

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-2016

Christ, Church, and World: A Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom

Theodore Hopkins

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, theodore.hopkins@cuaa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/phd>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hopkins, Theodore, "Christ, Church, and World: A Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom" (2016). *Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation*. 148.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/phd/148>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

CHRIST, CHURCH, AND WORLD:
A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR POST-CHRISTENDOM

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Theodore J. Hopkins
May, 2016

Approved by 
Charles Arand Advisor


Joel Biermann Reader


Erik Herrmann Reader

My utmost thanks to Beth, Thomas, and Emma, who endured with me to the end.

“Religious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant, but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life.”

George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

“The church stands not at the point where human powers fail, at the boundaries, but in the center of the village.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER	
1. MORE THAN NECESSARY:DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM	1
The Thesis	4
The Outline	4
The Modern Ecclesiological Turn	7
The Crisis of Christendom	11
Pluralism and the Marketplace: The Crisis of Identity	16
“The Triumph of the Therapeutic”: The Crisis of Instrumentality.....	23
Losing Influence and Losing Privilege: The Crisis of Purpose.....	32
Conclusion: Three Criteria for Ecclesiology after Christendom	36
2. JUSTIFICATION MAKES CHURCH: ASSESSING THE LUTHERAN WORD OF GOD ECCLESIOLOGY	39
The Lutheran Ecclesiology of the Word	42
Oswald Bayer’s Formal Ecclesiology of the Word	47
Steven Paulson’s Sermon Centered Ecclesiology of the Word.....	60
The Problem of Justification as the Logical Center of Ecclesiology	70
Conclusion	76
3. SPIRIT MAKES CHURCH: ASSESSING LUTHERAN ECCLESIOLOGIES FOR POST-CHRISTENDOM	81

Post-Christendom Lutheran Ecclesiology	84
Reinhard Hütter’s Ecclesiology of the Spirit.....	87
Cheryl Peterson’s Ecclesiology of the Third Article.....	93
The Christological Deficiency of Lutheran Ecclesiology after Christendom	104
Conclusion: Toward a Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom.....	106
4. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER’S ‘PERSON-THEOLOGY’: A LUTHERAN FOUNDATION FOR A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM	112
Bonhoeffer’s Person Theology: Between Barth and Holl	113
Bonhoeffer’s Person Theology: Jesus Christ as the Ground of Revelation ...	125
The Relevance of Bonhoeffer’s Person Theology in Lutheran Ecclesiology Today	133
Bonhoeffer’s Christology in the Christology Lectures.....	135
Bonhoeffer’s Continuity with the Lutheran Tradition.....	151
Conclusion	162
5. CHRIST, CHURCH, AND WORLD: THE STRUCTURE OF A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM	166
Christ and his Church: The Priority of Christology	168
An Ecclesiology of the Person of Christ: Major Emphases for the Church	170
An Ecclesiology of the Person of Christ: Storied Identity	171
An Ecclesiology of the Person of Christ: Visible Concreteness	179
An Ecclesiology of the Person of Christ: Avoiding Two Misunderstandings	190
Christ for and against his Church: Christ’s Dialectical Relationship with the Church	200
Church and World Christologically Considered.....	206

Conclusion: Toward a Story-shaped Ecclesiology	215
6. CHRIST, LORD AND SERVANT: AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE AND SOLIDARITY IN REPENTANCE AND MISSION	219
Jesus Christ the Lord: An Ecclesiology of Difference in Discipleship and Repentance	221
Why is Jesus the Lord a Necessary Story for Today?	224
The Lord Jesus: A Narrative Rendering for Ecclesiology	225
An Ecclesiology of the Lord Jesus	235
Jesus Christ the Servant: An Ecclesiology of Solidarity in Witness and Service	246
Why is Jesus the Servant a Necessary Story for Today?	252
Christ the Servant: A Narrative Rendering for Ecclesiology	254
An Ecclesiology of Christ the Servant	263
Conclusion: A Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom	277
BIBLIOGRAPHY	281
VITA	298

PREFACE

The secularization of American society has reached into the pews of American churches. In my own ministry, for instance, I have noticed much hand wringing in Christian churches about “the direction America is headed.” Although such anxiety is often overstated, there are legitimate reasons for concern. The church does stand in a different position vis-à-vis American society than it used to: the church has lost privilege and power in North America. Recognizing this problem, many recent ecclesiologies have sought to address the relationship between the church and the world, usually defining church and world in relationship to each other. What if, however, this way of stating the identity of the church is already by-passing the church’s foundation and problematizing its mission? In the New Testament, the church does not find its identity *first and foremost* in distinction from or in connection to the surrounding culture (the world), but from the Christ who gathers and calls his church through the Spirit. In other words, ecclesiology needs to take its center from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who obtained the church by his blood. Only from this center in the Scriptures—as the epigraph from Lindbeck above suggests—can the church truly stand “in the center of the village,” to use Bonhoeffer’s words. Bonhoeffer himself will be an important guide in seeing how the Christ-centered church takes its place not merely at the boundaries of death, dying, and feelings of transcendence but at the center of the world because Christ is the center of the world. In Jesus, the church is connected to while remaining distinguished from the world. In Jesus, the church is given a renewed call to reimagining its life and mission to a changing world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me, the sociality of the human race is never more apparent than in writing. The conversation spans not only space but time, engaging with friends and opponents across continents and centuries. Those with whom I have engaged along this journey, both near and far away, have been essential partners for my development and, of course, my conversations. Without them, I would not be a true theologian, and more directly this dissertation would not be finished, even though any mistakes are mine, not theirs. I hope that my work can speak for just a moment in the on-going conversation about Christ, his church, and the mission to God's world.

Above all, I wish to thank my friend and mentor Robert Kolb for all he has done for me over the past few years, studiously reading manuscripts, challenging my thinking, and inviting me to work with him on many projects. I also wish to thank my advisor Charles Arand for all of his hard work and thoughtfulness throughout the process. My readers too deserve my thanks: Joel Biermann and Erik Herrmann, in particular, as thoughtful readers of both the proposal and the entire project, but also Joel Okamoto who read the proposal with keen eyes. No fellow student was more important for my formation than Rick Serina, who was an engaging companion on this journey. Michael Knippa and Mark Koschmann were tremendous friends, challenging me to articulate my work better. Beth Hoeltke was the companion who traveled the road before me, always willing and helpful for navigating between the many manifestations of Scylla and Charybdis on the way. Many others were important along this journey as well: Luke Edwards, Jackson Watts, Joel Meyer, and so many more that I do not have space to mention all of them. Finally, my students at Concordia Seminary who had me as an adjunct professor in the Winter Quarter of 2013–14 deserve my thanks as I was reflecting upon Christ's relationship to the church in that class and, hopefully, helping them understand the contours of Lutheran Christology and soteriology that were shaping this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

Hopkins, Theodore J. "Christ, Church, and World: A Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2016. 296 pp.

The North American church is facing a profound crisis. The post-Christendom situation is changing the landscape of the church's relationship with culture, society, and individual communities, creating problems of ecclesial identity and purpose. This dissertation argues that the unique challenges of post-Christendom require three criteria for ecclesiology: storied identity, doctrinal substance, and visible concreteness. Most recent Lutheran ecclesiology has begun with either God's word of the Gospel or the Holy Spirit, leading to an emphasis on individual justification or the practices of the church, respectively. Against these starting points, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* leads me to center the church on the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ, the church finds its story, called into mission by the Lord himself. This account resists the relegation of the church to an insipid, individual matter of the heart since Christ is no mere spiritual figure but is the Lord of the world, fully human yet fully divine. In this way, the church is rooted deeply in the personal union of Christ, who not only became a man but took the form of a servant to save his world. Thus grounded in Bonhoeffer's Christological "person-theology",¹ the church receives specific direction through the Gospel narratives of Christ the Lord, who calls his church to discipleship and repentance as a distinct community from the world, and Christ the servant, who invites the church to witness and service in solidarity with God's world. As the church inhabits the story of Jesus, the Spirit opens eyes to ministry that is faithful to Christ and to his world.

¹ The term is from Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

CHAPTER ONE

MORE THAN NECESSARY: DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR AN ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM

Once there was no ecclesiology. According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The church did not form a separate theme in the systematic presentation of Christian doctrine until the 15th century.”¹ Before that time, the church was not something to explain but something to be experienced. The church was simply the context in which worship, preaching, the sacraments, Bible reading, and works of love took place. Martin Luther’s Smalcald Articles of the 16th century reflects this earlier notion of the church: “A seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and ‘the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.’”² In this way, Luther suggests that the church might be understood best without systematic ecclesiology; the church is simply the people gathered around the word of God and the Sacraments who hear the voice of the Lord and Shepherd. The key to the church’s life is not explaining it but receiving it and living it. The church is first the mouthpiece of the Shepherd and second the sheep who hear and respond. In such a simple understanding of the church, systematic explanation of this gathering could detract from the centrality of God’s word and faith.

In the early church, the fathers said much that was important and influential with regard to the church, but still not a single Latin or Greek church father developed a systematic

¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3:21.

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 324–25.

understanding of the church.³ Even Augustine, whose anthropology is central to the ecclesiological reflections of John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy,⁴ never wrote a systematic presentation on the church. In fact, in *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine speaks of the church in scriptural terms as the bride and body of Christ, but he never explains what those terms mean or formally states the nature of the church. Augustine briefly mentions the church with regard to Christ's reconciliation, Christian sanctification or unity in love, and the office of the keys, but Augustine offers no sustained reflection on the church's being.⁵ Augustine, then, illustrates the way that the church was central to theology without being a separate topic for a dogmatic presentation. More generally, before the ecclesial crisis of the late middle ages culminated in the Protestant Reformation in the West, the church was the *context* in which theological reflection was done rather than being a separate topic for dogmatics. In the language of 20th century German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the church was "presupposition" for theology instead of a basic theme of systematic thought.⁶

During the sixteenth century, *de ecclesia* became a standard chapter in dogmatic presentations. What changed to spark the revolution from an understanding of the church as a presupposition to the church as a separate topic for theology? In short, an ecclesial crisis necessitated a new focus of theological reflection on the nature of the church. According to historian Scott Hendrix, this ecclesial crisis began with the Spiritual Franciscans and the

³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:21.

⁴ See James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15–16.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932*, vol. 11 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*, ed. Victoria Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 283.

Waldensians in the thirteenth century as the “quest for the *vera ecclesia*.”⁷ Eventually, the church—as well as larger European society—entered a new reality of division and confessionalization during the sixteenth century Reformation, which corresponded to an explosion in dogmatic presentations on the church.

The Reformation, though, was not the origin of this new ecclesiology; the Reformation was rather the “concluding phase of the late medieval quest” to come to grips with the ecclesial and societal crises.⁸ The major spiritual event at the beginning of the crisis was the great schism of the church between East and West, which resulted in “religious perplexity.”⁹ Moreover, late medieval society was also experiencing a “heightened sense of insecurity in several domains: economic instability, social unrest, urban tension, [and] national feeling.”¹⁰ This social anxiety stemmed from the anarchical conditions of post-Carolingian Europe and the rudimentary beginnings of modern European nations which were changing the shape of European Christendom.¹¹ When the crisis of the papacy was added to these other problems, the result was a reformation movement in the church, beginning in the thirteenth century and culminating in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.¹²

The new shape of European Christendom necessitated a new kind of systematic ecclesiology. In the face of ecclesial division and the problem of church authority, the church could not be simply the context or the presupposition for theology any longer. In this ecclesial

⁷ Scott Hendrix, “In Quest for the *Vera Ecclesia*: The Crisis of Medieval Ecclesiology,” *Viator* 7 (1976): 347–78.

⁸ Hendrix, “In Quest,” 347.

⁹ Hendrix, “In Quest,” 351.

¹⁰ Hendrix, “In Quest,” 351.

¹¹ R. Van Caenegem, “Government, Law and Society,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 185–95.

¹² See Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250–1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

quagmire questions such as “Whose leader?” “Which church?” and “What confession?” became as natural as “Which god?” was to the ancient Israelites. The church could no longer be assumed “in the age of conciliarism and after the experiences of the Western schism and the papal captivity in Avignon.”¹³ The Protestant Reformation furthered this ecclesial crisis. Ecclesiology became a necessary dogmatic topic as a response to the new form of Christendom.

The Thesis

In the recent cultural milieu of post-Christendom, the necessity of ecclesiology has not abated; ecclesiology has become more than necessary because of the ecclesial crises that the church faces. In my view, post-Christendom ecclesiology must address these challenges directly, identifying the church in terms of the story of God, placing an important emphasis on the visible life and mission of the church, and connecting the church to the basic doctrines of the faith. At the same time a *Lutheran* ecclesiology after Christendom must be cognizant of importance of justification: God *extra ecclesiam* speaks the church into existence through the word. I use Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christological “person-theology,” which stresses a traditional element of Lutheran Christology, to bring together justification with a concern for the visible concreteness of the church’s life and mission.¹⁴ I develop this Christological person theology ecclesologically in order to orient the church to Christ, which directs concrete church-communities to re-imagine their identity, life, and mission in terms of Jesus and his story.

The Outline

In the following pages of this chapter, I will describe the ecclesiological turn that occurred

¹³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:22.

¹⁴ For an in-depth study of Bonhoeffer’s “person-theology,” see Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

during the twentieth century. Then, I will examine what prompted the turn: the change from Christendom to the new era of post-Christendom. In particular, I argue that three ecclesial crises have arisen because of this shift to which a post-Christendom ecclesiology must respond. First is the crisis of identity, produced by pluralism and nationalism. Second is the crisis of instrumentality, produced by the dominance of the therapeutic narrative. Third is the crisis of purpose, caused by the church's loss of privilege in society and its corresponding change in social location. These three crises lead me to develop three criteria for post-Christendom ecclesiology: storied identity, doctrinal substance, and visible concreteness. In short, ecclesiology should take a narrative form to shape identity and imagination, it must flow from and into substantial doctrines of the historic faith, and it must be concrete in orientation, focusing on the visible life of church-communities, without neglecting the necessity of justification as God's word which creates the church from without.

Chapter two begins my investigation into *Lutheran* ecclesiology. I first examine a common Lutheran ecclesiology that I term "the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word." Based upon my criteria established in chapter one, How well does this ecclesiology fit the post-Christian milieu? Although the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word connects the church directly to justification, it falls short on the criteria of visible concreteness and storied identity. In particular, the church as a historical, concrete community called to discipleship and witness is placed on the sideline in favor of the importance of the sermon which brings the individual to faith. The primary culprit is the logic of justification that focuses this ecclesiology on a logic of how one comes to saving faith rather than a logic of the basic, core Christian beliefs.¹⁵

Chapter three investigates Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom, especially the work of

¹⁵ This typology of different theological logics comes from David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), 1:27–29.

Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson. These theologians write on the church in a way that emphasizes its visible, public character through an account of the Holy Spirit. Although there is much to commend in both of their work, especially Peterson's, I argue that they risk an ecclesial introspection that is dangerous for the church, directing congregations to themselves rather than outward to Jesus Christ. To avoid such an introspection, I turn to a Christological grounding of the church from the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Chapter four examines Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being*, with Michael DeJonge's guidance, in order to establish a Christological account of revelation and ecclesiology that can unite the strengths of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word and the work of my two representatives of Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom.¹⁶ I argue that Bonhoeffer's Christological person theology, as understood in DeJonge's analysis, brings together an emphasis on history and concreteness of the church and its mission while orienting the church to Christ the Lord *extra ecclesiam*. In this way, Bonhoeffer orients the church outward both to Christ in repentance and faith and to the historical world in the mission of proclamation and service.

Chapter five explores the structure of this Christological ecclesiology rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. In particular, I develop the contours of storied identity, arguing that an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus has to be told in story since Jesus is a man whose identity is known authoritatively in the story of the Scriptures. In addition, the criterion of visible concrete receives direct attention, showing that an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus affirms the goodness of materiality and creation, stressing the church's place within the created world rather than as a temporary gateway to heaven. Most importantly, this chapter discusses the relationships among Christ, the church, and the world, contending for a dialectical relationship between the

church and Christ, which leads to a Christological understanding of the world. Seeing the world in light of Christ, the church relates to the world in terms of solidarity, mission, and repentance. As such, the church cannot be divorced from the world, which God has created and redeemed through his Son and Spirit, but at the same time the church, for the sake of God's mission, must be distinguished from the fallen world that does not yet know its creator or redeemer.

In the final chapter, I explicitly address two stories of Jesus the Christ that are particularly relevant for church-communities in post-Christendom: the stories of Jesus the Lord and Jesus the servant. The narrative of the Lord Jesus emphasizes the identity of the church who belongs to Jesus and is called to listen to him. Connecting the church to the Lord Jesus distinguishes the church from the world so that the church is critic of the world and called on Christ's mission to the lost and broken world, in need of the Lord. At the same time, the story of Christ the servant is just as necessary for this time after Christendom. In light of this story, the church is called to solidarity with the world in repentance and justice, not making power plays or demands from above but working from below in love toward the world that Jesus came to serve. From the perspective of Christ the servant, the church is called to witness in solidarity with God's world as fellow creatures, reconciled to the Father in the death and resurrection of the Son through the Spirit. Both of these stories provide important correctives to the church in light of the crises and criteria addressed in this first chapter.

The Modern Ecclesiological Turn

As stated above, the social and ecclesiastical crises of Christendom during the late middle ages provoked an ecclesiological turn in which ecclesiology became a standard topic of

¹⁶ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*.

systematic theology for the first time.¹⁷ Although ecclesiology became a standard theme in this time, it was one topic among many. In the subsequent period of confessionalization across Europe, the main theological focus was grace and justification, individual salvation, which stemmed from the Reformation debates of the sixteenth century. Because of this, some Lutherans pushed ecclesiology to the back of dogmatics, almost as an appendix to theology, clearly subordinated to the individual appropriation of salvation.¹⁸

In the last couple of centuries, however, theology has taken another ecclesiological turn, making ecclesiology come into focus as a fundamental theological task.¹⁹ Gerard Mannion and Lewis Mudge note that ecclesiology has become more and more popular in the twenty-first century and of great interest to theologians again.²⁰ Above mere interest, ecclesiology has also taken a fundamentally different shape. Instead of being one topic among many in the dogmatics textbook, ecclesiology has become “the normative study” of communities.²¹ As a normative study, ecclesiology is “fundamental to Christian theological reflection as such” since it “concerns the nature of the social space which makes language about God, and therefore faith itself, possible.”²² In articulating ecclesiology this way, Mannion and Mudge show that they consider the church primarily as a context for theology rather than an object of investigation. How did this change take place?

¹⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:21–24.

¹⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:23–24.

¹⁹ See Theodor Kliefoth, *Einleitung in die Dogmengeschichte* (Parchim: Hinstorff, 1839), 98–99. Already in the early 19th century, the German Lutheran Kliefoth recognized the emergence of ecclesiology as a central theological task: “Thus, at the least we must recognize that investigations into the being, emergence, growth, and completion of the church are already taking a dominant place in our dogmatic activity and... [dogmatics in our time period] will have its specific task in the doctrine of the church.” My translation. I am obliged to Shawn Barnett for this reference.

²⁰ Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge. *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.

²¹ Mannion and Mudge, *Routledge Companion*, 3.

²² Mannion and Mudge, *Routledge Companion*, 3.

In the twentieth century a different understanding of ecclesiology began to take shape. Karl Barth's turn against the protestant liberal giants like Adolf von Harnack was the beginning of a theological trajectory that presumed the church was something more than a simple theme of systematic investigation. Karl Barth named his second attempt at a systematic theology *Church Dogmatics*. With this title, Barth indicates that dogmatics is more than religious *Wissenschaft*; dogmatics is subordinate to the word of God and to the proclamation of the church that results in faith.²³ In this inconspicuous way, Barth suggests that the church cannot be only a topic of theology; theology happens in the church, which makes the relationship between theology and the church more complex than the topical method suggests.

Following the theological direction of Karl Barth—with significant influence from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and sociologist Clifford Geertz—the Lutheran ecumenist George Lindbeck articulated an understanding of Christianity which placed church-community at the center. In his influential book *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck's ecumenical endeavors led him to advocate a “postliberal” theory of religion different from two common models.²⁴ For Lindbeck, the two common models for understanding religion are the cognitive model, which privileges propositional, cognitive truth-claims about reality as the heart of religion, and the “experiential-expressive” model, which emphasizes the interior and personal side of religion so that church doctrines are “noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.”²⁵ As an alternative to these two models, Lindbeck proposes a “cultural-linguistic” model that understands religions “as comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized, which structure human

²³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, trans. G. T. Thomson (1936; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 1–25.

²⁴ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 135n.1. Postliberal is the term Lindbeck prefers for his project.

experience and understanding of self and world.”²⁶ In other words, for Lindbeck, religion is a comprehensive hermeneutic—like culture and language—that interprets all reality so that its adherents understand the world they live in based on the stories they tell, the language they use, and the rituals they practice in community with others. Hence, Lindbeck makes the audacious claim that “for those who are steeped in [the canonical writings of religious communities], no world is more real than the ones they create. A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe.”²⁷

Although *The Nature of Doctrine* appears more sociological and philosophical in orientation, it has deep theological roots, particularly in ecclesiology.²⁸ The details of Lindbeck’s ecclesiology are unimportant here;²⁹ the point is rather to see how Lindbeck has situated ecclesiology as the heart of his theological proposal, and then to understand what context made Lindbeck’s proposal intelligible. Ecclesiology remains under the radar of *The Nature of Doctrine* except at a few crucial points, yet the whole proposal presumes an ecclesiology: the church is a “community identified by and participating in a common language, the basis of which is the story of Jesus Christ.”³⁰ Since Lindbeck believes that the church is this sort of community,³¹ *The Nature of Doctrine* functions both as a sociological and philosophical defense of this ecclesiology from the standpoint of the theory of religion and as a substantive argument for its

²⁵ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

²⁶ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 32.

²⁷ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 117.

²⁸ Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 58–62.

²⁹ See George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). For a concise summary, see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 102–5.

³⁰ DeHart, *The Trial*, 154–55.

³¹ DeHart, *The Trial*, 60–62. DeHart notes how Lindbeck’s theological position in *The Nature of Doctrine* is already present in outline in his ecclesiology of a decade before.

implications. Hence, Lindbeck's regulative theory of doctrine and the central place of catechesis and formation are implications of his ecclesiology.³² Just as one learns a language by immersion into its forms and its use, so Christians must be immersed in the language and stories of the Bible and church practices that "socialize [church] members into coherent and comprehensive religious outlooks and forms of life."³³

Therefore, Lindbeck's proposal in *The Nature of Doctrine* places ecclesiology in a central position from which other theological positions are derived. Ecclesiology is no mere topic of theology for Lindbeck; it is inseparable from the central message of the gospel. Furthermore, Lindbeck is hardly the only theologian to move this direction. Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, and Reinhard Hütter—to name an influential few—have all situated ecclesiology near the center of their theological programs.³⁴ This is a far cry from the first systematic ecclesiology in the late middle ages! What prompted this change? What context has made such theological proposals intelligible and even attractive?

The Crisis of Christendom

In a word, the answer is post-Christendom.³⁵ To understand this situation rightly, however,

³² See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 104–108 for Lindbeck's summary in defense of his theory. See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 112–35, for the importance of catechesis and formation.

³³ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 126. In his book on creatureliness and hermeneutics, James K. A. Smith echoes Lindbeck's placement of ecclesiology with the concluding sentence of the book: "In other words, our hermeneutics of Scripture will require, first and foremost, an ecclesiology." *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 221.

³⁴ See DeHart, *The Trial*, 41–53 for a short history of the so-called "Yale School" and some of the conversations that came from the work of Lindbeck and Hans Frei, especially. DeHart mentions an emphasis on concrete communities as one of the characteristics of this theological trend (p. 44), but I believe it is more applicable to say that ecclesiology has become *methodologically* significant for these theologians.

³⁵ It can also be named Post-Constantinianism, but I will use the term post-Christendom or post-Christian because of the theological weight placed on Constantinianism by John Howard Yoder. Yoder used Constantinianism primarily as a judgment against the eschatological and ecclesiological heresies he believed were intrinsic to the political arrangement. Certainly, nearly all of the eschatological and ecclesiological matters named by Yoder are problems, but I did not wish to make the historical judgment that Christendom should have been opposed at all costs. See John Howard Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in *The Priestly Kingdom*:

we must first see post-Christendom as the final crisis of Christendom. In AD 313, Emperor Constantine signed the Edict of Milan, which signaled the beginning of the era of Christendom. With one mark of his pen, Constantine made the once persecuted and marginalized Christian church socially and politically normative. Of course, the church did not immediately gain favored status in the eyes of everyone in the Empire, but over time the year 313 would come to mark a “turning point in Christian and European history,” the inauguration of Christendom.³⁶

Over the next centuries, the situation of Christendom would redefine the church’s identity as well as its mission in society, to which the church remains indebted today. What was Christendom? Craig Carter provides a helpful definition:

Christendom is the concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to Christian faith, which is seen as the so-called soul of Europe or the West. The essence of the idea is the assertion that Western civilization is Christian. Within this Christian civilization, the state and the church have different roles to play, but, since membership in both is coterminous, both can be seen as aspects of one unified reality—Christendom.³⁷

To restate, Christendom is the unified reality of church and governing authorities working in tandem to rule a Christian society. It is not first a concept but a lived reality, which shaped and changed the church. From 313 to the present day, Christendom has continued to mold the way that western Christians understand the identity of the church and its purpose in the world.

Although the United States never experienced the same legal establishment of Christendom—exemplified in early modern Europe by the 1555 Peace of Augsburg’s principle *cuius regio, eius religio*—Christendom is still a (dying) reality in North America. According to

Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984; repr. 2011), 135–47. For a more comprehensive argument that Christendom was a “bad idea,” which follows Yoder, see Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 77–93.

³⁶ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 37.

³⁷ Carter, *Rethinking*, 14.

Douglas John Hall, the situation in North America is simply a *different type* of Christendom. Christendom in Europe is *de iure* while in North America Christendom is *de facto*.³⁸ More concretely, the form of Christian establishment has been “cultural, ideational, social” rather than legal.³⁹ In other words, “whereas the traditional establishments of European Christendom were at the level of *form*, ours have been at the level of *content*.”⁴⁰ Though somewhat counterintuitive, Hall contends that Christendom in North America has been stronger than Christendom in Europe precisely because of this *de facto* character. Christian establishment in North America has “enormous staying power” and is difficult to detect “because it is part and parcel of our whole inherited system of meaning.”⁴¹ Therefore, the reality of Christendom has molded the church in North America just as much or more than it did in Europe.

Now, however, the era of Christendom is waning, and this new cultural milieu of post-Christendom helps to make sense of the major change in ecclesiology in recent years, as exemplified in George Lindbeck’s proposal. Lindbeck himself recognizes this context as the rationale for thinking about the church as a language and a culture and emphasizing the visible shape of church-communities’ life together.⁴² In the essay “The Sectarian Future of the Church,” Lindbeck notes the lack of “social support” in the larger society, which means that Christians need to “gather together in small, cohesive, mutually supporting groups.”⁴³ In a post-Christian culture, the very survival of the Christian faith depends on Christians being rooted in church-communities in which the story of the Scriptures is imagined as the story of the world and the

³⁸ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 29.

³⁹ Hall, *End of Christendom*, 29.

⁴⁰ Hall, *End of Christendom*, 29. Emphasis original.

⁴¹ Hall, *End of Christendom*, 31.

⁴² DeHart. *The Trial*, 58–62.

⁴³ George Lindbeck, “The Sectarian Future of the Church,” in *The God Experience*, ed. J.P. Whelan (New

practices of the church are more basic than the cultural practices of production and consumption. Hence, Lindbeck's proposal in *The Nature of Doctrine* ends with arguments for catechesis and faithfulness to the Christian tradition: "Religious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant, but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life."⁴⁴ In short, for Lindbeck, the "plausibility structures"⁴⁵ of Christianity in society at large—known as Christendom—have eroded, which means that the church must be a community in which the Christian faith is plausible again.

To say that Christendom is over—which makes Christian faith less plausible or obvious—is not yet to describe post-Christendom with any concreteness. Lindbeck indeed is right to point out that Christianity does not hold the same place in society that it once did. For example, the number of people with no religious preference and the number of people who attend no religious services have risen dramatically in recent years.⁴⁶ In addition, Americans are less apt to believe that the Bible is the literal word of God.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Christians *qua* Christians no longer influence high culture, the arts, drama, movies, or central education centers.⁴⁸ Even though American religiosity is not dropping as significantly as was once expected, Lindbeck's concern still rings true since Christianity is losing its plausibility within North American society.⁴⁹

If that was the only concern for post-Christendom, then a 'sociological sectarianism' may

York: Newman, 1971), 230.

⁴⁴ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 128.

⁴⁵ Peter L. Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 173–74.

⁴⁶ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 120–27.

⁴⁷ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 111–12.

⁴⁸ See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79–92.

be a sufficient ecclesiology to save the church.⁵⁰ Post-Christendom, however, includes a number of challenges that make this new ecclesial crisis as the most difficult challenge for the western church since the Reformation. The late middle ages encountered the transformation of one unified Christendom to discrete, national Christendoms while we face Christendom's end. In light of the changing shape of Christendom in North America, Lindbeck is correct that ecclesiology must be central to the theological task. What, however, is the character of this crisis called post-Christendom? How does it affect ecclesiology?

Three elements of North American post-Christendom stand out as particularly important for ecclesiology, which I identify with a specific ecclesial crisis. Although this is an oversimplification—no single particular element causes a particular crisis; they are all interrelated—the categories are useful to see how three important characteristics of post-Christendom in America must shape an ecclesiology after Christendom. First, the diverse nature of North America has eroded ethnic identity, which formed the basic identity of many religious communities. For the American church, the narrative of Christian America emerged as the way to identify and understand the church as part of the American story. Although this remains a common belief, the narrative is shifting. The research of sociologist Robert Wuthnow on religious diversity in America suggests that the dominant public story of American religion today is the story of the marketplace, which has much affinity with the older story of Christian America. As a result of this struggle to find its place in American life, the church is experiencing a crisis of identity.⁵¹ Second, the marketplace has overtaken the church in particular with the

⁴⁹ See Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, for a recent study of American religiosity.

⁵⁰ Although I am reflecting Lindbeck's usage, I am not characterizing his position. Lindbeck's ecclesiology is not merely formal (sociological sectarianism) but also material in nature (an Israel-like understanding of the church). Lindbeck, "The Sectarian Future of the Church," 230. He says that without broader social support in the culture churches "must become, sociologically speaking, sectarian."

⁵¹ For another study that contends for identity as central to the problem of the church in post-Christendom,

narrative of the therapeutic. The therapeutic cannot be understood apart from its bureaucratic counterpart, but the therapeutic understanding of life, in particular, has seized American imaginations concerning religion and the church. In this situation, the church has become a private instrument for personal or spiritual health and well-being. This is the crisis of instrumentality. Third, since the church is largely treated as instrument of personal health, it should come as no surprise that the church is losing—or has lost—its privileged place in society. Nevertheless, congregations and denominations continue to act as if church institutions as such carried authority and meaning, and they continue to understand and enact the church's purpose by the Christendom model of territorial expansion. The Christendom method of relating to the world via power and politics, however, does not work in a post-Christendom world. This shift has led to a crisis of purpose.

Pluralism and the Marketplace: The Crisis of Identity

From the beginning, the United States of America was a diverse country. Catholics, Puritans, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Jews all existed within the early colonies. Although a kind of religious and ethnic diversity marked early colonial life, it was far different from the pluralism characterizing the twenty-first century. During the early colonial years, there was enough space in America that the various groups carved out areas of settlement for themselves.⁵² Thus, religious and cultural diversity did mark the early colonies in America, but particular ethnic and religious identities shaped and formed the people within their enclaves. In fact, ethnic and ecclesial identity often went hand in hand.⁵³

see Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, *The Distinctive Identity of the Church: A Constructive Study of the Post-Christendom Theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).

⁵² Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age: American Religious Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 6.

⁵³ For example, see E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

Today, however, one cannot help but encounter people of other religions and other cultures on a daily basis. While I lived in Saint Louis, Missouri, I drove by a Buddhist shrine every time I went to the public library; such diversity is simply part of American experience even in the relatively homogenous Midwest. What is important about such diversity for ecclesiology is the way it shapes Christian identity. The very presence of religious and cultural “others” makes subtle but important changes in how Christians think and practice their faith.⁵⁴ The sociologist Robert Wuthnow observes that pluralism does not change every Christian in the same way: some people become more obstinate about the truth of their faith while others become more inclusive and relativistic.⁵⁵ In both cases, religious diversity challenges Christians so that they are unable to presume Christian identity. Peter Berger argues that such pluralism means that Christian identity is a matter of choice rather than given by birth.⁵⁶ With the language of choice, not only does Berger suggest that Christians can pick their own religious identity in the same way that we choose our shoes, but he also suggests that the church too is defined by choice. Later in the same article, Berger contends that Protestant ecclesiology should veer away from a “strong” institutional ecclesiology that is absolutist with regard to truth and identity—by equating faith with knowledge—and be content to be a “weak” institution which privileges the voluntary nature of the church and the epistemological uncertainty of faith.⁵⁷ In other words, Berger thinks the church should embrace its identity as voluntary, which he connects to a nonfoundational epistemology.

⁵⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 97.

⁵⁵ Wuthnow, *America*, 97.

⁵⁶ Peter L. Berger, “Protestantism and the Quest for Certainty,” *Christian Century* 115, no. 23 (August 26, 1998): 782.

⁵⁷ Berger, “Protestantism,” 794–96. Although Berger is right to say that faith is different from knowledge and there is no full certainty until Christ returns, his analysis is predicated on an epistemological dichotomy between foundationalism and relativism with no space for a non-foundational, yet substantial, notion of truth.

Although Berger understands his ecclesial reflections as an adaptation to pluralism, I argue that Berger is actually adapting to a deeper problem facing ecclesiology than pluralism:⁵⁸ the story of the marketplace as a transformation of the story of Christian America. The old story of Christian America—which still remains quite common, especially among conservative Christians⁵⁹—is being transformed into the story of the neo-capitalistic marketplace which dominates all Western lives. The old story of Christian America saw America as the chosen people, picked by God, for a divine purpose, to spread Christianity, freedom, and democracy throughout the world.⁶⁰ In the transformation of this story, the humanistic values of freedom, justice, democracy, and tolerance have remained. Nevertheless, the story of Christian America is being transformed into an equally triumphalistic story, characterized by the autonomy, self-actualization, and tolerance of the twenty-first century marketplace. According to theologian William Cavanaugh, the new global realities, which many have assumed would undercut the reality of the nation-state, have lodged the logic and story of the marketplace into the imaginations of people across the world. Global capital dominates the way twenty-first century people imagine space and time.⁶¹ The American economy is turning the whole world into itself; what George Ritzer has called “the McDonaldization of society.”⁶² In this transformation of the American story, the American economy, instead of the people, has been chosen as the redeemer

⁵⁸ I do not mean to say that pluralism, especially religious pluralism, is not a problem that needs attention. Robert Wuthnow’s research on Christian responses to pluralism—the most common strategy being avoidance—demonstrates just how inadequate the Christian response has been, particularly among those committed to Jesus Christ as *the* revelation of God. See Wuthnow, *America*, 230–58.

⁵⁹ Peterson, *Who is the Church*, 20–27. Peterson argues that the narrative of “Christian America” has overcome the identity of the church. While I believe she is right about America overcoming the church’s identity, the dominant story in which people place the church today is the story of the American marketplace, not the story of the American nation as such, although these are closely related. See below.

⁶⁰ See Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁶¹ William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 97–112.

⁶² George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, rev. new century ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004).

of the world.

Robert Wuthnow's intensive research among Christians about religious pluralism reveals just how deeply the story and logic of the marketplace are lodged into Christian imaginations. Wuthnow identifies three different types of Christian responses to the diversity that characterizes twenty-first century North America: spiritual shopping (usually regards all religions as equally true), Christian inclusivism (usually privileges Christianity but believes there is truth in other religions), and Christian exclusivism (usually believes only Christianity is ultimately true).⁶³ Although these three responses differ in significant and profound ways, Wuthnow also notes some important similarities among the three groups which show that the logic of the marketplace rules American religious thought. For example, Wuthnow describes each group as "spiritual shoppers." For the spiritual shopping group, this is not surprising; these people consciously embrace diverse religious and cultural experiences. For this group, choosing a religion is "like shopping for television sets, automobiles, or motion pictures insofar as feelings, tastes, and preferences play a large role in the selections people make."⁶⁴ Ultimately, a subjective, pragmatic evaluation, based upon what feels right for the individual, determines whether a religious choice was a good one.⁶⁵ Thus, for spiritual shoppers, religion is a private choice, made in autonomy and freedom, in order that the individual may be self-fulfilled. The basic logic of the marketplace—I the autonomous individual pick one product, when I could have chosen many interchangeable ones, in order to fulfill a personal desire—prevails. Among Christian inclusivists, a similar kind of logic abounds. In his interviews, Wuthnow found that "inclusive Christians often personalize their arguments about churchgoing to the point that there is little reason to think that people

⁶³ Wuthnow, *America*, 190.

⁶⁴ Wuthnow, *America*, 125.

⁶⁵ Wuthnow, *America*, 125–26.

outside the church might be better off going there. Churchgoing is depicted as a personal choice, like going to the movies or baking one's own bread; if it happens to give joy and fulfillment, so be it; if it doesn't, do something else."⁶⁶ Considering the group, perhaps this perspective too is not surprising. Most importantly, then, even Christian exclusivists are "in their own way spiritual shoppers. Although they do not dabble in esoteric spiritual practices rooted in non-Christian traditions, they often switch churches, fall away, experience conversions and moments of new vitality, and make countless decisions about what to read, who to believe, and how to worship and pray."⁶⁷ These choices do happen "within limits" for Christian exclusivists,⁶⁸ but Wuthnow's research still reveals the way in which the story of the American marketplace has taken over. For example, Wuthnow observes, "The ground on which decisions are made increasingly takes the form, as expressed in people's comments, of 'just feeling right.'"⁶⁹ American Christians talk about their faith in terms of a marketplace mentality of personal choice and personal desires rather than the importance or reality of God.

Not only does this attitude predominate among individual Christians, but it is also the way in which pastors and congregations understand their ministry. In studying the effect of religious pluralism on Christian congregations as a whole, Wuthnow found that religious diversity is having a "powerful effect" upon congregations largely because the clergy are following "certain cultural scripts about how to be the church."⁷⁰ These cultural scripts follow the story of the marketplace: emphasizing individuality, autonomous choice, and superficiality. Since American religious "pluralism means that there are always competitors waiting to absorb members who

⁶⁶ Wuthnow, *America*, 152.

⁶⁷ Wuthnow, *America*, 165.

⁶⁸ Wuthnow, *America*, 166.

⁶⁹ Wuthnow, *America*, 165–66.

⁷⁰ Wuthnow, *America*, 253.

may become disgruntled,”⁷¹ Christian pastors, wary of going into too much depth and losing their hold on the religious market, treat other religions like “an ethnic custom.”⁷² Religion is “little more than ethnic food and dress... similar to the taste that cause some people to prefer one brand of automobile over another.”⁷³ In so doing, Christian pastors are supporting the idea that the Christian religion too should be understood as a preference, a nice choice for Western people in order to be good Americans.⁷⁴ As we saw above, this simply reinforces the way North American Christians already talk and think about their faith.

To sum up, the Christian church is facing a crisis of identity because the marketplace has become dominant in North American identity. The logic of the marketplace has turned religion into a mere private choice, a personal preference with little public or political impact. In fact, most churches have embraced this, consciously or unconsciously, treating their church like just another religious good or service within the religious marketplace.

What does this mean for ecclesiology in particular? First, this account of the marketplace shows part of the need for ecclesiology in the twenty-first century. Individualism and private choice dominate North American Christianity so that the Christian faith and the church have been segmented into the private sector. In this, religion has been relegated to the realm of the conscience, becoming, in the words of Karl Marx, “a private whim or caprice.”⁷⁵ In the face of a

⁷¹ Wuthnow, *America*, 253.

⁷² Wuthnow, *America*, 254.

⁷³ Wuthnow, *America*, 254.

⁷⁴ For more on the marketplace mentality among Christians, see James B. Twitchell, *Shopping for God: How Christianity Went from In Your Heart to In Your Face* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

⁷⁵ In 1843 Karl Marx argued that American religion is characterized by interiority and is a private matter. In an important passage, Marx contends, “Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by expelling it from the sphere of public law to that of private law. Religion is no longer the spirit of the *state*, in which man behaves, albeit in a specific and limited way and in a particular sphere, as a species-being, in community with other men. It has become the spirit of *civil society*, of the sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. It is no longer the essence of *community*, but the essence of *differentiation*. It has become what it was at the *beginning*, an expression of the fact that man is *separated* from the *community*, from himself and from other men. It is now only the abstract avowal of an individual folly, a private whim or caprice. The infinite fragmentation of religion in North America, for

privatized view of Christianity and the church, a post-Christendom ecclesiology needs to focus on the visible, tangible community in order to show how God has called his people to life together and has given his mission to church-communities *qua* communities. A church is not merely a collection of like-minded individuals but has an identity and a mission as a community.

Second, post-Christendom ecclesiology should take a narrative form in order to reinforce the identity of the church, which is no mere private choice but a public calling from God. As Charlotte Lind has noted, individuals use coherent life stories in order express their identity, rooted in the past and directed toward the future.⁷⁶ American Christian identity, however, has been fragmented by the marketplace. The only coherence to North American lives is individual desire, the story of self-fulfillment if one's desires are met or the story of resentment if one's desires are not met.⁷⁷ To combat this narrative of consumption, another narrative is necessary to construct an alternative, coherent identity, rooted in the past and present work of God and directing God's people toward God's future work and mission. This narrative cannot be an individual story, but the story of Christ and his church, in which individuals find their stories too.⁷⁸ Therefore, the appropriate form for a post-Christendom ecclesiology is narrative in order to shape identity, logic, and ethics according to the unique story of God in the Scriptures. Thus, the story of God will be seen as more basic to one's life and to the world than the story of

example, already gives it the *external* form of a strictly private affair." Karl Marx, "The Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T.B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 15. Emphases original.

⁷⁶ Charlotte Lind, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁷⁷ See Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 111–12. "The ideal consumer, however, is detached from all particulars. Novelty wears off, and particulars become interchangeable; what is desired is desire itself. The global economy is characterized by the production of desire as its own object" (111).

⁷⁸ Charlotte Lind, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On pages 3–4, Lind writes about the importance of narrative for institutions: "Narrative is one very important way that institutions construct their presentations of who they are and what they have done in the past, and they use these pasts in the present as an attempt to shape their future." The difference in the church is that this narrative identity is not constructed by us but given by God and the future is not shaped by us but by God and God's mission.

consumption.⁷⁹ In other words, narrative is central to formation and identity: we are the stories that we tell. Hence, ecclesiology must describe the church through a narrative logic that begins to form Christians to reimagine their identity as people shaped into the image of Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism and the proclamation of the gospel. A narrative ecclesiology is necessary to reshape Christian imaginations and aid the church in rethinking its identity in post-Christendom North America.

“The Triumph of the Therapeutic”: The Crisis of Instrumentality⁸⁰

Certainly, the story of the marketplace, which understands people as self-interested consumers who make choices to meet perceived needs, has a strong hold on American Christianity, but this does not yet explain the unique situation of the American church. According to the 2002–03 National Study of Youth and Religion, “Most U.S. teenagers seem to hold rather positive general attitudes about religion and their own congregation.”⁸¹ Yet, the same research says that “religion is taken as a part of the furniture of [teens’] lives, *not a big deal*, just taken for granted as fine the way it is.”⁸² American teens hold two apparently contradictory opinions about the church: they think the church is good, but they do not believe that it actually

⁷⁹ On the importance of narrative from a variety of perspectives, see Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds. *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997). My understanding of the reason for narrative comes largely from Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 204–25. MacIntyre writes, “We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos*—or of a variety of ends or goals—towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present” (215–16). Therefore, MacIntyre concludes, “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (216).

⁸⁰ “The Triumph of the Therapeutic” comes from Philip Rieff’s important work on the relationship between faith and therapy after Freud. See Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, 40th anniv. ed. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006; orig. New York: Harper, 1966).

⁸¹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70.

⁸² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 122. Emphasis added.

matters. In other words, Christianity is nice, but it is just another choice in life, like furniture: it may be a couch, a chair, or a beanbag, just as long as it allows one to sit.⁸³

How did these two contradictory beliefs become lodged in the minds of American youth? Although American belief in God and American church attendance has remained surprisingly steady,⁸⁴ the recent National Study of Youth and Religion reveals that this religious belief is hardly a sign of profound and meaningful faith. Instead, the faith of American youth, which reflects their parents' faith quite closely,⁸⁵ is "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" rather than orthodox Christianity.⁸⁶ Christian Smith defines the "creed" of moralistic, therapeutic deism with five propositions—although this is hardly a professed religion.⁸⁷ First, "A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth." Second, God desires for people to be "good, nice, and fair" to others, as most religions teach, including the Bible. Third, "the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself." Fourth, God is not involved closely in life except when one needs God to fix a problem. Fifth, "Good people go to heaven when they die."⁸⁸ This faith is moralistic—what matters is that a person is good and nice to other people. It is therapeutic—God is a "Divine Butler or Cosmic Therapist" who makes people feel

⁸³ Lest one thinks that youth are idiosyncratic in their religious belief, Kenda Creasy Dean, one of the researchers in the national youth study, argues, "If teenagers consider Christianity inconsequential—if American young people find the church worthy of 'benign whatever-ism' and no more—then maybe the issue is simply that the emperor has no clothes, and young people are telling churches that we are not who we say we are." Thus, the problem for Dean is that the church more generally has substituted moralistic therapeutic deism for Christian faith. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.

⁸⁴ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 91–133.

⁸⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 34–37.

⁸⁶ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 118–71.

⁸⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 166. Smith asserts, "This religious creed appears to operate as a parasitic faith. It cannot sustain its own integral, independent life; rather it must attach itself like an incubus to established historical religious traditions, feeding on their doctrines and sensibilities, and expanding by mutating their theological substance to resemble its own distinctive image."

⁸⁸ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162–63.

better about themselves and their pursuits.⁸⁹ Consequently, the church too is therapeutic, helping people feel good about themselves. Finally, this faith is rightly called deism since its god remains distant from everyday life and only occasionally intervenes.

The national study shows how the church has become an instrument for the individual well-being of Americans. American Christians do not primarily view their lives as part of the body of Christ or part of the people of God or even part of the story of God. Their language about faith is the language of therapy,⁹⁰ which suggests that their imaginations are dominated by the metaphors and the characters of therapy, and the therapeutic narrative models the story of their lives. Certainly, sociologists have illustrated how all arenas of American life are saturated with the logic and language of therapy.⁹¹ Smith and Denton's research portrays the ways in which it has affected the Christian church as well. Thus, I must delve into the therapeutic narrative in order to see how the reality of the therapeutic ought to shape ecclesiology for post-Christendom North America.

In the significant book *After Virtue*, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre notes that modern American culture has three character types which embody the expected moral roles for our society: the aesthete, the bureaucratic manager, and the therapist. Characters, for MacIntyre, are "moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world."⁹² The rich aesthete is the person who seeks to feed her "satiated appetite," pursuing the

⁸⁹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 165.

⁹⁰ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 167–68.

⁹¹ See, for example, Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); and Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁹² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 28.

fulfillment of her desires above all else.⁹³ This is the character type that the story of the market assumes but is less important for understanding the therapeutic challenge to ecclesiology. MacIntyre defines the manager as the representative of a bureaucratic organization—either government or large corporation—who directs human and non-human resources to meet the goals of the bureaucracy. The manager thus uses “bureaucratic rationality” to meet his goals, which focuses on efficiency and effectiveness toward the economic end.⁹⁴ In this way, the manager makes no distinction between a manipulative relationship—with technology, for instance—and a nonmanipulative relationship—with people. For the manager all relationships are directed toward bureaucratic effectiveness—his ends are given, “his concern is with technique.”⁹⁵ In Kant’s categories, even “human resources” are a means toward an economic end. Whereas the manager represents the public sphere, the therapist represents the private sphere. Nevertheless, for MacIntyre the therapist too is concerned only with technique. The ends are given; the therapist seeks to turn “neurotic” patients into normal or self-realized people.⁹⁶ In this way, therapeutic techniques assume that all profound commitments in life, including marriage and vocation, are “enhancements of the sense of individual well-being.”⁹⁷

MacIntyre is right that the therapist is concerned primarily with technique—contemporary psychology is quintessentially modern in its assumption that all human problems can be solved with the proper technique.⁹⁸ Therapy, however, would be misunderstood if it were only seen as a

⁹³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 24.

⁹⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 25.

⁹⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 30.

⁹⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 30.

⁹⁷ Robert Bellah, et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, updated ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 47.

⁹⁸ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 2–3. Moskowitz asserts that the “second tenant of our therapeutic faith is the belief that our problems stem from psychological causes” (2). The third tenant reveals even deeper modern assumptions: “the psychological problems that underlie our failures and unhappiness are in fact treatable and that we can, indeed *should*, address these problems both individually and as a society” (3, emphasis original).

technique for human happiness. MacIntyre himself argues that his character types embody a narrative of one's life and how one relates to others. What is the shape of this narrative? The sociologist Eva Illouz shows the particular dimensions of the therapeutic story and why it has overcome the church. In her book *Saving the Modern Soul*, Illouz combines ethnographic, historical, and textual research to chart the impact of therapeutic culture.⁹⁹ For Illouz, the therapeutic is all-pervasive: "The therapeutic discourse offers an entirely new culture matrix—made of metaphors, binary oppositions, narrative schemas, explanatory frameworks—that throughout the twentieth century has increasingly shaped our understanding of the self and of others."¹⁰⁰ Therapeutic discourse is not a neutral way of speaking; rather, the language of therapy has transformed North American culture, reshaping what it means to be human and how we see ourselves in relationship to others and in relationship to God. This schema is enacted in the therapeutic narrative of the self.

The therapeutic narrative of the self is a flexible narrative scheme, which finds its shape based upon the goal of the story. Illouz explains, "The main characteristic of therapeutic narratives is that the goal of the story dictates the events that are selected to tell the story as well as the ways in which these events, as components of the narrative, are connected."¹⁰¹ The goals, however, are elusive and extremely subjective. Happiness, health, and self-realization are key terms that define therapeutic goals but they have no content; different therapists, different social institutions, and different people define these terms in very different ways (often for their own economic benefit).¹⁰² In the National Study of Youth and Religion considered above, American

⁹⁹ Illouz sees the therapeutic as a world-wide phenomenon, although particularly pronounced in the United States—her ethnographic research includes not only the U.S. but also Israel. See Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 220–22.

¹⁰⁰ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 8.

¹⁰¹ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 173.

¹⁰² Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 171. This is one place where the connections between the bureaucratic

teenagers exemplify Illouz's point since they use therapeutic discourse to talk about their faith with almost no content, except for a moralistic ethic and an expectation for happiness. Hence, the therapeutic story is a flexible narrative that each individual fills in with his particular content. Happiness may look like heaven in the Christian version of moralistic, therapeutic deism, or it may be more of a utopian society of tolerance for the modern liberal agnostic version. As Christian Smith observes, "The Jewish version, for instance, may emphasize the ethical living aspect of the creed, while the Methodist version stresses the getting-to-heaven part."¹⁰³ The framework of faith is therapeutic even as the content is faintly religious.

Despite the nihilistic content, the therapeutic narrative has captured the American imagination. In fact, part of the allure of the therapeutic narrative is its flexibility. The goal of the story dictates the plot and reveals the conflict that is keeping a person from reaching the goal.¹⁰⁴ The goals vary widely; intimacy, professional success, and self-realization are all legitimate goals which shape each individual telling of one's experience. The initial conflict is obvious; I want, for example, intimacy that I do not have. Why do I not have this intimacy? While a Christian story of sin would indicate that I am morally responsible for the problem, the therapeutic narrative names the disease without considering me culpable. Instead, an early childhood experience of trauma, remembered with the therapist's interpretative help, has caused me to retreat from intimacy and avoid commitment. Although I now recognize *my* failure, the therapeutic narrative names me as a victim of this problem rather than a responsible agent. Yet, despite my victimhood, the narrative also opens the door that I may change my future, with the proper help. Thus, the therapeutic narrative is a "narrative of suffering" or a narrative of disease.

and the therapeutic become clear. There is much money at stake so therapy has become commodified. See Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 164–67.

¹⁰³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 166.

¹⁰⁴ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 173.

As Illouz asserts, “Therapeutic culture—the primary vocation of which is to heal—must generate a narrative structure in which suffering and victimhood actually define the self.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, this narrative of disease also rewrites one’s life experience so that the newly initiated sees her childhood differently—as the origin of her diseases—the rest of her life differently—as failures of self-development—and she plots and plans her future with therapy as the instrument of her self-fulfillment.¹⁰⁶

Why does this narrative have such force in North America? Although Illouz gives eight reasons why this narrative has influenced so many, one reason stands out above the others as significant for ecclesiology. The therapeutic narrative coheres and overlaps with the Christian story in significant ways.¹⁰⁷ As a narrative of disease, therapeutic narrative has a conception of evil, even original evil, that is at the heart of human problems: neurosis caused by childhood trauma rather than sin. According to the therapeutic narrative, “both normal and pathological children—*all* children—do not and cannot achieve mental health and consequently need the help of psychology to surmount the crises inherent in the very experience of living.”¹⁰⁸ In addition to the similar notions of evil, the therapeutic narrative names a similar solution to the problem: the practice of confession. For Christians, confession is about telling the truth about oneself as a sinner before a gracious God who forgives sinners and gives them new identity as children of God. For the therapeutic narrative, however, confession serves as part of the realization of the outside disease without claiming culpability. Confession is a necessary step to forging one’s new identity toward the goal and reorienting one’s experience to understand the original trauma. For

¹⁰⁵ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 184. “The narrative is performative, and in that sense it is more than a story because it reorganizes experience as it tells it.”

¹⁰⁷ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 184. Illouz asserts, “The [therapeutic] narrative uses the basic cultural template of the Judeo-Christian narrative” although Illouz never says what the Judeo-Christian narrative is.

¹⁰⁸ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 177.

therapy, confession is not about telling the truth about *personal* culpability, but about blaming something else for personal failure and then using this suffering to shape the future toward one's own goals. Thus, the therapeutic narrative uses a self-interested and public version of individual confession as well as a heretical transformation of the Christian dogma of sin, in order to shape people toward a new end, personal fulfillment and happiness, whatever that may be.

This therapeutic narrative differs widely from the Christian story in terms of its content and goal, but the form is similar enough that even the church has begun to tell its story as a therapeutic one. Theologian John Wright argues that Christian preaching is often comedic with respect to the self, reinforcing the private, therapeutic goals of self-realization and self-fulfillment, rather than challenging people's comfortable lives with the gospel.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Christian preaching that does not help people lead happier and more fulfilling lives is often considered irrelevant.¹¹⁰ Americans believe that the church, with preaching as a paradigmatic example, is supposed to be like a gas station, filling a person up when she feels down so that she can become normal and healthy again for the workweek. In this way, therapy defines the church as an instrument to further personal well-being.¹¹¹ The church, like God, is relegated to the periphery of personal life and almost removed from the public story of the world altogether. Although therapy's use in business has confused the division of public and private throughout American society,¹¹² the reality is that everything has become bureaucratic, dominated by

¹⁰⁹ John Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2007), 35–37.

¹¹⁰ Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 10–11. Much of this dissonance is the fault of the preacher, as Wright points out from his experience in the parish.

¹¹¹ See Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), especially 63–83.

¹¹² See Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 58–104. Illouz calls this reciprocal process “emotional capitalism” (60).

production and consumption.¹¹³ The therapeutic story and goal may be ever changing, but at the heart of the whole enterprise is the self-interest of the marketplace both for the therapeutic industry and for the individual consumer of therapy.¹¹⁴ In this context, the church is an instrument in the individual lives of American consumers.

What do the triumph of the therapeutic and the crisis of instrumentality mean for a post-Christendom ecclesiology? Similar to what was required in response to the story of the marketplace, a post-Christendom ecclesiology must emphasize the church as a visible community with a particular identity. Thus, the triumph of the therapeutic narrative reinforces the need to do a narrative ecclesiology but with a vital qualification. A narrative ecclesiology for post-Christendom North America must have substantial content. Since the form of the therapeutic story is quite similar to the Christian story, the content gives the clear and decisive difference. Thus, a narrative ecclesiology cannot be satisfied with a brief narrative overview that emphasizes the church as part of the economy or mission of God. However true such statements may be, a narrative overview is too easily shaped into the therapeutic story that has captured most Americans' imaginations. Instead, a narrative ecclesiology for post-Christendom must not only illustrate the biblical narrative that shapes the church's story in some detail, but it must also show the integral relationship between the church and central Christian dogma, like Christology and soteriology. In this way, a narrative ecclesiology for post-Christendom will reveal the church

¹¹³ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 74. Illouz notes, "The extraordinary cultural power of psychology thus seems to have resided in its capacity to inscribe the individual—his or her needs, claims, and critiques—within the very structure and culture of economic organizations."

¹¹⁴ Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 88. "Psychologists not only made emotions central to the workplace but relentlessly codified the notion of self-interest itself, arguing that mature individuals are defined by their ability to secure their self-interest, in turn expressed by self-control and by the capacity to forego expressions of power." See also MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 73–78. MacIntyre says that the manager assumes "a stock of knowledge by means of which organizations and social structures can be molded" (77). What he does not recognize is that psychology has provided that knowledge for the manager. Hence, therapy is not merely necessary for bureaucracy because of the competition and stress of modern work but also to provide the "scientific" rationale that justifies the bureaucracy. In this way, the therapeutic story does seem to justify the social, political, and economic status quo. On the scientific use of therapy for business, see Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 58–104.

not as an instrument for personal well-being but as central to the story and mission of God.

Losing Influence and Losing Privilege: The Crisis of Purpose

For sixteen-hundred years, the church has operated with Constantinian privilege. When the church spoke official pronouncements, people cared and listened. What pastors proclaimed from the pulpit, people largely believed and tried to repeat. In America, Christian denominations were instrumental in the establishment of the most important education centers in the country. From Yale to the University of Chicago, Christian churches established and maintained the Universities and colleges that were near the center of American cultural life. Moreover, even state and county laws privileged the church by closing down shops on Sundays and giving clergy tax breaks. To use the words of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, the church was “the only show in town.”¹¹⁵ This was simply a cultural reality, reinforced by local laws and cultural pressure.

Now, however, almost everything has changed. Looking back at their own experience, Hauerwas and Willimon name 1963 as the date when the walls of Christendom fell down since the first theater opened on Sunday in South Carolina—and one of them chose the theater over church.¹¹⁶ Certainly, though, Christendom’s walls had been collapsing all across North America before then. Although the church was once a central part of American society, the church is now moving to the periphery. Subsequent with this change in social location, church attendance has dropped significantly,¹¹⁷ and the cultural influence of the Christian church has plummeted since

¹¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 16.

¹¹⁶ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 15–17.

¹¹⁷ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 105. The rise in those with no religious preference is most clear evidence of this shift since 1970 among the general public, but the drop in adolescent faith should not be ignored either (see p. 78).

the church has little influence in the cultural centers of education, capitalism, or aesthetics.¹¹⁸ The church has lost its place of privilege in society.

Although this bare fact has caused a crisis of purpose in its own right—for example, church marketing takes the loss of privilege as its starting point¹¹⁹—another problem lies beneath the surface. According to Douglas John Hall, the church has conceived of its mission as part of the mission of the state. When the nations of Christendom won a victory over the pagans or the heretics, the church believed it had won a victory for Christ.¹²⁰ In fact, Hall documents how early 20th century Christian missiology saw the church’s mission as *territorial expansion*.¹²¹ In their minds, the twentieth century would be the “Christian Century”—the popular journal continues to bear this name—in which Christianity would take over the entire earth, often through the vehicle of American foreign policy.¹²²

In the Christendom model, the church acts from a place of power, and the church understands its purpose as affecting society from an authoritative position. During the Lutheran Reformation, for example, Luther and Melancthon advocated for pious princes to encourage reform in their territories.¹²³ Thus, the church encouraged and expected the government to aid the church in fulfilling its purpose. This was part and parcel of Christendom’s unity of government

¹¹⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 79–92.

¹¹⁹ See George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 21–23, which lists stagnant church membership, stagnant conversion rate, and declining confidence in the church as part of the need to do church marketing. Although the literature on marketing has declined, it has become a reality of American Christianity. See Twitchell, *Shopping for God*.

¹²⁰ Hall, *End of Christendom*, 9.

¹²¹ Hall, *End of Christendom*, 13.

¹²² Hall, *End of Christendom*, 14–17.

¹²³ James M. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melancthon, 1518–1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). To say this is part of Christendom is not to say that such a move is bad or unbiblical. As one of my readers, Joel Biermann, pointed out to me, Paul himself included members of “Caesar’s household” among those saints to whom he wrote to speak God’s truth and work in Christian service (Phil. 4:22). Obviously, their vocation looks different from those not in power. My purpose is not to criticize the reformers but to point out the way things worked during Christendom.

and church. In America the separation of church and state prevented such explicit cooperation, yet churches received all sort of *de facto* privilege, which meant that churches thought of their purpose in the same kind of ways, from a position of power. This understanding of the church's purpose is instrumental, in service to the ultimate purpose of the state and the society and seeking to advance American freedom, democracy, and capitalism (for ostensibly Christian ends). Allen Hilton aptly describes the result of Christendom: "This approach to Christian mission ends with Christians reading the newspapers to see whether God is getting things done in the world, rather than finding our way to the poor or the sick or the war-torn and extending our own hand of love."¹²⁴

Although post-Christendom is upon us, the American church still operates with a Christendom model of the church's purpose, which is not only bound to fail but is also unfaithful to Jesus Christ. As the church has lost influence in the culture at large, formal politics—voting especially—has taken center stage for the Christian method of affecting society. James Davison Hunter shows how the state has dominated the imagination of the American people so that only the state is believed to solve all problems about the common good.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Christians have not been immune to this "politicization," which Hunter defines as "the turn toward law and politics—the instrumentality of the state—to find solutions to public problems."¹²⁶ In fact, the Christian Right and the Christian Left practically reduce the church's purpose to voting.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Allen R. Hilton, "Being Christian in an Age of Americanism," in *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities*, ed. Wes Avram (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 157.

¹²⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 102–3.

¹²⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 109–10, and the following chapters on the Christian Right and Christian Left. While I follow Hunter's analysis on the Christian Right and Left, I do not agree with his characterization of "neo-Anabaptism." For now, it will suffice to say that Hunter fails to see both the real similarity in his argument and "theirs"—grouping these together is hardly fair to the individual views of Milbank, Cavanaugh, Hauerwas, Yoder, and the rest—and to see the real difference on the character of the modern nation state, especially with regard to violence, and whether theology is first concerned about America or about Christ and the church.

¹²⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 99–193.

Christians must vote their consciences and help elect leaders—whether on the left or the right—who will realize God’s peace and justice. In this way, Hunter—agreeing with William Cavanaugh—sees that the ecclesiological problem is one of the imagination. Christians, along with all Americans, imagine the problems in the world as something which the state must fix. Hunter argues, “Politics is the way in which social life and its problems are imagined and it provides the framework for how Christians envision solutions to those problems.”¹²⁸ Hunter reveals, then, a clear crisis of purpose for the church in twenty-first century America. Not only have a decline in membership and a decline in cultural influence left the church on the periphery, but the church has not recognized the change. As a result, the power game of Democrats and Republicans contending for Christians’ votes with pious words has overcome the purpose of the church.¹²⁹

Hall’s description of the church’s crisis of purpose and Hunter’s specific portrayal of politics mean two things for a post-Christendom ecclesiology. First, a post-Christendom ecclesiology must be critical, disentangling the story and values of America from the Christian narrative and virtues, which highlights again the importance of Christian doctrine.¹³⁰ Second, a post-Christendom ecclesiology must engage the imagination *in a practical way* so that Christians are aided in reimagining what it means to be a Christian in post-Christendom America.¹³¹ Ecclesiology cannot remain abstract in ideas and concepts, but must concretely address some of the practical matters that are facing church today: How does the church relate to the world without a privileged place? In fact, the relationship between the church and the world has

¹²⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 168.

