Forgiveness and the Risen-Wounded Christ:

In Dialogue with Karl Barth
and Hans Urs von Balthasar

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ABSTRACT

“See my hands and my feet” (Luke 24:39); “he showed them his hands and his side” (John 20:20): the witness of the Gospels is clear on this intriguing detail – Jesus rose from the dead still bearing the principal wounds of his crucifixion. In his risen-wounded form, Jesus stands as both a reminder of human sin and a sign of divine forgiveness. His victory over death is indicated by the marks of death which have become a permanent feature of his immortal and glorified humanity. This thesis will explore, in conversation with Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, the significance of Jesus Christ's risen-wounded form for theology insofar as it is concerned with forgiveness. It will take up important questions relating to christology, evil and sin, ecclesiology, and eschatology. As a result of this exploration we will be arguing in support of the claim that the meaning of all history, the unity of all creatures, and the eternal destiny of all creation, is understood, contained, and finally realised in the risen-wounded Christ. The forgiveness of God accomplished in the death of Jesus is revealed in his risen-wounded form as the centre of all human history, as the source of reconciliation for all created reality, and as the hope for the inclusion of all in the eternal life of God.
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To my wife, Cheryl, and daughter, Daisy-Ann, who kept me inspired, grounded, and helped to make these the most enjoyable three years of my life (so far).

I would like to thank the University of Otago for the incredibly generous doctoral scholarship I have received, and for the staff, especially those in the distance library, whose service was always friendly and fast.

Finally, I would like to thank and to dedicate this thesis to my friend Mr. John T. Jensen, who sent me the article on forgiveness that inspired this entire project.
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NOTES ON STYLE

Throughout this thesis I will be using the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in my own quotations. I have chosen it for its solemn tone and reasonably literal rendering of the sacred text. While it does not adopt a policy of inclusive language, the advantage in this is that it retains a more concrete feel because it does not place abstract nouns like ‘humanity’ in place of ‘man’, or plural pronouns (they, their) in place of him, his. This fits with the concreteness of my theological project, which is to offer an account of forgiveness in light of the risen-wounded flesh of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the reader will notice that in my own writing I have made use of both male and female pronouns. In this way I have sought to retain a more concrete style while attending to the sensitivities of modern academic writing.

I have not capitalised pronouns for God, but have capitalised certain titles where I deemed it appropriate (e.g. Son of God, Law of Moses, Chosen One).
0.1. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness and the risen-wounded Christ

There are two ways that this thesis could be introduced. It could be presented as a theological inquiry into the nature of forgiveness, which finds its ontological foundation in the person of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose from the dead. This formulation would entail that Jesus is the key for understanding forgiveness. Or, it could be put forward as a study of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and yet still bearing the wounds of the crucifixion, which takes forgiveness as its point of departure. This formulation would entail that the notion of forgiveness is a key for unlocking the mystery of Jesus. What is important is that the relation between these two is made clear: Jesus is the ontological foundation of forgiveness, while forgiveness is the starting point of our enquiry into the significance of his risen-wounded form. In fact, this thesis has developed and found its final form between these two trajectories and for that reason the author does not wish to dispense with either formulation.

The earliest and most basic intention was to write a theological account of forgiveness. During this period of preliminary research I stumbled upon an article on forgiveness by a Jewish scholar named Yotam BenZimman. The article is entitled, ‘Forgiveness and Remembrance of Things Past’, and contains a thoughtful critique of numerous philosophical and Christian accounts of forgiveness. BenZimman opposes several common notions of forgiveness present in recent academic literature. These include the notion of forgiveness where the injured party undergoes a process akin to forgetting (Berel Lang, Jean Hampton and Jeffrie G. Murphy), forgiveness as the offender negating the wrong through moral reform (Norvin Richards), forgiveness as somehow distinguishing the offender from the offence (Erving Goffman, Joram Haber, Hagit Benbaji, David Heyd, Margaret Holmgren, Trudy Govier, Robert Roberts), and forgiveness as the victim’s recognition of the humanity of the offender and identification of their shared complicity with wrongdoing in general (Eve Garrard, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Robert Enright, Suzanne Freedman, and Julio Rique).

For BenZimman, the problem with all of these accounts is that they involve a denial of something real, whether it be a denial of the past offence, a denial of the intimate
connection between the person and their actions, or a denial of the real distinction between victim and offender. Instead he proposes an understanding of forgiveness based on the Hebrew word *nesiah* (נשיאה), found in both biblical and modern Hebrew, which literally means “to take something upon oneself, to lift up or to load a burden, to bear it.” “But”, he adds, “the burden can also be spiritual and metaphorical, such as a person who ‘bears his iniquity.’”

Benziman cites Ezekiel’s dramatisation of the fate of Israel in Ezekiel 4:1-6 and the expulsion of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16:21-22 as biblical instances of *nesiah*, which introduce the idea that it is possible for the sins of one to be borne by another. According to this notion of forgiveness, sin is understood under the analogy of a heavy physical burden that the sinner must bear. To forgive another person is to help her bear the spiritual burden of her sin by taking it on oneself as well.

On reading Benziman’s account of forgiveness as ‘bearing the burden’, I was immediately led to wonder how this Hebrew understanding could be developed in line with the revelation of the New Testament. As a lay Catholic, familiar with the Sacred Heart and Divine Mercy devotions which emphasise the significance of Christ’s wounded body, I saw a striking correlation between *nesiah* and a prominent detail of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus – that in his risen, immortal flesh he still bears the marks of his crucifixion: “See my hands and my feet” (Luke 24:39); “he showed them his hands and his side” (John 20:20). Indeed, it appeared to me that everything Benziman said about ‘bearing the burden’ could have been a commentary on the risen-wounded Jesus, who “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

The scars [of the offense] are the burden we must bear. The marks that you leave on my skin are proof of our close relationship, even as they leave scars on my body. The wrong does not disappear; quite the contrary. Forgiveness is a process that embeds the offense inside me, and gives it meaning. By choosing to take the wrong upon me, its presence is accentuated. This is a paradox, of course, because the scars are present only because of the offense. They are the consequence of the wrong, not of forgiveness. And . . . forgiveness makes the scars permanent. Forgiveness does not heal the wound—it deepens it; and this is exactly why it is so important: It increases the wronged party’s burden. And yet he takes it upon himself “without further protest and without demand for retribution.” He bears it with him.

Indeed, we could easily read the quotation above in christological terms: his wounds are the proof of our close relationship – that through our sins we all play a part in

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2 Ibid., 107.
crucifying him, and that he bore his injuries without protest or demand for retribution (1 Peter 2:23 says “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten”). The wounds of Christ are a consequence of our wrong, not of God’s forgiveness, but the forgiveness made definitive in the resurrection imbues them with new meaning. His wounded form keeps alive the memory of his death, and re-interprets it for us as a self-gift that brings about reconciliation and eternal life.

Understanding forgiveness as a gesture of bearing the burden would also explain a striking omission in the post-resurrection narratives: Jesus never formally forgives the disciples for abandoning him at the cross. His appearance to the eleven on the evening of the first day (John 20:19-23) has the atmosphere of a forgiveness that is already realised. In light of nesiah as expounded by Benziman, we could say that Jesus does not need to say ‘I forgive you’, because his risen-wounded form reveals that he has already borne the burden of sin and continues to bear it, albeit now in a way that is both joyful and painless.

**Forgiveness as the springboard**

In order to be true to this initial inspiration, our first chapter will focus on questions relating directly to forgiveness. These questions, in fact, will function as a bridge between important elements in recent discourse on forgiveness (which is predominantly philosophical) and our theological interest in the significance of Christ’s risen-wounded form. And so, chapter one will consist of three sections, each discussing a different question about forgiveness. These questions each arise out of a difficulty or aporia that is present within the recent literature on forgiveness, and flow out of the three main problems identified by Benziman. The first is that for many writers, forgiveness involves some form of denial of the past offence. As Jean Hampton asserts,

> the forgiver nevertheless “forgets” what the wrongdoer has done to him, not literally, but in the sense that he will not let the wrongdoing continue to intrude into his dealings with the wrongdoer in order that they can reestablish some kind of relationship.³

Benziman is critical of this on the grounds that it seeks to secure a peaceful future by ignoring the past and, therefore, forgiveness is based on a practical denial of what really

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happened. This approach to forgiveness is doomed to fail because the past cannot be undone. In the first section of chapter one we will address this problem by considering the question of how forgiveness relates to time, and in particular, how forgiveness can be achieved in the face of the indelible nature of past events.

The second problem that Benziman sees is a severing of the intimate link between the offender and her actions. This is exemplified in the work of Trudy Govier who says that forgiveness is “something we extend or do not extend towards persons, and it fundamentally affects the relationships between persons. And yet, it is deeds which are said to be unforgivable.” She reasons that forgiveness is directed towards persons and not towards deeds, and so while the deed is evil and cannot be forgiven, the person is fundamentally good and can merit forgiveness. But as Benziman points out, such a separation is problematic because apart from the evil deed there is no reason for the act of forgiveness in the first place. Any act of forgiveness that was not simultaneously directed towards a person and their mis-deed would be emptied of all possible meaning. Now, if the inherent goodness of the person cannot be used to trump the evil of the misdeed, then what is the motivating force for granting forgiveness? Why would a person choose to forgive? In section two of our first chapter we will ask whether forgiveness has a motive and, if so, what the right sort of motive for forgiveness might be.

The third problem identified by Benziman is the blurring of the distinction between offender and victim. He identifies this tendency in the reflections of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. “None of us could predict”, says Tutu, “that if we had been subjected to the same influences, the same conditioning, we would not have turned out like these perpetrators.” On the other hand, “even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically.” Thus, Tutu identifies all – presumably even the victims of apartheid – as potential offenders and extends the designation of victimhood to include even the offenders. The

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problem with this, for Benziman, is that it amounts to a reversal of the roles of wrongdoer and wronged. The actual wrongdoer is seen as a victim while the actual victim, especially if they withhold forgiveness or harbour resentment, becomes a wrongdoer. Such a confusion of roles would seem to undermine the dynamic of forgiveness, understood as an exchange between a distinctly identifiable victim and a distinctly identifiable offender. The blurring of this victim/offender distinction leaves us with the problem of how to determine who is actually qualified to make the offer of forgiveness. Therefore, in the third section of our first chapter, we will address the problem of determining who has the authority to forgive.

A recent book by John Milbank entitled Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon lends support for the choice of these three questions raised by Benziman. Milbank identifies five difficulties or aporias present in modern philosophical discourse on inter-personal forgiveness. Among these are the very same issues raised by Benziman: the problem of “Forgiveness in time”7 – how, in any sense at all, a past fault can be removed; “The trade in forgiveness”8 – the problem of attaining a pure motive in the offer of forgiveness; and “Who is to forgive?”9 – the question of who has the authority to grant forgiveness. Milbank’s position, like our own, is that these problems that arise within philosophy only find a satisfactory resolution within theology, and more particularly, in light of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God. Milbank will therefore be a significant conversation partner for us, and especially as we make the transition from these philosophical aporias to the theological response that will form the content of the remaining four chapters. That transition will begin in the third section of chapter one, when our attempt to locate the ultimate authority for forgiveness will lead us to the person of Jesus Christ, the sovereign victim.

**Barth and Balthasar**

As our focus moves to the person of Jesus Christ, in his risen-wounded form, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar will be introduced into the discussion. We will remain in conversation with these two prolific theologians of the twentieth century throughout the rest of the thesis. This decision to conduct our study in connection with

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8 Ibid., 57.
9 Ibid., 50.
Barth and Balthasar can be justified on three levels. Firstly, both thinkers are committed to a radically christocentric methodology which is grounded in faith and sees the entire truth of God and the meaning of the created world as communicated through the person and mission of Jesus Christ. This will provide a rich array of material for us as we explore the significance of Christ’s risen-wounded form. Moreover, affirming Jesus as the unique locus of revelation will enable us, along with Barth and Balthasar, to express the Gospel in language that is thoroughly Trinitarian: the Father sent the Son to give the Spirit. In this way we will be able to discuss the implications of Christ’s risen-wounded form for our understanding of the mystery of the Godhead, as well as the articulation of a uniquely Christian account of history.

Our second reason for the choice of Barth and Balthasar as our main dialogue partners is that both have produced vast corpuses of work that attempt to span all areas of Christian theology. Barth’s main contribution is the immense 14 volume series of the Church Dogmatics, which began to be published in 1932 and was still incomplete at his death in 1968. With Balthasar it is the great trilogy, beginning with the 7 volumes of The Glory of the Lord, continuing with the 5 volumes of the Theo-Drama and concluding with the 3 volumes of the Theo-Logic. The sheer magnitude of their joint output means that our study of the risen-wounded form of Christ, viewed in light of the notion of forgiveness and conducted in the company of Barth and Balthasar, can engage with and respond to a range of important theological questions, while remaining tightly focused and avoiding the need to introduce a new principle conversation partner at each turn. Indeed, every section from the end of chapter one onwards will engage with either or both of these two theologians as we seek to articulate the significance of the risen-wounded form of Christ in light of his mission of forgiveness.

The third reason why Barth and Balthasar make a good pair of conversation partners is that there were already clear links formed between them during their lifetimes. They were both Swiss, both wrote in German, and while Barth was nearly twenty years Balthasar’s senior, there was a significant period of overlap between their academic careers. Balthasar, in fact, took a great interest in the theology of Barth, and his 1951 book The Theology of Karl Barth, traces and evaluates the development of Barth’s

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10 In this thesis we will follow Barth and Balthasar in speaking of the procession of the Holy Spirit “from the Father and the Son” as it is expressed in the western form of the Nicean Creed.
thought. Balthasar remarked that “It is almost unnecessary to set out how much I owe to Karl Barth: the vision of a comprehensive biblical theology, combined with the urgent invitation to engage in a dogmatically serious ecumenical dialogue”. This mention of ecumenism indicates that the bond between Barth and Balthasar is one which includes significant differences. Indeed, since they hail from divergent confessional traditions, to engage with both Barth and Balthasar is to enter into a kind of ecumenical dialogue. Barth stands on one side of the dialogue as a Swiss Reformed Protestant, and Balthasar on the other as a Roman Catholic. This difference means that even on matters in which they are in complete agreement they will tend to express themselves in different language and to emphasise different aspects of the issue. Conversely, it means that when they appear to disagree, there may be a greater proximity between their positions once the differences in terminology and emphasis are taken into account. Therefore, while the two have enough in common to be employed as joint contributors to a unified thesis, there is enough difference between them to leave room for much discussion, debate and synthesis.

As a lay Catholic conducting my research within a largely Protestant theological faculty, this thesis takes on an even more decidedly ecumenical character. And so, the interaction between Barth and Balthasar that the reader will observe in the text is mirrored by interactions between different Christian theological backgrounds that I experience in connection with the University of Otago. Indeed, I am committed to producing a piece of work that will cross confessional boundaries. This is another reason why Barth’s voice will play a highly significant role in this thesis, and I will be greatly indebted to my supervisors for helping me to present his work in an accurate and responsible manner.

This sustained engagement with Barth and Balthasar will require and enable us to gain a robust understanding of each of their theological contributions considered as a whole. However, since we are not conducting a study on Barth or on Balthasar, we will refrain from getting heavily involved in the finer questions relating to the interpretation of their work. Rather, in order to remain focused on our own thesis, it will suffice that we treat their work responsibly, and that we consult the prominent and relevant secondary

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literature. This qualification in the treatment of Barth and Balthasar indicates that our thesis is primarily a constructive one rather than an expository or textual one. That is, we are directly concerned with understanding the theological reality of the risen-wounded form of Christ, rather than analysing a piece of theological writing, or comparing the positions of two theologians. This is not to say that such analysis and comparison are of no concern to us, but that they play a secondary and supporting role within the thesis. The primary task that will occupy us is the development of a rich theology of the risen-wounded Christ from the perspective of forgiveness, with Barth and Balthasar being the main conversation partners.

Admittedly, despite the scale of their works, there is not a lot of material in Barth or Balthasar that is explicitly concerned with the risen-wounded form of Christ as we are in this thesis. Barth makes the basic observation that the wounds guarantee continuity between the one who was crucified and the one who emerged from the tomb.

What the Evangelists really know and say is simply that the disciples saw and heard Jesus after His death, and that as they saw and heard Him they recognised Him, and that they recognised Him on the basis of His identity with the One whom they had known before. ... In the ensuing appearance to the eleven, recognition comes when He allows them to see and touch His hands and His feet (Luke 24:39). In John 20:20, 25, 27, where there is also a reference to the touching of His side, this is rightly taken to mean that He gave Himself to be known by them as the Crucified.\(^{12}\)

This continuity, for Barth, wondrously illustrates the grace and power of God.

The Gospel of St. John (20:25f.) thought it worth reporting that the risen Christ bore the wounds of the Crucified. Life was given to the One who had been slain. The One who belonged hopelessly to the past was present. The Humiliated was exalted, being given the name of *Kyrios* (Phil. 2:9), being declared the Son of God (Rom. 1:4) – to be seen and heard and handled (1 Jn 1:1) as such by His disciples for forty days, to eat and drink with them as such (Ac. 10:41), and as such to die no more (Rom. 6:9).\(^{13}\)

Balthasar penetrates further when he considers what the wounds indicate about human participation in the divine life.

It is essential, therefore, that [Christ’s] wounds feature in his Resurrection and transfiguration. Not only to prove to the disciples the identity of this tortured body that has become bafflingly spiritualized, able to walk through closed doors, but, more importantly, because it is through his opened body (a hand can be reached inside his body through the wound: John 20:27) and the infinite distribution of his


flesh and shedding of his blood that men can henceforth share in the substantial infinitude of his Divine Person.\textsuperscript{14}

These passages in the writings of Barth and Balthasar which speak of the risen-wounded Christ are in full accord with our project, but are obviously insufficient to ground an in-depth study. There are two reasons why this does not present a problem. First of all, the radically Christocentric approach of Barth and Balthasar ensures that the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus is always in the forefront of their theological vision. Since Christ’s risen-wounded form is essentially the result and the sum of his incarnation, death and resurrection, this means that much of the time we are simply making explicit what is already implied in their writings, or developing it one step further. 

Secondly, it is not our intention to present the risen-wounded form of Christ as one aspect or branch of theology alongside others. Therefore, our study will not be limited to or heavily dependent on any token references to the risen-wounded Christ in the theological literature. As will become clearer as our argument progresses, we wish to propose the risen-wounded Christ as the key for theology as a whole insofar as it is concerned with questions related to forgiveness.

**Originality and necessity**

In this way we wish to make a genuine and much needed contribution to doctrinal thinking, particularly in the study of forgiveness and of the person of Christ. We hope to advance an account of Christ's person sensitive to this particular moment of the Christ event, the post-resurrection appearance as the risen-wounded Lord, which has not received the attention it deserves. Indeed, we deem there to be a shortcoming in contemporary theological scholarship as regards this dimension of the person of Christ (his risen-wounded form) and with respect to its bearing on forgiveness – one that has not been adequately exploited.

A notable exception to the general lack of theological attention given to the risen-wounded form of Christ can be found in Roberto S. Goizueta’s *Christ our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation*. In this short volume, Goizueta seeks to bring together the theological discourse of liberation, which approaches the Gospel in light of and in solidarity with the poor, and theological aesthetics, which emphasises the

role of sensory experience and beauty in coming to know God. He finds the perfect meeting place for these two approaches in the risen-wounded Christ. The risen Lord appears in a glory marked by the poverty of death, and in such a way that we are drawn into relationship with him. Like us, Goizueta recognises that Christ’s risen-wounded form has not been given due attention, and, further to this, he identifies in much western theological scholarship a distinct avoidance of the subject and a tendency to abstract away from the particularity of the incarnation.

Under the sway of a contemporary, Kantian gnosticism in which form becomes merely a pointer to the content that lies behind the form, we have become increasingly incapable of seeing the form as inseparable from the content of faith. Uncomfortable with the necessarily physical, bodily, and therefore particular character of revelation – in the crucified and risen body of Christ . . . Euro-American and European theologies have too often relativized that body in favour of some presumably more universalizable content that, since it is not intrinsically related to the form, could just as easily be expressed in other forms. . . . Christ is thus severed from the particular form of his wounded body as it hangs on the cross, appears to his disciples after the resurrection, and is given historically in the Eucharist, the ecclesial community, the church (itself, of course, a social body). 15

The task Goizueta sets himself is to articulate an authentic approach to Christian life and proclamation in light of the incarnational insights of theological aesthetics and liberation theology. In so doing he seeks to show the inherent consistency between the two theological approaches. “If the transcendent God is encountered, first, on the cross,” states Goizueta, “then all those persons who continue to be crucified today must be the starting point of Christian theological and reflection and worship.” 16 This assertion underpins Goizueta’s theological project and is the key insight which Christ our Companion seeks to establish and explore.

In his frequent reference to ‘the form’, Goizueta is explicitly drawing on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whom he seeks to appropriate alongside Latin American and U.S. Hispanic theologians. Goizueta presents his response to the questions posed by the diverse, pluralistic, contemporary world, arguing that the universal key to human meaning is to be found in the concrete character of Christian revelation – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, communicated in the sacraments, and embodied primarily in the faith of the poor and those who live amidst struggle and difficulty. It is on this final point that our study will differ substantially from that of Goizueta. On the one hand we

16 Ibid., 149.
will not be drawing from the tradition of liberation theology. So, even though the experience of the poor and the marginalised will feature in the ecclesiological reflections of chapter four, the ‘preferential option for the poor’ will not function for us as a privileged point of departure as it does for Goizueta. On the other hand, our study will be more concerned with and centred on the notion of forgiveness. We will take our starting point from questions and difficulties that arise within recent discourse on forgiveness, and as we explore the significance of the risen-wounded form of Christ, we will do so with a view to how this can inform a robust christological account of forgiveness. Thus, while many of our reflections on the risen-wounded Christ will agree with those of Goizueta, our study will proceed under a different methodology and toward a different purpose.

There is another benefit of studying Christ’s risen-wounded form that we wish to make more explicit than Goizueta does in his study. That is, we wish to show that such a focus helps to provide a unified view of the person and mission of Jesus that cannot be so readily attained by viewing his life, death and resurrection simply as a sequence of events, or by attempting to abstract from those events an outline of his person. In the case of the former, viewing the Gospel merely as a series of events, there is a risk of failing to see the essential unity of Christian revelation, and of interpreting one moment in isolation, apart from the other moments. In the case of the latter, generating a christology that is abstracted from the Gospel events, there is the risk of equating Jesus with a set of truth statements or definable characteristics, and thereby undervaluing the utterly mysterious character of revelation. The approach of this study seeks to avoid the restrictions of both of these approaches. In his risen-wounded form Jesus’ life and death are gathered up, transfigured, and preserved in his new resurrected existence. In this way we are given living proof of the unity of the Gospel events, and that this unity is to be found in the very person of Jesus, crucified and risen. Furthermore, in this unified self-manifestation Jesus shows what it is to be Son of God and Son of Man, and the words he spoke before his death are brought to their fulfilment: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Thus, the identity of Jesus is shown to be inseparable from his being-sent-from-the-Father to reveal the Father.
Methodology

From the outset the reader will notice that this study contains a number of different styles. In particular, we wish to connect the discursive mode of systematic theology and philosophical theology with a reflection on narrative and symbol. The former aims at a precise analysis of the relevant theological material and the corresponding questions arising from it, while the latter offers a poetic exploration of layers of meaning in the appearance of the risen-wounded Christ. Even if there is no predetermined order with which these approaches will be employed, we preserve an overarching commitment to be sensitive to our subject matter and to make use of different styles in order to understand and express that subject matter as deeply and clearly as possible. As Thomas F. Torrance, a student of Karl Barth, asserts,

> We know things in accordance with their natures, or what they are in themselves; and so we let the nature of what we know determine for us the content and form of our knowledge.17

This sensitivity to the particular demands of the subject matter is a kind of over-arching methodology which does not generate a predetermined method. Rather, it is an attitude of openness that allows a method to unfold, not prior to, but in the engagement with the subject matter.

Our aim is to acquire a deeper understanding of forgiveness in the light of the risen-wounded Christ. Our philosophical material on forgiveness, which inspired us in the first place to explore the significance of the risen-wounded Christ, provides us with the key questions that will initiate our theological exploration. Our theological data is provided chiefly in the Gospel narratives of the risen-wounded Christ (especially John 20:19-29), in other scriptural texts relating to forgiveness and the paschal mystery, in the theological writings of Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, our two principle sources, and in other secondary and related sources. The relative shortage of deep and sustained theological reflection on the risen-wounded Christ will require us to be genuinely constructive in our treatment of these sources. At times we will be comparing and contrasting the theological positions of Barth and Balthasar, and discovering a synthesis in light of the Gospel narrative of the risen-wounded Christ (e.g. section 4.1). At other times their theological work will enable us to reflect more deeply on the Gospel narrative (e.g. sections 2.2 and 4.2). The results of these engagements will, at

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other times, be developed further in relation to secondary and related sources (e.g. chapter 3). A number of these reflections will, finally, enable us to formulate responses to our initial questions relating to forgiveness (e.g. sections 3.1, 3.2, and the concluding chapter).

The remaining chapters
As we have described above, chapter one will set the trajectory for the rest of the thesis by first addressing three difficulties in the recent philosophical discourse on forgiveness, and then locating the answer to these difficulties in the person of Jesus Christ, the sovereign victim. Of these three difficulties, the first relates to time and the question of ‘when’, the second relates to motive and the question of ‘why’, and the third relates to personal authority and the question of ‘who’. In the four remaining chapters we will explore the theological significance of this sovereign victim as he reveals himself in his risen-wounded form. Each chapter will consist of three sections building on the three sections from the previous chapters. Therefore, while there is an overall development of argumentation that runs from one chapter to the next, we will also be able to show in our conclusion, a line of development that connects, sometimes directly, sometimes, loosely, the first sections with one another, and the second sections, and the third sections.

In chapter two we will begin to explore the significance of the risen-wounded form of Christ directly. The first section will consider how the risen-wounded form of Christ enables us to establish a christological account of time and eternity, and the interpenetration of the two. This will draw from and develop Barth’s doctrine of pre, supra, and post-temporal eternity. We will see that by assuming human flesh, being put to death, and rising again still wounded, Jesus is forever changed while remaining exactly who he is. Section two will begin by asking why it is fitting that Jesus retains his wounds in the resurrection. With the help of St. Bonaventure and Balthasar, this will lead into a christological reflection on glory and, with Milbank and John Fisher, a consideration of the marks of the wounds as revelatory ‘text’, whose deathly significance is redefined in the resurrection. In the third section, in conversation with Balthasar and Milbank, we will discuss how Christ’s risen-wounded form reveals his priestly capacity, by which he is authorised to ‘bear’ the sins of the world. We will also
look at how the gratuitous piercing of his side on the cross becomes an occasion for the participation of Mary and the Church in his priestly self-offering.

In light of this initial reflection on the risen-wounded Christ, our third chapter will seek to situate the notions of evil and sin in relation to the creative and salvific work of God in Christ. We will use Barth’s doctrine of evil as ‘nothingness’ to build upon the insights from his doctrine of eternity which we considered in chapter two. In section one we will relate his notion of evil as a ‘dangerous semblance’ of dominion to the ‘glorious semblance’ to which it has been transformed in the risen-wounded flesh of Christ. All history following on from this transformation then becomes the unfolding of the forgiveness inaugurated “once and for all” by him. Furthermore, given the status of evil as nothingness, there can be no direct rationale for evil acts – no definitive answer to the question of why we sin. And so, in section two we will argue, with the help of Robert Spaemann, that sin is rooted in culpable blindness – a not-knowing for which one is nevertheless morally responsible. It is this combination of blindness and guilt, we will argue, that leaves open the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. After relating this to Barth’s material from the previous section, we will compare Spaemann’s notion of sin as culpable ignorance with the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on sin as knowledge of good and evil. Having argued in support of a complementary reception of these two notions of sin, we will insist that ‘waking up to one’s culpable blindness’, and ‘transcending the knowledge of good and evil’ both amount to the same thing and both occur definitively in the encounter with Christ, risen and wounded. This will lead us, in the third section, to consider sin in relation to personal freedom. We will discuss, with Balthasar and Josef Pieper, to what extent sin is a result of free will and whether a sin should be considered a free act. Having presented sin as the failure of finite freedom whereby the possibility of sin stems from creaturely finitude rather than freedom per se, we will relate this again to Bonhoeffer who sees sin as a false judging that falls short of true action. This is proven in Christ’s risen-wounded form, which shows that our sinful activity produces no real effect of its own, but only plays into the workings of God.

Our fourth chapter will look theologically at the Church. As the risen-wounded body of Christ that is made up of sinners, the Church represents a combination of the subject matter of chapters two and three. Section one will ask how the Church, which lives of the life of Christ, can be said to share in his risen-wounded form. This will enable us to
progress from the christological ecclesiology of Barth to the sacramental ecclesiology of Balthasar. We will support this movement with reference to Aquinas and the classical distinction between primary and instrumental causality. In section two we will ask how the Church, which is made up of sinners, can be called holy. With the help of Barth and Balthasar we will argue that holiness is not a quality the Church possesses on her own but is what she becomes in her sacramental encounter with the risen-wounded Christ. Section three will explore the status of those who do not have access to this sacramental encounter in light of Barth’s doctrine of election. We will argue that in his risen-wounded form, Christ reveals himself as both the elected and the rejected one, and so enables us to understand sacramental and social exclusion in light of himself.

Chapter five will be concerned with eschatology – the coming together and culmination of all things. It will also serve to draw together the themes from the first four chapters and offer a unified presentation of our reflections on the risen-wounded Christ. In each section of this final chapter we will gather up the insights from the corresponding sections in the previous chapters. This will show a development from the chapter one categories: ‘time’, ‘motive’ and ‘person’, to our three eschatological categories in chapter five: ‘the vow’, ‘the whole’, and ‘the hope’. Finally, within the structure of chapter five there will be a ‘gathering up’, whereby sections one and two will inform and be drawn up into the final vision of section three.

The thesis
Ultimately our thesis, which we will present in chapter five, is this: that the meaning of all history, the unity of all creatures, and the eternal destiny of all creation, is understood, contained, and finally realised in the risen-wounded Christ. The first part of this is the affirmation that Jesus’ self-gift on the cross is the ‘vow’ to which all past history is oriented and from which all future time is directed. The forgiveness accomplished in this ‘vow’ transforms the memory of the past, and exposes the ‘nothingness’ of evil and the transitory character of sin, while establishing a future that is definitively marked by blessing. Time, then, finds its centre in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In light of this centre all past time is seen as a preparation for the ‘vow’ which was ordained from all eternity by the Father, and all future time is recognised as the unfolding of the ‘vow’, communicated and sustained by the gift of the
Holy Spirit. Thus, time is not a series of innately meaningless events. Rather, every event is intrinsically related to the central event of the ‘vow’ of Jesus’ self gift on the cross, and draws from the infinite depths of meaning contained in that gift. Again, time is not a closed system. Rather, the entrance of the Son of God into world history reveals the truth that creaturely time flows out of the eternal life of God and is directed back to him. Indeed, it is revealed when the eternal one enters into time without ceasing to be eternal, and returns to heaven without ceasing to be the man who was crucified.

The second part of the affirmation is that the risen-wounded Christ encapsulates reality as a mysterious ‘whole’ that cannot be objectified, mastered, or broken into analysable components. Forgiveness, then, is not a superficial covering placed over an inherent state of conflict. Instead, the forgiveness of Christ reveals and restores the deep and original unity of reality. In his risen-wounded form, Jesus even reinterprets the signs of sin and death, so that his mortally pierced body becomes the supreme sign of immortal life. The Church, as the body of Christ, lives exclusively from this life, and is constituted and made holy only in her encounter with Jesus, her Head. Therefore, she cannot exist or be understood apart from him. In heaven this encounter with him becomes the final manifestation of the mystery of God. The divine essence is contemplated, not in some static vision, abstracted from bodily life, but through a living friendship with the risen-wounded Christ – a friendship which always involves self-surrender, creativity, receptivity, mystery, and even surprise. Thus, all of creation and earthly history, which is summed up in the risen-wounded form of Christ, is ingredient in the beatific vision.

The third part of the affirmation is that Christ’s risen-wounded form expresses all at once the hope for the salvation of all, and the real possibility of damnation that threatens each one of us. We will argue that the ultimate authority to forgive resides in Jesus by virtue of his perfect sovereignty and absolute victimhood. As the sovereign Victim, Jesus is capable of bearing the sins of all and he also invites and enables our participation in this priestly work. In his risen-wounded form, sin is shown to be merely the failure of finite freedom. Sinful activity produces no real effect of its own, but only plays into the workings of God. Thus, the pure autonomy of human action, the meaningless of time, and the disintegration of reality are illusory. Moreover, election and rejection are both taken up and expressed in his risen-wounded form, revealing that
Jesus identifies himself even with the excluded – those outside the sacramental economy of the Church.

As we stated above, the meaning of all history, the unity of all creatures, and the eternal destiny of all creation, is understood, contained, and finally realised in the risen-wounded Christ. This is the thesis in support of which we will be arguing throughout the five chapters that follow. In the conclusion we will return to the questions raised by Benziman, and so show how the findings of our thesis inform a christological account of forgiveness.
1. FORGIVENESS

Introduction

This chapter will unfold in three parts, each part dealing with a different aporia related to forgiveness. An aporia refers to “a difficulty, impasse, or point of doubt and indecision”.\(^\text{18}\) In *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, John Milbank identifies and discusses five aporias that, he claims, tend to arise in any present-day discourse seeking to establish an account of inter-human forgiveness.\(^\text{19}\) As we prepare to enter on an analysis of the wounded-risen form of Christ through the topic of forgiveness, we will focus our attention on three of Milbank’s five aporias. What we aim to trace in each case is a new path that allows us to move beyond the limits of the aporia in question and that converges on the christological roots of forgiveness.

The first difficulty that will look at is the aporia of time. What is done is done, so how can an act of forgiveness in the present affect an offence that occurred in the past? How can the past be ‘smoothed over’ without simply forgetting the offence or pretending that it never happened? The second aporia relates to the problem of achieving a pure motive in the offer of forgiveness. It seems that offering forgiveness as a means to some other end lessens the sincerity of the act. But if forgiveness is not an end-directed activity then why would anyone want to forgive at all? We encounter the third aporia when addressing the question of who has the authority to grant forgiveness. While it would seem to be the victim who holds this authority, the worst offences tend to obliterite or incapacitate the victim. From where is forgiveness to be sought in the extreme cases when it is needed the most?

I have selected these three because they serve as rich entry-points into the study of the risen-wounded Christ. In fact, each aporia relates directly to the main questions that will concern us in chapters two to five. The fact that the wounds of Jesus are carried through into the resurrection immediately raises the question of time, especially in regards to the notions of change and continuity. What sort of future does the resurrection of Jesus open up for human history and why is continuity with the past important? What does this temporal aspect introduced by his abiding wounds tell us

\(^{19}\) Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 49-60.
about the Christian notion of eternity? The *aporia* relating to purity of motive is an entry into the question of meaning. What is the significance of Christ’s risen-wounded humanity? Why does he remain wounded, and how does this show us more clearly the intention of God? The *aporia* of who has the authority to forgive leads us to consider questions relating to the identity and mission of Jesus. Who is this risen-wounded One, and how does his woundedness contribute to the task of the forgiveness of sins and the revelation of God the Father? Further to this, how does his particular mode of manifestation shape and reveal the identity of the Christian?
1.1. PARDONING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Introduction
Forgiveness is concerned with past offences. We speak of turning back time, of setting right past wrongs, but as plain experience shows, there is no way of altering or even accessing the past, nor, aside from deception or wishful thinking, of making a past evil into something good. In this section I will argue that the impossibility of turning back time does not present an impasse for forgiveness. Rather, on closer inspection this metaphysical problem gives way to an ethical one: the seeming impossibility of the misdeed itself. The real problem is not the impossibility of turning back time but the impossibility of making sense of the seemingly unprovoked attack, the crime without a motive, or the utter reversal of values. Memories of such absurd events resist explanation and refuse to be integrated into a meaningful narrative.

This shift from the problem of time to the apparent impossibility of the misdeed itself raises the question of radical evil. Is evil merely a privation of the good or is it a principle in itself? Is the human being capable of willing evil for its own sake? The claim that every offence can be forgiven implies that even in the worst of wrongs there is some good at which the wrongdoer aims, as distorted as it may be. I will argue that forgiveness presupposes the orientation of the human will to the good. Discovering this remnant of the good which allows, not a full, but a partial explanation of the misdeed is a crucial step for the victim who seeks to forgive.

Turning back time
When somebody does something wrong, and that wrongdoing harms me, to forgive means that I, by some process or other, come to regard and to treat her as if the wrongdoing and the harm never took place. My relations with her are not marked by bitterness any longer. We can now be friends. We might call this a common sense view of forgiveness. The difficulty here is how I am able to attain this forgiveness without forgetting the misdeed on the one hand or deceiving myself on the other, for no such ‘psychological adjustment’ could amount to forgiveness. But it seems that we have not the power to do anything else. The bad effects of a past action can be undone, its moral value can be retrospectively justified, its memory can be left to fade, but the fact that it was done, the fact of the malicious intention, as fleeting as it might have been, the fact
that my blood was found on her hands, can never be erased. It remains and endures forever. This is because unlike the effects, the scars, or the disorder occasioned by his act, the fact that it happened is not capable of alteration. It lies beyond the reach of the will, yet stands as a witness in the memory. It is the ghost that no earthly weapon can drive away.

“It was” – that is what the will’s teeth-gnashing and mostly lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator in all things past. . . It is sullenly wrathful that time does not run back. The bitterness that results from this powerlessness . . . nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone. . . it desires two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened.

And so we arrive at the problem of time. It seems that there can be no forgiveness because the very thing that forgiveness demands, the turning back of time and the undoing of what was done, is impossible. In what follows we will explore three responses to the problem of time. This will help us to articulate our own response which involves resituating the problem along ethical, rather than metaphysical lines – the metaphysical impossibility of turning back time becomes the ethical impossibility of the bad action itself. Following that we will examine St. Augustine on time, eternity, and evil, showing how his ontology can act as a foundation for the move we have proposed. Lastly we will explore, with particular reference to the ontological status of evil, some of the implications this has for the possibility of forgiveness.

**Some responses to the problem**

In response to this paradox Vladimir Jankélévitch proposes a second paradox. Forgiveness, he says, is a miracle that accomplishes the impossible.

> [T]he accursed stain of the having-done is indelible, and no amount of polishing will wash it away. And nevertheless, in another truly pneumatic and incompressible sense, it is the very miracle of forgiveness that in a burst of joy annihilates the having-been and the having-done. By the grace of forgiveness, the thing that had been done has not been done. . . . And since the two forces are equally all-powerful,

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we can say: the infinite force of forgiveness is stronger than the infinite force of the fact of something’s having-done, and reciprocally.\textsuperscript{23}

What is immediately apparent to us is that Jankélévitch’s paradox makes no attempt to describe how forgiveness overcomes the problem of time. This, to be fair, is hardly a criticism, for it is the very mark of a miracle, that it cannot be demonstrated. It does not disclose to us the ‘how’, but conceals it and leads us instead to the agent. Who did this, and by what power? Who is the source of this miracle, this force, this grace of forgiveness? By describing forgiveness as a miracle Jankélévitch implicitly redirects us away from the question of how to a consideration of the mysterious and incomprehensible workings of love. For him, the lover loves the beloved because it is her, because it is him, and similarly, the forgiver forgives, not despite the guilt of the offender but because of it.\textsuperscript{24}

Another response to the problem of time is offered by Paul Ricoeur. For him forgiveness is something ‘poetic’, exceeding the order of morality just as, at the level of verbal expression, song exceeds mere talk.

Its “poetic” power consists in shattering the law of the irreversibility of time by changing the past, not as a record of all that has happened but in terms of its meaning for us today. It does this by lifting the burden of guilt which paralyses the relations between individuals who are acting out and suffering their own history. It does not abolish the debt insofar as we are and remain the inheritors of the past, but it lifts the pain of the debt.\textsuperscript{25}

This appeal to the ‘poetic’ offers a different light on how the problem of time is overcome. The past fact is not changed but takes on a new meaning. The misdeed is still remembered but the guilt is lifted. The debt remains but is emptied of pain. There is a transformation involved in forgiveness that is not simply an ‘undoing’ of past events. Rather, the change is something that takes place in the present. The impossibility of turning back time remains, but within Ricoeur’s view this impossibility presents no problem or limitation when it comes to forgiveness. What is called for is a change in the meaning of the past event, a re-evaluation of its significance. This same idea is developed by Pamela Hieronymi.

If your spouse leaves you, your attitude towards your marriage vows will likely change dramatically. What is more, your attitude can change without requiring any

\textsuperscript{23} Jankélévitch, \textit{Forgiveness}, 164.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 147.
revision in your understanding of your spouse’s intentions at the time. Analogously, various intervening events (apologies, restitutions, punishments) can change the significance of a wrongdoing. Further, it can do so without requiring any revision in one’s understanding of what the person who authored the event meant at the time.²⁶

We have an interesting distinction here. We are to view the past misdeed in a new way, but it does not require any change in the way we view what the offender intended at the time of the offence. In other words, the whole past episode is left intact and is free of any manipulation. Forgiveness seems to require, not a change in what took place (for that is impossible), nor a change in our memory of what took place (for that is a form of self-deception), but a change in our attitude towards the event. Forgiveness is a change in one’s present attitude towards the past.

**Reframing the problem: the impossible offence**

In his book on resentment, inspired by the work of Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, Thomas Brudholm gives just a brief mention to an observation that could allow us to radically reconsider the aportia of time.

The wish and the demand inherent to the kind of ressentiment delimited by Améry are absurd or impossible. However, they protest against another kind of ethical impossibility: testimonies on the Holocaust often dwell on the “impossible” indifference with which people can witness other people being transported to death.²⁷

This suggests another way in which, like Jankélévitch, Ricoeur and Hieronymi, we could resituate the problem of time in relation to forgiveness. Instead of focusing on the metaphysical impossibility, the impossibility of undoing what was done, we can re-interpret the problem on an ethical level. It is the misdeed itself that appears to be impossible. How could it have happened? How could anyone have chosen to do that? These questions strike more at the heart of what resentment struggles with. For example, how could a man have stood by and watched while his Jewish neighbours were arrested and taken off to a death camp? Or, what could have possessed this stranger to approach and strike me without my slightest provocation? Or again, how could you spread these lies about me when I never did anything to offend you? What we struggle with most is not the impossibility of turning back time, but the


impossibility of how anyone could have committed such a deed. The wound of the victim continues to fester because she remains trapped in that moment of initial shock. The offence against her remains utterly absurd, unexplained and seemingly unexplainable.

Ressentiment not just keeps the past alive. In the mind and will of the person trapped in it, it keeps the past open or unfinished insofar as the victim cannot accept that what happened, happened.28

Let us return to another passage from Jankélévitch in which he is dealing with the problem of time but also seems to suggest this shift to the ethical plane. The past misdeed, he says,

does not allow itself, in the manner of any new experience (the recollection of a voyage, for example), to be integrated or totalised in a higher synthesis. Subsequent good actions, following upon the bad one, are juxtaposed with it, but without absorbing it or without transfiguring it from the inside . . . it remains in our history as a foreign body.29

It is this last phrase especially that interests us here. The indestructible fact of the misdeed having been done, ‘remains in our history as a foreign body.’ Our contention is that the ghostlike durability is not what bothers us most about a past having been done. It is rather its foreignness that is the main issue. How is it foreign? It is foreign to the otherwise meaningful narrative of our life. It does not permit of explanation. It is like a splinter that will not dissolve and become one with the flesh in which it is so firmly embedded. It remains as an absurdity amongst the otherwise reasonable fabric of our past memories. The evil appears to the victim as something radical. It seems like nothing good, not even the slightest trace of goodness, has motivated the action. The evil path was not naively mistaken for a good one – it was chosen because it was evil. This is the way it will appear to the victim of the ‘impossible’ offence.

The presentism of Augustine
Can the human will incline to evil for its own sake and not for the sake of some good? Is there such a thing as an unforgiveable offence? St. Augustine’s reflections on time, eternity and evil in his Confessions suggest a negative response to both these questions.

28 Ibid., 109.
29 Jankélévitch, Forgiveness, 46-47.
For Augustine, eternity is where nothing passes away, but the whole is simultaneously present.\textsuperscript{30}

Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once. The past is always driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present.\textsuperscript{31}

Augustine observes that we are accustomed to speaking of time in terms of three divisions. The future flows through the present moment into the past. We tend to regard the future as if it were something that exists, but this cannot be since the so-called future only comes to be when it passes into the present, and then it is no longer the future. So the future, as such, does not exist. We speak in a similar way of the past, as if it were an object for us, but this also cannot be. The now-past was at our disposal only when we experienced it as present, but then it was not past. Therefore, the past, like the future, does not exist as such.

Augustine concludes that to speak of the past and the future can make sense only if by ‘past’ we refer to our memory and by ‘future’ we mean our expectation. It is not time itself, but our mind that permits of the three divisions, and each one can be expressed in terms of the present. The past is the present memory of things that are no longer, the present is attending to what is now, and the future is the present expectation of things that are not yet.

This brings us to consider the present itself. When we speak of this year, this month, or this week, we seem to imply that these are present to us. But in fact we know that such spans are not present to us all at once. They are durations that we must wait to see unfold. An hour, a minute, even a few seconds, especially when we focus on them, show themselves to be more than a single present. The moment we call the present is so small that it defies any measurement, for to measure implies duration – that the end occurs at a later moment from the beginning of the measurement.\textsuperscript{32} Nor, says Augustine, can the present stand still, for “if the present were always present, and did not pass into past time, it obviously would not be time but eternity.”\textsuperscript{33} Rather, the present is infinitesimally small and vanishes the moment it appears. It is, by its very nature, on the border of nothingness. And since the infinitesimally small present is the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 261-262.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 269.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 267.
only time that actually exists, it must be said that time itself is characterised by this
next-to-nothingness.

Given how precariously time is perched between being and nonbeing, it is important for
Augustine that it be recognised as having a solid foundation. For this reason he relates
his discussion on time with the notion of eternity. While time is next-to-nothingness,
eternity is total fullness.

Thy “today” is eternity . . . Thou madest all time and before all times thou art, and
there was never a time when there was no time.34

Thou dost call us, then, to understand the Word – the God who is God with thee –
which is spoken eternally and by which all things are spoken eternally. . . . Still, not
all the things that thou dost make by speaking are made at the same time and always.35

This relationship of time with eternity as expressed here is nuanced and needs to be
elaborated further. While we creatures inhabit an infinitesimally small present in which
we know things only bit by bit in their successive unfolding, God’s eternity is an
infinite ‘present’ in which he knows all things directly and simultaneously. For St.
Thomas Aquinas

God knows, in His eternity, all that takes place throughout the whole course of time.
For His eternity is in present contact with the whole course of time, and even passes
beyond time. We may fancy that God knows the flight of time in His eternity, in the
way that a person standing on top of a watchtower embraces in a single glance a
whole caravan of passing travellers.36

The difficulty arises when we attempt to bring together these two assertions: (A) The
only temporal moment that exists is the present, and (B) God is in simultaneous
knowing contact with the whole course of time. For, if the past and the future do not
exist, it would seem that they could not be known by God. In recent times this paradox
has given rise to some debate.37 We will not be able to go into all the arguments here,
but it will be worth outlining the two main positions – presentism and eternalism, and
putting forth the reasons why we favour the former.

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34 Ibid., 266.
35 Ibid., 261.
36 Thomas Aquinas, Compendium Theologiae, trans. Cyril Vollert, (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co.,
1947), 56.
37 See Kevin M. Staley, “Omniscience, Time, and Eternity: Is Aquinas Inconsistent?” in The Saint
Anselm Journal 3.2 (Spring 2006): 9-16.
Let us begin with eternalism. It seeks to resolve the conflict between the above two assertions in this way. It embraces (B) whole-hearted and reformulates (A) to fit in with it. In particular, the claim of eternalism is that (A) is an illusion of our finite time-bound state. God, who sees things as they truly are, sees that all moments co-exist eternally. What we call the present has no ontological priority over the moments that preceded it and the moments that will follow. Aquinas’s analogy of the caravan of passing travellers seems to fit perfectly with this position. From one bystander’s limited vantage-point the parade seems to unfold bit by bit. First the front appears, then the middle, and finally the rear. The moment that the middle is in view, the front is only a memory and the rear is still just an object of expectation. This, of course, is an illusion. The person standing high up on the watchtower can see that in fact the entire line of travellers exists all at once. And so it is with time according to eternalism. God knows each and every moment in his one eternal gaze, while our perspective in which the past is vanished and no more, and the future is nothing but the present expectation of what is not yet, is a creaturely illusion.

As sensible and convincing as this may sound I am inclined to seek a resolution to the paradox without passing off as illusory the Augustinian notion of time, for I believe it to be very important in enabling us to overcome or at least reposition the aporia of time in regards to forgiveness. As Kevin Staley points out, a clue to how we can achieve this lies in Aquinas’s restatement of the parade analogy in *De Veritate*.

If someone were to see many people walking successively down a road during a given period of time, in each part of that time he would see as present some of those who walk past, so that in the whole period of his watching he would see as present all of those who walked past him. Yet he would not simultaneously see them all as present, because the time of his seeing is not completely simultaneous. However, if all his seeing could exist at once, he would simultaneously see all the passers-by as present, even though they themselves would not all pass as simultaneously present.38 What is striking here is the absence of a watchtower, of any special elevated perspective that would suggest the eternalist interpretation given above. Rather, the comparison is between knowing the successive thing successively and knowing the successive thing simultaneously.

What is important about the eternal knower is not a privileged perspective on reality that we lack; rather, it is that his knowing is not itself divided by time. Because his

knowing is simple and partless, real succession in the object known does not give rise to succession in God’s knowledge of the known.\textsuperscript{39} Note this “real succession”. What this means is that the gradual unfolding of things, the passing of the present from the not-yet into the no-longer, the non-existence of past and future – these are not illusions. This is the way that temporal things are in themselves.

Since God is outside of time it is not a case of him remembering the past or awaiting the future, and the question ‘What is God doing now?’ has no real meaning except, of course, in reference to Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, who has entered time, assumed our human state, and come to know things in a time-bound, human way. Notwithstanding this, God’s divine knowledge remains unchanging. We are, however, forced by the limits of language to assign a tense to God’s knowing, though it is not something that truly applies to him. What we can say is that ‘God knows’ (not in our present but in his eternity) everything that ever was, everything that is now, and everything that is not yet but will be. God’s direct knowledge of all moments does not entail that they co-exist, but only that they had, have, or will have existence at some time or other.

The question of the nature of time could easily comprise a whole book in itself. However, our discussion so far, as brief and restricted as it may be, has important implications for the aporia of time which we have been considering. The difficulty with which we were originally faced was how to undo the fact of a past misdeed. Ricoeur and Hieronymi indicated that such a project is unnecessary, and that what was needed instead was a change in attitude towards the past, so that it takes on a new significance for us. Forgiveness does not require a paradoxical change in the past, rather, it is something that has an effect in the present. Augustine’s exploration of the notion of time seems to provide support for this. It found what we call ‘the past’ to be nothing more than our present memory of what once was but is no longer. That the past no longer exists means that the demands of forgiveness must pertain to the present, for only the present exists, and only in the present can anything be done.

