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**Christology and the Cleansing of the Temple:
Integrating Biblical and Dogmatic Theology**

By Gerhard Bode

Seminar Paper

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Of Master of Sacred Theology**

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Introduction

Since the Council of Chalcedon, traditional Christology has focused on the person and work of Christ in his two natures. Jesus is both God and man: one person, two natures – divine and human. While never separating Christ's two natures, classical Christology has tended to begin its study of Christ with his divinity. The starting point of any discussion of Christ is important, not because it necessarily determines the outcome, but rather, the point of departure marks out a specific path along which the story of Christ unfolds.

Traditional Christology has started with the fact that Jesus is God, and is generally referred to as Christology "from above." This "descending" Christology originates in the doctrine of the Trinity, and considers how the Second Person of the Trinity, the Logos, assumed a human nature.¹ Christology "from above" gives prominence to the teaching that Christ existed before creation as the Logos, that he has been the Son of God from eternity, and that he is divine. The Christology of the early church and its councils is a Christology "from above." This way of doing Christology prevailed in the church until the Enlightenment.

The other starting point for Christology is "from below." This "ascending" Christology begins with the humanity of Christ: the man Jesus of Nazareth, and with his relationship to God and with his fellow human beings in Palestine. In this Jesus, "God spoke to mankind, and bestowed salvation, embodied in the representative resurrection of his Son."² Christology "from below" examines the humanity of Christ in light of careful investigation of the biblical and early church writings, and considers the historical context of Jesus' life and activity.³

¹ Cf. Klaas Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1984, 33.

² Leopold Sabourin, *Christology: Basic Texts in Focus*. New York: Alba, 1984, 195.

³ The distinction between a Christology "from above" and "from below" is not new. (Perhaps the terms have their origins in platonic thought.) Although Luther held firmly to the traditional, Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ, he also (at least early in his career) emphasized that the biblical account starts with the humanity of Jesus, and only gradually reveals his messiahship and divinity. "We can have no more certain basis for the deity of Christ unless we wrap and lock our hearts in the statements of Scripture. For the Scripture begins gradually and gently and leads us to Christ as to a human being, and then to a Lord above all creatures, and then to a God. Thus I come gradually to learn to know God. But the philosophers and those filled with worldly wisdom would begin *from above* and have become fools. We must begin *from below* and after that move upwards..." (italics added) (Luther, *Predigt am Sonntage nach Pfingsten 1522*, St. Louis edition vol. XI, St. Louis: Concordia, 1881, 1150.) Although Luther rightly points out that the Bible itself gives us to understand Christ as a man, then Christ, Lord, and God, his understanding of a Christology "from below" is very different from how some modern theologians understand the term.

The terms Christology "from above" and Christology "from below" have come into common use since Vatican II with the help of Karl Rahner's definition (cf. "Two Basic Types of

Lutheran dogmatic theologians have traditionally employed a Christology "from above." Aside from following the classical Chalcedonian emphasis, there are natural reasons for beginning with Christ's divinity. Christ existed as a divine being before he was conceived and born of Mary according to the human nature, and, it was the divine nature that actively united itself to the human in the person of Christ (cf. John 1). In addition, Jesus' statements about himself, and the confessional statements in the Gospels also emphasize Christ as God. The disciples do not seem to question the humanity of their teacher; on the contrary, they wonder "what kind of man is this?" (Mt. 8:27). The Jewish leaders did not plot to have Jesus executed because he claimed to be a man (Mt. 26:63-4), but rather because he was (obviously) a man, who claimed to be God. Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," was not revealed to him by men, but by the Father (Mt. 16:13ff.).

Most writers of biblical theology in the last few decades have used a Christology "from below." They base what can be known about Christ on the biblical texts and supplement that knowledge with reliable historical data. Biblical theology is rooted in and founded on the teaching of Scripture. It begins with a description of what Christ said and did in the different texts of Scripture, and then points to interpretations and conclusions that can be drawn about who Christ is and what he accomplished, based on those texts.

No one has successfully integrated both biblical and dogmatic theology on the topic of Christology. The work of biblical scholars and dogmaticians often comes to an interpretation of Christ that partially borrows from the other, but neither goes as far as the other in tying together the biblical-dogmatic account of Christ. For instance, dogmatic theology often employs a classical, systematic structure in its doctrine of Christ which limits and does not always confess and teach the full witness of what the Scriptures say about him. This structure is

Christology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, 213-23). According to this understanding, Christology "from below" begins with the Jesus of history: "a human being like us in all things except sin, who stands out from the rest of the human race by his proclamation of, and commitment to, the Kingdom, or Reign, of God. His life of dedicated service to others led him to the cross, from which point God raised him up and exalted him.... It is the dominant approach in Catholic Christology today..." "Christology 'from above' begins with the preexistent Word of God in heaven, who 'comes down' to earth to take on human flesh and to redeem us by dying on the cross, rising from the dead, and returning to enjoy an exalted state as Lord in heaven. This was... the dominant form of Catholic Christology from the medieval period until Vatican II." (Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994, 493.)

Many theologians reject the notion of Christology "from above"/"from below" as a "false dilemma." Cf. Runia, 99.

often primarily concerned with interrelating specific doctrines about Christ, or relating the doctrine of Christ to the others in the *corpus doctrinae*. Texts that do not directly speak to specific doctrines about Christ, or to Christology in general, are often overlooked by dogmatic theologians. At the same time, biblical theology may approach the doctrine of Christ taught by dogmatic theology, but does not venture as far in its understanding of the person and work of Christ. In addition, it often does not consider how Christology speaks to the other doctrines of the church, especially Justification. For example, a biblical scholar may argue that Jesus (the man) acts a prophet when he cleanses the temple, but does not bring Jesus' divinity to bear on this action, nor fully discusses what this event tells us about who Christ is, what he has come to do, and what this means for my salvation.

Although extremism⁴ is to be avoided, both Christology "from above" and "from below" can make a valuable contribution to the overall study of the doctrine of Christ. A biblical, historical approach to the study of Christ is vital. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the integration of dogmatic and biblical theology, specifically demonstrating how the findings of biblical theology can be implemented by dogmatic theology to enhance the understanding of the person and work of Christ.

This is a new way of doing Christology, one that examines episodes from the life of Christ to see what each has to bring to the teaching of and about Christ. It looks at how the Scriptures speak of Jesus and how they give us to interpret who he is and what he has done and will do for us. In order to demonstrate how biblical theology can aid dogmatic theology, the pericope of the Cleansing of the Temple has been chosen for consideration. In biblical theology circles, this story from the life of Jesus has received much attention in the last decade; however, this event is seldom discussed in dogmatic theology. Therefore, it will serve as a useful text.

This paper will first examine the methodologies of biblical and dogmatic theology in light of the study of the doctrine of Christ. Furthermore, it will consider how several leading biblical theologians have understood Christ in the Cleansing of the Temple, specifically in the Gospel according to Matthew.

⁴ Christology "from below," taken too far, results in Adoptionism or Nestorianism: Jesus is not truly divine, but a human with special gifts or with a humanity different from our own. Christology "from above," carried too far becomes Monophysitism or Docetism: Jesus is not truly human, but merely appears so.

