 Ibid., 192.
outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the horizon of expectation in the early church went through a twofold transformation in accordance with the new covenant: the universalisation of the promise to encompass all peoples; and the intensification of the promise to extend beyond even the final boundary of death. In light of this eschatological horizon beyond the limits of existence, human life now is characterised by an irresolvable restlessness that cannot be pacified this side of the grave.

A christological anthropology in the horizon of hope understands human existence in tension between the promise given in the resurrection of the crucified Christ and the fulfilment of the promise in his coming-again as judge and Lord of all. For Thurneysen, “the coming-again is connected with the cross”. The humiliated one, who suffered and was condemned to die, and who was judged by the powers of this world, is revealed in his resurrection as the Lord of all and judge of the earth. His verdict has been given: sin and death have been defeated — not according to the violent ways of the world but according to the way of suffering love. However, the verdict (Urteilsspruch) awaits the execution (Urteilsvollstreckung).

The resurrection of the crucified One awaits the fulfilment of his lordship and the coming of his kingdom when his victory over sin and death will be realised on earth as in heaven.

Moltmann draws attention to precisely this point: the resurrection appearances do not reveal Christ as he is in timeless eternity but “as the Lord on the way to his coming lordship, and to that extent in differentiation from what he will be.” In other words, Christ is Lord of all, but his identity as Lord has a future bound up with the future of creation which has not yet been fully realised. The space between the resurrection promise and its fulfilment “sets the stage for history” and “constitutes the horizon” of what is to be expected as history. For Moltmann, it is not revelation that merely illuminates and interprets “an existing, obscure life process in history”. Rather, the revelation in Jesus Christ itself “originates, drives and directs the process of history”. History, in other words, is a predicate of eschatological revelation, not the other way around. In his essay, Christus und seine Zukunft, Thurneysen wants to say a similar thing: it is Christ’s future which is determinative of all history, encompassing it like a sea surrounds an island.

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59 Thurneysen, “Kreuz Und Wiederkunft Christi,” 23.
60 Ibid., 25.
61 Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 87.
62 Ibid., 227.
63 Ibid., 75.
64 Thurneysen, “Christus Und Seine Zukunft,” 193.
world established in Christ, it is genuinely *coming* into history disrupting the existing order of the world.

For Thurneysen and Moltmann, the waiting and hastening of human existence in the horizon of hope corresponds to the coming kingdom of the *crucified Son of Man*. That is to say, the coming kingdom demands an *Interimsethik*, a particular way of being human “in the between-time”.\(^{65}\) Human existence in dynamic tension between the promise and the fulfilment is not amoral. It is in movement towards a particular future and that future orients and guides ethical discernment for how we live in the present. Human living can more or less correspond to the coming kingdom of the crucified Son of Man. “The word of promise,” Moltmann writes, “creates an interval of tension between the uttering and the redeeming of the promise. In so doing it provides man with a peculiar area of freedom to obey or disobey, to be hopeful or resigned.”\(^{66}\) Thurneysen says similarly, preferring the language of divine patience (*Geduld*). In God’s patience, God gives us time to respond to God’s address in loving freedom. In pastoral care, the conversation tends to be localised on one’s personal lifetime (*Lebenszeit*). One’s time is validated not simply as time to achieve one’s own ambitions, but as time dialectically oriented to God — a spaciousness in which to respond to God in faith and to others in love.

In his short work on anthropology, Moltmann challenges the prevalent “modern doctrines of salvation” and the anthropologies they derive from. In his final chapter he proposes a distinctive theological anthropology that takes its bearing from the crucified Son of Man, whose kingdom comes not in dominion but in service, not in power but in love, not in demands but in vicarious suffering.\(^{67}\) Consequently, human living that corresponds to his coming kingdom will be defined by love as “life in reconciliation” and “life in hope”:

> “Life in hope means being able to love, and being able to love in particular the life which is unloved and rejected … Reconciliation and hope are spread by concrete, personal and social love. For this reason the deepest possibilities for human man in an inhuman world lie ultimately in a creative, reconciling, and hoping love.”\(^{68}\)

For Thurneysen too, the prayer for the coming kingdom leads to a new way of living based on the command to love.\(^{69}\) Christological anthropology in the horizon of hope therefore

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\(^{65}\) *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 52.

\(^{66}\) Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 104.

\(^{67}\) *On Human Being: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present*, 114ff.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 117.

\(^{69}\) Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 43.
makes concrete demands on how we spend our time and live in relationship with others, within ourselves, and with the world. Our life-time is not our own but a gracious gift of God given in order that God’s good purposes might be realised on earth as in heaven.

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While Moltmann primarily develops the ethical ramifications of this eschatologically-oriented anthropology in the sphere of political and public theology, Thurneysen begins to explore the possibilities for pastoral care. With what is remaining of the chapter, I expand on Thurneysen’s eschatological pastoral care under two main subheadings: first pastoral care as *insertio* into the body of Christ; and second, pastoral care in the horizon of a *universalised* eschatology that encompasses the whole world.