\textsuperscript{39} Staley, “Omniscience,” 16.
The question of radical evil

As we noted earlier, for Augustine, what secures the precarious next-to-nothingness of time against slipping into the abyss of non-existence is that it originates in and is oriented to eternity. Augustine’s position on time and eternity underpins the move we made in the previous section from the impossibility of turning back time to the seeming impossibility of the offence. It is, after all, in relegating past time to the realm of memory that the demand of forgiveness to undo the offence is made redundant and replaced by the need to re-evaluate it. Moreover, by placing time within the backdrop of eternity there is an ultimate divine perspective against which any such re-evaluation can in the end be measured.

For Augustine, just as time is to be understood in relation to eternity, the time-bound creature stands in a radical relation of dependence to the eternal Creator. This affirmation is crystallised in that oft-quoted prayer, “you have made us for yourself, and our hearts find no rest until they rest in you.”40 In this light Augustine formulates his position on evil.

And when I asked myself what wickedness was, I saw that it was not a substance but perversion of the will when it turns aside from you, O God, who are the supreme substance, and veers towards things of the lower order.41 Thus, evil is viewed by Augustine as a privation of the good and not as a thing or principle in itself. Indeed, in our moral dealings with others we tend to carry the very deep Aristotelian assumption that ‘every action and decision seems to seek some good.’42 The offence is not the choice of something evil, but the preferring of a lesser good over a greater one.

Can this formulation of evil do justice to an extreme historical horror like the Holocaust? Jankélévitch does not think so. “[T]he extermination of the Jews”, he writes, “is the product of pure wickedness, of ontological wickedness, of the most diabolical and gratuitous wickedness that history has ever known.”43 For him the

40 Ibid., 21.
41 Ibid., 150.
paradoxical nature of forgiveness means that it only comes into effect in the face of such absolutely evil and therefore ‘unforgiveable’ acts.

However, from her observation of the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt concluded that, far from exhibiting the signs of a ‘monster’, “He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. . . . He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness . . . that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.” In other words, the evil that took hold of Eichmann exhibited no “diabolical or demonic profundity” but rather a mere lack of due thoughtfulness, of moral imagination, of basic compassion. For Arendt the Holocaust represents not the ontological status of evil but rather its sheer banality.

Furthermore, according to Milbank, to grant an ontological status to evil in the wake of such events is to falsely glamorise it, absolutise it, attribute to it “a demonic status equivalent to divinity”, and to keep alive its terror.

The argument which runs ‘This evil was so terrible that we belittle its horror if we describe it as negative’ effectively means that this evil was really so impressive that we had better accord it a status in being equivalent to the Good. Thus whereas the soldiers simply and rightly, if belatedly, sent in the tanks and arrested the perpetrators, the philosophers choose rather to resurrect this horror as ontological victory. Bowing down to the remains of the camps as though before an idol, they solemnly proclaim a surd and ineliminable evil so serious that art from henceforward must confine itself to fashioning little figurines of atrocity.

We will now move on to identify some important implications of the ontological status of evil for forgiveness. Since a more lengthy and critical treatment of the question of evil is beyond the scope of this section we will proceed in a somewhat conditional manner, not pretending that we have settled the question, but rather offering some conclusions about the relationship between this question of evil and the possibility of forgiveness.

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45 Ibid., 287.
46 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 54.
47 Ibid., 55; a more lengthy argument on the non-ontological status of evil can be found in the same work in Chapter One, ‘Evil: Darkness and Silence’, 1-25.
48 For a discussion of Barth’s doctrine of evil as ‘nothingness’, see section 3.1.
Final reflections: reason amidst absurdity

If evil were to be granted an ontological status, what implications would this have for forgiveness? It would seem that the offence done out of pure malice, evil for evil’s sake, must leave any possibility of forgiveness in doubt. This is so for two reasons. On the side of the offender, it is doubtful whether there could be any way of coming back from such an action. Indeed, pure malice is perhaps the converse of love offered for its own sake, because like that love, it promises to endure forever. It is unclear how any remorse could come from a will that had knowingly chosen the evil path for its own sake. For, in repentance there is always a ‘coming to one’s senses’ which implies that at the time of the misdeed, one did not know the full import of what one was doing, and that if one had known, one would not have acted so.

On the side of the victim of an act of pure malice there appears to be no motivation for the offer of forgiveness. Why would the victim want to restore any kind of relationship with such a wrongdoer? The offender whose will is capable of orienting itself towards evil does not have enough in common with the victim to ever be her friend. There is nothing to motivate the move towards reconciliation. There is no way of even desiring to be reconciled with this ‘freak’. A moral deficiency can be forgiven, but what is radically evil has to be left well alone, since (unless, with Jankélévitch, we characterise forgiveness as a miracle) there is no redeeming what is rotten to the core.49

Now, if pure malice and utter absurdity preclude the possibility of forgiveness, does this mean that the offence and the offender have to be understood before forgiveness can take place? The answer cannot be as simple as that, for no misdeed can be given a full explanation. Rather, if it can be shown to be completely reasonable then it is clearly not a misdeed at all. Perhaps, however, in order for there to be forgiveness, the victim needs to be able to find a scrap of good, even the tiniest of traces, in what motivated the bad deed. The offence will never be entirely comprehended, not even by the offender, but to understand something of it would seem to be essential. This will enable the victim to see that the ‘impossible’ misdeed was not impossible after all; that the foreign body is actually capable of being integrated into a meaningful narrative. All it may require is that we come to recognise in it a trace of good amongst the bad, a touch of

49 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 51-52.
goodwill amidst the malice, or a shred of reason behind the absurdity. For, we are not looking to excuse the act, only to discover in it the marks of a human act – that something in what it aimed for was good. Only then can we identify with the offender.

I could have done as you did; maybe I will do as you did. I am like you, weak, fallible, and miserable. There is a principle of pride in the ruthless rigour of the person who does not forgive: to refuse to forgive is to reject all resemblance to, all brotherhood with, the sinner.50

When a son murders his father for the inheritance money, something of the ‘why’ is visible. It remains obscure how he could value the money more than the life of his father, but we who have never murdered may still identify with his greed. The deed may have been heinous but it was not ‘impossible’.

It is necessary to bring this discussion to a close for now. In chapter three the issue of evil will be taken up in detail. There we will have time to deal more critically with the questions arising from our exploration of the apora of time. In particular we want to discern whether it is possible for a person to will evil for its own sake. If so, would the acts of such a person be forgivable? Or if not, is a mere trace of good all that is needed to render a misdeed forgivable? For the moment, however, it will be enough to note this last jump that we have made. We have moved from the impossibility of turning back time to the impossibility of the motiveless offence. In the move we have seen the apora of time dissolve and give way to a problem that is purely ethical. We have replaced a paradox with a challenge, to allow events subsequent to the misdeed to bring about a change in attitude towards the past offence. Still, much work lies ahead of us if we are to articulate clearly what this means and to understand the particular ethical demands of forgiveness for victim and offender alike.

50 Jankélévitch, Forgiveness, 161.
1.2. WHY FORGIVE? IN SEARCH OF A PURE MOTIVE

Introduction

The task we set ourselves in this section is to identify what is a pure motive for the offer of forgiveness. Like with the giving of a gift, many of us will tend to think that the offer of forgiveness should be made freely, with ‘no strings attached’. There are numerous ways in which my motive for giving can become impure. For example, I can give hoping to elicit something in return. I can give in order to be admired by others, or in order to prove my superiority. When it comes to forgiveness, my intentions can be clouded in similar ways. We will conduct this exploration in conversation with Jacques Derrida, whose deconstruction of ‘forgiveness’ attempts to take certain commonly held assumptions about the concept to their logical conclusion. The work of Derrida is of particular value for us because he helps us lay out very clearly the seeming impossibility of achieving a pure motive in the offer of forgiveness. For Derrida, in fact, there is no such thing as a pure motive to forgive, since, for him, ‘pure forgiveness’ has no motive at all. We will not, however, be content to uphold this negation, but will seek to move beyond it and to identify a pure motive which is interior to the act of forgiveness. In this way, with the help of Vladimir Jankélévitch, Charles Williams, Charles Griswold, and Nigel Biggar, we will trace an amended vision of forgiveness which finds its primary motive in the other.

The non-motive of Derrida

Derrida’s account of forgiveness takes the ‘no-strings-attached’ intuition to its extreme. For him, any finality whatsoever undermines the purity of forgiveness. “[E]ach time forgiveness is at the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or Redemption, reconciliation, salvation) . . . then the ‘forgiveness’ is not pure – nor is its concept.” How does having a finality make forgiveness impure? A finality or end suggests that forgiveness is being instrumentalised - used as a means to an end. It means that forgiveness becomes a strategy or a tool, offered not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else. Is this necessarily a problem? It is certainly easy to imagine examples of finalities that would cast a shadow over the whole enterprise of

51 Throughout this argument I will employ the term ‘finality’ to designate the intended outcome of an action, and will use it interchangeably with ‘motive’, ‘goal’, ‘end’, and ‘aim’.
forgiveness. Since I was so gracious in forgiving you today I expect you to be equally generous in pardoning me tomorrow. In other words, my aim in pardoning you was to store up moral credits for myself. Or, this great act of forgiveness will show the world how kind-hearted I am. My aim in forgiving you was to establish a good reputation for myself. Or again, to pardon the offence is nothing to me, I will forgive and prove that I am the better man, that I am not petty like you. My motivation for forgiving was to show my superiority. In these cases forgiveness appears to have lost its original purity and become a vehicle for selfishness, vanity and pride. In so doing it loses its true character and therefore does not deserve to be called forgiveness. My gesture of forgiveness was empty. I used it simply as a means to achieve some other end, but that end turned the gesture of forgiveness into a lie.

The question that we must raise in response to Derrida is, how can a finality like reconciliation pollute the practice and concept of forgiveness? Is this not what forgiveness is ultimately for? Imagine I had a falling out with a friend - she cheated me, lied to me, and disrespected me. Then suppose I find it in my heart to forgive her. Am I to say to my friend, ‘I forgive you for what you have done, but I do not wish this forgiveness to restore our friendship”? Or again, am I to say, ‘Let the guilt of your crime be taken away but let us continue to treat one another as enemies”? Actually, Derrida does not counsel this. He would not “dare to object to the imperative of reconciliation.” In fact, he has nothing against reconciliation, as such, nor any of the other aforementioned finalities. The point he is trying to make is that while these might be good things, they do not constitute pure forgiveness. He wants to distinguish forgiveness very clearly from these other things, so that, for example, the more an act aims at reconciliation, the less it is to be regarded as an act of forgiveness. Derrida is intent upon recognising the radical nature of forgiveness, to show that it stands out from all other moral acts.

Just as Derrida wants to separate forgiveness from any notion of finality, he also insists that pure forgiveness is without conditions. It is not, he asserts, a transaction in any shape or form. Forgiveness is a one-way movement. Therefore, he thinks it should not demand the repentance or reform of the guilty one, for to do so would make the act into

53 Ibid., 50.
a transaction. It would be to say, ‘I will not forgive until she comes to me and makes a sincere apology. She must cast herself down before me in sorrow before I agree to cast myself in the vulnerable position of forgiving, of relinquishing my right to hold anything against her.’ Again, Derrida does not think reform and repentance are things to be avoided. He simply wants to separate them from the notion of pure forgiveness. “Imagine”, he says,

...that I forgive on the condition that the guilty one repents, mends his ways, asks forgiveness, and thus would be changed by a new obligation, and that from then on he would no longer be exactly the same as the one who was found to be culpable. In this case, can one still speak of forgiveness? This would be too simple on both sides: one forgives someone other than the guilty one.54

This line of thought calls to mind a comment of one of my past professors, crudely summarising the epistemology of Kant, that ‘you can’t eat an oyster’. That is, you cannot know a thing as it is in itself. The moment an oyster is placed in the mouth it begins to mix with the saliva, to be cut to pieces by the chewing teeth, before it finally enters the stomach and passes beyond any resemblance of its proper and original state. It was an oyster before, but now it has become something else. And so it seems you cannot eat an oyster, because the moment you try to eat it, it ceases to be the ‘pure’ oyster that it was. Similarly, Derrida asserts that you cannot forgive a sinner who has repented and reformed because the repentant and reformed one is not the same as the one who committed the offence. A process has already begun by which the guilty one, the only true object of pure forgiveness, has been changed into something else, and is no longer a fitting candidate for forgiveness. The central claim that Derrida seems to be making here is that conditions such as repentance and moral reform detract from the purity of forgiveness because they take away the need for it. The more they are present the less work there is for forgiveness to do. If the offence is a raging river then repentance and reform are like stepping stones which make the great leap of forgiveness unnecessary.

We may wish to regard repentance and reform as parts of the process of forgiveness just as salivation and digestion are parts of the process of eating.55 But, for Derrida, pure forgiveness is a great leap – it is not a process but something spontaneous. This will be problematic if we want to think of forgiveness as a good that brings about a

54 Ibid., 38-39.
55 For a discussion on repentance in the process of forgiveness see Jeffrie Murphy, Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31-54.
better state of affairs. For, if forgiveness is so one-sided that it leaves no room for anticipation or response from the guilty party, then it does not appear to achieve anything at all.\textsuperscript{56} In order to understand why Derrida insists so heavily on an unconditional and non-finalised ‘pure forgiveness’ we need to see what sort of offence he has in mind for forgiveness to overcome.

There could be, in effect, all sorts of proximity (where the crime is between people who know each other): language, neighbourhood, familiarity, even family, etc. But in order for evil to emerge, ‘radical evil’ and perhaps worse again, the unforgivable evil, the only one which would make the question of forgiveness emerge, it is necessary that at the most intimate of that intimacy an absolute hatred would come to interrupt the peace.\textsuperscript{57}

In light of this statement Derrida’s notion of pure forgiveness starts to make more sense. Derrida is drawing our attention to the very real fact that many of those who wrong us – especially those who are guilty of evil – are not basically decent people. And if forgiveness is going to be available to victims of serious wrongs, it will often have to be directed toward nasty people who still pose the threat of future wrongdoing. And since it is a matter of ‘radical evil’ and ‘absolute hatred’ it should no longer surprise us that he wants to separate forgiveness from notions of repentance and reform. For Derrida, forgiveness is the very thing that comes into play when repentance and reform are not forthcoming.

What, then, does this pure forgiveness, this pardoning of radical evil, look like? “In order for there to be forgiveness”, says Derrida,

must one not forgive both the fault and the guilty as such, where the one and the other remain as irreversible as the evil, as evil itself, and being capable of repeating itself, unforgivably, without transformation, without amelioration, without repentance or promise?\textsuperscript{58}

It is clear that for Derrida the act of pure forgiveness does not achieve anything outside of itself. The guilty one is forgiven, yes, but that forgiveness is not given in order to change her, and it is not given on the condition that she shows remorse for what happened or makes a commitment to avoid a repeat of the injury in the future. Derrida transcends the question of what an offer of this kind of forgiveness could possibly mean. “[P]ure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must

\textsuperscript{57} Derrida, \textit{On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness}, 49.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 39.
have no ‘meaning’, no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible.” In other words, if the notion of forgiveness is to be reserved for the pardoning of radical evil, then it must be considered meaningless, aimless, unintelligible, and indeed, ‘impossible’.

**Pushing beyond the non-motive**

At this stage in the discussion it is worth turning our eyes back to the original question regarding purity of motive. What is the right motive for forgiveness? According to Derrida, as we have seen, pure forgiveness does not carry any motive. However, there may well be a way of moving beyond this conception of pure forgiveness set up by Derrida. It will be very interesting to compare his position to that of Vladimir Jankélévitch, whose philosophical writings on forgiveness in the wake of the Nazi regime were of great interest to Derrida. On the question of motive, Jankélévitch appears to make the same point as Derrida when he says that

forgiveness forgives because it forgives, and again it is similar to love in this respect: for love too loves because it loves. . . . And we say again, the lover loves his beloved because it is he and because it is she: – as if that were a reason for loving! But yes, it is a reason for loving; for a reason without reasons is the most profound of all.

This means, we can suppose, that forgiveness has no external motive at all. And yet it is important to note that these words of Jankélévitch enable us to make a distinction that is not found in the reflections of Derrida. The lover loves the beloved, not arbitrarily, but “because it is he and because it is she”, and therefore we might say that there is a motive for loving after all. It is only that the motive and the object of love are the same. The finality of love is the beloved. Why do I love her? I love her simply because she is herself. It seems, then, that while love has no external motive, it does have a motive that is internal to the relation of love itself – the beloved. Analogously, the words of Jankélévitch may permit us to distinguish between external motives for forgiveness that would render it less pure, and an internal motive that does not compromise its purity. Following this logic, the internal motive for forgiveness is the guilty person. Just as love says, ‘I love my beloved because it is she’, forgiveness says, ‘I forgive her because she is her (guilty) self.’ This would permit us to speak of forgiveness as love that is

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59 Ibid., 45.
60 Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, 147
sustained, or perhaps, love that is resurrected in the face of hurt and guilt – even in the face of Derrida’s ‘radical evil’.

This identification of an internal motive enables us to overcome the dividing wall between forgiveness and reconciliation erected by Derrida. If forgiveness is love sustained in the face of the rupture caused by wrongdoing, then by its very nature it appears to be aimed at restoring the relationship, or what Milbank calls “that order of free unlimited exchange of charity which was interrupted by sin.”61 Such a view also eliminates the need to separate forgiveness from repentance and reform. These may or may not be necessary in order for forgiveness to take place. In fact, they may take place only after the offer of forgiveness is made. In any case, the point is not that forgiveness precludes any sort of transaction but that it is the act that re-establishes the sort of relationship which will allow for a free and loving interaction.62 The chief concern of the forgiver is not to maintain a pure motive. Derrida is right to point out that forgiveness is not concerned with (external) motives. Nor is forgiveness concerned with performing a pure act of forgiveness. The concern of forgiveness, rather, is to break down the barrier that separates the victim from the guilty one. This pursuit of reconciliation, as I am putting it forward here, is not an external motive. Rather, it is a motive that operates at the interior of forgiveness. It is like the chicken that crossed the road in order to get to the other side. The aim of getting to the other side does not make the chicken less of a road-crossing purist. Getting to the other side is not some external consequence of crossing the road like getting a promotion might be an external motivation for being friendly with the boss. Rather, getting to the other side is what it means to cross the road (successfully). In a similar way, the reconciling of enemies is not an external effect of forgiveness. Rather, assuming it is both offered and received, this is what forgiveness directly accomplishes. Reconciliation is central to the meaning of forgiveness, and so, does not compromise its purity.63

61 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 57.
False motives

Having proposed the desire for reconciliation as an internal motive for forgiveness it is worth spending time looking at what might constitute a contaminating, external motive. In Charles Williams’ classic text, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, he identifies three such distortions as he reflects on the temptations of Christ in the Gospel according to Matthew (4:1-11). The temptation to turn stone into bread is interpreted here as an image of the false motivation of comfort.

The first temptation of Forgiveness then is to procure, through its own operation, some immediate comfort. . . . Our natural hunger desires immediate comfort. Yet any haste after this comfort is apt to destroy the whole act of forgiveness.64

Love of comfort becomes the substitute for love of the guilty one. And so the rupture remains hidden under a veneer of cordiality. The would-be forgiver lacks the courage to properly address the evil that has taken place and to make herself vulnerable before the offender.

The second temptation is linked to pride. It is relying too heavily on one’s own nobility of soul, on one’s own power to forgive. It hastens to take the initiative and grant pardon to the wretched wrongdoer before she has a chance to repent. “‘Cast thyself down,’ The devil murmurs, ‘the angels will support you; be noble and forgive. You will have done the right thing; you will have behaved better than the enemy.’”65 Here, the desire to take the moral high ground takes the place of love of the guilty one. The rupture is actually deepened, for this feigning of forgiveness is really a form of revenge. It is a subtle retaliation against the original misdeed, clothed in humility but designed to humble the offender and exalt the victim. In so doing it bypasses that middle plain on which the two may have met and been reconciled. This distortion becomes a danger especially when forgiveness is severed from reconciliation. In the absence of a genuine finality outside of the self, the love of self naturally comes to fill the void. If the main concern is reduced to ‘my pure motive’ then the successful act of ‘forgiveness’ is just another occasion for self-congratulating smugness.

Williams interprets the third temptation as the seeking of freedom for its own sake.

In some sense Forgiveness is promised the kingdoms of the world; and how? Precisely by being set free from grudges and resentments, from bitterness and strife.

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65 Ibid., 54.
This certainly is the proper nature and the proper result of Forgiveness, but . . . Forgiveness which primarily desired this would not be forgiveness at all . . . one would be completely free, one would no longer be hurt by others. To be, or to desire to be, free from being hurt by others, is to be, or to desire to be, free from the co-inheritance of all human souls, which it was the express intention of Christ to redeem.

This distortion of forgiveness is a danger for the one motivated to forgive for therapeutic reasons. It is evident in popular psychology and the wisdom of the talk-show. Just as weight loss offers greater freedom of physical movement, forgiveness gives greater freedom of movement in the moral sphere. It helps one to ‘move on’ from failed relationships, to climb out of the pit of heartbreak and bitterness and to face the world again.

Lewis Smedes’ *Forgive and Forget* is a good example of the kind of therapeutic approach to forgiveness that we are talking about here. According to Smedes, readers of *Forgive and Forget* discover that the person who does the forgiving gets the first benefit from doing it. They may have heard that forgiving is a hard duty God lays on Christian people. Then they discover that forgiving is an opportunity for injured people to heal their own wounds. They discover that forgiving is something that happens inside the injured person’s mind, and that sometimes the person they forgive never even hears about it. That if we wait to forgive people until they say they are sorry we make ourselves hostages to the very person who wronged us to begin with. They discover that forgiving does not turn us into doormats. And that when we forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us.

Here in just a few sentences we are given a picture of forgiveness that appears to relate exclusively to the wellbeing of the victim. In the act of forgiving, the forgiver benefits first, achieves self-healing, is set free, and avoids remaining a hostage. Most astonishing of all is that these benefits can all be attained from the comfort of one’s own mind. The guilty one need not be involved at all except as the absent object of our forgiving thoughts. Presumably this means that the guilty one need not benefit either. Such a conception represents a severely limited view of forgiveness because it occurs solely within the forgiving party.

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66 Ibid., 54-55.
Earthly limits of reconciliation

Even if, while rejecting these external motives, we consider reconciliation as the proper internal motive of forgiveness, we must acknowledge at the same time that such an outcome may not always be possible or desirable. We need to allow for cases, on the one hand, where intimate friendship cannot be restored and, on the other hand, when the offence is committed by a stranger and so there is no prior relationship to be restored. For an example of the latter, let us say I am assaulted by a stranger. He strikes me from behind, snatches my wallet and runs off. There is no relationship, no contact, except for the fleeting moment of the offence. Now suppose he is caught and I have the chance to meet him face to face, what would forgiveness accomplish in this case? We are talking here about what it would mean to be reconciled with the stranger, with whom I had no previous relationship. On the other hand, it is not as if the stranger and I have nothing at all between us. The stranger is related to me already as a potential friend. I cannot deny that those who I now call my friends were all once strangers to me – that they were once only potential friends. And so there is something to be restored in forgiving the stranger. By forgiving him I restore him to that status of potential friend, though, of course, he will have some work to do in order to win my full trust.

Aside from the question of the stranger there is also the question of what motivates forgiveness when full reconciliation is not possible or not desirable.68 Charles Griswold, by distinguishing between different understandings of reconciliation, offers a thoroughly reasonable answer.

If “reconciliation” is taken to mean “acceptance,” in the minimal sense of non-interference, then we may say that forgiveness may lead to it. But if reconciliation means “affirmation” – the relevant sense of which here would be something like friendship and support or a renewal of any previous ties of affection – then there is no reason to believe that forgiveness must lead to “affirmative reconciliation” as one might call it. Such an outcome might be neither warranted nor desirable. For example, one could forgive one’s partner for infidelity but no longer wish to remain together as a couple; forgiveness does not necessarily restore the love that was destroyed by infidelity, even if it does restore a certain level of mutual respect, and dissipate resentment and guilt.69

When the desire to restore the relationship to its previous fullness is absent, as it can be in the collapse of a marriage, the result of forgiveness may just be a peaceful distance.

The fear of a repeat offence might prevent the restoration of intimacy and trust, and therefore a very minimal form of reconciliation may be all that is sought. As Biggar affirms,

[the oft-used word “reconciliation” is one that connotes a certain completeness, a certain conclusiveness, a certain closure. It conjures up the classic image of the reconciling embrace. . . . Now I do not doubt that there may be moments of completion, but most of the time . . . reconciliation remains frustratingly incomplete. . . . So ours is an age of compromise and much unfinished business. . . .]

Though these philosophical reflections on the limits of forgiveness remain incomplete, they will serve as a preparation for the development of a christological account of forgiveness in the remaining chapters.

**Conclusion**

In this section on the proper motive for forgiveness we began by exploring Derrida’s conception of pure forgiveness and by identifying its underlying logic, we showed why he separates forgiveness so sharply from notions of repentance, reform, and reconciliation. Then, with the help of Jankélévitch, we were able to establish a distinction between external and internal motives. We went beyond the parameters set by Derrida, arguing that forgiveness is directed towards reconciliation, which operates within forgiveness as an internal motive. Having arrived at a more satisfactory response to our question we then spent time exploring some false motives that arise when the desire to be reconciled with the other is lost or replaced with some other ultimate motive. We ended with a brief look at the limits of reconciliation as the intended outcome of forgiveness. In the case of the stranger we concluded that there is still a disposition, the openness to friendship, albeit unrealised, that forgiveness can serve to restore. We also acknowledged that there are cases when relationships are damaged seemingly beyond repair, and that sometimes the most that can achieved is a peaceful distance.

This drive towards reconciliation which is inherent within the act of forgiveness will help us as we begin our exploration of the wounded-risen form of Christ in the next chapter. Indeed, the second section of chapter two will build upon this present section. We will move from our present question – why forgive? – to question why Jesus

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remains wounded in his glorious post-resurrection state. Drawing from Hans Urs von Balthasar, we will explore the Christological notion of ‘glory’ as the divine ‘showing forth’ that brings about reconciliation of sinful humanity with God.
1.3. WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE?

Introduction
On the face of it there seems to be little need to devote time to the question of who holds the authority to forgive. It is like the question of who has the duty to apologise. Clearly, it seems that the one who ought to apologise is the offender and the one who has the power to forgive is the victim. However, there are difficulties which arise from this view that have not gone entirely unnoticed and in what follows we will see to what extent these difficulties present a challenge to our assumptions about forgiveness. We will begin by drawing from the work of John Milbank on the question of who has the authority to forgive. By a process of elimination in which the victim, the sovereign state, and finally God, are each found to be unsuitable locations for that authority, Milbank places the source of authority within a christocentric view of forgiveness. This view is not an alternative to the other three, but encompasses them all. Jesus is the divine sovereign Victim. Then drawing from Barth and Balthasar I will conduct a theological exploration into the sovereignty and the victimhood of Jesus.

Victim, sovereign or God?
Among the challenges noted by Milbank for articulating a robust account of forgiveness is the problem of absent victims. In the case of a major wrong, like homicide, the primary victim is necessarily absent. It seems the offence itself has eliminated the only one who could rightly wield the keys of pardon.71 Who are we to call upon to make the offer of forgiveness? Perhaps one has to admit that no forgiveness is possible in the absence of the victim. But if that is the case then it means that forgiveness is only possible for lesser offences, and indeed, ceases to be viable at the very moment when its restorative power is needed the most. Charles Griswold allows for the case where forgiveness may be offered by a third party, but this, he says, is only legitimate under certain conditions and, in any case, always represents an imperfect form of forgiveness.72

There is also, says Milbank, the problem of multiple victims which raises the problem of whether an offence can ever be said to be forgiven comprehensively (i.e. by all those

71 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 50.
72 Griswold, Forgiveness, 117-9.
hurt by the offence). Since sin is contagious, observes Milbank, even a minor offence can have detrimental effects on a great number of people. Human lives are woven together so intricately and so tightly there will always be ‘collateral damage’. The blow intended for one so easily spills over. Can one, or a few, presume to represent the multitude of victims? The forgiveness of one may well amount to a betrayal of the rest, letting the offender off the hook before an adequate penance or restitution has been done. To be sure, a victim might well forgive and consider the act complete from their own point of view, but the offender who is forgiven by one remains guilty in relation to others. This is a problem for the offender who seeks a forgiveness that is comprehensive, leaving no room for lingering guilt. The point is that it is difficult to see how an act of comprehensive forgiveness could legitimately be made by one victim (or several victims) on behalf of all the others.

Another consideration for Milbank is that the offence and the act of forgiveness have an effect on the community which the sovereign power has a duty to protect. So, says Milbank, even if the multitude of victims of the contagious offence could somehow be summoned, even this would not be enough. This is because the many are part of a community, the good of which is bound up with the good of its members. The many, therefore, are answerable to the whole. For example,

the forgiving [rape] victim might legitimately incur public outrage; her loyalty to a friend may betray other women, past or future possible victims of the same man, or else still other women rendered more vulnerable to similar acts in parallel situations by the girl’s refusal to expose, and make an example of, this particular criminal. What makes her, after all, the right one to do the forgiving, rather than all those other women? Moreover, since any rape renders all women less secure and all men less trusted and more liable themselves to false accusations of rape and therefore also less secure, this crime is an attack on the whole community.73

The one, the many, and the whole, are therefore bound together. If the victims could agree among themselves to forgive, there would still remain, says Milbank, the need for “public, third-party assessment” to determine whether the conditions for recompense and reconciliation with the offender were just.74 This trail of reasoning suggests that when it comes to granting forgiveness, the ultimate authority rests with the sovereign, the institution responsible for protecting the welfare of the whole community. Could it be the sovereign authority rather than the victim has the authority to forgive?

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73 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 51.
74 Ibid., 50.
Milbank shows why this cannot be so. Firstly, he says, if the sovereign power were to grant pardon but the primary victims did not then this could hardly merit to be called forgiveness. The sovereign stands in the service of the members of the community, not as an absolute power taking all judgements upon itself and depriving its subjects of moral potency. While the victims withhold their forgiveness no declaration of pardon by the sovereign could render an offender forgiven or reconciled. Secondly, the damage done by the offence may cross boundaries of sovereign domains, and so locating the appropriate sovereign power may prove impossible.

The sovereign does not seem to wield the right kind of authority to bring about true forgiveness. Victims, on the other hand, do seem to have the right sort of authority to forgive, but as has already been noted, it is not clear how any act of forgiveness offered by a victim or a group of victims could amount to that full, comprehensive pardon that the offender needs in order to be completely free from guilt. In other words, because every offence has victims and affects the community as a whole, the victim lacks the sovereignty to completely free the offender from guilt, while the sovereign power lacks the necessary victimhood. From all of these preceding considerations Milbank concludes that “neither the victim nor the sovereign power can forgive, and there is no human forgiveness.”

No human forgiveness means that we need to look beyond the created realm to find the true seat of authority to forgive. We may ask whether God can supply for our creaturely limitations. Indeed, if any being has the authority to forgive surely it is God himself. “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). Is not God the absolute sovereign capable of representing all? To this question Milbank gives a rather unexpected answer. “This conclusion is partially correct, but it of course runs up against the problem of how we can be forgiven by God if human victims do not in fact forgive us.” We might reply that, unlike the sovereign power, God’s forgiveness can in fact override the refusal of human victims. But this leads to a serious problem. For, unlike the human sovereign which has the capacity to suffer some of the ill effects of the offence, Milbank asserts that God, in his divinity, knows “no variation or shadow

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75 Ibid, 51.
due to change” (Jas 1:17) and therefore is beyond all suffering. Appealing to Julian of Norwich, Milbank states that “God does not forgive, since he cannot be offended, but only continues to give, despite our rejection of his gift.”76 This is not, of course, to say that God refuses to forgive, but that his giving does not have the character of forgiving. It is simply giving, unaffected by the disobedience and ingratitude of his creatures.

So, to summarise, victims cannot be counted on to forgive, either because the offence has left them incapable or they are too numerous to be summoned, and no single victim has the authority to represent the rest. The state cannot forgive because it lacks the concrete particularity of the victim and cannot be directly offended. Even the appeal to divine forgiveness does not seem to be meaningful in the absence of the forgiveness of the victims. Therefore, it seems that there can be no comprehensive forgiveness for serious offences.

**The sovereign victim**

This is where the Christian tradition offers its own unique answer to the problem of forgiveness. It is an answer that deals with the central issues of this problem: that victims lack the necessary sovereignty to grant comprehensive forgiveness, while the sovereign lacks the necessary victimhood to forgive. These problems are surmounted, for the Christian, because the all-sovereign God has become a man.

As unique sovereign victim, perhaps, the God-Man was alone able to inaugurate forgiveness; for here was not a single instantiation of human nature, victimized like all humans by other humans, but rather a human victim suffering the maximum possible victimage, by virtue of its personification by the divine Logos, all-wise and all-innocent and therefore able to let the human nature plumb the full depths and implications of suffering. In this way a single suffering became also a sovereign suffering, capable of representing all suffering and of forgiving on behalf of all victims.77

Jesus of Nazareth unites the particularity of frail humanity with the absolute sovereignty of God. He is the Author of the world who becomes a character in the world. And so his suffering on the cross is not merely understood as the suffering of one man at one particular time and place. Or at least, while admitting of such particularities, the significance and effectiveness of Jesus’ suffering reach far beyond

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77 Ibid., 61.
the bounds of first century Israel. In Jesus the absolute sovereignty of God and the human capacity for suffering are for the first time brought together. Somehow Jesus’ suffering and victimhood are joined with and take up into themselves all human suffering – all suffering that ever was and all that ever will be. There are two movements simultaneously at play here. Human suffering, without losing its particularity, has become truly sovereign, and God, without losing his sovereignty, has become a victim – the Victim who identifies himself with all victims.

How does this universal identification take place? For Milbank it flows from Jesus’ perfect innocence and infinite wisdom. His innocence renders him perfectly sensitive to the horror of evil on the one hand, while, on the other hand, his wisdom enables him to understand that every human sin is essentially the monstrous and absurd rejection of God. This is what all offences have in common, and this is what Jesus experiences and becomes familiar with on the cross. Enveloping all suffering, Jesus’ suffering is representative of all human suffering. And so he holds the authority to forgive offences not historically connected with him because on the cross he has, albeit in a mysterious way, become acquainted with them all.

As Milbank points out, Jesus’ manner of suffering differs from normal human suffering in one important respect. Unlike us, he accepts suffering without becoming embittered. Indeed, the suffering Christ is without qualification forgiveness from the outset, and not merely after repenting of his initial anger as a victim (which we cannot avoid) precisely because his human nature and will is imbued with the shape, character, idiom or tropos of the pure divine gift, which, as Julian of Norwich argued, never needs to forgive since it is never offended.78

When God’s constant and unchanging giving is expressed through the humanity of Christ in the face of human sin and guilt, it comes forth as forgiveness. This is perhaps the “very sudden miracle, this miraculous coincidence of position and negation” of which Jankélévitch wrote. Or again it is that “loving in the face of guilt and conflict” that we spoke of in our discussion on purity of motive. In the face of extreme malice, which in human dealings always elicits some form of aggressive or defensive response, it is the granting of an infinite kindness. It is the gesture that corresponds completely to his new command, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt

78 Ibid.
5:44). At the moment of humanity’s most comprehensive rejection of God it is the gift of divine forgiveness.

In order to develop further the position of Milbank we will now bring Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar into the conversation. With the help of Barth we will consider in more depth what it is that makes Jesus’ victimhood sovereign. Then with Balthasar we will examine more closely what we mean when we apply to Jesus the experience of ‘maximum possible victimage’.

The Reconciler is the Creator

As Karl Barth points out, God’s work of reconciliation (which involves the work of forgiveness), comes within a particular context. Reconciliation, of course, always implies two things. Firstly, it implies a prior relationship, which in this case is that between the creature and her Creator. Secondly it implies the rupture of that relationship. The creature has fallen out of communion with the Creator. “[I]n our attempt to grasp the concept of the Reconciler we had to assume that there is a world created by God, although fallen and lost, a mankind created by God, although actually living in enmity towards God.” The work of reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ is, of course, a work of repairing what was once whole. It may be reasonable to think that the ‘craftsman’ is best qualified to carry out the ‘repair’, and while affirming this, Barth goes further, introducing in his reflections a connection between the work of creation and the work of reconciliation that is radical and that flows in both directions.

Only in him who acts on us as Reconciler through cross and resurrection could we recognise the Creator, and only in the Creator who remains the Lord of our existence in spite of our enmity could we recognise the Reconciler.

When it comes to recognising who made us we are shown the one who heals us, and in order to discover who the healer is we are presented with the Creator.

Barth is saying, on the one hand, that our status as creatures estranged from our Creator is not fully appreciated until the moment when our reconciliation is brought about. Reconciliation, in other words, has profound epistemic consequences. We do not realise our true origin until we are restored to it, or our being-in-exile until we are called home.

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80 Ibid.
We are in fact aware of our human existence in no other way, than by the same Word which announces to us judgement and grace. Thereby it tells us that it itself is the ground of our human existence: upon this ground we are men and not otherwise. It reaches us, because already it always reaches, before it reaches us. It is the hand which already holds us by grasping us.\textsuperscript{81}

The work of reconciliation that comprises the mission of Jesus is itself an act of revelation. He reveals God as the neglected (and, indeed, rejected) foundation of our existence.

On the other hand, this revelation of God is itself the act of reconciliation, because it contains the call to return home and the path along which that call can be followed. In this way, the very manner in which this reconciliation is brought about is inseparable from the revelation that Jesus is the Son of God, the one in whom all things were created (Col 1:16).

[H]e without whom [we] would not be, and yet from whom we have yet separated ourselves, not only does not, in spite of our separation, let us drop into the nothingness from which he called us, but, by accosting us as sinners and laying claim to us, presents us over and above existence with no less than himself, with communion and intercourse with himself.\textsuperscript{82}

By accomplishing our reconciliation he reveals the Father as Creator and by revealing the Creator he accomplishes our reconciliation. In short, the reconciliation of Christ is revelatory and the revelation of Christ is reconciliatory. Now, since the work of reconciliation is accomplished in the mode of revelation, Jesus’ authority to reconcile us to God is evident from the reconciling work itself. “Jesus Christ the Word of God does not in his revelation require first of all to get the authority from somewhere or other, but he already has it antecedently in himself, authority to address us and to claim us.”\textsuperscript{83} His authority, therefore, is self-authenticating, insofar as the authority to do the works he does is proven from the works themselves: “The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me” (John 10:25).

Because the revelation of Jesus takes the form of a gesture of reconciliation, one cannot remain a mere observer to the revelation. Rather, once one sees then one is implicated.

It is not a question of whether we wish to vindicate ourselves to him: we are responsible to him, and our whole existence, one way or the other, is responsibility towards him. There is no possibility of us appealing against him or withdrawing to

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 509.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
some domain of our own, where to begin with we once lived by ourselves, where he
does not yet touch us at all or has ceased to do so, to a so-to-speak neutral human
existence, where for a start it is left to us to submit or not submit to the judgement
and grace which he announces to us, from which we might treat with him at our
case.\textsuperscript{84}

To say that his forgiveness is truly sovereign is to say that it places actual demands on
each one of its intended recipients and does not require their consent in order to do so.
It makes certain claims, “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), and generates
its own apostolate, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19).
Nobody is excluded; indeed, there is no room to opt out or to take a neutral stance: “He
who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” (Matt
12:30). For Barth, the sovereignty of Christ places real demands on us. The
accomplishment of forgiveness is not simply a judicial cancelling of guilt, but
represents a truly personal summons to come into communion with him. There is, in the
end, no middle way between acceptance and refusal. As the Creator, Jesus has the
authority to forgive and he confronts us as one who holds a definite claim on us.

This affirmation is also to be found in the writings of Balthasar, but it is approached in
a different way and expressed in different language. Balthasar observes that in certain
passages of St. Paul, ‘Adam’\textsuperscript{85} is presented as the principle of unity at humanity’s
origin, while humanity’s destiny lies in Jesus Christ. ‘Adam’ is “the first man . . . from
the dust” and Christ is “the second man . . . from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47). This text alone
suggests that ‘Adam’ is the Alpha and Christ the Omega. “Just as we have borne the
image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.” (1 Cor
15:49). Elsewhere in the Pauline Epistles, however, and in the Johannine writings, we
find testimony to a single principle. There is “one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are
all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6), and “in him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth” (Col 1:16). We are left with no doubt – Jesus is not only the
last, the Omega, but rather “the first and the last” (Rev 1:17, 2:8), “the Alpha and the
Omega” (Rev 22:13). As Balthasar explains, this means that “the second principle
embraces and includes the first . . . [while] the first comes to rest in the second”\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Balthasar employs quotation marks to acknowledge the ambiguity of this ancient biblical noun.
\textsuperscript{86} Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama Volume III: Dramatis Personae}, trans. Graham Harrison. (San
Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 34.
‘Adam’ might be first in the order of time but since all creation and all time comes to
be in Christ, he is to be considered first in the order of being.

From this initial position Balthasar draws out two further considerations regarding the
first man, ‘Adam’. Firstly, since he is historically prior, ‘Adam’ cannot know the
destiny that awaits him. He cannot know that he is a step on the way to Christ. Second,
being created out of nothing, ‘Adam’ cannot have any certainty about his origin – he
cannot “uncover his own foundations”.87 Rather,

it is only from the vantage point of the end, the Omega (the Incarnation), that
Christ’s Alpha comes forward from the Alpha of Adam (1 Pet 1:20). What is
eternally present and true in God – that is, that He has created all things, from before
all time, with a view to Christ and actually in Christ – this is only in the process of
coming-to-be in creation. In the nature of created reality, in itself, it is not yet
visible.88

We can note here Balthasar’s essential agreement with Barth. The latter’s reflections on
the particular relation that exists between Jesus as Creator and Jesus as Reconciler is
mirrored here in different language. For Balthasar it is in his coming in the flesh to
restore ‘Adam’ and to reconcile humanity back to God, that Christ shows himself to be
the one through whom we have been created. Or again, it is in appearing as the Omega
that he reveals himself as the Alpha. Furthermore, to say that he is both Alpha and
Omega is to deny the existence of any parallel sphere outside of Christ. With Barth we
saw that Christ’s accomplishment of forgiveness places demands on us, that it does not
leave room for a neutral position. So, Balthasar also affirms that all of creation and
each human life is determined christologically, both in its origin and in its final destiny.

Perhaps if ‘Adam’ were the true Alpha and Christ some sort of ‘newcomer’ on the
human scene then there would be a genuine choice between accepting the ‘upgrade’ –
the new form of life he offers, lived in reference to God and judged by divine standards
– or remaining purely in ‘Adam’, where human life can be lived and understood on
purely human terms. There would be the option to hold, with Richard Rorty, “that
nature is not leading up to anything – that nature has nothing in mind.”89 If, however,

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 37.
89 Richard Rorty, Philosophy and Social Hope, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 266. In the latter half of
his career (1980s – 2007) Rorty became a neo-pragmatist, attempting to transcend the divide between
theism and atheism, and to understand human life purely on its own terms and not in relation to the
existence (or non-existence) of God.
Christ is both Alpha and Omega then he encapsulates everything in between and there can be no human sphere that is untouched by his person and his mission.

These reflections of Barth and Balthasar serve to elucidate what is meant by the fundamental Pauline phrase ‘in Christ’. Our question at the beginning of this section was ‘who has the authority to forgive?’ We encountered the problem that no individual appears to have the authority to declare a wrongdoer forgiven comprehensively, because the sovereignty of each victim is limited to her own case, to the settlement of her own particular grievance. It seems that no one victim, therefore, is able to sum up or represent the totality of victims. But in the case of Christ we can see that it is different. As Creator and Reconciler, Alpha and Omega, he encapsulates all of creation. We are all, mysteriously, in him, and being so contained we are capable of being, in an equally mysterious sense, represented by him. By describing these affirmations as mysterious I mean to make explicit that their meaning resists being contained in a system of finite concepts – they do not allow us to fully comprehend them. While we may rely on their truth as guaranteed by Christian revelation, we acknowledge that we are using human words and spatial metaphors to speak of divine realities which surpass human experience and understanding.

However, it is important to admit, at this point, that our path of exploration seems to be running in a way which both Barth and Balthasar think to be false. That is, we have started with the problem of how forgiveness might be obtained, and, with Milbank, arrived at a decision as to what would be required (i.e. a sovereign victim). We have then presented Christ as satisfying these seemingly predetermined requirements. Yet according to Barth and Balthasar this sequence is artificial. It is only with the coming of Christ that the problem of sin becomes clear to us. And it is only in his accomplishment of divine forgiveness as the remedy of sin that we recognise the ultimate meaning of forgiveness and its demands. In other words, God’s designs are unknown to us until he reveals them in Christ. Our reply to this possible objection must return to the foundations of this chapter – the three aporias of forgiveness which we have borrowed from Milbank. By taking these as our starting point we do not mean to imply that these aporias arise from a pre-Christian mindset. On the contrary, as noted by Milbank himself, these aporias arise from the ‘post-Christian mind’, in which a residue of the
Christian Gospel is present, but its core features have been largely stripped away.\textsuperscript{90} The \textit{aporias}, perhaps, can be seen as arising from a worldview derived from Christianity but in which the Person of Christ is no longer a prominent feature. That is, they could probably not have been thought of without the influence of Christian thought on the one hand, and its demise on the other. Therefore, our sequence, far from being artificial, is actually meant to correspond to the sorts of concerns which are common in twenty-first century ‘post-Christian’ societies. The \textit{aporias} are the actual difficulties which, in our times, anyone exploring the nature of forgiveness might encounter.

\textbf{Maximum victimage}

We now turn again to Hans Urs von Balthasar as we attempt to understand more clearly our second question. What does it mean to say that Christ plumbed the depths of human suffering? In what follows we will draw in particular from his reflections on the mystery of Holy Saturday, the doctrine of Christ’s descent into hell. Balthasar’s writing on this doctrine offers perhaps the most distinctive contribution of all his theological work.\textsuperscript{91} While most theological treatments of the Paschal Mystery are, like the Scriptures themselves, relatively silent about the descent into hell, focusing much more on the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Balthasar sees Holy Saturday, the time in between, as the ‘turning point’ between the old creation and the new.\textsuperscript{92} He therefore chooses to devote a great deal of time and energy to exploring and reflecting upon the mystery of Christ’s descent.

Firstly, Balthasar is critical of much of the theological tradition that has grown up over the centuries to fill in the gaps left by Scripture surrounding the nature of the descent into hell. He strongly rejects the view of the descent as a triumphal conquest of the dark dungeons, in which Christ swoops down in a flash of blinding light, smashes open the gates, breaks the chains of the prisoners and leads them out of their captivity into the

\textsuperscript{90} Obviously this represents a vast generalisation, but it does express something of the secularising trend in western societies today.  
\textsuperscript{91} This contribution has become a matter of some debate. A systematic critique of Balthasar’s doctrine of Holy Saturday is advanced in Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, \textit{Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).  
glory of heaven. In fact, Balthasar thinks it is wrong to see the descent as a further action of Christ undertaken after his bitter suffering on the cross.93

Instead, Balthasar wants to take seriously the death of Christ as a true human death. For Balthasar it is misleading to think of death as an action, and as an experience alongside other human experiences. Rather, the death of Christ is the ceasing of his activity, the closing of his human experience. The descent, therefore, is not a case of Christ having certain tasks to perform in the underworld. As one commentator aptly puts it,

Holy Saturday . . . is not an additional mystery added to the Cross, but rather the latter’s “obverse.” It is the “underside” of the Cross, when Jesus’ experience of giving everything, which is distinctive of Good Friday, reaches its intrinsic fulfilment in the state of having given everything.94

The descent, therefore, is not an event that we can imagine as following on from the cross. It is not a movement that occurs subsequently. Rather, to take the position of Balthasar is to regard the descent as simply the prolongation of the moment of death. It is determined, conditioned, and indeed, can only be understood as in light of that death. Its desperate and miserable character is shown in the anguished cry of Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). Since this, for Balthasar, is the revelation of death, the descent of Jesus does not need to be given a narrative of its own. No further imagery is required.

Another aspect of what Balthasar wants to affirm is that in the experience of suffering and the state of death Jesus entered into solidarity with the human race. It was by plumbing the depths of human misery – being truly cut off from the land of the living, that Christ’s work of loving sacrifice on the cross was then capable of being applied to the rest of humanity.

If Jesus has suffered on the Cross the sin of the world to the very last truth of this sin-godforsakenness – then he must experience, in solidarity with sinners who have gone to the underworld, their – ultimately hopeless – separation from God, otherwise he would not have known all the phases and conditions of what it means for man to be unredeemed yet awaiting redemption.95

95 Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology* IV, 408.
This is to say that in order for the death of Christ to be representative of each and every human death it must be a real death, suffered in all its profundity as separation from God.  

Indeed, for Balthasar, Jesus is capable of reaching the very depths of the abyss, of bearing the very worst consequences of sin by virtue of his being the Son of God.

[T]he vicarious experience of being dead (in the biblical sense) had to be suffered, indeed could only be suffered, more deeply by the Son of God than by any other human being, because he possessed a unique experience of being connected with God the Father and therefore he had a much deeper access to the experience of being dead and forsaken (again, in the biblical sense) than was available to the creature.

By this qualification ‘in the biblical sense’, Balthasar is distancing himself from the Greek understanding of death in which the soul is said to live on after its separation from the body. By ‘the biblical sense,’ he is referring to the Old Testament notion of death understood as a true spiritual death in which the soul suffers separation from God, is irrevocably cut off from his goodness, and loses the ability to communicate with him in praise or supplication: “For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness.” (Isaiah 38:18). In this way, for Balthasar, Jesus forges a path to God via death. The irrevocable return to the Father brought to fruition in the resurrection is reached by way of the darkest depths of divine separation, which Jesus undergoes out of perfect obedience.

For Barth this great abyss of suffering, this second death, is the judgement of God on sin. For sin is not only the obstacle to be overcome in the reconciliation of the world with God, but is also the source of humanity’s movement towards death. The death ordained by God as the proper consequence of sin is not merely some “shadowy existence”, not a state of “unwelcome but tolerable neutrality”, but rather “an annihilatingly painful existence in opposition to [God].” As Barth puts it, Jesus fulfils this judgement on sin

... by taking our place as sinners . . . treading the way of sinners to its bitter end in death, in destruction, in the limitless anguish of separation from God, by delivering up sinful man and sin in His own person to the non-being which is properly theirs,
the non-being, the nothingness to which man has fallen victim as a sinner and towards which he relentlessly hastens.\textsuperscript{100}

As the Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus is able to represent us, not only as victims (as has already been discussed) but as sinners, and therefore as guilty. Innocent though he is, he takes to himself the whole guilt of humanity and suffers its divinely ordained consequences to the very end. “The man of sin, the first Adam, the cosmos alienated from God, the ‘present evil world’ (Gal 1:4), was taken and killed and buried in and with Him on the cross.”\textsuperscript{101} As sinners, we are put to death in him. Christ drew to himself all the sin and guilt of the world and allowed himself to be plunged into the abyss of eternal death, so that, along with himself, sin and guilt could be brought to nothing.

