Ascension and ecclesia on the significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for ecclesiology and Christian cosmology

Farrow, Douglas Bryce

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT

Unless another licence is stated on the immediately following page this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

• Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
• Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
• No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
ASCENSION AND ECCLESIA

On the significance of the doctrine of the ascension for ecclesiology and Christian cosmology

Douglas Bryce Farrow

Ph.D.

King's College London

1994
Abstract

Recent theology offers but few serious attempts to come to grips with the meaning and implications of the ascension of Jesus. One obvious reason for this is that with the ascension theology effectively runs out of the christological history that serves as its fundamental datum and starting point. From another point of view, that history now takes a new shape in the form of ecclesiology and directs theological inquiry into the examination of new problems.

The present thesis is an exploration of the doctrine of the ascension with an eye on the complex issues which appear at the intersection of these two concerns. It begins by approaching the subject of ecclesiology through a focus on the eucharistic celebration. This highlights the paradox of the Christus praesens and the Christus absens as perhaps the central difficulty to be faced in that discipline, while implicating the doctrine of the ascension as the 'higher ground' on which this paradox rests.

There follows a discussion of the biblical treatment of the ascension, not only as a climax to the story of Jesus but as the fulfillment of a powerful canonical motif, from which emerges a quite revolutionary worldview shaped by the outcome of Jesus-history. This is a worldview that makes possible the discipline of ecclesiology.

Moving beyond the apostolic era, there are two chapters on the treatment of these matters by Irenaeus, Origen and Augustine, and on developments up to the Reformation. Two very different approaches are established already by the first two theologians mentioned, turning on the question of ascension "in the flesh" or "of the mind"—otherwise put, between differing conceptions of the cosmic Christ. The link between notions of the ascension, cosmological frameworks, and ecclesiology is further explored.

There is of course another reason for lack of attention to the ascension, namely, the difficulties facing that doctrine in the modern scientific world. These difficulties and the ecclesial identity crisis to which they have contributed are highlighted in a chapter entitled 'Where is Jesus?,' which covers the period from Copernicus to Nietzsche before going on to examine contemporary options. Here two streams of thought (represented, e.g., by Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Barth respectively) are seen in a contrast similar to that generated by the examination of Origen and Irenaeus. A final chapter heightens that contrast and calls for an ecclesiology based on an approach to the doctrine of the ascension that does not marginalize the human Jesus.
Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the following for financial contributions which have helped to make this work possible: the committee for the Overseas Research Student Awards; the King’s Theological Trust; the Anglican Church of Canada. A debt is also owed to Regent College, Vancouver, for office space while writing up, and of course to my supervisor, Professor Colin Gunton—-not to mention the other staff and students at King’s who in numerous ways offered assistance. To my wife, our parents and friends, I am deeply indebted both for financial and moral support, and in particular for their prayers.
# Table of Contents

**Preface**  
5

1. **Thinking about the Church**  
8  
Eucharist and Ambiguity  
Two Histories

2. **The Ascension as Story and Metaphor**  
29  
A Lukan Artifice?  
The Larger Story  
Breaking Boundaries  
The Master's Metaphor

3. **Cosmologies and Ecclesiologies, I**  
66  
A Precarious Position  
One Step Forward  
Ascension and Recapitulation  
Eucharistic Ecclesiology  
Preserving the Tension

4. **Cosmologies and Ecclesiologies, II**  
163  
Two Steps Back  
Dualist Ecclesiology in East and West

5. **Where is Jesus?**  
281  
The Copernican Factor  
An Unresolved Question  
Return of the Cosmic Christ  
This Same Jesus

6. **Church at the Crossroads**  
425  
Two Options  
Ecclesiology with a Cutting Edge?

**Appendices**  
441  
A: Catholicity & Charismata  
B: Biblical Resources  
C: *Adv. Haer.* 4.38  
D: Cosmology & Eschatology

**Bibliography**  
459
PREFACE

Not since the time of Paul has the question of ecclesial identity been a more pressing one than it is today; then again, not for at least a millennium has the question of the identity of the church’s founder (and we do not mean Paul!) been more hotly disputed. "Who was Jesus?" is the debate that currently drives New Testament scholarship. Theologians, on the other hand, tend to use the present tense: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" Some even prefer the future tense, which puts a rather different light on the matter again. This debate makes the present study a timely one, as will soon enough become clear.

Our interest in the ascension was first aroused by the intersection of the two matters identified in the subtitle. The necessity of thinking together christology and cosmology became evident while reflecting on the friendly dispute between Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth regarding Christ and time; the ecclesiological focus arose directly out of reflection on the eucharist and on the nature of the community that celebrates it. The joining of these two pursuits was natural enough, and eventually suggested inter alia that the Who? question and the Where? question are by no means unrelated. And since a good detective, they say, begins his search where his subject was last seen, the doctrine of the ascension seemed the right place to begin.

An esoteric adventure? Not as it turned out. For what we eventually discovered, to our own surprise, was that doctrines of the ascension are woven into the most diverse theological projects from the Fathers to the Reformers, and indeed into the major theologies of our own era. So much is this so that we must acknowledge that we are in some danger of having overreached both our own abilities as a sleuth and the practicalities of such a monograph as we are now presenting. A great many subjects are either passed over lightly, or returned to from time to time and from various angles. Others are more
consistently engaged but without any real attempt at resolution. Nevertheless our findings, we believe, are significant both for the ongoing task of theology and for the community to which that task is important.

It has been said that too much attention to christology is bad for theology, distracting it from the wider horizons of working out the relationship between God and the world, and the Christian's responsibility in the world. Here no defense is necessary. What is christology about, if not all of that? One reason for the length of our work is that a christologically-centred piece actually requires ecclesiology and cosmology at its poles, and the doctrine of God (including pneumatology) overarching it. That sounds rather more grand than what we have achieved, but the effort has at least been made.

Cosmology, on the other hand, is a rather fashionable subject and warrants a word of explanation. In the first instance we are using the term quite broadly to indicate any attempt to see the world as an ordered whole or at least to articulate the conviction that it is (or was or will be) such. But what do we mean by "Christian" cosmology? Christians have a special reason for exploring the idea that creation is an ordered whole, viz., the belief that God in Christ has given **himself** as its centre. And that claim (especially when the resurrection and ascension are taken into account) leads to another, namely, that neither natural science nor philosophy will suffice to discover that order in anything like its fullness, or even to discover all that can and should be known about it. There is, of course, no such thing as a complete worldview where man is concerned, and striving after such can lead to great error. Nor is there any one Christian perspective. But there is one thing that cannot be evaded by any serious theologian, and that is to say something about the relationship between Jesus and the rest of creation. And that is what we will be watching for.
What follows is both an examination of the Christian tradition in its broad contours and a programmatic essay calling for substantial change. Obviously no single doctrine (however well-connected) provides an entirely satisfactory key to the tradition, nor can it lead by itself to a balanced theological programme. Yet each aspect of Christ's life is capable of supporting a life-time of reflection, as von Balthasar has observed, and the ascension we think a subject much richer and more instructive than is commonly recognized.

Lacking, for good or for ill, the continental fascination with method, and preferring a centre to strictness of order, we have taken as far as possible a story-like approach to our study. There is undoubtedly a price attached to that decision, which we hope is not too high.

Eve of Ascension 1994
Every journey needs a place to begin, and a reason for beginning. Ours begins where it will end, with the church, a concern for the health of which is one reason for setting out on this particular expedition. Is it wrong in an academic study to draw attention to such a reason? Not if it is sound method to indwell one's subject. Not if the church is a consequence of the ascension, as we believe, and not merely the inventor of a doctrine of the ascension. But with that primary presupposition stated we will not delay our beginning.

**Eucharist and Ambiguity**

There is no context in which to ground serious thought about the church but the eucharistic assembly. Here Christian theology in general takes root in its own proper soil.\(^1\) Here ecclesiology is furnished with the object of its special consideration. We quite agree, then, with John Zizioulas, who in his book *Being as Communion* calls for a recovery of "the lost consciousness of the primitive Church concerning the decisive importance of the eucharist in ecclesiology." He goes on to argue, in fact, that it is the eucharist that constitutes the church, not the reverse,\(^2\) a point some find difficult. But

---

\(^1\) "A heuristic impulse can live only in the pursuit of its proper enquiry. The Christian enquiry is worship." (M. Polanyi 1962:281)

\(^2\) 1985:20f. (see also P. McPartlan 1993); cf. Hans Frei 1975:159.
whoever is at least prepared to assert, with a well-known Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches, that "it is in the eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested, n must also admit that just there the nature of the church is laid open (in a qualified way) to genuine observation and interpretation. 4

Other starting points for thinking about the church are common enough, of course. Denominational concerns override doxological ones; political interests compete with the eucharistic assembly as the dwelling place of ecclesiology; sociologists or scientists become the doctors of the church. But the fact remains that the church itself is established only by "the upwards call of God in Christ Jesus," and that call is made concrete precisely in the eucharistic liturgy. Sursum corda! is the cry that heralds the possibility of ecclesial being, and to that possibility ecclesiology is naturally bound. 5

Is this really an assumption the whole church can share? 6 Even if we grant the priority of a doxological starting point over a strictly institutional or perhaps an ethical

---

3 Baptism Eucharist Ministry, Eucharist §19.

4 Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes this very point, reminding us that "it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church" (A. Flannery 1975:1).

5 The transcendent dimension of the church requires an internal and strictly doxological engagement for its interpretation. Interfaith dialogue may have something to contribute; even the secular paths to understanding the church are not devoid of insight (cf. J. Moltmann 1977:4ff.). But it is not vis-à-vis the world's own social, religious or scientific communities that the truth about the Christian communion is ultimately to be uncovered. That is only possible when face to face with Jesus Christ. See Phil 3:14, Rev 4:1ff., 11:1ff.; cf. Eph 4:14–21.

6 We are well aware that many do not share it, as the BEM responses show. "For example, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland says that 'to see the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as the focal point and channel of the whole Christian faith and life is to give it an altogether greater place than is Biblically and theologically legitimate" (British and Irish Churches respond to BEM, 27). But J. T. McNeil observes of Calvin himself that no one has surpassed him "in his estimate of the importance of this sacrament in the corporate life of the church" (Inst. xiii).
one, must we name the eucharistic assembly specifically? Let us turn the question around. Where **shall** we begin if not at the very place where the bond between head and members is proclaimed, where the church's identity is renewed in memory and hope, where its unity is plainly set forth? The simple answer is that no other situation presents itself as an adequate alternative. All the various resources on which we must lean for insight into the church—scripture, creed, tradition, baptism, the experience of the faithful—live and move and have their being in a community knit together around a common table.

Immediately we are faced with certain consequences of conceding that the eucharist provides the axis along which the heuristic impulses that govern a sound ecclesiology will run. First, we cannot approve of an ecclesiology that attends primarily to the past, that is dominated by a ponderous history of traditions perspective and related concerns about formal unity. Such an approach is too abstract (*sic*). Neither, then, can we afford to substitute an ecclesiology that is focused primarily on the future, very much the modern temptation. By this we mean both the church's own future (its institutional viability) and that of the world. Where the latter is concerned it must be asked, not out of pessimism or hysteria but for reasons known only to itself, whether the church should not be quite dubious about its prospects. In any event the church, unlike the world, takes

---

7 Or denied!—which may indeed account for the long history of ecclesiological confusion. Cf. G. Wainwright 1978:140f.

8 According to J. Moltmann (1988:23), "the basic question of modern times is the question of the future. Therefore Christian theology of modernity must necessarily be a theology of the future." But cf. 1979:16.

9 Or rather, **more** than dubious; see Matt 24, e.g., or Rev 8:1–5 (a specifically liturgical passage). That the same need not be said of the church itself is due entirely to its eucharistic possibilities. What we mean by that will later become clear; but it will already be clear that we are no longer speaking in a way that typifies the WCC.
its bearings not so much from planning committees and strategic summits as from the new meaning given to its present, as in the Spirit it actually meets with the one it remembers and for whom it hopes. A eucharistic ecclesiology must reckon faithfully with that fact, seeking first of all to accompany and assist the church as it inhabits the present in a transformed and transforming way.\(^{10}\)

Second, and more profoundly, we are brought face to face with the eschatological nature of ecclesial being as we know it. Zizioulas and Geoffrey Wainwright are among those who have drawn to our attention the fact that the eucharist is in every respect an eschatological act. No doubt there are different ways to articulate this, not all of which are compatible. But since it is only Christ who can make the church the church, perhaps the best way is to point directly to the central paradox of the Christus praesens and the Christus absens. The one around whose table we are said to gather is "in a manner present and in a manner absent," to borrow Calvin's way of putting it.\(^{11}\) Is there anything about the church that is unaffected by this peculiar ambiguity at its very heart? The oddity of the eucharistic situation must never be overlooked, even if we are ashamed of the quarrels it has occasioned! For it is in its eucharistic ambiguity that the church is marked off from the world ontologically and not merely ideologically. It is in confessing that ambiguity that its appeal to the Holy Spirit is spared the banality, or rather the blasphemy, of reducing to self-reference. It is in knowing the provisionality of its own existence that the church is able to speak with some integrity of a reality that lies beyond

---

\(^{10}\) As Zizioulas (1985:180) points out, in the eucharistic community the Spirit "brings the eschata into history," confronting "the process of history with its consummation, with its transformation and transfiguration," transcending its linearity. If ecclesiology is not to lose touch with its own subject matter, then, it must accept the epistemological implications of the eucharist and admit that trying to preserve the past or project (so as to control) the future is not its true calling.

\(^{11}\) Quoted by J. Torrance, "Worship in the Reformed Church," 8 (see chap. 5 below).
itself and beyond the world in which it lives. To put the matter more positively, there is something more to the church than meets the eye, and that "something more" belongs to the christological enigma which the eucharist introduces.

To grapple with the mystery of the *quodammodo praesens et quodammodo absens* is indeed ecclesiology's constant challenge. Where either side of that mystery is neglected the mystery of the church itself is undone. A rather cheeky editorial in *Theology Today* recently encouraged us to learn to appreciate "the presence of the absence," something we propose to do; but to take such advice at face value, eschewing the eucharistic movement from absence to presence, would be to give up believing in the church altogether. On the other hand, those who are content to build lopsidedly on the wonderful promises of presence in Matthew 18:20 or 28:20, for example, will still find it difficult to press through to a serious view of the church. In neither case are presence and absence brought into their right relation, for they are not seen together, as the eucharist demands. Thus the intimate association between ecclesiology and eschatology is lost from view and the church is gradually assimilated to some more or less worldly agenda.

Third, it becomes clear (how did it ever become unclear?) that the liturgy of the sacrament and the liturgy of the word also belong together as different dimensions of a single reality. Just because Jesus Christ, even in his eucharistic parousia, is in some

---

12 Hugh T. Kerr 1986:1ff. (see chap. 6 below).

13 I.e., a self-generated eschatology of some sort arises to impose an ecclesiology of its own making. Ironically, this problem is common to the anti-sacramentalist traditions and to the sacramentalism they have learned to fear.

14 Gregory Dix (1945:36f.) reminds us that in origin the synaxis and the eucharist were distinct, and remained detachable, though the normal custom was to combine them in regular Sunday worship. All we are claiming here is that there is indeed an organic connection between them in the life of the church (cf. Frei 158).
sense still absent or yet to come, it is plain that neither his presence as word nor his presence as sacrament is meant to stand alone. Disembodied word or mute substance would be unnaturally divided aspects of his self-giving to the church. Each needs and qualifies the other, testifying jointly to the provisional nature of his presence and the graciously contradicted fact of his absence. Where they are prised apart the consequences are always negative; only by correcting any imbalance here can the church hope to keep properly in touch with its Lord, and so to guard its worship and its theology from subjection at critical points to the restricting canons of worldly orthodoxy.\footnote{The imbalance fosters both rationalism and a false mysticism, which is paralleled by a dangerous dichotomy between the church as visible institution and as “mystical body,” wreaking havoc with Roman and Protestant ecclesiology alike (cf. T. F. Torrance 1988:270ff., 1993:5ff.).}

*  

In our day the liturgical net has been strained by a catch of bewildering variety, but the simple pattern laid out by Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century will suffice to set before us these two moments of Christian worship in their natural relation. Justin's description runs like this:

> And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray....\footnote{First Apology §67 (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1).}  

In other words, scriptures, sermon, and prayers are the backbone of the liturgy of the word, in the church as in the synagogue. If we allow that the prayers may take many forms (confessions, intercessions, psalms, hymns etc.), and if we leave room for the fact that words of instruction and exhortation may not be confined to the president, this outline...
still fits most churches today. Only one major element has been added and hallowed by
more than a millennium of common tradition: the recitation of the creed. That distillation
of the essential content of the liturgy of the word, though it arose under pressure of
controversy, quickly became a vital doxological act in its own right. ¹⁷

Much might be added about the messianic pattern of receiving and responding to
the word of God, but we must go on to speak of the transformation of the contents of the
liturgy of the word as they are ultimately caught up and fulfilled in the eucharist itself.

Justin continues:

and when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the
president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability,
and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a
participation of that over which thanks has been given, and to those who are
absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

In this manner words are transfigured by and into actions. The kiss of peace is put in
place of mere reminders of brotherly regard; gifts are presented in place of mere
acknowledgment of indebtedness to God; above all, communion together in the body and
blood of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit replaces mere confession of a
common hope and need. ¹⁸

Just here the eschatological character of the liturgy comes to the fore, together with
its cosmic scope and ramifications, as Justin's conclusion indicates:

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is
the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter,
made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.

¹⁷ That it is widely ignored in churches that concentrate mainly on the liturgy of the word
is odd; that it is now regarded only as "the language of love," in John Hick's phrase, by
many churchmen and theologians in the sacramental churches is a clear sign of the
twofold malaise to which we referred in n. 15.

¹⁸ See §65f. for details.
This observation helps us to set the mystery of the church in a much wider context, that is, in the context of the mundane "ambiguity" of creation, the ambiguity it owes to the fall. The eucharistic event, as a movement from absence to presence, is as such a movement from chaos to order, darkness to light, death to life. It is an inventive, ordering event on the same plane as the act of creation, though its actual results are largely withheld from our view. It is an event aimed at nothing less than the restoration to creation of its own proper goodness, and of its lost transparency to the goodness of God.

We are quite right, then, if following the habit of the eastern church we insist on connecting that movement with the appeal to the Holy Spirit (i.e., with the epiclesis, to use the technical term). Was it not the Spirit, hovering over the waters of our world at its birth, who brought it into being as a world? Likewise, the Spirit is the one who brings the church into being as a new creation in Christ by making possible its communion with him. The epiclesis and its answer, complete with the charismata, are entirely necessary if any genuine response is to be made by us to the ano klesis or upwards call—that is, if any real fellowship with Jesus in the presence of the Father is to occur. For it may indeed belong to the church to make claims that embrace heaven and earth, yet of itself it has no claim on either; without the Spirit its ambiguity is not at all paradoxical but quite mundane.19

The movement itself, however, is christologically grounded, and it is dramatized by the handling of the bread that is presented. Gregory Dix, a twentieth century liturgist, has highlighted the fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking and distributing which is

---

19 Otherwise put, it is only by appealing to the Spirit (Justin is careful to include mention of the Holy Spirit alongside the Son) that we can insist on the Christus praesens at all, a point our study is intended to underline. Cf. W. Kasper 1989:186ff., A. Heron 1983b:152ff. (also Frei 155ff., though the trinitarianism is somewhat weak there).
at the core of every eucharistic liturgy. What this drama declares is the sanctification of our humanity through the life and passion and heavenly intercession of Jesus—what for economy's sake we will often refer to as Jesus-history—a sanctification that actually takes effect in us as we and our histories are made by the Spirit to overlap with him and his. That overlap, it is plain, requires the deconstruction and reconstruction of the reality belonging to us, as the sacrament of baptism likewise declares. That is why the Christus praesens is and remains for us the Christus absens, why the Spirit himself is given only in pledge form. For the course marked out by Jesus, the movement that reverses the fall and leads "upwards" to the new creation, is a radical departure from our own.

*  

About the eschatological qualification of ecclesial being much more must be said, but there is here an epistemological rebound we do well to observe at the outset. Is it not ecclesiology's special contribution to the theological enterprise to draw attention to the fact that all its labours are in vain if they are not grounded beyond themselves in the mystery of the kingdom of God? That the moment they propose to be self-sufficient, to deal only with what is publicly accessible, they cease to be churchly and hence to be Christian?  

20 1945:4Sff. Dix, though not in this context, supports the idea that the "primitive eucharist is above all else an 'eschatological' rite" (see 256ff.; cf. G. Wainwright's *Eucharist and Eschatology*, and Zizioulas).

21 If the centre of that overlap is the holy communion—and why should we wish to deny that there is a centre?—its periphery is as wide as the experience of the faithful. Yves Congar (3/228ff.) rightly describes the life of the church as "one long epiclesis." But that means that we must be careful not to divorce the consecration of the gifts from that of the people who present and receive them—for the work of the Spirit is to bring about a change in the onto-relations not only of the bread and wine but of the eucharistic assembly itself and its participants.

22 If the ordo cognoscendi must follow and obey the ordo essendi, as Karl Barth attempted to impress upon us, then there is in the eucharist this most fundamental implication for theology and theologians: Our thinking about the church, and all our thinking for the church, must be done in a churchly way. The present dispute over
Ecclesiology is, or ought to be, the conscience of biblical studies, by which we seek to clarify our reading of scripture; of dogmatics, by which we strive to comprehend the faith embodied in the creed; of practical theology, through which we hope to translate the prayers of God's people into a thoughtful course of action consistent with the upwards call. It ought to remind those disciplines (and itself) of their liturgical footing and raison d'être, of their epicletic dependency.

Unfortunately, ecclesiology itself is prone to move in just the opposite direction, displaying a keen interest in the church's self-justifying and self-serving agendas. By subtly transferring the church's ambiguity to Christ himself, a process we shall witness many times over in the course of our journey, it stands the eschatological relation on its head. Small wonder, then, if biblical studies often gives the impression that the identity of Jesus is a great, perhaps an insoluble, problem; if systematics has detached itself from the creed; if practical theology has for some time looked to the sociologists and scientists for direction. Small wonder if ecclesiology is a discipline that divides rather than unites; if the table of the Lord has become the table of this or that ecclesiastical authority. But to dig further into these matters we must look into the ground of the eucharist itself.

Two Histories

On the road to Emmaus, where only two or three traveled together, they found Jesus in their midst. His path fell alongside theirs and the "liturgy" of the word began, burning deep into their hearts and minds though their eyes remained veiled. At the house

Veritatis Splendour is symptomatic of the difficulty we have with this principle—though we hasten to add that the "symptoms" may not be all on one side.

23 In this light consider again Zizioulas' really quite vital point that the church does not constitute the eucharist but the eucharist the church.
of Cleopas eyes, too, were opened at the breaking of bread. The one who was present was finally recognized, and that decisively, but in the recognition was suddenly found to be absent again. The new creation had apparently begun, but not without its ambiguity.24

This remarkable vignette, a prophetic scene situated at the church's foremost border, introduces in narrative form the problem we have already identified as the central challenge of ecclesiology, the problem of the presence and the absence. Jesus is seen here as one who still moves in parallel with his people, if with considerably greater freedom of movement than theirs. He is resurrected to walk the old roads, but without being subject to all their usual conditions. In some sense he is already in a manner present, in a manner absent; perhaps even in a manner here, in a manner there. The privilege and the need of his people is to find him at least momentarily visible or tangible in their midst, instructing them and nurturing them for the journey together—for without him it is not at all clear that they are a people. The eucharistic assembly is to be the place where this will happen. It is the place where Jesus will reveal and interpret himself; where the church, therefore, will also interpret itself in his presence and renew its gospel mandate.25

But how and when and in what way precisely will these paths touch in the necessary manner? With the cross and resurrection the history of Jesus has taken a

24 E. Ellis (1991:276) points out that Luke has structured his account to present this meal as Jesus' eighth meal with his disciples—the first of the new creation. Note also the parallels with Adam and Eve walking and talking in Eden with the Lord, and eating the fruit in his absence, with the result that their eyes are "opened;" here the situation is reversed. We may also observe with J. Nolland (1993:1208) that "a nice irony emerges" at the outset of this encounter, with the disciples remarking on what they suppose to be the ignorance of Jesus.

25 Cf. Frei 135ff., 149. Cf. also Dix's comments (56ff.) on the last supper as a chabûrah meal.
startling turn, and so also the history of God's people; that is the beginning of the good news. How, though, are the two to be held together? Has not the sudden turn in Jesus' own history to some extent thrown his people off his track, at least temporarily, so that it is difficult to speak of parallel paths? We cannot avoid the fact that the Easter events introduced a discontinuity into the life of Jesus which renders the kind of links we are used to impossible and irrelevant. The path of Jesus cannot be traced as if by some kind of extrapolation.

How then are we to speak sanely about his presence, and thus to speak also and secondarily of our own ecclesial existence?

Many answers to this critical question, which has been posed under a great variety of guises, have been attempted down through the centuries. The problem of the presence and the absence, of the Lord who is "seen" but not seen, who is at table but not at table, who is both with us and away from us, who is walked with yet awaited, has dogged ecclesiology from the beginning. According to Dietrich Ritschl, the question "What does it mean that Jesus Christ makes himself present?" lies at the center of christology itself, and of all theology. He attempts to show that the notion of a timeless God, accompanied by a negative view of ordinary world history and an insistence that God's decisive actions lie in the past, has led the West as a whole into a theological impasse

26 The discussion between Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus already makes this clear, as do the messages of Peter in Acts 2 and 3.

27 Mapping Jesus-history by extrapolation (e.g. L. van den Brom 1994) is for those who do not reckon with that history as Jesus' own.

28 1967:20f. Among the main answers given he includes "the strictly platonic–realist understanding," wherein the earthly church is a mere reflection of heavenly realities, effected or sealed as such by the sacraments; the Reformation approach, which stresses the Word of God as the mode of Christ's presence; the liberal and mystical approaches, which in quite different ways rely on individual appropriation of Jesus through "the strength of the mere memory of Jesus' words and works;" and the existentialist approach, which combines elements of the previous two.
precisely through an inability to come to grips with this question. Only a new focus on the Christus praesens, he contends, a new starting point for theology in the ongoing "history of God" as the present subject of our own lives, can move us ahead.\textsuperscript{29} We may ask, however, whether Ritschl's thought-provoking analysis really penetrates to the heart of the problem. We may even ask whether a new focus on the Christus praesens is possible without at once attending more seriously to the Christus absens. For the history of God with which scripture and the creeds have to do is the history of the man Jesus, and Jesus, as we have said, has a course all his own.\textsuperscript{30}

A course all his own? We have not yet mentioned the ascension directly, but then it is remarkable (as J. G. Davies observed in his Bampton lectures on the subject) how little mention the ascension gets these days.\textsuperscript{31} Once it was seen as the climax of the mystery of Christ:

\begin{quote}
He appeared in a body, \\
was vindicated by the Spirit, \\
was seen by angels, \\
was preached among the nations, \\
was believed on in the world, \\
was taken up in glory.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Once too it was celebrated as the crown of Christian feasts and the ground of the

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. xii, 6f.; cf. 1986:171ff.

\textsuperscript{30} If christology is not to collapse into a rather vague pneumatology, if it is not to become simply a means of saving the appearances in an evolving church, the discontinuity thrust upon us by the eucharist and by the Easter events themselves must not be glossed over. Talk of the present Christ and the history of God must not become an evasion of Jesus-history, or of the mystery of the eucharistic form of the church.

\textsuperscript{31} "Of all the articles in the Creed there is none that has been so neglected in the present century as that which affirms our Lord's Ascension into heaven" (1958:9).

\textsuperscript{32} 1 Tim 3:16, \textit{New International Version}. 
sacraments. Today it is something of an embarrassment. Both exegetically and theologically the ascension is quickly assimilated to the resurrection. Its festival is commonly passed over as a redundant marker on the road to Pentecost, allowing it little or no impact on the shape of Christian life and thought. It is said to smack of the triumphalism we intend to put behind us or of the remoteness of God we want to overcome. For many the very idea conjures up an outmoded cosmology; for a few, something more sinister. But perhaps its greatest offence is that just here the eucharistic dilemma of the two histories, and with it the troubling ambiguity of the church, stubbornly asserts itself. For with the ascension the track of Jesus-history, still genuinely visible in some sense on the Emmaus road, passes beyond all ken: "Where I am going you cannot come."

* 

It is the divergence of Jesus-history from our own that gives to the ecclesia its character and its name. It is the divergence of Jesus-history from our own that calls for a specifically eucharistic link: for the breaking and remoulding, the "transubstantiating" of worldly reality to bring it into conjunction with the lordly reality of Jesus Christ. The kind of ecclesiology we wish to do is quite impossible, then, without careful attention to

33 Davies (1969:16) quotes Augustine in support: "This is that festival which confirms the grace of all the festivals together, without which the profitableness of every festival would have perished."

34 "According to the dominant line in the New Testament witness, resurrection and ascension may be considered as different aspects of the one reality of the risen and exalted Lord." That is all that Confessing One Faith (Faith and Order Paper No. 140, §158) has to say about the ascension.

35 G. Jantzen, in a recent editorial in Theology, has even managed to link it with sexism and to read it "as yet another of the many biblical 'texts of terror.'"

the ascension, however difficult and unpromising that doctrine may appear today. Certainly it is true that the divergence in question began at the beginning, that is, with the conception of Jesus. His devotion to the Father, his sinless life, was a profound deviation from our history. His death too was unique, a fact to which its jarring, tomb-opening effects bore witness. With the resurrection and brand new beginnings for Jesus all doubt about his uniqueness disappeared, at least for the disciples, and the ecclesiological problem also came into view. But it was not with the resurrection or on the road to Emmaus that the church began. Its footings were laid on higher and firmer ground. It was not with the resurrection that Jesus' link with his people became inscrutable and enigmatic. Only with his establishment at the right hand of God—"separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens"—did ecclesial being become possible. Only then did its eucharistic form become necessary, somehow anticipating a second and more profound "change in the darkness and matter" that is yet to come.

When we want to think about the church we are therefore obliged to think about the ascension, and that is what we propose to do in the present work. We are not unaware of the skeptical response we are inviting even from within the church; beyond it the project can commend itself only as an exercise in the history of Christian dogmatics, on which we hope to shed some further light. The embarrassment of our subject does not much concern us, however. We will come in due course to a consideration of the

37 Where Jesus' identity was concerned, says Frei (149), the ambiguity was over. But plainly a new kind of ambiguity came into being, an ambiguity in the identity of his followers which also requires our attention.

38 Not for nothing does the fourth Gospel bracket its magisterial treatment of the ecclesial situation (14–16) with references to Jesus' absence and exhortations to guard against anxiety (a concern which also informs Jesus' high-priestly prayer in chap. 17).

39 Heb 7:26, Revised Standard Version.
cosmological difficulties which today beset the notion of Jesus' ascension, only remarking here that there never has been a cosmology into which that part of his story could be fitted without impossible strain. On the other hand, the same must be said of Jesus-history as a whole and of the eucharistic community as such, which brings us back to what we have called the "troubling" ambiguity of the church.

What exactly do we mean by that? In Jesus covenant history was reduced to the history of one single man—on whom, Christians claim, the covenant community has become entirely dependent for its true identity. But the outcome of Jesus-history was something so radical, in the proper sense of that word, as to leave that community stripped of every earthly distinction from the rest of humanity. Jesus, broken on the cross and restored in the resurrection, was "taken up in glory" as the representative and judge of all people. Since the ascension the only thing standing in the way of the community's complete dissolution into the world (hence into what is commonly called universal history) is its eucharistic reincorporation into the society of one whose course is known to God alone. The church, then, is marked off from the world, insofar as it is marked off, not by race or culture or even by religion (marks which are definite enough by worldly standards and more or less acceptable) but by its mysterious union with one whose life, though lived for the world, involves a genuine break with it.

Now the church is only really itself when it accepts and embraces this situation

40 Cf. Frei 137.

41 It is a weakness of Frei's work that the ascension is taken too little into account, and the eucharist too, so that the tension of the presence and the absence is eased by talk of "indirect presence." That leads (155ff.) to a different construction of the ecclesiological problem as a tension between Christ in the church and Christ in the world. Frei does not overlook our concern altogether, however.

42 That break is represented by the ascension no less than by the cross; where this point is overlooked the cross itself becomes a mere religious symbol.
of radical continuity, and equally radical discontinuity, with the world. But that can hardly be taken for granted! Most of the really thorny issues in ecclesiology, as in Christian spirituality, arise where this uncomfortable tension is rejected and a more "solid" (or at least condign) identity is sought. So too do the great betrayals of ecclesial integrity to which history bears witness, among which the greatest is surely the church's attempt to hand over its own proper scandal to the Jews, deflecting the animosity of the world onto their shoulders by encouraging the exaggeration of their racial and cultural and religious differences. For insofar as the church seeks to alleviate the eucharistic pressure—usually by denying or falsifying its own much more profound discontinuity with the world—it is bound to spend much of its time and energy trying to cover up for that discontinuity. A surprising amount of ecclesiastical history can be accounted for in just that way.

What is not surprising is that the doctrine of the ascension (if it is not rejected outright) is often pressed into service here, precisely by refusing to allow it to teach a doctrine of absence and hence of discontinuity. The following excerpt from a theological dictionary illustrates how readily the ascension is converted into a prop for the notion of universal presence:

43 See Hebrews 10–13. In appendix A we have briefly discussed two of these, namely, catholicity and the charismatic controversy.

44 It does not follow, however, that Christians should cease to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the Jews, or that Christian theology must now become first and foremost a theodicy, a defense of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" against crimes committed in his name. Only a theology constructed on its own proper ground, its course set not by our agendas (not even that of a wounded conscience) but by God's own agenda in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, will suffice.

45 Sectarian attacks on the church's continuity with the world are by nature self-marginalizing; and to the same degree that they manage to avoid that they inevitably pass over into their opposite.
Thus, even if Jesus appears to be absent from his church, in one sense, he is, in fact, more profoundly and intimately present to the church, in another sense. For he is now in "heaven" with God—in the heaven which, according to the biblical tradition, is a symbol not only of God's transcendence and inaccessibility but also of God's omnipresence. Paradoxically, being in heaven with God, Jesus is also present in the world in the way that God is present. 46

No doubt there is a moment of truth in this, not to mention a quite different intention behind it. But in what way is God present, and how can Jesus be present in that way? How does his presence in the church differ from his presence in the world, or does it? (If not, what is the church?) How is he to return from such a heaven, and what can heaven possibly mean for the rest of us? 47 Above all, what does the ascension, so interpreted, do to his humanity? Is there not a marked tendency towards the dehumanization of Jesus, and thus towards that confusion between him and the Spirit that is so prevalent today? 48

The notion of Christ's universal presence is an exceedingly common one, as we shall see. Whatever its other merits it nicely sidesteps the question of the two histories and the difficult ecclesial situation that goes with it. The burden of the cosmological and the ecclesiological challenge of the ascension is lightened, but at the cost of trifling with

46 L. Swain, A New Dictionary of Theology (Komonchak 63). We do not mean to connect his article with our present discussion; on the whole, the entry is a good one.

47 In an otherwise helpful article J. Ratzinger (1975:46) suggests that "it would be a misunderstanding of the Ascension if some sort of temporary absence of Christ from the world were to be inferred from it." But surely that assertion leads more or less directly to another, viz., that a visible second coming should "not be taught as a certainty" (thus the Congregation of the Sacred Office in 1944; quoted with some amazement by Karl Barth, CD 3/2:510).

48 Gordon Fee's massive exegetical study, God's Empowering Presence, essays, for the sake of the integrity of pneumatology, to reclaim the distinction between Jesus and the Spirit in the letters of Paul. Our own first concern is with the integrity of christology, but the health of each depends on the other, and the health of ecclesiology on both. (The impact of the confusion on the eucharist is noted by Heron 1983b:154.)
Jesus' identity too. What is sacrificed for the sake of this Christus praesens, as Calvin noticed long ago, is his specificity as a particular man. Christ everywhere really means Jesus of Nazareth nowhere. In the ascension he becomes atopus in the most literal sense: he is unnatural, absurd, for he has no place of his own. (Vague talk among modern theologians about "a change of state, not of place" hardly alleviates that difficulty, however effective it may be in turning aside impolite inquiries as to Jesus' actual whereabouts.) For that reason, and others we will encounter later, we begin to hear of the "post-existent" Christ or about the period after the incarnation. In other words, just when the gospel has taught us to think of salvation in the most concrete terms, as an act of God in the flesh and for the flesh, the story of Jesus is turned against itself. His humanity is betrayed and marginalized after all. The ascension means, not the consummation, but simply the end of Jesus-history.

When that happens, of course, the problem of the church's own identity is badly compounded; for it is no longer clear who it is that it confesses as Lord. The next step is almost always to fix even more strongly on one or another aspect of its own structure or mission as a guarantee of its fidelity and continued relevance—"seeking to grasp identity from the fear of nonidentity," in Hans Frei's phrase. That in turn throws up barriers to eucharistic unity by creating competing notions of the church which must be


50 Frei's main reference to the ascension (see p. 49) is an attempt to counter this notion, but he offers no hints as to how we might do that.

51 "Christ is not confined to Jesus of Nazareth.... I dare not cling too closely to Christ as past event, lest I miss the incarnation present now" (J. Nelson, Body Theology, 193).

52 p. 154 (the context is not ecclesiological).
jealously guarded. In fact, the more the church struggles to establish an identity that can be clearly delineated in worldly (i.e., non-eschatological) terms, the more it suffers fragmentation along its political and cultural fault-lines. And in that brokenness it shares less and less with its Lord; at the same time the glass through which it sees grows darker and darker.

We have, then, a second reason for taking up the doctrine of the ascension, since it is chiefly by way of that doctrine that the church's eucharistic ambiguity is passed on (all in vain, of course) to Jesus. We shall find ourselves arguing what is perhaps an unusual line. It is frequently said that the humanity of Christ used to be the great problem for theology but that today it is his divinity which is distracting and difficult. Our study suggests that the case is otherwise. It is still the humanity of Christ over which we are prone to stumble, and what is required today more than ever is a doctrine of the ascension that does not set his humanity aside.

Such a doctrine will actually require a new and more coherent relationship between the disciplines of christology, ecclesiology and cosmology. How that relationship is commonly understood, and what we believe to a more right-minded approach, we will leave to unfold with the work itself. For we do not intend to launch directly into a systematic consideration of the ascension but to examine at some length its treatment in scripture, tradition, and the modern context, making our systematic observations along the way. We will of course keep a constant watch on the manner in which the doctrine of the ascension is brought to bear on the doctrine of the church, and return in our concluding chapter to the concerns of the present one. Our main sub-thesis in

---

53 Or shamelessly promoted. Cf. 1 Cor 3:1ff & 11:18f.
ecclesiology may be stated in advance, and it is this: To the extent that the doctrine of the ascension is used to dissolve Jesus' humanity, ecclesiology also deteriorates into the impersonal and, indeed, the irrelevant. But we shall have to fill this out from the tradition in order to make much sense of it.

To open up a new and fruitful discussion of the ascension (if we may offer this broad hint about the queried relationship) we must be prepared to take Jesus-history more seriously than our own, wherever that may lead us. Christians have never believed that the cross was the end of that history, nor even the resurrection; to take such a position requires one to fall silent midway through the creed. The direction we are headed can be indicated by recalling another occasion—recounted by Luke no less than three times—when after the ascension a small band of travelers again met up with Christ upon their road. This time it was not Jesus whose path was temporarily arrested at a mortal's bidding, but just the reverse. Only one of the travelers saw anything specific at all, but what he saw and heard completely overwhelmed the confident categories of his own existence. The collision knocked him from his seat, provided him with a new identity, and thoroughly rearranged his theology in the process. And that is what may be called a fresh starting point!

---

54 When historians decided that Jesus' identity had been determined by the church, rather than the reverse, the history of tradition—not Jesus' own history—became the proper object of scholarly investigation, and even NT studies became a branch, albeit a highly independent one, of the self-absorbed ecclesiology we criticized above. It became hard to speak directly about Jesus-history before the cross never mind after it. But things have changed somewhat; a new interest in Jesus-history is emerging. We mean to urge that interest on towards the climax of his story.
Chapter Two

THE ASCENSION AS STORY AND METAPHOR

What St Paul encountered on the road to Damascus, namely, the disrupting and transforming power of the ascended Jesus, Daniel perceived from afar in prophetic visions which "passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed":

'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.'

Like Paul, Daniel was disturbed by the unexpected revelation, and inquired about "the true meaning of all this." We must do likewise, for it is a most helpful (if often neglected) passage in getting to grips with the significance of the ascension within the biblical framework. First, however, it is necessary to speak directly of the New Testament witness.

We begin with Luke, who is the only one to offer an actual account of Jesus' departure, and with the difficult question of the genre of that account. Is Luke attempting to describe the ascension more or less as it happened, leaning on apostolic testimony, or was the story conceived, like Daniel's dreams, in the comfort of a bedroom or study? Certainly there are reasons for questioning the historicity of Luke's story. That it appears only in his writings (if we discount the longer ending of Mark) is frequently pointed out.

---

1 Dan 7:13–14, NIV.
That it is told twice, in a not entirely consistent way, has been taken to suggest either some confusion or the liberty of invention. Other assumption stories in the literature of that period offer a precedent for such invention. It is not surprising, then—given its native ability to provoke incredulity—to find that the story of the ascension is often regarded as a pious fiction.²

There are some, however, who consider that judgment a hasty one. A number of lines of evidence converge to suggest even to the skeptical a second look. That the story of Jesus' ascension is, in its context, quite unlike its supposed parallels is evident. That Luke's two versions of it are not mutually contradictory more sympathetic commentators have shown.³ That the story itself is of great importance to Luke is becoming increasingly clear.⁴ This last point in particular invites our closer attention, for it will lead us eventually to a consideration of the ascension elsewhere in scripture. By "consideration" we do not mean anything like a proper scholarly investigation, of course; that is a task for others to perform. All we mean to do is to draw attention to the fact that

² Harnack (1909:157ff.), e.g., regarded the ascension myth as one of the "semi–doctrinal legends" developed by second–generation believers in the interchange between Jewish and Hellenic ideas. Luke had access to more primitive traditions, which included nothing of the sort, but gradually embraced the invented version—not his only slip of credulousness. See Davies (1958:9) on the impact of Harnack's popular pamphlet, Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis (1892). Though Lukan studies have come a long way since Harnack, his view is still a common one.

³ The main, though not the only, point of "conflict" is the insertion in Acts of a 40 day period between the resurrection and the ascension. This has been explained in a variety of ways. C. F. D. Moule (1957:207), e.g., suggests that Luke received new information, but can we not allow him the licence to condense before unfolding? M. Parsons (1987) is very helpful on this and related matters. (Cf. R. Tannehill, 1990:10ff., whose discussion is less satisfactory. The compatibility of Luke 24 and Acts 1 does not depend on adopting the shorter reading of the former.)

⁴ Even Prof. Houlden ("Beyond Belief" 178), whose skepticism would appear to be quite settled, acknowledges that the ascension provides "the climax or watershed of Luke–Acts, and makes sense of the conceptuality of that novel work as a whole." His response is to isolate Luke from Paul and the rest of the NT, in a divide and conquer approach.
our subject is a worthy one, and to show up something of the seriousness with which it is treated. If what we have to say is sufficiently suggestive (or provocative, for we shall have to take many risks) to encourage further investigation, so much the better.

A Lukan Artifice?

The ascension episode, twice-portrayed, is the hinge on which Luke's two-volume work turns, a fact that can be acknowledged without immediate prejudice to the question of genre. Whether as history or as a bit of New Testament apocalyptic, this remarkable scene first provides a dramatic closure to the story of Jesus and then a hermeneutical key to the new history of the people of God. It serves to inform us that it is from the standpoint of the vindication and exaltation of Jesus that Luke intends to recount that history, and to account for it. So much Peter's Pentecost sermons already make clear, but more can be said.

Among those who have argued strongly for the centrality of the ascension narratives in Luke's overall design is Eric Franklin. Franklin develops the somewhat controversial thesis that the ascension is used by Luke not to abandon eschatology for history, as the "delay of the parousia" scholars would have it, but to bring history into the service of eschatology, in view of growing uncertainty about the timing of the parousia. For Luke, he argues, it is no longer the end of history which is to guarantee "the claims

---

5 Cf. Parsons 17f., 185; G. Lohfink, chap. 7. Parsons notes the claim of R. Maddox (1982:10) that "the ascension is for Luke the point of intersection of Christology, eschatology and ecclesiology." Whether as a so-called foundation myth or "pre-narrative" (in the genre of a heavenly assumption story with apocalyptic overtones) or as actual history, the story's multi-faceted theological significance is not in doubt. How precisely to interpret it is of course a question caught up in the wider disputes over Luke's theological agenda.

made on behalf of Jesus;" the ascension and heavenly session provide that guarantee already. The ascension (not the resurrection or the parousia) thus becomes the climax of Jesus-history and the eschatological event, fulfilling all the prophetic hopes of Israel. And this eschatologizes what is left of history by setting it within the tension of his departure and still-impending return.\textsuperscript{7}

Franklin, we think, is on the right track, though his work requires some rethinking in view of the much more radical criticism now being aimed at the eschatological assumptions of those with whom he is taking issue. Today it begins to appear (as some suspected from the start) that the delay of the parousia crisis was strictly a modern one,\textsuperscript{8} which leaves us to confront the fact that the return of Jesus to establish his kingdom was, and remained, a very central element in the kerygma. What we need to notice here, however, is that Franklin does not commit himself on the question of genre, in spite of making such great claims on behalf of the ascension in Luke. Luke's scheme, he suggests, appears to be "an artificial one and is most likely of his own making." Historical considerations are in any case secondary to theological ones.\textsuperscript{9}

More recently, Mikeal Parsons has pointed to the centrality of the ascension narratives by means of an extensive literary analysis. In \textit{The Departure of Jesus in

\textsuperscript{7} 1975:6ff., 41ff.; cf. 1970:200. Luke's efforts to come to terms with continuing history, and with the church's situation in that history, led him "to see the Ascension as the climax of God's action in the history of the Jewish people, and to view history since the Ascension as witnessing to it as the moment of the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God. However, history does not take the place of eschatology...." The absence of Jesus must be taken seriously (1970:194ff.).


\textsuperscript{9} 1975:33. In view of what we have just said about the parousia, i.e., about the fact that the departure-return schema was a staple of New Testament thought all along, it is not at all clear that any such retreat should be made. (Cf. J. Maile, 1986:46ff., who also criticizes Franklin's retreat, but by way of an attack on his whole position.)
he attempts to show how the ascension resolves a number of key tensions in Luke's Gospel, while setting in motion the entire plot of the book of Acts. On the question of genre, Parsons also takes a mediating position. An underlying tradition, historical or otherwise, was moulded by Luke's considerable literary prowess (which "is at its best in the ascension narratives") to the requirements of the project in which he was engaged. In short, "Luke shaped an ascension story inherited from primitive tradition into a final departure scene in Luke 24:50–53 and a heavenly-assumption story, complete with apocalyptic stage-props, in Acts 1." Fittingly enough, the former was given the form of a priestly benediction, the latter that of an invocation, as it were.

Naturally such monographs invite and receive their own share of criticism, but perusal of their contents makes it difficult to dispute the presence of the ascension as a major motif in Luke. On the other hand, even those who so regard it are frequently inclined to speak of Luke's narrative as an artificial device, one that works well structurally and symbolically but not as history per se. The historical kernel within it, if such there be, is not very accessible and seemingly of little importance. But this should not go unchallenged, if only because it turns upside-down the relationship between history and theology. For a theology that wishes to take its own departure from Jesus-history, it is far from irrelevant whether the ascension should have its own place as a distinct

---

10 Cf. P. Benoit, 1/244ff., and the popular view of van Stempvoort (1958). Parsons does not pass judgment on the historicity of the tradition, but is persuasive that an ascension story belonged to it.

11 Pp. 63, 150; see 111ff., 189ff.


13 Nor has it, of course. See, e.g., C. F. D. Moule 1957:209, for whom the ascension is a distinct moment in the Christ-event which "carries its own special significance as the closing moment of one chapter and the opening of the next.... As such, it seems to demand a position 'in history' as truly as the others." Cf. N. T. Wright 1992, chap. 13.
event in the life of Jesus, and if so whether it should be understood as having taken place in this way or that. Indeed, the greater the place accorded to the ascension in Luke or elsewhere, the more urgent this question becomes. We must continue to ask, then, whether the ascension is Luke's story only—an artful metaphor by which he means to unpack something of the meaning of the resurrection—or whether it belongs in the first place to Jesus himself as part of his story. A "metaphor" it may be either way, but whose metaphor is it?¹⁴

Suppose in answering our question we simply set aside Reimarus' charge of fraud against Luke, a charge the faithful have always rejected and which few biblical scholars today are prepared to repeat. Suppose, too, that we reject Rudolph Bultmann's completely unfounded suggestion that what is incredible now was credible enough in the first century.¹⁵ What reason will we then put forward for deciding that Luke's story is an artifice? Today Luke is recognized as a serious theologian in his own right, but it will be granted that he is indeed a historian, not a writer of fiction or apocalyptic or some kind of picture-theology.¹⁶ It will be granted, too, that the fullest version of the ascension

¹⁴ The value of such a metaphor or "enacted parable" (W. Temple 1962:154) is not in question here. But just as it would be a mistake to miss the metaphor by seeing nothing but physical movement, so (for reasons we will come to) it may be a mistake to miss the actual movement.

¹⁵ "What meaning can we attach to ... 'ascended into heaven'? No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven" (1953:4). It is a consequence of the scientific worldview that "we can no longer accept the story of Christ's descent into hell of his Ascension into heaven as literally true. We can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air."