**Insertio into the body of Christ**

In *The Coming of God*, Moltmann helpfully distinguishes between four “horizons” of Christian eschatology: personal, historical, cosmic, and divine eschatology. Each of these aspects are of course interrelated in view of the holistic vision of God’s new creation of heaven and earth. However, pastoral care, by nature, tends to focus on personal eschatology: one’s personal future with God.\(^70\) Therefore, questions of a personal nature — questions pertaining to one’s life and death in the horizon of hope — will be explored.

In agreement with Klaus Raschzok, I want to challenge the notion that Thurneysen’s pastoral model did not take the empirical life experiences of an individual seriously.\(^71\) However, for Thurneysen, one’s life experiences were not the sole determining factor of reality or even the primary determining factor of reality. The revelation of God is not a predicate or qualifier of one’s life, merely serving as an illuminating interpretation of human existence. Rather, one’s life-time is understood as a predicate of the eschatological revelation of God as one is incorporated into the community of faith and into the history of promise. Here, one’s personal history, one’s life and death, is validated not on its own terms but as a sharing in the eschatological history of God. In other words, a life is not measured by what one achieves or does not achieve, or by any subjectively- or socially-imposed criteria. Rather, a life is

\(^70\) In Moltmann’s personal eschatology, he addresses topics such as: death, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the relationship of sin and death, mourning and consolation. See: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1996), 47ff.

validated according to one’s inalienable identity as a child of God in Jesus Christ and is measured in correspondence to that promise. One’s ongoing living in the promise occurs in the community of faith. Within the community of faith, one’s life is affirmed and celebrated as a life with a concrete history, a unique life-time, in which the promise of God is witnessed and responded to in loving freedom. Again, one’s understanding of one’s history and what is to be expected as history is not therefore defined by any subjective criteria but by one’s inalienable identity towards the realisation of which our actions and relationships are oriented or disoriented (in so far as one can reject and live in denial of one’s eschatological identity).

For Thurneysen, therefore, the central aim of pastoral care is insertio into the body of Christ. In the community of faith one’s history is validated and affirmed within the history of the community. One actively participates in the ongoing history of Pentecost, which constitutes the horizon of one’s own lifetime, framing it and inseminating it with meaning and purpose in community. True comfort arises from this incorporation into eschatological history as one grasps for oneself the hope of resurrection and the defeat of sin, suffering, and death. Pastoral care, for Thurneysen, properly begins in the communal event of proclamation in Word and sacrament. Proclamation is always pastoral care and vice versa. “In the Lord’s Supper and baptism, the implantation (which Calvin called insertio) of the individual into the body of Christ is accomplished.”72 Baptism is the entry into the body, the sign and seal over a person’s life of their eschatological identity from which pastoral care proceeds.73 The Lord’s Supper is the “anticipation of the eschatological meal in the coming kingdom”74. It is the ongoing nourishment of what is to come. In the Supper, the Eucharistic community participates in the promise of God in the present by remembering the institution of the promise in the past and anticipating the fulfilment of the promise in the future. Thurneysen rightly understands the sanctification of the individual in terms of their incorporation and ongoing nourishment into this communal history of promise.

Within this framework, we might even speak of sanctification as a process in time — something Thurneysen rejected in his early pastoral theology.75 In Vollzug he reframes pastoral care in terms of the eschatological task of harvesting, which Jesus gives to his disciples in Matthew 9: “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the

72 Thurneysen, Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 28.
73 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 97.
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 89.
74 Seelsorge Im Vollzug, 28.
75 "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge," 201-03.
Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.”76 The proclamatory task of *sowing* the seed in pastoral care is now complemented by the task of *harvesting* the seed as first fruits of the eschatological harvest. While Thurneysen’s early pastoral theology focussed rather mono-dimensionally on the act of proclamation as an extension of the sermon, in *Vollzug* there is now a double aspect to the one kerygmatic task in pastoral care.77 The distinction, though, is important in terms of the validation of one’s personal *history*. In his earlier work, one’s life-time was rather incidental to the pastoral task. All emphasis was laid on the proclamation of the promise in the present moment. In his later conception of things, however, the event of proclamation — the sowing of the seed in one’s life — anticipates the harvest to come and thereby initiates a *history* in which the Word grows, flourishes, and leads to concrete transformation. In this dialectic between sowing and harvesting, one’s life-time is no longer incidental to God’s redemptive work but central to it as a unique history of God’s kingdom breaking in. One continues to have a history as before, but now that history is determined *missionally* in the dialectical tension between address and response. In other words, one’s lifetime becomes a predicate of God’s eschatological revelation in history. We can speak of pastoral care as a history-making event: the pastoral task is an ongoing process of persons in community announcing God’s promise to one another and working towards the concrete realisation of that promise in one another’s lives. The naming of the eschatological promise will anticipate the actualisation of justice, healing, wholeness, restoration of selfhood and self-worth, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace et cetera. In this way sanctification is the life-long *process* of one living in light of the promise of God.