We have been exploring the question of how Jesus can be said to have suffered, as Milbank put it, the “maximum possible victimage.” In seeking to answer this question we now find ourselves affirming with Barth that Jesus has taken on our guilt, and therefore, has accepted to stand before God, in the place of each and every sinful human being, as the universal Offender. Normally the victim and the offender are separate individuals, but here, in Christ, Barth identifies a remarkable coincidence of the two. More precisely, Barth’s claim is that Jesus becomes the ultimate Victim by placing himself in the position of the Offender for us. Or again, as the innocent Son of God, the sinless one without spot or blemish, his taking the place of Offender for us renders him the ultimate Victim. As Offender, he is able to present himself before God as the guilty one on our behalf. As Victim, he forgives us on behalf of God. The wounds of death that remain etched into his resurrected flesh can therefore be interpreted two ways: as signs of death they indicate the guilt he took to himself, and in their glorified-resurrected state they reveal his innocent victimhood. He has undergone both the punishment of the guilty and the vindication of the just. It is to these glorified wounds that we will soon be turning our attention. At this point it is necessary to offer a few words of summary to conclude this third section of our preliminary discussion on forgiveness and to take up the threads from the previous two sections. That way we will be able to, as it were, orient ourselves towards the sacred text (John 20:19-29) of which we will be treating in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{100} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV.1, 253. This notion of ‘nothingness’ in the thought of Barth will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 254.
Conclusion
We began this section asking who has the authority to forgive. With Milbank we explored three possible responses, the victim, the sovereign authority, and God himself, and found each on its own to be unsatisfactory. This, however, did serve as a useful introduction to the Person of Jesus in whom we recognised the divine sovereign Victim. We then took on the task of exploring this sovereign victimhood and relating it to our question. For Milbank, Jesus has the authority to forgive because in his sovereignty he is able to suffer the maximum possible victimage and therefore to represent all victims. In order to explore this affirmation in more detail we turned to Barth and Balthasar. With their help we sought to better understand Jesus’ sovereignty and what could be meant by ‘maximum possible victimage.’

For Barth Jesus is the Creator-Reconciler. He reconciles by revealing himself as Creator and reveals himself as Creator by reconciling. As the Creator Jesus holds the authority to reconcile – to accomplish forgiveness and so make an unavoidable claim on us. Balthasar describes the same mystery in terms of the Alpha and the Omega. By coming in the fullness of time and showing himself to be the Omega, our final destiny, he reveals himself also as the true Alpha, our origin through whom all things were created and in whom all things have their being. Thus, there is no created sphere, no human sphere that is untouched by him.

On the question of Christ’s suffering and victimage we drew first from Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday. There the descent into hell is presented not as a triumphant rescue mission but as true death, the plunge into the abyss, and the misery of separation from God. In this death Jesus enters into a radical solidarity with sinful humanity. And as Barth pointed out, this involved Jesus actually taking our place as Offender, as the one in whom all the guilt of humanity was concentrated. By taking on our guilt and submitting to death Jesus has disposed of it. He has brought guilt and sin to nothing by taking them on himself and allowing himself to be brought to nothing, though without being annihilated. Thus, in our investigation into Christ’s victimhood we encountered him also as the offender and saw how the two radically depend on one another.
2. CHRISTOLOGY

Introduction

In chapter two we will discuss the themes of chapter one in relation to the Johannine account of Christ’s Easter appearance to the disciples “on the evening of the first day”. By engaging directly with the sacred text we will be able to develop our reflections in a very concrete and focused way. After beginning on a philosophical level, we have begun to establish an account of forgiveness centred on the person and mission of Christ, and therefore when we return to those themes in this chapter we will do so from an explicitly theological perspective. The questions from section one related to time, the impossibility of undoing past offences, and the call instead for a change of attitude towards the past wrong – these will be taken up in light of the risen-wounded Christ. We will see how this informs our understanding of time and eternity. Similarly, our affirmation from section two that reconciliation stands as the primary motive for forgiveness will be re-evaluated and re-interpreted in relation to Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance. We will see that woundedness of the risen Christ is an invitation to see his glory and to enter in to communion with him. In this way, his risen-wounded form is at the service of the reconciliation of sinners with God. Finally, our treatment of the authority and victimhood of Christ in section three will be developed in chapter two when we ask how, as the innocent one, Jesus is able to accomplish the forgiveness of all sins by bearing the sins of the world. This will lead to a reflection on the priesthood of Christ, manifested as it is in his risen-wounded form, and on creaturely participation in his priesthood.

In this way, the structure we followed in our first chapter will be an important influence for how we engage with the christological questions of chapter two. It will provide continuity with the territory already covered, as well as ensuring a focused approach that avoids becoming disordered or over-generalised, and it will enable us to build a coherent theological structure. We will see an interplay between the questions and concerns carried over from chapter one and the Gospel text (John 20:19-23) which forms the basis for chapter two. Thus we can approach our scriptural text in an ordered manner, with these related concepts, questions, qualities and distinctions ready at hand and the findings of our literature review at our disposal.
2.1. ETERNAL WOUNDS

Introduction

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (John 20: 19-20).

The time has come now to engage with this scripture from John which lies at the very centre of this investigation into the mystery of forgiveness. Out of the plenitude of meaningful and significant signs involved here we want to fix our gaze on the wounds, just as Jesus invited the disciples to do on the evening of that first day. That he “came and stood among them” in spite of the doors being shut suggests a different mode of existence from the days of his earthly life. But that “he showed them his hands and his side” indicates a profound and very unexpected continuity between this present joy and the dark events of Good Friday. It is profound because it recalls the final event of Jesus’ earthly mission, the very thing that he foretold would take place, and ‘had to’ take place. It is unexpected because the juxtaposition of glorious flesh and wounded flesh is something that could never have been humanly imagined. The resurrection of Jesus is itself, of course, unexpected, but the wounds are a surprise on top of a surprise. It is one thing to be confronted by one who has come back to life, but in this living man the disciples behold the enduring marks of death. “I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1:18).

Raymond Brown asserts that John’s emphasis on the wounds in 20:20 is primarily to “establish a continuity between the resurrection and the crucifixion. The risen Jesus who stands before his disciples is the Jesus who died on the cross, and now they are to receive the fruits of his having been lifted up.”102 Rudolf Bultmann agrees that the showing of the wounds shows that “the Risen Lord and the crucified are one.”103 The same is echoed by Rudolf Schnackenburg: “The recognition of Jesus is, for the primitive Church, a means of expressing the deeply significant fact that the same Jesus encounters the disciples as the one with whom they lived before his passion.”104 Thus, we see an agreement among some of the big names in modern New Testament

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scholarship on this fundamental point. As features of the risen Christ, the wounds are an unmistakable sign of the continuity between the events of the death and the resurrection – that the one who suffered the defeat of the crucifixion is the same one who rose victorious. Part of our task here will be to discover the theological implications of this very basic affirmation.

While John Calvin insisted that the wounds only remained long enough for Jesus to convince the disciples of his true identity, the predominant view throughout the Christian tradition is that the wounds are permanent features of Jesus’ resurrected body, that he bears them eternally. Aquinas attributes to Augustine the view that “our Lord's body [exists] in heaven, such as it was when he ascended into heaven”, and Pope Gregory I argued that “if then there was aught in the Body which was capable of being altered after His resurrection, contrary to the truly spoken declaration of Paul, the Lord after His resurrection returned into death; and what fool even would venture to say this, save he that denies the true resurrection of His flesh?” On account of his wounds Jesus will always be the one who died. In him there is a real coming together of time and eternity. In real historical time he appeared amongst his disciples as the eternal one, and in eternity he bears the marks of that being-towards-death which is temporal life.

It is this coming together in Jesus Christ of time and eternity, temporal life and eternal life, that we wish to explore further in this section. As our starting point we will take elements of Barth’s trinitarian account of eternity and his incarnational account of the eternity-time relation. Aided by Balthasar and other writers including David L. Schindler and St. Therese of Lisieux we will critically engage with Barth and strive to come to an articulation which expounds the meaning of the wounds in a way which is faithful to their scriptural origins and illuminates their significance for the coming together of time and eternity.

**Nunc stans and a threefold eternity**

In the Christian west, God’s eternity has been traditionally described as a *nunc stans* - an eternal now excluding before and after, beginning and end. 108 Barth, however, in rooting his notion of eternity in the doctrine of the Trinity and the scriptural testimony, is emphatic that eternity does not exclude beginning, middle and end. It has these distinctions, he says, but without the separations that are characteristic of creaturely time. God’s eternity is pure duration in which beginning, middle and end are simultaneous. 109 In his ‘now’ there is not the fleetingness that belongs to time, his ‘before’ excludes the ‘not yet’ that belongs to our ‘before’, and his ‘after’ excludes the ‘no longer’ that is a mark of our ‘after’. At first sight, this way of characterising eternity invites an obvious objection. To say that beginning, middle and end are simultaneous seems to amount to a contradiction, for these terms necessarily imply a chronological series of first, last and in-between. By speaking of beginning, middle and end, Barth seems to be departing from the tradition, but in qualifying these three as simultaneous he collapses the three into one and shows that what he actually means is the traditional *nunc stans* and nothing more.

However, as Hunsinger points out, this seeming contradiction is a sincere attempt to express eternity in a manner that is faithful to the mystery of God. Just as there is no way of faithfully capturing “in a single, and unified thought” the threeness and oneness of the Trinity, the notion of eternity must be described in a dialectical form. 110 Just as God is one Being, in which three distinct and co-equal Persons are perfectly united in one divine Life, so eternity is pure duration, in which beginning, middle and end are not three separate occasions but perfectly united in one simultaneous eternal moment.

“My times are in thy hands” (Ps 31:15), says the Psalmist, and this surely means, says Barth, that eternity must be something capable of encapsulating time. God’s works are, after all, temporal. As the eternal One God gives us time, accompanies us, makes himself present to us, and rules over our time, whilst remaining eternal. This would be impossible if his eternity were merely a negation of time and not its supreme source and

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108 The phrase ‘*nunc stans*’ can be traced at least as far back as Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which appeared around 521 AD.


Thus Barth wishes to offer a positive definition of eternity rather than a purely negative description of eternity as the opposite of time, for he believes it to be the only way to allow for the real action of God in human history. For this reason Barth has a great respect for the positive definition of Boethius: *Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio.* Eternity is the total, perfect and simultaneous possession of interminable life. Barth observes that while this definition has been often quoted, it has never been duly exploited, not even by Boethius himself. He argues that the traditional negative approach to the eternity-time distinction which characterises them respectively as *nunc stans* (the standing ‘now’) and *nunc fluere* (the flowing ‘now’) does not do justice to the notion of eternity as God’s life, possessed in all its totality, simultaneity and perfection. What God’s life excludes is not *fluere* but the dividedness, non-simultaneity and imperfection which characterise creaturely life. The *nunc stans* of God, says Barth, does not exclude past, present and future, nor the notion of *fluere*, but takes all these up into itself so that there is no separation between them as there is in creaturely time. Therefore eternity, he says, is a readiness for time – a readiness to be the origin of time, to accompany time and to be its fulfilment, completion and end. Eternity is the prototype and foreordination of time.

Similarly, Balthasar proposes that we understand stillness and rest in God not as a lack of motion but as the eternal motion of the trinitarian relations. According to Balthasar, the begetting of the Son by the Father, and the proceeding of the Spirit from them both “refer to eternal acts in which God genuinely ‘takes place’.” Thus, the superabundant vitality of the Trinity “is not eternally the same, in a sense which would imply a kind of everlasting boredom.” Rather, it is constantly and perfectly renewing itself. The Father is forever beheld by the Son in a new way, while the Son is forever surpassing the Father’s wildest expectations. Despite his omniscience God constantly allows

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111 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 612.
112 Ibid., 610.
113 Ibid., 611.
114 Ibid.
himself “to be surpassed and surprised by the Beloved.”  

To be sure, the difference between uncreated and created life and love cannot be overstated. This eternal event of the Trinity of which we have been speaking is not a becoming in the earthly sense. It is not the coming-to-be of something which previously was not, but “of something that grounds the idea, the inner possibility of reality as a becoming.” In what follows we shall explore in more depth what this correspondence between divine eternity and earthly time means. In particular we are interested in how eternity can be said to admit of beginning, middle and end, and it is this claim of Barth that will provide the structure for our exploration.

**Pre-temporal eternity**

In order to expound upon what is meant by the past or the ‘before’ of eternity, Barth affirms that God is “pre-temporal”. This is to say that he exists as the Eternal One before the beginning of time. He is in the beginning before all beginnings, and in that eternal beginning he is his full self, “no less perfect, not subject to any lack, super-abounding from the very first even without us and the world.” We may ask whether it makes sense to talk of pre-temporal eternity. Do not ‘pre’ and ‘before’ denote a moment within the order of created time? Augustine introduces an important and relevant distinction when, addressing God, he says, “although you are before time, it is not in time that you precede it.” And while he does not explicitly propose a threefold vision of eternity as Barth does, he nevertheless offers a vision of eternity enfolding time, and standing as its supreme source and ultimate goal. “It is in eternity, which is supreme over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time.”

In his discussion of pre-temporality Barth is at pains to stress that God does not need the world in order to be God. Rather, his decision to create is perfectly free and without necessity. Here Barth is directly opposing the position of Hegel and some of his

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118 Schindler, “Time in eternity, eternity in time”, 58.
120 Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.1*, 621.
121 Augustine, *Confessions*, 263.
theological followers who affirmed the immanence of God in the world at the cost of his utter transcendence and independence from creation. Rather, before ever the world began, God “was no less Himself, no less perfect, not subject to any lack, superabounding from the very first even without us and the world.”122 God is perfectly free in regards to us, his creation. Our creation and election in Christ is a matter of pure gratuity. Without acknowledging this pre-existence of God, says Barth, we completely misunderstand him “in His divinity, in His holiness and righteousness and wisdom, and also in His omnipotence.”123

In this eternal pre-time, says Barth, all time and everything in time was decided and determined, from the creation to the redemption and the final goal of salvation for all who believe in Christ.

And in this pure divine time there took place the appointment of the eternal Son for the temporal world, there occurred the readiness of the Son to do the will of the eternal Father, and there ruled the peace of the eternal Spirit – the very thing later revealed at the heart of created time in Jesus Christ.124 Here we see God’s pre-temporal eternity given its trinitarian expression. It is God being himself eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the beginning before the creation of the world.

Barth also wishes to show that the truth of God’s pre-temporality must be established with reference to Christology. “To say that everything is predestined, that everything comes from God's free, eternal love which penetrates and rules time from eternity, is just the same as to say simply that everything is determined in Jesus Christ.”125 Barth cites several passages from Scripture to support this: the affirmation of Christ himself that “before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58) and passages from 1 Peter and Ephesians in which “before the foundation of the world,” Christ was “destined” to be our ransom (1 Pet 1:18-20) and we were “chosen” in him and “destined” to be sons of God through him (Eph 1:4-6).

In this turning to the world, and with it to a time distinct from His eternity, this God, Yahweh Sabaoth, is identical with Jesus Christ. If we understand eternity as pre-time

122 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 621.
123 Ibid., 622.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
and we must understand it in this way too – we have to recognise that eternity itself bears the name of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{126}

This is to say that there is no eternity ‘before’ or without God having ordained to come among us as man. This is not an intention that is introduced into the mind of God but is what, in his freedom, he has chosen from all eternity.\textsuperscript{127}

Supra-temporal eternity

This brings us to consider the “middle” of eternity in which God accompanies time in its unfolding. Barth sums up this “supra-temporality” of God as “the divine life which bears time”\textsuperscript{128} and which, he says, finds its most accurate description in the angelic chorus: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). This joyous song affirms that God is to receive glory and his favoured people on earth are to know peace. What is the basis for this state of affairs? It is that God is in the highest, over and above all things. This supra-temporal stance, eternity over time, in time and with time, is what guarantees the security and happiness of the things of earth. Furthermore, it is fitting that this joyous song is rung out on the night when God comes to dwell amongst his own in a new way. Indeed, it is at the incarnation that God’s presence in time, his super-temporality, is revealed.

The union of time and eternity achieved in the incarnation is expressed very vividly by Barth. “The fact that the Word became flesh”, he says, “undoubtedly means that, without ceasing to be eternity, in its very power as eternity, eternity became time.”\textsuperscript{129}

There is in eternity, therefore, not just a readiness for time, but an actual, historical entry into time. In Jesus Christ eternity has entered time without ceasing to be eternity. This is another way of saying that, in Christ, God has become man without ceasing to be God. Christ has made himself “present for us in the form of our own existence and our own world,” not just standing over time and encompassing it but actually “submitting Himself to it, and permitting created time to become and be the form of His eternity.”\textsuperscript{130} His presence in time also permits of the complex web of relations of tense that characterise human reality. His coming has a ‘before’ and an ‘after’, it moves from

\textsuperscript{126} Barth, Church Dogmatics II.1, 622.
\textsuperscript{128} Barth, Church Dogmatics II.1, 623.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 616.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 616.
the ‘not yet’ of waiting and anticipation to the ‘no more’ of remembrance. Though even in the ‘not yet’, says Barth, its pre-figuration in the exodus from Egypt made it an object of remembrance. Similarly, even in the ‘no more’ it remains a matter of expectation in view of the final return of Jesus.\footnote{Ibid., 617.}

In order to further expound upon the significance of the incarnation for our understanding of time Barth draws from St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. With Christ, St. Paul commends himself “in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Cor 6:8-10). What is of utmost importance here for Barth is that these words of St. Paul are understood in light of the victory of Christ. The pairs of opposites that fill this passage are by no means pairs of equals. Dishonour, falsity, ignorance, death, punishment, sorrow, poverty and destitution – these are the things that are passing away. On the other hand, honour, truth, knowledge, life, joy, riches and plenitude are the things that will increase and endure. That St. Paul experiences them all at once is because he stands, like us, in the turning between what was and what is to come.

It is in the incarnation that time receives this centre. It is when God takes time to himself and makes himself subject to it that he brings about this turning point between evil and good. He makes sin a thing of the past, so that even future sins belong to the definitive ‘before’ and past blessings belong to the definitive ‘after’. For Barth this has several ramifications. There is no need, he says, to mourn over what once was but is no longer because nothing of God’s goodness is ever truly lost. “Forget not all his benefits”, says the psalmist, “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (Ps 103:2-4). These past blessings are not to be forgotten because they have been secured for us in the future. On the other hand we are to join St. Paul in “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13). Just as the past holds no regret, so the future holds no fear. The evil that may await us in the
future has lost its sting, for all sin and evil has been brought to nothing in and by Christ. Thus, time, which in itself was subject to fragmentation, decline and ultimate loss, is now united irrevocably with eternity, its true origin, its deepest meaning, and its rightful end.

For T. S. Eliot, to discover this entrance of time into eternity means to discover “a lifetime burning in every moment”. This intersection of the timeless moment, reflects Schindler, can only be perceived through humility and prayer, and through a stillness that is still-moving, through an ever-deepening intensity of communion. The meaning of life is found, not by moving outside of the moment, but by ‘burning into’ the moment. And yet, as one ‘burns into’ the moment, one will find that that moment (of time) becomes ever stranger, that its ‘here and now’ increasingly ceases to matter: but never in the sense that the moment becomes an occasion to which one is now simply indifferent.132

This ‘burning into’ the moment is first of all a receptivity to God, a waking up to the fact that my life is not something I am simply in possession of but is rather something I am constantly receiving. Indeed, to be the Son is to be in a relation of receiving everything from the Father. That our time is drawn up into eternity means that we have been adopted as children of God in the Son. It means that we can now enter consciously and willingly into his relation of radical receptivity to the Father. This receptivity is at the same time, paradoxically, intensely active. It is by its nature a complete offering back of self, of all that has been received. Just as the Father generates the Son and so makes him Son, so the Son, by actively receiving, enables the Father to be Father. The receptivity of the Son comes to its completion in his passion, where he allows the Father’s will to be done in him: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt 26:39).

This is what gives his activity its form. . . . Receptivity is thereby revealed to be intrinsically ordered to the most intense activity: it leads to a death within which – and within which alone – arises the fullness of life. Jesus’ life is a suffering of eternity into time, so that time might transcend itself into eternity, and might thereby be redeemed.133

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133 Ibid., 64.
Post-temporal eternity

Finally, we have the ‘end’ of eternity which Barth names God’s post-temporality. That God is post-temporal means that eternity, as well as being the origin of all origins and the ‘now’ supporting and enfolding every ‘now’, is the also the end, goal, and destiny to which all time tends. It is the absolute ‘after’ of all time. It is God’s Sabbath rest, and it is the rest and perfection of all creatures. “For then creation itself, the world as a reality distinct from God, will be no more in its present condition”.\(^{134}\) To turn away from this goal is to turn towards nothingness, to choose what Barth termed an “impossible possibility”.\(^{135}\) All roads lead to eternity, for inasmuch as a road leads away from eternity it leads to nothingness and therefore ceases to be a road, to be anything at all.\(^{136}\) Post-temporality concerns the final judgement of all things, eternal life and eternal death, and the revelation of the Kingdom of God, where faith gives way to sight, and where God will be “all in all”, “everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). What is now veiled will be revealed. Of course, God is already all in all, his kingdom is among us now, but we await for its clear revelation and manifestation.\(^{137}\)

This end and final consummation of all things in Christ is foreseen in God’s pre-temporality and stands as the horizon of his supra-temporality. We see it remarkably anticipated in the death-bed aspiration of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, “I wish to spend my heaven doing good on earth.” She rests confident that this desire is perfectly appropriate given that “the angels who enjoy the beatific vision watch over us”. She is convinced that those who enjoy the vision of God are nevertheless able to accompany the characters and events of human history, and to ‘do good’. Her wish carries the strong assumption that supra-temporality and post-temporality are simultaneous.

“For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36). This verse is a summary of all that has been said so far – God’s pre, supra and post-temporality are each eternal and are each of equal importance for our consideration. None of the three, warns Barth, ought to be emphasised to the detriment of the others, or we give way to

\(^{134}\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 629.
\(^{136}\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 629.
\(^{137}\) Ibid., 630.
errors and omissions. We will need to consider now how Barth’s notion of eternity might enrich our understanding of the risen-wounded Christ and the mystery of forgiveness. As we discussed above, by his dying and rising, Christ has brought sin and death to nothing. Yet we seem to have an exception to this in Christ himself, inasmuch as the very signs of sin and death remain etched into his flesh. That which he has relegated definitively to the status of ‘passing away’ is what he bears within himself in eternity. Thus, the wounds that were inflicted in time, in a few fleeting moments, and suffered for a matter of hours, are carried over into heaven. They become eternal wounds, eternal signs of that “death he died, once for all” (Rom 6:10). This means that Jesus will forever be the one who carried the guilt of human sinfulness and the righteous one who pleads before the Father on our behalf, who “always lives to make intercession for [us]” (Heb 7:25).

Indeed, to employ the language of Barth, we can argue that forgiveness has its pre-temporal, supra-temporal and post-temporal eternity in Jesus Christ. It is eternal in God’s loving plan of salvation, conceived before the foundation of the world. It is eternal in God’s intimacy with creation, especially in the incarnation, in which eternity enters time and time enters eternity, and the temporal events of Christ’s life and death are thereby imbued with eternal significance and eternal consequences. Finally, since the wounds of his death are indelible features of his ascended body, forgiveness is eternal in the consummation of all things in Christ.

The risen-wounded Christ
Let us expand each of these affirmations in order to express a more detailed account of the risen-wounded Christ in relation to pre, supra and post-temporal eternity. Firstly, the wounds are inflicted in time and therefore reveal something about the way in which God in his supra-temporal eternity accompanies and stands over time. He does so not as a distant ‘other’, but as the Other whose transcendence enables a radical immanence. In particular, that he is, in his divinity, beyond suffering and death, means that he is able to enter truly into the depths of suffering and death and to allow suffering and death to make a permanent impression upon him. Mortal wounds signify what is most tragic in fallen human existence – that life can be rendered miserable by suffering, and must be cut off by means of a final defeat. But in Jesus God has transformed this sign from
within. He has given woundedness a new significance, not in some abstract way, but by raising Jesus from death and transforming the wounds into wounds of glory. This transformation sheds new light on what went before. The crucifixion is not primarily a gesture of misery and a stance of defeat. Rather, the gesture of outstretched arms nailed to the wood is now recognised as an all-embracing gesture of forgiving love. The head bowed in death is rediscovered as the moment of victory when the work of salvation is “finished” (John 19:30).

Christ’s risen-wounded form also exposes the way in which God has committed himself to us from the very beginning. In his pre-temporal eternity he chose us and chose to be for us. The precise form this pre-temporal commitment will take is anticipated by Jesus at the last supper, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). The wounds are the openings in Jesus’ body through which his blood is to be poured out for us. Therefore they signify the particular manner in which Jesus, before the world began, chose to be for us – as the one who forgives a new covenant by the shedding his blood. And so while Jesus’ wounded flesh is clearly not an explicit feature of pre-temporal eternity, we can at least affirm that the wounds are implied and anticipated in God’s pre-temporal commitment to be for us.

Finally the wounds are to be a prominent feature of God’s post-temporal eternity. Jesus Christ bears the wounds forever. When all things are brought to completion in him, when “all tears will be wiped away” (Rev 21:4), his wounds will not be wiped away. They remain as prominent features of his humanity. In the wounds something genuinely new has taken place. The ‘once and for all’ event of the cross has eternal consequences, not just for humanity but also, in a qualified sense, for the person of Christ. In accepting the wounds he has allowed something to happen to himself which is in perfect accord with who he is and what he wills from all eternity. By the wounds he is forever changed, yet he nevertheless remains who he is. Inseparably united with wounded flesh, he is not more or less divine, but divine in a new way.

**Conclusion**

This means that in God’s post-temporality, when all creation is made new and brought to perfection in Christ, he, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), will forever stand
as one wounded. Glorious flesh will bear the signs of injury; blessed humanity will exhibit the marks of the curse. It is to this 'paradox' of the glorious wounds, identified in relation to post-temporal eternity, that we will take up in more detail in section two of this chapter.
2.2. GLORIOUS WOUNDS

Introduction

In chapter one our three sections were arranged according to a triadic structure of time, motive, person, corresponding to the questions ‘when?’, ‘why?’ and ‘who?’ At that time we were asking certain preliminary questions relating to some of the difficulties that tend to arise when one tries to come to grips with the notion of forgiveness. In this second chapter we have begun to explore the significance of Christ’s glorified wounds. Having dwelt on the mystery of time and eternity in section one, we now turn to the notion of glory which is so important for appreciating the paschal mystery as a whole and Christ’s risen-wounded form in particular. We position our discussion of glory here in the second section as a response to the question of motive. Why does the risen Jesus still bear the five wounds of his crucifixion? The New Testament does not explicitly raise this question, but it is clear from the post-resurrection appearances in Luke and John that the wounds are there, not to remain hidden, but to be shown (Luke 24:39, John 20:20). In short, the wounds are glorious because they ‘show forth’. We will now be asking what it is that they show forth, how they show it, and to what end. The three parts of this section deal with distinct but overlapping themes and each begins by highlighting one perplexing aspect of the glorious wounds.

The wounds

‘Stigmata’ are incisions made by a sharp instrument. In the ancient world stigmata marked the slave, the criminal, the warrior, the member of a tribe or religious cult. However, unlike ordinary stigmata it is important to note that the post-resurrection wounds of Christ are not scars, but holes; not scar tissue but flesh that is opened up. To say that the wounds are strange and perplexing is to understate the matter. They are not merely unusual. They are completely singular, and so they stand beyond any of the concepts of human experience that we might use to name them. They are wounds, but not like any other wounds. They are stigmata, but are distinguished from any incisions that human flesh has ever borne before.

\[138\] Luke 24:39: “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself”, and John 20:20: “he showed them his hands and his side”.
This means that when we refer to them we are forced to use language analogically. They are wounds, yes, but the difference between them and ordinary wounds is perhaps greater than the similarity. And, on the other hand, even while we emphasise the enormous difference we acknowledge the real and intimate relation that exists between these wounds and ordinary human wounds. We indicate this paradox by the qualification that has become customary, namely, the ‘glorious’ wounds. At face value this qualification stands in opposition to the concept it qualifies. Wounds as we know them are more readily associated with infection, disgrace and humiliation. A wound is not a locus of glory. But Christ’s wounds are different. The difference does not lie in the manner in which they were caused. Here, rather is the point of similarity between ordinary wounds and the wounds of Christ. The point of difference lies in what happens to them next. It is normal for wounds to heal, or else to fester and deteriorate. And in the resurrection of Christ’s flesh the wounds are certainly changed, but it is not the sort of change we might have expected (even if we had the insight to anticipate the resurrection). Time has not healed them, that much is clear. It might be more accurate to say that they have been transformed in order to participate in eternity. In this section we will be seeking to describe and understand this transformation theologically.

To begin with we might express it in this paradoxical way. The wounds are transformed by staying the same, by remaining what they are, and therefore, remaining open. In the resurrection of Christ’s flesh the past crucifixion is ‘remembered’ in all its clarity, for the wounds of Good Friday are still fresh. In this way they fulfil the name more perfectly than ordinary wounds. They are the true wounds to which all other wounds are fleeting imitations, insofar as ordinary wounds heal and close up and so cease to be wounds. This healing is a necessity in order for earthly life to continue, especially for wounds of this magnitude. Christ’s wounds are in fact mortal wounds. And yet the one who has risen from the dead still bears the wounds of death while remaining fully alive. “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor 15:55). In the risen Jesus, mortally wounded humanity is animated by the life of God. The transformation we are speaking of here is, therefore, a paradoxical one. It is the transformation from a state of passing away to a state of remaining; from a finite earthly life to the infinite life of God. For Balthasar the life of the Trinity is characterised by both dynamism and rest.
For God, rest is the perfection of activity, and dynamism is the perfection of rest. So the wounds of Christ show themselves to be transformed by remaining the same, and remain the same by a transformation from fleeting temporal wounds to abiding eternal wounds.

What does this remaining-the-same bring about? What does it actually accomplish? In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, St. Bonaventure offers seven reasons why the wounds remained in Christ’s flesh after the resurrection.

First, to build up faith in his resurrection. Second, so that he might always show to the Father when he makes intercession for us what type of death he endured. Third, so that he might teach those redeemed by his death how mercifully they have been aided by these very indications of his death. [Fourth], so that in the judgement he might declare how rightly the impious are damned. . . . Revelation 1:7 reads: “Every eye will see him, and they also who pierced him.” [Fifth] . . . to inflame our frigid affections, as Ambrose says. “In his body he not only strengthens faith, but also enkindles love. For he preferred to enter heaven bearing the wounds received for our sakes. He did not rub them out, so that he might show to God the Father the price of our liberation.” And a sixth reason is that they are the sign of victory. Thus Bede observes: “He did not preserve the wounds out of powerlessness, but in order to carry out the triumph of his everlasting victory.” Seventh, his wounds are a special indication of his love. Thus, Isaiah 49:16 reads: “I have carved you on my hands.” And the Song of Songs 8:6 has: “Put me as a seal upon your heart.”

Of the seven reasons named above, we can observe that two are about evoking in us the gift of faith and a renewed love, three are primarily a teaching on the divine perfections of mercy, justice, and love, and two are about recalling the event of salvation itself, namely, the type of death Jesus endured, and the victory over death that he gained. While this does not claim to be an exhaustive list – such a list is in principle infinite given the utter fittingness of the divine plan of salvation, we are nevertheless able to identify these three distinct threads, three kinds of reasons why the wounds remained after the resurrection. They are there to evoke in us a firm faith and ardent love, to teach us about God, and to recall the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

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141 This is undoubtedly not the only possible grouping of the seven reasons, but it will be a helpful way of directing our attention towards the wounds and their manifold significance.
Taking up our first thread we affirm that the wounded flesh of Christ brings about in us a response in excess of our natural powers. That is, it enables us to transcend ourselves, to make an ecstatic movement out of ourselves towards a good beyond any of the goods for which we were previously able to aim. Survival, pleasure, wealth, honour, and even happiness (finitely construed) are all surpassed by the marred yet radiant humanity of Jesus. “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). This disfigured yet perfect body is our new joy, goal, and destiny, but it can only be recognised as such by the gift of (loving) faith and (faithful) love which it evokes in us. By this gift human life is raised to a new level. In light of this new orientation all the lesser goods that constituted the goal of human life before are given new significances in relation to the risen-wounded Christ.

The good of survival is given a relative place within an attitude of self-offering, expressed by St. Paul, who is confident that “with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil 1:20). Pleasure and wealth are also made relative to a christological freedom and agency that are not limited by earthly resources: “I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:12-13). Worldly honour is transcended and replaced by a glory that again is understood only with reference to Christ and the glory of his crucifixion wounds: “far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). And finally, the ultimate human good of happiness is given new content, and insofar as it was deemed finite and imaginable, is now radically surpassed by something boundless and beyond all earthly knowledge: “we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

It is as a consequence of this ecstatic movement that the second thread comes to fruition. Having been drawn to the person of Jesus and having been oriented to his risen-wounded flesh as our true end, as the destiny that awaits us, we discover him also as Teacher and as Truth. In this school, which we have entered by faith and in which we remain through love, Christ teaches us, by his risen-wounded humanity, what it means to say that God is mercy, that God is justice, that God is love. And so the ecstatic movement we spoke of above leads to a movement of assimilation. Having gone out
from ourselves we now return to ourselves, informed by this truth and conformed to it. “He showed them his hands and his side” (John 20:20). Here our intelligence must accept to be informed about the loftiest and most sublime truths of God through the humble testimony of the senses. Indeed, even after all the most eloquent and penetrating theological reflection on what has been revealed in Jesus’ glorified humanity, our most direct contact with the truth of God is still in the remembrance of his tangible appearance, in that which “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1). We can even venture to say that in being known through the senses, in succeeding in making God known to us in this way, Jesus’ sacred humanity is further realised and brought to perfection, since the purpose of his coming into the world was “to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).

Finally we come to the third thread identified above. The wounds are there to recall the events of the cross and resurrection – the death and the victory. We have already noted that the wounded flesh of Jesus indicates a profound integrity - the one who rose on Sunday is none other than the one who was crucified on Friday. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples is therefore a manifestation of this integrity, a manifestation of truth which informs the minds of the disciples and of goodness which enkindles in them a new desire to orient their lives towards this one who is wounded yet glorious. But further to this, the integrity of the death and resurrection is recognised as something beautiful, as something worthy of wonder and contemplation, as something fundamentally attractive.\textsuperscript{142} We hear it from the lips of Jesus himself, speaking simultaneously of his death and resurrection: “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32). This beautiful form is then, in a certain way, imprinted on the life of the Christian, as St. Paul describes: “[we are] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:10).\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{142} Barth, Church Dogmatics, II.1, 655.
\textsuperscript{143} See also Rom 6:4-5, Phil 3:10, Col 2:12, 3:1.
Windows and doors
When Jesus presents himself to Thomas we are given a further detail regarding the wounds. In these holes the interior is accessible from the outside: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side” (John 20:27). What is on the inside, the bodily interior of Jesus, is now accessible from the outside. They are like windows and doors which enable communication between what is internal to Jesus’ body and the exterior world, and this communication is able to occur in both directions. Indeed, the wounds provide two kinds of access, expressed in two distinct invitations that Jesus offers to Thomas. First he says, “see my hands”, and by this he presents his wounds as ‘windows’ through which Thomas is able to peer in, as it were, and thus to see inside while standing on the outside. The wounds communicate the interior to the exterior. Secondly Jesus says, “put out your hand, and place it in my side”, and by this he presents his wounds as ‘doors’ through which Thomas is invited to ‘enter in’, to place his hand into the side of Jesus and thus to move from the exterior to the interior. In summary we can say that the wounds show forth something and they draw us into something. But what is it that they show and where do they lead?

For Balthasar glory means God manifesting himself and communicating the truth of who he is in a way that is beautiful. The various forms that this beauty takes can to a certain degree be grasped by human intelligence, measured with human instruments, and expressed in human language. However, the fact that the form is beautiful necessarily implies, for Balthasar, that it manifests and directs us to something that cannot be captured by our understanding, harnessed by our machines of scientific analysis, or encapsulated in our limited vocabulary. Indeed, the delight which the beautiful form arouses in us is based on the fact that the form manifests and mysteriously contains the truth and goodness of the depths of reality. It is in this way that the gracefulness and dignity of the body manifests the soul, and in a yet more concealed manner, that God is manifested in the creation and the redemption of the world. For this reason Balthasar speaks of the manifestation of glory in terms of ‘the form’ and ‘the depths’.

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144 We are not told that Thomas did, in fact, touch the Lord’s wounds. Our reflections here concern the invitation itself and the possibility that it presents.

The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths. More precisely, God shows himself to human beings through the form of Jesus, his incarnate Son. Jesus both contains the depths, the divinity of God, and points beyond himself to the depths, to the person of God the Father.

For Balthasar the form itself and the pointing beyond itself are not to be separated, but comprise a unity. That is, there is a unity between the form and the depths to which it points. Our contemplation of these ‘depths’ enraptures and transports us, but never in a way that is divorced from the form which gave access to the depths in the first place. Jesus leads us to the Father but not in such a way that would make Jesus distant or superfluous once we have been so led. For what is creation, reconciliation, and redemption effected by the triune God if not his revelation in and to the world and man? Not a deed that would leave its doer in the background unknown and untouched, but a genuine self-representation on his part, a genuine unfolding of himself in the worldly stuff of nature, man and history – an event which in a supereminent sense may be called an ‘appearance’ or ‘epiphany’. To further elucidate this Balthasar draws our attention to a liturgical text – the preface for the feast of Christmas which is given in the Latin: Quia per incarnate Verbi mysterium nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur. The translator renders this in English as: “Because through the mystery of the incarnate Word the new light of your brightness has shone into the eyes of our mind; that knowing God visibly, we might be snatched up by this into the love of invisible things.”

Balthasar observes that while this text makes no explicit reference to faith it implies faith in two ways. Firstly, the ‘new light’ cast into our minds by the incarnation of the Son, and, secondly, the notion of being ‘snatched up’ by the visible into the invisible. That is, for the first part faith is the opening of our minds to the words, deeds, and person of Jesus. It is receptivity to the truth of his words, rejoicing at the goodness of his deeds, and ultimately allowing oneself to be ‘imprinted’ with his form. Secondly,
though simultaneously, faith means being drawn from the visible manifestation of Jesus into the relation that exists between him and the (invisible) Father who makes himself visible in his Son. By knowing God visibly in Christ we are caught up into love of the Father whom we cannot see.

This two-sided account of glory given to us by Balthasar enables us to formulate the beginnings of an answer to the question regarding the union of interior and exterior that takes place in Christ’s risen-wounded flesh. We asked how the wounds act as both windows and doors – what do the wounds show forth and to where do they lead? Firstly it is clear that the wounds show forth the form of the one who bears them. They are not merely cosmetic but are intrinsic signs of who he most deeply is. “I am the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1:18). In Jesus a profound integrity exists between temporal death and eternal life. This is perhaps most directly what the wounds express in bodily form and gesture. And this integrity has an order. Death, which is always for us a negation, is actually incorporated into Christ’s character. It is given a place, a role, a purpose. Death provides the window through which we can see into the depths of God. Like death, a hole in a wall is simply a negation. But in Christ the hole becomes the window. The gaping hole becomes intrinsic to the actual structure as if it had been part of the plan from the beginning. It is as if from out in the darkness we had laid siege to Christ’s body and violently penetrated through his flesh only to be blinded by a stream of light issuing from within. In this way, the prophecy of Zechariah is fulfilled: “they shall look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19:37, cf. Zech 12:10). It is the glory of Christ’s form, exposed in this way, which casts a new light into the world, a light that exposes the darkness just as it brings the promise of coming day.

And yet in this light the form of Christ remains somewhat shrouded, and its significance still resists any comprehensive evaluation. We remain perplexed by the one who comes to us as God and man. When we sought to reduce the form to something wholly within our grasp then we took the form prisoner and we crucified him. But God raised him from the dead, displaying to us by the marks in his very flesh

151 The entire verse from Zechariah reads: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.”
the foolishness of our conduct, by which we have rendered this form even more mysterious, more significant, and more perplexing.

The wounds, however, do not just serve in this way. Windows provide openings for the communication of light, but they are not the sort of openings that would easily enable one on the outside to enter in. This is why we also describe the wounds as doors - doors which lead beyond created reality to the very depths of reality, to the one in whose eternal and unfathomable image the human form was made. As Balthasar argues,

It is essential, therefore, that [Christ’s] wounds feature in his Resurrection . . . because it is through his opened body . . . and the infinite distribution of his flesh and shedding of his blood that men can henceforth share in the substantial infinitude of his Divine Person. 152

While these wounds are signs that point to death, at the same time they signify that the way to eternal life has been opened up for us. Humanity has access to heaven, to fellowship with God himself, for the only way to the Father is through the risen-wounded Son (cf. John 14:6).

**Corpus-text**

What is it about these five wounds that God chooses them to remain? They point back in a very particular way to the crucifixion, while the effects of the scourging and the crowning with thorns are manifestly absent in Christ’s risen flesh. Perhaps what this absence emphasises is that the whole course of the passion is taken up in the death, and the whole execution is summarised in the crucifixion. So while a range of punishments were suffered by Jesus, it is the five wounds he bears in his resurrection that alone indicate the manner in which he died. They point back to the posture of the crucifixion – limbs stretched out horizontally and vertically. They mark both the extremities of his hands and feet, as well as what is most central – his side, his heart. Indeed, to be more precise we must actually distinguish the wounds in his hands and feet from the wound in his heart. The four wounds of Christ’s extremities were intended to cause a great and prolonged suffering, but not necessarily expected to bring about his death. Only the piercing of his side was meant as a mortal wound, though, as the passion narrative of John relates, by the time the soldier thrust the lance into his side, Jesus was already

dead. The wound of the heart, therefore, did not in fact bring about his death. In the next section we will have a chance to explore the particular significance of this post-mortem piercing. But for now we explore the meaning of the five wounds in relation to the lesser abrasions.

In order to do this we will turn to a Good Friday sermon given by St. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. The sermon is centred on the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in which the prophet is handed a scroll: “and he spread it before me; and it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and [songs] and woe” (Ezek 2:10).153 Relating it to the events of Good Friday, Fisher describes Jesus as a book, “written with in and without”.154 On the inside of the leaves of that book is written a single word, his divine Sonship (Logos) while on the outside, on the parchment of his flesh, is written “three maner of things, Lamentationes, Carmen, et vae, which is to say, Lamentations, songes, and woe.”155 To further explain what he means by the writing on the outside of Jesus, Fisher observes that

when a booke is spread, you see that in the leaues and many lynes drawen. And many letters, some read, some blacke, some blewe, so in this booke, (the moste blessed bodie and Christ) was drawne many lynes, for it was all to scourged with whippes, so that euery where the print of the cordes of the scourges, was left behind, and that in euery place, from the necke downward vnto the soles of his feete, so that there was no margent lefte in all thys booke”156

On the pages of Christ’s scourged and crucified flesh the small letters are the marks of the whip, and in addition to these there are also “greate Capytall Letters . . . illumined with Roset colour ” and these are “the great wounds of his body, in his hands, and in his feete, and in his side.”157 It is these illumined capital letters that will remain in the resurrection.

If the wounds are, as Fisher has it, a kind of text, then what is it that this text says? Fisher understands the “lamentations, songs and woe” as follows.

153 Fisher is using the Latin Vulgate which renders the Hebrew hegeh as the Latin carmen, ‘songs’, while the majority of modern English translations render it as ‘mourning’. According to Strong’s Hebrew Concordance hegeh literally means ‘a rumbling, growling, moaning’:
154 Ibid., 303.
155 Ibid., 305.
156 Ibid., 304.
157 Ibid.
Fyrst is lamentaion . . . For whosoeuer will [joy] with Christ, must first sorow with him. And by sorrowe and lamentation hee may come vnto [joy]: But hee that will not sorrowe and lament with Christ here in thys lyfe, hee chall come fynallye to the place where is everlasting woe\textsuperscript{158}.

It is striking to note that what, according to Fisher, is written on the flesh of Jesus is not simply a message to which we may or may not respond. Rather, the words are our words and our responses just as much as they are God’s revelation to us. The wounds are the obscenities that by our rejection of God we have etched upon the flesh of Christ, like a scrawl of hideous graffiti. And yet in the way that he bears them they are also a most poignant and persuasive poetry that is able to generate a response from us – a response that involves sorrowful repentance leading to joyful song. To respond in this way is to lament because the wounds are our own work, while at the same time to delight in the beauty of this corpus-text. To refuse to recognise this ‘graffiti’ as our own and to resist the invitation of this ‘poetry’ is to enter into everlasting woe.

As we saw with Balthasar, God’s glory is manifested but never contained in ‘the form’. Lowell Gallaher observes a similar mode of surpassing in Fisher’s description of Christ’s body as ‘corpus-text’. “Itself the memorial of transgression, the corpus-text transgresses the bounds of the analogy that frames it”.\textsuperscript{159} That is, there are no margins left of Christ’s body. His flesh is covered with wounds, his entire surface is etched with meaningful signs. Again this indicates both the excesses of human sin and the superabundance of meaning that the divine Word is able to communicate through his flesh. The attempt to obscure the sign-value of Jesus’ flesh, to ‘deface’ the image of God, has only made of him a more powerful sign. The attempt to do away with him altogether, to banish him to the obscurity of death, has only served to establish him as an indestructible sign. For, as Milbank points out, the “complete but potent character of the sign is a function of its lifelessness.”\textsuperscript{160} The sign is the “finished, definable, artefact”, and this is why a human life becomes a definitive sign only when it comes to an end, when it can be framed within a certain limited time and space. Before that its meaning is in principle open and its course is undecided. For Jesus, however, death does not make of him an artefact. It does serve to frame his earthly life, but his capacity to stand as a sign is realised in his resurrection, whereby we encounter something quite

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 305.
new - the Living Sign. Only in this light can the true significance of his earthly life be perceived, and the true victory of the cross, which was experienced at the time as utter defeat, be recognised. Only in light of the ‘illuminated capital letters’ does the corpus-text of Good Friday acquire its true meaning.

Here we have the beginnings of a response to the question of how the saturated corpus-text of Good Friday relates to the five glorious wounds of Easter. Jesus allows himself to be made into a sign of death (just as all our signs are lifeless and point to things that will ultimately die or pass away) in order that he might redefine the language of signs by transforming the sign-value of his own flesh in the resurrection. The fact that the ‘small letters’ of the corpus-text have been erased indicates that the falsity of sin has been “critically exposed and surpassed.”\(^\text{161}\) Meanwhile, the fact that the ‘capital letters’ remain guarantees that death as the limit of all human signs has truly been overcome. Jesus has passed through death, and so death itself is taken up into him, the Living Sign, who points us to the living heart of the Father.

**Conclusion**

This prophetic character of Christ’s risen-wounded flesh, to act as windows revealing the depths of God, and doors inviting entry into God’s life, and his capacity to act as a sign of universal significance, leads us to consider more directly his priestly character. That is, having contemplated his risen-wounded form as a sign that he bears the sins of all, we now set ourselves to explore what it means for him to ‘bear’ the sins of others. It is to this question that we now turn as we bring this second chapter to a close.

\(^{161}\) Ibid., 138.
2.3. PRIESTLY WOUNDS

Introduction

Christ bears his glorious wounds eternally. In this affirmation our whole second chapter is contained. Each of our three sections is meant to emphasise and elucidate a different aspect of this affirmation: that the wounds are eternal, that they are glorious, and that Christ bears them. Having already treated of the eternal and glorious aspects, we now turn to what we will identify as the priestly aspect, that Christ bears his wounds. In this light we may also be permitted to look back and recognise afresh the structure with which this chapter has unfolded, corresponding to the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet and king, though with the order reversed. The temporal-eternal nature of the wounds is kingly insofar as it points to the uniting of past, present and future in the ‘realm’ of eternity. Christ reigns for ever as the wounded one. Secondly, the glorious nature of the wounds is prophetic insofar as the wounds are signs that reveal the depths of God and they are ‘text’ that expresses and proclaims the divine truth which overcomes the falsities of sin. In what follows we will see how the wounds are priestly.

Guilt and obedience

What does it mean to say that Christ 'bears' his wounds – how is it different from merely having wounds, or being wounded? Sacred Scripture affirms quite clearly that Christ is not simply wounded but by bearing his wounds he takes away our sins (cf. 1 Peter 2:24). St. Paul expresses this in a remarkable way when he explains that “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). In the face of this mysterious affirmation we need to ask how the sins of the world get placed upon Jesus. How does his death act as a sacrifice for the sins of the world? How does he take on the totality of human guilt? Is it human beings who heap this on Christ’s shoulders or is it to be attributed to the mysterious work of God the Father? Here we seem to have a dilemma. If we regard the laying of guilt as a work of human beings, we would seem to be ascribing too much authority to mere creatures. For, sinful humanity may have regarded Jesus as the scapegoat, as the guilty one, but surely that is a shameful error – surely it does not make Jesus the bearer of any actual guilt. Just because human beings choose to see Jesus this way does not mean that he actually appears this way in the sight of God. Meanwhile, if we reject this conclusion and instead attribute the laying of guilt on the innocent Son to
God the Father, then we have a God who acts unjustly, who does evil so that good may come from it, for whom ‘the end justifies the means’.

While neither of these explanations provide an adequate response to the question, it would appear that each one holds a kernel of truth and that a fitting account of how Jesus is burdened with the guilt of the world’s sin requires that the two kernels of truth be brought together. The unjust act of casting the blame on an innocent man belongs to human beings. This act, however, is only effective because it accords with the Father’s will, that the cup of suffering should not pass by the Son (cf. Luke 22:42). The remarkable thing which takes place in the death of Jesus is, in short, that a sinful human act corresponds to the perfect will of God. Humanity’s ‘no’ to God is brought into line with God’s ‘yes’ to humanity. This, admittedly, does not yet represent an adequate response to our question. What we have done is reframe the problem so that its defining lines can be seen more clearly. The two kernels have been identified but we cannot see how they are meant to be reconciled. In what follows we will enter into dialogue with Balthasar, Barth and Milbank in an effort to articulate a clear and orthodox theological response to the problem we have identified, and to develop further our appreciation of the priestly aspect of the risen-wounded Christ.

For Barth what bridges the gap between the two kernels identified above is that Jesus is not a passive recipient of the guilt of the world. Rather, he freely chooses to be made

the one great sinner among all other men . . . to be declared to be such by the mouth of every man, and treated as such at the hand of every man, yet not apart from the will of God, not in abrogation of it, but according to its eternal and wise and righteous direction, in the fulfilment of the divine judgement on all men.¹⁶²

On the one hand it is the Father’s will that Jesus should suffer this fate, and to this Jesus responds as the obedient man. This response means that the sins of the world are not laid upon Jesus’ shoulders as something external, as something that is forced upon him against his will. Though it fills him with great sorrow and distress (Matt 26:37) he has made it his firm purpose (John 12:27) and willingly goes to his death without opening his mouth in protest (Is 53:7, Matt 27:12). “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18).

¹⁶² Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.1, 239.
On the other hand it is human malice that lays all the blame on this innocent one, and in accepting this Jesus is the rejected God. Fully aligned as he is with the Father’s ‘yes’, with the decision to continue to love in the face of human indifference, and to continue to give in the face of human rejection, Jesus opens himself fully to the brutal assault of humanity’s ‘no’ and looks on the naysayers in compassion. Indeed, Jesus does not accept this bitter plight with resignation and brace himself until it is over. Though he had refused to open his mouth in his own defence against the false charges brought against him, he is quick to intercede for his executioners at the moment of his crucifixion: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). This mysterious utterance will be dealt with in more detail later. For now it will suffice to point out that it indicates very clearly the way in which Christ takes the side of sinners. He does not disown those who are disowning him but agrees to stand in the breach between the righteous God and sinful humanity.

This juxtaposition is what we are referring to when we speak of Christ's priesthood. It is a double representation: representing God to man and man to God. As God he is the subject of the ultimate rejection, yet prefers to remain weak, to continue to give of himself, to remain as the giver, as the lover, in a state of utter vulnerability, to mercifully refrain from any just retaliation. As man he carries the guilt of all the world and stands obediently before the holy wrath of the Father. Thus he reveals God's mercy to humanity and forges the path of humanity’s obedience to God. The wounds are priestly signs because they stand in the middle – they mediate. The wounds represent both the guilt of humanity overcome by obedience and the divine mercy (the omnipotence of God expressed through human weakness) which overcomes the human rejection of God – the false wielding of finite power.