¹²⁹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 148–49.

¹³⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 184–85.

¹³¹ A practical orientation has become more common in ecclesiology. For example, see Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

become *the* ecclesiological question of the twenty-first century.¹³² Still, the general question about how the church relates to the world must become more specific: How do we imagine and live the Christian life as a community in North America after Christendom? This requires ecclesiology to focus more content and less on form, more on the connections between ecclesiology, Christology, soteriology, and the story of the scriptures, and less on the abstract model that the church should embody.

Conclusion: Three Criteria for Ecclesiology after Christendom

In this chapter, I have argued that the church has entered a radically different sociopolitical situation, post-Christendom, which requires an ecclesiological response. Post-Christendom refers not only to the end of the synthesis between church and society, but also, in my usage, to a plethora of related challenges in the twenty-first century. In particular, I discussed pluralism and the story of the marketplace as challenges to the church's identity. Then, I examined the triumph of the therapeutic narrative, and the need for the church to move beyond instrumentality by emphasizing the substantial content of the gospel. Third, I analyzed the problem of the church's loss of privilege as a challenge to rethink the church's purpose and the relationship between church and world. Although other characteristics could rightly describe the church in post-Christian America, these three highlight the ecclesial crises of identity, instrumentality, and purpose. These three crises shape what ecclesiology should look like after Christendom.

Despite the challenges of post-Christendom, we should not be looking to rehabilitate the old synthesis between church and culture in North America. Not only is such a synthesis outmoded, but it also led the church to imagine its mission in terms of power rather than faithful

¹³² Gerard Mannion, "Postmodern Ecclesiologies," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2008), 131–32. Mannion asserts that the major question for a postmodern ecclesiology "is the relationship between the church and the world, and the ecclesial attitudes and practices which relate to, shape and reflect this" (132).

service to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ecclesiology today must emphasize faithfulness to Christ in response to this new situation. To restate the point, it is not that theologians must focus on creating “post-Christendom ecclesiology,” but rather that ecclesiology in twenty-first century America must attend to the socio-political situation known as post-Christendom. Only by attending to these concerns will an ecclesiology be genuinely applicable to North Americans today.

An ecclesiology that properly addresses the post-Christendom situation must fulfill three criteria derived from the current crises, which will be important in later chapters as the basis for analyzing other ecclesiologies. First, the criterion of storied identity emerges from the crisis of identity. The criterion of storied identity means that ecclesiology for post-Christendom must have a narrative shape in order to cultivate identity as part of Christ’s body instead of understanding the church as a religious industry within American capitalism. This narrative, though, is not merely the story of a religious community; it is the story of the God who created the church through his Son and his Spirit. God’s story gives the church its story and its identity.¹³³ Second, the crisis of instrumentality necessitates a criterion of doctrinal substance. This criterion maintains that a post-Christendom ecclesiology must directly relate the church and its mission to foundational Christian doctrine—the doctrine of God and Christology, for example—so that the story of the church is imagined in terms of the substantial content of the person of Jesus Christ and God’s story with his people. Third, the crisis of purpose—with support from the other two crises—implies the criterion of visible concreteness. Against the privatization of the church, a post-Christendom ecclesiology must emphasize the visible, tangible community as a focal point of ecclesiology. Moreover, an ecclesiology for post-Christendom

¹³³ For more on the importance of the church’s identity, see Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 85–101.

must be practically oriented so that the church's purpose is articulated with concreteness for this place and time.

These three criteria provide a flexible outline for ecclesiology in the post-Christendom situation. The criteria are not yet an ecclesiology, but they indicate essential topics, provide standards for evaluating an ecclesiology, and suggest important questions. For example, an ecclesiology for post-Christendom might ask: What is the story of the church? How does the church relate to God, Christ, and justification? What is a congregation called to do in and for the broader community? These questions drive toward a storied identity, doctrinal substance, and visible concreteness in order to shape an ecclesiology to be faithful to Christ in post-Christendom.

CHAPTER TWO

JUSTIFICATION MAKES THE CHURCH: ASSESSING THE LUTHERAN WORD OF GOD ECCLESIOLOGY

In chapter one, I analyzed the sociopolitical situation of twenty-first century North America as it relates to ecclesiology. In particular, I argued that three crises are significant contexts for doing ecclesiology in post-Christendom. First, the pluralistic marketplace, combined with the older narrative of Christian America, has produced an ecclesial crisis of identity. This crisis has made the church an agent of American neo-capitalism. Second, the crisis of instrumentality stems from prevailing therapeutic assumptions about religion—the church and God are understood to serve individual, spiritual well-being. As a result the church has been privatized and turned into an instrument to make people’s lives more fulfilling. Third, the crisis of purpose is rooted in the end of ecclesial privilege in North America. Churches, once in a dominant position vis-à-vis society, now find themselves on the outside looking in. Hence, the old ways of envisioning ecclesial purpose—dictating public policy, supporting the governmental authorities, and participating in partisan politics—are no longer tenable. Ecclesiology thus must articulate a clear answer to the question, What is the church for?

From these three crises, I developed three criteria for an ecclesiology in post-Christendom. The first criterion is the criterion of storied identity, which means that ecclesiology must take a narrative shape in order to identify and form the church as part of the story of God rather than the American marketplace. The second is the criterion of doctrinal substance. This indicates that an ecclesiology for post-Christendom must be directly related to the substantial doctrines of the Christian faith, like the doctrines of God and Christ. In other words, ecclesiology must ask first

about God and Christ—God’s identity is primary to the church’s identity—and show how the church fits into the life and story of God. The third is the criterion of visible concreteness. An ecclesiology for this time after Christendom must resist attempts to privatize the church, insisting instead that the visible life of the church *is* the public means by which God continues to do his mission in the world. Furthermore, the criterion of visible concreteness means that ecclesiology must give concrete direction to the relationship between the church and the world for concrete congregations, supporting their mission in this time and space.

To restate my thesis, I contend that Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom must attend to particularities of post-Christendom, uniting the concerns for the church’s identity, historical concreteness, and purpose with the traditional Lutheran emphasis of justification: God *extra ecclesiam* speaks the church into existence through the word. How does Lutheran ecclesiology measure up to this? This question is a driving question of this chapter and the next. In this chapter, I examine a common Lutheran ecclesiology that I call “the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word.” Although this ecclesiology rarely addresses post-Christendom directly, it does claim relevance for the twenty-first century. Moreover, it has found a broad base of support from American and German theologians among a number of different Lutheran traditions.¹³⁴ As such, it deserves an analysis and response.

As I analyze the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word in this chapter, my argument will move forward in two ways. First, I will show the ecclesiological deficiency of this common Lutheran position and the need to reconsider ecclesiology in the unique situation of post-Christendom on the basis of the three criteria developed in chapter one. Second, the ecclesiology of the word

¹³⁴ For example, Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Robert Kolb, “The Sheep and the Voice of the Shepherd: The Ecclesiology of the Lutheran Confessional Writings,” *Concordia Journal* 36 (2010): 324–41; Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

brings to the fore the criterion of doctrinal substance, which will require more specificity than I have given it heretofore. Both the criterion of storied identity and the criterion of visible concreteness have received considerable attention and emphasis in ecclesiology,¹³⁵ but the criterion of doctrinal substance has received less explicit work. To be clear, every ecclesiology uses a doctrinal criterion of some kind. My purpose is to develop this criterion explicitly and Christocentrically in order for the church to be more faithful in a post-Christendom context. This chapter addresses the criterion of doctrinal substance with particular regard for the relationship between justification and the church.

As we will see in detail below, the ecclesiology of the word fails to address the post-Christendom context adequately, but it does connect the church intimately to the doctrine of justification, which must be taken into account in any Lutheran ecclesiology. In fact, the ecclesiology of the word recognizes that God is outside of the church, calling the church into being from the outside. Thus, the ecclesiology of the word rightly confesses that the church must be always oriented to God who is outside of it, which is a necessary prospective to the work of God provided by justification. Nevertheless, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word predominantly uses the logic of justification, the “logic of coming to believe,” which creates

¹³⁵ On the importance of narrative for ecclesiology, see Stanley Hauerwas, “A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 171–99. For one of Hauerwas’s best essays on the church that explores the relationship between narrative and doctrine, form and content, see Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church as God’s New Language,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 142–62. For others emphasizing a narrative ecclesiology, see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000) and Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013). On the importance of visibility and concreteness in ecclesiology, see Reinhard Hütter, “Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit,” *Pro Ecclesia* 3, no. 3 (1994): 334–61; Joseph L. Mangina, “Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (1999): 269–305; and David S. Yeago, “The Church as Polity? The Lutheran Context of Robert W. Jenson’s Ecclesiology,” in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 201–37.

ecclesiological problems, especially in post-Christendom.¹³⁶

This chapter will proceed by looking first at the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word more generally in order to see the broad strokes of this ecclesiology. Although I could dismiss the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word simply for its neglect of narrative ecclesiology and its failure to stress the visible community, I will focus instead on the doctrinal center of its ecclesiology and the implications for the church and its mission after Christendom. The Lutheran ecclesiology of the word correctly recognizes the priority of God over the church as the one who acts on the church from the outside, but the ecclesial center of justification—and the concomitant logic of coming to faith—causes problems for the theologies of Oswald Bayer and Steven Paulson in light of the post-Christendom situation.

The Lutheran Ecclesiology of the Word

“The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly.”¹³⁷ This basic definition from Philip Melanchthon in the 1530 *Confessio Augustana* stands at the heart of the ecclesiology of the word in the Lutheran tradition. The word of God—in its oral, written, and sacramental forms—constitutes the church as well as faith which hears and receives the word. In one phrase, the church is “the creature of the Word.”¹³⁸ This position reaches back to the Lutheran Confessions especially—and to Luther—to articulate the meaning of the church. As such, this position finds support in broad variety of Lutheran church bodies across North America and Europe. Although he is primarily a

¹³⁶ David Kelsey has developed a typology of three theological logics: logic of beliefs, logic of coming to faith, and the logic of Christian living, which I am using. David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 1:27–29.

¹³⁷ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 43.

¹³⁸ See Christoph Schwöbel, “The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers,” in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, ed. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh:

Lutheran Reformation scholar, Robert Kolb is an important advocate for this ecclesiology, mentioning it often in his work, particularly in his favorite mantra, “God is a God of conversation and community.”¹³⁹ Despite not having written a comprehensive ecclesiology, Kolb’s work indicates the basics of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word.¹⁴⁰ In an essay on the ecclesiology of the Lutheran Confessions, Kolb argues that “the church lives as God’s community from his Word, in the conversation every (*sic*) initiated anew by his conversation from the pages of Scripture in its various forms.”¹⁴¹ While noting that the Lutheran Confessions’ ecclesiology is “lean and clean,” Kolb argues that the basic elements of a Lutheran ecclesiology are present within the Confessions. For Kolb, “Lutheran ecclesiology always proceeds from Luther’s and Melancthon’s understanding of God’s Word and what it does as his instrument for creating his universe and re-creating his human creatures who have fallen into sin.”¹⁴² Although this has become a common Lutheran position, it was a revolutionary one in Luther’s day. The church as a creature of God’s word is diametrically opposed to two problematic understandings of the church: first, the Roman Catholic hierarchy as the substance of the church and, second, the church as arbiter of sacred rituals. In the first case, Rome had argued that only the Pope can properly interpret Scripture, but the reformers contended that the Scriptures interpret themselves

T&T Clark, 1989), 110–55.

¹³⁹ For example, Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), xvi.

¹⁴⁰ Although Kolb does follow the general direction of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, he focuses more on the *life* of the church than most. See Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1993), 261–68. Using the framework of the two kinds of righteousness, Kolb emphasizes the connections between the two kinds of righteousness: one’s identity before God (passive righteousness) is lived out before the neighbor (active righteousness). In this way, Kolb has incorporated the logic of Christian living into the justification logic of coming to faith. This is an important and helpful improvement, but the logic of Christian beliefs remains a little more distant from his task. Therefore, Kolb’s two kinds of righteousness logic, like the justification logic of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word more broadly, also needs to be invigorated with an imaginable and storied account of the Scriptures that stems from the logic of belief.

¹⁴¹ Kolb, “The Sheep,” 324–41.

¹⁴² Kolb, “The Sheep,” 325.

or, more clearly stated, the Holy Spirit drives Christ home through the Scriptures—the word of God alone—apart from an authoritative magisterium.¹⁴³ In the second case, Luther’s revolutionary move, for Kolb, was to move from a ritual-based religion to a religion of the word. In the popular mind of the day, the church was the institution in which sacred rituals were performed to appease God.¹⁴⁴ In Steven Paulson’s terminology, the church had been made part of a “legal scheme” by providing the rituals that helped people make their way to God via the law—if pious—or think they could make God do what they wanted—if impious.¹⁴⁵ Luther, however, argued that Christianity and the church were about God speaking his word to human beings, not about a human striving to God. God descends to his people through the words of a preacher and gives the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the gospel, within this church.

Kolb illustrates the fundamental elements of the ecclesiology of the word: Christ (or God) speaks the gospel which creates the church. Thus, the doctrinal center of this Lutheran ecclesiology is God’s effective word of law and gospel, particularly God’s word that justifies sinners. The church cannot create itself; instead, God’s word of justification creates the church from the outside. As the reformation dictum states, the church stands or falls on the doctrine of justification. Kolb explains, “The justifying action of the Savior Jesus Christ, his work through the Holy Spirit using God’s Word, and, in a derived sense, the new obedience of the faithful constitute the church.”¹⁴⁶ Schematically, this position can be represented as Christ→Gospel→Church; Christ speaks the good news of justification that creates the church.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Kolb, “The Sheep,” 325–36. On this understanding of the Lutheran dictum *Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*, see Gerhard O. Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 68–74.

¹⁴⁴ Kolb, “The Sheep,” 328–30.

¹⁴⁵ On the “legal scheme,” see Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 2–5, and the section on Paulson below.

¹⁴⁶ Kolb, “The Sheep,” 331.

¹⁴⁷ Charles J. Evanson, “Center and Periphery in Lutheran Ecclesiology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 239. Evanson uses the image of a circle with a center to describe the relationship of aspects of

Returning to the three criteria for doing ecclesiology after Christendom, the criteria of storied identity and visible concreteness are clearly secondary concerns. We will see, however, that the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word does have a particular storied account of Christian identity, but it is not the story of Christ lived out in the public, concrete church community. For the criterion of visible concreteness, certainly the visibility of God's word and sacraments is essential for the word of God ecclesiology—Kolb speaks of the church as “*audible or tangible or tastable*”¹⁴⁸—yet the congregation as a concrete community of people called to discipleship and public witness can become a secondary concern. Most importantly, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word understands the church in direct relationship to the gospel, the good news of justification. This word ecclesiology does well to establish the church in relationship to this essential doctrine, justification. Furthermore, the subordinate position of the church to God's word and work cannot be ignored or dismissed. The Lutheran ecclesiology of the word rightly contends that the church is God's church, and it is not a work of human hands. In fact, for those who follow the Lutheran Confessions, the story of the church *must* be guided by the doctrine of justification. The church does not create itself; the people do call themselves into the church. God's word always calls his people from the outside, and *God* creates the church as a community from the outside to do his mission of proclaiming the gospel and serving his world. In this way, the doctrine of justification reveals that God always has priority over the church. God never comes into human hands to be manipulated nor can the church come into being by human power. Instead, the church must always be pointed outward, outside of itself to its Lord, Jesus Christ, who graciously comes into the church through preaching and the sacraments.

At the same time, though, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word places justification at the

ecclesiology, but he uses the linear progression of Christ→Gospel→Church to show the relationship among Christ, the gospel, and the church, which is typical for the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word.

center of ecclesiology, shaping the foundational logic and questions of ecclesiology. This singular focus creates some ecclesiological problems by failing to address the post-Christendom context adequately. The fundamental logic of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word is based on justification, the logic of an individual coming to faith. The reception of God's word by faith is foundational to understanding the church, which focuses attention on the individual. Thus, the story of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word is first the story of God's word converting an *individual* and bringing her into a community of others who have likewise been killed and made alive by God's word. The church is treated as a fruit of faith, the result of justification, rather than an integral part of God's story. Consequently, the visible nature of the Christian life is relegated to individual action so that the church's identity and purpose as a visible, public community are marginalized.

These characteristics, with their own nuances, can be seen within the theologies of two influential Lutheran theologians: Oswald Bayer and Steven Paulson. As we will see in detail below, Oswald Bayer's formal ecclesiology of the word situates the church within a formal account of justification, which centers theology on Bayer's own framework for how an individual is impacted by God's word rather than the biblical story of God in Christ. Thus, Bayer's account of the church lacks clear biblical content. Steven Paulson's sermon-centered ecclesiology moves beyond Bayer's problem of content by locating the preached word of justification within a substantial Christology. Nevertheless, the church's role is envisioned solely as the preaching office, and not as a community of people called to do the public mission of Jesus in word and deed for the world. As such, Paulson's approach neglects the church when addressing Christian life in the world, not challenging the privatization of the church nor emphasizing the church's life according to the gospel. Hence, the church remains a private

¹⁴⁸ Kolb, *Christian Faith*, 260. Emphasis original

institution for supporting business and the marketplace, and its only recourse is to political action or inaction.¹⁴⁹

Oswald Bayer's Formal Ecclesiology of the Word

Oswald Bayer, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen, has dedicated his life to understanding Luther's theology for people today. Although Bayer attempts to understand Luther on Luther's own terms, Bayer's theology is hardly an historical account that ignores the contemporary world. Instead, as the subtitle of a recent book indicates, Bayer presents a "contemporary interpretation" of Luther that addresses the postmodern world.¹⁵⁰ Consistent with the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, the center of Bayer's theology is the word of justification or, in his terminology, God's word of promise. In fact, Bayer goes so far as to argue, "It is thus not sufficient to speak of the article on justification solely as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*—as the article on which the *church* stands and falls. Instead, the meaning of justification must be taken seriously in its breadth, with ramifications that have application for a theology of creation and for ontology."¹⁵¹ My analysis of Bayer will start with the problem that he identifies in theology and then the solution, working outward from his starting point of God's word of promise, seeing how it affects ecclesiology, and ending with my critique.

The major problem in modern theology for Bayer is the distinction between faith and

¹⁴⁹ James Davison Hunter has observed that a political ethos has captured the church's imagination so that the only way for the church to act in the public sphere is through politics. See *To Change the World*, 102–110. I suspect that Hunter is wrong, however, on the reason for this politicization. It is not that the church has become too political, but that the church has become too privatized. In becoming privatized, the church has to resort to the same means that any private person has in America: political process. Nevertheless, Hunter is right to argue that the church needs to reimagine its public life in a way that political action for the public good is understood as a proper ecclesial endeavor apart from partisan politics.

¹⁵⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*. The German subtitle is "Eine Vergegenwärtigung," meaning a making present or a making contemporary, indicating that Bayer intends to bring Luther's thought to bear on the contemporary world.

theology, supported by the eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophical starting point of the unity of consciousness.¹⁵² According to Bayer, this particularly modern problem has split theology into several spheres: “academic theology, professionalized public religion (the public ministry of the church), and private religion.”¹⁵³ As a result of this split, doctrine has been separated from life, theory from practice, theology from faith, and church theology from university theology. Responding to this problem, Bayer undertakes a “meta-critique” of modern theology by seeking to ground theology not on human subjectivity but on the external word of God.¹⁵⁴ According to Christine Helmer, Bayer’s understanding of theology is part of the “contemporary shift from the paradigm of self-consciousness to the paradigm of language.”¹⁵⁵ Bayer finds speech—particularly, God’s word of promise—central to justification, the church, and all creation.

Furthermore, Bayer sees “the problem of secularization” as an important part of the modern ethos that split theology from faith and centered theology on human subjectivity. Bayer identifies three quintessentially modern theological approaches that have contributed to the problem. These three starting points obscure and even destroy the promise of God by making human activity or knowledge the object of Christian thought instead of human passivity. These three approaches include the absolutizing of the ethical—typified by Kant—the absolutizing of the theoretical—typified by Hegel—and the absolutizing of the existential—typified by Schleiermacher.¹⁵⁶ Although all three approaches destroy God’s promise, Schleiermacher’s existential starting point

¹⁵¹ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 98. Emphasis original.

¹⁵² Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 83. See also Christine Helmer, “The Subject of Theology in the Thought of Oswald Bayer,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 36–40.

¹⁵³ Bayer, *Theology*, 84.

¹⁵⁴ Bayer, *Theology*, 84–85.

¹⁵⁵ Helmer, “The Subject of Theology,” 36.

is particularly important because it has impacted Luther studies through Gerhard Ebeling. Ebeling is worth a brief look from Bayer's perspective because his approach shows what Bayer is reacting against in his project. Similar to Bayer, Ebeling stresses the word of God as central to being human. Ebeling, however, starts with the assertion that all of humanity uses language, thus inhabiting a *Wortsituation*, "a situation in which the word is paramount."¹⁵⁷ In this way, Ebeling sees humanity as absolutely dependent on language so that humanity is oriented transcendently through words.¹⁵⁸ Ebeling's anthropological claim about a dependence on human language determines the shape and the importance of God's word rather than the other way around.¹⁵⁹ Ebeling begins with the existential reality of human dependence on language and then moves to God's word as the fulfiller of that need. For this reason, Bayer contends that Ebeling is in danger of absolutizing the existential element of humanity so that humans are existentially *active* before God, as in Friedrich Schleiermacher, which annuls the re-creative power of God's promise.¹⁶⁰ In other words, the possibility for justification and revelation, for Ebeling, lies within human existential grasp so that God is rendered peripheral to the human subject. In Ebeling's turn to the subject, Bayer also criticizes him for reducing theology to the "Christ-faith correlation," which fails to challenge the modern segmentation of theology and faith into distinct spheres.¹⁶¹

For Bayer, against Ebeling, theology must begin outside of humanity: with God's external word of promise. In fact, from his *Habilitationschrift*, Bayer's understanding of justification as God's external word of promise has been Bayer's consistent starting point and has formed the

¹⁵⁶ Bayer, *Theology*, 139–71.

¹⁵⁷ Bayer, *Theology*, 158.

¹⁵⁸ Bayer, *Theology*, 158.

¹⁵⁹ Bayer, *Theology*, 158–59.

¹⁶⁰ Bayer, *Theology*, 148 and 159.

¹⁶¹ Helmer, "The Subject of Theology," 26.

“matrix” of his thought.¹⁶² According to Bayer, the *promissio* marks the turning point of Martin Luther toward *reformatorysch*, “reformational,” theology, evidenced in the 1520 treatise *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*. The promise, and its relationship to faith, marks what is reformational in Luther’s theology.¹⁶³ Bayer, then, interprets Luther’s notion of promise through the speech act theory of John L. Austin.¹⁶⁴ Bayer considers the *promissio* to be a “performative statement,” which means that it “actually constitutes a reality; it does not affirm something as if it exists already, but presents it for the first time.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, Bayer believes a promise is a performative speech act that delivers something new. It does not merely describe reality like a declarative or a constative speech act does; it creates reality. God’s promise creates reality *ex nihilo* just as his word did in the beginning of creation.

From this starting point, Bayer describes the Christian life, the church, and all theological topics. Central to his understanding of God’s promise as performative speech act, Bayer argues that all creation is a gift,¹⁶⁶ and human life—not just Christian life—is properly the “receptive life,” the *vita passiva* of faith. Accordingly, the proper human disposition is not acting before God, the *vita activa*, or thinking before God, the *vita contemplativa*, but simply receiving God’s word, the *vita passiva*.¹⁶⁷ All modern theology that makes human subjectivity—existentially, ethically, theoretically, or otherwise—the starting point of theology obscures God’s promise by destroying the receptivity of creation in relationship to God. In addition, Bayer claims that the starting point of God’s promise abolishes the separation of academic theology and faith. As a

¹⁶² Helmer, “The Subject of Theology,” 22.

¹⁶³ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 46.

¹⁶⁴ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 50–51. See also J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

¹⁶⁵ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 51.

¹⁶⁶ On the connection between creation and the promise, see Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 95–105.

¹⁶⁷ For Bayer’s understanding of the “receptive life,” see Bayer, *Theology*, 21–27.

performative speech act, which creates reality, and not a constative speech act, which describes reality, God's *promissio* "overcomes the unfortunate antithesis between 'doctrine' and 'life'," and between academic theology and the church's faith.¹⁶⁸ Doctrine, life, theology, and faith all begin with the gospel as a performative speech act in time which creates a new relationship with God for individuals: "Our thesis is that the gospel, understood as a particular speech act, is itself the ground of faith."¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, by connecting the gospel of God's promise to all creation, Bayer also attempts to open up the world for theological reflection. Theology is not relegated to only private matters of faith or only the professional matters of the academe, but it has "a responsibility to speak to the world."¹⁷⁰

What is the topic or the subject of theology that theology has a responsibility to speak? The subject of theology, for Bayer, is "the sinning human and the justifying God."¹⁷¹ This is no abstraction; theology is about the theologian—not a professional but anyone who encounters and suffers God's word—who undergoes the *experience of Scripture* in *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.¹⁷² The experience of Scripture is essentially and primarily the experience of being "accused and acquitted by God," the experience of law and gospel, which is a result of God's word of justification that makes the sinner dead through the law and alive through the gospel.¹⁷³ Thus, the topic of theology takes place in a dialogue, a conversation of the justifying God with the sinning human.¹⁷⁴ What is the content of this conversation? Since every theological doctrine

¹⁶⁸ Bayer, *Theology*, 137.

¹⁶⁹ Bayer, *Theology*, 138.

¹⁷⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 18.

¹⁷¹ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 29.

¹⁷² Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 30–37. "It is not experience as such that makes the theologian a theologian, but rather experiencing Holy Scripture" (37).

¹⁷³ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 40–41.

should be “articulated within the framework” of justification,¹⁷⁵ Bayer argues that the content of the conversation is dictated by a threefold experience of the human creature who is addressed by God. Bayer makes God’s conversation with his creatures concrete in three—actually four—life settings or contexts.¹⁷⁶ Bayer’s threefold subject of theology is defined primarily by three ways that God encounters “*me*”: first, the law accuses me of sin and delivers me to death; second, God speaks for me in the gospel that Christ has taken my death and my judgment for me; third, God assaults me in “incomprehensible, crushing hiddenness.”¹⁷⁷ In short, the three ways are the law that kills, the gospel that gives life, and the inconsolable terror of theodicy, to which Bayer later adds a fourth: the “grace of preservation” of the first use of the law.¹⁷⁸ These contexts are the concrete settings according to which Bayer understands God’s conversation with his creatures. In fact, the word of God heard in these life settings forms the doctrinal center of Bayer’s ecclesiology, which leads to a number of problems, especially for post-Christendom.

Following from the centrality of God’s word of promise as an effective speech act that creates reality, Bayer understands the church as a creature of the word. As Bayer writes, “Everything that makes the church the church is contained in the ‘Word’: the *preaching* of the gospel, its visible and tangible form in the *sacrament*, and the *Holy Spirit* by the gospel, whose office is to sanctify.”¹⁷⁹ For Bayer, everything about the church flows from this basic axiom. Hence, Bayer goes on to describe the church as founded upon the word so that the church does

¹⁷⁵ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 38.

¹⁷⁶ Bayer, *Theology*, 102–6. The confusion between a three- or fourfold subject of theology is Bayer’s. He argues that there are four ways, but the first three are clearly more important. In fact, Bayer begins with a threefold definition and only moves to a fourfold definition later. I will focus on the first three. See also Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 41–42.

¹⁷⁷ Bayer, *Theology*, 102. Emphasis added to “me.” See also Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 42.

¹⁷⁸ Bayer, *Theology*, 106.

¹⁷⁹ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 257. Emphasis original.

not, in any way, own the word.¹⁸⁰ God's effective word of justification makes the church, and the marks of the church are primarily the marks of the creative word.¹⁸¹ To his credit, Bayer does not ignore Luther's other marks of suffering, prayer, and marriage. In fact, Bayer connects them to his central thesis with the assertion that proper Christian practice, such as marriage and prayer, flows from the word of God.¹⁸² Nevertheless, Bayer does not discuss these marks of Christian practice in any detail; he is not concerned with the content of the church as a concrete community as much as its relationship to the divine promise. Consequently, Bayer describes baptism, confession and absolution, the Lord's Supper, and offices in the church, especially the ordained office, in some detail because they are means of delivering God's promise. The sacraments and the words of sermons and absolution are the ways God creates his people anew through performative speech acts. What is important for Bayer is the word of God and faith, understood as a performative speech act made to an individual who receives it by faith, and everything else stands in support of that thesis. Although Bayer has a few helpful insights into the nature of the Christian life as a battle¹⁸³ and the corporate nature of faith,¹⁸⁴ these are tangential to the center of his theology. Bayer hardly addresses the church as a concrete community of people called by God to witnessing and discipleship. The concrete, public community remains outside of his concern.

One of the more interesting aspects of Bayer's ecclesiology, which Bayer asserts early in his treatment of Luther but I have saved until now, illustrates the formal nature of his ecclesiology. Bayer argues, using Luther as his support, that the church is not a Christian order

¹⁸⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 258.

¹⁸¹ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 263.

¹⁸² Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 261–62.

¹⁸³ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 269.

¹⁸⁴ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 267.

but an order of creation.¹⁸⁵ This assertion is rooted in Luther's notion of the three estates (*Stände*): church, the economy or household, and the state. All people, not just Christians, are encompassed by these orders of creation, and thus the church is *not* "in the first place, something specifically Christian."¹⁸⁶ This church is the "fundamental estate," which Bayer defines as "the human being who is addressed by God," and is able to respond to God's word with gratitude.¹⁸⁷ Following Luther, Bayer understands that the church is established when God first spoke his word of promise and threat to humanity in Genesis 2, and here a "general" church comes into being on the basis of God's word and faith.¹⁸⁸

By situating the church as part of creation, God's address to his creatures, Bayer clearly emphasizes the individual character of faith rather than the common, public life of distinct, Christian communities. For Bayer, what is decisive is the word of God's promise that must be received by individuals in faith. Following this logic, Bayer asserts, the church is "*the human being* who is addressed by God."¹⁸⁹ The individuation of the church is unmistakable. The primary community for Bayer exists between the individual and God, and the concrete community of Christians is decidedly ancillary to the matter of faith or unbelief.¹⁹⁰ Thus, Bayer's ecclesiology is formal in that it is defined by formal terms—the human addressed by God—but the church as a concrete community is hardly described nor given direction for discipleship or witness. The

¹⁸⁵ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 95–105. See also Bayer, *Theology*, 86–88.

¹⁸⁶ Bayer, *Theology*, 87.

¹⁸⁷ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 122.

¹⁸⁸ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 126.

¹⁸⁹ Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 122. Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁰ See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 125. "The fundamental estate deals with the relationship to God, with faith and unbelief. At the same time, the *status ecclesiasticus* is not to be equated with God's spiritual rule. After the fall into sin and before the eschaton, the Christian church is not the pure kingdom of God, as is the invisible church; instead, visible and invisible elements permeate it." What does Bayer mean by "Christian church" here? Considering his previous understanding as the person addressed by God and trusting his word, which is understood as invisible church here, it appears he means the concrete, visible community of Christians. However, this is precisely the church Bayer has refused to describe.

community of the church and its story of the Scriptures are peripheral to the threefold subject of theology, the individual who hears God speak in three ways. Hence, Bayer's theology is distanced from Christian doctrine and practice that are essential to the church and the story of the Scriptures.

In a similar vein, Reinhard Hütter has identified a crisis in Bayer's theological approach that is primarily ecclesiological. For Hütter, the problem is Bayer's understanding of the promise as a performative speech act, which creates a new relation or a new reality, as strictly distinct from a constative speech act, which refers to a reality that has already been constituted.¹⁹¹ By making this strict distinction based on a misreading of John Austin's theory of speech acts and Luther's notion of the promise, Bayer is unable to identify a doctrine of the gospel "that is both antecedent to and distinct from the performance of the *promissio*."¹⁹² In other words, Bayer divides the promise of God from the doctrine of the church. In fact, according to Hütter, Bayer abstracts the promise not only from doctrine but from the context of the church more generally, its creeds, and the story of the Scriptures.¹⁹³ Thus, the promise has to create its own context for hearing in the order of creation rather than being intelligible because of the narrative of the Scriptures interpreted according to church doctrine.¹⁹⁴ In particular, Bayer's focus on the promise as a speech-act apart from the content of the Scriptures allows him to understand God's word according to the three-fold subject of theology, the three primary ways that God's word impacts human creatures.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 82–83.

¹⁹² Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 82.

¹⁹³ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 89–90.

¹⁹⁴ This is an implication of Bayer's understanding of the Scriptures interpreting themselves: see Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 68–92.

¹⁹⁵ I do not mean to say that Bayer has no sense of the work of Jesus for justification, but it is telling that Bayer covers Christology in chapter 10 and the Trinity in chapter 15 (of 16 chapters) whereas the topic of theology

Hütter argues that Luther, unlike Bayer, sees the gospel not as pure performance but as a performative speech act which is grounded in doctrine content.¹⁹⁶ In a 1521 preface which functions as a hermeneutic for reading the Scriptures, Luther writes, “The gospel is a story about Christ, God’s and David’s Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell.”¹⁹⁷ Unlike Bayer, Luther identifies the gospel more broadly than the promise of forgiveness. The gospel is the story of Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, and it is the foundation and basis for the forgiveness of sins. Without telling the story of this Lord, the forgiveness of sins is meaningless and unintelligible. At the same time, though, Luther also calls the forgiveness of sins the “gospel,” because the gospel story must be interpreted according to the doctrine of justification, the promises that God makes to his people on behalf of Christ. Hence, Luther says, “So you see that the gospel is not really a book of laws and commandments which requires deeds of us, but a book of divine promises in which God promises, offers, and gives us all his possessions and benefits in Christ.”¹⁹⁸ In short, then, Luther sees the story of Christ as the root and the foundation for preaching the promise of Christ with doctrine, especially the doctrine of justification, providing the necessary hermeneutical limits for the story so that it is preached according to the Scriptures. The gospel as story is not separated from the gospel as the effective word of forgiveness, but instead the latter finds its intelligibility within the former and the former is misunderstood without the latter. For Luther, the promise is understood and proclaimed on the basis of the story of Jesus Christ told in the Scriptures.

Bayer, however, contextualizes God’s word and promise primarily within a story of human

is covered in chapter two and the *promissio* in chapter three. Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*.

¹⁹⁶ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 83–85.

¹⁹⁷ Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” in vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 117–18. I’m following Hütter’s use of Luther’s preface. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 84–86.

¹⁹⁸ Luther, “Brief Instruction,” 120.

beings experiencing God's word rather than the story of Jesus Christ. Because of this, Hütter sees Bayer's failure as largely ecclesiological. For Hütter, Bayer has not given an account of the church or church practices which establishes the church as the context for reading, hearing, and speaking the story of the Scriptures. Bayer's account implies an ecclesiology, but he never makes this explicit.¹⁹⁹ In fact, Hütter argues that the center of Christian existence for Bayer is "Luther's own understanding of the *vita passiva* as actualized in *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*." Such an understanding "naturally presupposes the church," but Bayer never explicitly examines the concrete community that makes sense of this Christian existence.²⁰⁰ Bayer seems to recognize this when he states that "being interpreted by the biblical text is something that takes place only *in the church itself*," yet Bayer does not develop an ecclesiology of the concrete, visible community in which God transforms human beings through the Scriptures.²⁰¹

Hütter correctly identifies the ecclesiology problem, but he does not mention that Bayer indeed concretizes the *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* in something that Bayer has called "church." Bayer's church, however, is difficult to align with the concrete community that receives preaching and the sacraments, confesses the creeds, prays, and witnesses to Christ as a community. Bayer's understanding of the experience of God's word happens instead in the context of creation—the human addressed by God which Bayer defines as church—in the universal experiences of the threefold subject of theology: the law that kills, the gospel that gives life, and the inconsolable terror of God's hiddenness.

That the threefold subject of theology stands at the heart of Bayer's theology, shaping its logic and providing the essential hermeneutical framework, is suggested also by Bayer's splitting

¹⁹⁹ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 89–90.

²⁰⁰ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 89.

²⁰¹ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 89, quoting Oswald Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik: Zur Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991), 7. Emphasis Hütter's.

of a general doctrine of God from the doctrine of the Trinity. Because Bayer understands the experience of law, gospel, and theodicy as distinct objects for theology that cannot come together—each of which has its own tacit narrative—he argues that a generic doctrine of God and anthropology must be separated from the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁰² For Bayer, if the Triune God is understood as speaking the law, then that will “bring about a darkening, indeed a displacement, of the gospel.”²⁰³ Bayer fears that the doctrine of the Trinity will be turned into a generic doctrine of God if a theologian asserts that law and gospel come from the same source. Because of this fear, Bayer argues that a generic doctrine of God is necessary to concentrate on the law and theodicy while the doctrine of the Trinity focuses on the gospel.²⁰⁴

Not only is this a profoundly unbiblical split—even if it is a split in the *doctrine* of God—this “generic” doctrine of God also signals an unraveling of Bayer’s stated purpose to focus theocentrically on God’s promise which takes place historically. Instead of the biblical story driving Bayer’s doctrine of God, the contexts of theodicy and the law are the starting points according to which Bayer explicates God’s identity *in general*.²⁰⁵ In this way, existentialism reenters the picture, and theology leans toward anthropology, as Bayer himself seems to indicate: “Such a ‘generic’ doctrine of God describes the non-Christian *human being*, who stands nevertheless under God’s demand and accusation. It asks what it means *to deal with* the omnipotence of God outside the relationship with Jesus Christ, outside the love of the triune

²⁰² Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 224–25.

²⁰³ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 225.

²⁰⁴ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 224–25.

²⁰⁵ Christine Helmer too has identified this as a problem. See Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship Between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther’s Works (1523–1546)* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1999), 148–9. Helmer argues that Bayer projects the law/gospel principle onto God, which “symmetrically splits [the nature of God] apart into the two sides of wrath and mercy” (149). Helmer is right in her criticism, but she does not clearly identify that the problem is Bayer’s anthropological center. Paul Hinlicky too critiques Bayer on this point. See Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 122–30.

God.”²⁰⁶ Thus, Bayer’s “generic” doctrine of God is hardly a doctrine of God at all; it is anthropology, which is the opposite of Bayer’s stated intentions. The center of the generic doctrine of God is not God but humanity. Worse yet, only this generic doctrine of God, according to Bayer, can lead to the true revealed God.²⁰⁷ Because the threefold object of theology is Bayer’s doctrinal center that shapes the implicit narrative of theology, “God” is abstracted from the Scriptures and church doctrine, recontextualized within a contemporary theologian’s understanding of the subjective experience of God’s word. Bayer’s theology has turned against itself.

To sum up, Bayer takes the doctrine of justification—the effective word of promise from God—as his starting point for theology. Bayer, however, does not understand the doctrine of justification primarily in light of the story of the Scriptures and the foundational doctrines of the church, such as the doctrine of the Trinity or Christology, but instead gives the word of promise a formal character, using John Austin’s theory of speech acts. Justification becomes concrete, for Bayer, in the threefold subject of theology, the three primary ways that human beings experience God’s word. As a result, Bayer’s theology remains largely formal, never explicating the story of God in its Scriptural substance nor describing the church with any concreteness. In fact, his splitting of a generic doctrine of God from the Trinity is a result of Bayer’s formalism.

In terms of the post-Christendom situation, Bayer’s theology is even more problematic. First, Bayer’s threefold subject of theology is individualized, which in a therapeutic context is easily warped into a theology that stems from and is directed toward personal well-being. Hence,

²⁰⁶ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 225. Emphases added.

²⁰⁷ See Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 225. Here this sounds a lot like Bayer’s own criticisms of Ebeling. For Bayer’s criticisms against absolutizing the existential, which focus on Schleiermacher, Ebeling, Bultmann, and Jonas, see Bayer, *Theology*, 148–71.

Bayer unintentionally reinforces the privatization of the church.²⁰⁸ Second, Bayer's ecclesiology neglects concrete, visible church-communities beyond the worship setting, emphasizing the hiddenness of the church on the basis of justification.²⁰⁹ As a result, Bayer's ecclesiology does not stand up to the criterion of visible concreteness. Third, Bayer gives no biblical story for forming the identity of church communities as a whole. Instead, the Christian story for Bayer is primarily the story of individuals being addressed by the law of God and being saved by the gospel, with theodicy questions forming an alternative story. Finally and most importantly, Bayer's ecclesiology is grounded primarily in a formal account of justification instead of a substantial story of God in Christ. Bayer's primary logic is the logic of coming to believe, based upon his three-fold subject of theology as an understanding of how God's word impacts human creatures. This logic has created other problems in Bayer's thought as we saw above. Is the problem, though, *justification* as the center of ecclesiology, or is this merely a *quirk* of Bayer's particular nuances? The next section will help answer this question.

Steven Paulson's Sermon Centered Ecclesiology of the Word

Steven Paulson, professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, is indebted to the proclamation theology of Gerhard Forde, evident both in Paulson's approach to theology and in the fact that Paulson edited three works of Forde for the *Lutheran*

²⁰⁸ Ironically, Bayer identifies psychotherapy as a problem to confront. See Bayer, *Theology*, 134–36.

²⁰⁹ To be clear, the church is rightly described as hidden. For one thing, it can only be seen by eyes of faith that have been shaped by the word of God. Secondly, classic protestant dogmatics emphasized the hiddenness or even invisibility of the church against a Roman Catholic understanding of the church as institution where believers are identified by visible membership rather than faith in the heart. This second reason was an important matter during Christendom, but it is not a question or issue that I am concerned about in this dissertation. At the same time, the first reason for the church's hiddenness is a relevant reminder to stay away from the kind of institutional power that plagued mission during Christendom. In light of the situation as I have described it, however, the reality of the hiddenness of the church is a secondary concern. For an essay arguing for the importance of spiritual hiddenness in ecclesiology today, see John Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible,'" in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2005), 96–113.

Quarterly Books series.²¹⁰ Although Forde is a major influence in Paulson's theology and Forde's ecclesiological minimalism is well known,²¹¹ Paulson is worth investigating on his own terms. Paulson's theology moves beyond Bayer both by responding to the "legal scheme" as a polemical context and in his emphasis on Christology, thus providing the content that was only outlined in Bayer's theology. As in Bayer, Paulson's theological center is also God's word of justification, which allows a further review of justification as a doctrinal center for ecclesiology after Christendom. I will begin with the theological problem according to Paulson, proceeding to his solution and ecclesiology's place within his system and ending with my critique.

For Paulson, theology has two tasks and only two tasks. The first is the critical task of the law, naming and "magnifying sin" so that the very best, most pious things of the world—ethics, morality, happiness, and even love—are revealed as sin, human attempts to reach God by way of the "legal scheme."²¹² The second task is making way for the proclamation of the gospel, the declaration that God's righteousness has come through an entirely different way than the way of the law.²¹³ Otherwise stated, theology creates space for the direct announcement of God to a sinner that God forgives you in Christ. Paulson's book *Lutheran Theology* accomplishes these two tasks as he explicates the biblical book of Romans.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ For Forde's most comprehensive work, see Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Paulson edited Forde's *The Preached God, A More Radical Gospel*, and *The Captivation of the Will*, all published by Eerdmans in partnership with *Lutheran Quarterly*.

²¹¹ The best-known example is Forde's pin which he proudly bore: "This man has no ecclesiology." Of course, the pin overstates the case even though it points to the truth. Forde's understanding of the proclamation of the word *is* his ecclesiology. For more detail see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 45–48.

²¹² Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 1. For love as the primary object of critique, see Steven D. Paulson, "No Church of Christ without Christ," in *Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (Delphi, NY: ALPB Books, 2010), 171–94. Love is the problem in Paulson's essay because he is reacting against the ELCA's decision to nullify the proclamation of the gospel of forgiveness to gay people. In other words, a voter's assembly—acting in love!—justified sin outside of the proclamation of the gospel in Jesus Christ.

²¹³ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 2.

²¹⁴ Within these two tasks, Paulson's emphasis on justification is already clear, steering away from questions

Paulson's theology takes the problem of the legal scheme as the central issue. For Paulson, humanity's best works, such as virtue and morality, are the most dangerous because these works are the ones human beings identify as good, thinking they earn favor before God according to the law. The legal scheme, however, is broader than simply works righteousness; it has more in common with Luther's understanding of a theology of glory from the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518.²¹⁵ Thus, the legal scheme is any understanding of righteousness before God that bases itself on the law or free will. Paulson identifies four aspects to the legal scheme. First, God "gives the law." Second, the law is given as "a guide for the journey of life." Third, free will is the center of life as one may either accept or reject God's law and teachings. Fourth, God will judge based on how well one fulfills the law, which grants life, or fails to do so, resulting in death.²¹⁶ In this way, God's good law is turned into an idol, and sinful humans try to use the law as righteousness before God instead of receiving a different *passive* righteousness from God through the gospel, which they can only believe. For those who think according to the legal scheme, the human being is the primary actor while God remains passive, rewarding or punishing according to a person's own actions. Paulson, however, seeks to turn this around so that God is understood as living and active, and humans are rendered passive before God. Consequently, the distinction between law and gospel and the distinction between passive and active righteousness are Paulson's two central hermeneutical distinctions.

Trapped in the legal scheme, sinners cannot comprehend or hear the Gospel as good news; at best, it sounds like a legal *fiction*.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, God sends preachers—of which Jesus is the

of living the Christian life. To be fair to Paulson, considering his ecclesial context, the emphasis on the gospel and the reticence to speak about social ministry and living as a Christian are understandable. Despite it being understandable, the problems with his ecclesiology remain.

²¹⁵ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 140–46.

²¹⁶ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 3.

²¹⁷ Compare Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 48.

preeminent—to proclaim the unbelievable gift of forgiveness. Paulson names the simple weak sermon as the word of God by which the whole world falls.²¹⁸ Without a preacher, one lives under God’s wrath, the law, and death. The preacher’s job is not to deny God’s wrath but to name it and magnify it so that people see God’s wrath as real and personal and learn to flee from it.²¹⁹ The preacher’s goal in proclaiming God’s wrath is not merely to instigate fear but to hold up God’s promise as the one thing to which a person can flee. The promise of the forgiveness of sins in Christ is the “rhubarb” to which one must cling and trust for healing.²²⁰ Giving this promise is the central task for the preacher. The preacher does not just talk *about* who God is or describe God’s mercy but actually gives God’s mercy in the form of a promise: “I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the preacher speaks on God’s behalf, announcing the performative word of God that forgives sinners, declaring them right with God.

Near the heart of Paulson’s understanding of the performative word of forgiveness lies a substantial Christology, taking the place of Bayer’s formal account of speech acts and moving beyond Bayer in emphasizing the content of the story of Christ. Paulson understands the story of Jesus primarily as the story of God’s preacher who proclaims the promise of God’s forgiveness to sinful and broken creatures.²²¹ In addition to the story of Jesus as preacher, Paulson describes Jesus in terms of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of attributes, understood soteriologically to emphasize that “Christ goes deeper into the flesh than sin itself” so to “legally take those sins in order to fulfill the law so that it cannot make any further claim on the sinner,”

²¹⁸ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 8.

²¹⁹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 64.

²²⁰ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 87–88. Christ the “rhubarb” that brings healing is Luther’s metaphor that Paulson utilizes here.

²²¹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 89.

making instead a new creation.²²² Since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, enters into the old world of sin and abides in the old world in the flesh, Christ, not the law, stands as the mediator between fallen creation and God. Thus, in Christ the legal scheme is ended and a new world and age is opened in which the law no longer prevails. The word of forgiveness does not merely set the sinner back into the legal scheme to fulfill the law—with the help of grace, of course!—but justification marks a new creation in which Christ takes upon the sinner’s sin and gives the sinner his righteousness.²²³ Because Christ has become sin for sinners, God wins in the battle over sin, death, and the law. Christ wins the battle by suffering under the attacks of these enemies and losing on the cross, but this loss is precisely the greatest victory where law, sin, and death are destroyed, and a new world is created out of nothing.²²⁴ This new world comes about by faith, by trusting in the promise of forgiveness for Christ’s sake and receiving the new world in freedom from God’s wrath, sin, the law, and death.²²⁵

Paulson’s Christology draws from the deepest and best work of the Lutheran tradition, in particular the personal union of Jesus Christ as the true subject of theology rather than divinity or humanity in the abstract and Christ’s humiliation as the willingness to dive deep in the flesh and become sin to save his fallen creation.²²⁶ Nevertheless, this aspect of Paulson’s Christology does not play much of a role in the logic of his project because the Christological reality of the *communicatio idiomatum* functions as an explanation for how the forgiveness of sins works to

²²² Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 92. For Paulson, just as Jesus’s own person unites divine and human attributes in one person, so there is also a communication of attributes between sinful humanity and the righteous person of Jesus. In this communication, Christ takes on human sin by his choice in the humiliation and gives humanity himself, including his righteousness, through preaching and sacraments. In this soteriological turn from classic Christology, Paulson is following Luther. See Johann Anselm Steiger, “The *Communicatio Idiomatum* as the Axle and Motor of Luther’s Theology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2000): 125–58.

²²³ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 96–100.

²²⁴ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 110–11.

²²⁵ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 112.

²²⁶ This is articulated most famously in Luther’s magisterial Galatians commentary. See Martin Luther,

end the legal scheme for a person. Christ's taking on sin answers the question, "How does Christ's blood, as mercy seat, save?"²²⁷ In this way, Paulson's substantial Christology is usurped by an individual account of justification as God's killing and making alive. The logic of coming to faith through preaching shapes the remainder of Paulson's theology rather than the person and work of Christ more broadly.

Although Paulson's Christology offers promise for a concrete articulation of the church's life on the basis of the story of Scripture, Paulson's understanding of justification as the proclamation of forgiveness is the central story that shapes the Christian life. This can be seen in Paulson's subsequent chapters exploring the character of faith and the fruits of faith. Paulson begins with the individual Christian life of faith, which grasps God's promise, especially given in baptism. In four separate chapters, Paulson describes the benefits of the gospel under the titles "Freedom from Wrath," "Baptism's Freedom from Sin," "Freedom from Law," and "Freedom from Death."²²⁸ In each of these chapters, Paulson describes the Christian life as "freedom" but in so doing his understanding of the Christian life is abstract and formal. The freedom is always freedom *from* something bad, but rarely does Paulson say what Christians are freed *for*.²²⁹ In fact, Paulson emphasizes the hiddenness of the Christian life (and later the hiddenness of the church), which leads him away from describing the life to which God calls his people.²³⁰ For example, Paulson concludes the chapter on freedom from wrath by asserting, "Freedom is to trust the

Lectures on Galatians 1535, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963).

²²⁷ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 101.

²²⁸ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 138–207.

²²⁹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 203–7. Other than the vague references to being "freed to God," I noticed Paulson name only prayer and confession as concrete practices Christians do in defiance of death.

²³⁰ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 140–46. From the perspective of justification, of course the Christian life remains hidden, but God also calls his people to obey, listen, follow, and work. These things are visible acts and must be described theologically even if the Christian person is hidden with Christ in God. On the hiddenness of the church, see Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 240–43.

promise that in Christ the wrath is over—even if we feel the opposite.”²³¹ Such freedom lacks concrete substance: freedom *from* wrath with almost no description of what Christians are freed *for*. Hence, Paulson’s theology of the Christian life in the gospel is mostly private and personal. Even in his two concrete descriptions of the Christian life, prayer is the defiance of my own death and personal confession is my turning to God and away from my sinful self.²³² To be clear, Paulson rightly names confession and prayer as central practices flowing from the gospel promise, but the effects of the gospel are primarily private and individual.

The problem intensifies as Paulson describes the church directly, in the chapter “The Fruits of Faith.” Following his account of the centrality of preaching, Paulson reduces the church to the preaching office and the preaching event, with a minor role played by the mutual consolation of the brethren—meaning the forgiveness of sins offered by a lay Christian. In fact, Paulson defines his “notion of church” in another essay without reference to the concrete community at all: “The Holy Spirit works anew all that is needed by bringing Christ to his sinners by the preaching office.”²³³ In his larger book, Paulson argues along the same lines: “The preached Word makes the church, which word is solely authorized by the law and promises of Scripture.”²³⁴ Thus, the church is not the papacy, nor an institution; it is an assembly of people who hear the word of God. “Signs of true church are therefore all acts of preaching: sermons that distinguish law and gospel, baptism, Lord’s Supper, Absolution, the calling of a public minister from among the Royal priesthood, and suffering for the gospel—the exact opposite of any sign of glory or power in the world.”²³⁵ Conspicuously absent are the church’s visible, public marks—which are still

²³¹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 152. See also pages 170–71, where the freedom is basically the same.

²³² See Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 203–7.

²³³ Steven D. Paulson, “Do Lutherans Need a New Ecclesiology?” *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 233.

²³⁴ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 238.

²³⁵ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 239.

only seen as such by faith—of prayer and acts of love for the neighbor which Luther names in his 1539 treatise on the church, “On the Councils and the Church.”²³⁶ These marks are further from the center of the church’s identity, but they are nevertheless *Christian* marks, which should be described and encouraged in any ecclesiology.

Not only does Paulson shy away from describing acts of love in connection with the church, but he also fails to identify the church’s purpose outside of the individual act of forgiving sins.²³⁷ The church primarily acts as individual Christians who dispense forgiveness, but not as the corporate body of Christ that *publicly* witnesses to God in Christ by word and deed. Paulson states,

The fruit of love for the neighbor comes in the unromantic form of a call (*vocatio*) into an office (*vocation*) that organizes life in opposition to the forces of destruction. Love is born by children honoring parents, spouses being faithful, not murdering our enemies or coveting, and so on (Romans 13:9), and—least romantic of all—by being subject to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1). Institutions [!] are the way God gets good works done by sinners, and the way love happens.²³⁸

Indicated by the reference to institutions, Paulson places his social ethics within the context of general society instead of the context of the church. The Christian life becomes visible primarily as it takes shape in “secular” institutions. For Paulson, the church remains hidden while the family, government, and work are the visible contexts for life, including the Christian life.

Part of the reason Paulson locates his social ethics within the context of general society

²³⁶ Martin Luther, “On the Councils and the Church,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 41 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-1986), 3-178.

²³⁷ In Peterson, *Who Is the Church?* 48, Cheryl Peterson identifies this problem with Forde’s proclamation ecclesiology too.

²³⁸ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 245. Is the church on equal footing with all other institutions in terms of love? Thinking through the doctrine of the two kinds of righteousness, the church is only on equal footing with other institutions if there is no connection between one’s identity before God as justified (vertical righteousness) and one’s works of love toward a neighbor (horizontal righteousness). Instead, though, one’s identity as a Christian results in works of love, which also applies to the church as a community. Hence, even Kolb entitles a section, “The Church Provides Love in the Horizontal Realm,” in his dogmatics, *Christian Faith*, 266. This does not mean, of course, that the church is the only institution that knows how to love or that no service toward the neighbor happens outside of the church. The Lutheran doctrine of vocation clearly indicates the way God works through all walks of life,

rather than the church is that Christians are not “fanatics” or “Gnostics”; Christians love their neighbors *in* the world without dominating the world.²³⁹ Although Paulson’s concerns for disembodiment and triumphalism are valid, his solution is a pyrrhic victory. Paulson’s social ethics make a Christendom assumption: the family, honor, marriage, faithfulness, enemies, and the government are clear and obvious realities—he never explains these terms in detail nor locates them within the Christian story.²⁴⁰ Because of this assumption, Paulson never defines what social institutions are intended to be from God’s point of view, nor does he say how one should love the neighbor within them.²⁴¹ In this way, Paulson’s social ethics cannot help but take on the dominant form of American society because there is no concrete biblical or ecclesiastical context for them to take root. Hence, Paulson’s failure to take the post-Christendom context into account erodes and even vacates his social ethics.

In post-Christendom North America, almost nothing about social ethics or the fruits of faith is obvious. The family, for example, has been reinterpreted by Western individualistic, therapeutic, and neo-capitalistic values, which changes parenting completely. Stanley Hauerwas has observed how many Americans want to have children as a way to fulfill their own lives, but for Christians children are a gift from God and are begotten in hope and trust.²⁴² Having children

Christian and not.

²³⁹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 244–47.

²⁴⁰ See Paulson, “No Church,” 191–92. In this essay, Paulson contends that the shape of love is known on the basis of “natural law,” which he assumes is understood by reason. Paulson uses natural law as part of his argument that procreation is natural and should be part of marriage. In so doing, Paulson makes the modernist assumption that truth—even if truth of God’s left-hand kingdom—is known universally by reason. On this basis, Paulson implies that people who agree with homosexuality must be morally reprehensible since natural law is “universally held by reasonable people.” Paulson, however, fails to see how social structures and tacit narratives shape the way we think and feel. As chapter one showed, Americans have been captured by a different narrative from the Christian one so that the stories of the marketplace and the therapeutic have reshaped the family. Thus, a biblical or Christendom understanding of “natural” is no longer natural to most Americans, even American Christians.

²⁴¹ See Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 228–243.

²⁴² Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 155–174.

is not about *my* self-fulfillment but an embodiment of God's creativity and his gift of life in hope of its re-creation. In other words, for Christians, children fit into a different story, one lived in gratitude to the Creator while trusting in the work of Christ and hoping for his return, not a story about a financial burden or personal fulfillment. Paulson's failure to see how the therapeutic and market mentalities have warped institutions and vocations leaves his social ethics without Christian content, filled by the content of other narratives.

To summarize, Paulson's ecclesiology echoes Bayer's in a few important ways. The visible, concrete community of the church is subordinate to the hiddenness of faith and the proclamation of the gospel. Moreover, the identity of the church is not considered in terms of the *story* of God. Accordingly, Paulson's ecclesiology falls short on both the criterion of storied identity and the criterion of visible concreteness. Nevertheless, Paulson's strong Christology has potential to root the church more firmly within the biblical story and the doctrine of God, which gives Paulson's theology a decisive edge over Bayer's. In particular, Paulson's description of Christ serving his creation by coming deep into the flesh and bearing sin in his person has potential to describe the church's role of service to its community, but Paulson shies away from such connections. Instead of rooting the church's life in the person and mission of Jesus, Paulson's ecclesiology focuses on the preaching event, in which the law convicts individuals of sin and the gospel promises forgiveness. In this way, Paulson's theology takes the logic of coming to faith—the individual who is killed by the law of God and raised to life by the gospel—as the central hermeneutic and the primary framework for understanding the church and the Christian life. As such, Paulson's theology largely echoes Bayer's even though they differ in some important ways. It is this logic of coming to believe, I contend, that is the unifying problem for the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word

Against Cheryl Peterson, who argued that Christocentrism is part of the reason for Gerhard

Forde's problematic ecclesiology, my analysis of Paulson shows that his Christocentric reading of Scripture is not the problem.²⁴³ In fact, Paulson's ecclesiology is tangential to his Christology. Instead of the story of Jesus Christ as the doctrinal center, Paulson's doctrinal and logic center is justification, understood as individual repentance and forgiveness delivered through proclamation. Consequently, the church is rendered as individuals who must hear law and gospel, relegating the life and mission of the church—except for the proclamation of the gospel—to the extreme periphery of ecclesiology. Although the church indeed must proclaim forgiveness to sinners in Jesus's name, Paulson's singular ecclesiological focus makes the church as a community unintelligible outside of a one-hour slot on Sunday mornings. Even during the Divine Service, Paulson's church is individualized: the *individual* must hear the law and the gospel.²⁴⁴ While God's word certainly impacts individuals, the prominence of individual faith means that preaching is easily conscripted by the therapeutic narrative where the law names my troubled past and the gospel opens the door for me to reach personal fulfillment. The hearers are able to integrate the story of God too easily into the civil religion of moralistic, therapeutic deism. Ecclesiologically, the church becomes the instrument by which the individual reaches her own spiritual goals. Such a privatized church does not challenge an important legal scheme that dominates North American post-Christendom minds.

The Problem of Justification as the Logical Center of Ecclesiology

At the heart of the word of God ecclesiology is the doctrine of justification. As Bayer's and Paulson's theologies show, justification forms the center of the church so that the church is fundamentally the community which hears the gospel and trusts the word of God. This doctrinal

²⁴³ Cheryl M. Peterson, "The Question of the Church in North American Lutheranism: Toward an Ecclesiology of the Third Article," (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2004), 160.

²⁴⁴ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 230: "God's word of the gospel creates new individual creatures called Christians, and a communion of such creatures called the church." Paulson's order is telling.

center problematizes the church in three ways. First, since God alone justifies and human creatures are purely passive before God's justifying word, the church's visible and concrete life is described only rarely and tentatively. The ecclesiology of the word shies away from concrete description because that begins to obscure or overcome God's work of justification. At this point, some steeped in confessional Lutheran theology might object to my criticism: "Isn't that the point? The church is not about outward appearances but faith in the heart." To be clear, such an objection certainly follows the primary concern of the Lutheran Confessions.²⁴⁵ Consequently, I am not arguing that faith should be replaced with works at the heart of the church's identity. As the Confessions assert, the church's identity is given by Christ Jesus and received by faith. At the same time, however, the cultural context has shifted significantly. The Roman church put an emphasis on outward works over faith in the heart, but the post-Christendom context internalizes faith so that it is practically irrelevant to life. In other words, the problem today is not that outward works are the center of the church, but that the life and work of the church are split apart from the internal matter of faith. The church is internalized in such a way that the community's life of faith is obscured. Thus, ecclesiology today must describe not only faith in the heart, but the life of faith that is lived in community, as I argued in chapter one. On this point, the ecclesiology of the word falls well short of the criterion of visible concreteness, despite its proper understanding of justification and the word of God.

Second, since the doctrine of justification articulates the logic of how individuals come to faith, the ecclesiology of the word struggles to speak about the church as a community at all. The individual takes the central place in Christian mission and life.²⁴⁶ Third, when the doctrine of

²⁴⁵ Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 174–83, which is articles VII and VIII of the Apology.

²⁴⁶ Chad D. Lakies, "An (Enduring) Ecclesiology: Beyond the Cultural Captivity of the Church," (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2013), 90–98, recognizes the problematic relationship of the individual and the community and the Lutheran emphasis on the individual.

justification is the framework for all doctrine, the focus of theology is on individual conversion, which in the Lutheran tradition is understood in terms of law and gospel. The law is the word that breaks down the barriers of sin and pride and convicts the heart; the law, then, is the work of the Spirit that opens the way for the gospel to be heard and trusted as the life-giving promise of God. As such, law and gospel are too easily understood as a polarity, with the gospel receiving its content primarily from the convicting function of the law.²⁴⁷ This is seen in Paulson's ecclesiology, in which the gospel is understood primarily as negation. The gospel frees the Christian *from* the law, death, and sin, but it does not free the Christian *for* much at all. As David Yeago observes, the problem of the law in Lutheranism is connected to the tendency toward "disembodiment" and the privatization of Christianity.²⁴⁸ In a post-Christendom world, this logic of law and gospel becomes particularly problematic. When the church fails to speak positive content for the Christian life, the dominant frameworks of society, neo-capitalism and the therapeutic, form the church and the Christian life into their own image, as evidenced in chapter one.

What exactly is the problem with the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word? In an essay written with William Willimon, Stanley Hauerwas, the well-known theologian and ethicist, goes so far as to suggest that Reformation theology was wrong in focusing on justification by faith.²⁴⁹ In fact, they argue, "We believe the association of the Reformation with presumptions of

²⁴⁷ See David S. Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age," *Lutheran Forum* 34, no 4 (2000): 12. "Within Lutheranism, this surrender of the ambition to form human lives [—a function of the law—] has taken shape in a construal of the Gospel as a word without positive content—a word that reassures and comforts but brings nothing substantively new into human life."