¹⁶ Should we wish to contend that Luke has in some way or other stylized his story (his shorter and longer versions are proof of that) no further conclusion follows. "An author is not to be suspected of having invented what he narrates because he arranges his narrative for the benefit of his theological teaching" (Benoit 1/250).
story (Acts 1:6–11) falls in the middle of what is in other respects a very traditional historical prologue. Are there, then, clear signals that Luke wishes—suddenly and very briefly—to effect a change in genres? Does this plain and concise passage, highly remarkable for its restraint, display some quite different form or style than what precedes or follows it? If we are dealing with a bit of apocalyptic, say, or creative myth-making, against which the charge of fraud ought not to be made, where are the usual semantic markers? Certainly there is no visionary framework, no telltale symbolism (in scripture angels are thin fare indeed for proving apocalyptic!), no feel of the primitive, no hint of the universal. Is there not instead a sense of stubborn realism, even to the almost humorous rebuke of the disciples for having their own feet stuck too firmly to the ground as they gape incredulously into the skies? What is there to contradict the feeling that Luke, at least, believed what he was writing, as Bultmann also supposed? But if that is so, then we must not only admit that he was representing a more primitive tradition, but also that it is unlikely that that tradition existed in a merely fanciful or obviously apocryphal form. For we can hardly turn around and accuse a writer of such sensitivity and "literary prowess" of being less astute than his peers.

---

17 A mountain site, departure address, clouds—these things may well be typical of assumption stories; indeed it is hard to imagine a more suitable setting. But the only assumption story in which Luke might well have taken a direct interest is that of Elijah (the transfiguration and the forty days link him and Moses closely to Jesus), set against which that of Jesus is very tame indeed! Cf. Benoit 1/248ff., Parsons 137ff.

18 If we follow, e.g., G. B. Caird's lucid definition of myth (1966:66, 1980:219ff.) the ascension story certainly will not fit that category; nor does it fit the aims of apocalyptic (cf. K. Koch 1972:24ff.). See also J. Alsup (1975:272), who for other reasons questions the use of words like "legend" and "myth" to describe the appearance stories generally. Hans Frei (1975:139ff.; cf. 1974) rejects a mythological reading of these narratives as diametrically opposed to their actual character, which is designed to bring out the irreducible particularity of Jesus.

19 Even Harnack (1909:161) noted among fellow critics of Acts that some appeared to lack sufficient acquaintance with the "unwieldy collection of fabulous stories" available in Luke's day. "If they knew them," he remarked, "they would not make so much ado about
Of course, there is still the point about Luke being the only one actually to tell the story, but the argument from literary and theological design is a double-edged sword. If we wish to maintain that one Gospel writer incorporated an ascension story (invented or otherwise) only because it suited his peculiar purposes, we can scarcely deny that others may have left it out simply because it did not suit theirs. The real issue, then, is whether its omission elsewhere implies that only Luke saw in this particular element of the tradition something especially noteworthy. Even that is by no means a foregone conclusion, for the omission of an account of the event and its absence from the work itself are not the same thing. Besides, the only ending we have for Mark does indeed mention the ascension, and it must be said that there are several vital passages within that terse Gospel which make no sense without such a reference. The ending to Matthew, on the other hand, has another task in view. One of its functions is to complete the presentation of Jesus as the "prophet like Moses," and it reaches its natural climax with Jesus on a mountaintop, at the finge of the gentile world, commissioning the disciples like so many Joshuas. But in that commissioning it is made clear that Jesus will not have to let go of the reins of authority as he departs to his place of Rest. This suggestive scenario, with its allusion to Daniel 7 in verse 18, does not rule out Luke's story, but runs parallel to it and may well presuppose the substance of it. As for John, at once the

the stories of miracles in Acts."

20 Cf. W. Milligan 8ff.

21 Mark 8:38, 13:26ff., 14:62; Dan 7 imagery is strong throughout. See Davies 1958:35ff. for discussion of these passages, and of ascension imagery and typology in the account of Jesus' baptism. Cf. F. Watson (1987:15f.), who suggests one possible reason why Mark might have omitted a triumphant ending to his Gospel.

22 On Matt 28 see J. G. Davies 1958:43f., 64. Elsewhere Davies observes (62f. n.13, following H. Schrade 1930:89f.) that early iconography suggests a parallel with Moses.
simplest and the most sophisticated Gospel, we find that it is powerfully charged with the ascension motif throughout (a matter we will touch on later). But of course it is only Luke who took up the challenge of carrying on the gospel story into a history of the early church. Is that not explanation enough why he alone among the Evangelists concerned himself with an account of Jesus' departure? His work required it, theirs did not.

The historical flavour of Luke's account has been argued by C. F. D. Moule and others; we see no reason for rejecting their findings. We may add that the case for a historical genre is considerably strengthened when we face the fact that removal of the ascension episode would render unintelligible other significant material in Acts. The thrice-repeated Damascus Road episode is a case in point. It is sometimes conveniently overlooked that Paul's pivotal confrontation with the risen Jesus was remarkably unlike the pre-ascension encounters of the disciples. On the way to Damascus Paul did not sit down to eat and drink with the risen Christ; he met up with the Lord of Glory, whom mortal eyes cannot behold without dramatic consequence. As an apostolic witness, he was

---

23 1957:205ff. M. Hengel (1979:68f.) comments: "We only do justice to the significance of Luke as the first theological 'historian' of Christianity if we take his work seriously as a source.... The radical 'redaction-critical' approach so popular today, which sees Luke above all as a freely inventive theologian, mistakes his real purpose, namely, that as a Christian 'historian' he sets out to report the events of the past that provided the foundation of the faith and its extension. He does not set out primarily to present his own 'theology.'"

24 It is false to suppose with J. Dunn (1975:115) or J. Fitzmyer (1984:422) that the inclusion of Paul's experience in a list with other resurrection encounters means that these are of a kind in every way, a supposition entirely unconnected with the arguments of 1 Cor 15. The uniqueness of Paul's encounter with the heavenly Jesus, at once both "real" and visionary, is to be accounted for not by some alleged tension between Pauline spiritualizing and a materializing tendency in the Gospels and Acts, but by the exaltation of Jesus (cf. Dunn 108, 120ff.).
thus "one abnormally born."\textsuperscript{25} In short, the ascension made a difference! And just here we find ourselves in opposition to another highly popular idea.

It is common today to insist on equating the resurrection with Christ's full glorification. For many this is a primary reason for sitting lightly to Luke's account.\textsuperscript{26} Even those who are prepared to allow that the latter is by and large historical are therefore obliged to treat it as only a lesson designed to put an end to the disciples' expectation of further "visitations" from heaven.\textsuperscript{27} Were the disciples then capable of being taught the mysteries of the kingdom but quite incapable of grasping in any other way that their visits with Jesus were only a temporary arrangement? And why should the arrangement have been temporary if Jesus had already entered upon his heavenly glory? Why should he not have continued to come and go in their midst at his own pleasure, taking up his kenotic disguise from time to time? As a matter of fact, the only New Testament evidence for a visitation from heaven is to be found in the life of Paul; everything else is pure surmise. If certain texts could be read that way, none need be.\textsuperscript{28} When they are, it ought to be

\textsuperscript{25} 1 Cor 15:8. Paul admits to being born by caesarean section, as it were: "He may be taken to mean that Christ had in some way to do violence to the ordered scheme of salvation to bring about Paul's vocation" (\textit{Catholic Dictionary of Theology} 1/165). Cf. Moule (208, n.4) who agrees with Prof. Knox that this episode is distinguished from subsequent visions or trances.

\textsuperscript{26} Though other reasons may be given. See. e.g., W. Pannenberg 1972:116; cf. Benoit 1/221ff., who rejects the "frankly anachronistic" idea that the resurrection was first interpreted in spiritual terms, then gradually materialized.

\textsuperscript{27} For J. Fitzmyer (1984:424), e.g., the ascension "is nothing more than the appearance from glory in which Christ took his final leave from the community...." Luke has not invented it "but he has \textit{historicized} it in a way no other NT writer has...." Variations on this theme may be found in a number of the scholars to whom we have already made reference.

\textsuperscript{28} The heavenly authority with which Jesus bestows the Spirit in John or commissions the disciples in Matthew is not, in our judgment, a decisive objection; these acts require and look towards Pentecost for their fulfillment. As for Paul, Moule (208) rightly argues that he also holds to the pattern of resurrection first, then ascension and glorification (cf. Phil
admitted that the resulting construction—which is indeed a new and strange form of kenoticism—is a highly problematic one.  

Some, of course, try to evade the problems by speaking of the resurrection appearances rather as visions, and of the ascension as a departure vision, but that is expressly ruled out by all four Evangelists. To hold such a view is to make the resurrection itself as doubtful as this so-called departure. It is not for nothing that the concreteness of Jesus is always underlined in his resurrection appearances, the last being no exception, since Luke describes it as taking place "before their very eyes."

Visions of Jesus did not cease with the ascension but rather commenced. What Jesus "began to do and to teach" in his earthly ministry, says Luke, he did and taught "until the day he was taken up into heaven." It was then that his ministry took on a brand new form—a pentecostal form—in which visions of various sorts were and are commonplace.

To move away from Luke's story is of necessity to write a different one, an exercise that inevitably creates more problems than it solves. For our part, we will proceed on the assumption that what Luke has to say about the ascension ought not to be dismissed, or even admired, as an artifice, but pursued as the indication of an essential

3:14 and 1 Thess 4:16f., which appear to translate that pattern into the expectation of believers).

29 See e.g. M. Harris 1985:50ff. When Harris says that the ascension "does not lead to the exaltation but looks back to that event which it visually dramatises as an acted parable of the raising up of Jesus to cosmic dominion" (84), we do not quarrel with the notion that it had a parabolic form but with the way he abstracts it—and the rest of the appearances also, then—from the actual glorification of Jesus at the Father's right hand. (Cf. Benoit, 1/250ff., who takes a similar position but turns in the right direction with his closing thoughts.)

30 As the NIV aptly translates it (kai tauta eipōn blepontōn autōn epērthē kai nephele hupelaben auton apo tōn ophthalmōn autōn).

31 See e.g. Acts 2:17, 7:55f.
component of salvation history. That can be done by looking at the wider framework in which it is set. Along the way it may be that we will find further and even better reasons for affirming the traditional view of the ascension as a space–time event with its own proper claim on our theological reflection.

The Larger Story

It has been observed that the journey motif is the most prominent organizational element in Luke–Acts. In the Gospel the large, seemingly disorderly central section admits of no obvious superstructure other than the slow, tortuous, but deliberate advance of Jesus from the desert of temptation beyond the Jordan to his final hour of trial in Jerusalem. 32 N. T. Wright, for one, points out how Luke thus sets the life of Jesus carefully alongside that of David, presenting him as Israel's true king and heir of the covenant promises. In Acts the travels and trials of Paul, especially, imitate and so bear witness to those of Jesus. 33

Acts begins, however, where the Gospel leaves off, by furnishing a fuller version of Jesus' departure on his own ultimate journey—the journey that leads from Jerusalem to God's heavenly sanctuary and throne, completing the exodus of which he spoke at the transfiguration when the glory cloud enveloped him briefly in an anticipatory way. 34

---

32 See 9:31, 51ff., 18:31, 23:5, which drive home the point; that is not to say, of course, that there are no other structural or thematic considerations in play. Cf. Parsons 90.


34 Cf. Franklin 1975:54. The cloud motif is a highly prominent one in scripture, of course, and has a number of different overtones, all connected with the divine Presence. See e.g. Gen 1:2, Exo 40:34ff., 1 Kings 8:10ff., Isa 6:4, Eze 1 & 10, Dan 7:13, Luke 1:35, 9:34, 1 Thess 4:17, Rev 11:12. M. Kline (1980) is particularly helpful in this matter.
From there, the angels avow, he will someday return. For his ascent to heaven, like his ascent to the cross, is a journey undertaken on behalf of God's people and with a view to the realization of their kingdom hopes. That is the context in which the disciples are commissioned for their journeys; the outwards spiral of the apostolic mission is the ripple in the sea that marks the upwards passage of Jesus to receive what was promised.

In this light, Franklin's notion that Luke's entire story comes to rest on the ascension must be confirmed. And when we stop to consider (as Wright and others bid us do) that the story Luke is telling plainly belongs to a very much longer one, we are finally in a position to allow the full force of that episode to make itself felt. Carried along by the central currents which generate the Bible's seemingly impossible unity, we are brought to a place where we can see this particular journey as marking the very climax of salvation history. For without the ascension not only would Luke's story begin to disintegrate, but the biblical story as a whole would lack the outcome it demands. Within the parameters of the present study, unfortunately, we can do little more than

---

35 Jerusalem is still to be the polestar of the new creation. The cloud which now receives Jesus outside and above the city recalls, however, the temple vision of Ezekiel in which the Glory of Israel departs and stands at a distance, judgment on the present Jerusalem having been pronounced (cf. Eze 8–10, Luke 21:5ff.).

36 Pentecost, of course, being the link between the two. See below, chap. 4, on Augustine's abuse of this insight; cf. Wright 373ff. for a suggestion as to Luke's own agenda in bringing it to light.

37 A revival of sensitivity to the wholeness of the biblical story has begun to pay off with a number of very useful works of different shapes and sizes; see, e.g., N. Frye (1982), W. Gage (1984), W. Dumbrell (1985). In particular, Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God* will be teaching us how to read "the larger story" for some time to come. What vol. 2 of that series will have to say about matters germane to present interests we cannot say, naturally, but there is already much assistance to be had respecting Luke and Daniel 7 in vol. 1.

suggest a vantage point from which the reasons for making such a claim can be glimpsed. And that brings us back to Daniel 7.

In this purely visionary ascension scene, which belongs to a popular apocalyptic dream sequence, we are invited to observe the action not from below, with anchored feet and craned necks, but from above. It is neither a departure nor an assumption story we are offered, but an arrival story—arrival at the end of a long and painful pilgrimage, disclosed in advance to a footsore people. Here we do not see what those bound to the paths of this present world must be satisfied to see; we see instead from the other side of the mysterious theophanic cloud, and from the other end of history. To be sure, what we see "from above" is something which at the end of the age will take place in human history, namely, the people of God being exalted over the destructive chaos of the nations. (That is what we are told in the pesher rendered to Daniel by "one of those standing there.") And that means that we are glimpsing something of the world's own destination, when the human imago dei has been reformed as the priest–king within creation through the perfecting and vindicating of the saints.

This much any diligent student standing within the Hebrew theological milieu could have made out without a great deal of difficulty.39 Since the true dominion of man over the earth was lost in his expulsion from Eden, man (and creation with him, as Romans 8 tells us) has been on a long journey of rediscovery. This journey, hopeless but somehow full of promise, by divine election has been compressed into the journey of Abraham and his descendants. These, unfortunately, even at their faithful best, have suffered the enmity of the Babel–building beast–nations engaged in a lawless drive to

39 Obviously we are taking a good deal for granted in a very controversial passage. See Wright 291ff., whose general line we find convincing; cf. Dumbrell 1985:187.
generate a dominion of their own making. But Daniel is assured that at the end of the journey "the court will sit" to settle the matter of just dominion once and for all; and thus God's people will arrive at their appointed place. Towards that everything moves, if in hidden ways and by secret channels.

What has all this to do with Luke? Daniel and Luke–Acts are clearly engaged in telling one and the same story, about the same great journey of God's elect, with an eye deliberately fixed on that journey's end. Peter's sermon in Acts 2, leaning on three or four royal and liturgical Psalms, rings out the triumphant note sounded already by Christ during his trial: "from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." That is Daniel's note, of course. The difference here is that the story has moved along in a most surprising way. In the specific person of the once despised and crucified Jesus of Nazareth, Adam–Israel has indeed been led into the presence of the Ancient of Days to receive dominion over all things.

What Daniel envisioned from above, therefore, Luke is now able to chronicle from below; this he does, conscious of his task. Jesus' ascension has actually been witnessed

40 The cursing of Cain in Gen 4:12 already establishes the paradigm both of the wandering journey of man and his pursuit of an artificial sanctuary and dominion—"Cain was then building a city"—which becomes a violent parody of Eden (cf. H. Blocher 196ff., Gage 49ff., Kikawada & Quinn, 55ff.).

41 Cf. Wright 374, 382, 400ff., 462.

42 Cf. Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33. Peter quotes from Pss 16 and 110, but M. M. B. Turner (Rowdon 1982:176ff.) and others have argued persuasively that Psa 68 is also of fundamental importance to his claim in Acts 2:33 (note especially v. 18, "When you ascended on high... "). There appear to be allusions to Psa 18 (cf. 3ff., 46ff. with Acts 2:22–24) as well.

43 Cf. Luke 21:27. Note also the extended genealogy for Jesus in Luke 3—"Jesus is ultimately "the son of Adam, the son of God"—and the prayer in Acts 4:23ff., which begins with a reference to God's dominion over creation, then draws on Psalm 2 in order to attach this to Jesus.
by the disciples, with their craning necks. News of his coronation in heaven (still hidden from view) has reached earth in the pandemonium of Pentecost. His universal authority is already becoming manifest through the power of the gospel in every place and people. His glorious return, leading to the promised restoration of all things, is expected. Moreover, in this whole unexpected turn of events—fulfillment for the many in the person of the one—a nagging anomaly in Daniel 7 begins to clear up, namely, that "all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him." For the one in question is not just any one, but himself the Holy One of Israel.44

Luke thus sets out to share with us the realization in history of the ancient dreams and promises. The unifying climax of the whole story is contained in the ascension, which carries forward the journey motif to its natural conclusion. His accounts of this (coming from below) are simple and brief but strategically employed, powerfully illuminated by their context.45 Acts 2 openly expounds the vital importance of the ascension episode within the flow of biblical history. In spite of the circumstances giving rise to Peter's address, it is not a sermon on the Holy Spirit we hear; nor is the focus on the resurrection. What we are offered is a sermon on the ascension of the risen Jesus to the throne, that is, to Israel's throne and the throne of the Presence from which the Spirit goes forth.46 It is the final merging of these thrones in Melchizedekian fashion which

---

44 Cf. Luke 1:26ff.; also Pss 97, 99, etc.

45 The continuity of reference is necessarily matched by a discontinuity of genre. If Luke really is telling the story of Jesus as "a story which he intends to be the true climax of the story of Israel" (Wright 382), he can hardly do so with the tools of figurative language.

46 J. Nolland (1993:1228f.) denies that Luke has any interest in a priestly christology, while pointing out that Luke 24 casts the ascension in a form that parallels Sir. 50:20ff. Surely that alone is weighty evidence for such an interest. Are we not invited throughout (another uniquely Lukan story, about the boy Jesus in his Father's house, deserves mention here) to see in Jesus something of Samuel as well as David, and of the priestly as well
occasions the unleashing of the Spirit, thereby signaling both the beginning of the last
days and the imperative of Jesus-worship.47 Pentecost is thus interpreted as witnessing
to the actual arrival of Jesus at journey's end. It is the audible earthly echo of what is at
once a great liturgical procession and a victory parade, in the fashion of Psalm 68.48

Such is the logic of Pentecost as Peter exposes it. The manner in which the
central notions of kingship and priesthood are here gathered up testifies to its rightness
and invites our attention. For it was chiefly through these two institutions that Israel
guarded within its own corporate life the great quest for the rediscovery of human destiny,
and kept its bearings for the journey. Or rather, that is how it was supposed to be. In the
Gospel we are shown how persistent unfaithfulness (the prophets' raison d'être and
constant preoccupation) terminated in a mortal conflict between Jesus and the keepers of
the temple, and with the wicked King Herod as well.49 All the same, it belonged to the
nature of cult and monarchy, especially in their central rituals, to point the people of God
towards their goal: not simply ascension over the nations but ascension from the chaos
and contamination of the nations into the presence and blessings of God, and thus into the
promised image-bearing dominion over creation. Peter's Pentecost sermon, the
theological frontispiece of Acts, is nothing more nor less than an argument that this goal

as the kingly? But this question belongs to a discussion of Luke's temple theology, which
do not have room to consider.

47 It is really the thrust of Turner's article to show that Jesus' right to "administer the
operation of the Spirit" (this also explaining "the means of his heavenly reign") was
understood to have christological implications of the highest magnitude; see Rowdon 180f.


has finally been reached in the person of Jesus—anointed, ascended and crowned. The point is clinched with the quotation from Psalm 110.\textsuperscript{50}

Luke thus completes the Daniel 7 picture by adding an arrival story, also witnessed from below (i.e., in a historical rather than a visionary way), to the departure story he has already twice told. Though the emphasis varies, each scene supports the other in a consistent witness to a single movement which by its very nature reunites earth to heaven in fulfillment of the great biblical promises. On that fulfillment, with the ascension as the consummating element and the promised return as the dénouement, rests the integrity of the new Christian gospel; on it all that follows in Acts depends.\textsuperscript{51}

* 

We must stress the point that it is indeed the ascension towards which the biblical story constantly strives, especially in its messianic dimensions, not the resurrection in and of itself. In the Bible the doctrine of the resurrection slowly emerges as a central feature of the Judeo-Christian hope. But if, metonymously, it can stand for that hope, the hope itself is obviously something more. Resurrection may be a necessary ingredient, since death cuts short our individual journeys, but it is not too bold to say that the greater corporate journey documented by the scriptures continually presses, from its very outset and at every turn, towards the impossible feat of the ascension.

There is no shortage of evidence with which to back this claim, the full weight of which systematics must eventually shoulder. The cosmic mountain motif offers another avenue of approach. The biblical story begins with Eden, of course, the mountain–garden

\textsuperscript{50} L. Houlden (177) admits "a degree of consensus" in the NT around Psa 110:1, "early Christianity's sheet–anchor text."

\textsuperscript{51} R. Maddox (185ff.) points to the significance for Luke–Acts of two words from its preface: \textit{peπληροφορημένα} and \textit{ασφαλεία}. 
of God from which Adam was forced to descend, at the foot of which was the flaming sword of the guardian cherubim, which would frustrate any attempt to return.\textsuperscript{52} The pattern of descent and ascent is furthered (and proleptically fulfilled) in the story of the great flood, during which it is granted to one man, his family and representatives of the animal creation with him, to rise far above even the highest places of our fallen, chaotic world, until he comes to rest on Ararat.\textsuperscript{53} Next is the man-made mountain of Babel, provocatively pushed upwards in the very face of the cherubim, a mountain which Yahweh himself stooped to level. Its positive counterpart is Sinai, which God graciously invited Moses to ascend on behalf of his people, on which the seventy elders also "saw God" in table fellowship. There on Sinai the pattern was laid out for the holy tabernacle, in which the high priest was to ascend by stages into the divine Presence once each year, and from thence descend to bless the people.\textsuperscript{54} When this tabernacle (containing the ark of the covenant as the earthly version of the heavenly throne) itself comes to rest on Mount Zion, kingship in Israel is co-opted with it, so that ascent to the davidic throne

\textsuperscript{52} See Gage 49ff. for a brief summary of the cosmic mountain motif. The enigmatic oracle of Ezekiel 28 and various references to the cherubim or "living creatures" in that book and in the Apocalypse suggest that these represent creation itself, in its mandate to render obedient worship to God through the mediation of man. In that case the distortion of creation, i.e., its dislocation connected with the fall of its anointed mediators, is itself the barrier to recovery of the Edenic heights.

\textsuperscript{53} See Gen 7:17ff., where we are told that the waters, carrying the ark with them, "rose ... rose greatly ... rose and covered the mountains" (on the consummate literary design of this chiastically structured passage, see Kikawada & Quinn 97ff.). This episode is tied by analogy directly to the resurrection and ascension of Christ in 1 Pet 3:18ff.

\textsuperscript{54} The cloud of the Presence, in which Moses communed with God on Sinai, descended into the camp—after Moses, like the Creator, "finished the work"—and dwelt in the inner sanctuary (Exo 40). It was into this glory—cloud that the high priest was to ascend yearly. The tabernacle itself represented cosmic order, just as the whole redemptive history and liturgy of Israel is presented in the Pentateuch as a microcosm of the original creation. See Gage 66ff., Kline 42ff. (Cf. Acts 7:47ff. and Kikawada & Quinn 108ff., on the Babel—like overtones of the Solomonic temple.)
likewise comes to hold promise of access to the lost blessings of the mountain-garden of God. 55

So it goes throughout the entire body of Old Testament literature. The prophets work endlessly with modifications of these themes, testifying at one and the same time to the centrality and to the provisional nature of the institutions enshrining them, until the coming of the one through whom every hope will be fulfilled. Along the way, every would-be priest is thrust out again from the holy place, barred for another year. Every would-be king is carried down from his throne in exile or in death. Certainly every charlatan and imposter, whether he ascends in the midst of Israel or rises among the nations, is warned, rebuked, ridiculed. The failures of the best and the worst of the messianic forerunners are documented together by scribes and prophets, as the Spirit of prophecy drives their dissatisfied thoughts ever forward to the coming of the anointed one. When he finally does come, he comes himself as a prophet, but it is plainly towards this sacred ascension as high priest and king that he moves on his way to the destiny of man. He has come for nothing less.

Of course the messiah must resist every possible shortcut on his journey. He cannot ascend the heights of the temple directly, as the devil suggests, 56 for the temple itself requires reconstruction, a reconstruction he will accomplish in connection with his own person through bitter conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil—and especially with those who take it as their task to guard the temple. 57 Thus in the end Babel proves only a foil for the much more sinister Calvary, the ironic mountain of death with its man-

55 Dumbrell 1984:150ff. For an outline of the above, see appendix B (2).

56 Luke so orders the temptations as to make this the climax.

57 See John 2:12ff.
made trees. Then again, Ararat, Sinai and Zion in turn show themselves foils, not merely
for a lost Eden, but for a new cosmic glory-temple on the heights of which man is to
dwell as the true image of God, fully permeated and empowered by the overshadowing
Spirit. Jesus, enabled by the Spirit, is the builder of this temple and the first
embodiment of this image. Through his resurrection and ascension he will realize in the
presence of God the fruit of the work he accomplished here with us, when we in our own
crude parody of the ascension lifted him up on the cross.

To cut short the journey of Jesus by conflating resurrection and ascension,
however, is to alter the goal of salvation history. How? First of all, it puts in jeopardy
the continuity between our present world and the higher places of the new order
established by God in Christ. For in that conflation the ascension, insofar as it can still
be distinguished from the resurrection, is regarded as an event with **no historical
component**, separating it from Old Testament expectations. This eventually rebounds
on the doctrine of the resurrection itself—if indeed it is not already the sign of a docetic
version of that doctrine—and binds it closely to an other-worldly eschatology that has
little in common with that of scripture. Resurrection comes to mean "going to heaven,"
which in some theologies makes it rather hard to distinguish from dying! The doctrine
of the parousia either falls away or signifies simply the end of the world. Thus the very

---

58 This theme is important to Luke in building up to the ascension; see esp. 1:35, 9:26–36,

59 Calvary requires Olives as its counterpart. We cannot agree with John Macquarrie
(1990:409f.), e.g., that the ascension has no historical dimension. Ratzinger (1975:46)
rightly insists that "it is not wholly confined to the realm of the 'other-worldly' and the
suprahistorical," but also "has a solid basis in history;" yet he also errs by way of this
conflation.

60 Davies (1958:30, 170) argues with Bultmann (1952:1/45) on this matter of conflating
resurrection and ascension, now a commonplace. V. Larranaga (1938:51ff.) provides
some background.
point the angels of Acts 1 were concerned to safeguard, the return of “this same Jesus,” is overlooked and the verdict which Daniel heard in his dream is set aside. That in turn puts in jeopardy the proper discontinuity between Jesus-history and common history, leading to the substitution of our own story (the story of man’s self-elevation) as the real kernel of salvation history in the present age. That is a process we will have adequate opportunity to expound in a later chapter; suffice it for now to say that it tends to the very obverse of Daniel’s vision.61

In the last analysis, then, to go back on Luke is to risk going back on the larger story itself. But if we are to stick with Luke, we are obliged to direct our attention to certain awkward questions. For if we allow that Jesus was raised in such a way that he was still a participant in our history—albeit in some profoundly new and liberated way—then the ascension plainly entails a parting of the ways. On the far side of his suffering and death, the resurrected one had, and at the proper moment took, a different direction.62 What are the implications of this parting and how, if at all, shall we attempt to conceive it? Does the ascension of Jesus fit nicely into the biblical worldview or does it do something to that worldview?

To answer such questions we need not confine ourselves to Luke. Indeed, if we are on track with what we have said so far, we should expect to find a bold theology of the ascension growing throughout the New Testament. We are not disappointed.

---

61 Wright (382), having explained how Luke subverts other contemporary readings of the story of Israel by retelling it as the story of Jesus, rightly accuses Eusebius of subverting Luke’s story in turn by combining it with the story of Constantine. We might add, and the connection will later become clear, that Eusebius (Dem. Ev. 6.9) was among those who followed Origen in spiritualizing the ascension.

62 “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father” (John 20:17).
Breaking Boundaries

It is sometimes suggested that there is little of the ascension as an event with its own distinct significance to be found in the New Testament outside of Luke 24 and Acts 1.\(^{63}\) That is an entirely specious claim, as others have been quick to observe. In his Bampton lectures J. G. Davies shows the contrary in a convincing manner. "The witness of the New Testament writings to the ascension of Christ is remarkable in its universality," writes Davies. He cites evidence from all four Gospels together with Acts, and several important examples from the Pauline corpus, including both the disputed and undisputed letters, along with 1 Peter and the Revelation. We have outlined some of the most obvious of these references and allusions in an appendix, but the evidence is even greater than Davies supposes and more revolutionary in character than he perceives.\(^{64}\)

Serious reflection on the ascension appears to have contributed to important breakthroughs in biblical thought about God, man, and the universe, and to have shaped ecclesiology in a quite fundamental way. In support of this claim we will look briefly (much too briefly to qualify as a full demonstration) at three other New Testament theologians, each of whom we believe to have developed a penetrating insight into the significance of the ascension for a Christian worldview.

Paul, as ferocious in his pursuit of theological integrity as of frightened Christians on the road to Damascus, was naturally the first to grapple with the problem. The

---

\(^{63}\) P. E. Hughes (1989:372ff.) notes Emil Brunner's rejection of the ascension on this basis, a rejection that goes hand in hand with "a spiritualization or dematerialization of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection."

\(^{64}\) Whether or not this is a result of his backing away from Luke's account, others may judge. It is his suggestion (1958:27) that to follow the ancient habit of approaching the ascension through St Luke is very possibly to miss references to the ascension which do not conform directly to it. That may be so, but we would reverse the charge: not to take St Luke's approach with full seriousness is to risk seeing in those other references less than they actually contain. See appendix B (1).
Christus victor theme which runs through all his letters was no mere theory to him but an unshakable conviction born of his confrontation with the ascended Jesus. Pauline scholars have with good reason traced back to this experience his devoted reworking of basic Jewish doctrines about God and salvation into the foundations of the Christian faith. Some have also discussed the meaning of his forays into cosmology, especially in terms of Christ's triumph over the daimonia, subjugation of the stoicheia, relation to the pleroma, etc. Hemmed in by faulty assumptions about Hellenization, however, this latter debate has produced more confusion than clarity. In interpreting the lordship of Jesus, Paul's building blocks were the materials provided by the Hebrew scriptures. God's design for human dominion and stewardship, creation's fall into slavery and its coming liberation, the elect "shining like stars" in the darkness of the pagan firmament, the resurrection of the dead and the eventual advent of the messianic kingdom—such ideas continued to form the horizon of his theology. Paul was no dualist or Hellenizer.

It is clear enough, however, that all of these interests took on new dimensions as he wrestled with the significance of the exaltation of Jesus. Jesus' own U-shaped course (in Philippians the descent–ascent pattern of the Old Testament is adopted as a framework for christology) completed in the midst of history was a thoroughly unexpected affair that called for a new estimation both of the God who works in history and of history itself. We are not thinking only of the question of Jesus' divinity, for this cannot be thought at all except in terms of this one man in his actual relation to God and the world. And if in the case of this one man all the promises had already been fulfilled, if the anō klesis tou theou had already been heard and answered, a radically revised worldview was unavoidable. Salvation history was no longer comprehensible in strictly linear terms; cosmic structures and powers were no longer fixed or immovable determinants of human
existence. Heaven itself, as Andrew Lincoln has pointed out, had to be reinterpreted.\textsuperscript{65} In his advent and enthronement the long-awaited messianic Son had reorganized, not just the nations, but the whole of creation around himself.

In short, the alteration of the world order anticipated in Daniel and the prophets had now to be expressed in terms that went well beyond those of political, social, or religious possibilities. The vessel of Jewish apocalyptic expectations had to be enlarged and reshaped; the cosmic imagery of the prophets had to be given more weight; the (hitherto largely unspeculative) doctrine of the resurrection had to take on new connotations.\textsuperscript{66} "The form of this present world is passing away"\textsuperscript{67}—this was now to be proclaimed with a profound sense of the ontic link between creation and the cross, or rather between creation and the Christ through whose death, resurrection, and ascension a quite new reality had been forged out of the old. For the one who confronted Paul on his journey to Damascus was regarded by him as nothing less than the Lord of creation. To him all things had been made subject; in him all things were seen to cohere; by him all things would reach their goal. Even the highly paradoxical conclusion that through him all things came into being forced itself upon Paul. "For us," he confessed, "there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."\textsuperscript{68} History itself,
then, belonged to the one who had ascended hina περοσὴ ta panta.\textsuperscript{59} A new ontology and a new christocentric cosmology were being conceived, at least in broad outline.

All of this was implicit in Pauline ecclesiology, and indeed necessary to it. The baptized derive their new existence from their union with Jesus (a claim the boldness of which left nothing to the mystery religions). The church is a community of Jew and gentile, slave and free, because it is one man in Christ. It stands poised at the consummation of the ages because it exists with Christ on high and not only in a world whose schéma has been condemned. These ideas and others like them demand something more than a noetic or forensic or purely "spiritual" interpretation. E. P. Sanders points to a certain maddening, elusive element in Paul, bound up with his so-called "Christ mysticism":

\begin{quote}
We seem to lack a category of `reality'—real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit—which lies between naive cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand and a revised self-understanding on the other. I must confess that I do not have a new category of perception to propose here. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not have one.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Paul was, as Sanders claims, a coherent thinker, even if his writings were more pastoral than systematic; it is therefore reasonable to suppose that he did in fact develop such a category, or at least a framework for it.

May we not look to his insight into the implications of the ascension for understanding here? Ephesians, for example, makes it quite plain that the church is

\textsuperscript{59} Eph 4:10

\textsuperscript{70} Sanders (1977:522f.) is interacting here with Bultmann, whose interpretation of Paul does not do justice to Paul's ontological claims. For Paul, "Christians really are one body and one Spirit with Christ, the form of the present world really is passing away...." Jesus' lordship meant "that a real change was at work in the world and that Christians were participating in it." (Sanders, of course, supposes that Paul's beliefs have failed to prove themselves out; but such were his beliefs.)
founded in and with the ascension of Christ, who by virtue of his heavenly session is
given to it as "head over everything." The ecclesial communion as such is the prophetic
sign to the world that God has (re)organized all things around the one whom he has
enthroned at his right hand. The church has cosmic significance—precisely in its
anticipation of the appearance of that new order. To pursue this point we would need
of course to explore at some length Paul's sense of the eschatological tension introduced
into the basic structures of reality by the events of Jesus-history, and in that light his
doctrine of the Spirit, the eucharist, and of suffering. Unfortunately, we cannot attempt
that here. But we will make so bold as to say that these matters are not better understood
in part because the boundaries and horizons of our own cosmologies are generally very
stubborn, and resistant to the lessons of the incident on the road to Damascus.

That Paul began forging new categories of existence with which to work out his
theology is not to be doubted; the exact role of the doctrine of the ascension may be a
matter for dispute. For the author of Hebrews, on the other hand, the ascension is that
which determines both the shape and the content of his great epistle. Many commentators
miss the marvelous symmetry and rhetorical power he derives from this motif, which we
have tried to outline in an appendix. We can be thankful, however, for those whose
work has laid to rest the unhappy notion that Hebrews is a work of Christian Platonism,
opening the way for much more fruitful attempts at interpreting the book and for
reckoning with its eschatology in particular. Hebrews is the classic Christian restatement

---

71 See Eph 1:9f., 3:8ff.; cf. e.g. 1 Cor 6:2f. Later on we will observe the faulty elaboration of this high standing of the church into a de-eschatologized "kosmos of the cosmos" doctrine.

72 Appendix B (3).

(in the context of, and over against, an educated diaspora Judaism) of the Old Testament journey motif. The journey in question is the exodus, viewed here as a pilgrimage into "the world to come." The book thus serves as a treatise on the destiny of the faithful in connection with Christ, in fulfillment of the promised glory. A familiar frame of reference is marked out plainly by Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 (which parallel Daniel 7). Of course, Hebrews is also a treatise occasioned by the needs of a suffering church, and that is where the ascension motif asserts itself. All the encouragement it has to offer flows from a single assertion about Jesus, namely, that "he sat down" in the presence of God as the Melchizedekian priest-king. This bit of ascension theology, repeated at key intervals, is the focal point which holds Hebrews together.

The suggestion of Aileen Guilding that the book is in fact a sermon built up around the synagogue lections for Pentecost has much to commend it. Hebrews is nothing if not a celebration of the grace associated with the accession of Christ to the heavenly throne and to ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Its very structure (as our appendix shows) embodies the invitation to "share in the heavenly calling" of Jesus by

74 "ἐν οἰκουμενῇ τῆς μελλούσας, about which we are speaking" (2:5).

75 1:3, 8:2, 10:12, 12:3. Hebrews works on the premise that Jesus fulfills entirely the goals of both cult and monarchy, such that the Christian way has a surety and solidity about it which renders the beckoning of the old Jewish way no alternative at all. As a path to God the latter is now no more than a mirage, whereas the way of Christ is undergirded by the full power of a heavenly dominion and priesthood. Cf. P. Church (1982).

76 Guilding (1952) points out that the readings in the three-year lectionary included Psa 110, Gen 14–15 (the Melchizedek story), Exo 19 (the arrival at Sinai), and Num 18 (Aaron's budding rod)—all touched on in Hebrews, and woven into the enthronement motif established by the Christological doxology with which the book begins. From its opening lines the rhetoric of Hebrews shows a sermonic character and structure, and it closes with the advice [ἀνεχεσθε τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως], a common way of referring to a synagogue sermon (F. F. Bruce 1964:xlviii).
following in his train, and that is the Pentecost message from a Christian point of view. But what we are especially interested in is the power of the ascension motif to shape, not only a sermon, but a worldview and a vision of the church.\textsuperscript{77}

Like Paul, the author of Hebrews finds that what happened with and to Jesus compels us to think of his life as the actual consummation of the ages—he has appeared, before us and before God, \textit{hapax epi suntelēia tōn aiōnōn}. This consummation includes and indeed rearranges worldly existence from the foundations up. It creates a new and higher order that stands in judgment on that with which we are familiar.\textsuperscript{78} The permanent reception of Jesus into the heavenly sanctuary as the \textit{leiturgos tōn hagion} signifies that in him our humanity has been rendered truly presentable to God ("perfect" in the cultic sense) through the Spirit.

Here again the logic is not linear, as we admit when we speak of a higher order. Jesus' ascension, considered as a priestly act, begins already on the cross; or rather his whole life is seen as an act of self-offering that culminates in the cross. In the ascension this offering is received on high. It is Jesus in the totality of what he was and did who "passed through the heavens" to the divine sanctuary that is "not a part of this creation," to minister there.\textsuperscript{79} But he does minister there, in a new way; the cross is the sacrifice

\textsuperscript{77} It is remarkable, writes Paul Ellingworth (1986:340), "how often the author's view of who Jesus was and what he did does involve presuppositions about the universe.... The author thinks synthetically, not analytically: for him, what Jesus did, who he was, and how the universe is framed, belong together, though the last is least important for him."

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. 1:10–12 (Psa 102), 9:10 (\textit{mechri kairou diorthōseōs epikeimen}), 8:13 ("what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear," \textit{NIV}) and 12:26f. See esp. 9:24ff., which speaks of the time of Jesus Christ in his self-offering as that which consummates the ages, inasmuch as he, in his time, "enters heaven itself." \textit{All} of creation—history is equally bound up in this moment, i.e., in Jesus—history.

\textsuperscript{79} H. U. von Balthasar (1967:287) speaks in another context of the "refounding" of history from the new beginning contained in the resurrection and ascension, in which Christ integrates "in himself everything he was on earth, in order to take it away into the sphere of this miracle, to translate it, to heighten it...."
that makes possible the ascension, not the ascension itself. The reference therefore is not to an ideal or supra-sensual realm but to the divine Rest from which the present creation has been barred, but which Jesus has entered. Once more highly paradoxical conclusions are drawn as to the significance of Jesus for all of God's works from the very beginning. Once more a profound eschatological tension comes into view.

The author of Hebrews does not shy away from pressing the liturgical pattern through to its conclusion. He who appears before God on man's behalf will also reappear before man on God's behalf, to bestow the fullness of his high-priestly blessing. But that reappearance will mean a thorough shaking of the aiōnes, so that whatever cannot be made presentable with and through him will be removed. Only thus will the rest of creation, strengthened and confirmed by his blessing, enter into the place of Rest. For the reality Jesus knows and inhabits is both continuous and discontinuous with that which we know and inhabit. Fulfillment has an ontological depth that failure and futility lack.

80 "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary..." (8:1f., NIV). Elsewhere we are told that his priesthood is based on "the power of an indestructible life" (7:16), offered up unblemished "through the eternal Spirit" (9:14). Just so, by virtue of the reception of his self-offering with God, this one true Pilgrim is found to be the high priest of creation, without beginning or end (7:5), "the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

81 This is a clear and sustained note even from the opening doxology, which, as we have argued elsewhere (1986:129f.), does not reflect a three-stage pre-incarnate, incarnate and post-incarnate christology, but refers to Jesus as the embodiment of God's glory and the mediator of all revelation from creation to new creation. Nor should we miss the fact that the name Jesus stands at key points where his heavenly being is proclaimed (2:9, 4:14, 6:20, 7:24, 8:6, 12:2). Cf. 10:19, where the eucharistic point is made: his body is the curtain, his blood "a new and living way."

82 "Like a garment they will be changed," 1:12 (Psa 102); cf. 9:28, 12:26ff., 13:14. The notion of "rest" in 3:18-4:13 is esp. interesting. OT passages are adduced partly in order to explain their anomalies by reference to Jesus-history as the solution (see, e.g. 4:3-10).
His life in its consummation is rendered substantial to such a degree that it not only surpasses but calls into question, subjects to judgement, the history it leaves behind—that is, the obsolete ages and structures of this fallen world. But the eucharistic community, sustained by the manna of "the heavenly gift," does not belong to that obsolescence, for it shares even now in the reconstituted reality that belongs to Christ. It is drawn "upwards" with him in an invisible way; or to use temporal language, "the powers of the age to come" are already at work in it, rendered operative in the Spirit through Jesus' priestly ministry.  

Such is the language and logic of Hebrews, crudely condensed from the persuasive form in which it is applied to the insecurities of its recipients, who were under pressure to join in the self-deception of fading worldly forces—for that is how its author was forced to regard even the religion of his fathers in its position post Christum. The resulting world-picture, in spite of certain deliberate similarities, is neither Platonic nor strictly Jewish, but represents the filling up of the Hebrew vision of history with something so substantial that the mould itself is made to fall away. Two religious cosmologies, not one, are thus subverted and replaced; such was the heuristic power of the doctrine of the ascension.

* 

John's Gospel, as we observed earlier, contains an abundance of references and allusions to the ascension in spite of the fact that an account of it is lacking. The absence of such an account is no more to be held against the historical facticity or significance of

---

83 Skian gar echōn ho nomos tôn mellontōn agathōn, ouk autēn tēn eikona tôn pragmatōn (10:1). Cf. 6:4–5, where we learn that it is by sharing with the Son in the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, of the creator Spirit (pneumatos aiōniou), that the church gains its footing within this new reality, the reality of the coming age with its "good things that are already here" (9:11).
that event than in the parallel case of the last supper, an account of which is also lacking in this most eucharistic of Gospels. Both these interests are set forth in provocative dialogues but held back, in a tantalizing way, from the narrative itself.\(^84\) The veil that is drawn in front of them only heightens the reader's interest.

We are not so brave as to offer an interpretation of John, but we ought at least to notice what is openly stated about the ascension. **Where** Jesus goes, we are told, is to the Father.\(^85\) **Why** he goes is to prepare "in his Father's house" a place to which others will eventually come. "You cannot follow now, but you will follow later." **That** he goes makes him the way.\(^86\) And the *consequence* of his going is a mission of the Spirit aimed at the proclamation of the Father's open house, a mission that hails the advent of ecclesial man, whose being is in communion.\(^87\) Already there is too much here for us to digest properly, but it will suffice for our purposes simply to indicate that John forces to the forefront of our reflection the following matters.

First is the pneumatological dimension of life in the Father's house, towards the exposition of which any theology of the ascension ought to move. What is accomplished

\(^{84}\) Thus we may actually *reverse* the charge about the apparent insignificance of such an event owing to its absence in the historical form Luke ascribes to it.

\(^{85}\) Jesus' departure is twofold, for it begins with death; but 20:17 makes clear that neither the cross nor the resurrection are his return home (cf. 13:3).

\(^{86}\) 14:1ff., 16:5ff. Note that John is careful to point out that Jesus not only cleanses the earthly temple, but ultimately becomes that temple. In him the glory of God "tabernacles" (1:14), he is the real Beth-\(\text{el}\), the place where heaven and earth are linked (1:51). Cf. 2:12ff., and note also 7:25ff., where the imagery of Eze 47 is used by Jesus (see Dumbrell 1985:66ff.).

\(^{87}\) C. K. Barrett (1978:570) observes of 20:21ff., "That John intended to depict an event of significance parallel to the first creation cannot be doubted." The baptised man, i.e., the man born of water and the Spirit, thus stands as the answer to the man of dust because of this communal inbreathing of the trinitarian Life. (Note that the commission to baptise and the word *ekklēsia* are also present by absence in John; on the latter see Barrett 92f.)
in going to the Father is a decisive opening up not only of the Father's house but of human being, which realizes its true nature through a perichoretic and communal—that is, ecclesial—form of existence. Second, and closely related, is the cosmic status accorded to Jesus in view of the fact that his history with us is defined in terms of a coming and going from the Father's side. Paul's ground-breaking insights are very much alive in John, whose whole work (not the prologue only) packs a cosmological punch. In the book that has rightly been described as the alpha and omega of the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as one who stands equally at the beginning of time and at its end, and just so at its creative centre. "Truly I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am!" Third is what we can only refer to as the retroactive effects of the ascension. In John the one who will ascend speaks and acts as if he has already done so; his descending and ascending inter-penetrate, so that the latter recapitulates and lends power to the former. Later we will have to reckon with the different ways in which dogmatics has dealt with this inter-penetration, but for the moment we will say only that Jesus-history as we find it in John's Gospel also defies any interpretation that moves strictly within a linear

88 This Jesus who is returning to the Father seems to relativize the past and the future to the real temporal priority of his own history. His life among us seems to stand equally at the beginning of time and at its end. "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."

89 8:56 (cf. Neill & Wright 434). J. A. T. Robinson (383ff.) rightly takes issue with the view that John represents the beginning of a late christology, interested in the coming and going of a divine being—a view, he says, that makes Christ "a cuckoo in the human nest" (366). It is the "pre-existence" and the "ultimacy" of a man with which John is concerned, like the author of Hebrews (and Paul, we would add). But Robinson rejects the language of ontology for something he calls "existential embodiment," a curious term that answers very few questions.

90 Cf. 1:18, 3:13, 13:3, e.g. Benoit (1/233) rightly observes that John "narrates the life of Jesus in terms of the glorified state." The whole debate over pre-existence in John is bedeviled by a failure to come to grips with this matter, which is no mere literary device.
framework. Fourth is the way in which John heightens the tension between the presence and the absence by frequent talk about Jesus leaving the world in order to go to the Father, and through his close association of the cross and the ascension. The comfort of the Christus praesens is clearly grounded in the stubborn and troubling fact of the Christus absens. Among other things, this prevents any confusion between christology and pneumatology. It also allows John to press upon us, in subtle and not so subtle ways, a question we will eventually have to deal with at some length—where, from our point of view, is Jesus?

Last, but by no means least, is the link between the ascension and the eucharist to which we have already pointed. That link, which is quite deliberate, is made explicit by John precisely at the point where the common capacity of these doctrines to offer offence—or to break down barriers—is underscored. Addressing the dispute that broke out among his followers over the seemingly coarse and foolish notion of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, Jesus asks: "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!"

May we not find here a vindication of our claim

---

91 C. H. Dodd was quite correct in settling on the statement, "The time is coming and now is," as a suitable summary of John’s eschatological outlook (Caird 1980:253), for in an even more basic sense it captures nicely the liturgical logic of John’s interpretation of Jesus.

92 See 14:1ff. It is the eschatological task of the Spirit to keep Jesus squarely in the centre of the picture in spite of his absence.

93 "Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" (16:5) Houlden (177) maintains that the Where? question, in "literal" terms, is a non-question. But how can we eschew literal terms altogether without falling into gnosticism? Lincoln (172) points in a better direction.

94 6:6ff. (see 25ff.). Can there be any doubt that in the present climate, were it not for our long familiarity with the eucharist, our reaction must be the same—i.e., intellectual and cultural revulsion? And how will we maintain a doctrine of the eucharist if we are inclined to treat the doctrine of the ascension in that way?
that the ascension is the greater mystery on which the lesser mystery of the eucharist rests, such that we must interpret each in the light of the other? That properly understood they imply an unsettling worldview not derivable from any other source than the remarkable outcome of Jesus-history? At all events, we will take from it courage for a journey into dogmatic history that in exploring some of these matters is likely (though not intended) to cause some small offence of its own. But first let us turn back for a moment to Luke's story in order that we may bring the present chapter to a conclusion.