The question must be asked however: what about when the promise remains unrealised? What about when sowing does not lead to harvest, when one’s hopes for a particular situation remain unfulfilled or only partially fulfilled? This *un fulfilment* is also part of our validation in the history of promise whose *eschaton* extends beyond death. Human life now, we have argued, is characterised by restlessness, by *non-fulfilment*, in anticipation of the resurrection which only comes through death. While we may experience “first fruits” of the harvest, concrete signs of the coming kingdom, we are all in the process of dying and must all experience the final event of death.78 We are *Todesmenschen*, as Thurneysen said.79 In these times of *unrealisation*, pastoral care must neither offer false comforts nor seek to deny human limitedness, creatureliness, and transience. In the face of expectations and hopes unrealised,

76 Matthew 9:37-38 NRSV.
79 "Rechtfertigung Und Seelsorge," 207.
pastoral care will journey with a person in their mourning and grief. Grief is not opposed to hope. On the contrary, because one has hope for the future one will grieve at the non-fulfilment of those hopes and expectations.

Because the promise of resurrection takes us through the path of death and dying, an eschatological anthropology will not deny the reality of death, but see it as a necessary event of life. And yet, as Moltmann rightly notes, the modern human being often seeks to repress awareness of death.\textsuperscript{80} We cannot suppress its reality, but we can at least live as if it were not going to happen. In more recent times, authors like Kathryn Mannix are seeking to once more broach the topic of death at a popular level.\textsuperscript{81} We live in an age of death denial that seeks to repress not only the reality of death but even the signs that point to it, for example ageing, frailty, grief, suffering, and sickness — and yet, these things are common to every human experience. The prevalent worldview that idolizes life and represses awareness of death is a form of hopelessness. It promotes an airbrushed view of human life that either indulges narcissism in order to achieve the ideal, or wallows in despair when that ideal is not attained.

In the wake of this widespread death denial, the pastoral task of \textit{insertio} into the death and risen life of Jesus Christ becomes all the more urgent. In his practical advice for comforting the dying and grieving, Thurneysen proceeds from the starting point of the crucifixion and resurrection to frame our own experience of dying and hope for life beyond death. Through one’s baptism one shares in the vicarious \textit{Lebensgeschichte} (life-history) of Jesus Christ, which is nothing other than his \textit{Leidensgeschichte} (suffering-history) into the depths of human sin, suffering, and death. This Crucified One, who knows the depths of our human experience, who enters into our suffering, who intercedes to the Father for our forgiveness, and who died for us, is the judge who stands at the end of history. And so for Thurneysen: “The Alpha and Omega of all pastoral care to the dying will consist in pointing to the Crucified One as the source of all comfort in the judgment of our death.”\textsuperscript{82} We do not turn away from death, in other words. And yet in pastoral care, Christ’s victory and judgment over death establishes the personal eschatological horizon beyond one’s own death. The church bears witness to this reality neither by offering false comforts nor by denying material suffering, but by entering fully into the reality with the one who is suffering. Pastoral care is

\textsuperscript{80} Moltmann, \textit{The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology}, 51.
\textsuperscript{82} Thurneysen, \textit{Praktische Seelsorge}, 134.
here a ministry of solidarity with the other in Christ, the *Mitmenschen*, who suffers for us and with us.

Our sharing in Christ’s death leads us also to anticipation of resurrection. “Through the resurrection of Jesus *our own resurrection* is assured and guaranteed.”83 Between his resurrection and the general resurrection of the dead at his Parousia, the task and work of pastoral care becomes “unambiguously clear”.84 Thurneysen describes this task as tethering one to the Word of promise so one is able to endure temptation (*Anfechtung*) even in the midst of severely disorienting anxiety.85 In his commentary on Philippians he employed a similar metaphor of a pendulum tethered to a point beyond itself to describe the power of being “in the Lord”.86 Through *insertio* into the death and risen life of Christ the Lord, one’s hope for the future is no mere wishful thinking. It is hope tethered to a concrete promise, which is held by the Eucharistic community in which one’s own personal hope is sustained and nourished. When one is unable to hope in one’s own power, when one is in the throes of despair and crippled by fear in the face of suffering and death, one’s hope is held vicariously by the community whose life is rooted in the risen Christ by the Spirit. In this understanding, pastoral care is necessarily a communal task as the whole community seeks to journey with a person in their despair, upholding them in prayer, and orienting them in hope to the coming kingdom. While certain individuals may take on a more active pastoral role in any given situation, pastoral care remains fundamentally a corporate ministry as the community shares in the pastoral ministry of Christ, gathering in prayer and embodying faith, hope, and love to one another and on behalf of those unable to do so themselves.