²⁴⁸ Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism," 6–16. Joel Biermann too recognizes that justification understood in the framework of a law/gospel polarity is problematic for any positive description of the Christian life. See Joel D. Biermann, *A Case for Character: Toward a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 115–18.

²⁴⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, "Why *Resident Aliens* Struck a Chord," in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 58.

justification by faith through grace as a center of the Gospel was a profound mistake.”²⁵⁰ For Willimon and Hauerwas, the focus on justification by faith has created the ecclesial muddle in which the North American church is mired. Justification by faith creates “essentially individualistic accounts of salvation that [have been] combined with liberal political theory to produce an outrageously accommodated church.”²⁵¹ Instead of focusing their theology on justification and risking an individualistic account of salvation that is easily absorbed by the social forces of therapy and neo-capitalism, Hauerwas and Willimon focus on the church, claiming that participation in the church is itself salvation. For them, there is no such thing as salvation which is “somehow *extra* political,” that is, outside the church as a political, social, and visible community.²⁵²

Hauerwas and Willimon raise a fundamental challenge against the doctrine of justification as the doctrinal center for ecclesiology and as the center of theology more generally. As we have seen, the ecclesiology of the word contends, according to the traditional Lutheran mantra, “Justification is the article on which the church stands or falls.” Hauerwas and Willimon, however, argue that this logic is precisely the problem in a post-Christendom world. For Hauerwas and Willimon, post-Christendom demands an inverted dictum: the church is the community on which justification stands or falls. Hence, the church is a community in which salvation takes place, and the Christian life is not a dialogue of law and gospel but a journey according to which a Christian finds her part in the practices and story of the church.²⁵³

Following this understanding, Hauerwas explains the shape of salvation with clear reference to

²⁵⁰ Hauerwas and Willimon, “Why *Resident Aliens*,” 62.

²⁵¹ Hauerwas and Willimon, “Why *Resident Aliens*,” 62.

²⁵² Hauerwas and Willimon, “Why *Resident Aliens*,” 62.

²⁵³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 127–28, especially note 15.

the church: “Salvation, then, is best understood not as being accepted no matter what we have done, but rather as our material embodiment in the habits and practices of a people that makes possible a way of life that is otherwise impossible. That is why we are not saved in spite of our sin, but we are saved precisely through practices of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.”²⁵⁴

According to my analysis of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, Hauerwas’s critique is on target even though his solution is not. The fundamental logic of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word leads toward an emphasis on the individual story of believers, which fits into the privatization of the church. Nevertheless, Hauerwas’s constructive proposal is just as problematic. While the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word can be represented schematically as Christ→Gospel→Church, Hauerwas’s account flips gospel and church: Christ→Church→Gospel. In so doing, Hauerwas exhibits the same problem as the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word in that Hauerwas is so keen on explaining the church as the center of the gospel that Jesus Christ himself almost becomes an unexplained presupposition, a foundational trope for his theology.²⁵⁵ Nicholas Healy observes this problem when he argues that Hauerwas’s theological method is just like the German theological loci method, which Hauerwas deplors: Hauerwas’s “own presentation, though far more American than Germanic, is similarly founded upon, and governed by, a single locus—in his case, the church.”²⁵⁶ Whereas the German Lutherans filtered all theological reflection through justification, Hauerwas does the same with

²⁵⁴ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 74.

²⁵⁵ In my opinion, Hauerwas’s best account of the theological foundations of his work is found in his Gifford Lectures: Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). To be clear, Hauerwas occasionally writes about the story of Jesus, understood eschatologically in the context of the story of Israel, as the foundational story for the church. For example, see Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 72–95.

²⁵⁶ Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 39.

the locus of the church. Moreover, Healy contends that Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric theological method distorts Christian doctrine because his theology gives inadequate attention to the Triune God, who should stand at the center of all theological reflection.²⁵⁷

To be clear, much of Hauerwas's theological critique is accurate. Hauerwas rightly recognizes the problems of the privatization of the church as an instrument of the American project.²⁵⁸ Moreover, Hauerwas identifies part of the post-Christendom ecclesiological crisis as a problem of identity; accordingly, he describes the church by its fundamental narrative and practices. Thus, Hauerwas's ecclesiology follows both the criterion of visible concreteness and the criterion of storied identity. Where Hauerwas's ecclesiology is questionable is the criterion of doctrinal substance. As I have argued, the criterion of doctrinal substance requires that the church is understood in relationship to the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation. Hauerwas attempts to do this when he locates salvation within the church and church practices and explains the church as transformation into Christ and becoming part of the story of Christ. Nevertheless, for Hauerwas, the church and the church's life of faith form the foundation logic for understanding Christian doctrine instead of God and Christ situating soteriology and ecclesiology. Whereas the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word uses a soteriological logic to understand the church, Hauerwas uses a logic of Christian living and practices—interpreted through Alasdair MacIntyre's social theory—to understand soteriology and the church. As a result of this move, Hauerwas's theology distorts Christian doctrine.²⁵⁹ For example, justification is treated almost as an incidental part of God's work with his creatures rather than God's central

²⁵⁷ Healy, *Hauerwas*, 16.

²⁵⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000), 23–34.

²⁵⁹ For a defense of Hauerwas's ecclesiology that emphasizes the theological and Christological underpinnings, see Robert John Dean, "For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas," (PhD. diss., University of Toronto, 2014).

work. Additionally, Hauerwas makes the Bible not about God and Christ primarily, but about the church and its ethics.²⁶⁰ In this way, the church's life comes to dwarf the life and economy of God, which is known through the church.

Hauerwas's ecclesiology, in one sense, marks a helpful advance on the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word as a critique of the church in post-Christendom by emphasizing the church as a community which is identified through narrative. Hauerwas's proposal, however, has lost much more than it has gained. A better description of the church's life has been gained at the expense of God and God's grace, something to which the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word rightly holds. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of Hauerwas and the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word illuminates the heart of problem: what doctrinal center can hold together an account of the church's concrete, visible life as a community while emphasizing God who stands outside of the church, justifying it, and calling it into mission?

Conclusion

In his book *Eccentric Existence*, David Kelsey develops a typology of theological logic, which clarifies my argument in this chapter. As I have alluded to a few times above, Kelsey distinguishes between three foundational logics for doing Christian theology: "the logic of beliefs," "the logic of coming to belief," and "the logic of the life of Christian believing."²⁶¹ The logic of beliefs asks about God and God's relationship to creation, probing what these

²⁶⁰ Healy, *Hauerwas*, 69–71.

²⁶¹ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 27. Compare Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), xiii. To be clear, these logics are not cleanly separable and distinguishable. Who God is affects how we think about coming to faith and the Christian life. Moreover, one cannot help but allow a particular logic of coming to faith or logic of the Christian life to shape one's description of God and Christ. Nevertheless, the point is to return to the basics and let the basics of God's identity and purpose, in story form, shape all Christian doctrine. At the same time, certain descriptions of coming to faith and the Christian life will and must act as criteria for understanding God. For example, justification is the central, non-negotiable criterion for Lutheran theology. In this sense, justification must hold the distinction between God and his creation and give all credit, glory, and honor to God for creation, redemption, and sanctification.

fundamental beliefs imply about other theological topics. The logic of coming to belief—also known as the logic of coming to faith—asks about the theological means or process by which human beings come to faith. The logic of the Christian life asks how Christians should live. Following Kelsey’s typology, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word follows the logic of coming to faith and applies this to the church. In this way, the logic of beliefs, the identity of God known in Christ, is short-circuited, resulting in a problematic ecclesiological account, particularly in light of post-Christendom. Hauerwas’s critique implicitly recognizes that this logic of coming to faith neglects the logic of the Christian life and renders it moot. Hauerwas’s answer, however, is to use the logic of the Christian life to describe God and the church.²⁶² Such logic is even more problematic and fails to see the importance of justification for understanding God’s work in the world. It is not that the logic of coming to faith or the logic of the life of faith is bad or wrong as such; instead, I contend that the post-Christendom situation distorts both. The therapeutic ethos, for instance, uses a problematic logic of coming to faith—an inchoate experience of suffering that must be personally overcome—deforming the Christian doctrine of justification. Moreover, moralistic, therapeutic deism is highly legalistic, which distorts the logic of Christian living significantly. These problems are best addressed by returning to the basics, the logic of Christian beliefs.²⁶³

In addition, it is important that these different logics are not conflated.²⁶⁴ Kelsey argues that conflating the logic of coming to faith with the logic of beliefs causes four “serious systematic consequences” in anthropology, one of which stands out as pertinent to ecclesiology. Conflating

²⁶² Healy, *Hauerwas*, 55.

²⁶³ See Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1:21. Kelsey even goes so far as to suggest that new formulations of Christian doctrine may be necessary because of cultural shifts. Kelsey writes, “As those host societies and their cultures change over time, the community’s received doctrines, which use those concepts, although intelligible in earlier periods or in other societies become misleading or unintelligible.” Post-Christendom represents a type of change that could make Christian doctrine misleading.

the logic of coming to faith with the logic of beliefs leads to “utilitarian and functionalist trivialization of understandings of God and God’s ways of relating to human beings.”²⁶⁵ Oswald Bayer, in particular, exhibits this problem in his articulation of a “generic” doctrine of God. Since Bayer does not adequately differentiate the different logics, the doctrine of God is determined by Bayer’s threefold subject of theology, which is his logic for how human beings are impacted by God’s word. The problem of conflation, however, is also evident in the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word generally since the logic of coming to faith drives ecclesiology while the logic of Christian living—a logic of vocation, in particular—drives the social ethics of the same ecclesiology. Since two different kinds of logics shape ecclesiology and social ethics, Lutheran theology struggles to find the intersection between the two.²⁶⁶

Kelsey’s typology clarifies what is at stake in my argument for the criterion of doctrinal substance. I am not merely arguing that the church needs to be rooted in *any* important Christian doctrine. In post-Christendom, ecclesiology must go back to the basics.²⁶⁷ The logic of coming to faith and the logic of the life of faith have their place—justification in particular is essential in orienting all theology to God—but ecclesiology for post-Christendom needs to be grounded in the identity and story of God who is known in Jesus Christ. Adapting Kelsey’s argument on anthropology: systematically, an ecclesiological proposal should “have a secondary, dependent

²⁶⁴ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1:80–119.

²⁶⁵ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1:113.

²⁶⁶ Some conflation between logics is necessary although my use of Kelsey’s argument makes it sound like all conflation is bad. The key is that the being, identity, and mission of God shapes when and how the logics are conflated. To give an example, God’s work alone in saving his creation through his Son and Spirit is part of who God is, but it is also part of the logic for how humans come to faith. Conflation thus is more complicated a matter than my brief use of Kelsey makes it appear.

²⁶⁷ In a note to his friend Eberhard Bethge on mission to non-Christians and how it should effect “the church renewal movement, Bonhoeffer outlines a few notes about preaching in a basic, concrete way that I think must typify all theology in this age: “Preaching about the *true God* and the *false gods*... Preaching the *God of grace*. Preaching Christ. Preaching *repentance*—putting away the old life—very concrete....No use of slogans, but substantial, concrete, a real event.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*, ed. Mark S. Brocker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 497.

status, logically derivative from more basic Christian theological claims about ways God relates to all that is not God.”²⁶⁸ Using my own language, the criterion of doctrinal substance entails not only a limit for a post-Christendom ecclesiology—namely, that ecclesiology must not be a tangential locus of theology—but it also indicates the center. A post-Christendom ecclesiology must be centered upon the doctrine of God who is known in Jesus Christ. For a Lutheran ecclesiology, this center must describe the church in visible concreteness, including its public mission, and with a storied identity rooted in the narrative of God as told by the Scriptures. Moreover, it must remain consistent with the logic of justification by faith: God alone creates faith and the church, apart from all human work.

To anticipate my argument which will become clearer over the next two chapters, the answer for post-Christendom Lutheran ecclesiology is not to abandon the emphasis on the forgiveness of sins through the gospel of Jesus Christ in favor of a communal, eucharistic piety,²⁶⁹ but to center the church on who God is and how God relates to his creation in his mission. This center is the Scripture’s account of Jesus Christ’s life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit. As a Lutheran ecclesiology, this story must make intelligible justification by faith even as it describes the Christian life within the community called church. The primary focus, however, is Jesus, the image of the invisible God, who performed God’s mission of service to a dying world to give it life. The person and work of Jesus give identity to the church and shape to its mission. In this way, Christology integrates the doctrine of God, the church, and justification, especially emphasizing the church’s concrete

²⁶⁸ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1:41.

²⁶⁹ Although “Communion Ecclesiology” has much to offer, it often situates its communal, eucharistic piety over against the forgiveness of sins. See, for example, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985). For Lutherans appropriating this approach, see Heinrich Holze, ed., *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1997). See also Steven D. Paulson, “What Is Essential in Lutheran Worship?” *Word and World* 26 (2006): 149-61. Like communion ecclesiology, Paulson also argues as if there are two mutually exclusive options: gospel promises to individuals or

visible and public life, which can open the door to conversations about reimagining church for post-Christendom on the basis of the Scriptures and foundational Christian doctrine.

an ecclesial, communal life, focused on worshiping God, which, for Paulson, is via the law.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPIRIT MAKES THE CHURCH: ASSESSING LUTHERAN ECCLESIOLOGIES FOR POST-CHRISTENDOM

In the previous chapter, I analyzed a common Lutheran ecclesiology, which I called the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, on the basis of the three criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom: storied identity, doctrinal substance, and visible concreteness. The ecclesiology of the word begins with the justifying word of God so that the church is understood as a creature of the word of the gospel. Otherwise stated, justification makes the church. In this way, the Lutheran ecclesiology correctly grounds the church in God and in the work of God, orienting the church to God who stands outside and over the church. The church does not exist apart from God's word, which justifies, creates, and sustains his people.

Although this orientation is right and true, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word falls short on all three criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom. Considering the criterion of storied identity, the ecclesiology of the word does not understand the church in terms of the story of God with his people; the primary story, as Oswald Bayer's theology illustrates, is the story of the individual who is convicted by the law and comes to trust the gospel of God.²⁷⁰ In twenty-first century North America, such an emphasis on the individual plays right into the privatization of the church. In terms of the second criterion, the ecclesiology of the word locates the church in relationship to God's word of justification. This is the most important contribution of the ecclesiology of the word because it grounds the church in God and God's work and orients the

²⁷⁰ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 37–42.

church's vision to God's salvation. Following David Kelsey's typology of theological logics, however, grounding the church in justification uses the "logic of coming to faith" instead of "the logic of Christian beliefs."²⁷¹ As such, the logic of beliefs, the identity of God known in Christ, is short-circuited, resulting in a tendency toward an instrumental ecclesiology, in which the church is understood primarily in terms of aiding the human condition. Because of this greater potential for instrumentality, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word can be adapted more easily to the logic of therapy, the market, or a Christendom notion of the church's mission as power politics. On the third criterion, the ecclesiology of the word neglects the shape of the concrete community. Although the visible forms of the word of God—oral, written, and sacramental—are given immense attention, they are largely interpreted as events of individual justification instead of events of ecclesial formation, the transformation of the people of God.²⁷² Moreover, the church's public life and mission in the world is made subordinate to a creation ethic for all people that privileges the functions of the state over the church in the public realm. Because of this emphasis, the ecclesiology of the word tends to give little direction for concrete congregational life.

Although the second chapter judged the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word to be inadequate for post-Christendom, the ecclesiology of the word brought to the fore the criterion of doctrinal substance as a central issue for my dissertation. In the first chapter, the criterion of doctrinal substance was developed formally: ecclesiology must be closely connected to foundational Christian doctrines. In engaging with the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, the criterion of doctrinal substance became more specific in two ways. First, the relationship between

²⁷¹ David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), 1:27–29.

²⁷² See Chad D. Lakies, "An (Enduring) Ecclesiology: Beyond the Cultural Captivity of the Church," (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2013), 86–111.

justification and the church cannot be ignored in a Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom. Since justification stands at the heart of a Lutheran understanding of God's work, ecclesiology must conform to the standard of justification. This means that ecclesiological reflection must acknowledge that God alone saves his creatures and creates his church apart from all human effort. Moreover, the church must be always oriented toward God since the church must continually hear God's word and receive from him his gifts. At the same time, however, justification creates problems for the church when it structures the central logic and questions of a post-Christendom ecclesiology. When the logic of coming to faith dominates the framework of Christian theology, it is difficult to avoid instrumentality.²⁷³ Instead of controlling the logic of ecclesiology, justification must act as a critical limit to ensure that no room is left for human boasting even when God works through created hands and voices. To restate the central point here, ecclesiology should not be built on the foundation of justification, wherein justification shapes the central questions and issues for the church. Rather, justification must function as a critical limit for Lutheran ecclesiology, ensuring that the church is continually pointed to God who called it into being from the outside and sustains it through his Son and Spirit. Justification is thus essential to ecclesiology without structuring all ecclesiological questions and answers.

Following David Kelsey's logic of Christian beliefs, the criterion of doctrinal substance became more specific in a second way. In post-Christendom, ecclesiology needs to be rooted in the logic of Christian beliefs rather than the logic of coming to faith or the logic of Christian living. Thus, an ecclesiology for post-Christendom needs to articulate the relationship between

²⁷³ See Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 1:113–19. Here, Kelsey speaks about conflating the logic of coming to faith with the logic of Christian beliefs. Kelsey, however, sounds as if Christian theology could be done with one set of logic without implications for the other two logics, which suggests that it is possible to do theology without the risk of conflation. I do not think that is possible. If a logic of coming to faith talks about God, then any theology that uses the logic of coming to faith will cause conflation with the logic of beliefs. To my mind, the important question is how to relate the various logics rather than how to avoid conflation. Thus, the priority of the logic of beliefs over the logic of coming to believe is important, but the logic of beliefs does not have an autonomous existence unrelated to the other kinds of logic.

the church and the doctrine of God, who is known in Jesus Christ. Ecclesiology, then, must first speak of God, particularly God in Christ, so that the church finds its place within God's identity and purpose, revealed in the story of his Son and his Spirit. Although earlier in this dissertation I spoke of the *church's* story for the sake of simplicity, this assertion already jumps one step in the logic. The church's story is first God's story, and the church receives this story by faith.²⁷⁴ Therefore, ecclesiology must speak first about God and situate the church within the story of God. Furthermore, since the story and mission is first God's, the church must be measured against the story and work of God portrayed in the Scriptures. More pointedly, the church must be oriented continually to the Lord Jesus Christ, who calls the church into his mission of preaching and service. To anticipate my later argument, the church will be seen not only as a creature of God's word listening to the Lord Jesus but also as an agent of God's mission in the world called to follow Christ in his preaching and service.

Post-Christendom Lutheran Ecclesiology

Although the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, which I assessed in the last chapter, does not usually address the post-Christendom situation directly, a number of Lutherans have developed the doctrine of the church in similar ways to my approach, especially with regard to the visibility of the church. Throughout the last century, Edmund Schlink, Peter Brunner, Anders Nygren, and Kristen Skysgaard, among others, were important for emphasizing the visibility of the church in the context of ecumenism, leading up to and after the second Vatican council.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ This is true for all three sociological arguments that I made in chapter one more generally. Although I argued for the three criteria for a post-Christendom ecclesiology on the basis of sociology, both the criterion of visible concreteness and the criterion of storied identity will find their ultimate source in the story of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Only the criterion of doctrinal substance has independent status since it is the ground of the other two criteria. In other words, my argument for the criterion of doctrinal substance is, in essence, an argument for a presupposition on the basis of which I proceed in this dissertation. The other two criteria—while essential in post-Christendom—have derivative status.

²⁷⁵ See Edmund Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik: Grundzüge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983),

More recently, America's Carl Braatan and Norway's Ola Tjørhom have argued for the importance of the church's visibility in ecumenical and sacramental contexts.²⁷⁶ Although these accounts are helpful for seeing the church in sacramental and eschatological dimensions within the context of discussions with Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, they are beyond the scope of my dissertation since they do not deal explicitly with the Post-Christendom situation.²⁷⁷

Closer to the topic of this dissertation, George Lindbeck develops his ecclesiology within the postmodern world that has "lost its story."²⁷⁸ As we saw in chapter one, Lindbeck constructs his theology ecclesologically, emphasizing the importance of catechesis and church practices within a plausible ecclesial structure, helping to make the story of God intelligible.²⁷⁹ While this earlier theology establishes a formal framework for his ecclesiology, Lindbeck later develops the specifics through "an Israel-like view of the church."²⁸⁰ Lindbeck's typological approach brings Israel together with the church, which is helpful in terms of visibility, concreteness, and

537–724; Peter Brunner, "Von der Sichtbarkeit der Kirche," in *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1962), 1:205–12; Anders Nygren, *Christ and His Church*, trans. Alan Carlsten (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956); and K. E. Skydsgaard, *One in Christ*, trans. Axel C. Kildegaard (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 77–112, esp. 94–112.

²⁷⁶ See Carl E. Braatan, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Ola Tjørhom, *Visible Church—Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and "The Great Tradition of the Church"* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); and Ola Tjørhom, "The Church as Place of Salvation: On the Interrelation between Justification and Ecclesiology," *Pro Ecclesia* 9, no. 3 (2000): 285–96.

²⁷⁷ Although I am not considering ecumenism as a primary context for doing ecclesiology in this dissertation, this is not to say that I think ecumenism is tangential and unimportant. Instead, a better account of the church is necessary for many Lutherans to see why ecumenism is important. An account of the church that makes sense of social sin and the need for repentance of social sin within the church—which will be hinted at later in this dissertation—should lead to ecclesial repentance for the division of the church. This would be a good ecumenical step. See Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Although Radner's prose is opaque at best, his insights on how ecclesial division has changed the church—especially with regard to ecclesial repentance—are sublime.

²⁷⁸ This is Robert Jenson's phrase, but it fits Lindbeck's milieu. See Robert Jenson, "How the World Lost its Story," *First Things* 36 (1993): 19–24.

²⁷⁹ See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

²⁸⁰ For an early exposition, see the autobiographical essay, George A. Lindbeck, "Confession and Community: An Israel-like View of the Church," *The Christian Century* 107 (6 May 1990): 492–96. This essay is also in George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Post-Liberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1–9.

ecumenism, but the doctrinal center of the ecclesiology is too far from Christology and justification to be the best approach for an ecclesiology that seeks to work within the Lutheran tradition.²⁸¹

Although the ecclesiologies mentioned above are all attempts to address the contemporary situation in one way or another, this chapter will focus on the ecclesiologies of two Lutheran theologians that are directed explicitly to the situation after Christendom: Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson. Whereas the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word stressed the distinction between God and the church, focusing on God's creation of the church, these recent Lutheran theologians see the church in closer relationship with the Spirit of God. Reinhard Hütter, in particular, nearly equates the work of the Spirit with the work of the church, concretizing the Spirit's work within established church practices. Cheryl Peterson improves considerably upon Hütter in this regard, but she still lacks a substantial Christology for her ecclesiology. As such, the church is in danger of being directed toward itself, the work of the Spirit that happens within it, rather than directed toward the Scriptures and God's work in Christ. From my investigations of Hütter and Peterson, I will argue for the necessity of Christology for post-Christendom theology since the church needs to reimagine God's story and understand its place within God's work in the world. In particular, I advocate for a Christological basis for ecclesiology that uses Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "person-theology" to shape an ecclesiology that emphasizes the concrete life of the church as part of the mission of Christ at the same time that it orients the church continually to Jesus Christ *extra ecclesiam*, who calls the church to repentance.²⁸²

²⁸¹ George Lindbeck, "The Church as Israel: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," in *Jews and Christians: People of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 78–94. For a more detailed analysis and critique of Lindbeck, see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 102-105.

²⁸² For a study of Bonhoeffer's "person-theology," see Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Reinhard Hütter's Ecclesiology of the Spirit

Reinhard Hütter, now a Roman Catholic, is professor of Christian theology at Duke University. While still a Lutheran, Hütter wrote his influential book *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, which connects theology, dogma, church practices, and ecclesiology. Although Hütter eventually became Roman Catholic, his work in *Suffering Divine Things* is an important attempt from within the Lutheran tradition—Hütter uses Luther's 1539 treatise "On the Councils and the Church" extensively—to understand the church in the contemporary world. My analysis will outline the important elements of Hütter's project before I proceed to my critique.

Reinhard Hütter contends that Christian faith today is experienced in two ways, "on the one hand, in the context of the split in Western Christendom, and on the other with regard to a modernity that understands itself to be post-Christian."²⁸³ Clearly, then, an important context for Hütter's understanding of theology is the post-Christian milieu. In particular, Hütter deplores the privatization of the church in Protestantism. For Hütter, the

dynamic of advanced modernity seems to be pushing the Protestant churches in two directions: either toward an incessantly increasing intensification of the understanding of 'religion' and 'faith' as essentially private gnosis or experience made 'relevant' through various subject-centered activities; or toward objectified, increasingly reified forms of faith designed to counter the subversive dynamic of modernity itself, as is certainly the case in biblical fundamentalism.

Both reactions share a common problem: "the church as a genuine 'public' is lost."²⁸⁴ Hütter's analysis corresponds with my description of post-Christendom. In my terminology, the church has become a therapeutic association to serve the well-being of members and the political interests of the nation-state, which neglects the public, concrete, and visible nature of the church.

²⁸³ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 22. Although ecumenism is certainly an essential part of Hütter's work, I will focus on the post-Christian context.

²⁸⁴ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 3.

In response to this situation, Hütter seeks to establish an ecclesiology that understands the church as a “genuine public” by connecting the Holy Spirit to the “core practices” and binding doctrine of the church.²⁸⁵

For Hütter, church practices and church doctrines are essential to the church’s character as a public and to the work of the Spirit within the church. On one level, practices and doctrine are built into Hütter’s definition of public so the constitutive nature of practices and doctrines is tautological in his understanding of the church as a true public.²⁸⁶ Hütter goes beyond this tautological definition based upon the Greek polis, though, arguing that the Holy Spirit creates the dogma and the core practices that make the church possible as a public. In fact, Hütter’s basic ecclesiological contention is that the church is “the soteriological locus of God’s actions, as a space constituted by specific core practices and church doctrine. These practices... participate in the being of the Spirit as the latter’s work in the Spirit’s mission of the triune God’s economy of salvation.”²⁸⁷ Hütter’s argument follows Oswald Bayer in asserting the church as pathic, suffering—passively receiving—the work of God. At the same time, however, Hütter faults Bayer for separating God’s promise that is suffered from the content of the promise, which is church doctrine. Hütter rightly sees Bayer’s theology as overly formal, failing to root God’s promise in substantive content.²⁸⁸ Hütter’s ecclesiology, then, develops further as he criticizes Karl Barth for a Christological ecclesiology with a deficient pneumatology, which does not

²⁸⁵ In an earlier essay that outlines the argument of the larger book, Hütter attempts to accomplish the same tasks, which focuses more clearly on Hütter’s concern for the church as a genuine public in an era of ecclesial privatization. See Reinhard Hütter, “The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit,” *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 334–38 for a clear introduction to the project.

²⁸⁶ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 161. Based upon Hannah Arendt’s work on the polis, Hütter states, “A ‘public’... is characterized by four constitutive features: (1) a specific telos; (2) mutually binding principles expressed in distinct practices, laws, and doctrines; (3) a ‘moveable’ locale; and (4) the phenomenon of ‘freedom.’”

²⁸⁷ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 27.

²⁸⁸ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 69–93.

distinguish between the mission of Christ and the mission of the Spirit.²⁸⁹ Against Barth's tendency to pit God's revelation against church doctrine, Hütter seeks to "understand both the church and church doctrine rather as the work of the Holy Spirit."²⁹⁰

Thus, for Hütter, the Spirit is the key actor who concretizes itself in the core practices of the church and in church doctrine. Moreover, the relationship between the church and theology is such that binding doctrine and the core practices of the church, which are understood Christologically and pneumatologically, constitute and characterize the church as a public.²⁹¹ In other words, the work of the Spirit is concretized and localized in the doctrine of the gospel and the core practices of the church. The true actor of the church's practices and its doctrine is the Holy Spirit, not human beings.

The church, Hütter says, is "*the public of the Holy Spirit*," both as its "core practices" actualize the salvific mission of Christ in the Spirit and as its practice of theology constitutes a public, communal activity.²⁹² Using the ideas of communion ecclesiology, Hütter understands the church's *koinonia* to be grounded in the *koinonia* of the Triune God because "the triune God has bound his communion to the ecclesiastical *koinonia*." Thus, for Hütter, the church is not merely called by God to take part in God's mission, but the church is "the actualizing agent of the salvific-economic mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit."²⁹³ In this way, Hütter practically reifies the salvific-economic mission of Christ and the Spirit in the church's core practices, in binding doctrine, and in the authoritative teaching office of the bishop.²⁹⁴ When the church acts in

²⁸⁹ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 112–13.

²⁹⁰ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 113.

²⁹¹ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 162.

²⁹² Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 158. Emphasis original.

²⁹³ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 158.

²⁹⁴ Against this, Hütter states, "This constitutes neither a reification of the Spirit nor an incorporation of the church into the deity as the fourth *hypostasis*. The church remains strictly separate from the Holy Spirit insofar as it

preaching, authoritative teaching, and core practices, the Holy Spirit too acts to save and form God's people.

Hütter is certainly right to stress the ways in which God has bound himself to his promise in the church, and he is correct to assert that preaching and the sacraments are God's continuing acts of salvation. Corresponding to this, Hütter rightly notes that preaching and the sacraments are not merely human practices in the church, but they are acts of God, which people passively receive. Despite these true emphases, Hütter's ecclesiology exhibits three problems: a church-world dichotomy, an ecclesial introspection, and ecclesial idealism. First, Hütter's understanding of the church and the Spirit implies a dichotomy of church and world, placing the church in a privileged place of power vis-à-vis the rest of God's creation.²⁹⁵ Although the church is in a privileged place *in terms of God's salvation*, it is imperative that the church understand its mission toward the world in a way different from power politics. As Christ came into the world as its Lord in a humble way, so the church follows the mission of Christ in coming to serve God's creation rather than asserting power and privilege. Hütter's concept of the church, however, risks a problematic dichotomy between the church and the world, as Steven Paulson has observed: for Hütter, "creation is outside this communion [of God and the church in the Eucharist], although it is being drawn in, and the church will always be *set against* the created world as a 'mystery'."²⁹⁶ This "set against" creates a problem of the church's mission, mirroring a Christendom understanding of mission, where the church envisions itself as an authoritative beacon of light for the dark world and is thus tempted toward power politics rather than serving

perpetually receives what the Spirit creates in it and is thus pathically determined by the Spirit's poiesis." Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 144–45. As we will see, this is a largely formal limit since "the Spirit's poiesis" is the mission and doctrine of the church. To be clear, Hütter's point is not wrong *per se*, but the directionality is wrong. The church's eyes are pointed to itself instead of to the Triune God who is for it, precisely by being outside of it.

²⁹⁵ Hütter does consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit works more broadly, but does not explore in detail what this means. See Hütter, "The Church as Public," 358–59. See also Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 250n.135.

the world in humility following the mission of Jesus.

Second, Hütter's intraecclesial focus is deeply problematic for congregations that are trying to be faithful to God in this post-Christendom age. Hütter's claim that church practices are the "organs of the actualization of God's economy of salvation,"²⁹⁷ combined with his understanding of the church as "the public of the Holy Spirit,"²⁹⁸ points God's people primarily to the church itself rather than to God in Christ who is known in the Scriptures. To be clear, it is not that Hütter's claims about preaching and the sacraments are wrong—they truly are the work of God in the world for salvation—but Hütter's ecclesial focus turns the church into itself, *incurvatus in se*. Since the church is the actualization of God's *koinonia* and the actualization of God's salvific mission happens in its already established core practices and doctrine, the standard for understanding God's mission becomes the church itself, the church's status quo, rather than the church being reformed by the word of God. In effect, Hütter's attempt to "understand both the church and church doctrine... as the work of the Holy Spirit" threatens to nullify God's continuing reform of the church, annulling the *ecclesia semper reformanda est*.²⁹⁹ Moreover, since the church's teaching and doctrine are already the work of the Spirit, the intraecclesial focus also threatens to neglect the importance of translation to understand God's word anew for the church today.³⁰⁰ Therefore, Hütter's ecclesial perspective is introspective: the work of the Holy Spirit is concretized in the church so that the church becomes the locus of the Spirit's work. While this is a problem for any time and place, it is particularly problematic for post-Christendom because of the crisis of purpose. In this time after Christendom, congregations are

²⁹⁶ Paulson, "Do Lutherans Need a New Ecclesiology?" 231. Emphasis added.

²⁹⁷ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 174.

²⁹⁸ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 158.

²⁹⁹ Quoting Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 119.

³⁰⁰ On the importance of translation, see Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on*

struggling to understand their reason for existence and are tempted toward power politics. In this situation, congregations need to be directed toward the work of God in the story of Jesus to call the church to repentance and reshape its mission according to God's word, but Hütter's ecclesiology points the church primarily to itself.

Third, Roman Catholic theologian Nicholas Healy has observed that Hütter "gives a theologically (and sociologically) thin account of the church and the Spirit."³⁰¹ According to Healy, Hütter neglects the concrete, sinful church that needs to hear God's word of both law *and gospel*, instead focusing on the church's core practices which are already part of the work of the Spirit.³⁰² Thus, Healy notes that Hütter idealizes the church as the faithful embodiment of God's salvific mission, which leaves little room for the church as a sinful community in need of God's word to reprove, correct, and forgive.³⁰³ In this critique of Hütter, Healy confirms my contention that Hütter's ecclesiology is introspective. Hütter leaves little room for God's prophetic word which calls the church to repentance, precisely because Hütter's church is curved in on itself rather than looking outward, oriented toward the God who speaks the word of both promise and correction to his people.

To sum up, Hütter's ecclesiology recognizes the importance of visible concreteness for the world today, and he attempts to establish the church in relationship to God's economy to do so. In particular, Hütter argues that the church actualizes the salvific mission of God and is the concretization of the Holy Spirit's work. Although Hütter rightly emphasizes God's work and

Culture, 2nd ed. rev. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2009).

³⁰¹ Nicholas M. Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 299.

³⁰² Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology," 296–99.

³⁰³ For a general critique of idealism in ecclesiology, see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 1–51. Hütter does identify the lack of unity in the church as a reason for repentance, which is good, but he does not seem to consider that the crisis of purpose during post-Christendom has led to failures of the church's mission in fundamental ways vis-à-vis

presence in the church, Hütter’s ecclesiology directs congregations to a naïve vision of an idealistic church rather than to the Scriptures and the work of Christ in the Spirit, whose mission the church is called to undertake. As a result, Hütter is little help in directing the church’s mission in a world where the church has lost its privilege.

Cheryl Peterson’s Ecclesiology of the Third Article³⁰⁴

Cheryl Peterson, professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, initially developed her ecclesiology of the Spirit in her dissertation, but has since written on the church in numerous places.³⁰⁵ In my judgment, Cheryl Peterson’s account of the church is the best ecclesiology for post-Christendom from the Lutheran tradition. In line with what I have argued, Peterson grounds the church in the doctrine of the triune God: the work of the Spirit makes known the Son who reveals the Father’s heart.³⁰⁶ In doing this, she appropriates important insights from *communio* ecclesiology, the *missio Dei* movement, and the Lutheran tradition, particularly Luther’s Large Catechism, in order to offer an account of the church’s identity for this time after Christendom. She also roots her ecclesiology in what she considers to be the foundation of the Lutheran tradition: “the Christological principle” and “the criterion of justification.”³⁰⁷ Although Peterson believes that these principles are important, she also seeks to

the world and not only as an internal, intra-ecclesiastical problem. See Hütter, “The Church as Public,” 360–61.

³⁰⁴ An earlier version of this section on Peterson was abridged and published as a review of Peterson’s book *Who is the Church?* See Theodore J. Hopkins, Review of *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, by Cheryl M. Peterson, *Concordia Journal* 41 (2015): 181–83.

³⁰⁵ For example, see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); “Lutheran Principles for Ecclesiology,” in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, ed. Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 148–171; “The Church as Confessing Koinonia of the Spirit,” in *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections*, ed. Karen L. Bloomquist (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 71–90; “Whither Lutheran Ecclesiology?” *Trinity Seminary Review* 27 (2006): 107–120; “The Question of the Church in North American Lutheranism: Toward an Ecclesiology of the Third Article,” (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2004).

³⁰⁶ I am paraphrasing Peterson’s own words in “Lutheran Principles,” 155.

³⁰⁷ Peterson, “Lutheran Principles,” 149–154.

nuance them since Peterson thinks that these principles by themselves cause some Lutheran theologians to minimize the church as a community, such as in Steven Paulson or Gerhard Forde.³⁰⁸ To prevent such problems, Peterson adds other ecclesial principles to form a well-rounded ecclesiology, especially the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As we will see, Peterson's ecclesiology is an excellent contribution to ecclesiology after Christendom from the Lutheran tradition, but it does exhibit three weaknesses, stemming from a neglect of the concrete Christology necessary to ground her account of the Spirit's mission. In this section, I will examine Peterson's ecclesiology, primarily her recent monograph *Who is the Church?* with reference to her other work, looking at the ecclesiological problem according to Peterson and the solution. Then, I will proceed to my critique.

In Peterson's understanding of the church, the major ecclesiological problem is that the narrative of Christian America has developed an anthropocentric ecclesiology based upon the "voluntary principle."³⁰⁹ The voluntary principle means two things: the church is a "voluntary association of believers," and such voluntary associations work together to promote a virtuous republic.³¹⁰ In this way, the voluntary principle assumes a Christendom context, even in America; the church is a pragmatic instrument for the good of the society.³¹¹ Peterson recognizes, however, that Christendom is over; the church can no longer be a "chaplain" to the nation and must think of its mission apart from the social vision of America.³¹² The ecclesiological problem, according

³⁰⁸ Peterson, "Lutheran Principles," 150–51. As I argued in the last chapter, I believe this is a misreading of the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word. The problem is not too much Jesus as the historical God-man, but too much *instrumental* Christology in service of justification.

³⁰⁹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 24–25. In her dissertation, Peterson identifies this as an issue but primarily targets the problem of Lutheran ecclesiology: Lutheran ecclesiology does not understand the church as a missional church. See Peterson, "The Question of the Church," 1–3.

³¹⁰ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 24.

³¹¹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 27.

³¹² Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 30–31.

to Peterson, is not only that of purpose but also that of identity. Who is the church if it no longer has a role in the American project? Peterson answers, “We are the church because of what *God* has decided and is doing for our redemption—and because of what *God* desires for the sake of God’s mission in the world.”³¹³ In other words, the church finds its identity and mission in God and the work of God. In this, Peterson echoes what I have been arguing with regard to the criterion of doctrinal substance: the church must be understood in relationship to the doctrine of God. In particular, Peterson argues that a post-Christendom ecclesiology must describe the church as a missionary church, called by God into his mission of baptizing and making disciples through the gospel.³¹⁴

As Peterson defines the contours of a missional ecclesiology, she engages with three different paradigms of the church: “word-event” ecclesiology, communion ecclesiology, and *missio Dei* ecclesiology.³¹⁵ Although Peterson finds the *missio Dei* model most helpful, she is appreciative and critical of all three. The “word-event ecclesiology,” represented primarily by Gerhard Forde, reduces the church to the sermon, but is still helpful and correct in its stress on God speaking a “word that is addressed us and creates the community of the church.”³¹⁶ Communion ecclesiology, represented especially by Robert Jenson, asks primarily about the unity of the church rather than its identity and purpose.³¹⁷ Nonetheless, communion ecclesiology rightly emphasizes that the church not only declares forgiveness, but it makes Christ present to believers so that they share in the communion of the Triune God. This improves upon the “word-

³¹³ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 32. Emphases original.

³¹⁴ Peterson, “The Question of the Church,” 119–27.

³¹⁵ For a short summary of Peterson’s thoughts on these three models, see Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 93–95.

³¹⁶ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 94. For analysis of Forde, see Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 45–48 and 52–54; Peterson, “The Question of the Church,” 139–60.

³¹⁷ For analysis of Jenson, see Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 66–70 and 73–76; Peterson, “The Question of the Church,” 161–99.

event” ecclesiology by highlighting the visible communion of the church as a *koinonia*. Against both the “word-event” ecclesiology and communion ecclesiology, though, Peterson contends that neither takes “into account the post-Christendom context in the same way as the missional paradigm.”³¹⁸ In contrast to the previous two paradigms, the *missio Dei* model provides a starting point for Peterson since it emphasizes the economic Trinity and the mission of God in the world. In this way, the church is given an identity in terms of God’s work in his creation, and it is also given a purpose in embodying the mission of God. As Peterson argues, “It is in this *missio Dei* that the church finds its identity and purpose.”³¹⁹

Although Peterson is concerned about the church’s identity and purpose, she grounds the church firmly in God rather than social structures. In fact, she begins her ecclesiology with “the *ad extra* movement of God in the *missio Dei*.”³²⁰ Peterson follows Edmund Schlink in arguing that “the church exists in a double—not a single—movement of the Spirit. Following the New Testament narrative, the church is both the people of God called *out* of the world and *sent into* the world.”³²¹ Moreover, Peterson does not neglect the church as it exists between these movements: between being called and being sent, the church lives off the Holy Spirit’s gift of forgiveness of sins which leads to witness.³²² From this perspective, Peterson argues that a narrative which “starts with the Spirit” identifies the church in a missional way, combining the contributions of the other two models: “the emphasis on the word in proclamation encountering hearers from outside of themselves to bring reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins, and the communion that members share with God and one another as a gift of God’s own

³¹⁸ Peterson, *Who is the Church*, 94.

³¹⁹ Peterson, *Who is the Church*, 94.

³²⁰ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 99.

³²¹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 99. Emphasis original.

³²² Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 99.

self-giving.”³²³

Peterson “contends that the church receives its *particular identity and purpose* through the Holy Spirit, which in the Acts narrative is promised by Jesus after his resurrection and received at Pentecost.”³²⁴ Hence, Peterson’s narrative ecclesiology “starts with the Spirit,” by looking at the book of Acts. Peterson emphasizes that the church is “Spirit-breathed,” given its “new identity and mission to forgive sins (John 20:22–23) and to be witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:8).”³²⁵ In Pentecost, the Spirit gathers the people of God—now experienced universally throughout the nations and not just in Israel—and calls God’s people to be witnesses to Christ. Following this, Peterson tells the story of the church in Acts as a story of the Holy Spirit pushing the church into mission as witnesses to Christ, guiding the disciples to cross ethnic, religious, and social barriers in proclaiming the salvation of God, and drawing believers deeply into *koinonia* with God and each other.³²⁶ The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead gives new life to the church, creating, sustaining, and calling God’s church into mission.³²⁷

Following the biblical argument from Acts, Peterson looks to the Lutheran and wider Christian traditions to argue that ecclesiology should be grounded in pneumatology. For Peterson, such a foundation is fully Trinitarian since “the work of the Spirit is centered in Christ.” The story of the Spirit is “the story of God’s mission in the world,” which finds its center in “the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”³²⁸ The Holy Spirit should not be

³²³ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 99–100.

³²⁴ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 105. Emphasis original. In her dissertation, this argument was merely formal; Peterson never actually told a story which identified the church. She merely asserted that the church exists in the narrative arc of the mission of God, starting with the Holy Spirit. Although I remain concerned that Peterson’s story is too formal without a substantial Christology, her recent monograph has improved upon her dissertation in an important way.

³²⁵ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 106.

³²⁶ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 108–14.

³²⁷ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 114–15.

³²⁸ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 123.

known as a general Spirit of creation, but the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. This is an essential point in Peterson's theology since it establishes the fully Trinitarian understanding of God's story with its focal point in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As Peterson looks at the Lutheran tradition, she finds an ally in Martin Luther and his *Large Catechism*.³²⁹ Following Reformation scholar Gottfried Krodel, Peterson contends that Luther's understanding of the Creed tells the narrative of God and places the individual within God's story.³³⁰ Looking at the third article, Peterson sees Luther telling a story of the Holy Spirit bringing people to faith at the same time that they are brought into the community of the church. Against those who focus on the Spirit's work in the individual, Peterson emphasizes the "mutual relationship between the individual and community... whereby sanctification itself is not only an individual and personal event, but one that is also relational and communal."³³¹ Peterson makes three points using Luther's understanding of sanctification in the *Large Catechism*. First, "the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the community of saints." In other words, the Spirit through the word of God both creates faith and brings us into the church in which Christians live out the promises of God.³³² Second, "The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the forgiveness of sins." In this, Peterson stresses that forgiveness of sins, which is the "primary blessing" of the church, comes through Christ's external word but it happens within the

³²⁹ In her dissertation, Peterson asserts that Luther's "letter/spirit hermeneutic" interprets the church as a holy people. Peterson's contention seems to be that the Spirit of God creates the church in an invisible manner to live visibly as a holy people. Thus, Peterson can assert with the Lutheran tradition the church is hidden even while she emphasizes its visible life. Peterson's conclusion is right, but her attempt to use Luther's "letter/spirit hermeneutic" obfuscates an otherwise clear point. I suspect this is because Peterson was trying to make a deeper, hermeneutical connection to the Lutheran tradition. Peterson wisely left this argument out of *Who is the Church?* See Peterson, "The Question of the Church," 273–74, for a brief summary of the relevant section.

³³⁰ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 123–24, citing Gottfried G. Krodel, "Luther's Work on the Catechism in the Context of Late Medieval Catechetical Literature," *Concordia Journal* 25 (1999): 380–82.

³³¹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 125.

³³² Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 125–26.

community of the church.³³³ Third, “The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Peterson understands Luther to be extending the mission of the church to the world: the Holy Spirit speaks “*through* the holy community to extend God’s blessings to the world.”³³⁴

Based on this, Peterson sees Luther developing a “story arc” with the Holy Spirit and the people of God as two major characters, moving from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to Pentecost to the second coming of Christ. In the middle of the story, Luther understands the church’s identity as given by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit empowers the church for its purpose through the gospel. Thus, Peterson states, “The Holy Spirit gives the church its narrative identity as a Spirit-breathed people, in whom the Spirit breathes new life, life that is experienced not only existentially through the gift of faith but also through the lived-out reality of forgiveness of sins and transformed relationships.” Furthermore, this community comes to embody the new life of the Spirit, by which it witnesses to the world.³³⁵

Finally, Peterson examines the four traditional marks of the church from the AD 381 Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—from the perspective of the Acts narrative of the church as part of the Spirit’s mission. She sees these marks first as “dimensions of the Spirit’s activity,” which identify the church within the Spirit’s mission. Peterson begins with the church’s apostolicity and works backward since the church is grounded in God’s own sending of his Son and Spirit. The church is apostolic, for Peterson, not only because of its doctrine but because it is “sent out to bear witness to the eschatological future that has broken forth in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”³³⁶ The church is catholic

³³³ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 126.

³³⁴ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 127.

³³⁵ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 128.

³³⁶ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 133.

since it is called to proclaim the message of Christ to the whole world and be all-embracing toward other cultures and people just as Christ was in his mission. Peterson even recognizes that such catholicity requires repentance within our churches since we have failed to bring the gospel of reconciliation to address racism and other injustices.³³⁷ The church is holy because the Spirit sets it apart from the world for mission to the world. Furthermore, the church is holy not in itself but through the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, which is to be lived within a congregation and not only spoken about.³³⁸ Lastly, the church is one because the Spirit has made us one through baptism into Christ and faith even as churches need to work toward visible expressions of this unity through ecumenism.

As I stated at the outset, Peterson's ecclesiology in my judgment is the best account of the church from the Lutheran tradition for this time after Christendom. Most impressive is her consistent theological language and framework for understanding the church while emphasizing the life of the visible, concrete community. Her ecclesiology is broad enough—the Spirit-breathed church rooted in God's mission—to work in many contexts, and specific enough that it can be directed toward a particular mission of the church. For example, Peterson names racism and unfair housing policies as loci for the mission of the church even though she focuses on the forgiveness of sins and the witness of the gospel.³³⁹ For Peterson, the church's mission is not only the forgiveness of sins proclaimed, but also forgiveness lived out in the *koinonia* of the Spirit within the church.

Considering my three criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom, Peterson does much well with regard to the criterion of doctrinal substance. She grounds the church in the economy of

³³⁷ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 133–35.

³³⁸ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 135–36.

³³⁹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 135.

God, understanding the church as stemming from the Spirit's work of making the church holy through preaching and the sacraments. Thus, the church begins with God and the work of God, and the church only exists *from* God. While locating the church within the mission of God, Peterson also emphasizes the forgiveness of sins and the new life of faith that happens within the church. Thus, Peterson connects the church to the doctrine of God while stressing justification as an essential criterion for God's work as well as the mission of the church. As such, Peterson exhibits a positive relationship between the church and the world because Peterson clearly states God's love and concern for his world, in which the church is called to participate. Regarding the criterion of storied identity, Peterson does well in telling the story of Acts: the Holy Spirit creates the church, establishing true community, and sends it on God's mission. Finally, Peterson's account of the church follows the criterion of visible concreteness by stressing the concrete community of the church. Peterson focuses on the actual mission of the church, which is to be lived out in witness and *koinonia*. For example, she stresses the way in which the church embodies the forgiveness of sins within the relationships of the community.³⁴⁰

Peterson has made an excellent contribution to ecclesiology in post-Christendom, which makes good use of the Lutheran tradition. Nevertheless, her ecclesiology does have three weaknesses which should be addressed. First, although Peterson correctly argues that the Holy Spirit is not understood apart from Jesus of Nazareth, she overlooks the Christology necessary to describe Jesus's person and ministry. Peterson recognizes that "the work of the Holy Spirit is centered in Christ," but she says little about the concrete person and ministry of Christ beyond the fact that the Spirit raised him from the dead.³⁴¹ Peterson assumes too much about the story and person of Jesus as she focuses upon the Spirit's relationship with the church. If, however,

³⁴⁰ Peterson, "The Question of the Church," 306–18.

³⁴¹ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 123.

Peterson is right that the work of the Spirit can only be known through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, then should Jesus of Nazareth not take a central place in such an ecclesiology? Peterson rightly sees problems with a Christology that focuses on individual salvation, ignoring the Spirit's continuing work in the church, but that does not negate a proper Christology that begins with the identity of Jesus Christ and works from there.³⁴² In fact, Peterson does that implicitly by founding the Holy Spirit on the life, mission, death, and resurrection of Christ, but this needs to become explicit, especially because of post-Christendom. I contend that the church is called by the Spirit into the ministry of Jesus Christ—the mission of God—which requires that ecclesiology is intimately connected to the identity and mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Peterson affirms this, but she does not do the necessary Christology to ground this assertion.

Secondly, without a clear description of the person and ministry of Jesus upon whom the ministry of the church is based, Peterson's ecclesiological model risks self-referential introspection. In other words, the church's identity is focused on the Spirit creating the church, which risks referring the community to the church rather than to Christ and the Scriptures. In more concrete terms, I am concerned that the church's work of witness and *koinonia* may become disconnected from the ministry of Jesus Christ and lead congregations to rethink their ministry by looking inward at the church rather than outward at Christ and the Scriptures.³⁴³ To be clear, Peterson does not do this directly.³⁴⁴ When Peterson considers the church's mission, she

³⁴² Compare Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), esp. 6–7. My assertion is similar to Frei's contention that 'identity' must precede 'presence' when talking about Jesus.

³⁴³ For a critique of communion ecclesiology along a similar trajectory, see Joseph L. Mangina, "The Cross-Shaped Church: A Pauline Amendment to the Ecclesiology of *Koinōnia*," in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, ed. Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 68–87.

³⁴⁴ In her dissertation, she steers closest to this problem as she criticizes various ecclesiologies for their focus on Christ (for example, Forde, Jenson, and the Lundensians). See Peterson, "The Question of the Church," 160, where she dismisses Gerhard Forde's ecclesiology in part for its "Christocentric" definition. Forde's ecclesiology is

points to the work of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins which comes through his life, death, and resurrection. Elsewhere, she even asks rhetorically, “What if the church lived into the stories that give us our identity as a *koinonia* of the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead?”³⁴⁵ However, since she does not actually describe Jesus and his work in any detail, the Holy Spirit is the primary Trinitarian person to whom the church is directed for rethinking its mission.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, Peterson concretizes the Holy Spirit in the actions of the forgiveness of sins, formation of holiness, preaching the gospel, the raising of Jesus from the dead, and the church’s *koinonia*. Besides the act of raising Christ from the dead, the work of the Spirit tends to direct church-communities introspectively to the church itself as they reconsider the shape of their ministry in the world. This is not Peterson’s intention, but it is a danger of her ecclesiology that starts with the Spirit.

Third, Peterson’s ecclesiology has potential to be concrete in many different circumstances, but she does not give a clear example, which leaves her ecclesiology more abstract and distant than she intends. She does address the problem of the church as a voluntary association, arguing that the church must be seen as part of the creation and mission of God.³⁴⁷ In her dissertation, she also contends for a focus on sanctification in the church, as a context in which Christians learn to

a problem, but not because of its Christocentrism. Forde’s ecclesiology should be criticized for a narrow view of Christ as the instrument of justification which individualizes the church but not for a focus on Christ. To restate myself, the problem is not Christocentrism but a reductive, instrumental Christology.

³⁴⁵ Peterson, “Church as Confessing Koinonia,” 88.

³⁴⁶ See Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 121–23. One essay Peterson uses for support admits that the relationship between the Spirit and the church is more formal than material: “Though (above and beyond the vivification of the church) the ecclesiological function of the Spirit seems more formal than material—the Spirit guards a certain kind of relation between Christ and the church rather than directly, and independently of Christ, giving concrete content to the identity and mission of the church—that function of the Spirit is nonetheless significant.” Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee, “The Spirit and the Church,” in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. by Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 383.

³⁴⁷ Peterson, *Who is the Church?* 143–47.

embody the forgiveness of sins which they are given through the work of God.³⁴⁸ This criticism may be unfair to Peterson since she addresses the problems she identifies, but if I am right about the crisis of ecclesial purpose in North America, more concrete and more visual suggestions are needed.³⁴⁹ Since we live no longer in the print era but in the era of electronic media, we need holy images to shape the church's imagination.³⁵⁰ Propositions about the church are not enough; the church needs to be re-imagined. The loss of ecclesial privilege has distorted the images of the church and its mission, and congregations need concrete ideas and ways to re-imagine what it means to be church in North America, which takes congregations into the world as public witnesses to Christ Jesus. Peterson's work does open the door to such suggestions, for which it should be commended, but she does not go far enough.

The Christological Deficiency of Lutheran Ecclesiology after Christendom

Although much ecclesiology from the Lutheran tradition has not addressed the situation of the church in this time after Christendom, the two theologians examined in this chapter, Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson, both recognize the ecclesiological challenges of post-Christendom and have given accounts of the church that face these challenges. Hütter's greatest strength is in his consistent emphasis on how God works through the core practices and teaching of the church. Hütter will not allow the church to be abstracted into the realm of faith which is only visible to God. He consistently highlights the life of the church in proclamation, the sacraments, worship, and the church's teaching, relating them to the work of the Holy Spirit. Peterson's greatest

³⁴⁸ Peterson, "The Question of the Church in North America," 306–13.

³⁴⁹ See also Peterson, "Church as Confessing Koinonia," 88–90. Peterson's two brief examples here are on the right track, but could use more depth and more theological description.

³⁵⁰ Compare William James Jennings, "The Desire of the Church," in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2005), 249. Jennings recognizes the need for visual images when he argues concerning distorted desires: "What is needed, however, are cleansing images, holy icons that focus our attention and begin to destroy the formation of distorted desire through false and unholy images."

strength lies in her through-going theological center. Peterson consistently connects her ecclesiology to the triune God who gives life to the church and calls the church to continue in the mission of God through the Spirit. In this way, Peterson sees the church as living within the mission of God, opening the door to describing the church's visible, concrete life while understanding the church as a creature of the word.

In doing these things, Hütter and Peterson center the church primarily on the person and mission of the Holy Spirit, who creates the church and works through it. This approach provides a step forward from the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word in two ways. First, it stresses the church's character as a visible, concrete community. Second, it opens the way to considering the identity of the church in terms of the story of God as in Cheryl Peterson's theology. At the same time, however, both of these approaches share a similar danger, although to different degrees: ecclesial introspection. As I argued above, by neglecting Christology, Hütter and Peterson risk an ecclesial introspection that directs the church to itself rather than to the revelation of God in Christ. The stress on the person of the Holy Spirit contributes to this problem because the Holy Spirit becomes concrete and visible primarily in the church community. In other words, the content of the Holy Spirit's work is filled largely by the work of the church (or the person and work of Christ). The emphasis on the historical and visible character of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit in the church's mission, risks turning the church toward itself instead of outward toward God's word, Christ and the Scriptures. On this point, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word fares much better than the post-Christendom ecclesiologies of Hütter and Peterson by focusing on God's actions apart from controllable, human structures. The Lutheran ecclesiology of the word consistently orients the church to God and the word of God, to Christ and the Scriptures, never risking an ecclesiology that is primarily focused inward.

On the one hand, the Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom viewed in this chapter

emphasizes the historical, visible church, but it falters on the criterion of justification by promoting the danger of ecclesial introspection. On the other hand, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word emphasizes God's actions toward the church and in the church, but it falters on the criterion of visible concreteness. Therefore, what is needed in ecclesiology today is not only to steer clear of the Scylla of ecclesial introspection and the Charbydis of neglecting the concrete visibility of church-communities, but also to integrate the positives of both the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word and the post-Christendom ecclesiologies of Hütter and Peterson. An ecclesiology for post-Christendom must orient the church to the Lord Jesus Christ who is outside of the church *extra ecclesiam*, calling the church to repentance, faith, and discipleship, while emphasizing the church's identity, mission, and purpose according to the criteria of visible concreteness, storied identity, and doctrinal substance.

Conclusion: Toward a Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom

I contend that a Christological ecclesiology is better suited than a pneumatological ecclesiology to orient the church continually to God who stands beyond the church and fulfill the three criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom. Although Hütter and Peterson do well to stress the visibility of the church and its identity in terms of the story and work of God, the connection between the Holy Spirit and the church remains largely formal because the work of the Spirit is largely formal—though no less important for it! Even the pneumatologists Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee admit, “Though (above and beyond the vivification of the church) the ecclesiological function of the Spirit seems more formal than material—the Spirit guards a certain kind of relation between Christ and the church rather than directly, and independently of Christ, giving concrete content to the identity and mission of the church—that function of the

Spirit is nonetheless significant.³⁵¹ Because of the largely formal function of the Spirit, it is essential that ecclesiology spell out the relation between Christ and the church, focusing first on the identity of Christ and then on how he is present in the church.³⁵² This is a necessary step to orient the church toward the Lord and avoid the risk of ecclesial introspection.

Moreover, theologian Kathryn Tanner has argued that Christology is the best avenue for discussion of theological politics for the mission of the church, not Trinitarian theology or pneumatology.³⁵³ The reason is that Christ is the one whom Christians see, understand, and envision, and thus see and know God himself. As Paul asserts in Colossians chapter 1, “Jesus is the image of the invisible Father,” which the apostle John also echoes concerning Jesus the Word in John 1: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”³⁵⁴ Jesus entered into human life in the world, making known God’s word and grace to all people, and he called his people into community and the mission of God. As the risen and ascended Lord, Jesus continues to come to his people, descending to us in community, words, water, bread, and wine, to make the Father known. In addition to the fact that Jesus makes God known, the work of the Spirit continually points to Jesus Christ and the revelation of God in him. Jesus is the focal point of the Scriptures. Thus, ecclesiology too ought to point primarily and most centrally to Jesus. Tanner claims, “Christ is the key... to what God is doing everywhere. Christ clarifies and specifies the nature, aim, and trustworthiness of all God’s dealings with us because Christ is where those dealings with us come to ultimate fruition.”³⁵⁵ God ultimately deals

³⁵¹ Volf and Lee, “The Spirit and the Church,” 383.

³⁵² Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 5–7.

³⁵³ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 208.

³⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³⁵⁵ Tanner, *Christ the Key*, viii.

with us in Christ, which means that ecclesiology—and theology in general—must keep Christ Jesus at the center of its reflections.

Furthermore, for Tanner, Trinitarian theology adds nothing substantial to the church's mission because the recommendations from the doctrine of the Trinity remain vague at best. Considering the largely formal nature of the work of the Spirit that I explained above, this should not be surprising. Yet, many theologians have attempted to use the Trinity to establish the politics or mission of the church.³⁵⁶ These, however, only function to reflect another reality rather than delve into the reality of the God's word. For example, Karen Kilby sums up how the doctrine of perichoresis has been used:

First, a concept, perichoresis, is used to name what is not understood, to name whatever it is that makes the three Persons one. Secondly, the concept is filled out rather suggestively with notions borrowed from our own experience of relationships and relatedness. And, then, finally, it is presented as an exciting resource Christian theology has to offer the wider world in its reflections upon relationships and relatedness.³⁵⁷

Kilby observes how the perichoresis pretends to be new and exciting as theology, but it only reflects our cultural experience with a theological spin. Trinitarian theology lacks the necessary concrete Scriptural root to bring a substantial theological idea to bear on the world. For the church, Trinitarian theology—and pneumatology too—lacks the concreteness necessary to add anything substantial to the mission of the church without a concomitant emphasis on Christology.

As we saw above, Cheryl Peterson provides the best example of an attempt to do ecclesiology starting with the Spirit and emphasizing the Spirit. Peterson uses the book of Acts in admirable way to put some concrete biblical flesh on the bones of her pneumatological

³⁵⁶ For example, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

³⁵⁷ Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection," *Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 442. Quoted in Tanner, *Christ the Key*,

ecclesiology. Nonetheless, as Peterson herself states, this Spirit has to be known as the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit who worked in the life of Jesus from incarnation through his resurrection from the dead and ascension. Thus, it is necessary to see the church in relationship not only to the Spirit but also to the Christ who receives, bears, and sends the same Holy Spirit to the church. The Lutheran theologian Leopoldo Sánchez has attempted to do this using a Chalcedonian Spirit Christology.³⁵⁸ Sánchez's Spirit Christology establishes the church definitively in terms of God's work and mission while directing God's people to rethink their call into the on-going mission of God. Just as the Father sends the Spirit to empower the Son in his mission of justification, service, koinonia, hope, and judgment—to name a few—so the Spirit justifies the church and calls it into the same mission of Jesus.³⁵⁹ In my work, I affirm and presume the importance of the relationships that Sánchez has described among the persons of the Trinity, but the relationship between Christ and the Spirit will not be the focus of this dissertation.³⁶⁰ I intend to explore the relationship between Christ and the church, beginning with the identity of Jesus Christ and exploring his mission that is given to the church.

In doing this, a Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom must focus on God's story and work which lies outside of the church, orienting the church always to Christ the Lord who speaks

223.

³⁵⁸ On ecclesiology in particular, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "More Promise Than Ambiguity: Pneumatological Christology as a Model for Ecumenical Engagement," in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, ed. Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 189–214. For Sánchez's fuller understanding of Spirit Christology, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life and Mission in the Spirit as a Ground for Understanding Christology, Trinity, and Proclamation," (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2003).

³⁵⁹ In addition to the previously mentioned works by Sánchez, see also Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus: The Mystery of Christ's Baptism*, trans. Alan Neame (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994); and Leopoldo A. Sánchez, "Praying to God the Father in the Spirit: Reclaiming the Church's Participation in the Son's Prayer Life," *Concordia Journal* 32 (2006): 274–95.