The omnipotent powerlessness of God's love shines forth in the mystery of darkness and alienation between God and the sin-bearing Son; this is where Christ “represents” us, takes our place: what is “experienced” is the opposite of what the facts indicate.\(^{163}\)

With this last point Balthasar indicates that the experience of the horror of sin is opposed to and actually obscures the fact of Christ's perfect communion with the

Father. This means that his bearing of the world’s guilt is opposed to and obscures the fact of his innocence.

**Otherness in God**

Balthasar situates the ground for this apparent separation between the Son and the Father – the Son's capacity to take on the guilt of the world’s ‘no’ to God – in the very relations of the Trinity.

The action whereby the Father utters and bestows his whole Godhead, an action he both ‘does’ and ‘is’, generates the Son. This Son is infinitely Other, but he is also the infinitely Other of the Father. Thus he both grounds and surpasses all we mean by separation, pain and alienation in the world and all we can envisage in terms of loving self-giving, interpersonal relationship and blessedness.¹⁶⁴

Balthasar’s claim is that the human rejection of God, including the deadly rupture that this causes, is dependent on and offers a distorted image of the distinction between Father and Son. The Father is God pouring himself out completely but without losing himself, just as the Son is God receiving everything and offering it all back in gratitude but without being annihilated. We will argue, therefore, that the wounds themselves, borne in Christ’s flesh, take their ground from this same distinction within the Godhead, from the mystery of the complete handing over of Godhead without the loss of Godhead. The wounds indicate that the Son remained totally receptive to the Father’s will, and undertook to offer himself to the point of what seemed like annihilation. However, since we encounter Jesus, as the risen-wounded one, we see that he was never lost, never destroyed. Thus, if we are to take up Balthasar’s reading we would say that the wounds show that Jesus is ‘infinitely Other’ while the fact that he bears them as the risen one shows that he is ‘the infinitely Other of the Father’. His otherness in relation to the Father is not opposed to, but is actually the condition for, his perfect union with the Father. That is why Jesus can say, without contradiction, “the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand” (John 3:35), and “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

The question remains, however, whether we wish to appropriate Balthasar’s position here. Does it adequately express the relation between the mission of the Son in time and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 324-325.
his eternal procession from the Father? In her recent critical introduction to Balthasar, Karen Kilby objects to Balthasar’s position on the basis that

if Christ is to take into himself all that is most wrong, and if this is not to be something new, but something always in some way anticipated in the Trinity, then it seems that there is no way to avoid importing into God’s eternity something of all that is most wrong, and so introducing a sort of fusion of the highest love and the greatest bliss with (something like) the greatest suffering and the profoundest loss.\(^{165}\)

Indeed, the danger of drawing such a close connection between death and the inner life of the Trinity is, as Karl Rahner writes, to render God incapable of being of any help to fallen humanity. “To put it crudely, it does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament.”\(^{166}\) In other words, if I am swept up in the surging waters that lead to death then the one to rescue me will need to have his feet on solid ground, not be caught up in the same flood. To carry the analogy further, what we need is for God to ‘throw us a line’, and he has done this by taking on human nature. In this way, Rahner, following the main current of Christian tradition, would want to say that the Son of God is not drawn into or associated with sin, suffering, and death \textit{in his divinity}, but only in his humanity. Divinity stands firmly on the shore while his assumed humanity is cast into the threatening waters to act as the instrument of our salvation.

In response to the sorts of objections raised by Kilby and Rahner, Healy admits that the language of ‘separation’ and ‘distance’ employed by Balthasar is potentially misleading and “undoubtedly runs the risk of anthropomorphism and a loss of analogy.”\(^{167}\) This is a danger, says Healy, of which Balthasar was acutely aware and took care to avoid. “In every act of genuine love”, says Healy,

\begin{quote}
there is an affirmation of the other that requires something like a total self-surrender, including (implicitly) a willingness to die for the other. It is only when the gratuitous offer of love is sinfully rejected that a negative separation in the form of suffering enters the world.\(^{168}\)
\end{quote}

Balthasar grounds this in the eternal processions of the Trinity.

In giving himself, the Father does not give something (or even everything) that he \textit{has} but all that he \textit{is} – for in God there is only being, not having. So the Father’s being passes over, without remainder, to the begotten Son. . . . This total self-giving,
to which the Son and the Spirit respond by an equal self-giving, is a kind of ‘death’, a first, radical ‘kenosis’, as one might say. It is a kind of ‘super-death’ that is a component of all love and that forms the basis in creation of all instances of ‘the good death’, from self-forgetfulness in favor of the beloved right up to that highest love by which a man ‘gives his life for his friends’. It is because he is using the terms ‘death’, ‘separation’ and ‘otherness’ analogously that Balthasar can locate them as purely positive aspects in the life of God. It is not that the human notions of suffering and loss are fused with and become indistinguishable from love and bliss. Rather, the position of Balthasar is that the positivity of love and bliss and the negativity of evil and of suffering are all grounded in the (positive) life of God.

For Balthasar, it is not just that the Son is able to enter into solidarity with the fallen human situation through his humanity. It is also of crucial importance that this fallen human situation bears a certain correspondence to something real in God. Indeed, as David Luy observes, Balthasar is working from two closely connected assumptions: that “whatever takes place in the economy must express a reality that exists eternally within the immanent life of the Trinity”, and that there is no possibility of “unmediated knowledge of God’s being.” This means that for Balthasar, everything that Jesus says, does and undergoes must reveal something about the inner life of the Trinity – must have a basis in that inner life. This must include, of course, his cry of dereliction from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). For Balthasar this does not pose an impasse to affirming the unity of the divine Persons. He argues that

we must not see the ‘distance’ in opposition to, or in conflict with, the ‘closeness’ (of circumincessio in the one divine nature); at the same time such distance is necessary, for two reasons: first, in order to hold fast to the personal distinctness of each Person both in being and acting; and second, in order to establish the basis within the Trinity for what, in the economic Trinity, will be the possibility of a distance that goes as far as the Son’s abandonment on the cross.

The life and death of Jesus shows that even discord, suffering and death have their basis in the inner life of the Trinity. For Balthasar, all that is created, by virtue of its coming from God, retains its revelatory power, regardless of how twisted and depraved it may have become as a result of evil.

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With these affirmations we begin to touch on what is directly revealed about the priesthood of Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews. The sacred author is eager to stress that Christ’s priesthood does not find its source, like the priesthood of the Old Covenant, in tribal membership. It is neither inherited nor passed on to a successor. Ultimately, Jesus has become a priest, “not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life” (Heb 7:16). This wording is interesting, for it does not simply say ‘eternal life’. “Indestructible life” carries particular implications, namely, that, in addition to being everlasting, his life has proved to be incapable of destruction. Again, we must come back to Christ’s risen-wounded form, for it is visible proof of this indestructible life. The attempt to destroy him has not only failed, but it has served to instate him as a priest forever, and the wounds serve as an everlasting reminder of this. They point to the fact that he stood in the breach and experienced the full violence of the rupture between the rejected yet merciful God and sinful humanity, responding to the former and representing the latter in perfect obedience.

**Gift and sacrifice**

The fact that ‘indestructible life’ is the basis of Christ’s priesthood, the new priesthood, also has dramatic implications for our understanding of sacrifice. The priest is the one who offers sacrifice, and in the case of Christ, we see the priest and sacrifice converge into one: he is not only the Priest who offers, but also the Lamb who is offered (John 1:29). For a clear and bold articulation of this new notion of sacrifice we turn to Milbank. He contrasts a Christian account of sacrifice with a postmodern ‘deconstructed’ view of the pure gift, which requires true giving to be entirely unilateral, and in the end deems it to be practically impossible.\(^{172}\) It means that the giver must sacrifice herself to the point of death, without any hope of return or reward, not even the consolation of a benevolent God or a happy afterlife. In what follows we shall critique this deconstructed view (which Milbank regards to be prevalent in contemporary thought). This will serve to stimulate a discussion on the Christian notion of sacrifice which we will relate to Christ and his wounds.

\(^{172}\) Milbank associates this position primarily with French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, Czech Phenomenologist Jan Patočka, and to a lesser degree with French philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion.
The first part of the deconstructed view of the gift provides a key for understanding the whole. The corrupting influence of selfishness can only be avoided if the act of giving remains entirely sacrificial, without any hope of return or reward. Any such hope must be eliminated because it would corrupt the act of giving with the expectation of receiving something back. This expectation empties the act of ethical value because it turns the act of giving into a contractual exchange. For the deconstructed view, the radical onesidedness of gratuity is thereby reduced to the comfortable mutuality of contract.

This deconstructed conception of giving, argues Milbank, lacks due respect for the person because taken to its extreme it does not allow for a relationship of communication with the other. On the contrary, this ‘act of giving’ signals the end of all communication with the other, since to open oneself up to communication is to fall into the trap of mutuality and so spoil the purity of the gift. For Milbank, the real distinction between gift and contract lies not in the absolute freedom and non-binding character of the gift [from a totally anonymous and disconnected giver] . . . but rather the surprisingness and unpredictability of gift and counter-gift or their character in space as asymmetrical reciprocity, and their character in time as non-identical repetition.173

For Milbank it is important to see that mutual exchange is not synonymous with contract.174 The contractual exchange is by its nature predictable, and demands a certain symmetry and identity in the value of whatever is exchanged. But with gift exchange it is different. If my colleague gets me a gift for my birthday I may feel obliged to reciprocate when her birthday comes around. But this is not like a contract, for I will try to surprise her, not necessarily with something of the same value as her gift to me (for to measure that would seem petty), but with something that I think she will like. The exchange is unpredictable, asymmetrical and non-identical. Furthermore, the obligation that arises from her initial gift is not for me to ‘pay her back’ somehow, but to continue what she has begun – a relationship of mutual exchange. To fail to do so is not unjust like the breaking of a contract. Rather, it is to miss the opportunity to enter into a richer mode of friendship.

173 Milbank, Being Reconciled, 156.
174 See also Ricoeur, Memory, History and Forgetting, 478-485.
The second part of the deconstructed notion the gift opposed by Milbank is that death is not viewed as an evil but as “the necessary condition for the event of the ethical as such”.\(^{175}\) This is so for two reasons. Firstly, for the deconstructed view, it is only the presence of vulnerability, made possible by the threat of death (be it near or remote), which generates the need for an ethical response in the first place. The giver is summoned to action in order to supply for this need. Secondly, death acts as a necessary limit, so that the act of pure giving, once complete, is not poisoned by any return or reward for the giver. There is not even time for her to feel the consolation of having done well. This means that, paradoxically, only the now-absent dead person counts as a true giver, and only the anonymous, disinterested offering made to the stranger (or, even better, the enemy) counts as a true gift. Thus the giver and the gift have become completely invisible. The giver can never be recognised because their offering is anonymous and they are dead, while the gift can never be recognised as such because it occurs outside of any relationship of exchange.\(^{176}\) On the contrary, for Milbank, death is only seen as a good in the realm of gift and sacrifice when it is accompanied by a firm hope of self-return.\(^{177}\) Death only constitutes a gift when it carries the promise of a joyful reunion, albeit beyond the giver’s knowledge of how, when and where.

The notion of a hopeful self-sacrifice that Milbank speaks of is perhaps expressed most eloquently in this passage from the fourth Gospel:

> The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:23-25).

Here it is clearly not the case that we have a fruitful, self-possessed life which we then lose by sacrificing it to some greater cause. The Christian mystery is rather that only in giving ourselves away – and this tends to involve a certain amount of sacrificial pain – are we able to receive our life back as something ever more fruitful and ever more our own.\(^{178}\) This is not the ‘selfishness’ that the conception of unilateral giving outlined above was trying to avoid, since the ‘reward’ involved here is not something external but issues from the sacrificial act itself. Indeed, as Milbank puts it, “a final surrender of

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\(^{175}\) Ibid., 154.
\(^{176}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{177}\) Ibid., 157.
\(^{178}\) Ibid., 155.
an isolated life, a life indifferent to the pain of others, issues of itself – dare one say automatically – in a better more abundant life.”

This, Milbank points out, is the logic of the resurrection. Jesus lays down his life not for strangers but for his friends (John 15:13). And this he does, not in order that they may continue to live their lives after his life has come to an end, but to uphold the truth of “the absolute creative power of the Father,” which is not revealed definitively until Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. He appears then with his sacrificial wounds, and in so doing reveals the new meaning of sacrifice. The life that he has given up is received back in a new and super-abundant way. The wounds which were torturous and bloody are now glorious signs of his burning love. And to make this love effective Jesus allows the fruitfulness of his sacrifice to overflow onto the disciples. “He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the one who epitomises ‘the gift’. He constitutes and manifests the relation of perfect mutual exchange that exists between the Father and the Son. Thus he shows that God is not “a gesture of lonely superabundant giving”, and, that true self-offering is not unilateral, but a gift-exchange that is undying and always new.

**Priesthood and participation**

This new priesthood with this new pattern of sacrifice is passed on in a new way. Not by bodily descent, but by the handing over of Christ’s ‘indestructible life’ – the Holy Spirit. In chapter four we will devote ourselves to exploring the Church’s participation in the woundedness of the risen Christ. For now we set some of the groundwork for that discussion by focussing specifically at a crucial salvific moment in which this participation is made possible.

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag'dalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfll the scripture), “I thirst.” A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 160.
181 Ibid.
spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water (John 19:25-34).

This text is of great importance for us as we seek to understand the significance of Christ’s wounds. We see that the final wound, the wound of Jesus’ side, was inflicted after he had already died. He therefore did not experience or suffer from this final wound. Rather, the moment of the piercing was something experienced only by those standing near the cross.

Marie-Dominique Philippe offers this reflection on the suffering of the Mother of Jesus:

Mary is present. She too witnesses the piercing of the lance which opened the side and the heart of Jesus’ corpse and which caused Him to shed His last drops of blood and water. Christ did not suffer from this final wound since he was already dead, but Mary did. Hence this final wound was meant for her; it was reserved for her. If this blow could not be mortal for Jesus, it was for her maternal heart: “A sword of sorrow will pierce your own soul,” Simeon had said. The prophecy is thus fulfilled, and with such violence! While this wound could no longer sadden and humiliate Jesus, make him poorer and more of a beggar, more thirsty for love, it could still sadden and humiliate His Mother’s heart.

Thus while Jesus bears this final wound in his flesh, the Mother of Jesus bears it, according to Simeon’s prophecy, in her soul. Now, it is important for us to express more precisely the manner in which Mary can be said to bear this final wound. Employing again the language of ‘bearing’ we can state that Jesus is the one who bears the wounds and Mary is the one who bears Jesus. She bore him first in the intimacy of her womb, by the power of the Holy Spirit who ‘overshadowed her’. What we will argue is that at the cross she bears him in the midst of physical separation, as he is raised aloft in execution and torn away from her in death, and that she does so by the power of the same Spirit, handed over by Jesus in his final agony.

In relation to her unique maternal vocation Mary is named Theotokos, the God-bearer. The One whom she bore in her womb, Jesus of Nazareth, is himself God. As Barth rightly emphasised, this title was employed at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD)
primarily in order to safeguard the right understanding of the person of Jesus.\textsuperscript{183} What we wish to propose here is that Theotokos can also be applied to Mary as she stands beside the cross of her Son, in order to express more precisely the manner in which Mary is affected by his final wound, and thus to safeguard a right understanding of the work of Jesus. His work, as we have discussed earlier, is to reconcile sinful humanity to God. And this means making of them “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9). How does she bear him in this mode of separation?

By standing beside the cross and contemplating the form of her dying Son.

In contemplating this wound, these last drops of blood and water, Mary offers them to the Father. She thus accomplishes her Son’s priestly work. As the Helper, the Associate of His priestly heart, she must offer to the Father this immolated heart, these last drops of blood and water, since Jesus as priest can no longer do it.\textsuperscript{184}

For Philippe this scene at the cross contains a key moment in which the work of Jesus is accomplished. With Mary humanity is invited to and made capable of participation in the priesthood of Christ.

It will be helpful to see this offering within the sequence of events that precede it in the passion narrative. Jesus has been nailed to the cross, he has entered into the depths of human misery, he has endured every injustice without cursing God or humanity, and finally he has handed over his Spirit and descended to the dead. He has offered everything. There is nothing lacking in his offering, nothing that he has held back. And yet, even after his death there is a final wound that remains to be offered. However, this wound is not merely ‘another one’, for it is a wound of the heart, a wound which opens up what is most intimate in his human flesh, a wound that on its own would have been mortal. Therefore it is a wound that summarises the entire life, passion and death that has just taken place. He does not leave ‘an additional part’ to be offered. No, for after offering everything and having breathed out his Spirit, the piercing of his heart is an invitation for the Mother of Jesus to offer (in the Spirit) everything that he has offered. This is a full sharing, not a partial one. To insist on this is important in order to safeguard two things: the infinite and complete nature of Christ’s offering, and the real sharing in that offering which is afforded the human creature. Indeed, by bearing the

\textsuperscript{183} Tim Perry, “‘What is Little Mary Here For?’ Barth, Mary, and Election,” in Pro Ecclesia 19:1, (2010): 51.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 210.
pain of this one wound Mary is again the *Theotokos* who bears the whole Christ – and this is made possible because her Son has poured out the whole Spirit.

Having argued that the content of Mary’s offering is the same as that of Jesus, we will need to distinguish between two modes of offering. As Philippe describes it, Mary’s sacrificial offering stems from her contemplation of Christ on the cross. She does not experience directly the pain of crucifixion, of God’s anger, or of humanity’s rejection. But in her contemplative gaze she sees these horrors and is profoundly affected by them. Indeed, Simeon’s prophecy was very particular in stating that a sword of sorrow would pierce her *soul* – not her flesh. The then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger offers a simple reflection on the mode of Mary’s participation that will help us to distinguish it clearly from the mode of Christ’s sacrificial self-offering.

Mary’s path includes the experience of rejection (Mk 3:31-35; Jn 2:4). When she is given away under the Cross (Jn 19:26), this experience becomes a participation in the rejection that Jesus himself had to endure on the Mount of Olives (Mk 14:34) and on the Cross (Mk 15:34). In the prophecy of the aged Simeon, who foretold that a sword would pierce Mary’s heart (Lk 2:35), Luke interweaves from the very outset the Incarnation and the Passion, the joyful and the sorrowful mysteries. In The Church’s piety, Mary appears, so to speak, as the living Veronica’s veil, as an icon of Christ that brings him into the present of man’s heart, translates Christ’s image into the heart’s vision and thus makes it intelligible.\(^{185}\)

This appeal to the tradition of Veronica’s veil provides a rich image through which the contemplation of Mary can be more clearly understood. Christ bears the burden of sin in his flesh, while Mary bears the sword of sorrow in her soul. Her suffering is derivative of his, but in a mysterious way, for the wound that she suffers is one that is made in his flesh that he is yet unable to suffer. The suffering she bears is ‘imprinted’ upon her through her contemplation of the suffering of her Son, and through the final indignity of the piercing, rendered after his death. In her contemplation she ‘absorbs’ the sorrow of her Son, and it affects her to the very depths of her soul.

It is to this that her maternity is directed from the very beginning, to look upon her dying Son. She bears him in the intimacy of pregnancy in order that she might bear him in the agony of utter rejection. In this way she becomes a sign that contains nothing of itself but is there to point beyond itself to Another. That is why she can be likened to

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the bloodstained veil which takes its value not from what it is as a veil but from whose image it bears. She is the living sign pointing to the truth that the self-offering of Jesus is not only a gift for us, but is something in which he invites us to share.

**Conclusion**

Let us now tie together the key points from the three sections of this chapter. In section one we argued that the ‘once and for all’ event of the cross has eternal consequences, not just for humanity but also, in a qualified sense, for the person of Christ. In accepting the wounds the Son of God has allowed something to happen to himself which is in perfect accord with who he is and what he wills from all eternity. By the wounds he is forever changed, yet nevertheless remains exactly who he is. Inseparably united with wounded flesh, the Son is not more or less divine, but divine in a new way. This ‘new way’ is what we set ourselves to expound upon in section two. In order to overcome the power of death, Jesus allowed himself to be made into a sign of death in order that he might redefine the language of signs by transforming the sign-value of his own flesh in the resurrection. Thus, what was hidden in God from all eternity (Eph 3:9) is now manifested to us visibly. The total self-emptying that constitutes the inner life of the Trinity is shown forth and made into a gift for us in the flesh of the risen-wounded Christ. Finally, in this present section we have sought to develop our argument one step further. This total self-offering of Jesus also constitutes an invitation to participate in his priestly offering – a participation which the Mother of Jesus experiences at the cross in a contemplative mode. In chapter four we will explore the manner in which this participation in the self-offering of Jesus takes place in the life of the Church. For now, however, we turn to consider the notions of evil and sin in light of the risen-wounded Christ.
3. EVIL

Introduction
The problem of evil and the question of how to account for it arises quite naturally from our previous considerations on forgiveness and the risen-wounded Christ. Forgiveness, of course, presupposes that some wrongdoing has occurred. There is a need to explicate the theological commitments that are implied when, in the Christian tradition, we characterise wrongdoing as ‘sin’. The risen-wounded form of Christ also presupposes the occurrence of evil. Jesus has come back to life, but with death inscribed in his immortal flesh. He has definitively conquered evil, yet certain signs of the horror of Golgotha remain. He has ushered in a new era of hope for his disciples, though something of the past still clings to him. It is not clear how we are to understand these juxtapositions of life with death, good with evil, and the new with the old. In this chapter we will explore the notion of evil, and the human participation in evil which we call sin. It seems fitting, therefore, to explore the notion of sin with reference to the risen-wounded Christ, to draw from and build on the work done in chapter two. In section one we will examine the ontological status of evil in the work of Karl Barth. This will be tied closely to his doctrine of eternity which we introduced in section one of chapter two. We will see that the forgiveness of Christ is definitive, not because it is exclusive, but because it generates subsequent acts of forgiveness. It is not simply a one-time event but demands to be played out again and again in response to sin. In this way we will seek to develop our lines of argument in continuity with the previous two chapters. In section two we will discuss the relationship between sin and knowledge in conversation with Robert Spaemann, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. After characterising sin as both culpable ignorance and as judgement by the knowledge of good and evil, it will be argued that the true character of sin is only known in light of its defeat in Christ. This will be of particular importance for showing what it is in the human condition the makes forgiveness a possibility. Finally, in section three we will employ Balthasar, Josef Pieper, and Bonhoeffer in a discussion of sin in relation to freedom and action. We will show that, far from constituting free action, sin represents a failure of freedom and a failure to act, and that the ultimate proof of this lies in the risen-wounded form of Christ. Indeed, it is due to the ‘unreal’ character of sin that it is able to be overcome through forgiveness.
3.1. EVIL AS NOTHINGNESS

Introduction
This section will be divided into three parts. In part one I will draw from two doctrines of Karl Barth. Firstly I will recap parts of his doctrine of eternity which we unfolded in section one of chapter two, and secondly I will introduce his doctrine of evil (which he refers to as nothingness), identifying an obvious objection to each doctrine. In part two, I will explore how the apparent futility of historical unfolding is overcome and given meaning by the death and resurrection of Christ. I will show how this is consistent with biblical presentations of time, in Ecclesiastes and the Apocalypse. Part three will explore the implications of these themes for a christologically charged account of forgiveness and the glorified wounds.

Eternity and nothingness in Barth
In his treatment of eternity Barth argues that, in Jesus Christ, time has been given a ‘centre’ in relation to which sin and death have been relegated to ‘the past’. We live now in this turning point where sin and death are ‘passing away’. Barth’s description of this present state is rather elusive. Christ, he declares, has made sin a thing of the past, so that even future sins belong to the definitive ‘before’ and past blessings belong to the definitive ‘after’. For Barth this has several ramifications. There is no need, he says, to mourn over what once was but is no longer because nothing of God’s goodness is ever truly lost. “Forget not all his benefits”, says the psalmist, “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (Ps 103:2-4). These past blessings are not to be forgotten because they have been secured for us in the future. On the other hand we are to join St. Paul in “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13). Just as the past holds no regret, so the future holds no fear. The evil that may await us in the future has lost its sting, for all sin and evil has been brought to nothing in and by Christ. Thus, time, which in itself was subject to fragmentation, decline and ultimate loss, is now united irrevocably with eternity, its true origin, its deepest meaning, and its rightful end.

In order to further expound upon the significance of the incarnation for our understanding of time Barth draws from St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians.
With Christ, St. Paul commends himself “in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Cor 6:8-10) What is of utmost importance here for Barth is that these words of St. Paul are understood in light of the victory of Christ. The pairs of opposites that fill this passage are by no means pairs of equals. Dishonour, falsity, ignorance, death, punishment, sorrow, poverty and destitution – these are the things that are passing away. On the other hand, honour, truth, knowledge, life, joy, riches and plenitude are the things that will increase and endure. That St. Paul experiences them all at once is because he stands, like us, in the turning between what was and what is to come.

But is this a plausible reversal of the familiar concepts of past and future? The objection could easily be mounted that this doctrine flies in the face of a straight-forward ‘linear’ understanding of time. How can the blessings of the past, in all their particularity, really be gathered up into the future and how can future evil be realistically approached as that which is already consigned to the past? These claims seem more like statements of contradiction than of genuine theological development.

Corresponding to Barth’s notion of eternity is his doctrine of evil (which he refers to as nothingness, das Nichtige) in which evil has been destroyed but is allowed by God to linger on as if it had not been. It remains then, says Barth, as a “dangerous semblance” of dominion. It has no dominion over us, but carries still the appearance of dominion, and for that reason it is still dangerous. As Wolf Krötke explains:

Nothingness remains defeated by God because its power to annihilate is not a power belonging to it in a positive sense. Rather, in its _antithetical anhypostatic_ being, the power with which God has condemned it to ruin has an effect. Nothingness turns against God by seeking to carry over to creation its annihilation under God’s No. It cannot do more than this. It can only be in annihilating and is only able to pull others along with it into ruin.

Nothingness for Barth is not a recognisable thing. It has no essence, but is characterised only as that which is passing away, and that which is destroyed. It is not part of the

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creation but is precisely that which God has not willed to create. It therefore has no positive capabilities, but can only oppose God and seek to draw creatures into that opposition.

Because nothingness is not something created, it is explained neither “as the action of the Creator nor as the life-act of the creature”.\textsuperscript{187} There is, on the other hand, a negative aspect in creation that is not to be confused with nothingness. It holds the latter position in the contrasts between day and night, land and water, fortune and misfortune, the heights and the depths, clarity and obscurity, growth and decay, beauty and ashes, beginning and end, value and worthlessness.\textsuperscript{188} This negative side is not to be confused with nothingness, for it is included in the intention of God and part of the perfection of the creature.

It is good, even very good, in so far as it does not oppose but corresponds to the intention of God as revealed by Him in the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of the world with Himself effected in Him. For in Him God has made Himself the Subject of both aspects of creaturely existence.\textsuperscript{189} Because of this twofold (positive and negative) character of creation, the creature exists as something “on the very frontier of nothingness”, and yet it is described in Genesis as “very good” because this state implies no opposition or resistance to God’s will but is in full accord with it.

The negative aspect is evident in creation insofar as being is subject to limitation, truth is found in the midst of obscurity, goodness is nurtured through an ongoing struggle, and beauty is revealed through transitory forms. As well as classing this negativity under one heading, however, there is room to make some important distinctions. Firstly, we can distinguish the creaturely limitations of human nature before the fall, and those ruptures that result from human disobedience. The limited strength of the human body is an example of the former while susceptibility to illness is an example of the latter. Or again, the deep waters of an ocean over against the raging waters of a flood. Both of these would, presumably, be classed by Barth as negative aspects of creation even though the one is provided from the beginning and the other is introduced by God’s providence as a curse for fallen and disgraced humanity. Though the latter

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 292.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 295-297.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 296.
category arises as a result of nothingness entering the world through sin, the ruptures represented here are not themselves instances of nothingness. They are, rather, the way that God in his wisdom and mercy allows nothingness to disfigure the good creation. So while the disfigurement is caused by nothingness, the disfigurement is not itself evil, but remains within the good creation as a negative aspect.

It would be a mistake to conclude that because nothingness is not created by God nor constructed by creatures that it is nothing or non-existent. No, for Barth, nothingness ‘is’, even if it is said to be only in a third sense, different from the manner in which God is and in which the creature is. Still, it ‘exists’ as a power which God takes seriously, which he strives against, which he opposes, and which, in Christ and at great personal cost, he overcomes. 190

So what is nothingness? Barth answers in the following way: Nothingness is the opposite of what God elects, wills, affirms and brings about according to his purpose. Nothingness is defined as that which God does not elect, does not will, does not affirm and does not bring about. It is what God rejects, opposes, negates, and dismisses. 191 Nothingness is therefore neither willed by God nor independent of him. 192 It is a power which is grounded in God’s power, but not in the way the creature’s power is, for the power of nothingness is only to oppose and destroy, and so it is inherently contradictory. It is powerlessness which is, nevertheless, able to oppose true power. It is sterility which attacks what is fruitful to make it barren. It has no essence or form as creatures do. Rather, nothingness is the force of chaos that threatens and opposes the essence of the creature. “It has the essence of non-essence, and only as such can it exist.” 193

Nothingness is that which God does not will. It lives only by the fact that it is that which God does not will. But it does live by this fact. For not only what God wills, but what he does not will, is potent, and must have a real correspondence. What really corresponds to that which God does not will is nothingness. 194

To say that nothingness is evil means that it is the absence of God’s grace. In particular, nothingness contests “God’s honour and right to be gracious”, and it disturbs and

190 Ibid., 349.
191 Ibid., 351.
192 Ibid., 353.
193 Ibid., 352.
194 Ibid., 352.
obstructs “the salvation and right of the creature to live by the grace of God”.\textsuperscript{195} Nothingness opposes the right relationship between Creator and creation by protesting against God’s gift of grace and thwarting the reception of grace by the creature.

Therefore it should not surprise us that evil does not appear to have diminished since the coming of Christ. Rather, according to a natural reading of history it would be easy to argue that things have gotten worse, not better, since the coming of Christ. Barth acknowledges that, “Nothingness may still have standing and assume significance to the extent that the final revelation of its destruction has not yet taken place and all creation must still await and expect it. But its dominion, even though it was only the semblance of dominion, is now objectively defeated as such in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{196} It is only the eyes of Christian faith that can ‘see’ this triumph of the Kingdom of God in the midst of an apparent kingdom of evil. As H. R. Mackintosh insists, “It is in the light of Christ that we see sin clearly and can in some real degree understand how it looks to God, whose estimate of it we are bound to share so far as we discover it.”\textsuperscript{197}

More specifically, Barth argues that nothingness is only revealed for what it is in the revelation of Jesus Christ and his victory over it. Otherwise the human tendency is always to grant evil a place within creation, alongside other creatures as the substantial opponent, or even the necessary opponent of goodness. But from the true viewpoint of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ we look upon nothingness “with fear and trembling as the adversary with whom God and God alone can cope.”\textsuperscript{198} And so to truly see it is to see its destruction in Christ and to recognise him as the source of real hope.

In the revelation of Jesus Christ, nothingness is seen to take concrete form in human sin. It is that for which the human creature is responsible and of which she is guilty. It is her opposition to God’s will, her ingratitude in the face of God’s graciousness, her attempt to be her own master, provider, and consoler, her desire to possess what is not

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 353.  
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 305.
rightfully her own, the deception, malice, and conceit in which she operates in relation to her neighbour, and the foolishness which imbues her thoughts, words and actions.\textsuperscript{199}

Without this revelation the examination that we make of ourselves can only achieve a self-knowledge which identifies the twofold nature of creation in ourselves – strength and weakness, light and shadow. This can only amount to “an awareness of the deficiency of our spontaneity and activity”, of the fact that we are finite creatures. In this view we are also able to see our goodness and to compare ourselves favourably to others. But this does not amount to an awareness of real sin. It is blind to nothingness as its stands in contradiction to God and the twofold nature of creation.\textsuperscript{200}

In order to see my real sin, my real complicity with nothingness, my real state in opposition to God, I need God himself to show me, not by an abstract law, but by displaying his “merciful, patient and generous will” which I have resisted.\textsuperscript{201} Otherwise the possibility is left open for me to hide behind my creaturely limitations and excuse myself on the basis that God’s demands are beyond my finite capacity. Only Jesus Christ can reveal true sin and nothingness

because in Him alone and in His light real nothingness, the real sin that wages war with God and is assailed and overcome by Him, stands revealed as the sin of man, and so revealed that I may no longer regard it as a defect or as something natural but must rather recognise in it the alien and adversary to whom I myself have given place.\textsuperscript{202}

This is the case most truly on the cross where the working out of nothingness (human sin) is shown in all its depravity, and the ultimate realisation of nothingness (suffering, abandonment, death) is brought into fullest expression in the figure of Christ crucified. We can only ‘know’ of nothingness by virtue of its defeat.

\textbf{Futility is given meaning}

When we look at Barth’s doctrine of nothingness it can appear as mere wishful thinking, divorced from historical fact. Faith tells us that “Christ has conquered sin and death forever,” while our experience testifies to the contrary – that sin and death remain in force. “Ah yes,” the Barthian voice within us might reply, “but what you see is only

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 305.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 306.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 308.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 307.
the defeated, passing remnant of evil. It is merely an illusion performed by evil’s corpse, like the body of a headless chicken, running and flapping wildly but without self-mastery or true vitality.” But this is not a very convincing defence. It seems here that there is a divorce between faith and experience.203

To say that Christ has conquered sin and death, even with the uncompromising qualification, “once and for all,” does not usher in the need for theological “double-think”. Rather, the logic of Barth’s position, that Christ has given time a ‘centre’, means that in his person and mission we have a reference point and a key for understanding all time. The seeming futility of earthly history is given meaning by the coming of the Son of God into the world. We can expect his victory and the defeat of evil, accomplished on the cross and manifested in the resurrection, to be played out in human history again and again (though differently each time of course). Indeed, every age, every generation, every individual human life, every particular event and every crisis has been made the stage for this drama in which, like Christ crucified, good conquers evil in the midst of seeming defeat. Thus, evil may appear to triumph, and, as with the resurrection, the victory of the good in each age, lifetime, event and crisis may remain hidden, except for a few eyewitnesses.

This concurs with biblical presentations of time, especially in Ecclesiastes and the Book of the Apocalypse where the unfolding and passing of time is a central feature. The author of Ecclesiastes expresses the passing of all things as ‘vanity’. The movements of the sun and the wind, the lives and activities of human beings, all these are subject to futility. “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). What gives meaning to this apparent futility is the duty to uphold the commands of God and the promise that “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whetherever good or evil”

203 In a highly contested reading of Barth, Mark Lindsay objects to Barth’s insistence on the definitive defeat of nothingness. Echoing the view of G.C. Berkouwer and Alan Davies, he argues that Barth’s doctrine of Nothingness fails to do justice to historical atrocities such as the Holocaust. By declaring Christ’s triumph over nothingness and the latter’s consignment to a thing of the past – only a “dangerous semblance” of what it once was, Barth understates the threat of evil and the power of the demonic. Lindsay implies that he would want to qualify the doctrine so that, even after the coming of Jesus Christ, nothingness retains some form of dominion, for this would offer an account more in tune with the historical incidents of extreme evil such as the Holocaust. See Mark Lindsay, “‘Nothingness’ Revisited: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Radical Evil in the Wake of the Holocaust,” in Colloquium 34:1 (2002): 15. Our current discussion seeks to respond to this sort of objection.
As Pierre Gilbert contends, this piece of Wisdom Literature represents “a radical critique of life ‘under the sun’ and the proposal of an alternative that re-centers human life within a divine perspective.” In other words, it presents earthly concerns in themselves as circular and futile, while the following of God’s commands gives life an orientation and a purpose beyond the circularity.

In the Apocalypse, however, the emphasis on futility is gone, replaced by the victory of the Lamb. It is a victory however, that is played out again and again and again. The seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls – each set of seven repeats (though in a different way) the rise of evil along a course of ever worsening destruction, then ending in a surprising turnaround - the sudden victory of God. And along the way the listener is told over and over that these things must soon take place, and that the Lord Jesus is coming soon. Without an adequate reference point, one would struggle to find meaning in the repetition of the doom-to-victory sequence, and the promise of these things taking place soon may only represent a naive eschatology of the early Church. But from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Christ as the centre of time, the Apocalypse starts to make sense. The struggle between good and evil goes on and on, but there is hope amidst this struggle because in each instance and in the cosmic drama as a whole, the Lamb is victorious. It is therefore true in each age that these things will take place soon, for every age is invited to share in the struggle and in the victory over sin and death that has been accomplished once and for all in and by Christ. In the final age, perhaps, this will be doubly true, for their particular victory will coincide with the final revelation of Christ’s overarching victory, and the definitive end of the struggle. The seemingly futile unfolding of earthly events will have reached its finality.

These reflections on time also help to make Christ’s glorified wounds more intelligible for us. Because he remains wounded, Jesus bears in his flesh (forever) the pattern of redemption that he himself has established on the cross and perpetuated through history by sending the Holy Spirit. In Jesus the sin-bearer is the Righteous One and the bearer of death is the Living One. His glorified humanity contains death and life, defeat and victory, the past and the eschatological present, not separated out, nor merely

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synthesised, but related in a very particular way. Namely, as the risen-wounded Christ shows, death and defeat are subordinated to life and victory. They are brought to an end by being absorbed into Christ’s body and transformed into grace-filled signs. The Father’s merciful love is displayed in his glorified yet marred form. We see that evil has been permitted to rear its head and to deliver its ‘fatal blow’ to God himself, that in so doing evil might itself be destroyed (surprisingly) and God mysteriously glorified.

Forgiveness understood within christology

We turn now to determine how these reflections help us to understand forgiveness as an element of christology. For here, like with the issue of Christ’s victory, one can struggle to make sense of the data of Christian revelation. Jesus has offered himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and he commands his followers to forgive. But to this there are all sorts of objections that can arise: if Jesus has already forgiven everything then why must I forgive or seek forgiveness from others? Or, what gives Jesus the right to forgive offences committed against others and subsequent to his earthly life? Or, how can mere creatures be expected to follow his example of forgiveness? Barth’s doctrine that Christ gives time its ‘centre’ enables us to relate Christ’s act of forgiveness and our acts of forgiveness together. We are able to maintain that all forgiveness is christological, not just the forgiveness granted by God for sins against him but also forgiveness within human relationships.

The ‘centre’ of time is also the centre of forgiveness: Jesus intercedes with the Father for the forgiveness of all sins on the cross. He then gives the Holy Spirit so that the work of forgiveness might be carried out in every time and place. Does not his first appearance to the eleven, recorded by John, facilitate such an understanding? He appears to them, wishes them “Peace”, shows them his wounded hands and side, then breathes the Spirit on them, entrusting them with the forgiveness of sins. Whether or not we recognise in this the origins of an actual sacrament of forgiveness, it is clear that forgiveness is a task handed on by Christ to his disciples, which, by the Spirit, he will accomplish in them. The forgiveness won by Jesus must now be enacted in every age, lifetime, and in every particular event (when it is needed).

This means that there is no divide between human and divine forgiveness. They are not two ‘levels’ of forgiveness. The God-man has united them together, transmitting the Father’s forgiveness throughout the whole of human history by sending the Spirit. As Miroslav Volf remarks, “our forgiving is inescapably incomplete. That’s why it’s so crucial to see our forgiving not simply as our own act, but as participation in God’s forgiving.”

In this way, forgiveness can be understood as originating in the death and resurrection of Jesus, repeated and re-enacted throughout history and reaching a final fulfilment at the end of time. The Christian injunction to forgive unconditionally is, therefore, not meant to be a burdensome duty, as it might be if it were simply a matter of imitating Christ’s example. Rather, it is a call to cooperate with the Spirit who animates and inspires in each situation, enabling the forgiveness of Christ to be made present in a way that is both authentic and new.

Lastly we will explore how this all relates to Christ as the risen-wounded one. Let me summarise the claims that have been made so far. The ‘once and for all’ victory of Christ gives time a centre in relation to which even future sin and death are relegated to that which is passing away, and even past blessings are stored up to be fully realised in the future. The endless repetition and seeming futility of time is imbued with the pattern of Christ’s victory, so that in each particular time and place the Holy Spirit makes us co-operators in and witnesses to the forgiveness accomplished by Christ. Thus, humanity has become the bearer of divine forgiveness, in the person of Christ and in his Spirit-filled disciples.

Moreover, we have observed that this pattern of Christ’s victory-amidst-apparent-defeat finds a physical expression in Jesus’ risen-wounded form. This is how, as the evangelists Luke and John both testify, Jesus shows himself to his disciples. And as the vision of the Apocalypse describes, he is revealed as “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). Jesus wants his death to be clearly visible for all eternity, not hidden or forgotten about, and this, I will advance, has profound implications for our understanding of forgiveness. So while, according to Barth, evil presents itself now

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207 For a discussion on our participation in the forgiveness of God see Paul S. Fiddes, Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity, (London: DTL, 2000), 191-223.
only as a dangerous semblance, this lingering semblance is a constant reminder that sin and death have been destroyed. And it is here that the paradox of the glorified wounds comes to the fore. The form of this paradox can be expressed as follows: We know that X is no more because the appearance of X remains. Indeed, the risen Christ bears the semblance of evil within himself, and yet having entered into glory, it is no longer a dangerous semblance. The semblance of sin that remains has become a glorious semblance. I will now conclude with a few remarks about what this lingering semblance indicates about forgiveness.

The wounds that Christ bears as a perpetual sign of his crucifixion suggest that forgiveness is not primarily about forgetting, but involves a genuine remembering of the evil that took place. Indeed, to forget or to overlook the fault would act as an obstacle to true forgiveness, or even eliminate the possibility of it altogether.\textsuperscript{208} Even the old saying ‘forgive and forget’ places forgetfulness after the act of forgiving. In this life forgetting the offence might be a desirable consequence of the limitations of memory. But in the life to come everything will be gathered up and there will be no forgetfulness. Rather, as St Paul says, “Then I will know even as I am known” (1 Cor 13:12).

Secondly, the fact that the wounds of Christ are revealed to us as ‘glorious’ suggests that the remembering associated with forgiveness involves a transformation – literally a re-membering whereby what remains of the injury takes on, somehow, a positive value. Thus, there is a sense in which a kind of forgetting is involved in forgiveness. The past offence does not linger on in the memory as an object of pain or horror which it would be if it remained something alien to the victim. As Yotam Benziman puts it,

\begin{quote}
Forgiveness makes the scars part of [the victim’s] being, and from then on they belong to him. They are no longer just the fingerprints of the offender. The [victim] becomes responsible for them as well. In embracing the offender, he also embraces the offense. He participates in bearing the wrong, and turns it into a part of himself. He does not reject his scars; he deals with them.\textsuperscript{209}
\end{quote}

What once was only the reminder of the offence and of the rupture between offender and victim that it caused, becomes in forgiveness a sign of the new bond of love that

\textsuperscript{208} For an interesting discussion on forgiveness and memory see Miroslav Volf, \textit{The End of Memory. Remembering Rightly in a Violent World}, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2006).

has overcome the rupture. From then on the relationship stands always as something that has overcome the threat of nothingness and, by love, has been re-forged.

Finally, just as the wounds have become an abiding feature of Christ’s identity (i.e. he will always be the one who was crucified), so the remnants of our injuries, transformed by forgiveness, can become integral parts of our actual identity. The remaining effects of past offences can actually render me more fully myself than I was before. They become “trophies” of Christ’s victory over sin, which has taken effect in me. The oft-quoted “all things work together for the good of those who love God” (Rom 8:28) is clearly not a promise of good fortune for the God-fearing but a remarkable affirmation that every weakness, blemish, and disorder that I carry through my earthly life can find a place in the glory of the bodily resurrection.

3.2. EVIL AS CULPABLE BLINDNESS

Introduction

In the previous section we dealt with metaphysical and soteriological questions of evil: What is evil? Where does it stand in relation to God and creation? How is its presence to be understood in light of the saving work of Christ? Now we turn to consider evil as it is manifested in human beings and in human acts. Here we will begin by drawing from Robert Spaemann, an eminent German intellectual whose work, while not strictly theological, is nevertheless firmly grounded in the Christian tradition. After laying out his description of human sin I would like to show how it relates to Barth’s notion of nothingness that we explored in the previous section. I will argue that Spaemann’s position corresponds very closely with and offers a concrete application of the doctrine of nothingness to the problem of human sin and the possibility of forgiveness. Then, in order to situate the discussion of sin firmly in the Gospel narrative I will draw from the christological ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In this I hope to show the close connection between Bonhoeffer’s notion of ‘the knowledge of good and evil’ and Spaemann’s notion of ‘culpable ignorance’. These, it will be seen, are both exposed for what they are in the encounter with the risen-wounded Christ.

Spaemann on culpable ignorance

Spaemann’s claim is that the human being is characterised as the animal which has ‘woken up’ to itself. The human becomes aware of her own nature, and therefore ceases to be merely this nature. Her nature is now something towards which she must adopt an attitude. She does not simply act spontaneously out of a set of natural desires, but in waking up she has become responsible for her actions and for discerning the quality of her desires.\textsuperscript{211} This does not mean her nature has become something external to her. It is not like an aircraft that she must pilot as a mind in a machine. This is because her nature remains the ground of her self-transcendence. It is because she is human that she is able to become self-aware, and she does not become aware of her nature as something external but as something she has internally. “We seem, as human beings,” says Spaemann, “to be onlookers of our own selves.”\textsuperscript{212}


\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.
For Spaemann, this waking up to her nature also brings with it a necessary dose of shame or guilt. For while she knows that her fellow human beings share with her a common dignity, that their wellbeing is as important as hers, she is nevertheless closer to her own sufferings, triumphs and cares than she is to the same realities in the lives of others. Often what is to her advantage is to her neighbour’s disadvantage. She must ‘trample on a few toes’ in order to get where she is going, often in circumstances which do not allow time for explanations or apologies. Though it is but a mark of her limited nature, this apparent apathy towards others is a source of regret. It is not that she bears any moral guilt for it, but rather, she carries ‘pre-moral’ guilt, or, a certain unease with the fact that she cannot regard the other as intimately as she does herself or treat the other with the care they truly deserve. She has transcended her nature enough to recognise this self-bias, but not enough to completely overcome it. To deny this guilt, and to refuse to acknowledge this unease with one’s own self-bias is, for Spaemann, a mark of cynicism.\(^{213}\)

Pre-moral guilt, says Spaemann, expresses itself in various forms of pre-moral apology. What is actually meant by the oft said “pardon me,” is that we stand closer to ourselves than to the other. We express that we know and feel this and that the other, when we infringe on him, is nevertheless more real to us than can be seen from our actions. We acknowledge others at the same time as we move to elbow them out of the way. We see that this cannot be otherwise but we depend on the fact that they also have this insight, so that insofar as they are real to us, we cannot be at peace with ourselves, as long as they do not forgive us our finitude.\(^{214}\)

What we ask of the other is that they do not take our actions as a full expression of who we are, and in turn we acknowledge that there is more to the other than what their actions display. Indeed, we respect them, says Spaemann, only when we do not take them completely seriously, for that would place too onerous a burden on them. No one is fully awake. This means that in benevolent love there always includes a moment of pre-moral forgiveness, “for the fact that no one fulfills what is promised by their being.”\(^{215}\)

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\(^{213}\) Ibid.

\(^{214}\) Ibid., 188-189.

\(^{215}\) Ibid., 189.
Thus we see a mysterious relationship between nature and freedom. The ‘animal that has woken up’ does not cease to be an animal. The one who has transcended her own nature does not cease to be limited (and enabled) by it. And in a mysterious way, the one who has woken up does not escape all responsibility for having previously been ‘asleep’.

Rather, our naturalness, which is centred in and prejudiced towards ourselves, appears to us as the fundament out of which the point of view of reason arises like an emergence from sleep. But in this wakeful view that primordial, that apparently innocent \emph{amour de soi} [self-love], becomes something of which we are ashamed, as if it were really not primordial, but rather already the result of a culpable inattention.\footnote{Ibid., 190.}

It is this distinction between attention and inattention that Spaemann finds most effective in formulating his account of good and evil.

Sin, he says, is letting oneself slip back into that pre-waking naturalness where one no longer notices the reality of the other. It means feigning ignorance, pretending to be innocent. It is like choosing not to look to my right when I know that if I do look I will see something that may oblige me to act. It is like hearing my alarm in the morning and telling myself I will get up in a few minutes, though I know that very soon I will fall asleep again and so become incapable of getting up. We are talking here about a culpable blindness, which is not so much the result of an action as it is the outcome of a refusal to act – “a non-activity, a renunciation of that original activity, in which I allow reality to become real for me.”\footnote{Ibid., 190-191.}

Spaemann does not put forward this description as a purely philosophical reflection, but regards it as a specifically Christian insight. He points to the remark made by Jesus that “every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20).\footnote{Ibid., 191.} Thus, for Spaemann, sin stems from a blindness that is culpable. It is the unwillingness to come into the light, and so to see. Paul makes a similar statement in Romans 1:20-21, in which he finds evildoers “without excuse” since God’s eternal power and deity is clearly perceivable in creation. To be unaware of God is not a mitigating factor that would render one innocent, but the result of an
unwillingness to “honour him as God [and] give thanks to him”. Blindness to the truth is not a morally neutral fact but a result of hardness of heart.

Perhaps most remarkable of all is Jesus’ plea to the Father from the cross to forgive his assailants (Luke 23:34). “‘They know not what they do’”, says Spaemann, “is a comment on all human action which is not a pure expression of love, and is at the same time the argument for the request: ‘Forgive them.’”219 This again contains the juxtaposition of ignorance and guilt that we have been speaking about. They are ignorant of what they are doing and yet the request for forgiveness itself presupposes their guilt. Indeed, as Spaemann argues, without both ignorance and responsibility there would be no possibility of forgiveness at all. That is, if there were no ignorance at play, if they consciously knew who it was they were crucifying – not only a just man, but the very Son of God, and if they comprehended the full ramifications of such an act, then there would be no basis for repentance and forgiveness. If they were already fully ‘awake’ to what they were doing then there would be no possibility of later waking up or ‘coming to their senses’. There would be no space for the movement of remorse and repentance. On the other hand, if their ignorance carried no responsibility then there would be nothing to forgive. The crucifixion would then be just an innocent misunderstanding, or the natural outcome of the events that preceded it. The two factors, therefore, must both be at play. Their ignorance must be something for which they are morally responsible.

Barth’s positive and negative sides of creation

Thus, Spaemann’s description of sin can be shown to flow from and to illumine certain scriptural threads on the matter. We would also like to demonstrate that it can be brought together with and help to elucidate elements of Barth’s account of nothingness which we encountered in the previous section. There we saw how Barth spoke of creation having both a positive and a negative aspect. Day and night, land and water, affirmation and negation, the heights and the depths, clarity and obscurity, growth and decay, beauty and ashes, security and vulnerability, value and worthlessness, are all examples of this duality.220 As we saw, both of these aspects exist according to the will

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219 Ibid., 189.
220 Barth, Church Dogmatics III/3, 295-297.
of God, both are created by him and are therefore good. Indeed, God partook in both aspects in the incarnation of the Son. For, as Barth insists, the very structure of his self-revelation is a movement from humiliation (negative) to exaltation (positive).\textsuperscript{221}

For Barth, as we have seen, any reconciliation of the good creation with nothingness is an absolute impossibility. Nothingness is precisely what God has rejected and it stands in total opposition to him and to the created order. For Barth, the danger that we face in regards to nothingness is to confuse it with the negative side of creation. We do this, for example, when we identify nothingness with the sorrow of loss, the darkness and cold of winter, the pain of the body, or the experience of misfortune. When we complain and curse about such things, as if they represented the chief threat to our existence and ultimate wellbeing, then we have begun to regard them as the embodiment of evil, as the face of nothingness, and as the manifestation of that which is opposed to God’s justice and providence. This, says Barth, is a great deception.