The Master's Metaphor

Leslie Houlden (whose position is not at all like ours) is quite right to speak of Luke's story as "an obstinate presence." That Luke's rendering of the ascension as a distinct event in the life of Jesus has indeed a claim on our attention is made more certain by the creative thinking the ascension apparently evoked in the other New Testament theologians. But what of the event itself? One thing about which there can be no doubt at all is that the journey thus undertaken was one that cannot be comprehended by those left behind! "A cloud hid him from their sight." Nevertheless, since we have insisted on a historical component, and see no reason to abandon Luke's proffered description, let us try to say something sensible about it.

We spoke earlier of the ascension episode as a metaphor. All that we have said since has been in support of the claim that the metaphor in question was not so much Luke's, or even the tradition's, as Christ's own. Nor was it merely a metaphor. It was a real departure, the exchanging of a shared—though no longer a fully common—history

---

95 P. 174

96 Our argument is of course a circular one, and rightly so.
for an altogether distinct and unique one. That this departure and exchange took place in the form of a dramatic gesture is plain enough; space travel was never in view. But it did take place. Let us call it, then, a liturgical metaphor, for it was an act which both imitated and also **effected** its aim.\(^97\) And what was the aim? To leave the world and go to the Father? Then let us say further, with the Venerable Bede, that it was that particular liturgical act on which every other such act depends.\(^98\) For it was the act in which the link between our fallen world and the new creation was fully forged. Moreover, it was the act in which the problem of the presence and the absence came into being, the problem that defines the eschatological situation and necessitates the peculiar sacramental form of the people of God.

It is important to understand exactly what is at stake here. If there is no genuine this-worldly component—if the act of ascension is one of pure transcendence capable of any number of really quite arbitrary historical manifestations but incapable of being carried out in a historical way\(^99\)—then Christ is indeed atopic and atemporal, and it is above all his personal human identity that is beclouded in his ascension. Again, if in the ascension the movement **within** our corrupted space and time is not as real as the movement beyond it, then the church's sacramental acts are devoid of meaning (for that

---

\(^97\) Torrance (1976:108f.) rightly reminds us of the cultic significance of the verb **anabaino** used in Acts 2:34 (though not in 1:9).

\(^98\) Bede (*Hom* 2.9; see Davies 1958:158f.), in a remark not without insight, compared the gift of the sacraments to the cloak that Elijah left Elisha at his assumption. Bede died on the eve of Ascension Day in 735.

\(^99\) See von Balthasar’s discussion (1990:246ff.) of the views of G. Koch (1965). Cf. O. O’Donovan (1986:36f.): “The incarnation is not simply a mythic portrayal of the fellowship between men and God, nor the ascension of the triumph of the cross. Insofar as these transitions have one foot in our space and time, they are seen there as **events**—events which, however, have another end to them beyond the historical sequence of which, at this end, they form a part.”
is where and how they also take place). Then the church's distinction from the world does indeed reduce to something that is purely ideological or ethical or social. Or put the other way round, if we wish to take the eucharist and the church seriously we must also take the ascension seriously in both its dimensions.

Could that not be done, it may be asked, by holding to an ascension on the same day (Luke 24) rather than forty days later (Acts 1)? We reject this proposal for two reasons: first, because it pits Luke against Luke; second, because it still refuses to take the "leaving" as seriously as the "going." In biblical terms the ascension is a real departure of Jesus of Nazareth. That is the basis on which we find ourselves compelled to speak of two histories rather than one. Covenant history and world history have divided in this departure, for in and with Jesus the former has already reached its goal. In the resulting gap a place has opened up for the eucharistic community as a genuinely new entity within world history, albeit a peculiar one with its own peculiar view of the way things are.
Cosmologies and ecclesiologies are inseparably linked, we are convinced, though the relationship is one that generally receives little attention. But we must not get ahead of ourselves. On this score our last chapter indicated only that reflection on the ascension and the notion of ecclesial communion as a real participation in Christ was accompanied by the opening up of new horizons in cosmology as well. With the appearance of a discrepancy between the two histories, and the revision or deepening of Jewish eschatology, that was inevitable. The task before us now is to trace these connections, and in particular the role of the doctrine of the ascension, into the later reflections of the church. If we have read rightly the movement of thought in the biblical witness, and if it has (for all its diversity of expression) the inner coherence we suspect, then it will surely prove instructive to approach subsequent developments with the same interests in view. In that way we will be able to add historical sinews to the theoretical bones of the conviction just stated, and demonstrate something of the significance of our subject for the evolution of the church.

Before proceeding, however, it will be helpful to set the stage a little further by reminding ourselves of the general context in which the ecclesiological interests of the early church took shape. We may appeal for assistance here to the summary of a well-known New Testament scholar.
A Precarious Position

In a recent volume of lectures Professor C. K. Barrett argued the paradox that "in the New Testament the church is at the same time central and peripheral." This strange feature reflects something of the church's own nature, he suggests, as "the community of the interim" between the resurrection of Jesus and his parousia. The consequence of its present provisional character, however, is that the church as it faces the world "had and has an impossible task, for it can affirm itself only at the cost of denying its own proper being." This paradox upon which Barrett reflects translates (on the practical side) into the problems of church order, and (on the theoretical side) into the whole question of the way in which the being of the church is conditioned by grace, in a manner suited to the present fashion of things. That is to say—if we may be permitted this recasting of the paradox in terms of our own systematic interests—it thrusts upon us the whole complex of issues connected with the enigma of the presence and the absence which we introduced already in chapter one.

Now according to Barrett the church in the first century had not yet hardened into rigid forms of self-expression. Ministry and sacraments provided "some of the necessary apparatus of permanence," but the tension between its historical needs and its eschatological orientation was for the most part successfully maintained. If here and there we discern signs that the balance was being tipped towards the former, signs of retreat into a dangerous sort of institutionalized self-security, it was not until later on that these elements coalesced into anything like the Frühkatholizismus of which we hear so much, usually in pejorative terms. We might say, in other words, that the Pauline emphasis on

---

1 See appendix A.

2 See Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament (quotations from pp. 9, 77f.). Barrett himself does not attempt to identify or deal with the theoretical side of the problem directly. Nor does he address satisfactorily the distinction between ecclesial provisionality or ambiguity and mundane ambiguity.
koinônia (with Christ and in the Spirit) prevailed as the guiding light of ecclesiology throughout the critical early phases of the church.

But of course far-reaching changes did take place, however gradually. Some of the key developments (as they would later prove to be) can be seen quite clearly even in the writings of Clement and Ignatius, at the turn of the century. In facing the challenges thrown up by the unexpectedly long historical course of things, the form and self-understanding of the worshiping church underwent a great many adjustments. Barrett rightly rebukes those who cannot look upon this evolution with empathy; change was always and necessarily part of the picture. But he does take care to point out what he sees as a growing "deficiency in theological criticism," such criticism as keeps Jesus central and the church itself peripheral. On the reasons for that deficiency he does not speculate, though the paradox itself may appear as explanation enough.

Whatever the causes, and they are surely several, in retrospect it is difficult to deny that the characteristic emphasis on a Christ-centred koinônia, which feeds primarily on eschatological realities, slowly faded into the background. It was above all a creeping institutionalism that took its place, in which (many are prepared to admit) the whole framework of ecclesiology became badly distorted. Even now, four centuries after the

---

3 See Barrett 88ff. Obviously, perspectives on the nature, speed, and profundity of such changes differ widely. Kasper (1989:157), e.g., speaks of the communio ecclesiology that prevailed for the first ten centuries, towards which the Roman church has turned once again in decisive fashion (he argues) with the Second Vatican Council. Many would be far less charitable to the first ten centuries, while others might wish to downplay as far as possible the negative character of the changes we have in view.

4 I.e., both the person and example of Jesus, who in his own day walked humbly along quite ordinary paths (Barrett 100f.).

5 Where the eucharist itself is concerned, Zizioulas (1985:20f.) contends that this fading did not reach the critical point in East or West until about the twelfth century; but this evaluation is overly generous.
heated battles of the Reformation, the church is still struggling to set things right. For our part, we think it reasonable to suggest that the deficiency of theological criticism which permitted this evolution was aggravated, not only by the insecurity generated by the prolonged absence of Jesus, but by a loss of grip on the provocative cosmological dimensions of the eschatological framework developed in embryonic form by the leading New Testament thinkers. That loss could only result in a certain confusion about the fact that the church exists—and can exist at present—only in the most painful and precarious of positions, namely, as a community with a foot in each of two radically diverging histories.

But such an existence is by nature impossible to subject altogether to institutionalizing tendencies, even if the church is constantly tempted to seek relief in that direction. In any event, even in theological criticism there were both advances and retreats, which we hope now to underline in our own way. Of course there are far too many threads here to trace out anything like a complete depiction of this story within the greater tapestry of concerns to which we have just made so brief a reference. Thus we will have to settle for looking at only a few representative theologians, chosen both for their overall significance and for their attention to our primary subject, the ascension. Again, if the special complex of ideas we have selected for consideration is but one of a number of relevant lines of inquiry into the evolution of ecclesiology, we are at least bold enough to think that it is more important than is usually perceived. For the ascension forces us to grapple with the inner logic of the church in a way that highlights its

---

6 By "institutionalizing tendencies" we have in mind all efforts to carve out an identity for the church which is determined by the supposed necessities of historical continuity, at the expense of its eschatological character. These tendencies assume different forms at different times, naturally. In fact, the most prominent contemporary form has at first glance the appearance of being anti-institutional (thus encouraging as well an overtly institutional reaction).
paradoxical situation, a thorough understanding of which is essential to its welfare and its mission.

**One Step Forward**

Christian systematics makes its first appearance in the second-century struggle with gnosticism, which (like most philosophical systems, religious or otherwise) was heavily occupied by the problems of evil and of finitude, and the possible relation between them. That is, like everyone else the gnostics were attempting to cope with those basic discontinuities of human existence which our world is always thrusting upon us, discontinuities painfully highlighted on the one side by suffering and death, and on the other by an envious awareness of things which appear to participate in some form of eternity. Squatting upon ground which is neither eastern nor western, ground hallowed by the ancient Hebrew tradition and newly cultivated by the Christian church, the gnostic challenge took on a peculiar poignancy. It boiled down, of course, to a dispute over the relation between creation and redemption. How were the discontinuities of creaturely existence to be overcome—by the rejection of that existence as innately flawed (the common pagan view) or by its full and happy repair (the Judeo-Christian view)? In other words, was redemption the antithesis of creation or its fulfillment? That was the question, and in the increasingly energetic hands of the gnostics it forced the issue of cosmology onto the main agenda of dogmatics at a very early stage. Indeed, this question virtually created the discipline of Christian dogmatics.

7 "I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecc 3:10f., NIV).

8 Here we agree with Harnack (1129ff., 252ff., 326ff.), but only in part. For Harnack the very possibility of dogmatics is bound up with the prior inclination to ask and answer
The first theologian of genuinely catholic stature in these times, and the great Christian champion against the gnostics, was Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons. A man firmly convinced that the true faith is "ever one and the same," he was nonetheless a creative thinker, no simple (if somewhat confused) preservationist, as some have supposed. In turning the gospel to face the rising tide of intellectual and moral deviations with which the second-century church had to cope, Irenaeus was not afraid to follow the fresh lines of thought which beckoned him from within the apostolic witness. By reason of this constructive interest his work retains an even greater relevance than many imagine, and there is a richness to his thought that is only the brighter for being set in the dark background of the tedious speculations he sought so patiently to destroy. In any event, his thoroughgoing repudiation of gnostic and docetic revisions to the Christian message still rewards his readers even in the twentieth century, especially those who have an eye for the refined and subtle forms of those heresies which have gained so much ground again today.

such questions with a Hellenistic slant, introduced by St Paul (i.e., by his alleged spirit–flesh dualism and the "secularizing" cosmological speculation to which it contributed). For us dogmatics took its start from a highly perceptive rebuttal of Hellenistic misreadings of Paul and John, misreadings which have nonetheless proved attractive to many, including Harnack.

9 Adv. Haer. 1.10.2. Irenaeus has been charged both with a lack of originality and with a rather unsuccessful experimentation with his sources, but neither of these charges can be made to stick. See the helpful comments of G. Wingren (1959:xvff.), whose work supports Brunner's highly positive evaluation (1934:249, 262): "No other thinker was able to weld ideas together which others allowed to slip as he was able to do, not even Augustine or Athanasius." Thus also W. Bousset (1970:421), for whom Irenaeus was "the Schleiermacher of the second century."

10 See Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, from which translations will be taken (with occasional deviation in capitalization). If, as the editors suggest, "the fundamental object of the Gnostic speculations was doubtless to solve the two grand problems of all religious philosophy, viz., How to account for the existence of evil; and, How to reconcile the finite with the infinite" (310), then it is no surprise that in spite of his valiant effort Irenaeus was able to bury only a particular form of these heresies, not to eradicate the stubborn tendencies they represented.
In *Adversus omnes Haereses*, completed just over 1800 years ago, Irenaeus takes for his compass the baptismal confession by which the Christian identifies him or herself.\(^{11}\) He evidently believed that in this trinitarian formula, which wraps itself around the history of Jesus, there was an arsenal of insights adequate for any theological task. Thus he set out, not only to expose the great "tissue of falsehoods" woven by the gnostics, but also to lead his readers through to a deeper grasp of their own "celestial" faith.\(^{12}\) But what is immediately interesting to us is that Irenaeus framed this first-ever theological textbook with pointed references to the ascension.

While spelling out the third article of the confession, and stressing the unity of salvation history to which we devoted much of our last chapter, he writes of the Spirit who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one,' and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow....\(^{13}\)

---

\(^{11}\) The church has but one voice, heard in all the members of its household: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty..., in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God..., and in the Holy Spirit..." (1.10.1). This is a path he follows in the shorter *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* as well, and it marks off his work from that of Justin before him or Origen after him, as fundamental theology in the best sense, i.e., as theology tied closely to the story of Jesus. (On the notion of the creed as personal self-identification for the Christian, see D. Harned, 1981.)

\(^{12}\) *Adv. Haer.* 1.9.4; cf. the preface to Bk 5. His achievements here thus parallel to a great extent those of the Nicene theologians, who responded to the Arian problem in just the same way.

\(^{13}\) 1.10.1 (emphasis ours). Irenaeus refers to the Son and the Spirit as "the two hands of God," who do his work both in creation and redemption. He is very conscious of the mutual dependence of these two hands in their operation, as we shall see. The fact that he actually elaborates the life and work of the Son not in the second article, but in the third, shows a promising way forward for today's church, long since divided over a multitude of issues related to the *filioque* problem.
Here, especially in the allusion to Ephesians 1:10, the christological foundation on which Irenaeus will construct his work is already disclosed, and "the ascension into heaven in the flesh" is clearly an important element in that foundation.\footnote{Irenaeus's extensive debt to Justin is denied by no one, and Justin too mentions the ascension quite prominently in his many references to the essentials of the gospel story (cf. \textit{1st Ap.} 21, 42, 45f., 50f., 54). He even speaks of ascension "in the flesh" (\textit{Res.} 9), but does not include this qualifying phrase in his regular formula. The Irenaean expansion here signals an important shift philosophically. Though Irenaeus never openly argues with the apologists, his work amounts to a radical correction of many of their presuppositions.} Thus in the closing lines of the work we find him summing up as follows, again giving a prominent place to our subject, which is now seen in terms of its soteriological and ontological impact:

For there is one Son, who accomplished His Father's will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, 'which the angels desire to look into;' and they are not able to search out the wisdom of God, by means of which His handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with His Son, is brought to perfection; that His offspring, the First--begotten Word, should \textit{descend} to the creature, that is, to what had been moulded, and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and \textit{ascend} to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God.\footnote{5.36.3 (emphasis ours).}

Between these two references to the ascension there are in fact a good many others.

Perhaps this should not surprise us, since it is that doctrine above all which both affirms the importance of the gnostic question and forces us to deny the rightness of their answer to it. If the ascension of Christ--or rather what we might call the ascension-parousia differential--highlights the discontinuity between this present world and the world to come, it is equally true that ascension in the \textit{flesh} demands that we understand the latter as something still intimately linked to the former: "Because the Word was made flesh, he was visible in His ascension..."\footnote{\textit{Demo.} 84} Continuity and discontinuity are held in tension. That tension--the very same that belongs to the eucharist, as Irenaeus himself

---

\textit{Demo.} 84
declares—is what he sets out to explore in defense of the Judeo-Christian tradition. His own emphasis naturally falls on the positive pole (i.e., on continuity rather than discontinuity) since it was at that end that the attack had come. We will eventually see, however, that it makes little difference which end is attacked, or which defended. The important thing is the tension itself, which no one, in our judgment, has expounded with greater perspicacity than Irenaeus. By rejecting the gnostics' mythologizing treatment of the ascension, he allowed the doctrine to open up for us all huge tracts of fruitful theological discourse. It will serve our purposes to devote this entire chapter to his ideas, which will stand as a measuring rod for the later treatments we will touch upon in the next two chapters.

* We might well have expected Irenaeus to shy away from the descent–ascent motif which features so prominently in his work (following the pattern of the Philippians carmen Christi), just because it was that aspect of the Christian message upon which the gnostics had seized as the natural Gestalt for their own presentation. Instead he chose

17 4.18.5

18 J. Lawson, having argued Irenaeus's biblical rather than speculative orientation, nonetheless concludes that he "essayed the problems of Christian philosophy and cosmology ... to such good effect that he left behind him what is perhaps the most satisfying attempt at a systematic Christian theology that has been preserved to us from the great formative period which lies between the close of the New Testament and the opening of the Arian controversy" (1948:293f.).

19 The significance of his achievement here we will later set over against the work of Origen in particular, who succeeded in establishing a major counter–current of philosophical (as opposed to fundamental or kerymatic) theology, which far more effectively than that of the gnostics won a place for dualist presuppositions within Christian thinking. It was his approach that first heavily compromised "the old eschatological view," the loss of which Harnack rightly regarded as having determined dogmatic history.
to tackle the problem head on. Within the framework of Hellenist dualism, the pattern of descent and ascent was a strictly vertical affair, static and essentially timeless, for the temporal belonged to the corrupt realm of material being, which was really a form of non-being. Ascension by definition meant a straightforward disassociation from this realm, a movement of the mind-spirit that entailed a denial and an erasure of the temporal creation.\(^\text{20}\) But for Irenaeus the ascension of Jesus in the flesh invalidated any such dualistic approach, and indeed made nonsense of it. In the ascension the horizontal or temporal dimension of his being was affirmed and maintained, even while being made open to eternity. This secured the essential goodness of creation and the unity of revelation (the issues immediately at stake)\(^\text{21}\) but raised afresh the question of how the vertical and the horizontal were to be integrated—that is, how the intimate relation between the temporal and the eternal here affirmed could possibly be conceived. That was a question that could not be shirked.\(^\text{22}\)

Irenaeus realized that from the perspective of the Christian creed, which witnesses to a profound interchange between time and eternity in the personal history of Jesus, there could be only one way to provide an adequate response, namely, by a basic paradigm shift in ontology—more specifically, by the adoption of dynamic, \textit{relational} categories on

\(^{20}\) Cf. 2.14.3, where Irenaeus takes note of the alleged non-being of all that lies outside the Pleroma. He is openly critical of Platonic dualism and the "vacuity" of the teaching of Democritus, which the gnostics had accepted and adapted to their own ends, i.e. into opinions "sewed together out of ancient dogmas redolent of ignorance and irreligion." For the gnos- tics the consummation of this world would come when "all that is spiritual has been formed and perfected by gnosis" (1.6.1). From this the animal and material creation was excluded, as in the pure monism of the East.

\(^{21}\) See the preface to book four.

\(^{22}\) In the second century, no less than today, such serious answers as might be put forward to the question of the relationship between time and eternity, or between heaven and earth, left little or no room for actual \textit{bodily} ascension. But Irenaeus was determined to think out such questions from the standpoint of Jesus-history, not the reverse.
virtually every level. This he attempted, after his own fashion, challenging along the way not just the self-styled gnostic gurus but the great philosophers and "all that are ignorant of God, poets and historians alike," from Homer to Aristotle. For he certainly recognized that the gnostic faith was based on the same foundation as that of the Greek tradition generally, and actually accused their teachers of a low sort of plagiarism, accompanied by fanciful embellishment. But this acknowledgment meant in effect that the Christian faith had to discover within itself a serious alternative to that more ancient and reputable tradition of dualism, which was now shown conclusively to be inadequate just because it was incapable of answering to the climactic events of the life of Jesus—that is, to his resurrection and bodily ascension, and the expectation of his return.

A new interpretation of the relation between the eternal and the temporal (heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, etc.) must certainly be found and articulated, an interpretation which continued to affirm the primacy of the former while refusing to deny or depreciate the latter.

How did Irenaeus develop this train of thought? First, he threw out together both the static, hierarchical theology of his opponents, and the rationalistic epistemology from

---

23 See 2.14.1ff. Irenaeus makes no attempt to match the great thinkers of the Greek tradition point for point, as he does with the gnostics, though he clearly has much more respect for the former (even if he accuses the latter of transferring to the treatment of the faith "that hair-splitting and subtle mode of handling questions which is, in fact, a copying of Aristotle"). He frequently underlines his own notion of a scientific approach, which has a distinctly realist orientation, in which the object of our study must control our methods (2.15.3, 25.1, 27.1f.).

24 This charge of inadequacy applied likewise to Stoic monism, as Irenaeus is careful to point out (2.14.4), for it was no more possible for the materialists than for the idealists to comprehend how God could possibly "impart immortality to what is mortal, or bestow incorruption on what is corruptible," thus preventing the dissolution of man into his constituent parts. "God" being in either case merely a grand projection of man, he remained "the slave of this necessity," the consequence being very rigid cosmological clamps on soteriological possibilities.
whence it sprang. The nature of God cannot be got at by projecting into the divine being distinctions which may to some extent hold true in the analysis of human being, as the theory of Aéons supposed. For the Creator is "simple, uncompounded Being" in whom thought, will, word, and action cannot be separated; he is totus spiritus operans, existing in such a way as to entirely transcend the distinctions and polarities which we discern in ourselves.25 We hasten to point out that we would not be doing justice to Irenaeus unless we noticed here the pronounced contrast between his conception of the divine simplicity and that later adopted by Plotinus, for example, or even that of Origen. For Irenaeus does not build his theology around a philosophical opposition between the one and the many, as do these classically Greek thinkers, whose approach thus far retains a fundamental kinship with gnosticism.26 He builds instead, in a deliberate reversal of perspective, on the unlimited power of this transcendent God to make himself known in and for creation. For "the Father of all" is already in his simplicity the triune God, who in the person of Jesus Christ "confirms and establishes" all things and draws them to himself.

This cuts completely across the grain of any Greek construction.27 Cosmology is

25 2.13, 4.11.2; see esp. 2.28: God is wholly each of these, and thus "in no degree similar to human weaknesses." All human language about God must be used analogically, not univocally, and with conscious metaphorical reserve. It is our view of man which must be gaged and modified in light of our knowledge of the Creator, not the reverse. This knowledge does not derive from "mere human experience" but from God's own self-revelation in the Son, in that Word whose generation is altogether indescribable and who belongs in an utterly primary way to the divine self-constitution.

26 Both Origen and Plotinus reject the gnostic fables, and Origen has many things to say about God's transcendence and about his activity as the Almighty which sound similar to the above. Yet because the notion of absolute Oneness (Henas) dominates their thinking, neither can escape altogether the necessity for a gradation of divinity as a means of accommodating the divine to the (undesirable) diversity of this material world, the creation of which was determined by other factors alongside the divine will. Cf. Princ. 1.1.6f., 1.2.6, 1.3.5ff., 2.1.1ff., 2.8–9, 3.5.3ff.

27 See 4.20, e.g. If Irenaeus is "unphilosophical," he has (which in this case is much more desirable) a story to tell: the story contained in the creed, which is the story of God and man in the story of Jesus. This story is the one thing almost entirely lacking in Origen's de Principiis. And it is just this difference which accounts for that which we ought to find
not to control theology, but theology cosmology. Here God is seen to be capable of the most intimate and positive involvement with his world in its every aspect, the material no less than the rational. He contains all things "within his own territory," personally affirming and sustaining their existence. Indeed, his sovereign will "is the substance of all things," which derive their ontic possibilities from God's own freedom from necessity. Creation exists in its relatedness to the God who is able to relate freely to it. And creation as such is good, not in part but in whole: the material aspect being included not by default or concession, but by divine design.

To be sure, the Creator himself in the largeness of his personal activity, can be contained and comprehended by no one. Yet it is by very reason of this greatness that (philosophically!) between Irenaeus's description of God as totus spiritus operans and Origen's corresponding claim that God's is a "simple intellectual existence" (intellectuales natura simplex, 1.1.6).

28 2.2.5, 11.1, 14.4, 28.4, 30.9, 4.20.1, 5.5.2. God is the architect of the world "by an omnipotent will, and with a new effect, potently and efficaciously," drawing creaturely things into existence and on toward a true fullness of being. "For this is the property of the working of God ... to go beyond substance, and fullness or perfection" (frag. 6). His own perfection is not a static perfection, to be conceived in terms of motionless immutability, but dynamic and alive. This is reflected in the possibilities of the creation, inasmuch as it has a direct relation to him.

29 It is because the philosophers fail to find for God a sufficient transcendence that they find it necessary to rob him also of his proper immanence, consistently introducing a breach between God and his Logos. Both Justin and Origen can be accused here along with the pagans; their concern to protect the "unbegotten and impassible God" from too close an association with the flux of this world pushes them into subordinationism (cf. e.g. 1st Ap. 13, 32 with Adv. Haer. 2.28.5). But Irenaeus's profound (if primitive) trinitarianism liberates him from this concern.

30 Unlike the gnostics, Origen at least allows for the possibility that some form of corporeality is native to the original creation, the goodness of which cannot be denied from a biblical perspective. But so far is he occupied by the antipathy between mind and body that he constantly toys with the eventual disappearance of the latter altogether. In any case, the breach between God and his Logos is matched by an even greater breach between the Logos and material creation, as we will see.
he is able to be known by his creatures, in an entirely genuine self-disclosure through the Son and in the Spirit (the same "two hands" by which he also shapes and upholds creation, and which belong to his dynamic simplicity). That is, human knowledge of God is made possible through an act of self-giving quite natural to God, whose "hands" embrace creation for just that purpose. For the power of God must be considered under a twofold aspect: not only from the standpoint of his ineffable glory, which renders him incomprehensible, but also from the standpoint of his love and kindness, by which he comes to meet creation and lends to man the capacity to know him. The power of God is to be located as much—or rather, more—in his self-disclosing love as in the remoteness of his majesty. Thus we may say that the communion of the creature with God in no way compromises the divine transcendence, inasmuch as the latter is conceived in these relational terms, but rather arises from it and depends upon it.

True knowledge of God therefore develops through actual encounter with God, according to Irenaeus. It is not impossible for man as a creature, but neither is it subject to the dictates of a priori reasoning. In the final analysis we can speak of God "only according to the love [we bear him]." We do so within the community of love he has established, the church, admitting all the while the imperfection of our present knowing.

---

31 See here the powerful passage in 2.30.9. For Irenaeus, as for Barth, the One who thus gives himself to creation is really able to do so; there must be no tearing apart of God and his revelation, in creation or redemption, by any means whatever (especially not by the alleged mediation of Nous or Logos, 2.13.4). It is Irenaeus's rejection of this gap which at once distinguishes his theology from that of the Hellenistic theologians, even where their language overlaps.

32 All this is laid out vigorously in 4.20.1ff. It begins as follows: "As regards His greatness, therefore, it is not possible to know God, for it is impossible that the Father can be measured; but as regards His love (for this it is which leads us to God by his Word), when we obey Him, we do always learn that there is so great a God..." (cf. esp. 20.5.). See P. Forster (1985) for sympathetic criticism of Irenaeus' doctrine of God.
yet inquiring together after him with an obedient spirit and a scientific diligence. All of this comprises a warning against "knowledge falsely so-called," which is built up, layer upon layer, by the speculative imagination and autonomous intellect. Against this Irenaeus sets the claim that human knowledge of God and of his design for creation must be conformed to God's own dynamic, trinitarian being—and can be, inasmuch as he, in connection with the incarnation, has lovingly adapted himself to us in our times, in order to draw us up with Jesus into the glory of his own fellowship. This knowledge is therefore essentially relational, not simply rational; gnōsis is by nature personal and communal, that is, ecclesial. Already we see a dramatic shift in categories on a number of important fronts, brought about by taking Jesus-history as the proper point of departure.

Second—and here we get into the thick of things frequently passed over, though they are really inseparable from the matters already discussed—Irenaeus began to attack Greek cosmology, not merely in its gnostic form but at its roots. Naturally enough, his

---

33 Cf. 2.13.4, 27.1ff., 28.1ff.; 5.20.1f. Note well that the apophatic aspect is carefully combined with a strong notion of the revelatory nature of the Scriptures ("which are throughout spiritual") and a scientific attitude toward creation itself. By a humble, student-like attention to God through both means, we are called to growth in knowledge, hoping "ever to be receiving more and more from God, and to learn from Him, because He is good, and possesses boundless riches, a kingdom without end, and instruction that can never be exhausted" (2.28.3). This is not mysticism.

34 "But as for us," says Irenaeus (2.28.7), "we still dwell upon the earth, and have not yet sat down upon his [God's] throne!" If we then transgress against revelation with "blind and foolish talk" that proceeds by human analogy and "reserves nothing for God," we but expose ourselves as those "knowing neither things human nor divine" (28.4f.).

35 This, we believe, is a fair summary of the Irenaean theology of revelation as set out in 4.20: "Thus, therefore, was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth through all these [operations], the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and man's salvation being accomplished." Irenaeus' attention to the Spirit alongside of Christ stands out among the early theologians as being quite remarkable. It is through the Spirit that Christ dispenses "paternal glories adapted to the times" (4.20.6).
attack begins with a strong affirmation of the pregnant Hebrew doctrine of creation ex nihilo, and of the Judeo-Christian respect for temporal process. He stresses time and again that creaturely being is the immediate object of God's action and affection: "The will and the energy of God is the effective and foreseeing cause of every time and place and age, and of every nature." That being which is given to us, then, is not by nature degenerate being, disintegrating being, mediated by declining stages or faculties of the divine Pleroma; neither is it the mere shadow of higher things. It is a gift, a positive being—in-relation-to-God. Irenaeus was not content to stop here, however. Nor yet was he satisfied simply to reaffirm in the Hebraic manner that creation was made for man, not the reverse (as if man were its unfortunate slave, a notion toward which pagan thought inevitably inclines). All this already assures a more dynamic approach to cosmology, inasmuch as it postulates a purposeful relationship between man and his world—an anthropic principle, if you please—in which human creativity and human behaviour assume genuine ontological significance. But Irenaeus pushes things a step further, and it is at this point that some of his most interesting ideas take shape.

Taking his cue from the (bodily) ascension and its pentecostal consequences, and building conceptually on the fruitfulness motif from Genesis—that "faculty of increase"

36 Creation is said to have a definite beginning and to extend itself "throughout a long course of time" according to God's will (2.28.3, 34.2). Insistence on the goodness of temporal and material existence, and on God's freedom from necessity in generating and sustaining it, is of course already a complete rejection of any theory of emanations, indeed, of anything related to a static hierarchy of forms such as the Greek mind was wont to imagine. See esp. 2.7-10, 2.14, for a statement of his views as they pertain to the present paragraph.

37 This acute way of putting it is taken from frag. 5 rather than Adv. Haer. itself. Irenaeus is really developing something like an ontology of will—or better, of communion and the fellowship of wills—at the heart of his view of creation and of personhood itself. Brunner (254) roundly criticizes Harnack and Ritschl for failing to see what Irenaeus is up to, but shies away from the important cosmological questions raised here—perhaps partly because, as G. Aulén (1969:29) notices, he gives too little attention to the resurrection and ascension.
which attaches to man and to creation itself—he develops a view of the cosmos, and of
man as its pivotal inhabitant, which completely upsets the gnostic Weltanschauung.
Temporal creation may indeed be said to be in a fall towards non-being, but not by nature
(i.e., by reason of finitude or its material aspect). The temporal world, from the
standpoint of its Creator and Redeemer, is on the way to true being, moving towards that
fullness of being in view of which God at first bestowed the faculty of increase. The
falling away into corruption which mars creation is not the consequence of a defect in
God, as the gnostics implied, and hence inherent in the creation. Rather (as Genesis
informs us) it is correlated to man's deliberate moral dysfunction, which, by virtue of his
contributing role in the creative process, cannot be contained or isolated but has cosmic
consequences. Creation is therefore found to be working against itself. Its recapture
through Christ's faithfulness means the rectification of its ontic course, the re-
establishment of the movement of the temporal upward into the fullness of that eternity
with which the Spirit of God in Christ is prepared to invest it. For "God is he who gives
rise to immortality," overcoming corruptibility and bestowing on created things the

38 We differ here somewhat from the view of Prof. Zizioulas (1989/1990).

39 Irenaeus uses this terminology to refer to much more than mere physical reproduction
(though he has no contempt for the latter); it is tied together with the notion of ascension:
God "fashioned man, and bestowed the faculty of increase on His own creation [in sua
creatura donavit incrementum], and called him upwards from lesser things to those
greater ones which are in His own presence..." (2.28.1). The importance of this theme is
widely underestimated.

40 The fall brings about a curse not so much against the man as "against the ground, in
reference to his works" (3.23.3). Again, it is a serious flaw of Hick's approach (1966: 221; following H. H. Wendt, Harnack, et al.) that he is prepared to pass over the passages
in Irenaeus which show how central to his thinking is the fall. These so-called "cross-
currents" can hardly be dismissed—as Brunner, Aulén and Wingren have all shown—for
neither biblically nor in debate with the gnostics could Irenaeus afford to trivialize evil
in this way.
capacity to transcend their fallen nature in communion with himself, leading them on triumphantly "to their own proper result."  

In other words, Irenaeus adopted a cosmology into which the dynamic of personal relations, divine and human, was fully factored. This is the feature that really determines his understanding of temporality and eternity. Though he does not develop it with systematic consistency, he is drawn steadily to an important insight: Time and eternity are not in opposition; the latter is rather the consummation of the former. Temporality, then, is neither a by-product of human perception nor the result of the degradation of being, though there is an element of truth in those views. If we read Irenaeus correctly, the temporality which is God's gift in creation and redemption is a function of the movement of the world, with man at its helm, towards its Creator, the blossoming of a self-transcending relationship with God which bespeaks the coming fruit of perfect communion. That decaying time with which we are all too familiar is therefore a function of man's rejection of God, plainly marking a collapse of "those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them." In other

---

41 2.29.2, 5.13.3; frag. 6. Thus all things will be made new, not men only: "For since there are real men [in the kingdom], so must there must also be a real establishment, that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but 'the fashion of this world passes away,' that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them" (5.36.1).

42 God "made the things of time for man, so that coming to maturity in them, he may produce the fruit of immortality," thus God will finally bestow on him eternal things as well (4.5.1, 5.29.1). Cf. 2.29.1f. on the power of righteousness and faith respecting the disposal of creation, an idea with ecological as well as eschatological implications.

43 The Eleatic tendency to spatialize time, which was intended "virtually to eliminate it," has also been described as a relational view of time (M. Capek [Wiener] 389). This approach, which was also that of the gnostics, is overthrown by the Irenaean alternative, which is relational in quite another (personalist-communalist) sense. Irenaeus utterly rejects a spatialized psychology and cosmology in favour of an innovation based on the notion of growth and advance toward God, grounded in the ascension.
words, the present fashion of the world has a perverted temporality which as such is disowned by eternity. Fortunately, it is destined to give way to that which belongs to the saving time of Jesus Christ, who ascends to the Father. Man in his time, "the fullness of the time of liberty," enters upon such entire intimacy with his Creator that he is "always holding fresh converse with God"—a revitalizing and creative converse that precludes the possibility of becoming old. In the kingdom, says Irenaeus, "man will forget to die." His temporality is invested with eternity through friendship with God.

We will return to these matters shortly. Meanwhile, perhaps the most crucial thing to say about Irenaean cosmology from this point of view is that creation is understood to be not only ex nihilo but in progress. The temporal cosmos is only coming–to–be. This notion (which should not be too quickly identified with similar sounding proposals popular today) is easier to assimilate when we remind ourselves that, for Irenaeus and his opponents alike, real being, established being, is certainly eternal being. But if for his opponents the temporal world was thus excluded by definition, it was not so for Irenaeus, who obviously invested "eternal" and "temporal" with new meanings. In the light of Jesus–history eternal being is understood as a form of existence which is fully open to, and fruitfully engaged in, the inexhaustible possibilities generated by communion with the

---

44 5.36.1. Shakespeare captured this as well as any of the ancients, in Sonnet 65: "O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out / Against the wrackful siege of battering days / When rocks impregnable are not so stout / Or gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?" In suggesting that this condition is brought on by the fall however, Irenaeus did not confuse the condition of the material world with the fact of the material world, as did the Greeks and the Christian Platonists; like the Bard he had more respect for it than that!

45 See esp. the last chapter of Adv. Haer. (5.36; cf. 4.22.1, 5.12.6, frag. 39). "Eternal rest," then, should not be viewed as a cessation of motion but the triumph of motion, considered from the vantage point of the personal, i.e., the relational (Demo. 96). But this dynamic approach leaves room for the participation of the physical dimensions of creation as well; hence the dualist model, with its rejection of both Creator and creation, is completely overturned, as is its much too narrow soteriology.
triune God. While the temporal world is not yet so engaged, its very temporality is the consequence of God's invitation to such engagement. To that extent the temporal may be included in the real, inasmuch as it has a proleptic reality lent to it by God himself along the way of this invitation. Yet by the same token its reality is also pending, awaiting that response in which communion is actually achieved. Indeed, as a function of creaturely response vis-à-vis the divine initiative, it is both reversible, so to speak, and also redeemable. Only a relational ontology can support this differentiation of time from time upon which the Christian gospel rests.

Nowhere is all this more relevant, of course, than in the interpretation of human being in particular, since it is man to whom the invitation to approach God actually comes. Thirdly, then, Irenaeus worked out a new dynamic for anthropology. So far as he was concerned, man is still in the making. It is not the unmaking of man which is wanted—always the dominant strand in both Greek and Oriental philosophies, including that of the gnostics—but his finishing. Body and soul do not comprise a man that is truly alive, far less the intellect alone; something more is needed. That something is the love

46 "Eternal" is not a master-concept to be applied univocally to God and creation; indeed, no qualifier can properly be so applied.

47 P. Forster's study confirms the line we are taking: "Irenaeus would appear to be attempting to see time on two levels, a linear, progressive level being overlaid by what we may term a recapitulating level, in which time and eternity definitely meet. Alternatively we might describe Irenaeus' understanding of time as comprising two aspects: fallen, linear time, which is being redeemed, and the redeemed time of the incarnate Christ, by which it is being redeemed. These two aspects correlate with the twin Irenaean themes of growth and anakephalaiōsis..." (1985:140).

48 Indeed, it is in connection with man that creation has its peculiar provisional and tension-ridden status (cf., e.g., 5.29.1). Irenaeus knows no conflict between anthropocentrism and cosmocentrism. From his point of view, the modern opposition to the former—even if motivated by noble ecological concerns and dressed up in terms of "creation-centred spirituality"—can only represent a return to paganism. As an attack on man, however well-provoked, it is a misguided attack on creation itself. For man is "the centre of the divine art" (H. U. von Balthasar 2/74).
which is quite literally "the life of man;" it is a particular relational existence, namely, a freely enjoyed and gladly embraced participation with God, apart from which man's hold even on his own existence is altogether suspect. To put it less abstractly, it is to be possessed fully and finally by the Holy Spirit, body and soul: "Where the Spirit of the Father is, there is a living man;" nothing else qualifies. Even Adam, the prelapsarian Adam, was a provisional sort of creature with a provisional sort of existence, an infant, an animal with a spiritual umbilical cord and not yet finally a man. For by no means was he all that God intended him to be when he attempted to push away the "two hands" by which he was being formed. He had received but the beginning of his creation, having enjoyed only the first inklings of communion. For that reason he was as yet merely a tentative thing, "a creature of today."

49 Man's life is not within man as such, but in his relation to God: "the soul herself is not life, but partakes in that life bestowed upon her by God" (2.34.4; cf. 2.26.1). Hence it belongs to the nature of a man to receive "advancement and increase toward God" (4.11.2), without which he falls away from his own proper being toward non-existence (4.20.7). "For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God."

50 5.9.3: "[There is] the rational blood preserved by God ... [there] the flesh possessed by the Spirit, forgetful indeed of what belongs to it [i.e., death], and adopting the quality of the Spirit, being made conformable to the Word of God."

51 Cf. 4.38.1. His infantile nature, his condition of unrealized humanity, may be understood quite simply as his relative inability to respond to the Spirit. This was not the result of any immaturity or lack of practice, so to speak, on the part of the Creator, but a direct corollary of the fact that humanity is indeed a relational way of being, a being by invitation and response (analogous to the being of the Trinity, but conditioned by a beginning; which is to say, by creatureliness).

52 Cf. 2.25.3, 4.38.3f., 4.39.1ff. This is the condition in which mankind remains, apart from Christ and the resurrection. This is what Irenaeus means by "passible." Through submission to Christ, however, who enters into our passibility (see below), we are those "whose creation is still being carried out" (4.39.2). See appendix C.
This situation the fall made over into something it was not, namely, the law of our existence. Man was unnaturally confined to today, trapped by the stoicheia tou kosmou; which is to say, the fall put the becoming of man into reverse, and creation with him. Thus it came about that a true man—one who is more than a creature of today, one who by virtue of his unreserved reciprocity with God has become the master and not the subject of his creaturely condition—did not appear in our history until much later. This occurred when the Word of God penetrated our fallen estate and the Spirit rested upon him, raising him up again into the presence of the Father. By descending and ascending he "established fallen man, "rendering him "receptive of the perfect Father." On this basis, and on this basis alone, is our humanity secured as such. But it is indeed so secured:

For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking, said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And for this reason in the last times [fine] ... his hands formed a living man....

Jesus Christ, then, is the genuine image of God who by the power of the Spirit actually bears fruit. The increase he yields is humanity as such: "the wages of Christ are human beings," men and women who in the Spirit are themselves spirit, who are truly alive to

53 The soul, though it is given "the reason of an artist" in order to possess and rule over the body (2.33.4), is not properly able to do so as long as it is spiritually destitute and a stranger to communion. Note well that Irenaeus does not locate the image of God strictly in the rational mind (5.1.3, 6.1), which would play—as he is well aware—directly into the hands of the gnostics. His view is markedly different from that of the whole Greek tradition (on which see Harnack, III/258). Cf. 2.29ff., also 4.9.3, where "the true rationality" is shown to lie in self-giving to God.

54 See 2.20.3 (corruptum hominem), 5.1.3.

55 5.1.3; cf. 5.16.2: "For in times long past it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was his image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through the visible Word." Thus man became precious to the Father.
God, who in that way become the self-possessed masters of a fecund creation, without corruption and "without restraint."\(^{56}\)

Here we come to the very heart of the theological territory explored by Irenaeus. But we may pause a moment to observe that the extent to which relational categories dominate his thought is richly evident in his treatment of the idea of the human spirit. For Irenaeus the spirit exists as such only insofar as the human animal (i.e., body and soul moulded after the image of God in Jesus) receives the Holy Spirit, who "absorbs" the weakness of carnal man by bringing him into communion with God.\(^ {57}\) To say "spirit" is in fact to say man—in—union—and—communion with God, or quite simply: living man, complete man. There is an ontology of communion at the centre of his anthropology. It would be a great mistake to suppose that all of this is really only the language of piety, which naively strays here and there into assertions about reality as such. God, man and the world are thought about together with remarkable ingenuity. Irenaeus knows no split between the moral and the metaphysical such as his post-Kantian interpreters presuppose. Consider, as a further example, his account of paradise. For Irenaeus paradise is not a garden that once was, nor a temporary haven for the departed souls of the righteous, nor

\(^{56}\) 4.21.3, 5.32.1; cf. 3.17–18: He who descends and ascends recovers for us what was lost in Adam, "commencing afresh" (so the Syriac in 3.18.1, which is really saying nothing else than the Latin in seipso recapitulavit, as we shall see) the human race, lest we be "rendered unfruitful." The fruitfulness motif at every point runs counter to gnostic doctrine, inasmuch as the invisible Spirit does not negate the visible plasma, but reforms and increases and perfects it (5.9.3).

\(^{57}\) See 5.6–10: "as many as fear God and trust in His Son's advent, and who through faith do establish the Spirit of God in their hearts—such men as these shall properly be called both 'pure,' and 'spiritual,' and 'those living to God,' because they possess the Spirit of the Father who purifies man, and raises him up to the life of God...; when the Spirit absorbs the weakness [of the flesh], it possesses the flesh [i.e., the whole earthly man] as an inheritance in itself, and from both of these is formed a living man..." (5.9.2).
the third fixture of the seven heavens (a cosmological notion he is driven to reject). It is that situation of man which consists in the coincidence of a proper relationship with God in the Spirit and a proper disposing of the rest of creation by human activity. It cannot be located by us either temporally or spatially, not because it is atemporal or atopic, but because of the damaged relations of our own way of existing in time and space.

Lastly, then—to come indeed to the heart of things—we find that the bishop worked out a christology with immense implications, a christology quite capable of giving coherence not only to his understanding of man (which certainly raises a number of puzzling questions) but to his entire scheme of things. Unfortunately, this fact too is not sufficiently appreciated. The main reason why Irenaeus is charged with inconsistency, or with having produced only "theological fragments," is that his christology is regularly sold

58 See 2.30.7ff. It is true of course, that in Demo. 9 he speaks in popular terms of this world as "encompassed by seven heavens," but as J. A. Robinson notes (1920: 77f.) he "strangely connects the Seven Heavens with the Seven Gifts of the Spirit." On our view—i.e., in consideration of our general interpretation—this is not so strange after all!

59 Including the human body, which participates in life insofar as it participates in righteousness. This principle is the hope of the physical creation in the eschaton also, for "righteousness is powerful enough to bring thither [i.e., to the place of enjoyment] those substances which have participated in it" (2.29.2). In context—set directly against the rigid cosmological structures of the gnostics—it clearly indicates the Irenaean shift (cf. 2.30.9, 5.1.1; frag. 28 must be seen in this light).

60 Cf. 5.5.1, 2.30.7, Demo. 11ff. Man now dwells "on the way to paradise" (Demo. 16), having been "cast out thence into this world." The parousia will see a resolution of the ontic ambiguity of our world into "the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day," on the one hand, and eternal fire on the other (5.30.4). One of the best attempts to feel out this whole approach to human and cosmic realities, by the way, can be found in C. S. Lewis's little book, The Great Divorce.

61 According to Wingren (ix), to get at the heart of Irenaeus we must ask, "What idea of man does he have?" That is true; only it is not man in general but Jesus in particular to whom we must attend.
short by his readers. The key to that christology, of course, is the doctrine of recapitulation. On this notion and its connection with the doctrine of the ascension we must now concentrate.

**Ascension and Recapitulation**

We have suggested right along that the compatibility between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the heavenly, is something which Irenaeus read off from the climax and conclusion to Jesus-history, that is, from Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven and the promise of his return. He did not first devise a link conceptually or abstractly, squeezing Jesus-history into it, in the fashion of the gnostics. Instead he derived the link from Jesus-history. He then used it to challenge the conceptual structure and assumptions of Hellenist theology, epistemology, cosmology and anthropology, and to reshape all of these around a christological centre. The dynamics associated with that centre are captured in a single term: anakephalaiōsis or recapitulatio.

As employed by Paul and by Irenaeus, recapitulation is an idea absolutely without parallel in any other system of thought. Certainly it does not simply reserve for Jesus a pride of place at the apex of salvation history. Nor does it testify merely to a repetition

---

62 The popular caricature of his christology is that of a crudely overreached "speculative realism" that tapers off into mysticism (see Harnack 2/230ff., 3/103ff.). But to portray him thus—even quite sympathetically as one who sought to juggle a simple biblical faith with Hellenistic speculations and religious piety, who is best interpreted "from the mystical side" (Bousset 420ff.)—will not do at all.

63 Wingren (xv) suggests that "the best confirmation that a particular interpretation of Irenaeus is a correct one will be whether or not we have given the terms recapitulatio or anakephalaiōsis a definite and objective meaning." With this judgment we concur, without necessarily being satisfied that Wingren—who manages, like most interpreters, to ignore the ascension—takes us as far as we need to go. See Lawson 140ff. for a review of proposed definitions of the word, the meaning of which must certainly be settled contextually rather than etymologically.
in brief of the essential challenges faced by man—a concise summary of the headlines of human history in a single life, so to speak. It says much more than that Jesus made right the spiritual sums which Adam had got wrong. To discover the full meaning of the term we need first to explore further the significance attached by Irenaeus to the notion of bodily ascension. We begin by appealing to a fascinating section at the conclusion of book three, in which—while disputing with the gnostics over that very subject—he promises to call on "the entire mind of the apostles regarding our Lord Jesus Christ."64

Irenaeus argues here, inter alia, that the heretics make two critical mistakes: First, they do not find in Jesus the true centre of all God's works; second, they effectively "set the Spirit aside altogether." Both of these mistakes come from abstracting the divine agent from the man of Nazareth, whom the gnostics regard only as the dispensable instrument of the descending and ascending Word. This marginalizing of Jesus leads to a position the bishop can only describe as "homicidal." That is, by subdividing the Lord's person along the lines of their fragmented (hierarchical) cosmology and finally discarding the human element at the ascension, the gnostic vision proves ruinous to any serious notion of man's redemption or fulfillment.65

Irenaeus reverses the picture. It was Jesus himself, assisted by the Holy Spirit, who descended and ascended.66 It was Jesus himself who came to us from God and returned thence. That is, it is Jesus himself (homo verus!) who sits at God's right hand and with whom we must reckon as the agent of God. He is the mediator between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the heavenly. He is the one who presents God

64 3.16.1. There are in these last few chapters of Bk 3 about half a dozen references to recapitulation, and twice that number to the ascension.