³⁶⁰ One concern I have for Spirit Christology in general is that it can too easily fall into psychologizing Jesus. Sánchez does not do this, but this is a characteristic of some Spirit Christologies and must be strictly avoided. For an example of the psychologizing problem in a Spirit Christology, see James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

to it, creates it, and calls it to follow him, while at the same time understanding the church according to the criteria of visible concreteness and storied identity. Christology is the best doctrine to accomplish these things. In fact, I contend that the person theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides a Christological foundation for the church that can do both things, directing congregations to the Lord Jesus who creates the church by his word and Spirit *and* calls it to follow him in discipleship, who gives himself fully through the church in service *and* calls his church to follow in his mission.³⁶¹ At the same time, Bonhoeffer's theology retains a clear sense of the church's storied identity in the story of Jesus and its concrete visibility as the church relates to the world. In this way, Bonhoeffer's person theology takes seriously both the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word's emphasis on God's creation of the church from the outside through his word and the more recent emphasis on the public, visible nature of the church.

One advantage of my approach over Sánchez's Spirit Christology and Peterson's pneumatological ecclesiology is the connection to the Lutheran tradition. Peterson correctly sees Luther's catechisms as highlighting the communal nature of the Christian life, to which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens, and Sánchez emphasizes the relationship between Spirit Christology and the church's proclamation. Nonetheless, these connections to the Lutheran tradition remain outside of the traditional core of the Lutheran tradition. My use of Bonhoeffer, however, works from the traditional Lutheran understanding of the person of Jesus Christ established in the Formula of Concord, article eight, and Luther's tradition of speaking about the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, long attested in Luther's work and emphasized in the Formula of Concord, articles three and seven. In this way, Lutheran Christology will form the substantial doctrine which unites post-Christendom concerns for the church's identity, historical

³⁶¹ Yves Congar too suggests, "The health of pneumatology is in Christology." Cited in Kilian McDonnell, "A response to D. Lyle Dabney," in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 263.

concreteness, and purpose with the traditional Lutheran emphasis of justification: God *extra ecclesiam* speaks the church into existence through the word.

Although I will need to set some limits on the relationship between Christ and the church, my primary focus will be on the person of Jesus as the center of the church's story and mission. While there are dangers of identifying the church too closely with Jesus—for example, as an “extension of the incarnation”³⁶²—the Christological center grounds the church conclusively in terms of God's work and mission in the Scriptures while directing the church to Christ who speaks to his people from the outside. The twentieth century Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw the person of Christ at the heart of the Lutheran tradition: theology looks not to divinity or humanity in the abstract but the person of Jesus. Thus, I will look now to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ in his theology of revelation, which will lead us into the contours of a Christological ecclesiology for Post-Christendom.

³⁶² For a recent critique of understanding the church as an “extension of the incarnation,” see Mark Saucy, “Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church an Extension of the Incarnation?” *JETS* 43, no. 2 (2000): 193–212.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S 'PERSON-THEOLOGY': A LUTHERAN FOUNDATION FOR A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM³⁶³

This dissertation argues that a post-Christendom ecclesiology needs to address the particular crises of the age—identity, instrumentality, and purpose—fulfilling my three criteria of storied identity, doctrinal substance, and concrete visibility while also orienting the church to the Lord Jesus Christ who stands beyond the church, *extra ecclesiam*, creating it, working through it, and calling it on his mission. As we saw in chapters two and three, recent Lutheran ecclesiology has faltered on one or more of these issues. The Lutheran ecclesiology of the word rightly directs the church to God who speaks to it from the outside, emphasizing the doctrine of justification as the foundation for the church. In so doing, however, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word tends to neglect the criteria of storied identity and concrete visibility. The church is largely reduced to Sunday morning worship. Two Lutherans writing on the church after Christendom, Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson, have emphasized the visibility of the church and its identity as a historical community within the economy and mission of God, particularly through the person of the Holy Spirit. As I argued last chapter, though, this pneumatological approach risks ecclesial introspection so that the church is directed toward itself and its own work rather than outward toward the Lord Jesus Christ who is known through the pages of Scripture.

My contention is that a Christological ecclesiology can do both things: emphasizing the

³⁶³ “Person-theology” is the term of Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

church's continuous orientation to God in Christ as the receiver of God's word and mission and focusing on the visibility and storied identity of the same church. In fact, such a Christological ecclesiology has its roots in the Lutheran tradition in the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God in the flesh, uniting humanity and divinity in himself and living out God's mission in history and time. In the twentieth century Dietrich Bonhoeffer picked up this focus on the person of Jesus Christ in his contention for a third way of understanding God's revelation between Karl Barth and Karl Holl, between Barth's understanding of God as wholly other subject and the Berlin school which emphasized history and culture. In establishing a theology of revelation in terms of the person of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer set up a theological foundation that is centered completely and fully on the Triune God, the Father who sent Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, directing the church continually to hear and receive Christ in the word of God and the sacraments while focusing also on the historical and concrete nature of congregations that are called to follow Christ on his mission of preaching and service. Bonhoeffer's Christology establishes time and space as a multi-dimensional arena wherein God is present and the church is called to speak and act in the world as concrete congregations following Jesus in discipleship. At the same time, the church must be oriented always to the Lord Jesus Christ who speaks the justifying word *pro nobis* and calls the church to his mission.

Bonhoeffer's Person Theology: Between Barth and Holl

Twentieth century Lutheran theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer crafted his theology in the space between Karl Barth's "bomb" on the early twentieth century "playground of the theologians" and the liberal Protestantism of his teachers, like Karl Holl and Adolf von Harnack.³⁶⁴ Karl Barth's early theology—before Barth modified his doctrine of election to center

³⁶⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 7: "The problem of act and being is Bonhoeffer's

on the election of Jesus Christ in 1936³⁶⁵—was characterized first and foremost by the critique of religion, a critique of all anthropocentrism in theology based upon the transcendence of God, a critique that is muted but never abandoned even in Barth’s later theology.³⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer followed Barth in this critique, emphasizing God’s transcendence with a corresponding concept of revelation as contingent.³⁶⁷ A concept of contingent revelation was important for Barth and Bonhoeffer in order to avoid the anthropocentrism of cultural or liberal Protestantism. Barth and Bonhoeffer both recognized that if revelation were not understood as contingent upon God’s own words and acts, then revelation would be rooted within human psychology or consciousness or within being itself. Since Bonhoeffer learned this approach to the question of transcendence from Barth, Michael DeJonge observes, “Bonhoeffer develops his alternative to Barth *on the very road Barth clears*.”³⁶⁸ At the same time, Bonhoeffer is truly developing *an alternative* to Barth and not merely copying Barth’s approach. As such, Bonhoeffer remained critical of Barth, and crafted his theology to be genuinely different from Barth’s actualism.³⁶⁹ In fact, in *Act and Being*, his *habilitationsschrift*, Bonhoeffer developed a theology of person as an alternative to the theologies of Karl Barth, on the one hand, and the cultural Protestantism of Karl Holl, on the

articulation of the impasse between Berlin critical theology’s orientation toward the historical world and Barthian theology’s orientation toward transcendent revelation.” The Roman Catholic Karl Adam made the now famous quip that Karl Barth’s 1921 second edition of the Romans commentary “fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians.” See Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 3.

³⁶⁵ For the development of Karl Barth’s theology, see Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

³⁶⁶ To understand Barth’s development in his own words, see his late programmatic essay, “The Humanity of God,” in *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), 37–65.

³⁶⁷ For an argument that Bonhoeffer works within Barth’s theological approach, see Andreas Pangritz, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: ‘Within, Not Outside, the Barthian Movement,’” in *Bonhoeffer’s Intellectual Formation*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 245–82. For Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Barth in this period, see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 73–81.

³⁶⁸ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 113. Emphasis added.

³⁶⁹ See George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. 27–32, on Barth’s actualism and its relationship to other “motifs” of his theology.

other.³⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer's alternative does not reject Barth and Holl entirely, but affirms the strengths of both. Holl, with the Berlin school of theology more generally, was oriented toward the historical world and the importance of culture.³⁷¹ Barth, on the other hand, was oriented toward God's word.³⁷² Bonhoeffer offers his theology of person as a way to do theology for the historical, visible world in orientation to the word of God.

As Bonhoeffer understands the intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century in *Act and Being*, recent theological developments have struggled with the relationship between act and being in revelation, allowing one side of the opposition to overcome the other.³⁷³ For Bonhoeffer, act and being are "basic, formal, oppositional terms," which do not refer to things themselves but to characteristics of things.³⁷⁴ Michael DeJonge notes that Bonhoeffer distinguishes between act and being in three ways: temporally, modally, and relationally. First, act-concepts stress the discontinuity or transience of an act in time whereas being-concepts highlight historical continuity and permanence. Second, acts are determined by the giver, not the receiver, "giving them unpredictability" as free and contingent while being is "always either there or potentially there." Third, acts are directed outward toward the giver of the act, away from the act itself and away from the one who receives it whereas being "exists out of its own possibility" and "is directed towards itself."³⁷⁵ DeJonge sums up the characteristics: "act means the discontinuous, contingent, and structurally open; being means the continuous, the possible, and the structurally

³⁷⁰ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*. See Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 128–37, for an overview of *Act and Being* with historical and biographical details.

³⁷¹ For example, see Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, trans. Karl and Barbara Hertz and John H. Lichtblau (New York: Meridian, 1959).

³⁷² See, for example, Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

³⁷³ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 19.

³⁷⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 17.

³⁷⁵ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 17.

closed.”³⁷⁶ Most important for my dissertation are the temporality of act concepts and the relationality of being concepts. To restate these problematic features, act concepts in theology emphasize discontinuity, minimizing history, and being concepts direct primary attention to the object under examination, referring the thinker to the thing itself instead of to God.

Bonhoeffer sees two problems arise when act- or being-characteristics overcome the other in theology. First, in Bonhoeffer’s construal of the problem of transcendence, “the human epistemological act overpowers the being of God and revelation,” bringing God’s word under human power.³⁷⁷ This is the danger of being theology, which locates revelation within the anthropological sphere, able to be understood or believed *by human power*. For Bonhoeffer, being theology—idealism such as in Hegel is the most obvious and most tempting form—makes revelation a human possibility, something that human creatures can understand or experience through the conscience, through feelings of absolute dependence, or through being itself.³⁷⁸ Such being theology creates two problems. First, and most importantly for Bonhoeffer, God is no longer transcendent. God exists in the anthropological sphere within human power, able to be grasped intellectually, emotionally, or through some other human possibility. God becomes part of human religious activity rather than the transcendent Creator who reveals himself in his word and work on earth.³⁷⁹ Furthermore, Bonhoeffer recognizes a second problem with being theology that is more important for my work thus far: “The perspective is introspective.”³⁸⁰ In other words, being theology turns the person to being itself, to the human psyche, conscience, or emotion,

³⁷⁶ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 18.

³⁷⁷ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 20.

³⁷⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., vol. 2 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 103–05.

³⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 105–06.

³⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 50. Theologically, this also risks semi-pelagianism since one can participate with the divine work inside of oneself.

rather than outward to God in Christ. Being theology limits its understanding of God so that God no longer encounters his creation from the outside.

In response to being theology, act theology, like Karl Barth's, emphasizes the transcendence of God over against any attempt to place revelation and God on earth, within the anthropological sphere.³⁸¹ Corresponding to this understanding of God's transcendence, Barth argued for a contingent concept of revelation where revelation only takes place according to God's initiative and God's word. Revelation cannot be grasped by human knowledge, but must be given by the word of God in God's free encounter with humanity. For Barth, revelation can never be conceived as temporal or historical, even if Barth uses temporal terms to characterize it. Charles Marsh describes this aspect of Barth's early theology of revelation quite well: "God's act in revelation has no material or temporal extension, no history as such, no place in the world as its concrete expression. God is free, never subject to the control of human interests."³⁸²

Although Bonhoeffer agrees with Barth's contingent concept of revelation, Bonhoeffer sees a second problem arise from Barth's solution. To save God's transcendence, Barth's act theology places revelation and faith outside of time, in the eschatological frame, the "beyond" of God. For Barth, revelation is never graspable in history and time. God's promises have no time or space to which one can point and say here is God, which allows a person to look and trust in God's word received in history and time.³⁸³ Thus, Barth's act theology creates a problem of historical existence.³⁸⁴ How can a person know herself as a historical human constituted on the

³⁸¹ Compare DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 43.

³⁸² Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 10.

³⁸³ I'm alluding to one of Bonhoeffer's favorite *freely* quoted dictums from Luther about Jesus: "This is the human being to whom you should point and say, this is God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," in *Berlin, 1932-33*. ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 318. See 318n.44 for the derivation of the quote.

³⁸⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 20-21.

earth when her center, faith, is in heaven?

In light of the problem of transcendence in being theology and the problem of history in act theology, Bonhoeffer seeks to bring together Barth's concern for God's transcendence with a theological account of historical, worldly existence. Although Bonhoeffer begins his discussion of the problem of act and being with continental philosophy, the center of Bonhoeffer's work is theology. Bonhoeffer's central question is this: What is an appropriate account of revelation that retains God's transcendence and situates historical existence in the world? Bonhoeffer locates his answer between the being theology of Karl Holl and the act theology of Karl Barth. In treating "the interpretation of revelation in terms of being," Bonhoeffer dismisses three being concepts of revelation that treat revelation as an object: doctrinal proposition, an experience of consciousness, and revelation latent within ecclesial and biblical institutions.³⁸⁵ In these three varieties of being theology, the revealed God is "something existing," which can be objectified and categorized according to human reason. God is a possibility within the human system.³⁸⁶ In the case of doctrinal proposition, Bonhoeffer means that God is understood, classified, and limited in terms of a doctrinal system. Bonhoeffer sees some systematic theology as making God "understandable and subject to classification" within the human sphere. Such an understanding of doctrine turns Christianity into a system of cognitive beliefs that can be freely accepted or rejected by an outside observer. Thus, God is made into an object of human minds, and the fact of "divinely created faith" is negated.³⁸⁷ In the case of consciousness, Bonhoeffer is speaking about a view which understands revelation "as religious experience," elevating such experiences to "objective status." Once again, God is classified and understandable within a human system,

³⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 103.

³⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 105–106.

³⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 104–105. Bonhoeffer writes, "To declare that doctrine can be appropriated only through a divinely created faith is to make clear that there is something to revelation as a doctrine which

and God is simply found within one's own experience. There is no encounter from the outside.³⁸⁸ In the third case of ecclesial or biblical institutions, Bonhoeffer has in mind both the Roman Catholic church and the doctrine of verbal inspiration. For Bonhoeffer, both bind God to an institution so that God "is at the disposal of human beings." For Catholics, whoever is in the institution is in God.³⁸⁹ For Protestants, Bonhoeffer contends that verbal inspiration depicts God's word as a static thing where the reader stands safely outside of the text, studying and classifying the Bible like any old thing, failing then to be encountered by the living God who speaks.³⁹⁰

Karl Holl, the Luther scholar and church historian, is Bonhoeffer's most important opponent of being theology.³⁹¹ Holl argued, using Luther, that Christianity is "a religion of conscience," making it urgent and personal.³⁹² The pinnacle of religion for Holl's Luther is the *Anfechtungen*, the terrors of conscience, which placed Luther "directly and alone" before God, and even "Christ himself seemed to vanish."³⁹³ Thus, for Holl's Luther, the most exalted and profound understanding of God is God as judge, and God's judgment is experienced and known

somehow goes beyond human ontological possibilities" (105).

³⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 104.

³⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 104–105.

³⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer goes too far in criticizing verbal inspiration even though he makes a valid point. Verbal inspiration can be taken to mean the opposite of what Bonhoeffer suggests. Instead of seeing verbal inspiration as locating God's words in a set form on earth for an outside reader to grasp the doctrinal content for herself, verbal inspiration should suggest the Bible is truly the word of the living God. We do not stand safely outside of the Scriptures as observers, but Christ encounters us through the living words of God in the Bible. Thus, the Bible is primarily to be heard and believed. Nonetheless, Bonhoeffer's warning should be heeded that Christians can treat the Bible like an object of mere study rather than the voice of the living God. The material understanding of inspiration that I have suggested takes form in the Lutheran tradition in terms of the doctrine of perspicuity, stated as the dictum *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter. Oswald Bayer interprets the meaning of this clearly and tersely: "The text itself causes one to pay attention." See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 68–72, quoting 68.

³⁹¹ See Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 141–144. For an overview of Holl that places him within his historical context, see James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 18–47.

³⁹² Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 48.

³⁹³ Holl, *What Did Luther Understand*, 77–79. For more on Holl's disparaging of Christology, see Stayer,

primarily in the conscience. As such, Holl's understanding of Luther turns one inward to the conscience rather than outward to Christ and the Scriptures. In fact, focusing on Christ leads a person in the wrong direction. To know God truly, according to Holl's Luther, one reflects upon God as judge in the conscience.³⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer contends that Holl's theology excludes a genuine encounter of God from the outside because it turns a person inward to the possibility of God inside the conscience.³⁹⁵ Moreover, personal religious encounter as understood in Holl excludes the church as a genuine community.³⁹⁶ For Bonhoeffer, against Holl, revelation cannot be understood in terms of being, as a possibility of the human conscience, but must be conceived as something *extra nos*, something which comes to humanity from the outside.³⁹⁷

Karl Barth constructed his theology in response to the problem of transcendence raised by being theologies similar to Karl Holl's. More specifically, Barth forms his account of revelation in direct response to Ludwig Feuerbach's deformation of Lutheran theology.³⁹⁸ In his famous book *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach turned theology into anthropology and anthropology into theology. Feuerbach believed that the essence of Christianity was the conflation of humanity and God in the incarnation.³⁹⁹ For Barth, Feuerbach corrupted theology by reducing God to humanity, and Barth forms his act theology to preserve God's transcendence against such a view. In order to retain God's transcendence, Barth's theology includes six

Martin Luther, German Saviour, 43–44.

³⁹⁴ See Holl, *What did Luther Understand?* 51–53n.28, for evidence of Holl's internalizing tendency.

³⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 105–106.

³⁹⁶ Holl wrote much about the church, but “the key community in Luther's ecclesiology [according to Holl] was the invisible assembly of those with genuine faith, an inner leaven in the external, visible church where the Word was preached.” Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour*, 25.

³⁹⁷ For more on Bonhoeffer's criticism of Holl, see DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 118–28.

³⁹⁸ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 39.

³⁹⁹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 39–40.

conceptual elements.⁴⁰⁰ First, God and humanity are in “a relationship of *diastasis*, standing over against each other with no possibility of reconciliation in some other form of being.”⁴⁰¹ That is, a “real wall” exists between God and the world.⁴⁰² Second, only God can break down this wall through revelation. Third, the wall between God and the world “holds even during and after revelation” since revelation is always *act*.⁴⁰³ Fourth, God is subject and can never become an object under human control, conceptually or otherwise. Fifth, since God is always subject, he cannot be perceived directly, but only indirectly through another medium. In short, revelation is indirect. Finally, theology must use “a *dialectical thought-form*” since theology must always speak two words about God instead of one direct word.⁴⁰⁴

As Michael DeJonge has argued convincingly, Barth’s theology includes more than just the characteristics of an act philosophy; Barth’s theology is also confessional, using resources of the Reformed tradition against Lutheranism.⁴⁰⁵ According to Barth, Lutheranism corrupted Christology and sacramental theology, and these corruptions contributed to Feuerbach’s conflation of God and humanity. In the Lutheran tradition, God communicated directly in history in Jesus Christ. Thus, for Lutherans revelation is made known *on earth* in Christ and the Spirit. For Barth, such an understanding of God’s word eliminates “the quality of hiddenness from the

⁴⁰⁰ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 40. I’m following DeJonge on these six conceptual elements of Barth’s theology.

⁴⁰¹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 40.

⁴⁰² Karl Barth, “The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 257.

⁴⁰³ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 40. See also Barth, “Doctrinal Task,” 257. Barth writes of the “real wall between God and the world which God both razes *and reestablishes* in Christ.” Emphasis added.

⁴⁰⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 40. See also Barth, “Doctrinal Task,” 256.

⁴⁰⁵ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 41–55. The confessional differences are often downplayed, as DeJonge points out. For example in Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. They are also downplayed in Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Pangritz, for example, says about *Act and Being*: “The acuity of the critique of Barth present in the habilitation dissertation should not deceive one into ranking Bonhoeffer with the colleagues at the Berlin faculty in their opposition to Barth. The converse is more likely...” (29).

Lord who had become man” by directly identifying “heavenly and earthly gifts.”⁴⁰⁶ Barth contends that Lutheran theology makes revelation into “a given” and a simple “fact” which begins and ends on earth, thus eliminating God’s transcendence.⁴⁰⁷

As implied in the previous paragraph, Christology is at the center of Barth’s critique.⁴⁰⁸ Barth argues that Lutheran Christology is in error for holding to the direct personal union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. Such a direct union conflates God and humanity, making revelation direct, a given fact instead of contingent upon God’s freedom. For Barth, Lutheran Christology confuses a means of revelation, the humanity of Jesus, with revelation itself.⁴⁰⁹ Against this, early Barth clearly distinguishes between a means of revelation and the thing itself by considering revelation as always indirect. Concerning the person of Jesus Christ, Barth uses the classical Reformed doctrine that Lutherans termed the *extra calvinisticum* in order to retain the diastasis of God and creation within Christology so that revelation remains clearly contingent and indirect within Jesus Christ. The humanity of Christ is the medium through which the divine Logos, who is not entirely circumscribed on earth, is indirectly revealed.⁴¹⁰ For Barth, revelation only happens in the *act* of God, which is never an existing object within time or space, not even in the humanity of Jesus. God’s contingent act of revelation must maintain the separation of God and creation even in Christology so that God’s revelation is not located on earth where it might be graspable by human logic.⁴¹¹ God is always subject, including in Jesus Christ, not available to human schemes or human knowledge.

⁴⁰⁶ Barth, “Doctrinal Task,” 257.

⁴⁰⁷ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 51. Compare Barth, “Doctrinal Task,” 256–57.

⁴⁰⁸ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 50. “Barth’s caution about the union of natures is a response to what the Reformed tradition perceives as a Lutheran over-eagerness to identify the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ.”

⁴⁰⁹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 50.

⁴¹⁰ See Barth, “Doctrinal Task,” 257–61.

Bonhoeffer agrees with Barth that the only proper concept of revelation is a contingent one in which God remains outside of humanity. Like Barth, Bonhoeffer refuses to give any space to a being theology that turns God and revelation into objects under human control. God and God's revelation are not a possibility within human grasp since God is always *extra nos*, encountering humanity from the outside. Hence, Bonhoeffer is able to argue against being theology in a manner that sounds much like Barth: "If...the being of revelation is understood as what exists, then revelation is, on account of its false objectivity, delivered fully into the power of human beings. Knowledge here finds no limitations placed on it by revelation. Even though revelation is bound, it is no longer *God's* revelation."⁴¹²

At the same time, Bonhoeffer disagrees with Barth in understanding revelation as an act or an event that occurs in God's freedom because Barth's theology falters on the problem of historical existence.⁴¹³ The culprit is Barth's formal concept of God as subject, which implies a formal concept of God's freedom. According to Barth, God is *free from* all constraints. Bonhoeffer describes Barth's theology this way: "God remains always the Lord, always subject, so that whoever claims to have God as an object no longer has *God*."⁴¹⁴ Even if this approach were to safeguard God's transcendence—which Bonhoeffer thinks is unlikely—Barth's subject concept of God renders history and the church nearly irrelevant. The subject concept of God means "God's freedom and the act of faith are essentially supratemporal."⁴¹⁵ God remains always

⁴¹¹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 52–55.

⁴¹² Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 125. Emphasis original.

⁴¹³ Bonhoeffer also argues that Barth fails to secure transcendence because Barth's concept of God is formal and philosophical rather than biblical and material. I will not dive into this problem further because it will take us so far into Bonhoeffer's argument that it will obscure the larger purpose of my dissertation. Suffice it to say that Bonhoeffer's biblical and material understanding of God fits well with my criterion of doctrinal substance. For Bonhoeffer's argument against Barth on transcendence, see DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 58–63.

⁴¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 85. Emphasis original.

⁴¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 84.

outside of historical contingency, and faith too is outside of history, an eschatological act *instead of* an historical one. In fact, Bonhoeffer argues, “according to Barth, no historical moment is *capax infiniti*, so that empirical human activity—be it faith, obedience—is at best reference to God’s activity and in its historicity can never be faith and obedience itself.”⁴¹⁶ Furthermore, God’s activity takes place in discontinuous acts, which means that Christian faith and life are also conceived as discontinuous acts. Therefore, Barth’s subject concept of God negates the historical continuity of the old and new person and renders history theologically meaningless.⁴¹⁷ Furthermore, Barth’s subject concept of God conceives of faith individualistically: “God *is* in the divinely wrought, existential act of faith” only.⁴¹⁸ As such, the church is a discontinuous series of events, coming into existence when Christ shows up in the existential, supratemporal act of faith of an individual.⁴¹⁹ The church’s existence as a visible concrete community makes little sense in Barth’s act concept of revelation.

Against Barth’s subject concept of God and act concept of revelation, Bonhoeffer asserts, “The ultimate reason for the inadequacy of this definition [of God as subject] lies in the fact that it finally fails to understand God as person.”⁴²⁰ According to Bonhoeffer, God is no formal subject; God is a person, a speaker, who encounters his creation through his Son and Spirit, and the proper concept of both God and revelation is the concept of person. For Bonhoeffer, a person mode of being is non-objective like Barth stressed, but it is very different from a subject mode of being. In DeJonge’s words, “A person is a historical being who acts.”⁴²¹ Thus, Bonhoeffer

⁴¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 84. Notice the confessional reference to the Lutheran and Reformed arguments concerning the finite and the infinite and the ability of the infinite to be known or believed in finite things.

⁴¹⁷ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 57.

⁴¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 124. Emphasis original.

⁴¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 110–112.

⁴²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 125.

⁴²¹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 75.

conceives of being and act as brought together in a person concept of being that affirms history as the arena of God's identity and mission while also affirming the character of revelation as *extra nos*; God encounters humanity from the outside in revelation.⁴²² With Barth, Bonhoeffer affirms that a person must encounter another from the outside; we cannot have access to a person unless that person first reveals himself. In addition, Bonhoeffer appropriates Heidegger's terminology to argue that personal being is *Dasein*; that is, a person is there in time and history.⁴²³ History cannot be divorced from the ontology of personhood. Moreover, a person is in relationship so that a person cannot be conceived of individualistically. In fact, Bonhoeffer uses the concept of person corporately too; a community exists as a corporate person, a community of people with one spirit.⁴²⁴ The church exists as a community of people with the Holy Spirit, a corporate body, the body of Christ, called as a community by the Lord Jesus to faith and obedience, called to hear God's word and follow Christ in his mission.

Bonhoeffer's Person Theology: Jesus Christ as the Ground of Revelation

The center of Bonhoeffer's person-concept of God and revelation is the person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is both God in the flesh and the revelation of God in time and history, Bonhoeffer employs the same person-concept of both God and revelation. Bonhoeffer makes this assertion directly against Barth's understanding of indirect revelation, where he clearly distinguishes between God and revelation so that God remains outside of time and

⁴²² For a good summary of how act and being are brought together in Bonhoeffer's person theology, see DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 70–77.

⁴²³ See Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 35. For Bonhoeffer's relationship to Heidegger, see Stephen Plant, "'In the Sphere of the Familiar: Heidegger and Bonhoeffer,'" in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 301–27.

⁴²⁴ For Bonhoeffer's concept of the corporate person in *Sanctorum Communio*, see Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36–45.

history, even in the incarnation.⁴²⁵ By doing this, Bonhoeffer takes seriously the Christological critique of Barth against Lutheranism. Bonhoeffer directly asserts a person concept of revelation derived from Lutheran Christology as the answer to the problem of act and being. In fact, while Barth derided any theology that sank into “the exclusive ‘Jesus Christ’-pit of the Lutherans,” Bonhoeffer jumped into the pit with reckless abandon, arguing that the key to the problem of act and being is proper Christology.⁴²⁶

Barth, with the Reformed tradition, considers the Logos to be the proper Christological “person” of the historical Jesus, thus understanding the Logos in a similar way to Kant’s transcendental subject. The life of the historical, empirical Jesus points in a veiled, dialectical way to the divine Logos as the ultimate, final subject of all actions of this human life.⁴²⁷ As Bruce McCormack writes, “The Subject of this human life—we may liken this to Kant’s conception of an unintuitable, noumenal self—was at every point the Second Person of the Trinity.”⁴²⁸ In this way, Barth retained the indirect and contingent nature of revelation by keeping heaven and earth separate within the person of Jesus. Although Barth’s anhypostatic-enhypostatic model of Christology is not itself a problem,⁴²⁹ Bruce McCormack notes how Barth used this model to build an “eschatological reservation” into the structure of his Christology: “The shift from an eschatological to a Christological grounding of theology could take place with no weakening of the eschatological reservation. Theology in the shadow of an anhypostatic-enhypostatic

⁴²⁵ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 75n.60.

⁴²⁶ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 105. DeJonge says, Bonhoeffer responded to Barth “by doubling down on ‘the exclusive ‘Jesus Christ’-pit of the Lutherans’.”

⁴²⁷ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 74–75.

⁴²⁸ McCormack, *Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 327. Cited in DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, 75n.59.

⁴²⁹ The anhypostasis or enhypostasis—the doctrines mean the same thing, simply differing in whether it is negatively or positively described—is traditionally part of the Lutheran tradition. Likely against Barth’s theology which used this model, Bonhoeffer asks in his lectures on Christology, “For what is the doctrine of en-hypostasia if not an ultimately concealed form of docetism?” It is docetism, Bonhoeffer says, because “Jesus as a human being is

Christology was as much a *critically* realistic theology as the previous theology in the shadow of a consistent eschatology had been.”⁴³⁰ In other words, Barth’s move to Christology from eschatology did not weaken diminish the importance of the critical distance between God and the world that Barth had found in eschatology. For Barth, the Logos was the subject of the life of Jesus so that the Trinitarian person is revealed and hidden dialectically in Jesus of Nazareth. Barth’s Christology distinguishes theologically between the Logos and the man Jesus in order to retain the wall between God and the world. Heaven and earth must remain separate, even within the person of Jesus.

Bonhoeffer, however, rejects Barth’s Christology—in part because it contributes to the problem of historical existence—in favor of the Lutheran tradition. Bonhoeffer, with the Lutheran tradition, holds to the direct union of the divine and human natures in Christ. Instead of focusing on the distinction and separation between the God and humanity, Lutherans emphasize *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of attributes, between the divine and human natures *in the one person*.⁴³¹ With the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, Lutherans intend to focus on the person of Jesus who is and acts in two natures rather than on the bare natures themselves outside of the personal union of Christ. The reformed theologian Michael Horton has recently criticized the Lutheran tradition since the *communicatio* “runs in only one direction (from the divine to the human),” which deemphasizes or even loses the humanity of Jesus.⁴³² Although Horton’s claim that the sharing of attributes runs in only one direction is true about the

incidental, as opposed to the substance that is God.” Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 335.

⁴³⁰ McCormack, *Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 328.

⁴³¹ Johann Anselm Steiger, “The *Communicatio Idiomatum* as the Axle and Motor of Luther’s Theology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2000): 125–58. Steiger also examines how the *communicatio* was used in the later orthodox era. Also see Paul R. Hinlicky, “Luther’s Anti-Docetism in the *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* (1540),” in *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 139–85.

⁴³² Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox,

genus majesticum—the communication of attributes from the divine nature to the human nature of the person of Jesus in the exaltation, especially important for Christ’s bodily presence in Lord’s Supper—the other two genera make no such suggestion.⁴³³ For instance, that Jesus saves according to both natures is exactly the claim of the *genus apotelesmaticum*.⁴³⁴ In fact, the point of the Lutheran focus on the *communicatio* is not the natures at all, but *the one person*. Jesus Christ reveals God, forgives sins, and serves his creation not according to one nature or another, but as one person who is completely the second person of the Trinity and fully a first century Jewish male from Nazareth. The *communicatio* functions properly when the doctrine points to Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, as the Savior who lived, died, rose again and continues to be present in his church. Thus, the *communicatio idiomatum* directs attention to the historical God-man, not to anything or anyone beyond or above the person of Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer follows the Lutheran tradition in this focus on the one person of Jesus against the reformed doctrine of the *extra calvinisticum*. According to this reformed Christology, the Logos is not entirely circumscribed by the historical Jesus on earth, but remains fully in heaven in relationship to the Father and the Spirit.⁴³⁵ As such, God remains fully God only in himself and not in his outward relationship with the creation.⁴³⁶ Against this view, Bonhoeffer contends

2005), 171. See also pages 160-177 for Horton’s broader discussion.

⁴³³ Horton ought to acknowledge the similarities between Lutheran and Reformed Christology on this point, but does not, perhaps because his primary interlocutor is Robert Jenson.

⁴³⁴ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 624. For the whole discussion of the genera and the *communicatio*, see p. 616–34.

⁴³⁵ For Barth’s understanding of the *extra calvinisticum* and how he developed on this point, see Darren O. Sumner, “The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth’s Critical Reception of the *Extra Calvinisticum*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 1 (2013): 42–57.

⁴³⁶ The Reformed doctrine of the *extra calvinisticum* reveals the largest difference from Lutheran Christology. The *extra calvinisticum* means that the Son of God (the Logos) is not entirely circumscribed within the assumed humanity of Jesus. According to Anglican theologian Christopher Holmes—referring to the well-known theologian John Webster—this doctrine intends to refer the person of Jesus back to his eternal relationship with the Father and the Spirit. Holmes has argued that Bonhoeffer’s Christology lacks a full Trinitarian reference and needs the *extra calvinisticum* to point back to the eternal Trinity. For Bonhoeffer, however, the whole point of highlighting the

that no hidden subject, the Logos, exists behind the actions of the historical Jesus.⁴³⁷ Instead, the historical Jesus is the Son of God without qualification. In contrast to the *extra calvinisticum*, Lutheran Christology proclaimed the *genus majesticum*. For Lutherans, the humanity of Jesus is in such close communion with the divinity that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in his person as God and man, as he promised.⁴³⁸ For Lutherans, then, the very person of the historical Jesus is the Word, the revelation of God. As such, God is present historically and visibly on earth in Jesus Christ not merely in acts that appear and disappear in time, but in a person who was, is, and will be present in God's creation. Bonhoeffer himself affirms the importance of the *genus majesticum* for Lutheran Christology and its assertion concerning the person of Christ when Bonhoeffer calls this *genus* "the core of Lutheran theology."⁴³⁹

person of Jesus as the God-man is that one of the eternal Trinity has entered into time and space, and Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God without remainder. There is no need to point beyond Jesus to the Trinitarian relationships through a separate doctrine since the Son is on earth. Of course, Jesus is the Son of God and bearer of the Spirit, but such a Trinitarian reference is part of the person of Jesus and not apart from him. As such, the *extra calvinisticum* can only serve to point beyond Jesus rather than pointing to him as the fullness of God, in whom God has bound himself graciously to time and space for humanity. Since this "backward reference" is part of the person of Christ, the *extra calvinisticum* only serves to bypass God's chosen revelation in Christ. Therefore, Holmes misses the point of Bonhoeffer's person theology: the *extra calvinisticum* can only divert attention away from God's gracious word and work in Christ. See Christopher R.J. Holmes, "Bonhoeffer and Reformed Christology: Towards a Trinitarian Supplement," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 28–42. In making this point, I am also arguing against Andreas Pangritz's interpretation of Bonhoeffer as a mediating figure between Lutheranism and Calvinism. Because he is an outsider to Lutheranism, Pangritz cites Bonhoeffer's claim that "the finite can hold to the infinite, not by itself, but by the aid of the infinite" as a "mediating formula" without realizing that this is the historic Lutheran confession. For example, Heinrich Schmid quotes Quenstedt as saying, "The philosophical axiom, 'A natural body cannot be at one and the same time in many places,' is true of a merely human body, but not of the body united with the Logos." In other words, the finite body is capable of the infinite—the ability to be everywhere—because the infinite Logos has assumed a finite human nature. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3d ed., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899), 565. See Andreas Pangritz, "Who is Jesus Christ, for Us, Today?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 140–41.

⁴³⁷ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 51.

⁴³⁸ For the Lutheran understanding of the *genus majesticum*, see Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 314–15. Schmid writes, "Not only the person, but, since the person and nature cannot be separated, the divine nature also has entered into communion with the human nature." From this short text, it is clear that Lutheran Christology focuses on the person of Christ even if it speaks of Christ's natures as part of the traditional dogmatic vocabulary. Schmid is a good reference to cite in relationship to Bonhoeffer since Bonhoeffer used Schmid regularly in his later work. See, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Ascension of Jesus Christ. A Reflection on Its Christological, Soteriological, and Parenetical Meaning," in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 476–81.

⁴³⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 345. This is not to say that Bonhoeffer was not critical of the

By focusing on the person, Bonhoeffer's theology successfully insists on both the importance of historical existence and the transcendence of God. On the one hand, Bonhoeffer's understanding of revelation as a person locates God's revelation in history and time. Revelation is truly present in Jesus Christ; it is direct, to be received by faith.⁴⁴⁰ In general, a person makes himself present to another "in the act of self-giving," and Jesus makes God known in the act of self-giving which begins in the incarnation and the concomitant humiliation.⁴⁴¹ Thus, the person of Jesus Christ is truly "graspable" and "haveable," in Bonhoeffer's terminology, while Barth's understanding of revelation as act keeps God's word outside of human grasp, even the direct grasping of faith.⁴⁴² For Bonhoeffer, as Karsten Lehmkuhler also observes in Luther, "Everything that can be said about the work of Jesus, especially also the doctrine of justification itself, rests finally upon the person of Jesus himself, in whom God and humans come together."⁴⁴³ In this way, the visible world is sanctified as God's revelation happens in it in Jesus, and the Christian life in the church is given space to participate in the mission of God within the visible world of God's creation. Revelation does not happen outside of history, in the eschatological beyond, but within it as God has freely given himself in Jesus Christ to the world. Therefore, Bonhoeffer's person concept of God also entails a substantial account of God's freedom against Barth's formal understanding of God's freedom.⁴⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer depicts God as *free for* his creation in the history of Jesus Christ and in the church. In other words, where Barth sees God's freedom as freedom

Lutheran tradition too on this point, especially the tendency to speak of the human and divine natures in the abstract as happens in discussions of the *communicatio*. See DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 90–92.

⁴⁴⁰ *Fides directa* is an important component of Bonhoeffer's argument in *Act and Being* and the rest of his theology. See Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 27–29 and 65.

⁴⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 128.

⁴⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 91: "God *is* present, that is, not in eternal nonobjectivity but—to put it quite provisionally for now—'haveable', graspable in the Word within the church." Emphasis original.

⁴⁴³ Karsten Lehmkuhler, "Christologie," in *Bonhoeffer und Luther: Zentrale Themen ihrer Theologie*, ed. Klaus Grünwaldt, Christiane Tietz, and Udo Han, (Velkd, 2007), 61. My translation.

from all human constraints, Bonhoeffer describes God's freedom as that which takes place in the story and history of Jesus, the one who reveals God's favor for humanity in his life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence in the church in his Spirit.

On the other hand, Bonhoeffer's understanding of revelation as person agrees with Barth in asserting the contingency of revelation and the transcendence of God. Person-being is something different from object-being. An object is something for scientific study, able to be classified and understood according to human logic, but a person is something different from that. A person is historical and visible, as Christ is, but Bonhoeffer asserts, "The person 'is' free from the one to whom it gives itself."⁴⁴⁵ Thus, "a person, unlike an object, escapes the power of the mind and is therefore free to encounter existence."⁴⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer shows this by looking to Christ: "In faith Christ is the creator of my new being, a person and at the same time the lord (*sic*)." Christ is both the one who gives himself to me fully in faith, giving me the Holy Spirit who is within me, yet at the same time Christ is "the Lord of my faith."⁴⁴⁷ Christ is the free Lord who exists outside of me and comes to me, encountering me with his word, and he is the person who is *pro me*, for me, giving of himself for me to receive the forgiveness of sins and communion with God and God's creation. For Bonhoeffer, revelation is to be understood through Christ so that revelation is seen to have this structure of encountering us as Christ does in the church *from the outside* while also making himself truly present in the preaching, sacraments, and service of the church.

Based upon the person of Christ as the Lord *extra ecclesiam* who is present in the church *pro nobis*, Bonhoeffer's person theology brings together the assets of Barth and Holl in the person of Christ and the church. With Barth, Bonhoeffer refuses to allow revelation to become a

⁴⁴⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 75.

⁴⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 128.

⁴⁴⁶ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 71.

⁴⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 128.

possibility within human systems. Instead, revelation comes through Christ, the person who is the “counter-logos,” putting to death human attempts to classify and rationalize him in order to avoid encountering him as the revelation of God.⁴⁴⁸ Hence, Jesus is truly outside of humanity, encountering his creatures in his gracious freedom for us. At the same time, Bonhoeffer asserts the importance of justification and the willingness of God to make himself graspable within the historical world, akin to Karl Holl. Unlike Holl and Barth, however, Bonhoeffer’s concept of person requires not only Christology but also ecclesiology. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer contends that the church is also part of God’s revelation since it is so closely connected to Christ: “God reveals the divine self in the church as person. The community of faith is God’s final revelation as ‘Christ existing as community [Gemeinde],’ ordained for the end time of the world until the return of Christ.”⁴⁴⁹ In this quote, Bonhoeffer uses his famous definition of the church from *Sanctorum Communio*, the church is “Christ existing as church-community [Gemeinde].”⁴⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer makes this argument because of Jesus’s identity as the risen one. In a newsletter to pastors of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer wrote in 1940: “In [the ascension] the heavenly Christ is in fact utterly present to the earth; he fills his church-community, and with it and through it he fills all in all (Eph. 1:23); for through the church-community he gradually permeates the entire world, which belongs to him, and fills it with his active presence.”⁴⁵¹ For Bonhoeffer Jesus *is* the risen Lord, not confined to the past, and Jesus makes himself present in the church, encountering humanity through the sacraments, preaching, and service of the church. Thus, Bonhoeffer’s definition of church—“Christ existing as church-community”—is not

⁴⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 302–03.

⁴⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 112.

⁴⁵⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 189–190.

⁴⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Ascension of Jesus Christ,” 480.

primarily a definition of church *per se*. It is first a statement about Jesus. Christ makes himself present in the world through the church. Because of who Christ is, the church is what it is as the body of Christ, the people of God called to Christ's mission.

The Relevance of Bonhoeffer's Person Theology in Lutheran Ecclesiology Today

Although Bonhoeffer's person theology was developed in the early twentieth century as a response to dialectical theology and cultural Protestantism, it remains relevant for a twenty-first century Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom. As I examined above, Bonhoeffer developed the Christological center of his theology of revelation in response to Karl Barth and the problem of historical existence, on the one hand, and Karl Holl and the problem of God's transcendence on the other. In particular, Bonhoeffer criticized Karl Barth for failing to establish revelation and faith within the historical, visible world. Instead, Barth's theology threatened to overlook the visible, concrete, and historical life of faith by moving God and revelation safely into the transcendent realm of heaven. At the same time, Bonhoeffer condemned Holl's theology for placing God within the anthropological sphere, within the conscience, and thus being dangerously introspective. Holl's theology of conscience threatened to point Christians to their own consciences, to discover God's judgment and pardon within themselves instead of looking to the word of the living God, Jesus Christ and the Scriptures which encounter the church from the outside.

The two problems of visibility (Barth) and introspection (Holl) correspond to problems I noted in the chapters two and three respectively, as I discussed the landscape of recent Lutheran ecclesiology. I argued in chapter two that the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word falters on the criterion of visible concreteness, the church's historical presence and activity in the world, in part because of similarities to the act theology of Karl Barth. Like Barth, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word properly points the church to God who speaks from the outside, by focusing on the

doctrine of justification. As such, Lutheran ecclesiology is always oriented to God, just as Barth's theology is. Although this orientation is good and necessary, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word considers the church primarily as a collection of individual encounters with God in God's act of justification, which stresses the individual, eschatological aspect of faith over and against the visible and concrete community of the church. As a result, individual faith takes center stage in the ecclesiology of the word, minimizing the historical, concrete mission of the church-community in the world. Like Barth's theology described above, the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word falters on the criterion of visible concreteness.

On the other hand, the Lutheran ecclesiologies after Christendom from chapter three ground themselves on the person and work of the Holy Spirit so that the church is seen as a visible, concrete community, closely connected to the economy and mission of God. As I noted earlier, however, Cheryl Peterson's ecclesiology and especially Reinhard Hütter's ecclesiology are dangerously introspective in a similar way to Karl Holl's being theology. Karl Holl turned the individual Christian introspectively, looking to herself to know God and justification. Peterson and Hütter do not go nearly as far as Holl, but they do direct Christian reflection on the church's mission *toward the church itself* rather than toward the Scriptures and the story of Jesus Christ. In other words, Peterson and Hütter are in danger of suggesting that the church needs to look to its own practices and its own life in order to reimagine its mission to the world. Such a perspective is ecclesiastically introspective, and particularly dangerous for this time after Christendom, when the church's mission has been problematized by the crises of identity, instrumentality, and purpose.

Just as Bonhoeffer needed to develop a theology of revelation that was oriented to both God and his word from the outside and the visible, concrete, historical world, Lutheran ecclesiology today needs the same thing. I contend that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's person theology

provides a framework for Lutheran ecclesiology that will establish both desiderata as essential to the church and its mission. The church must be directed outside of itself to the Lord Jesus Christ who gave his mission to the church and continues to speak to it, calling his people to repent for their sins, restoring them to their forgiven identity, and directing them to discipleship and mission in following him, the Lord of the church. In this way, the person theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer refuses to allow the church to look to itself for its identity, story, or purpose. Instead, the church always looks to Christ, oriented to him both in identity and mission. Furthermore, this orientation is to the *person* of Jesus Christ, the Jew from Nazareth who lived, died, and rose again as part of time and history. His mission is establishing God's reign on earth. The church, then, is not taken outside of time and space leaving only the individual's eschatological relationship with God, but the church is considered primarily in terms of its mission in the world, given in Christ Jesus.

Bonhoeffer's Christology in the Christology Lectures

What is the Christology that grounds and shapes this ecclesiological perspective? I have already argued that Bonhoeffer's person theology describes the person of Christ in such a way that history is understood as a theological category without reducing Jesus to a mere cog within human history.⁴⁵² As we saw above, Bonhoeffer's approach is helpful for Lutheran ecclesiology today because of the similarities between Bonhoeffer's opponents and Lutheran ecclesiology in the twenty-first century. Before I develop an ecclesiology from Bonhoeffer's Christology, I must look first at the contours of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology itself, which forms the heart of the doctrinal substance of my ecclesiology.

⁴⁵² Albert Schweitzer's 1906 *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, for example, emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, but Jesus is largely a cog of larger historical forces. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, complete ed., ed. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

Bonhoeffer never published a Christology proper, but his work was always Christological as seen above in *Act and Being*. In fact, Eberhard Bethge describes Christology as “the magnetic or even the explosive center” of Bonhoeffer’s 1931 ecclesiology lectures and “the basis for ethics” and critiques of other ethical positions during his university teaching years.⁴⁵³ Two years after the 1931 ecclesiology lectures, Bonhoeffer made that explosive center explicit in lecturing on Christology during the final term of his formal appointment to the University of Berlin before nearly two hundred students.⁴⁵⁴ Although there is neither a published version of these lectures nor more than two pages of Bonhoeffer’s own lecture notes, extensive student notes from seven students are available to provide a detailed outline—nearly a transcript—of the lectures.⁴⁵⁵ By examining these lectures, I intend to do two things. First, I will show how Bonhoeffer’s Christology exhibits both features mentioned before, visible concreteness in time and history and an orientation to Christ the Lord who is outside of the church, by employing the category of person. Second, Bonhoeffer’s Christology will illuminate the main features that place Bonhoeffer squarely within the Lutheran tradition, although quite critical of a particular problem within Lutheranism, which is still seen today.

In the 1933 Christology lectures, Bonhoeffer begins with a seemingly odd discussion about knowledge and its relationship to Christology. Based upon the first chapter of John’s Gospel, Bonhoeffer asserts that “Christology is logology,” precisely because “Christ is the Logos of God.”⁴⁵⁶ This Logos, however, is not knowledge as an idea but as *a person*, which makes all the difference. Although he makes no direct reference to Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer clearly places

⁴⁵³ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 219.

⁴⁵⁴ For a short historical introduction to these lectures, see Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 219–20.

⁴⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 299n.1. The critical edition of Bonhoeffer’s works, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, follows the transcription of just one student, Gerhard Riemer. An earlier publication of Bonhoeffer’s lectures, called *Christ the Center*, reconstructed the lectures based upon many different student notes. I use the more recent and critical version from *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*.

his Christology within the framework of the problem of transcendence. In fact, Bonhoeffer claims about Jesus, “This human person is the *transcendent*.”⁴⁵⁷ What is important for Bonhoeffer is that Jesus is transcendent not as “the idea of the Logos” but as a person who is free to encounter reality. In other words, Bonhoeffer refuses to allow an abstract idea of knowledge (even Christological or Trinitarian or existential knowledge) to take priority over the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, Christology itself is “the center of the sphere of knowledge,” and as such, it “stands alone.” Furthermore, the incarnation is not the “proof” that humans have knowledge of ultimate reality, and it can never be such proof because that would make Christ into an object within human classification and no longer transcendent. Instead, the incarnation is “the prerequisite” for knowledge about ultimate reality. Human beings know ultimate reality only because God became a human creature, entered into time and space, and made himself known.⁴⁵⁸

Bonhoeffer further clarifies his argument concerning the transcendence of the person of Christ by considering classification systems in *Wissenschaft*. “All scholarly questions can be reduced to two fundamental questions,” Bonhoeffer says. “First, what is the cause of X? Second, what is the meaning of X?” The first question is the question of the natural sciences whereas the second question is the question of the arts and the humanities. For both, though, the object X is understood in relationship to other objects that human creatures already know and have classified.⁴⁵⁹ For Bonhoeffer, the human logos knows something by classifying it according to categories that it already has at hand. The human logos asks the “how” question—how does this object fit into my prior classification system?—which looks at the possibilities for making an object correspond to prior human knowledge and classification. If the object defies easy

⁴⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 301.

⁴⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 301. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 301.

⁴⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 301.

classification, then the human logos makes a better system to incorporate the new object. No matter what, the human logos refuses to be *confronted* by the object. The human logos always demands to be the subject in control of the object.⁴⁶⁰ In this way, Bonhoeffer describes the same problem of transcendence that Karl Barth observed above; revelation is placed within a human classification system that treats revelation like any other object so that human beings are not confronted and changed.

Dealing with Christ explicitly, Bonhoeffer claims that Christology gets into trouble when it asks the “how” question with the goal of fitting Jesus into a classification scheme. Instead, the proper Christological question is the “who” question: “Who are you?” This is the question that the divine Logos prompts, and it is the question that human beings need to ask to reflect properly upon the person and work of Christ. Human reason need to die to its demands for control and power over Christ, being put to death at the hands of the Word. Christ does just this, putting human beings and their need for control to death, by confronting them as the Truth, the Logos of God. In fact, since Christ is the beginning and the end of all knowledge and all things, he negates the how question completely. Since Christ is unable to be categorized as an object under human power, the human reason is “dethroned,” and the only question left to ask is “the question of faith: Who are you? Are you God’s very self?”⁴⁶¹ For Bonhoeffer, this is the quintessential question of Christology, which is also “the question about transcendence,” precisely because it is the question of the person himself. The who question asks about Jesus’s person, the identity of this human being who encounters us from the outside. The how question, on the other hand, is the “question about immanence,” which asks *how* Christ exists, *how* Jesus can be God, or *how* Jesus is present in the world. The how questions seek to learn about Jesus in order to classify him

⁴⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 302.

⁴⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 302.

within human systematic thinking, but the who question is the response of one who is confronted by Christ. The who question is the question of faith.

Staying within Barth's understanding of the problem of transcendence, Bonhoeffer does not stop by asserting the priority of the who question. In fact, Bonhoeffer claims that even when human beings ask the who question, "we are speaking the language of obedient Adam, but we are *thinking* the 'how' of the fallen Adam."⁴⁶² This is the intellectual corollary to the doctrine of original sin, which Bonhoeffer defines using Luther's phrase the *cor curvum in se*, the heart turned in on itself. Like the heart, the thinking of fallen human creatures is curved in on itself too. Such sinful thinking manifests itself when human beings assert authority over Christ through classifying him rather than hearing his word which kills the sinner and leads to the question of faith, "Who are you?" and results in the confession of the church. Bonhoeffer believes that the who question is the proper question of Christology, but we cannot ask that question in ourselves as sinners. Instead, "one can legitimately ask *who* only after the self-revelation of the other to whom one puts the question has already taken place." In other words, the question that is at the heart of proper Christology—Who are you, Jesus?—can only be posed after a person has already come to faith and the "answer has already been given."⁴⁶³ Christ must give himself to his creatures and reveal himself to them so that they ask the proper question and confess him as the Logos of God. The task of Christology, then, is to reflect upon this answer of faith within the realm of the church. Since Christology is an ecclesiastical discipline, it does not investigate the fact of the answer, never questioning the *that* of revelation in Christ; the fact that God has revealed himself in Christ is part of the given faith of the church. Nor does Christology focus on

⁴⁶² Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 303. Emphasis original.

⁴⁶³ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 303.

how we conceive of this revelation, because that returns to the how question.⁴⁶⁴ Instead, Christology focuses on the who question, the identity of Jesus Christ.

Although Bonhoeffer does not always use the language of who versus how with regard to Christ, Bonhoeffer does consistently focus on the whole of Christ's person throughout the Christology lectures, which is represented by the who question.⁴⁶⁵ The who question is important for Bonhoeffer because the concept of person highlights transcendence even as Bonhoeffer also understands Christ's identity as historical and in relationship with humanity. Human beings cannot know Christ unless he first encounters us, and Christology is faithful to God only when it rightly reflects on Christ's person by asking about his identity within the sphere of the church, where Christ is present. In fact, Bonhoeffer's insight into Christology as a reflection on the person of Jesus—the who question instead of the how question—also stems from Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the fifth century ecumenical council of Chalcedon. By looking at his understanding of Chalcedon, I will show again Bonhoeffer's focus on the *person* of Jesus, which will also bring together justification and the Lordship of Jesus Christ with an historical focus on concrete visibility in the church.

In the second half of Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology, the Berlin theologian turns to the historical Christ. In covering the historical Christ, Bonhoeffer first deals with "Critical Christology," which looks at formulations of councils and the Lutheran tradition over and against problematic positions, including contemporary figures like Albrecht Ritschl.⁴⁶⁶ Within this overview of church history, the council of Chalcedon figures prominently. As one would expect, Bonhoeffer describes the problems addressed at Chalcedon in terms of the heretical Monophysite

⁴⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 304.

⁴⁶⁵ This is an example of what DeJonge calls Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical thinking, which is a kind of analytical thinking (as opposed to Barth's dialectical and synthetic logic) in which the whole is prior to and takes precedence over the parts. See DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 97–100.

and Nestorian tendencies, which Chalcedon attempts to avoid.⁴⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer, however, sees Chalcedon make a critical move for Christology that goes beyond the standard interpretation. For Bonhoeffer, Chalcedon is critical in the sense of being crucial certainly, but most importantly Chalcedon is *critical* Christology in the sense of ruling out false ways of thinking. Bonhoeffer interprets Chalcedon as focusing on the person of Christ, making it illegitimate to speak about the two natures apart from the one person. Bonhoeffer says that Chalcedon makes it “no longer permissible to talk about the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ as about things or facts.” Instead, “we can only enter in faith.”⁴⁶⁸ In other words, Bonhoeffer sees the four negative formulations of Chalcedon—Jesus Christ is one person with two natures *without confusion, change, distinction, or separation*—as emphasizing the oneness of Jesus Christ’s person who is fully divine and fully human. “There is only *one* Christ. But he has two natures.”⁴⁶⁹ As such, Bonhoeffer thinks Chalcedon “cancels itself out” by using the language of the two natures even as it “demonstrates that these concepts are inappropriate and heretical forms.”⁴⁷⁰ For Bonhoeffer, Chalcedon formulated a doctrine of Christ using the traditional language of the two natures, but the whole point was to overcome the language of the two natures and focus instead on the one person Jesus Christ who is God and man. Bonhoeffer recognizes the importance of keeping divinity and humanity separate in the abstract, which has been an important emphasis in the Lutheran tradition.⁴⁷¹ The point of Chalcedon, however, is not to talk about abstract divinity or

⁴⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 331–53.

⁴⁶⁷ For an historical and theological overview of Chalcedon, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 226–77.

⁴⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 342.

⁴⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 342. Emphasis original.

⁴⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 343.

⁴⁷¹ See Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 63–65.

humanity; the point of Chalcedon is to confess the one concrete human being Jesus who is God.

Consequently, Bonhoeffer follows the development of the *unio hypostatica*, the unity of the person, and the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of attributes, as doctrines the Lutheran tradition uses to convey the unity of the person of Christ in two natures. As mentioned above, Bonhoeffer does call the *genus majesticum* “the core of Lutheran theology,”⁴⁷² but he is largely critical of the whole enterprise of understanding the relationship of Christ’s divinity to Christ’s humanity within the Reformation tradition. From Bonhoeffer’s perspective, the Protestant tradition dwells upon the relationship between abstract humanity and abstract divinity rather than driving toward a confession of the identity of Jesus Christ. Although I would argue that Bonhoeffer misses the critical side of the *genus majesticum*—which ought to be understood as asserting the unity of the person of Jesus Christ in the state of exaltation after the resurrection so that Jesus is true God and true man forever, particularly in the Lord’s Supper—Bonhoeffer rightly points out a common Lutheran temptation to analyze *how* Jesus is present instead of focusing on the *identity* of the person of Jesus who is present.⁴⁷³ The reason for the problem is simple: the tradition has focused on the “how” question instead of the “who” question. The driving question of the Protestant tradition of Christology, according to Bonhoeffer’s interpretation, has been: “How shall we think about the difference of the two natures and the unity of the person?”⁴⁷⁴ Chalcedon, however, rules out this question in favor of the question of identity: “Who is this human being who is said to be God?”⁴⁷⁵

Who is this Jesus? How does Bonhoeffer describe him? As a foundational point to

⁴⁷² Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 345.

⁴⁷³ With the categories of presence and identity, I am following Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁴⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 350.

⁴⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 350.

Bonhoeffer's description of the present Christ—which precedes his investigation into the historical Christ—he distinguishes between Christology and soteriology, the person of Christ and the works of Christ. By starting with the present Christ over the historical Christ in his lectures, Bonhoeffer had threatened to place Christ's work and presence over his historical identity as Jesus of Nazareth. However, at the beginning of his lectures on the present Christ, Bonhoeffer relates the person and work of Christ in an important way. Many Bonhoeffer commentators emphasize the way that the Berlin theologian connects and relates Christ's person with Christ's work,⁴⁷⁶ but considering Christology from the Lutheran tradition, as Bonhoeffer does, the distinction and difference is just as important. Bonhoeffer recalls Melanchthon's famous dictum "Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere," to know Christ is to know his benefits. According to Bonhoeffer, this settled the question of the relationship between Christ's person and works for much of the Lutheran tradition by knowing Christ solely on the basis of his works. In fact, Bonhoeffer sees the Christology of Schleiermacher and Ritschl as a natural development from Melanchthon's dictum: Christology is settled on the basis of soteriology.⁴⁷⁷ Instead of this, Bonhoeffer appeals to Luther: "Luther's thinking is that it is the person through whom the works are to be interpreted."⁴⁷⁸ Although Bonhoeffer does not refer to Luther's

⁴⁷⁶ This is done primarily by emphasizing the interconnectedness of Bonhoeffer's theology, which tends to collapse Christ's person into Christ's work, threatening to lose the unique identity of the person. For example, when Bonhoeffer's definition "Christ existing as church-community" is made primarily into an ecclesiological rather than Christological claim, the emphasis is on Christ's presence and work through the church. Jennifer M. McBride's use of Bonhoeffer threatens to do just this even as she does much well with regard to the church's public witness. See Jennifer M. McBride, "Christ Existing as Concrete Community Today," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 92–105. See also her larger project Jennifer M. McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 308. This is hardly a fair reading of Melanchthon's 1521 *Loci*. At least in this first edition of the *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon's intention is to say that Christ cannot be merely known as a fact, but trusted in as a person who encounters us for salvation. See Philip Melanchthon, *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*, trans. and ed. Christian Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2014), 24–25.

⁴⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 308.

doctrine of the two kinds of righteousness, it is apparent here.⁴⁷⁹ For Luther, one's works can only be understood on the basis God's word which establishes one's identity. The fruit of the tree is judged based upon the goodness of the tree itself. Just as the tree is prior to the fruit, the person and the person's vocation or office is prior to the works. In a sermon on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, Luther says, "So all the works of a Christian are of a good kind because the tree is sound."⁴⁸⁰ God's word is the ultimate judge that determines the identity of God's people and determines the value of their works and vocations, nothing else.⁴⁸¹ Norman Nagel, thus, observes, "For Luther... [Christ's] person is the unshakeable ground of the salvation he achieved—*qualis persona, talia opera*."⁴⁸² Based upon this understanding of the priority of the person over the works, Bonhoeffer claims, "Everything depends on whether Jesus Christ was the idealistic founder of a religion or the very Son of God."⁴⁸³ The difference between these two views is profound, first on the level of his person—simply a man who started a religion versus the Son of God himself—but also on the level of his work. The works will be interpreted by how one understands Jesus's person. For Bonhoeffer, Jesus must be trusted, seen, and understood as the Son of God, which only happens when Christ reveals himself. Only on the basis of the word of God, the revelation of Christ himself, will Jesus and his works be understood as they should be. Of course, Bonhoeffer acknowledges that Christ's person and Christ's work are not really separate—they are interrelated in complex ways—but theologically Christology asks first about

⁴⁷⁹ For an introduction to the two kinds of righteousness, see Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on his Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of his Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 449–66.

⁴⁸⁰ Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 21 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956), 267.

⁴⁸¹ Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 21:259–68.

⁴⁸² Norman E. Nagel, "Martinus: 'Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy!'" The Person and Work of Christ," in *The Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary, 1483–1983*, ed. Peter Newman Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 43. Ironically in this context, Nagel mistakenly cites Bonhoeffer as collapsing Christ's person into his work immediately before this quote.

his person and only then about his work. Identity precedes presence, and Christology precedes soteriology.

As Bonhoeffer moves to discuss Christ's person, he begins by describing the "present Christ," who is "*pro-me*." In this way, Bonhoeffer roots the doctrine of justification in the person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, for Bonhoeffer to speak about Christ's presence is to speak of him as present *hic et nunc*, here and now, in the church. "Christ in his person is indeed present in the church *as person*."⁴⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer's repetition of Christ as person in this sentence emphasizes that Christ is not present in the church as an object available to be manipulated but as a person to encounter his human creatures. Following from this, Bonhoeffer rejects the Christology of his teacher Wilhelm Hermann as well as the Christology of Albrecht Ritschl because they make Christ into a power instead of a person. To show the difference between his Christology and the Christology of Ritschl, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between person and personality. Bonhoeffer explains, "Personality is by nature an apersonal concept. Personality is realized in the concepts of power and value, that is, it is realized within history."⁴⁸⁵ Personality questions are, thus, how questions, but Bonhoeffer is after the who question, the question of the person, which is grounded on the presupposition of the resurrection: "Only where the risen Christ is understood as the ground and the prerequisite for Christology is it possible to grasp his presence as person."⁴⁸⁶

This risen Christ who is present in the church is the human Jesus. He is present in the church now as a human being, and he is eternally present because he is God. With this two-fold affirmation of Jesus's humanity and divinity, Bonhoeffer refuses to veer off into speculation about how the human could be present everywhere, or how God could enter time and space.

⁴⁸³ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 309.

⁴⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 310. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 311.