Moreover, it will review how dogmatic theologians have made use of this pericope. Finally, the paper will outline how the scholarship of biblical theology can be integrated into dogmatic theology and inform its doctrine of Christ.

I. The Methodologies of Biblical and Dogmatic Theology

A. The Methodology of Biblical Theology

Biblical scholars work in light of the event and words explicitly presented in the Bible. The text of Scripture is the focal point from which episodes are described and interpreted in their historical and literary contexts. George Eldon Ladd defines biblical theology as "that discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting." Biblical theology is primarily a descriptive discipline... [It] has the task of expounding the theology found in the Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, categories, and thought forms."⁵ While some scholars see God's revelation in history as mythological, and others as factual, most agree that the intent of Scripture is to communicate truths about what God has done. As Ladd summarizes,

Biblical theology is *theology*: it is primarily a story about God and his concern for human beings. It exists only because of the divine initiative realizing itself in a series of divine acts whose objective is human redemption. Biblical theology therefore is not exclusively, or even primarily, a system of abstract theological truths. It is basically the description and interpretation of the divine activity within the scene of human history that seeks humanity's redemption.⁶

The way scholars go about exercising "biblical theology" varies greatly. Brevard Childs observes that the term is distinguished between two definitions. The first "denotes a theology contained within the Bible" which "understands the task of Biblical Theology to be a descriptive, historical one which seeks to determine what was the theology of the biblical authors themselves." The second definition refers to a theology "which accords with the Bible" and views the task of biblical theology to be "a constructive, theological one which attempts to formulate a modern theology compatible in some sense with the Bible."⁷ This distinction may be obvious, but it underlines the ambiguity of the term "biblical theology," and reveals the vastly different approaches scholars take to Scripture. This paper will deal primarily with the first "biblical theology" which describes

⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 20.

⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

⁷ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 3.

the words and actions of Christ in their historical setting. Again, this biblical theology employs a Christology "from below."

Some biblical theologians have attempted to bring together biblical and dogmatic theology. One way has been to begin the study of the person of Christ with the names of Jesus given in Scripture. Many of these names are found in both the Old and New Testaments and lend greatly to the interpretation of Christ's person and work. Scholars have sought to understand their original meanings, and the meanings when applied by Christ to himself, or by the writers of the New Testament. These names are most helpful to theologians: "The names of Jesus are both the foreshadowing and the precipitate of Christology in its beginnings; they anticipate developments and reveal what Christians thought in the creative period of theology. The question, who Jesus is, is approached best by considering how men named Him, for it is by His names that He is revealed and known."⁸ The names of Jesus are not studied in isolation, but these theologians have tried to synthesize, as much as possible, the different elements of the names of Christ found throughout the Bible. The names of Jesus, taken together, provide a solid foundation for the teaching about Christ, his person and work.

B. The Methodology of Dogmatic Theology

Dogmatic theologians, often working in light of doctrinal controversies, have historically taught concerning the person and work of Christ, and have done Christology "from above." Most Lutheran dogmaticians have focused on the theological significance of Christ – who he is and what he accomplished – and have synthesized a doctrine of Christ based on Scripture.

Though not a dogmatic theologian by profession, Luther articulated much concerning the methodology and purpose of theology that greatly influenced subsequent Lutheran theologians. Luther believed that theology hands down doctrine. The first thing a student of theology is to know (after the three rules concerning the right manner to study theology: *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*) is that "the Holy Scripture is such a book that it makes the wisdom of all other books foolishness, because no book teaches about eternal life, except this alone."⁹ Luther also stressed that God communicates through his Word: "You are to deal

⁸ Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*, London: MacMillan, 1962, 1. Other important works on the subject of the names of Christ are Oscar Cullman's *The Christology of the New Testament*, London, SCM, 1957, and Leopold Sabourin's *The Names and Titles of Jesus: Themes of Biblical Theology*, New York: MacMillan, 1967.

⁹ *Vorrede über den ersten Theil seiner deutschen Bücher*, St. Louis Edition, vol. 14, 1898, 434.

with the Scripture in a way that you realize that God himself is speaking it."¹⁰ He equated "theology" with the exposition of true teaching and doctrine based on Scripture.¹¹

The purpose of this theology is to communicate and exposit God's Word and his activity in the lives of human beings; theology teaches Law and Gospel.¹² Theology imparts knowledge about God, externally revealed by God to humans.¹³ That true theology is grounded firmly on God's revealed, inspired Word was crucial for Luther: "this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive."¹⁴ This theology is done by believers, with knowledge of God and faith.¹⁵ Believing the Word of God is the starting point for Luther; learning and reason are subjective and will lead astray if one begins with them.¹⁶ Doctrine is found in the literal sense of Scripture which "alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology;" God said what he meant and meant what he said – faith believes what God says.¹⁷ Reason does not believe; it judges that the Gospel of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:18) and the "folly of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21) are offensive and foolish:

For it does not understand that the supreme form of worship is to hear the voice of God and to believe, but it supposes that what it chooses on its own and what it does with a so-called good intention and from its own devotion is pleasing to God. When God speaks, reason, therefore, regards

¹⁰ *Vorrede auf die Predigten über das erste Buch Mosis*, St. Louis Edition, vol. 3, 1894, 21.

¹¹ E.g. *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 26, St. Louis: Concordia, 1963, 127, 286, (WA XL, 225, 445).

¹² "'The aim' [of theological study] is not to increase questions and to leave consciences unsure after all their difficulties but to bring consciences to the point that they know this for sure... that they know how their relationship with God in this world stands." *Lectures on 1 Timothy (1:5)*, 1528, AE 28, St. Louis: Concordia, 1973, 224, (WA XXVI, 9-10).

¹³ "God must be known and apprehended, not as remaining within Himself, but as coming to us from outside..." *Lectures on Genesis (22:16)* 1540, AE 4, St. Louis: Concordia, 1964, 145, (WA XLIII, 240).

¹⁴ *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 26, 387, (WA XL, 589).

¹⁵ E.g. *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 26, 268, (WA XL, 419).

¹⁶ "In other sciences and arts it is true that a person acquires learning by hearing and observing much. But in theology and in godly wisdom neither hearing nor observing profits, neither exploring nor groping about. No, we must begin by believing the Word of God. Whoever fails to do so will miss the mark... If you want to become learned in spiritual and divine matters, here is the beginning: Believe the Word of God." *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 1530 (*John 7:18*), AE 23, St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, 233, (WA XXXIII, 369).

¹⁷ *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, 1525 (1:41), AE 9, St. Louis: Concordia, 1960, 24, (WA XIV, 560).