65 16.6ff., 17.4.

to man and man to God, who in fact gives substance, shape and direction to all things. He is indeed one and the same, but rich and great," he both gathers together all things in himself and also "works them out at the proper time in perfect order and sequence." He it is who lends to creation his own relational character, rendering everything (including his own body) subject to the purposes of communion. In order to do this, however, he must in fact descend and ascend, so as to erase the fragmentation that man is bent on introducing into the cosmos. Jesus thus links fallen time with creation time in his own person, resolving the conflict between them at his own expense. A moving passage in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* makes the same point in spatial terms when it presents the crucified Christ as "inscribed crosswise" upon the entire universe.

Now it is just this—a recognition that the very hand being fixed to the cross under the centurion's watchful gaze somehow touches personally every affair in heaven and on earth, working and reworking all things in connection with God himself—that lies behind

---

67 Jesus thus becomes, in his one undivided person, the guarantee both of the unity of God's handiwork (i.e., of creation and redemption) and of the salvation of the whole man. Likewise, then, he becomes the proof of the consistent character of the one God with whom we have to do, and of the love and power of that God in keeping his promises. These are Irenaeus' primary concerns; cf. 16.6ff., 18.3, 20.1f., 24.2ff., 4.20.7.

68 Of his profundity we are given a sign "in the depth below, and in the height above"—i.e., in the virgin birth and the ascension—as the envelope around Jesus—history—which speaks of his qualification from the side of eternity, a qualification that belongs to him uniquely, "beyond all others, in himself." His generation from Mary and bodily ascension speak just as forcefully of his complete solidarity with us. Jesus is *homo verus* but not *homo tatus*. He is a stone from the earth, but one cut without hands, "the corner—one" (18.7, 19.1ff., 20.7).

69 In that way ordering and disposing it to the Father of all (*Demo*. 34). The image is borrowed from Justin (*1st Ap*. 60), but its elaboration here only restates the gist of *Adv. Haer*. 5.18.3, which indicates that our Lord "in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation.... For it is He who has power from the Father over all things, since He is the Word of God, and very man...." Cf. Col 1:17, *ta panta en auto sunesteken*, and *Demo*. 53, "through him the Father anointed and adorned all things."
Irenaeus's constant reference to recapitulation. There is more to Jesus—history than at first meets the eye. From the high ground of the ascension it can be seen that nothing is laid down by God the creator, nor gathered up by God the redeemer and consummator of creation, except in and through the life, death and resurrection of this Man. Jesus is quite literally the man for and with all men, a stranger to no corner of human experience or creaturely reality. He is the key player on every stage, the one with whom all people in all times have to do. Unlike the gnostics, in other words, Irenaeus refused to treat Jesus simply as the vehicle for a series of redemptive measures undertaken by the Logos. He saw him rather as the very alpha and omega of creative power and redemptive love. But in thus resisting the marginalization of Jesus he made with the apostles a commitment of huge metaphysical and cosmological import.

The doctrine of recapitulation tells us that in and with this one man, Jesus Christ, we are already dealing (in actual fact, not merely in the form of a blueprint or working model) with the whole story of man and with all its parts. Against such a claim our minds naturally rebel. Certainly we may find it as hard to affirm, with any real meaning, as for other reasons we may to deny. Not so Irenaeus, who rested the notion of

---

70 His earnestness here even drives him to the unnecessary supposition that Jesus lived to some 50 years of age, the "old man for old men" after whom Padre Blazon yearned in Robertson Davies' novel, *Fifth Business* (see esp. 2.22; also 3.18.7 and frag. 54). Harnack (2/278 n.1) dismisses this aspect of the recapitulation theory as "peculiar to Irenaeus, and for good reasons ... not repeated in succeeding times," but fails to inquire as to its significance. Irenaeus may indeed overreach himself at times, but we ought always to consider what he is reaching for.

71 Beginning with Adam, the "protoplast" himself (3.21ff.). It is an ontological conviction that lies behind the seemingly fanciful elaborations of the doctrine of recapitulation. Irenaeus is determined not to separate between Jesus and the Word who "governs and arranges all things" (3.16.5f.; cf. 5.18.3). That is why he is prepared to claim, e.g., that our Lord as a mere child "did fight with a hidden hand against Amalek" (3.16.4). In this light consider also the transfiguration story.

72 J. N. D. Kelly (1977:172), e.g., acknowledges this, but does not follow it up.
recapitulation on the doctrine of the ascension to create a comprehensive worldview that is both "open" and yet christologically controlled.⁷³ At the very least it must be said in his favour that he tackled the difficult issues which both his critics and his admirers now generally prefer to ignore; but then a christology not in dialogue with basic assertions about the nature of the cosmos and the destiny of man was of no use to him.⁷⁴

Many, of course, are inclined when reading Irenaeus to detour around this difficult but crucial terrain. That is generally done by appealing to the idea (introduced by the apologists but developed by Origen) of a logos asarkos, who later takes a human mode of existence in a kind of ad hoc way. But this Hellenizing construction effects what for Irenaeus could only be a highly unsatisfactory separation between the work of creation and the work of redemption, by assigning the former to the Word in his pure divinity and the latter to the Word in his historic accommodation. Such a move leaves room for doubt about the actual target or scope of redemption, which was the original bone of contention. Furthermore, it comes dangerously near to reproducing something like the divided Christ of the gnostics, which leads directly to the marginalization of Jesus as merely accidental to the Logos, and hence to creation as such. As the writings of the apologists already illustrate, Jesus the man—though he may or may not retain a central role in soteriology—certainly becomes cosmologically peripheral and ontologically problematic.⁷⁵

⁷³ Cf. Eph 1:9f., 18ff., 4:7ff. with Adv. Haer. 3.18f., e.g., where the dependence of the latter on the former is obvious.

⁷⁴ The question of the inner connection between Jesus' divine and human natures was not so prominent for Irenaeus as that of the impact of Jesus' unique divine–human person on the whole of creation. I.e., he did not occupy himself as much with how God could become man, as with its implications. Perhaps his relational ontology minimized the difficulty (cf. Brunner, 1934:258ff., who argues much the same point).

⁷⁵ See Harnack 2/202ff., 3/270, who wrongly accuses Paul of setting this train of thought going (1/326ff.).
Recapitulation then reverts to the dubious status of a theological symbol, taking on distinctly mystical overtones or disappearing altogether.

But Irenaeus himself does not employ such a device, which at best only postpones the issues sure to be raised by the ascension, and leaves dangling Christianity's sweeping soteriological claims. He steers clear of it as something far too closely akin to the dualist approach of the Greek philosophical tradition he is attacking, in which the "pure" realm of the intellect is closely associated with the divine, while both are distanced as far as possible from the (ontologically suspect) temporal and corporeal existence which is the lot of human beings. Irenaeus wants no part of this opposition, which in one form or another has continued to plague theology from Origen until the present day, generating even among orthodox treatments of redemption traces of the gnostic bias against the material world.

We must disabuse ourselves of the *logos asarkos* idea when reading *Against Heresies* or the *Demonstration*. For Irenaeus the human Jesus is not by any means a mere accommodation. If the Word does indeed accommodate himself in the most radical way to the burdens of our situation, taking on a mode of existence not by nature his own, this does not mean that Jesus comes into existence by virtue of that fact; it means that he comes to dwell with us "who knew him not," as one who has bent low that we might see and hear him.76 Inasmuch as "man" and "flesh" are alike understood dynamically,77 we

---

76 "Because, for God, the Son was the beginning before the creation of the world; but for [he was] then, when he appeared; and before that he was not for us, who knew him not" (Demo. 43).

77 For Irenaeus even *sarx/caro* is very much a relational term. The status of "the flesh" is determined and interpreted according to man's actual relationship to God (5.12.1). Hence it can often be given negative connotations—indicating the entropic form of human existence in isolation from God—without implying anything like the Greek prejudice against the material world. *Contra* Bousset (449), this was already Paul's view. It is not he with whom Irenaeus argues when claiming that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom but "can be taken for an inheritance" (5.9.4).
must certainly speak of the Word becoming man, being made incarnate—that is, becoming one of us—but that is not to say that his humanity springs from being joined to sinners. It is rather the other way around! Harnack rightly argues that Irenaeus does not add the historical Jesus to the (timeless) Greek Logos, in the manner of the apologists. Rather, as we are trying to show, he works outwards from the historical Jesus as his theological and cosmological starting-point. No separation between Jesus and the Logos is to be countenanced. He is the Word by which creation is called into existence, and by which it is also recalled from the threat of non-existence. This revolutionary perspective, just because it transcends any linear or two-dimensional grid, stretches the limits of language and pushes Irenaeus (as Robert Jenson observes) into some difficult, "violently paradoxical" formulations which can easily be misread. But his position is quite clear. Before book three closes we find him making explicit once again the same profound conclusion we attributed earlier to Paul and John, the significance of which Christian theology has been slow to digest: Jesus Christ pre-exists as a saving being, by virtue of

78 Harnack (2/262f.) is quite clear about this, though he does not perceive the extent to which Irenaeus allows it to control his entire construction; he assumes that the bishop reverts to the framework of the apologists and/or the gnostics at key points. But Irenaeus is quite consistent here. His readers are asked to recognize that all christological titles have in the first place direct reference to the historical Jesus, even where they are not immediately concerned with his redemptive work, but rather with his cosmic significance (1.9.2).

79 Robert Jenson (1982:69f.) fixes on this crucial feature of Irenaean thought and develops a christocentric cosmology that moves along similar lines. His discussion (57ff.) of the antipathy between the Judeo–Christian and Greek points of view is extremely helpful. (See 140f. on the positing of a Logos asarkos "in captivity to the timelessness axiom.") Jenson, however, conflates creaturely eternity and divine eternity in a non-Irenaean way, with the result that the whole construction passes over into panentheism (see chap. 5 below).
which "what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the being who saves should not exist in vain."\textsuperscript{80}

We should not attempt to weaken the force of this blow (even if its expression here is problematic, as we shall see) by attempting to divert it into existing Greek channels or those of later Christian conceptions. The pre-existence Irenaeus has in view is plainly not isolated to a divine element in Jesus; much less, of course, can it be made to refer to an original state uncontaminated by material existence. Nor yet is it fully accounted for along more Hebraic lines—though these show better promise—as an affirmation that Jesus is "known" by God before other persons or things, that he has priority with God and so exists more truly than those lesser things among which he eventually appears.\textsuperscript{81} This is already a relational approach, to be sure, if somewhat one-sided; moreover, it begins to make room for the Irenaean conviction that Jesus Christ is somehow truly in the midst from the very beginning, long before his visible appearance.\textsuperscript{82}

But the bishop has something still more in view, for he does wish to take into account the divinity of Christ, and especially his active role as the master of all things. What he

\textsuperscript{80} 22.3. Arguing that Jesus "summed up in himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards," Irenaeus explains that "the Word, the Maker of all things, had formed beforehand for himself the future dispensation of the human race, connected with the Son of God; God having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One. For inasmuch as he had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence....." Cf. 5.1.1, which is even more explicit.

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. \textit{Demo}. 51f. This is much preferable to saying that he pre-exists in the "mind" of God, a notion which shows traces of gnostic and neoplatonic distinctions which Irenaeus repudiated. Wingren (18f.) comments more perspicaciously that for Irenaeus the future is "already real in God" before it emerges in history, but makes no attempt to explain how such a conception is possible. (Wingren does not break loose altogether from the notion of a \textit{logos asarkos}; cf. Harnack 1/318ff.)

\textsuperscript{82} See especially \textit{Adv. Haer}. 4.5–14. "One and the same householder produced both covenants, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who spake with both Abraham and Moses, and who has restored us anew to liberty, and has multiplied that grace which is from Himself" (4.9.1).
appears to be saying is that Jesus pre-exists by virtue of the fact that everything which in any way participates in creation is qualified in terms of its actual and immediate relation to him as Lord.\textsuperscript{83} For he rules over all and reveals God to all "indifferently throughout all time."\textsuperscript{84}

Indeed, we can reach no other conclusion but that Irenaeus saw in the fundamental ordering of spatio-temporal reality a depth dimension which transcends and transforms the flattened, linear aspect which presents itself to us.\textsuperscript{85} The incarnate and ascended Son is the one who provides this depth dimension, through the richness of his Spirit-given capacity to carry out "the bountiful and comprehensive will of his Father."\textsuperscript{86} "Christ is the treasure hid in the field, that is, in this world," says Irenaeus;\textsuperscript{87} in himself he contains

\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, God pre-exists for his creation in just this way, i.e., in connection with the economy of the incarnation (cf. Demo. 47f.). That is not to say, however, that God's own existence is to be correlated, purely and simply, to "the Mystery of the world" (to borrow Jüngel's phrase).

\textsuperscript{84} 4.6.7 (and see all of 4.6 in this light). This is not to deny that pre-existence by which we point to the aseity or otherness of God as such, which the present notion indeed requires. But Irenaeus will not be drawn by false questions on that score, i.e., about the "before" of the God who sends his Son, Jesus, as the arché and telos of creation (cf. 2.28.3). The Son himself, as this very God in his going-forth, in his self-giving to creation, "possesses a generation which cannot be declared" (4.33.12). Here we have all that can be said about pre-existence in this connection.

\textsuperscript{85} This addresses a number of otherwise insoluble problems related to pre-existence by demanding a change in the way we understand time itself. It also avoids reading our time and space directly into God via the logos asarkos, as the only alternative to Greek dualism. Indeed, Irenaeus's relational view of time—in which both cyclical and linear notions are rejected as fundamentally impersonal—shows great promise for addressing the whole Aristotelian conundrum which has long bedeviled the philosophy of creation (cf. G. Jantzen 1983:572ff.).

\textsuperscript{86} 3.16.7: "... inasmuch as He is Himself the Saviour of those who are saved, and the Lord of those who are under authority, and the God of all those things which have been formed, the only-begotten of the Father, Christ who was announced, and the Word of God, who became incarnate when the fulness of time had come...."

\textsuperscript{87} 4.26.1. Though he was "pointed out" to the ancients, "His human nature could not be understood prior to the consummation" (i.e., his advent). But in the fullness of time this
"all possible novelty." But of course this position makes the realm of personal relations the primordial ontological category for both anthropology and cosmology in a most unprecedented way. It was Irenaeus's special contribution to theology to begin thinking this through.

Only with these things in view does the meaning of "recapitulation" properly unfold. The first purpose of the doctrine is to ensure that no realm whatsoever is left beyond the pale of Christ's domain, and that the integrity of the God-man is not compromised by the dictates of such autonomous times or spheres. Hence the literal sense of the word, "to collect together again," is the right place to start. But if with Harnack we thus describe Christ's work as the reunion under one head "of things unnaturally separated," estranged by the effects of sin, we give only half the picture.

On the Irenaean approach the relevance of Jesus is not confined to soteriology. His name treasure is both manifested and, in ascending, glorified. Now we know that "He is all in all: Patriarch among the patriarchs; Law in the laws; Chief Priest among priests; Ruler among kings; the Prophet among prophets; the Angel among angels; the Man among men; Son in the Father; God in God; King to all eternity. For it is he who sailed along with Noah,..." etc. (frag. 53).

88 4.34.1; cf. 2.2.5.

89 Eschatology and protology thus communicate in him; see esp. 4.20.

90 The bishop's favourite confession is 1 Cor 8:6, which affirms one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things. This is his unifying theme in 3.1–15, which he wields against the heretics on every side before coming to the section on which we have focused. The point to be taken is that the invisible and incomprehensible God has chosen to act only in and through and as the visible, i.e. Jesus Christ (3.11.5; see Demo. 5f.). Unlike the gnostic redeemer—-a mere Teacher—he is "a perfect Master for all" (2.22.4).

91 Cf. Eph 1:9f.; Adv. Haer. 3.16.6, 4.20.2.

92 Harnack 2/238 (following Molwitz; cf. Lawson 140). Harnack observes helpfully that such was Irenaeus' response to the pessimism of the gnostics, who saw "in the redemption by Christ the separation of what was unnaturally united" (cf. 272ff.).
is twofold, says the *Demonstration*, because his works are twofold.\footnote{And the two names are names of works actually wrought. For he was named Christ, because through Him the Father anointed and adorned all things, and because on His coming as man He was anointed with the Spirit of God...; and Saviour for this, that He became the cause of salvation" (par. 53). There is no divorce here between ontology and function; the Son is what he does. This entails a kind of mutual, if asymmetrical, "quiescence" between the weak and the victorious modes of his existence (3.19.3, an often misunderstood passage; see the Latin).} He did not come to repair a created unity that existed independently of himself in Adam. He came rather in a twofold way: from the standpoint of his own eternity he came as the composer and conductor of all creaturely becoming; but from the standpoint of our default he came to rewrite the score. From the "already" of his position with the Father he came as the pillar on which all things lean, yet he came in such a way as to clasp to himself what was falling away. By living and dying in a particular manner—as a man among men, to use a favourite Irenaean phrase, as *homo indecorus et passibilis*—he came even to and for the disobeyed, so as to reclaim what was his own.\footnote{The Lord then was manifestly coming to His own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by Himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred..." How then, asks Irenaeus revealingly, did the tree support him on whom it must itself lean? "The Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously, and the Word borne by the Father grants the Spirit to all as the Father wills. To some He gives after the manner of creation ... but to others, after the manner of adoption" (5.18f.; cf. 1.9.2, 3.19.2, 4.20).} And by thus joining the work of redemption with that of creation, combining these seamlessly in the one advent of his own divine–human person, he made himself truly the Lord of all, twice over.

No doubt it will already be obvious that all of this must come to rest on pneumatology, or come to nothing; on its own it can make no sense at all. Before turning to the pneumatology, however, we may take notice of the sort of interpretation that is otherwise offered. Wilhelm Bousset's well-known *Kyrios Christos* contains a stimulating account of Irenaeus and his doctrine of recapitulation. He observes how, in Christ,
the beginning appears bound up with the end, the work of redemption with the original work of creation, in a marvelous manner: *Jesus Christus, qui novissimis temporibus homo in hominibus factus est, ut finem conjungeret principio*.... It is actually true that the outset reappears in the outcome.... The line is rounded into a circle, and at the end, which is also the point of beginning, stands Jesus Christ, *vera homo et vera deus*, who sums up in himself this entire long line of development....

The outcome, however, is somehow "one step higher" than the outset, for the advent of Christ results in the mysterious "deification" of man. The circle thus becomes a spiral, an evolutionary spiral achieved by divine intervention. But now the whole business becomes problematic. Bousset reluctantly accepts from Harnack the opinion that Irenaeus' anti-gnostic stress on the continuity between creation and redemption catches him up in a troublesome tension between a backward-looking theology of restoration and a forward-looking theology of elevation. Within this ambiguity the theory of recapitulation comes out as a highly complicated "interweaving of evolution and supernaturalism"—innovative, stimulating, carried out with flair, but fanciful and mythical nonetheless.

Here is a charge that is often repeated and requires an answer. It will suffice at this point to make two observations. First, Bousset (like most other commentators) fails to make the shift to the relational categories without which the Irenaean scheme remains

---

95 1970:439 (quoting 4.20.4). This way of putting the matter, if only where the geometry is concerned, puts Irenaeus in too close a proximity to Origen, whose very different ideas we will take up in our next chapter.

96 P. 446

97 For Bousset, the latter is the one Irenaeus seems to prefer. For O. Cullman (1964:189ff., 1964:56ff.), e.g., as for John Hick, the other strand scarcely exists; there is no spiral, but rather a straight line. The whole dilemma goes back to the analyses of Duncker and Wendt, who insisted that here was a "real contradiction" in Irenaeus (Harnack, 2/274 n.1).

98 In which case, we would suggest, Bousset is too positive about this "remarkable" theologian. But then his real problem is not with Irenaeus but with Paul, whom he has tried to read through Hellenist rather than Jewish spectacles (see 446ff.).
unintelligible. A Christ who does not himself stand quite literally at the beginning and the end is certainly incapable of holding together the old and the new by coming in at the middle; on that we may agree. But the whole thrust of the doctrine of recapitulation is to insist that he does indeed stand at the beginning and the end. Second, talk of evolution is an anachronism that throws the entire discussion off track—as if Jesus had come in at the middle to move everything forwards and upwards onto a higher plane. This is a very grave distortion of Irenaeus' teaching which virtually undoes the notion of recapitulation altogether. Jesus does not show himself "as a man among men" at the middle, but at the bottom.

We note that there is remarkable agreement (even among the critics of Harnack and Bousset) that the key to Irenaeus lies in the question Cur deus homo?, but the question is an artificial one. Irenaeus does ask, Ut quid enim descendebat? Or elsewhere, Quid enim huc veniebat? But in both cases he is referring to "the descent of the saviour into this world," which has in its context quite different connotations. The emphasis here falls on the huc, on the "hither" of this world of ours in which bondage to sin and death prevails. God is a man, and a man God, from the beginning, for Jesus is the beginning. What is at issue (as the conclusion to book three makes clear) is the saviour's solidarity with a fallen race. That is the thesis Irenaeus wants to set firmly

99 Bousset 422ff., 453f.; Harnack 2/240ff. Cf. G. Aulén, 18ff., who at least argues that the answer to Cur deus homo? is considerably more complex than might be suggested by the simple response usually offered: "that man might become God."

100 2.14.7, 4.6.4. Respecting the emphatic huc, cf. esp. Demo. 38: "But God the Father was merciful. He sent His creative Word, who in coming to deliver us came to the very place and spot in which we had lost life, and brake the bonds of our letters."

101 The point is missed by Bousset (448); even Wingren waffles (84f.; but cf. 116ff.). For Irenaeus, who thinks consistently in relational terms, "man" is what he does. Hence the Son's solidarity with us cannot have any other humanity in view than fallen humanity, and there can be no other way of saving us than to share in every stage of our journey. He
against the docetic tendency of the heretics as he develops his theory of recapitulation:

"For it behoved him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that he should himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage...." We must not be misled by the ill-advised punctuation (the semi-colon) into thinking that Irenaeus had eyes only for the penetration of humanity by deity. Nor indeed was he thinking of a descending deity at all, unless by deity we mean the God-man, who consented to being made like us in every way—to being joined to the very man qui a peccato quidem in servitium tractus fuerat, a morte vero tenebatur; to man under bondage, mortis reum. Irenaeus had his eye rather on the fact that Jesus had to pass through every stage of our own downwards career, overthrowing the devil's work and "restoring to all communion with God," if the original goals of creation were to be realized.

Where then is the conflict? The only really significant conflict belongs to the story of Jesus. By presenting the incarnation as a hero's descent into enemy territory—for everything here turns on Christ's invasion of the "the land of sepulture" and his victorious

must sum up in himself the entire sixth "day" of creation, including man's bondage and death (5.23.2).

102 Oportebat enim eum qui inciperet occidere peccatum, et mortis reum redimere hominem, id ipsum fieri quod erat ille, id est hominem: qui a peccato quidem in servitium tractus fuerat, a morte vero tenebatur, ut peccatum ab homine interliceretur, et homo exiret a morte (3.18.7).

103 See 3.10.2: Omnia enim nova aderant, Verbo nove disponente carnelum adventum, uti eum hominem qui extra Deum abierat, ascriberet Deo ("... the Word arranging after a new manner the advent in the flesh, that He might win back to God that human nature which had departed from God").

104 Why does he appear only in novissimis temporibus, et non in initio? That is a query listed among those critical questions which must be answered in Adversus Haeresies (1.10.3). It is because he has chosen to take his stand at the bitter end, so to speak, to rule and to save from the bottom up. For it is just there that he exercises power over all things, including the corruption and death introduced by the devil.
return as the liberator of his people—Irenaeus sends us along a quite different track than
that suggested by the Cur deus homo? question. At the same time, and this is
altogether vital, he defends against the gnostic attack on the unity of the saviour. In the
words of Paul, "he who descended is he who also ascended": the liberating hero is none
other than the one Jesus Christ. Only when that aim is kept in view is a sound
interpretation possible.

To be sure, other questions now arise. If it was Jesus who descended, where then
did he come from, and how? Irenaeus occupies several pages arguing that Jesus, in
coming from Mary, came also from God, and in coming from God came also from Mary.
His descent consists in the fact that it is here, in the depths of our fallen world, that he
actually shows himself—that he really does come forth from God in this way and in
this "waterless place," even though he is "in his own right" creation's King Eternal.

---

105 A conflict between God and man, considered as metaphysical opposites, leads to talk
of deification; but a conflict between the king of creation, his disobedient subjects, and
"the author of transgressions" leads (as we shall see) to talk of renewed humanization.
We might add that the reason Harnack et al. are unable to give the devil his due (again,
see Aulen) in their interpretations is that there is little room for such an outsider in
metaphysical discourse.

106 Cf. Eph 4:10, Adv. Haer. 1.9.3. (see also 3.20.4, 4.34.1ff.). See appendix C for further
discussion of the restoration-elevation problem.

107 In 3.19 he discusses τεν σαρκοσιν τεσ καθαρας γεννησεος του λογου του θεου with
a view to guarding against error on either side: The Word indeed enters into our midst in
the fullest possible sense, taking from Mary our corrupt condition (sic). Yet he is not
helpless in the face of this corruption, for that generation "which is from the Most High
Father" is also his from the start. Being inherently one twice-born, of double generation,
he triumphs over sin/corruption throughout his life. See 5.14.

108 Quoniam autem est ipse proprie praeter omnes qui fuerunt tunc homines, Deus,
et Dominus, et Rex aeternus, et Unigenitus, et Verbum incarnatum... (3.19.2). The
royal Son's double generation, his coming from God and his coming from Mary, is always
carefully held together: "this stone from the earth derives existence from both the power
and the wisdom of God" (3.21.7). Cf. Demo. 55: "hereby the Son of God is proclaimed
both as being born and as being eternal King."
his appearance in the land of sepulture something of a disguise then? On the contrary, as his ascension in the flesh makes clear, it obtains "from the beginning." For there are not several independent dispensations of the Logos, but a universa dispositio in Jesus; nor are there several Christs, but one only. Though he relates to us in a variety of ways adapted to the times, it is always he himself with whom we have to do. In other words, Irenaeus pushes us from every conceivable angle to recognize that we must not look behind the Jesus who marches out from Bethlehem for another saviour. There is no Word sine carne, just one "short" Word in whom God says everything he has to say and does everything he wishes to do.

With so bold an alternative, then, does Irenaeus scorn the disconnected planes of the gnostic picture of reality, and protest against their "lowering and dividing" of the Son of God. But what of the Spirit, whom the heretics more or less paint out altogether? Before we can complete our presentation of the dynamic structures of Irenaean thought, we need to observe that it is by means of pneumatology that he confronts directly the "homicidal" aspects of the gnostic position, and goes about the task of shaping a soteriology fully in keeping with his radically christocentric point of view. Attention to this feature (too often lacking in accounts of Irenaeus) will take us some distance further into the logic of descending and ascending, and of recapitulation. For the relational view

---

109 "[N]either was Christ one and Jesus another: but the Word of God—who is the saviour of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father—was made Jesus Christ..." (3.9.3). At the very outset (1.9.2f.) Irenaeus makes his position clear over against all of the heretical systems he has summarized: "Learn then, ye foolish men, that Jesus ... is himself the Word of God."

110 See 3.21.4.; cf. 1.9.3, where he rebukes the heretics because "according to them, the Word did not originally become flesh": Oude gar ho logos kat' autous proégoumenos [principaliter] sarx gegonē. See also Demo. 51ff., 87, 97ff.; Adv. Haer. 4.20, 28.2, 33.7.
of reality we have been describing certainly requires elaboration in terms of a strong doctrine of the Spirit, and this is just what Irenaeus begins to provide, following the same method of careful attention to Jesus–history.

Touching first on the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism, and then on the pentecostal consequences that followed his ascension, Irenaeus quickly discovers in the Spirit's response to Jesus the best exposition of the latter's U-shaped course. The Lord, he says, was

commending to the Holy Spirit his own man, who had fallen among thieves, whom he himself compassionated, and bound up his wounds, giving two royal denaria; so that we, receiving by the Spirit the image and superscription of the Father and the Son, might cause the denarium entrusted to us to be fruitful, counting out the increase to the Lord.

In other words, Jesus' principal mandate in descending and ascending was to draw the Spirit into man and man into the Spirit. In this way he rescues man by allowing the Spirit to render him fruitful after all. For man (suum hominem!) is by no means dispensable, as the gnostics implied. His abortion is prevented by the medicine of the Spirit which Jesus stoops to provide: "Sustaining, and receiving, and embracing the Son of God," the human race becomes together with him the very "receptacle of all [God's] wisdom and power." The isolated and decaying atoms of our fallen race are gathered up into a single vessel of the Spirit, who becomes the mover and shaper of a humanity that is genuinely

---

111 Zizioulas (1985:109 n.109) warns against bringing in the Spirit as a deus ex machina; a serious ontology is called for. "To establish the existential link between Christ and each particular man is not easy," he says, "without a courageous application of the notion of personhood to theology." But this means "that Christology itself has to be conditioned in two ways, Pneumatologically and ecclesiologically..." (1975:440).

112 3.17.3. This passage is one of many, by the way, which makes obvious the fallacy of saying that Irenaeus made any careful distinction between the "image" and the "likeness" of God.
alive to God—that fruitful humanity which is the true image and vice-regent of God, and
which ultimately lends to the rest of creation its proper character.  

To marginalize Jesus, then, is at the same time to marginalize the Spirit, and this
is indeed homicidal; given the above, we might even say that it is cosmicidal.
Conversely, to recognize the centrality of Jesus is to recognize the need to make
pneumatology a vital component of fundamental anthropology. If it belongs to the Son
to "accustom" the Spirit to dwell even in an unreceptive world (a lesson taken from his
baptism), it belongs in turn to the Spirit to provide the harmonizing faculty which
effectively submits that rebellious world to the headship of its descending and ascending
Lord, such that the many do in fact cleave to the one in a Christ-centred community of
being (a lesson learned from Pentecost).  

Which is to say, Irenaeus presents the Spirit
as the one who universalizes the mediatorial activity of Jesus; he is the instrument and
power of recapitulation, as Jesus is the agent. Through baptism and the ascension he first
interprets Jesus' own being in relational terms, and in so doing also contradicts that self-
enclosed and self-destructive mode of being which otherwise belongs to us.

The whole pattern of thought here pertains to the realization of the
creative aims of God as expressed in Genesis 1ff., against the fragmentation—and false
harmonies—introduced by Satan; again, cf. 4.11.2, 4.20, 5.1ff., 5.35f. What we are
saying, of course, requires that ecclesiological interpretation of man-in-Christ, and of
Christ as man, to which Zizioulas refers; cf. his own discussion (1975:433ff.) on the way
in which man, personalized by and for communion, is thus able "to turn God's absence
in creation into presence."

This includes an interesting counterpoint to the biblical idea that the Spirit
enables Jesus to triumph over the fallenness of the flesh. A careful reading of this section
shows that Irenaeus has no interest in undermining that aspect, but wishes to make clear
that the ascension and its pentecostal consequences are all of a piece with the work of the
incarnation (cf. the first few lines of 17.4). Indeed, they are the work of the incarnation,
viewed through a wide-angle lens, as it were.

The very name of Christ implies "He that anoints, He that is anointed,
and the unction itself with which He is anointed" (18.3), i.e., the community of Father,
Son, and Holy Spirit into which man is drawn by the descending and ascending Christ.
Having mastered our condition by turning over to the Spirit at every point along his path
all things belonging to man, he makes them the possession of the Spirit, who stamps upon
Simply put, it is the work of Jesus to commend man and his world to the communal possibilities of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit to refer man back to Jesus as the solid ground for his own existence. Only thus, in the grasp of the two hands of God and within this highly personal conversation, is man rendered presentable to the Father as such.16 Once again, we must not suppose that this arrangement is a strictly soteriological one. Irenaeus, by allowing the ascension and Pentecost to serve as a commentary on Genesis 1, develops the thesis that it is of the very essence of man to advance towards God through Christ and in the Spirit.17 Freedom in and for this advancement—understood as an actual increase of being which flows from a common participation in the communal life of God—becomes for him the conditio sine qua non of human existence. Only the man continually fortified by "the increase of God" is the man of God's making, the man in God's image who is the priest-king of creation.18 And

themselves a spiritual character, a fitness for communion. Thus the Spirit becomes the "dew" that cools us against the consuming fire (17.3).

16 See esp. 3.19.3; cf. 4.pref.4, 5.32ff. Christ, who is the head of the Spirit, gives the Spirit to be the head of man (5.20.2). The Spirit, then, is "the ladder of ascent to God" by means of communion with Christ (3.24.1), who ascends "to the height above, offering and commending to His Father that human nature [hominem] which had been found...." Here is a humanity only conceivable in communal terms, as the passage goes on to show (3.19.3).

17 Cf.4.11.1f. "For He formed him for growth and increase, as the Scripture says: 'Increase and multiply.'" Adding a purely logical point, he argues that it is of the nature of what is made to receive increase, inasmuch as it has a beginning: "God is truly perfect in all things ... but man receives advancement and increase towards God." This approach is again rooted in Hebraic rather than Hellenic soil, for it is by no means confined to moral freedom, or to intellectual advancement, or to a mystical experience, but embraces the whole man and his environment too.

18 Bousset (444) is well wide of the mark in thinking that Irenaeus is "completely determined by rational—apologetic concerns" in his appeal to the idea of human freedom, in keeping with "all the idealist philosophy of that time." The failure to connect liberty with fruitfulness, and both with a communal participation in God, is one of the oversights which set Bousset off on the wrong track (422ff.). All these concepts are flattened out by their isolation from each other, which is made inevitable by the absence
because Irenaeus holds soteriology and ontology together in this way, the notion of fruitfulness or increase combines with that of recapitulation to form the axis of his worldview. He understands creation to be just what God makes of it in Christ, and what God makes of it is something which enjoys the liberty to advance towards himself.  

Failure to grasp this point is fatal for any treatment of Irenaeus. The ultimate principles of being must be read out of Jesus-history, in order to generate a genuine alternative to gnosticism. When this is done the resulting ontology of creation assumes a dynamic, trinitarian form. The Son "grants the reality of being," says Irenaeus, and through the Spirit orders it according to his own character: the character of being drawn into the ever-increasing fullness of life that is with the Father. The specifically soteriological feature, of course, is the peculiar route which the Son himself takes in bestowing the Spirit of life on what is being made. His U-shaped history tells of the need to incorporate redemption within the act of creation, and displays the impress of the fall upon both creature and Creator. It is in this connection that we find we must speak

119 Wingren (28) points out that "what Irenaeus was attempting to undertake was nothing less than the interpretation of words such as grow, growth, and so on, terms which, for an interpretation of man are central to the New Testament." Yet we might also turn this around and say that he attempts to interpret the whole of reality in terms of his pneumatological concept of growth, i.e., "fruitfulness." How contrary this is to the Greek point of view, which associates becoming strictly with corruptibility! The eucharistic connection we will develop below.

120 I.e., into "all possible novelty"! See Demo. 5: "Since then the Word establishes, that is to say, gives body and grants the reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of the powers; rightly and fittingly is the Word called the Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God.... [Here he appeals to 1 Cor 8:6 and Rom 8:15ff.] Now the Spirit shows forth the Word ... and the Word utters the Spirit..., and leads and draws man to the Father." He goes on in the next paragraph to unfold this trinitarian economy in just the way we have been describing.

121 The fall determines only the shape, not the fact, of Jesus-history. Cf. 4.12.4: "For He who has brought in the end has Himself also wrought the beginning...; it being customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction." Zizioulas (1975:434 n.1) notes that Maximus is the first to state explicitly that the fact of Jesus is not contingent upon the fall. Yet we must not attempt to interpret the fact without careful attention to the shape, as we are trying to
not simply of his headship over the advancing creation, but of ana-kephalaiosis; for the way of the Son must address the fact that there are those who object to the entire enterprise.

Indeed, we may well say that recapitulation represents for Irenaeus a kind of moral-ontic warfare waged by the Creator along the way of his own creative act. For what is the fall but a devilish ellipsis in creation's coming-to-be, caused by the absence of the Spirit, whose powers of increase through communion man has spurned? This ellipsis it is incumbent upon Christ to remove. Descending, he stands in the gap in order to foil the enemy who sounds the retreat; he makes himself the avenue of the Spirit even from the depths of the abyss. That is, the Son takes up his position as the one with whom and through whom the whole of creation converses with the Father, in such a way as to accommodate the brokenness of our response. In ascending he overcomes this brokenness, which signals our fatal defection from the Spirit, transforming the fading cacophony of competing tongues into a coherent offering of praise. And by means of this twofold relation to our world (which is both sequential and supra-sequential) he secures for us an eternal mode of existence against which the forces of alienation are unable to prevail. The dissonance of demonic objections to God's handiwork is cancelled out by show.

122 R. A. Norris (1966:73) points out how Irenaeus "formally repudiates the idea that creation can be understood as God's moulding or shaping of a resistant 'matter.'" Yet the business of creation, we must say, clearly does involve such a wrestling with resistant material—the material being man and the resistance spring from his option for non-being.

123 Irenaeus employs the analogy of Jonah and the whale (3.20.1f.; cf. esp. 4.11.2, 38.3, 5.1.1). Wingren is very helpful here, insomuch as he sees clearly that "man's growth ... actually is God's act of creation;" man as we know him is therefore "on the way" (33). Should "this function of growth or receptivity [to God] cease, man's humanity also ceases" (210); but the Son wages war with the devil to fulfill the Creator's work (see esp. p. 121). Wingren's analysis suffers, however, from a thin pneumatology, which shortchanges his christology as well.
Jesus—history, by him in whose descending and ascending the original notes of creation are found to resonate already with the harmonics of redemption.\footnote{124}{The musical analogy (of which Irenaeus himself is fond) brings to mind the opening pages of J. R. R. Tolkien’s \textit{The Silmarillion}. By now it should be evident, by the way, that on our view of recapitulation there is no need to make any contrast between the idea of “going over the ground again” and that of “comprehension in unity,” such as Lawson (143) finds necessary. Where relational categories are employed, the happy ambiguity of the Greek prefix may be allowed to stand, preserving the distinction between soteriology and ontology without pulling them apart.}

It is the combination of christology and pneumatology that creates room for an \textbf{open} ontology, an ontology that can be soteriologically determined. Here, however, we must question the propriety of the link Irenaeus draws between Christ's pre–existence as saviour and the calling into being of the rest of creation. The risk of a new determinism, and with it the collapse of relationality, arises unless it is made completely clear that pre–existence and mutuality of influence are not contradictory notions. Creation does not come into existence in order to prevent the saviour from saving in vain; the saviour saves because creation proves to have need of his salvation. Given the inherent danger in christology of generating a false, \textit{non–}pneumatological universalism—\textit{in short}, a christomonism—the question is far from insignificant.\footnote{125}{We shall have to criticize theologians from Origen to Barth on the matter of confusing soteriology and ontology. Forster (138) points out that it is to avoid the gnostic \textit{unreality of history} that Irenaeus reconceives history around Jesus—rather than projecting him backwards or upwards into some timeless eternity. Yet Forster also suggests that the doctrine of recapitulation threatens to swallow history up after all. If it does so threaten, it is precisely at this point.}

But the main direction of Irenaean thought is a safer one. If to be is in fact to bear the fruit of communion in the Spirit, then it is in just this way—as the "head" of the Spirit and therefore as the champion of free and genuine human being—that the Son "goes before" the creation and provides for it a footing with God.\footnote{126}{Yet as it happens this going–before does indeed have a soteriological dimension; ascending involves descending. Note here that eschatology and protology do communicate. Receiving "power from the Father over our life," Jesus brings it down to
the Spirit are not marginalized.

Just here the business of deification also requires and receives a proper explanation. Let it be noted that we would not really be saying enough to satisfy Irenaeus if we took up instead the common position that it is God who descends and man who ascends, echoing the Athanasian dictum: "God became man that man might become God." This shorthand expression is potentially misleading, particularly where anthropology is to be given a pneumatological cast. Above all, it is too easily twisted around into something amenable to the gnostic soteriology, namely, that it is the condition of being human—rather than the human condition—which must in the end be overcome. But man does not ascend into the care of his eternal Comforter in order to be spirited away, but rather to be planted on his own proper ground! That ground is the creature's communion with God in and through the person of Jesus, who descends and ascends in order to render such communion possible in spite of the fall.

us who are afar off (cf. Demo. 52, 97; Adv. Haer. 3.22.3, 5.1.1, 20.2, etc.). Understood from this standpoint the pre-existence of Jesus is not "so bizarre a doctrine" as A. T. Hanson (1982:92) imagines it to be.

127 V. Lossky (1978:137) puts this in the mouth of both Irenaeus and Athanasius, as something "repeated by the holy Fathers and theologians of every age." Strictly speaking, however, not even Athanasius put it quite like that. In Inc. 54 we read that the Word "was made man that we might be made God [theopoïēthômen]; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father...." Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Prot. 1.84 (Pelikan 1/155): "the Logos of God became man so that you might learn from a man how a man may become God."

128 Not that Athanasius took such a position, of course, but his more Hellenic construction, with its Logos who is not-yet-Jesus, left room for this error (cf. also Ep. ad Adelph.; Con. Ar. 1/38ff., Gentes 40ff., Inc. 41ff.). Wingren observes (211) that for Athanasius "virginity or celibacy is the highest expression of the Christian life," whereas in Irenaeus there is "absolutely no trace of any such ascetic ethic."

129 Cf. Demo. 47f.: "Because to created things the Father of all is invisible and unapproachable, therefore those who are to draw near to God must have their access to the Father through the Son." This is enunciated as a general principle, but is applied in a specifically soteriological context because it is by way of redemption that creation is actually achieved. Irenaeus appeals fittingly to Psa 110, with its rich combination of such imagery as we have been employing—that of a temporal warfare qualified by eternity.
We can be quite sure, in fact, that Irenaeus had nothing in view that would appeal to the gnostics when he insisted that "the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ ... did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself." This saying must not be read anachronistically, through the lenses supplied by those later theologians who were inclined to make of the doctrine of theopoiēsis, as it came to be called, a notion which gradually left less and less room for a truly creaturely existence. Irenaeus, whose task it was to oppose the homicidal tendencies of the gnostics, would not have us move in so ambiguous a direction. God indeed becomes man, but it is the God–man who descends and ascends in order to meet the exigencies of that fleshly condition which is ignorant of the Spirit. He who is posited by God as the Man of the Spirit posits himself again as a Man in need of the Spirit, that man in need of the Spirit (homo tantus) might share after all in the Man of the Spirit. He who is the pure Word spoken personally by God at the heart of creation

130 Book 5, preface; cf. esp. 3.19.1: "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.... But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by the incorruptible...?" (See also 3.10.2, 22.1).

131 Thus faith acknowledges three things—not two—regarding the Son: carnalem adventum, et Deum, et hominem (the last with the parousia in view, 5.14.4). Only with reference to the descent–ascent differential between the carnalem adventum and the hominem could we speak meaningfully of a Logos asarkos, but that would be an analytical contrivance requiring careful qualification. It is, however, this differential that is immediately in view when Irenaeus speaks of the incarnation, though the underlying God–man union remains the ultimate ground of our salvation.

132 Cf. 3.9.3. Once this non–linear concept is grasped the problem with which Harnack (2/283ff.) wrestles is put in a different light. Likewise the more insightful ideas of Cullmann (1963:188ff.) are rescued from a fatal weakness. He is quite right that "already at the very beginning" the Word is "by his very nature divine Man"—which is why we must not work with a strictly linear view of time, which drives a huge wedge between this "heavenly Man" and the earthly Jesus! Unless we make the Irenaean shift such a view can only relapse into dualism (witness Hanson 77ff.).
willingly agrees for our sake to be the Word which sounds forth even in Nazareth, from whence no good thing otherwise comes. He whose generation is uniquely from God—the stone cut without hands—submits to sharing as well in that fallen generation which comes from Adam. He submits to becoming man under the power of death, in order that the shadow—men who live under the power of death "might contain the Word, and ascend to him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God."

Here is the proper framework for interpreting Irenaeus's famous soteriological equation, as well as his talk of that genuine "promotion [anodos, ascensus] into God" of which the heretics, he says, wish to defraud us. What the Spirit enables Jesus to be, whether in descending or ascending, is Man—in—union—and—communion—with—God; and that is what we are to become, as the same Spirit raises us up with Jesus in order to "bear God" in the roots of our being on behalf of all creation. This is divinization, to be sure, but it is also what being made human is all about. For it is indeed a particular vision of man (one impossible on any Hellenizing approach) that Irenaeus is expounding, a vision largely inspired by reflection on the bodily ascension of Jesus.

---

133 What is remarkable to Irenaeus—unlike the gnostics—is not the fact that the Word should be expressed in human terms, for that is what the Word is, as well as being God (3.20.4). What is remarkable is that this pure Word should be so expressed in our midst, becoming visible to us within the terms of our fallenness; that God should produce "a community of union between God and man" that reaches even into this dark world. That is how he reads the prologue to John, e.g. (1.9.2f.; cf. 10.3, where he poses the question as to why the Word caro factum est, et passus est).

134 See 3.19.1, 5.1.1. Cf. 5.8.1: Believers are even now being gradually accustomed by the Spirit capere et portare Deus—and "not indeed sine carne"! Wingren's comments (206ff.) are very useful in this whole area. He insists that deification—which is not an Irenaean term, just as Cur Deus homo? is not an Irenaean question—"coincides with man's 'becoming man.'" Zizioulas (1975:438ff.) is also quite clear about divinization as humanization.

135 This casts further light on the fact that Irenaeus is little troubled by the "how" of God's manhood. He comes at the problem from the other end: the nature of man is interpreted sub specie Jesu Christi. Man is comprehended, therefore, not so much in terms of his natural distance from God—which is already accommodated in the insistence that Adam's race is only human being "on the way"—as in terms of the invitation to that self—
demonstrates to the complete discomfort of gnosticism that man, the whole man, has a place in the Father's house; that redemption is not the reversal of creation, but its affirmation and consummation; that salvation does not make us something other than man, but makes us rather to be man in another and truer way, namely, in the Spirit.

The descending and ascending Jesus in fact removes every barrier we have thrown up against the possibility of life in the Spirit, conferring eternity upon our temporality by knitting together for us what has become subject to decay. In short, he applies his own genuine humanity to our inhumanity, "re-forming the human race" and precluding the crude abortion of his own handiwork. The strong emphasis that Irenaeus lays on the commixtio et communio Dei et hominis, and on the consequent incorruptibility of the latter, is thus anything but the triumph of "an essential bit of Hellenistic piety," as some would have it. It points instead to the triumph of the Judeo–Christian confidence in the high destiny of creation as the habitation of God, and of man (body and soul) as the imago Dei, based on what happens to Jesus.

But Irenaeus was not content simply to affirm that the Christian gospel proclaims transcending communion with God which is his true birthright and the very essence of God's creative Word. Cf. Wingren 87ff., Zizioulas 435ff.

He mediates between God and man "through many dispensations, lest man, falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist" (4.20.7). Instead, those who believe receive increase "from the perfect One" (5.1.1). The abortion reference is taken from the conclusion to Book 3, where Irenaeus is actually throwing back at the gnostics their self–opinion, i.e., as based on the implications of their own theological and cosmological commitments; we have used it differently, but not inconsistently (see 3.25.6; for the above, see also 3.19.3, 20.2, 4.24.1).

Bousset 430. It is rather the result of taking Jesus–history as his starting–point and sticking with its implications against the dictates of prevailing philosophies. That the gospel should thus be found to speak even to the infinitely poorer hopes of Hellenistic religion can hardly be held against the integrity of the Irenaean approach! (While Bousset does try to balance Harnack's criticisms here by suggesting that Irenaeus struggles to good effect against the much more radical dualism of Paul, he too is forced to impose glaring inconsistencies on Irenaeus.)
redemption of, rather than from, the creaturely. At the same time he began to explore a way of conceiving how this can be so. If so positive a view is to have any cash value this indeed is necessary, and Irenaeus had put himself in a position to attempt it. Recognizing that redemption actually coincides with creation in the dialectic of Jesus-history, he pressed beyond the self-contradictory alternatives of restorationism (which ultimately denies history) and survivalism (which absolutizes it) towards what might be called a "transfigurational" approach. This is an approach fully in keeping with the open ontology we have been describing. Man as determined by Jesus—that is, man as "found in God," enfolded within the divine communio—enjoys all the liberties of sonship to God. He is, as the ascension shows, master rather than servant of his own creaturehood; the cosmos itself belongs to him, in and for his movement toward God.\textsuperscript{138} In Christ it becomes his very nature, inasmuch as he has his being in communion, to produce the fruit of eternity out of spatio-temporal becoming. The Spirit enables him to grant increase to what is barren, wholeness to what is fragmented, depth of being to what is passing away, freshness and vitality to what is otherwise lifeless. In other words, man in Christ "redeems the time," to use Paul's expression, for all things become subject to his will.\textsuperscript{139}

Irenaeus captures the dynamic here with a very simple analogy, sticking closely to his personalist framework: As the living inherit the goods of the deceased, so the descending and ascending Lord, in the company of those who embrace him, takes possession of our inverted and decaying world through "the vivifying Spirit."\textsuperscript{140} By

\begin{footnotes}
\item[138] An illustration of this can be taken from Irenaeus's teaching that Christ's body "budded forth" from (the) Spirit (\textit{Demo.} 59, 71); indeed, being God he is Spirit (\textit{Adv. Haer.} 3.10.2).
\item[139] See 4.5.1, 5.9.4, and 5.35f.; cf. Wingren, xivf., who also argues that recapitulation and consummation are realized through man in Christ.
\item[140] The logic with which Irenaeus is working here is set out in 3.22.4. a passage (connecting Eve and Mary) most find hopelessly obscure, but which can be easily explained along these lines. It is unfortunate, however, and one of his shortcomings, that
\end{footnotes}
making the Spirit to be the **head of man**, he enables man to share with God a perichoretic mode of existence which is able to override every form of alienation or fragmentation which the discontinuities of his fallen condition have thrust upon him.141 Here and in this way—which is the way of death, resurrection, and ascension—man emerges as a finished work, and the world enters with him into the liberty of his uninhibited conversation with God. Here and in this way the time of fallen man is exposed to eternity and its dissipating character is overcome; even our corruptible flesh is transposed into the higher key of the Spirit. For what is inherited and liberated by Jesus is none other than the world and the man we know. That is the significance of ascension in the flesh as the antidote to gnosticism; that indeed is the import of recapitulation. What Jesus commits to the Spirit, what therefore belongs to eternity, is time itself and this history of ours, even if it belongs only in this mysterious, roundabout way: namely, by the descending and ascending of the Word.142

From this angle it becomes obvious just how important it is that descending and ascending be not pulled apart. If descending is the Son's movement parallel to that of a

---

he does not offer many abstractions of his analytical approach for the sake of greater clarity.