⁴⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 312.

Instead, Bonhoeffer centers his reflection upon the God-man Jesus Christ himself. In this way, Bonhoeffer shifts the question from how Christ is present to what Christ does *for us*, moving his emphasis from the traditional locus on the person of Christ to his work. Using terminology closer to Bonhoeffer's own, he shifts the Christological focus from the relationship of divinity to humanity (the incarnation) to the relationship of Jesus to the world (the humiliation). In Bonhoeffer's words, "the problem has shifted: it is not the relation of God and human in Jesus Christ, but rather than relation of the God-human, as already given, to the ὁμοίωμα σαρκός," the likeness of the (sinful) flesh, quoting Paul in Romans 8:3.⁴⁸⁷ In moving to consider the relationship between Christ and the world, Bonhoeffer has not abandoned Christology for soteriology, but is still describing the person of Jesus, now with a soteriological lens. While Bonhoeffer has already contended that Christ's identity is prior to and more foundational than Christ's work, person and work cannot be separated. In fact, "I cannot think of Jesus Christ in his being-in-himself, but only in his relatedness to me." Using classical Lutheran dogmatic language, the Berlin theologian asserts that Jesus is *pro-me*. This is not a mere descriptor of his work; this is at *the core of his person*. "His being-Christ is his being-for-me."⁴⁸⁸ Thus, in describing Christ and confessing Jesus's identity, Bonhoeffer asserts that Jesus must be known as the Christ *pro-me*. Bonhoeffer will not allow the *pro-me* structure of Jesus's person to only refer to the risen Christ in the exaltation either: "The *pro-me* structure refers first of all to the historical Jesus."⁴⁸⁹ In dogmatic terms, justification is foundational to the person of Jesus Christ; Jesus is for us, for our justification, for our restoration, and our entry into the church, the new humanity.

Bonhoeffer describes Jesus's *pro-me* structure in the three-fold form of Word, Sacrament,

⁴⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 313.

⁴⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 314.

⁴⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 315.

and church-community (*Gemeinde*).⁴⁹⁰ As Word, Christ is the truth, not an idea of the truth but a Word spoken to us of the truth. Christ is not an idea to be manipulated and determined by human reason whether it is true, but Christ is a spoken Word directly addressed to people, creating community through the truth.⁴⁹¹ Christ is the direct address of God spoken to his people, revealed when Christ allows himself to be heard. The content of Christ as Word is law and gospel, commandment and forgiveness. In Christ God forgives his people in a Word. It is not merely that Christ is the prophet of God—in fact Bonhoeffer argues “to see Christ in this way [as a prophet through whom God speaks] contradicts the New Testament”—but that Christ *is* the Word of God in person.⁴⁹² Now exalted, Christ is still present as the Word, as he makes himself present in congregations in preaching. God’s Word and human words are not mutually exclusive. Instead, Bonhoeffer points to the fact that Jesus became a human being—this human being is God!—just as these human words are truly the word of God because of Christ’s presence in the church as Word in proclamation.⁴⁹³

Christ is also present in the church as Sacrament *pro-me*. For Bonhoeffer, Christ’s presence in the Sacrament speaks to God’s recreation of the sinful world. “Sacrament exists only where God, in the mist of the world of creatures, names an element, speaks to it, and hallows it with the particular word God has for it by giving it its name.”⁴⁹⁴ In the mist of the sinful, creaturely world, Christ is present in the Sacrament in bodily form. For Bonhoeffer, the scandal is not the

⁴⁹⁰ The German *Gemeinde* is translated in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English as “church-community” most of the time. Although this is helpful to remind the reader that Bonhoeffer uses *Gemeinde* in broader sense than a single congregation, he does have a concrete entity in mind, which is often the congregation.

⁴⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 316.

⁴⁹² Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 317.

⁴⁹³ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 318, especially 318n.44. Bonhoeffer loves to freely quote Luther as saying: “This is the human being to whom you should point and say, this is God!” Although Bonhoeffer does not attribute the quote as such, Bonhoeffer’s quote is based upon his friend Franz Hildebrandt’s free quote of Luther from his 1520 treatise “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.”

⁴⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 319.

relationship between divinity and humanity in Jesus and how he could be present in the Sacrament but the humiliation of the Son of God who hides his presence in bread and wine. Thus, Bonhoeffer directs the question of sacramental presence back to the who question: "Who is the Christ who is present in the Sacrament?" Bonhoeffer answers with a focus on the one person: Who is the present Christ? "The God-human, the Exalted One!" "His being sacrament is his being humiliated in the present. It is not an incidental aspect of his God-human substance, but rather his existence is a humiliated existence."⁴⁹⁵ In pointing to the humiliation, Bonhoeffer is pointing to Christ's willingness to become the "stumbling block," to enter the world "in the likeness of sinful flesh" and "in the form of a servant." Thus, Christ makes himself present in the Sacrament as a creature for creatures. Jesus is the new creation who makes bread and wine part of the new creation too in order that Jesus might give of his body and blood through physical elements for physical people. At the same time, this Jesus is the Creator who makes us into new creatures.⁴⁹⁶ As a historical, visible humiliated human person, Jesus makes himself present for his historical visible church to make his people new.

Finally, Bonhoeffer describes Jesus as present *pro-me* as church-community. Jesus takes the form of the community as a community, not only as individual Christians who become Christs for their neighbors, but as a church community which is called to live as the new humanity. Here too, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the bodily form that Christ takes in the church. The church-community is the body of Christ in reality and not merely as an image. Bonhoeffer asserts, "The concept of the body as applied to the church-community is not a functional concept referring to the members but is instead a concept of the way in which the Christ exists who is

⁴⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 322.

⁴⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 323.

present, exalted, and humiliated.”⁴⁹⁷ The God-man Jesus Christ takes form in the church to continue his mission in history.

From this three-fold form of the *pro-me* structure of Christ, we see how Bonhoeffer emphasizes not only the person of Jesus as the transcendent one but also the historical and visible emphasis on Christ’s mission based upon the incarnation and especially the concomitant humiliation. Jesus, a true, historical man, continues to be present in word, sacrament, and the congregation in visible and historical forms. These forms are hidden, only seen by faith, but Christ truly takes concrete form in these three ways. In fact, Bonhoeffer does not stop there with his emphasis on history and visibility. Bonhoeffer also considers Christ to be the “center” of “existence,” “history,” and “nature.” Christ is the mediator who stands at the center of all things. In this, Bonhoeffer acknowledges Christ’s as the center of nature, the bearer of the new age inaugurated yet still to come, and the center of history even now as the old age persists.⁴⁹⁸ Such a view of Christ opens up time and space as genuine theological arenas where Christ is the center and the church is called to act in Christ’s mission.

Since at least Charles Marsh, it has been common to distinguish between Bonhoeffer’s theology and Karl Barth’s theology by noting Barth’s emphasis on the *aseity* of God—God’s being or identity in himself—and Bonhoeffer’s stress on the *promevity* of God—God’s being or identity for me.⁴⁹⁹ In so doing, Barth emphasizes God’s being in himself as primary to the God’s being in revelation. Our discussion of Bonhoeffer’s Christology within the context of his person theology explicated in *Act and Being* reveals this analysis as true but incomplete. Bonhoeffer follows Barth in emphasizing identity over presence, primary objectivity over secondary

⁴⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 323.

⁴⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 324–27.

⁴⁹⁹ Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, vii–ix. On promevity in Bonhoeffer, see also Philip Ziegler, “Christ for Us Today—Promevity in the Christologies of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard,” *International Journal of*

objectivity, to use Marsh's categories. With its focus on the person of Jesus Christ, the who question that drives to Christ's identity, Bonhoeffer's Christology refuses to let Christ become an object under human control. Christ is transcendent in his person, and his identity as the historical God-man is the priority. At the same time, Bonhoeffer radically connects identity with presence in a classically Lutheran way so that the distinction between primary and secondary objectivity is overcome in favor of the person of the God-man. Promerity—justification—is intrinsic to Christ's person and identity. Jesus is not simply the Lord *per se*; Jesus is the Lord for me.

For Bonhoeffer, Christ is the Lord who encounters his creatures, killing their sinful nature and making them alive again so that they confess him as the very Son of God. This encounter with Christ is the heart of Christology. For this reason, Bonhoeffer directs much attention to critical Christology, critiquing those ways in which the Christian tradition has asked the wrong question—the how question—and focused on the manner in which Christ is present rather than the identity of the one who is present. In focusing on the person of Christ as the God-man, Bonhoeffer's Christology emphasizes Jesus as the humiliated one who comes “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” The humiliation then is the center of Bonhoeffer's positive Christology which highlights Christ *pro-me* not in an abstract sense but in the concrete sense of his historical life and mission which is accomplished for the world.⁵⁰⁰ In fact, in reflecting upon Christ's humiliation and its meaning for Christology, Bonhoeffer stresses the true humanity of Jesus. Jesus became like his human creatures in every way: Jesus “comes among us humans not in [the form of God] but rather incognito, as a beggar among beggars, an outcast among outcasts; he comes among sinners as the one without sin, but also as a sinner among sinners.”⁵⁰¹ The

Systematic Theology 15, no. 1 (2013): 25–41.

⁵⁰⁰ For Bonhoeffer's “positive” Christology, see Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 353–60.

⁵⁰¹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 356.

humiliation, then, is central to how Bonhoeffer speaks of the identity of Jesus, and it serves to focus on Jesus as the historical, visible man from Nazareth, who is God. This man calls the church into existence, whom the church must also follow. This man is the risen Son of God who makes himself present as *Gemeinde*. As such, Bonhoeffer must say who this man is and not simply focus on how or that Jesus is present.

Bonhoeffer's Continuity with the Lutheran Tradition

Not only does Bonhoeffer's person theology establish a Christological basis for an ecclesiology oriented both to the Lord Jesus *extra ecclesiam* and to the historical, visible world, but Bonhoeffer's person theology also has merit because of its connection to the Lutheran tradition. One of the advantages of Bonhoeffer's starting point for a Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom is its long roots within Lutheranism. Recent Bonhoeffer research has identified two ways in which Bonhoeffer's Christology connects to Luther and the Lutheran tradition. Although both are true and helpful connections to the Lutheran tradition, one of them is more important for Bonhoeffer in order that the identity of Jesus is given priority over how he is present.

Bonhoeffer's popularity among the opposing camps of liberal Protestants and conservative evangelicals has created a debate that often overlooks Bonhoeffer's confessional identity.⁵⁰² So many have employed Bonhoeffer for contradictory purposes—like supporting liberal social causes or a conservative Biblicism—that Bonhoeffer's own tradition has been sidelined.⁵⁰³ What

⁵⁰² See Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), for the many ways that Bonhoeffer has been understood and used in modern theology. DeJonge's book, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, is important for emphasizing the confessional categories.

⁵⁰³ Richard Weikart wrote his book because of what he felt was an uncritical reception of Bonhoeffer among conservative evangelicals. See *The Myth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Is His Theology Evangelical?* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1997). Weikart is also a good example of someone who knows little about the Lutheran confessional tradition and thus interprets Bonhoeffer as a "liberal." For example, Weikart says, "Bonhoeffer reveled in paradox and contradiction, because they broke through rationalistic ways of thinking and created mystery, an ingredient necessary if one is to communicate anything about an ultimately ineffable God" (6). Weikart calls Christian language that uses paradox and mystery "myth." In actuality, Weikart is referring to the

makes this fact so odd is that Luther is the most cited extra-Scriptural authority in Bonhoeffer's works by far. In fact, Wolf Krötke notes that, unlike Barth, Bonhoeffer does not offer polemics against Luther. Instead, Bonhoeffer's "orientation towards Luther's theology evidently constituted for him the objective orientation of the Protestant Church and theology as such." Bonhoeffer is critical of the Lutheran tradition, but he is never directly critical of Luther.⁵⁰⁴ Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's thought not only abounds with arguments from Luther but also arguments from the broader Lutheran tradition, often against the Reformed tradition, as we saw above in *Act and Being*. Even though Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Lutheran orthodoxy and its metaphysical system are well known, Bonhoeffer cited Heinrich Schmid's compendium of the teachings of the Lutheran Orthodoxy as an authority, at least after his time teaching at Finkewalde.⁵⁰⁵ In these ways, Bonhoeffer clearly shows deference to Luther and, in a lesser sense, the Lutheran tradition. Nevertheless, many Bonhoeffer scholars downplay Bonhoeffer's confessional identity. Wolf Krötke is representative here: "Bonhoeffer does not fit into the category of a confessionalist, at least not in the sense of being a hard-line member of a so-called

common distinction between *fides reflecta* and *fides directa* in Bonhoeffer but he characterizes an emphasis on *fides directa* in theology as myth since it is not purely cognitive and propositional. With any background in the greater intellectual tradition or the current arguments of Bonhoeffer's, this clear mistake would not be possible. Weikart's book is filled with such errors that ignore Bonhoeffer's confessional history and contemporary polemics.

⁵⁰⁴ Wolf Krötke, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther," in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 53–54.

⁵⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, "The Ascension of Jesus Christ," 476–81. During my study of Bonhoeffer's Christology and ecclesiology, I was surprised by how traditional Bonhoeffer sounds during this late time period. I have not done a thorough study of this—it is intuition at this point—but Bonhoeffer seems to have gone through a confessional orientation later in his life. In a spring 2013 conversation with my teacher Robert Kolb about Bonhoeffer's development, Kolb noted that his teacher Hermann Sasse suggested that Bonhoeffer was moving along the same lines as Sasse himself, toward a stronger confessional basis. Supporting the development of a stronger confessional foundation in Bonhoeffer's later life is the common claim that Bonhoeffer began to lean toward Rome in his later life because a stronger confessional foundation can be misunderstood easily as Romanizing. For just one data point on Bonhoeffer's development, the Christological logic and sources used here for the ascension are quite different from the lectures in Barcelona on Christ, as an early example. For those early lectures, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity," in *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 10 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 342–59.

‘Lutheranism.’”⁵⁰⁶ Krötke has an important point; the ecclesiastical situation of Germany with the union church renders it difficult to consider Bonhoeffer a confessional Lutheran in the same way as Werner Elert. Krötke correctly recognizes that Bonhoeffer is not trying to prop up an ecclesio-political system, any particular Lutheran institution, with his theology. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer does work within the thought forms of the Lutheran tradition, and his thought is consistently Lutheran—not in the sense of appealing to Lutheran institutional authority but in the sense of a Lutheran *ressourcement*, returning to the Lutheran sources to find a theological way forward. Bonhoeffer sought to read Luther in a way that would enliven the church for discipleship and responsibility in God’s world based upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, Bonhoeffer was simply reworking Luther as his teachers, Holl and Seeberg, had before him.⁵⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, though, captured a central aspect of Luther and the Reformation that had been laid aside by those teachers: “There was one fundamental and most crucial aspect in which Bonhoeffer was always in agreement with Luther: taking seriously the *solus Christus*. None of the various stages of Bonhoeffer’s life ever departed from a concentration on Christ alone.”⁵⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer thus took Christ as the center, as Luther did too, and developed Christ to be the center of salvation, the church, and the Christian life. Theology comes from and is directed toward Christ.

Bonhoeffer followed Luther and the Lutheran tradition in much more substantial sense than a mere focus on Christ alone. Christocentrism is a mere formal connection to the Lutheran tradition, which does not yet mean very much.⁵⁰⁹ More than a formal focus on Christ, Bonhoeffer comes to understand Christ and uses Christology in a way consonant with Luther and the

⁵⁰⁶ Krötke, “Bonhoeffer and Luther,” 54.

⁵⁰⁷ For the different readings of Luther during this period, see Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour*.

⁵⁰⁸ Krötke, “Bonhoeffer and Luther,” 56.

⁵⁰⁹ See Richard Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 254. Muller writes, “What Christian theologian, after all, would want to be anything other than christocentric?”

Lutheran tradition, particularly in his understanding of the person of Christ, the historical God-man whose mission it is to establish the reign of God and recreate God's world. As I mentioned already, there are two important, recent ways in which scholars have connected Bonhoeffer's Christology to the Lutheran tradition. The first is Bonhoeffer's person theology as in Michael DeJonge, and the second is the *communicatio idiomatum* as in Karsten Lehmkuhler. Building upon Bonhoeffer's person-theology from earlier in the chapter, DeJonge sees Bonhoeffer's connection to the Lutheran tradition in terms of the category of person, a hermeneutical framework for understanding theology. Historically, DeJonge connects Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, to a strand of the Lutheran tradition that goes through Johannes Brentz to the Tübingen theologians of the seventeenth century. Doctrinally, DeJonge argues that Bonhoeffer moves theology away from a discussion of how the divine and human natures relate in Christ to the historical person of Jesus. The concrete man from Nazareth Jesus, who is the Son of God, is the proper subject of Christology; that is, Christology is to confess this Jesus as the Son and revelation of God. This trajectory of Bonhoeffer's Christology derives from Luther. Robert Jenson explains the priority of the person of the God-man over the natures for Luther,

In Luther's Christological discussions, 'person'—not 'hypostasis'—is the central concept, and is used very much in a modern sense, for the protagonist of a history. Only the person of the God-man appears as an actual someone or something; the two natures appear only in the abstract as 'deity' and 'humanity.' Thus the one agent of salvation is the person; if Christ's works could be assigned to one or the other natures, this in Luther's view would mean that he was not in fact one person at all and that there was no incarnation.⁵¹⁰

Following this, DeJonge declares that the "definition of the God-man as the Christological person is the central insight of the Lutheran Christological tradition and the foundation of

⁵¹⁰ Robert W. Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 277.

[Bonhoeffer's] own positive Christology."⁵¹¹ Bonhoeffer's person theology that focuses on the singular identity of the God-man, Jesus Christ, derives from the heart of the Lutheran theological tradition.

DeJonge's thesis receives support not only from Robert Jenson but also from Paul Hinlicky, who sees the unity of the person as a central concept of Luther's Christology.⁵¹² Hinlicky points out how Luther stresses the concrete person of Jesus in his 1540 "Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi." Hinlicky concludes,

When we understand that it is not and can never be the ineffable mode or manner of the personal union—the miracle—which Luther seeks to comprehend in theology, but rather the reality and sense of 'the *one Lord Jesus Christ*, true God and man' as our salvation, we see that theology, unlike philosophy, asserts here a *specific and concrete unity* of the finite and the infinite.⁵¹³

Thus, Bonhoeffer's Christology, which asserts the unity and identity of the concrete person of Jesus as the center, comes from this distinct Lutheran emphasis and understanding of the personal union of Christ.

The other interpretation of the relationship between Bonhoeffer and the Lutheran tradition stresses the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of attributes between the divine and human natures of Jesus. The *communicatio* is related to the unity of the concrete person Jesus Christ but should not be conflated with it. Avoiding conflation between the communication of attributes and the personal union is particularly important since the doctrine of the *communicatio* is usually extended to soteriology. As we have seen, soteriology must be kept distinct from the personal union—although intimately connected—as Bonhoeffer does in his Christology lectures,

⁵¹¹ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, 90.

⁵¹² Jenson's understanding that Luther uses person is used in a "modern sense" must be nuanced in light of Hinlicky's examination of Luther's anti-docetism. Hinlicky contends that Luther uses the term person to refer to the public *persona* of the God-man but without the psychologizing that modern people add to the notion of person. Jesus is truly human, for Luther, but that does not mean we can or should overly psychologize, assuming contemporary psychological theories of anthropology transcend time and place. See Hinlicky, "Luther's Anti-Docetism," 165–66.

for the sake of the identity of Jesus Christ. In an essay on Christology in Bonhoeffer and Luther, Karsten Lehmkuhler sees Bonhoeffer's Lutheranism in terms of the doctrine of the communication of attributes and the happy exchange, addressed within the pro-me structure of Bonhoeffer's Christology.⁵¹⁴ Lehmkuhler emphasizes Bonhoeffer's integration of the person and work of Jesus Christ, which brings together soteriology and Christology in the same way that Luther had done before. For Lehmkuhler Bonhoeffer extends the doctrine of the *communicatio* into the field of soteriology through the pro-me structure of his Christology.⁵¹⁵ While Luther moved the *communicatio* into the field of soteriology through the happy exchange, Lehmkuhler sees Bonhoeffer doing the same thing with his emphasis on the pro-me structure of Jesus. Lehmkuhler relies upon Johann Anselm Steiger, who understands this pro-me trajectory to be present already in Luther's understanding of the *communicatio*:

What was originally said of the communication between the two natures of Christ is now formulated anew with regard to the "for us" [*pro nobis*]. The Christological *communicatio idiomatum* is the model for the soteriological one: "Here the happy exchange and struggle occurs: since Christ is God and human, who has never sinned and whose devotion is unconquerable, eternal and all-powerful, he makes the sins of believing souls his own through their wedding ring, that is, faith, and does not act differently than if he had done them."⁵¹⁶

According to Lehmkuhler, Bonhoeffer "interconnects soteriology and Christology in the smallest detail" with his understanding that justification—*pro me*—is part of the *person* of Christ, which Lehmkuhler sees Luther also doing in the happy exchange.⁵¹⁷ In fact, Lehmkuhler continues,

⁵¹³ Hinlicky, "Luther's Anti-Docetism," 177. Emphases added.

⁵¹⁴ Lehmkuhler, "Christologie," 55–78.

⁵¹⁵ Lehmkuhler, "Christologie," 59.

⁵¹⁶ Steiger, "*Communicatio Idiomatum*," 129. Quoting Luther's 1521 *The Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31:351–52. Steiger's quotation is from the German, accounting for the differences from the English, which was translated from the Latin.

⁵¹⁷ Lehmkuhler, "Christologie," 62.

“Here one can no longer properly divide the person and the work of Jesus.”⁵¹⁸ According to Lehmkuhler, Bonhoeffer’s pro-me structure of Christology mirrors Luther’s understanding of the happy exchange, which emphasizes soteriology, the presence of Christ, using Christological concepts.

Lehmkuhler rightly addresses the *communicatio idiomatum* as an important connection between Luther and Bonhoeffer. Going beyond what Lehmkuhler says here, Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the humiliation of Jesus, even speaking of Jesus as the humiliated one, the stumbling block, in the exaltation stems from the *communicatio* extended soteriologically as in Luther. In Steiger’s words,

Luther’s pastoral intensification of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* has an effect also on Christology that in turn affects the distinction between the state of humility and the state of exaltation [*status exinanitionis et exaltationis*]. For Christ is emptied even after the ascension, according to Luther. Christ has gone into glory as the emptied one; he is still found sitting at the right hand of God in the state of humility.⁵¹⁹

Luther clearly has these doctrines—humiliation, *communicatio*, and justification *pro me*—in mind in his comments on Galatians 3:13 in the 1535 magisterial Galatians commentary:

By this fortunate exchange with us He took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious Person. Clothed and dressed in this, we are freed from the curse of the Law, because Christ Himself voluntarily became a curse for us, saying: “For My own Person of humanity and divinity I am blessed, and I am in need of nothing whatever. But I shall empty Myself (Phil 2:7); I shall assume your clothing and mask; and in this I shall walk about and suffer death, in order to set you free from death.”⁵²⁰

Luther brings together sin and righteousness in the person of Christ who humiliates himself for his creatures becoming a servant. This is the heart of the good news: just as the humanity and

⁵¹⁸ Lehmkuhler, “Christologie,” 63.

⁵¹⁹ Steiger, “*Communicatio Idiomatum*,” 136.

⁵²⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), 284.

divinity of Christ cannot be separated in his person, neither can our sins be separated from his righteousness. Bonhoeffer follows Luther in this, understanding Christ as the humiliated one who bears humanity's sins, becomes the greatest sinner of sinners, and becomes human even in our sinful state, taking our condemnation *for us*. The Christ *pro nobis*, Bonhoeffer says, is the humiliated one, which makes him the stumbling block. Yet faith believes in the Word of God, trusting that this man is God and Lord, who truly took on the sins of the world for me.⁵²¹

Lehmkuhler is correct in asserting the “indissoluble” connection between soteriology and Christology for both Luther and Bonhoeffer. Matthieu Arnold too observes this in Luther: “We cannot truly know Jesus Christ except from his work, in particular from his work for each human being.”⁵²² Bonhoeffer agrees with this point when he contends, “I cannot think of Jesus Christ in his being-in-himself, but only in his relatedness to me.”⁵²³ There is a danger here, however, that DeJonge's understanding of Bonhoeffer avoids. Lehmkuhler's interpretation of Bonhoeffer and Luther threatens to lose the person of Christ as the transcendent one precisely by failing to distinguish clearly between Christ's person and his work. The *that* of Christ's work threatens to overtake and overcome the *who* of Christ's work. In other words, the fact of salvation threatens to become a given reality rather than a dynamic gift offered by the particular Creator God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who is known in his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When the *communicatio idiomatum* is given primacy over the identity of Jesus Christ, theology threatens to become anthropology as God's salvific word is encompassed and understood in a theory instead of a person.

⁵²¹ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 357–58.

⁵²² Matthieu Arnold, “Luther on Christ's Person and Work,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 279.

⁵²³ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 314.

Although Bonhoeffer's theology does connect to the Lutheran tradition both in terms of the emphasis on the personal union and the happy exchange, which is the *communicatio idiomatum* brought into soteriology, DeJonge's emphasis on the category of person is more important for a Lutheran theology in post-Christendom because the person of Jesus must remain prior to the *communicatio*, as it is in both Bonhoeffer and Luther. This is Bonhoeffer's point when he critiques Melancthon and the Lutheran tradition for interpreting Christ's person in term of his benefits, as I discussed above.⁵²⁴ In Bonhoeffer's terminology, the person interprets the work, which means that the person of Jesus (and confession of that person by faith) must take priority over understanding how Christ's work saves. In fact, when soteriology takes priority over the identity of Jesus, then Barth's critique of Lutheranism shows itself to be true. Johann Anselm Steiger's interpretation of Luther reveals the accuracy of Barth's intuition about Feuerbach and the Lutheran tradition. Steiger suggests that Hegel took up Luther's understanding of the *communicatio* philosophically: "In a later time, it would be Hegel who, being serious philosophically about this heritage from the Reformation, defined changeableness, history and the self-emptying of the Spirit, thus that which appears accidental at face value, as substance and as the essential."⁵²⁵ Hegel, however, turned the historical reality of the man Jesus who is the Son of God into a philosophical reality. In other words, the identity of the man Jesus as God and man was turned into an essential truth of reality, grasped in the anthropological sphere. In this way, the incarnation as such becomes salvific, a *necessary* outworking of the nature of reality, just because it unites God and humanity, leading naturally to Feuerbach, as Barth suggested.

This problem is also seen in Diane Bowers, who mentions the "*Anknüpfungspunkt*, the long-sought after point of contact between anthropology and soteriology," in connection with

⁵²⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 308–9.

⁵²⁵ Steiger, "*Communicatio Idiomatum*," 148.

Steiger, Hegel, and the *communication idiomatum*.⁵²⁶ For anyone who knows Karl Barth's theology, this immediately reeks of natural theology, wherein one attempts to grab control of God and God's salvation through a theory in the anthropological sphere rather than receiving it as a gift from God.⁵²⁷ Although this newer version of the point of contact falls in the realm of words, verbal communication, the problem is the same. The model of how God becomes present among his people takes precedence over the story and identity of God. According to Sammeli Juntunen, "For Luther Christ's incarnation is the basic soteriological event, which makes the union between God and humans possible."⁵²⁸ Juntunen proceeds to describe Luther's theology quite well, articulating the identity of the one Christ, but Bowers in her dissertation threatens to turn the incarnation and the *communicatio* into a principle, an "essential second step in justification."⁵²⁹ The *communicatio* is, then, turned into another model for the possibility of salvation, which risks turning Christians away from God in Christ and the Scriptures, relying instead on the model itself.⁵³⁰ As such, the identity of the man Jesus is overcome and even unnecessary since the presence of God is already presupposed in the event itself.⁵³¹

⁵²⁶ Diane Virginia Bowers, "Martin Luther and the Joyful Exchange Between Christ and his Christian: Implications for the Doctrine of Justification and the Christian Life," (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 2008), 139.

⁵²⁷ See Karl Barth's response to Emil Brunner, which directly addresses the question of the *Anknüpfungspunkt, Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: The Centenary Press, 1946).

⁵²⁸ Sammeli Juntunen, "The Christological Background of Luther's Understanding of Justification," *Seminary Ridge Review* 5, no. 2 (2003): 24.

⁵²⁹ Bowers, "Martin Luther," 141.

⁵³⁰ Bowers is trying to find a model for justification that will appeal to "post-modern" people, and she claims the *communicatio* as presupposition for the indwelling of Christ will do that. She makes some fine points about trouble with forensic justification and her goals are worthwhile, but in the end she does not avoid the danger of overcoming the unique identity of the Savior Jesus with her model. For Bowers's purpose in her own words, see Bowers, "Martin Luther," 234–41.

⁵³¹ Gerhard Forde rightly polemicized against attempts to "put roses on the cross," which means to explain away the death of Jesus through a theory. Forde addresses only the atonement as such, but the problem of theorizing away the particularities of Jesus of Nazareth and his salvific life, death, and resurrection is broader than it appears from Forde's work. Salvation becomes certain because of a system instead of the promises of God in the person of Jesus. For Forde's most comprehensive essay on this, see Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian*

According to Paul Hinlicky, Luther prioritized the identity of Jesus and refused to slide off into abstract theories of salvation. Hinlicky comments,

It is not *any* incarnation *as such* that will be saving (the incarnation of God in, say, Josef Stalin would *not* be good news), but that personally particular union of divine and human whose sense and purpose is made known in the personal history of *Jesus*, which by the same token is understood (by the anti-Arian *homoousios* clause of the Nicene Creed) to enact in time the Eternal Son's loving obedience to his Father in the Spirit.⁵³²

Thus, for Luther, it is not the incarnation *per se*, the model of the *communicatio*, that is important, but the history of the man Jesus who is the second person of the Trinity and is enacting the economy of the Triune God in his personal obedience and the coming reign of the kingdom of God. Hinlicky further explains Luther's view:

Luther is entirely uninterested in explaining *theoretically* how this union [the personal union of Jesus's divine and human natures] is to be explained; indeed he regards the use of early analogies (body and soul, fire and iron) as dangerous and misleading just because they are taken *theoretically* as potential explanations of the Incarnation's manner or mode. The point of the doctrine [the personal union] is not theoretical but interpretive, not to grasp God with a concept, but to recognize and appreciate the *decision* of the triune God to redeem humanity and its actualization seen *von unten* in the obedience of the man Jesus and his history with us, seen *von oben* in the Son's journey into a far country.⁵³³

In other words, Luther does not seek to understand how the incarnation took place, but to focus on who God is and what God is doing in the sending his Son to become a man and redeem his creation. Thus, Luther interprets the personal union—and the concomitant *communicatio idiomatum*—in terms of the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and his work of redeeming sinners. According to Hinlicky, the point of the doctrine of the personal union is not to explain how God saves or turn the personal union into some *Anknüpfungspunkt* between God and man. Instead, the personal union focuses the Christian imagination on the identity of the man Jesus of

Dogmatics, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2:5–99.

⁵³² Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 55. Emphases original.

⁵³³ Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 64. Emphases original.

Nazareth and his work of salvation for humanity through the Spirit and directed toward the Father. Further, I would argue that this doctrine of the personal union stands at the base of and is assumed in Luther's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* understood soteriologically. Because Luther understands the story of the gospel as the work of the Son of God who was obedient to the Father in history unto death upon a cross, Luther sees connections between the constitution of Christ's person and the work of salvation. For Luther, the *communicatio* assumes the identity and story of Jesus as told in the Scriptures so that, in Bonhoeffer's terminology, the person is prior to the work even if they cannot be separated.

Conclusion

Bonhoeffer's person theology offers a way to do theology in a Christological key, which retains the priority and transcendence of God over his church while highlighting church-communities' mission in this concrete time and space. In this person theology, Bonhoeffer focuses on the identity of Jesus—the who question—which grounds Christ's mission and work. The person interprets the work, not the work the person. Bonhoeffer thus connects the person and work of Jesus Christ quite closely together, but he prioritizes the person over the work. Jesus's work is God's work of salvation and restoration because Jesus is who he is. Theology, thus, must focus first on the identity of Jesus Christ, and only then look to the presence of Jesus Christ.

More recently in the twentieth century, Hans Frei has echoed these ideas in his preeminent Christological study *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. Frei undertakes an understanding of Christian belief through an interpretation of the story of Jesus. In doing this, Frei contends, "That the right order for thinking about the unity of Christ's identity and presence is to begin with his

identity.”⁵³⁴ Why is it important to work in this order? “If we proceed in the reverse fashion, we are apt to impair that simple praise of God with the mind, of which I have spoken. Instead, we might begin to use our reflections about Jesus for purposes that we should actually eschew, e.g. showing nonbelievers how faith in Christ or the idea of his presence might be ‘possible’, ‘meaningful’, or ‘real’.”⁵³⁵ According to Frei, starting with Christ’s presence, how he comes among us to save, focuses on theoretical explanations that in fact deter from Christ’s unique identity as the Son of the Father come to restore his fallen creation through the Spirit. In fact, Frei observes that the starting with Christ’s presence often turns Jesus into a mere representative or even a symbol of humanity in general rather than the one and only Son of God and Savior of the world who is known in the story of his history depicted in the Scriptures.⁵³⁶ This is exactly what I am afraid of in Lutheran theology that starts with and focuses on the *communicatio idiomatum* and the interconnection of soteriology and Christology without prioritizing the identity of Jesus. I am afraid that the interconnection between God and man in Jesus becomes an explanation and a rationalization for justification, whether as a theory of Christ’s indwelling or a theory of verbal communication. Bowers, for instance, stresses the *communicatio* because it is “a theologically useful concept for us today.”⁵³⁷ It is, of course, not wrong as such to find concepts that are understandable in our cultural milieu, but Bowers subordinates the identity of Jesus to his presence in her search for this useful concept. The observation that Christ’s work and person are connected leads Bowers to emphasize Christ’s person primarily as a possibility for salvation.⁵³⁸ In other words, Christ’s unique identity is almost turned into a cipher for human

⁵³⁴ Frei, *Identity of Jesus*, 6.

⁵³⁵ Frei, *Identity of Jesus*, 6–7.

⁵³⁶ Frei, *Identity of Jesus*, 36–37.

⁵³⁷ Bowers, “Martin Luther,” 109.

⁵³⁸ See Bowers, “Martin Luther,” 134.

salvation. The Finish school of Luther research reflects the same problem where Christ's presence in his people takes priority over his unique identity and history, and Christ is nearly reduced to the human possibility of salvation.⁵³⁹

Frei, then, reinforces the importance of Bonhoeffer's person theology in post-Christendom. Bonhoeffer is not only important for bringing together an emphasis on the concrete, historical church with an orientation to the Lord who stands outside the church, but also because of his stress on the personal identity of Jesus Christ. Particularly in a cultural milieu where the identity of Jesus is hardly known, what is necessary is not a better explanation for how Christ saves, but a clearer articulation of who he is. This understanding of Jesus must have ecclesiological import for the sake my dissertation, showing how Christ's identity and mission is reflected in the identity and mission of the church. This is the case because Christology can never be separated from soteriology or ecclesiology. At the same time, though, soteriology and ecclesiology find their root in the person and story of Jesus Christ. Such a Christology points to a narrative Christology, the story of the identity of Jesus Christ, in a similar fashion to the progression of Hans Frei's *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. This identity of Jesus is the necessary foundation for theology, especially for an ecclesiology after Christendom.

⁵³⁹ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). For instance, Mannerma says, "In his human nature, according to Luther, Christ *really* bears the sins of all human beings; in his divine nature, he is eternal righteousness and life" (8, emphasis original). In doing this, Mannerma focuses on humanity and divinity in Christ, defined primarily according to the qualities of sinfulness (humanity) and righteousness (divinity). Christ is then this abstract divine and human who ontologically makes divinization possible by destroying human sinfulness through his divine righteousness. Luther did speak of Christ as taking on sin, Satan, and death in a duel, a duel that is fought in his own person, destroyed because Christ is the eternal Son of God. But, as we saw in Hinlicky, Luther's point was to focus on the identity and history of Jesus in his obedience to the Father rather than seeing Jesus first and primarily in terms of justification and divinization. This loss of Jesus's unique identity is also apparent in that Mannerma connects the incarnation *per se* to justification rather than the humiliation. He quotes Luther speaking of the *way of incarnation* as becoming the greatest of sinners—i.e. the humiliation—but Mannerma talks about this as the incarnation itself (p. 13–15). A failure to distinguish between the humiliation and incarnation makes it appear as if incarnation as such, the abstract unity of God and humanity, is salvific rather than the ministry and obedience of Jesus in history as the Messiah of God. This too leads away from the story of Jesus to the philosophical unity of God and man which makes the salvation possible. In light of *Act and Being*, this is being theology, more nuanced but just as problematic as Karl Holl's. See also Bowers, "Martin Luther," 107–69, for another example of the same problems.

In the next chapter, I will first develop some formal principles that underlie this narrative ecclesiology. In particular, I will investigate the formal perimeters of the relationship between Christ and the church and the church and the world. These formal perimeters will then receive their center in the final chapter, which sketch two narrative directions from the Scriptures intending to open up the concrete church toward its public mission while identifying the church in terms of the story of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRIST, CHURCH, AND WORLD: THE STRUCTURE OF A CHRISTOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER CHRISTENDOM

Within the framework of Bonhoeffer's person theology, the important questions raised for an ecclesiology after Christendom revolve around three loci: Christ, the church, and the world. In the first chapter, I argued that these relationships must unfold ecclesiology according to three criteria: storied identity, doctrinal substance, and visible concreteness. The criterion of storied identity is necessary to identify the church in terms of Scriptural story of God in Christ. I developed the criterion of doctrinal substance in a Christological direction, requiring Jesus to be understood as the center of this ecclesiology in a material sense, according to his person and work illustrated in the Scriptures. As such, the person of Jesus is the center of the other two loci. The final criterion of visible concreteness is particularly important for how the church relates to the world, showing itself as a public witness to Christ through the Spirit in word and deed. At the same time that I developed these criteria for a Lutheran ecclesiology after Christendom, I remain committed to justification as a basic requirement for understanding God's work in relationship to his creatures. Thus, an ecclesiology after Christendom must also place a priority on God and God's work through his Son and Spirit in creating and recreating his church, calling it to discipleship and mission.

The second and third chapters looked at recent Lutheran ecclesiologies, which have fallen short of these criteria. For the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word, Christ's relationship with the church was primarily the relationship of the Lord to individual Christians by preaching and the word of God. Although the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word does properly orient the church

toward Christ, this orientation was largely one of individual faith, tending to minimize or even exclude the public mission of the church. The proponents of a Lutheran ecclesiology for post-Christendom, Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson, did well in terms of focusing on the public nature of the church in relationship to the world, but their ecclesiologies threatened to turn the church inward to find resources for its calling and mission. In turning the church inward for support in its mission, their ecclesiologies risked directing the church introspectively toward itself and failing to reimagine the mission of the church in terms of the story of Christ in the gospels. In other words, they risk an ecclesial introspection that does not challenge the problems raised by the crisis of purpose in post-Christendom. Where will churches mired in the crisis of purpose find direction, guidance, and the call to repentance if not in Christ who confronts his church from the outside?

As an alternative, I turned to Dietrich Bonhoeffer in chapter four, to investigate what Michael DeJonge calls Bonhoeffer's "person-theology" as found in his Habilitationsschrift *Act and Being* and Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures.⁵⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ as the historical God-man, whose identity is prior to his work, unites the concern for Christ's transcendence *extra nos* with an emphasis on history and visibility. Further, Bonhoeffer sees Christ deeply connected to the church so that Bonhoeffer's person theology orients ecclesiology toward Christ as the Creator of the church and its Lord while also focusing on concrete communities that are called into the mission of Christ as part of his story. This person theology is rooted in the Lutheran focus on the personal union of Jesus Christ, which does not emphasize the incarnation as such but the salvific mission of the obedient Son of the Father. Bonhoeffer's person theology, therefore, provides the substantial doctrinal substance upon which my

⁵⁴⁰ Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

ecclesiology after Christendom will take shape.

Through Bonhoeffer, I have centered my ecclesiology firmly upon Christology as an answer from the Lutheran tradition to the challenge of ecclesiology during this time after Christendom. I have not however, fully articulated the relationship between Christ and the church. In addition, I have not addressed clearly yet the relationship between the church and the world or the prior relationship between Christ and the world. At the center of this chapter then are three questions: What is the relationship between Christ and the church? How does Christ relate with the world? Christ's relationship with the world entails a further question: how does the church relate to the world? The answers to these questions will develop in accordance with my three criteria for post-Christendom ecclesiology while also remaining faithful to justification, an orientation to Christ the Lord and justifier of the church.

Christ and His Church: The Priority of Christology

As I argued in the last two chapters, Christology is the best doctrine in which to root ecclesiology for this time after Christendom. The traditional doctrinal center of Lutheran theology is justification, as we saw in the Lutheran ecclesiology of the word. Although justification is a necessary criterion for Lutheran ecclesiology, justification tends to make the church "punctiliar," emphasizing the individual event of conversion.⁵⁴¹ This further tends to cause Lutheran ecclesiology to lose sight of the importance of the public, visible mission and service of church *communities* in favor of individual social ethics and most importantly individual faith.⁵⁴² In an extreme case, the emphasis on justification forces theology to take its

⁵⁴¹ Richard John Neuhaus, "Luther, Newman, and the Punctiliar Church," in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, ed. Dean O. Wenhe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just Jr., Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 160.

⁵⁴² See my summary and analysis of Steven Paulson in chapter 2.

cues from anthropology rather than God’s revelation in Christ.⁵⁴³ Furthermore, following David Kelsey’s typology of theological logics, justification emphasizes the logic of how human creatures come to faith rather than focusing primarily on the logic of beliefs.⁵⁴⁴ This causes conflation between the logic of beliefs and the logic of coming to faith, suggesting a conflation between anthropology and theology proper. Oswald Bayer’s affirmation of a general doctrine of God necessarily distinct from the Trinity is a clear example of the dangers of this conflation, as noted in chapter two.⁵⁴⁵ Hence, the problem with justification as the center of Lutheran ecclesiology cannot be solved simply by understanding justification in a corporate or communal way as part of the visible work of God through the means of grace—although this is necessary and important. Rather, the foundation for the church needs to return to the basics, to the foundation of justification itself, to understand the church from Christ the justifying Lord who is present through the Spirit. The church is given its identity in the Lord Jesus.

Pneumatology has received much recent support for ecclesiology after Christendom also. In addition to the work of Reinhard Hütter and Cheryl Peterson, many others have looked to the Trinity and pneumatology as starting points for ecclesiology.⁵⁴⁶ Although such approaches tend to stress the community of the church and public mission and service done there, the danger of introspection is too great in the accounts of Hütter and Peterson. The Trinity and the Spirit lack the same concreteness that Jesus Christ has, which tends to reduce the Trinity and the Spirit to

⁵⁴³ See my summary and analysis of Oswald Bayer in chapter 2.

⁵⁴⁴ See David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 1:1–119.

⁵⁴⁵ See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 334–40. Bayer asserts, “A dogmatic study that begins with the teaching about the Trinity ignores or minimizes the problem of unfaith” (335). Bayer takes an anthropological issue and logic (unfaith) and forces that back on the doctrine of God, conflating two different questions and issues and creating real problems.

⁵⁴⁶ For examples, see Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, eds., *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), especially 347–415.

apriori concepts or ideas. In other words, theologians often fill in the content of the Trinity or the Spirit with ideas or concepts to support their own projects.⁵⁴⁷ For theologians that affirm God's continued presence and work in the church, an ecclesiology rooted in the Spirit or in the Trinity has a danger of focusing the church on its own structure, practices, or current life because the Spirit becomes concrete in these ways and places. This, however, is dangerously introspective, focusing congregations on the church itself rather than Christ and his word through which the Spirit works. Ecclesiology needs a solid Christology in order to root the church in the Son of God who is present in it, calling the church to repentance, forgiveness, and discipleship.

An Ecclesiology of the *Person* of Christ: Major Emphases for the Church

What does it mean for the church to be rooted in the person of Christ? In this section, I explore two major emphases entailed by the person theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: namely, the other two criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom, storied identity and visible concreteness. In the following section, I will distinguish my understanding of the relationship between Christ and his church from two common misconceptions. After this, I will explore the dialectical relationship between Christ and the church, which will lead to a discussion of the relationship between Christ and the world and thus the church and the world.

To understand the church from the person of Christ means to place the entire church and reflection upon the church in relationship to Jesus of Nazareth. The contours of this ecclesiology are built upon his identity and history with his creation in his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, continued presence in the Spirit, and his coming again in judgment. This section will show how an ecclesiology rooted in the person of Jesus fulfills my criteria for ecclesiology after Christendom. Even though these criteria were developed initially through sociology and

⁵⁴⁷ See Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207–46.

anthropology, in Christ they find their theological origin. In fact, without this theological origin, my criteria for post-Christian ecclesiology would be in danger of what James K. A. Smith calls “correlationist” theology.⁵⁴⁸ A correlationist theology is “a theological strategy” that operates “beginning with a certain confidence in the findings of a secular discipline—whether philosophy, psychology, history, or sociology—a correlationist theology adapts this neutral or scientific framework as a foundation and then correlates Christian theological claims with the facts disclosed by secular science.”⁵⁴⁹ Although I began by characterizing the ecclesial situation in chapter one using sociological arguments, this was always in view of the development of a Christological center. Hence, the criterion of doctrinal substance became the primary focus of the dissertation shortly thereafter, with a view to understanding the church from the logic of beliefs, which would entail the importance of the other two criteria, visibility and concreteness. The relative importance of visibility, history, story, and concreteness may change as culture and the church shift, but the church must be rooted always in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who makes himself known in the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the words of the classic hymn, the church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord, regardless of time and place. And in this time, post-Christendom, an ecclesiology rooted in Jesus emphasizes essential characteristics for our time: storied identity and visible concreteness.

An Ecclesiology of the *Person* of Christ: Storied Identity

Jesus is not an idea, a concept, or a theory. Jesus Christ is a person. This simple and obvious proposition has many implications, including the importance of story. To identify Jesus, the church must tell a story about him. Certainly, doctrinal propositions play an important

⁵⁴⁸ See James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 123–27.

⁵⁴⁹ Smith, *Who's Afraid*, 123.

regulative role in delimiting theological grammar and language.⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, doctrinal propositions indicate central points of logic and essential hermeneutical points that must be grasped for a Christian reading of the Scriptures.⁵⁵¹ Nevertheless, the Bible does not speak about Jesus primarily in propositions, but in story. The Gospel writers sought to confess him by witnessing to his life and his ministry, his preaching, teaching, suffering, and resurrection, which identify him as Lord, Christ, Rabbi, Son of God, Immanuel and many other important titles. In other words, the Gospels do not simply recall Jesus's words or particular actions without a larger context of his story, as some Gnostic texts do;⁵⁵² instead, the Gospels recall Jesus's life in connection with the entire creation—including his disciples, those outside the inner circle, and even those who hated Jesus. Jesus is who he is as he, for example, brought the reign of the kingdom of God, as the greatest of servants, and as the long-foretold prophet. To know Jesus from the Scriptures is to know his story. In this way I agree with Hannah Arndt who comments more generally on identity: “*Who* somebody is or was we can only know by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he is or was.”⁵⁵³ Arndt is largely correct, but for Christians there is a vital qualifier. The Gospels are much more than the opinions of biased biographers; they are authorized witnesses to the word and judgment of God.⁵⁵⁴ To tell the story of Jesus rooted in the Scriptures is, therefore, to speak the word of

⁵⁵⁰ Compare George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

⁵⁵¹ Compare this to my doctor father Charles Arand's understanding of the proper role of the Lutheran Confessions in his dissertation. See Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 263–66.

⁵⁵² I have in mind, in particular, the Gospel of Thomas.

⁵⁵³ Hannah Arndt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 186, quoted in Robert A. Krieg, *A Story-Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 7. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵⁴ Thus, Dietrich Bonhoeffer contends, “This assertion that this person is God *is the vertical Word from*

God that says who Jesus is, which entails his work of salvation *pro nobis*.

In arguing for the importance of story in the identity description of Jesus, I do not intend to indicate that personal identity is self-evident. As Hans Frei has noted in his important work *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, personal identity is a complicated issue: “The most we can do with identity description (as distinguished from metaphysical explanation) is to indicate that the self relates itself to itself. Apparently, we cannot come up with any single factor within the self that has unifying power.”⁵⁵⁵ For this reason, Frei calls personal identity “mysterious,” and defines it in a nearly paradoxical manner. On the one hand, all changes of the person’s actions, states, and properties are truly changes of the self. On the other hand, “no set of changing states, properties, and, in particular, set of actions, exhausts the self in such a way that it cannot also provide the *bond of continuity* between these distinct acts, states, and properties which it is.”⁵⁵⁶ The self is constituted by the one’s actions, yet is distinct from them. Personal identity has both continuity and discontinuity. Personal identity is discontinuous because one’s intentions and actions in changing life circumstances constitute the self; at the same time, a continuity of the self lies beyond these changes and circumstances. Based upon these two observations, Frei argues for two kinds of identity description: an “intention-action” description,⁵⁵⁷ “suggesting that a person is

above that neither takes anything away from nor adds anything to Jesus Christ, but rather qualifies this entire human being as God. *It is God’s judgment about this human being!* It is God’s Word, which takes this human being Jesus Christ and qualifies him as God.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” in *Berlin, 1932–33*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 353–54. Emphases original. Obviously, this cannot be understood in an adoptionist way.

⁵⁵⁵ Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 42. Jerrold Seigel has also made the same point in his historical investigation of the self in Modernity. Siegel concludes in his condensed prose: “If the three dimensions of personal existence [corporeality, relationality, and reflectivity] both limit and support each other, then no conception that essentially absorbs any one of them—in practice almost always reflectivity—into another can encompass our condition, however much it may transfigure things in accord with some hope or wish.” Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 651–52. The whole book is basically evidence for this point.

⁵⁵⁶ Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 43. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵⁷ Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 43–44.

as he acts,” and “a person’s manifestation as a total being,” which emphasizes “the continuity of the person as he persists through all the changes that take place in his life.”⁵⁵⁸ In a certain sense, the intention-action description tells a story from below, looking at what Jesus is like from his acts, while the description of total personal manifestation requires a view from above, of God’s word and work that declares who Jesus is.⁵⁵⁹ The Gospels identify Jesus in both of these ways, presenting “Jesus’ identity as that of a singular, unsubstitutable person, especially in the sequence from his passion to his resurrection.”⁵⁶⁰ According to Frei, the identity of Jesus cannot be sundered from his story; he is the Lord who gives himself up to suffer and die as a sinner and be vindicated by his Father in the resurrection.

Not only is the story of Jesus important because Jesus is a person whose story is told in the Scriptures, but it is also important so that the church continues to look beyond itself to Christ. In other words, the person and story of Jesus focuses the eyes of the church on its Lord rather than on itself. A narrative ecclesiology that is primarily concerned with “the story of the church” can lead to an unhelpful introspection as if the church were the center of its own story.⁵⁶¹ Instead, the church is *given* its story; it receives it as a gift from God. Hence, the story of Jesus which identifies the church cannot be constructed from the side of the church, even though it is always interpreted from this side. Rather, the church lives in the story of God and receives its place as

⁵⁵⁸ Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 45.

⁵⁵⁹ Frei does not use these categories of above and below, but he suggests as much when he says, “There, where God enacts his intention most directly (though veiledly) [namely in the resurrection], it becomes most clearly evident *who* Jesus is.” Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 124. Emphasis original.

⁵⁶⁰ Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 52. See pages 86–152 for details on how the Gospels describe Jesus in these two ways.

⁵⁶¹ This is the critique Nathan Kerr levels against Stanley Hauerwas. Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 101–16. Kerr contends, “Hauerwas conceives of Jesus’ relation to the church in such a way that who Jesus is *outside* of the church can really only ever be a kind of hermeneutical function of the internal linguistic and narrative construct that is the church’s habits, practices, and institutions.... Thus, when I say that Christ’s identity as Lord is itself a ‘hermeneutical function’ of the church, I am suggesting that for Hauerwas Christ is ‘outside’ the church in a way that is reducible to the Christian community’s consistent interpretation of its own ‘internal’ story” (111, emphasis original).

part of this story. In fact, this is an implication of the doctrine of justification. The church's identity is not created by the church but received from God. An emphasis on the person of Jesus and his story provides this important orientation for the church: the church looks always to the Lord. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer asserts, "Human beings, when they understand themselves in faith, are entirely wrenched away from themselves and are directed towards God."⁵⁶² A theological foundation of the person of Jesus Christ helps theology remember the necessity of this orientation for the church.

Throughout this section, I have spoken about the story of Jesus as if it were self-evident, but it is not. Whose narrative? Which Jesus?⁵⁶³ This problem is particularly acute in post-Christendom since the story of Jesus is hardly known in the broader culture, and postmodern philosophy has deconstructed all metanarratives.⁵⁶⁴ I have asserted, with Hans Frei, that the Scriptures render the character of Jesus Christ; the Gospels describe Jesus's unsubstitutable identity. Is the task that simple? Is it simply a matter of narrating the one story of Jesus in the Bible? On the one hand, the Roman Catholic theologian Rudolf Schnackenburg contends that there is a "unified faith-picture" of Jesus consistent in the four Gospels.⁵⁶⁵ In a similar way, Martin Luther refused to write a specific introduction to each particular gospel, but instead opted for a preface to the New Testament, which emphasized the gospel as such, the good news of

⁵⁶² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., vol. 2 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 135.

⁵⁶³ I am playing off Alasdair MacIntyre's well-known book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

⁵⁶⁴ For Lyotard's understanding of metanarrative and why it matters to the church, see Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 59–79. Smith, however, shows how a metanarrative for Lyotard is not about its cosmic scope but about the modern legitimation of any story by universal reason. The universal *warrant* for a story that stands outside of language and culture is what makes any story a metanarrative, not its cosmic scope. In the text above, I am using metanarrative in the more colloquial sense of big story rather than Lyotard's notion.

⁵⁶⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 308–16.

Christ.⁵⁶⁶ The Scriptures have much consistency and coherence as they describe only one Jesus and his one work of salvation for his creation. Mark describes the same Jesus of Nazareth as John does, even considering their various nuances and differences.⁵⁶⁷ On the other hand, these differences must not be conflated into a monolithic picture of Jesus that disregards the total witness of the Bible. As Richard Burridge notes about recent biblical scholarship: “The variety of such narratives [of Jesus] within the canon means that we should no longer talk of New Testament Christology as a single entity, but look at the diversity of attempts to understand the person of Jesus within these different texts.”⁵⁶⁸ A conflation of this diversity results in a Jesus that is much less than the Bible describes so that Jesus is interpreted into one’s own likeness rather than Jesus confronting people from without in the reading of the Scriptures.

In other words, a danger lurks within an emphasis on the one story of Jesus even as it rightly stresses the unity of the Bible and the unity of Christ. The person of Jesus remains greater than any particular title, any monolithic telling of his story.⁵⁶⁹ Therefore, a theology of the person of Jesus resists any attempt to speak of a total all-encompassing metanarrative as if the

⁵⁶⁶ See Martin Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” in *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 357–62. Luther says, “The gospel, then, is nothing but the preaching about Christ, Son of God and of David, true God and man, who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all men who believe in him” (360).

⁵⁶⁷ I make this point against John Milbank who begins with ecclesiology since Jesus “cannot be given any particular content” without the practices of the church. Milbank continues, “The waters of baptism, the fire of the Holy Spirit, Mary’s consent to the incarnation, all in a historical sense ‘precede’ Jesus, although Jesus makes them operative. If we want to describe a founder precisely in the moment of origination of a practice, then all we can do is to identify him with the general norms of that practice, and this procedure is followed by the gospels.” Not only does Milbank misidentify Jesus as founder of Christianity rather than Lord and Son of God, but his procedure also represents an extreme ecclesial introspection. How does Christ encounter Christian practice and call the church to any new or different mission in Milbank’s notion of church? How does repentance, especially ecclesial repentance, exist in Milbank’s account? See John Milbank, “The Name of Jesus: Incarnation, Atonement, and Ecclesiology,” *Modern Theology* 7, no. 4 (1991): 318.

⁵⁶⁸ Richard A. Burridge, “From Titles to Stories: A Narrative Approach to the Dynamic Christologies of the New Testament,” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 47. See also Burridge’s book, Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁵⁶⁹ By monolithic, I mean any telling of the story of Jesus that uses one way of speaking of his identity and one metaphor for his work as an all-encompassing, necessary, and sufficient condition of Jesus’s story.

metanarrative itself was canonical. Metanarratives are hermeneutical tools, ways to organize and systematize information, whereas Jesus remains above and beyond such concepts, graspable in the word proclaimed in his stead and about him yet encountering the same church from outside, calling it to repentance and faithfulness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes this point in *Act and Being* when he argues, “Theological thinking and knowledge is possible only as *ecclesial thinking and knowledge*. Because theology turns revelation into something that exists, it may be practiced only where the living person of Christ is itself present and can destroy this existing thing or acknowledge it.”⁵⁷⁰ A metanarrative risks thinking of Christ primarily as an existing thing, failing to see how this construction must be set before Christ’s judgment in the church, to destroy it or acknowledge its worthiness in thinking and acting faithfully according to the Scriptures. To avoid this, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ confesses that Jesus is known in the story of the Bible, understood within the Christian church and its normative confessions and Creeds, but emphasizes that this story is multi-faceted with new sides and perspectives shining a different light in various times and places. In this way, Christ is always judging theology to drive the church to faithfulness through the Scriptures.

Although there is one Jesus and one Bible, the pictures of Jesus in the Scriptures are many. Schnackenburg, for instance, also mentions a “varied picture of Jesus Christ” in each Gospel,⁵⁷¹ and even his understanding of the “unified faith-picture” of Jesus has four different sketches: Messiah, Son of God, bringer of salvation, and the wholly other revealer of the Father.⁵⁷² The gospel accounts reveal both unity and diversity in their witness of Christ and his salvation. We should not, however, understand these different pictures of Jesus as conflictual; an understanding

⁵⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 131.

⁵⁷¹ Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels*, 295–308.

⁵⁷² Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels*, 308–16.

of Jesus as the Messiah is not in conflict with Jesus as the bringer of salvation. Instead, the different sketches of Jesus are complementary. To use Hans Frei's categories and vocabulary, each different picture brings out the intention-action description of Jesus within a particular context, thus making an important addition to the total manifestation of Jesus's person. In other words, the sum total picture of Jesus from the Scriptures along with the judgment and word of God is the total manifestation of Jesus's person, but we cannot start there for theological reflection.⁵⁷³ The trajectories are too diverse for a systematic presentation of Christ or of a resulting ecclesiology.

The multiplicity of the story of Jesus finds support in the form of the Bible itself. The Bible tells not one story but four stories of Jesus. Each gospel has its own unique perspective and emphases that characterize its account of Jesus. Certainly, there is only one Jesus and one good news of salvation, but there are many ways to speak this message and story.⁵⁷⁴ Of course, every telling of the story of Jesus must be rooted in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament. This is a prerequisite. At the same time, though, no single telling can ever fully encompass Jesus Christ. Jesus remains always outside of our grasp, encountering his church in his word, challenging it, forgiving it, and calling it to new ventures of discipleship. This is the point of Bonhoeffer's person theology. It requires a story because Jesus is a particular person, a first century Palestinian Jew of history; a man with a particular identity who preached, taught, and performed signs of the reign of God. His story gives the church its story so telling the story of this Messiah is necessary, yet one telling is never enough. One must keep telling and retelling

⁵⁷³ To be clear, the total grasping of Christ's person through the Spirit is where all Christians begin by faith. *Fides directa* is this kind of direct view and grasp of Christ, trusting in his person and promise for me. Any reflection upon faith, however, can only view Christ in part. For Bonhoeffer's understanding of the *fides directa*, see Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 157–61.

⁵⁷⁴ See Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), which shows how many different metaphors there are for the good news of Christ in the Scriptures.

this story over and over again. As the context changes, as the challenges of post-Christendom shift, so the particular emphases of the story can and should change to help the church be faithful to Jesus Christ *hic et nunc*. This is not to say, of course, that Christ himself changes—“Christ remains forever”—but the way we speak about Jesus can and must change in accordance with the Scriptures in order to see more clearly how Christ is calling his church to discipleship today.

An Ecclesiology of the *Person* of Christ: Visible Concreteness

The criterion of visible concreteness is complex. As I explained in the first chapter, “visible” indicates that the church should be understood primarily as a visible community, not as the invisible hearts of the faithful, and “concreteness” signifies that ecclesiology must consider the congregation as the primary actor, called to serve Christ in its community and undertake his mission of service and witness in the public realm. More than that, visibility also demands embodiment; the church is part of the history of God’s work with his creation on earth and not some abstract history of ideas or disembodied souls. The church lives on earth in flesh and blood history, which is God’s history with and for his creation. Hence, an ecclesiology of the person of Christ remembers the specific place of a church’s ministry, emphasizing the fact that it is made of creatures, and it ministers to creatures in service to the Lord of creation, Christ himself.

The Reformed philosophical theologian James K. A. Smith contends for a “logic of incarnation” that will help identify some of the important emphases of Bonhoeffer’s person theology. Like Bonhoeffer, Smith argues that the incarnation is “a mode of manifestation that both makes God present to the immanence of human perception but also retains the transcendence of the Wholly Other.”⁵⁷⁵ Smith further recognizes the formal and conceptual

⁵⁷⁵ James K.A. Smith, “A Principle of Incarnation in Derrida’s (*theologische?*) *Jugendschriften*: Towards a Confessional Theology,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (2002): 219. Elsewhere, Smith writes, “The Incarnation is God’s refusal to avoid speaking, and so the Incarnation functions as a paradigm for the operation of theological language which both ‘does justice’ to God’s transcendence and infinity, but at the same time makes it possible to

problems involved in his use of the term incarnation as a concept, logic, and principle. Smith notes, “The concept is merely a pointer—and a formal one at that—which directs others to find its fulfillment in the experience itself. Its task is not to play the role of a substitute for the Transcendent, but to direct the gaze beyond itself *to* the Transcendent, and be challenged by this Other.”⁵⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer’s person theology functions in a similar way, focusing on the person of Jesus Christ in order to direct the gaze of the church toward Christ who makes himself graspable and haveable in the church and the Scriptures while refusing to let Christ be reduced to human systems and concepts.⁵⁷⁷

In addition to the importance of the transcendence and thus condescension of Christ, Smith’s logic of incarnation also emphasizes embodiment and particularity, the goodness of creation, which corresponds well with Bonhoeffer’s person theology. Smith describes his understanding of the logic of incarnation in contradistinction with the “logic of determination.”⁵⁷⁸ According to Smith, a number of important philosophers and theologians, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida among them, follow the logic of determination, in which “the particularity of religious confession will lead only to tribalism, and ultimately violence.”⁵⁷⁹ The very fact of any specific belief or specific hope creates violence so that all social hope and justice must be unspecified and indeterminate. This view, then, has grand claims for justice, but the claims can never be fulfilled or even articulated concretely. From this perspective, all concrete policies are

‘speak.’ In other words, it is the Incarnation that provides an account which affirms both transcendence and immanent appearance—both alterity and identity—without reducing the one to the other.” James K.A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 154.

⁵⁷⁶ Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 169. Emphasis original.

⁵⁷⁷ See chapter four for more details.

⁵⁷⁸ See James K.A. Smith, “The Logic of Incarnation: Towards a Catholic Postmodernism,” in *The Logic of Incarnation: James K. A. Smith’s Critique of Postmodern Religion*, ed. Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 8–17. for a description of the logic of determination.