His Word as heresy and as the word of the devil; for it seems so absurd. Such is the theology of all the sophists and of the sectarians, who measure the Word of God by reason.¹⁸

For Luther, the ultimate purpose of God's speaking is to proclaim Christ and him crucified; this is God's theology for us: "Here we are in a divine theology, where we hear the Gospel that Christ died for us and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous."¹⁹ True theology is founded on God's Word and points to Christ and his salvation.²⁰

The theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy approach the doctrine of Christ systematically: divine nature of Christ, human nature in Christ, the personal union of the two natures in Christ, supported by a catalog of testimonies from Scripture, the Creeds, Councils, and Fathers. Theirs is a Chalcedonian Christology, "from above," with a different emphasis than Luther's, due to the controversies in the Lutheran circles following the death of the Reformer. The Lutherans now felt a pressing need to demonstrate that the doctrine they taught was the historic, Scriptural doctrine of the Church catholic. In the *Prelection* to his *Loci Theologici* (published 1591), Chemnitz states his intention for writing his book of Christian doctrines: "For in the case of everything which we teach, we must show the beginning, the progress or development of the matter, and the purpose or end."²¹

In his *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (1677), Abraham Calov explained the importance of the doctrine of Christology: "The purpose of this doctrine is that we rightly acknowledge the Son of God, that we believe in him as eternal Redeemer and Savior with true faithfulness of the heart, that we honor with a grateful mind the eminence of grace shown in himself, and in this our all and all; that on this, as comforted and joyous people, we establish our salvation."²²

Lutheran theologians stress the importance of Christology in Christian doctrine. As Pieper affirms, the doctrine of Christ serves the doctrine of

¹⁸ *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 26, 228, (WA XL, 362).

¹⁹ *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 26, 234, (WA XL, 371).

²⁰ E.g. "[Christ the King] alone ought to 'fill heaven and earth' and all things... for our consolation, so that we may cling to Him with a firm faith and hope for salvation through Him alone. This is true theology, which teaches the heart and encourages it in the greatest perils." *Commentary on Psalm 2:10*, 1532, AE 12, St. Louis: Concordia, 1955, 68, (WA XL.2, 279).

²¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici: Prelection*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia, 1989, 25.

²² Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*. Wittenberg: Andreas Hartmann, 1677, 273.

"Usus hujus Doctrinae est, ut Filium Dei recte agnoscamus, in eundem, ceu æternum Redemptorem ac Salvatorem vera cordis fiducia credamus, eminentiam gratiæ in ipso exhibitæ grata mente veneremur, & in illa proram puppimq[ue]; solatii ac gaudii, salutisque nostræ constituamus."

Justification, the central article of the Christian faith.²³ The very reason God sent his Son, the Christ, was for our justification. If there had been no Christ, there would be no justification, and thus, no salvation. In addition, Lutherans emphasize that the true doctrine of the person and work of Christ has been known and is believed in Christendom on the basis of Scripture alone.²⁴

Dogmatic theology has been criticized because it reflects on the events in the life of Christ in general, or in synthesis, without much regard for specific accounts and details. Wenham summarizes biblical theology's criticism of dogmatic theology:

Some of what has been done with Scripture is illegitimate, namely: (1) using verses and passages of Scripture as prooftexts, as though the Bible presented a homogeneous body of doctrine, (2) much of the harmonizing of biblical passages and ideas that has been done, since it represents a failure to appreciate the diversity of Scripture, and (3) interpreting biblical texts in terms of later Christian orthodoxy, since so-called Christian orthodoxy represents only one of several theological viewpoints represented in the New Testament and since it is a mistake to read later orthodoxy into the early texts.²⁵

II. Biblical Theological Approaches to the Cleansing of the Temple

This section is a survey of biblical theologians' treatment the Cleansing of the Temple in the Gospel of Matthew. It is a brief report of exegesis by those who have recently written on this episode in the life of Jesus. Many scholars do not deal with this event in depth; one can only speculate as to the reason. The differences in approach, emphasis, interpretation, and outcome for the doctrine of Christ will be discussed. A brief summary outline of the pericope in Matthew will be followed by the exegesis of biblical scholars and a exegetical outline for possible interpretation of the text. The conclusion of this paper contains ideas of how this exegesis may be integrated into dogmatic theology in regard to the Cleansing of the Temple.

A. Review of the Pericope

All four gospels record the Cleansing of the Temple (Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-47; Jn. 2:13-16). The accounts commonly say that after

²³ Cf. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, volume II, St. Louis: Concordia, 1950, 512ff.

²⁴ Cf. Pieper and Luther's quote, Pieper, II.57f.

²⁵ David Wenham, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," Appendix in Ladd, 686. Cf. 717-19.

entering Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple and drove out those selling and changing money in the temple courts. This act angered the chief priests and teachers of the law. Beyond this, the different gospel accounts vary in details. The synoptic gospels have more in common with each other than with John. Outside the gospels and Acts, this event is not explicitly referred to in Scripture.²⁶ The Gospel of Matthew has been chosen for study in this paper only because it provides the fullest account of the episode among the synoptic gospels.

It is helpful to consider the structure and broader context of this event in Matthew.

The Context/Structure of Matthew 21:1-25:46:

- I. 21:1-11 – Jesus enters Jerusalem.
- II. 21:12-13 – Jesus drives traders from temple.
- III. 21:14-27 – Immediate outcomes:
 - A. 14-17 – Jesus heals blind and lame; deals with Jewish leaders; departs Jerusalem.
 - B. 18-22 – Jesus curses the fig tree and it withers.
 - C. 23-27 – Chief priests and elders question Jesus' authority.
- IV. 21:28-23:39 – Continued conflict with Jewish leaders
- V. 24-25 – Eschatological discourses

Several aspects of this pericope are unique to Matthew.²⁷ First, Matthew notes (21:14), that after Jesus drove the traders from the temple, the blind and

²⁶ However, Mt. 26:61, 27:39-40, Mk. 14:58, 15:29-30, and Acts 6:13-14 all refer to Jesus' statement in Jn. 2:19.

²⁷ There are differences in the various gospel accounts of the Cleansing: **Mark:** 1. Jesus goes to the temple and views it on the evening (Palm Sunday) before he cleanses it (11:11). 2. Mark makes the cursing of the fig tree a framework for the incident in the Temple (11:12-14; 20-25). 3. Mark clearly indicates that the cleansing of the temple took place on the day *after* Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:12). 4. Mark says that Jesus would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts (11:16). 5. Mark includes the words "for all nations" in his quotation of Is. 56:7 (11:17).

Luke: 1. Luke makes no reference to buyers, moneychangers and dove sellers. 2. Luke (as well as Matthew) lacks Mark's comment about the temple being a place for all nations; this seems a significant omission in light of Luke's gentile emphasis. 3. Luke does not detail any violent acts, such as the use of a whip (Jn. 2:15) or the overturning of tables (Mk. 11:15). 4. Luke says Jesus was teaching at the temple every day, and that the plot by the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus was frustrated "because all the people hung on his words" (19:48). 5. Luke omits reference to the fig tree's withering.

John: 1. John places the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. 2. In his narrative, John refers to oxen and sheep and to a whip made of cords, none of which is in the synoptic gospel accounts (2:14). 3. John uses a different word for *moneychangers* (in the first reference), as well as for *overturned* (2:15). 4. John says the money was poured out and that Jesus commanded the traders to take their things away, which none of the other gospels mentions

lame came to him in the temple and he healed them.²⁸ Furthermore, the incident in 21:15-16 is unique to Matthew. The high priests and scribes saw Jesus healing and saw the boys crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David." The high priests and scribes became indignant, and asked Jesus "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus responded, "Yes. Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have brought perfect praise?'" (Ps. 8:2).²⁹

B. Scholars' Interpretation of the Episode

N. T. Wright observes that the various proposals of what Jesus did in the temple and why he did it fall along a broad spectrum, running, basically, from "cleansing" to "acted parable of destruction."³⁰ At one end of the spectrum, some scholars believe Jesus did not approve of the temple cult and sought to reform it.³¹ Or, others theorize that Jesus may have had a new theory of purity, which he failed to establish in the temple.³² At the other end of the spectrum, Wright

(2:15-16). 5. Jesus treats the dove sellers leniently; he simply orders them to leave with their merchandise (2:16). 6. Jesus calls the temple "my Father's house" (2:16). 7. The synoptic gospels say that Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jer. 7:11, but John does not say that he quoted Scripture. However, he does say (2:17) that the disciples remembered the words, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Ps. 69:9), which none of the synoptic accounts has. 8. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (2:19).