**Pastoral care with universal horizons**

The promise of the general resurrection at the eschaton established in Christ’s raising, we have seen, is the basis for one’s *personal* hopes for the future. And yet as the *general* resurrection of the dead it also has a *universal* scope encompassing the whole of creation. One’s personal future in Jesus Christ is bound up with the future of the cosmos in the new creation of heaven and earth. A personal eschatology, which is the focus of pastoral care, must keep this broader perspective in mind. For Thurneysen, pastoral care must take seriously the link between the particular and the general, the personal and the social, the concrete and the universal. It will always see the human being in the complexity of their

83 Ibid., 136.
84 Thurneysen, *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 55.
85 Ibid.
social relations and their wider environment. In the comprehensive vision of God’s shalomic kingdom, the hope of salvation is no private matter.\(^\text{87}\) A pastoral and practical anthropology is therefore always casting its gaze beyond the particular circumstances of the individual to the wider social, political, and environmental context. For this reason, Thurneysen speaks not only of pastoral care to individuals but also of \textit{pastoral care to society}.\(^\text{88}\) In the 1960s, for instance, when Thurneysen wrote \textit{Vollzug}, new existential threats, such as nuclear war, were facing humanity. These new, global, existential threats, he argued, formed a “dark horizon” at the edge of almost every pastoral conversation. The deep uncertainty and hopelessness in contemporary geopolitical developments, Thurneysen recognised, was having a direct effect on the mental health of the modern human being.\(^\text{89}\) As a result, more and more people were seeking out professional psychotherapeutic and counselling services. The emergence of mass-communication and the rise of mass-society had also enabled the spread of ideologies on a scale not seen before. “People are attacked and overwhelmed by foreign spiritual forces not only as individuals but in their plurality.”\(^\text{90}\) He named especially communism on the one hand and capitalism on the other. In short, the church’s pastoral ministry was “increasingly only possible in the frame of a pastoral care to society, that is, a \textit{political} pastoral care”.\(^\text{91}\) There is a fluid movement between the personal and social as the church carries out its ministry of care in the world.

And yet, for Thurneysen, care for society begins and proceeds with care for individuals — an assertion, which is itself a practical and missiological outworking of his anthropology. For him, any claims about the future of humankind generally must be rooted in the highly specific and particular witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. One cannot begin with general anthropological truths and proceed from there to Christ. Rather one must begin with Christ and proceed from \textit{his} unique and true humanity to general anthropological statements. Moltmann makes the same point:

“…the path of theological knowledge leads irreversibly from the particular to the general, from the historic to the eschatological and universal … the path leads from


\(^{88}\) Ibid., 68, 70.


\(^{90}\) \textit{Seelsorge Im Vollzug}, 70.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 72.
the concretum to the concretum universale, not the other way round. Christian theology has to think along this line.”

The redemptive work of the Spirit, in other words, has a distinct bias from the ground up, from the concrete to the universal, from the particular to the general. If eschatological knowledge of God is discovered in the particular and the concrete — in the interpersonal encounter — then pastoral care takes on renewed significance not only for theological anthropology but for the practical mission of the church in the world in anticipation of the coming kingdom. For Thurneysen, pastoral care’s eschatological orientation means that it has a universal horizon and a missional character.

Thurneysen grounds his understanding in the pastoral care of Jesus. He was no social or political revolutionary. Rather, “he always turned to the individual”, to the interpersonal encounter, and the concrete situation. He walked the path of suffering love, refusing to take up arms, and instead being judged and crucified by the powers of the world. Through this way of suffering love, Christ spoke truth to power and subverted the hierarchical structures of society. On these grounds, Thurneysen was wary of the church becoming embroiled in any political or revolutionary activity. For him, social transformation begins at the local and personal level:

“[Pastoral care to society] is concerned with a liberation from every realm, bondage, and structure in which the individual lies imprisoned. No question it is concerned with that! We have heard the cries of the oppressed and enslaved, which rise up from every continent. But the way to such liberation is always and everywhere through individuals. The transformation of structures is stimulated and initiated through individuals who, affected by the call of God, build the way to a new and just form of life.”

Here, Thurneysen reveals a social conservatism, which is built on an underlying Reformed ecclesiology. Moltmann offers a helpful summary and critique in his recent, Ethics of Hope.
While Thurneysen’s instinct is correct that social transformation begins with the local and personal, at this point he is operating with an overly individualistic notion of pastoral care which seems at odds with his wider pastoral framework. Pastoral care does not simply consist in the spiritual liberation of an individual but in *insertio* through one’s baptism into the eschatological community of Jesus Christ. The purpose is not to become resilient individuals who are “able to stand steadfast in the confusion of societal and political life”. Rather, the purpose is to become persons-in-relationship who are drawn into Christ’s way of suffering love in anticipation of the coming kingdom. In this way, the local and the personal is still the basis for social change. However the locus of that change is not the *individual* as Thurneysen asserts in the passage above, but the *community* of Jesus Christ in which persons are brought into free and loving relationship.