⁵⁷⁹ Smith, “Logic of Incarnation,” 11.

judged as unjust. Considering these characteristics, Smith sees Derrida's thesis playing out in North America in both conservative circles that settle for injustice since it is inevitable and liberal versions of civil religion that seek to avoid the particularities of any confession.⁵⁸⁰

According to Smith, the logic of determination construes the particularity of confession as inevitably violent because *finitude* is itself violent. Derrida, for instance, contends that no one can attend to the obligations of all: "When I feed my own cat, I am guilty for *not* feeding every other cat."⁵⁸¹ For Derrida, then, the fact of creaturely particularity inevitably leads to guilt and violence. Creatures simply cannot live in peace and wholeness.

Smith's logic of incarnation and Bonhoeffer's person theology reject such a construal of creatureliness and particularity. Certainly, a theological emphasis on creation and creatureliness also affirms these aspects of created life, but creation theology tends to separate Christ from God and the Spirit under the guise of a first article theology.⁵⁸² In the process, the history of Jesus and

⁵⁸⁰ Smith, "Logic of Incarnation," 12.

⁵⁸¹ Smith, "Logic of Incarnation," 13. I have heard a number of Lutherans make a similar claim during catechesis: you are guilty of failing to provide for, forgive, and witness to everyone in the world. In fact, I taught the same way in my first catechism class while in seminary. Granted, the point is two-fold: to emphasize both the all-encompassing nature of sin and the importance of sins of omission. These points are true and important, but in the process finitude is construed as sinful as such. Considered Christologically, is Jesus guilty of not healing, forgiving, or helping everyone? Clearly not, so to get around this problem, some have suggested that Jesus was an exception from the normal human condition, which allowed him not to be guilty of all those sins of omission. Such an exemption, however, tilts toward Docetism, not reflecting the biblical claims that Jesus "came under the law," "took on the likeness of sinful flesh," and "was at all points tempted like we are, yet without sin." Considered ecclesiological, the logic of the first claim about sins of omission disconnects the individual from the church and humanity at large so that the individual is guilty of each sin of omission without consideration of the larger church and the responsibility of other Christians. Perhaps, the church at large could be guilty of all sins of omission across the globe, and an individual would share the guilt because of her participation in the Body called to the ministry of Jesus. It seems to me, however, that no individual should be considered as guilty of the whole world's sin except for Christ himself in the humiliation. To combat these Christological and ecclesiological problems, pastors must be careful not to suggest that finitude is itself a sin. Moreover, we must affirm social sin, including the sin of the church, as real. An affirmation of social sin does not *ipso facto* deny personal culpability, but highlights the relatedness of all things and the way sin works within cultures, social forms, and the general social *Zeitgeist*. For a critical theological analysis of social sin in the last two centuries, see Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

⁵⁸² For example, see Gustaf Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article," *Word & World* 4 (1984): 353–71. The common distinction made between a first, second, and third article theology suggests this separation too. Although my work focuses on the person of Jesus, I see Christ as a unifying perspective, where creation, redemption, and eschatology find their center in the Lord of creation who is coming again in judgment.

God's history with Israel can be short-circuited so that the particularities of human history are glossed over in favor of the cosmic history of creation to eschaton. To be sure, the Bible sees the history of Jesus as a cosmic history, a history to which and from which all history flows. This cosmic history, however, is fully the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, Jesus does not just happen to embody and represent the cosmic history of God; instead, his particular history has been made cosmic by the particularities of his ministry, his death, his resurrection, and the sending of the Spirit upon the church. God has exalted him as Lord precisely because of the shape of his humiliated life.⁵⁸³

As such, Jesus was not an archetype of humanity, an idea and representation of God's salvation, or an embodiment of the power of the eternal Geist. Rather, Jesus was born of a Jewish woman, Mary, in Bethlehem during the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Jesus was laid in a manger among sheep and cattle; he nursed at his mother's breasts. His father, Joseph, held him safely in his arms and lovingly rocked Jesus to sleep. The particularities of this Jewish baby are not alien to Jesus's person or ministry; they are central to Jesus's identity and mission, and necessary for them. Jesus entered into the fullness of human history to affirm the goodness of creation even as he called out sin and rebellion against God and brought restoration to the broken, sinful world. Particularity itself is not sin; Jesus became a particular human creature. Instead, it is the disorder of the particularities of creation—its orientation to the kingdom of the devil rather than to the kingdom of God, what Luther called the bondage of the will or bound choice⁵⁸⁴—that is the problem, not created particularity itself. Hence, Smith argues, "This is why the logic of incarnation, which flows from and re-affirms the goodness of creation, finds its completion in the doctrine of the resurrection and an eschatology of the new heavens and new earth—which is not

⁵⁸³ See Philippians 2.

⁵⁸⁴ See Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, ed. Philip S. Watson, vol. 33 of *Luther's Works*

any kind of escape from finitude as if finite particularity were inherently evil; rather, it is the hope of well-ordered particularity.”⁵⁸⁵ In Christ, creation finds its hope, the hope that God loves his particular creation and will restore it—not annihilate or destroy it—to creaturely perfection, the image and form of Jesus himself.⁵⁸⁶

In a similar way, Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues that “natural life” is not only good, but is to be understood in the light of Christ. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer contends, “The natural is that form of life preserved by God for the fallen world that is directed toward justification, salvation, and renewal through Christ.”⁵⁸⁷ For Bonhoeffer, natural life is deformed both by a “vitalism” which makes life an end in itself and by a mechanization of life that makes creatures and created matter merely instruments of economics or politics or any ideology.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, Bonhoeffer opines, “Natural life stands between the extremes of vitalism and mechanization. It is at the same time life as an end in itself and as a means to an end. In Jesus Christ life as an end in itself expresses its createdness, and life as a means to an end expresses its participation in the kingdom of God.”⁵⁸⁹ For Bonhoeffer, natural life finds in Christ both an emphasis on creatureliness or createdness and an emphasis on the kingdom of God. Christ brings together the beginning and the end in calling creaturely life a good gift of the Creator now in the fallen creation. As Jonathan Wilson argues, “Apart from Jesus Christ the universe described and confessed by

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

⁵⁸⁵ Smith, “The Logic of Incarnation,” 18.

⁵⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer emphasizes worldliness, especially in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* in contrast to an other-worldly orientation and hope. See Douglas John Hall, “*Ecclesia Crucis: The Disciple Community and the Future of the Church in North America*,” in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 66–69.

⁵⁸⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 174.

⁵⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 178–79.

⁵⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 179.

Genesis simply would not exist, and we would have no way of conceiving it. The confession of ‘creation’ in Genesis looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. He becomes incarnate, knowing that to become human is to submit to death. Yet he sees and lives his life fully in the way of creation.” Christ is the center of this creation which is fallen yet remains good since God is redeeming it *as creation*.⁵⁹⁰ In this way, the person theology of Bonhoeffer affirms the status of the creation as a good gift of God, and intends to direct it to Christ who is coming again to restore the entire creation to the goodness of the kingdom of God.

With this emphasis on creation, Bonhoeffer’s person theology also highlights embodied worship, especially the sacraments, as Christ’s affirmation and restoration of creatureliness. In his Christology lectures, Bonhoeffer asserts that the elements of water, bread, and wine are signs and manifestations of the new creation in the midst of the old. The crucified and risen Christ truly makes himself present in creation, freely choosing to give himself through creaturely means, making these elements part of the new creation.⁵⁹¹ Christ gives himself through creaturely means not to assimilate the creature into the divine but to restore creatures to their proper place vis-à-vis God. In other words, the sacraments are not mere pointers to a higher reality above and beyond the visceral, created elements of bread and wine, as Hegel thought.⁵⁹² Instead, Christ condescends to earth to give himself in bread and wine, making these part of the new creation. The reality of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Spirit cannot be separated from the form of bread and wine, the means of creation. Bonhoeffer notes accordingly: the sacrament engages humans in created form because we are created. God hallows out a part of creation—since it is

⁵⁹⁰ Jonathan R. Wilson, *God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 171–72. Wilson’s quote above does not adequately distinguish between incarnation and humiliation, but otherwise his point is a good one.

⁵⁹¹ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 322–23 and 327.

⁵⁹² Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

no longer all sacrament after the fall—giving forgiveness and life through creaturely means to restore fallen creatures to true creatureliness, trust in and obedience to God.⁵⁹³ For an ecclesiology following the person of Jesus Christ, the creatureliness of worship is central, especially the sacraments; Christ works through creaturely means for creatures so that we might be righteous as creatures before God and in his creation. Therefore, the visible concreteness of the sacraments are the gift of Christ to his body, the visible church-community. As visible, tangible gifts of creation hallowing Christ's body for service, the sacraments make the church a visible, concrete community. Like the story of the church, the church's visible concreteness is a gift of Jesus Christ to his body for his world.⁵⁹⁴

Although a theology of the person of Christ affirms the goodness of materiality and creation, it does not entail a “general sacramentality,” contra the claim of James K. A. Smith.⁵⁹⁵ Smith argues that his logic of creation, “a catholic postmodernism,” affirms “a general sacramentality: the whole world has potential to function as a window to God and a means of grace from God because God himself affirms materiality as a good thing.”⁵⁹⁶ Certainly, creation and materiality are good in themselves, as I have already argued, and God does work through creaturely means. Smith, however, goes beyond the goodness of creation in asserting a general sacramentality of creation as a “*potential*” for God to use material things. The problem here lies primarily with the word potential, for two reasons. First, the very idea of potentiality suggests that the sacramentality of creation lies in the creation itself—it is a potential within creation to be grasped in the anthropological sphere—rather than in God's word and promise.⁵⁹⁷ Second,

⁵⁹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 318–19.

⁵⁹⁴ My thanks to Michael Knippa for drawing out this point in his studious reading of this chapter.

⁵⁹⁵ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 137–39.

⁵⁹⁶ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 138.

⁵⁹⁷ Recall from chapter four the connection between potentiality and being theology.

potentiality emphasizes God's absence as much as God's presence. In other words, all creation may have the potential for God to work through it sacramentally, but it also has the potential to be used by the devil. How does one discern such difference without the word of God?⁵⁹⁸ From a perspective of the person of Jesus, the important question for worship, and thus the sacraments, is not about God's hidden work but about God's specific promises. Jesus has instituted and authorized the sacraments of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession and Absolution, and has promised to show up in them. These sacraments are essential to worship, even as the goodness of creation is also affirmed through the person of Christ.

In addition to affirming the particular good of creatureliness and bodies, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ emphasizes the particularities of time and space. History is not an arena of contingencies separated from the eternal truths of reason by an "ugly, broad ditch," as Lessing asserted. Instead, a theology of the person of Christ affirms time and space as the arenas where Christ is present and God is at work through the Spirit. Theology should not seek to disembodied itself from history and time, trying to find the eternal truths outside of the particularities of time.⁵⁹⁹ Instead, theology can take seriously the history of the church, affirming tradition and the role of tradition in the church. As Smith insists, "To affirm the goodness of creation (Gen. 1:31) is to affirm the goodness of time, time's unfolding in history, and the fruit of this process in history."⁶⁰⁰ In Christ, God reaffirmed time as good when Jesus became incarnate at the proper time, as a first century man. Further, Jesus promised that the Spirit would continue

⁵⁹⁸ Smith is asserting something akin to Luther's distinction between ubiquity and ubivoli presence in the Eucharistic controversy. God is present everywhere, Luther says; the question is where does God promise to be found. Smith's assertion of a general sacramentality (ubiquity) and a special sacramentality (ubivoli presence) mirrors this distinction, but with a failure to see how God is also present in wrath. See Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This Is My Body,' Etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics," vol. 37 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 55–69, esp. 68. Bonhoeffer criticizes such methods of arguing from omniscience and turning the promise into a principle, suggesting that it focuses on the how question rather than the who question. See Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 321–22.

⁵⁹⁹ For critique of such positions, see Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 127–29.

to work in time to lead the church into truth (John 16:13). In Christ, then, time, history, and tradition are affirmed as part of God's continued work in the church. Nevertheless, such an understanding of history cannot simply justify the church of the past nor of the present; Christ is always calling his church to repentance and faithfulness.

As part of the emphasis on time, an ecclesiology of the person of Christ remembers and affirms the catholicity of the church.⁶⁰¹ Although ecumenism is not my focus in this dissertation, the ecumenical work of the church is part of its call to be faithful to Jesus Christ. Christ has made his church one and calls for it to be one. As Ephraim Radner has pointed out, however, denominations do not know how to repent for their participation and furthering of the splintering of God's church.⁶⁰² Denominations are often more concerned with self-preservation than faithfulness to God. In this, an ecclesiology of the person of Christ calls the church to repentance, to do ecumenism in a repentant key, not to ignore doctrine and simply unify for unity's sake but to seek genuine unity and talk about genuine differences with an eye toward the whole catholic church and not merely one denominational instantiation.⁶⁰³ An ecclesiology of the person of Christ remembers that Christ is the Lord and judge of the whole church, and no particular denomination or congregation is immune from his on-going call to repentance and mission.

Not only does an ecclesiology of the person of Christ affirm time, history, and

⁶⁰⁰ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 129–30.

⁶⁰¹ So also Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 132, although he is primarily talking about tradition.

⁶⁰² Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁶⁰³ Bonhoeffer too was critical of ecumenical efforts without doctrinal substance, without addressing the question of truth. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "On the Theological Foundation of the Work of the World Alliance," in *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–32*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens, vol. 11 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works En*

glish Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 356–69. See also page 350 of the same volume for Bonhoeffer's conference notes on the same theme.

creatureliness, but it also emphasizes concrete local places as the spaces of Christ's call and mission. In other words, just as Jesus Christ inhabited a particular place and culture, ministering and serving prostitutes, lepers, Pharisees, and zealots, so the church is called to minister to people in particular place and cultures. While this point might be obvious, ecclesiology has often failed to address the concrete situations of churches, focusing instead on a pure, abstract church which is far from the messiness of the local congregation. In his excellent monograph *Church, World and the Christian Life*, Healy observes how much ecclesiology undercuts the concrete church, for example, by underscoring the sinlessness and perfection of the true church and suggesting that only this pure church is the proper object of ecclesiological reflection.⁶⁰⁴ An ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ, however, would focus not on the pure church, but primarily on the congregations called to Christ's ministry in their local contexts. That means that ecclesiology must take seriously the problems and issues, the social sins, of local communities, the church's participation in these sins, and how Christ is calling the church to witness and service.⁶⁰⁵

For this reason, congregations must see themselves embedded in their places, called by Christ to this community. James K.A. Smith rightly notes how the old model of parish ministry embodied a notion of place that could be a helpful step in recovering local concreteness.⁶⁰⁶ Along the same lines, Eric Jacobson argues, "Parish thinking in a very general sense has to do with

⁶⁰⁴ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9–10. Healy's chapter two is also relevant to this discussion.

⁶⁰⁵ It may even mean taking architecture seriously. See James K.A. Smith, "The Architecture of Altruism: On Loving Our Neighbor(hood)s," in *The Devil Reads Derrida: And Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 32–35.

⁶⁰⁶ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 142. For a recent theological analysis of place, Eric O. Jacobsen, *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), esp. 55–77.

accepting geography as a significant factor in faithfulness to God's call on our lives."⁶⁰⁷ The parish model is not simply about drawing lines for the sake of membership; it is about identifying the role geography plays in faithfulness to Christ, and it helps a congregation see this specific place as a locale wherein Christ is calling *us* to witness and service. As such, the people of the congregation should be led to spend time in the area, getting first-hand knowledge of the people and places and seeing where God is calling them to his mission.⁶⁰⁸

To be sure, congregations are participants in and witnesses to the kingdom of God and part of the *whole* church, but such a perspective does not allow a congregation to move beyond its local place. Instead, Jesus calls his church to proclaim the gospel and serve the needs of the community in their locales in faithfulness to him. In this, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ does not suggest that structure and order are unimportant—in fact ordination comes from Christ's own authority⁶⁰⁹—but the focus is not on how the church is ordered but on the shape of its ministry.⁶¹⁰ Thus, congregations must be attentive to their communities to justice, peace, and mercy, listening closely to God's word to hear how and where Christ is calling to repentance, forgiveness, and mission.⁶¹¹ The areas of service and witness are many and various—social justice, race, poverty, immigration, drugs, violence, food, abortion, care for the elderly, empire, economy, and various concerns with the natural environment—and no single congregation can

⁶⁰⁷ Jacobsen, *Space Between*, 195.

⁶⁰⁸ See Jacobsen, *Space Between*, 194–96.

⁶⁰⁹ For a Christological centering of ordination, see my “Local Ministry and Universal Ordination,” *Lutheran Forum* 47, no. 1 (2013): 46–49.

⁶¹⁰ For a recent ecclesiology that tries to take seriously structure and order, see Peter Schmiechen, *Defining the Church for Our Time: Origin and Structure, Variety and Viability* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012). Among Lutherans, see David S. Yeago, “The Church as Polity? The Lutheran Context of Robert W. Jenson's Ecclesiology,” in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 201–37.

⁶¹¹ Not only must the congregation be attentive to the “world” around it, but also to itself. Here, I think the recent emphasis on ethnography in ecclesiology can be quite helpful. See Pete Ward, ed. *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Healy also suggests an ethnographic direction in his *Church, World and the Christian Life*.

attend to all.⁶¹² The community, both congregation and broader community, must shape the church's service and witness to be more faithful to Christ Jesus. James K.A. Smith's conclusion equally applies to an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus: "The Christian *ekklēsia* must be not only liturgical but also local; it must transform not only hearts but also neighborhoods; its worship must foster not only discipleship but also justice—indeed, disciples who are passionate about justice."⁶¹³ In other words, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ takes seriously the local concrete nature of ministry and its visible work not only in preaching the gospel but in public service to the community.⁶¹⁴

An Ecclesiology of the *Person* of Christ: Avoiding Two Misunderstandings

Some important emphases in an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus have surfaced in this chapter thus far. Ecclesiology must tell the story of Jesus that identifies the church, stresses the presence of Jesus in the church, and calls the church to repentance and mission. Moreover, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus emphasizes local ministry and the visibility of the church in worship and mission, the sacraments and social justice, relationship building and neighborhood restoration. In short, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus highlights my criteria of storied identity and visible concreteness.

In order to clarify the relationship between Christ and the church in my ecclesiology, I must distinguish an ecclesiology that centers on the person of Jesus Christ from two other

⁶¹² Some of these concerns, such as consumption, ethnocentrism, and environmental ethics, are addressed in the book I edited with Robert Kolb, *Inviting Community* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013). See also Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) for specific issues related to the city.

⁶¹³ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 142.

⁶¹⁴ To be clear, the church remains hidden, just as Christ is hidden under the opposite of the cross even as he is the revelation of God in the flesh. My focus on visibility does not deny this epistemological perspective; visibility rather points toward faithfulness to Jesus. For Bonhoeffer's understanding of church as both hidden and visible, see Luca D'Isanto, "Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutical Model of Community," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge, PA:

Christological starting points that are used in ecclesiology: the *imitatio Christi* model and a universal incarnational method. Although these methods differ in important respects, they also share a common problem. In both, Christ becomes something less than the transcendent Son of God who encounters us from the outside, becoming instead a model for ecclesial formation.

The most conspicuous distortion of a Christological ecclesiology happens when Christ is understood primarily as an example for the church to follow. In an *imitatio Christi* model, Jesus chiefly calls the church to act as he acted, to do as he did. In the popular adage of my youth, “What would Jesus do?” is the most important question of this model, making Jesus the moral exemplar to be followed. Although contemporary theology is quite a bit more sophisticated than WWJD, the *imitatio* model of the church remains a real temptation. Within liberal Protestantism, for example, the typical account of moral formation is conceived “as an educational process” whereby “every person is developed and brought to flourishing through the inspirational impact of a religious genius.”⁶¹⁵ Jesus, then, is the inspiration and moral exemplar to follow in order that human creatures flourish and have a full life. Considered ecclesologically, Jesus provides the example for what the church’s mission should look like, and following this example will create a good and healthy church.

The *imitatio Christi* model is hardly reserved for liberal theology. Two evangelical scholars, Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, also use an *imitatio* model for the church’s ministry as they argue for the incarnation as “God’s metaphor for ministry.”⁶¹⁶ In fact, Lingenfelter and Mayers understand incarnation less as the unique mystery of God’s becoming

Trinity Press International, 1994), 135–48.

⁶¹⁵ Bernd Wannewetsch, “The Whole Christ and the Whole Human Being: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Inspiration for the ‘Christology and Ethics’ Discourse,” in *Christology and Ethics*, ed. F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 87.

⁶¹⁶ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 13–25.

human in Christ and more as a “principle” to understand and a “practice” to follow. They write,

The *practice* of incarnation (i.e. a willingness to learn as if we were helpless infants) is the first essential step toward breaking this pattern of excluding others. Missionaries, by the nature of their task, must become personally immersed with people who are different. To follow the example of Christ, that of incarnation, means undergoing drastic personal reorientation.... Moreover, they must do this in the spirit of Christ, that is, without sin. While most of us may not face situations requiring total reorientation, the *incarnation principle* can also be applied effectively in family and church life.⁶¹⁷

It is apparent in Lingenfelter and Mayer’s work that the incarnation is primarily understood in terms of something that Christians are to do. Not only are God’s people to follow Christ in terms of his deeds, but even the mystery of the incarnation is reduced to the practice of learning and being immersed in a culture, something all Christians should emulate to one degree or another.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified a basic problem with such an *imitatio Christi* model in his chapter “Ethics as Formation,” part of his unfinished magnum opus *Ethics*. For Bonhoeffer, ethical formation cannot proceed as the church figures out what works of Jesus to emulate, but instead formation is passive as Jesus works on the church. The works of Jesus cannot be understood independently from his person, as the *imitatio Christi* model attempts to do.⁶¹⁸ Instead, Jesus shapes his church into his own form, not as something which the church does, but something which Christ does to the church. Bonhoeffer writes,

Formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, by *being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen*. This does not happen as we strive “to become like Jesus,” as we customarily say, but as the form of Jesus Christ himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ’s own (Gal. 4:9). Christ remains the only one who forms. Christian people do not form the world with their ideas. Rather, Christ forms human beings to a form the same as Christ’s own.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 22–23. Emphases added.

⁶¹⁸ Wannewetsch, “The Whole Christ,” 87. Wannewetsch writes, “The problem with the idea of Jesus as moral exemplar whose works are to be emulated is that it assumes these works can be taken on their own, in abstraction from the person of Christ.”

⁶¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 93. Emphasis original.

The *imitatio Christi* model fails, then, according to Bonhoeffer because it reverses the direction of formation, making the church the primary agent of formation rather than Christ himself. IN an analysis of Bonhoeffer, Joseph McGarry contends, “Christian formation is determined by an asymmetrical agency, in which formation in Christ is a byproduct of the church’s discipleship to Christ, even as such formation is not—indeed cannot—be its original objective.”⁶²⁰ An *imitatio Christi* model places the priority on the church to emulate Jesus as the goal of discipleship whereas Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the person of Jesus places the priority on Christ himself who shapes and forms his church. For Bonhoeffer, McGarry argues, formation is something that Christ does to his people while the eyes of the church remain upon the person of Jesus himself, following him in simple obedience.⁶²¹ By abstracting Christ’s work from his person and focusing on doing the works of Jesus as a goal in itself, an *imitatio Christi* model threatens to diminish the transcendent Son of God who judges and forgives his human creatures into just another object of human investigation which can be rejected or accepted from a distance. Hence, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus is far different from simply understanding Jesus as a moral exemplar to follow. Jesus cannot merely be imitated; he is the Lord who judges, forgives, and calls his church to lives of repentance and faithful discipleship. Faithfulness to Jesus, not Christlikeness, is the goal of an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ.

This discussion of the *imitatio Christi* reveals another similarity between Bonhoeffer’s Christological person theology and Luther’s theology. Just as Bonhoeffer rejected an understanding of Christ that focused on imitating him, Luther made a distinction between Christ as *sacramentum* and Christ as *exemplum*.⁶²² For Luther, “Before you take Christ as an example,

⁶²⁰ Joseph McGarry, “Formed While Following: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Asymmetrical View of Agency in Christian Formation,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 108.

⁶²¹ McGarry, “Formed While Following,” 106–10.

⁶²² On this distinction in Luther, see Bayer, *Luther’s Theology*. 63–64.

you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own. This means that when you see or hear of Christ doing or suffering something, you do not doubt that Christ himself, with his deeds and suffering, belongs to you.”⁶²³ What Luther meant by this “was not an abstract priority of salvation over sanctification or of human receptivity over activity; what he sought to defend was rather Christ’s *ongoing activity as a living* sacrament, as opposed to his being reduced to a *historical* role of exemplifying moral values.”⁶²⁴ In a similar way, Bonhoeffer argued on the basis of his person theology against any attempt to make Christ an instrument of human projects, moral or intellectual. Christ is first the one who acts upon his human creatures and for them, before he can be rightly seen as an example for creaturely service. A reversal of this order threatens to abstract Christ’s person from his work and turn the church’s risen Lord into an instrument for the church to use. An ecclesiology based upon Bonhoeffer’s person theology is rooted in the *person* of Jesus Christ and not in his works in isolation from his identity.

In addition to distinguishing between an ecclesiology built on Bonhoeffer’s person theology from an *imitatio Christi* model, I also need to distinguish my approach from a universal incarnational model of the church and its mission. In some recent theological discourse, the incarnation has become a model for understanding *how* the church relates to the broader culture. For example, the Roman Catholic scholar Louis Luzbetak understands an incarnational model of the church’s mission as “contextualization” or “inculturation.” Luzbetak writes, “We understand contextualization as the various processes by which a local church integrates the Gospel message (the ‘text’) with its local culture (the ‘context’). The text and context must be blended into that one, God-intended reality called ‘Christian living’.” As mentioned earlier, contextualization is

⁶²³ Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” in *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 119.

also known as ‘inculturation’ and ‘incarnation’.”⁶²⁵ While Luzbetak’s understanding of contextualization shares much in common with my three criteria—for example, a focus on the local congregation as the primary agent of Christ’s mission through the Spirit and the importance of affirming God’s creation through an emphasis on history and time⁶²⁶—a deep problem arises when one identifies the incarnation with contextualization as such. The person of Jesus of Nazareth and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God are in danger of being reduced to understandable concepts within anthropology. The whole of Christ’s person and work threatens to be boiled down to an idea: blending the text with the local culture just as the Son of God “blended” himself with humanity in his person and his work to bring together God and humanity.⁶²⁷ There is, of course, truth here in the importance of contextualization and in the reconciliation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ, but both become watered down when the incarnation of Jesus Christ is treated in terms of an anthropological concept.⁶²⁸

Bernd Wannewetsch too shows how Jesus can be reduced to a concept under the umbrella of the incarnation, which is a particular danger for Lutheran theology. According to Wannewetsch, such a method stems from Hegel. Hegel turned religion into a concept as he sought to reconcile the totality of life against philosophies that created fundamental dichotomies.⁶²⁹ Hegel’s method is apparent in his understanding of the Lord’s Supper, which

⁶²⁴ Wannewetsch, “The Whole Christ,” 89. Emphases original.

⁶²⁵ Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 69.

⁶²⁶ Compare Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, 70.

⁶²⁷ As is apparent, Chalcedon is at issue here, though the language could be adjusted to be more acceptable according to Chalcedon’s four negations. I am simply using Luzbak’s language from the quote above for contextualization and following his implication by applying it to the incarnation.

⁶²⁸ The language of translation is better, I believe, and the argument is less problematic in Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. rev. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2009) as long as the incarnation and Jesus is not reduced to a concept of translation.

⁶²⁹ Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 41–42.

seeks to move beyond the physical senses to a general concept. Wannenwetsch explains, Hegel “can hardly deny the sensory character of ‘tasting and seeing’. At the same time, this counts only as a starting-point, which must very soon be left behind, as Hegel says, believing that the Lutheran view of the Eucharist is the ‘most thoughtful’ of the different confessional ways of thinking the dissolution of the antithesis between finite and infinite.”⁶³⁰ In this way, Hegel divides the form and content of the Lord’s Supper, distilling it to its essence “under the logic of ‘concept’.” In short, Hegel turns the Lord’s Supper and the presence of Christ among his people into the general idea of the unity of divinity and humanity.⁶³¹

Because the Lord’s Supper and Christ are so closely connected,⁶³² Wannenwetsch’s discussion of the sacrament also points to how Christ himself is reduced to a concept, often “in the framework of a universalist incarnation theology.”⁶³³ What happens is that the incarnation becomes a general idea or concept of the union of God and humanity rather than a mystery of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus of Nazareth, and part of his obedient service to God and the world. Wannenwetsch explains,

It may then be perhaps the ‘union’ or ‘unification’ of the divine and the human, God and the world, which in supreme generality is understood to be the ‘sacramental principle’ [or, in my terms, the incarnational principle]. This not infrequently takes place in the framework of a universalist incarnation theology which—with the help of an incarnation Christology derestricted in a problematical way through its pneumatological poverty—is talked about as ‘sacrament’ by the world at large.⁶³⁴

When the incarnation as such is taken as justification for an affirmation of the world rather than

⁶³⁰ Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 43. Citing Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. ii: *Determinate Religion*, part III.

⁶³¹ Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 43.

⁶³² This is evident in the Formula of Concord, articles 7 and 8, which shows how one’s understanding of Jesus’s person and presence affects one’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper. See Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 591–634.

⁶³³ Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 44.

⁶³⁴ Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 44.

the concrete history and obedience of Jesus, this is often the resulting problem. Jesus Christ is reduced to a concept of affirmation. Bonhoeffer characterizes this kind of concept as “cheap grace.”⁶³⁵ Jesus is no longer available as a person to confront his church with judgement and grace, but is simply assumed to be present based upon a concept or idea.

Similarly, some recent theologians have focused on the kenotic element of the incarnation, arguing that the humiliation is not merely a renunciation of divine power but a giving up of divinity in the Greek, philosophical sense. Daniel Peterson, for example, rightly rejects any notion of the extra-calvinisticum, contending that God must be found on earth and not in heaven. Peterson uses Bonhoeffer’s suggestion from his prison writings that “God is the beyond in the midst of our lives,”⁶³⁶ to opine, “The radical Christian seeks God in a new way—in time, in the neighbor, in the world.”⁶³⁷ Peterson identifies a true problem with Christology, namely a tendency to abstract from the person of Jesus to the natures. Accordingly, Peterson argues that God is not the God of power—not the abstract God of omnipotence—but the “God whose presence we encounter at the center of life and in and through our care for others.”⁶³⁸ Peterson contends that God is found in normal life in the ethical encounter with the neighbor. To cite Bonhoeffer on Peterson’s behalf, “Jesus’s ‘being-for-others’ is the experience of transcendence.”⁶³⁹

In this emphasis on the present Christ in the encounter with the other, Peterson makes the

⁶³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 43–56.

⁶³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, vol. 8 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 367.

⁶³⁷ Daniel J. Peterson, “Beyond Deep Incarnation: Rethinking Theology in Radical Lutheran Terms,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2014): 247. Peterson is using and pushing beyond the work of Niels Henrik Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 173–88.

⁶³⁸ Peterson, “Beyond Deep Incarnation,” 248.

⁶³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 501.

same mistake as his antagonists and the same one that Wannenwetsch identifies in Hegel, even though the concept has shifted. In Daniel Peterson's logic God is abstracted from the historical man Jesus of Nazareth to the neighbor. Just as God is abstracted into a hidden omnipotence in heaven, Peterson abstracts God into human beings on earth. God and Christ thus become no more than an ethical construct, without independent content. Thus, the incarnation of the Son of God has shifted from the story of the Bible to the ethical encounters of life, universally applicable perhaps, but the particularity of Jesus has been lost in the process.

Although Daniel Peterson relies on Bonhoeffer for his argument, Bonhoeffer's theology hardly supports Peterson's central contention. Bonhoeffer does hint in this direction, but he does not travel Peterson's route because Bonhoeffer rooted the present Christ in the historical Christ. The present Christ for Bonhoeffer is the historical Jesus who was killed on a cross and raised by God from the dead. Peterson, however, does not direct the *Christus praesans* back to the historical, person of Jesus seen in the Scriptures, instead diffusing the historical Jesus into a present force to be found in the world, especially in other people, which sounds like a Christological pantheism.⁶⁴⁰ Practically speaking, Peterson tends to push the church first and primarily toward the neighbor in ethics whereas Bonhoeffer pushes the church to Christ, *who* drives the church to the neighbor.⁶⁴¹ Later in the prison writings, for example, Bonhoeffer states,

We must immerse ourselves again and again, for a long time and quite calmly, in Jesus's life, his sayings, actions, sufferings, and dying in order to recognize what God promises and fulfills. What is certain is that we may always live aware that God is near and present with us and that this life is an utterly new life for us; that there is

⁶⁴⁰ Peterson calls the church to "abandon" all attempts to find God up in heaven, and instead "to find God here," doing "the kind of discipleship that seeks Christ among us, present rather than preincarnate." Peterson, "Beyond Deep Incarnation," 248–49. For Peterson, the present Christ appears divorced from the historical Christ, which is hardly Bonhoeffer's position as we saw in the last chapter.

⁶⁴¹ Theologically, Peterson fails to recognize the essential Lutheran distinction between God hidden and God revealed, which is inherent in the theology of the cross. For Bonhoeffer, the theology of the cross is a necessary framework for theology, but this is missing completely in Peterson's Christology. For Bonhoeffer's understanding of the theology of the cross, see H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

nothing that is impossible for us because there is nothing that is impossible for God; that no earthly power can touch us without God's will, and that danger and urgent need can only drive us closer to God.⁶⁴²

These reflections are not rooted in Peterson's radical Christology, but in the radical Christology of the Bible, which directs the church to the man Jesus who is truly God in the flesh. Peterson's radical Christology abstracts God to the neighbor, turning the incarnation into a universal concept, which is a far cry from Bonhoeffer's person theology.

To sum up, a Christological ecclesiology that uses Bonhoeffer's person theology must be distinguished from both an *imitatio Christi* model and a universal incarnation model. One abstracts the person of Jesus into his works while the other abstracts him into a prior concept of incarnation. My understanding of the relationship of the church to Christ is closer to what missiologist Darrell Guder is driving toward in his little book *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, in which he writes about an "incarnational" understanding of mission and evangelism. For Guder, the incarnation is not a model; instead, the incarnation refers to the entire life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that began with the incarnation. As Guder explains, "By incarnational mission I mean the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ."⁶⁴³ Thus, Guder intends to refer the church and its mission to the entirety of the gospel story of Jesus Christ, and to take seriously the prior identity and mission of Jesus before coming to understand and explain Christian mission, as I have argued thus far in this dissertation.⁶⁴⁴ Although Guder recognizes the dangers of the *imitatio Christi* model for a Christological ecclesiology, he does not protect himself from the second danger of abstracting the incarnation into a universalistic

⁶⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 515.

⁶⁴³ Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), xii.

⁶⁴⁴ See also, Guder's discussion of the problems of the adjective "incarnational": Guder, *The Incarnation*, 11–

model.⁶⁴⁵ In this way, Guder's intention is correct, but he sometimes slips into thinking about the incarnation primarily as contextualization or inculturation rather than his holistic intention to consider the entire life and ministry of Jesus.⁶⁴⁶ In fact, the very use of the term "incarnational" suggests that the incarnation of the Son of God is a particular instance of a general idea rather than a unique event of the coming reign of God.⁶⁴⁷ An ecclesiology rooted in the *person* of Jesus Christ has many similarities to Guder's ecclesiology of mission, but with a stronger emphasis on the transcendence of the Son of God who is fully present in his church, as he promised. Nonetheless, Guder is correct in orienting the church to the entire history of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord who continues to be present in the Spirit.

Christ For and Against His Church: Christ's Dialectical Relationship with the Church

The *imitatio Christi* model of ecclesiology places the impetus on the church for the relationship between Jesus and the church. The church does the works of Jesus. A universalistic incarnation ecclesiology makes the relationship between Jesus and the church reliant upon an abstract concept of Jesus—Jesus and the church are equated because they are both particular instances of a general principle. Both of these perspectives have some biblical support, but they make the relationship between Jesus and the church too one-sided and simplistic. The truth embedded within the universal incarnation model is that the reconciliation of God and the world takes place in the personal history of Jesus Christ. In light of what Jesus has done, the personal union of God and humanity in Jesus points toward Christ's humiliation and his happy exchange with sinners wherein sinners are declared righteous and made true children of the Father while

19.

⁶⁴⁵ Guder, *The Incarnation*, xiii.

⁶⁴⁶ For example, see Guder, *The Incarnation*, 51.

⁶⁴⁷ Guder certainly recognizes these dangers, but moving away from incarnation language to the person of

Jesus is numbered among thieves to die under the curse of the law. In his person and work, Jesus has indeed affirmed the goodness of creation and the goodness of history in bringing forth the buds of the kingdom of God in the midst of the fallen world and promising the full flowering of creation in the eschaton. The *imitatio Christi* model also has biblical support, stemming from Saint Paul's command to "be imitators of God" in loving as Christ loved us (Eph. 5:1–2) among other important Scriptural commands. In this way, the Bible does call for Christians to follow Christ in discipleship, doing his mission and loving their neighbors as Christ has loved them. Nevertheless, the *imitatio Christi* and universal incarnation models make the relationship between Christ and his church static rather than flowing from the dynamic word of God. The relationship between Jesus and the church is static because Christ and his church are equated either in principle (universal incarnation model) or in works (*imitatio Christi* model). Instead, the relationship between Jesus and his church must be described in two counterbalancing ways: the presence of Christ in the church and an orientation to Christ as Lord of the church.

By presence, I am affirming that Christ is truly present in his church. *Christus praesans*, the present Christ, dwells in his church, giving of himself in the word and the sacraments, showing up when his people gather for prayer, confession, witness, service, and justice. The church is none other than the mouthpiece of God, the community wherein God is speaking and giving of himself for forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ by the Spirit. In fact, the presence of Christ in the church is less of a conclusion from Bonhoeffer's person theology and more of presupposition.⁶⁴⁸ In Bonhoeffer's logic, we only ask about Christ and reflect upon him in relationship to the church "because Christ is the Christ who is present" in the church.⁶⁴⁹ That the

Jesus would bring even stronger reinforcements against those dangers.

⁶⁴⁸ Compare Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 304, where he says that we cannot ask whether God is revealed in Christ or not.

⁶⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 310.

crucified Jesus is risen from the dead, exalted to the right hand of the Father, and makes himself present in the world now, especially among his people, is a basic presupposition of Lutheran theology. And where Christ is, there is the church. By his word and Spirit, Christ gives of himself through his church, assuring his people of their identity as sons and daughters of God, and bringing new sheep into his sheepfold. Christ is present in his church for his church through the Spirit. As such this differs little from the Lutheran ecclesiology studied in chapters 2 and 3, including the traditional point of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession that the church is “properly speaking, the assembly of saints who truly believe the gospel of Christ and have the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁵⁰ The added emphasis of an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus, however, affirms Christ’s presence not only in the preaching and the sacraments, but also in the service of the church to the broader community through the emphasis on local ministry and visible public mission, visible concreteness. Transforming violent neighborhoods into places of peace, bringing justice to immigrants, and treating the homeless as human beings rather than ciphers for self-fulfilling service are all ways in which Christ is present and working through his church.⁶⁵¹

We cannot be content, however, with the relationship of Christ and the church dictated solely by the presence of Christ in the church for two closely related reasons. First, it fails to explain ecclesial sinfulness, and second, it leaves no room for the *semper ecclesia reformanda est*, Christ’s call for the church to be faithful. Both of these problems arose in connection with the ecclesiology of Reinhard Hütter and his ecclesial introspection. In Hütter’s ecclesiology, the church was the actualization of the Spirit so that the concrete sinfulness of the community was

⁶⁵⁰ Kolb and Wengert, eds. *Book of Concord*, 178.

⁶⁵¹ Joel Lehenbauer also sees the public work of the church as important emphasis for the church today, especially among Lutherans. See Joel D. Lehenbauer, “The Theology of Stanley Hauerwas,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76 (2012): 170–71. Lehenbauer asks, “How effectively, as an ecclesial community, are we at demonstrating to the world, by the very character of our community, the peace that the world lacks and that is available only in and through Christ and the church?” (p. 171)

nearly ruled out.⁶⁵² In fact, Nicholas Healy has noted how this kind of idealism has become commonplace in ecclesiologies that he has termed “blueprint ecclesiologies.”⁶⁵³ In such ecclesiologies, the church is considered as an ideal, an abstraction so that the concrete messiness of congregational life is largely ignored, giving the church triumphant precedence over the church *in via*.⁶⁵⁴

Primarily considering the church in terms of its ideal has been a particular temptation for Lutherans because ecclesiology was developed against Rome in the 16th century. Polemics against the Catholic church’s institutional and hierarchical model led Lutherans to deny the existence of non-Christians in the church—but not in the institution—in favor of affirmations of the church in the proper sense being the congregation of the faithful.⁶⁵⁵ As such, the church is usually described in terms of its perfect identity in Christ, and more effort is spent saying why the love of the church is not an essential mark than commanding love.⁶⁵⁶ The faithful, however, remain sinners and saints so that the church, the community of these sinner/saints, is also *simul congregatio sanctorum et peccatorum*.⁶⁵⁷ This does not merely mean the church has two aspects: a hidden righteousness in Christ and a visible, historical identity.⁶⁵⁸ The congregation needs not

⁶⁵² See Nicholas Healy, “Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 3 (2003): 296–99.

⁶⁵³ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 25–51.

⁶⁵⁴ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 37–38.

⁶⁵⁵ See Kolb and Wengert, eds. *Book of Concord*, 174–83, articles 7 and 8 of the Apology.

⁶⁵⁶ Although Charles Arand does much well in his two kinds of righteousness description of the church, I do believe it is weak on this very point. The center of the word receives all the descriptive power, and the visible love and discipleship of the church is affirmed but not described. See Charles P. Arand, “What Are Ecclesiologicaly Challenged Lutherans To Do? Starting Points for a Lutheran Ecclesiology,” *Concordia Journal* 34 (2008): 157–71.

⁶⁵⁷ For Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the church as a sinful and justified community, see Eva Harasta, “One Body: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the Church’s Existence as Sinner and Saint at Once,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 62, no. 3–4 (2010): 17–34. Her understanding of Bonhoeffer’s concepts of “being in Adam” and “being in Christ” is spatial rather than temporal, which misconstrues her interpretation of *Act and Being* and suggests more discontinuity than there is between *Act and Being* and *Ethics*.

⁶⁵⁸ This is the implication of David Daniel’s understanding of Luther on the church. See David P. Daniel, “Luther on the Church,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingle, and

only Christ's word of forgiveness to establish its identity before God, but also his continual call to discipleship, repentance and faithfulness in worship, structure, and mission of service and witness. In other words, the church's identity in Christ is always lived out historically and visibly, even though such faithfulness is only recognized in light of God's word. In this life, the church remains fallible and must be always oriented to Christ in order to return to its identity in Christ through the word of God and be called to the new obedience of faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the world.

In my view, the affirmation of the sinfulness of the church is particularly necessary in Post-Christendom because it necessitates the reformation of the church, not only in the church at large but also in each congregation as it wrestles with God's word so that the Spirit will lead to greater faithfulness. This is exactly what Dietrich Bonhoeffer was calling for in the Confessing Church and in the church of Germany in his classic work *Discipleship*. In Bonhoeffer's time, the church had been captured by the ideology of National Socialism and a bourgeois mentality, and it had to find itself again in relationship to Jesus, look to him, and follow his word in "simple obedience."⁶⁵⁹ More recently, Darrell Guder has argued that the church must experience a "continual conversion" as it "hears, responds to, and obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁶⁶⁰ Christ is always calling the church to hear his word and obey, and the current situation of post-Christendom has underscored some particular sins. Since Post-Christendom has challenged the church as a public community and instrumentalized the church for individual well-being, making the mission of the church unimaginable, it is all the more important for congregations to lose themselves in Christ and the Scriptures in order to reorient their life in service and witness.

L'ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 333–52.

⁶⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 77.

⁶⁶⁰ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 150.

Following from the need for an affirmation of the church's sinfulness and its continual reformation to the word of God, I contend for an *orientation* to Christ the Lord who judges and rules the church. Bonhoeffer affirms a similar thing when he states, "The unity between Christ and his body, the church, demands that we at the same time recognize Christ's lordship over his body."⁶⁶¹ The church must continually look outside itself to Christ who speaks within the church calling it to discipleship. The church must always be oriented to Christ which is only possible because Christ makes himself truly present through the Spirit in the word, sacraments, and service of the church. There is no mystical fusion between Christ and the church, no equation or identification; Christ is the Lord of the church, and he is its Lord as he gives himself in it speaking his word of law and gospel.

In sum, then, the relationship between Christ and the church must be characterized by the presence of Christ in the church and an orientation to Christ the Lord of the church. Christ gives himself in the worship, preaching, witness, and service of his church, forgiving sins, incorporating people into his body, and bringing justice and peace to the earth as signs of God's kingdom. These acts are none other than the marks of the church, the tangible means by which Christ gives himself to his people.⁶⁶² At the same time, Luther always argued that "the only perpetual and infallible mark of the church was always the Word."⁶⁶³ Christ's word is given to the church, but it does not belong to the church as an object to be manipulated or studied. This word belongs to Jesus Christ who speaks to the church from the outside. In this way, the presence of Christ in the church points to Christ's lordship *over* the church. The church must always look to Christ, oriented to the Lord for identity and a renewed call to discipleship and

⁶⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 220.

⁶⁶² For Luther's understanding of the marks of the church, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 283–85.

⁶⁶³ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 283.

faithfulness. Jesus is present in the church for all, but he is not the church. Christ is the Lord of the church who judges it and calls it to faithfulness. As such, an ecclesiology of the person of Christ starts from the Lord Jesus and lets him speak.

Church and World Christologically Considered

Although the heart of this chapter has been the relationship between the church and Christ, the church-world relationship is just an important for a Post-Christendom ecclesiology. In fact, the relationship between the church and the world has been at the center of much recent theology. The influential movements of Radical Orthodoxy along with Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder all grapple with the question of the church's relationship with the world.⁶⁶⁴ Theological politics too has become an important locus for theologians to tackle questions of the church and the world that deal explicitly with the government and the state.⁶⁶⁵

On the one hand stand those theologians who focus on the church as its own polity wherein the emphasis is on the difference between the church and the world. John Howard Yoder may be the strongest advocate of this position. Yoder's position is more nuanced than a simple dichotomy of church and world, but his emphasis is certainly on the distinction. For Yoder, the church-world relationship has been problematized by the Constantinian heresy. During Christendom, the known world became Christian, causing the true church to become invisible, the government to become the bearer of God's power through the sword, and the unbelieving world beyond Christendom to be largely written off. The world within the borders of

⁶⁶⁴ For radical orthodoxy, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006). See also Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000); and John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁶⁶⁵ For example, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); and William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

Christendom was equated with the church so there was little critique of the world's power structures in Christendom, and the world out there was antithetical to the church, to be destroyed in crusade.⁶⁶⁶ For Yoder, the church must be distinguished from the world in order to open the way to genuine critique of and mission to the world.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, the church is certainly for the world, not simply a community split from it, but Yoder's places the stress on these being two different communities living with different stories.⁶⁶⁸ Among Lutherans, David Yeago emphasizes this position in an essay reflecting on Robert Jenson's ecclesiology. Against the secularization of the western church that has been on-going since the late middle ages,⁶⁶⁹ Yeago agrees with Jenson that "the church *is* a polity" which means "it also has a 'church polity' in the more usual sense, and this polity has a proper form distinctive to the church as the body of Christ."⁶⁷⁰ Following this logic, Yeago argues that church authority is a different *kind* from political authority, but it is still authority: "Church authority is nonetheless a genuine public authority entrusted to human beings in history and exercised by human beings in space and time. Thus the character of the church as the eschatological community calls for a special mode of

⁶⁶⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (1984; repr. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 135–47.

⁶⁶⁷ Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 144–45.

⁶⁶⁸ To be clear, I disagree with the common sectarian charge brought against Yoder and those of his ilk, especially Stanley Hauerwas. Distinguishing church and world is a necessity for theology today as I will explain below. For the sectarian charge leveled against Hauerwas, see James M. Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985): 83–94. For another critique of Hauerwas and Yoder and their "sectarianism" which looks at some underlying philosophical commitments, see Scott Holland, "The Problems and Prospects of a 'Sectarian Ethic': A Critique of the Hauerwas Reading of the Jesus Story," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 157–68. For Hauerwas's own rebuttal to the charge of sectarianism, see Stanley Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson (1988)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 90–110. For an argument sympathetic to Hauerwas (and Yoder), see Nigel Biggar, "Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?" in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. Mark Thiessen Nation and Samuel Wells (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 141–60.

⁶⁶⁹ Yeago, *Church as Polity*, 227–28.

⁶⁷⁰ Yeago, *Church as Polity*, 204.

authority embodied in distinctive forms of common life.”⁶⁷¹ In this way, Yeago delineates the church and the world eschatologically—as Yoder too does—emphasizing the church’s authority, rule, order, and world over against the forms of the world.⁶⁷²

On the other hand stand theologians who highlight the interconnectedness of the church and the world and the need for the church to affirm culture and society more broadly. Jane Barter Moulaison, for instance, states, “A political theology that takes its cues from Nicene Christology must begin instead with an affirmation of this world.”⁶⁷³ Barter Moulaison confirms the importance of critical judgment, but the primary emphasis is on the affirmation of the world. So too James Davison Hunter contends that the “first moment” of the dialectic of affirmation and antithesis between the church and the world is affirmation.⁶⁷⁴ Against Yoder and Hauerwas who emphasize the distinction of the church and the world, Barter Moulaison and Hunter emphasize the world as creation of God, recreated by Christ through the Spirit.

Much disagreement in political theology stems from different understandings of the “world.” William Cavanaugh has observed how Martin Marty and John Courtney Murray, for instance, think of political space as one simple space: the nation-state. There is only one political space for Marty and Murray, and it belongs to the nation-state, and the church must find its place within this larger community.⁶⁷⁵ Some reactionary theologians construe the world as primarily evil and a seduction, construing the world as the kingdom of the devil. Carl Braaten, hardly a

⁶⁷¹ Yeago, *Church as Polity*, 230.

⁶⁷² What I am describing here shows the similarity of politics and theology. As William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott explain, “Both are constituted in the production of metaphysical images around which communities are organized. All politics has theology embedded within it, and particular forms of organization are implicit in doctrines of, for example, Trinity, the church and eschatology.” William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 3.

⁶⁷³ Jane Barter Moulaison, *Thinking Christ: Christology and Contemporary Critics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 9.

⁶⁷⁴ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 231.

typical reactionary theologian, argues in a recent essay, “Eschatologically speaking, the church will always be a resistance movement in the world, resisting the Devil and his agents of death, resisting the wiles and ways of the Dragon and the Beast.”⁶⁷⁶ For still others, the world is the world redeemed and restored by Christ, affirmed and accepted by God the Creator. How does an ecclesiology of the person of Christ speak about the world?⁶⁷⁷

To understand the world properly, an ecclesiology of the person of Christ sees the world Christologically. One danger that must be avoided in the church-world relationship is thinking of the world as value-neutral, a simple common space for people to meet.⁶⁷⁸ In other words, we cannot think about the world as the world *per se*. The world does not exist in a vacuum apart from God or the church. In this sense, John Howard Yoder’s well-known quip is accurate: “The church precedes the world epistemologically.”⁶⁷⁹ That is, for Christians, we come to know Christ and his church through the Spirit first, which shapes how we see the world in the light of the lordship of Jesus and the creation by the voice and hands of his Father. The world, then, is hardly value-neutral for Christians; it has religious significance, which is understood within the particular storied framework of the Scriptures. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s work on social philosophy similarly suggests a storied framework for understanding the world. Like Yoder Bonhoeffer argues that only revelation—the word, especially the Word made flesh—can reveal what the

⁶⁷⁵ Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 46–68.

⁶⁷⁶ Carl E. Braaten, *That All May Believe: A Theology of the Gospel and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 137. Most apocalyptic or eschatological perspectives dichotomize church and world.

⁶⁷⁷ The question of the world has been an important one in Bonhoeffer scholarship too. See Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 99–205. More recently, see Joel Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 54–76 and most of the essays in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Theologie heute: Ein Weg zwischen Fundamentalismus und Säkularismus?* Ed. John W. De Gruchy, Stephen Plant, and Christiane Tietz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2009). Jens Zimmermann has also addressed this theme thoroughly with Bonhoeffer, Jens Zimmermann, *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012).

⁶⁷⁸ As represented by Marty and Murray in the paragraph above. Compare Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 58.

⁶⁷⁹ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11.

church is, and only in light of the church does the world, its sinfulness and its nature as creation, make sense.⁶⁸⁰ In this way, Bonhoeffer understands all of reality in terms of a brief biblical “narrative” described in three states: as creation (primal state), as fallen in sin (being in Adam), and as redeemed in Christ (being in Christ).⁶⁸¹ All of reality, church and world, is thus split into these different aspects of creation, sin, and redemption. All of reality exists in this dialectic of creation, sin, and redemption, and cannot be divorced from the Christian story. Notice that the world is hardly monolithic in this Christian story: it is created by God, opposed to his will, loved and redeemed by Christ, and promised to be made whole in the Spirit. Such a typology does not say everything there is to say about any aspect of the world—more granularity is needed in studies of culture, the state, economics, and war among other things—but it does open the door to see the world in its complexity as theological. In fact, such a view contends the church *must* see the world theologically. The world is created by God and under the lordship of Jesus Christ; the world is fallen under sin and in need of judgment and reconciliation; the redemption of the world has already begun in Christ who will come again and bring the full restoration of creation in the eschaton through the Spirit.

The world, then, only knows itself to be creation, fallen, and redeemed in light of Christ and the Spirit—the church does precede the world epistemologically!—which makes it appropriate to continue on a Christological path in thinking through the relationship between the church and the world. In Christ, the world receives its identity as created, fallen, and redeemed. Furthermore, we have seen from Bonhoeffer that *all* of reality exists in this three-fold typology

⁶⁸⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 122–34. Bonhoeffer mostly speaks about understanding sin from the church in this section, but he claims that all of his lines of previous argument (including primal state/creation) will come together in the church (p. 124).

⁶⁸¹ Michael Mawson, “Christ Existing as Community: The Ethics of Bonhoeffer’s Ecclesiology,” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2012), 70–75.

as creation, fallen, and redeemed. Therefore, the church cannot be dichotomized and separated completely from the world. To be sure, the distinction between church and world is necessary and helpful so that God's people attend to Christ and his word above all, but that distinction must not become rigid. The church is part of the creative handiwork of God, a part of the visible concrete creation. Its mission is not to separate God's people from the created world, ascending to some bliss in the skies, but to get its hands dirty in working for the Shalom of the creation. Moreover, the church exists within God's world, the object of God's love, and the object of the mission of God in Christ and the Spirit to save the world through the humble service and work of the Son of God. Corresponding to this, Healy comments, "For who we are, as Christians and as the church, is what the world is, too. The church is not an ark floating on the top of the waters. It lives and breathes within the waters. The world is the ark of salvation; the church is but the worldly expression of the Christian response to God's saving work in the world."⁶⁸² In view of the eschatological judgment of God where the whole heavens and earth will be made new and in view of the universal love of Christ that seeks to reconcile everyone in all places and times to the Father, Healy brings the church and the world as close together as possible. Although Healy's perspective is not the only essential one for the church's relationship to the world, it is a vital corrective against any church-world dichotomy.

Healy's broader point is that the church is not the church *as such*; the church is only the church *in God* and *in the world*. Healy concludes, "Our lives as Christians are centered in God's call to us in the world. The world and God are the church; the church isn't the church apart from both the world and God working in it."⁶⁸³ I have already argued for the church's place *in God* by focusing on Jesus Christ in this chapter, but what does it mean for the church to be also in the

⁶⁸² Nicholas M. Healy, "In and Of the World: Why There Is No Christian 'Community,'" *Christian Century* 129, no. 10 (May 16, 2012): 31.

world? One of the important tasks for the church today is to express solidarity with God's world, solidarity as creatures, solidarity in the search for truth, justice, peace, and beauty, and solidarity as sinners, broken people in a broken world needing the forgiveness and new life offered in Christ Jesus. In other words, the church's solidarity with the world happens under all three aspects of the world's ontology: as creation, as sinful, and as redeemed. This solidarity is expressed in worship and repentance, work for social justice, and creativity in the humanities and arts. Furthermore, solidarity is nothing other than an expression of locality, of Christ's mission given to his church in this place.

In addition to emphasizing the solidarity of the church with the world, the world as creation, fallen, and redeemed also suggests the church's mission to the world in terms of difference. That is, the church must also be distinguished from the world because the world does not see itself within the story of creation, sin, and redemption. As such, part of the church's calling is to remind the world that it is world, as Stanley Hauerwas frequently argues.⁶⁸⁴ Because the world does not understand itself within the story of God, "the primary social task of the church is to be itself—that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption." For this reason, the church fails in its task when it capitulates to the "world" and serves it on the world's terms rather than its own.⁶⁸⁵ The story of Jesus Christ must be the center of the mission of the church, and we cannot be content with a vision of social justice that does not have its heart in the mission and calling of Jesus Christ. The mission of the church is Christ's; it is not ours to

⁶⁸³ Healy, "In and Of the World," 31.

⁶⁸⁴ Hauerwas mentions a variation of this often. For example, see Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 10. He states that Christians are to "serve the world on their own terms; otherwise the world would have no means to know itself as the world."

⁶⁸⁵ Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 10.

do what the society or government wants us to. In its continual pointing to God, the church reminds the world that it does not belong to itself but to the God who created it.

As fallen, the church is in solidarity with the world, but it also differs from the world in that the church recognizes and repents of its sin. Both the church and the world stand under the rule and judgment of Christ the Lord. Both stand sinful before him, having violated God's will and having no righteousness in themselves. The church, however, recognizes its sinfulness before God and admits this in confession and repentance. In confession, the church stands in solidarity with the world at the same time that it witnesses to the world, confessing its failings and witnessing to the God of Jesus Christ who comes in the word of forgiveness, giving the Spirit and making all things new. Considered in terms of sinfulness, then, the church is both critic of the world—recognizing the idolatry implicit in so many political, economic, and social games played in North America—and sister of the world who stands in solidarity, prays for the world, and works in discipleship to make God's justice come here and now in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.⁶⁸⁶ The church stands in connection with the world, yet also different from it, witnessing to it and praying for it. Without this difference, the church fails in its faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

When the world is construed in terms of the redemption of Christ, the eschatological aspect of the reconciliation of God in the Spirit, the same tension emerges. On the one hand, as Nicholas Healy stresses, the church is not different from the world. The world is the object of God's love and redemption. As such, the church must recognize that it does not have some kind of ontological primacy vis-à-vis salvation. In other words, salvation and redemption do not belong to the church; salvation belongs to God who graciously gives it to the world. The church is the people, the community, that hears this word, believes it, and is called by God into the

⁶⁸⁶ Compare L. Gregory Jones, "The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community and the Politics of Worldly Discipleship," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 149–69.

world. As such, there is no room in the church for triumphalism, whether intellectual or moralistic. The eschaton is part of the coming of Jesus Christ; it is *his adventus*, not the *futurum* that the church or society will bring inevitably.⁶⁸⁷ The kingdom of God, then, only comes in its fullness with the radical breaking through of Jesus Christ in the second coming and the trumpet blast that marks the new heavens and the new earth. The church witnesses to this coming of Jesus Christ, testifying to his coming as it gathers together people from different walks of life, different socio-economic and racial backgrounds, coming together to drink from one cup and eat of one bread. The church witnesses to the coming of Christ as it enters into the despair of the homeless and the poor and treats these as creatures of God loved by Christ. The church witnesses to the coming of Christ as it seeks to end racial disparity and bring justice to whole communities. The church witnesses to the coming of Christ as it forgives the sins of murderers and pedophiles. The church witnesses to the coming of Jesus as it proclaims the message of good news only in this one, the crucified and risen Savior of the world. The church witnesses to Christ and his coming; it does not control it, even as Christ has promised to be present within it.

In this light, I contend that the church's relationship with the world should be considered in three ways: solidarity, mission, and repentance. Solidarity highlights the connections between the church and the world and the need for the church to stand with the fallen world for issues of justice and peace, for beauty and truth. Mission highlights the disconnection between the church and the world; the church is called to be *for* the world, to serve it and witness to it as disciples of Jesus Christ. Mission is thus eschatological in orientation, remembering that it is forgiven by Christ and called to serve him in the power of the Holy Spirit. Repentance highlights both continuity and discontinuity; on the one hand, repentance highlights the sin of both church and

⁶⁸⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

world, and the need for a constant orientation to Christ. Repentance, though, also indicates how the church must stand against the world, critiquing it for its idolatry and power plays, because the church is founded only on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Toward a Story-shaped Ecclesiology

The person and story of Jesus shape Christian imaginations, construing how God's people envision the church's identity, place, and mission within the story of God. That is, an ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ intends to function as a hermeneutic, to help interpret the church and the world, seeing opportunities for service and witness within one's community. An ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ is, then, less of a detailed point-by-point description of the church and more of a broad typographical map for the church to develop a logic and imagination that will result in faithful witness and service. By logic, I mean "an implicit working assumption about how things relate to one another, what follows from what, how things hang together, and the rules that govern such relationships."⁶⁸⁸ That is, the person of Jesus should operate to shape the questions for the church, cultivate congregational imaginations for witness and service, and inform the way that Christians see the relationship between the church and the world, the church and God, and the world and God. I have further described the elements of storied identity and visible concreteness as essential emphases rooted in Christ's person and particularly pertinent for the church today. I have argued how the church both receives Christ's presence in it and is oriented to him as the Lord with an emphasis on the sinfulness of the church. Further, the church is called to solidarity, mission, and repentance vis-à-vis the world as created, fallen, and redeemed in Christ.

An ecclesiology of the person of Jesus Christ does not intend to be an all-inclusive model

⁶⁸⁸ Smith, "Logic of Incarnation," 10.

so that the church is fully comprehended and systematized in an abstract sense. As I mentioned briefly above, Nicholas Healy has criticized such models for the church as “blueprint ecclesiologies.”⁶⁸⁹ Healy names five methodological characteristics common to blueprint ecclesiologies:

One is the attempt to encapsulate in a single word or phrase the most essential characteristic of the church; another is to construe the church as having a bipartite structure. These two elements are often combined, third, into a systematic and theoretical form of normative ecclesiology. A fourth element is a tendency to reflect upon the church in abstraction from its concrete identity. And one consequence of this is, fifth, a tendency to present idealized accounts of the church.⁶⁹⁰

An all-inclusive, normative model attempts to systematize the church’s entire being around one understandable concept. This, however, flies against the account of the Scriptures. As Healy notes, “There seems to be an irreducible plurality of ways of talking about the church within the New Testament.”⁶⁹¹ Robert Jenson too, following the example of many in ecumenical circles, structures his ecclesiology around three major biblical concepts of the church: people of God, body of Christ, and temple of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹² These different concepts cannot be reduced to any particular one without losing essential aspects of the New Testament witness.⁶⁹³ Furthermore, the concrete messiness of congregational life is largely ignored in a blueprint ecclesiology so that the church triumphant is given precedence over the church *in via*, as I also noted above.⁶⁹⁴ The church, however, is a lived reality more than a concept, the community of God oriented to Christ in the Spirit in the difficulties of a particular time and place.

⁶⁸⁹ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 25–51.

⁶⁹⁰ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 26.

⁶⁹¹ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 34.

⁶⁹² Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2: 189–210. Although Jenson rightly notes the plurality of concepts of the church, his discussion is largely concerned with polity and institutional structure, which disconnects it from the congregation, largely thinking of the church on a transcongregational level.

⁶⁹³ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 34.