²⁸ Jesus brings the blind and lame into the temple area from which the law excludes them and heals them. They are not afraid or shocked, and children praise him with Hosanna! According to 2 Sam. 5:8, the blind and lame are excluded from the house of God by David's decree. In addition, hereditary priests who were blind or lame were not permitted in the sanctuary (Lev. 21:18).

²⁹ Cf. Mt. 11:25 for the ability to perceive spiritual truth which others fail to grasp. "In Mt. 21:15-16, Jesus cites LXX Ps. 8:2, but Ps 8 speaks of praise offered to God, not of the acclamation of the Messiah or any other man... it is then only the idea of the acceptability of children's praise to which Jesus refers, or is there implied here a claim to a status even higher than that of 'Son of David?'" (R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, 302). Cf. also H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*. Ray Tognman, trans. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, 388: "Jesus made known to the chief priests and scribes (by using Ps. 8:2), that the praise that God the Creator evoked in the noises and babbling of babies and children also belongs to Himself. The shouts of the children in the temple were not senseless, and even less were they objectionable. Instead they were a recognition of the Son of David that had been brought forth by God Himself."

³⁰ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume Two*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996, 413.

³¹ Cf. Peter Richardson, "Why Turn the Tables? Jesus' Protest in the Temple Precincts," *Society for Biblical Literature 1992 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 507-523; Bruce D. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, 121-30; Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple," *Society for Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David Lull, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 522-39; and Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 51:237-70.

³² Cf. Chilton, 155.

notes how some scholars have argued that Jesus symbolically acted out the destruction of the temple building itself.³³ For some, this destruction was merely the necessary preparation to rebuilding, and held no implications of judgment, (e.g., Sanders); for others it was the outworking of divine wrath.³⁴ For yet others, it was the result of the temple's intrinsically unjust and oppressive system,³⁵ and for still others, it was the prelude to the institution of an alternative religious system, begun with the Lord's Supper.³⁶ More interpretations fall somewhere between the ends of the spectrum, however, there are two main interpretations of the event.

Due to the immense size of the temple outer courtyard where the incident took place, and the fact that Jesus was not arrested immediately, it is believed that the scale of the action was relatively small and that Jesus did not intend to stop all temple operations completely.³⁷ On this account, most scholars view Jesus' action as prophetic or symbolic.³⁸

Scholars have interpreted Jesus' "symbolic" or "prophetic" act in two important ways.

1. Symbolic Demonstration

Although a higher-critical scholar, E. P. Sanders has made some valuable contributions to the study of the event in the temple. Sanders has proposed that Jesus' action be regarded as a symbolic demonstration – one that represents both the destruction of the temple, and its restoration.³⁹ Sanders denies that there was

³³ Wright, 413. Cf. C. K. Barrett, "The House of Prayer and the Den of Thieves" in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and E. Grässer. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 13-20; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, 61-71; *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1993, 253-264.

³⁴ Cf. Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984, 170-99.

³⁵ Cf. J. Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, 127-33.

³⁶ Cf. Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *New Testament Studies* 35: 287-90.

³⁷ Cf. Kim Huat Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus*, Cambridge: University Press, 1997, 165. On the basis of Josephus' measurements, E. P. Sanders estimates that the entire temple complex measured approximately 450 by 300 meters and comprised an area of 35 acres. Cf. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE.*, London: SCM, 1992, 57-8.

³⁸ These two interpretations are often considered synonymous, but Tan notes a distinction between them: "a prophetic act, although often symbolic, may be intended simply as a protest against or denunciation of certain practices (in the spirit of the classical prophets, e.g., Neh. 13.8-9) without the intention of symbolizing anything, while a symbolic act may not be prophetic at all (e.g., Ruth 3.7). To regard all prophetic acts as symbolic is unwarranted." Tan, 165-6.

³⁹ Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 69, 71. Tan provides an excellent discussion of this argument and the criticism it has received, 166-172.

any dishonest practice or corruption in the temple, but rather, Jesus "expected a new temple to be given by God from heaven, and... he made a demonstration which prophetically symbolized the coming event."⁴⁰ Jesus was not making an indictment on religious practice or the temple itself, but paving the way for the eschaton. Tan summarizes, "if one were to carry Sanders' logic to its conclusion, Jesus' action was a portent not of judgment but of *hope*. For it announces the *replacement* of the old temple (by destruction) with the new."⁴¹ In effect, Sanders presents a Christ whose purpose is to prophesy and bring hope. Sanders also argues that the incident in the temple was the immediate cause of Jesus' crucifixion.⁴²

Tan observes that Sanders' interpretation rest on four assertions.⁴³ First, Sanders argues that there is no strong evidence that the temple establishment was dishonest or corrupt.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Sanders sees the commerce in the temple as necessary for its principal function. Suitable animals for sacrifice were needed along with accommodations for changing money.⁴⁵ Thirdly, Sanders asserts that destruction is one of most obvious meanings of the action of overturning tables, and that those in the temple would have understood this action as an attack that symbolized destruction.⁴⁶ Finally, Sanders believes that Jesus' statement "My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of robbers" (Mk. 11:17, Mt. 21:13, Lk. 19:46) is inauthentic, and he argues that during the incident Jesus probably said something like, "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands." (Mk. 14:58; cf. Mt. 26:61, Jn. 2:19, Acts 6:14).⁴⁷ Sanders believes that Mark, writing first, was disturbed by Jesus' bold and extreme statement and substituted it with a fiction, drawn from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.⁴⁸

A great deal of criticism has been leveled against Sanders' view. He bases much of his interpretation on only one element of the temple incident: the overturning of the tables. The other details are not treated, constituting a major

⁴⁰ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 75.

⁴¹ Tan, 166.

⁴² Cf. Sanders, "Jesus and the Kingdom: The Restoration of Israel and the New People of God," in *Jesus, the Gospels, and the Church: Essays in Honor of William R. Farmer*, ed. E. P. Sanders, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987, 235.