How surprised we shall be, and how ashamed of so much improper and unnecessary disquiet and discontent, once we are brought to realise that all creation both as light and shadow, including our own share in it, our puny and fleeting life, was laid on Jesus Christ as the creation of God, and that even though we did not see it, without and in spite of us, and while we were shaking our heads that things were not very different, it sang the praise of God just as it was, and was therefore right and perfect.\textsuperscript{222}

The inherent goodness of the negative aspect of creation, according to Barth, is shown in the fact that even in the midst of misfortune, hardship and suffering, the human being is still capable of praising God. Thus it does not represent that utter opposition to God’s goodness and truth that we refer to when we speak of evil or nothingness.

For Barth, the error of falsely identifying nothingness or evil as the negative side of creation has serious consequences. On the one hand it means that genuine evil will remain hidden from view. Just as the one wrongfully convicted of a crime hides the presence of the real criminal, so when the shadow side of creation is understood and labelled as ‘evil itself’ then nothingness, the real force of evil, goes unlooked-for and unnoticed. When, for instance, we locate the true evil as the misfortune of the unwanted pregnancy, then abortion, the actual rejection of creation and of God’s gift, creeps under the moral radar. On the other hand it means that we will be strongly inclined to

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 296.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 297.
incorporate the concept of evil into our ontology. We will tend to grant nothingness a place within God’s created order. We will be tempted to accept sin “as an essential and necessary part of existence.” Why? Because the negative side of creation, where we are mistakenly locating sin and nothingness, is in fact a part of the created order. So, having convicted the ‘innocent man’ (the negative side of creation) of the ‘crime’ (evil, nothingness) we will then begin to notice (rightly) how decent a person he is and be brought (wrongly) to the conclusion that ‘criminal activity’ (evil, nothingness) has an important place in forming ‘a sound moral character’ (the good created order).

The fabrication of this confusion is exactly how nothingness attains its semblance of dominion in the world. It pretends to be more than it is, and deceives us into attributing its existence to a positive act of God.

The very existence and essence of [nothingness] is that this can and does happen. In this way nothingness deceives us, we let ourselves be deceived by it, and we deceive ourselves. In this way true nothingness irrigts into God’s good creation. In this way we ourselves come to have a part in its nullity.

We may feel that we have become wiser when we can entertain the notion of a higher synthesis beyond good and evil, but in this blind folly we lose the desire and the capacity to resist the destructive and godless influence of nothingness.

I would now like to argue that Spaemann’s distinction between benevolent self-transcendence and self-biased human nature is the identification, within the human person, of the distinction between the positive and negative aspects of creation spoken of by Barth. Benevolent self-transcendence represents an instance of the positive side of creation. It is the capacity within the human to ‘wake up’ to herself as human and so transcend the limits of her human nature. This mysterious movement ‘out of herself” enables her to become aware of the other as another ‘self” and to sympathise with him in his struggles, triumphs and cares. It is also a ‘return back to herself” by which she is able to see herself as if through the eyes of another, to adopt an attitude towards herself. This movement of ecstasy and return makes her able to make promises, resist fatigue, repair injuries, order her emotions, give and receive forgiveness, cooperate in her own flourishing and that of others, and to see her life as a unified whole. It enables her to discern not only what will be to her benefit, but what will benefit her neighbour.

223 Ibid., 299.
224 Ibid., 301.
Self-transcendence, however, is conditioned and at times thwarted by the very source from which it originates – self-biased human nature. As an instance of creation’s negative side, self-biased human nature is part of the created order. It is negative insofar as it is unaware of and unsympathetic to the cares of others. It is non-rational and incapable of benevolence. It is subject to fatigue, forgetfulness, injury, emotional instability, and overall decline. It sets the conditions for a life in which what is to my advantage will often be to the disadvantage of others. And yet, it is not evil. It may be a source of unease for us, but the guilt we ought to feel in the face of our natural human incapacities is not a moral one. For, to bear with these incapacities is part of our creaturely state, willed by God, and pleasing to him. In Christ, God himself took on these same natural incapacities without falling prey to sin.

If Spaemann’s distinction between benevolent self-transcendence and self-biased human nature can be regarded as an instance of the more general distinction made by Barth between the positive and negative aspects of creation, then we will be able to draw a direct connection between Spaemann’s notion of sin - culpable ignorance posing as the self-bias of human nature, and Barth’s notion of evil - nothingness posing as the negative side of creation. For Spaemann sin tries to pass itself off as mere naturalness, while for Barth nothingness deceives us into thinking it is the negative side of creation. The consequences of these two deceptions are the same. Real sin and real nothingness can no longer be seen, and both, like the Trojan horse, are dragged inside the gates of human judgement to be accepted and incorporated into our philosophical outlook. Nothingness is assigned a place in created reality, and sin is accepted as a necessary part of human activity.

**Bonhoeffer on the knowledge of good and evil**

What does Spaemann’s ‘culpable ignorance’ look like in the serious moral person who always seeks to act justly? For this question we will turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While Spaemann speaks of sin in terms of ignorance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer develops the notion in terms of a certain kind of knowledge - the knowledge of good and evil. The contrast between holiness and sin is vividly expressed, for Bonhoeffer, in the conflict between
Jesus and the Pharisees. But since the Pharisee is actually seeking with all his efforts to be holy, the actual location of the contrast is somewhat elusive and requires careful discernment. It is not that the Pharisee is immoral, lacking in virtue, mischievous or cruel. Rather, for Bonhoeffer,

[the Pharisee is that extremely admirable man who subordinates his entire life to his knowledge of good and evil and is as severe a judge of himself as of his neighbour to the honour of God, whom he humbly thanks for this knowledge. For the Pharisee every moment of life becomes a situation of conflict in which he has to choose between good and evil. For the sake of avoiding any lapse his entire thought is strenuously devoted night and day to the anticipation of the whole immense range of possible conflicts, to the reaching of a decision in these conflicts, and to the determination of his own choice.]

In making these careful judgements, the Pharisee is mindful to avoid prejudice, to allow for special situations and emergencies, to seek to be as forbearing and generous in accord with the requirements of the law of Moses, and to avoid presumption, arrogance, and unwarranted pride. The Pharisee seeks to know his own faults in all their detail and to be humble and thankful before God. For the sake of God himself, however, there can be no denying, in the Pharisee’s mind, the difference between the good man and the sinner, between the one who tries to be faithful to the law and the one who transgresses the law out of disregard or sheer defiance. Anyone who fails to maintain this distinction, and to strive to stand always on the better side of it, “sins against the knowledge of good and evil.”

In their dealing with Jesus, observes Bonhoeffer, the Pharisees cannot help but seek to place him on one side or other of this distinction. They study his actions and pose him questions involving situations of moral conflict in order to test his judgement and to expose any weaknesses or inconsistencies: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (Matt 12:10); “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?” (Matt 22:17); “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matt 19:3). These testing questions are designed to draw Jesus into, what Bonhoeffer calls “disunion in the word of God”, but they fail on account of his “essential unity with the Word of God.” It is precisely this disunion in the word of God that characterises the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness – “If you are the Son

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226 Ibid., 30-31.
227 Ibid., 31.
228 Ibid., 32.
of God . . .” (Matt 4:1-11), and of the woman in the garden—“Did God really say . . .?” (Gen 3:1-7, NIV). It is to generate the illusion of a conflict and a sense of doubt in the covenant with God, and to force a decision that would undermine the covenant.

And, finally, all these temptations are repeated in the questions which we, too, always put to Jesus when we appeal to Him for a decision in cases of conflict, in other words when we draw Him into our problems, conflicts and disunions, and demand that He shall provide the solution to them.229 But because of his essential unity with the Word of God, Jesus refuses to enter into the conflict set up by his questioners: “Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?” (Luke 12:14). Instead, he transcends the questions with replies that express the unity of the word of God and serve to undermine this disunion, this knowledge of good and evil, from which their thoughts arise: “it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” (Matt 12:12); “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matt 22:21); “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” (Matt 19:8).

Bonhoeffer observes that when a question is put to Jesus, he often seems not to understand the question, he evades the question, he replies to a different question. He refuses to be limited by the law of logical alternatives or to enter into the either/or schema proposed by the question. Instead of addressing the question he is more intent on addressing himself to the questioner. In acting like this he appears to be refusing to play by the rules of fair argumentation and honest communication. He transgresses the law where there is no great necessity to do so, allowing his disciples to pick and eat the corn of the field on the Sabbath though they were not at the point of starvation, and healing the sick woman on the Sabbath, though having been unwell for eighteen years, she could easily have waited another day. In the exercise of this freedom, Jesus appears to the Pharisees as an impious, disobedient, egotistical blasphemer of God.230 And so, for Bonhoeffer, what ultimately sets Jesus apart from the Pharisees is the particular mode of freedom that he enjoys.

This freedom of Jesus is not the arbitrary choice of one amongst innumerable possibilities; it consists on the contrary precisely in the complete simplicity of His action, which is never confronted by a plurality of possibilities, conflicts or alternatives, but always only by one thing. This one thing Jesus calls the will of God. He says that to do this will is His meat. This will of God is His life. He lives and acts

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229 Ibid.
230 Ibid., 33.
not by the knowledge of good and evil but by the will of God. There is only one will of God. In it the origin is recovered; in it is established the simplicity and freedom of all action.\textsuperscript{231}

The Pharisees rely on a moral calculus which stems from their estrangement from God. Even though they use this calculus in order to be virtuous and so to overcome this estrangement, their efforts serve only to reinforce the disunity of their position. In contrast to this, the action of Jesus stems from his unshakable union with God the Father. There is no perspective or knowledge or resource outside of this union to which he can make appeal.

It may appear at first that Bonhoeffer’s description of sin differs substantially from that of Spaemann. Bonhoeffer centres sin in judgement based on the knowledge of good and evil while Spaemann identifies sin as culpable ignorance. However, we would like to push past this apparent divergence and seek a connection between the two positions. In fact, in order to understand Bonhoeffer it is important to see that the judgemental attitude (based on the knowledge of good and evil) is a kind of culpable ignorance. Indeed, Bonhoeffer insists that the Pharisees, despite their awareness of particular virtues and vices, suffer from an overarching ignorance of their state of disunity. This state infects even their acts of virtue, emptying them of genuine value, reducing them to acts of judgement – “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (Matt 23:5), in order that their display of virtue may serve as reproaches and accusations against the vices of their neighbours.

The Pharisee’s action is only a particular form of expression of his knowledge of good and evil, that is to say of his disunion with other men and with himself. It is consequently the gravest impediment to the achievement of that real action which arises from the rediscovered unity of man with other men and with himself. In this sense therefore, in the sense in which it arises from his disunited existence and not in the sense of conscious malevolence, the action of the Pharisee, that is to say, of the man who realises his knowledge of good and evil to the very extreme, is false action and hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{232}

The Pharisee is blind to his own apostasy and deaf to the call of Jesus to abandon the knowledge of good and evil for the freedom of being a disciple. Faced by Jesus the Pharisee is frustrated. Jesus refuses to give direct answers to his questions because the questions are filled with the presuppositions of fallen existence. Jesus’ answers transcend the Pharisees’ knowledge of good and evil, and they challenge the questioner.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 33-34. 
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 34-35.
to abandon the position of judge, based on the knowledge of good and evil, and to agree to be led by Jesus himself. In his evasive answers Jesus invites his questioners to a renewed existence in which their only certainty lies in God’s faithfulness, in his saving judgement, and in which they are therefore not permitted to be autonomous judges of good and evil anymore, or to find certainty in the knowledge of their own goodness.

In this way the work of Bonhoeffer helps us to develop Spaemann’s philosophical work in a more christological direction. Just as sin, for Spaemann, is culpable blindness posing as mere naturalness, so, for Bonhoeffer, the specific sin of the Pharisee who refuses to accept Jesus is culpable disbelief posing as obedience to the Law of Moses. So, while Spaemann traces sin back to a certain kind of ignorance, for Bonhoeffer sin is a certain kind of knowledge which masks a more fundamental ignorance. The Pharisees have the knowledge of good and evil but they are ignorant of the identity of Jesus. They remain in this ignorance wilfully, refusing to recognise him because that would mean abandoning their knowledge of good and evil. It would mean relinquishing their mastery over the Law of Moses. They protect themselves from ‘seeing’ Jesus by discrediting the great signs that he performs. He heals, but on the Sabbath. He casts out demons, but (some conjecture) in the name of Beelzebub. He raises a dead man to life, but this threatens public order. He makes a great impression by his teaching, but refuses to invoke any human authority to support it. For every great deed he performs there is an escape route for the sceptics. In this way the Pharisees use the knowledge of good and evil in order to remain ignorant of the divine character of Jesus’ identity and mission.

For Bonhoeffer the problem with judging one’s neighbour is that one opposes or resists the saving judgment of Christ and sets up in its place a judgment of condemnation. Thus, the sinner, in the act of judging her neighbour, places herself outside the saving judgment of Christ, where there is no light to see her own state and no cure for her own sins. The disciple of Christ abandons judging and the knowledge of good and evil for the judgement and knowledge of Christ. “No longer knowing good and evil, but knowing Christ as origin and as reconciliation, man will know all.”233 She is not permitted to ‘keep score’ by measuring her own goodness, but is spared the burden of

233 Ibid., 37.
endless moral dilemmas in following the single path of God’s will. To know the will of
God in Christ is to act on it, for it is only in consenting to be led, in entering the activity
of discipleship, in doing the will of God, that the will of God can be known.

Conclusion
In order to bring this current discussion to a close, we want to explicitly relate the
points of this section to the risen-wounded form of Christ. By manifesting himself as
the risen-wounded one, Jesus awakens the sinner from the state of sin as from a self-
induced sleep. As Spaemann points out, he shows sin to be culpable ignorance posing
as the self-bias of human nature. Or, in the language of Barth, he enables us to
recognise the deception of evil, posing as the negative side of creation. Or again, as
Bonhoeffer put it, he shows that life apart from God leads us to cast false judgement on
others, and ultimately on himself, the innocent one. This judgement is contradicted and
shown to be false by the fact that the Father has raised him from the dead. Indeed, by
rising still wounded Christ continues to give an ‘answer’ that goes beyond our fallen
human questioning. According to the knowledge of good and evil, the resurrection of
Jesus with the incriminating marks of the crucifixion ought to pose a direct threat to
those who participated in his death. His ‘answer’ to being executed at the hands of his
enemies transcends the disunion of those who reject him, because he does not demand
recompense: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did
not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly” (1 Pet 2:23). In this way Jesus
shows what it means to transcend the knowledge of good and evil and to be truly active
in the face of sin.

For Bonhoeffer, when the disunity of the knowledge of good and evil is overcome by
the unity of the word of God, which means knowing only in the light of Christ, then
false judgement is supplanted by a judgement of reconciliation. This judgement
will consist in brotherly help, in lifting up the falling and in showing the way to the
straying, in exhortation and in consolation (Gal. 6; Matt. 18.15ff.), and also, if the
need arises, in a temporary suspension of fellowship, but in such a manner that the
spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5.5). It will be a judgement
of reconciliation and not of disunion, a judgement by not judging, a judgement
which is the act of reconciliation. No longer knowing good and evil, but knowing
Christ as origin and as reconciliation, man will know all.234

234 Ibid.
This reconciling judgement described by Bonhoeffer is the kind of judgement enacted by Jesus when he appears in his risen-wounded form. It is a judgement which exposes the truth of sin and, in the same gesture, draws sinners back into communion with him. We will develop this further in section two of the next chapter when we explore the notion of holiness as a dynamic encounter with Jesus rather than a fixed possession or a state of self-sufficiency.
3.3. EVIL AS SELF-ENSLAVED FREEDOM

Introduction

Having explored the notion of evil in relation to being (chapter 3.1), and discussed the human participation in evil with reference to knowledge and ignorance (chapter 3.2), we will now concern ourselves with the connection between sin and the notions of freedom and autonomy. First of all we will briefly reintroduce Spaemann’s notion of ‘waking up’ outlined in the previous section. Then, in conversation with Balthasar, Josef Pieper, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonhoeffer, we will discuss whether the sinful act can rightly be described as ‘free’, and what this means for an account of sin articulated in light of the risen-wounded Christ. In conclusion we will draw together the points from the three sections of this chapter, offering a unified summary and plotting a way forward for the ecclesiological explorations of chapter four.

Freedom as autonomy and gift

As we saw in the work of Spaemann in the previous section, to wake up is to realise that one was previously ‘asleep’, and that one has been active in one’s sleep. Here, ‘sleep’ means activity that is not yet aware of itself. Once one has woken up then one is aware of a life that has already begun to unfold before the awakening. Progress has already been made in a certain ‘direction’. I am a child of these parents, a member of this community, an heir of this culture, and I already have this character that has begun to emerge. This given life in which I find myself is, in fact, the ground for my awakening, and so waking up does not mean I automatically become detached from the relations in which I find myself. Rather, it means, while immersed in them, I can adopt attitudes towards them. Indeed, I am called upon to reaffirm them and foster them, though, having woken up, it now lies within my power to reject and distance myself from them. In transcending myself and coming into this freedom it is even possible to reflect on my own freedom: where did it come from and what is it for?

In his reflections on finite freedom Balthasar speaks of it as having ‘two poles’. On the one hand freedom is autonomy. It means that one is able to direct oneself. And on the other hand finite freedom is something received as a gift. Like every genuine gift it has its origin in a giver and invites some kind of return or response. While distinct from one another these two poles belong together and imply one another. They are like the north
and south poles on which the sphere of human freedom rotates. The autonomy of finite freedom is not self-generating, nor is the gift-character of finite freedom hidden from its recipient. After all, a self-generating creature is not a creature, and a totally anonymous gift is not a gift. A creature can have autonomy only if it is given by the Creator, and at the same time it is on account of this autonomy that the gift can be acknowledged as such and reciprocated. The content of the gift is the ability to give. To be given freedom means to be invited into a relation of gift-exchange with the Giver. Thus, the two poles are intimately linked and belong together.

Sin is the rejection of the second pole. It is, for Balthasar, to cling to autonomy while feigning ignorance of one’s indebtedness to God. It is to treat finite freedom as if it were not a gift, but a power originating in oneself or a mere fact demanding no explanation. Thus the gift is not received as such, but is made the object of a theft. It is stolen out of the hands of the Giver. Freedom is accepted as an object (autonomy) but rejected as a gift. But even though one may reject it, the gift-character remains at the core of finite freedom. It is an invitation to enter into that relation of exchange with the Giver, and it cannot be silenced, only muffled and obscured under the cover of the lie – the refusal to acknowledge one’s indebtedness to God. In this way “the sinner builds a kind of ‘bulwark’ against the real truth; he hides behind its illusion, knowing all the while that the truth he has ‘wickedly suppressed’ (Rom 1:18) will eventually come to lay siege against his citadel.”

What, then, becomes of this autonomy? Or rather, what is left of human freedom when its autonomy-pole is separated from the gift-pole? For Balthasar, “The one who attempts to seize absolute power is overwhelmed by it; he has no defence against it.” In other words, the only way to try to remove oneself from the relation of exchange with the Giver is to lock oneself in, and the more one does this, the less room one has in order to exercise autonomy. We see this played out in the secularisation of public discourse where ‘freedom from the tyranny of religion’ actually results in the incapacity to enter meaningful dialogue about anything relating to the ultimate questions in life. We are reduced to speaking about the means of human existence without being able to discuss the ultimate ends to which they are directed. In the effort

236 Ibid., 165.
to secure one’s own autonomy one ends up frustrating it. Thus, for Balthasar, to reject the second pole and seek absolute autonomy is to become a slave.

[T]he freedom that refused to acknowledge God was bound to maintain this lie, but, by pursuing this course, it actually worked against its own true nature, since part and parcel of this nature is its transcendence backward and forward, that is, pointing to God as its origin and its goal. Thus it is overwhelmed by the very power of self-transcendence with which it has been endowed and becomes “bent in on itself”. Augustine calls this “incurvatio in se ipsum”.

This image of distortion and isolation must lead us to question the motive for sin. If this is the effect it has on the creature, then what is the attraction in rejecting the gift-pole of freedom and cutting oneself off from God as origin and goal? How is such a choice possible?

For Balthasar, these questions lead to a reflection on the gift and reception of freedom which take place in the form of a dramatic encounter between God and the creature. In order to fully actualise itself, finite freedom must choose the good for itself. It must accept its indebtedness to God as its supreme origin. This is possible as a choice thanks to the presence of “a necessary ‘latency’, according to which God initially keeps his free, inner self hidden: thus he gives the creature the opportunity to lay hold of its own freedom, a freedom that is both its own and comes from an external source.” God reveals himself only implicitly and partially. The creature does not perceive God in his irresistible splendour and is therefore capable of resisting him. The ineffable joy of beholding God, the peace that comes from depending on him, and the delight of offering oneself back to him in gratitude – all this is hidden, implicit. Even in the coming of Christ, to say that God is revealed also means that he is re-veiled. The manifestation of God in the flesh is at the same time the shrouding of the divine glory. So while “we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). There remains, therefore, the possibility that finite freedom would choose to deny its dependence on God, to turn away from its Creator. While this possibility does not belong to the essence of freedom, given that the blessed who behold the face of God in perfect freedom are incapable of sin, as a possibility it is a necessary ingredient in the movement by which finite freedom comes to itself in the first place.  

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237 Ibid., 150.
238 Ibid.
Pieper: sin as the failure of freedom

In a footnote to his discussion of freedom, power and evil, Balthasar makes reference to Josef Pieper and his refusal to ascribe the possibility of human sin to free will. This footnote indicates an apparent disagreement between Balthasar and Pieper (whose book on sin was first published in German just three years prior to Volume IV of Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama*). It seems that Pieper wants to deny the kind of connection that Balthasar makes between sin and freedom. For Pieper, “the negatives of guilt and sin cannot be explained by the positive quality of freedom.” In other words, to say that the possibility of sin comes from free will is like saying that the possibility of fratricide comes from having a brother. Or, the claim that freedom to do good implies freedom to do evil is like saying that having vision implies being able to gouge out one’s eyes. It may be true in a certain limited sense but it does not approach the core of the problem. The real opposition between these things needs to be spelt out. Sin is contrary to freedom just as fratricide is contrary to fraternity, and eye mutilation to vision. The latter does not serve as an explanation for the former.

For Pieper, following Aquinas, sin is at most “a consequence, or . . . a sign of freedom” but to be able to choose evil does not belong to the essence of free will. On the contrary, to be able to sin “is more related to a defect of freedom.” To use another physiological analogy, if we are told nothing else about an animal except that it is starting to go blind then we can be sure that it has vision. Such an ailment serves as a sign that the creature is normally capable of seeing. But while having the power of sight is a necessary precondition for becoming blind it is not what we would call an explanation. There would need to be some other cause to explain the loss of sight, over and above the painfully obvious assertion that only creatures with sight are able to lose it. If the creature has the power of sight then why is it going blind? Similarly, when it comes to the question of sin it will be unsatisfactory to invoke freedom as an explanation. For, it will rightly be asked, if one was free why did one sin?

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239 Ibid., 151.
242 Ibid., 79.
In relation to this question Pieper cites a remark from André Gide that “sin is what one does not freely do”.\textsuperscript{243} Though it is an exaggeration, this phrase, says Pieper, holds an important truth. Namely, it serves as a corrective to the assertion that sin stems from free will. St. Paul clearly expresses this disconnection between sin and freedom in his letter to the Romans: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15). While the human will does supply the “origin and springboard” for sin, a sinful act “is not committed \textit{as} an act of freedom.”\textsuperscript{244} In light of these comments, sin seems to involve a partial opposition between what one wants and what one does. We say ‘partial’ because a total opposition would entail that one had no control over the act, that it was a simple matter of coercion. But this would eliminate the agency that makes sin what it is – an action for which one is morally responsible. Sin presupposes agency, and yet the words of St. Paul, Pieper and Gide point to the fact that sin is also the failure of one’s agency. It is an act that undermines true human activity, and a choice that is opposed to human freedom. It is this contradictory character of sin that St. Paul refers to when he admits that “I do not understand my own actions.”

What is it, then, that makes sin possible if it is not freedom \textit{per se}? For Pieper, finite freedom is susceptible to sin primarily because it is finite, not because it is free. It is not because it bears the image of God that it is able to distort that image, but because it was created ‘out of nothing’. Only the divine will can be the standard for its own actions. The finite will of the creature is capable of ‘missing the mark’ because it is called to conform to a standard beyond itself. But further to this, it is because the creature stems from nothing that it is capable of that turning away from reality which is sin. It is, says Aquinas, “because the free will comes from nothing, that . . . it is inherent in it not to remain in the good by nature.”\textsuperscript{245} And what does it mean to be from nothing, asks Pieper, if not to be created? Here he refers to a rather mysterious distinction made by Aquinas: that this “bent toward evil” arises in the will of the creature “not by virtue of its origin from God, but because of its origin from nothing.”\textsuperscript{246} How ‘from God’ and ‘from nothing’ can be construed as two origins over against each other, Pieper admits, is beyond his capacity to understand or express. “We seem to have reached”, he says,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{243} André Gide, \textit{Tagebuch} 1889-1939, (Stuttgart, 1951), II, 257, cited in ibid., 79.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Pieper, \textit{The Concept of Sin}, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{De veritate} 24, 8 ad 4, cited in ibid., 81.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Pieper, \textit{The Concept of Sin}, 81.
\end{itemize}
“the furthest border beyond which not only language but thought itself begins to encounter the impassable.”

Barth would presumably agree with Aquinas and Pieper here. For Barth, the finite creature, insofar as she shares in the negative side of creation (i.e. limitation) is situated “on the very frontier of nothingness, secure, and yet in jeopardy.” Sin is, on the one hand, just a small step over a thin line, but while this line might be thin it is not in any way hazy or insignificant. It is definitive. To step over it implies an orientation that is completely contrary to creaturely existence. Or rather, as an incurvatio in se ipsum (turning in on oneself) it implies a lack of orientation – a rejection of everything towards which one could possibly orient oneself. For, to reject God as Creator means to reject oneself as creature. When the sinner ‘turns in on herself’ she does not actually encounter herself, but is faced with that emptiness which is the result of her refusal to answer the invitation to be herself, to open up to the other as gift. If she tries to consider herself in isolation from the other then she will discover only a malign void, a terrible negation – that ‘nothing’ from which she was divinely created.

The apparent disagreement between Pieper and Balthasar

We now need to address the question of whether a real disagreement exists between Balthasar and Pieper in the way that each accounts for the possibility of sin. Firstly, there are a few key points on which they clearly agree. They both hold that there is no possibility of sin for finite freedom once it has come to its perfection in the beatific vision. The possibility of sin is, therefore, not essential to finite freedom. They also agree that sin results in a diminishing of freedom, that the ungrateful seizing of autonomy undermines the very power of self-directed activity that it seeks to master. If there is a difference between their treatments of the matter then perhaps it is simply that Pieper does not appear to speak of that initial moment of finite freedom coming into itself that is so important for Balthasar. It is necessary to the structure of this movement, Balthasar thinks, that the possibility of sin be open. Or again, God cannot grant freedom to the creature without the risk of being himself rejected by the creature. Instead, for Pieper it is finitude – being created out of nothing – that is central for

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247 Ibid.
248 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3, 296.
opening the possibility of sin. Behind this apparent difference lies an important convergence. Balthasar and Pieper are both committed to the position that “God cannot create a freedom that is so confirmed in the good that it does not need to choose; [for then] such a freedom . . . would have been deprived of its supreme dignity.”\textsuperscript{249} That is, finite freedom cannot be thought of as being created ready-made, or fully mature, since the gift of finite freedom is an invitation, and a genuine invitation must leave room for both acceptance and decline. For Balthasar this is so because finite freedom must be self-actualised, and such a movement requires that God hide his full splendour. For Pieper, as for Aquinas, a fall away from the good is possible simply because of the finitude of the creature.

Therefore there does not seem to be any necessary conflict between Balthasar and Pieper. If anything, they could be said to complement each other. Balthasar emphasises that the gift of freedom has to be appropriated by the creature, that there is a choice that is involved in finite freedom actualising itself, which leaves open the possibility of sin. Pieper argues that there is no causal connection between freedom and sin, though without denying that sin does presuppose (finite) freedom. Both positions highlight that for the creature to be free she has to assent to that to which God calls her – the relationship of gift exchange.

**Judging and acting**

We will now round off this chapter by asking how these reflections on sin as the failure of finite freedom can be further developed in connection with the work of Bonhoeffer from the previous section and in light of the risen-wounded form of Christ. Bonhoeffer, in fact, does make a clear connection between judging and acting. For him, the judgemental attitude condemned by Jesus is not so much a source of action as it is an obstacle to action. “He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.” (Jas 4:11). Indeed, if sin is understood not as the exercise of freedom per se but as the failure of finite freedom, then it follows that sin also cannot be classed as genuine activity.

\textsuperscript{249} Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 150.
Judging the other man always means a break in one’s own activity. The man who judges never acts himself; or, alternatively, whatever action of his own he may be able to show, and sometimes indeed there is plenty of it, is never more than judgement, condemnation, reproaches and accusations against other men.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 34.}

And so, the one who judges, in a sense, fails to act. This is because the act of judging is an attempt to objectify the activity unfolding before her. In order to clearly survey and properly assess the actions of others she seeks to stand over and outside the drama of human life, and therefore ceases to be a genuine actor in that drama. This judging does not really oppose sin but expresses and perpetuates the state of alienation from God and neighbour. For Bonhoeffer it is from this state of alienation that sin actually arises.

As we saw in our previous section, this state infects even a person’s acts of virtue, emptying them of genuine value, reducing them, says Bonhoeffer, to acts of judgement – “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (Matt 23:5), in order that their display of virtue may serve as reproaches and accusations against the vices of their neighbours.

The Pharisee’s action is only a particular form of expression of his knowledge of good and evil, that is to say of his disunion with other men and with himself. It is consequently the gravest impediment to the achievement of that real action which arises from the rediscovered unity of man with other men and with himself. In this sense therefore, in the sense in which it arises from his disunited existence and not in the sense of conscious malevolence, the action of the Pharisee, that is to say, of the man who realises his knowledge of good and evil to the very extreme, is false action and hypocrisy.\footnote{Ibid., 34-35.}

What this passage makes clear is that false action is not simply to be equated with certain immoral deeds. Rather, false action arises out of a state which is the result of a more fundamental refusal to accept finite freedom as a divine gift (Balthasar), or the choice to turn in on oneself (Augustine), or the failure to enter into the drama of ongoing gift exchange. It is to assume in one’s operations a fundamental conflict in one’s relations with others, and to construe moral activity as the means to successfully navigating one’s way through the conflict.

However, the appearance of the risen-wounded Christ exposes this fundamental conflict as an illusion. Just as the risen-wounded Christ reveals sin as false judgement (this was the argument of the previous section), so, by overcoming sin and death, he also proves their underlying impotence. The state of conflict which seemed to characterise all
creaturely relations is relativised and placed in the service of a deeper unity. This is so because, in his risen-wounded form, Jesus is revealed as the rejected gift that is nevertheless given – given in the very moment of rejection. His wounds remind us of his rejection on the cross. But in the resurrection they become the sign that his self-offering has been received by the Father, and is to be extended to all through the gift of his Spirit. As Jesus himself said, “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (Matt 21:42, cf. Psalm 118:22). He exposes sin as our rejection of him, but it is a rejection that is completely impotent. This is because, instead of nullifying his self-gift, our rejection becomes the actual occasion for the gift. In this sense, sin is not really an act but a failure to act, since it has no purpose and no outcome of its own. Its attempt to nullify the divine gift by crucifying Jesus is not only brought to nothing, but is actually turned to the service of the gift.

**Conclusion**

In his risen-wounded form, Jesus teaches us of the utter absurdity of sin. This absurdity stems from the affirmation of Barth that we put forward in section one, that the agency of evil is rooted in nothing. The ‘dominion’ of Satan is not only corrupt but is empty, hollow. The deceit amounts to nothing because it comes from nothing. Jesus bears this nothingness in himself but only by virtue of the defeat of nothingness accomplished in the resurrection. The wounds show that you cannot know of the (empty) origin of evil from evil itself but only from the one who has triumphed over it. As we saw in section two, sin is a distorted kind of knowledge which can be characterised as culpable ignorance – a not-knowing for which one is morally responsible. It is a blindness that stems from a refusal to see, and that conceals itself behind the facade of the knowledge of good and evil. Again, however, this blindness and false knowledge can only be recognised as such from the point of view of the one who has been forgiven in Christ. His risen-wounded form shows that sin consists in a culpable failure to recognise him and a false judgement made against him. In this third section we have developed this notion of sin further in connection with the notions of freedom and action. We have argued that because sin cannot be regarded as a real exercise of freedom, neither can it be regarded as genuine action. As the refusal to enter into relations of dramatic gift exchange with God and neighbour, the sinful state is one of utter impotence. As is shown in Christ’s risen-wounded form, even when sin appears to produce its own
outcome by putting him to death, this final refusal of God’s Son only serves as the supreme occasion for the glorification of human nature and the gift of divine life. Thus, sin only renders the goodness of God even more explicit and fails to bring about any outcome of its own.
4. THE CHURCH

Introduction
This chapter, in a certain way, draws together the themes from our second chapter devoted to the person of Christ, the source of forgiveness, and our third chapter devoted to sin, the occasion for forgiveness. That is, when we come to consider the Church, we are considering the body of Christ made up of sinners. She is constantly seeking forgiveness and, at the same time, is constituted as a source of forgiveness by the Holy Spirit. We would like to develop an ecclesiology in harmony with our reflections on the forgiveness and risen-wounded Christ. We will do so in dialogue with Barth and Balthasar, mindful that it is here, in the realm of ecclesiology, that their positions appear to diverge the most.

In the first section we will discuss the nature of the Church and seek to formulate this as a participation in the risen-wounded form of Christ. Even as we move towards a radically sacramental account of the Church, Barth will remain an important voice in the dialogue alongside Balthasar. In section two we will explore the holiness of the Church in light of this sacramental view and with the help of Balthasar, whose survey of patristic material on harlotry and adultery in the scriptures will inform our study. This will require us to articulate a relational, non-possessive account of holiness in order to align with our fundamental reflections on the nature of the Church. The sacramental view developed in section one will allow us to speak of the Church as both seeking forgiveness from her Lord and as a source of forgiveness. We will see that holiness is not a static state but is associated with the sacramental encounter with Christ, risen and wounded. In section three we will explore Barth’s doctrine of election in an effort to account for those who are excluded from the sacramental life of the Church. With Barth we will argue that Christ’s election in the midst of rejection must inform the way we consider the unbeliever, the marginalised, and the excommunicated.
4.1. THE RISEN-WOUNDED CHURCH

Introduction
The aim of this section is to explore the nature of the Church in relation to the glorified wounds of Christ and in conversation with Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. This will begin with an exposition of Barth’s dialectical account of the nature of the Church. From this we will be able to draw certain connections between Barth’s account of the Church and the sacramental ecclesiology of Balthasar. It will then be necessary to identify certain commitments of the later Barth that would resist Balthasar’s sacramental account. From there we will propose a way of developing Barth’s ecclesiology in a sacramental direction in light of the glorified wounds of Christ. Finally, we will present the doctrine of primary and instrumental causality in Thomas Aquinas implied by such a proposal.

First dialectic
Barth gives his account of the nature of the Church with reference to the categories of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Just as Christ is recognised as true God and true man, so the Church is understood as a work of the Holy Spirit and as a reality within history. She exists as divine work and as human community without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. This account makes use of dialectical relations. The Church is both an invisible work of the Holy Spirit and a visible reality within history. In this relation, the divine is the basis for and is joined with the human. There is a real distinction here but no separation, since the invisible work of the Spirit is the basis for the visible reality within history and is irrevocably joined with it. Just as the flesh of Christ could not be without the Divine Word, so the visible Church relies for its existence on the invisible presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

For Barth, in order to be correctly understood, the Church must be viewed dialectically as both eternal event and historical activity. The Christian community is “the work of the Holy Spirit . . . which takes place among men in the form of a human activity.”

That Christian community and Christian faith are founded by the Holy Spirit entails

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253 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 650.
that they are being constantly re-founded by him. The visible, historical state in which the Church manifests its essence depends radically on the re-presentation (making present) of the event of its founding by the Spirit. It is founded only because it is being at all times re-founded, and its re-founding is nothing other than a renewal of the founding that has already been achieved.

To put it in another way, the receiving of the Holy Spirit which makes the community a Christian community and a man a Christian will work itself out and show itself in the fact that only now will they really expect Him, only now will they want to receive Him; and where He is really expected, where there is a desire to receive Him, that is the work which He has already begun, the infallible sign of His presence.254

Thus Barth rules out any notion that the Holy Spirit merely adds certain qualities to a pre-existent Church. This would be the case were the visible manifestation of the Church considered the primary partner in the dialectic. Then we would be able to speak about the Church as a community of disciples who wish to follow and bear witness to Christ, and who therefore call upon the Holy Spirit to enable and assist them in this human-divine task. The Spirit, according to this model, is a second reality, ‘added’ to the already existing Church to make it effective. For Barth, to hold this position is to totally misunderstand the nature of the Church, whose very being depends on the action of the Spirit, and whose expectation of and desire for him is itself the Holy Spirit’s work. Without the Spirit there simply is no Church – nothing that could rightfully be called the Christian community.

As Kimlyn J. Bender observes, Barth’s particular framing of the dialectic is a defence against a view of the Church conditioned by the christological heresies of docetism and ebionitism. The docetic error applied to ecclesiology is to regard the Church solely as an invisible reality and to see its contingent, historical manifestation as illusory, unimportant, or a necessary evil. The ebionitic error, on the other hand, regards the church as merely a religious society - an historical human reality alongside others, differing from other institutions only by degree, not by kind.255 Against these errors Barth wishes to affirm both the historical, visible nature of the Church, and the radical discontinuity that exists between the Church and all other human institutions which

254 Ibid., 647.
255 Bender, Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology, 171.
have their origin in a human initiative and not in the direct agency of the Holy Spirit and the proclaimed Word.

For Barth, the affirmation that the Church is formed by the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand with the affirmation of a deep correspondence between the Church and Christ. This correspondence means that the Church must not be thought of as a second mystery, but as another dimension of the mystery of Christ. The history of the Church, in fact, has its basis in and is united to the history of Jesus Christ. When we move from the life of Christ to the life of the Church it is the same reality that we see.256 "We are not now in a different sphere; we are simply looking at it from a different angle."257 Together the history of Christ and the history of the Church constitute the history of salvation, of the reconciliation of God and humanity. Again, following the logic of Chalcedon, this correspondence entails unity and differentiation. The mystery of Jesus is the basis for the mystery of the Church, which has no existence apart from his, but is the earthly historical form of his glorified existence. Like the divine and human natures of Christ, the two aspects of the history of salvation are united without confusion or change, and distinguished without separation or division.

For Barth, because it is a mystery with its basis in the mystery of Christ, the Church is rightly confessed by Christians as an object of faith. For, just as the full identity of Christ cannot be arrived at by a consideration of his historical existence divorced from faith, the true nature of the Church cannot be appreciated merely from her historical manifestations.

The glory of Jesus Christ was hidden when he humbled Himself, when He took on our flesh, when in our flesh He was obedient to God, when He destroyed our wrong, when He established our right. So, too, the glory of the humanity justified in Him is concealed. And this means that the glory of the community gathered together by Him within humanity is only a glory which is hidden from the eyes of the world until His final revelation, so that it can be only an object of faith.258 While the Church does indeed manifest its invisible character, faith is needed in order for this invisible character to be recognised in the visible manifestation. It is because the Church is a unity of the invisible work of the Spirit and the visible response of

256 Ibid., 166.
257 Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.1, 644.
258 Ibid., 656-657.
human beings (for which the work of the Spirit is the basis) that her true character can only be grasped by faith.

**Balthasar and the second dialectic**

Within the visible historical form of the Church Barth speaks of a further dialectic – the Church as both obedient and sinful. As Bender aptly summarises,

> the church lives in qualified correspondence to God insofar as its historical life bears (divinely actualized) analogies to its invisible and spiritual reality. The reality of the church is thus hidden under the visible form of sin, yet, as joined to its invisible mystery, even this visible form may reflect its divine reality, though no direct identity can be drawn between them.

Thus the Church is at the same time the communion of saints and the refuge of sinners. Her invisible divine essence is both obscured by her visible historical form and it is revealed by it. This means, for Barth, that while her dogmas, structures, and practices do bear a certain correspondence to the revelation and reality of God, they are not to be simply equated. This dialectic ensures that the proper distinction is held between God and creation, between the visible manifestation of the Church, and its invisible mystery, the Holy Spirit.

With this second dialectic, Barth’s way of describing the Church is beginning to sound sacramental in character. In it we can hear echoes of the sacramental logic whereby there is a visible sign that both reveals and hides an invisible reality. In the ecclesiology of Balthasar the sacramental nature of the Church is made utterly explicit. While Barth speaks of the Church as originating in the work of the Spirit, and living from the very life of Christ, Balthasar describes it in terms of the liturgical action of the Eucharist.

> [T]he memory of the event of Jesus’ self-surrender is a remembering (*anamnesis*, 1 Cor 11:24f.) that recalls the birth of the Church. In other words, it is a memorial that consciously establishes contemporaneity with the act whereby the Church becomes herself. In so far as this birth occurred once and for all (*έφαπαξ*) it is a remembering of a past event and, thus, a true memorial meal commemorating a death. But since this man who died is no longer dead, but lives (Acts 25:19) and has promised to come again, it is a memorial meal that looks to the future, when he will return (1 Cor 11:26; Lk 22:18) to transform the memorial meal of the death definitively into the eternal banquet of joy (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:30). Finally, however, in so far as all Jesus’ earthly activity has been taken up and made present in the risen Saviour, what had occurred once and for all can and must become present here and now. The meal of the Church, whereby the Church comes to be, is the very same as the meal of

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259 Bender, *Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, 179.
suffering whereby Jesus surrendered himself unto death; but it is also the same as the eschatological meal, only sacramentally veiled.\textsuperscript{260}

As described by Balthasar, the sacrament of the Eucharist seems to provide a genuine instance of Barth’s dialectic of divine event and earthly-historical activity. The Eucharist is an earthly-historical memorial, and it is the re-living of the salvific work of the Son of God in the present moment. It is both a looking back to the formation of the Church by Christ’s sacrificial self-gift on the cross and it is the re-formation of the Church by the actual renewing of that gift here and now. The Church employs the rites and symbols that it has received from Christ through a (horizontal) historical process of tradition, and at the same time she depends radically on the (vertical) work of the Holy Spirit, animating those rites and symbols in the given moment and making them effective. Here in the words of Balthasar we seem to have a real instance of the conceptual dialectic which Barth has used to describe the nature of the Church. Or, put another way, Barth’s application of Chalcedonian categories to ecclesiology suggests a deeply sacramental view of the Church.

\textbf{Barth and the sacraments}

The question is whether this link between the ecclesiological positions of Barth and Balthasar can be upheld. At first glance it would seem doubtful. For, when it comes to explicit reference to sacraments, Barth clearly does not wish to associate them with what is essential to the nature of the Church. For Barth, in his later writings, the event of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is “the one \textit{mysterium}, the one sacrament, and the one existential fact before and beside and after which there is no room for any other of the same rank.”\textsuperscript{261} Barth’s view is that Christians have not to assist or add to the being and work of their living Saviour who is the Lord of the world, let alone replace it by their own work. The community is not a prolongation of His incarnation, His death and resurrection, the acts of God and their revelation. It has not to do these things. It has to witness them.\textsuperscript{262}

And therefore, for Barth, the Lord’s Supper is not meant to “complete or represent or actualise” the death of Jesus Christ “but only attest it.”\textsuperscript{263}

\textsuperscript{260} Balthasar, \textit{Glory of the Lord} I, 572.
\textsuperscript{261} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV.1, 296.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 317-318.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 296.
It is clear that a strong effort is being made here to emphasise that the Church does not have her own separate life but lives of and from the life of Jesus Christ. Similarly, the Christian community does not possess its own agency per se, but, in all its works, refers to the agency of the Spirit of Christ. Or again, Barth wishes to avoid any notion that Christ is simply absent between the time of the ascension and the parousia, and that the Church must make him present in the exercise of her sacramental life. For Barth, Christ’s physical absence is not the last word. Rather, he remains truly present, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in his body, the Christian community. “This people, this community, is the form of His body in which Jesus Christ, its one heavenly Head, also exists and has therefore His earthly-historical form of existence.”

Balthasar offers a similar description of the Church as “the imprint of Christ’s form in the medium of those who have followed after him and whom he has called his own.”

But while the Church lives of the very life of Christ, Barth insists that the historical form and invisible basis of the church must never be equated, even though they are inseparable. If they are equated (as he thinks they are with liberal Protestantism on the one hand and Catholicism on the other) the church ceases to be an object of faith. “What it is, its mystery, its spiritual character, is not without manifestations and analogies in its generally visible form. But it is not unequivocally represented in any such visible manifestations and analogies.” For Barth, the Church in its visible form must not try to be anything more than a witness to its invisible glory – the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

No concrete form of the community can in itself and as such be the object of faith. Even the man Jesus as such, the caro Christi, cannot be this, just as the individual Christian cannot believe in his faith as a work. The community can believe in itself only when it believes in its Lord and therefore in what it is, in what it really is in its concrete form. The work magnifies the master. The visible attests the invisible. The glory of the community consists in the fact that it can give God the glory, and does not cease to do so.

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264 Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.2, 59.
265 Balthasar, Glory of the Lord I, 562.
266 Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.1, 657.
267 Ibid., 658.
**Caro Christi and the glorified wounds**

Barth’s reference to the *caro Christi* is of particular interest here. By this he supposedly means that our faith in Christ does not dictate to us anything particular about his physical appearance. The Gospels witness to his words and deeds, but they do not offer us the sort of information that would normally be given for a character in a modern day novel. We do not know what Jesus looked like, how tall he was, how strong he was, what colour eyes he had, or what his voice sounded like. Nor do we know anything about his personality traits, if he had any particular hobbies, food preferences, favourite colours, or if he liked to joke, or to dance or sing. It is common to assume that he learnt the trade of carpentry from Joseph but even this is nothing more than a safe guess. Nothing of this, it seems, really matters for the Christian. These are the sorts of details that fuel our present-day personality cults, seen in the plethora of celebrity fan clubs, where particular images, habits, opinions and escapades of the famous are put forward as matters of curiosity, to encourage certain practices, endorse certain attitudes, to surprise, amuse, or distract us. But in the life of Jesus such details can never be genuine objects of faith, and it must be considered providential that the Gospels do not give us any. Of all the images that we have of Jesus in Christian art, none can ever be held definitive, even though they may serve to invoke his person – to remind us of his undying presence, and of what he has said and done.

This all points to the fact that Jesus did not come simply to reveal himself or to do his own will, but to reveal and to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 6:38). In the total gift, the total surrender of himself, there is nothing of Jesus that remains solely his own. He does not reveal to us any trivial facts that would merely point us back to him. Indeed, he does not glorify himself but is glorified by the Father (John 8:54). And this glory will remain hidden until he comes again as King and Judge (Matt 25:31). So it is, according to Barth, with the Church.

Its glory can appear only where there appears the glory of Jesus Christ and the sinner justified by Him. But as long as time endures, until the final manifestation of God and man in the future of Jesus Christ, the place where this takes place is hidden in its concrete form, with which it is only indirectly and not directly identical. For that

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268 This is one significant way in which ancient biography differs from modern biography.
269 Barth, however, held that “there is no theological visual art. Since it is an event, the humanity of God does not permit itself to be fixed in an image. In conformity with its object, the fundamental form of theology is the prayer and the sermon. It can only take the form of dialogue.” See Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 57.
reason this occurrence must be believed in the concrete form of the history which is visible to all.\footnote{270}{Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.1, 658.}

Therefore, just as the human (or even Christian) imagination can offer no definitive depiction of Christ, so, for Barth, there can be no definitive concrete form of the Church. If there was such a form then the Church would cease to be an object of faith. When we suppose that the visible manifestation of the Church corresponds fully with her hidden inner mystery then “what the church is is not hidden” and so it “does not need to be believed.”\footnote{271}{Ibid., 659.} This does not mean, for Barth, that there is no way of recognising the Church. She can in fact be recognised when she bears witness, like the Gospels do, to the words and deeds of Jesus. But exactly what this is to look and to sound like is not something that can be humanly prescribed. The concrete form of the Church throughout the ages is not determined by theologians or pastoral planners, but by the Holy Spirit who continually constitutes the Church as the body of Christ.

This is Barth’s view of the Church. However, in light of the explicitly sacramental vision of Balthasar, we would like to add an important feature to this conception of the nature of the Church and to develop it in such a way that our ecclesiology is brought into harmony with the previous chapters. Going back to our comments relating to the \textit{caro Christi}, there is one exception to the rule, one detail of Christ’s physical appearance that is disclosed to us in the Gospels. There is one feature that he manifests after the resurrection to which he draws his disciples’ attention in order, among other things, to confirm his identity. It is, of course, the very thread that has run through our discussion since the second chapter: that Jesus bears, in his hands, feet, and side, the wounds of his crucifixion. While his bodily dimensions and ‘personality’ do not feature in the content of the Gospel, the wounds do feature, and therefore, the wounds have a definite place in the content of Christian faith. Christians believe in the one who bears the wounds. We do not know what our risen Lord looks like, but we believe that he is “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). As Barth says, the disciples recognise him “when He allows them to see and touch His hands and His feet (Lk 24:39).”\footnote{272}{Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.2, 145.} More than any other feature of his humanity, the glorified wounds correspond with the hidden mystery of Jesus. Indeed, they do this most profoundly. They point to the death to which his whole earthly life was oriented, and in their
enduring presence they proclaim death’s defeat and the coming kingdom in which God’s mercy and forgiveness will be revealed in his final triumph.

The wounds and the Church

This crucial detail of Christology must surely be given a place in our understanding of the Church. If there are, in fact, certain concrete, visible marks by which we can identify Jesus Christ (even though his overall appearance remains hidden from us), then should not the Church, which lives only by his life, also bear his risen-wounded form? The wounds which mark Christ must also mark her. It is in light of this insight that we return to Balthasar. Here we see that when it comes to the visible form of the Church, his instincts are as radically Christological as those of Barth.

Nothing in the Church – not even the Church herself – can lay claim to an autonomous form that would compete with the Christ-form or even replace it. Nor is it as if through the sacraments a ‘formless’ grace, so to speak, were mediated for which the Church, as administrator of the sacraments, had to invent a fitting and adequate form starting from nothing. The fundamental figure of grace is Jesus Christ himself, and all sacramental forms are grounded in his form in a most concrete sense.²⁷³

For Balthasar, both the Church and her sacraments take their form from that of the Christ-form, whom we are contemplating as the risen yet mortally wounded Christ. Therefore, while Christ bears his wounds as a visible sign of his death and resurrection, we are able to make a similar affirmation about the Church. The Church is marked and made recognisable by the sacraments that she has received, just as Christ is marked and made recognisable by his wounds. The Church is the body of Christ and the wounds she bears and presents to sinners are the sacraments. They are like ‘openings’ in Christ’s body through which and in which sinners are united with Christ’s death and resurrection and encounter the one who was slain but lives forever. The Church witnesses to Christ who bears his wounds and calls the doubters to “see my hands and put your hand into my side, do not be doubting but believe” (Jn 20:27). The wounds are manifested in the Church as the sacraments of Christian faith. Yes, Barth is right that Christ hanging on the cross is the one sacrament, but this need not prevent us from affirming the sacraments of the Church as diverse means of entering that one sacrament of Christ crucified.