Finally, Thurneysen emphasised the missional dimension of the pastoral conversation in light of its universal horizon. “In Christ, God has long been present with the God-forsaken ones and the ones estranged from the faith … God is nearer to the godless world than one has often wanted to assume in the pious world.” The universal and cosmic scope of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, alters how the church engages with society. So, for Thurneysen, the emerging Billy Graham crusades and mass-communication they depended on presupposed that God was *absent* from the world, which was destined for hellfire and destruction unless it turned to God. In this understanding the eschatological scope of Christ’s promise is limited to the bounds of the church. By contrast, if God is already present in Christ and if his kingdom is already coming on earth by the Spirit, then the nature of the church’s mission changes:

> “The community of faith can only open itself towards the world, placing itself next to the unbelievers through an unambiguous and living witness … in order to reveal to them the presence of God and his gracious turning-towards all people.”

The church’s witness is therefore better served not by mass-gatherings and “crusades”, but by interpersonal dialogue, which assumes that God is already at work, sanctifying and redeeming God’s world by the Spirit in accordance with the coming eschaton. In this understanding, the church’s pastoral ministry in the world is precisely the arena where the eschatological promise of God is witnessed to, anticipated, and realised.

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97 Thurneysen, "Erwägungen Zur Seelsorge Am Menschen Von Heute (1968)," 222.
98 *Seelsorge Im Vollzug*, 20.
99 Ibid.
Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored certain aspects of Thurneysen’s anthropology in the horizon of hope. By bringing him into conversation with Moltmann, the question of eschatology for anthropology has come to the fore: what is the future of humanity? I have suggested that Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* helped Thurneysen to recover a forward-looking eschatology in his theology of pastoral care. In the 1960s, Thurneysen reframed pastoral care as *pastoral care of hope* in anticipation of the coming kingdom. I have pointed to a number of key insights that emerge from Thurneysen’s pastoral and eschatologically-oriented anthropology: first, the restless character of human existence in anticipation of the eschaton; second, the validation of one’s personal life history through *insertio* into the history of promise; and third, the distinct movement in his anthropology from the local and the concrete to the universal and the eschatological. These three elements challenge the church today to revisit the role of pastoral care for a practical theological anthropology in the horizon of hope. Precisely as conversation, as an instance of interpersonal encounter, it enters into the concrete realities of everyday life in order that we may better learn what it is to be human before the God who is making all things new.
Conclusion

The theological anthropology of Eduard Thurneysen in review

The theological anthropology of Eduard Thurneysen is first and foremost a practical theology. Its practical nature does not derive either from one’s personal experience or from wider historical context. That is to say, its agenda is not set by the human subject or by modern questions and problems. Certainly, Thurneysen’s exploration of human nature engages critically with these things. He sought to bring the theological and the empirical into conversation. However its practical nature is not derived from empirical reality, but from the event, the Ereignis, of God’s address to the human being. God meets us in the practical living of life. God’s eternal future breaks in and disrupts time. For Thurneysen, the question of what it means to be human before God is best explored in the community of faith, the church, which is the real “Existenzgrund and subject of theology”.¹ The church is itself practical in nature. It is an event: the event of God’s speaking by Word and Spirit, reconciling human beings to God and to one another in love. In this one event of revelation and reconciliation, we learn what it is to be human as we are conformed to Christ, the true human being, and share in his life by the Spirit.

In my thesis, I set out to explore Thurneysen’s dialectical understanding of being human in response to God’s living Word. In particular, I asked two questions: how did his theological anthropology develop over time? And, in conversation with a selection of more contemporary theologians, what are the implications of his theological anthropology? In chapter one, we saw that, from its beginnings, Thurneysen’s anthropological interest arose out of his pastoral

¹ Barth, "Geleitwort [1935],” 227.
calling. From Blumhardt, he learned to give voice to the eschatological yearning of human life awakening to the coming kingdom. Thurneysen learned that such a practical anthropology was best explored in the pastoral conversation rather than in the classroom. In the intimacy of a conversation, the deepest needs and questions of one's existence can be taken seriously, explored, and placed sub specie aeternitatis.² From his liberal theological education and especially from Ernst Troeltsch, Thurneysen learned to grapple with the problems of “Modern Man” in the midst of social, cultural, and religious crisis. He received an appreciation of historical-criticism and of psychology, which he later applied in his theology of pastoral care. From the Religious Socialists, the ethical and political dimensions of theological anthropology were cultivated in Thurneysen. The social-eschatological message of Blumhardt, Kutter, and Ragaz broadened Thurneysen’s focus from the subjective individualism of modern theology towards the transformation of human life in its social and political dimensions as well.