⁴³ Cf. Tan, 166-7.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 66-7.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid*, 63-5.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid*, 70-1. Cf. also 77-90.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid*, 66-7, 73-4.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid*, 66-7, 71-4.

weakness in his thesis.⁴⁹ In addition, Sanders' assertion that there was no financial corruption in the temple establishment appears to be historically inaccurate.⁵⁰ Moreover, Sanders' interpretation is inadequate because it understands Jesus' action as a symbolization of the destruction of the temple in order to prepare the way for a new one, without regarding it as an act of judgment. Tan points out that Sanders

fails to see that in most texts concerning the new temple, the old is usually destroyed because of *judgment* either directly by Yahweh or through the hostile nations. It would not make sense to a Jew for an eschatological figure (whether messiah or prophet) to threaten to destroy the temple in order to bring in a new one. Announcements of the destruction of the temple were normally made in the context of the divine judgment which was about to fall."⁵¹

Tan also refutes Sanders' claim that Mk. 11:17 and parallels are inauthentic, and that the Jesus' statements explain the motivation behind his action.⁵²

2. Symbolic and Prophetic Judgment

H. N. Ridderbos provides a fairly traditional interpretation of the "purging" of the temple. The significance of what Jesus does is clear. He is in the role of the Messiah and his actions, symbolic and prophetic, clearly predict the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.:

Jesus stepped forward as the Lord of the temple (cf. 17:26) and made an unmistakable messianic claim. His action, as He stood at the brink of death, was symbolic and prophetic. On the one hand, He passed judgment on Israel's degenerate cult. On the other hand, by overturning the tables and benches of the merchants, He gave a presage of the storm that soon would engulf the whole city of Jerusalem.⁵³

R. T. France hints that Jesus' action signifies his judgment on those Jews who rejected him as Messiah and would have him executed. "Jewish messianic expectation included the belief (based on visions of Ezek. 40-48, and focused by Zech. 6:12-13) that the Messiah would renew and purify the temple, which had

⁴⁹ Cf. Tan, 167. J. D. G. Dunn points out that the significance of the overturning of tables is vague and that there is little consensus in its meaning, cf. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London: SCM, 1991, 48.

⁵⁰ There is much reliable evidence to the contrary. Cf. Tan's discussion, 168-171. Cf. also Evans, "Jesus Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple," 522-539.

⁵¹ Tan, 171. Cf. Mic. 3:12; Jer. 7; Sib. Or. 3:265-81; 4:115-18; 2 Bar. 1-8; 4 Ezra 1-4; 1 En. 89:73, 90:28.

⁵² Cf. Tan, 172, 181-185. For additional criticism of Sanders' view, cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, New York: Doubleday, 1991, vol. II, 473 n. 97; Chilton, 98-9.

⁵³ Ridderbos, 385.

been desecrated not only by pagan conquerors (Antiochus Epiphanes in 167, and Pompey in 63 B.C.) but also by the false worship of God's own people."⁵⁴ According to France, Jesus intended both to condemn Jewish religious practice and stake his claim as Messiah: "His demonstration thus speaks not only of the corruption of the current Jewish approach to the worship of God, but also of his own Messianic authority. It is as deliberate and unmistakable a challenge as the donkey-ride into the city, and its location in the focal point of Israel's religion makes it impossible to ignore."⁵⁵

Warren Carter points out the full impact of what Jesus was signifying and connects it with Jesus' impending death:

Jesus' actions indicate that the temple's sacrificial system is no longer needed. He is the ransom (20:28), the sacrifice poured out for the forgiveness of sins (26:28). His death splits the temple curtain covering the holy of holies, the place associated with the ark, the locus of God's faithful presence and forgiveness (27:51; cf. Ex. 26:31-35). This act of tearing it "from top to bottom" is an action of God, probably an act of judgment (27:45, darkness; 27:46, Jesus' cry).⁵⁶

Here Jesus, the Cleanser of the temple, is the Sacrifice, Savior, and Judge.

N. T. Wright closely examines the main interpretations of Jesus' action in the temple and forms his own position, drawing from the strengths of the major ideas. In his own description of the event he emphasizes Jesus' role as prophet in the cleansing:

- (i) Jesus intended to symbolize the imminent destruction of the Temple.
- (ii) He believed that Israel's god was in the process of judging and redeeming his people, not just as one such incident among many but as the climax of Israel's whole history.
- (iii) The judgment on the Temple would take the form of destruction by Rome, which (like Babylon, according to Jeremiah) would be the agent of the wrath of YHWH.
- (iv) The specific reasons for this judgment were, broadly, Israel's failure to obey YHWH's call to be his people...; more narrowly, Israel's large-scale commitment to national rebellion, coupled with her failure to enact justice within her own society, not least within the Temple-system itself.
- (v) I thus agree with Sanders that Jesus symbolized the destruction of the Temple; but I agree also with Sanders' critics (e.g., Bauckham, Evans) that this was more than a mere intention to replace the present Temple with a new one. It included a critique of the present Temple. This critique, though, was itself part of Jesus' eschatological programme. That is, after all, what we might expect from prophet.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ France, 300.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 301.

⁵⁶ Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996, 221.

⁵⁷ Wright, 417-8.

C. Summary Description

This episode fits within the theology of Matthew in several ways. In the immediate context, Matthew connects the cleansing of the temple closely with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The whole city asks who Jesus is, and the crowds respond, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11; cf. also Dt. 18:15). The cleansing of the temple is the sequel and culmination of the deliberately symbolic entry to the city. Jesus comes to Jerusalem and the temple and acts as one who has authority, despite the anger of the Jewish leaders. Jesus' action effectively stops all trading and brings about the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy that a day would come when "there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 14:21), although Matthew does not draw attention to this particular fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew describes a protest against the practice of buying and selling – it was wrong for this to be going on in the temple precincts.⁵⁸ The temple was meant for worship.

Two other outcomes follow rapidly from the incident and its aftermath. The fig tree episode (21:18-22) and the question about authority (21:23-27) confirm the reversal of insider and outsider.⁵⁹ In addition, Jesus' activities over the next few days of Holy Week are important: having first cleansed the temple, Jesus spends days preaching and teaching in it.

Jesus' words and actions in this text are in accord with the names given to Jesus in Matthew. Throughout the gospel, Matthew identifies Jesus with names that inform who Jesus is and reveal the meaning of what he does. Sometimes the names are explicitly present in a text, other times they are only implied with Jesus' words and deeds. Several names of Jesus are connected with the cleansing of the temple. These names are given to Jesus immediately before his action in the temple, and he acts out the names through his words and deed in the temple.

1. Son of David/ Christ/Messiah

⁵⁸ Cf. France, *Matthew*, 302: "My house shall be called a house of prayer' is from Is. 56:7, ('for all nations' is omitted here and in Luke 19:46, but seen in Mk.11:17) where it is part of God's promise that in the time to come there will be a place for outcasts and foreigners to worship God with his people. Jeremiah's description of the temple of his day as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11) referred not so much to what went on inside the temple, as to how its worshippers behaved in daily life; but Jeremiah's accusation of a misplaced confidence in hypocritical worship, and the consequent threat of judgment on the defiled temple (7:1-15), form a proper ground for Jesus' predictions of the coming destruction of the temple (23:38; 24:2, etc.)."

⁵⁹ Cf. "Temple Cleansing," William R. Herzog, *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; I. H. Marshall. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1992, pp. 818-9.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem the crowds hail him as "The Son of David" (21:9; also in 21:15). "Son of David" appears elsewhere in Matthew (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30; 22:41-45) and was a popular title for the messiah. Although this name is clearly the explicit theme in Mt. 21:9 and 21:15, "Son of David" also identifies Jesus as Messiah and connects it with the name "Christ," "the Anointed One" (cf. 1:1; 16:16). From the very beginning of his gospel, Matthew identifies Jesus as both the Christ and Son of David. In Mt. 11:10, Jesus quotes Mal. 3:1 to identify John the Baptist as the messenger preparing the way for the Lord who is coming to his temple to purify its worship (vv.1-4). Jesus fulfills this prophecy through his action in the temple. The children in the temple courts, like those at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, proclaim Jesus as the Messiah in messianic terms. Indeed, "One greater than the temple is here" (12:6).