²⁷³ Balthasar, Glory of the Lord I, 576.
There is a long theological tradition which associates the wounds of Christ with certain sacraments. Many patristic and medieval writers understood the blood and water issuing from the side of the crucified Christ to be signs of the waters of Baptism and the Blood of the Eucharist. Among the most notable of them was St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407).

*There flowed from his side water and blood.* Beloved, do not pass this mystery by without thought. For I have still another mystical explanation to give. I said there was a symbol of baptism and the mysteries in that blood and water. It is from both of these that the Church is sprung *through the bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit*, through baptism and the mysteries. But the symbols of baptism and the mysteries come from the side of Christ. It is from His side, therefore, that Christ formed His church, just as He formed Eve from the side of Adam. And so Moses, too, in his account of the first man, has Adam say: *Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh*, hinting to us of the Master’s side. Just as at that time God took a rib of Adam and formed a woman, so Christ gave us blood and water from His side and formed the Church. Just as then He took the rib from Adam when he was in a deep sleep, so now He gave us blood and water after His death, first the water and then the blood.\footnote{274 John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* (Ancient Christian Writers), Cat. 3, 17-18, trans. Paul W. Harkins, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1962), 62.}

Chrysostom presents here a view of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist which is fundamentally christological. They are not something which, first of all, the Church does. Rather, like the blood and water, they issue directly from the crucified Christ, and bring about the birth of the Church.

What we are proposing here goes further than this because, rather than simply seeing the blood and water as signs of two sacraments, we are identifying an analogy between the woundedness of Christ’s risen body and the sacramental nature of the Church. It is an analogy which applies in several ways. Firstly, it applies on the levels of recognition. The risen Jesus is recognised in his woundedness, and the Church is recognised in her sacramental life. The risen Christ is the same one who was crucified, just as the Church today is the same reality that was instituted by Christ and commissioned to baptise and to celebrate the Eucharist (Matt 28:19; Luke 22:19).\footnote{275 We are aware that when it comes to the number of sacraments that are recognised, there is a lack of consensus among the Catholic/Orthodox traditions and those of the various Protestant groups. We mention only Baptism and Eucharist here, but our arguments could equally be applied to all seven sacraments.} Secondly, the analogy applies on the level of revelation. Christ’s woundedness reveals him as the source of mercy for sinners, just as, in her sacramental life, the Church is shown to be the instrument of that same mercy. Thirdly and fourthly, the analogy applies on the levels of significance and
efficacy. The wounds of Christ are signs of his death – signs which indicate that the death he died continues to be efficacious. As Balthasar himself says, “It is essential, therefore, that his wounds feature in his Resurrection . . . because it is through his opened body . . . and the infinite distribution of his flesh and shedding of his blood that men can henceforth share in the substantial infinitude of his Divine Person.” 276 This is what the sacraments of the Church signify and bring about. They point to the saving death of Christ and his abiding presence, which, through the exercise of the sacraments, continue to be efficacious. In her sacramental life, then, we might say that the Church participates in the risen-wounded form of Christ, and that human beings are able to enter into the life of Christ through the sacraments.

For Barth, as we heard, the Church is called, not so much to participate, as to witness to the Saviour, Christ, and his saving deeds. But how does she do this except by participating in his life and work? There is no suggestion here that the sacramental economy has its place alongside the economy of the Saviour as a rival system. Rather, as Balthasar has argued, it is through the sacraments (though not exclusively) that Christ manifests himself in the Church and that his saving work is continually made present. 277 “Do this in memory of me” is the mandate which he gave to the Church, not simply “bear witness that I have done it,” though the latter is, of course, contained in the former. When it comes to the sacramental economy, to do it is to bear witness. The Christian community is not only a prophetic people, it is also a royal priesthood, and it is on the basis of its chosen, royal, priestly, holy character that it is called be prophetic – “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pt 2:9). Our reading of this scripture is that the Church bears witness to Christ by fulfilling the mandate that he has given.


277 This is not the same as saying that the sacraments make present an otherwise absent Christ. As John Webster has shown, Barth rejects the assumption pervading much modern theology that there is a disjunction between Jesus and the world that theology must overcome “by elaborating upon various modes of human activity (experiential, hermeneutical, sacramental, moral), through which Jesus can be ‘realised’, made meaningful.” John Webster, “Eloquent and Radiant” The Prophetic Office of Christ and the Mission of the Church,” Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1998), 128. On this we are in complete agreement with Barth.
This sacramental account of the Church can even be expressed in Barth’s language of dialectic. On the one hand, the Church (as Bride) has nothing that she may call her own but is simply called to witness to the presence and work of her incarnate Saviour. And at the same time (as Body) she actually carries out this work in him, in every time and place, by the power of the Holy Spirit. She witnesses to the presence and power of Christ which infinitely surpasses her and does not depend on her, and yet this witness is only effective because through it she actually mediates\textsuperscript{278} that to which she bears witness - the presence and power of the living and present Christ. On the one hand the Church is a witness to Jesus, and on the other she is the one in whom and through whom Jesus makes himself present and active in the world.\textsuperscript{279} In both aspects there is a union between the activity of Christ and that of the Church. Christ’s activity is, of course, primary. It is the basis for the activity of the Church. Still, this does not supplant the Church’s agency. She does act and her activity is effective because it is Christ acting in her by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Primary and instrumental causality**

There is at play here a double agency, described by Thomas Aquinas as a unity of primary and instrumental causality. “First, when the primary cause acts through an instrumental cause, the whole effect is attributed to each, though in distinct ways.”\textsuperscript{280} Bernhard Blankenhorn observes that, for Aquinas, the notions of primary and instrumental causality are firstly employed to express the mystery of the hypostatic union.

The union of Christ’s two natures in his single divine person is so intimate that his human operations truly share in the power of the divinity, so that supernatural power truly “goes out” of his body (Lk 6:19), a truth made intelligible to us by the philosophy of instrumental causes fully subordinated to, dependent on, and participating in the power of the Triune principal cause.\textsuperscript{281}

\textsuperscript{278} Barth avoided this term in *CD IV*, probably because it seemed to him to presuppose a disjunction between Christ and the world that demanded to be bridged by the mediation of the Church. Here, however, we are presenting the activity of the Church as based in and radically dependent on the activity of Christ. For a stimulating analysis of the shift in Barth’s thought on ecclesial mediation see John Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

\textsuperscript{279} We will not discuss here the question of whether Christ acts outside the Church. If anything, we are operating under the assumption that the Church is present wherever Christ acts.


\textsuperscript{281} Blankenhorn, “The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments,” 279.
In other words, just as the saving actions of Jesus Christ have their primary cause in the person of the Divine Word, they are, nevertheless, performed through his humanity as an instrument. This is why the Scriptures can affirm that we are truly “justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9) even though we are “justified by his grace” (Rom 3:24). There is no opposition between these two statements because divine activity and human activity are united in the activity and person of Jesus. Invisible grace is communicated through visible gestures and audible words.

Similarly, we affirm by faith that the sacraments are enacted by the agency of Christ, and yet it is clear from what can be seen that all the sacramental signs are performed by the members of the Christian community. Neither of these assertions can be faithfully or reasonably denied. Though the agency of Christ is primary and the activity of the Christian people is that of freely cooperating instruments, there is definite overlap between the agency of Christ and that of the members of his Church. It is never the case, therefore, that certain activities or effects are attributed to Christ and certain others to the Christian community. Thus, the distinction between primary and instrumental causality mirrors Barth’s dialectic. The two are joined in a profound yet asymmetrical unity. Their unity is profound because the agency of each overlaps and the two are inseparable. It is asymmetrical because primary causality is the basis for instrumental causality and not vice versa. The instrument has no being or agency that it has not received from the primary cause. To illustrate this Aquinas employs the analogy of a craftsman using an axe to build a couch. The effect of the couch is caused by both the craftsman and the axe, but in different ways. The axe on its own is not capable of forming the materials into a couch, but it is when moved by the craftsman who possesses the form of the couch in his mind. Similarly, the sacramental signs (water, bread, wine) and actions do not cause grace by virtue of their own form. Rather, it is because they are instituted as signs by Christ that they share provisionally in his work of justifying and sanctifying sinners. Just as the couch is not formed in the image of the axe, but in that of the craftsman’s idea, so the effect of the sacrament is not to conform us to the signs themselves, but to conform us to the person of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who, as ‘primary cause’, makes himself present by constituting the Christian

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community and instituting the sacramental signs so that they may act as ‘instrumental causes’.

An objection that could be raised at this point is that a philosophical distinction is here being employed to determine a theological position.\textsuperscript{283} Human wisdom is presiding over the wisdom of God, so that our understanding of the work of Christ in the sacraments is being filtered through some prior philosophical convictions. But this is far from the case according to Blankenholm. In his analysis of the development of Aquinas’ doctrine of sacramental causality, Blankenholm argues that Aquinas formulated this doctrine only when “he learned to meditate with the Greek Fathers on Jesus’ healing activity in the Gospels and on his hypostatic union.”\textsuperscript{284}

Far from being a mere adoption of Aristotelian categories into his theology,\textsuperscript{285} Aquinas’ employment of these notions of causality is better described as “exploding the limits of Aristotle’s teaching.”\textsuperscript{286}

Aristotle hardly conceived of physical instruments infusing spiritual accidental forms, nor a temporary intrinsic power by which an instrument produces an effect that radically exceeds anything in proportion to its own form whenever it is moved as an instrumental cause by the primary agent.\textsuperscript{287}

In other words, it is clear from the doctrine of Aquinas itself that it is not determined by the philosophy of Aristotle but by the reality of the hypostatic union and of the Christian sacraments. In this way Aquinas escapes the accusation of putting human categories before the revelation of God. His concern is not to accommodate the revelation in a way that is fully accessible to human reason. On the contrary, he employs these terms in order to preserve the unfathomable mystery of the relation between divine and human agency in the person of Christ and in his sacraments.

\textsuperscript{283} Barth discusses the distinction between primary and instrumental causality in \textit{Church Dogmatics} III.3, 89-158. While he does not see the distinction as necessarily problematic, he describes it as “an invitation to error” (103), warning that its use must be conditioned by certain commitments: that causality is not understood in a mechanistic sense as in the natural sciences; that the Creator and the creature are not thought of as two known and controllable ‘objects’ alongside one another; that the infinite qualitative difference between the Creator and the creature is maintained; that the distinction should not cause theology to be reduced to a philosophical system; and that the employment of the distinction is not concerned solely with God’s creative activity, but also with the salvific activity of God in Christ.

\textsuperscript{284} Blankenhorn, “The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments,” 285.


\textsuperscript{286} Blankenhorn, “The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments,” 284.

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid.
Conclusion

No doubt, there is much room for disagreement and debate surrounding this issue of the sacraments and human cooperation with grace. What we have proposed here is way of understanding the Church as radically sacramental in nature without separating her from or collapsing her into the person of Jesus Christ. We can therefore insist, with Barth, that her earthly-historical form corresponds to but is not simply identical with her invisible divine essence. Though we do not possess a pre-conceived image of what the Church is meant to look like, we can still recognise her by the sacraments she bears in correspondence to the glorified wounds of the risen Christ. We can affirm that in these sacraments, sinners encounter the risen-wounded Saviour. He is the primary agent in this encounter, and yet the Church herself is nevertheless fully active in this encounter as the instrument of grace.

If we deny that the witness and activity of the Church is effective in this way – that it brings about that to which it bears witness by the agency of the Holy Spirit – then it will be difficult to avoid thinking of the Church as separate from Jesus Christ. Either we will neglect the poverty of the Church and conceive of her as something akin to a ‘second incarnation’ distinct from the incarnate Word, or, by overlooking the efficacy of her witness, we reduce her to a mere ‘servant’, or ‘devotee’ of Christ. Yet the separation of Christ and the Church is the error that Barth is intent on avoiding. What we have sought to establish here is that a correct understanding of the sacraments and of causality provides the very means by which Barth’s dialectic is preserved.
4.2. THE HOLY CHURCH

Introduction

In the last section we spoke about the relation between Christ and his earthly-historical form as one of correspondence. The invisible, divine basis of the Church, says Barth, is both revealed and obscured through her visible form.

What it is, its mystery, its spiritual character, is not without manifestations and analogies in its generally visible form. . . . But the being of the community in its temporal character is hidden under considerable and very powerful appearances to the contrary. . . . For in what its generally visible history is on that level it does not belong only to the creaturely world but actually to the world of flesh, of fallen man. It is always sinful history – just as the individual believer is not only a creature but also a sinful man. Woe to it if . . . it accepts as its being its concrete historical form, equating itself with it and trying to exist in it abstractly.

In this section we will seek to understand this partial correspondence more deeply. What do we mean when we confess that the Church is holy? How can she be rightly referred to as the communion of saints? And most particularly, why are such affirmations about the Church not rendered meaningless by the sins of her members?

In framing this problem it is important to acknowledge that the problem is not a partial one. It is not as if the Church’s members were by and large holy, but were found to fall into sin in a few exceptional cases. No, during her earthly life the Christian is always a sinner. At the beginning of every celebration of the Eucharist she confesses this publically: “I confess to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned . . .” This is not a fact that is checked empirically, but is simply presupposed. The Christian is a sinner. And yet to be a member of the Church is to be counted as one of the saints, to be numbered among the holy ones, to have had one’s sins completely washed away through one’s baptism into Christ.

We will begin by examining Barth’s dialectic of the Church as both holy and sinful. We will then develop our line of enquiry further with reference to Balthasar’s reflections on Rahab, the ‘chaste-whore’, and Hosea’s harlot-spouse, as types of the Church. Finally we will offer a critical assessment and a synthesis of these themes with reference to the glorified wounds of Christ. In reference to this, our central theme, we will articulate a

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288 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 657.
position that sheds light on the holiness of the Church whilst remaining faithful to its mysterious character.

**Barth: the holy-sinful dialectic**

First it is important to establish what is meant by ‘holiness’. For Barth, to be holy means to be

set apart, marked off, and therefore differentiated, singled out, taken (and set) on one side as a being which has its own origin and nature and meaning and direction – and all this with a final definitiveness, decisively, inviolably and unalterably, because it is God who does it.\(^\text{289}\)

In this statement we can recognise three distinct affirmations. The first is that the holiness of the Church means that she is set apart from all the institutions of the world. The second is that her origin, her goal and her methods are from God and cannot simply be derived from or applied to other institutions. Thirdly, since God has constituted the Church in this way, she is indestructible and her holiness is guaranteed. Even when by her unfaithfulness she ‘contradicts’ her true self, falling away from the dignity of her original calling, she cannot become something else other than what God has made her, the Body of Christ.

These affirmations depend on the position that we expounded in the previous section, that the Church lives not by her own life but by the life of Christ. For this reason the creed says: *credo ecclesiam*, not *credo in ecclesiam*, which indicates that we do not believe *in* the Church or its holiness as we believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather, on the basis of our belief in the triune God, we believe that the Church exists and that, among other attributes, it is holy.\(^\text{290}\) “What else can the holiness of the Church be but the reflection of the holiness of Jesus Christ as its heavenly Head, falling upon it as He enters into and remains in fellowship with it by His Holy Spirit?”\(^\text{291}\) Thus, holiness is not something that the Church could ever possess in and for itself. It is only as Jesus enters into fellowship with her that the Church is made to be holy. For Barth, as we saw, the Church is founded only because it is being constantly re-founded by the Holy Spirit. So too, the Church is holy only because she is constantly being made holy in her encounter with Jesus Christ by word and sacrament.

\(^{289}\) Ibid., 685.
\(^{290}\) Ibid., 686.
\(^{291}\) Ibid.
For this reason Barth has no hesitation in affirming that “as [Christ’s] community within Adamic humanity it is just as unholy as that humanity, sharing its sin and guilt and standing absolutely in need of its justification.” The Church is not distinguished from the rest of humanity by possessing some inbuilt immunity to sin. What sets her apart is that she is the community of faith that, while made up of sinful people, is constantly drawn into an encounter with the Saviour, mediated by word and sacrament. In being joined to him she is made holy. In this encounter with Jesus her Saviour she is re-founded, truly becoming again what she already was – the Spirit-filled body, the spotless bride. Here we have been speaking about the members of the Church as well as the Church as a unity. For Barth, there are not too different levels or notions of holiness here. One does not first encounter Jesus as an individual and then become a member of the Church. Nor is one initiated into the community and then made holy as an individual. There is but one movement: “To be awakened to faith and to be added to the community are one and the same thing.” This means that the movement of being ‘set apart’ – which is what we are referring to when we speak of holiness – means being joined to Christ and being made a member of the Christian community, simultaneously. Friendship with Jesus through faith means always also being drawn into that Body, the *communio sanctorum*, of which he is the Head. Balthasar makes the same point when he says that “the election of the individual as a theological person and the election of the community by God must be seen as ‘simultaneous’ phenomena, belonging to the same order; in fact, they are two complementary aspects of a single event.”

This encounter takes concrete form in the christologically grounded activity of the Church – in particular the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, Christian ministry, and Christian prayer. As such this is evident for Barth in Paul’s letter to the Church in Rome.

Even in the city of Rome (although it is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah) baptism and the Lord’s Supper and the voice and word of the Gospel and Holy Scripture and the ministry and the name of Christ and the name of God still remain. Where these are found in a people, that people is holy.

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292 Ibid., 687.
293 Ibid., 688.
295 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 692.
That is, where Jesus the Incarnate Word encounters a people in these ways: where he washes them in the baptismal waters, where he feeds them in the Eucharist, where he speaks to them through his preachers and through the word of Holy Scripture, where he serves them in his ministers and teaches them to call upon the name of God through him in prayer – there, that people will be holy. Because the holiness of the Church is to be understood christologically, so must these activities of the Church. Or rather, these activities which guarantee her holiness are first and foremost activities of Christ.

Barth’s affirmation that the being of the Church is indestructible and that her holiness is guaranteed must also be understood christologically. “The body of Jesus Christ may well be sick or wounded. When has it not been? But as the body of this Head it cannot die.” Christ, her Spouse and Head, has risen from the dead and conquered death in himself forever, and so the Church, who only lives by sharing in his resurrected life, shares too in this victory. Concretely this means that the activities mentioned above – the proclamation and preaching of the word, the celebration of the sacraments, the life of service and of prayer, will never cease to reconstitute and renew the life and holiness of the Church. This is true provided, again, we understand these activities christologically. “What saves it and makes it indestructible is not that it does not basically forsake Him . . . but the fact that He does not forsake it”. Christ is the principle author of these activities. It is he who initiates the Church’s encounter with him, and it is he who makes the Church what it is, his Body. It is his faithfulness to her, despite her unfaithfulness, that makes the Church what she is. This means that it is primarily his fidelity which guarantees that these sanctifying activities continue in the Church. With the help of Balthasar we will now turn to reflect more on this asymmetrical relation of fidelity.

Balthasar: the prostitute and the Church

In a chapter entitled Casta Meretrix (chaste whore), Balthasar offers a survey of the patristic and later medieval reflections on the Church in light of the biblical characters associated with prostitution and adultery. In this section we will limit ourselves to the themes arising from the stories of Rahab and Hosea.

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296 Ibid., 691.
297 Ibid.
As Balthasar observes, the character of Rahab the harlot provides a locus for reflection on the Church’s active receptivity. She receives the two spies, preserves them from danger, declares her faith that the Lord the God of Israel “is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh 2:11), and intercedes on behalf of all her kin, to be saved from the destruction that she knows will befall the city of Jericho. On receiving the promise of the spies she delivers them out of the city in safety and counsels them on how to avoid being caught by their pursuers. Finally she receives from them the scarlet cord which will serve as a sign for Joshua and the hosts of Israel to spare her house and all its inhabitants. After Rahab, her father’s household, and all who belonged to her were preserved from the destruction of Jericho, we are told that “she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (Josh 6:25).

As Balthasar’s exploration shows, there is a great deal of ecclesiological material derived from the story of Rahab in the sermons and commentaries of the church fathers and the medieval theologians. They see in her the Church of the Gentiles, receiving the messengers of Joshua (almost universally understood as a forerunner of Jesus) in faith, and being saved by the scarlet cord (understood as a type of the blood poured out by Jesus for sinners). Balthasar presents Origen as among the most eloquent and prolific voices in the tradition. Origen observes that

Rahab means breadth [latitudo]. What is this breadth if not the Church of Christ assembled out of sinners as well as harlots?... It is this “breadth” that received the spies of Christ... From a prostitute she [Rahab] becomes a prophetess, for she says: “I know that the Lord your God has handed over this land to you.” So you see how the woman who was once a whore, godless and impure, is now filled with the Holy Spirit. To things past she bears witness, in the present she has faith, and the future she prophesies. So Rahab, the “breadth”, extends and grows until she reaches the four corners of the earth... The advice she gave [the spies] was mysterious, heavenly, with nothing earthly about it: “Make your way through the hills”, in other words, do not go through the valleys, avoid what is base, proclaim what is sublime. She herself places a scarlet sign on her house, by which she escaped the destruction of her city. She chose none other than a scarlet sign, as a symbol of the Blood, for she knew that no one could be saved except in the Blood of Christ.

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We see here that for Origen, no detail of the story lacks significance. In the person of Rahab Origen sees the activities of the Church. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she provides hospitality and a safe refuge, expresses genuine faith, bears true witness, speaks words of prophecy, offers sound guidance, and entrusts herself and all who dwell within her walls to the saving power of Christ’s blood signified in the scarlet cord.

St. Peter Damian takes up the same theme as Origen. He contends that when Joshua arrives at the walls of Jericho with the people of Israel and the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant, we have the Church signified twice. For Damian the Church is signified outside Jericho by Israel and the Ark, and inside Jericho by Rahab and her household. Similarly, St. Ambrose explains that “Outside the city walls the name of Jesus gave the attackers victory. Inside the sign of the Lord’s Passion gave the attacked salvation.” According to this reading, if Jericho signifies the walls of sin erected against God and his chosen people then we have, on the one hand, the holy Church wielding the name of Jesus to break down the walls of sin and, on the other, the sinful-repentant Church depending for its survival on the blood of Jesus. In fact, these represent but two elements that exist in the one Church. They indicate that she is the communion of saints who are made strong “by faith in his name” (Acts 3:16) and the refuge of sinners for whom Christ’s power “is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

The Church, as the bride of Christ, is subject to the temptation to idolatry (Rahab), but as his body she knows what she ought to be and is able to see and denounce in herself what ought not to be there (Israel). She participates in her own purification and renewal, though it is first of all the work of Christ. This, perhaps, is what is meant by repentance - the dynamic movement of ‘thinking again’ which St. Paul describes as “being transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). Even the Church’s repentance is brought about by Christ. Even her return to him is capacitated by him.

In Hosea, who is commanded by the Lord to take a prostitute for his wife, we see a type of Christ’s mercy and extreme self-abasement, extended to sinful humanity. Unlike in the Rahab story where the woman was the chief character, here the emphasis is on the action and intention of the man, which Balthasar describes as “unrestrictedly

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By this he indicates a second difference between the Hosea and Rahab stories. While the salvation in Rahab is presented as something exclusive, being restricted to the inhabitants of a single house, the typology in Hosea suggests a more universal interpretation – that in the incarnation of the Son, God reaches out to save all sinners by uniting all sinful flesh to himself. Balthasar finds this interpretation in Pseudo-Ambrose, and to some extent in St Hilary of Poitiers, that Hosea’s union with the harlot, before acting as a symbol of the Church, is a type of the union of the divine and the human in Christ. “The interpretation that sees [the harlot] as referring to the flesh of Christ is decisive, because in this personification of the caro we can see the destined unity of all flesh, indeed of all ‘sinful flesh’ (Rom 8:3)”.

The emphasis being made here is that adulterous humanity as a whole is restored by the incarnation. In this reading the harlot-bride is “the whole of humanity, which is meant to be in the Church and is being progressively incorporated into her.” In this way, Balthasar describes Hosea as a “counterweight” to the more exclusive emphasis of the Rahab story, in which to be found outside the house (the Church) is to be responsible for one’s own death (damnation).

The exclusive and inclusive elements can be brought together only by recognising the state of the Church on earth as one of transition. For Balthasar it means regarding “the turning from old to new as something with an absolute and permanent relevance, an unending process of coming from the old and moving into the new, the dynamic of all existence and reality in the Church.” It means that the sinful, empty past – that which has ceased to have any power or reality – is continually being left behind, while the new life of fidelity to God in Christ – the only reality that lies before us – is continually being entered, and therefore remains ever-new. Thus, it is as Barth described, that the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, his dying and rising from the dead, has given time a ‘centre’, from which sin and death is passing away and in which there is a genuine hope for life and holiness. It is that centre that we now occupy, patiently bearing the struggle with the already-defeated power of sin which is passing away, and

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303 Ibid., 228.
304 Ibid., 233.
305 Ibid., 228.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid., 227.
possessing a pledge of the life to come in our encounter with Jesus, who speaks to us and acts for us and in us by word and sacrament.

For the harlot of Hosea, who has been joined to the prophet on one hand, and yet who on the other hand is made to confront her shameful past in the names of her children until the day of the Lord, “the past has been graciously crossed out and totally overcome, and yet something from the past lives on and clings to the present, something formal and somehow constitutive”\textsuperscript{308}, but, we might add, not real. The past is overcome but not wiped out. Its memory is kept alive and its shamefulfulness is constantly revisited. The liturgy of the Church expresses this duality quite clearly in the Easter ceremonies. On Good Friday, praying as the repentant Jerusalem, she confesses to the murder of her Lord in the Reproaches. Then after enduring the deathly silence of Holy Saturday she is given to sing the Exultet, in which she proclaims the return of her Bridegroom and the joyful renewal of all things in him.\textsuperscript{309} She already lives of that promised day when “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 21:4), and yet she is still invited to weep for her sins as she contemplates the divine corpse of her Saviour nailed to a tree.

This duality does not imply equality. The sorrow of Good Friday depends on and flows out of the joy of Easter Sunday. Christian sorrow is secondary to the primacy of Christian joy. It is temporary and derivative. The light, we might say, enables us to perceive the darkness, not the other way around. That is, it is in light of the resurrection of Jesus that the reproaches acquire their real force, since the one who reproaches the Church for murdering him has come back to life and is thus able to speak for himself. The silent Victim has become the triumphant Saviour, announcing and revealing the significance of the cross in his resurrection. And so, just as Jesus remains, in his resurrection, the crucified one, the Church remains, in her redemption and sanctification, the sinner and the unfaithful bride. This trajectory we are following suggests a consideration of the holiness of the Church in light of the glorified wounds of Christ, and it is to this task that we shall turn our attention now.

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{309} Cf. ibid., 280-281.
Holiness in light of the risen-wounded one

The material we have been exploring from Barth and Balthasar indicates that holiness has a backward-looking character. The holiness of the risen Christ is the holiness of one who has humanity’s sinful past inscribed into his flesh. It is a cruciform holiness. In this way he reveals to us that holiness is not primarily a matter of moral perfection, though such perfection is certainly not lacking in him. Still, holiness is first and foremost the attribute of him who has been set apart for the sole purpose of accomplishing the purposes of God. The mystery of the holiness of Jesus is that accomplishing the purposes of God meant allowing himself to become acquainted with sin and guilt. It is as St. Paul said: he who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). On the cross he became united with our sin. No other person rejected by the human community in this way can be said to be the bearer of sins. But for God, rejection and sin are synonymous. To reject him is the essence of sin and to sin is always in some way to reject him. In this way Jesus unmasked all sin as the attempt to destroy God – and so we can say that only in the incarnation does sin find its proper object, its ultimate victim. In “becoming sin” he became what kills him. He embraced that which crucified him. That is why it is only Jesus who can reveal our sin to us. It is because even while plunged into the depths of sin and guilt he never ceased to be the Son of the Father, and never ceased to be the one to whom and from whom the Spirit proceeds.

The holiness of the Church, as well as its Lord, is cruciform in character. For the Church holiness means continually returning to the event of her sanctification. It means celebrating the memorial of the cross, by word and sacrament. It means contemplating and entering into the glorified wounds of Jesus. And this necessarily demands of her that she face up, again and again, to her sinfulness, for the wounds of Jesus are marked, as it were, with her signature. This, perhaps, finds its most powerful liturgical expression in the Reproaches of Good Friday. “Because I led you out of the land of Egypt, you have prepared a Cross for your Saviour . . . and with a lance you pierced your Saviour’s side.” These wounds which announce our deliverance from sin imply, nevertheless, an accusation. In response, the Church’s appeal for mercy is incessant: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison. This cry, addressed confidently to her

Lord, remains on her lips and in her heart (cf. Rom 10:8). Mercy is the way that she must come to God. It is the narrow road that leads to life (cf. Matt 7:14), and no one can come to the Father except through the risen-wounded Saviour (cf. John 14:6). That is, just as we said in the beginning, the struggle with sin is not like an ‘exception to the rule’ in the Christian life, but is among its most basic characteristics. In complementary fashion, holiness is not primarily a matter of moral perfection or an absence of any vices, but a life lived in utter dependence on the mercy of God embodied and communicated to us in risen-wounded Christ.

This backward-looking dimension of the holiness of the Church helps to determine how it is to be viewed and understood in the present. The Church’s holiness always remains somehow alien to her. It is not simply a state that she enjoys in herself, but, like the harlot-wife of Hosea it is a relationship into which she has been and is constantly being drawn. The Church may rest secure in this holiness only if, like the beloved disciple, she rests close to the breast of Jesus (cf. John 13:23) – a breast which is now wounded. In the previous section we suggested that, in the life of the Church, the wounds of Christ find their expression in the sacraments. Just as the wounds are identifying markers for Christ, the sacraments act as identifying markers for the Church, because when they are faithfully understood, they express the truth of her radical dependence on Christ. And just as Christ’s agency in the sacraments generates the Church, so it also generates her holiness. As the wounded Saviour, acting in his word and under the sacramental signs, he evokes genuine repentance in the sinful members of the Church, makes present for them the Father’s forgiveness, and accomplishes their sanctification. Christ’s continued woundedness is a sign of his continued presence with those who have wounded him.

For now, however, the true holiness of the Church is hidden and so has to be believed. The Church participates in the glorified wounds but their glory remains shrouded because the agency of Christ in the sacraments is completely invisible except to the eyes of faith. They are like the scarlet cord hung from Rahab’s window which cannot, so it seems to outside eyes, provide any protection from the coming destruction of Jericho. It is for this reason that the Church, viewed from the outside, can appear as a

311 Since word and sacrament cannot be separated any more than the words and deeds of Jesus, the proclamation of the word is always implied when we speak of the sacraments.
rather pitiful institution. Her cry of Kyrie eleison can be heard, but only as a human appeal to an absent God. The presence and power of Jesus Christ and the joy of the Church whose prayer is made and answered in his name – these cannot be perceived or understood from without. And so, as Barth insists, coming to recognise, though faith, the activity of Christ in the Church and being joined to her as a member are not two separate movements but one. To contemplate the glorified wounds is to be drawn through them into union with Christ. To recognise the sacraments as encounters with the mercy of Christ is to be already enveloped in his mercy.

This brings us to consider the forward-looking dimension of the holiness of the Church. In the material we have been considering there is an interesting detail that warrants attention and lends itself to a close comparison with the glorified wounds of Christ. In the final verses of the story of Rahab the spies who had originally been received into her house went into the city and brought Rahab out along with her household and all who belonged to her. They gave her and her household a place outside the camp of Israel while the hosts of Israel burned the city with fire. We are then told, as a way of rounding off this episode, that “Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (Josh 6:25). Notice that in the final mention of her name she is still explicitly referred to as “the harlot”. Indeed, the harlot has become a permanent feature of Israel. She dwells there “to this day” - a member of the people of the covenant. As a member of this covenant she is a harlot no longer and yet she is still named as such. The title, it would appear, is no longer a cause of shame. Rather, it now serves as a memorial of Rahab’s salvation and the triumph of Israel against the towering walls of Jericho. She bears the name now as a sign of the mercy she has received and a trophy of the victory in which she was given to play an indispensible part. So it is with the wounds of Christ in which the Church participates. Though he is dead no longer he still bears the wounds of death. And, though the power of sin was unable to overpower him, he still bears the marks of sin. In his resurrection the wounds have become glorious. He bears them as a trophy of his victory over sin and death, as an everlasting memorial of his saving works. During her earthly pilgrimage the Church lives of the wounds of Christ in the sacraments, and in the eschaton we can expect a transformation corresponding to the glory of the risen Christ.
Conclusion
What are we able to say about this transformation insofar as it is revealed in Christ?
“Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we
know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John
3:2). Thus, the First Letter of John indicates that there is little that we are able to say
about the glory to come. However, the christological reference-point that it gives, “we
shall be like him”, will permit us, in the second section of our next and final chapter, to
explore this question in some detail. Now, we move into the final section of this chapter
where we will consider the status of those who are not included in the sacramental life
of the Church.
4.3. ELECTED AND REJECTED

Introduction
In our previous section we affirmed that Christ is encountered in word and sacrament. Now we wish to ask what this means for those who, for whatever reason, are not included in the sacramental life of the Church and do not experience the proclamation of the Gospel. This includes those who do not know Christ or profess the Christian faith. It also includes those who find themselves on the margins of society, the “tax collectors and prostitutes” (Matt 21:31), the lost whom Christ came to seek out (Luke 19:10), who can sometimes have a better grasp of the person and mission of Christ than those in the religious centre. It includes those who have distanced themselves from the Church and those who have been excommunicated. In this section we will seek to articulate the significance of exclusion in light of the risen-wounded Christ. Drawing from Barth’s doctrine of election, in which Christ is understood as both the elected and the rejected one, we will argue that those who are excluded from the life of the Church are, nevertheless, participating in Christ. Then, with Marie-Dominique Philippe we will identify the Mother of Jesus as the exemplar of this participation in his rejection.

Barth’s doctrine of election
Barth’s doctrine of election will be very instructive for addressing these questions. For Barth, the mystery of God’s election and rejection is seen from the very beginning of the Old Testament. He observes it in Cain and Abel. In this story the sacrifice of Abel is accepted by God and that of Cain is not, and there does not appear any reason for this election and non-election in the conduct of Cain and Abel. Rather, it is simply the decision of the Lord concerning them. Still, this does not amount to an unqualified rejection of Cain, for even after he has murdered his brother, the Lord promises to protect him: “And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him” (Gen 4:15).

Singularly enough, the determination of Abel, of the offering which is well-pleasing to God, is a determination to death (the first human death mentioned in the Bible). It is that of Cain, of the man who is his brother’s murderer and who, according to v. 13, knows that the punishment he has earned must be greater than he can bear, which is a determination to life.312

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Abel is the elect and yet he is allowed to be slaughtered, while the Lord promises to protect the life of the non-elect Cain. After the election of Noah and his family, the name of Abram/Abraham is singled out to be made a word of blessing, but with this the Lord’s call will tear him away from his father’s house and his homeland (Gen 12:1-2). Of Abraham’s offspring, the younger Isaac is chosen over Ishmael and regarded by the Lord as firstborn, and yet Abraham’s prayer of blessing for Ishmael is heard – he is not left to die in the wilderness. Of the sons of Isaac, Jacob acquires the birthright and the blessing of his father in place of the elder and favoured Esau, and yet Esau is also given a word from his father, albeit one that resembles a curse. Then of Jacob’s wives, the favoured younger sister Rachel remains for a long time childless while the Lord makes the “hated” (Gen 29:31) older sister Leah very fruitful. Among Leah’s sons we find Levi, the ancestor of the priestly family, and Judah, the ancestor of the royal family. And yet when the Lord finally chooses for Rachel to bear her own children, she becomes the mother of Joseph who will be the central figure among his brothers, their saviour in the famine, who will open the doors for their eventual passage into Egypt.

Another inversion occurs between Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph’s sons whom Jacob adopts, when Jacob announces that Ephraim, the younger, will surpass his brother. Similarly, among the sons of Leah, Judah is given ascendency over the first-born Reuben. And yet, in the next generation, both of Judah’s sons are failures. The first, Er, dies before he can consummate his marriage to Tamar, and the second then refuses to enter a Levirate marriage with her. It is only in the bizarre episode in which Tamar becomes the mother of twins to her father-in-law, that the line of Judah (and, indeed, the line of Christ) is kept alive. Again the order of the twins is inverted with Perez taking precedence over the elder Serah.

Barth sees in all these unique instances the distinguishing choice of God which is continually operative in the history of salvation. God’s choice seems to be marked by two curious characteristics. First, more often than not, it overturns the normal distinctions by which human choices are made: the eldest son ahead of the younger, the favoured wife ahead of the unfavoured, the legitimate offspring ahead of the illegitimate, the good deed rewarded over the misdeed. Second, for the most part the distinction between the chosen and the rejected is somewhat relative and ambiguous. Even those who are seemingly cut off or passed over are not totally rejected. Rather,
says Barth, they are “blessed in their own way” and retain an important and “positive relation” to God’s covenant.\textsuperscript{313}

The distinguishing choice is seen again most powerfully in the stories of Saul and David, and for this reason Barth grants them a great deal of attention. The two stories, he affirms, cannot be understood apart from one another.\textsuperscript{314} David does not possess the obvious attributes of kingship as Saul does, and his kingship is for a long time concealed. For Barth, this initial ascendency of the tribe of Benjamin (Saul) over Judah (David) mirrors the patriarch Jacob’s preference for Rachel (the mother of Benjamin) over Leah (the mother of Judah). What this indicates, for Barth, is that, unlike the kingship of Saul, the kingship of David is not directly associated with the people’s denial and rejection of the rule of God over them at Ramah (1 Samuel 8:7), but emerges later according to the direct initiative of God. David was not the sort of king that the people of Israel had in mind at Ramah.

Or positively: Just because he was the one whose heart – not his disposition or character, but his real status before God – God had seen, or rather perceived and recreated by the omnipotence of His vision, of His divine eye; the shepherd who as such, i.e., in virtue of the lowliness of this his human status and employment, who in pursuance of this most dependant, most humble, most menial shepherd rule, alone could be shepherd of Israel as well. This one, a shepherd like this, was the gracious thought of God when He sanctioned the fulfilment of the foolish wish of the nation.\textsuperscript{315}

While David may occupy the place of the elect in his ascendency to the throne, in other respects he becomes the rejected. Unlike Abel his life is not accepted by God as a sacrifice to spare the life of his first son to Bathsheba, or that of Absolom, or to save Israel from suffering the punishment for his faithless census. He is subject to the same law as Isaac who was spared on the mount of Moriah, Jehoshaphat the king of Judah who was spared in the battle of Ramoth-gilead (1 Kg 22), and Joseph who was sent into Egypt to save the sons of Israel, but whose life was not accepted as the price for this deliverance.\textsuperscript{316}

Most of all, David’s sinful taking of Bathsheba and disposing of Uriah is, for Barth, “the abandonment of the kingship which distinguishes him from Saul in favour of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 356.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 373.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., 381.
\end{footnotesize}
heathen kingship which was rejected in the person of Saul.”

So here David and Saul ‘overlap’. “The punishment for David’s sin is that from the moment of its outbreak it is clear that he, too, is a figure of secular history, and that for all the light proper to him he shares in the much greater shadow which none of its figures can escape.” In David we see again that Old Testament election does not stand or fall on the worthiness or unworthiness of the elect but on God’s purpose and promise. By God’s power and despite his sin, the elect will bear witness to the grace of God.

Leviticus as commentary
Barth identifies two important passages in Leviticus as commentaries on the choices of God in Genesis. The first is the ritual for the purification of lepers found in Lev 14:4-7.

[T]he priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two living clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet stuff and hyssop; and the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water. He shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet stuff and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water; and he shall sprinkle it seven times upon him who is to be cleansed of leprosy; then he shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird go into the open field.

The second is the ritual of the day of Atonement which begins at Lev 16:5, 7-10, 21-22.

And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, . . . Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the LORD at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Aza'zel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Aza'zel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Aza'zel . . . and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.

Barth observes that in both these rituals two animals which, for all intents and purposes, are exactly alike, are treated in completely different ways. There are no discernible conditions on which the choice is to be made between the two, which indicates, for Barth, that it is God who chooses. The actual content of the choice is that one creature is sacrificically slain and the other is allowed to go free. Both rituals are related to

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317 Ibid., 382.
318 Ibid.
319 Ibid., 383.
purbation. The first is the confirmation by the priest that a leper has been cured.\textsuperscript{320} The second is the verification, by Aaron or the high priest, of the removal of sins from the whole nation of Israel. Barth observes that the rites do not bring about the purification, but merely attested to that purification “which has already taken place, is still taking place, and takes place again. Neither the priest nor Aaron, but God, is its author.”\textsuperscript{321} In both cases those whose purification is being attested are not actually involved in the ritual action, but remain as spectators.

The first goat of Leviticus 16 shows that

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man is chosen for the Lord, and not for Azazel, not for the wilderness; and God has made it his own concern that there should be visited on him the redemptive suffering and death by which the presupposition of his purification and renewed life is secured. He may – and this is God’s great love – totally surrender his blood, that is, his impure life. The redemptive method by which God leads him is that he is placed under the utter graciousness and terror of this law of death. . . . The death of the one, which is, in fact, full of grace and salvation, is accompanied by the life of the other, which is, in fact, the essence of desolation. The fact that man is of himself unfitted for the service of God, and his blood valueless, is revealed in the treatment of the second animal.\textsuperscript{322}
\end{quote}

In this we have what appears to be a paradox. On the one hand, as we see in the first goat, the human creature is chosen by God, elected, set apart, and accepted as a sacrifice of purification. On the other hand, as we see in the second, the human creature is found to be unworthy for God’s service and since his life is of no value as a sacrificial offering, he is simply rejected and sent into exile, abandoned to the wilderness. If the first goat reflects the election of Abel, Isaac and Jacob, this second goat reflects the rejection of Cain, Ishmael and Esau.\textsuperscript{323}

In Leviticus 14 the relationship between election and rejection is reversed. God’s election of humanity is manifested not in the choice of the first bird to be slain, but in the selection of the second bird to be released.\textsuperscript{324} In this ritual the sacrifice of the first bird is for the sake of the life and freedom of the second. “The one exalted by God

\textsuperscript{320} It is presumably to this practice that Jesus refers when he instructs lepers on several occasions to “go, show yourselves to the priests” (Luke 17:14, cf. 5:14, Matt 8:4).
\textsuperscript{321} Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} II.2, 358.
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 360.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.
through his election is humbled unto death in order that the one humbled by God through his rejection may be exalted.”

The elected and rejected Christ

The passages from Leviticus provide a commentary on the election stories from Genesis and Samuel that we have been considering, but they do nothing to dispel the riddles contained in them. If anything, the rituals of Leviticus bring out even more starkly the riddle of the status of the human being before God. They show that the human creature is both chosen and rejected, sacrificed yet unfit for sacrifice, slain yet saved, exalted yet shamed, but they do not enable us to understand an order or a unity between these pairs. To whom or what does the Old Testament witness refer? Exegesis alone, says Barth, cannot give us the answer. “On the other hand, the subject of the Old Testament witness can be accepted as identical with the person of Jesus Christ as it is seen and interpreted and proclaimed by the apostles because he had Himself revealed and represented Himself to them in this way.” Only faith, then, for Barth, can establish that the Old Testament is a witness to Christ. Only faith can establish that the striking duality of the Old Testament stories is a prophecy of Jesus Christ, who, according to the New Testament witness,

both came down from heaven and ascended into heaven . . . both lives by the grace of God and is branded by the wrath of God . . . both claims the world as His own and is rejected by His own. . . . And, since all this is the will of God, He is both the Elect of God and the Rejected of God, rejected because He is elect and elect in His rejection.

Read in this light, Leviticus 16 shows that Jesus is like the first goat of Leviticus 16, the one chosen and sent by God to be the perfect sacrifice for sins. And, he is like the second goat because in order to accomplish this offering he became the rejected one, upon whom was laid the weight of the sin of the world, and who bore it away into the most shameful exile. Read in the same light, Leviticus 14 shows that Jesus is, in the first bird, the completely pure man who is delivered up in place of the impure leper, taking his place and offering, in death, his blood to purify him. And at the same time, in

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325 Ibid., 361.
326 Ibid., 363.
327 Ibid., 366.
328 Ibid., 365.
the second bird, he is the cured leper, bathed in the blood of sacrifice (his own blood) and raised up into freedom.\textsuperscript{329}

For Barth, this indicates very clearly that Jesus Christ cannot be aptly prefigured in a single image, but only in the juxtaposition of two seemingly irreconcilable images. The person of Christ cannot be grasped as simply ‘this’, but always as ‘this’ and ‘that’, where the relationship between the two is shrouded in mystery. It is, presumably, for this reason that Christian theology, according to Barth, is strongly dialectical in character. The word of God itself takes this form, with Cain and Abel, Saul and David, the two goats and the two birds, Israel the chaste whore, and in the New Testament, Christ the God-man, and the risen-wounded one. Theology, therefore, must reflect this same logic of dialectic if it is to be faithful to the revelation it seeks to serve.

The suitability of this approach for our present inquiry should not be difficult to see. We opened this section by asking about those who, for whatever reason, are excluded from the sacramental encounter with Jesus. The doctrine of election, as presented by Barth, has at least three implications for our understanding of sacramental participation. The first is that by participating in the sacramental action, the Christian receives, experiences, and proclaims her election in Christ. The second is that to be excluded from the sacraments is to be united with Christ in his lonely and shameful rejection. The third is that each of these states bears a close connection to the other. The sharing in Christ’s election in the sacraments always involves the remembrance of his rejection. It is always a participation in his saving death. Similarly, participation in the rejection of Christ presupposes a prior and overarching election. Christ is only rejected as the Chosen One of God, as the one who does the will of the Father. The Christian is only excluded from the sacraments as one who has already been called, sanctified and sent in Christ. The unbeliever is only said to be excluded on the presupposition that they too have been chosen and called to conversion and sacramental initiation. The closed door presupposes, according to this logic, that there is a way in.

The unbeliever remains, as it were, outside the city walls. What does he find there but the cross of Jesus, with his mother and the disciple Jesus loved standing there,

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid.
contemplating his wounded corpse. This, I would suggest, is where the unbeliever, the marginalised and the excommunicated, find themselves; not simply alone – indeed, far from it – but in the company of the dead Christ and the sorrowing saints who live only by hope. Yes, there is a barrenness in this scene that, it is hoped, will facilitate conversion. It is not simply the barrenness of solitude or nothingness, but the barrenness of the fruitful origins of the Church’s life – the death of Christ on the cross.

It may even be possible to describe Christ crucified as the foundational and ultimate experience of ‘excommunication’. He is rejected by his own followers (Judas, Peter and the other apostles excepting John), by his own people (the Jews), and by the ruling power (the Romans). This rejection, of course, is motivated by jealousy, hatred and fear. However, as an initiative originating in the wise providence of God, it is ultimately motivated by mercy – the mercy of God. It is this same mercy which God wishes to show through the act of excommunication (even though there may be human corruption or indifference in the manner in which it is dealt by the Church’s frail members). Excommunication, despite its obvious punitive function is, nevertheless, a mode of encounter with Christ. It means being sent outside the sacramental life of the Church to dwell with the rejected one from whom all sacramental life originates.

Therefore, there is no need to abandon the assertion made in the previous section that we encounter Christ in the sacraments, or to weaken it by refusing to attribute any special dignity to the sacramental economy. Barth makes it clear that Christ is not the elect in the same way that he is the rejected, and so we do not wish to glamorise unbelief or excommunication or downplay the importance of the sacraments. “[W]e do not recognise Him in any of these types in exactly the same way as in the others, but . . . in all of them we have to recognise Him as He is.”330 We do see in Cain a type of Christ, but not in the same way that we see it in Abel. The relationship between them is asymmetrical, and that means that the peculiarity of each affirmation made about the person of Christ must be respected. And so, for Barth, while believers and non-believers both represent the person of Christ, they do so in very different ways.

Believers “are” the elect in this service so far as they bear witness to the truth, that is, to the elect man, Jesus Christ, and manifest and reproduce and reflect the life of this one Elect. The godless “are” the rejected in the same service so far as by their

330 Ibid., 366.
false witness to man’s rejection they manifest and reproduce and reflect the death of
the one Rejected, Jesus Christ. Because this one is Elect and Rejected, He is –
attested by both – the Lord and Head both of the elect and also of the rejected. Thus
not only the former, but no less indispensably, in their own place and after their own
totally different fashion, the latter, are His representatives, just as originally and
properly as He is theirs.\textsuperscript{331}

While, for Barth, the believers and the godless both bear a real connection to Christ –
both “manifest and reproduce and reflect” something of him, he insists that there
remains an important difference between them. It is that believers reflect Christ’s life,
while the godless manifest his death. And yet, even in life and death there is a mutual
cross-over. “As the election of Jesus Christ finds its scope and completion in His
representative rejection,” says Barth, “and as conversely this very representative
rejection confirms His election, so the elect and rejected do not stand only against one
another, but also alongside and for one another.”\textsuperscript{332} Jesus’ rejection and death is that of
the spotless victim, the perfect offering, and the Son in whom the Father is well
pleased. Conversely, in his glorious resurrection he is marked by the wounds of death,
rejection and shame. Thus, Christ’s dual status of elect and rejected is signified most
clearly in his wounded-risen state. As the above quote from Barth affirms, we know
Jesus Christ as one who “lives by the grace of God and is branded by the wrath of
God”.

\textbf{Prophesy and participation}

Again this dual nature of Christ’s life and work is indicated by Simeon who prophesies
that the infant Jesus “is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is
spoken against” (Luke 2:34). This prophecy is particularly interesting for us because it
also refers to a participation in the election and rejection of Christ in the person of
Mary: “and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many
hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35). Balthasar pays particular attention to these words
in his treatment of the ‘drama’ of the election. The Son, says Balthasar, uses his mother
to demonstrate how he transcends the parameters of the Old Covenant.

Five times he turns her away, sometimes very abruptly: the twelve-year-old breaks
with his tribe so resolutely that his parents cannot understand it; his rebuff to his
Mother in Cana (Jn 2:4) cannot be glossed over; and when he refuses to see his
family when they came to visit him, describing those who heard his word in faith as

\textsuperscript{331} Ibid., 347.
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., 353.
his “brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:50), a sword must have pierced his Mother’s heart. Thus, again, when his Mother’s breasts are pronounced “blessed”, he turns the blessing to those who believe (Lk 11:27f); on the Cross, he withdraws from her (“Woman behold your son”, Jn 19:26) – an act shrouded in mystery, bringing to an end the many acts in which he distances himself from her.\footnote{Balthasar, Theo-Drama III, 330.}

And yet, Balthasar notes, in humbling her in this way Jesus is actually incorporating her more and more into his own humiliation and rejection. After receiving with joy the word of Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38), Mary must learn to live more and more by faith, trusting in the promise as she ponders in her heart the mysterious deeds of her son (Luke 2:51). She must accept to remain more and more in the background as her Son leaves the family home at Nazareth and commences his public ministry.

We have already noted that Christ is prefigured in both Isaac and Ishmael: in the chosen firstborn son, the son of the promise, the one who is offered up in sacrifice and yet saved from death, and in the rejected son who is sent away and left to die alone in the wilderness. In a similar way, for Philippe, Mary the Mother of Jesus is prefigured in both Sarah, who conceived Isaac the son of promise as a miraculous gift of God, and in Hagar, who is banished along with her son and without having any means of preserving him from death. At the cross Mary “must accept being treated like Hagar, reduced to living in the desert, dying of hunger and thirst with her Son because people refuse to recognise the Latter's true dignity. He will be considered only as a slave, a slave's son, an intruder . . .”\footnote{Philippe, Mystery of Mary, 133.}

Marie-Dominique Philippe is in complete accord with Balthasar in his reflections on the painful separations that are experienced by Mary – that they occur in order for her to be more closely united with the mission of her Son, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Simeon.