In chapter two, we saw how Thurneysen interwove these different threads in an attempt to respond to the “real problematic of real life” as it arose from his first pastoral office at Leutwil-Dürrenäsch. Strongly influenced by Blumhardt’s kingdom of God theology, Thurneysen’s early anthropology centred on the idea of Unruhe, that is, the yearning for God’s future life awakened by the eschatological Spirit. Central to the human condition is the search for God, the search for life in abundance. And yet, together with Barth, Thurneysen became increasingly unsatisfied with the tendency in 19th century theology to focus this search on the human subject, the homo religiosus. Any anthropology built from the ground up could only amplify human thoughts and ideas. From 1916, Thurneysen and Barth consciously placed study of the Bible and preaching at the centre of their pastoral work and their underlying anthropology. They proceeded on a new presupposition that the search for God begins, not with the human subject, but with the living God who speaks to us in the witness of scripture, and who takes hold of us in order to be our God.

In chapter three, I explored Thurneysen’s development of death-wisdom, Todesweisheit, at the heart of his anthropology in conversation with Franz Overbeck, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Martin Luther. He sought to liberate ultimate knowledge of God and of humanity from every ideology and worldview by turning to empirical reality “under the sign of the resurrection”. This “eternal” aesthetic of life sub specie aeternitatis critically negates the ideological

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² Thurneysen, A Theology of Pastoral Care, 123.  
Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 113.
distortions by which we make sense of our human existence. Under God’s Word of resurrection, human life in all its concreteness is genuinely affirmed and entered into — not from the starting point of some human criterion, but from the starting point of God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

In chapters four and five, I looked at the christological concentration of Thurneysen’s early Basel years. His understanding of being human was an extension of his christological eschatology. The end times, the future of all things, has been determined by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. In his risen and ascended life, he reigns as Lord and sovereign. He is the new human being whose victory over sin and death prefigures the general resurrection from the dead and the new humanity to come. Through him, sin is forgiven and death is defeated. For Thurneysen, then, the hidden identity of every human being is that we are forgiven sinners, children of God, destined for fullness of life with God and others.

Thurneysen’s christocentrism coincided with an ecclesiocentrism: the church is the concrete sign in the world of the new humanity in Christ. By Word, sacrament, and prayer, the church is ordered by God’s Word and oriented by the Spirit to God’s future. As the community shaped by the politics of God’s coming kingdom, it is called to both political resistance and to pastoral comfort in society.

In the final chapter of part one, we explored the theological anthropology during the pastoral concentration of Thurneysen’s Basel ministry. Underlying his pastoral theology was the conviction that the imago dei in every human being is inalienable because it is not determined by anything a human being does or does not do, but by the address of God. A human being is one addressed by God and called into relationship with God as a responsible person, a living and acting being-in-relationship. Christ is the true human being, who lives for God and for others as our Mitmensch. In Christ, God addresses humanity as our fellow human. On the basis of Mitmenschlichkeit, Thurneysen places the pastoral conversation at the centre of his anthropology. God does not simply address an amorphous mass or an homogenous crowd. In the event of God’s address in worship, God is calling a new humanity into being, a new community of persons-in-relationship living for God and for one another. Pastoral care, conceived as an extension into the community of the proclamation event, is the venous system of the body of Christ, the complex network by which the life-blood of the community is given and received at an interpersonal level, and by which persons are sustained and nourished in the wider community and drawn back into worship.
In part two, we considered the implications of Thurneysen’s Word-centred theological anthropology in three broad areas: practical theology, pastoral theology, and eschatology. To aid in this process, and to demonstrate Thurneysen’s enduring relevance today, I brought him into conversation with a number of theologians. For chapter seven, I chose Ray Anderson as the dialogue partner. Both he and Thurneysen place the event of proclamation at the centre of the church’s life. In God’s address we become the new reconciled and reconciling humanity in Christ. On this basis, understanding human nature in Christ is a thoroughly practical task. Through Anderson, I developed Thurneysen’s “aesthetic disposition” as a method for pastoral care. I contrasted Anderson’s liturgical paradigm with Thurneysen’s “liturgical conversation”. I explored the similarity in Thurneysen and Anderson in conceiving of the church as living event in which pastoral conversation becomes central to the life of the community. Finally, I reflected on sanctification as a practical process of personalisation as one is sustained and nourished in community.

In chapter eight, I brought Thurneysen into dialogue with John Swinton in exploring the possibilities of a pastoral anthropology. Swinton, with his emphasis on mental health and disability, helpfully challenges outdated aspects of Thurneysen’s thinking. And yet, there is also much in Thurneysen that is worth recovering and is a complementary voice to Swinton’s work. Swinton and Thurneysen share a great deal in their understanding of the human being in terms of responsible personhood. They both understand the integrity of pastoral care in the church as a ministry of the whole people of God as we communicate Christ to one another through mutual care. However they develop their pastoral theology in different ways. In Swinton, the concepts of care and friendship are central to his model with a particular emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. Theologically conceived, care and friendship orient us to the eschatological role of pastoral care through participation in God’s shalom. By contrast, Thurneysen focuses on conversation and the concept of neighbour to develop his pastoral anthropology. With the aid of Alistair McFadyen and Trevor Hart, I explored the implications of the pastoral conversation in the formation of community and the actualisation of personhood. Finally, Thurneysen’s emphasis on neighbour gives pastoral care a universal scope in anticipation of the coming kingdom in which Christ will reign as Lord not only of the church but of the world.