141 "For through Him we see, and hear, and speak" (5.20.2; see 3.17.2, 5.9.1ff.). Irenaeus points to supernatural gifts and miracles in the ecclesial community as an accessible witness to this transcending reality (2.32.4, 5.6.1), but notes later that on the basis of the recapitulating Word the Spirit is poured out in a variety of ways "even from the creation of the world to its end" (4.33.15). For it is the Spirit—the heavenly—who bestows the things of eternity on what has been formed—the earthly—so as to render the latter an inheritance for the kingdom (5.9.3f.).

142 *Tauta de* [i.e., even the "seed" that rots in the ground!] klēronomeitai hupo tou Pneumatos, metapherōmena eis tên basileian tou ouranou (5.9.4). Cf. 5.12.4: "Now the final result of the work of the Spirit is the salvation of the flesh. For what other visible fruit is there of the invisible Spirit, than the rendering of the flesh mature and capable of incorruption?" See esp. 5.30.4 to the end, where we read, e.g., that the resurrected and ascended Lord "will Himself renew the inheritance of the earth, et reintegrabit mysterium gloriae filiorum" (5.33.1).
falling, rebellious world—the movement by which we know him as part of our own
dissipating history—ascending is the great reversal and recovery of that history, the
consummatio mundi, which he achieves in his self-offering to the Father through the
Spirit. Once again, these are not merely sequential, as they necessarily appear to us on
the narrow stage of our own history. That is, they are not simply events which happen
to Jesus, as if they were beyond his control. By the power of the Spirit they are
concomitant dimensions of his own (cross-shaped!) existence, by which he makes
himself, even as one of us, the cornerstone of that fruitful creation which lives to God.
Descending—and ascending is the manner by which he exercises his own judgment of
good and evil on behalf of our world, so as to effect in himself a costly separation
between them, in which the option for life triumphs. If descending and ascending were
to be strictly sequentialized (i.e., externalized) by an impersonalist ontology, there could
be no harvest from among fallen man. It is the dualist option that would then prevail
after all.

If the gnostics wish to divide man, flesh and spirit, and so to conquer (i.e. do away
with) him, Irenaeus sees that Jesus divides man in terms of good and evil, that he might
conquer—i.e., reinte grate—him for the sake of the kingdom (5.6.1; on this separation see
e.g. 1.10.1, 3.25, 4.4, 4.20.2, 5.27f.). That this work must be carried out internally, by
way of recapitulation, is one of those basic insights which set Irenaeus leagues above his
contemporaries as a theologian (cf. Torrance 1988:31ff., 156).

The descending into corruptibility is "swallowed up" in the ascending to incorruptibility
(3.19.3; cf. John 10:18), though the literal, sequential events are not thereby denied or
abandoned, which would mean a rejection of the whole scheme and acceptance of
gnosticism. (The triumph of redeemed over fallen temporality through Jesus' heavenly
conversatio was hinted at in the transfiguration, 4.33.11. Cf. also Demo. 45: "his
sufferings are our ascension on high.")
which has also been sold short, in most cases, along with his christology. What remains to be settled on this score we will leave (appropriately) to the very last, but one essential observation now will help us bring the present discussion to an end. Let us admit straightaway that, without the relational ontology towards which Irenaeus struggles, talk of a *consummatio mundi* in connection with Jesus must seem an absurd religious encroachment into cosmology, whether to the modern mind or to that of the ancients. But if, as we have claimed, the entire project of Irenaeus turns on establishing the claims of Jesus–history over the whole of history, then the bold simplicity of his ultimate vision will come as no surprise: The concluding chapter of *Against Heresies* actually speaks of the renewed heaven and earth as that true "plantation" in which the Saviour is seen *everywhere*, "according as they who see him shall be worthy."

This is a most telling feature respecting the Irenaean scheme of things. It is the final, decisive rejection of that marginalization of Jesus which characterizes heretical

---

145 Indeed, the mss of *Adv. Haer.* were themselves for a long time "sold short" quite literally, with the suppression of the final five chapters (presumably because of their allegedly naive millenarianism)!

146 The gnostics, at any rate, preferred to think of the consummation as taking place "when all that is spiritual has been formed and perfected by *gnōsis*" (1.6.1). Irenaeus naturally had other ideas. Harnack (2/294f.) thinks that the eschatology set out in book 5 does not correspond to his christological theories but appears rather "as a remnant of antiquity directly opposed to the speculative interpretation of redemption." He is again mistaken, however; most of Irenaeus's eschatology shows a high level of integration with his larger project (cf. Bousset 443).

147 5.36.1. The textual variant ("God" for "saviour") is misleading; see Harvey's comments *in loc.* and cf. 4.20.9.

148 Thus the *visio dei* is realized in a full–blooded *communio Christo* which bends the very universe to its own ends. Read in this way—as an indication of a universe structured by the capacities of its inhabitants to enjoy God in Christ, 5.36 sheds its fanciful look. Bousset (426f.) nearly grasps this but is stopped short by his iconic conception of Irenaeus's "mystical piety of deification." Even Lawson thinks of the *visio* as the intellectual side of salvation, having failed to see that Irenaeus's Logos doctrine is not Greek (154ff.).
theology. It is also a way of insisting on the primacy of the personal, without falling back into philosophical abstractions. For surely it is only where an ontology of communion has been unreservedly adopted in anthropology and cosmology alike that such a thing is even remotely conceivable! But indeed, recapitulation itself can and should be understood as the triumph of the personal over those impersonal, atomistic tendencies introduced in Eden as objections to creation which have increasingly characterized our temporal existence. And how could such a triumph avoid taking just this form, the form of one particular Person who himself is seen everywhere: one so profoundly personal that in and through the Spirit he is able to personalize his fellows, drawing them into the immediacy of his own dialogue with the Father and opening up their artificially closed universe to the possibilities of communion?

This final stroke may seem over-bold, but it points to the fact that Irenaeus was not at all inclined to serve up such abstractions as have become commonplace in modern theology, which tries to house Jesus within its own prefabricated cosmological and ontological structures—already determined along formal and impersonal lines. Is it not by reason of these precommitments that recapitulation is a notion which has now been pushed more or less to the periphery of theological debate about the transcendentals

149 Setting aside, i.e., the absurdly one-dimensional (sic) thinking that certain academics have been indulging in of late—Prof. Tipler's version of "Omega Point" theory being a case in point, which apart from fascinating scraps of physics is interesting only as a kind of inverted gnosticism. If since Faraday we have been struggling to make room even in the physical sciences for new conceptualities built along relational lines, and have eventually been forced to include man in the equation, it is high time that we began including the whole man!

150 The notion of "fulfilling, extending, and widening" (4.13.3) is basic to the Irenaean outlook: "that which is made must receive both beginning, and middle, and addition, and increase" (4.11.2); man will "always possess something towards which he might advance"—i.e., God (4.20.7). Notice how this ontology of freedom is qualified: "the more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our liberator had been implanted within us" (4.13.3)! All of this brings to mind Ezekiel's vision of the new temple (41:7).
possibilities of creation, and that the *consummatio mundi* has been reinterpreted in terms of curiously vague visions of a future in which Jesus of Nazareth is increasingly difficult to spot. But what Irenaeus has to say about the consummation is in the first place not so much a statement about the world as about Jesus, the great mediator and the judge of all people. It is not so much a way of articulating a Christian vision for the future of the world as a way of insisting that the Spirit is calling the future back, and the past forward, to place all within reach of that one Man who stands squarely at the centre of the world's every God–given possibility. In keeping with everything else we have discussed, his eschatology is a way of pointing to Jesus–history as the means by which God himself is the Lord of creation, "possessing the beginning, the end, and the mean of all existing things." Just here, perhaps, we find ourselves in a position to say what most needs to be said in order to bring the picture as a whole into its proper focus: namely, that the doctrine of recapitulation appears to serve as a sort of theological shorthand for what is essentially a *eucharistic model of reality*. For the creaturely world as such, on Irenaeus's view, falls entirely within the dynamic of that personal mediation with God provided by him who descends and ascends. It has its true existence only within the unbounded possibilities of its doxological conversion——through, with, and in Christ——into something fitted for communion with God. This is what can be seen quite clearly from the high ground pointed out to us in the ascension, attention to which results in a

---

151 Ironically enough, such developments most often begin by attempting to substitute pneumatology for christology.

152 See 3.24–25. God establishes all things by His Word and binds them together by his Wisdom, i.e., by Christ and the Spirit. In this way (here Irenaeus employs the words of Plato in a most un–Platonic context) the one God possesses "'the beginning, the end, and the mean of all existing things, [and] does everything rightly, moving round about them according to their nature,'" his goodness leading and his justice following after.
genuinely eucharistic way of thinking. That way of thinking crystallizes in the concept of anakephalaiōsis, by means of which Irenaeus effectively portrays Jesus-history as a priestly movement which impinges sovereignly and triumphantly, in an epicletic way, on every aspect and corner of cosmic history.  

But what does all this do to, or rather for, the doctrine of the church? We need now postpone no longer our look at the bishop's ecclesiology, which resonates fully with the conclusion just reached.

**Eucharistic Ecclesiology**

The ecclesiology of Bishop Irenaeus has for the most part been buried by the more powerful currents which flowed around it in the history of dogmatics. Perhaps one reason for this unfortunate fact is his admirable success in maintaining that New Testament balance which keeps the church both central and peripheral; at any rate, the subtlety of Irenaean ecclesiology, which is highly integrated with the wider horizons of his work, is often overlooked. This is a great pity, the more so since his thoughts on the subject, if naturally quite primitive in expression, were also unhampered by the whole tangle of self-generating problems which developed along with the creeping institutionalism to which we earlier referred. As for Irenaeus's alleged contribution to the same, we will come to that in a moment. But we must begin by insisting that there are greater things to be gleaned from this early father than theories about apostolic succession and primacy, or the emergence of a "canon of truth," or matters touching the real presence debate, or the

153 When descending and ascending are understood just so—as a priestly movement at the heart of Jesus' own existence, culminating in an offering of praise which he himself presents to the Father (3.19.3)——recapitulation passes from an artificial, ultimately incomprehensible, theological device to a potent worldview. In the last analysis, then, we must side decisively with the eucharistic approach to Irenaeus represented by Zizioulas (1985: 78ff.), even if we think that the course pursued by Irenaeus owes rather more to reflection on Jesus-history than Zizioulas suggests.
prevailing ecclesiological metaphors in the second century. In view of what we have already discovered, it is quite right to expect more than this; nor are we disappointed. Of course, we cannot hope to offer a comprehensive outline here, but there are three primary characteristics of Irenaean ecclesiology, following directly from the foregoing discussions, which require to be noted. We mean to develop each of these in turn, though they are closely linked and can scarcely be separated.

The first emerges in the fact that the Pauline notion of a Christ-centred koinōnia is certainly retained by Irenaeus as the ontological backbone for ecclesiology. What fascinates him about the church is how "we, being many, [should] be made one in Christ Jesus." If the church is the church, in distinction from the world and from the gatherings of the heretics, it is because "communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it." For this reason he can even describe the church as paradisus in hoc mundo, concluding that it alone offers such fruit (doctrinally and otherwise) as is truly edible to man. Of course, given the ultimate cosmological vision towards which Irenaeus builds, it can be no surprise to find that this same communion motif dominates his ecclesiology. We have already intimated that the former relies to a considerable extent upon clues provided by the latter, which also supplies it with powerful empirical support—-for it

---

154 See Kelly 192, e.g., or Pelikan 1/144f.

155 3.17.2, 24.1 (in eo est disposita communicatio Christi, id est, Spiritus sanctus, arhra incorruptelae). We will turn to the pneumatological point shortly. It is no accident, by the way, that Irenaeus, while laying his cards on the table in the latter part of Bk 3, hastens to introduce into his discussion the subject of ecclesial being—-for him, the only ontically sound modus vivendi in this fragmented world of ours.

156 Plantata est enim Ecclesia Paradisus in hoc mundo: see 5.20, which pursues the thought of 3.24.1. This passage connects the very idea of paradise with the summing up of all things in Christ himself; it is by virtue of participating together in him, as those empowered by the Spirit for a new kind of seeing and hearing and speaking, that the church is Paradise "in this world." As for the heretics, "everything connected with these men is unreal" (4.33.5)!
should not escape our notice that here the Irenaean point of view is grounded in experience as well as in the biblical witness. Indeed, we can only suppose (with Professor Zizioulas) that his whole project was nurtured and shaped by insights arising from the actual intimacies of ecclesial fellowship, as the positive context of his reflections on the significance of Jesus-history. At all events, his understanding of what comprises ecclesial reality is integral to his larger vision, as we shall see.

This focus on *communio* must be set over against what is commonly said about Irenaean ecclesiology. Harnack, for example, supposes that the bishop—having inherited a simple, non-theological notion of the church as an aggregate of spiritual individuals who commune in common convictions and a common destiny—was forced in doing battle with the gnostics to betray this original purity in favour of ideas which led inevitably to the entrenchment of an externalized, "Catholic" conception of the church. This emerging view, that the church is nothing but "the visible communion of those holding the correct apostolic doctrine," did not yet hold complete sway; but it now began to gain the upper hand. Especially by pointing to an episcopal transmission of the apostolic *magisterium*, Irenaeus's defensive ecclesiology contributed heavily to the process of secularization, in

---

157 See e.g. 4.34.1, 5.34.3; cf. Zizioulas 1985:80, Bousset 429. Whereas it was his dispute with the gnostics that forced Irenaeus to embark on a consideration of the wider implications of the ascension, this speculative project must (and does) lean for support on the empirically accessible component that is found in the actual experience of ecclesial *koinōnia*—which, in turn, is better understood in the light of these reflections. We have already observed that such a combination of the theoretical and the empirical is fundamental to Irenaean epistemology.

158 Indeed, so thoroughly has he connected the unique corporate life of the church with the revelation of God's fundamental design for creation that it is often difficult to say where the dividing lines between cosmology, anthropology and ecclesiology fall. But then a trinitarian ontology of communion, in which every genuine possibility of creaturely becoming is understood (in the light of Jesus-history and its ecclesial consequences) to derive from the vitality of persons-in-relation, necessarily holds these together.
spite of his own frequent repetition of more primitive motifs. But such a picture, even if it captures something of the use to which Irenaeus was subsequently put, badly misrepresents his actual achievements. In the first place, with respect to the more primitive line of thought Irenaeus did not hold to anything so naïve as Harnack suggests. If he was fond of speaking about "the communion of the brethren" or the activity of the Spirit, that was no substitute for serious ecclesiology but an expression of his most systematic themes, and already a primary line of defense against heretics and schismatics. Nor, in the second place, did his appeals to the church as the locus of truth, or to its overseers as guardians of the truth, comprise dangerously independent lines of argument, as Harnack imagines. On the contrary, even the institutional strands of his ecclesiology were thoroughly embedded in his ontology of koinonia.

In order to resolve this issue satisfactorily it is most important to remind ourselves of the relationship between truth and communion in Irenaean thought. The knowledge of God, he tells us, is fellowship with God, made possible by the grace of God's tangible self-giving in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this knowledge (which means nothing less than "to enjoy his goodness") is itself life and existence, as John's Gospel teaches us. In other words, the truth with which Irenaeus concerns himself is not merely propositional, but

---

159 2/77ff. Harnack allows that Irenaeus himself retained a strong emphasis on the Spirit and did not employ an openly hierarchical construction. The primitive notions and the new ideas existed side by side, and more or less independently; but it was the latter which prevailed in future generations.

160 See 3.11.9, e.g., where against the private fancies of the heretics he protests that the church is a prophetic community (here cf. Lawson, 252ff.). We must pass over the question of what Irenaeus inherited from his immediate predecessors, other than to say that the notion of "the personal Christianity of the individual Christian"—from which the idea of the church on earth was not yet fully detached, says Harnack (2/73)—has more in common with post-enlightenment Protestantism than with early Christian faith. We will return to this point in a moment.
ontological; it is the truth of being, and being is understood as love and communion.\footnote{4.20.5; cf. John 17:3. Zizioulas discusses the evolution of these revolutionary concepts in patristic philosophy (which here owes a great deal to Irenaeus in particular) in chap. 2 of \textit{Being as Communion}.

This momentous adjustment sets the whole matter on an altogether different footing, raising a variety of issues, great and small, for Irenaeus to deal with in his own context, and even more for the rest of us. But just at the moment we need simply insist that the truth question is already bound up with the communion motif from the outset. Thus it is quite mistaken to conclude, as many do, that the weight of the ecclesiology in \textit{Adversus Haereses} lies with a single, pressing concern to defend the church as "the sole repository of the truth"\footnote{Kelly 192 (cf. Harnack 2/78). Is this really Irenaeus's "most characteristic thought" on the church, as Kelly also claims? In the context of his dispute with the gnostics it may be one of the most frequently repeated, but what of that? When Irenaeus is taken for a serious thinker rather than an overworked heresy-hunter, we will look a little deeper for his most characteristic thought, in ecclesiology and elsewhere.}—at least where "truth" continues to be understood only along formal or noetic lines.\footnote{It is worth noting (\textit{pace} von Balthasar 2/90f.) how he sets about transforming the apologists' interest in the prophets—which derives in part from the Greek tendency to associate truth, revelation and salvation primarily with the mind, and which attempts to establish a purely \textit{formal} correspondence between the revelation given in Jesus and prior knowledge of God (cf. Jenson 95 n.44)—into a question of the prophets' actual \textit{fellowship} with Christ. See esp. 4.33.8ff., where he begins by insisting that real knowledge consists above all in \textit{love}.

For Irenaeus the church as such does not rest on its doctrinal traditions; nor the reverse, for that matter. He does indeed regard the gospel as belonging to "the 'pillar and ground' of the church;"\footnote{3.11.8 (an interesting reversal of 1 Tim 3:15); cf. Harnack 2/74, 78. We say "belongs" advisedly, for it is not the gospel alone but "the gospel and the Spirit of life." See below.} but how so? It is by virtue of the fact that it—or more concretely, they, the four Evangelists—point from all sides to him who sits enthroned in

126
the midst, and to "his effectual working, his leadership, and royal power," etc.¹⁶⁵ Though
the church is inconceivable apart from the gospel, it nonetheless rests (together with its
scriptures, teachers and traditions) directly on the person of Jesus Christ. It is on this
basis that we must also understand apostolic succession. The lineage of its teachers is an
important element in the constitution of the church, to be sure, but does not by itself
comprise that constitution.¹⁶⁶ It is of interest to Irenaeus for only two reasons: negatively,
because it exposes false claims to an authentic tradition behind or contrary to the gospel;
positively, because it helps to display the church’s wonderful organic cohesion, the
cohesion of a living body with a commonality of mind and life undiminished by distance
in time or place or culture or expertise. This depth dimension, this communion in a
Truth that has embodied itself in such a way as to "breathe out immortality on every
side," is much more critical to the bishop’s way of thinking than the mere fact of a linear
pedigree taken by itself. For what matters about the church is that it is everywhere and
always in direct touch with Jesus.¹⁶⁷ If the heretics lack consistency, if their behaviour

¹⁶⁵ This fascinating passage likens the Gospels to the four-faced cherubim, which in
apocalyptic visions represent a creation completely responsive to its Creator, united by one
Spirit and bound together as an eternal throne for its Lord. Indeed, ecclesial and cosmic
realities are here seen to merge in the enthronement of Jesus and in his sacerdotal activity
on behalf of the church, to which the Gospels are made the key witnesses. See Torrance
(1988:31ff., 260ff.) on Irenaeus’s insights into the way in which both church and gospel
are bound to the living Christ.

¹⁶⁶ See 4.33.8, where it is prominent in a long list of essentials—reaching its climax in
"the pre-eminent gift of love"—each of which supports and displays the being of the
church in the true knowledge of God. Notice that the following paragraph rebukes the
heretics for relying exclusively on a set of doctrines as a sufficient basis for union, and
for denying that more complete forms of witness-bearing (martyrdom in particular!) are
"at all necessary."

¹⁶⁷ And hence also with all its parts, synchronically and diachronically, which makes the
church always an apostolic community in the fullest sense. One way in which this fact
manifests itself is the linear continuity of ministers (3.3.1), but the fact itself and the
security it affords derive directly from Christ and the Spirit (cf. 3.6.4, 11.8ff., 24.1, etc.).
For this reason we must agree in principle with the American editor in his note on
Irenaeus’s views on Rome (3.3.2; ANF 1/415 n.3 and 460f.). On the whole subject of
apostolic continuity, see Zizioulous 1985:171ff.
is infamous and "the footsteps of their doctrine are scattered here and there without agreement or connection," it is because they spurn the connection with Jesus that God has established in the life and witness of the church.\textsuperscript{168}

The ecclesiology of Irenaeus goes much deeper, then, than the contention that the church is distinguished from heretical movements by its adherence to the \textit{kanon tēs aletheias}, though he rightly saw that the bond between Christ and the gospel demands doctrinal measurements in the church, and that deviations from the "body" of truth are in fact deviations from the Lord himself.\textsuperscript{169} The reason why Harnack mistakes the part for the whole, as it were, is that his notion of communion is an extremely thin one, devoid of relational thinking and incapable of supporting the Johannine synthesis between being and truth. Where Harnack sees (even in the primitive church) only a collection of individuals in a "common relation to a common ideal and a common hope," Irenaeus sees a true communion of persons constituted as one new man in Christ: a fully corporate humanity, a perichoretic community established in the image of God through a mutual embracing of the Word and by the Word. Hence doctrinal truth is not for him an external matter at all—"a law and aggregate of doctrines" whose practical aim becomes doubtful—

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{168} If it is the case that the church preserves the faith from generation to generation through duly appointed teachers, it is even more true to say that this faith itself preserves the church, for it is entrusted to her "as breath was to the first created man"! Ever renewing its own youth by the Spirit, it renews the church's youth also (3.24.1). For "the faith" is not a doctrinal deposit in abstraction from the life of Christ but a reflection of it. That life is what the heretics do not share, preferring instead their moral and doctrinal wanderings. Cf. 1.10.2; 5.20.

\textsuperscript{169} See 1.8.1: To pull apart the membra veritatis, by disregarding "the order and connection of the Scriptures" and "dressing them up anew," is to destroy the portrait of the King, and so to turn away from his beauty and majesty. Cf. 1.10.2, which makes clear that the distinction Irenaean wishes to make has nothing to do with theological skill or a fixed set of interpretations as such, but with \textit{hē dunamis tēs paradoseōs} as a living witness to one and the same Christ.
\end{flushleft}
-but a vital dimension of genuine being. Likewise, catholicity is not simply conformity to an institutionally-maintained credal standard. It is the communion of the faithful everywhere in the one Lord who has summed up in himself all things in heaven and on earth. Even the formal aspect of catholicity, the \textit{ordinatio ecclesiae} to which all adhere, springs from participation in a common Reality that embraces the people of God in every time and place, and constitutes them as such. This was a given of Christian experience to which Paul and John bore constant testimony, and which in Irenaean theology is liberated from the impediment of any intransigent ontological reserve.

But if we ourselves are to capture the full import of an ecclesiology founded on the notion of communion, or properly grasp the relationship between ecclesiology and Irenaeus's larger scheme of things, a word more must be said about the church as "paradise in this world." That this is not an expression of sentimentality, or of blind loyalty, is evident in a number of places: Irenaeus is quite aware that the serpent of hypocrisy exists in the church as well as among the heretics. Nevertheless the description is an apt one, for it is only in and as the church that man is free to advance toward God and be fruitful. The church is "the entrance to life" both because it has the stewardship of the gospel \textbf{and} because by means of it the door is held open to the

---

\textsuperscript{170} I.e., being-with-Jesus in the image of God; see 3.17ff., 4.20ff. (esp. 26), and 5.36. Cf. Harnack 2/74.

\textsuperscript{171} Cf. 3.4.2, 24.1, with 5.20.1f., which argues \textbf{from} the fact that around the world "all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit," etc., \textbf{to} the notion of catholicity. I.e., the church may claim catholicity because in one Spirit the same "light of Christ" shines forth everywhere. Cf. Zizioulas 1985:158: "We cannot understand catholicity as an ecclesiological notation unless we understand it as a Christological reality."

\textsuperscript{172} See e.g. 4.26.2, 33.7. In the former passage he warns especially against those "who are believed to be presbyters by many, but serve their own lusts ... and are puffed up with the pride of holding the chief seat," etc.
possibility of genuine human being. For if it is only in union and communion with the triune God that true human being emerges, it is only ecclesial man—which is to say, corporate man, "strengthened through means of joints and bands by the increase of God"—who is actually able capere et portare Deus. In other words, it is only the man whose being is in communion who has the vital capacity to go on receiving and enjoying the goodness of God. It is as the proof of the appearance of this man in the recapitulating work of Jesus Christ, who ascended to the Father, that the appearance of the church itself is so significant.\textsuperscript{173}

This indeed is the crucial point, which gathers momentum from the latter part of Book Three onward. Contrary to every secularized or rationalistic or even mystical notion of the church which has been read into Irenaeus by various interpreters, it is on this ontological commitment, on this relational view of man, that he builds his ecclesiology. But having said this, we must now appeal to the second major characteristic of that ecclesiology for help in explaining the first: namely, its impressive pneumatological component. It is extraordinary how modern commentators in the West (from Harnack to Wingren) have failed to appreciate the extent to which Irenaean ecclesiology is conditioned by this ubiquitous, and indeed indispensable, feature. Virtually every one of the passages to which we have referred in the preceding paragraphs, for example, makes pointed reference to the Spirit: It is the gospel and the Spirit together which are the

\textsuperscript{173} See esp. 3.19.3, 4.22.2, 37.7, 5.8.1. Of course, it is only in and through the resurrection that the "increase of God" is actually realized and the mature man (for whom Adam was only the raw material, so to speak) stands forth in full possession of himself, of his creaturely environment, and—in a qualified sense—of his God. This man is nonetheless witnessed to here and now through the being of the church \textit{in hoc mundo}, where by the grace of the Spirit a genuine form of that mutual containment, that essential capacity for Jesus and for one another, is already demonstrated.
pillar and ground of the church. It is the Spirit himself who is the Truth of that communion with Christ which is distributed throughout the church. Without the Spirit oneness in Jesus is quite impossible; he is the essential "water from heaven" who compacts the barren dust of our fallen humanity into fruitful ground for the Word. The church, according to Irenaeus, is the veritable "winepress" of the Spirit which God has dug in the world.

It is difficult to find anyone among the early fathers who sounds this note with the same clarity or consistency. If Ignatius could say, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church," Irenaeus would rather say: "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace." When we inquire as to what might account for this difference in emphasis, it is quite right to suggest that his attention to the bodily ascension is partly to answer, for that required him to take with utmost seriousness the fact that the church's communal centre of gravity lies "hid with Christ in God," to borrow St Paul's phrase. The consequences of this fact, on which both the unlimited potential and the present precariousness of ecclesial being must be said to rest, were not lost on Irenaeus, but neither did its disconcerting aspect prove as troublesome for him as for many later theologians. At any rate, he did not seek

174 3.11.8. For Irenaeus there are but two things that save, then: "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of our God." Indeed, people are "saved altogether by the communion of the Spirit" (5.11.1).

175 4.36.2; cf. 3.17.2, 24.1. Notice also, e.g., that Irenaeus rebukes the Montanists not for claiming too much respecting the Spirit, but for claiming too little (3.11.9).

176 Ignatius, Smyrn. 8; Adv. Haer. 3.24.1. Pelikan (1/156) shifts the emphasis of this Irenaean dictum from the Spirit himself to the ecclesiastical means he employs, but this is not justified: It is not the church per se that the heretics need, but the One who creates and indwells it; he—not the sacraments—is "that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ." Indeed, Spiritus autem veritas. (Cf. 4.38.1, where the Spirit is identified as "the Bread of immortality" shared with those who eat and drink the Word of God.)
refuge in either formalism or mysticism (which as two sides of the same counterfeit coin
are equally destructive of authentic koinōnia) in order to establish a secure link with
heaven. Instead he laid great stress on the doctrine of the Spirit. 177 He apparently
recognized that if Jesus is not to be marginalized in ecclesiology, and if the altar at which
he ministers is indeed a heavenly one, then the Spirit—"the ladder of ascent to God"—
must not be set aside either. 178 That is, he saw plainly that ecclesial communion with the
Son, and through the Son with the Father, cannot be accounted for by any lesser means
than that common heavenward translation which the Spirit provides. 179 A general doctrine
of the ubiquity of Christ, lacking this critical qualification, will not do.

Irenaeus's upward-looking construction and potent pneumatology is really quite
remarkable for the transparency it lends to the formal aspects of the church. Such
attention to the latter as may be found offers not the slightest impediment to the
communion motif, as we have already noticed respecting the magisterium. Other
examples are not difficult to find. To begin with, water baptism and Spirit baptism are

177 As Orthodox theologians are quicker to note: Zizioulas (1985:189f.), e.g., observes
that the danger of too heavy an emphasis in Irenaeus on the historical or linear
transmission of the church's apostolicity "is overcome ... thanks to two factors which
survive so strongly in his theology: Pneumatology and the centrality of the eucharist."
We will come to the latter in a moment.

178 3.24.1; cf. 4.17.6, 18.6. This pattern is unfolded ontologically: "For man does not see
God by his own powers," but by means of God's own (triune) action, "the Spirit truly
preparing man in the Son of God, and the Son leading him to the Father, while the Father,
too, confers [upon him] incorruption for eternal life" (4.20.5). The people of God thus
"advance through steps of this nature," i.e., "they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and
through the Son to the Father" (5.36.2).

179 A comparison between Elijah's chariot and Pentecost's tongues of fire is instructive (see
5.5f.). It is very important, of course, that we preserve here the notion of "heaven" as
marking existence in true communion with God, body and soul; in other words, as the life
of the resurrection which overcomes and transfigures what is merely worldly (cf. 2.28.1,
4.9.2, 18.5f., 38.3, 39.2, 5.2.3, 9.1ff., 20.2, etc.; see below). In keeping with the liturgical
metaphor enacted in the ascension, however, it is not inappropriate to retain the spatial
analogy.
carefully balanced, preventing any dualistic breach that might lead either to externalism or to an esoteric idealism. As for the liturgical ministry, if this is regulated according to an established pattern by the bishops "together with the presbyters," its truth is consummated only in the mutual edification of love, which flows from a common participation in the Spirit. Indeed, Irenaeus exalts the harmonious communion of voices in hymn-singing as a way of capturing the ultimate essence of the church, whereas he warns against the pride of holding the chief seat. His whole approach militates against any self-serving turn in ecclesiology, we would submit, just because he is interested not so much in Christ being made present pro nobis—a fundamental mistake which later tempted the church to devote a great deal of attention to its own mediating role and hierarchical structures—but in the work of the Spirit in making us present (in corporate fashion) with Christ pro Patre.

At all events, Irenaeus shows no inclination to try on the oversized armour of institutionalism which others were beginning to forge. He does not turn to clericalism to

---

180 3.17.2; cf. Torrance 1975:94ff. Either of these options, of course, makes the faithful dependent on man rather than God, whether through the performance of ritual or private instruction in the mysteries of the religious life.

181 2.28.3; cf. 3.24.1, 4.9.1, 26.2ff., 32.1, 33.8, 5.20.1, 22.2. Order as such is not the essence of worship, which is found in relational being: If anyone attempts "to offer a sacrifice merely to outward appearance, unexceptionally, in due order, and according to appointment, while in his soul he does not assign to his neighbour that fellowship with him which is right and proper, nor is under the fear of God," it profits him nothing. Sacrifices do not sanctify the man, but the man his sacrifice, for God (who has no need of it) desires to receive it "as from a friend" (4.18)!

182 Careful attention to the ascension in fact disallows any attempt to construe the activities or structural implements of the church as an attempt "to bring Christ down" (Rom 10:6; cf. 3.18.2), or to substitute for him in his absence—which amounts to Pelagianism (Torrance 1993:39f.) and confuses between the Spirit and the church. This same focus also warns against overlooking the ascension—differential between Christ and his ecclesial body (ibid. 45f.), which is something that Zizioulas is incautious about (1985:110f.; but cf. 137f.).
secure the unity of the church in the way that Ignatius did, for example. Other substitutes for the Spirit are notably absent as well. Equally foreign to him are Tertullian’s legalism, on the one hand, and Montanist elitism on the other, both of which betray a certain unease about the church’s footing and a desire to shore it up from below with some comfortably visible device. But neither does Irenaeus resort to the imaginary safeguard of a distinct “spiritual” or heavenly church, such as 2 Clement propounds. He could not possibly affirm this fateful move, since it really is creation itself that the church offers to God for the sake of his kingdom, as the bodily ascension and the eucharist both declare. For Irenaeus the church on earth is not connected with a heavenly “counterpart” as image to reality—a notion that that would soon attract to itself mediating hierarchies in the form of formidable institutional signs and symbols. The connection between the church on earth and its heavenly existence is rather a distinctly eschatological one, which invites no such domination, inasmuch as it is bound up with pneumatology and discoverable only in the grace of the resurrection.

Here is a point worth dwelling on, for much of what we have left to say about Irenaeus is contained in it. The pneumatological conditioning of ecclesiology in conjunction with the ascension demands a very specific eschatological orientation, namely,

---

183 It is surely significant that he does not take up the constant rallying cry of Ignatius (Magn. 6, 13; Trall. 3; Phil. 2ff.; Smyr. 8f.), for whom the clerical orders, and the bishops especially, were the visible guarantee of an invisible unity. Though Irenaeus elsewhere draws from Ignatius (see Eph. 9, e.g.), in this area he seems to prefer the more primitive approach in which bishops are teachers and examples. At the same time he replaces his overwhelming emphasis on union and unity (cf. Pelikan 1/159f.) with the earlier and richer idea of koinonia.

184 The Lord, he says, “confers gifts upon men, that is, his own presence, and the resurrection of the dead” (4.9.2); the linking of these two concepts is not insignificant. Against this (and 4.32.2) cf. 2 Clem. 14, which postulates a pre-existent spiritual church, of which the one we see is a counterpart and copy. By making the church pre-existent along with Jesus, this author introduces for the first time the possibility of actually confusing Christ and the church, or at least of treating them as if they were coordinate first principles (see chap. 4 below).
one that grapples with the tension intrinsic to Jesus-history. Plainly the church exists only through assimilation by the Spirit to its ascended Lord, but what does this mean? It is nothing so crude as the mere overcoming of spatio-temporal distance, as if the ascension were a rocket ride after all. Neither is it a rejection of such creaturely categories altogether, which would mean retreat from a bodily ascension. It is rather a matter of the Spirit marshalling our spatio-temporal becoming—indeed, of conquering its unbecoming (indecorus) nature—for the sake of the consummation that is won for us by Jesus. It means the handing over of our own fallenness and dissolution to be swallowed up by the one who descends and ascends. For this very reason, however, our assimilation to Christ can only take place in the face of death (his and ours) and through the window of the resurrection; it is from thence that the wind of the Spirit blows on the church.185 It must be said, then, that the church occupies in this world the place of tension between annihilation and consummation, and that it is the Spirit who enables it to do just that.186 For the "hope of the resurrection to eternity" which he imparts to the church is framed by the cross and the ascension as antipodal dimensions of the lifting up of Christ.187

Everything about the church must submit to this uncomfortable and sometimes

---

185 See the previous note, and esp. 5.2.3, where Irenaeus shows that the grace of union with Christ which the Spirit now grants to the church eucharistically works by way of our actual death and resurrection. This explains, no doubt, why he comments that the church throughout all of time sends forward "a multitude of martyrs to the Father" (4.33.9).

186 The ascension speaks first of God's affirmation of Jesus-history as his very own, and then also of the lordly appropriation of our history in and through Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The church as such is the witness to this latter appropriation, its visible edge, as it were. But it exists as this witness only on the brink of annihilation. Hence the Spirit is also the "dew" from heaven which Christ sends throughout the world to cool its members against the consuming fire, while rendering them fruitful (3.17.3; cf. Rom 8:15–27).

187 Cf. 4.2.7, 18.5, 5.17.3; Demo. 34, 38, 45. See Heb 9:11–14.
frightening qualification of its supernatural hope. But the pneumatic place—the epicletic place of groaning and of eager expectation, as Paul has it in Romans 8—is also the courageous place in which the church refuses either to become irrelevant to the world or to be in conformity with it. It is the place where the absence of the ascended Christ is acknowledged on behalf of the world and acutely felt, and where the parousia of him who was pierced is urgently sought in all soberness. In short, it is the eucharistic place, and it will come as no surprise that it is to this subject that we must now turn if we hope to finish our account of the two characteristics of Irenaean ecclesiology already noted. For its third, and perhaps most important, characteristic is that it is thoroughly eucharistic in its innermost logic. The eucharist, with all its fascinating tensions, is the real measure of Irenaeus's doctrine of the church. If the church is a heavenly communion created by the power of the Spirit, it is such only in a eucharistic way and for eucharistic possibilities. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the eucharist, together with the bodily ascension, is applied by Irenaeus as a yardstick for his whole dispute with the heretics: "Our opinion," he says, "is in accordance with the eucharist, and the eucharist in turn establishes our opinion." No presentation of his ecclesiology which neglects this fact

---

188 Not least its institutional forms, as Torrance (1993:43ff.) observes. These are "essentially ambiguous," inasmuch as they are both necessary to the church's task of redeeming the time and yet require redemption themselves. "Thus the Church is summoned to look beyond its historical forms in this world to the day when Christ will change the body of our humiliation and make it like unto the Body of His Glory (Phil. 3.21)." Where it refuses to do so the church itself becomes frightening.

189 "Men therefore shall see God, that they may live"—i.e., those men "who bear His Spirit and do always wait patiently for His coming" (4.20.6; cf. 5.14.4).

190 I.e., concerning the real redemption of created things and the resurrection of the body (4.18.5). The centrality of the eucharist for Irenaeus is made evident in his claim that "the new oblation of the new covenant" is the very "means of subsistence" (alimenta) which the Lord offers his church as "the firstfruits of his own gifts" (4.17.5). It is worth noticing, however, that he never treats the form of the eucharist for its own sake, but always for illustrating an ontological or soteriological point. Thus he avoids the opaque sacramentalism of later times.
can hope to be persuasive.

We do not mean to say, of course, that Irenaeus is primarily interested in the church within the confines of its liturgical events; far from it. But the lessons of the eucharist have deeply informed his thinking about the church. These lessons are really about the Spirit's **overcoming** of confines through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, that is, of the confines imposed by slavery to the atomistic character of fallen nature, to self-enclosed being, to "every spirit of wickedness," and to death itself. They are about making room for the Word, and finding room in him to grow and advance toward God, and so eventually "to rise with manifold increase by the Spirit of God" like the bread on which he is fed. 191 The eucharistic existence of the church is in the first place a highly positive affair, then: In the eucharistic garden men and women are granted an increase of being through union with Christ, a relational depth of being out of which they are able to offer together an oblation of thanksgiving on behalf of creation. 192 This oblation is an activity with profound ontic effects, bursting the boundaries of that time and place which is otherwise under God's judgment, "increasing and supporting" that nature which is otherwise unable to bear God, testifying convincingly to the continuity between creation and redemption. In its eucharistic depth the church overcomes the limitations of the world's dissipating mode of existence in order to enthrone God on the praises of his

---

191 As the corn of wheat decomposes and then springs up to a fruitful harvest, and (having been made into bread) receives the Word of God and so becomes the Eucharist, we too, "being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth," shall rise to immortality; thus learning, n.b., that we have this immortality as a free gift of God, "not from our own nature" (5.2.3).

192 4.17.5f., 18.1ff., 5.2.2f. Torrance (1993:39 n.2) points out that there is one Hebrew word for oblation and ascension: olah. It is by virtue of the fact that the being of the church is bound up with the ascension that it is eucharistic, having precisely the character of a thank-offering. (Irenaeus takes great care to preserve this character by frequent reminders that the triune God does not stand in need of us, and that our being is thus grounded in the freedom of love.) This, of course, is quite consistent with a relational ontology.
people. And thus creation itself begins to receive from God, in the doxological ferment of the Spirit, that lively, open-textured quality which is lent to it for the sake of communion with the Father through the Son.\textsuperscript{193}

Irenaeus is not at all shy in staking the claim that it is only eucharistically that nature receives the ontic liberty which it lacks in consequence of the fall. Here the full relevance of his crucial link between anthropology and cosmology begins to appear; more importantly for our purposes, the supreme ontological status he assigns to ecclesial being is made plain. His line of thought runs like this: It is the fundamental task of man to "sanctify what has been created" by recognizing its quality as a gift and rendering thanks for it. Only in this personal interchange between God and man is the cosmos set on a sound footing.\textsuperscript{194} But fallen man, as the slave of duplicity and corruption, cannot fulfill this function. He can at best make only a "servile" oblation, which is of no existential value to creation in that it makes no connection with the Creator, who himself gives freely and stands in need of nothing. Having lost touch with the Spirit, man lacks a share in the free and unreserved offering of the Son or Word, "through whom the wood fructifies, and the fountains gush forth, and the earth gives 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full

\textsuperscript{193} See esp. 4.9. In a warning highly germane to our own day, however, Irenaeus also remarks here on that \textbf{perverse abolition of boundaries} which parodies the grace by which the Son "throws open" his inheritance. He speaks ironically of the "progress" of the self-willed, who are "turned away backwards" from the Father into "an abyss without limits." For the freedom produced by the grace of communion is not a \textbf{rejection} of created order and the precepts by which man is formed, but their "extending and widening" through love for the sake of eternity (4.13.3, 20.7).

\textsuperscript{194} Thus he encourages us to offer our eucharistic gifts "frequently and without intermission" (4.18.6: note that he does not divorce prayer and good works from the eucharist itself); for God takes these to himself for \textbf{our} good in order to return them to us in kingdom-form, where by way of "reorganization" in the Spirit they will bear such fruit that the very clusters of grapes (exponentially increased) will fall all over themselves crying out, "Take me; bless the Lord through me!" (5.33). This famous claim is not foolish credulity but---dare we say it?---vintage Irenaeus.
corn in the ear." \footnote{195} Because his own heart is "divided with envy and malice," because he is fragmented in his resolute individuality, he cannot make of himself or his world a proper offering; more and more the world simply reflects and perpetuates his own corruptibility, as his offering runs to dust in his hands. \footnote{196} 

What is needed, then, if man is to regain his place in the dynamic of God's design for creation, is a "change of species" through the implantation of the Word. \footnote{197} He requires the "voluntary rain" from above, the Spirit of liberty who prepares him for communion with the ascended Jesus, turning the slave into a freeman and his corruptible offering into an incorruptible one. \footnote{198} The evidence that such freedom really does exist even here and now, as a kind of first-fruits of the finished creation, is to be found precisely in the eucharistic vitality of the church. By the unique quality of its joyful and uncompelled

\footnote{195} See 4.18.1ff. (cf. 3.23.5, 4.33, 36.6). On his own man is unable to participate in or contribute to this fruitfulness, because he does not give thanks with a pure single-mindedness. The gnostics, of course, go so far as to deny that thanks should be given for creation. But creation is good not defective, and is rendered fruitful not barren, just because of the recapitulating Word \textit{per quod offertur Deo} (see Harvey). In receiving Jesus by way of word and sacrament, "invoking" God through him, the church is enabled to share in the one free and effective oblation.

\footnote{196} The archetype here is actually Cain rather than Adam, of course. We must underline the crucial point that it is the man who sanctifies the offering, not the reverse. Hence the importance of the manhood of the Word, who sanctifies the whole offering, beginning with ourselves, once for all—including the most obviously corruptible part, i.e., our flesh (5.12.6; cf. 5.1ff.). It is only by being conjoined to the Word in the Spirit that we too are constituted as sanctifiers of creation, as image-bearers who bring a free, personalizing quality to creation.

\footnote{197} The "change of species" refers to the Christian oblation as such, since it is an offering made "not by slaves, but by freemen" (4.18.2). There is also a change in the elements, from being merely earthly to being at the same time heavenly; this correlates with the change in the worshipers (18.5). Later preoccupation with the elements alone served to obscure the relational dimension of the eucharist and its emphasis on freedom, marking a significant reversal in the basic framework of ecclesiology (cf. Dix 244ff.).

\footnote{198} 4.18.2 (cf. 5.10.1). It is the power and function of the Spirit, that \textit{superna voluntaria pluvia} (see 3.17), to liberate man for the Father and the Son, indeed, to personalize him in this way so that he can participate in the unconstrained self-giving of the Creator.
offerings an *indicium libertatis* is set out around the world. In its common consciousness of the Spirit, in its communion of goods and spiritual gifts, in the mutual priesthood and service of its members, in its supernatural growth and rejection of heretical discord, etc., the church provides a foretaste of the consummation of all things.\(^{199}\) In other words, Irenaeus sees in the eucharistic prising-open of man to the possibilities of communion the beginning of ontic integrity for creation.\(^{200}\)

It would be interesting to pursue this angle on ecclesiology into spirituality and liturgics, but we must rather follow Irenaeus in attending to the more pressing matter already raised. For if the logic of the eucharist is the logic of supernatural increase through the offering up of creation with thanksgiving, it nevertheless remains the tension-filled logic of the "lifting up" of Christ (*Verbum per quod offertur Deo*). It is quite true that the views of Irenaeus respecting the joyful nature of the church's offerings show a marked contrast to later Western treatments of the mass, imbuing his ecclesiology with a buoyant spirit. But the more seriously his approach is taken from an ontological point of view, the plainer it becomes that this very positive affair is nonetheless shot through with a painful sense of the incongruity between "the fashion of this present world" and the creation that lives to God. The church's eucharistic existence here and now is costly

\(^{199}\) Irenaeus' faithfulness to the New Testament concept of the priesthood of all believers ("for all the righteous possess the sacerdotal rank," 4.8.3; cf. 5.34.3) is undergirded both by his upward-looking pneumatology and by his refusal to divorce cosmology from soteriology. But the subsequent weakening of this framework in dualistic theology suppressed this vital notion (cf. e.g. *ANF* 1/471 n.6) with grave consequences for the church and—where the church might have had a beneficial influence—for the whole of man's environment.

\(^{200}\) For the Spirit perfects human being through communion, and the eucharist melodiously (*emmelos*) proclaims the fellowship of the flesh and the Spirit, implanting in us "the hope of the resurrection to eternity" (4.18.5; cf. 5.6ff., 5.20). As the faithful advance in receptivity to the Spirit and in an *ek-static* mode of being, so to speak, they are being prepared "little by little" for incorruption and for their full and proper priesthood (cf. Zizioulas 1975:407f., 1990:4f.).
as well as joyful, just because it does invite (and in its own way comprises) the cracking open of the closed compartments of our world. Because its oblation is made from below, from the side of the cross and on this side of the parousia, its invocation of heaven necessarily passes judgment on what is merely earthly. If the church gladly affirms what Jesus' resurrection and ascension attest, namely, that man as such is God's workmanship et capax incorruptelae, it also acknowledges his need to be "lifted up" with Christ in the fullest sense if he is to see immortality. Indeed, it pursues this double lifting up in its own experience so far as it is able.

But to pass such a judgment is to stand out from the crowd. More than that, it is to invoke the eschaton over against the fashion of our world. And here the whole question of the continuity and discontinuity between creation and redemption, the temporal and the eternal, etc., returns in the form of a dialectic between church and world. Occupying the place of eucharistic stress carved out for it by Jesus, the church deliberately distinguishes itself from the world, in order to present itself to the world as a vehicle of salvation. How is this dialectic to be preserved? How is it ultimately to be resolved? These questions, which bring us round again to the eschatology of Irenaeus, are also vital to our interpretation of his project. By attempting to show how he addressed them we can bring our lengthy discussions to a conclusion.

Preserving the Tension

Certainly a great deal can be told about any major theological project by the way in which it characterizes the tension implied in the eucharistic judgment and the course

---

201 It is interesting that Irenaeus refers to Rev 5:8, 8:3ff., and 11:19 while describing the eucharistic prayers (4.17.6, 18.6), though he does not make explicit here the earth-shaking character of such prayers as portrayed in the Apocalypse (cf. Torrance 1960:73).