Instead of this kind of blueprint ecclesiology, my ecclesiology of the person of Christ is a critical, heuristic ecclesiology, which intends to guide congregations to hear the word of God calling them to discipleship and mission in their context.⁶⁹⁵ I am not trying to dictate a theory which must then be applied in a church. Rather, my dissertation is trying to guide the vision of the church in order to help churches hear God's word as a call to mission and see their church-communities called by God to discipleship and mission here and now. As such, this dissertation does not attempt to provide a normative model for the church, but rather an essential *orientation*. This orientation to the person of Jesus that provides a number of important emphases for this time after Christendom, one which can help congregations read the Scriptures critically and practically to hear Jesus's call to discipleship and mission as their own.

This orientation to the person of Jesus Christ cannot be laid out simply in proposition. Jesus makes himself known in the stories of the Scriptures. As such, the church's relationship to Christ and to the world is best set out in story. For this reason, the propositions laid out in this chapter function as hermeneutical keys to guide the reading of the Scriptures. My final chapter will tell two necessary stories of Jesus Christ for an ecclesiology after Christendom. The story of Christ the Lord will highlight repentance and discipleship as primary modes for the church. Such repentance orients the church continually to Christ, distinguishing the church from the world as it listens to his word which calls for reform and restoration, new directions in faithfulness to Christ. On the one hand, such an ecclesiology of repentance stresses the solidarity of the church with the world as sinners, but it is also witnesses to a different answer for sin from the therapeutic framework. The church must listen to Christ the Lord. In addition, I will tell the story of Christ the servant. Philippians two, in particular, reveals the narrative of the humiliation of God's Son

⁶⁹⁴ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 37–38.

⁶⁹⁵ My understanding of a critical and heuristic ecclesiology corresponds largely to Healy's "practical-

for which he is exalted as Lord over all. As Christ fully entered into the human state, even coming under the law to take upon himself the sin of the world, so too is the church called to serve and witness in this way, not in triumphalism, but in solidarity and mission with the world that Jesus loves.

prophetic” intention of his *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*.

CHAPTER SIX

CHRIST, LORD AND SERVANT: AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE AND SOLIDARITY IN REPENTANCE AND MISSION

In the previous chapter, I argued that an ecclesiology for post-Christendom based on the person of Jesus identifies the church in terms of the story of Christ in the Scriptures, providing constructive directions for church-communities. I identified the church in relationship to Jesus as a receiver of his gifts and a participant in his mission. This aspect stressed the ways in which Jesus is *for* his church, which is one side of the dialectic. In the other side of the dialectic, I contended that the church must be oriented to Christ *extra ecclesiam* so that Christ is understood not only for his church but also *against* it, as the Lord who calls the church to discipleship and faithfulness. Moreover, this ecclesiology of the person of Jesus stressed embodiment, visibility, and concreteness, especially in the mission and discipleship of the church.

Focusing on the story of Jesus in the Scriptures, however, is not an obvious or self-evident task. Rather, the Scriptural account of the one person Jesus Christ is multi-faceted so that any telling of the story of Jesus—particularly one in a systematic theology—is a rendering of his person for a particular purpose. Just as John states his purpose at the end of his gospel—“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and by believing you may have life in his name”⁶⁶—my ecclesiological renderings of Jesus in this chapter are also for a specific purpose: to lead church-communities to better faithfulness in this time after Christendom. In so doing, I do not claim that these particular ecclesiological interpretations of Jesus Christ are directly applicable to every place and time. Nevertheless, I would contend that the Christological

orientation I have sketched in the dissertation thus far stands near the heart of a biblical and catholic ecclesiology even if the specific tellings and interpretations of the Bible's account of Jesus will vary across contexts.

In addition to the Christ-church relationship, I also described the relationship between the church and the world in the previous chapter. Like the relationship between the church and Jesus, the church-world relationship should not be construed in a single way. I emphasized that the world is not a blank slate, a neutral space for Christian participation, but neither is it the wholly evil empire, bent to the will of Satan. The Scriptures, instead, connect the world to the triune God, describing it as created by God, fallen into sin, and redeemed by Christ through the Spirit, and this three-fold typology structures the church-world relationship. In particular, the church stands apart from the world, distinguished from it as the community acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ and its own sin in the midst of communities that do not know themselves as created, sinful, or redeemed. At the same time, the church is also part of the world, as a community also created by God, fallen into sin, and redeemed by the work of Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the church stands in solidarity with the world since the world too is a fallen creation of God for which Jesus was crucified and rose again, seeking to penetrate it with his Spirit through the word. The mission of the church takes this two-fold form of difference and solidarity, which is evident in its callings to social justice, prayer, repentance, worship, discipleship, and proclaiming the gospel. The church has not received a single calling as a contrast community nor has it received a calling to be in the world to the extent that it simply incorporates every prominent social agenda. Instead, the church stands apart from the world as critic and missionary while also standing with it as striver for God's justice throughout creation as well as standing with the world in non-triumphal prayer and repentance.

⁶⁹ John 20:31.

To emphasize the dialectic inherent within both the Christ-church and the church-world relationships, this chapter will tell two necessary, interconnected, and mutually enriching stories of Jesus Christ: Christ the Lord and Christ the Servant. Although these stories could be told as one—Christ the Lord who serves or Christ the servant who rules—they are best told as two stories. As one story, the lordship of Jesus or the servanthood of Jesus would tend to overpower the other, losing one side of the dialectic by stressing, for example, the presence of Christ in the church over the lordship of Jesus.⁶⁹⁷ Such an unbalanced approach would also throw the church-world relationship off-kilter, placing undue emphasis on difference or solidarity, depending on the particularities of the account. By telling two stories, I intend to give equal weight to Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant because both provide necessary directions for an ecclesiology after Christendom. Each section will begin with a description of the reason for this particular telling of the story of Jesus before I tell the story and draw out the ecclesiological implications. To these stories I now turn.

Jesus Christ the Lord: An Ecclesiology of Difference in Discipleship and Repentance

At the heart of the New Testament confession of Jesus stands two words: *Iesus Kyrios*, Jesus is Lord. In the book of Romans, Saint Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). The early church historian J.N.D. Kelly notes that “Jesus is Lord” is the “most popular” of the brief Christological confessions in the New Testament.⁶⁹⁸ More than just a part of

⁶⁹⁷ There is a parallel here in Karl Barth’s method in the first two parts of the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* where he describes “Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant” (IV/1) and “Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord” (IV/2), which corresponds in part to the traditional protestant understanding of the priestly and kingly offices of Christ, respectively. One difference from Barth is that Barth tends to cast these ways of speaking about Jesus in terms of the two-nature doctrine while my focus is on the biblical story of Jesus which emphasizes the unity of the person. For a summary of the first three part volumes, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 1, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (1956; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 128–54.

⁶⁹⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 14–15.

early Christian doxology, the gospel of Luke, in particular, features the title Lord prominently. New Testament scholar C. Kavin Rowe has shown how Luke's Christology unfolds the meaning of the lordship of Jesus throughout the narrative of Jesus's life.⁶⁹⁹ In other words, as Luke renders the 'unsubstitutable identity' of Jesus Christ,⁷⁰⁰ he shows his readers what it means for Jesus to be the Lord. Who Jesus is and what it means for him to be Lord take place in the narrative flow of Luke's gospel. Rowe explains, "Consideration of the story, of Luke's composition, and of matters as basic as numerical frequency actually demand instead that we pay attention to κύριος as a word that carries substantial christological conviction."⁷⁰¹ The lordship of Jesus is a basic tenet and an essential confession of Luke's Gospel in particular and the entire New Testament. But what does it mean?

On the one hand, the confession of Jesus's lordship harkens back to the Old Testament, especially the Septuagint, and the confession of Yahweh as Lord. In this way, the identity of Jesus is intricately related to the identity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Yahweh.⁷⁰² Hence, Rowe asserts, "Luke positions κύριος within the movement of the narrative in such a way as to narrate the relation between God and Jesus as one of inseparability, to the point that they are bound together in a shared identity as κύριος." Rowe points out that this connection is not a *Vermischungsidentität*, a blending or mixing of identity, but a *Verbindungsidentität*, a linking of identity.⁷⁰³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob makes himself definitely known in the Lord Jesus, and the identity of Jesus is only properly understood in intimate relation with his Father,

⁶⁹⁹ C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), esp. 1–30.

⁷⁰⁰ This is Hans Frei's language. Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁷⁰¹ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 24.

⁷⁰² In addition to Rowe's *Early Narrative Christology*, see Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁷⁰³ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 27.

God. This relationship between Jesus and God, and thus the identity of Jesus, unfolds in the narrative of Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection.⁷⁰⁴

On the other hand, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord is always a counter-proclamation. That is, Jesus is proclaimed as Lord over and against other possible lords. In the New Testament, the proclamation of Jesus's lordship naturally conflicted with the Roman confession of Caesar—Caesar is lord.⁷⁰⁵ The New Testament scholar N.T. Wright points to the Johannine narrative of Jesus's trial before Pilate as a conflict between “not just two kings but two types of kingdoms.” Wright continues, “Pilate stands for the world, the world made by God but run by Caesar; Jesus stands for the kingdom of God, as announced by psalms and prophets, by Isaiah and Daniel.” In this scene where Pilate stands off against Jesus, the life of Christ in Pilate's hand,

Jesus has come, he says, to bear witness to the truth; and Pilate's famous response, ‘What is truth?’, indicates the gulf between the two empires. Caesar's empire knows only the truth of Roman rule, the truth that comes out of the scabbard of a sword (or, as we would say, the barrel of a gun): the ‘truth’ of taxes and whips, of nails and crosses, the truth that will swap Jesus for a brigand if that's what the crowd wants, the truth that lets Pilate wriggle of one hook while impaling Jesus on another.⁷⁰⁶

Jesus brings a different kind of truth in a different kind of kingdom. To confess Jesus as Lord is to renounce the coercive power and self-serving violence that is perpetrated by Caesar and all idols that demand the same service.⁷⁰⁷ The early Christian confession of Jesus's lordship, then, functions, in part, as a polemical confession, pointing out idolatry or potential idolatry and

⁷⁰⁴ This assertion corresponds considerably with Hans Frei's argument in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.

⁷⁰⁵ See Tom Wright, *Creation, Power, and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion* (London: SPCK, 2013), 48–57. See also Jeffrey Kloha, “Making Christ's Reign Known: Church in the New Testament,” in *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 40–42. For a discussion of the social and political consequences for the earliest Christians, see Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 56–82.

⁷⁰⁶ Wright, *Creation, Power, and Truth*, 49.

⁷⁰⁷ Wright implicates modern imperialism in Caesar's kingdom in *Creation, Power, and Truth*, 35–65. For discussions of empire and the church today, see also Karen L. Bloomquist, ed., *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007) and Wes Avram, ed., *Anxious about Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).

calling the church to a witness that confesses the lordship of Jesus Christ over all things. In so doing, the story of Jesus the Lord highlights the difference of the church from all other communities. The church worships *this* Lord and no other, the man Jesus of Nazareth, who was murdered on a cross but God raised from the dead. The church consists of the people who acknowledge Jesus as the Lord and live as witnesses, living sacrifices, to him in the idolatrous world. In this way, the narrative of Jesus the Lord further cements the importance of the church's identity in Christ as well as his call to discipleship, repentance, and mission.

Why Is Jesus the Lord a Necessary Story for Today?

The story of the Lord Jesus orients the church totally to Christ, who acts against his church as its Lord. This narrative is particularly important in Post-Christendom because of the crises of identity and instrumentality that I described in the first chapter. With church membership based upon choice and religious organizations ostensibly existing for the sake of societal or individual well-being, the church in North America today desperately needs to hear the story of Christian identity, the story that brings the church into being not by its own choice but by the divine choice and purpose of God. The story of the Lord Jesus does exactly that. The church belongs to Christ. Its origin is in the authority of his word and call, its ongoing existence stems from his continued presence in the church through the Spirit, and its goal is formation into Christ, which Jesus realizes in the church as it hears his word and faith and responds in obedience. Furthermore, the story of the Lord Jesus decisively distinguishes the church from the therapeutic story of self-fulfillment. The church is no therapeutic community, intended to help me on my self-chosen journey. Neither is the church beholden to the nation-state to make good citizens according to the rules of the state. Rather, the church belongs to God and God's salvation. The church is part of the on-going story of Jesus Christ and the salvation of the world, and its purpose comes only from Christ alone. The story of Christ the Lord shows how the church takes form as a

community different from the world, forgiven and granted freedom through the gracious word of God, and called to witness to and serve the world in obedience to the Lord of the world, Jesus of Nazareth.

The Lord Jesus: A Narrative Rendering for Ecclesiology

In the story of the Lord Jesus, I am following the Gospel of Luke because, as C. Kevin Rowe has demonstrated, “for Luke, to narrative the life of Jesus is to write of ὁ κύριος.”⁷⁰⁸ The Gospel of Luke begins with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth and the promise of their son John who is “to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (1:17).⁷⁰⁹ The “Lord” here already points not only back to the God of Israel, but also forward to his Son whom Luke also names as Lord. Speaking to Mary in Luke 1, the angel Gabriel announces that God will give her son “the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” Gabriel also adds that this baby will be called “the Son of God” (Lk 1:32–33). In this way, Luke identifies the coming Lord Jesus from the beginning of his story as the promised King of Israel, the anointed one who has come to save his people and establish the reign of God, and as the Son of God, the one who reveals God the Father and embodies the authority and power of the Father on earth. While the latter answer is a good and important one, especially emphasized in John’s Gospel, Luke’s Gospel spends more time on the former answer, which focuses on the lordship of Jesus.⁷¹⁰ Most significant for the early identification of Jesus as Lord in Luke is Elizabeth’s confession to Mary, “Why is this granted to me that the mother of *my Lord* should come to me?” (Lk 1:43) With these words, Jesus himself appears for the first time in the narrative, as the Lord in the

⁷⁰⁸ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 10.

⁷⁰⁹ As a reminder to the reader, all Scriptural quotations are ESV unless otherwise noted.

⁷¹⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 253–58.

womb of his mother Mary.⁷¹¹

Before I address the specifics of Jesus's ministry as the Lord, I need to set his birth in the midst of Israel's expectations concerning God and God's rule. Jesus was not born out of thin air; he is not an eternal idea or an everlasting gnosis. Rather, Jesus was born in the first century in Palestine among Jewish people, God's chosen ones. God's people, however, were in the midst of exile. They could hardly be identified as God's people. They had the temple and temple worship, but they were not ruled by God through his anointed. In fact, God's king had not ruled Israel since the Babylonian captivity. Instead, Israel had been burdened under the rule of Greece and Rome, forced to give money and allegiance to kings across the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, God's reign was not yet established among his people; the enemies of God's people continued to triumph, and Israelites were slaves of sorts, under Roman rule.⁷¹² Moreover—although this was not generally recognized—Israel was repressed by the presence of sin, death, and the devil; they were still waiting for the Shalom of God's reign. In his book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N.T. Wright argues,

Week after week, and year after year, Israel kept alive the memory of what YHWH had done in the past to show that he was king, both of Israel and of the whole world and so kept alive the hope that his kingdom would soon come, and his will be done, on earth as it was (they believed) in heaven. God's kingdom, to the Jew-in-the-village in the first half of the first century, meant the coming vindication of Israel, victory over the pagans, the eventual gift of peace, justice and prosperity.⁷¹³

Thus, when Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit at John's birth, he prophesies that the Lord God is raising up a "horn of salvation" for his people Israel as he promised of old "that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy

⁷¹¹ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 39.

⁷¹² In Nehemiah 9:36 the Levites (and others) say, "Behold, we are slaves this day" in the midst of a long prayer recounting Israel's sinful history and God's faithfulness.

⁷¹³ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 204.

promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant” (Lk 1:68–72). With these words, Zechariah implies that Israel remains in the grasp of her enemies, in need of God’s salvation; God’s covenant is still to be fulfilled so that God’s people can “serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days,” have “knowledge of salvation,” and “the forgiveness of their sins” (Lk 1:74–79). Jesus, then, comes into a world that is waiting; Israel is waiting for God to come down and bring them true knowledge of him, bring them peace with their enemies, forgiveness of sins, and the fulfillment of the covenant. Israel waits.

The Lord comes to his people; the promised King, whom God sent to establish his reign and save his people, appears in Galilee. In Luke chapter 4, the “programmatic” scene of the Gospel, Jesus emerges from his baptism and the temptation with the devil to go into Galilee anointed by the Holy Spirit.⁷¹⁴ The first act of his public ministry was to teach in the synagogues, proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor. In Nazareth, Jesus opened up the scroll of Isaiah to read from chapter 61, which sums up what Jesus has come to do as Israel’s Messiah and Lord: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18-19). In so doing, Jesus proclaimed that God’s Spirit had anointed him as Israel’s Messiah to free God’s people from their enemies, to proclaim the word of freedom to captives, to heal the blind, and to bring a new eschatological Jubilee. In other words, Jesus was coming to establish the kingdom of God, making Israel what it was supposed to be, a place of freedom, health, peace, and wholeness. In Jesus, Israel would be filled with the Shalom of God, the eschatological Shalom hinted at during the year of Jubilee. Israel will no longer be enslaved to its enemies, the poor will no longer be in bondage, the lepers, the paralyzed, and the blind will be made whole, and the

demon-possessed will be freed. Jesus will establish God's reign over his people in Shalom, and Jesus will reign as Lord and King. Thus, the year of the Lord's favor not only refers back to the Old Testament Jubilee picture of Shalom, but also forward to the ministry of Jesus himself.

Rowe summarizes, "Through the Spirit's anointed (4:18), Jesus' public debut and the inauguration of God's jubilee year coincide (4:19). In this way it is through the mission and life of Jesus that the Spirit of the Lord (4:18) makes possible the year of the Lord's favor (4:19)."⁷¹⁵

Jesus' ministry in the rest of Luke's gospel enacts his words in Luke 4. The Lord Jesus forgives sinners, makes the sick whole, gives freedom to those in bondage, and brings the reign of God to the earth.⁷¹⁶ Three episodes from the Gospel will illustrate what it means for Jesus to be Lord, which have ecclesiological implications. First, the miraculous catch of fish shows the connections among discipleship, repentance, and the Lord Jesus. Second, the teaching of the Lord demands following him in obedience and mission. Third, the humble Lord who is arrested, tried, and crucified illustrates the way the disciples are called to follow a different way of life from the world even unto death.

Jesus the Lord has proclaimed the reign of God on earth, healed many, and cast out demons in Luke 4, and Luke 5 begins the call narrative of Jesus's disciples. The Lord needs servants; that is, the Lord is not simply Lord *per se*, but he is the Lord of, and Luke 5 establishes his community of disciples who will confess, proclaim, and teach about their Lord and the coming kingdom of God.⁷¹⁷ In Luke 5, Jesus was teaching by a lake when the crowd pressed him toward the lake to hear what he had to say. In order to better serve the people, Jesus went into

⁷¹⁴ See Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 78–79, especially fn. 1.

⁷¹⁵ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 81.

⁷¹⁶ Compare Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 82.

⁷¹⁷ To be clear, I am emphasizing the *community* who confesses his lordship, not denying his lordship over all.

one of the nearby boats, which was Simon Peter's, and asked him to put off from land to teach from there. When Jesus finished teaching, he addressed Peter directly: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Lk 5:4). Simon was incredulous—they had just been fishing all night and caught nothing—but he obeyed nonetheless. Off in the deep part of the lake, Peter put down the nets, and to his surprise, the nets were jammed full of fish and ripping at the seams. They called their friends to come help with the fish, but there were so many fish that both boats began to sink. Peter recognized that this catch of fish did not come from his own skill or hard-work, but from Jesus. Back on shore, Peter fell down before Jesus—unwittingly taking the proper worshipful posture before his Lord, and confessed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord [κύριε]" (Lk 5:8). Although Peter has no way of yet recognizing the fullness of his address—the vocative use of κύριος was a common address in Greek meaning "sir" or "master"—Luke is sketching a rich picture of the Lord Jesus.⁷¹⁸ In fact, in Luke's narrative, precisely because Jesus is the Lord, Simon is afraid and recognizes himself as a sinner.⁷¹⁹ Recognizing the lordship of Jesus Christ requires repentance and confession, and it also necessitates the gracious word of Jesus, which he gave quickly to Simon: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (Lk 5:10). Jesus gave Simon a word of grace—do not be afraid—and made him part of his mission, the mission of the Lord of heaven and earth. Simon falls before Jesus having nothing and recognizing that he himself is nothing, and Jesus raises him up as a disciple, one given identity and mission in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. This forgiveness and mission distinguishes Simon and the other disciples from other communities even as Jesus directs them to be *for* humanity in mission. The repentance of Simon separates him

⁷¹⁸ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 82–89.

⁷¹⁹ Wolfgang Dietrich, *Das Petrusbild der lukanischen Schriften* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972), 51. Dietrich writes, "Jesus's being as Lord and Peter's being as a sinner are objectively correlated" (my translation). Cited in Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 88.

from the sinful world, identifying him completely with the Lord Jesus, even as Jesus forgives his sins and sends him back into the creation as participants in his mission.

At the end of the pericope of the miraculous catch of fish, the disciples leave everything and follow the Lord, which is a prominent feature not only of the narrative portions of Luke but also the didactic sections. From Luke 5 to Luke 9, Jesus continues to preach the reign of God, bringing life from death, healing the sick, and gathering a community of forgiven and repentant sinners.⁷²⁰ At the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus, the Lord of mission, sends out the disciples to do God's mission on his authority. Jesus gives the disciples "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Lk 9:1–2). On the return of the disciples, Jesus feeds five thousand with just five loaves of bread and two fish, the Lord of the creation giving food to those in need from his abundant mercy. After Peter confesses Jesus to be "the Christ of God" (Lk 9:20), Jesus speaks of what it means for him to be Lord and Christ: that he will suffer and die at the hands of the religious leadership before being raised from the dead. This proclamation of what it means for Jesus to be Lord and Christ naturally leads into the next pericope, the demand of discipleship. Jesus commands, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23–24). Jesus demands that his community must *follow him*. That is, to be in community with Jesus necessitates putting Jesus above all else, even one's own life. Each day, the disciples of Jesus are called to put away their sinful selves in repentance and confession and find themselves looking only at Jesus following him in obedience. If Jesus is truly Lord—and anything else claiming lordship is an idol and a fraud—then the disciples must put everything into following Jesus as

⁷²⁰ For another great pericope on repentance and forgiveness and its connection to Jesus the Lord, see Luke 7:36–50.

disciples, following him even unto death for the sake of him and his word, by which they became what they are.

What Jesus says in this teaching in Luke 9:23–27 is then enacted in a later pericope in verses 57–62. In the short section before Luke 9:57–62, Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” marking his resolution to come to the city where the prophets, and soon the Lord, die. As Jesus sets out on the way to Jerusalem, three people address or are addressed by Jesus to come and follow. The first comes to Jesus promising to follow him wherever he goes. Yet Jesus responds enigmatically, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To the second, Jesus calls for him to follow, but he evades the immediacy of the call, asking the “Lord” if he can first “go and bury my father.” Failing to recognize the truthfulness of his address, κύριε, the man does not acknowledge Jesus to be Lord of all but just to be a master among masters. Jesus thus commands, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Like the first, the third approaches Jesus seemingly of his own accord saying that he will follow the Lord, κύριε, but only after he has said farewell to his family. Jesus will not allow anything to be placed above himself, and he responds, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus’s authority as the Lord extends, of course, to raising the dead, forgiving sins, healing the sick, casting and demons, and here to the fullness of his demands. What Jesus demands must be done. This reality of Jesus’s Lordship is raised forcefully in Jesus’s directive to the second man. This second man appeals to bury his father, an appeal to the law of God. Jesus, however, directly opposes the law simply by his own authority. He makes no appeal to another authority, no argument like in the Talmud that appeals to an important Rabbi. “No explanations

for the demand are given, and there is no attempt at persuasion in light of the cost.”⁷²¹ Instead, Jesus places himself above the law: “Jesus *consciously* requires disobedience of a commandment understood by all Jews to have been given by God.”⁷²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer comments, “Here a clear command of the law stands between the one called and Jesus. Jesus’ call forcefully challenges this gap. Under no circumstances is anything permitted to come between Jesus and the one called, even that which is greatest and holiest, even the law.”⁷²³ As the Lord, Jesus demands obedience, following him and putting aside all other things. This is the clear point of this passage, as Rowe summarizes, “Following Jesus requires that one place him above everything else in life.”⁷²⁴ This separates the community of disciples from the world even as the particular calling also directs them to the world in mission since Jesus is the Lord of the harvest.⁷²⁵

As Luke progresses, the verbal confrontations with the politico-religious leaders escalate as Jesus calls them directly to repentance (Lk 11:37–54) and speaks parables against them and against his followers too (Cf. Lk 14:7–35). The lordship of Jesus and the response of repentance and obedience are also emphasized in, for example, the story of Zacchaeus who gives half to the poor while calling Jesus κύριε. The account of the Last Supper exemplifies how the Lord Jesus gives to his apostles his own body and blood before he is broken and killed upon the cross. Immediately following the account of the Last Supper, Luke tells of a dispute among the disciples as to which was the greatest (Lk 22:24–30). Jesus turns their ideas of greatness upside-

⁷²¹ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 132.

⁷²² E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 254. Emphasis original. Quoted in Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 131n.23.

⁷²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 60.

⁷²⁴ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 130.

⁷²⁵ On Jesus as Lord of the harvest, see Luke 10:1–12 and Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 133–36.

down. The Gentiles, the pagans, exercise lordship in terms of coercive power, but Jesus is not that kind of Lord. Instead, he says, “I am among you as the one who serves.” The Lord Jesus is not like the pagan kings; he is a different kind of Lord, not seeking violence and coercive power, but the service of love. This is the kingdom of God given by the Father to Jesus and now the apostles are placed as judges and fellow servants within this kingdom of service and love.

This same aspect of the Lord Jesus as a humble, non-violent Lord continues to be emphasized in Luke 22:35–38. In this short pericope, Jesus predicts his coming demise, and instructs his disciples to grab moneybag, knapsack, and sword. Whatever Jesus means by instructing his disciples to sell their cloaks and presumably buy swords—the scholarly consensus does not understand the sword literally as a violent weapon of destruction but perhaps as an item of protection and self-sufficiency at the death of the Lord⁷²⁶—the next episode at the Mount of Olives makes it clear that Jesus is not justifying violence for his disciples. As in versus 35–38, Jesus is called Lord [κύριε] in connection with violence by the sword and Jesus rebukes them, “Enough of that!” (22:38) and “No more of this!” (22:51)⁷²⁷ Through an ironic juxtaposition of the disciple’s naming Jesus as Lord and his rejection of all violent measures, Luke turns the normal understanding of power and violence upside down for the Lord Jesus. The disciples rightly call Jesus Lord, but they still have violence and power in mind rather than humility and service in love. Rowe summarizes well: “In general terms, Jesus’ identity as κύριος as displayed in these two Lukan passages [22:38 and 22:49] deconstructs the normal association of power (Lordship) with violence. The nature of Jesus’ Lordship is radically misunderstood if interpreted as the power to destroy opponents by means of the sword.”⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ See Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 180, including n.79.

⁷²⁷ Using the translations of Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 180.

⁷²⁸ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 181.

Although Jesus is not a violent Lord, he is the Lord, and his authority is different from and opposed to the religious and political authorities. Jesus had upset the traditions of the Pharisees by healing on the Sabbath, by raising the dead, and by teaching with authority against the traditions of the Pharisees. God was bringing his reign in Jesus of Nazareth, but God's reign was going to be *God's reign alone* in Christ through the Spirit so that any other way or attempt at ruling had to be set aside. Jesus had disturbed the Sadducees and the Romans, the ones in charge. Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing shook the religious and socio-political traditions at the core. Tax collectors and sinners, those outside of the kingdom of God, were brought into communion with God and his people through Jesus. Further, Jesus taught the resurrection of the dead, which is God's greatest reversal of human life, exalting the lowly and humble and humiliating those of high estate. The exalted ones in power could take this no longer so they arrested Jesus, and put him on a cross. They killed the King of the Jews, the Lord of the world, mocking his claims by putting a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe on his back. The Jewish leaders wanted nothing to do with this reign of God; they wanted to reign over Israel themselves. They would rather have violence than the Shalom of Jesus's lordship which would disrupt their rule with God's own.

At this point, everything appeared over for Jesus. The Lord does not die; the King reigns *forever*. Yet, here was Jesus lying in a tomb. His disciples, who had deserted him too, decided to go their own ways, back to their old lives. Two of the disciples began to walk to Emmaus, getting out of Jerusalem, trying to clear their heads so they could forget what happened to Jesus. Then, they met a strange man on the road who walked with them and began to talk to them about the Scriptures and about God's Messiah and what would happen to the Christ. He said it was God's plan and will for the Messiah to be rejected but that God would raise him from the dead. Over dinner, this strange man broke bread with the two disciples, and only then did they

recognize the stranger—it was the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead! God had vindicated him. Jesus was the Lord after all; he was bringing the reign of God. The disciples recognize this as they proclaim the Lord Jesus no longer in the ambiguity of the vocative but clearly in the nominative, “The Lord [κύριος] has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon” (Lk 24:34).⁷²⁹ The risen Lord will soon send the Spirit upon his church and lead them into his mission in the book of Acts.

An Ecclesiology of the Lord Jesus

From the beginning of Luke’s Gospel to the end (and through Acts), Jesus is depicted as the Lord. He creates a new community of disciples through repentance and forgiveness, giving them a new identity in communion with him, and puts them on mission to preach the reign of God, heal the sick, and invite all into this community of the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples are always oriented to the Lord Jesus even as he works through them. In Luke, the disciples are continually chastised, called to repentance and a new orientation to Christ apart from their desires for self-sufficiency, power, or any other idolatrous desire. In this way, the Lord Jesus forms the identity of his people over against any other lord that would capture the hearts and minds of his community. Moreover, the Lord Jesus demanded that his disciples follow him, holding fast to his word, even into death. The story of Jesus the Lord is, therefore, a story of the Lord who creates a people for himself and calls this community to follow him in obedience and in mission.

The story of the Lord I have given is obviously a sketch and not the full story of Jesus. I hope this story opens some eyes to what it means for Jesus to be the Lord so that the individual stories of the Bible are situated within the broader account of the Lordship of Jesus. Pastors and

⁷²⁹ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 184–85, makes this excellent observation.

church leaders, then, are called to connect the Scriptures to their congregations. Perhaps, the congregation looks like any other community, failing to witness to the world since North American identity has overshadowed their identity in Christ. Or perhaps, a congregation is relying on forgiveness while ignoring obedience to Jesus's word. Or, the congregation is ignoring the poor and the needy in the community, obsessed instead with itself. Here, the story of Jesus Christ calls the church to himself, to be oriented, looking always, to the Lord. In this, the Scriptures call the church to repentance and renewed obedience in witness and service, embodying their Christian identity, given as a gift from Christ, in the world. The story of Lord Jesus is lived out as the church obeys the Lord and follows him in mission.

This story of the Lord Jesus is at the center of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous work *Discipleship*, which shows one way that the story of Jesus the Lord has been used for a concrete people during Bonhoeffer's time. Bonhoeffer's work on *Discipleship* began to take form in the early 1930s as Bonhoeffer became interested in the Sermon on the Mount and its relationship to ethics. These interests were further developed in lectures at a seminary of the Confessing Church during the height of the German church struggle, and the lectures were incorporated into core sections of the book.⁷³⁰ Although Bonhoeffer's friend and authoritative biographer Eberhard Bethge sees "both the theme and the underlying thesis" of *Discipleship* as "fully evolved before 1933," *Discipleship* must be understood within the political and ecclesiological context of the Confessing Church and National Socialism, the German church struggle, rather than solely or even primarily Bonhoeffer's personal development.⁷³¹ As David Yeago has pointed out, the

⁷³⁰ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 450–51.

⁷³¹ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 457. For an insider perspective on the German church struggle, see Karl Barth, *The German Church Conflict* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1965). Bonhoeffer's personal and psychological development has received at least as much attention as his ideas. Clifford Green commends Michael DeJonge's recent book for his focus on Bonhoeffer's theology rather than Bonhoeffer's "image." See Clifford J. Green, "Foreword" to *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology*, by Michael P. DeJonge (Oxford:

German church struggle was a specifically ecclesiological conflict wherein mainstream Lutheranism in the 1930s ripped the church out of the public, historical sphere and made it irrelevant to any social or communal issue.⁷³² The church, baptism, and the sacraments were set “into an ahistorical place ‘before God,’ which is to be marked off carefully from any location within earthly historical common life.”⁷³³ In fact, Bonhoeffer’s situation where the church had been rendered apolitical and private is similar to the North American context of today, especially the crises of identity and instrumentality.⁷³⁴ Within this context where faith is merely private and personal, Bonhoeffer proclaims the lordship of Jesus Christ over all things and the demand of obedience *in* the church and *by* the church. In so doing, Bonhoeffer connects the church’s identity—justification—completely and solely in Christ, which leads to the response of faith in sanctification and mission. Faith is no mere private thing, but results in a publicly formed life of faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. As we will see in Bonhoeffer, an ecclesiology formed by Christ the Lord focuses on identity in Christ, difference from the sinful world, and mission to God’s world in proclamation and service.

The first chapter of *Discipleship* begins with the well-known discussion of cheap grace and costly grace.⁷³⁵ Bonhoeffer centers costly grace in Jesus Christ because grace was won at the

Oxford University Press, 2012), xi–xii.

⁷³² David S. Yeago, “The Church as Polity? The Lutheran Context of Robert W. Jenson’s Ecclesiology,” in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 214–18.

⁷³³ Yeago, “Church as Polity,” 218.

⁷³⁴ Although I have not said much about the similarities between Bonhoeffer’s context and our own—in part because I do not wish to minimize the discontinuity—this is an important reason for my use of Bonhoeffer. For others who also see Bonhoeffer as helpful for our current context despite the important difference between his day and ours, see Stephen Plant and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, eds., *Religion, Religionlessness and Contemporary Western Culture: Explorations in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Theology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008) and Florian Schmitz and Christiane Tietz, eds., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christentum: Festschrift für Christian Gremmels* (Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2011).

⁷³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 43–56. To understand Bonhoeffer’s meaning within the classical Lutheran understanding of justification, see Jonathan D. Sorum, “Cheap Grace, Costly Grace, and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer’s Defense of Justification by Faith Alone,” *Lutheran Forum* 21, no. 3 (1993): 20–23.

cost of God's Son, and grace "calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*."⁷³⁶ Bonhoeffer argues that cheap grace, in contrast to costly grace, is a mere presupposition, eliminating any possibility of discipleship and obedience since grace is simply assumed in principle.⁷³⁷ Moreover, this cheap grace eliminates the difference between the church and the world, separating Christianity into its own sphere apart from normal life. Christians live like the world merely "going occasionally from the sphere of the world to the sphere of the church, in order to be reassured there of the forgiveness of my sins."⁷³⁸ True discipleship has been ruled out by the principle of cheap grace, and Christian identity has dissolved into the social, economic identity of the *Volk*.

The second chapter in *Discipleship* focuses on the call to discipleship, which is where Bonhoeffer began in his lectures at the Confessing Church seminary when it was still in Zingst.⁷³⁹ In this chapter, Bonhoeffer places the individual in immediate and intimate connection with the Lord Jesus and in the community of the church. Discipleship is never something that can be chosen by oneself; the church too cannot choose its identity or its mission. Rather, "Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God."⁷⁴⁰ Discipleship is a commitment to Christ, which requires obedience. Jesus is the Lord with the authority to speak God's word and God's command, and believers are called to obey this same Jesus Christ. Hence, Bonhoeffer contends, "faith is only faith in deeds of obedience." For Bonhoeffer, though, Christ does not simply call to obedience and expect the believer to follow on her own power. Rather, Jesus's call "creates existence anew."⁷⁴¹ Jesus recreates the person, creates faith, and

⁷³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 45. Emphasis original.

⁷³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 52–53.

⁷³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 51.

⁷³⁹ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 450.

⁷⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 57.

⁷⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 62.

changes her heart and mind, and Jesus's work of making new always results in obedience. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer asserts a dialectical relationship between faith and obedience: "*only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe.*"⁷⁴² The Lord Jesus demands obedience, and the church obeys, following him and his word.

Obedience to Jesus is "simple obedience," according to Bonhoeffer.⁷⁴³ Simple obedience requires a single orientation of the community of disciples, to Jesus. Simple obedience overcomes all human attempts to get around obedience by appealing to hermeneutics or some other kind of intellectual discipline that can justify ignoring the word of Jesus in the Scriptures. In other words, Bonhoeffer observes how the church has evaded obedience to Jesus's word with principles and ideas. Bonhoeffer points the eyes of the church directly to the Lord Jesus Christ who is known in the Bible. "We cannot and may not go behind the word of scripture to the actual events. Instead, we are called to follow Christ by the entire word of scripture."⁷⁴⁴ Jesus is the living Lord, and his word continues to resound in the church, which he expects us to obey.

Throughout *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer focuses on the concrete obedience of Christians in connection to the Lord Jesus. Christians are called out of all other ways of life to Christ alone. Christ is the mediator between human persons and between all aspects of reality. "Christ the mediator stands between son and father, between husband and wife, between individual and nation, whether they can recognize him or not. There is no way from us to others than the path through Christ, his word, and our following him."⁷⁴⁵ For Bonhoeffer, then, Christ lays claim to us, separating us from all immediacy with the world and connecting us to him. At the same time, though, Christ gives "the promise of new community." The difference of the church from the

⁷⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 63. Emphases original.

⁷⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 77–83.

⁷⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 82.

⁷⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 95.

world is the basis for a new community, the body of Christ. “Everyone enters discipleship alone, but no one remains alone in discipleship.”⁷⁴⁶ The church, the visible community of faith, is the congregation of disciples, the people who seek to obey the Lord Jesus and follow him.

Bonhoeffer’s exposition of the Sermon on the Mount stresses again and again the need for God’s people to look only to the Lord Jesus and obey his word visibly and tangibly in community.⁷⁴⁷

We have seen thus far how Bonhoeffer highlights Christian identity as a gift from the Lord Jesus, emphasizing the difference between the church as the community of disciples and all other communities and obedience to the word and command of the Lord. In the second part of the book, Bonhoeffer construes these themes in terms of the visible church community while describing its mission within the world. According to Bonhoeffer, “What the Synoptics describe as hearing and following the call to discipleship, Paul expresses with the concept of *baptism*.”⁷⁴⁸ In this way, Bonhoeffer grounds the life of the church in Jesus as Christ comes to his people in baptism, calling them in the same way that the Twelve were called by Jesus in his ministry. Because Christ is fully present in the church, the call of Jesus Christ in baptism has the same center as Jesus’s spoken word to Peter—the person of Christ himself—and this call gives the same gift of Christian identity and requires the same concrete obedience. As such, this call of baptism is first about identity: “Baptism thus implies a *break*. Christ invades the realm of Satan and lays hold of those who belong to him, thereby creating his church-community [*Gemeinde*].”⁷⁴⁹ Jesus who is fully present in his church creates the church through baptism, demarcating his people from the fallen world, and making them new as the community of Christ.

⁷⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 99.

⁷⁴⁷ See especially Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 110–14. Hauerwas emphasizes this point of Bonhoeffer’s work in Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 33–54.

⁷⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 207. Emphasis original.

⁷⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 207. Emphasis original.

Baptism is an absolute break from the sinful world, but it is also new life in the Spirit of God, which is lived in obedience to Jesus Christ and his word. The identity of the church is fully given through Jesus Christ, resulting in obedience in life and mission. This obedience takes place in the visible church-community.

“The Body of Christ takes up physical space here on earth.”⁷⁵⁰ With this opening line to the chapter “The Visible Church-Community,” Bonhoeffer signals an important emphasis on the visibility of the church which obediently lives out the call of Jesus. In this way, Bonhoeffer’s understanding of baptism as a break from the sinful world does not separate the church from the world as the creation of God. Instead, the church takes up physical space in God’s creation as part of it, and called to it in Christ’s mission. For Bonhoeffer, the community of Jesus Christ is a community within the creation, just as visible as the incarnate Son of God: “The body of the exalted Lord is likewise a visible body, taking the form of the church-community.”⁷⁵¹

Bonhoeffer’s point is not that the church is visible *in toto*; rather, as William Cavanaugh opines, “just because the boundaries of the church are invisible, it does not mean that the center is invisible as well.”⁷⁵² Bonhoeffer names the center of the church as the work of Jesus Christ in preaching and the Sacraments, consistent with the marks of the church in Luther’s theology.⁷⁵³ These marks must be visible, and in these marks the community takes space on earth. Moreover, the church must take a visible form, even as this form is adapted to the specific context, according to the judgment of the church. Although the institutional form of the church is not

⁷⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 225.

⁷⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 226.

⁷⁵² William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 152. Cavanaugh sees canonization of both texts and people as examples of visibility, as would be expected in Roman Catholic theology, but his point applies well to Bonhoeffer even though Bonhoeffer uses the typical Lutheran notion of the marks of the church.

⁷⁵³ For Luther’s understanding of the marks of the church, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 283–85.

irrelevant, most importantly for Bonhoeffer, the church must make space for proclamation, for witness to Jesus Christ. In proclamation, Jesus creates and sustains his church, giving Christian identity and sending his people on mission. As such, proclamation is holistic, committing the entire person and community to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because the Lord Jesus is the *incarnate* God, who is the Lord of all things, Bonhoeffer reasons,

Jesus' community with his disciples was all-encompassing, extending to all areas of life. The individual's entire life was lived within this community of the disciples. And this community is a living witness to the bodily humanity of the Son of God. The bodily presence of the Son of God demands the bodily commitment to him and with him throughout one's daily life. With all of our bodily living existence, we belong to him who took on a human body for our sake.⁷⁵⁴

In this way, Bonhoeffer extends the lordship of Jesus Christ to all of life, *body* and soul, so that the church is called in obedience and faithfulness to Jesus not only in proclamation and spiritual things, but in the world in all things, including faithfulness in social and political space. In other words, Christians are called into the world to witness and serve God's world not on the world's terms, but as Christians, living out their secular vocations in the world within "very definite *limits*," which are defined by Christ and the church.⁷⁵⁵ As Lord, Christ calls his church to live in God's creation, looking different from the world even while participating in the goodness of the natural, created world, and witnessing to it of the hope of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵⁶

For the Confessing Church and all Christians in Germany who were faced with the choice of joining the oppressors or being oppressed, Bonhoeffer orients the church to Jesus Christ the Lord, stressing the identity of the church as the body of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, Jesus's lordship means that he calls the church into existence, baptizing his people, and bringing them into the fellowship of the body of Christ. No immediate relationship with anyone or anything exists

⁷⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 232.

⁷⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 245. Emphasis original.

⁷⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 249–50.

except with Jesus Christ so that all relationships are mediated by Jesus. Thus, every act and work of the church passes through Christ. This is good news for the church since Christ is the gracious Lord who gives of himself among his people, forgiving sins and connecting his people to the hope of eternal life in God and the justice of the age to come. At the same time, the Lord Jesus requires repentance. The church must always obey the Lord, do what he says, and follow him in his mission. The church may not choose for itself what works to do, nor may it determine whom it wishes to serve, nor what message to proclaim. Instead, the church receives these things from the Lord Christ and must continually do them. Because the community of God's people remains sinful, called away from idolatry to further trust and obedience, the word of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures calls the church to repentance over and over again. Bonhoeffer does exactly this in *Discipleship*, proclaiming repentance and obedience to the church in Germany by orienting it to Christ the Lord. Hence, confession and absolution—which grounds the people of God in their identity as forgiven children of God—are central acts of the church that is oriented to the person of Jesus. In confession, the church lives in the cross of Christ and receives new life through the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁵⁷ This new life of Christian identity is not a pure spiritual reality, separated from political and social life, but instead this identity leads to obedience, confession of faith, witness to the Lord Jesus, and Christian service to the neighbor. As N.T. Wright has affirmed, the truth of the Gospel is not a private truth but a “public truth for the public world” since “the risen Jesus is Lord of earth as well as heaven.”⁷⁵⁸

As the church is identified solely and completely in Jesus Christ and is called to obey him, the church is distinguished from the sinful world. The difference between the church and the world is a mark of an ecclesiology stemming from the story of Christ the Lord as I have

⁷⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 111–12.

described it. Some see such an ecclesiology as quietist and apolitical because of the strong distinction between the church and the world. Bonhoeffer scholar David Gides, for example, argues that Bonhoeffer's stance in *Discipleship* is an "apolitical church-against-world stance."⁷⁵⁹ Because Bonhoeffer emphasizes the difference between the church and the world, Gides contends that Bonhoeffer "removes the necessary foundations for meaningful interaction [between church and world], leading to a vision of the church that appears unconcerned with happenings in the political realm." Based upon this reasoning, Gides charges Bonhoeffer with "a sect-like conception of the church."⁷⁶⁰ Is Gides right? Does a strong identification of the church with Christ the Lord create a sect that cannot speak to the world? I argue that the opposite is in fact the case. The church *only* speaks to the sinful world the truth of the gospel when it is oriented to Christ fully and completely. Gides' argument makes two mistakes. First, Gides assumes that the "world" is a neutral space, wherein the state is the primary actor. Whereas Bonhoeffer's understanding of the world follows the drama of salvation so that world is understood as the created, sinful, and redeemed world at the same time, as I described last chapter, Gides' world is largely a static, neutral space. Second, Gides rules out the church *qua church* as a political community *a priori*, which he gives away in his reference to Ernst Troeltsch's church-world typology, namely, the church as sect.⁷⁶¹ For Gides, politics is accomplished vis-à-vis the state in society so that the church only acts politically when it works in relationship to the state, whether against it or for it.⁷⁶² If the gospel is understood as a public

⁷⁵⁸ Wright, *Creation, Power, and Truth*, 47.

⁷⁵⁹ David M. Gides, *Pacifism, Just War, and Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer's Church-World Theology and His Changing Forms of Political Thinking and Involvement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 270.

⁷⁶⁰ Gides, *Pacifism*, 208–09.

⁷⁶¹ For a good analysis and critique of Troeltsch's theology, including this typology, see Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 23–62.

⁷⁶² Gides says, "Bonhoeffer has constructed a church set apart from the larger community, one that is called to a greater purity than the secular, and one that does not conduct itself by the same set of rules or values as the

message about the Lord of creation and the church is a public community oriented to the same Lord and called to his mission, then Gides' critique disintegrates. The church is firmly distinguished from the sinful world, but the church is not set off from the created and redeemed world. In fact, the church as a community which is not reducible to the sinful world exists to be a testimony to the fact that the world is created by God, who desires to bring the Shalom of his Son's reign through the Spirit.⁷⁶³ By connecting the church to the Lord Jesus, who is the Lord of earth as well as heaven, the church is called into the world to participate in the fallen creation of God which has been and is being redeemed through Christ and the Spirit—not to participate strictly in the partisan politics of the state. This calling does not stem from the politics of the world but the politics—or, better, the word—of Jesus, lived in the church.

Although Bonhoeffer's context is significantly different from North America today, the story of the Lord Jesus remains necessary. In Bonhoeffer's time, the rise of National Socialism and the obvious evils of Bonhoeffer's world created a need for *Discipleship* to distinguish between the church and the world and orient the church solely to Jesus Christ. North American today is not so conspicuously evil, but the crises of identity and instrumentality require an ecclesiology based in the story of Christ the Lord nonetheless. The church only knows itself properly when it knows itself in terms of God's story of salvation, the story of Jesus. Oriented to the Lord, the church finds its identity as the forgiven people of God living in hope, and continually called to obey Christ in this time and place. As such, the church is not a perfect

secular. The church sits in a 'holding pattern,' passively accepting conditions as they are until the end" (*Pacifism*, 256). In addition to the two problems already named, Gides, somehow as a historian, fails to see that Bonhoeffer is primarily speaking to the church *in status confessionis* as it encounters a world in opposition to it, killing millions of Jews and destroying the gospel. No middle ground exists where this world is simply neutral. As such, the church must be oriented decisively to Jesus Christ so that it continues to speak and live as a visible presence in the world, taking up space for witness to Jesus Christ. Gides ignores these major emphases of Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* because of the two problematic assumptions named above.

⁷⁶³ Here, I echo Hauerwas's famous claim that "the first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world." Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 56. For evidence that Hauerwas's point is also

society different from all others in its moral perfection, but it is a sinful community, yet playing “the part of that humanity that lives in the hope of redemption.”⁷⁶⁴ The church is sinful—hence, the need for continual repentance and confession—but Christ has nonetheless called this sinful community to be part of the story of God and his salvation. As part of the on-going story of Jesus Christ and the salvation of the world, the church’s purpose comes only from Christ alone, not from the state or any cultural entity.⁷⁶⁵ The story of Christ the Lord shows how the church takes form as a community different from the world, looking to Christ for its purpose and mission of witness and service. The story of Christ the Lord decisively orients the church to Jesus, bestowing identity on his people, and requiring obedience in witness and service. What, however, should this witness and service look like today?

Jesus Christ the Servant: An Ecclesiology of Solidarity in Witness and Service

The story of Christ the Lord is a necessary story for the church today because it orients the church to Christ who speaks his word both for and against his people. The church always lives by this word and needs to hear Christ’s calling to repentance and mission anew in the Scriptures. The story of Christ the Lord is not, however, the only necessary story of Christ for the North American church today. The story of the Lord Jesus highlights the identity of the church in Christ, its visible obedience in the world, and the difference between the church and the world. Another story is necessary to describe both the interconnectedness of Christ and the church and the other side of the church-world relationship, the solidarity of the church with the world. Because the story of the Lord Jesus stresses the difference of the church and the world and the

about different uses of the term “world,” see *Performing the Faith*, 15–16.

⁷⁶⁴ Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 162.

⁷⁶⁵ On Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the church as a limit to the state, and especially the necessary criticism of the state, see Christiane Tietz, “‘The Church Is the Limit of Politics:’ Bonhoeffer on the Political Task of the Church,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 60 (2006): 23–36.

church's epistemic primacy over the world—although not ontological!—another story of Jesus Christ is necessary to direct the church to the world in faithfulness to Christ and his mission. The story of the Lord Jesus rightly orients the church to Christ, but it can result in a problematic triumphalism without the complementary and just-as-necessary story of Jesus the servant.

The story of Jesus the servant presumes the presence of Christ in the church so that the proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments as well as the witness and service of the church are truly the word and work of Christ in the Spirit. Whereas the story of the Lord Jesus distinguished clearly between the church and Christ so that the church is oriented completely to Christ, the story of Jesus the servant connects the church and Christ inseparably. In addition, the narrative of Christ as servant describes the way Christ entered into the totality of the human experience in the humiliation, even taking on the “likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), which directs the church to act for the world, in solidarity for God's creation, redeemed in Christ through the Spirit.

The fact of the lordship of Jesus cannot be divorced from the way in which Jesus is Lord: as a servant. I implied this above in my story of the Lord Jesus when I described how Jesus's lordship is radically different from violent power. Jesus rejects all ways of violence and coercion by force. He demands that his followers live differently from the Gentiles, not requiring service from a position of power, but serving one another just as Christ served them. Accordingly, in John's Gospel, Jesus descends to the feet of his disciples with a water basin, washing their feet as the supreme servant and giving the apostles an example of loving one another. Most importantly of all, Jesus gives himself up to die at the hands of the chief priests, scribes, and governing authorities in order that he might “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus serves unto death on a cross.

The Scriptures reveal the servanthood of Jesus in more than just his work of salvation. The

Scriptures locate Jesus as the servant all the way back in the manner in which he assumed human nature humbly in the form of a servant. In tradition dogmatic language, Jesus's servanthood coincides with the humiliation, which happens concomitantly with the incarnation. In other words, the mode of the incarnation is the humiliation, which reveals Christ to be the servant from the beginning.⁷⁶⁶ Jesus's life takes shape in the gospels as humiliation. His story is not only one of the Lord, the master and Son of God, but also the servant who lays down his life for the world. In addition to the story of the Scriptures testifying to Jesus's humiliation and servanthood, a few key Scriptures attest to the humiliation of Jesus from his conception. In Philippians chapter 2, Saint Paul affirms the equality of Christ with God—"though he was in the form of God"—yet Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant."⁷⁶⁷ As Richard Bauckham explains, Jesus "did not understand his equality with God as a matter of being served by others, but as something he could express in service, obedience, self-renunciation and self-humiliation for others."⁷⁶⁸ Jesus renounced the splendor that he deserved as the Son of God, and became a human being not in the luxury and riches of a palace, but in a stable, to poor parents with little power or influence. Jesus took on the form of a servant, humbling himself in obedience to God even though that obedience led to a cross where he was murdered. That God exalts Jesus, giving him the authority to rule and judge all things, is not important to my argument here, but is presumed in the previous section on his lordship. In this section, it is essential to see that Jesus's lordship is

⁷⁶⁶ It's important to distinguish the humiliation from the incarnation in order to delineate the goodness of creation from the fall into sin. Otherwise, Jesus bears our sin in the incarnation, which implies that created matter is inevitably sinful. In locating the servanthood of Jesus in the humiliation, the bearing of sin occurs in Jesus's person by his choice as part of salvation history rather than ontological necessity. This mistake is made in William Cavanaugh's otherwise very good description of Christ bearing sin. Cavanaugh is speaking about the "kenotic movement" in the "drama of salvation," but he regularly mentions Christ "assuming" sin so that it appears to be part of the incarnation as such instead of the humiliation. For Lutherans this is particularly important because of Formula of Concord, Article 1, which confesses that creatureliness is good and not *essentially* sinful. See Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 154–61. See also Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 531–42.

⁷⁶⁷ Phil. 2:6.

exercised precisely by renouncing his status and taking the form of a slave, one without status or power, precisely for the sake of his creation. In fact, “The passage [of Philippians 2], inspired both by Deutero-Isaiah and by the Christ-event, answers: only the Servant can also be the Lord.”⁷⁶⁹ Jesus humbles himself as a servant from the beginning of his life in the womb of Mary, and calls his church to “have this [his] mind among yourselves” (Phil. 2:5), the mind of service for the sake of others and not status for the sake of self.

In addition to Philippians 2, Galatians 3 describes Jesus’s willingness to “become a curse for us” and “come under the law.” For Luther, Paul is describing Jesus’s service to the world in becoming not just a human being, but a sinner, even the chief sinner of sinners. Jesus humbles himself to such an extent that he enters fully into the sinful situation of humanity. In Luther’s beautiful prose, Jesus became

the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc. there has ever been anywhere in the world.... He is a sinner, who has and bears the sin of Paul, the former blasphemer, persecutor, and assaulter; of Peter, who denied Christ; of David, who was an adulterer and a murderer, and who caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord (Rom. 2:24). In short, He has and bears all the sins of all men in His body—not in the sense that He has committed them but in the sense that He took these sins, committed by us, upon His own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood.⁷⁷⁰

For Luther, this is not only something that happens in Jesus’s death, but this is part of his life and ministry: “Christ was not only found among sinners; but of His own free will and by the will of the Father He *wanted to be* an associate of sinners, having assumed the flesh and blood of those who were sinners and thieves and who were immersed in all sorts of sin.”⁷⁷¹ According to Luther,

⁷⁶⁸ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 58.

⁷⁶⁹ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 61. As can be seen in this quotation, Isaiah 52–53 are also important for understanding Jesus as the Servant, but this Philippians passage sums up well the key points of Isaiah for my purposes.

⁷⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), 277.

⁷⁷¹ Luther, *Galatians*, 278. Emphasis added.

Jesus came into the flesh not to remain apart from sinful humanity as a pure and holy specimen in the midst of a sinful world, but he came to associate with sinners, to eat with tax collectors, to allow prostitutes to anoint his feet at parties, and associate with lepers. Christ served his creatures in this way that our sins, death, and all evil might be taken into him and destroyed in him: “Just as Christ is wrapped up in our flesh and blood, so we must wrap Him and know Him to be wrapped up in our sins, our curse, our death, and everything evil.”⁷⁷²

In the Galatians commentary, Luther sees Christ’s service reaching back not only into his ministry but back into his birth, extending the humiliation to the conception of Jesus Christ. According to Luther, Jesus took on the *sinful* human condition so fully that the Lord of the law became captive to the law. Commenting on Galatians 4:4–5—“God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, *born under the law...*”—Luther places words in the mouth of Jesus:

Come to Me, all who labor under the yoke of the Law. I could have overcome the Law by My supreme authority, without any injury to Me; for I am the Lord of the Law, and therefore it has no jurisdiction over Me. But for the sake of you, who were under the Law, I assumed your flesh and subjected Myself to the Law. That is, beyond the call of duty I went down into the same imprisonment, tyranny, and slavery of the Law under which you were serving as captives. I permitted the Law to lord it over Me, its Lord, to terrify Me, to subject Me to sin, death, and the wrath of God—none of which it had any right to do. Therefore I have conquered the Law by a double claim: first, as the Son of God, the Lord of the Law; secondly, in your person, which is tantamount to your having conquered the Law yourself.⁷⁷³

Luther thus shows how the Lord of the law rescinds his status—not his ontological being—as Son of God to take the place of a slave, underneath sin, death, and the power of the law. This soteriological service of Jesus takes place in the humiliation, bearing the sin of the world under the power of the law from his conception. Jesus’s service for the world knows no bounds, even taking sin into his own body, bearing it for the sake of his creatures from conception until

⁷⁷² Luther, *Galatians*, 278.

⁷⁷³ Luther, *Galatians*, 370–71.

death.⁷⁷⁴

Jesus then enters into human history as a servant, coming “in the likeness of *sinful* flesh” (Rom. 8:3, emphasis added) not in the likeness of perfect humanity.⁷⁷⁵ This is how Christ exercises his lordship, through service, bearing the sin of the world for the world’s sake, giving up his status as the Son of God and working from a position of weakness rather than a position of power. Jesus even gets his hands dirty in the sin of the world, associating with sinners and outcasts, being in solidarity with the sinful world in order that he might witness to it of the reign of God and win for it the redemption of the world. Therefore, the story of Christ the servant is intrinsically connected to Christ’s vicarious representative action—*Stellvertretung* in German—in which he enters vicariously into human history, becoming a servant in our place in order to give us his status as sons and daughters of God.⁷⁷⁶ Having received this status as a gift of the Son through the Spirit, the church too “bears one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2), acting vicariously for each other and by extension for the world. In this story of Christ the servant, the church is called to solidarity with the world in Christ’s mission since this mission is not only for the church but it is for others, for the world. The church witnesses to Christ’s vicarious redemption of others through repentance of social sin and in service to the broader community through which Christ is present in his church.

⁷⁷⁴ This idea is also in the Lutheran Confessions, not however in its articles on Jesus. Instead, the Lutheran Confessions speak about Jesus this way in relation to the righteousness of faith. Article 3 of the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) states, “Therefore, faith looks to the person of Christ, as this person submitted to the law for us, bore our sin, and in going to his Father performed complete and perfect obedience for us poor sinners, *from his holy birth to his death.*” Kolb and Wengert, eds., *Book of Concord*, 572. Emphasis added.

⁷⁷⁵ On Romans 8:3 and the significance of Jesus coming “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” in *Berlin, 1932–33*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 355–57.

⁷⁷⁶ *Stellvertretung* is important in Bonhoeffer’s corpus. Clifford Green notes the Christological root and the connection to responsibility: “In 1942, having defined ‘life’ by Jesus, Bonhoeffer argues that the life of Jesus is not the isolated individual seeking personal perfection but that of the One who lives in vicarious representative action for humanity; he is ‘the responsible person par excellence.’” Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 313. Green is citing Bonhoeffer from *Ethics*. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 231–36.

Why Is Jesus the Servant a Necessary Story for Today?

The story of Jesus the servant is a necessary complement to the story of Christ the Lord because political power has deconstructed public life so that the mission of the church is nearly impossible to imagine in a way different from partisan politics. As I described in the first chapter under the crisis of purpose, even Christian imaginations during post-Christendom are enraptured by secular partisan politics. Partisan politics structures the way in which Americans understand public problems and the solutions to these problems. According to James Davison Hunter, since the New Deal, there has been “a tendency toward the politicization of nearly everything.”⁷⁷⁷ In short, Hunter says, “the state has increasingly become the incarnation of the public weal. Its laws, policies, and procedures have become the predominant framework by which we understand collective life, its members, its leading organizations, its problems, and its issues.”⁷⁷⁸ In this politicized world, ideology and partisan politics becomes central. “Taken to an extreme, identity becomes so tightly linked with ideology, that partisan commitment becomes a measure of their moral significance; of whether a person is judged good or bad.” Part of the problem, thinks Hunter, is that the public has been conflated with the political so that we do not know how to address public, common, shared, collective problems in a non-political way.⁷⁷⁹ Moreover, the politicization of everything is also a mark of a Nietzschean description of everything as “will to power.” The loss of a common culture means that the temptation is to try to dominate others rather than using persuasion and compromise.⁷⁸⁰

As Hunter observes, power has become a major problem within Western culture and the

⁷⁷⁷ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 102.

⁷⁷⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 103.

⁷⁷⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 105. Using my normal definition of political as related to public, social matters, I would rephrase Hunter: we do not know how to address public, collective problems except through governing authorities and partisan politics.

use of power is an important problem of the church's public witness today.⁷⁸¹ The church, like the North American culture more broadly, has succumbed to the will of power as public manifestation of its witness. Hunter sees this in the work of the Christian Left and Christian Right, which have broad support across Christian denominations. Instead of Christians actively engaging public space with the service and witness of the Gospel, Christians lobby political parties and vote for their preferred ideology, finding ways to “take back the culture” in power.⁷⁸²

Accordingly, Hunter calls for Christians to rethink power. Power, Hunter observes, is always present and cannot be avoided. As such, it is impossible to give up power *per se*. The problem to avoid is not power but the misuse of power. Hunter states, “Its use—for good or ill—is a function of the cultural assumptions and narratives through which it is legitimated and exercised. It cannot be evaded or transcended.”⁷⁸³ With this, Hunter has hit on the key issue. What assumptions and narratives guide the understanding of power in North America? More importantly for my project, what narrative and assumptions ought to guide the church's public witness and use of its power? The story of Jesus the servant is the story which shows how Jesus relates to power, and opens up some directions for the church's public witness to the world in a way different from power politics.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 106–07.

⁷⁸¹ See also Jennifer M. McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁸² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 111–49. Hunter also groups the “Neo-Anabaptists” among those who have overpoliticized the church, which includes Hauerwas, Yoder, and many others. Hunter is not as convincing on this point because his understanding of politics is centered in the nation-state whereas these “Neo-Anabaptists” turn politics on its head so that the church defines its own politics through Jesus Christ. See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 150–166. At the same time, I agree with Hunter that the emphasis for Hauerwas and Yoder is certainly on discontinuity between the church and the world (see p. 174), but this discontinuity and difference has an important place as I described above in the ecclesiology of the Lord Jesus even if it is not the whole story.

⁷⁸³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 179.

⁷⁸⁴ Compare Hunter, *To Change the World*, 187–93.

Christ the Servant: A Narrative Rendering for Ecclesiology

The baptism of Jesus has often been a source of embarrassment for Christians. Within the first two centuries, this embarrassment was evident already in the early church. Both Ignatius of Antioch, the important bishop in the early church, and Justin Martyr, the influential Christian apologist to Rome, felt it was necessary to justify Jesus's baptism, although it was otherwise an ancillary part of their respective theologies.⁷⁸⁵ The debate continued in the patristic period as theologians argued and debated the reasons for the baptism of Jesus.⁷⁸⁶ Why was Jesus's baptism such a point of contention? The problem revolves around the relationship of Jesus to sin. The beginning of Mark's Gospel announces that the Son of God receives "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" at the hands of the prophet John the Baptist (Mark 1:4). The syllogistic logic is difficult to overcome: if baptism is for the remission of sins, then one who receives baptism must be a sinner.⁷⁸⁷

At this point of perplexity, however, we arrive at the profundity of Jesus's person and work. His baptism reveals how fully Jesus enters into his fallen creation, which looks back to the incarnation and forward to the cross. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus comes out of Galilee to John in the wilderness by the Jordan River. John has been preaching repentance and a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As Jeffrey Gibbs explains, John's baptism is "for conversion from unbelief to faith, and for entrance into the people of God." It is for "the lost sheep who were no longer members of the true Israel."⁷⁸⁸ More than that, it is a baptism for all of Israel because all of Israel was sinful, in exile apart from God's appointed King. So, Jesus comes

⁷⁸⁵ Killian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 19.