2. King

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey and Matthew quotes Zech. 9:9 to show this as a fulfillment of prophecy: "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey." Jesus has the name "king" several times in Matthew. After Jesus' birth, the magi from the east came to Jerusalem asking, "where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" (2:2). Later in the week after the temple episode, Jesus identifies the Son of Man as the king who judges (25:34ff). To Pilate's question to Jesus of whether he was the king of the Jews, Jesus responded, "Yes, it is as you say" (27:11). Jesus is called king of the Jews by his mockers (27:29, 42), and Pilate's notice on the cross labels him "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (27:37). Old Testament prophets also foretold that the Messiah would be king. Isaiah prophesied that a king descended from David would reign in righteousness (9:7; 32:1). This king would also be a judge (16:5) and a judge that "will save us" (33:22).

3. Prophet

In Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy, but he is also a prophet. After being opposed by the people of Nazareth, Jesus says, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor" (Mt. 13:57). Matthew also relates that there was a popular identification of Jesus as a prophet, and that Jesus' disciples were well aware of this. When Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" they answer, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (16:13-14). As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds identify him as "Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11). Matthew tells us that on the next day the chief

priests and Pharisees were afraid to arrest Jesus because the people believed he was a prophet (21:46). It should be noted that many of the popular views of Jesus as a prophet are unreliable or inaccurate. As Jesus enters the city, the crowds hail him as "Son of David," but then tell the people of Jerusalem that he is a prophet. There seems to be confusion among the people about who Jesus really is. Nevertheless, that the crowd identifies Jesus as a prophet immediately before he enters the temple is important because Jesus acts as a prophet by his action in the temple. Like a prophet Jesus uses symbolic actions to send the message that God has given him to send. Precisely because Jesus is viewed by the crowd as merely a prophet, Jesus prophesies judgment on those who do not recognize him as God's Messiah.

4. Judge

Matthew pictures Jesus as the "Son of Man" (cf. 8:20; 12:8; 12:32; 12:40; 20:18; 20:28) who will judge. John the Baptist first prophesies that Jesus will be an eschatological judge (3:12), and Matthew continues this theme throughout his gospel (cf. Mt. 13:41; 16:27-8; 19:28; 24:30, 44; 25:31; 26:64). It had been prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah would judge between nations (cf. Is. 2:4, Mic. 4:3). The Spirit of the Lord would rest on him and he would judge with righteousness (Is. 11:2-4). He would be both king and judge, and he would save his people (Is. 33:22).

Thus, Jesus is the Messiah-King, a prophet who judges.⁶⁰ This prophetic message of judgment is demonstrated by Jesus' action in the temple. Jesus shows the divine anger against the religious establishment in a way reminiscent of the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 7:11, "Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?"), of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:12, the One is coming "whose winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor"), and the judgment prophecy of Mal. 3:1 ("...the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple...") where the Promised One is both Messiah and Judge. Even the verb Matthew uses to describe Jesus' action is meaningful. Jesus "drives out" (ekballw) the traders, a word which Matthew uses frequently. Jesus "drives out" (ekballw) demons (e.g., 8:16, 9:33, 12:27-8). More significantly, Matthew uses this

⁶⁰ Cf. Wright, 147-474, esp. 166-7; 415-17. Wright notes (415) that OT prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel acted symbolically, often in relation to Jerusalem and the temple, and sometimes in prediction of its destruction. He cites as examples Isaiah's nakedness (Is. 20:1-6), Jeremiah's smashed pot (Jer. 19:1-15), and Ezekiel's brick (Ezek. 12:1-25).

same verb to describe how Jesus the Judge deals with those who reject him and are not in his kingdom ("Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 25:30; cf. 8:12, 22:13). For Matthew, Jesus' cleansing is symbolic of the temple's destruction and of the treatment of those who reject God's Messiah. By his healings in the temple and by the acclamations of the children, Jesus is shown to be the true end-time king, whom the city of Jerusalem ought to have known and welcomed.⁶¹ This episode is one of the few times Jesus is apparently angry, and here already is manifest the wrath of the judgment which Jesus will display at the end of time (cf. Mt. 11:20-24; 18:34; 23; 25:41).

What are the theological implications of Jesus' action in the temple? The following is a possible interpretation of the event.

First, Jesus symbolically proclaimed divine judgment upon the temple by overturning the tables and driving out those buying and selling. The action also symbolizes the destruction of the temple. Jesus, just having entered the city, hailed as Messiah, now acts as the Messiah. His action also symbolizes that the sacrificial system is no longer needed.

Furthermore, the act was also a parabolic and prophetic deed that signified the judgment imminent on the temple and the nation. Like an Old Testament prophet, Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple. Like a prophet, Jesus illustrated this judgment by a symbolic act, both in the cleansing of the temple and by the cursing of the fig tree. But unlike an Old Testament prophet, Jesus does not simply predict the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. As in the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus in cleansing the temple, brings about that cursing and that judgment. He causes the end of the temple. Jesus does not predict that a new temple will be built to take its place.

As has been shown, Jesus' words and actions in the temple episode are in accord with the names given to him in Matthew's gospel. These names explain, to a certain extent, who Jesus is and provide an interpretation of what he does. This biblical-theological way of doing Christology is very helpful to dogmatic theologians. A study of the names of Jesus in a specific text can discover much about who Christ is and what he came to do, and this fits neatly into the discussion of the person and work of Christ.

⁶¹ Cf. Jeffrey Gibbs, *"Let the Reader Understand": The Eschatological Discourses of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel*, Dissertation, 1995, pp. 292-295.

III. Dogmatic Theological Approaches to the Cleansing of the Temple

Dogmatic theologians generally treat events in the life of Jesus together and see all the gospel accounts as forming one basic source. They reflect on events in general in order to ascertain God's purpose or message. They usually look for the "big picture" or "main point" in the text. As related above in the discussion of methodology, dogmatic theologians have usually employed a Christology "from above" when speaking about Christ, and have focused on Christ's two natures, and on his person and work.

A. The Cleansing of the Temple in Dogmatic Theology

The Cleansing of the Temple does not occupy a significant role in the doctrine of Christology, nor is it used in most of the historical doctrines of the Church. It is seldom found in the writings of the Church. For example, none of the three ecumenical creeds refers to the Cleansing of the Temple or alludes to it, nor is there any reference to it in the records of the seven ecumenical councils. The pericope is rarely mentioned by the Church Fathers, and then often without much theological comment. In *De Principiis*, Origen cites John 2:16 ("...how dare you turn my Father's house into a market!") as evidence that the "God of the Law and the Prophets, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the same God."⁶² In his homily on Matthew 21:12-13, Chrysostom uses the example of Christ's cleansing the temple to exhort his hearers to good works.⁶³ Other writers interpreted the temple incident in order to spiritualize it (2 Clement 14.1), to emphasize judgment on Israel, or to accuse the Jews of greed and corruption (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 17).⁶⁴ The pericope is rarely mentioned by medieval theologians and with little meaning for dogmatic theology.