Mary’s fate is intimately linked to that of her Son. That is why her soul must be pierced by a sword. Mary’s soul must be tortured; it must experience the deepest, most acute sufferings. The image of the piercing sword clearly shows that it is not simply a superficial and transitory wound. It is a mortal wound that strikes what is most vital in her: her maternal heart, which must be pierced in its most loving and vulnerable aspect.\footnote{Ibid., 130.}
Thus, the life of Mary shows in utter clarity how the members of Christ are to share in his election and rejection. Both are in direct relation to him and entirely for his sake. In her election announced by Gabriel she is told that she has been chosen to give birth to the Chosen One. At the cross the rejection she suffers is totally on account of his rejection. Neither can be appreciated except in direct relation to the person and mission of Jesus.

**Conclusion**

This personal identity and mission are revealed most clearly in Jesus’ risen-wounded form, which shows him to be the elected-rejected one of God. It is this form that we share in as sinners called and chosen by God to be holy. It is with this affirmation that we are able to recapitulate all three sections of this present chapter. In section one of this chapter we affirmed that the Church witnesses to and shares in Christ’s risen-wounded form through the sacraments. Just as the risen Christ is marked and made recognisable by his abiding wounds, so the Church, who draws from his resurrected life is recognised by the celebration of the sacraments. In section two we saw that the Church’s sacramental life is both a sign of her sinful past and an encounter with Christ in which she is made holy. Her sanctity is characterised by a continual turning from her sinful past towards her new life in Christ. Now, in this present section we have argued that the Church’s election in and with Christ the elect is at the same time a sharing in his rejection, just as, conversely, those outside the sacramental life of the Church are the rejected in Christ who at the same time share in his election. This means that Christ, in his risen-wounded form, relates to and encompasses all people, whether they receive him in faith or refuse him through unbelief. This line of enquiry will be developed further in section three of our next and final chapter. There we will be asking whether the Christian can entertain a well-founded hope that all may be saved.
5. ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction
In this final chapter we will seek to recapitulate the lines of enquiry and the preliminary conclusions of the first four chapters. Each of the three sections that follow will draw together the material from the corresponding sections in the previous chapters. In chapter one our literature review on forgiveness was focused on three questions relating to time (section one), motive (section two), and personal authority (section three). In chapter two, our christological chapter, we explored time and eternity, glory and shame, and the priestly bearing of sin. Chapter three focused on the problem of sin in relation to redeemed time, in relation to knowledge, and in relation to freedom. Our ecclesiological explorations in chapter four looked at the church as sacramental, her holiness as the encounter with Christ, and the union in Christ of the elect and the rejected.

This final chapter will draw up these themes into a christological eschatology. In the first section we will be drawing from Balthasar’s theology of history and, with the help of Nicholas Healy, will seek to develop it in light of the glorified wounds of Christ. We will see that forgiveness is accomplished on the Cross in the form of a ‘vow’ which gathers up the entire past and encompasses the entire future. The second section will examine Balthasar’s development of the notion of the beatific vision, and will present the risen-wounded Christ as the mysterious and indivisible revelation of the Father – the revelation that contains within itself our forgiveness and reconciliation with God. In the final section we will discuss, with Balthasar, whether one may legitimately hope for the salvation of all. We will defend the position of Balthasar and seek to understand it more deeply in light of Christ’s risen-wounded form. We will argue that to encounter him in this way is to be faced with both the promise of salvation and the threat of eternal damnation. In order to be received, the gift of forgiveness contained in this encounter needs to be freely accepted. And so, to refuse the gift of forgiveness remains a possibility – a terrible possibility which we are each called to face in dialogue with Jesus.
5.1. THE ‘VOW’ ENCOMPASSING ALL TIME

Introduction

Our reflections on time and eternity now bring us to consider how the one-time events of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus can bear a salvific relation to all other times and places. In this discussion and particularly in our adoption of the ‘vow’ as the central principle, we are greatly indebted to Nicholas J. Healy, whose reading of Balthasar’s eschatology we will develop in light of the risen-wounded Christ.

Balthasar and the ‘vow’

In *A Theology of History*, Balthasar discusses the significance of history in the light of christology. For him the question of history is illuminated in the person of Jesus, who is the meeting place for the particularity of flesh and the universality of the divine *Logos*. On the one hand, to be incarnate is to be reduced to the level of the particular. To be a man is to be one among many, bearing various characteristics that distinguish one from the rest. It means being ‘this’ and not ‘that’. It means being a concrete being and not a universal concept. On the other hand, to be the *Logos* is to be “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation”, in whom “all things were created”. It is to be “before all things”, and to be the principle in which “all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17). At face value it does not appear that such particularity and universality can coexist together, yet at the core of Christian faith is the affirmation that Jesus is the incarnate *Logos* – the Word made flesh.

As Healy points out, Balthasar is asking how it is possible “for the Incarnation to be understood both in terms of the concrete figure of Jesus of Nazareth and as a universal event which includes the whole history and the cosmos?”

In order to shed light on this question as it is treated in the work of Balthasar, Healy cites Balthasar in his reflections on the essence of love and introduces the analogy of the marriage vow. “Love wants to abandon itself, to surrender itself . . . it wants to lay its freedom once and for all at the feet of love. As soon as love is truly awakened, the moment of time is transformed into a form of eternity.”

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marriage vow is marked by these two qualities: that it is total – it wants to abandon itself, not just a part of itself, and it is irrevocable – once and for all. Now, these claims of totality and irrevocability deserve some careful attention. Given that human life is not something that we possess in its fullness all-at-once, but is something that unfolds over time, how is it possible to give oneself totally in the fleeting moment of a vow? As Healy points out, Balthasar sees the early stages of human life as a preparation for giving oneself away in the form of a vow. The love that the husband and wife share is a vantage-point for them from which to understand the meaning of all their past experiences. All of these, seen from the perspective of love, have led to this moment of union, this free joining of two lives. ‘How did you meet?’ is a common question asked of couples, and for good reason. There can be a real sense of wonder and gratitude in the retelling of this story, for it stands as a reminder that things could easily have turned out differently. ‘If I hadn’t got that job’, ‘if the train hadn’t been late’, ‘if my family hadn’t moved to this town’ we would never have met. The past events which brought the two together are to be, as it were, gathered up and given to the other. The past is both the preparation for the gift of self and, as a preparation, forms part of the content of what is given. “A relationship”, says Healy, “that does not involve such an exchange of memories, together with the new discovery of the meaning of these past events in light of the present and future life with the other, is fraught with a certain sterility.”

The loving gift of self that is made now is essentially an act that transcends the ‘now’, stretching back and gathering up the past, and, as we will now consider, reaching into the future. The future orientation of the marriage vow flows from the joining of two lives together. There is now one life shared and lived by two persons and one history, such that it would be misleading to tell the story of one spouse without reference to the other. In the vow there occurred a kind of ‘death’ of the solitary life of each spouse and the creation of a new life lived in a communion of love. In this ‘death’ the old life is not destroyed, but is permanently handed over to the other. To claim one’s old life back is to break the vow. From now on, all that happens to each spouse happens to both of them within the communion of love which they have entered through the mutual self-gift. “Every event in the future, especially those occasions which call forth new forms of self-surrender, is simultaneously an unveiling of the depths of what has already been

given to the other in the form of a vow.” While the future remains untamed and filled with surprises, a vow between lovers anticipates the unforeseeable, though it does so in a mysterious way. The prime example of this, says Healy, is the gift of children. For this gift is “in one sense, already included in the vows, and yet should the couple be graced with a particular child, this child will be the very incarnation of newness and surprise.” The present moment of the vow, therefore, involves the gathering up of the past and the anticipation of the future. Only in light of the past which has led to this point and the stability of love that is promised for the future does the present vow have any meaning at all.

The next step for Healy is to apply this analogy of the marriage vow to the covenant forged and consummated by Jesus on the cross. The mission of Christ was to reconcile all of creation with God, but when, asks Healy, is this mission complete? He argues that in light of the analogy of the vow we can situate it at the very moment when, according to the Gospel of John, Christ utters his last words from the cross: “It is finished” (John 19:30). This is because, when understood as taking the form of a vow, the moment of Christ’s self-offering on the cross can be recognised as encompassing all history that preceded it and all time that will follow after it. “Christ’s mission is in fact consummated at the hour of his death, but it is consummated in the form of a promise or a vow. What is given to us in Christ’s death is a covenant of new life in communion with him.” The gift of the Holy Spirit breathed on the disciples on the day of the resurrection, Healy affirms, is the same Spirit handed over by Jesus in his death on the cross. Because of this, he argues that the gift of the Spirit does not bring anything additional, but is given solely to unfold the hidden depths already contained in the mission of Christ, the visible expression of his eternal procession from the Father. Therefore, the claim here is that Christian revelation presents the history of the world prior to the revelation as a preparation for this great event, and all events that follow as “an unveiling of the hidden depths of what has already been given” in the once-and-for-all event of Christ’s life-giving death (cf. 1 Peter 3:18). In what follows we will seek to explore this claim in its past and future aspects, both in light of the glorified

339 Ibid., 153.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid., 153-154.
342 Ibid., 154.
wounds of Christ and the themes arising from the first sections of our previous four chapters.

The ‘vow’ contains the past

First let us look at how the cross as ‘vow’ encompasses the past. The most immediate past that it encompasses, of course, is the past of Jesus himself. In *A Theology of History* Balthasar reflects at some length on the total receptivity of the Son. It is clear, he says, from John’s Gospel that the incarnate life of Jesus is characterised by “a not-doing, a not-fulfilling, a not-carrying-out of his own will.” It is, moreover, the “essence” of the Son to receive everything he is and has “from another, from the Father.” Balthasar interprets this within the analogy of a drama. The Son is like an actor, “playing a part for the first time”, but because his life has no script, he must receive “each line by inspiration, scene by scene, word by word.” The Son lives in a perpetual state of receptivity to the Father, and this entails, for Balthasar, that he is receiving the Father’s will in each moment, through the action of the Holy Spirit. This means that Jesus does not pre-empt the Father’s will. Of the end times, for example, Jesus is able to say that “no one knows [the day or the hour], not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt 24:36). This is not, for Balthasar, some kind of gap in Jesus’ knowledge. It does not indicate that there is something that the Father has that Jesus, the Son, does not receive. Rather, it represents the mystery of the Son’s total receptivity, translated into creaturely time. Indeed, his total receptivity to the Father in his life on earth is the expression of his eternally being begotten from the essence of the Father. Or again, this receptivity is a function of his receptivity in the inner-divine life. It shows that the Son does not possess anything exclusively for himself. He does not have a store of knowledge tucked away that he might bring out to satisfy his followers’ fleeting curiosities. All his words and deeds are received from the Father and serve to reveal the heart of the Father and to communicate the gift of salvation.

“[H]is possession and experience in this world of that which is his own is going to be, not all in one flash, but something received from the Father, possessed only in

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344 Ibid.
345 Ibid., 33.
him and through him, and hence, continually offered up to him, given back to him and yet again received as yet another new gift of love.”

Thus, while it will be given to the Son to come again in glory at the end of time, when asked what time that this will occur Jesus does not anticipate the Father’s will. “[H]is knowledge as God-man”, says Balthasar, “is measured by his mission.” Even the ‘I don’t know’ is a revelation of his procession from the Father.

This receptivity, for Balthasar, is the basis for the Son’s participation in creaturely time. Each and every moment is, for Jesus, a moment to receive his mission from the Father. That is what gives content to his creaturely form of existence. Or put another way, each and every moment is, for Jesus, a preparation for his ‘hour’ and the consummation of his mission. Here, the analogy of the vow comes into view. Just as the vow contains and crowns the life that preceded it, the cross is the moment of self-gift in light of which the entire course of his earthly life can be recognised as preparation, as laying the groundwork. Even the tradition, which Luke is careful to preserve, of his being laid in a manger at his birth, is a sign that his flesh will become (eucharistic) food by being given up for us. Even there, at his first appearance in the flesh, there were indications of the self-gift through which his earthly life would come to an end. And as with a marriage vow, his entire past is included in his self-gift on the cross. This is why the Church continues to cherish and celebrate the key events of the life of Jesus, and to meditate on the words and deeds of his earthly life and public ministry. They are not made redundant by the cross, but are contained and brought to their fullest meaning in it.

Just as the whole life of Jesus is contained in his self-giving death, so the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah are also contained within the life of Jesus. These, says Balthasar, are not to be thought of primarily as discrete words, laws, or signs that Jesus must fulfil one by one, but rather, the entire series of events laid out in the Old Testament are to be seen as together constituting the promise which is fulfilled in Jesus. Or, put another way, it is first of all the Old Testament as a whole that points to and anticipates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In light of this overarching

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346 Ibid., 29.
347 Ibid., 32.
348 Ibid., 58.
connection, particular links can be drawn between certain prophetic passages and their New Testament fulfilment.

Balthasar describes a two-way relationship between Jesus and past-history, where history is subject to him and he is subject to history.

The very fact that there could be any such thing as a Paradise, a Fall, a Flood, a Covenant with Abraham, a Law, a prophetic history, all has its meaningful centre in the appearance of the Son, although the Son obediently submits to the pattern of what has been and what is.\footnote{Ibid., 59.}

So, on the one hand, Jesus is the purpose of the whole drama of history. Only in reference to his appearing does it have any ultimate meaning. And on the other hand, it is only through a series of historical events, generations, and choices that the incarnation of the Son takes place at all. History is in submission to the Son insofar as its ultimate purpose is to lead to the incarnation, and the Son submits to history insofar as he willingly takes on the life of the son of Mary and (as it was thought) Joseph, from the town of Nazareth, of the house of Judah, of the people of the Jews, under the reign of Caesar Augustus and of Tiberius, etc. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke pay special attention to this by including genealogies of Jesus in which the history of salvation and of humanity is evoked in the names of the characters. This shows that there is a very specific context for the coming of Jesus. Matthew begins with Abraham and so presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel while Luke, beginning with Jesus, traces the line of descent back to the dawn of creation (“Adam, the son of God”). Thus, Jesus is presented as both the fulfilment of the longings of Israel and as the culmination of human (and cosmic) history.

For Balthasar, the two way submission of Jesus means that the necessity of fulfilling the prophecies of the past is not laid on Jesus as something exterior that constrains his action. Rather, the ‘horizontal’ fulfilment of history whereby we are told numerous times (especially in Matthew) that “this was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet” is one with his ‘vertical’ obedience to the will of the Father. That is to say, Jesus is not caught in a tension between adhering in each moment to the will of the Father and satisfying the demands of historical prophecy about him. This is because the Spirit who inspired the prophets and the Spirit in which Jesus enjoys communion with the Father
are one and the same. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. He stands behind this union between the horizontal and the vertical aspects of Christ’s obedience as both the loving union between Father and Son and the one, sent by both, who animates human life and history.

Because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son in personal unity, he can, at the same time, be the heart of the Father’s command and the heart of the Son’s obedience, of the Father’s promise in history pointing towards the Son and the Son’s fulfilment of history pointing towards the Father.  

Thus, in Christ, according to Balthasar, history takes on a Trinitarian form. It is directed from the Father to the Son insofar as the Father’s promise in the Old Covenant directs all history to the coming of Christ. It is directed from the Son back to the Father again insofar as the words and deeds of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, perfectly reveal the Father. These two movements are united because they take place in the Holy Spirit. For Balthasar, it is the Spirit “who makes history into the history of salvation, which is to say prophetically oriented towards the Son; and it is he who places the Son in those situations which fulfil the promise.”

Before we go on it will be worth addressing a possible ambiguity over the word ‘promise’ that has arisen with our application of the analogy of the vow to the self-gift of Jesus. On the one hand Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament, while on the other hand we are characterising his death as a kind of promise. It therefore appears that we are saying that the fulfilment of the ancient promises of the Old Testament is itself another promise. This could be problematic as it would seem to provide only a provisional fulfilment. To fulfil one promise with another promise would seem to be a kind of delay tactic. In response to this apparent problem it is well worth devoting some time to distinguish between these two instances of the promise by widening the scope of the marriage analogy. If the self-gift of Jesus on the cross is akin to the marriage promise then the time of the promise represented by the Old Testament can be likened to an engagement. The engagement is a promise of something to come which is yet to arrive. This promise expresses the firm intention of God to restore the communion which sin has interrupted. This is to be done through the agency of the Christ – the one who is to come. In contrast to this engagement-promise, the marriage-promise speaks of a reality which has already begun. The communion is restored and

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350 Ibid.  
351 Ibid.
human life has been joined with the life of God. This marriage-promise does not ‘undo’ the engagement but takes the engagement up into itself. The centuries of dramatic activity that have taken place earlier between God and his people are included in the gift of this new marriage-promise. And now, in the new promise, everything that has been reaches its climax and culmination in the present. The new promise does not delay the fulfilment but serves to guarantee that this present fulfilment will endure for eternity. Jesus Christ promises to be “with [us] always, to the close of the age” (Matt 28:20), and assures us that his words “will not pass away” (Matt 24:35). These promises are fulfilled by the Spirit “whom the Father will send in my name” to “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

The affirmation that human history contains the promise of the incarnation of God has profound and far reaching implications. Balthasar discusses these implications in conversation with the work of French writer and poet Charles Péguy. “Normally,” writes Péguy,

Christians see [the Incarnation] as issuing forth from the eternal; they contemplate the supreme insertion, this point of concentration, this drawing together in one point where the wholly eternal enters the wholly temporal. To find the counterpart to this, the view from the other side, the countervision, as it were, for a story that had happened to the earth – namely, that it had given birth to God – for this the earthly, the fleshly and the temporal realms, the pagan world (and also the mystics of the elder Law, the Jewish people) would need to see the Incarnation from their side. . . . The Incarnation would have to present itself as the full flower and the temporal fruit of the earth, as an extraordinary triumph of fertility.352

We noted above that for Balthasar there is no conflict in the life of Jesus between obedience to the Father and fulfilment of the prophecies of old because both of these relations are constituted by the Holy Spirit. This text from Péguy follows the same logic. The incarnation is a mystery that can be viewed from the top down and from the bottom up. “Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,” declares the psalmist, “and righteousness will look down from the sky” (Psalm 85:11). For Péguy, the incarnation is rightly understood as the eternal life of God entering human history, and as human history reaching its absolute summit in the birth of God. Again, by making appeal to the action of the Holy Spirit, it can be argued that there is no conflict or competition between these two perspectives. In the appearance of the angel Gabriel, Mary is told

first that the Lord is with her, and then that she will be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:28, 35). Thus, the Spirit is revealed as the one who animates history from within and who graces it from above. He accompanies us through time and breaks into our lives from beyond.

**The ‘vow’ encompasses the future**

We can note here that this meeting of the horizontal-historical and vertical-eternal aspects of the Spirit’s activity evokes the image of the cross. The cross is the place to which Jesus is drawn by the will of the Father and in which the prophecies of the past reach their ultimate fulfilment. “At the moment of consummation,” says Healy,

> the Holy Spirit and the Church (symbolized in the blood and water that stream forth from Christ’s side) are given as the fruit of Jesus’ death. Taken together, the Spirit and the Church are the form and fruit of the God-creature marriage covenant in its historical unfolding.\(^353\)

It is the Spirit who, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, constitutes the Church, and as we hear in John’s Gospel, will guide her “into all the truth” (John 16:13). For Healy, this mission of the Spirit does not add new material over and above the mission of the Son. Rather, the Spirit is sent to unveil “the true depths of Jesus’ self-surrender as a revelation of the Father’s love, a self-surrender that comprehends the past, present, and future.”\(^354\) This, as presented by Healy, is akin to the future orientation of the marriage vow. We noted above that every event in the shared life of a married couple is an unfolding and a living-out of their marriage vows. Their future life is ‘contained’ in the vows just like the tree is contained in the seed. Analogously, life in the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit, is the unfolding of the gift that has already been given, and a sharing in the mission that has already been completed on the cross. The crucified Christ encompasses in himself the future just as he fulfils and gives meaning to the past.

For Healy, the future is capable of being encompassed in the ‘vow’ of the crucified Christ because the Spirit crystallizes the event of Jesus’ death in the sacrament of the Eucharist.\(^355\) In this way the utter particularity of Jesus is made universal by the Spirit.

\[^{353}\text{Healy, }\textit{Eschatology}, \text{154.}\]
\[^{354}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{355}\text{Ibid., 155.}\]
Eucharist is the crystallized fruit of the particular birth, life, death, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth as the expression of his eternal relation to the Father within the mutual love of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{356}

This universalising action of the Spirit does not stand in any sort of opposition to the particularity of the event of Christ’s death. Rather, in every time and place that the Eucharist is celebrated, the crucified Christ makes himself present. If this unity is to be respected, the Christian community must not attempt to transcend or disregard his historical particularity. They must not forget that everything the Spirit does in the Church is a witness to Christ in his historical and incarnate manifestation. They cannot regard the incarnation of God merely as the initial inspiration for their existence without acknowledging it also as the ultimate goal. Indeed, Christ’s particularity must remain the form of the liturgical action and the focus of contemplation.

Even when Christian art places him in a new time and place, when it enculturates the Christian Gospel, this need not be seen as a denial of Jesus’ particularity. What depictions of Jesus in Christian art may genuinely seek to express is the universalising action of the Spirit – that the same Jesus who walked the earth in first century Israel is truly present here and now, simultaneously revealed and hidden in the word and in the sacramental signs that he instituted. To say that the life of the Church is contained within the ‘vow’ of Jesus means that what she is by the Spirit, and all that she does in the Spirit, is an unfolding of the true depths of his self-gift on the cross.

**The ‘vow’ of the wounded one**

The argument that we have been mounting in this section can be further developed in relation to Christ’s wounded-risen form. As we outlined above, the future orientation of Christ’s ‘vow’ is marked by the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist. It is chiefly in the celebration of this sacrament that the Church takes on Christ’s risen-wounded form. As we argued in chapter four, the Church bears the wounds of Christ and is made recognisable in the sacraments. This participation in the ‘vow’ of Christ is made possible by the Holy Spirit, in whose activity we can again identify a vertical and a horizontal aspect. By ‘vertical’ here we mean that the fruitful proclamation of the word and the true celebration of the sacrament depend on the presence and power of the Spirit acting in each moment. Indeed, the words and gestures of the Eucharistic liturgy

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
are charged with this dependency. That ancient greeting, “The Lord be with you. And with your spirit”; and the extending of the priest’s hands over the bread and wine at the Epiclesis, are clear examples of this. Just as the pattern of Jesus’ life is to be constantly receiving everything from the Father, so the Church constantly renews her attitude of dependency on the Father by praying through the Son for the gift of the Spirit. In this way she lives of the life of Jesus by sharing in his prayer to the Father.

Meanwhile, the Church also depends on the ‘horizontal’ work of the Spirit. That is, any celebration of the Eucharist presupposes that the Spirit has prepared a Christian people – a worshipping people – to participate in it. There needs to be a community of baptised, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Within this community there need to be those who receive the vocation to sacramental ministry within the Church, and those who are called to devote themselves to marriage and family life. The Church needs preachers and evangelists to spread the Christian faith, and teachers to hand on the Gospel to every successive generation. There are countless other gifts by which the Spirit builds up the Church horizontally, from architects and artists, to administrators and those with the gift of discernment, to those with the gift of hospitality and those who dedicate themselves to works of mercy. All of these are an unfolding of the ‘vow’ of Jesus on the cross and are brought together in the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the ‘vow’ is made present, and the Church (along with the many gifts she receives) is renewed by returning to her source. In short, the Spirit acts ‘horizontally’ within history to prepare a people to celebrate the Eucharist, and works ‘vertically’ from beyond history to make the eternal life of God present in each moment.

In the analogy of the marriage vow we will venture to say that the woundedness of the risen Christ functions like a wedding ring. The wounds evoke the cross, which is the point to which all of Christ’s earthly life tends, and from which his glorified existence takes its meaning. Firstly, like a ring, the wounds are the enduring sign of the covenant made by Christ on the cross. They signify that God unites himself to all the troubles and concerns of creaturely human life. The cross is not just one passing moment in world history. It is the ‘vow’ that opens up a union that will never end. In the glorified wounds of Christ we see that the ‘vow’ of the cross encompasses the entire future.
Balthasar describes the life of Jesus as the “wellspring of history”.

“Each situation in the divine-human life is so infinitely rich, capable of such unlimited application, so full of meaning,” he says, “that it generates an abundance of Christian situations.” And because, as we have already argued, the gift Jesus made of himself on the cross draws together and so contains every act and event of his incarnate life, human existence thereafter is marked by the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Each and every person becomes an actor in the drama of his life, and a participant in the story of salvation. Earthly time is henceforth to unfold in the presence of the wounded one and under his merciful dominion. Time is not money, as the old adage goes, but mercy. In the future opened up by the ‘vow’ of the cross, life has meaning and value to the extent that it is marked by mercy: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me . . . [for] as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matt 25:35, 40). Thus, the wounded Christ indicates that earthly life lived within the ‘vow’ will not be free of struggle and suffering. If anything these will increase. What is new is that these trials will no longer detract from the meaning and value of life. Rather, moments of hardship, failure and conflict will be special occasions for mercy, and it is from these that life will obtain its chief meaning and value.

Secondly, as the Groom’s wedding ring is given to him by the bride, the woundedness of Jesus is inflicted upon him by those for whom he offers up his life. Unlike a wedding ring, of course, the wounds are not given as a gift. They are, on the contrary, inflicted as a denial of Jesus’ divine sonship and a refusal of the covenant with God in him. But the fact that the wounds remain in the resurrection shows that Christ is able to ‘absorb’ this refusal. The gesture of refusal is taken up and transformed into a sign of the covenant. In the act of offering himself unto death, Jesus creates a spotless bride for himself (Rev 21:2). And here lies another great difference within the marriage analogy. In the ‘marriage’ between Christ and the Church, the bride is not an equal partner in the covenant – the marriage assumes a kind of asymmetry. Indeed, she only comes into being as a fruit of the groom’s vow. Before it she exists as fallen humanity, and as such she participates in the execution of Jesus through her sin. This enables us to develop the position of Barth which we put forward in chapter three that in Christ time has been

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358 Ibid.
given a definitive centre. Indeed, in his ‘vow’ on the cross, Jesus makes sin into a thing of the past. The sin of humanity (and the love of God) has brought him to the cross, and it is now gathered up and crystallised in the wounds. But when Jesus rises from death and those wounds are transformed into glory, they no longer represent sin as a present reality, but only as that which has been consigned to the past. The present reality to which they bear witness is mercy – the mercy that transforms the rebellious creation into a faithful bride, by absorbing and overcoming the human ‘no’ to God and using it to bring about our reconciliation and to lead us into a new covenant with God. The ‘vow’ of Jesus is, then, more creative than the wedding vow because it does more than join together two lives. It actually communicates new life to a people who have forfeited the gift of life through sin and who exist under the curse of death. The ‘vow’ is the communication of God’s forgiveness which simultaneously creates the Church as a worthy covenant partner and actually constitutes the covenant.

Therefore, the prophecy that “they shall look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19:37; Zech 12:10) is a very accurate description of the contemplative disposition of the Church and the relationship she bears to Jesus. In contemplating his wounded form she is invited to recognise her very origins. This indicates that even in heaven, where struggle and suffering will cease, where “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4) – even there the prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled. For the one we shall behold face to face (1 Cor 13:12) remains for all eternity the risen-wounded Christ whom we have pierced. In the resurrection time and eternity are joined together in a very particular way. On the one hand the temporal wounds are eternalised – which is to say that they participate in God’s self-revelation, expressing in a particularly poignant way the Son’s loving receptivity to the Father. On the other hand, eternity bears the marks of disfigurement – characteristic of the fallen temporal world. This means that in the ‘vow’ of Jesus a real exchange has taken place – a mutual joining of God with sinners, so that sinners share in the life of God and the Son of God shares in the death of sinners.
Conclusion
In the first section of the first chapter we asked about the relationship between forgiveness and the past. To conclude that preliminary stage of questioning we suggested that forgiveness does not seek to undo the past but to transform it by remembering it in a new way. However, it was not clear, at that point, how an absurd act of evil was to be incorporated into the fabric of meaningful history. In light of our present reflection on the ‘vow’ of Christ we are now able to be more specific about what we mean by ‘transform’ and ‘remember’. The ‘vow’ makes the human rejection of God literally the crux of the story of salvation, the lead-up to the covenant, and a condition for the ‘vow’ of forgiveness. In this way the rejection of God is brought to nothing by being incorporated into the story of the reconciliation of humanity with God. God’s ‘yes’ towards us transforms the human ‘no’ so that the human ‘no’ is put into the service of our salvation. And thus, evil is exposed as ‘nothingness’, having no potency to effect its own outcome, and having in itself no being except that of opposing the will of God, for even as it strives against him it cannot help but contribute to his plan of salvation.
5.2. CHRIST AS THE MYSTERIOUS ‘WHOLE’

Introduction

The aim of this section is to continue the development of Christian eschatology in reference to the risen-wounded Christ. In this light, we will explore the meaning of the creaturely participation in the life of God. In the previous section our particular focus was the meaning of earthly history, which we explored in light of the ‘vow’ of Jesus’ self-giving death. Now we ask what sort of relation is opened up by this vow. In what sense can human beings share in the life of God? This will also enable us to gather up the themes of the second sections of the four earlier chapters. In chapter 1.2 we asked ‘why forgive?’ and argued that the internal motive of forgiveness consists in bringing about reconciliation. In chapter 2.2 we asked why the humanity of Jesus remains wounded in the resurrection, and we argued that this is chiefly to manifest his glory – so that the truth of who God is might be more perfectly communicated through the humanity of Jesus. In chapter 3.2 we asked ‘why do human beings sin?’ and argued that sin is committed out of culpable ignorance – a not-knowing for which one is nevertheless responsible. In chapter 4.2 we asked why the Church is called ‘holy’ and we argued that her holiness is rooted in her encounter with Jesus, not in anything she might possess on her own. Now, in this final chapter we explore the meaning of the creaturely participation in the life of God represented by reconciliation (1.2), glory (2.2), knowledge (3.2), and encounter (4.2). This exploration, aided by the work of Nicholas Healy and David C. Schindler, will draw from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s analysis of mystery which he develops in relation to the notions of veiling and unveiling, and the ‘transcendentals’ of truth, goodness and beauty. Within this exploration of mystery we will also be drawing from John’s account of the first Easter appearance of the risen-wounded Jesus to the disciples (21:19-29). Our intention is to illustrate how this account contains the foundations of Balthasar’s doctrine of mystery, and can serve as a commentary on heavenly existence understood as participation in the life of God.

Following Aquinas, the scholastic tradition has tended to speak of our heavenly participation in the life of God using the analogy of vision – beatific vision, visio dei. But as Nicholas Healy points out in his discussion of Balthasar’s eschatology, this is just one of a variety of images of heaven that can be found in the New Testament. In
The synoptic tradition it is predominantly the kingdom of God/heaven. St. Paul speaks of seeing God “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). John writes of being “born from God” (John 1:13, 1 John 3:9; 4:7), “born anew” (John 3:3; 3:7), and “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Peter speaks of becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Balthasar attempts to capture these various images under the broader concept of interpersonal communion. In doing so he wishes to point out that an exclusive use of the analogy of vision cannot express all that the Christian revelation tells us about heaven.

For spiritual creatures, eternal life in God cannot consist merely in ‘beholding’ God. In the first place, God is not an object but a Life that is going on eternally and yet ever new. Secondly, the creature is meant ultimately to live, not over against God, but in Him. Finally, Scripture promises us even in this life a participation – albeit hidden under the veil of faith – in the internal life of God: we are to be born in and of God, and we are to possess his Holy Spirit.

This is not to deny the importance of the analogy of vision, but to say that it must be treated within the context of the broader notions of life and personal communion. Balthasar insists that this sharing in the divine life must involve “self-surrender, creativity, receptivity, mystery, and even surprise”. Thus, heaven is a life to be lived in which continual self-surrender is not opposed to having already given oneself, creativity is consistent with rest, perfection does not preclude ongoing receptivity, and mystery and surprise are not opposed to knowledge. It is perhaps on this point that Balthasar parts ways with the classical tradition represented by Thomas Aquinas, who, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, describes wonder/amazement (*admiratio*) as stemming from ignorance, not knowledge, and therefore as something not proper to God. In what follows we will focus our attention on the notion of mystery in the work of Balthasar in an effort to develop an incarnational account of heavenly existence. In particular we will be exploring the implications of Balthasar’s view that “unveiling is perfectly compatible with veiling and mystery”, and will thus seek to present the heavenly *visio dei* as a true encounter with God, mediated by the risen yet wounded humanity of Christ, and encompassing a life of personal communion that strongly resists being understood as a static vision.

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Mystery and manifestation

In his analysis of mystery Balthasar asserts that to exist is, necessarily, to reveal oneself, communicate oneself, and to make oneself known. “A dog, a cat, and even a human being confess their essence simply by existing: they cannot elude this ontological confession.”\textsuperscript{364} Part of what it means to exist at all is to communicate that existence as a kind of ‘public announcement’. There is always, of course, the possibility of hiding from view or passing oneself off as another, but in principle, at least, every creature ‘announces’ itself just by being what it is and doing what it does. As Balthasar observes, this confession is something that has “always already begun” even before one has become explicitly aware of oneself.\textsuperscript{365} It is certainly true for each human being. From birth, well before we were ever capable of purposefully expressing ourselves, we have been manifested to others and subject to their penetrating gaze. In the nakedness of this self-disclosure, Balthasar insists that “The elementary act of knowledge must include an attitude of benevolence, if not of mercy, which receives the defenceless object in an atmosphere of warmth and discretion.”\textsuperscript{366} We can think of how jarring it would be to hear it said of an infant ‘he is ugly’ or ‘she is pathetic’. Not only does this strike us as cruel, but such an attitude seems to overlook the value of the child – that there is here a hidden potency that exceeds our imagination and our understanding. In this affirmation Balthasar places love at the very centre of knowledge. In order to know something as it really is requires gentleness and sensitivity, so that the acquisition of knowledge does not defile or destroy that which one is seeking to know.

In fact, Balthasar will go so far as to say that love is the \textit{meaning} of being.\textsuperscript{367} By this he is claiming that the ‘act’ of being that underpins everything is not just a generic act, but the act of simultaneous giving and receiving. The notion of being is understood in light of the notion of gift and is inseparable from it. Thus, love is an ontological category before it is a moral one. It is something that ‘is’ before it is something that we ‘do’. We encounter reality as something gifted to us, and not merely as a set of passive objects.
for our one-way subjective experience. To be means being set in relation to other beings, coming from another, communicated to others, receiving and giving.

This gratuity and wonder can be further understood in light of the transcendental of beauty. For Balthasar, being is beautiful insofar as it “manifests itself with a generous and inviting radiance.” In other words, the act of being is an act of self-gift which takes place as self-manifestation. The creature reveals itself, its essence, under the particular form that is proper to it and invites the attention of the subject. On the other side, I, the subject, actively perceive this beauty and respond to it with a measure of sensitivity. The real other actively claims my attention, just as I actively recognise and attend to it. And so to the question of whether beauty resides in the eye of the beholder or in the object itself, Balthasar answers ‘both’. For him, beauty has two termini – the mind of the beholder and the object itself. It draws the beholder outside of herself towards the object, and it is communicated from the object to be actively received in the mind of the beholder.

For Balthasar the appearance of the other is not a mere facade but constitutes a kind of fundamental act. The appearance is the other’s self-presentation, self-declaration and self-communication. This act exhausts what we mean by ‘appearance’, but does not reduce the essence of the other to the ‘appearance’. For, while the appearance of the other discloses its essence, there is always more to the other than can be shown in any given moment or encounter. This ‘more’ is not something purely quantitative, as if each ‘appearance’ disclosed a certain measurable portion of the other. If this were so, then it would mean that, in principle, one could come to know a finite being exhaustively. Rather, the word ‘more’ is meant here in a qualitative sense, so that while there is nothing of the essence of a thing that cannot be perceived in its appearance, the clarity of the perception can, in principle, always be increased. The enthusiastic gardener, as much as she knows about plant life, never reaches the point where she has ‘seen it all’. This is due in part to the sheer quantity of plant species and the many aspects of plant life. But it is also true in a qualitative sense because the wonder of growth, budding, and flowering is manifested in fleeting moments and cannot be exhausted in a single plant or a single season. The plant lover delights in each good season and always awaits

the next. In this way the essence is never exhausted by the appearance, and this fact is
evident in the appearance itself, which continues to re-express the essence differently in
each passing moment.

For Balthasar, this innate drive to self-communication is what gives created beings their
value.\footnote{Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama} I, 220.} It is only because they are communicated to others that they can become
objects of desire and, therefore, of value. If a thing remained somehow uncommunicated then its existence would be a matter of complete indifference and it
would be senseless to speak of it having any value – even a value for itself. Indeed, a
being can only acquire a value for itself by communicating itself to others, because only
in this act of self-communication does it “[catch] sight of itself” and so become aware
of its own value.

In one and the same movement, being does two things. First, it renounces its
ambition to be for itself alone, in order to open itself in the act of self-
communication. Second, it acquires, thanks to this original sacrifice, the weight and
dignity of a good, of a one-of-a-kind value. It pays no attention to its precious value –
and that is precisely what gives it this precious value in the first place.\footnote{Ibid.}

For Balthasar, this philosophical assertion is founded on the revelation of God’s
Trinitarian life. God’s life is, in itself, this radical communicative exchange originating
from the Father and returned by the Son in the Holy Spirit. This dynamic of gift
overflows in the creation and so, for Bathasar, becomes the key for appreciating the
presence and power of God in the world.

This dynamic of gratuity is present in John’s account of the post-resurrection
appearances of Jesus. “On the evening of that day,” we are told, “the first day of the
week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came
and stood among them . . .” (John 20:19). The appearance of Jesus to the disciples
occurs as something truly active and totally gratuitous. They are not expecting him, or
looking for him, or even minimally open to a visitation from him (for the doors were
locked), but Jesus comes to them in spite of this. His appearing is not just a passive
‘being there to be seen by them’ but is a fully-fledged action, and something that
positively \textit{happens} to the disciples, like being flooded in light.
The Gospel passage continues: “and [he] said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this he showed them his hands and his side.” (John 20:19-20). In this way the appearance of Jesus is both generous and inviting. He comes with the gift of peace on his lips and invites the disciples to behold his wounded form. He reaches out to them with a word and draws them in with a gesture. And so in a very concrete way he reveals the gift-character of being.

Opening oneself to the gratuitous self-communication of being and to meeting it with an attitude of benevolence leads to the experience of ‘wonder’. This wonder does not only recognise the value of each particular being in its essential qualities, but also grasps the mysterious nature of being itself. According to this attitude of benevolence, the moment of clarity when we recognise what a particular being is gives way to a sense of wonder and amazement at the fact that it is. Just as we take a step towards mastering its essence we are struck with awe at the mysterious fact of its existence. In this way the essence of a thing – what it is, does not at all explain its existence – that it is. The opposite, in fact, is closer to the truth. To know a thing intimately makes one more able to appreciate the utter gratuity of its existence. It is possible to imagine that this thing did not exist, and yet as one does so one is struck by what a considerable deprivation that would be.

Then there is the experience of mystery flowing in the opposite direction where we recognise that something is and are filled with wonder and amazement at what it is. This is because, in the very appearance of the thing in which it reveals itself, we perceive that an ever-greater richness of being lies beneath the surface. In order to illustrate this Balthasar uses the example of a body. The interiority of the body, says Balthasar, is both revealed and protected by its skin or hide. The exterior contours of the body manifest the life and purpose of the creature and so reveal “as much of the inside as is meant to be divulged”.371 In fact, “the exterior of a man’s appearance gives away more about his humanity as a whole than we would learn by dissecting him and looking inside his body.”372 It is the same with the soul. We can learn more about who he is through normal association with him than by submitting him to invasive psychoanalysis. Why should this be the case? It seems that with both of these examples,

371 Ibid., 208.
372 Ibid., 209.
the main point is that we get to know another better by encountering her as a whole than by dividing her up into parts. To dissect the body is to kill, or at least to cause injury, to the very one whom we are seeking to know. Even medical surgery, which is used to repair the body, can only be justified if the benefit of the repair outweighs the trauma of the procedure. And while the surgeon does gain certain knowledge of the parts of the body, it is not to be compared with the intimate knowledge of the close friend or spouse who understands the person as a whole, greater than the sum of her parts. Indeed, the knowledge of the surgeon only tends to become useful in the context of a health threat, but under normal circumstances it is of little import. In short, the moment I open up the living body and start analysing its parts I no longer have a living body before me. Or, in the words of J. R. R. Tolkien’s character Gandalf, “he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom.”

These reflections indicate that while the skin veils the body’s interior it also safeguards its integrity and so enables the body to be encountered as a whole and known as a living unity. And so the genuine unveiling of a creature always involves a certain veiling, and demands a certain reverence for the form in which we encounter it. We might say, then, that mystery is closely related to ‘the whole’. In the creature, numerous and varied parts and functions of the interior are bound up in a unified exterior. This hides something of the inner complexity but in so doing actually reveals the creature as a whole. For only through this exterior can the unified whole (which includes the interior) be revealed as such. In this way veiling is not opposed to unveiling. Rather, “things are unveiled as veiled, and it is in this form that they become objects of knowledge.”

This integrity makes the creature highly intelligible but not comprehensible. To use the analogy of food, it can be readily ‘tasted’ but never ‘digested’. There is a strong integrity in the being of the other that does not allow it to be broken up into conceptual parts and absorbed into me. I can perceive the other when I am present to her, and carry a memory of her with me when I am away, but in order to really know the other I rely on her being there and revealing herself to me.


This approach to mystery can help us to develop an account of heavenly communion with God which is thoroughly christological. Such an account is already anticipated in John’s farewell discourse when Jesus declares to Philip that “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). This indicates that our encounter with God, as God, in all his greatness and incomprehensibility, takes place in our encounter with the *humanity* of Jesus. In order for this to make sense theologically we have to conceive of this encounter in terms of mystery. That is, the appearance of Jesus – his life, death, and resurrection, reveal the Father both by unveiling and by veiling. At the birth of Jesus, God is manifested to Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds. He is heralded by angels and announced by a star. But by his manner of appearing as a new born babe, lying in a manger, the presence and action of God remain all but hidden. And yet, this mode of revelation emphasises God’s gentleness and discretion, his respect for the vulnerability of human life, and the patience with which he exercises his will. Throughout the public ministry of Jesus, he is thrust into public view. His words and deeds, imbued with divine wisdom and power, are witnessed by many and word of him spreads all over the land. Yet, on numerous occasions he instructs his disciples, or those whom he has healed, to “tell no one” (Matt 16:20; cf. 9:30; Mark 1:44; 5:43; 7:36). Thus, the truth of Jesus is revealed as a kind of secret. What will later become a message to be proclaimed is now a secret to be guarded. On the cross Jesus shows the very depths of the Father’s love for sinners. He is raised aloft for all who pass by to see, and the multilingual inscription names him the King of the Jews. And yet the whole scene is repulsive to human eyes. This most remarkable life ends in the most morbid and disgraceful anticlimax. The wisdom and glory of the Father are hidden in the wounded corpse of the Son.

Moreover, in the resurrection we see Jesus as the complete embodiment of mystery. It is curious to note that on several occasions the intimate friends of Jesus are unable to recognise him (Luke 24:16, John 20:14). We are not explicitly told why this is the case, yet it is possible to speculate in light of our present emphasis on his risen-wounded form. That is, perhaps Jesus is hidden from the eyes of his friends not because he does not look himself but because he appears with unprecedented clarity. This is the notion of mystery to which our reflections have been tending, which, in Balthasar’s view, rests
“not on a lack of clarity, but rather upon a superabundance of light.” In the resurrection, his life and death, his words and deeds, are perfectly summed up and revealed in their deepest unity. Every moment in the temporal unfolding of divine revelation is crystallised and made present in his new, definitive, glorified existence. In other words, it is in his risen-wounded body that his earthly and heavenly existence appears as a unified whole. And thus, while Christ’s risen-wounded flesh hides the Godhead in a certain way, it nevertheless encapsulates his life and death as a unity, and so presents, all at once, the entire revelation of the Father.

**Mystery and communion**

This veiled mode of revelation indicates that the encounter that God initiates with his creation is conducted in a deeply personal manner, with discretion, gentleness, and humility. Indeed, this is mirrored in our own interpersonal relations. One does not, for example, simply go about ‘making a friend’. Friendship is the kind of thing that has to unfold in a manner that respects the freedom of both parties. It must allow for a gradual self-disclosure whereby certain things are left hidden for now to be revealed later. The fact that they are hidden is a sign of their value and in that light their eventual disclosure, as a secret, is a mark of increased intimacy and trust. The choice to obtain personal information about the other without this personal encounter (e.g. to perform a ‘background check’) can come at a cost. One may gain certain knowledge but in so doing one risks undermining the trust and intimacy that alone make it possible to understand the other as a person. This is because the truth of the other can only be properly understood when their freedom is acknowledged and respected. But, as Balthasar insists, this freedom which originates deep within each person is only ever revealed as something shrouded.

That most precious gift that is brought forth from the depths of my self-disclosure and offered to others, and is actually produced by me and out of me, cannot be known in advance, cannot be totally grasped by anyone.\(^{376}\)

With each self-disclosure the other becomes more familiar to me, and yet no matter how well I know her, and how well I may be able to anticipate her responses, I can never access the source of her freedom. This is to say that freedom, as freedom, can

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\(^{375}\) Ibid., 225.

\(^{376}\) Balthasar, Theo-Drama V, 404.
never be mastered by another. It can be forced or bypassed through various techniques but never fully comprehended.

This insight relates closely to the transcendental of goodness. That is, as we encounter the other as good – as a being of value – we are invited to enter into a dramatic relation with her. We are not able to know the other directly except by entering this dramatic relation. In this relation we reach the centre of the order of love, described by Iris Murdoch as “the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real.” In this relation we discover being as goodness – as that which places moral demands upon us. It is for this reason that Balthasar characterises this encounter as ‘dramatic’. Faced with the presence and activity of the other, I am required to be genuinely present and to act. It is not as if there is a pre-determined script as in a play, but entering this drama means taking cues from the other ‘actors’, and prompting them in turn. The encounter with the good of the other calls us to seek and strive further outside of ourselves, to be attentive, and to respond.

In the face of Jesus’ appearance on the evening of the first day we hear that “the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). At this point the generous and inviting appearance of the Lord elicits a response of joy and wonder from the disciples. The appearance of Jesus is experienced according to a scholastic definition of beauty: \( id \ quod \ visum \ placet \) – “that which pleases merely by being seen”. The appearance of the risen Lord engages the intelligence, insofar as it is seen and recognised, and the will, insofar as it elicits delight. Engaged in this way, the disciples enter into a dramatic relation with the risen-wounded Christ, for it is not possible to remain neutral in the face of this appearance. The disciples recognise his goodness and they delight in it.

Again, Jesus addresses them with the offer of peace and declares that, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). With these words Jesus determines the shape of the disciples’ dramatic relation to him. They are to relate to him as he relates to the Father – as one who is sent. The gratuitous appearance of Jesus leads to the

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imperative to act. Thus the humanity of Jesus is the locus of the encounter, between God and creation. It is the ‘stage’ on which they meet – distinct from both the knower (in this case the disciples), and the known (in this case God).\textsuperscript{379}

The veiled unveiling of God that we experience in Jesus teaches us that we cannot genuinely encounter him as a mere object – not even an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent Object. He does not make himself known in such a way that can be perceived by a detached observer, or at least, the personal mode of Christ’s revelation is an invitation to the mere observer to draw closer and to become involved in a reciprocal self-disclosure. Put a third way, knowledge of God implies and pre-supposes love of God. At the cross this is illustrated in the negative when the onlookers defy Jesus to “save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” (Luke 23:35). This taunt follows the logic of the empirical test. In the face of torture Jesus will be forced to prove that he is the Christ by manifesting his power. But the truth of God cannot be ‘squeezed’ out of him like this. His freedom can never be forced because it consists solely in doing the will of the Father. And so, those who refuse to trust Jesus are not permitted to perceive his true identity.

**Mystery and fidelity**

Entering into a dramatic relation with the other informs us in such a way that we are able to understand and express something true in response to the being we have encountered. This truth which informs the subject is both the truth as knowledge of the other, and the truth as personal fidelity. It means that the truth of the other carries a strong ethical dimension. In this way Balthasar relates the transcendental of truth to the will as well as the intellect. This is important because it means that while the other has become an object of our knowledge, it is a knowledge that carries a commitment to be faithful. And so, the knowledge of the other is something we hold ‘in trust’. It is not our sole property to do with whatever we please. To assimilate this truth authentically is always to share in it, and so, even as it becomes our own it nevertheless remains the truth of the other.

\textsuperscript{379} Schindler, “Towards a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge,” 593-595.
It is for this reason that the truth of the other can never be totally encompassed in a definition. Human words cannot exhaust the richness of being. Balthasar provides a powerful illustration of this with reference to the music of Mozart. While a concept, he says, always applies to more than one thing,

art reveals something having singular, incommutable significance. A thousand adjectives will never convey to one who has not heard it the slightest notion of the overture to Don Giovanni. It is charged with spirit down to the last semiquaver, it brims over with sense and significance, not hiding it behind the sounds, but expressing everything that could be expressed. And yet, who would claim to say exhaustively what it really means? Perhaps it would be easier to tell if it were not so perfect. One might perhaps guess from the failure of the expression, from certain fractures, what message the artist had endeavoured to impart.\(^{380}\)

Balthasar is struck by the fact that the more perfect a work of art is, and, therefore, the more clearly it expresses the artist’s idea, the less it permits any kind of interpretative analysis. It confronts the listener as mysterious not because something unknown lies behind the expression of the work, but, on the contrary, because the meaning is flawlessly displayed in the expression. The more perfectly radiant and integrated it appears the less one is able to master it by breaking it up into parts and translating it into another form – in this case, from the form of music to that of prose. The perfect work of art becomes, then, wholly mysterious. It is perfectly intelligible as a whole but resists being abstractly broken down into ‘bite-sized’ conceptual pieces.

Now, as the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the risen-wounded Christ resists the sort of analysis that would attempt to assess the significance of each event in his life in isolation from the rest and to systematically construct moral laws from them and a worldview from their collective sum. His humanity cannot be cut up like this because in the resurrection his crucified body ceases to be a corpse and is raised to a living unity that can never again be destroyed. And so the Christian religion is not simply a comprehensive narrative and doctrinal system based on the person of Jesus. Rather, the Church comes to be and is perpetually renewed in her relationship of faith with the living Jesus. She has her liturgical rites, sacred scriptures and a firm doctrine which she treasures as divinely revealed gifts, but she knows that because these come from Christ and lead back to him, they can never replace him or make his presence and power unnecessary. In their numerous parts they do not express a quantitative measure of Christian revelation that must be added up in order to produce the whole. Rather, in

\(^{380}\) Balthasar, Theo-Logic I, 141.
each of their parts they express the mystery of the whole, though with different
emphases and from various angles. In this way, through the working of the Spirit of
Christ, the liturgy, the scriptures, and Christian doctrine are themselves marked with his
mysterious character. No amount of theological reflection can ever exhaust what is
communicated through them.