⁷⁸⁶ McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus*, 20–22.

⁷⁸⁷ Compare this with the fictitious debate between the bishop Archelaus and a disciple of Mani, the Manichean, from the fourth-century. McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus*, 20.

⁷⁸⁸ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary Series* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 178.

to John, entreating John to receive this baptism of repentance, requesting to be numbered with sinners and with the true Israel in hope for the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁸⁹ Jesus is not concerned about his own sin; he is concerned about the sin of his people and the bondage to evil that is enwrapping everyone. John, though, refuses to comply: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John’s question points toward the reality of Christ’s person. Jesus is the one who has been named “Jesus” precisely because he is to save his people from their sins. Jesus is the one who was adored by kings and called out of Egypt as God’s Son. So John objects, thinking that the Messiah did not need such a baptism for repentance. Perhaps, John had normal expectations for the Messiah in first century Palestine. Perhaps, John believed that through Jesus Yahweh would “accomplish this great renewal” of Israel in a way similar to the Maccabees or to King David.⁷⁹⁰ While no single monolithic view of the Messiah dominated the first century, as N.T. Wright has observed, the Messiah was expected to lead victorious battles, gaining worldly glory and power.⁷⁹¹ We do not know what John expected exactly, but his incredulity suggests that he anticipated the Messiah to be powerful and glorified according to the standards of the age. Jesus was something different.

Jesus responds to John enigmatically: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus claims that this baptism of repentance, wherein he would be numbered with sinful Israel and counted among the lawless rebels of God, will fulfill all righteousness. What could this mean? Of course, the righteousness fulfilled in his baptism is not Jesus’s own individual righteousness—even an appeal to the righteousness of his humanity in the

⁷⁸⁹ McDonnell states, “The baptism of Jesus is related not only to his own righteousness, but to that of the whole people.” McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus*, 17. Although McDonnell’s comment is misleading with the assertion that the baptism of Jesus is about his own righteousness—at least construed in the common western sense of personal righteousness—he rightly points to the corporate dimensions of baptism in relationship to Israel.

⁷⁹⁰ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 482–83.

⁷⁹¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 484–85.

mission to God the Father would dissolve the unity of his person—it is instead *God's* righteousness, not in the sense of God's holiness but in Luther's sense of God's eschatological saving deeds done in the present and received by faith.⁷⁹² God has come into the world in Jesus, and is accomplishing his saving deeds through this Nazarene. Why is a baptism for repentance fitting to these eschatological saving deeds of God? Gibbs explains,

Because it shows perfectly *how* this Jesus “will save his people from their sins” (1:21). It shows *how* the reign of heaven will come now, in an unexpected way. With John's participation, Jesus will perform “all righteousness,” that is, he will enact God's saving deeds for the people by (literally) standing with sinners, taking the place of sinners, receiving from John the baptism that sinners receive. Ultimately, *all* of Jesus' ministry will come to its head as the Scriptures are fulfilled (26:54, 56) in the arrest that leads to his trial and condemnation and crucifixion. There the sinless one will offer up his own life as the ransom payment *in the place of the many*. That's why it is “fitting” for Jesus to come and stand in the Jordan and be baptized, to stand (literally) *in the place of the many*.⁷⁹³

Jesus, then, enters into the waters of baptism for repentance, standing in the place of sinful Israel—and by extension sinful humanity, especially in light of the rest of the Jesus story—enacting and even embodying humanity's sinfulness in this act of solidarity.⁷⁹⁴ The sinless Jesus fulfills all righteousness not by differentiating himself from the sinful world or demanding that he be recognized as the Lord of this world through power and status, the ways of the sinful world. No, Jesus, the suffering servant, comes in humility, entering into the sinfulness of his people so fully that it has rocked the church ever since.⁷⁹⁵ In the kenotic movement of the humiliation, Jesus the servant makes himself less, accepting the sinner-status of his people and

⁷⁹² Gibbs, *Matthew*, 180. My reference to Luther is to his later recounting of understanding righteousness of God in Romans 1:17 in a new way. In the 1545 preface to his Latin writings, Luther recalls his breakthrough as recognizing that God's righteousness is not his ontological holiness by which he judges, but his saving deeds by which he makes his creatures righteous, which is received passively by faith. On this, see Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64–68.

⁷⁹³ Gibbs, *Matthew*, 181. Emphases original.

⁷⁹⁴ See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 477–539, for more on how Jesus identifies himself in Israel's history and as Israel's Messiah, enacting and embodying the state of the people of God.

⁷⁹⁵ McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus*, 18.

even bearing the sin of the world in his baptism, shedding an illuminating light across his entire ministry and person.⁷⁹⁶ Still in the waters of the Jordan, God sends the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, anointing him for his mission and confirming his acceptance of sin: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

The story of Jesus’s baptism not only points forward as Gibbs notes in the extended quote above, but it also points backward to the incarnation, particularly in light of the whole Scriptural witness. From the perspective of his baptism, Saint Paul’s language of Jesus’ incarnation and humiliation becomes clearer. In the humiliation Jesus “takes the form of a servant,” comes “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and takes his place “under the law.”⁷⁹⁷ Jesus does not grab glory and power for himself. Instead, he takes his place with sinners and among sinners. He does not come into the world immune from the sadness and sorrow of the present age. Instead, he comes “under the law,” under the restrictions, boundaries, and limitations of the fallen age. He comes under the wrath of God, submitting himself *from his incarnation*—in a humiliated way—to the effects of sin that sinners receive. Jesus refused to separate himself from his creation, but came in full solidarity with his fallen creatures. He became not just any man but a servant, a suffering servant, not grasping at or demanding his proper divine status, but receiving the status of a slave, entering into human weakness and sinfulness, being counted as a sinner among sinners, that his solidarity with his creation might connect us to him so that we could become sons and daughters of God. What happened in Jesus’ baptism, in which he was counted among sinners and bore their sin in the waters of the Jordan, reveals the reality of Jesus’ incarnation: from the beginning, Jesus

⁷⁹⁶ For a Christological reinterpretation of repentance that has some interesting ecclesiological directions and biblical imaginative possibilities, see Jennifer M. McBride, “Thinking within the Movement of Bonhoeffer’s Theology: Towards a Christological Reinterpretation of Repentance,” in *Religion, Religionlessness and Contemporary Western Culture: Explorations in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Theology*, ed. Stephen Plant and Ralf K. Wüstenberg (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007), 91–109, especially 103–09. For a longer and more extensive argument along the same trajectory, see McBride, *Church for the World*.

⁷⁹⁷ Phil. 2:7, Rom. 8:3, and Gal. 4:4.

comes to serve, willingly bearing the fallen creation in his body.

The work of the humiliation started at the incarnation does not end with Jesus's baptism, but continues into his ministry. In Matthew's Gospel, the Spirit immediately leads Jesus from his baptism into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus has already accepted the status of sinners in his baptism, and now he is tempted by the devil in the same manner as God's people, like Adam in the Garden and Israel in the wilderness beyond the Red Sea. Jesus's temptation was no play-acting with the outcome pre-determined beforehand—such a view annuls the extent of the humiliation, the degree to which Jesus is bearing the world's sinful conditions and effects, and leans toward a docetic view of Jesus's person.⁷⁹⁸ Hence, Bonhoeffer comments on the temptation of Jesus that “all desire and all fear of the flesh, all the flesh's condemnation by and distance from God was also in him.” Jesus accepted these things in order to “completely take upon himself the flesh's susceptibility to temptation.” As such, “The temptation of Christ was more difficult, inexpressibly more difficult than the temptation of Adam; for Adam bore nothing in himself that could have given the tempter any right or power over him. But Christ bore with him the entire burden of the flesh under the curse and condemnation, and yet his temptation was intended to obtain future help and salvation for all flesh that was to be tempted.”⁷⁹⁹ So the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where he experiences more fully the sinful condition of humanity, the temptations of the devil. Jesus's solidarity with sinners increases as he fasts for forty days

⁷⁹⁸ This is the view of Francis Pieper, one of the foremost theologians of the LCMS. Pieper writes, “We emphatically deny this possibility [of Christ committing a sin according to his human nature]. Not because of the sinlessness of the human nature of Christ in itself, for Adam, too, was created sinless and nevertheless succumbed to temptation, but because Christ's human nature never existed as a separated person, but from the beginning constitutes one Person with the Son of God.” Pieper's logic is the logic of the one person, but it is alienated from the humiliation so that Pieper asserts the impeccability of Christ rather than the concrete history of Christ's obedience in relationship to God. Pieper moves away from the Scriptural view of God who makes himself known in Christ toward his own understanding about divinity. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1951), 2:76–77.

⁷⁹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Bible Study on Temptation,” in *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, vol. 15 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 392.

and forty nights, becoming weak and alone, like Israel wandering in the wilderness. Even the Gospel of Mark's shortened account emphasizes this solidarity by adding that Jesus is with the wild beasts, among his creation, becoming weak in the body and the mind and submitting to the wiles of the devil just as we are. In Matthew's Gospel the devil himself comes to him in this weak state, tempting him three times. In the first temptation, Satan suggests that Jesus make bread for himself out of stones. After all, if Jesus is the Son of God, he has the power to do this, and he should use his divine power *for himself* to make bread from stones. "You, Jesus, need not serve others all the time," Satan connives. "Instead, serve yourself." The suffering servant refuses, trusting in his Father and obeying God's word in the midst of hunger and temptation. In the second temptation of Matthew, Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, reminding Jesus that God has promised to protect and save him, which is written in God's word. Under the guise of trusting in God's promise, Satan proposes that Jesus jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Such a move, however, would not be trusting in God's word, but testing it. Even more so, jumping from the temple might well be serving "not God but [his] own project by putting [himself] on display."⁸⁰⁰ In other words, jumping off the temple would be tantamount to putting himself in the public eye rather than his Father and his Father's mission. Jesus, though, is not in this for himself; he is working for sinners in obedience to his Father. In the third temptation, Satan leads Jesus to a high hill and claims that he will give all these kingdoms to Jesus if he will only prostrate himself before Satan. Again, the Suffering Servant refuses the temptation of the devil. His way is not the way of power and glory, of violent kingdoms and partisan politics. His way is the way of trust in and obedience to his Father, which means solidarity with sinners,

⁸⁰⁰ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 224. Lohfink denies the historicity of the temptation account, attributing the temptations instead to the experience of the church, which is not my intention. While I disagree with Lohfink on the (non-)historicity of the account, he rightly observes the public nature of this second temptation.

serving them in the mission of God.⁸⁰¹ His way is the way of the cross, not the way of glory.⁸⁰²

The rest of the story further illumines the same themes. Not only Matthew's Gospel, but Mark, Luke, and John too include the story of the servant who turns around Messianic expectations, going to the cross rather than seeking his own glory. Each of the synoptics, with more of the narrative details provided in Matthew and Mark, tell the story of James and John asking to be seated in glory with Jesus at his right and left hands (Mark 10:35–45 and Matt. 20:20–28). Even though Jesus has been regularly predicting and even promising his coming suffering and death, the disciples still see him through the lens of power and status. They expect Jesus to be sitting upon a glorified throne, probably in a palace, ruling a kingdom with worldly power. They want a part of this glorified status that Jesus will have in the future; they want to be included in the power and wealth that is coming. Jesus, of course, rejects the entire premise of the question. The glory of Jesus is not the throne of power, seated in a palace, overlooking a great kingdom of wealth and prosperity, ruling it with an iron fist. Instead, Jesus points to his cup, the cup of God's wrath, and his baptism, wherein he is counted with rebels to suffer and die with them and for them.⁸⁰³ The reference to Jesus' baptism is particularly striking in light of what I have already discussed. Just as Jesus was numbered with sinners in his baptism, so he will be again at the cross. The baptism and the cross combine in the one fabric of Jesus' story as the suffering servant. More striking yet, this baptism/cross *is* the glory of Jesus where he will be flanked by his companions, sinners, on the right and on the left. This glory, Jesus says, he will receive from his Father. The problem of status becomes more acute as the disciples do not

⁸⁰¹ For a closer look at the whole temptation account, see Gibbs, *Matthew*, 187–99.

⁸⁰² For the Lutheran understanding of the theology of the cross and its distinction from a theology of glory, see Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁸⁰³ On the meaning of cup and baptism, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 416–17.

understand Jesus' rebuke or message to James and John. They become indignant, and Jesus has to spell it out for them again; "The Gentiles," Jesus says, "lord it over others as the one who demand service. They are obsessed with status and power. But not you. You shall not demand service but shall become slaves of all. This is what I, the Son of Man, am doing for you and the world, giving my life as a ransom for many."⁸⁰⁴ Jesus's way is not the way of the world, not power and status but service for the world in solidarity with the weakest and the least. N. T. Wright sums up Jesus's words well: Jesus's words in Mark are "an invitation to understand atonement itself, God's dealing on the cross with the sin of the world, as involving God's victory not so much over the world and its powers (as though God were simply another cheerful Sixties anarchist) but over the worldly *ways* of power."⁸⁰⁵ Jesus's way is the way of service.

Jesus continues to show this in the Gospel of John on the night in which he was betrayed.⁸⁰⁶ John's focus on Maundy Thursday is not the Lord's Supper wherein Jesus gives of himself to his followers, serving them and connecting himself to them and to each other through his body and blood. John highlights the servanthood of Jesus on the eve of his suffering and death. In the upper room, seated at the Passover table on the night of his betrayal, Jesus is gathered with his disciples. Not only Peter, James, and John—the closest of the apostles—but Judas Iscariot is also at the table, the one whose heart has been captured by the devil (John 13:2). John points out that Jesus knows "that the Father had given *all things* into his hands," which prompts him to act (John 13:3). D. A. Carson observes that if Jesus had been concerned about status and power, we might expect him "to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation, and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath." We might even expect Jesus to demand that the

⁸⁰⁴ Paraphrasing Mark 10:42–45.

⁸⁰⁵ Wright, *Creation, Power, and Truth*, 52–53. Emphasis original.

⁸⁰⁶ Chronology questions are not my concern. I am following the typical synoptic chronology for Holy Week. For a discussion of chronology questions, especially in the Gospel of John, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According*

disciples wash his feet since he is the one in power, and they likely would have done it in an instant. But foot washing was too demeaning even for disciples to do for each other.⁸⁰⁷ Yet, this demeaning and even shameful act—one that should be done only by the lowest, a Gentile slave—is done by the Lord. Carson describes the scene:

We must picture the disciples reclining on thin mats around a low table. Each is leaning on his arm, usually the left; the feet radiate outward from the table. Jesus pushes himself up from his own mat. The details are revealing. Jesus *took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist*—thus adopting the dress of a menial slave, dress that was looked down upon in both Jewish and Gentile circles.... Thus, he *began to wash his disciples' feet*, thereby demonstrating his claim, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk 22:27; cf. Mk 10:45 par.).⁸⁰⁸

Jesus serves his disciples physically washing their feet, refusing to let them serve him, and putting them in the position of receivers, receiving the saving acts of God that he brought to them in service. From the humble act of washing feet in service, Jesus commands for his disciples to follow: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done for you." (John 13:15). Jesus is the Lord and the Teacher, yet he comes in service, and the disciples too are called to the same service. In Christ's kingdom chasing after status or power will not do. Only the way of Jesus Christ will suffice for the disciples, the way of giving up status and self-serving violence for the sake of the other.

Jesus's service culminates in the events of the next day. After Supper, Jesus and his disciples go to Gethsemane, where his suffering begins in earnest.⁸⁰⁹ In prayer to his father, Jesus sweats drops of blood in anxiety for the cup that is coming. Despite this, Jesus remains committed to serving his creation in obedience to the will of the Father. Not long after, the mob,

to *John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 455–58.

⁸⁰⁷ Carson, *John*, 462.

⁸⁰⁸ Carson, *John*, 463. Emphases are quotes of the text of John.

⁸⁰⁹ Consistent with my language of the humiliation as entering into the fullness of sinful flesh, it would be appropriate to speak of Jesus as suffering under the burden of sin from his conception. Nonetheless, the suffering takes on a more intense and direct character, without which the humiliation would not be understood.

led by Judas Iscariot, marches to the garden to capture Jesus. Despite Jesus's power—his word knocks the mob to the ground in John's Gospel—he eschews violence and self-serving power, letting himself be taken captive by the religious leaders. At trial, the suffering servant was oppressed and afflicted, but he hardly opened his mouth. Before Pilate, he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, whipped, beaten, and humiliated, but his way was not Pilate's way, and Jesus would not succumb to the temptation of power. Instead, he was stricken for the transgression of his people, hung on a cross between two robbers, and he made his grave with the wicked. What began in the incarnation and the concomitant humiliation, continued in his baptism, temptation, and ministry, culminating on the cross. Jesus refused to use any authority for himself, but instead served his people for their sake.

An Ecclesiology of Christ the Servant

The humiliation of the Lord Jesus continues now in the church. It is not merely that the church is to imitate Jesus in service—although this is not an insignificant point in light of John 13:15 and the story of the foot-washing—but that Jesus remains the humiliated one even in his exaltation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognizes this in his Christology lectures when he argues, “Even through the empty grave, Jesus remains incognito, in the form of a stumbling block. Jesus does not emerge from his incognito, not even as the Risen One. He will not lay it aside until he comes again, for the Last Judgment. Then he will come visible as the Eternal, the God who became human, in divine power and glory.”⁸¹⁰ Even after the resurrection, when Christ has been adorned in the spiritual body of the new age, he remains a stumbling block, the humiliated one. He does not yet come with trumpets blaring and lightning flashing with the angelic hosts. Instead, he comes in his church. On Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared among his disciples and gave his mission

⁸¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” 360.

to his church. Jesus spoke to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even I am sending you.” Then breathing on them, Jesus continued, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:19–23). The power of God will not be wielded in glory and power, swords and scepters but in words by a community of former fisherman, zealots, and tax collectors. The weakness of the cross continues in the church. In this mission, Jesus not only calls his church to continue his mission but to do it in his way, the way of service for the world in obedience to God. Hence, Jesus authorizes the church to work in the mundane ways of the cross: the sacraments, preaching, praying, confession and absolution, and the service of Christian community. In the exaltation, Jesus uses his divine power to come among his church and be fully present in water and words, bread and wine, yet these ways of Jesus reveal his lordship not in power but in servanthood and weakness, the way of the cross.

What does it mean for the church to follow the call of Christ into servanthood? For the remainder of this section, I use Bonhoeffer to highlight three aspects of an ecclesiology that follows the story of Jesus the servant. First, the church must be oriented outward toward the world, in being for others. Second, the repentance of the church must include social sin. Third, the church’s mission takes place from below.

First, the church must not be primarily concerned with its own well-being and status but with the status of others. In short, the church must be “the church for others.”⁸¹¹ In prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a number of letters to his friend Eberhard Bethge with intriguing prospects about Christianity in light of the new world order, the “world come of age.”⁸¹² In

⁸¹¹ Joel Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 35–37.

⁸¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, vol. 8 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). On what the world come of age means for Bonhoeffer, see Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Runscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 185–91. Feil states, “Being of age is not a category primarily of individual maturation but one of epochal social

prison, Bonhoeffer came to see how the world no longer sees any need for a strong God, one who has power over death and sin. The powerful God has been pushed out of the world through technological means. Without fear of death or sin, people do not think that they need a God of strength; the world come of age has overcome these weaknesses through technology. Moreover, the theological attempts to make the world come of age—which is strong in its maturity—seem weak are misguided, Bonhoeffer thinks. Instead, Bonhoeffer points to God on the cross where God’s strength is manifested in the weakness of the cross, and the greatest glory of God is in the shame of a man hanging dead upon a tree. Bonhoeffer argues,

God consents to be pushed out of the world and unto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering! This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and suffering of God; only the suffering God can help.⁸¹³

Bonhoeffer is pointing to the theology of the cross as the way forward, the radical reversal of worldly glory in Jesus which does not deny the strengths of the world but proclaims Christ as the center and Lord of the world come of age, confronting this world’s strengths and not merely its weaknesses. Joel Lawrence summarizes what Bonhoeffer means quite well:

The weak God confronts humanity in its strength, instead of the strong God confronting humanity in its weakness. The weak God, revealed in the humiliation and death of Jesus Christ, exposes the world come of age to a new light.... The problem with the world come of age is that she may have created protection from the natural environment, but there is no protection from herself. And this is where the weak Christ confronts the world come of age...⁸¹⁴

emancipation. Such emancipation causes people to cope with their problems, be they scientific, ethical, cultural, or religious, without God; they no longer live in the heteronomy of a certain world view and its corresponding understanding of God” (p. 186). Properly speaking, the world come of age lives in a *different* heteronomous world with its corresponding non-understanding of God.

⁸¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 479.

⁸¹⁴ Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer*, 109.

In this situation of the world come of age, where religious concepts no longer make sense to anyone, Bonhoeffer argues that the church is to follow in this mission of God, but the church has often acted like the world, trying to consolidate its own strength rather than proclaiming the weakness of Christ.⁸¹⁵ In an outline for a book written in prison, Bonhoeffer writes that pietism was the final attempt to preserve Protestantism as “religion,” in the Barthian sense of human religiosity. Orthodoxy was no better, though, since it attempted to preserve the church as institution. Bonhoeffer even criticizes the confessing church saying that it stood up for the cause of the church but without commitment to Jesus who “disappears from view.” All of these approaches are about the church “defending itself,” strengthening its own power, trying to retain its status in the world. There is “no risk taking for others,” in the church, only attempts to consolidate power.⁸¹⁶

Bonhoeffer’s critique rings true not only for the church confronting National Socialism but for North America today. As I noted above with James Davison Hunter, the North American church has continued to choose the way of power and status, trying to influence the world through partisan politics rather than concrete work for others on the ground floor of a community. In response to a church which is turned in on itself, Bonhoeffer proclaims Jesus not only *pro nobis*, for us, but *pro aliis*, for others. Jesus’s very being is a “being-for-others,” which truly transforms sinful, turned-in-upon-onself people into Christians who are led to the neighbor in love. Following from this, Bonhoeffer concludes, “The church is the church only when it is there for others.”⁸¹⁷ Bonhoeffer even suggests that this means giving away property to those in

⁸¹⁵ Some see Bonhoeffer as relaxing the connection between Christ and the church in the prison correspondence, but I do not believe that’s the case. See Barry Harvey, “The Narrow Path: Sociality, Ecclesiology, and the Polyphony of Life in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 102–23.

⁸¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 500.

⁸¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 503.

need with pastors living solely on the free-will offerings of the church and serving in other vocations.⁸¹⁸ The church gives up its position of power in order to best serve the community. The church must be the church for others, and not the church for itself. Joel Lawrence sums up Bonhoeffer's thoughts: "Through the formation of the new humanity in Christ, the church is redeemed from the fallen emphasis on self that marks the old humanity to become the new humanity of Christ that exists for others."⁸¹⁹ Lawrence continues, "Bonhoeffer sees in Jesus Christ a Man whose being is defined as for others, and so the church is the community in whom Christ is formed, the church that is the place where 'Christ exists as community,' must reflect her Lord in its being for others."⁸²⁰ The church must serve the world around it in the same way that Jesus served the world, not seeking status for himself, but humbling himself for others, for the world.

In being for others rather than for itself, the church cannot be focused on self-preservation. Trying to survive is not part of the given mission of the church. Jesus called the church to wash feet, forgive sins, and proclaim the gospel, not consolidate power in a building or denomination. Being the church for others is, thus, a matter of direction. The church that is internally focused on itself, concerned for its own well-being, is *incurvatus in se*, embroiled in its own selfish power plays. The faithful church, however, looks outward to Christ in obedience and to the world in service. What this service looks like depends on the particularities of the community, even though all Christian churches everywhere have been given this universal mission. Perhaps, the local community is full of immigrants struggling to get by in a new place. Here, the church for others enters into the lives of these immigrants, entering into their culture even, leading and

⁸¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 503.

⁸¹⁹ Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer*, 52.

⁸²⁰ Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer*, 53.

guiding them not from the front in power but from the side as an equal in finding homes, work, and of course proclaiming forgiveness of sins in Christ's name. Perhaps, the local community struggles with violence in the street. The church then must be a place of peace and work to end the violence not primarily through secular politics—although this may have a place—but by being a community of peace-makers who seek peace *in the streets*, not only a spiritual peace with God while living well apart from the violence. Being for others means, then, entering fully into the lives of the community, living as if this world and this community mattered just as it does to Christ.

Therefore, the church for others is in solidarity with others. No true “being-for-others” can take place in the church without “being-with-others.” The missionary church is not the one that charges into a primitive land, giving gifts from a position of power, but the one that enters into the culture, language, and lives of people, learning, and growing as it also witnesses to God in Christ and serves the community in Christ's name. An appropriate image for such a church, then, is not the pristine light on the hill, attracting people out of the world to its glowing ember; the church must instead take the form of *the* servant in the streets of the city, getting its hands dirty as it lives, works, plays, and serves for the sake of this community and not for its own existence. The Scriptural story of Jesus Christ the Servant gives exactly this impetus, revealing God's work of service on the ground floor and calling the church to his mission. As the church lives for its community, out of its identity given as a gift from the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, the church exists for others and not for itself.

Second, the church is obedient to Christ's mission of service as it acknowledges and takes responsibility for—repents for—social sin. This aspect of the church's service goes part and parcel with a willingness to get fully involved in the world, even in its messiness and sinfulness. Individual sin and individual salvation are essential aspects of the church's witness, it is true, but

in North America today the individual focus tends to turn the church into a therapeutic community for the individual psyche. More importantly, God's mission is not to individuals solely but to people embedded within culture and relationships, within society. To address these people with the word of God means addressing the whole of a society and not merely the individuals. Christians, and congregations, address personal and social issues first by prayer and confession and absolution. In prayer for the community at large, God's people identify the world as an object of God's love and mission, and identify themselves in solidarity with this community before God. Moreover, confession and absolution function not only personally but also socially. For example, Christ has called his people to repent, to confess of the ways the sin of the world has taken root within us, and to work in faithfulness to God in the church and in the world. In repenting for social sin, the church names the reality of a social situation; the church does not talk around racism, for example, but calls it what it is: a sin before God. In dealing with reality this way, the church sees God and God's call at the center of life, which calls the church to act in responsibility for the world.⁸²¹ In so doing, it will lead first to forgiveness and reconciliation with God and neighbor, and then toward justice and peace in service. This is the church's responsibility toward the world in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Christine Schliesser has shown how Bonhoeffer connects accepting guilt, responsibility to the world, and vicarious representation (*Stellvertretung*), all of which have a Christological base.⁸²² Jennifer McBride, making use of Schliesser, has worked further within Bonhoeffer's logic to suggest that acknowledging sin is rooted in Christ's own baptism and the humiliation as entering into "the likeness of sinful flesh." McBride contends,

The Lamb of God, the sinless Suffering Servant, is the one who is to confess,

⁸²¹ Compare Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 233.

⁸²² Christine Schliesser, *Everyone Who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: Bonhoeffer's Concept of Accepting Guilt* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), esp. 174.

acknowledge, and accept sin and guilt on the cross in order to repent, to change the ontological structure of the world and turn the course of history towards reconciliation and redemption. In other words, the cross is an act of divine vicarious representative repentance and divine righteousness in that through the crucifixion the risen God makes right for eternity all that is not.⁸²³

Following from this, McBride argues that the church “vicariously represents Christ to the world by taking the crucified Christ’s form of confession unto repentance,” and thus witnessing to the world in the same manner as the humiliated Christ.⁸²⁴ In fact, McBride contends that her “phrase *confession unto repentance* describes an ecclesial mode of being in the world, encompassing both act and speech, that provides the church with an ethical framework for social and political engagement and a description of a particularly Christian disposition in public life.”⁸²⁵ Living within the story of Jesus Christ, the church sees the problems of the world not merely as lack of education, ignorance, or political forces but as sin, also in its social manifestations. The church must learn to take responsibility for violence, racism, poverty, and even war as social sins in which we are complicit before God, proclaiming the gospel and serving the world in obedience to the Suffering Servant.

What does this look like for a congregation today? In a chapter in *Ethics* called “Guilt, Justification, Renewal,” Bonhoeffer situates the church in relationship to Christ as “the place where this acknowledgement of guilt becomes real.” The grace of Christ is such that it leads to an acknowledgment of guilt, and therefore the renewal of human beings as creatures in relation to God.⁸²⁶ In the West, today, Bonhoeffer contends that the church is not only the place where Christians take responsibility for personal sins, but the church must also take responsibility for

⁸²³ McBride, “Thinking within the Movement of Bonhoeffer’s Theology,” 106.

⁸²⁴ McBride, “Thinking within the Movement of Bonhoeffer’s Theology,” 107.

⁸²⁵ McBride, “Thinking within the Movement of Bonhoeffer’s Theology,” 101. Emphases original.

⁸²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 135.

“the Western world’s falling away from Jesus Christ as guilt toward Jesus Christ.”⁸²⁷ In fact, for Bonhoeffer, the church’s responsibility is never merely for individuals but for the world. As Bonhoeffer argues in a 1942 essay on ethics:

The church community of Jesus Christ is the place in which Christ is believed in and obeyed as the salvation of the whole world. Thus, from the beginning and by virtue of its very nature, the church-community stands in a place of responsibility for the world that God in Christ has loved. Wherever the church-community does not perceive this responsibility, it ceases to be a church-community of Christ.⁸²⁸

The key part of this responsibility is accepting guilt in confession and repentance. For Bonhoeffer, acknowledging guilt is not first about individual salvation but the command and forgiveness of Christ, the entire reality of Jesus Christ. At the same time that Bonhoeffer suggests this communal form of confession, Bonhoeffer does not deny personal sin and the need for individual confession. Individual sin poisons the community of the church and *needs* to be forgiven, Bonhoeffer says.⁸²⁹ Each Christian must take responsibility for her own sin and the sin of Adam, the original sin, and confess this guilt before God. Nevertheless, each individual confession, according to Bonhoeffer, is part of the “collective I [Gesamtich] of the church. The church confesses and acknowledges its guilt in and through them [individual Christians].”⁸³⁰ For Bonhoeffer, confession happens in community as well as individually.

Because the church as a whole takes responsibility for sin and guilt, the guilt is not only individual lust, personal greed, and individual lack of prayers, but also includes a broad social thrust. Following the Ten Commandments, Bonhoeffer calls the church of his day to repent. In so doing, his words suggest how the church should repent today as well. Thinking through the first

⁸²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 135.

⁸²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 543.

⁸²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 136–37.

⁸³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 137.

commandment, Bonhoeffer writes, “The church confesses that it has not professed openly and clearly enough its message of the one God, revealed for all times in Jesus Christ and tolerating no other gods besides.”⁸³¹ Reflecting upon the second commandment, Bonhoeffer states, “The church confesses that it has misused the name of Christ by being ashamed of it before the world and by not resisting strongly enough the misuse of that name for evil ends.” In fact, the church has allowed “injustice and violence” to happen in the name of Jesus Christ.⁸³² In light of the third commandment, the church confesses the “loss of holidays” and “the barrenness of its public worship” which has allowed the “exploitation” of working people through the week. On the fourth commandment, “the church confesses that it is guilty of the breakdown of parental authority. The church has not opposed contempt for age and the divinization of youth because it feared losing the youth and therefore the future, as if its future depended on the young!” Further, in obvious references to Hitler’s Youth, Bonhoeffer calls the church “guilty” of destroying families, children and parents, and “of abandoning them to fall away from Christ.”⁸³³ The fifth commandment declares that the church has “witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder without raising its voice for the victims and finding ways of rushing to help them. It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.”⁸³⁴ The sixth commandment reveals that the church “has found no strong or authentic message to set against the disdain for chastity and the proclamation of sexual licentiousness. Beyond the occasional expression of moral indignation it has had nothing to say... It has not known how to proclaim strongly that our bodies are members of the body of Christ.”⁸³⁵ Reflecting on the seventh

⁸³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 138.

⁸³² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 138.

⁸³³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 139.

⁸³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 139.

⁸³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 140.

commandment, “the church confesses that it has looked on silently as the poor were exploited and robbed, while the strong were enriched and corrupted.”⁸³⁶ The eighth commandment shows the church’s guilt in relation to the slandered and slanderers; it is guilty of not denouncing slanderers and leaving the slandered to their fate.⁸³⁷ In light of the ninth and tenth commandments, Bonhoeffer states that the church has “coveted security, tranquility, peace, property and honor” and “therefore has not bridled human covetousness but promoted it.”⁸³⁸

Before the Ten Commandments, the church stands guilty according to Bonhoeffer, guilty of “apostasy from Christ” as it has failed to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel in a responsible way for this age and time. As such, the church is not only guilty of its own sins; it “became guilty for the loss of responsible action in society, courageous intervention, and the readiness to suffer for what is acknowledged as right. It is guilty of the government’s falling away from Christ.”⁸³⁹ Bonhoeffer does not believe these strong words go too far because “confession of guilt is not something that one can take or leave; it is the form of Jesus Christ breaking through in the church.” No one should prevent the church’s confession of guilt so that the church can receive the judgment of Christ, becoming participants in Christ’s cross in order to wake up to new life in his righteousness.⁸⁴⁰ Here lies the justification of the West; it “lies only in God’s justification of the church, leading it into full confession of guilt and into the form of the cross.”⁸⁴¹

Although Bonhoeffer will go on to center his concerns on the West as a whole and betray a

⁸³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 140.

⁸³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 140.

⁸³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 140.

⁸³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 141.

⁸⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 142.

⁸⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 142.

latent wish for the *societas Christiana*, his understanding of the church and its confession of guilt in relationship to the whole culture is an excellent example of an ecclesiology that flows from the story of Christ the Servant. As Christ's work of service takes the form of the cross, so too does the mission of the church in confessing not only its guilt but the guilt of the society and the community around it. This is not primarily about having an ecclesiology that is relevant to the world, which is more interested in social justice than in the Gospel; rather, acceptance of guilt is theological and is necessitated by the church's relationship to Jesus Christ. Thus, Bonhoeffer uses the Ten Commandments to call the church to new responsibilities in relationship to God's world and to work for God's mission of witness and service to the world. What would such a list look like today? The first commandment shows the church's guilt for its commitment to the therapeutic "gospel" instead of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, guilty for the youth who cannot separate therapy from the message of the Bible. The second commandment reveals the church's splitting of public and private where Christ's name only applies to private lives so that God's name is honored only in one sphere of life. The church is guilty of relegating God and his name strictly to Sunday worship and individual faith. In light of the third commandment, the church confesses that it has often sought traditionalism above all else, failing to engage in the word of God that is both faithful to Jesus Christ and applicable to the world today. Before the fourth commandment, the church confesses its complicity to the deification of youth, as Bonhoeffer noted. The church has worshiped at the altar of relevance and is guilty for the lack of faith among young people today. The fifth commandment reveals the church's guilt for hatred and racism, for violence and murder, which dominate the cities of America.⁸⁴² Church-communities have fled from the city and left them barren of the love of Jesus Christ. On the sixth

⁸⁴² For more on racism and the church, see Theodore J. Hopkins and Mark A. Koschmann, "Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America," forthcoming from *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

commandment, Bonhoeffer hits the target for today too: the church confesses that it “has found no strong or authentic message to set against the disdain for chastity and the proclamation of sexual licentiousness. Beyond the occasional expression of moral indignation it has had nothing to say... It has not known how to proclaim strongly that our bodies are members of the body of Christ.”⁸⁴³ The seventh commandment indicts the church’s complicity in a corrupt capitalism wherein the rich get richer and the poor are treated like baggage that must be helped to assuage the guilt of the wealthy. In view of the eighth commandment, the church confesses its failure to speak the truth of the gospel and call others to the truth too, allowing the world to wallow in falsehood. In light of the ninth and tenth commandments, the church confesses coveting after power and privilege, ignoring the weak of the world for the sake of political strength.

The Ten Commandments lead the church to consider its relationship to God and its calling to be faithful to him in service to the world. As this short list shows, the church has much to repent of, yet this act is not an act of submission but one of faith and hope, in Jesus Christ whose cross is victory for all who hope in him. Trusting in Jesus Christ, the church takes responsibility before God for sin, its own sin and the sin of the world. In so doing, it follows the pattern of Christ who took the form of a servant and made himself nothing, serving the world and bearing its sin order to bring reconciliation with God the Father. So too the church takes responsibility for sin before God, and lets this confession and repentance lead toward engagement with the world in witness and service, not from a position of power but from the cross, serving the entire world in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Third, an ecclesiology of Jesus the Servant entails repentance of status and of attempts to gain political power, determining to work instead from below. Attitudes from the colonial style of mission, in which Christians barged forward triumphantly from a position of power, are

⁸⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 140.

unfaithful to Jesus Christ and his call to the church to serve. The church cannot charge into a “godless” place and expect the “heathen” or even the local Christians to conform to its likeness. More subtly, churches are also guilty of doing mission from a position of power when they enter into a community for a short-term mission, give out gifts to the poor, and then leave, feeling good about themselves but without any lasting contact with the community. Instead of this, mission work should consider its location as within the local community not from the outside, working with congregations or missionaries in the area, or, at the minimum, returning to the same community on an annual basis to reconnect with the same people. In this way, the church serves them not only by giving but by learning and receiving, treating God’s human creatures as equals who have something to give in return. The same attitude is also necessary for mission within North America. Being faithful to the story of the suffering servant means that congregations do not simply throw up a building project for the poor with outsider money, but partner with the local community in service. Leaders for these projects should not be outsiders thrown into an urban setting from lofty mansions in the suburbs, but should be the local lay and pastoral leaders or missionaries living in the community. Those living locally know best how to make the project serve the area in its needs. Faithful witness, then, partners with local churches and local people for service, which shows that the project is not about assuaging suburban guilt but serving people who matter to Jesus and to his church. In faithfulness to the servant Jesus Christ, this work is done from below. Only from below does the church fully enter into solidarity with those in need, taking locality seriously, and being involved for others, for this community, and not for its own image or the easing of suburban guilt.⁸⁴⁴

In light of all this, the church has much for which to repent. The temptations to work

⁸⁴⁴ The irony of the language of being “for others,” is that precisely when the other is not an other but is “Laura,” “Marco,” or “Keith,” then one is truly being for others. In other words, when the other has a name and is treated as a person loved by Jesus Christ, then one is truly “for others.”

through political means, lobbying governments, getting donors, and throwing money at problems are real temptations for congregations. These ways, however, are not the ways of Jesus. This is particularly true in the post-Christendom, politicized world. How can the world hear the public speaking of the church in a way that is not simply asserting the will to power? It is almost bound to hear attempts at witnessing to the truth in the public forum as an attempt to impute the church's will upon the world. As such, James Davison Hunter's radical suggestion has merit: "It would be salutary for the church and its leadership to remain silent for a season until it learns how to engage politics and even talk about politics in ways that are non-Nietzschean."⁸⁴⁵ The church must repent of its complicity in power politics, pray for God's forgiveness, and learn *from the Scriptures and the story of the Servant Jesus* how to engage one's community without power plays but with concern for the neighbor and in solidarity with the local community. Once the church has learned to do that and to speak in a different mode from the will to power, then perhaps the church can again testify to the truth of the Gospel "in such a way that the world is changed and renewed."⁸⁴⁶

Conclusion: A Christological Ecclesiology for Post-Christendom

This chapter has concluded my argument for a Christological, storied approach to an

⁸⁴⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 186. In reflecting from prison upon the baptism of his friend Eberhard Bethge's son Dietrich, Bonhoeffer writes about the church-world relationship in this new age. In so doing, he makes a suggestion that echoes Hunter's although Bonhoeffer does not directly reflect upon politics. Bonhoeffer writes, "Our church has been fighting during these years only for its self-preservation, as if that were an end in itself. It has become incapable of bringing the word of reconciliation and redemption to humankind and to the world. So the words we used before must lose their power, be silenced, and we can be Christians today in only two ways, through prayer and in doing justice among human beings. All Christian thinking, talking, and organizing must be born anew, out of that prayer and action. By the time you [baby Dietrich being baptized] grow up, the form of the church will have changed considerably. It is still being melted and remolded, and every attempt to help it develop prematurely into a powerful organization again will only delay its conversion [Umkehr] and purification. It is not for us to predict the day—but the day will come—when people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed." Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 389–90. See also Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 880–83.

⁸⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 390. For context, see previous note.

ecclesiology after Christendom by focusing on two stories of Jesus. I identified the story of the Lord Jesus Christ and the story of Jesus the Servant as two essential narrative directions within the Gospels that cannot be reduced to the other, although they are interconnected. I sketched some of the Scriptural directions and important conclusions from these stories that are relevant for the church today. First, I identified repentance as an essential disposition for the church. Repentance must permeate everything the church is and does. Repentance, here, has two senses. First, it is the gift of Jesus the Lord by which the church is confronted by the word of the Lord, and recreated through the Gospel as the community of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus creates his people and repentance stands at the beginning of the encounter with the Lord. Second, repentance is the continued response of the church to Christ's word in relation to the world. That is, the word of Christ not only orients the church to him but also calls the church into the world to follow him in humility. This second understanding of repentance is primarily concerned with the church-world relationship. Here, the church must confess where it acted as if it has ontological superiority to the world and failed in its mission to the world, and it must turn to live in obedience to Jesus Christ *in the world*. In this way, repentance indicates both the identity of the church in its orientation to Christ and its mission to the world in witness and service. Although calling both acts "repentance" risks the distinction between the gospel and the law, Christian identity and response, repentance is helpful for seeing how Christ permeates all of life and the life of repentance begun in baptism is not merely a personal, individual affair. Instead, the identity of the forgiven people of God *must* be embodied and lived out in service to the world.⁸⁴⁷ Related to repentance, I emphasize the importance of obedience to Jesus Christ in all

⁸⁴⁷ For a helpful reflection on forgiveness and its fruits using Bonhoeffer, see Gregory L. Jones, "The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community, and the Politics of Worldly Discipleship," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 149–69.

aspects of life. The church cannot only focus on the spiritual, personal lives of people, but on the public nature of the world. Christ is Lord over the entire creation, and the church's mission is not to save souls out of the earth, but announce in witness and point in service to the renewal of all things in the kingdom of God. For this reason, the church's identity as the body of Christ ought to be seen in public as the church witnesses to the Gospel and serves the world with humility. The church cannot, then, be identified with the world but the church's unique identity is *for* the world.

In addition to the story of Jesus the Lord, I also sketched the narrative of Jesus Christ the Servant. Whereas the story of the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized the difference of the church and the world, this story connects the church and the world intimately, showing *how* the church is to work for the world. Jesus Christ came not in glory or power, but in weakness in the form of a servant and the likeness of sinful flesh. In the humiliation, Jesus continued to do ministry in a cross-centered way, bearing the sins of the world for our sake. From this, the church is called to take Christ's form, the way of the cross, working for others in solidarity with the weak, the lonely, and the outcasts and not from a position of power. An ecclesiology of the suffering servant shows how the church must be the church for others, willing to take risks for the sake of God's creatures and not working to ensure its own institutional survival above all. Moreover, the church is called to repent of social sins, taking seriously its mission in service to the whole creation, and not merely human souls. Further, the church must repent of its attempts to consolidate power and work from a position of power, instead finding solidarity in the fallen world which is the object of Christ's love and his reconciliation with the Father. In this, the church is called not to power politics, but to the truth of the gospel in public, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus and working in the world in obedience to Christ. This type of mission only happens when the story of the Scriptures has engaged the entire church, and the

Spirit of God is moving in divine worship, proclamation, Bible study, small groups, and service in the community to lead God's people to do Christ's mission in his stead and by his authority.

Engaging the Scriptures, looking to Christ, and hearing his word of mission to the world stand at the heart of this Christological ecclesiology for post-Christendom. In this way, the church is identified in terms of the story of Christ, rooted in the doctrine of the person of Jesus, and seen as a visible participant in Christ's mission for the world, fulfilling my three criteria for an ecclesiology after Christendom. In these final two chapters, I have pointed in some specific and concrete directions, but this ecclesiology must become more concrete still as churches live out the word of Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arand, Charles P. *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1995.
- . “What Are Ecclesiologically Challenged Lutherans To Do? Starting Points for a Lutheran Ecclesiology.” *Concordia Journal* 34 (2008): 157–71.
- Arnold, Matthieu. “Luther on Christ’s Person and Work.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, edited by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka, 274–93. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Augustine. *On Christian Teaching*. Translated by R.P.H. Green. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Avram, Wes, editor. *Anxious about Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004.
- Barker, H. Gaylon. *The Cross of Reality: Luther’s Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer’s Christology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.
- Barna, George. *Marketing the Church*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. 4 vols in 14. Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. 1936–69. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010.
- . *The German Church Conflict*. Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1965.
- . *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply “No!” by Dr. Karl Barth*. Translated by Peter Fraenkel. London: The Centenary Press, 1946.
- . *The Humanity of God*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1960.
- . *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Translated by Douglas Horton. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.
- Bauckham, Richard. *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Bayer, Oswald. *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- . *Theology the Lutheran Way*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Updated ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.
- Berger, Peter L. *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- . “Protestantism and the Quest for Certainty.” *Christian Century* 115, no. 23 (August 26, 1998): 782–85 and 792–96.
- Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Rev. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Biermann, Joel D. *A Case for Character: Toward a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.
- Biggar, Nigel. “Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?” In *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, edited by Mark Thiessen Nation and Samuel Wells, 141–60. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.
- Bloomquist, Karen L., editor. *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.
- . *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*. Edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. Vol. 2 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- . *Discipleship*. Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.
- . *Life Together*. Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly. Vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- . *Ethics*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- . *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Edited by John W. de Gruchy. Vol. 8 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.
- . *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Vol. 10 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.
- . *Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932*. Edited by Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Bocker, and Michael B. Lukens. Vol. 11 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

- . *Berlin: 1932–1933*. Edited by Larry L. Rasmussen. Vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.
- . *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*. Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Vol. 15 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.
- . *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*. Edited by Mark S. Brocker. Vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.
- Bowers, Diane Virginia. “Martin Luther and the Joyful Exchange Between Christ and his Christian: Implications for the Doctrine of Justification and the Christian Life.” PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 2008.
- Braaten, Carl E. *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.
- . *That All May Believe: A Theology of the Gospel and the Mission of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Brunner, Peter. “Von der Sichtbarkeit der Kirche.” In *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*. Vol. 1. 2nd ed., 205–12. Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1962.
- Burridge, Richard A. *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*. 2nd ed. rev. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- . “From Titles to Stories: A Narrative Approach to the Dynamic Christologies of the New Testament.” In *The Person of Christ*, edited by Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae, 37–60. London: T&T Clark, 2005.
- Caenegem, R. Van. “Government, Law and Society.” In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450*, edited by J.H. Burns, 174–210. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Cantalamesa, Raniero. *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus: The Mystery of Christ’s Baptism*. Translated by Alan Neame. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Carter, Craig A. *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.
- Cavanaugh, William T. *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- . *Theopolitical Imagination*. London: T&T Clark, 2002.
- Daniel, David P. “Luther on the Church.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*. Edited by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingle, and L’ubomír Batka, 333–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dean, Robert John. "For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas." PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2014.
- de Gruchy, John W, Stephen Plant, and Christiane Tietz, editors. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theologie heute: Ein Weg zwischen Fundamentalismus und Säkularismus?* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009.
- DeHart, Paul J. *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.
- DeJonge, Michael P. *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- D'Isanto, Luca, "Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutical Model of Community." In *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh, 135–48. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994.
- Dunn, James D.G. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. 1975. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Estes, James M. *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melancthon, 1518–1559*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Evanson, Charles J. "Center and Periphery in Lutheran Ecclesiology." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 231–70.
- Feil, Ernst. *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Translated by Martin Rumscheidt. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- Forde, Gerhard O. *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*. Edited by Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- . *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- . *Theology Is for Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.
- . "The Work of Christ." In vol. 2 of *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 5–99. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

- Frei, Hans W. *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Gibbs, Jeffrey A. *Matthew 1:1–11:1. Concordia Commentary Series*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2006.
- Gides, David M. *Pacifism, Just War, and Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer's Church-World Theology and His Changing Forms of Political Thinking and Involvement*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011.
- Green, Clifford J. *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Gustafson, James M. "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University." *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985): 83–94.
- Hall, Douglas John. "Ecclesia Crucis: The Disciple Community and the Future of the Church in North America." In *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh, 59–73. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994.
- . *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997.
- Handy, Robert T. *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Harasta, Eva. "One Body: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the Church's Existence as Sinner and Saint at Once." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 62, no. 3–4 (2010): 17–34.
- Harvey, Barry. "The Narrow Path: Sociality, Ecclesiology, and the Polyphony of Life in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." In *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, edited by Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor, 102–23. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000.
- . *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981.
- . *The Hauerwas Reader*. Edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- . *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983.
- . *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004.

- . *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998.
- . *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001.
- Hauerwas, Stanley and L. Gregory Jones, editors. *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997.
- Hauerwas, Stanley and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.
- . "Why *Resident Aliens* Struck a Chord." In *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*, 51–63. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995.
- Haynes, Stephen R. *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- Healy, Nicholas M. *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- . *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.
- . "In and Of the World: Why There Is No Christian 'Community.'" *Christian Century* 129, no. 10 (May 16, 2012): 26–31.
- . "Karl Barth's Ecclesiology Reconsidered." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57, no. 3 (2004): 287–99.
- . "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 287–308.
- Helmer, Christine. "The Subject of Theology in the Thought of Oswald Bayer." *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 21–52.
- . *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship Between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther's Works (1523–1546)*. Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1999.
- Hendrix, Scott. "In Quest for the Vera Ecclesia: The Crisis of Medieval Ecclesiology." *Viator* 7 (1976): 347–78.
- Hinlicky, Paul R. *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- . "Luther's Anti-Docetism in the Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi (1540)." In *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation*, edited by Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede, 139–85. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007.

- Holl, Karl. *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*. Translated by Karl and Barbara Hertz and John H. Lichtblau. New York: Meridian, 1959.
- . *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* Edited by James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977.
- Holland, Scott. “The Problems and Prospects of a ‘Sectarian Ethic’: A Critique of the Hauerwas Reading of the Jesus Story.” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 157–68.
- Holmes, Christopher R.J. “Bonhoeffer and Reformed Christology: Towards a Trinitarian Supplement.” *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 28–42.
- Holze, Heinrich, editor. *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1997.
- Hopkins, Theodore J. “Local Ministry and Universal Ordination.” *Lutheran Forum* 47, no. 1 (2013): 46–49.
- Hopkins, Theodore J. and Mark A. Koschmann. “Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America.” Forthcoming from *Lutheran Mission Matters*.
- Horton, Michael S. *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- Hunsinger, George. *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- . “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, edited by John Webster, 127–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hurtado, Larry W. *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Hütter, Reinhard. “The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit.” *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 334–61.
- . *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*. Translated by Doug Stott. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Illouz, Eva. *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.
- Jacobsen, Eric O. *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

- Jenson, Robert W. "How the World Lost its Story." *First Things* 36 (1993): 19–24.
- . "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance." In *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, edited by Donald K. McKim, 272–88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- . *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Jennings, William James. "The Desire of the Church." In *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, 235–50. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2005.
- Jenkins, Michael. *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Jones, L. Gregory. "The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community, and the Politics of Worldly Discipleship." In *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh, 149–69. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994.
- Juntunen, Sammeli. "The Christological Background of Luther's Understanding of Justification." *Seminary Ridge Review* 5, no. 2 (2003): 6–36.
- Keller, Timothy J. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Creeds*. 3d ed. New York: David McKay Company, 1972.
- Kelsey, David H. *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*. Vol. 1. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009.
- Kenneson Philip D. and James L. Street. *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997.
- Kerr, Nathan R. *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009.
- Kliefoth, Theodor. *Einleitung in die Dogmengeschichte*. Parchim: D.C. Hinstorff, 1839.
- Kolb, Robert. *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition*. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1993.
- . *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.
- . "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on his Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of his Theology." *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 449–66.

- . *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . “The Sheep and the Voice of the Shepherd: The Ecclesiology of the Lutheran Confessional Writings.” *Concordia Journal* 36 (2010): 324–41.
- Kolb, Robert and Theodore J. Hopkins, editors. *Inviting Community*. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013.
- Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, editors. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Krieg, Robert A. *A Story-Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ*. New York: Paulist, 1988.
- Krötke, Wolf. “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther.” In *Bonhoeffer’s Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, edited by Peter Frick, 53–82. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.
- Lakies, Chad D. “An (Enduring) Ecclesiology: Beyond the Cultural Captivity of the Church.” PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2013.
- Lawrence, Joel. *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: T&T Clark, 2010.
- Lehenbauer, Joel D. “The Theology of Stanley Hauerwas.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76 (2012): 157–74.
- Lehmkuhler, Karsten. “Christologie.” In *Bonhoeffer und Luther: Zentrale Themen ihrer Theologie*, edited by Klaus Grünwaldt, Christiane Tietz, and Udo Han, 55–78. Velkd, 2007.
- Lind, Charlotte. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- . *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Lindbeck, George A. “The Church as Israel: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism.” In *Jews and Christians: People of God*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 78–94. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- . *The Church in a Postliberal Age*. Edited by James J. Buckley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- . “Confession and Community: An Israel-like View of the Church.” *The Christian Century* 107 (6 May 1990): 492–96.

- . *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Lippy, Charles H. *Pluralism Comes of Age: American Religious Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2000.
- Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012.
- Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. 55 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86.
- Luzbetak, Louis J. *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.
- MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3d ed. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007.
- Mangina, Joseph L. “Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (1999): 269–305.
- . “The Cross-Shaped Church: A Pauline Amendment to the Ecclesiology of *Koinōnia*.” In *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, edited by Alberto L. García and Susan K. Wood, 68–87. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- . *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004.
- Mannermaa, Tuomo. *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*. Edited by Kirsi Stjerna. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- Mannion, Gerard. “Postmodern Ecclesiologies.” In *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, edited by Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Mannion, Gerard and Lewis S. Mudge, eds. *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Marsh, Charles. *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

- Marx, Karl. "The Jewish Question." In *Karl Marx: Early Writings*. Translated and edited by T.B. Bottomore, 3–40. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Mattes, Mark C. *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Mawson, Michael. "Christ Existing as Community: The Ethics of Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology." PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2012.
- McBride, Jennifer M. "Christ Existing as Concrete Community Today," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 92–105.
- . *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . "Thinking within the Movement of Bonhoeffer's Theology: Towards a Christological Reinterpretation of Repentance." In *Religion, Religionlessness and Contemporary Western Culture: Explorations in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology*, edited by Stephen Plant and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, 91–109. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007.
- McCormack, Bruce L. *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
- McDonnell, Kilian. *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.
- . "A Response to D. Lyle Dabney." In *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, edited by Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, 262–64. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001.
- McGarry, Joseph. "Formed While Following: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Asymmetrical View of Agency in Christian Formation." *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 106–20.
- Melanchthon, Philip. *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*. Translated and edited by Christian Preus. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2014.
- Milbank, John. "The Name of Jesus: Incarnation, Atonement, and Ecclesiology." *Modern Theology* 7, no. 4 (1991): 311–33.
- . *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- Moskowitz, Eva S. *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

- Moulaison, Jane Barter. *Thinking Christ: Christology and Contemporary Critics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.
- Muller, Richard A. "A Note on 'Christocentrism' and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology." *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 253–60.
- Nagel, Norman E. "Martinus: 'Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy!' The Person and Work of Christ." In *The Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary, 1483–1983*, edited by Peter Newman Brooks, 25–49. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- Nelson, Derek R. *What's Wrong with Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation*. London: T&T Clark, 2009.
- Nelson, E. Clifford, editor. *The Lutherans in North America*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. "Luther, Newman, and the Punctiliar Church." In *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, edited by Dean O. Wenhe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just Jr., Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson, 153–61. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000.
- Nikolajsen, Jeppe Bach. *The Distinctive Identity of the Church: A Constructive Study of the Post-Christendom Theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015.
- Nygren, Anders. *Christ and His Church*. Translated by Alan Carlsten. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform (1250–1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Pangritz, Andreas. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'Within, Not Outside, the Barthian Movement.'" In *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*, edited by Peter Frick, 245–82. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- . *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- . "'Who is Jesus Christ, for Us, Today?'" In *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by John W. de Gruchy, 134–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 3. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

- Paulson, Steven D. "Do Lutherans Need a New Ecclesiology?" *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 217–34.
- . *Lutheran Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2011.
- . "No Church of Christ without Christ." In *Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives*, edited by Carl E. Braaten, 171–94. Delphi, NY: ALPB Books, 2010.
- . "What Is Essential in Lutheran Worship?" *Word and World* 26 (2006): 149–61.
- Peterson, Cheryl M. "The Church as Confessing Koinonia of the Spirit." In *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections*, edited by Karen L. Bloomquist, 71–90. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007.
- . "Lutheran Principles for Ecclesiology." In *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, edited by Alberto L. García and Susan K. Wood, 148–71. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- . "The Question of the Church in North American Lutheranism: Toward an Ecclesiology of the Third Article." PhD diss., Marquette University, 2004.
- . "Whither Lutheran Ecclesiology?" *Trinity Seminary Review* 27, no. 2 (2006): 107–20.
- . *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-first Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.
- Peterson, Daniel J. "Beyond Deep Incarnation: Rethinking Theology in Radical Lutheran Terms." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2014): 240–49.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol. 2. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1951.
- Plant, Stephen. "'In the Sphere of the Familiar:' Heidegger and Bonhoeffer." In *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, edited by Peter Frick, 301–27. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Plant, Stephen and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, editors. *Religion, Religionlessness and Contemporary Western Culture: Explorations in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Preus, Jacob A.O. *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.
- Putnam, Robert D. and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- Radner, Ephraim. *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

- Rieff, Philip. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*. 40th anniv. ed. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006.
- Ritzer, George. *The McDonaldization of Society*. Rev. ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2004.
- Rowe, C. Kavin. *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006.
- Sánchez M., Leopoldo A. "More Promise Than Ambiguity: Pneumatological Christology as a Model for Ecumenical Engagement." In *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E Braaten*, edited by Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood, 189–214. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- . "Praying to God the Father in the Spirit: Reclaiming the Church's Participation in the Son's Prayer Life." *Concordia Journal* 32 (2006): 274–95.
- . "Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life and Mission in the Spirit as a Ground for Understanding Christology, Trinity, and Proclamation." PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2003.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. 2nd ed. rev. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009.
- Saucy, Mark. "Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church an Extension of the Incarnation?" *JETS* 43, no. 2 (2000): 193–212.
- Schliesser, Christine. *Everyone Who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: Bonhoeffer's Concept of Accepting Guilt*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Schlink, Edmund. *Ökumenische Dogmatik: Grundzüge*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983.
- Schmiechen, Peter. *Defining the Church for Our Time: Origin and Structure, Variety and Viability*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012.
- Schmid, Heinrich. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 3d ed. Translated by Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899.
- Schmitz, Florian and Christiane Tietz, editors. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christentum: Festschrift für Christian Gremmels*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2011.
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*. Translated by O.C. Dean, Jr. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995.
- Schwöbel, Christoph. "The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers." In *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, edited by Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy, 110–55. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989.

- Scott, Peter and William T. Cavanaugh, editors. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.
- Seigel, Jerrold. *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Skydsgaard, K.E., *One in Christ*. Translated by Axel C. Kildegaard. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957.
- Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Smith, James K.A. "The Architecture of Altruism: On Loving Our Neighbor(hood)s." In *The Devil Reads Derrida: And Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts*, 32–35. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- . *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutics*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.
- . *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- . "The Logic of Incarnation: Towards a Catholic Postmodernism." In *The Logic of Incarnation: James K. A. Smith's Critique of Postmodern Religion*, edited by Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody, 3–37. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009.
- . "A Principle of Incarnation in Derrida's (*theologische?*) *Jugendschriften*: Towards a Confessional Theology." *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (2002): 217–30.
- . *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- . *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Sorum, Jonathan D. "Cheap Grace, Costly Grace, and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer's Defense of Justification by Faith Alone." *Lutheran Forum* 21, no. 3 (1993): 20–23.
- Stayer, James M. *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.
- Steiger, Johann Anselm. "The *Communicatio Idiomatum* as the Axle and Motor of Luther's Theology." *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2000): 125–58.
- Sumner, Darren O. "The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth's Critical Reception of the Extra Calvinisticum." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 1 (2013): 42–57.

- Tanner, Kathryn. *Christ the Key*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Tietz, Christiane. “‘The Church Is the Limit of Politics:’ Bonhoeffer on the Political Task of the Church.” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 60 (2006): 23–36.
- Tjørhom, Ola. *Visible Church—Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and “The Great Tradition of the Church.”* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.
- Trowitzsch, Michael. “Luther und Bonhoeffer. Zugleich: Eine Meditation über das Mittleramt Jesu Christi.” In *Luther—Zwischen den Zeiten*, edited by Christoph Marksches and Michael Trowitzsch, 185–206. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.
- Twitchell, James B. *Shopping for God: How Christianity Went from In Your Heart to In Your Face*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.
- Volf, Miroslav and Maurice Lee. “The Spirit and the Church.” In *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, edited by Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, 382–409. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001.
- Wannenwetsch, Bernd. *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- . “The Whole Christ and the Whole Human Being: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Inspiration for the ‘Christology and Ethics’ Discourse.” In *Christology and Ethics*, edited by F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters, 75–98. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Ward, Pete, editor. *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Webster, John. “‘The Visible Attests the Invisible.’” In *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, 96–113. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2005.
- Weikart, Richard. *The Myth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Is His Theology Evangelical?* San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1997.
- Wilson, Jonathan R. *God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Wingren, Gustaf. “The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article.” *Word & World* 4 (1984): 353–71.
- Wright, John W. *Telling God’s Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2007.
- Wright, N.T. *Creation, Power, and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion*. London: SPCK, 2013.

- . *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Yeago, David S. “Church as Polity? The Lutheran Context of Robert Jenson’s Ecclesiology.” In *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, edited by Colin E. Gunton, 201–37. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- . “Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age.” *Lutheran Forum* 34, no 4 (Christmass 2000): 6–16.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- . *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*. 1984. Reprint, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2011.
- Ziegler, Philip. “Christ for Us Today—Promeity in the Christologies of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard.” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 1 (2013): 25–41.
- Zimmermann, Jens. *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012.
- Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985.

VITA

“Preaching Environmental Ethics Christologically with Karl Barth.” *Lutheran Forum* 48, no. 3 (2014): 49–54.

“Local Ministry and Universal Ordination.” *Lutheran Forum* 47, no. 1 (2013): 46–49.

Co-author with Mark A. Koschmann. “Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America.” Forthcoming from *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

Co-editor with Robert Kolb. *Inviting Community*. Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013.

Co-author with Robert Kolb. “Inviting Community: Ecclesiology from the Foundations Up.” In *Inviting Community*, edited by Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins, 9–17. Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013.

Review of *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, by Cheryl M. Peterson. *Concordia Journal* 41 (2015): 181–83.

Review of *Divine Kingdom, Holy Order: The Political Writings of Martin Luther*, by Jarrett A. Carty, editor. *Concordia Journal* 40 (2014): 85–88.

Translator. “Luther’s Treatment of Political and Societal Life.” By Eike Wolgast, in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, edited by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka, 397–413. Oxford: University Press, 2014.

Translator. “Luther’s Transformation of Medieval Thought: Discontinuity and Continuity.” By Gerhard Müller, in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, edited by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka, 105–14. Oxford: University Press, 2014.