Luther does not refer to the Cleansing of the Temple in his theological writings, but does speak of it in several sermons.⁶⁵ Preaching on Luke 2:40, ("And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the

⁶² Origen, *De Principiis*, II.4.1. Cf. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, vol. IV, 276.

⁶³ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, LXVII. Cf. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, 409-14.

⁶⁴ Cf. Richardson, 509.

⁶⁵ In addition to the sermons referenced here, Luther preached on Mt. 21:12-17, sometime in 1537-40. Cf. WA XLVII. 376-408.

grace of God was upon him") Luther cites the wrath and disgust which Christ displayed in the cleansing of the Temple in John 2 as evidence of his humanity.⁶⁶

In his *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537),⁶⁷ Luther emphasizes that Jesus acts as a Judge in the Cleansing of the Temple. He asks why Jesus uses force, when he had previously done everything by preaching and teaching? In the temple he resorts to action and physical force. Jesus came into the world to establish a kingdom not controlled by force, but one in which preaching, teaching, consoling, and admonishing would reign. When Christ speaks judgment, it is as a sword issuing from his mouth (Rev. 1:16; 19:20-21). If Christ's kingdom is not ruled with a fisted sword but with the sword of the Spirit and the mouth, how do we account for his harsh and hostile treatment of those in the temple? Christ is between the Testaments. Here, he operates in the capacity of Moses – Christ is the Lord of punitive action, as well as teaching. He is acting on the Law given to Moses, that idolaters be punished. Christ acts according to the Law, not the Gospel. He works as a servant of the Old Testament, as a disciple of Moses. Christ directs the Church with the Word, the "oral sword." The secular government wields a different sword, one to inflict physical punishment. These swords must be kept apart and separate, so that one does not infringe on the province of the other.

In the *Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity* (1537),⁶⁸ Luther uses the episode of Jesus' cleansing (Lk. 19:41-8) to exhort the congregation to the right worship of God and the hearing of His Word.

After Luther, the Cleansing of the Temple is not treated in the writings of Lutheran theologians. It is not noted or referred to in the Lutheran Confessions. Chemnitz does not discuss or allude to the Cleansing of the Temple in his writings. If mentioned at all, it does not figure prominently in the writings of Gerhard, Calov, or Quenstedt. Nor do modern Missouri Synod theologians such as Pieper or Scaer refer to it in their dogmatic works.

Pannenberg does comment on the Cleansing of the Temple in his *Systematic Theology*. However, Pannenberg starts with a Christology from below. When he comes to the resurrection, for him the most important event in the life of Christ, he goes back and does a Christology from above to figure out what the

⁶⁶ Luther, *Sermon on the Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas* (1521) in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 52, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974, p. 147.

⁶⁷ John 2:13-22 in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 22, St. Louis: Concordia, 1957, 217-250, esp. p. 221-5.

⁶⁸ Luke 19:41-48. Cf. *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, volume 4, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996, 315-35.

resurrection, and all of Christ's life and ministry, means. Referencing the thesis held by Jürgen Moltmann, Pannenberg notes that by orchestrating his entry into Jerusalem along the lines of Zech. 9:9 (Mk. 11:1-11), and by his symbolic cleansing of the temple (11:15-17), Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. Indeed, he confessed himself to be so in his trial before Caiaphas (14:61f) and Pilate (15:2).⁶⁹ For Pannenberg, the overturning of the money changers' tables in the temple court may be seen as a prophetic sign (like the entry into Jerusalem), but one symbolizing the predicted destruction of the temple, rather than its cleansing. No messianic authority was required for this action. It stood in the authentic prophetic tradition.⁷⁰

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to the Cleansing of the Temple, but only in passing, without theological comment.⁷¹

Thomas Oden, a Methodist theologian, does not contribute anything specific to the dogmatic discussion of the Cleansing of the Temple in his systematic theology. He does argue that Christ presides over our justification in court ("as the guarantee of a better covenant," Heb. 7:22), and our sanctification in the Temple (as "priest forever," Heb. 7:17).⁷² He expands this view: "Christ is our advocate in court, by doing what the law demands and paying the penalty for us. Christ is our priest in the temple, himself serving as the sacrifice that God accepts. Christ is the son whom the father gives for all."⁷³ In addition, Oden also notes that, in Scripture, Christ himself is the Temple, as is the Body of Christ, the Church.⁷⁴ Although Oden's comments do not directly speak to the Cleansing of the Temple, one may see Christ in that event indicating that the time was at hand when no more sacrifices would be needed. The Sacrifice had come to Jerusalem and to the Temple to be offered up. The Priest and the Sacrifice were setting aside the Temple for holy use.

⁶⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, volume 2. Trans. G. W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 312-13. Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, London: SCM Press, 1990, 161.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 313.

⁷¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Liguori MO: Liguori Publications, 1994, § 584.

⁷² Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, Volume Two*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, 274.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 358.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 308.

B. Integrating the Work of Biblical Theologians into Dogmatic Theology in Regard to the Cleansing of the Temple

As noted in the previous section, dogmatic theologians have only seldom discussed the Cleansing of the Temple with regard to the doctrine of Christ. Granted, the pericope does not lend itself easily to the formulation of specific doctrinal statements about Christ's person and work. Nevertheless, Christ is present and at work in his action in the temple. The event is included in all four gospels. This episode has an important place in the events leading up to Jesus' suffering and death. What do Jesus' words and actions in the temple mean for our understanding of who he is and what he came to do? Dogmatic theologians have not dealt with these questions at length.

Perhaps the problem for theologians with the Cleansing of the Temple is that the pericope is unique in the gospels. It is a completely unique event in Christ's life. It does not seem to fit any of the standard "categories" in which theologians place knowledge about Jesus. Is it preaching or teaching? a parable? a miracle? rebellion? prophecy? judgment? It seems a little of each, but yet different. Theologians are not accustomed to an angry, violent Jesus and are not quite sure what to do with him.

For dogmatic theologians this pericope is especially difficult. What does this episode reveal about Christ's divine and human nature? about his person? about his work? What does this event tell us about what Christ came to do? What does Jesus tell us about himself in this text? Is this an affirmation of "Messiah" or "Son of Man" or "Son of God"? Is his wrath evidence of his humanity or divinity, or both? Many people in Jesus' day wanted to know who Jesus was and what he was doing, and had opinions on the matter. Does this episode inform them, or people in our own day? In Mt. 16, Jesus asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter responded for all, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." This statement of faith was revealed to Peter by the Father. The Church has always answered Jesus' question with Peter's response. The gospels provide a wealth of information about Christ. Everything he did and does and is, is given for us to confess. He is the Christ, Savior, Redeemer, Healer, Shepherd, Judge, etc., all of which has been revealed to us by God through his Word. But what does it mean when we confess that Jesus is the One who overturned tables and drove out the traders in the Temple? How does one preach on this pericope?

In addition, how does this event inform the doctrine of the divine offices of Christ? Is "the Son of David" here Prophet, Priest, or King?⁷⁵ Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and the Temple hailed as a King, he is a Prophet of Judgment through his action in the Temple court, and as a Priest, is about to offer himself as a Sacrifice to God.