Therefore, the task of theology must be understood in view of the gift of the Spirit – a
gift which John narrates for us in the account of the appearance of the risen Christ.
“And . . . he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John
so Jesus pours out the Spirit on those whom he sends. Earlier in John’s Gospel Jesus
had referred to the Spirit as the Spirit of truth (14:17, 15:26) and the One who “will
Teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26).
This gift of the Spirit, therefore, informs the disciples, giving them the form of apostles
sent out to communicate the authentic message of the risen Jesus to the world. This
mission pertains to truth, not only as knowledge of Jesus, but also as fidelity to him.

How are the disciples to remain faithful in their witness to Christ? The clue lies in the
next line. As he breathes the Spirit upon them Jesus gives this one instruction: “If you
forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are
retained” (John 20:23). Fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus ultimately means living lives that
witness to and are shaped by mercy. This mercy has a Trinitarian form. It is the mercy
of the Father who did not disregard the misery of his creatures, but sent his only
begotten Son into the world to save them (cf. John 3:16). It is the mercy of the Son who
willingly went to his death to fulfil the plan of the Father and to hand over the Spirit.
And it is the mercy of the Spirit who, proceeding from the Father and the Son,
accomplishes this plan of salvation by animating human flesh with the life of God.

This mercy is illustrated in the fact that Jesus, the living one, is also wounded. The
woundedness of his flesh indicates that his earthly life lived ‘for us’ and his death
suffered ‘for us’ are included in the mysterious ‘whole’ that constitutes his resurrected
form. This, in fact, gives the resurrection its content by making absolutely clear the
identity and mission of the one who has risen. The one who has risen is the one who
was born of the virgin Mary, who called God ‘Father’ and announced the coming of his
kingdom, who healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, was arrested by his own people, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, and died. All this is encapsulated in the risen-wounded form of Jesus, and this means that his humanity, and, therefore, the perfect revelation of the merciful God, has been brought to a mysterious whole. Without this radical connection with his earthly life and death, the resurrection could not contain the same revelatory power – it could not open up so clearly the divine revelatory character of the words and deeds of Jesus.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the argument of this section is that we need to think of the beatific vision, the beholding of God the Father, as something that occurs in and through our living friendship with the risen-wounded Christ, which we enjoy in the Spirit. This friendship, as Balthasar points out, cannot be static even if it is ever-perfect: perfectly intimate and perfectly transparent. Rather, ‘perfect’ here means it is always being renewed, it is always full of surprises and new gifts. And for Balthasar, this gratuity cannot be in one direction only, from Christ to us. Rather, since true friendship is always reciprocal, there must be a sense in which we offer ourselves anew, to the ‘wonder’ and ‘surprise’ of Christ – even if all we have to offer is what we have already received from the Father through him. In this way (and, no doubt, many others) our heavenly life with Jesus is marked by mystery. He remains mysterious, and so do we, because no matter how close we are bound in communion with him, he remains, and we remain, always ‘other’ – the mysterious, free other who can never be absorbed or mastered or pulled apart or ‘digested’.
5.3. CHRIST THE HOPE FOR ALL

Introduction

In this final section of our final chapter we will seek to draw the key themes of the entire thesis into a unified vision. The third sections of each of our previous chapters have arisen from and relate to the notions of person and identity. In chapter 1.3 it was ‘who can forgive?’ In 2.3 it was ‘who can bear the sins of the world?’ In 3.3 we looked at the connection between sin and personal freedom. In 4.3 we explored the relationship between Jesus and those who are excluded. Now we seek to draw these threads together through a christological response to the question, “who will be saved?” This will be conducted with a particular focus on the work of Balthasar on Christian hope. We will draw three important threads from Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”? With a Short Discourse on Hell, and use them to bring the core argument of our thesis to a close. First we will lay out the two-sided scriptural testimony relating to the question of who will be saved – on the one hand, the real threat of hell, and, on the other, God’s desire and capacity to grant salvation to all. We will present Balthasar’s response to this and develop it in light of ‘the vow’ as presented in section one of this chapter, the culmination of the previous section ones. Second, we will discuss, with the help of Balthasar, the relationship between hope for the salvation of all and love of neighbour. This will be developed in light of our reflections on mystery and ‘the whole’ as presented in section two. Finally, we will argue, with Balthasar, that hell is to be understood primarily as a threat to me rather than as a category of exclusion applied to others. We will develop this argument in connection with the encounter with the risen-wounded Christ in John 20:19-29. We will argue that only in this personal encounter (with the risen-wounded Christ) is the real threat of hell brought together (into a mysterious ‘whole’) with the promise of salvation (the ‘vow’ of Jesus made on the cross). And thus, the notions of ‘the vow’ and ‘the whole’ from our previous two sections will find their place at the heart of our present and final analysis.

In this way, the final section will serve to provide a unified expression of all five chapters. In the conclusion that follows we will have the opportunity to discuss the implications of our thesis for a christological account of forgiveness, and we will be able to make suggestions on the significance of our thesis for systematic theology as a whole and identify further paths of enquiry that could lead on from our current study.
The threat and the desire

The question “who is to be saved?” is not given a univocal answer in the Sacred Scriptures. Rather, the texts that deal with personal salvation are many and diverse, and call for a thoughtful interpretation. Balthasar enters the discussion with a statement that will become a kind of mantra in his little book on Christian hope.

It is generally known that, in the New Testament, two series of statements run along side by side in such a way that a synthesis of both is neither permissible nor achievable: the first series speaks of being lost for all eternity; the second, of God’s will, and ability, to save all men.381

Thus, what Balthasar sees in the diversity of the scriptural witness is a clear distinction between two different kinds of texts which cannot be reduced to a single statement or idea.

What follows is a representative, not exhaustive, presentation of the series of scriptural texts on judgement, damnation and hell. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven in terms of inclusion and exclusion. “And [those on his left] will go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matt 25:46). He warns of the real danger of self-deception. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21). He presents the path to hell as broad, straight and well-trodden. “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many” (Matt 7:13). The misery of those excluded from the kingdom is referred to with the evocative “weeping and grinding of teeth” (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:51; 25:30), while the unrepentant cities of Galilee are warned that “it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom than for you.” (Matt 11:24). Fear of earthly powers is to give way to the fear of “him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” (Matt 10:28). In Mark, hell is again presented alongside the kingdom and is the place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:48). The one who “blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (Mark 3:29). Faith and baptism bring salvation “but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark

381 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”? With a Short Discourse on Hell, trans. Dr. David Kipp, Rev. Lothar Krauth, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 29.
16:16). In John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of the hour “when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement.” (John 5:28-29). “He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.” (John 12:48).

St. Paul is also very serious about the catastrophic consequences of sin. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 6:9-10). The Book of Revelation contains a similar warning: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.” (Rev 21:8). The Letter to the Hebrews teaches strongly on the irrevocable character of apostasy. “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened. . . if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. . . if [the land] bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.” (Heb 6:4, 6, 8). “For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.” (Heb 10:26-27).

Then we have the other series of texts relating to God’s desire and a hope for the salvation of all. “God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:3-6). “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men” (Tit 2:11). God is described as “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). This desire is expressed with a strong cosmic dimension in the Pauline canticles: “For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:19-20); “his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph 1:9-10). We hear that the mission of the Son is imbued with this desire: “and this is the will of him who sent me, that I
should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39). It also informs the prayer of the Christian community: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men” (1 Tim 2:1), and Christian existence: “we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” (1 Tim 4:10).

Is the power of God sufficient to bring about the fulfilment of this desire? John speaks strongly of the overarching victory of the death and resurrection of Jesus. “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:31-32). The same is reflected in the priestly prayer of the Son: “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him.” (John 17:1a-2). For his part, St. Paul presents the grace of God as more powerful than sin and death. “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned . . . But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. . . . Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” (Rom 5:12, 15, 18).

According to Balthasar, to attempt a synthesis of these texts is to take one set as primary and to manipulate the other set until they can be brought into line with the first. The result of this, in either case, is a theologian who purports to know the answer to the question of salvation. The universalist purports to know that all will eventually be saved, while the ‘infernalist’ knows that some, or many, or most, will in fact be damned. Balthasar wishes to distinguish himself from both positions by approaching the question, not with a claim of knowledge, but with an attitude of hope. Such an attitude does not place him halfway between universalism and infernalism. It is not simply the stance of a neutral agnostic. On the one hand, genuine Christian hope acknowledges hell as more than just a threat to a few ‘really evil people’. Eternal

382 Ibid., 23.
383 Balthasar uses the term ‘infernalists’ to refer to those who are certain that hell is populated, in Dare We Hope, 178.
separation from God is what we have all merited by our sins. It threatens us all, the upstanding citizen no less than the criminal. And for Balthasar, on the other hand, Christian hope does not simply accept that, due to the enormity of the threat and the apparent godlessness of the world, souls will in fact be eternally damned. Rather, it recoils from the vision of a populated hell and opposes this threat with all its might, clinging to the revelation that God desires all to be saved. Unlike universalism it does not make light of the warning, and unlike infernalism it does not accept the disaster as fact.

This being said, a number of commentators and critics of Balthasar have charged him with failing to stay true to his own project and falling into a position that is virtually indistinguishable from universalism. It is said that Balthasar, despite his explicitly stated intention, does side with the series of texts that emphasise God’s universal desire to save, and re-interprets and softens the texts that speak of a two-fold judgement. While it is not our purpose to endorse and defend every detail of Balthasar’s argument, we do find Balthasar’s position, on a whole, to be compelling. Therefore, this central charge against Balthasar deserves our attention. Our response to this, in fact, will give us occasion to develop Balthasar’s position in light of the ‘vow’.

Having considered Balthasar’s arguments and surveyed the critical literature surrounding Dare We Hope, it is striking to observe how many of his opponents have misunderstood his position. The criticism that his position tends more and more...
towards universalism can only come from a critic who has failed to perceive the dynamic nature of Balthasar’s position. That is, the hope of which Balthasar speaks cannot be situated on some fixed point on the continuum between infernalism and universalism. It is actually a movement from one to the other – a flight away from the threat of hell and towards the fulfilment of God’s desire that all be saved. Balthasar insists that we heed the warning of Scripture that “the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many” (Matt 7:13). We are not, however, meant to accept this passively as a prediction of doom, for that would be to despair. At the same time we are to hear the announcement that God desires all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4) and to run towards it, though all the while, with the threat of damnation ‘nipping at our heels’. The threat is real just as the desire of God is real. In this way Balthasar is not really proposing a universalist reading of Scripture or any kind of synthesis that would render the threatening texts innocuous. Both series of texts are received as the word of God, but it is openly acknowledged that one is attractive, the other repulsive. One is consoling and the other is troubling. One pulls and the other pushes, not in opposite directions but both in the direction of pastoral charity. They are the positive and negative motivations for spreading the Gospel of salvation. On the one hand they show that the Gospel is good news for everyone. It is not just for certain people who have believed it, but also for those whose lives and minds appear to be in direct opposition to it. On the other hand they guard believers against complacency, reminding them that salvation demands a constant striving. Ultimately, when taken together, the two series of scripture texts prevent us from dividing humanity into two discrete sets: the saved and the damned. Rather, they compel us to work for the salvation of all, while acknowledging that, for each one of us, hell also poses a real threat. And so, our claim is that Balthasar is not proposing some neutral agnosticism between infernalism and universalism. His position does, in fact, enable us to preserve the force of each series of texts. To treat the threat of hell as a real threat is to seek to escape it, not to resign oneself to it. To regard the desire of God for the salvation of all as a real desire is to pursue its fulfilment, not to weaken it with qualifications. As for the eventual outcome, whether all, or many, or only a few will be saved, it is not given to us to know. What is given to us, argues Balthasar, is to hope for all.

We have described Balthasar’s position as a flight from the repulsive threat and towards the attractive desire of God. Now we need to go a step further and explore what relation
this bears to the christological foundations on which our thesis is being built. What is initially striking is that the dynamic of Balthasar's position is akin to the very dynamic of the incarnation. The Son undergoes a most radical descent, taking on human flesh, dwelling among us, and submitting to death on a cross. But since he is the Son of the Father from whom all life springs, death cannot hold Jesus and he is raised up and exalted, in his humanity, to the right hand of the Father. The position of the Son in relation to death and life is, therefore, neither neutral nor static. He does not stand between the two in some kind of limbo. Rather, he has passed through the darkest death into the fullness of eternal life. Therefore, death lingers on only as that from which Jesus has triumphantly emerged. And as the risen-wounded one he continues to be a living sign of this dynamic.

As we noted in section one of the chapter, all history is now to be understood in relation to this dynamic, as a passing from death into life, and as a movement from separation to reconciliation with God. With the ‘vow’ of his self-offering on the cross Jesus gathers up the entire past (which is now revealed as the preparatory lead-up to his death) and hands over his Spirit so that the entire future may be an unfolding of the hidden riches of that divine-human communion forged by the ‘vow’. In his risen-wounded form, he stands as an enduring sign of this covenant, which, like the Scriptures, conveys a two-fold revelation that cannot be given an adequate synthesis. Corresponding to the threatening series of texts is the fact that the wounds of Jesus recall humanity’s rejection of God, and his judgement on those who would persist in their sins and reject his mercy to the end. Meanwhile, corresponding to the series of texts that emphasise God’s universal desire to save is the fact that by carrying his wounds into eternal life, Jesus has ‘absorbed’ and overcome our refusal, making it a constitutive part of the story of salvation.

### Hope for the whole

Another important part of Balthasar’s argument is his reflection on the nature of hope itself, which he conducts in conversation with St. Thomas Aquinas.386 For Aquinas, the theological virtue of hope considered in itself is the striving, in the midst of difficulty,

386 Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 73-84.
for eternal happiness, which he calls “the infinite good” and “eternal life with God”. This striving is “a movement . . . of the appetite” towards that “arduous good” which is “proportionate” to the one who hopes. When I hope it is for what pertains to me - my own personal flourishing as a human creature in and with God. And because it directly concerns my personal flourishing, which is accomplished in a movement towards the perfection of my being, hope pertains directly to myself and not to others. As usual, however, Aquinas follows this affirmation with a distinction, and this opens up the way for the kind of hope that Balthasar is speaking about. We can hope for something, he says,

in two ways: first, absolutely, and thus the object of hope is always something arduous and pertaining to the person who hopes. Secondly, we can hope for something, through something else being presupposed, and in this way its object can be something pertaining to someone else.

For Aquinas, this “something else being presupposed” is love. For, while hope is a movement of the creature towards its own flourishing, love is a union which pertains directly to another. For me this union makes the other into another self, so that my good and the good of the other are bound up together. My happiness and my flourishing are somehow conditioned by and dependent on theirs. When this unifying love is presupposed then my hope can also apply to the other whom I regard as another self. Within this bond I can hope for the eternal happiness of the other just as I hope for my own.

If love underpins hope for another, does it make it possible to hope for the salvation of all? Balthasar finds support for a positive answer to this question in the Compendium Theologiae which is believed to be the final (and unfinished) work of Aquinas. In laying out the nature of hope, Aquinas states that hope, firstly, is a desire for something, that, secondly, is possible to attain, thirdly, is attained only with difficulty, and fourthly, is obtained from God. There is no controversy in the claim that hope for the salvation of all satisfies the first, third and fourth of these requirements. In the Christian context it is clearly a desire that is difficult to attain and that is being asked of God. Therefore,

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388 Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II.2, Q. 17 Art. 3, 1238.
389 Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II.2, Q. 17 Art. 3, 1238.
390 Balthasar, Dare We Hope, 75.
391 Aquinas, Compendium of Theology, II.7, 220.
whether the salvation of all is a suitable object of hope, hinges on satisfying the second requirement. Is the salvation of all a real possibility, or not?

In his next chapter Aquinas reflects on the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Hallowed be thy name.’ This, he explains, cannot express a desire for God to receive some measure of holiness that he does not already possess, for his holiness is complete. “But”, he continues, “we can desire that God, who in himself is always great, should be magnified in the opinion and reverence of all [omnia].” This petition asks that the holiness of God should be recognised and affirmed by all of humanity. Balthasar observes the universal character of this statement, noting that in light of the sentences that directly follow, it seems to affirm the possibility of salvation for all:

And we should not think of this as something impossible. For, inasmuch as human beings were made to know God’s greatness, they would seem to have been made in vain if they could not attain to perceiving it. This would be contrary to what Ps. 89:47 says: “Have you made the children of human beings in vain?” and the desire whereby all naturally desire to know something about divine things would be in vain.392

Is the desire that God “should be magnified in the opinion and reverence of all” equivalent to the desire for all to be saved? Since the Lord’s Prayer as a whole is undeniably a petition concerning the work of redemption and the establishment of God’s Kingdom, this would seem to be a very natural and unproblematic step. While even those creatures who reject God may still magnify him in some limited way, by merely existing, the interpretation of Aquinas presents this petition as asking for something much more. Namely, that God’s name be magnified directly and intentionally by human beings, which can only occur in a life of communion with God. So, if it is possible that all should share in the magnifying of God’s name, then it is possible that all should be saved, and if the salvation of all is a possibility, then according to the teaching of Aquinas on hope, it seems that the salvation of all is a legitimate object of hope.

It is at this point that a second counter-argument is brought to bear on Balthasar’s position. Our hope for the salvation of others ought to be conditioned by the will of God. Now, as several critics of Balthasar’s argument point out, the theological tradition has preserved a distinction between the ‘antecedent will of God’ and his ‘consequent

392 Ibid., II.8, 221.
will’ which is based upon the two series of scriptural texts to which we have been referring. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, following the eighth century Syrian, John Damascene, offers a wonderfully succinct expression: “God antecedently wills all men to be saved, but consequently wills some to be damned, as His justice exacts.”^393^ This distinction, Aquinas goes on to explain, is not in the divine will itself, but finds its place “in the things willed.” That is, there is no question of a duality or inconsistency in God himself. The antecedent will of God is for the salvation of each and every human creature, “taken in its primary sense, and absolutely considered.” This is because, absolutely considered, salvation is a good and the damnation of any creature is an evil. This corresponds to the series of scriptural texts that emphasises God’s desire for the salvation of all. We speak of the consequent will of God, however, when “all particular circumstances are considered”. And so it may be that God wills (consequently) that a creature be damned who refuses his mercy until the end, even though his antecedent will is for that creature’s salvation. This corresponds to the threatening series of scriptural texts, and indicates that in respecting the human capacity to freely accept him, God knows that in some instances this freedom will fail and the creature will be irrevocably lost.

The next line of the counter-argument is that, since this distinction appears to hold for human creatures in relation to the will of God, our Christian hope should also be subject to conditions. In this vein Kevin L. Flannery takes up the doctrine of the post-reformation Spanish theologian Francisco Suarez. We are permitted to pray, he says, for the salvation of all with a simple desire that, remaining subordinate to the will of God, acknowledges that some have and will in fact refuse the gift of salvation. But if we pray for the salvation of all out of an “absolute and efficacious desire” then we come into conflict with the revealed will of God “for in this mode we pray with respect to those supposed to be condemned that they not be condemned.”^394^ In other words, the strongest attitude we are permitted to take with regards to the salvation of all is a desire that is conditional on the will of God. Any prayer ‘that all may be saved’ is to carry the implicit qualification ‘insofar as it accords with God’s consequent will’.

Balthasar, however, is not convinced by this reasoning and opposes it with the assertion that harbouring such a qualification in our prayer for the salvation of all inevitably introduces a restriction of love. In support of this assertion Balthasar cites Hans-Jürgen Verweyen.

It seems to me that just the slightest nagging thought of a final hell for others brings on moments in which human togetherness becomes especially difficult, as does leaving the other to himself. If there may, in fact, be people who are absolutely incorrigible, why, then, should not those who make my life on earth a hell perhaps also be of that sort? In other words, to hold that the consequent will of God is for some to be damned creates an obstacle for the love of one’s neighbour, and in particular for the love of one’s enemy. The conviction that there are some ‘out there’ who will be damned lends itself almost irresistibly to being applied to ‘this arrogant fool’ or ‘that rotten scoundrel’. The anonymous reprobate (whose existence is assured by the threatening texts of Scripture) is ‘incarnated’ before us in the form of our own personal enemy. This must be understood, Balthasar notes, as a judgement of practical reason, and not as a principle on which theories (such as universalism) can be based. In other words, there is no strict logical connection between infernalism and casting negative judgement on one’s known enemies – the claim here is that to do so presents, in practice, a very strong temptation.

Balthasar’s positive argument is that while hope is the movement towards my final flourishing in God, Christian revelation does not permit this flourishing to be understood in terms of ‘just me and God’. Since it is his desire that all be saved (1 Tim 2:3-6), and that all things be united in Christ (Eph 1:10), the hope that I have for my own flourishing in God necessarily includes within it the presence of others and communion with them. For, as Gabriel Marcel urges, there can be no particularism of hope; hope loses all sense and all force if it does not imply the statement of an ‘all of us’ or an ‘all-together’ – but this one possible sense can ultimately ground itself, of course, only in the calling of the individual [by God].

This last phrase echoes the words of Aquinas that hope pertains directly to oneself, while its all-encompassing scope stems from the essential connection between hope and

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love. To hope exclusively for oneself implies a contradiction, in which what one hopes for (an eternity ‘on my own’) bears a closer resemblance to hell than it does to heaven. In this way that for which we hope is conditioned by those for whom we hope. The content of our hope (life with God) is inseparable from its scope (the communion of saints). The fact that damnation is a real possibility does not mean that anyone is ‘expendable’. Here, again, we are better to allow the two series of scripture texts to remain in full force and not attempt a synthesis. God desires all to be saved. His plan is for the whole creation to reach its fulfilment by being united in him, and yet for each human being there is a real danger of being lost.

In the previous section of this chapter we saw that, for Balthasar, “The elementary act of knowledge must include an attitude of benevolence, if not of mercy, which receives the defenceless object in an atmosphere of warmth and discretion.” We said that in order to know something as it really is requires gentleness and sensitivity, so that the acquisition of knowledge does not defile or destroy that which one is seeking to know. Jesus, in his risen-wounded form, must be approached in this way. He is the seamless expression of the heart of the Father, and is, therefore, profoundly mysterious, since he cannot be broken up into analysable pieces but must be received whole and entire. Similarly, we must not prejudge the world, dividing it up into ‘saved’ and ‘damned’, for then we completely misunderstand the world as it has been reconstituted in Christ. The only way to understand the renewed creation is to receive it all in an attitude of benevolence. This means regarding the whole as the object of Christ’s saving activity. Indeed, he exhorts us to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44) because our own salvation is tied up with the salvation of the whole.

**Hell as a threat to ‘me’**

For Balthasar, it is only so far as the person finds herself involved and drawn into this hope for the salvation of all, in loving her neighbour in the way that God loves him, that she sees herself as being included in hope – and included as “the last one.” Why the last one? Because, for Balthasar, unlike the hope of salvation which applies first of all to the ‘whole’, the threat of damnation applies first of all to oneself. “I am obliged to

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399 Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, 85.
hear, in a thoroughly existential way,” says Balthasar, “the threat of possibly becoming
lost as something directed in each case to me in particular.” In other words, while we
are saved as members of the whole of redeemed creation, damnation is as individuals
who have cut ourselves off from the whole. As Søren Kierkegaard attests,

I have never been so far in my life, and am never likely to get farther than to the
point of “fear and trembling”, where I find it literally quite certain that every other
person will easily be blessed – only I will not. To say to the others: you are eternally
lost – that I cannot do. For me, the situation remains constantly this: all the others
will be blessed, that is certain enough – only with me there may be difficulties.

This encapsulates, so well, the Christian attitude to the threat of hell being put forward
by Balthasar. It must apply to me first in order to prevent me from setting myself up as
judge over the eternal destiny of others. It is beneficial when applied to me and
hazardous when applied by me to others. For, to say to the others, ‘you are eternally
lost’, is actually to become lost myself; but to acknowledge the threat that I might be
lost is necessary for me to be saved.

Furthermore, as Balthasar observes, there are precedents in the Scriptures for this self-
deprecating attitude to be expressed as self-sacrifice. St. Paul is so anxious for the
conversion of his Jewish kinsmen, he states that “I could wish that I myself were
accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren” (Rom 9:3). Moses makes
a similar prayer after his people fall into idolatry: “But now, if thou wilt forgive their
sin – and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.” (Ex
32:32). These seemingly exaggerated offerings should not, according to Balthasar, be
passed off as zealous hyperbole. The willingness to be lost for the sake of others, in
fact, should point us back to the drama of the crucifixion, especially the cry of Jesus
from the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). “For in
this cry”, says Balthasar “when the Son of God became a ‘curse’ and was made ‘to be
sin’ for us – all the offerings up of self that seem so insane to us, of Moses and Paul, are
cought up, taken in and gone beyond.”

This observation makes clear that the attitude
of considering oneself last in the reception of salvation has its source in the self-
emptying of Jesus and his experience of abandonment. Since Christ made himself last,

400 Ibid., 80.
401 Quoted in Eduard Geismar, “Das ethische Stadium bei Søren Kierkegaard”, in Zeitschrift für
systematische Theologie I, (1923): 260, cited and translated in Balthasar, Theo-Drama V, 293, and Dare
we Hope, 88.
402 Balthasar, Dare we Hope, 208.
this attitude becomes the attitude of hope: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4).

Critics of Balthasar’s position say that by making hell primarily an existential threat addressed to each one of us personally, Balthasar is weakening the threat and misinterpreting the words of the Gospel. The existential threat, it would seem, reduces the warning to a rhetorical device, which is designed to foster a spirit of humility in us but which lacks the sting that it would contain were it a genuine prediction of a well-populated hell. For Balthasar, however, to interpret the threat as a factual prediction of a hell bursting with tormented souls is to succumb to despair. It also objectifies hell in such a way that I, the observer, remain always one step removed from it. To know, as an objective fact, that there is a great multitude suffering in hell, is practically to place oneself above and beyond that wretched throng of reprobates. It is to abstract oneself away from the very threat with which one is meant to be squarely confronted. For Balthasar, the only way to appreciate eternal loss without despair (in relation to others) and presumption (in relation to oneself) is to face up to the possibility of my own damnation in conversation with Jesus – hoping in him for the salvation of all while simultaneously acknowledging the real threat that I face. This means that whether or not I will be included in that ‘all’ is a question that can only be answered when I am face to face with the risen-wounded Christ. Only in him can the source of forgiveness for my sins be found. Or again, I can know him as the source of the world’s forgiveness only by first recognising him as the one who forgives me.

Conclusion
Here, in this encounter with the risen-wounded Christ, the reflections of all three sections of this chapter are brought together. In section one we saw Christ as the one who stands at the centre of all human history. His ‘vow’ on the cross is the key event to which all past events are directed and from which all future events flow. It makes the human rejection of God the centre-point of the drama of salvation. All are implicated in this sinful rejection just as all are included in the gift of divine forgiveness. Indeed, while his appearance in the flesh bears all the limitations of time and place, the Spirit

\[403\] Martin, *Will Many Be Saved?* 152.
unfolds the hidden richness of his life-giving ‘vow’, making it fruitful throughout the whole of creation. In this way, the mission of the Son of God, risen and wounded, extends to all people, and all are drawn, through the ordinary events of life, into an encounter with him to whom all our actions are mysteriously directed (cf. Matt 25:40, 45).

Moreover, in section two we argued that, in his risen-wounded form, Jesus stands as the utterly mysterious revelation of God the Father. In his resurrection, the various events of his life and death are drawn up into a single totality. Thus, the beatific life of heaven that is promised to those who believe in him is communion with God through a living friendship with Christ in the Spirit. He remains always deeply mysterious insofar he cannot be mastered or comprehended by being broken down into parts. His life cannot be sundered from his death, nor can any episode of his earthly mission be separated from his risen-wounded existence. This eternal encounter with the risen-wounded Christ is never static, but is always full of surprises and new gifts – it is always being renewed. And since true friendship is always reciprocal, there must be a sense in which we offer ourselves anew, to the ‘wonder’ and ‘surprise’ of Christ – even if all we have to offer is what we have already received from the Father through him. He remains mysterious, and so do we, because no matter how close we are bound in communion with him, he remains, and we remain, always ‘other’ – the mysterious, free other who can never be absorbed or mastered or pulled apart or ‘digested’.

In this final section we have argued that Christian hope can only be fostered in this encounter, since outside of union with Christ we fall prey to despair and presumption. In his risen-wounded form, Christ assures us of his mercy, which extends to all. At the same time, he enables us to recognise the destruction caused by our own sins, and their deadly consequences. For, only in light of the promise of salvation is it possible to appreciate the danger of being lost without losing the gift of hope. The threat of hell is therefore something that I must confront for myself, in the presence of the risen-wounded Christ, if I am to appreciate what it means. There, the fear of eternal punishment is driven away, because I stand face to face with the source of hope for my salvation and that of the whole world.
6.1. CONCLUSION

Introduction

Our point of departure for this thesis was an article on forgiveness by Yotam Benziman. In our introduction we identified in this article three criticisms of the recent literature on forgiveness. These three criticisms helped us to form three questions on forgiveness which provided the structure for chapter one and a trajectory for the theological exploration of the risen-wounded form of Christ in chapters two to five. And so now, in order to conclude our discussions on the risen-wounded Christ and to see what final implications they have for our understanding of forgiveness, we will return to Benziman’s three criticisms. We will discuss these three criticisms in connection with the three threads of argumentation that have run through our five chapters. So, the first criticism will connect us with the material from section one of each chapter, the second criticism with the material from our second sections, and the third criticism with the final conclusions reached in section three of each chapter. In this way forgiveness will frame our entire discussion of the risen-wounded Christ by providing both the starting point and the finale.

The past and the passing

The first of Benziman’s criticisms that we identified was that several accounts of forgiveness required the forgiving party to adopt an unrealistic attitude towards the past – whether it was overlooking the past misdeed, acting as if it never took place, or allowing subsequent events, like the repentance of the wrongdoer, to eclipse the memory of the offence. We saw that, for Benziman, the problem with this attempt to negate the past is that, since the past is not open to change, “any attempt to change history is going to fail. . . . Once an offense has been committed, somebody has been hurt, and this hurt cannot be undone.”404 But by understanding forgiveness as ‘bearing the burden’, Benziman was able to avoid this negating tendency in relation to the past. In the joining together of the victim with the offender in the task of bearing the consequences of the offence, the past is actually preserved. The offender’s guilt is made more explicit, the victim’s injury is felt more keenly, and in light of this new bond formed by forgiveness, the past offence is given new meaning. For, without forgiveness

404 Benziman, ‘Forgiveness’, 89.
the scars are a superfluous feature. The wronged person does not understand them. . . . He becomes willing to make them part of himself only when he decides to forgive. Forgiveness makes the scars part of his being, and from then on they belong to him. They are no longer just the finger prints of an offender. The wronged person becomes responsible for them as well. In embracing the offender, he also embraces the offense. He participates in bearing the wrong, and turns it into a part of himself. He does not reject his scars; he deals with them.405

In a way, then, for Benziman, forgiveness does have an effect on the past. However, rather than nullifying the past, this expression of forgiveness transforms the past by embracing it and thereby amplifying it.

This account of forgiveness provides us with an excellent platform from which to appreciate the content of our thesis, and particularly the first sections of each of the five chapters which deal with questions relating to time and eternity and culminate in our reflections on ‘the vow’ of Christ’s self-offering. There is no doubt, even from a first glance, that the forgiveness accomplished in Jesus is better understood as ‘bearing the burden’ than as overlooking the past misdeed, or acting as if the offence never took place. Israel’s history of disobedience to the Lord, and the godlessness of the Gentiles are not subjects that Jesus avoids or downplays. Jesus brought about forgiveness when he “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). And by remaining wounded in the resurrection, Jesus shows that he still ‘bears the burden’ with us. In the ‘vow’ of his self-gift on the cross, he preserves the past history of sin by showing that it was all directed to this moment. The past is not negated at all, though it is firmly put in its place, for in light of the ‘vow’, all sin, even future offences, are relegated to the definitive ‘past’ – to that which is defeated and passing away. By embracing sinners and ‘bearing the burden’ with us, Jesus reveals the true character of evil as nothingness. By exposing and amplifying it, he overcomes it.

Christ’s bearing of the sin of the world as a whole then becomes the basis on which interpersonal forgiveness for particular offences can take place. The one who forgives does not need to negate the past, but only to acknowledge the new meaning it has received in relation to the ‘vow’ expressed in Christ’s risen-wounded form. Christ has borne the burden of all past offences, which, culminating in the events of Good Friday, became the occasion for his self-offering and a new relationship forged between us and

405 Ibid., 107.
God. In order to forgive us he drew close to us and in our rejection of him he tasted the extreme bitterness of sin. He has become fully acquainted with sinners and the effects of their sin. On this basis the victim is able to relate in a new way to the offender and the offence. The offender is revealed as one who has been embraced by Jesus, and the offence is reinterpreted as an event which occasioned his self-gift. The past is not ignored or overlooked. If anything, the gravity of the sin is actually heightened, for every sin is recognised as a tributary to the torrent of hate and wrath that sent the Son of God to his death. Nevertheless, by being taken up by that larger narrative, the horror of sin becomes but an overture to the gratuitous forgiveness of God.

While Benziman does speak of a transformation that takes place when the victim and offender cooperate in bearing the burden of the offence together, he does not elaborate on the source of this transformation or how it takes place. But we, in light of the theological reflections of this thesis can affirm that human forgiveness takes place only as a participation in the forgiveness of Christ. Therefore, each act of forgiveness is not an isolated occurrence that can be understood without reference to anything else, or a mundane moral event that requires no explanation beyond the mere facts. To participate in forgiveness, whether as victim or offender, is to live from the ‘vow’ of Jesus. It is to cooperate in the work of the Holy Spirit, who was sent to unveil the true depths of Jesus’ self-gift. Thus, it is not only the past misdeed, but also the act of forgiveness itself that receives its significance in relation to Christ. In this sense, forgiveness is not only concerned with a past offence and the central moment of Christ’s ‘vow’, but also constitutes the new life opened up by that vow. Christ has done away with sin, not by preventing offences from occurring, but by providing the basis for a life of forgiveness to be lived by those who follow after him.

**Offenders and offences**

The second criticism that we identified in Benziman was aimed at the tendency in discussions on forgiveness to introduce a fundamental separation between actors and actions, the offender and the offence. This distinction is thought by some to constitute the actual meaning of forgiveness itself, or at least, to provide the basis and justification for the offer of forgiveness. I can be forgiven because what I did does not ultimately express who I am. While some offences might be deemed ‘unforgiveable’, this does not
preclude forgiveness, since it is offenders and not offences that are in need of being forgiven. When I repent I consciously distance myself from the offending action and I ask the victim to do the same. To agree to the request is, for the victim, to see me in a new light – to acknowledge my positive qualities and my potential for good, and no longer to view me under the shadow of my offensive behaviour. My promise to avoid a repeat of any such behaviour in the future is the basis for a new trust which overrides the suspicion and fear generated by the offence. In this way I will hope to resume friendly relations with the victim, confident that my past misdemeanours will not be held up to shame me at some future moment. To associate me with my crime in that way would be to break the rules of forgiveness.

As we saw in the introduction, Benziman is dissatisfied with this sort of account of forgiveness because it denies the essential unity between persons and their actions. “The truth, however, is that forgiveness always means forgiving a person for something.” In fact, without an acknowledgement of this unity, he argues, forgiveness loses its meaning and its purpose. “If I want to forgive a murderer,” says Benziman, “I want to forgive him for the murder he committed. Otherwise I would not need to forgive him.” But if I separate the offender from the offence then there is no longer an ‘offender’ in need of forgiveness. “In other words, portraying the murderer as a murderer—as the doer of the deed—is necessary in order to make forgiveness possible in the first place.”

In our second section of the chapter on sin we drew from the work of Robert Spaemann. We looked at his notion of pre-moral guilt which provided the foundation for his understanding of sin as culpable ignorance. Spaemann provides us with a more nuanced approach to the connection between persons and their actions. “Forgiveness, in this fundamental, pre-moral sense means that we are just to our own kind and respect them in their worth only when we do not take them completely seriously.” This means, on the one hand, that we do not consider the actions of another to be a full expression of who they are. And yet, on the other hand, Spaemann insists that these actions which provide only a distorted expression of our personal identity are nevertheless things for which we must admit responsibility. ‘Culpable ignorance’ is the

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406 Ibid., 95.
407 Spaemann, Happiness and Benevolence, 189.
description of sin that captures these two sides of the picture. My sin is something to which I am at least partially blind, and yet this blindness does not exonerate because it is the result of my refusal to see. And so, for Spaemann, there is a certain disconnection between the offender and the offence, but this disconnection is actually the sign of moral guilt. It is because this misdeed does not truly express who I am (nor the truth of who the victim is) that I must seek forgiveness for it.

This tension between the positions of Benziman and Spaemann needs to be viewed in light of the risen-wounded form of Christ. He is the one who presents divine forgiveness and human sin as a mysterious ‘whole’. His wounded flesh which he presents to his disciples on the day of the resurrection is both the sum of our faults and the sign of his forgiveness. This sits well with the position of Benziman, that forgiveness associates the offender with the offence and does not separate them. In the risen-wounded form of Jesus the sign of forgiveness is also a reminder to all those who participated in the crucifixion or abandoned him in his hour of need. And yet, as we argued above, Jesus stands at the centre of history as the bearer of all creaturely offences, and thus, reinterprets them as offences levelled against himself. On the cross he prayed to the Father to “forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). This means that the revelation of God’s forgiveness and of human sin is a revelation addressed to the blind – to those who did not know what they were doing, but who were guilty nonetheless. Their guilt lay in their refusal to recognise the true identity of Jesus and the divine source of his mission. This is the partial disconnection between offenders and their offences – the culpable blindness of which Spaemann speaks, which provides a subtle yet important corrective to the position of Benziman.

There are two further features of Benziman’s account of forgiveness which seem to stand in contrast to our reflections on the risen-wounded Christ. Firstly, the forgiveness he describes cannot, by its nature, be unilateral. This is because it essentially requires that both victim and offender cooperate in bearing the burden of the offence. It is a process of dialogue in which “The wrongdoer depends on the wronged person’s willingness to forgive him, and the wronged person depends on the wrongdoer’s willingness to enable the process of forgiveness.”408 Unlike more psychological

408 Ibid., 109.
accounts of forgiveness which focus primarily on overcoming interior dispositions of anger and resentment, ‘bearing the burden’ cannot be achieved by the victim alone. The second difference flows from the first. There is not an obligation, according to Benziman, to forgive in every circumstance. Forgiveness need only be offered to those with whom we are willing to maintain dialogue. The Nazis are presented as an example of offenders whose misdeeds have made them “unworthy of forgiveness.” Their actions in the Holocaust were “so appalling that we do not want them to be part of us. We do not want them as part of the human race. Because of their actions, their right to be members of our community has been revoked.” That Benziman does not speak of a general obligation to forgive is not surprising given the intimate and cooperative nature of this notion of forgiveness. It is so demanding and so dependent on the goodwill of both parties that it cannot be prescribed for every instance of wrongdoing. I only forgive those with whom I wish to remain in relationship.

Does the risen-wounded Christ present forgiveness as unilateral? The words uttered by Jesus during his execution which we have already quoted, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”, suggest that a one-way gift is being offered here. Jesus does not wait for the repentance of his enemies but takes the initiative himself. However, as we argued in section two of chapter five, the appearance of the gift calls for and generates a response. The generous and inviting appearance of the risen-wounded Jesus elicits a response of joy and wonder from the disciples (John 20:20), and in this way they enter into a dramatic relation with him. The one-way gift, so unexpected and entirely unmerited, inspires a more profound response. This is the logic of unilateral forgiveness. It is not that it needs to remain unilateral in order to be ‘pure’ as we saw with Derrida in section two of chapter one. Rather, the unconditional, utterly gratuitous, surprising, unexplained, ‘impossible’ act of forgiveness aims at restoring that communion which was broken by sin. Forgiveness may be unilateral at the outset, but in its full expression it is a two-sided exchange. Thus, the notion of ‘bearing the burden’ put forward by Benziman is compatible with our reflections on the risen-wounded Christ, if we allow that one party may have to strive, for a time, to persuade the other to agree to share the burden of the offence.

409 Ibid., 111.
Now that this ‘impossible’ forgiveness has been accomplished in Christ, it becomes a possibility for those who follow him. As we saw in section two of chapter five, the hidden richness of his ‘vow’, which is revealed as the source of forgiveness, is unfolded by the Holy Spirit who accomplishes this same forgiveness in us with our free participation. Forgiveness, then, becomes an obligation, but not as some external standard that we must strive to appropriate. Rather, to have been forgiven in the encounter with Christ is to have received the same Spirit that he breathed out on the disciples and is therefore to be animated by the same life by which he overcomes sin and death (cf. Rom 8:11). The Christian imperative to forgive is, essentially, an affirmation that our lives are animated by the very source of forgiveness. It is a claim about reality before it is a moral instruction. Benziman is right, then, to oppose any strict obligation to forgive, given that he does not recognise the risen-wounded Christ as the One who ultimately bears the burden of all offences. And truly, God was under no obligation to take on human flesh and to undergo such a shameful death. The inauguration of forgiveness is a free gift and it is only in direct connection to this gift that any sort of moral obligation can be understood at all, especially the obligation to forgive. In other words, the gift is what generates the obligation in the first place.

The gift of forgiveness in Christ generates the obligation to forgive our neighbour, since, to fail to do so is to refuse to live from the gift. This provides a key for understanding the affirmation that is emphatically repeated throughout the synoptic Gospels, that the forgiveness of God is conditional on our forgiving our neighbour: “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt 6:14-15). This seems to sit uneasily with other texts where the forgiveness of our sins is declared to be the free gift received in baptism (Acts 2:38) and through faith (Acts 10:43, 13:38-39). However, if we read the obligation in light of the free gift and flowing from it, then the seeming conflict between these two claims is overcome. Part of what it means to embrace the free gift of forgiveness is to extend it to others. Forgiveness is not some new object that I can possess but a new life that demands to be lived. In this way, the gift reinterprets the notion of ‘obligation’ so that it is no longer seen as opposed to free giving. Rather, moral obligation can now be understood as the response demanded by the gift. This demand, unlike the demand of a legal contract, is fundamentally personal and operates primarily on the level of love and freedom. It calls
for a creative and loving response, which, as we saw in chapter 2.3, is unpredictable in its timing, asymmetrical in its value and non-identical in its content.\textsuperscript{410}

**Pitiful offenders and guilty victims**

The third criticism that we identified in Benziman was that some recent accounts of forgiveness blur the distinction between the offender and the victim. He found this tendency epitomised in the reflections of Archbishop Tutu, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. “None of us could predict”, said Tutu, “that if we had been subjected to the same influences, the same conditioning, we would not have turned out like these perpetrators.”\textsuperscript{411} On the other hand, “even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically.”\textsuperscript{412} There is here, as Benziman observed, a tendency to identify all, even the victims of apartheid, as potential offenders and to regard the wrongdoers as victims. This leaves us with a reversal of the roles of wrongdoer and wronged. The offender becomes a victim, and the victim, if they harbour resentment or withhold forgiveness, becomes a wrongdoer.

If we are wrong to be angry at the wrongdoer, then we have wronged him. The wronged person therefore becomes the wrongdoer, and the wrongdoer becomes the wronged. This distorts basic morality: evil becomes good, and the seeker of justice who opposes wrongdoing becomes the wrongdoer.\textsuperscript{413}

According to Benziman, this sets up an ongoing transfer of guilt from the original offender to the victim, and back, \textit{ad infinitum}. Such a transfer of roles confuses the very notion of guilt and undermines the dynamic of forgiveness, understood as an exchange between a distinctly identifiable victim and a distinctly identifiable offender. The blurring of this victim/offender distinction left us with the problem of how to determine who is actually qualified to make the offer of forgiveness.

Benziman’s own account of forgiveness as ‘bearing the burden’ strives to avoid this confusion. Though it does require that the victim and offender join together in bearing the offence, this closeness is meant to preserve the victim-offender distinction generated by the misdeed.

\textsuperscript{410} Milbank, \textit{Being Reconciled}, 156.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 103, cited in Benziman, ‘Forgiveness’, 99.
\textsuperscript{413} Benziman, “Forgiveness,” 97-98.
The forgiver chooses to bear both the scars and the wrong. This does not mean that the wronged person is an accomplice to the wrongdoing. The crime remains the deed of the criminal. The forgiver does not carry it as an offender, but as one who is willing to shoulder the consequences of the offense: to remember the wrong and remind us of it, and to forgive it while refusing to forget.\(^\text{414}\)

In this process of bearing the burden the victim does not cease to regard the other as an offender on the grounds of ‘a common humanity’ or ‘because we are all liable to sin’. Rather, forgiveness is a dialogue which requires the offender to analyse his behaviour, his motives, and acknowledge that they do not justify the offence: he is guilty. The victim must acknowledge this too if forgiveness is to take place. There must, then, be a solid agreement between the two parties about what happened and where the moral responsibility lies, if they are to walk together on the path of forgiveness.

And yet, what Benziman overlooks is the fact that, in many cases, the distinction between victim and offender is not so easy to establish. Perhaps there were misunderstandings, insensitivities, or betrayals on both sides. Perhaps both spouses were committing adultery at the same time. Perhaps I consented to being treated in a way that I later came to regret. Perhaps the conflict spans years or generations and nobody can remember who started it. Perhaps there are victims or offenders who are no longer present to enter into the shared task of ‘bearing the burden’. Of course, this need not pose a problem for Benziman, since he does not hold that forgiveness is always possible or appropriate. But this moral messiness must at least partly account for the tendency to confuse the roles of victim and offender. Many of those writing about forgiveness are doing so out of a real familiarity with all sorts of difficult cases (e.g. Archbishop Tutu and the TRC) and they are looking to establish a rationale that does not depend on a linear, clear-cut victim-offender relationship.

It was in order to provide a robust theological response to these difficulties that, in the third section of chapter one, we presented Christ as the locus of authority for forgiveness. The argument was developed further in section three of chapter two in relation to his risen-wounded form. There we see one who is the definitive victim, while remaining perfectly innocent. And yet this victim has chosen to identify himself most intimately with wrongdoers by sharing in the penalty of sin and humbling himself to the point of death, “even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:8). All the while Jesus remains

\(^{414}\) Ibid., 108.
the innocent Son of God and so his shameful death constitutes, at the same time, his perfect self-offering to the Father. He experiences the state of utter rejection and abandonment while remaining the Chosen One of God. Here, just as in the account given by Benziman, we have an intimate solidarity forged between victim and offender. And here, in this close union, the clear distinction between the innocent and the guilty parties is carefully preserved.

Recognising this as the unique basis of forgiveness enables us to confront the messy and difficult instances of conflict while retaining the clear distinction between innocence and guilt. That clear distinction is to be found in the risen-wounded Christ, who stands as the foundation of human forgiveness. He is the innocent victim who ‘bears the burden’ of sin with all sinners. In him who bears the burden, all have been forgiven. And while this definitive forgiveness is still to be unfolded by the Holy Spirit in the concrete characters and circumstances of human history, it is nevertheless already the backdrop against which the drama of human life is played out. Therefore, the obligation to forgive is not primarily based on a common humanity or a shared complicity in sin. Benziman is right on this point. Anyone who examines the New Testament references to forgiveness will see that when the obligation is spoken about, it is in view of the forgiveness of God – either that God’s forgiveness is conditioned on ours: “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you” (Matt 6:14); or that we must forgive because we have been forgiven in Christ: “as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Col 3:13). Life in this world, which Jesus has reconciled with God, is marked by forgiveness, and so we must, as far as is possible, participate in this forgiveness if we are to truly enter the drama of life.

On the other hand, when we consider the confrontation with sin, we need to think of this as a confrontation with something that is fundamentally alien to and essentially outside of the drama. As we discussed in section three of chapter three, sin does not constitute a real exercise of freedom. Just as the wounds have no being of their own but reflect the mission of Christ and embellish his risen form, we argued that sin does not bring about its own outcome, but only plays into and embellishes the plans of God. Similarly, because Jesus has overcome sin, reconciling creation with God, it does not spoil the good creation, but only conditions the manner in which it is brought to perfection in him. Though we are sinners, Christ ‘bearing our burden’ actually makes
us innocent. As he does so he reinterprets the notion of ‘innocence’, so that it is no longer associated with moral perfectionism and the scrupulous observance of purity laws, but is the state of the sinner who has been reconciled with God – the one who loves much because she has been forgiven much (Luke 7:47). In this light we can see that the real deadly sin is the refusal to accept God’s mercy – the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31), which is the refusal to live within the drama of salvation, animated by the Spirit and marked by forgiveness.

By consenting to become the rejected one as well as the elected one of God, Jesus comes close to all and draws all into this drama of salvation. As we saw in section three of chapter four, the excluded and those on the margins actually find themselves in the company of the risen Lord whose wounded body expresses his deep solidarity with them. Exclusion and marginalisation are thus reinterpreted in light of Jesus, who stands as the cruciform revelation of the merciful God. They, like the wounds on the risen body of Jesus, can now be recognised as signs of God’s election. Nobody, therefore, is excluded from the drama of salvation on account of their exclusion from the proclamation and sacramental life of the church or from active participation in civil society. All are led, one way or another, into an encounter with the risen-wounded one, whom the Spirit makes present in the ordinary characters and events of life. As we affirmed in section three of chapter five, this encounter carries with it both the promise of salvation and the threat of eternal damnation. Refusing the gift of forgiveness remains a possibility – a terrible possibility which we are each called to face in dialogue with Jesus. Only when, in dialogue with Jesus, I recognise hell as posing a real threat to myself, am I able to face the terrible possibility of it without falling prey to despair – without removing myself from the drama of salvation. This is because, in the resurrection, Jesus bears the signs of rejection, death, and damnation in his own body. One is therefore able to consider the horror of being lost without turning one’s gaze away from the Saviour.

**Final conclusion**

In this thesis we have endeavoured to make a genuine and much needed contribution to doctrinal thinking in the study of forgiveness and of the person of Christ. We have developed an account of Christ's person sensitive to the particular moment of his post-
resurrection appearance as the risen-wounded Lord – a moment which has not hitherto received the attention it deserves. Indeed, we have sought to address a shortcoming in contemporary theological scholarship as regards the risen-wounded form of Christ and with respect to its bearing on forgiveness. This work, of course, does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject matter. Each chapter could well be developed into a study of its own, and this must especially be said for the ecclesiological material of chapter four. It was there, especially in the first section, that the engagement with Barth and Balthasar became particularly complex. We sought to establish an ecclesiology of the risen-wounded Christ sensitive to the fundamental ecclesiological concerns of both authors. Yet this was only a starting point and an outline of what could be achieved in this area. Indeed, a sacramental ecclesiology based on the risen-wounded form of Christ does certainly warrant a more comprehensive treatment than we have given in this thesis.

The chief benefit of conducting this study in reference to Christ’s risen-wounded form has been to provide a unified view of the person and mission of Jesus that cannot be achieved by viewing his life, death and resurrection simply as a sequence of events, or by attempting to abstract from those events an outline of his person. In his risen-wounded form Jesus’ life and death are gathered up, transfigured, and preserved in his new resurrected existence. In this way we are given living proof of the unity of the Gospel events, and that this unity is to be found in the very person of Jesus, crucified and risen. Furthermore, in this unified self-manifestation Jesus shows what it is to be Son of God and Son of Man, and the words he spoke before his death are brought to their fulfilment: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Thus, the identity of Jesus is shown to be inseparable from his being-sent-from-the-Father to reveal the Father and reconcile the world back to him.

In light of this final discussion and summary, our thesis can now be reformulated in relation to forgiveness as well as the risen-wounded Christ: The meaning of all history – oriented towards and stemming from the gift of divine forgiveness, the unity of all creatures – reconciled through forgiveness, and the eternal destiny of all creation – to share in the new life won by forgiveness, is understood, contained, and finally realised in the risen-wounded Christ, who embodies forgiveness in his very flesh.
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