Finally, in chapter nine, we turned explicitly to eschatology through conversation with Jürgen Moltmann. The connection between Moltmann and Thurneysen has not been explored before and yet, I agree with Isolde Karle, that there is good evidence to suggest Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* had a significant impact on Thurneysen’s later pastoral theology. Both
Thurneysen and Moltmann conceive of human existence in the horizon of hope. The future of humankind has been determined by Christ. Our future is his future. Arising from this central conviction, Thurneysen seeks to develop a pastoral care of hope. Central to this pastoral model is Thurneysen’s “breach” in the conversation as well as the role of prayer as eschatological orientation. I also suggested that pastoral care of hope is a “history-making” event in so far as, through it, one is inserted into the history of promise established in Christ and witnessed in the church. One’s own life becomes a unique participation in Christ’s Siegesgeschichte (the history of his victory). Finally, I explored Thurneysen’s fusion of pastoral care and mission through interpersonal dialogue. In anticipation of the coming kingdom, the church is called to a ministry of care to society by voicing hope and witnessing to the coming kingdom.

What has been contributed?

In the first part of my thesis, I outlined the central ideas of Thurneysen’s theological anthropology during what I perceive to be the key developmental periods of his ministry. In doing this, I have sought to extend our understanding of Thurneysen’s work in three respects. First, while other aspects of Thurneysen’s theology have been explored, as yet there has been no sustained work on his understanding of human nature. And yet, I believe, his theology of pastoral care is best understood alongside his theological anthropology. As Thurneysen said, tell me what you think of man and I will tell you what kind of pastor you are. Second, there are notable gaps in Thurneysenian scholarship that I have tried to fill. Most scholarship focuses either on the Dostojewski years and the relationship with Karl Barth in the emergence of the new theological Aufbruch or on his kerygmatic pastoral theology from 1946 onwards. This is beginning to change: Reijer Jan de Vries, for instance, devoted some energy to Thurneysen’s christological concentration in the 1930s. I have sought to take up his lead in that regard. My thesis also joins with a growing body of scholarship that revisits and reconstructs Thurneysen’s pastoral theology as theology more than pastoral practice. Third, I hope to assist in reintroducing Thurneysen to the English-speaking world as a theologian in his own right. Undoubtedly, he sat close to Barth at the theological table. But there were also a number of areas where he diverged from Barth and developed his own interests and emphases worthy of their own attention.

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3 A Theology of Pastoral Care, 66. Die Lehre Von Der Seelsorge, 58.
In part two, the fruitfulness of the discussion between Thurneysen and my various dialogue partners is proof of Thurneysen’s ongoing relevance today. The likes of Ray Anderson, Eugene Peterson, and John Swinton represent a strand of practical and pastoral theology that arises from a strong and enduring Barthian tradition in the English-speaking world. As Barth’s close colleague and a widely-regarded practical theologian in his own time, Thurneysen is an important voice to recover in exploring a practical kerygmatic theology today. In particular, his placement of pastoral care within church discipline, his emphasis on the pastoral conversation, and his kingdom orientation give his pastoral theology a lasting foundation which continues to challenge and enrich contemporary models of pastoral care today. Through Thurneysen, I have proposed a practical and pastoral theological anthropology in the horizon of hope. That is to say, true knowledge of human nature arises from God’s speaking to us in the faith community. We learn to be human as we participate in the event of God’s reconciling work in the world through Christ by the Spirit. In this way, theological anthropology is as much theopraxis as it is theology. Through Word, sacrament, and prayer, we share in the risen humanity of Christ, the true image of the invisible God. Our own humanity is sanctified in him, who is our future and to whom all human existence is oriented.

**Where to from here?**

Given that Thurneysen’s work has been largely overlooked, particularly in the English-speaking world, there are many possibilities for expanding Thurneysenian scholarship. I have already pointed to Thurneysen’s christological concentration in the 1930s and 1940s as a period that has been understudied. Another area for exploration is Thurneysen’s homiletics. Dozens and dozens of his sermons survive, particularly in the *Basler Predigten* publication, which he and Walter Lüthi edited for many years during the 1940s and 1950s. While I have made reference to a number of his sermons, it would be an interesting task, given the central importance he ascribed to preaching, to embark on a systematic study of his sermons and how they changed over time.