202 See 4.33.1; cf. 4.2.7, 37.7, 5.2.3, 10.1, etc.
it charts for its eventual resolution, whether in the form of prescriptions for prayer and action or by direct reference to the last things. *Adversus Haereses* contains both, though by reason of its main objective the latter is more prominent.\(^{203}\) This has not prevented some rather serious differences in reading the proffered compass, however. Harnack, for example, considers the chiliastic eschatology of Irenaeus to be a relic of primitive apocalyptic expectations, inconsistent with the secularizing tendencies of his ecclesiology and his theology generally. Bousset, on the other hand, finds that Irenaeus introduced perhaps his foremost systematic theme—the idea of advance or gradual development—into eschatology, which actually helps to account for his millennial convictions; indeed, what we have here is “the idea of chiliasm evolutionistically interpreted and transfigured!”\(^{204}\) These two options naturally reflect quite different conceptions of the relationship we are considering, and of the direction it might be expected to take. They also represent differing opinions about the degree of consistency in Irenaean thought, a matter on which some verdict must in fact be delivered.

Let us begin with a few comments on Bousset’s option, or rather, on what some might wish to make of it. His interpretation suggests something more creative than Harnack’s, and is especially attractive to those who are fond of the elevation motif.

---

\(^{203}\) See 2.32.4f. and 3.25.7, e.g., for hints of the former. It would indeed be helpful to examine the question of what influence Irenaeus may have had on actual liturgical developments in the early centuries. There may not be much to go on, yet Dix (749ff.) for one leans heavily on his theology in summarizing the thrust of the patristic shaping of the liturgy. We expect, however, that a number of important Irenaean insights were lost to the church in the paradigm changes that subsequently occurred, not least in eschatology.

\(^{204}\) For Harnack (2/294ff.) Irenaeus' systematic Christ was distinct from his eschatological one, "who will shortly come to overcome the Antichrist, overthrow the Roman empire, establish Jerusalem in a kingdom of glory and feed believers with the fat of a miraculously fruitful earth." Since he and his contemporaries still lived in this primitive hope they were "but half-hearted in their theology," which was a temporary defensive measure. But for Bousset they were men of the future, engaged in bringing radical theology down to earth in an "ecclesiastically usable" way (451; cf. 443).
Though Bousset himself does not take us very far in this direction—in that he also wants to address the element of supernaturalism in Irenaean eschatology—there are those who would argue that the bishop's favourite theme does invites us to adopt a gradualism of one variety or another. On such a model (adapted to the modern hesitation about the supernatural) the heavenward referral of creation which goes on in the church can be viewed as the means by which this world of ours is increasingly rendered open to God. The church here fulfills a priestly function (more or less crucial to the current phase of God's progressive act of creation) by which man in his own time and place is slowly invested with the gifts of Christ. In Irenaeus' own words, Christ by his advent "fulfilled all things, and does still fulfill in the church the new covenant foretold by the law, onwards to the consummation." The eschatological novelty which the Word of God brought to us in the person of Jesus is thus unfolded through the eucharistic presence of the church until, in some qualitative sense, the "spirit" of Jesus is seen everywhere in the ways of man and in the shape of his world. In this way the church renders its own distinct existence obsolete; the eucharistic oasis eventually covers the universe as man receives growth and advancement "throughout a long course of ages."

While no one would insist that Irenaeus himself could be adequately represented in this way, John Hick has prominently associated the bishop's name with a system of thought moving in this direction, if in another connection. Such a vision may owe

---

205 4.34.2; but cf. 2.22.2.

206 See 4.38.3, a passage to which reference is often made. It goes on to speak of "man making progress day by day, and ascending toward the perfect," and concludes with an underpinning theological maxim: "For God is He who is yet to be seen...." Just how this advance towards God eventually succeeds in reclaiming for the kingdom all that has gone before is of course a much more difficult subject, which receives a variety of highly speculative answers that do not pretend to lean much on Irenaeus. See chap. 5.

207 Taking up the problem of evil, Hick (1968:217ff.) suggests that Irenaeus is the first major representative of a teleological or eschatological framework for theodicy, in which the gradual process of "soul-making" extends over a long reach of time and proves in the
relatively little to Irenaeus (or to any of the fathers) and much to the enlightenment; it may even have a somewhat chequered history, tainted with triumphalism. Yet it is attractive to the modern palate, trained as that is by more than a century of optimistic evolutionary assumptions. Of course (as Hick points out) the myth of progress has been dealt many serious blows in the last generation or two. Our evolutionary interests are now heavily occupied with the less grandiose business of survival. But for just this reason the gradualist model, to which we will later devote a great deal of attention, is considered all the more relevant in many quarters, inasmuch as it minimizes an eschatology of conflict. Attempts have been made to excise (or heavily disguise) all traces of triumphalism so as to rehabilitate this approach, and to present it in a form serviceable to the related concern of removing religious tensions from the global village.\(^{208}\)

And here the contribution of Irenaeus is appreciated, in spite of certain unwelcome cross-currents in his work.

It is questionable, however, whether we can do justice to Irenaeus by simply ignoring these "cross-currents," that is, by setting aside Harnack's apocalyptic reading altogether, or supposing that the medievals were somehow intuitively correct in mislaying the last few chapters of *Adversus Haereses!* We may agree that a naïve chiliasm does not properly represent the Irenaean position either. In fact we have already argued that his vision of the eschaton proposes something much more profound. But we have also indicated that neither restorationism nor any form of survivalism (gradualist or otherwise) can account for that vision. Therefore it is necessary to ask again just what sort of map Irenaeus himself drew, and inquire as to how he transcended these strictly linear

---

end to have warranted the risks and sufferings and even the evil encountered along the way. Hick does not represent the naïve optimism we are pointing to; but his theology—as—thecodicy has more in common with those Irenaeus opposed than with Irenaeus himself.

\(^{208}\) See, e.g., Hans Küng's *Theology for the Third Millennium.*
constructions. Answers can be reached quite quickly by referring back to his view of the eucharist, and then by pointing out the way in which eschatological pronouncements are related to his wider ontological scheme. We will discover that Bousset's (not unhelpful) observation actually suggests a third option, one that engages with the modern context in a markedly different way.

We have noted how Irenaeus appeals to the eucharist in order to underline the essential continuity between the earthly and the heavenly, a continuity which the ascension implied but which the gnostics could not accept. Those who deny to the material creation full participation in the kingdom of God ought for consistency's sake to cease offering the eucharist, he insists.209 Were we to stop here, of course, this positive approach might well be adduced in support of a highly optimistic view of our world, and against too great an emphasis on the "opposition" between it and the church. But Irenaeus is equally concerned with the discontinuity between the earthly and the heavenly which the eucharist insists on, insofar as "earthly" has reference to the futile character fallen man has imposed on the passing schéma of this world.210 He leaves us in no doubt whatever that the eucharistic experience of the church is only completed, and its inherent tension resolved, on the far side of death and decomposition, to which the paths of our world must inevitably lead. The earthly capacity for the heavenly (i.e., for the Spirit) can be realized only by way of a radical metamorphosis: the resurrection to glory. In other words, there is already a clear trace of the apocalyptic at the very heart of his position. And if in the church "we do now receive a certain portion of his Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God," this gradualism only serves to drive deeper the wedge between the church and this world,

209 4.18.5

210 5.36.1
between ecclesial man and the man of the world. It heightens, rather than diminishes, the
eucharistic tension.\textsuperscript{211}

When we turn, then, to Irenaeus's own map for the final resolution of that tension
in his treatment of the last things, we are not surprised to find that at essential points it
is drawn with bold lines. The \textbf{consummatio mundi} does not come about, as the gnostics
supposed, by the perfecting of "spiritual" men and the separating out of what is merely
animal or material; nor does it come through the impact of the church and its gospel. On
the contrary, it takes place only by way of the parousia. Meanwhile the ecclesial
community belongs to a clash between Jesus-history and apostate history in which no
quarter is to be asked and none can be given.\textsuperscript{212} Whatever progress may be made within
the church, resolution of the church's differences with the world is certainly not a
progressive affair, except in the negative sense: The final chapters tell of an escalating
conflict which leads eventually to the emergence of an antichristic "recapitulation"—that
is, a hollow summing up of iniquity which issues not upwards into heaven but downwards
into the abyss of nothingness. For in its deliberate alienation from God our world is
divided against itself, and must inevitably fall. This process of its fall will be completed
at the parousia, when it is fully confronted with its own character. After that there will
no more be two histories; one will have disappeared.\textsuperscript{213}

The connection between ontological and eschatological insights now becomes

\textsuperscript{211} 5.8.1ff. (cf. 5.2.3).

\textsuperscript{212} Irenaeus has earlier spoken of "the movement of the whole earth against the church"
after the ascension (4.33.13). For his discussion of the last things, which follows directly
on his description of the church as \textit{paradisus in hoc mundo} and begins with a warning
against the devil's deceits, see 5.21–36. The gnostic view of the consummation he rejects
already in 1.6.1.

\textsuperscript{213} See 5.25ff. (esp. 29). The Antichrist, says Irenaeus, is called "'the other,' because he
is alienated from the Lord" (25.4). But he will be "as one who has no existence" (30.4);
so also all that has been willfully divorced from heaven.
increasingly obvious, with the idea of relational being and the notion that life is communion controlling his conceptuality throughout. If the gnostics themselves looked for a dis-integration of the world through the gathering of like to like, according to the predetermination of nature, Irenaeus looked for a re-integration of fragmented being through the recapitulating Word and the freedom of the Spirit to overcome nature. The way of the world is indeed the way of alienation and division, because that is what man has made of it. The way of the church, however, is the way of faith and righteousness, a righteousness powerful enough to save all "those substances which have participated in it." The final disintegration towards which our world is lurching in its ingratitude and disobedience thus becomes the stark backdrop against which the wonder of eucharistic increase is set; the one is a counterfoil to the other. Both can be maintained in all seriousness by virtue of his relational ontology. Ultimately, salvation means sharing through righteousness in the real and substantial creation that belongs to us in solidarity with the ascended Christ; destruction means fading away with to skēma toutou kosmou toutou, which is bound over to the futility of a temporality dictated by the weakness and stagnation of fallen man.

---

214 I.e., our bodies and the material aspect of our existence (see 2.29.1f.). That the death and disintegration already common to man pose no objection to this claim is secured by his insistence that "God is superior to nature," and overcomes what man in his weakness has made of himself and his world (cf. 4.38.4, 5.6.1). This is Irenaeus' answer to the skepticism of those who who hold to the necessity of Nature, whether they be idealist or materialist in orientation.

215 Ontically, the world and the church are moving in opposite directions in spite of their common history. The nations "who did not of themselves raise up their eyes to heaven nor returned thanks to their Maker" (a clear eucharistic allusion) will be reckoned "as waste water from a sink, and as the turning-weight of a balance—in fact, as nothing" (5.29.1). But the church, in "the last contest of the righteous," will be caught up with Christ into "the times of the kingdom ... the hallowed seventh day" (30.4), wherein the whole creation "will obtain a vast increase" (34.2).

216 Indeed, the things among which man grows old are already fading away, being ontically confounded by sin; but the church will flourish in the always-new creation that knows communion with God (see 5.36.1; cf. The Shepherd of Hermas, 3.10ff.).
It is important to recognize, however, that the eucharistic community does share with the world in its experience of passing away, if to better purpose. For salvation comes to the people of God only when they also have been "after a manner broken up, and rendered fine, and sprinkled over by the patience of the Word of God, and set on fire, that they may be fitted for the royal banquet." Only through its tribulations in the world does the church become sufficiently practised in faith and obedience to enjoy the divine feast; trials increase the ontic depth and viability of the people of God. Hence the church and the world continue to be relevant to each other precisely through their mutual opposition. Like its Master, the church must travel the way of the world right to the end. Against the growing forces of dissolution it stands as a battered signpost to a truer existence, its contrary nature attracting enmity as well as admiration. For in our place and time even Jesus brings division as well as communion, ruin as well as resurrection. The heretics' expectation of division and separation will not be altogether disappointed! Indeed, "the advent of the Son comes alike to all, but is for the purpose of judging, and separating the believing from the unbelieving."  

It is quite clear that Irenaeus has thought out his eschatology in eucharistic terms, helpful discussion, Prof. Torrance (1993:48ff.) contrasts the rejuvenating "time-form of the Spirit," which belongs to the church in connection with the ascended Christ, with the time-form of this world, in which man walks under the tyranny of ta stoicheia tou kosmou, in a ruinous bondage to the law of succession.

217 5.28.4. Thus even the evil that is done to the church is eucharistically transfigured; but the church's proclamation of the Word, and its invocation of the Spirit of transfiguration, proves to be a costly participation in Christ's own painful "exodus" (Luke 9:31).

218 5.27.1f.; cf. 4.4.3. Both those who belong to the church and those who do not are broken up, then, like the eucharistic bread, but to different ends. For "the Word comes preparing a fit habitation for both" according to their option for life in communion or for death through self-isolation (28.1; cf. 4.28.3 on the cross as both condemnation and salvation; note that he includes little children under the latter without any reference to baptism). Damnation is God's confirmation of the self-inflicted frustration of being (5.27.2).
and *vice versa*. That he should be so deliberate makes very good sense when we bear in mind Harnack's judgment that the gnostics' "greatest deviation ... appears in eschatology."\(^{219}\) There is much truth to this, and reason enough to credit Irenaeus with having taken notice of that fact from the outset; the tension he takes care to preserve in his eschatology is hardly an afterthought.\(^{220}\) But it still remains to be shown how he conceives the final triumph of ecclesial being. Our considerations thus far suggest a model that, while combining elements of gradualism with elements of apocalyptic, actually looks quite different from popular versions of either. Indeed, the logic of the ascension and the eucharist is more demanding than these models can accommodate, for it is not merely linear but three-dimensional.\(^{221}\) It requires us to work not only with sequence but also with depth or "harmonies," as does a piece of music.\(^{222}\) Irenaeus thus

---

\(^{219}\) 1/261 n.1. Cf. 129ff., where he argues that the eventual eclipse of "the old eschatological view" (which focused on the coming of Christ and the establishment of an earthly kingdom) led to a bifurcation of Christian spirituality in which "a strict moralism counterbalanced a luxurious mysticism." This change, which emptied primitive Christianity of its original vigour and integrity, occurred more quickly in the East (2/299f.). Irenaeus was one who resisted it in the West, if at the expense of systematic integrity.

\(^{220}\) What better place to confront the gnostics with the full impact of his own line of thought, a line of thought he has been developing all along? Wingren (192ff.) goes so far as to argue that "the whole of Irenaeus's doctrine of recapitulation in all its phases is oriented towards the Parousia." (Cf. Brunner 256 n.1., von Balthasar 2/92).

\(^{221}\) The "advance" of Jesus is both sequential and supra-sequential, as we have seen; he moves from virgin birth to the ascension in a sequential way, yet that sequence is made the subject—in both senses—of eternity. Likewise the eucharistic community moves along a line of historical succession towards a future expectation, but its participants move *epicletically* into communion with Christ and (through death and resurrection) into the kingdom of God. Cf. Pelikan 1/126f.

\(^{222}\) Irenaeus's fondness for musical allusions is evident in 4.38.3—-one of his clearest statements on the continuity between time and eternity, where temporality is interpreted relationally as an opportunity to advance in subjection to the eternal God, and so (*dia tautés tès taxeòs, kai tòn toiouton ruthmon, kai tès toiutès agögès*) to be prepared to bear the weight of glory. Cf. 5.36.2, where the actual transition to glory clearly transcends the linear framework of our own temporal logic, by virtue of the fact that it is the result of a *trinitarian* "training."
strives to develop an analytical framework in which there is room both for movement (progress) and for a "consistent whole," without giving way to the flatness or formality to which either alone is susceptible. The result is his theory of recapitulation and an eschatology based neither on despair over fallen time nor on a hopeful capitulation to it, but on the transfiguration and fulfillment of time by eternity through the appearing of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{223}

How then does this come about? If time is essentially relational, an opportunity for training (agōgē) in the arts of communion through willing subjection to the Spirit, leading ultimately to a freely bestowed "faculty of the Uncreated" (dunamis agennētou, i.e., immortality), then the time of man's rebellion is lost time, which must be confronted and brought to an end. Moreover the time of paradise must be restored; for this is the time in which men and women learn from the Son how to be with God in such a way as to become gods, sharing in the consummation of things temporal.\textsuperscript{224} Only by actually partaking of the millennial feast is humanity finally readied for eternity, that is, for the full realization of created being in the new heavens and earth—"real establishment" in which man abides by "always holding fresh converse with God." Irenaeus describes the manner of this habitation in terms of the degrees of fruitfulness and the varying

\textsuperscript{223} It must be said that neither apocalyptic nor gradualist models take history seriously enough. Whether one is pessimistic or optimistic about the future, the past remains the past, unredeemed and to some extent unjudged. But Irenaeus countered philosophical despair about temporality with the doctrine that all of time is contained and judged (recapitulated) by Jesus, and treated with the utmost gravity, being given over either to the increase of eternity or to the emptiness of the abyss. The parousia is the revelation of this judgment, which truly does come "alike to all."

\textsuperscript{224} See esp. 4.38f. and 5.35. Note well that there can be no question of a tug-of-war between a theology of restoration to paradise and a theology of advance or "promotion" into God. For paradise is the condition of growth and increase, of coming-into-communion with the living God. (See also Lawson, 284, whose entire discussion of Irenaean eschatology is very helpful, even if lacking the explanatory light that a fuller notion of recapitulation brings to a number of points.)
capacities for communion which time's training (including the millennium) achieves.²²⁵ For it is based on a trinitarian ingathering of the harvest of time: The Spirit delivers all things temporal over to the Son, who "confirms and incorporates" and delivers up to the Father what is fit for eternity. When this is achieved God will bestow "in a paternal manner" things which eye has not yet seen nor ear heard, nor any mind conceived.

We may wish to query Irenaeus on his chiliastic reading of Revelation 20, or probe his conceptual structures with a number of very difficult questions, but we do him an injustice to suppose that his reading is a simplistic one.²²⁶ The logic of recapitulation remains more or less constant: The millennium is the realization among men of the ascension–time of Jesus Christ, just as the present time of tribulation is a participation in the brokenness of his descensus ad inferna. These times—which plainly do not evolve one into the other in a linear fashion—are linked by the eucharistic transformation which is fulfilled at the parousia and in the resurrection. The events associated with the parousia are really disclosure events, whereby the one work of Jesus (who rests in the bosom of the Father) is made known. What we call the second coming is not a completely new work, then, but the appearance to us (at the Father's command) of that which is now hidden from us in the time of our fallenness. It is the apocalypsis of the secret work of God, who "throughout all time" has been moulding man by means of his own two hands in and through the person of Jesus. The last thing to be set in place, it would seem, are

²²⁵ See 5.36. We should be careful not to revert to the logic of fallen space and time in reading this scene, ignoring its metaphorical nature. Just the same, it is obvious here that to enjoy eternity in the "power of the Uncreated" is not to cease to be creaturely: Ou gar hê hupostasis, oude hê ousia tês ktiseôs exaphanizetai—it is only the barriers to communion that disappear in the eternal or consummated creation. This means, of course, that we must avoid also an abstract concept of eternity, which we imagine to mean the same thing for God and man alike.

²²⁶ Cf. von Balthasar 2/92ff. The whole question of the relation between ecclesial or eucharistic time as experienced from this side, and from the kingdom side, requires further exploration, but that is a task to be taken up elsewhere.
man's eyes, that he may see what has been done, and in seeing live forever. "For there is the one Son, who accomplished his Father's will, and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought...."

Whatever the enigmas and oversights of Irenaeus's construction, we ought at least to allow that his eschatological ideas are more or less consistent with the rest of his thinking after all, and in many ways far ahead of their time even while remaining closely tied to the biblical witness. At all events, the bold eucharistic tension to which his eschatology faithfully attests follows directly from the descent–ascent pattern in the life of Jesus, on which ground he staged his whole contest with the gnostics. By refusing to distinguish between the Jesus who belongs to history and the Christ who descended and ascended, Irenaeus could not do otherwise than to reaffirm the biblical verdict on our history that culminates in St John's *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The equally emphatic Yes and No of this verdict are implicit in the unique shape of Jesus–history, and cannot be torn apart to facilitate either the pessimism or the optimism of any existing worldview. In his attention to this fact Irenaeus readily grasped the apocalyptic intuition that history itself must be cracked open by the power of God, if the divine promises are to be fulfilled; yet in this cracking open it is to flower. Such precisely is the impact of him

---

227 Cf. 5.28.4, 5.31f., 36.3. The resurrection and the millennial kingdom comprise the giving of eyes to man, so that beholding God he may also rule God's creation (see 5.32.1). But like the man whose eyes Jesus' daubed with the clay moistened with spittle, man must become "accustomed gradually capere Deum" through his millennial experience.

228 Irenaeus's eschatology may be "primitive" in the sense of being in touch with the expectations of the earliest church, but not in the sense of being detached from systematic reasoning. Indeed, we find in the final chapters of his work considerable justification for our previous claims on his behalf. If he is sometimes too valiant in leaving no prophetic stone unturned, or given at points to a literalism not qualified by theological insight, it is primarily because he wishes to concede no ground at all to those who would undermine the link between creation and redemption.

229 See esp. the eucharistic pattern in Rev. 1, 4–5, 8:1ff. It is this idea that John's Gospel captures so well in another genre, i.e., through the discourses of Jesus; see chaps. 1, 3, 6, 14–17.
who descends and ascends.

It remains, then, only to ask what bearing all this might have on the modern context. In its most concentrated form, the issue we are dealing with belongs to a dispute about a possible paradigm-shift in Christian theology. Some think that Irenaeus faces us with a highly relevant dilemma, embodied in the conflict they perceive in his work between a static fall-redemption paradigm (whether gnostic or orthodox) and a more dynamic "continuous creation" approach. As heralds of a new theological era, they are inclined to cut the Gordian knot by abandoning the former altogether. Indeed, it has become a commonplace that Irenaeus himself palliates the fall of man in order to make room for a teleological approach; in this sense (i.e., by anticipating our own developmental optimism) it will be gladly conceded that he was well ahead of his time.230 Yet if his obviously confrontational eschatology really is of a piece with the rest of his systematics, as we have been claiming, then we are obliged to look again at both his view of the fall and his teleology. We may also be compelled to resist the growing pressure to translate this alleged "patristic insight" officially into the liturgy, creeds, and prophetic ethos of the church.

Just a few comments on the matter will suffice, since the issue is well known and our entire discussion is in one sense a response to it. It should be obvious by now that the conflict is an imaginary one, inasmuch as the doctrine of recapitulation is a complete answer to the charge. Nothing less than the whole thrust of Irenaeus's relational ontology requires us to treat the fall seriously, then. It is by reason of the fall that man is "turned

---

230 See, e.g., Harnack 2/270, Hick 1968:220f., 1977:54. Hick actually equates the "fall" with man's acknowledgment of his (created) condition as a morally immature creature in a sort of starter-world, so to speak. But here he begins to confuse the position of Irenaeus with that of the gnostics, inasmuch as he presents it in terms of mythological self-consciousness (cf. Frei 1975:60). See appendix C.
away backwards." It is for the same reason that the history of the Son has its peculiar
and painful shape, that his ascension means his absence as well as his presence, and that
his appearance effects a great separation in creation. It is quite true, of course, that
Irenaeus presents the fall as happening "easily," and as being turned by God to man's
advantage. It is true also that he regards man, and indeed creation, as moving from
imperfection to perfection. But it is not the case (as some argue) that he thinks of that
imperfection as having in the first instance any negative twist, any debilitating physical
or ethical problem. Man and his world in the beginning of their creation are fragile and
immature, as Genesis suggests, not beastly and unbecoming; man was holy and a dweller
in paradise. Indeed, he already belonged to the Son and the Spirit, the two hands who
placed him there. If Irenaeus minimizes the fall it is only to make plain two vital
points: that the **Creator** is not thwarted by the enemy who brought it about, and that the
creation itself has not (and will not be) abandoned to its seemingly hopeless condition.
In other words, he minimizes the fall only against the background of the "Job's wife"
philosophy to which the gnostic blasphemers were giving systematic expression.

To ignore this contextual qualification is necessarily to palliate both the fall and

---

231 4.9.3, 28.2; cf. 3.23.7: "Now Adam had been conquered, **all life having been taken
away from him.**" For this reason man actually increases in wickedness apart from the
undoing of the fall in the work of **ana-kephalaiosis.** If recapitulation is central to
Irenaean theology, the doctrine of the fall stands right beside it, as Wingren and others
have shown.

232 Even Zizioulas (1990) leaves us in some doubt here. His ambiguity is primarily
contextual perhaps but has roots in the attempt to read Irenaeus from the standpoint of
biological evolution, which of course begins not with man but with mortality as a fact of
life. Irenaeus knows no original imperfection of that sort, and to postulate such would
be quite at odds with his recapitulation theory. To overlook the fact that real beginnings
cannot be got at with the tools of human science—which works only within the
temporality of the fall—has serious ramifications.

233 3.23.5 speaks of "that robe of sanctity" which Adam had from the Spirit, though as a
mere infant he was nonetheless readily beguiled; cf. 3.20.1, 4.38, 5.5.1, Demo. 12.
the cross, as others have observed. It is also to teeter dangerously between a foolish optimism about the present bearings of human and cosmic history, and a possible collapse back into the negative dualism against which Irenaeus fought so ferociously.\textsuperscript{234} As for the powerful teleology which informs the Irenaean view, we have shown how that is thoroughly bound up with the doctrine of recapitulation. It therefore transcends not only a static restorationism but the notion of orthogenetic development as well. If Bishop Irenaeus cannot be dismissed (albeit somewhat wistfully in Harnack's case) as the last representative of a naïve supernaturalism, neither can his ideas be poured into the mould of an evolutionary cosmology of the sort that Hick imagines. Unless our interpretation is wholly misleading, we can only suppose that he would today object just as vigorously to the inclination to see history as evolving towards a future fullness which in theological terms—for the benefit of those who still use them—might be called the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{235} That he would consider naïve. If ascension in the flesh rules out the static system of the gnostics, it also cuts cleanly across the illusion of linear progress. Creation, according to Irenaeus, is not "on the way" along our way! Nor does the kingdom emerge, like Aaron's golden calf, out of the random offerings of this world.\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{234} In fact, it must be said that wherever a doctrine of creation fails to take the fall seriously a powerful dualism is already at work. This dualism is in the first place that between the ethical and the physical which troubles every non-relational approach to ontology (and which Harnack tried to read even into Irenaeus). It almost invariably produces some form of prejudice against the material world, but since Kant has inclined in the other direction. Cf. Brunner 257ff.

\textsuperscript{235} Eternity is not an extension of our time, nor does it follow from it or after it. The time that is qualified by eternity through Jesus Christ overcomes our time. It is not the "final state" towards which our time is supposed to be ascending (a quasi-Aristotelian concept which continues to influence many theologians; see e.g. Rahner 1978:190ff.). It is the victory of the time of Jesus, who descended and ascended to draw us out of ourselves and into the communion—time that God has for us.

\textsuperscript{236} Says E. Cousins (1972:viii): "In theology, the future has come into a new prominence. Instead of being viewed as outside time, God is seen as intimately involved in the temporal process, and Christ is the energy source of evolution. Eschatology has been singled out as the distinctive element in the Christian vision, and hope the central
Here is a notion every bit as dangerous to the life and witness of the church now, if we may be permitted to venture such an opinion, as was the gnosticism of the second century or the crushing institutionalism of the middle ages. Its popularity lends extreme urgency to attempts to spell out a proper theology of the ascension for our own time, if only to assist in the recovery of a genuinely eucharistic ecclesiology: an ecclesiology with a cutting edge. To that enterprise Irenaeus has a very great deal to contribute. Indeed, it might be argued that to some extent he foresaw the challenge of our times, so squarely did he set up the contrast between the church and the world which occupies the last chapters of Against Heresies. Leaning on the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, he points out that in the last days "there shall be minglings among the human race, but no cohesion"—a demonic parody of that koinônia which belongs to the church, an artificial union of nations and peoples without communion. This shaky counterfeit, which seeks to accomplish by earthly means what only the Spirit can create, will surely falter; of that he had no doubt. What he did not foresee, however, and would have been mortified to learn, was the extent to which the church itself would take on the look of iron mixed with clay, or the extent to which it would covet the sham catholicity at which worldly institutions and empires aim.

The church's self-controverting secularization cannot be analyzed on a strictly theoretical level, but inevitably it has a theoretical component. In our next chapter we will attempt to explore the development of that component in terms of a shift away from the views of Irenaeus. But now it is time for us to recapitulate, in the purely rhetorical

Christian virtue." But Moltmann (1990:303), a participant in the symposium Cousins is introducing, later writes: "What has to be called eschatological is the movement of redemption, which runs counter to evolution." Cf. Isa 26:18.

237 5.26.1f. (see Dan 2:43). Here he repeats the warning that those who ignore these things become dupes and agents of Satan. At the same time he turns the gnostics' own notion against them—there will indeed be a dividing-up of "unnatural" alliances!
sense, and perhaps also to redeem for weary readers the labours of the present chapter.

* 

It cannot be doubted that Irenaeus gave to dogmatics a solid start. He did so by thinking creatively within the framework of the baptismal confession, with its apostolic witness to the history of Jesus, and by taking seriously the lessons of the eucharist and ecclesial life. Like the eucharistic community itself, his theology is rich and wide-ranging while retaining a central coherence. It is not always consistent or right-minded, of course, but the favourable hearing we have tried to give it reveals a highly capable thinker who allowed the subject matter of the creed to speak for itself at critical points, to great effect. His contributions to our own subject have proved very substantial indeed.

Irenaeus responded wisely to the gnostic challenge by digging deeper into the biblical theology of descent and ascent which the heretics had tried to adapt to their own purposes. Pressing home the implications of "ascension in the flesh" against the pretensions of docetic christologies, he was able to develop a number of highly penetrating insights. In the last analysis most of these could be ranged around the fundamental conclusion that creation and redemption are contrapuntal movements conducted in the power of the Spirit by one person, Jesus of Nazareth. It is to this that the doctrine of recapitulation, as the centrepiece of his systematics, attests. Certainly Irenaeus saw clearly that the most potent threat to Christianity came (then as now) from those who would prise apart creation and redemption, at the expense of the biblical testimony to Jesus. With this device he came carefully to grips, insisting that Jesus-history provides its own logic, and that it is this logic which must be applied to all the handiwork of God. The Saviour was not to be carved up to fit the "cubist" cosmology

---

238 Such a move introduces a dangerous methodological "docetism" into the practice of theology, in that the nature of Redeemer and redemption is laid open to radical reinterpretation on the grounds of a sub-biblical view of creation.
of the gnostics; knowledge of the Saviour was to be allowed to reformulate our knowledge of the world and its destiny.

In other words, Irenaeus realized that it would not do to make of Jesus Christ merely an answer appended to the problem of fallen man. That manoeuver would not fully overturn the faulty utilitarian approach to Jesus characteristic of the heretics; nor would it answer their defective cosmogony, which gave rise to their restrictions on soteriology. But while carefully tightening the knot that gnosticism in all its forms was trying to undo, he was forced in his christological reflections to think out a new approach to the ontology of time and eternity, of physical and spiritual reality, of the earthly and the heavenly. The bodily ascension of Jesus and its ecclesial results cut cleanly across the lines of division in dualist thought. The presence of Jesus in the bosom of the Father meant that God himself was involved with history, and man with eternity, that the flesh was capable of the Spirit and things creaturely of things divine. Far from being the remote and impassible Intellect suggested by the Greek tradition, God was now revealed in his long—suffering love for man, embodied in and through Jesus at the very foundations of creation. This made necessary an entirely new approach to theology and anthropology alike: As God was revealed in his capacity for communion with man—of joining himself even to homo indecorus—so man was shown to be ultimately qualified and determined by communion with God in Christ. And in this light, the old cosmological notions had also to disappear.

None of this new territory was first explored by Irenaeus, of course; he is rightly praised as a theologian comfortable with Paul and John and the writer to the Hebrews. But it was Irenaeus who published the map, so to speak, in the face of gnostic resistance to the new world of apostolic discoveries. Squarely at the centre of his map is Jesus himself, "the treasure hid in the field" to which the apostles had borne witness but which
the heretics preferred to ignore. The ascension shouts out the location and identity of this hidden treasure, revealing the lowly Son of man as the eternal King, indeed, as the one through whom all creaturely being is established on a sound footing. From the same vantage point the scope of his recapitulation is also made clear: For a fallen world it means nothing short of creation again, from the top; a reorganizing of the mystery of the cosmos such that in the midst of its fall it lands after all on its own proper ground. Every objection to creation which creatures have put forward to their Creator is addressed and resolved in that one U-shaped history which lies at the heart of all history—the outcome of which (as the eucharist anticipates) is the consummatio mundi, a higher order of things than that with which we ourselves, who live on the frayed edges of reality, are familiar. Christ may bear the marks of the world's attempt at self-abortion, but in him increase of being triumphs over disintegration and decline.

Contained in this perspective are resources too numerous to recount. Indeed, this courageous christology represents an achievement of immense import for philosophy generally as for theology in particular. Quite plainly, Bishop Irenaeus understood that the teachings of the New Testament require us to abandon the rigid categories of Hellenistic thought. What happened with Jesus requires and justifies a shift in ontological categories in favour of the personal and relational over the substantialist, the taxonomic, the static. The most immediate benefit of this shift, of course, is that soteriology is freed from the shackles of a precommitment to the ultimate disintegration of human being. It is able to promise instead a profound reintegration of the different dimensions of human being through liberating communion with God. Salvation embraces the whole man, and the whole world of man as well, which is caught up through a Man into the communion of
the Spirit, emerging eucharistically into the fruitfulness of eternity.\footnote{In 5.31 Irenaeus thus dismisses all those "who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man [\textit{universam reprobant resurrectionem}], and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme]" as knowing nothing of the plan of God, even if by some they are "reckoned among the orthodox"!}

Here many harmful dichotomies (the ethical vs the physical, e.g.) disappear. Here also the great problems of philosophy as posed by the gnostics are addressed: Creation is \textbf{not} inherently flawed; finitude and temporality are not to be confused with evil; responsibility for creation's defects is not to be laid at the Creator's door. Formulating as simply as possible the alternative adopted by Irenaeus, we may say rather that finitude and temporality are functions of the creative process, aspects of the coming-to-be of creation in its christocentric movement toward God in the freedom of the Spirit. Evil, then, is an attack on this relationship, an attempt to reverse the movement, aiming at the collapse of finitude and temporality rather than their fulfillment. Insofar as finitude and temporality are in fact wardens of decline rather than increase, this is only what we ourselves have made of them. Any philosophy which obscures this point, in effect normalizing or rationalizing that decline—perhaps even calling it an increase!—is itself evil, inasmuch as it resists both the Creator and the true nature of his creation.\footnote{Likewise, then, it rejects redemption and is essentially \textit{escapist}, aiming at shadow rather than reality—and in some sense succeeding! Irenaeus takes seriously the fact of evil and the "freedom" for self—damnation, exactly because he thinks in relational terms. Cf. 1.21.1, 1.22.1, 2.28.1ff., 2.32.1ff., 4.33.5, 4.37.1, 4.38–51, 5.26.2, 5.27.2. He thus fully overturns the gnostic agenda without making light of the gnostic burden, as Harnack charges.} To the rebuking of such ingratitude we owe the labours of \textit{Adversus omnes Haereses}.

There remains a question as to whether Irenaeus has not spread his net rather too widely, claiming so much for Jesus in his ascension that it is difficult to see how his humanity can bear the claims. To put it another way, does the appeal to pneumatology hold up? That is not easy to decide. There is also the matter of a certain lack of clarity
regarding the relation between the Son's eternal generation, his going forth as the Lord of time, and his going forth as redeemer of our fallen time. Nor indeed can we deny that tensions do exist in Irenaeus' own treatment of the fall and of the problem of evil. But such questions and tensions, we believe, need not distract us from his main achievements, which are two: first, to re-establish the proper tension between the elements of continuity and discontinuity thrust upon us by Jesus-history at the ascension; second, to work out a general ontology which makes sense of the church as shaped and determined by that tension.

Irenaeus saw clearly that the ascension is indeed a break with this fallen world, but that ascension in the flesh is an affirmation of creation as such. He recognized that the break thus repudiates not the fact of the world but its fashion, and that the break and the affirmation together reconstitute the world in a quite different (pneumatic and christocentric) mode of being. A cosmology characterized by this ontological dynamic is a cosmology in which ecclesiology is possible. For the church actually embodies this dynamic within itself; occupying the precarious position opened up for it by Christ, it allows the affirmation to be seen and heard in the very place where the break is still taking place—-even at the cost of being also "after a manner broken up, and rendered fine"!

Surely it was not by accident that Irenaeus was able to retain the New Testament focus on real koinonia with Christ through the Spirit, and also to articulate something of the eucharistic logic of ecclesial being. If he sets us off in the right direction, it is the

---

241 There are three matters about which Irenaeus (2:28), for theological reasons, refuses to speculate: the production of the stuff of creaturely existence; the Son's eternal generation; the origin of evil. (The former two belong in different ways to the divine incomprehensibility; the latter simply offers no handle.) In this he is wise, but further clarity in the matters raised above is both possible and desirable. In appendix C we have attempted to address very briefly the much-disputed passage in 4.38 regarding the fall.
result of allowing what happened with Jesus to control his thinking on every level. Only by sharing this same determination is it possible to hold to the path. A less courageous worldview, in which Jesus and the Spirit are in some way marginalized, is inevitably full of pitfalls for ecclesiology. What follows now must support this claim.
The question of the relation between creation and redemption raised by the gnostics (definitely a cosmological one) has continued to occupy dogmatics even to the present day. But if ideally this whole matter should have been worked through early on in terms of an explicit doctrine of ecclesial being, that did not prove possible. With good reason the focus of the debate was soon narrowed to more pressing concerns respecting its christological underpinnings; and this proved troublesome enough that the best that could be managed in the sphere of ecclesiology, on a conciliar level at least, was a protracted controversy over the use of icons (itself a quite telling affair to which we will return later).

Now if it is largely to the credit of Irenaeus that a deliberately docetic approach to christology—viz., one which openly severed the link between creation and redemption at the expense of the human Jesus—could never again be taken seriously, it is nevertheless true that dualist tendencies were far from being fully vanquished in the church. The next really important battle made this clear. The Arian question was more than a prolonged argument over the kind of simplicity that ought to be predicated of God for piety's sake; it was laden with a great deal of cosmological and epistemological freight, in that it involved a dedicated attempt to re-establish the fundamental Greek opposition between things eternal and things temporal. In this case the effort to uphold that breach worked primarily from the opposite end of christology, by attempting to undermine the connection between the Son and the Father rather than that between the
Son and the world, but there can be no doubt that the same basic issues were again at stake.¹

We have seen how Irenaeus achieved his earlier success against the gnostics by working within the trinitarian vision of the baptismal creed, and also by exploring the full scope of its witness to Jesus-history, showing special attention to the ascension in particular. These commitments generated a powerful emphasis on the continuity between creation and redemption (and indeed between Creator and creature) without jeopardizing a proper sense of discontinuity.² In other words, they preserved the possibility of a truly eucharistic worldview, and along with it the potential for a profound ontology of ecclesial being supported by a robust soteriology. In principle, of course, all this was shared by the Nicene fathers, to whom it was left (under the pressure of Arianism) to attend more carefully to the trinitarian logic it required.

Unfortunately the Nicene theologians gave somewhat less attention to Jesus-history per se, and to its implications for either cosmology or ecclesiology.³ No doubt

¹ Arianism ruled out from the start the bringing of humanity and the creaturely into any direct relationship with God. Its soteriology thus demonstrated a rationalistic and a moralistic tendency, which was joined with an exemplarist approach to Jesus-history. Pelikan (1/198) observes that the "ultimate outcome of the Arian system was a Christ suspended between man and God, identical with neither but related to both: God was interpreted deistically, man moralistically, and Christ mythologically." This is the old problem in a new guise. Cf. Torrance 1988:47ff.

² Forster, as we have noted, is somewhat critical of Irenaeus for drawing God and his creation rather too close together, at the risk of smothering the independence of the latter.

³ Though the second section of the creed retained its basic task of witnessing to the actual shape of Jesus-history, even while being fortified with more technical language securing its trinitarian logic, the significance of that history for pneumatology, ecclesiology, anthropology, etc. was not explored with the same thoroughness, as the relative poverty of the third and final section makes plain. To say that it should have been would be to expect too much, yet the fact that this shortcoming was never properly rectified points to a genuine problem.
they were distracted by the task of defending his divinity and of addressing difficult questions about what novel kind of deity Christians believed in. But the shift in focus was a dangerous one, for the risk of misleading abstractions in theology is directly proportionate to neglect of the concrete form of God's self-explanation in Christ; so also is the possibility of quiet concessions to popular ideas about things creaturely. Nicene Christianity was thus laid open to acquiring a more Hellenistic flavour, in spite of its own vigorous interest in a wholesome soteriology.

If this danger (particularly as it touches ecclesiology) was enhanced by the profound political changes then taking place, it was also intensified by the fact that the Irenaean solution to the gnostic problem had not yet been fully digested by any means. Logos christologies with more than a trace of Greek dualism were common enough even in orthodox circles, and remained capable of moving theological speculation in quite unhelpful directions. Indeed, it must be said that the most influential Christian thinker of the intervening period had plainly attempted to chart a course somewhere between Irenaeus and the Greeks, steering rather more closely to the latter. From Origen onward, in fact, the positive connection between creation and redemption for which Irenaeus had fought (and which church councils repeatedly reaffirmed) was regularly undermined by stubbornly popular tendencies of a dualist sort. And this situation was further aggravated by the failure of the greatest post–Nicene theologian, St Augustine, to shake free from the shackles of a pagan worldview at crucial points.

---

4 I.e., by the gathering forces of Constantinianism.

5 Even Athanasius and (pace Jenson 1982:111ff.) the Cappadocians are implicated here. It should be pointed out that the most careful affirmation and defense of the Word's true and permanent assumption of human nature (complete with appeals to various episodes from his life on earth) does not in itself guarantee a theological construction with a great deal of room for a meaningful anthropology, or for a proper occupation with the mundane as well as the supramundane.
Now it is again interesting to observe that these two men, Origen and Augustine, who "tower above all other figures in the history of early Christian thought,"\(^6\) accorded to the ascension a significant place in their overall scheme of things. For neither of them, however, did the ascension of Jesus play an important role in the actual development of their cosmology or its theological foundations. For the most part this was already decided along dualist lines before the former was brought into play, and appears to have dictated the terms in which it would be conceived. In other words, the approach of both men represents a reversal of the method of Paul and Irenaeus, with especially telling results in ecclesiology, as we shall see. Such was their influence that, on the whole, and in spite of certain exceptions which we will attempt to note, we find that we must regard subsequent developments as something of a retreat from the gains and insights outlined in our last two chapters. But all this requires some elaboration.

**Two Steps Back**

**Origen**

Jacques Ellul's fortieth book, *The Subversion of Christianity*, opens with this provocative question: "How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible...?" His embarrassingly frank conclusions about the church's metamorphosis into something quite alien to its own beginnings we cannot go into here, let alone the larger question of the church's impact on society.\(^7\) But if Ellul

---

\(^6\) Maurice Wiles, in the preface to Trigg (1983).

\(^7\) Ellul (see 154ff.) argues a quite radical view of the basic paradox and precariousness of ecclesial being, pressing home with characteristic boldness the same point made by Barrett, with a straightforwardness that is content to ignore many serious questions. His approach owes rather a lot to Kierkegaard and Barth, and in our opinion requires a certain
points in convincing fashion to the church's self-betrayal with the seductive apparatus of worldly security, he does not do so by looking directly to the most obvious source, namely, to the fatal alliance with imperial power that took place in the fourth century. There is an older and distinctly theological component to be taken into account (as Harnack also argued) which he identifies thus: "It seems to me that everything goes back to a phenomenal change in the understanding of revelation, namely, the transition from history to philosophy."\(^8\)

One does not have to endorse his analysis entirely in order to agree that an epochal adjustment in the orientation of theology, and in theological method, did in fact occur at an early stage. And however it might be described, there can be little doubt (though Ellul does not say so) that it was the controversial Origen who effectively inaugurated the change.\(^9\) Origen was born in Egypt while Irenaeus was putting pen to paper in Gaul, and just as he outshone Clement, his predecessor in the catechetical school of Alexandria, so too his work quickly replaced that of Irenaeus as the main sounding board of Christian systematics. The differences between the two are as stark as the north African landscape.

---

\(^8\) P. 23. What he has in view is the kind of theology that thrives on ontological questions rather than on God's actual dealings with man in the concreteness of salvation history, forgetting "the essential point, that God does not reveal by means of a philosophical system or a moral code or a metaphysical construction." For Ellul this forgetfulness falsifies the whole project. The vital self-criticism of which we spoke in our last chapter is indeed threatened by any such forgetfulness, though that does not mean that we are forced into the choice: history or ontology.

\(^9\) This was achieved above all in *De Principiis*. H. Crouzel's (1989: 163ff.) attempt to salvage Origen's orthodoxy actually makes the point for us. By constantly emphasizing that this much-attacked work is of an exploratory rather than a strictly dogmatic nature, he underlines the speculative tendency which in fact runs throughout Origen's work. Thus Harnack (2/332) has Origen as the true father of ecclesiastical science, who, following in Clement's footsteps, freed theology "from its polemical aim." Harnack himself alternately criticizes and lauds this development.
These differences are not to be found in sincerity of faith or confession; they are chiefly related to a cast of mind and a number of fundamental commitments of an ontological or cosmological sort. Just how fundamental is not difficult to make clear, even if some rather basic questions about Origen's theological vision remain in dispute yet today.\(^{10}\)

Harnack suggests that Origen freed theology from its polemical aim, but it would be more accurate to say that he turned it to the service of a new attempt at theodicy.\(^{11}\) Rejecting the gnostic and Marcionite brands, which were willing to sacrifice God the creator in order to salvage God the redeemer, he set out to reconcile Judeo-Christian faith in the one God of creation and redemption to the hard facts of life. His main building blocks were borrowed from a variety of sources, Platonist, Stoic and gnostic as well as Christian; the central feature of his theodicy was the notion of free-will, which he set over against the fatalism that marked the gnostic approach especially.\(^{12}\) Now in Origen's hands the free-will defense included a claim that the inequalities and seeming injustices of our world could be accounted for by way of appeal to sins committed in a previous aeon, a claim which entailed the acceptance of a number of ideas drawn from outside the

---

\(^{10}\) See U. Berner (1981) for a survey of modern approaches to Origen. Whatever conclusions one might reach regarding Origen's primary sources and interests—or, indeed, regarding his orthodoxy or his value to the church—J. W. Trigg's (1983:9) judgment remains: "We have Origen, more than any other single person, to thank that Athens and Jerusalem belong equally to our Western heritage." For that reason the acknowledgment of Gregory Nazianzus that Origen is "the whetstone of us all" still applies.

\(^{11}\) I.e., at dealing with the problem of evil. To what extent Origen himself was familiar with the work of Irenaeus is not entirely clear (see Trigg 268 n.4).

\(^{12}\) Trigg provides a very helpful account of the sources on which Origen drew. Respecting the doctrine of free will he notes the influence of Antiochus of Ascalon and Plutarch of Chaeronea and the Platonic tradition generally, as mediated by Ammonius Saccas. He speaks of the conviction Origen acquired through Ammonius "that Platonism was the best antidote to Gnosticism" (p. 71; i.e., especially to gnostic and Marcionite pessimism about the goodness or morality of the Creator).
biblical tradition (the pre-existence of the soul, e.g.). Putting aside any Irenaean reserve about the "before" of creation, he went on to posit a progression of worlds as the best way to explain the otherwise problematic conditions which appertain in our own. In doing so, of course, he placed salvation history within the context of a broader and more speculative framework.

Henri Crouzel makes the bold claim that this framework ultimately "excludes all dualism." That is true, if by dualism we mean an eternal polarity between Mind and matter; yet Origen was greatly influenced by philosophical prejudices against the material and historical world. We might say that his outlook amounted to something of a compromise between gnostic pessimism and the optimism of the Judeo-Christian tradition. He was prepared to concede to the gnostics certain vital features in cosmology, beginning with the connection between evil and creation; always there were important modifications, however. On the one hand, the world of space and time is admittedly not the world of God's original design, nor would it exist except for the fact of sin. The sin in question, on the other hand, does not consist in the coming-to-be of the material world as such, a notion which conveniently shifts attention away from creaturely failure by positing some sort of decay in the being of God himself. Origen would have no truck with this kind of

---

13 See Princ. 2.3, 3.5.3ff (cf. 1.pref.7). This theory owes something to both Stoicism and gnosticism, yet there are important differences even with the former, which saw nothing of continuity or progress in the cyclical creation and collapse of the universe. Origen's own construction is somewhat obscure, it must be said, inasmuch as the pronounced individualism at its core really requires a kind of multiple--i.e., parallel--universe theory (something he denies) to complement the linear, or rather circular, progression of successive worlds (cf. 3.6.6ff.).