Is Christ here a Judge, symbolically acting out the future judgment of Jerusalem, and of all humanity? Does Jesus give us to know that the eschaton is already here?

It is difficult to bring together biblical and dogmatic theology at this point. As has been shown previously in the discussion of Matthew's gospel, a great deal can be said about Christ as King or Prophet or Judge in Scripture, and this material can be brought to bear on the pericope of the Cleansing of the Temple. Biblical theologians even help explain what it means, for instance, that Jesus acts a judge in the temple. But where do dogmatic theologians take up the discussion? Bringing Christ's-person-and-work talk to the table right off is not really an option, because the text does not easily lend itself to that subject. Perhaps the names given to Jesus in the Scriptures are a starting point for dogmaticians. Biblical theologians have laid out the history and interpretations of the names, and have pointed out where these names are used in different texts where Jesus is acting or speaking. Dogmaticians can pick up the discussion with the name, use the data provided by biblical theologians, and then explain, where possible, how these names inform the teaching on the person and work of Christ, and the doctrine of Christ in general. Of course, dogmatic theologians have long dealt with the names, titles, and offices of Christ, but perhaps a broader scope, with attention to specific biblical texts, would shed more light on what these names tell us about who Christ is and what he has accomplished for us.

This approach tends to remove the distinction between Christology "from below" and "from above." Christology begun with the names of Jesus is neither ascending or descending; it neither starts with a discussion of Christ only as man or as God. It simply begins with Jesus the God-man and the names given to him in Scripture. This approach does not eliminate the distinction, testified to in Scripture, between Christ's two natures; rather, it merely gives the discussion of Christ a different starting place, one which is firmly grounded in Scripture and employs a system of organization, i.e. the names of Jesus, which Scripture uses.

⁷⁵ David also had the role of Prophet, Priest, and King in 1 Chr 14-16 (King: 14:1, 14:8-16; Priest: 16:2, 15:27; Prophet: 16:8-36).

How does this approach work? In Matthew's account of the Cleansing of the Temple, for instance, Jesus (aside from being Messiah, Son of David, and King) acts as Prophet and Judge. What does this say about who Jesus is and what he has come to do? Like the prophets before him, Jesus speaks for God and acts out the message God has given him. And, like the prophets before him, Jesus would be killed because he delivered the message. As Judge, Jesus symbolically pronounces divine judgment on those who have rejected God's Messiah, as well as God's plan of salvation. Jesus is indeed the eschatological Judge, the "Son of Man," the "King" who will return enthroned and in heavenly glory to separate the sheep from the goats.

Investigating the names of Jesus can greatly contribute to the study of the doctrine of Christ. "Prophet" and "Judge" communicate, to some extent, who Christ is and what he has done, yet with a different emphasis than found in Chalcedonian categories. This approach starts with the names given to Christ in Scripture and examines how Christ is his names and how he acts them out.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, dogmatic theologians have traditionally employed a Christology "from above," and biblical theologians, in the last few decades, have used a Christology "from below." Both Christology "from above" and "from below" have much to contribute to the study of Christ and his accomplishment. Perhaps the real question is whether it is possible to do both at the same time without compromising either and remaining faithful to the testimony of Scripture. This paper has shown the complexity of the issue and has offered the suggestion of employing the names of Jesus found in biblical texts to inform the doctrine of Christ. It is difficult to bring specific details from the work of biblical theology to speak to Christology. Ultimately, the dogmatic theologian strives to teach Christology as a doctrine serving the doctrine of Justification, which preaches Christ Crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

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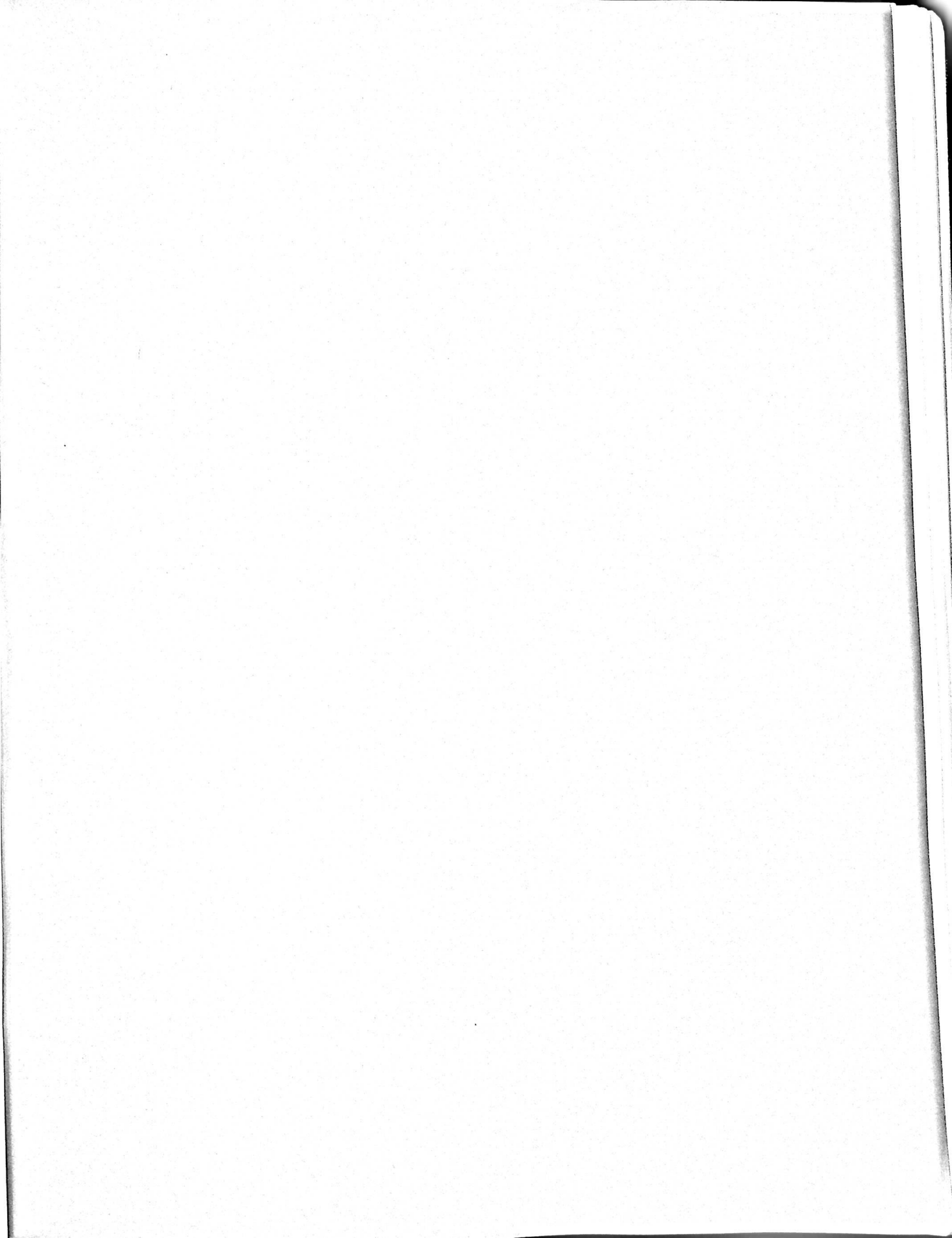
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