Because of the limits of the thesis, I have out of necessity stayed fairly close to Thurneysen’s own conclusions. My intention was to critically engage with Thurneysen — not to develop my own theological anthropology. There are a number of areas where I believe Thurneysen’s

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4 That being said, there are a number of contemporary practical theologians who are working with the theology of Barth and others and who are striving to take the theological task seriously e.g. Pete Ward, Andy Root, Claire Watkins. Advocating a rediscovery of Thurneysen’s theology should not in any way diminish from the good theological work already being done today.
theological anthropology is lacking, revealed particularly as I brought it into conversation with the theology of Anderson, Swinton, and Moltmann. Besides suggesting some ways in which his work could be strengthened, the task remains to go beyond Thurneysen and develop a pastoral and practical anthropology for today. I suggest a number of areas for further development.

First, I believe Thurneysen’s aesthetic perspective and his “breach” in the pastoral conversation to be of enduring importance. But, on the basis of its practical outworking and methodology, these aspects of his pastoral theology have been largely rejected in Thurneysenian reception because they appear at odds with modern counselling techniques. A practical methodology, therefore, needs to be developed as part of the reconstruction of Thurneysen’s theology today.

Second, Thurneysen’s overwhelming focus on the Word would be complemented by a stronger sacramentology grounded in an understanding of the priesthood and vicarious prayer ministry of Jesus Christ (for example as developed in T.F. Torrance or J.B. Torrance). Thurneysen’s lack of emphasis on liturgy and the sacraments strikes me as a missing link between preaching and pastoral care, which inevitably results in a preoccupation with speech and cognitive knowing. The link between pastoral care and Holy Communion was more present in John Calvin whose understanding of church discipline stressed the reconciliation of an individual back into the Eucharistic community.

Third, Swinton reminds us that theology of mental health and disability has developed hugely since Thurneysen’s day. Read alongside Swinton, Thurneysen’s understanding of certain illnesses, disabilities, or conditions seems utterly inadequate. This is not so much a criticism: Thurneysen was a product of his time, using the best of the medical knowledge of his day. But the task remains to reconstruct large areas of Thurneysen’s anthropology in light of modern understandings i.e. a theology of sickness and health, a theology of sexuality, a theology of mental health, a theology of disability, et cetera.

Fourth, there is an increasing recognition today of the responsibility of humanity to care for God’s creation. Many scientists and social anthropologists are now talking about the age of the Anthropocene. We have entered an epoch, in which human activity is affecting earth’s natural systems which have enabled life as we know it to thrive. Anthropogenic climate change is the most pressing issue facing our planet today and is sadly only one of many

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environmental issues caused by human over-consumption and abuse of the planet. God’s shalom consists in the right ordering of relationships with God, with one another, and importantly with the earth. An eschatological anthropology must see the future of humankind integrally bound to the future of the cosmos and the new creation of heaven and earth. Yet, this third decisive element of shalomic righteousness is notably lacking in Thurneysen’s theological anthropology. Reconstructing Thurneysen’s theology today must involve a dialogue with eco-theology as well as environmental concerns. With his emphasis on the creatureliness of the human being, there is warrant to extend Thurneysen’s theological anthropology in this direction.

Finally, Thurneysen’s connection of pastoral care and mission deserves further exploration. The church should be wary of using mass-communication in service of its witness in the world. Thurneysen’s criticism of Billy Graham crusades continues to be relevant today (perhaps even more so!) in the age of the internet. Such mass-communication seems fundamentally at odds with the God who encounters us as Mitmensch, person-to-person.

Today we see the devastating effects of mass and social media propagating misinformation and causing mass hysteria. Untruths and nationalistic fervour thrive in this uncritical environment. The rise in mental illness and anxiety, which Thurneysen noticed, is a trend that continues today. Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a major social issue. The task of developing a missional theology of pastoral care to society is critical for the church’s witness in the world today. We must become people of conversation, who listen actively for the voice of God in the other, who ask penetrating questions, who comfort and communicate hope in the midst of anxiety and despair, and who place the entirety of life under the sign of the resurrection.

**Addressed by God**

At heart, Thurneysen’s anthropology proceeds from a basic claim: *God speaks.* Gods speaks ever anew to human beings calling them into faithful obedience. And God speaks ever anew through human beings calling them into loving relationship. Thurneysen’s basic presupposition is right, if we are to take the witness of Jesus Christ, our *Mitmensch*, seriously. Because of this, his theology is an important reminder to the church that understanding human nature is a practical and pastoral task carried out in community. Precisely because it is a practical task, bound up with the event of God’s speaking, it is never finished. It is an ongoing task as every generation anew responds to the problems of the day and grapples with the question of how to live as a faithful witness to Christ in today’s world and in anticipation
of the coming eschaton. And precisely because it is a pastoral task, it is not a task we can carry out alone. We must image Christ through caring relationship with one another and speak Christ to one another in love. This practical and pastoral work, Thurneysen reminds us, is no secondary task. Rather, through the praxis of Word, sacrament, and prayer, we share in Christ’s risen humanity. We become the new humanity and thus learn to live now in the horizon of hope, waiting for and hastening towards the day when God will make all things new.
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