14 In this looser sense, Origen's dualism is highly pronounced (see below; cf. Princ. 3.6.7ff., e.g.). Crouzel (216) of course is pointing to Origen's doctrine of the freedom of God in creation. In passing, however, it is worth noticing that what Origen gives here he appears to take away again, for creation is in some sense necessary to give meaning to God's sovereignty (1.2.10).
immanence, with its impersonalist and fatalist overtones, and indeed its impiety. He upheld the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, arguing for the goodness even of the material world as the gracious provision of a sovereign God. Here he pursued his *via media* by taking up the tutorial concept of the universe found variously in Platonist and gnostic sources, adapting it to his own ends: Our world is a school for souls, belonging to a process of cosmic reform.\(^{15}\) Though consequent upon a defection from the good, it has purgatorial purposes. It is aimed by a loving God at the restoration of rational creatures who have strayed from their ontic foundations (i.e., from a single-minded contemplation of God). Thus, if the world is not exactly good in and of itself, it is at least *good for us*.\(^{16}\)

Origen's own antidote to gnosticism has been construed in different ways, more or less compatible with orthodoxy; it is no concern of ours to join this perennial debate. What is significant here is the contrast with Irenaeus, particularly in the fact that Origen reverts to something much closer to the gnostics' vertical, self-canceling cosmology in constructing his alternative. Butterworth points out in his introduction to *De Principiis* that the descent/ascent motif plainly "runs through it all," but in a manner reminiscent of gnosticism.\(^{17}\) The treatment of this theme is quite detached for the most part from the question of what happened with Jesus; it is made over instead into a relatively independent cosmological principle, aimed at dissolving away the inequalities and uncertainties of material existence.\(^{18}\) Once again the spatio-temporal realm is considered

---

\(^{15}\) This idea (see 1.6.3, 2.9.8, etc.) owes something to writers as diverse as Plato, Plutarch of Chaeronea, Basilides and Heracleon (see Trigg 41, 45f. 68ff.).

\(^{16}\) On all the above see *Princ.* 2.9, e.g.

\(^{17}\) P. lix; he leans here on the work of Eugène de Faye.

\(^{18}\) 1.6, 2.3, 3.6. Norris (126) observes that the world is here "understood as the product
to be the consequence, if no longer merely the product, of a mistake.\(^{19}\) When its remedial purposes are fully achieved, it will have disappeared. For the end of the cosmic process—so goes Origen's famous principle—will be like the beginning,\(^{20}\) when the spirits of men and angels have returned safely to the realm of pure rational being from their sojourns in a strange land.

Into this scheme what happened with Jesus must be fitted. To be sure, the upward progress now open to rational creatures depends upon his revelatory and redeeming work; the descending and ascending of the whole creation finds in him (particularly in the cross) its turning point or hinge. His own ascension, however, is manifestly not ascension in the flesh, which would be virtually a contradiction in terms. Given his cosmological commitments, Origen is bound to interpret the ascension much more narrowly as a movement of the mind:

And let us seek to understand in a mystical sense the words at the end of the Gospel according to John, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father,' thinking of the ascension of the Son to the Father in a manner more befitting his divinity, with sanctified perspicuity, as an ascension of the mind rather than of the body.\(^{21}\)

Here Origen takes leave of the apostolic tradition through an appeal to spiritual exegesis. Certainly such "sanctified perspicuity" does not see in the ascension the receiving up of

\(^{19}\) The weakness of Origen's system, considered as a whole, lies in its assumption that the entire cosmic process is a mistake, due to the misuse of freewill' (Butterworth, lviii). Sin is the cause of cosmic diversity; divine grace is that which restores unity (2.1.1, 3.5.4ff.).

\(^{20}\) 1.6.2

\(^{21}\) Euche 23.2: ... anabasin nous mallon anabainei sōmatos.
the whole of the human Jesus into the bosom of the Father, such that he himself is established as the ground and measure and possibility of all genuine existence. It sees instead his removal from this grosser and too-solid realm.\(^\text{22}\) The ascension of Jesus—or rather of the soul of Jesus—marks out a path for other righteous souls to follow in escaping the tentacles of the sensual world into which they have previously sunk.\(^\text{23}\)

No doubt Origen's ambivalence about earthly existence must be linked to deficiencies in his concept of God. The trinitarian thinking we noted in Irenaeus (rather more intuitive than systematic) competes here with an emphasis on the pure unity of God as the proper basis of divine dignity and power.\(^\text{24}\) Origen's theology is more triadic than trinitarian, as is often pointed out, suffering above all from a paper-thin pneumatology.\(^\text{25}\)

---

\(^\text{22}\) Ascension as a soteriological movement means precisely a "stripping away" (Cels. 2.62) of what belongs to our spatio-temporality; not a planting, then, but a plucking up of the infelicitous seeds of diversity falsely pressed into the eternal fields of rational being. Yet we note that Origen is careful to say that the "other world," from whence Jesus came and to which he returns, is not "an incorporeal world that exists solely in the mind's fancy or the unsubstantial region of thought" (Princ. 2.3.6).

\(^\text{23}\) After all, it is "of the nature of created things that they should be left behind" (Crouzel 107). Referring to John 14:3 and Heb 4:14 in Cels. 6.20, Origen says that in view of the ascension of Jesus we ourselves hope, "after the troubles and struggles which we suffer here, to reach the highest heavens," i.e. to pass to the things that are supra-mundane, where we "shall not be carried about by the revolution of the heavens, but shall ever be engaged in the contemplation of the invisible things of God." (The supra-mundane can also be thought of as intra-mundane, Princ. 2.3.6.)

\(^\text{24}\) De Principiis begins by acknowledging the trinitarian framework of the tradition, but the ODCC is right to observe that "the point of departure of Origen's doctrinal teaching was faith in the unity of God, who is altogether transcendent." This transcendent unity and power is not ultimately the relational unity of Father, Son and Spirit, but the absoluteness of the Father alone. Crouzel (182f.) acknowledges the overt connection here with Middle Platonism, while contending that this is counterbalanced by Christian insights and a kind of negative dialectic.

\(^\text{25}\) Surely it would be difficult to maintain that this—by itself!—is not a major step backwards; at any rate, its prejudicial influence not even Nicea would fully undo. To Origen (1.3.5ff.) more than anyone else we owe the hegemony of a far-too-narrow notion of the Father as archê or aitia; of the Son as logos or divine Reason; of the Spirit as the source of an inner light which liberates one from the pitfalls of material existence. The
His approach has its deepest roots not in salvation history but in that old (social and
metaphysical) opposition between the one and the many, which is commonly rationalized
in favour of the One. As a Christian thinker he naturally made significant innovations in
this area as well. His denial of divine impassibility, for example, or his defense of the
value of plurality in creation, already shows how far he was prepared to go in
confronting popular assumptions. But meaningful talk of God still had to be attached to
the absolutely undifferentiated One as a fixed point of reference. His system was
therefore bound to be constructed along dualist lines, displaying a bias against the untidy
diversity of the material world and a tendency to associate only the rational with the truly
real, and indeed with the divine.

Our interest at the moment is in effects rather than causes, however, and in
cosmology more than theology (though these cannot really be separated). In an odd sort
of way Origen's worldview is both more and less optimistic than that of the Christian

Nicenes rejected his peculiar mixture of subordinationism and emanationism (Lyons 124)
but did not break his spell altogether.

26 As opposed to variety or diversity; note, however, the limitations he places on plurality
(2.9.1).

27 God the Father (Princ. 1.1.6) is "a simple intellectual existence..., Unity [Monas], or
if I may say so, Oneness [Henas] throughout, and the mind and fount from which
originates all intellectual existence or mind." The chief thing to be said about him is that
he is totally incorporeal and thus unimpeded in his operations. This unique quality of the
deity must be carefully insisted upon; otherwise "the first principle of all things would be
found to be composite and diverse, and would be many and not one," which would be
absurd.

28 He complains (1.1.7) about those who "are unwilling to have it understood that there
is a certain affinity between the mind and God, of whom the mind is an intellectual
image, and that by reason of this fact the mind, especially if it is purified and separated
from bodily matter, is able to have some perception of the divine nature." (In spite of his
assault on anthropomorphic theology, he leaves himself open to the same charge here;
preoccupation with the problem of "mixture" suggests that idolatry of the mind is as much
a risk as idolatry of the body.)
tradition generally: more, because faith in the divine Tutor's infinite patience, and in the ultimate unity and stability of rational being, points him in the direction of a universal apocatastasis; less, because he is interested only in the spiritual aspect of the universe and its inhabitants. In any case, there is very little room for what is recognizably human in any well-rounded sense; there will be no hairdressers in heaven. The fruitfulness motif (so prominent in Irenaeus) is notably absent, being much too earthy, too sexual perhaps. To be sure, growth and advance are concepts dear to Origen; unfortunately they are confined quite strictly to the inner man. They also appear to belong mainly to soteriology, that is, to the repair of our fallen condition rather than to our creaturely essence. Staticism is therefore a real danger in the last analysis.

There are a number of related weaknesses we can afford to pass over: the

29 Unless speculation about spherical resurrection bodies qualifies! In the end, of course, he is inclined towards the exclusion of anything that could be called a body at all. Origen's anthropology, with its emphasis on freedom and love—not to mention the linkage between inner movements and outer form—has an interesting relational dynamic of its own (Crouzel 95; Norris 122ff.). The problem that cannot be got round, however, is the way in which the inner and outer dimensions of human being are placed in a competitive relationship (cf. 1.1.5ff., 1.6–2.3, 2.10, 3.6f., 4.4.6ff.).

30 See Trigg 114.

31 Being, after all, is opposed to becoming, the latter being linked with moral–ontic instability (2.9.2), though of course there is a good and appropriate becoming, namely, the progress or ascent of the soul after its fall. For Irenaeus, on the other hand, being is in becoming, growth and fruitfulness belonging in a positive way to life itself. Evidence of this basic disagreement can be seen in their differing notions of ultimate reintegration, which for Origen means return to a unity without worldly variety (3.6.5), but for Irenaeus a "real establishment" richly diverse.

32 Inasmuch as Origen is plainly working with the symmetrical scheme, stasis–kinēsis–genesis–kinēsis–stasis, we can only conclude with Maximus the Confessor (see Meyendorff 131ff.) that his anthropology, along with cosmology and eschatology, is ultimately static. Though it might be possible to argue that the end is in some sense an advance on the beginning and that Origen's construction is therefore not altogether static, it is difficult to escape the overwhelming impression of something fixed, "to which nothing new can ever be added" (3.6.9).
utilitarianism implicit in his "reform school" cosmology, for example, or the ironic resurfacing of determinism in his doctrine of apocatastasis; even the danger that so close a connection between suffering and individual desserts might be used to justify not only God but social oppression as well (as in oriental thought). What must be pressed further is the fact that Origen's speculative framework heavily subverts both the continuity and the discontinuity crucial to the Christian worldview. How is this so? By placing the origin of our world within the context of the fall (standing Genesis 1–3 on its head) he conflates creation and redemption; the making of this world is already a redemptive act. On the one hand, then, discontinuity gives way to gradualism, absorbed in a self-cancelling loop of descending and ascending aeons which join the end to the beginning. On the other hand, in this same gradualism the daring proximity between time and eternity espoused by the tradition is also destroyed. Origen's novel approach renders the present creation not only provisional but finally dispensable; continuity for him is located in the individual soul, not in the worldly plantation as such. In short, this makes a eucharistic worldview impossible. Origen fails to overturn the gnostic option of redemption from, not of, the creaturely realm as we know it.

Trigg observes that in Origen's hands even the revolutionary doctrine of creation ex nihilo is made to serve an eschatology more Greek than biblical, indeed, more Greek

33 Against which he apparently attempts to guard at the end of 2.9.8 (but cf. 1.6.2).

34 What Irenaeus links christologically, and also distinguishes in the same way—i.e., via the doctrine of recapitulation—Origen actually identifies.

35 Crouzel (217) is forced to admit that his notion of pre-existence and of a primal fall into materiality is "certainly the most vulnerable" aspect of Origen's thought. But how can we sidestep the implications? Eucharistic hope vanishes along with the eucharistic tension. It is the salvation of this world of ours which Origen cannot conceive. (Celsus began to put his finger on the key issue when he queried Origen as to why God should be interested only in some of his creatures.)
than the Greeks' own: What truly has a beginning—matter itself!—must also have an end; what opens out into many must fold up again into one. The Hellenic spirit is apparently well served by this Christian thinker, then. But here we may remark that his philosophical sophistication, though it has much to commend it over gnostic fancies, to some extent fails to produce the goods. In the Eleatic manner, Origen concedes the dubious ontological status of everything that has a beginning, while rescuing rational spirits from the common destiny (i.e., dissolution) by appealing behind their worldly beginnings to a prior connection with eternity. Here, however, he had a problem. The doctrine of creation out of nothing had in some sense to apply even to rational spirits. Theirs could not be an absolute eternity but only a borrowed, provisional one. This admittedly was a great paradox. A synergistic multiple-creation theory (reintroducing the gnostic link between creation and fall) allowed him to keep a respectable distance between the pure genesis of rational spirits and the grossness of this present world; to that

---

36 Coupled to his principle that the end will be like the beginning, creatio ex nihilo turns out to be even "more consistent with the ultimate disappearance of all corporeality in the divine unity at the end of time than [is] the creation of the world out of an already existing unformed matter" (p. 110). The pattern of movement from the one to the many and back again underlies De Principiis as a whole, which was written in part as a justification of Origen's interpretation of Genesis (see Trigg 91).

37 Irenaeus, on the other hand—who agrees that all things having a beginning must also have an end—qualifies this incarnationally and, given the fall, eucharistically. Through the mediation of the incarnate Lord, things temporal are gifted with eternality in spite of themselves. He therefore breaks with the philosophers and makes no such appeal. There are a number of difficult issues here which we will take up later, since they have an important bearing on anthropology and ecclesiology, a fact better recognized (though not necessarily well handled) in the East.

38 The chief advantages of which were preservation of the divine transcendence and provision of a rationale for the notion of free will. Free will was granted by the Creator so that rational spirits might claim the Good for themselves, making eternity their own. Corporeality (the original, invisible kind) provided opportunity for the negative exercise of free will; thus both were positively accounted for. See 2.9.2; on the whole problem, cf. Norris 123ff.
extent it could satisfy the philosophers while supporting his ambitious theodicy. What it could not do was solve the problem of how these spirits were eventually to achieve permanent unity with the One, an eternity recognizable to the Greeks.\footnote{I.e., without abandoning free will. The seriousness of this problem shows up in the dilemma over whether the final state is ultimately incorporeal or not, and whether there is such a thing as a final state (2.3.3, 4.4.8; cf. Trigg 111). Origen could not answer these questions. Insofar as his anthropology lacked an incarnational centre and a properly trinitarian basis, he did not have the necessary equipment. What is particularly needed here is a much deeper notion of the corporate Christ, worked out on such a basis rather than in connection with the Logos idea.}

For the sake of so doubtful a compromise on the question of rational spirits, Origen was willing to abandon Judeo-Christian exuberance about creation as a whole.\footnote{We put it this way by rhetorical licence; as a true Alexandrian his native exuberance was not inclined in this direction in the first place (see Trigg).} More importantly, perhaps, he was prepared to pay a heavy price in christology as well. Like the gnostics, if much more gently, Origen drives a wedge between Jesus of Nazareth and the heavenly Christ. Insofar as he reopens the ontological chasm between the noetic and the spatio-temporal this is unavoidable. Not that he has any inclination to go back on the universal significance of Jesus, but an exemplarist framework now dictates that this significance will be largely iconic rather than ontologically ultimate.\footnote{"What the Gnostics merely represented as a more or less valuable appearance—namely, the historical work of Christ—was to Origen no appearance but truth. But he did not view it as the truth, and in this he agrees with the Gnostics, but as a truth, beyond which lies a higher" (Harnack 2/368ff.). See Crouzel (99ff.) on the notion of education via images, and on the various levels, corresponding to Plato's five elements of knowledge, on which we learn to recognize Christ—always moving upwards and away from the merely historical or contingent.} If we would see clearly we must look through the Jesus of history to the pre-, supra- and post-incarnate Logos, the logos asarkos. That is where we will discover the Truth of things.\footnote{This is christology "from above" in the philosophical sense. It is largely subservient to his cosmology, which in turn is heavily dependent on the neoplatonist projection of man's rational operations, aspirations, and frustrations onto the very structures of the universe. Harnack (2/326) speaks of "the idea of the Logos who is Christ" elevated into}
words, Origen's universal or cosmic Christ is not God's embodied wisdom, intrinsically related to the world of man. He is rather (in a notable reversal of Col 1:15) "the invisible image of the invisible God," in whom there is not "the least reason to understand anything corporeal." He is "the truth and life of all things that exist," or at least of "the noble qualities that are within us," but (pace Irenaeus) he is all this above and apart from any direct participation in the vagaries of worldly existence.

Origen, we may allow, is orthodox in his commitment to the fact and necessity of the incarnation; docetism is disavowed. But he begins a crucial turn in christology by confining the bodily humanity of the Word strictly to the realm of soteriology. At the same time he posits a primordial (atemporal) union of the Word with the pre-existent soul of Jesus. And by thus shifting the link between the divine and the creaturely to a sphere in which humanity as such and the incarnation are not yet taken into account, he facilitates also his shift respecting the object of redemption. It is not man as we know him but the rational, immortal soul of man (as of angels) which requires and receives the highest principle already in Clement. See also Gunton 1983:35ff.

---

43 1.2.3ff. Lyons (114) summarizes concisely: "The First-born of all creation is being of beings, idea of ideas and beginning, while the Father is beyond all of these. The First-born is a world (kosmos) containing the principles (logoi) according to which all things made by God have been created (gegenetai)." (On the flexibility of the term kosmos itself, see 131ff.; note also that teachings on Christ's mediation of cosmic being must be set alongside affirmations of his true divinity, for "the Son possesses both divine and cosmic attributes," p. 117.)

44 See 1.pref.4; 2.6.1ff.

45 Hence "it is the God-man who is directly the subject of the kenosis" (Crouzel 220), an important point of agreement with Irenaeus, who, as we have argued, also postulated the creatureliness of the Word already in his act of condescension. But it is not to an a-temporal mode of being that Irenaeus refers, but rather to a fully temporal one as the very ground and mediator of temporality, i.e. of God's creation in its proper directedness towards eternal life. In any case, at the point of their agreement neither man was followed closely by later theologians.
salvation, through the temporal condescension of the soul of Jesus. Soteriology now becomes occupied almost exclusively with the revelation of the Logos to the "inner man." The Hellenist flavour is not hard to detect, and it has lingered in Christian theology to the present day.\footnote{If indeed we have Origen to thank that Athens is as much a part of our heritage as Jerusalem, to him also we owe theology's restrictive preoccupation with revelation and its confusion about the relationship between ontology, epistemology, and soteriology. (Rationalist and mystical options diverge from this point, in both East and West.)}

In all this there is a hidden, if quite unintentional, prejudice against the human Jesus, as against our humanity generally.\footnote{Logos christologies show a great weakness for the Greek tendency to equate being with knowing, and both with intelligibility. They are thus prejudiced against the contingent and invariably inclined towards homogenization of the many as a precondition of achieving unity in the One. There is little room here for the textured contours of human community. Origen's \textit{De Principiis} offers as clear an example as one could seek.} Origen was unable to conceive of anything like the Pauline or Irenaean notion of recapitulation, in which the descending and ascending Lord is recognized in his cosmic dimensions precisely as a man; this doctrine is simply set aside.\footnote{His own use of the idea is attached to the unity theme, as one might expect—a "totalling up" or "totalling together" (\textit{sugkephalaïôsis}) of all things as they converge into a single cosmos or a single result (\textit{apotelesma}) under the administration of the Logos (i.e., divine wisdom, \textit{Eph.} 6, 11.2–11; see Lyons 144, on Origen's brush with pantheism in this connection). The Irenaean tension virtually disappears here; indeed the doctrine itself is never really recovered even by those whose theology owes a great deal to Irenaeus, a curious fact of dogmatic history.} The full-blooded historical Jesus can be given only a utilitarian value, since history itself is an interruption of cosmic integrity which Jesus is called on to correct. After the ascension (which, as we have seen, Origen prefers to describe as \textit{nous anabasin}, "an ascension of the mind rather than a body going up") there is little more to be said of him as man; he is for all intents and purposes absorbed back into the noetic sphere of the original creation. Thus it is not really his human nature which...
interests Origen, but his "superior" nature, together with the soul assimilated to it.\(^4^9\) The former may be indispensable from the standpoint of soteriology, but attention to it represents only one stage on the path along which our own ontic integrity is regained.\(^5^0\)

Origen's tutorial cosmology produces its corollary in christology, then, which also gravitates towards the pedagogical: The historical Jesus is related to the cosmic Christ almost in the manner of an object lesson to a grander and more abstract theme.\(^5^1\) From eternity the Word "interprets and presents to the rational creation the secrets of wisdom and the mysteries of knowledge." In order to reach us in our fallen estate, however, it is necessary for him to do so concretely and in historical form, making himself the *logos* even of our earthly knowledge of God. But the ascension invites us to penetrate more deeply, to transcend what belongs to this earth. It points us heavenward, towards things that cannot be grasped *kata sarka*.\(^5^2\) Christ is now adored not so much as God become

---

\(^4^9\) It is important to notice that the *proēgoumenē ousia* is itself twofold, comprising the absolute simplicity of his divinity and the comprehensiveness of his cosmic extension, i.e., his universal mediation of creaturely being in the divine movement *ad extra* (cf. Norris, 135f.; *Joh.* 6.154ff.) There are, of course, many questions to be raised about the coherence of Origen's understanding of the manner in which the Logos mediates creation in conjunction with the soul of Jesus, but these we must leave to one side (see Lyons).

\(^5^0\) Meyendorff (1975:176f.) mentions the letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to Constantine's sister: "It contains a very clear exposition of Origen's doctrine of salvation. The 'form of a servant' assumed by the Logos was no longer in the realm of realities. He undoubtedly assumed it, but in order to transform it into a divine reality; it is important, therefore, that the Christians, if they desire to anticipate the glory that is his ... should contemplate God in the purity of their hearts and not in artificial images of a historical past that is now over."

\(^5^1\) We cannot enter into the debate about the precise role of the incarnate Jesus, and of the cross itself, in Origen. We will only say that while de Lubac, Crouzel, et al. are eloquent in his defense, they often appear to miss the point: namely, that there is a constant movement away from Jesus' humanity to his "superior nature," though both are affirmed. (The transfiguration, e.g., which in Origen vies with the cross as the central symbol of Jesus–history, speaks not of his glorified humanity but of his deity.) This is also Augustine's way, as we shall see.

\(^5^2\) Indeed the wine of Christ "takes one out of the human" (see Crouzel 129). Like the
man, but as "the Angel of great counsel," as the master Tutor who mediates to us the divine mysteries through which our own souls are instructed in the art of ascension.53

In this way the problem of the presence and the absence is rationalized and internalized along with the ascension itself. It becomes a question of the cultivation of a spiritual mind, of the fine-tuning of the inner man to incorporeal reality, and is no longer so closely bound up with the matter of Jesus' departure and return. In a word, it is de-historicized. Not surprisingly, one discovers in Origen very little of the biblical tension between two opposing histories preserved by Irenaeus, or of that equally biblical optimism about our world which eagerly awaits a resolution of this conflict at the parousia. That eschatological dialectic is supplanted by something much more formal and sterile: the tracing of a purgatorial circle focused on the soul's departure and return, from and to God;54 that is, on the restoration of a rational cosmos through rational means. Christology is not allowed to correct this scheme, but must support it.55

apologists Origen sees the Logos as having assumed a body——through the condescension of the soul of Jesus——only for very specific purposes. Certainly we are no longer to think of Jesus "as being confined within those narrow limits in which he once lived for sakes;" rather, he "is everywhere and runs throughout all things" (2.11.6). Yet somehow his concrete humanity is not abandoned altogether, as Origen tries hard to maintain a doctrine of the resurrection (cf. Cels. 2.14, 2.62, 5.22ff.).

53 Of course he is adored for his condescending love, and as man. "Origen, however, did not consider God's activity in the Incarnation an end in itself but the means to bring us to the knowledge of God.... Christ's self-giving life and sacrificial death transform us into beings worthy of the knowledge of God. Christ heals us of our sin by providing us an example of perfect love and obedience and by teaching us, at whatever level of comprehension we are capable of receiving it, the way to ascend mentally to God" (Trigg 1983:101).

54 Jerome writes: "What you admire so much we long ago despised when we found it in Plato" (Con. Joh. Hieros. 19; see Butterworth's note, On First Principles, p. 41, n. 1).

55 All this is already implicit in Origen's subordinationist theology, his vertical cosmology, and the distinction between temporal and eternal gospels. Now it must be bound to the theory of the ubiquity of Jesus, which effectively displaces a weak-sister pneumatology (2.11.6; cf. 1.3). Note, however, that even if Christ "runs through all things" and is the saviour of all, he still has a role as "the mediator of a privileged knowledge of God to a
Only in this connection can we explain the really quite astounding fact that at the outset of his *De Principiis* Origen quietly passes over the parousia altogether in setting out the apostolic tradition, while transferring the themes of revelation and salvation, of conflict and judgment, from the public arena of cosmic history to the private arena of the soul.\(^{56}\) The marginalization of the concrete humanity of Jesus and the privatization of eschatology go hand in hand. Might it not be said that the fateful transition from history to philosophy is accomplished just here, in the decapitation of Jesus-history which naturally follows any such reinterpretation of the ascension as Origen attempts? That is our own judgment; but the questions this raises we must set aside in order to attend specifically to the ecclesiological consequences of his position, which are enormous.

* 

The fact that Origen himself has almost nothing to say on the subject in *De Principiis*, his most schematized work, allows for a very simple explanation: His ecclesiology (as J. A. Lyons remarks) is "clearly a facet of his cosmology" and is largely assimilated to it, requiring no separate treatment. It is a speculative rather than a eucharistic or pentecostal construction.\(^{57}\) Since for Origen history ultimately lacks select few" (Trigg 1991:35), just because the problem of the presence and the absence has become a matter of degree.

\(^{56}\) 1.pref.4ff. Harnack (2/369 n. 1) rightly suggests that Origen's "aversion to the early Christian eschatology" is native to his whole outlook. Origen does make reference to the second coming in 4.3.13, but only in connection with a distinction between the temporal and eternal gospels. Crouzel (111) thinks that this distinction expresses Christian sacramentalism, but we beg to differ. It is rather a matter of drawing a very definite line between our world and "that other world" (cf. 3.5.6ff., 6.1ff.), i.e., between the dubious world of images and noetic reality.

\(^{57}\) This charge is no mere contrivance even if it leaves out of account evidence of a more conventional side, grounded in experience of the community of faith. (Lyon's comment is on p. 142.)
substance the way is open for a reformulation of the doctrine of the church remarkable for its boldness, namely, the de–particularizing of the people of God through adoption of a universalist perspective. This move is closely linked to his dualist christology, naturally, and requires him to take up again the treacherous distinction (eschewed by Irenaeus) between a heavenly and an earthly church. Just as Christ pre–exists as the Truth of universal being above and beyond the temporal world, so his church also pre–exists with him as the sum total of rational souls (the corpus verum). In the fallen realm of space and time its empirical counterpart (the corpus permixtum) is distinguishable from society at large, of course, but its role, like that of Jesus, is primarily the role of tutor, of guide—interpreting to the world its destiny to ascend with the ascending Saviour, as age after purgatorial age strips away the impurities of our present material existence until every soul is successfully reunited to its origin in the Logos.

If Irenaeus can be said still to represent the essentially Hebraic line taken by the NT, according to which the church (like Israel) is a special offering to God picked out from the fruit of the earth, Origen now introduces something fundamentally different: The history of the church is simply identical with that of rational beings, which already in the pre–mundane world form the bride of Christ (Crouzel 219, Lyons 136f.; cf. Cant. 2.8, Matt 4.7); the fallen bride is "every race of men, perhaps indeed the totality of all creation" (Pss 36.2.1; cf. Princ. 4.3.7).

Irenaeus's reinterpretation of pre–existence in relational rather than a–temporal terms (rejecting the whole line of thought that runs from 2 Clement through to Origen) enabled him to affirm the pre–existence of Jesus without affirming also the pre–existence of his church.

To the pre–existent church must be added three other ecclesial forms, corresponding to OT revelation, the temporal gospel, and the eternal gospel (Crouzel 220). The liturgy belonging to Israel and the baptism of John are mere signs or shadows of the true church/cosmos; the liturgical acts of the NT church afford both sign and reality; the eschatological "baptism of fire" administered directly by Christ introduces the eternal reality itself (ibid. 224f.; note the origin here of the doctrine of purgatory).

The divine Christ is the "soul" of the church, and indeed of the universe, which is "as it were an immense, monstrous animal" sovereignly held together by this soul (Eph 9.113–20, Cels. 6.48, Princ. 2.1.3; Lyons, 143, notes the influence of the Stoic anima mundi doctrine); in his train we are all ascending. But must we not ask whether we have here the real beginnings of an imperialist and triumphalist ecclesiology?
Origen thus assigns a tutorial function and a mediatorial quality to the church compatible with Christ's own. The church, in fact, is the "internal regulative principle of the cosmos;" since the Logos has made himself the head or governing principle of the church, it becomes an extension of his own quickening and unifying activity. In its empirical aspect, then, the church serves as the chief instrument of cosmic reintegration. The world of men is but a fragmented church which must eventually be put back together. Needless to say, this whole approach fatally weakens the church's distinction from the world. In spite of its dissenting, correcting, even scolding function in society, the church is actually one with the world in walking a common course. Indeed the fateful notion arose here that the church can provide for the world a foundation for moral and social order on their shared pilgrimage to the heavenly places. Such was the practical import of Origen's famous dictum about the church as kosmos of the cosmos. The effects of this idea were far-reaching, and more readily account for the social evolution denounced by Ellul (et al.) than any other single factor.

We can draw out the full contrast with Irenaean ecclesiology by noting briefly three fateful tendencies arising from this assimilation of the doctrine of the church to a

---

62 The Logos "is the initiator of order in the world and the Church its mediator;" neither are merely passive "adornments" (Lyons, 142f.; cf. Joh. 6.59.30ff.). Lyons points out that the church mediates not only "Christ's work of ordering the world ... but also the world's extending itself to Christ." It therefore "affords the precondition for the final state of the cosmos" (cf. Lev. 7.2). All this is moving in a most dangerous direction.

63 The visible church is "an imitation of that future kingdom" in which all "the human race will one day be constituted in the world in unity" (1.6.2). This teaching has remarkable parallels in modern theology, though the future kingdom is now understood to belong to this world, not some other. (For his part, Origen gropes for a clear response to the question whether in the ages to come, "in which the dispersion and division of the one beginning is to be restored to one and the same end and likeness, there will exist nothing whatever corresponding to this present world," 1.6.4).
cosmology not determined by the question of what happened with Jesus. Perhaps the most obvious is the introduction of a deeply rooted individualism, which is a consequence of the inwardness of the dualist approach. Allegiance to the Greek notion of ascension (i.e., as a motion of the mind) makes inevitable an atomistic view of the church. The concept of koinonia—of a human community gathered by the Spirit round the person of Jesus of Nazareth in a dynamic and expectant fellowship—simply does not find much encouragement here. Instead there is a focus on the disciplined advance of the inner man, on one's own private journey, and on the Christ who is formed in each of us. It is the function of the church to serve this personal evolution; where it failed to do so it soon invited replacement by a form of community more suited to this end.

A related tendency is to be found in the intellectual mysticism which begins to supplant earlier notions of a common life in the Spirit. There is, as we have said, a marked attenuation of pneumatology in Origen. The Hellenizing of the doctrine of creation has its corollary in the doctrine of the Spirit, who is no longer so much the creator Spirit as simply the Spirit of wisdom and holiness. This in turn has its impact on ecclesiology, insofar as it is appropriated to pneumatology, securing for it a distinctly

---

64 Or, from another point of view, springs from it. At any rate, a dualist system, though it aims at undifferentiated unity in the church above, cannot avoid a powerful atomistic tendency in the church below. Origen's multiple-worlds theory (which displaces the doctrine of the parousia) was intended in part to accommodate this individualism.

65 Crouzel (124) points out that the bride or lover "wounded by the arrow" is never the church, but always the individual soul. This atomism led, as is well known, not only to a powerful monkish expression but also, if much less rapidly, to a disturbing trend towards the privatization of the sacraments, and indeed to their multiplication. (Origen's association of infant baptism with the cleansing of the soul from the carnal act by which it enters the world already signals a privatizing tendency in sacramental theory.)

66 I.e., the monastic communities—though precisely as functioning communities these represent an attempt (led esp. by St Basil) to control and counteract the monachistic tendency implicit in Origenism.
ethical and contemplative flavour while suppressing the earthy vitality of its eucharistic
dimensions.\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, it must be added that the link between eucharist and church is
seldom acknowledged by Origen.\textsuperscript{68} Moreover, both he and Clement found it necessary
to stress the mystical and intellectual aspects of the eucharist at the expense of the
corporate and material.\textsuperscript{69} No doubt this portentous change (entirely predictable among
those enamoured of Platonism) can be connected with the rejection of ascension in the
flesh; a doctrine of the church "seen mainly in its spiritual aspect" follows naturally on
the heels of the disappearance of the human Jesus into the cosmic Christ.\textsuperscript{70} We have
already intimated that under such conditions the problem of the presence and the absence
is bound to be attacked by way of the intellectual channels of \textit{contemplatio} and \textit{imitatio},
rather than through the more holistic, eschatological categories emphasized by Irenaeus.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{67} Origen associates the Father with the creation of all things, the Son with rational
creatures as such, and the Spirit with enlightened souls—i.e., precisely with the church
(1.3.5ff.). But it is this very narrowing of scope for the Spirit that is the problem. His
work is to bring all men to a "unity of contemplation" not to enable them to be "real men"
in the Irenaean sense; no wonder, then, if some of the fizz disappears from the ecclesial
winepress. (According to Origen the saints do not even celebrate birthdays, for they are
not happy to be living in "this body of death.")

\textsuperscript{68} Crouzel 229. On the other hand, "Origen is one of the creators of the language of mysticism" (ibid. 121; see 99ff.).

\textsuperscript{69} See Heron 68f., Pelikan 170. "We are not deprived of any good merely by not eating ...
nor do we abound in any good by the mere eating.... It is not the material bread that
profits the person who eats ... [but] the word which is spoken over it" (\textbf{Matt. 11.14}).
Likewise in baptism Origen emphasizes the "ethical and contemplative virtue" conferred
by the word (Crouzel 225f.). The purely iconic character of the physical elements—
water, bread, the earthly church, or the bodily life of Jesus—militates against too close
an interest in them.

\textsuperscript{70} See Crouzel (221), though of course he does not make this connection. Again, we
would insist against Crouzel that Origen's "sacramentalism" is more Platonic than
Christian, inasmuch as it is tied to the antithesis between perceptible and intelligible
(earthly and heavenly, etc.) in which the former must finally be left behind in a movement
to the latter. Indeed it is an iconic and \textbf{not} a sacramental point of view. (Cf. Wybrew 25.)

\textsuperscript{71} Working on the ancient principle that "only the like knows the like," Origen naturally
The third tendency is of greatest interest to us. Perhaps it should be seen as a counterpoint to the first two, which doubtless required compensatory developments in the direction of the collective. At all events, we find in Origen the beginnings of an institutionalism potentially more dangerous than anything aroused by previous talk of apostolic succession, etc. This institutionalism is a product of the iconic manner in which he links the earthly with the heavenly church. The church below, described (again with Clement) as ἡ πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ, is an organized community which serves as an "imitation" of the eternal kingdom. It is naturally a mixed society, embracing many who remain heavily entangled in the web of idolatry associated with perceptible reality; but at its core are the teleioi, who have already attained a high degree of unity with the Logos in the hidden realm of the soul. These are the true (though not necessarily the official) priests and deacons, serving as the spiritual eyes of the church below inasmuch as they participate already in the church above, ἡ κυρίως εἰκόσια, which exists timelessly in the bosom of God as exemplar and goal of the church below.

---

takes up the Greek philosophical notion of imitating or "following" God (Crouzel 96ff.; cf. Trigg 60). This is joined to a distinction between the image and the likeness of God; man moves toward the latter by means of a progressive disengagement from the distractions of the material world. Thus arises "the great mystical theme of the birth and growth of Jesus in each one of us" (Crouzel 98)—but this at the expense of the particularity of Jesus and the communal dimension.

---

72 This imitation operates on several levels. Thus, e.g., the priest symbolizes the inspired exegete; the presbyterium resembles the senate of a city as to its outward appearance, and the whole visible hierarchy "is in fact the image of the hierarchy of holiness" (Crouzel 222). The stratification of revelation reflects and addresses the stratification of creation itself which exists as a consequence of the fall.

73 Most of this is shared with Clement, and no doubt borrowed from him; for references see Kelly 201ff. Kelly argues that Origen had "a firmer grasp" of the earthly church as an organized assembly of believers. "All the time, however, there is an acute tension in his mind between the empirical Church here on earth and the ideal Church."
Now if this approach at first glance appears to enshrine an anti-institutional bias, it has in the end the opposite effect. The transference of spiritual leadership from the official presbyterate to the enlightened, contrary to Origen's own intention, left room for an increasingly political and pragmatic view of the former. More importantly, perhaps, the Platonist framework conceded to visible ecclesiastical forms and functionaries a kind of revelatory necessity, at least for the simpliciores, in a way that would eventually attract a host of subsidiary devices to service the earthly disclosure of heavenly mysteries. It is in this connection that Harnack charges Origen with having, ironically, "a principal share in introducing the apparatus of polytheism into the church." Certainly he gave a disturbing new significance to the formalities of ecclesial life, even if all of this soon co-existed with a highly independent and largely non-sacramental monastic counterweight. Esoteric and exoteric forms of Christianity were equally well served by Origen.

---

74 It is true that his view of church leadership "contrasts markedly" with a merely formal approach (Trigg 1983:145; cf. 1991:50). But may we not see in the graded spirituality for which Clement and Origen laid the foundations, i.e., in the notion of ascension by degrees, the real force and necessity of the corpus permixtum concept—that double-edged sword which later helped to justify inclusion of the lightly sprinkled masses within the arms of Mother Church, thus spawning the political bishop?

75 This began with an allegorical treatment of the Levitical priesthood but built on an iconic treatment of Christ himself, according to the hierarchy of his self-revelation (and of our knowledge of him, which was cast in Platonic form: onoma = the prophetic revelation which climaxes in John the Baptist; logos = the historical Jesus; eidolon = the Christ in each of us; epistémé = the Wisdom found in the perfect; to which can be added, presumably, eidea = the Logos or cosmic Christ contemplated in the beatific vision—Cels. 6.9, Crouzel 112ff., 221ff.).

76 2/368; see also 3/2ff., where Harnack indicates a more general connection between the Logos speculation, development of the notion of the mysteries, and a growing dependence of the people on the ecclesiastical institution. We might mention as well in this context Origen's teaching on the intervention of martyrs as co-redeemers with Christ, along with other such fanciful projections into the heavenly spheres.

77 Cf. Harnack 2/343.
The combined force of these various tendencies, it must be said, was by no means slight. In Origen we find the beginnings of the church's double face: on the level of the individual member, encouraging that alienation from the world which in retrospect has invited such telling criticism; on that of the institution itself, turning in the direction of reconciliation to the world. The latter was perhaps almost as natural as the former, given the conviction that the cross of Christ had brought the world of becoming to its nadir, and that the course of the aeons had now been turned back towards the hoped-for (if distant!) reintegration of all things with the Logos. No doubt it was owing to such a conviction that Origen could afford to concentrate on the individual soul as the true arena of cosmic conflict. But one result of this conciliatory strand in his cosmology was that consciousness of the precariousness of ecclesial being was seriously undermined, insofar as it too was transferred to the life of the soul. In other words, the tension between the world and the church which was so critical to Irenaeus was replaced in Origen with a general metaphysical tension between flesh and spirit, which left room for the possibility that the church as an institution might actually fit quite comfortably in the midst of human society, serving as its spiritual eye and conscience. Thus the soil in

---

78 This combination of inward alienation and outward reconciliation is the almost inevitable product of dualistic thinking, and the clearest evidence of it.

79 Inasmuch as the cosmos is treated as the "body" of the Logos, it is inevitable that the history of Christ should have this universal effect, i.e., that it should be determinative of world history in every sense. It is in this connection that Origen contemplates even the restoration of the demonic realm (whilst all the time struggling to maintain a place for free will, on which his entire theodicy depends; cf. Princ. 1.6).

80 This contributed to a gradual erosion of the apocalyptic outlook and the concept of cosmic judgment, about which it belonged to the church to warn the world. Instead the church began to be seen as a stabilizing factor, capable of supporting law and order during a long and indefinite march of time (cf. Harnack 3/2f., 189, 235ff.; there were of course other reasons, which lie beyond our present concerns). Ecclesiology here begins to collapse into anthropology, as it must do on a universalist scheme.
which the Constantinian temptation might flourish was prepared well in advance; with this observation, however, we must return to the larger issues with which we began.

We have suggested that the way in which creation and redemption are related (a cosmological problem with a christological dimension) shapes the foundation on which ecclesiology is laid. Looked at in that way, Origen's theodicy project was a disaster for the church. It attempted to defend the Creator's goodness by complicating the motivation for the present creation, and by conceding its ultimate dissolution as the proper outcome of redemption.\(^{81}\) This compromise with gnosticism—to which even the concrete humanity of Jesus had to be sacrificed through a spiritualizing view of the ascension—cut the ground from under a eucharistic worldview and brought about a major sea change both in Christian theology and in the life of the church. It is really academic whether Crouzel, the most recent and thorough of his defenders, is correct in claiming that Origen did not intend that his speculation, his theology \textit{gymnastikos}, should impose itself on a biblical or orthodox faith; for impose itself it did, with epochal significance.\(^{82}\)

It would be most interesting to develop more fully the alternatives in method and content represented by Irenaeus and Origen, as the first serious (and to some extent archetypal) systematicians. But we will have to content ourselves for the moment simply with observing that many in both East and West passed over the most valuable insights

---

\(^{81}\) "Simply the metaphysics of the age," is Harnack's judgment (2/341), though others quite rightly protest at so bald a conclusion. In his own way—a highly enigmatic one—Origen remained a biblical theologian at heart, who struggled to the end with the often contrary (and sometimes quite original) conclusions to which he found himself driven.

\(^{82}\) Crouzel (chap. 9) complains to some effect about various points at which Origen has been mistreated, but never comes to grips with the fundamental change of direction which he introduces into Christian theology. Eusebius of Porphyry's judgment on Origen remains valid: "'His outward life was that of a Christian and opposed to the law, but in regard to his views of things and of the Deity, he thought like the Greeks, inasmuch as he introduced their ideas into the myths of other peoples'" (\textit{E.H.} 6.19; Harnack 2/341).
of Irenaeus in their fascination with the sophisticated Greek theology of Origen, never recovering the Jesus-centred perspective for which the former had fought. In the words of Norris, Origen's works contained "the germ of innumerable developments," in ecclesiology not least. They remain remarkably influential even today, though much of his outlook is quite foreign to the modern mindset. That, however, is a matter we must leave until later, turning now to the chief western influence on Christian theology and our second backwards step.

**Augustine**

We hesitate to describe the teachings of St Augustine, whether on the ascension or the church, as a backwards step. By what right do we do so? If we allow that Irenaeus and Origen offered two opposing models for theology—one working from a centre in Jesus-history and a eucharistic ecclesiology, the other with a spatialized cosmology and an iconic ecclesiology; one maintaining a high degree of continuity between creation and redemption and the other not; one owning the precarious situation of the church and the other heeding only the slippery footing of the soul—Augustine might be supposed at worst to waver between the two. Often he is happy enough to take Irenaeus's part. In his last great work, *The City of God*, does he not openly rebuke Origen for his pagan philosophical and cosmological assumptions, especially for his ideas about pre-existence? Does he not there insist on the ascension of Jesus in the flesh, deriding that "little coterie of skeptics" who (remaining true to the premises of Greek

---

83 I.e., just because it effectively "neutralizes" history (Harnack 2/341, 345) and turns away from things tangible. See Norris 107.

84 11.4ff., 22f.; cf. 21.17.
thought) were still holding out against this doctrine? Who, for that matter, speaks more often of the ascension than Augustine? Indeed, was it not he who argued that the foundation of the church does not lie here with us but in Christ who ascended—thus explicitly connecting our own primary themes? How then are we to see in his work a backwards step?

To answer this question properly we must look away for a moment in order to take stock of intervening developments. Apart from the contributions of Irenaeus and Origen, discussion of the ascension in the period leading up to the great ecumenical councils was not extensive. It was associated mainly with the growing debate about the divinity of Christ, on the one hand, and with his successful reconciliation of man to the Father on the other. To the extent that there is a clear commitment to the notion of ascension in the flesh—that is, to an ascension which embraces rather than repudiates the worldly dimensions of man—the evolving tradition sides unambiguously with Irenaeus.

---

85 See 22.4ff. "Even if we should grant that the resurrection of the earthly body was once beyond belief, the fact is that the whole world now believes that the earthly body of Christ has been taken up to heaven. Learned and unlearned alike no longer doubt the resurrection of his flesh and his ascension into heaven, while there is but a handful of those who continue to be puzzled" (22.5; quotation from Walsh and Honan).

86 Pss. 29; cf. C.D. 15.19, which makes clear the eschatological dimension of the church insofar as it has this heavenly foundation. See W. H. Marrewee 1967:146f.

87 Athanasius, e.g., is mostly concerned to repudiate any adoptionist treatment of the ascension; the Cappadocians make little mention of the subject, in spite of its link with a growing interest in our own "deification" (Cf. Athanasius, Arian. 1.37ff.; Gregory Nyssa, Eunom. 6.4, 12.1 and his Ascension Day sermon; see Davies 96ff., 113ff.) Hilary of Poitiers is much more interesting, even approaching something like a notion of recapitulation (cf. Matt. 4.12), but his wider reflections on descending and ascending in De Trinitate do not escape the neoplatonic tendency.

88 There are exceptions of course. Not only did the docetic Naassenes, with whom Hippolytus contended, argue for "a spiritualizing of Christ prior to His return to the heights" (Davies 88), but Eusebius of Caesarea, e.g., followed Origen's approach. Methodius, on the other hand, attacked directly Origen's drop-in view of the incarnation, though his own system is a rather strange hybrid of Irenaean and neoplatonic ideas.
Descending and ascending are not hijacked by a prior cosmological agenda, but remain first of all a unique personal history from which unfolds an unheard-of cosmological possibility. This possibility entails a marvelous restructuring of God's handiwork that overcomes all dualism; indeed, from Tertullian to Proclus we hear of the union of heaven and earth that is consummated in the ascension:

Blessed be God! The nature of creation is divided into heaven and earth; yet today the grace which unites that which is divided does not permit me to see the division.

Through the ascension of Jesus the Creator has in fact raised the whole creation on high "together with his divinity, and has settled it in the Father's bosom."\(^{89}\)

Such bold thoughts (bold because they were understood realistically rather than in terms of a monist fertility myth, or ascetic ecstasy) unfortunately were not matched by a concerted effort to think through their implications.\(^{90}\) The problem of the presence and the absence was only superficially treated, and eucharistic theology continued to be moved by quite different considerations;\(^{91}\) verticalizing tendencies in eschatology gathered

---

\(^{89}\) Thus Proclus, in a pair of Ascension Day sermons; cf. Tertullian, who remarks in an interesting turn of phrase that the way of ascent to heaven was "levelled with the ground by the footsteps of the Lord." Ambrose speaks in a similar vein, referring to Psa 24:7 (a favourite among the fathers); likewise Chrysostom, who focuses on the priestly work of Christ. It is worth noting here that in the spuria there is an interesting attempt to reinterpret the entire cosmic week in terms of a single christological economy. (See Davies 85, 105, 123ff., 130f. for contexts and references.)

\(^{90}\) Thus poor Platonic substitutes---Christ's offering up of "universal human nature," e.g.---often had to do in place of genuinely Christian concepts. We may add that the innovative worldview of Irenaeus was apparently not understood (cf. Gregory Nyssa, Eun. 6.4); certainly it was not pursued, for reasons we will touch on in a moment.

\(^{91}\) Cyril of Jerusalem (Catech. 14.30) insists that if the ascended Christ is absent in the flesh he is nonetheless present by the Spirit, but like Tertullian before him (Res. 51) he makes no effort to explain this. In the Chrysostom spuria we find the simplistic dictum: "Above his body, below his Spirit for us" (Davies 119). On the eucharist, see Catech. 23.9, e.g.
strength, while dubious ideas about the heavenly session of Christ also began to take root.\textsuperscript{92} No doubt this can be put down to the fact that orthodox theologians were embroiled in an effort to establish once and for all that in the person of Jesus there was a genuine intersection of God and man. In the heat of the Arian debate even the doctrine of the ascension was pressed into the service of this all-important task; in the interests of highlighting his twofold nature, \textit{descending and ascending were regularly attached to Christ as God and Christ as man respectively}.\textsuperscript{93} It was the former that required emphasis in this Nestorian-like approach to the subject, for the struggle to retain the continuity between creation and redemption was becoming concentrated mainly in the question of incarnation (i.e., in the descent of God).

This had the effect, not only of pushing the challenge of the ascension into the background, but also of making some form of Logos christology attractive as a starting point (though naturally it had first to be weaned away from the subordinationism of Origen). Moreover, the opening of a breach between descending and ascending, and the recasting of both primarily in terms of a divine–human polarity, now meant that the \textit{Cur deus homo?} question demanded the doctrine of deification as its answer. Only the formula "God became man that man might become God" could complete the symmetry.

\textsuperscript{92} I.e., we begin to meet the common notion that Jesus is, so to speak, "killing time until his coming again" (O'Donovan 1986:37), soothing God's fury with man in the meanwhile through his heavenly intercessions (Davies 121)—an idea easily linked to the sacrificial conception of the eucharist encouraged by Cyprian and Cyril of Jerusalem which so obscured its joyful, celebratory character. For a variety of reasons concern with the afterlife of the individual began to dominate eschatology (the parousia itself being seen as a trip to collect the rest of us; cf. Nyssa, \textit{Eun.} 12.1).

\textsuperscript{93} The not-so-orthodox Hippolytus already provides the formula in which the \textit{logos asarkos} descends and the incarnate Word ascends (\textit{Noetum} 4). Novatian states plainly that just "as He ascended as man into heaven, so as God He had first descended thence" (\textit{Trin.} 11). Afterward there arose the further distinction between \textit{anèlthon} and \textit{analempthent}a—the ascent of Christ as God, and his being taken up as man (see Davies 87ff., 95ff.).
The adoption of this equation shows that the Nicene break with Hellenic thought was hardly a clean one, for the equation takes aim first of all at an old ontological target: salvation from the dissolution native to creaturely and corporeal existence; only then is its concern also hamartiological, salvation from the catalytic effects of sin. To kill two birds with one stone might seem a great advantage, but there are significant problems in this conflation of Greek and Christian soteriology—problems which might even be said to underlie the whole history of Orthodox theology in particular, a subject we will take up briefly later on.

The first is in the uncertain relation between sin and death. Is death native to creaturehood (the Greek position) or a consequence of sin (the Judeo-Christian position)? The Nicenes were not sure. Their answer appears to be a very constructive mediation: Death is native to creaturehood considered in and of itself, but not when its relation to the creative Word of God is taken into account. Dynamic categories are thus employed to good effect. A related problem arises that is not so neatly answered, however. The Word who saves his creatures ontologically is the Logos asarkos; the Word who descends to save even sinners is the Logos ensarkos. This construction, like the tower of Pisa, is undermined by the compromising ground on which it is built; in spite of all rectifying

---

94 See chap. 3 on the contrast between Irenaeus' ideas on the subject and the classical doctrine of deification, which owes as much to Clement, Hippolytus, et al. as to Irenaeus.

95 Nicholas Cabasilas makes it three: man is "triply sundered from God"—by his human nature, by his sin, by his death (Vita 3; quoted von Balthasar 1990:22).

96 Or between ontology and soteriology, which remains a matter of some confusion among the Nicenes just because they shared certain of the Greek presuppositions of Origen. This confusion crossed other boundaries; cf. Pelikan 1/285f.: "Despite their fundamental differences, the theory of the hypostatic union and the theory of the indwelling Logos both concentrated on death rather than on sin."

97 Athanasius, Gentes 41.

98 Athanasius, Inc. 4ff.
attempts it inclines steadily towards the association of flesh with sin, and salvation with
the overcoming of fleshly existence, as that which distances man from God. The Nicenes
recognized that the incarnation of the Word meant the salvation of the whole man; of this,
unlike Origen, they had no doubt. Yet given the polarities that were built into their
formula they could hardly avoid linking the notion of ascent with a movement away from
our earthy humanity back towards the incorporeal qualities of the divine Logos.

On the whole this tendency was resisted, but it was nonetheless endemic (even in
the West, where the same polarities were operative even if the formula itself was looked
upon, as today, with some skepticism). To be sure, great energy was expended for several
centuries to secure on all sides a proper faith in the hypostatic union; yet very little of this
energy was applied above the line, so to speak. Where the earthly Jesus was
concerned, much heated debate about the coexistence of God and man ensued; what it
means to be both God and man in heaven was a question widely ignored. The fact of

99 Torrance (1988:163 n.61) notes that even Origen (Dial. 7) speaks of the redemption of
the whole man in Christ. Yet neither Origen nor even the Nicenes got fully to grips with
this, though the latter—by insisting that Christ was *homoousios* with man as with God—
at least prepared the ground properly. Torrance quite rightly makes a great deal of their
achievements, but is inclined to overlook their inconsistency in following through.
Defending against Apollinaris helped to incline them towards an emphasis on the mind
at the expense of other human dimensions.

100 I.e., of the *logos asarkos*. How easy it was to be of two minds about this can be seen,
e.g., by comparing two of Gregory Nazianzen's funeral orations (cf. Orat. 7.21, 18.3f.).
Perhaps the best evidence, however, is to be found in the spiritual writings of the
Cappadocians, i.e., in the fact that the ascent of the soul continues to be the dominant
theme. According to A. Meredith (*Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* 70): "The body,
the resurrection and the sacraments do not play a large part in the spirituality of any of
the Cappadocians." (Here cf. Basil, Epis. 8.4.)

101 John Damascene, e.g., hardly bothers with the ascension. Theophanius Ceramei, on
the other hand, describes it as "the crown of the mysteries of Christ.... Today the
substance of humanity has been raised above the dignity of incorporeal beings and has
become a participator in the divine dignity." He emphasizes the union motif and reminds
us that the Lord "has given us a way of ascent into the heavens," a way which he
connects with the resurrection (Ser. 39, 49). Most such preaching, however, is content
to focus on the progress of the soul; see Davies 149ff.
Jesus' heavenly manhood may have been affirmed regularly, but its meaning remained thoroughly obscure. The union of heaven and earth was therefore a rather uncertain affair after all, and received cosmological frameworks (whether naïve or philosophical) underwent little serious modification.

This is borne out by the iconography of the ascension. In early western form, and again in Carolingian circles, artistic representations are often absurdly literal, showing a very human Jesus stepping up into the heavens with a helping hand from above. In the east, and increasingly in the west from the fifth century, a more symbolic approach—having affinities with the apotheosis of emperors—prevails; above and below are clearly demarcated, with the Christus Pantocrator dominating from above. In neither case is there much clarity about the new relationship between the earthly and the heavenly, or about the way in which the heavenly Man should be conceived. As for the doctrine itself, things naturally became more complicated as the Nestorian and Eutychian controversies heated up, with the latter in particular generating more attention to Christ's exalted manhood. But the general situation did not change; discussion of the ascension throughout the conciliar age remained heavily bound up with the underlying competition between the divine and the human that ruled theological affairs.

102 See E. Dewald 279ff., noting esp. figs. 2 & 5, which illustrate the two contrasting styles from different panels of a 5th C. door (St Sabina, Rome). It is interesting to see how western literalism, as it merges once again with the eastern dualist type after the Carolingian period, yields an oddity we might call the "partial eclipse of Jesus," leading eventually to the famous dangling-feet renditions. A much happier compromise can be found in the 6th C. fresco of the church of Sts Cosmas and Damien in Rome—not least because it holds together ascension and parousia.

103 I.e., in reaction to the Nestorians. Cyril of Alexandria, e.g., ascribed the attribute of eternity even to the flesh of Christ through a kind of communicatio idiomatum (Inc. unii.; see Pelikan 1/250), but this was seen as a threat to the reality and continuity of his consubstantiality with us; nothing very enlightening was offered as an alternative.

104 Davies' research shows how heavily affected by the see-saw debate over the two natures was discussion of the ascension at this time. As we will see, the Nestorian/Eutychian problem is very much connected to that of the presence and the
Now this "Chalcedonian" tension which so preoccupied the theologians was not an eschatological one at all, for which reason it was wide open to ideological piracy. From the beginning it was capitalized upon by those whose interest in theology was more political than scientific.\footnote{What we are calling the "Chalcedonian" tension between the divine and the human cannot be divorced altogether from the mind/matter or time/eternity dualism of Origen (cf. again Princ. 1.1) and the Greeks. Where these dualisms are operating eschatology tends to be sidelined, and where eschatology is sidelined false appropriations of the gospel inevitably flourish. It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves here of Eusebius of Caesarea's approval of Origen's framework, particularly of his approach to the ascension.} Having compounded the inherent difficulty in thinking together God and man by attaching the U-shaped history of Jesus too closely to the problem itself, the Nicenes both encouraged an overly abstract approach and, at the same time, invited a treatment of the ascension that continued to marginalize the human Jesus. The combination of these two factors made life easy for those who wished to emphasize the distant, \textit{divine} majesty of Christ, precisely in order to make room on the stage of human affairs for an icon of suitably exalted proportions, \textit{viz.}, the emperor Constantine.\footnote{It matters little, perhaps, whether with respect to the ascended Lord the stress should fall on his divinity or on his exalted humanity, for in either case exaltation meant here something not unlike \textit{apotheosis}—i.e., promotion to the realm of God's own invisible rule, leaving room for a successor "in the flesh."} Their more pragmatic interest in christology developed virtually unchallenged at least until the time of Augustine (much longer in the east).\footnote{Here cf. Gunton 1983:195f., who refers to the similar observations of W. Elert.} In the meanwhile, the forging of a partnership between church and state under their foremanship brought a sense of security to the church which further undermined an already fading sense of eschatological drama,
thus facilitating an even more distinct turn in Origen's direction.\textsuperscript{108}

Traditional eschatological commitments were now squeezed by a powerful pincer movement. On the one hand, there was a conscious attempt to reclaim or sanctify temporal history just as it is; peace on earth began to be seen as a reflection of peace in and with heaven. The invention of the daily office and the growth of a liturgical calendar marks this change of perspective.\textsuperscript{109} On the other hand, given the increasingly obvious limitations of this effort in terms of its actual impact on society, which appeared indeed to be having a rather greater impact on the church, there was a growing rejection of time and of temporal reality as such. In this way the Judeo–Christian notion of a conflict of histories became once again a conflict \textbf{between} history—the now common history of church and world—and eternity, a reaction clearly signalled by the mushrooming of monastic and hermitic communities (in which the more radical aspects of Origen's dualism found a sympathetic hearing in spite of ecclesiastical censorship).\textsuperscript{110} The pincer movement just described also produced a distinctly Platonist colouring in eucharistic theology,

\textsuperscript{108} In other words, there were both theological and circumstantial factors. Pelikan (1/131) speaks of "the magnitude of the change" which took place in eschatology, which was "nothing less than the decisive shift from the categories of cosmic drama to those of being, from the Revelation of St. John the Divine to the creed of the council of Nicea" (which nonetheless preserved traditional apocalyptic expectations).

\textsuperscript{109} Dix (305ff.; cf. 263ff.) points out that the change in political circumstance which led to the church's reconciliation to time also shifted its liturgical emphasis from eschatology to "the representation, the enactment before God, of the \textbf{historical process} of redemption" (esp. of Jesus–history). The idea that the heavenly session of Christ, the universal man, mitigates God's wrath perhaps supported this change; but we would also stress here the influence of unexamined Platonic notions of time and eternity.

\textsuperscript{110} The daily office actually evolved in the monastic communities, of course, partly as an expression of the \textbf{individualism} already represented there (cf. Dix 333). But this qualified affirmation of time was matched in monasticism by a turn towards mysticism and a rejection of much that belongs to temporal existence (marriage, procreation, material pleasures, etc.)—a turn which fed on growing dissatisfaction with the practical results of reconciliation to the world but unfortunately only furthered the critical breakdown of the eschatological perspective.
supported by an increasingly flawed concept of Christ's heavenly session. Moreover, interest in the afterlife naturally began to displace interest in the parousia. An uncritical theological and cosmological hybrid, evolving with the political fortunes of the age, thus began to have a number of very serious side-effects.

It was in such a context, with one or two notable differences peculiar to circumstances in the west, that Augustine sought to weave the developing threads of patristic teaching on the ascension into a wider theological pattern. His many sermons and comments on the subject were greatly influential at a time when the Feast of the Ascension (not to mention systematic theology) was coming into its own. The first thing that requires to be said about his approach is that he shared the erect, anthropomorphic cosmology of Origen and educated Greeks generally. Though perhaps somewhat less interested in cosmology for its own sake and more interested in its anthropological core—hence the well-known existentialist flavour of his work—he saw the world with cultured, neoplatonist eyes: visible cosmos and invisible heaven, like corporeal body and incorporeal soul, vertically arranged under God in the hierarchy of being; the outer pointing to the inner, the lower to the higher, the many finding stability in subjection to the one. On such a view the rational soul of man belongs to heaven as his body belongs

---

111 The session of Christ as high priest at the heavenly altar was not clearly understood though it was much emphasized. It appeared to have both a–temporal and temporal characteristics, i.e., to be beyond time and yet somehow to run parallel to it. This basic confusion left room for all sorts of artificialities and inconsistencies in eucharistic or ecclesial conceptions. Heron (1983:78f.) points out how Chrysostom, at least, showed a more promising approach, by associating the heavenly session more directly with the earthly act of redemption.

112 Davies (136) points out that Augustine returns consistently to four related concerns: the interpretation of John 3:13; the doctrine of the totus Christus and the ascension of believers; the matter of bodily ascension; the significance of the forty days. Each of these is in fact related to his handling of the themes on which we are focusing.

to earth, and is at odds with itself until it escapes from earthly distractions into an uninterrupted *visio dei*; its affinity for heaven (or rather for God, of whose divinity the heavens partake) puts it in competition with the body, whose dissipating tendencies must be mastered for the sake of higher aims. All this Augustine shared, if in modified form, and his doctrine of the ascension would be made to count for it as much as against it.\(^{114}\)

Such modifications as he introduced were rooted mainly in other considerations. A strong commitment to *creatio ex nihilo* to some extent humbled the heavens (the visible ones, at any rate) and exalted earth, suggesting a number of departures from his philosophical tradition. But neither was he afraid, it should be said, simply to choose the teaching of the Scriptures over that of the philosophers, even to the point of accepting such absurdities as the opening of the highest heaven to corporeal bodies.\(^{115}\) In defense of this deviation from common physics he might have offered the brave claim (made elsewhere) that "my love is my weight," a notion showing something of that innovative relational ontology which the Christian creed always encourages. In the end he simply dismissed opposing arguments sarcastically as being more ponderous than the human body itself, as Jesus' ascension proved.\(^{116}\) Yet his dualism for the most part got the best of him: The things of the body belong to the earthly city; the things of the soul to the heavenly. Movement from the one towards the other means progressive detachment from worldly interests, a thinning of bodily life into transparency, so to speak, for the sake of the life

---

\(^{114}\) See esp. *Conf.* 10–13. Augustine desired to "ascend by steps" to God in the inner man (13.9). Like Plotinus and others, he laid more stress on mastering *oneself* than on mastering the numerous external enemies which were thought to populate earth as the sphere which lay at the bottom of the universe (P. Brown 1967:244f.).

\(^{115}\) *Fid. Sym.* 6 (quoted Davies 139).

of the spirit. The soul in its ascent might very well drag the body with it, but Augustine was never very clear why, or to what effect.

Given the common philosophical milieu, we should not be surprised that the tendency to conflate ontology and soteriology is very noticeable in the father of western theology also. Augustine's affirmation of the goodness of the material world, though quite lyrical on occasion, was compromised from the outset. To come into being, he suggests, is to go forth from God; to sin is to go astray. These concepts, as von Balthazar observes, are difficult to distinguish and Augustine makes no consistent effort to do so. To be created or to fall—both mean to find oneself at some remove from the Creator, being summoned back; creaturehood is already a problematic condition. Salvation then

117 Hence the idealizing of virgins, who were assigned a mediatorial status of sorts, as those existing on a higher plane; hence also support for a male, celibate clergy as models (along with those in monastic life) of that complete mastery of the flesh which will characterize the next life. As Augustine grew older he made more room for a physical and social existence in his concept of heaven; yet he never forsook the theme that the spirit must dominate and control the flesh—a notion which passed over into his ecclesiology and his politics (cf. McDannell & Lang 54ff.).

118 Without rethinking his whole cosmology it could hardly be otherwise. Heaven, after all, was the habitation of pure angelic spirits; the saints were chosen to make up the number of those who had fallen away (C.D. 22.1). A philosophical aesthetic is at work here that is less than open to life in the body. Indeed, Augustine reveals his own Origenist streak by finding in Genesis not one creation but two, heaven and the cosmos, with only the former ("some kind of intellectual creature," Conf. 12.9) participating truly in God by virtue of its unswerving contemplation.

119 E.g. C.D. 22.24. After describing the beauties of nature, he notes that these are "but the solaces of man's miseries, no way pertinent to his glories," which will be much greater. Discussion of the magnification of God's heavenly gifts is strangely ambiguous, however. It is the untroubled contemplation of regenerated nature which we will enjoy, rather than its use. (This is quite in keeping with earlier teaching that sight is the highest sense, because the least time-bound; see Conf. 10.30ff., 13.23f. Note his sense of guilt over the distracting pleasures of music.)

120 "To move out from God, to wander away from God: one is creation the other is sin. But who can, in terms of our concrete consciousness, distinguish between the two?" (von Balthasar 1967:5f.; see Conf. 11.4ff.) There is a strong relational dimension in this analysis, of course, but it is antithetical to creaturely movement, which—even in the person of Jesus—is of value only insofar as it leads us "to stable Truth, where we truly learn while we stand and hear him" (i.e., the uncreated Logos, who restores us to our
is not only redemption from the debilitating effects of sin but from "all straits of space and time," the gathering up of what has wandered away into the mists of time. It means the overpowering of the dissipating tendencies native to all that is not God, by means of a disciplined and loving response to God. In other words, though Augustine is quite famous for his attention to the hamartiological problem, it is not always clear how far this can be separated from the problem of human existence as such. Like Origen he lacked something, though not so much perhaps, of the biblical optimism about our diverse creaturely world—doubtless because his own doctrine of God was also, under the pressure of neoplatonism, weighted in favour of oneness rather than threeness.

In any event, the sense of distance and competition between the sphere of the divine and that of the human remained very strong in Augustine. He was therefore not at all inclined to question the validity of the *logos asarkos* idea as a starting point for christology, or the too-simple scheme that it is God who descends and man who ascends. Nor was he about to examine too closely the business of ascension in the source in God).

121 Time and things temporal "tend towards non-being" (11.14); by nature they lack divine cohesion, a condition contagious with sinful dissipation. Von Balthasar (9f.) notes Augustine’s "dangerous" proximity to Maximus, who "sees creation and the Fall as simultaneous, though not identical." But here we should return to Irenaeus, for whom man was a "child" who might very well (and did in fact) wander from his heavenly Father, but was by no means pointed in that direction by virtue of being made; neither death nor sin are intrinsically tied up with temporality—-or with sex!

122 Both Origen and Augustine combined something of Plato’s cerebral optimism about creation (viz., that all things participate "as far as possible" in their divine origin) with something of the more celebratory Hebraic approach, in order to combat gnostic and/or Manichean pessimism. Yet their underlying suspicion of diversity was not overcome by a properly trinitarian view of creation, or engagement with Jesus-history. Instead they employed as a filter the *logos asarkos* idea, which better suited the drive towards unity (cf. Pelikan 1/296f.; Augustine Ep. 238.13).

123 Irenaeus held together in a single economy of the Word, Jesus Christ, the self-giving of God the Son as the Lord of creation and his redemptive descent into our fallenness—i.e., *enanthropōsin* and *ensarkōsin*, so to speak—an approach made possible by his relational ontology. Origen, on the other hand, tore these apart, making the one "spiritual"
flesh. His way forward was not to deny or ignore this teaching, however, but rather to link it up with the believer's faith experience. One of the most striking features of Augustine's handling of Jesus' ascension is the fact that he is concerned not just with a unique historical event, but with its repetition for us. This is quite in keeping with the "professorial" image of Christ he shared with Origen, and his own instrumentalist approach to the incarnation.\textsuperscript{124}

Here we must take note of the crucial maxim, per Christum hominem ad Christum Deum, which rests on the assumption that the Word's humanity has no other purpose than to lead us to his divinity.\textsuperscript{125} No such result is possible, Augustine suggests, unless and until the humanity itself is withdrawn from view. This indeed was a primary objective of the ascension, for the disciples' minds were concentrated on his human nature, and they were unable to consider him as God. In fact, they would then think of him as God [only] when his human nature would be removed from their eyes, so that, with the intimacy which they had formed with his human nature thus severed, they might learn to consider his divinity in the absence of his humanity.\textsuperscript{126}

and eternal, the other material and temporal. Augustine, like most of the fathers, does not recognize the distinction; hence he has no reason to criticize the simplistic formula indicated above.

\textsuperscript{124} Christ "looked through the lattice of the flesh" (Conf. 13.15) and spoke with human voice—i.e., entered the unstable realm of time and space—in order to lead us to the stable Truth which exists far above us, where time and change do not occur. Now he speaks directly from there; "heaven is the chair of our professor" (Ser. 261). Covenant history is behind us, and must be recreated within the amphitheatre of the heart (to borrow a phrase of Brown's). How utterly different is Augustine's perspective from that of St Paul, as different as their respective conversions!

\textsuperscript{125} See E. Przywara (1936:277ff.) for excerpts on this theme: Ioh. 13.4 e.g., or Ser. 261: "Through the Man Christ you go to the God Christ. God means much to you, but God became Man. The Word which was far from you became Man in your midst. Where you are to abide, He is God; on your way thither, He is Man." Cf. Pss 117.22 or 119.1ff., where we are told that we must ascend "from his example to his divinity," and hence "above all temporal interests." Marrevee (99) suggests that by this frequent motif Augustine "summarizes the whole process of the Christian life."

\textsuperscript{126} Ser. 264. All this is quite fundamental: "What could not be attained by man directly," writes Marrevee (100f.), "manifested itself in the form of a man so as to enable man by
As with Origen, then, so with Augustine—for us, at least, the humanity of Christ must
give way to his divinity. By virtue of the ascension the former would no longer
obscure the latter, which by the power of the Spirit would stand forth to the inner eye:
"I am removing myself from you exteriorly, but I am filling you with myself interiorly."128

By this ingenious means Augustine appropriates the tension of which we have been
speaking in what appears to be a constructive way. Two questionable consequences,
however, follow from this none-too-subtle competition between the divine and the human
Christ. Bodily ascension, though affirmed, is for the first time assigned an essentially
negative value or function. Moreover, there is a disturbing psychologizing of the
significance of that climactic event in Jesus' life. As William Marrevee observes:

Although Augustine does not deny the objective Ascension of Christ as man, he
maintains that this objective event loses its significance for men, if they are not
able to believe in Him as God. The Ascension then takes place again, every time
we accept Christ's divinity: "Therefore He has ascended for us, when we rightly
understand Him. At that time He ascended once only but now He ascends every
day."129

means of this visible appearance to press on to what was manifested and at the same time
hidden, namely God.... The Lord himself, as Augustine sees it, `wishes us rather to press
on; and, instead of weakly clinging to temporal things, even though these have been put
on and worn by Him for our salvation, to pass over them quickly, and struggle to attain
unto Himself" (Doc. Chris. 1.38).

127 Cf. Marrevee 103. This is an attenuated form of Apollinarianism, in the last analysis,
though it has a Nestorian dimension: The human Christ does not enter us physically, but
"admonishes from without;" the divine Christ "dwells within in us so that we may be
interiorly converted, so that we may be quickened by him and formed after his pattern,
for he is the uncreated form of all created things" (Ser. 264). Surely the anti-Arian
mood of his time does not account for Augustine's emphasis on the divine at the expense
of the human; its deepest roots are philosophical.

128 Ibid. (cf. Trin. 1.18). Note that the glorification of Christ's humanity seems to amount
to its becoming completely transparent of his divinity—a notion which leaves little scope
for speaking of our own glorification in a properly differentiated way (cf. C.D. 22.29).
Another Origenist feature here is the narrowing of the Spirit's role towards a purely
revelational function in conjunction with the interiorization of salvation; see Heron

129 Ser. 246. Marrevee (p. 103) does not make our criticism. Earlier he explains (101):
"It is therefore in view of the function of the Incarnation, which was to bring man to God,
The ascension, in other words, is no longer so much the joyful occasion of man's presentation to God (though it is that) as the removal of a stumbling block to faith.\textsuperscript{130} It is in danger of being made over into something like a divine retraction of the human Jesus\textsuperscript{131}—this is the feature which renders it repeatable—lest in overstaying he should undermine his own purpose.\textsuperscript{132} In effect it is a drop—in theory of the incarnation that we confront in Augustine, then, who in fact \textbf{dismisses Christ's human nature as being necessary only "for our weakness."}\textsuperscript{133}

This sidelining of the human Jesus meant that the bishop might escape any thorough reworking of his neoplatonist worldview. For obvious reasons he found it convenient to remain agnostic regarding the Where? question, refusing to say more than

---

\textsuperscript{130} "It is better for you not to see this body and to think of my divinity" (\textit{Ser.} 264). Perhaps the difference in socio-political circumstance between east and west is relevant here; the emperor sat comfortably enthroned in Constantinople, but things were otherwise in the Latin world. On the other hand, it may be purely systematic.

\textsuperscript{131} In danger, we say: Augustine did not deny what Hilary (\textit{Trin.} 9.6) e.g. had insisted, viz., that the Lord remained \textit{toton hominem} after the ascension; he could and did preach the parousia. Yet the neoplatonic principle of descent and ascent undermined this in numerous ways.

\textsuperscript{132} "There is one thing transitory in the Lord, another that is enduring. What is transitory is the virgin birth, the incarnation of the Word, the gradation of the ages, the exhibition of miracles, the endurance of sufferings, death, resurrection, the ascent into heaven.... For Christ is no longer in a state of birth, or dying, or rising again, or ascending into heaven. Do you not see that these acts ran their course in time, exhibited to those on the way something that was transitory, so that they should not abide on the way but reach their country?"—\textit{Pss} 109.5.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ser.} 264.5. "Thus, the manifestation of the human nature of Christ is necessary for the faithful \textit{in this life} [a curious connection is here made with the forty days in which Jesus showed himself \textit{before} the ascension] so that they make their way toward the Lord. However, once they have come to the vision of the Word, an entirely human manifestation will not be necessary" (ibid.). A line thus runs from the gnostics through Clement and Origen and the Naaseni to Augustine, who does \textbf{within} orthodoxy what Origen the others had done outside of it.
that the body of Christ was indeed "in some part of heaven." Left unexamined this claim is more than a little problematic, of course.

Heaven, he taught, is the pre-temporal home of "that spiritual or intellectual creature which forever contemplates God's face" (an hypostasization of wisdom as God's first and truest creation). How are we to connect these ideas? Had he followed up instead his own insight that the ascended Christ "received as man the power to judge, which is the actual content of [his] being with the Father," some progress might have been made in remoulding "heaven" by the application of eschatological principles in cosmology. As it was, Augustine simply made do with a good deal of inconsistency here, leaving behind a legacy of confusion about the degree of continuity between creation and redemption. True, his picture of the human condition with Christ in the kingdom of heaven gradually took on some colour under the impact of his pastoral experience; yet it remains doubtful whether he was ever much interested in anything more than an ascension of and by the soul. Indeed, as Harnack points out, the man "who perceived the Deity, and had gained faith, love, and hope, [already] stood beside the throne of God, and was with the Father of light and his essential Word; the historical Christ lay beneath him." 

---

134 Ep. 187.41. "But the question as to where and in what manner the Lord's body is in heaven is one which it would be altogether over curious and superfluous to prosecute" (Fid. Sym. 6; Davies 139f.).

135 There are at least two problems here: one is the separation of person and body (the distinction is that of the divine and the human; see Ser. 263); the other is the lack of a Christian definition of heaven. Augustine did not get to grips with Paul's dynamic notion of heaven as something opened up by the ascending Jesus, embracing the church and the world itself in an eschatological way (cf. Lincoln 186ff.).

136 Marrevee 89 (emphasis ours), Fid. Sym. 14. Explored in a more eucharistic and less forensic way, this idea is promising; see also the beginning of Ser. 263 (and cf. Marrevee 120ff.).

137 Harnack 2/270. If the younger, more philosophical Augustine trained his sights on the ascent of the soul, as the true aim of the Christian in life and in death, along the way of his episcopal experience he came to place more stress on the survival of the whole man, as we have already indicated, speculating in an almost Irenaean fashion at the end of Civ.
In sum, it must be said that St Augustine, even while maintaining an orthodox confession of the ascension, furthered the dangerous process of internalization begun by Origen rather than checking it. The impact on his ecclesiology, namely a deepening of the drive towards individualism on the one hand and institutionalism on the other, is predictable enough. If in Origen that tension is weighted in favour of the former, however, a new balance now comes into play. This development owes rather a lot to factors other than the one we are considering directly, of course, but a second striking feature of Augustine's treatment of the ascension is that he made a more deliberate attempt than any of the fathers to correlate the doctrine of the ascension with his view of the church. That correlation eventually lent support to a growing element of externalism in ecclesial life, through a process of thought we can now attempt to trace, at least in part.

As the condition of a penetrating faith in Jesus' divinity, the ascension was a point of departure not only for the whole process of a man's sanctification but also for the diffusion of the church among the nations. This Lukan theme Augustine provides with a theoretical basis having a biblical ring but pronounced neoplatonist overtones: The increase of the gospel means the decrease of human fragmentation, as the ascending head brings his entire "body" under control. Christ "diffuses himself through all his members" in every age and place in order to draw them with him, as one man, into heaven.

---

**Dei.** Yet the tendency to equate revelation with salvation meant that the earlier view persisted and the latter remained largely unexplored.

---

138 See Marrevee 106ff., 120.

139 Ser. 263. This is accomplished by the Spirit, who glorifies Christ by manifesting his divinity, and so begins to effect in man a process of spiritualization—i.e., a personal ascension based on the faith triggered by Jesus' ascension; see Marrevee 104ff. Cf. Ser. 270: "You will indeed cease from being carnal, if the form of the flesh be removed from your eyes, so that the form of God may be implanted in your hearts" (by the Spirit). Praed. Sanc. 15.31 has a healthier pneumatology, presenting both Jesus and ourselves as the object of a Spirit-enabled humanity.
Joined to Augustine's activist (i.e., subjectivist or individualist) view of the ascension, in other words, is a complementary teaching about the totus Christus, based on the power of the exalted Lord to reassemble the dissipated fragments of temporal man in order to introduce them into the timeless cohesion of the Jerusalem above. This cohesion—along with the vertical orientation—is fundamental to Augustinian ecclesiology.¹⁴⁰ Again and again he stresses the identity of head and members as unus homo, una persona.¹⁴¹ The pneumatological note struck by Irenaeus is not forgotten here, nor his communio motif. Yet so strong is the emphasis on unitas that it actually pushes him towards a kind of christological modalism in which a distinction between Jesus and his church is difficult to maintain after the ascension, except by returning to that between divinity and humanity: If the church is the bride of Christ there are plainly "two in one flesh," we are told, but these two are the divine Word and the one corporate Man.¹⁴²

The virtues of this approach we may pass over for the sake of the criticism we are

¹⁴⁰ "Let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not merely Christians but Christ" (Ioh. 21.8). Given this identity, ecclesial being is determined by the directional quality lent to it by its ascending head (Marrevee 138ff.; see Pss 29/II.9f.). At the top—the foundation!—there is perfect unity in the presence of God; here below the drive for unity constantly extends the boundaries of the catholic church horizontally, inducing its order into the turbulence of worldly affairs.

¹⁴¹ See Przywara 211ff. for excerpts on the totus Christus idea; also Davies 136ff. This idea has something in it of recapitulation, for it is not unconnected with Jesus—history (see Marrevee 120ff.); yet it often seems to have rather more of the myth of shattered and recollected man (Conf. 13.20.28; cf. von Balthasar 1967:30), which is essentially anti—historical. Otherwise put, the notion that "all mankind is in Christ one man, and the unity of Christians is one Man" (Pss 29.2.5) reflects as much of Origen—tempered by the doctrine of election—as of Irenaeus.

¹⁴² "The 'two' you must refer to the distance of his divine majesty from us" (Pss 142.3). Marrevee (p. 133) observes that Augustine is less interested in what happened to Jesus himself in the ascension than in its consequences for the church—i.e., in the appearance of his ecclesial aspect; cf. Kelly 413f. on Christ's "triple mode of existence." We find here a modified echo of Hilary's christological "times": before the incarnation is the Word; during the incarnation is the God—man; after the ascension is the totus Christus, both head and members.
pursuing; its political utility we will come to in a moment. What requires to be pointed out straight away is that with the totus Christus idea the humanity of Christ, which was sublimated in Augustine's treatment of the ascension, comes back into play in the form of the church. The church is seen as a prolongation of the incarnation, and begins to attract to itself more and more of the essential function of the human Jesus. It now mediates the individual's faith in the divine Christ. Thus a new line of thought emerges, strangely at odds with the former one:

The church is spread throughout the whole world: all nations have the church. Let no one deceive you; it is the true, it is the catholic church. Christ we have not seen, but we have her; let us believe as regards him.

The cynic might be forgiven for replying that if it was easier for the disciples to believe in Christ's divinity after the withdrawal of his distracting human presence, how much more so today were it only possible to remove the opaque image of his all-too-human church! But Augustine had less difficulty than we do in looking on the positive side, and in any event did not notice the inconsistency of his arguments.

Indeed, he was quite happy to suggest that the church does not merely preserve the function of the earthly Jesus; since its foundation is in heaven it also stands in, so to speak, for the glorified and triumphant Lord. It is precisely by way of the church's own visible glory, especially its supernatural growth and marvelous catholicity, that Christ's true (but otherwise invisible) dignity is effectively declared to the world. As the church

---

143 See e.g. Pss 74.4, 86.5, Ep. 105.14f; since it is Christ as man who mediates with God the church begins to be perceived in just that role.

144 Ser. 238.3; cf. 116.6.6: "Their faith was made complete by the sight of the Head; ours is made complete by the sight of the Body" (Przywara 223).

145 "The recognition of the Church as Christ's Body on earth must precede any attempt to honour Christ because of His glory" (Marrevee 120). See Ep. Joh. 10.9, e.g., or Ser. 262.6: "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth.' Let him who does not grasp the second part not believe the first part. For what is the significance of 'And thy glory above all the earth,' except that Thy Church is above all the earth, Thy lady is above all the earth.... She is Thy glory...."
increases in stature, then, so does the compulsion to believe; such is the triumphant spiral of faith set in motion by the ascension.\(^{146}\) The obvious danger in this turbo-charged construction, however, is the likelihood of a runaway effect. When the earthly church is seen as a mirror of heavenly triumph, when its success on the horizontal axis is thought to display the dizzying heights to which its Lord ascends, it is difficult to set limits to the glory which should accrue to it: "The Lord, glorified in his resurrection, commends the church; about to be glorified in his ascension he commends the church; sending the Holy Spirit from heaven he commends the church."\(^{147}\)

This inflationary risk was intensified by Augustine's epoch-making innovation known as amillennialism.\(^{148}\) A certain advance on the power and glory which the church is to share with Christ in God's kingdom is already an important New Testament theme, of course; but the essential eschatological reserve which the scriptures insist upon here was badly undermined by Augustine's artificial resolution of the problem of the presence and the absence. The following comment on the eucharist reveals what is by now a familiar pattern:

In respect of his majesty, his providence, his ineffable and invisible grace, his own words are fulfilled, 'Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' But in respect of the flesh he assumed as the Word, in respect of that which he was as the son of the Virgin..., 'you will not have him always.' And why? Because in respect of his bodily presence he associated with his disciples for forty days; and then ... he ascended into heaven, and is no longer here. He is there indeed, sitting at the right hand of the Father; and he is here also, never having withdrawn

\(^{146}\) In an odd sort of way, then, widespread belief in the resurrection and ascension vie with the events themselves as a basis for faith (C.D. 22.5). Cf. Marrevee 121.

\(^{147}\) Ser. 265.12

\(^{148}\) Here the tension at the heart of Irenaeus's eucharistic worldview is broken down into distinct vertical and horizontal components, as aspects of the post-parousia authority of the saints are brought forward into the present age. I.e., the church reigns now, in time, by virtue of its participation in the sovereignty of him who has passed above and beyond time.
the presence of his glory. In other words, in respect of his divine presence we always have Christ; but in respect of his presence in the flesh it was rightly said to his disciples, 'Me you will not have always.' In this respect, the church enjoyed his presence only for a few days; now it possesses him by faith, without seeing him with the eyes.\textsuperscript{149}

This Nestorianizing analysis plainly signals a loss of eschatological edge; since it is the divine presence we are called on to seek and pursue, the belief that in that sense "we always have Christ" can only blunt our consciousness of the Not Yet.\textsuperscript{150} Under such circumstances amillennialism becomes a dangerous doctrine. Where it is not clear that it is one and the same Christ (the God–man) who is both present and absent, the eucharistic qualification of ecclesial existence cannot make itself properly felt.\textsuperscript{151}

The potential in all this for an unchecked advance of externalism is difficult to deny. In fact, both poles of dualist ecclesiology could now be strengthened. On the one hand, Augustine was able to maintain a heavy stress on the inner workings of the individual heart as it communed invisibly with its God: \textit{Crede et manducasti}.\textsuperscript{152} On the

\textsuperscript{149} Ioh. 50.13; quoted in Heron (1983b:72), who does not fail to notice the "sharp distinction between Jesus' physical presence and that of his divine power" which here befuddles eucharistic theology, rendering the link between heaven and earth problematic in the old pagan way.

\textsuperscript{150} "The absence of God is not absence" (Ser. 133). "When He ascended into heaven, we were not separated from Him" (Ser. 263). "He is the Head: we are the members. He is in heaven: we are on earth. Is He, as it were, far from us? If you ask space, He is far away; but ask love, He is with us." In the third quotation (Ser. 395, possibly pseudepigraphal: Davies 141) there are hints of an interesting ontology, but one mixed un–critically with a pre–Christian conception of space, precisely because it is only the \textit{divinity of the Logos} that is in view (cf. Pss 117.22).

\textsuperscript{151} Augustine's eucharistic doctrine is notoriously inconsistent; we note that elsewhere he leans on the hypostatic union in order to claim that the flesh of Christ is everywhere present eucharistically, in subjection to the will of Christ. But see Wainwright's helpful analysis of the way in which the vertical orientation of "realized" eschatology passes over into that triumphalism "which following on Augustine's interpretation of parables of the kingdom as parables of the church, makes a simple equation between kingdom and church" (1967:12; cf. C.D. 20.9).

\textsuperscript{152} Ioh. 25.12
other hand, the institutionalism which had been gathering steam since the beginning of the third century was greatly facilitated, since his construction of the problem of the presence and the absence really implies that the activity of the church can, indeed, must serve for the time being in place of Christ's absent humanity as the common means of access to his divinity. Given time, this tended to exaggerate the glory of ecclesiastical functions, steadily altering their character. What is worse, perhaps, it encouraged the fateful idea that the world is to serve the church with its temporal resources, as if thus serving Christ. We have mentioned the lack of a proper eschatological control here. Augustine certainly continued to see the church as an eschatological entity, but since he employed a sacramental theory resting mainly on the relation between signum and res (i.e., on the Platonic notion of similitudo rather than the more dynamic commutatis or conversio) the effect was, if anything, in the opposite direction. To the temporal sign which hid the eternal reality it was only too easy to grant its own temporal glory, in the manner already described.

---

153 Clement, Origen and Cyprian—North Africans all—had helped to chart this course long before, of course. Augustine himself might well respond in his own defense that since the church's humanity is held in solidum with Christ, it is not a question of the one substituting for the other. But does this justify the church steadily accruing to itself on earth symbols of "the power and the glory" of heaven? Only if it sees itself as standing in for one who has departed to Glory, rather than being eucharistically engaged with Jesus—history as a whole.

154 D. Ritschl (1967:123ff.) not unjustly fingers Augustine as "the theological architect of the 'Constantinian' Church" (though we might better say post—Constantinian church). This area of the bishop's thought, as with the eucharistic, is well—travelled; we need not dwell on it here. It comes out quite distinctly in his treatment of the Psalms, naturally enough.

155 As with the human Jesus, so with the eucharist: an eternal reality is hidden in, and revealed by, a temporal one. This is more pedagogical than eschatological (the latter would require us to think of his glorified humanity—not his divinity—being hidden in his historical humility). It is closer to Origen's view than to that of his mentor Ambrose, e.g. (cf. Crockett 1989:88ff.).

156 Heron (72ff.) points out the difficulty—inherent in what we have called the "iconic" model—of holding together sign and reality, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible,
Many balancing features might be pointed out in the fertile ruminations of this great theologian, opposing abuses ancient and modern. But our interest is in those seeds sown by Augustine which contributed to that massive harvest of ecclesiastical self-importance which would be reaped (as few deny) in centuries to come. A telling indication of this harvest appears in the single fact that the church's outward and visible form was already becoming a sign of Christ's heavenly glory, not only to the world, but also to its own members. Slowly but surely Mother Church was assuming a distinct identity, dignity, and authority over against the actual people of God, whom she served as earthly mediator of divine grace and human response. "For my part, I should not believe the gospel," we hear Augustine testify, "except as moved by the authority of the catholic church." Is this simply an affirmation of the church's apostolic character, a defense against the private opinion of the philosophers perhaps, or does it also reflect a general perception of the church ironically implicit in the totus Christus idea? In the final analysis that theory has difficulty accommodating the plurality of Christ's members and thus tends to hypostasize the church as a separate entity.

etc., and traces that difficulty in eucharistic theology down to the present day. He observes that what is "all too easily lost to sight is the fact that the bond between visible and invisible on which everything turns in Christian theology is not that supplied by a 'sacramental universe' [as in the Greek tradition], but is rather Jesus Christ himself." In ecclesiology this blind spot is fatal.

Dulles (1987:36) suggests that the church was "relatively free of institutionalism" until the end of the middle ages; but it is wrong to imply (as he appears to do) that the highly developed institutional model of later times owed little or nothing to things set in motion much earlier.

The fact that bishops in east and west alike were now having to plead with people to share in the eucharist along with the clergy is a poignant witness to the fact that this "otherness" was deeply felt. There were a variety of reasons for this development, of course, some of which are unrelated to our concerns.

Quoted by Pelikan I/303.

Moreover, since it is crucial that this entity be demonstrably "one, holy, catholic," etc., there is reason to suppose that it can only realize itself here and now in spite of its actual
The evolution of a distinction between church and people (the roots of which go back to the early third century) meant that the empirical or experiential check to the growth of ecclesiastical pride was undermined along with the eschatological. The *corpus permixtum* concept, which Augustine sanctioned and made indispensable to ecclesiology, made certain of that. But to explain how this happened we must observe as briefly as possible how circumstantial factors intertwined with cosmological and christological components to favour such a development.

In the first place, it was Donatist rigourism in his native North Africa that provoked Augustine to appeal to the *corpus permixtum* idea, as a way of rejecting any identification of the church in naïve sociological (i.e., sectarian) terms. To make this appeal was precisely to insist on an eschatological qualification of ecclesial being, but in a way that tended to attenuate the effect of that qualification where the institution itself was concerned. The cosmological framework in which the *corpus permixtum* idea was couched encouraged this attenuation.

Augustine, who like Origen saw the church as *kosmos* of the cosmos, offers us an ecclesiological version of Genesis in which the making of heaven and earth signifies the making of the spiritual and carnal parts of the church. Once again we witness the baptism of a general, rather than a christological, principle of descent and ascent: The membership (hence abstractly and impersonally). For just this reason, however, Augustine allows that "the glory of this House cannot be so great now, as it shall be then"—at the parousia—when the reprobate are removed from under its roof (*C.D.* 18.48f.). But as we shall see, this way of thinking actually permitted the process of ecclesial self-glorification to proceed.

---

161 I.e., while further abstracting it from its membership, even from its clergy. The *corpus permixtum* idea was taken over, in modified form, from the ex-Donatist Tyconius—see R. Markus, 1970:115ff.—but goes back to Clement and Origen. At any rate, it was quite fundamental to Augustine's entire system.

162 *Conf.* 13.12.
church is constituted by the dynamic of descending light (pure doctrine which introduces order into the "darksome deep" of our humanity) and ascending matter (repentant men whose eyes are fixed on the heavenly city).\textsuperscript{163} This neoplatonic model serves \textit{inter alia} to justify the fact that the church as we know it is a peculiar admixture of light and darkness. Indeed, it allows us to confess that the temporal church is a "standing betrayal" of its true self, and can be nothing else.\textsuperscript{164} Contrary to Donatist pretensions it is bound to be a mixed body. Such purity as it can and must claim is a purity of form rather than content, a form provided by the institution quite apart from the quality even of its functionaries. By its scriptures, doctrine, and sacraments it effectively "puts into place our disordered parts," stabilizing and sanctifying us with a heavenly light while we await the final, a-temporal resolution of our compromising position as inhabitants of the deep.\textsuperscript{165}

The institution thus becomes the one fixed point of reference for Christians, who must recognize in its profound \textit{auctoritas} that which upholds them (not they it!) in their present weakness and vacillation.\textsuperscript{166}

Into this picture ecclesial self-criticism can be fitted only with difficulty;\textsuperscript{167} likewise any sense of belonging to a crucial or delicate juncture in salvation history.

\textsuperscript{163} The process of creation is thus associated with the task of separating converted sinners from the incorrigible, reflecting the conflation of ontology and soteriology already described.

\textsuperscript{164} Markus 180

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Conf.} 13.34; cf. Bk 12.

\textsuperscript{166} Cf. Brown 221f. The Donatists, as Brown shows, also had a formal view of the church—i.e., as a ritually pure rather than a truly righteous people; but this ruled out any policy which would contaminate the clean with the unclean. Augustine insisted on holy \textit{purposes} rather than holy (or even "pure") people, another abstraction for the sake of his inclusive ecclesiology. The sacraments or rites of the Catholic Church, which he "endowed with a mysterious and enduring validity," preserved and guarded those who shared in them during the course of their private pilgrimages.

\textsuperscript{167} This was just as true for the Donatists, of course, as the facts of their history show.
Indeed, Augustine shared with many others a comfortable conviction about that "ineluctable course of history"\(^\text{168}\) in which the church was fated to spread to the four corners of the world, becoming coextensive with human society in order to repair its broken, post-Babel condition.\(^\text{169}\) This vision of more or less uniform progress was set over against the social conservatism of the Donatists. The struggle for a holy people was to take place inside the church rather than between the world and a despised (but ritually pure) minority; since it was a struggle that could be resolved only vertically in the last analysis, there was no reason to deny the church this universal inclusivity on the horizontal plane.\(^\text{170}\)

So optimistic a view he would have occasion to modify soon enough, but no thorough recovery of eschatological humility resulted. What did emerge was his notion of the homogeneity of ecclesial time (i.e., of time since the ascension), for the dominant verticality of his model could not but cast the affairs of the present age into limbo.\(^\text{171}\)

Though famous for his emphasis on the pilgrim church, it was not so much a corporate pilgrimage in time, but a personal pilgrimage away from time, Augustine usually had in view. Paraphrasing Acts 1:6, he chides his listeners: "What are the times to thee? Thy concern is to escape from time, and thou askest the time!"\(^\text{172}\)

\(^{168}\) Brown 221

\(^{169}\) Cf. e.g. Pss 1.3, 95.11, 147.19. "The poignant sense of the need to regain some lost unity is perhaps the most distinctive strand in Augustine's mystique of the Catholic Church" (Brown 224). Here again we see something of Origen.

\(^{170}\) See Brown 212ff.

\(^{171}\) Indeed, all time not expressly included in salvation history—i.e., in the revelatory history of the covenant—has this character; see Markus 62ff., 133, 157ff. "The life of the church is like walking on the spot" (von Balthasar 1967:38). We might well ask whether the theological rift between Geschichte and Historie does not begin here, along with that between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith (cf. Ser. 264).

\(^{172}\) Ser. 265. See Brown 244ff., 323f.; cf. Plato (Theaet. 176b, Jowett trans.): "Evils ... can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good.
apocalypticism, and the tilt towards the individual in eschatology, tempts him to pass over
the judgment under which the church itself stands (paving the way for the possibility that
Mother Church might even assume control of the times herself). Of the individual's
precarious position and accountability, he has a great deal to say; of corporate
precariousness and accountability relatively little.

Not that Augustine lacked sympathy with the Donatist concern for an undefiled
curch! The doctrine of predestination allowed him to maintain the holiness of Christ's
mystical body from all eternity while still insisting on the corpus permixtum (sanctified
de jure and de facto by word and sacrament) as its genuine manifestation on earth. Now
if this doctrine only plowed the ground more deeply for the rise, much later on, of a
radical individualism which came to see the institution itself as a repressive rather than
a redemptive force, such was not his intention. As Jaroslav Pelikan points out, the
mystery of election was meant to undergird the visible catholic church. That the fate
of the individual was hidden in the inscrutable will of God enhanced the importance of
the church qua institution, with its recognizable certitudes. Like Christ's humanity it is
necessary for our weakness, since it brings order out of chaos through the guidance it
affords and the grace it dispenses. The true church may be the heavenly body of the elect
among men and angels; but the church we see on earth, the corpus permixtum bound
together by its ecclesiastical ligaments, is no less vital to our well-being: per ecclesiam

Having no place among the gods in heaven, of necessity they hover around mortal nature,
and this earthly sphere. Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly
as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to
become like him is to become holy, just and wise. But, O my friend, you cannot easily
convince mankind that they should pursue virtue...."

173 Pelikan 1/302f. Notice that with this doctrine Augustine—while rejecting the
"Before?" question which led Origen astray—introduces his own dangerous "before"
(likeiwse the "after" of purgatory; cf. ibid. 355).
Augustine thus held together the opposing poles of his dualist ecclesiology by placing a theoretical emphasis on the unseen (as in his christology) but a practical emphasis on the visible or concrete: "If you wish to ascend, be my members"—words he was fond of putting in the mouth of Christ— took on a very definite connotation in the face of schism. But he did so at the cost of abstracting the institution and at certain points releasing it from the eschatological tension of the life of its members. As a result, he ran the risk of supporting another and even more unfortunate sociological characterization of the church, in which the authority of Christ himself would be brought to bear on men and women through ecclesiastical and even political means without regard for its eucharistic qualification. This danger (inherent in the relation between christology and ecclesiology as we have outlined it) emerges within the Donatist controversy but can be fully explained only in connection with Augustine's response to the other main circumstantial challenge he was called on to face, namely, the changing relationship of church and state as the western empire crumbled.

Questions about the role of the church vis-à-vis society became more pressing during the later stages of his episcopal career. The Constantinian myth of progress, or at least of a new golden age, was being shattered. Rejection of the line taken by Origen, Eusebius and his kind, even by Augustine's mentor Ambrose, was made a virtual necessity

174 Kelly (415f.) overlooks this unity in Augustine's ecclesiology, which we may represent as follows:

```
heaven  |  divine X  |  totus X  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>earth</td>
<td>human X</td>
<td>cor. per.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ecc. cael.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ecc. carn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

175 Ser. 263

176 The dangers inherent in such an abstraction are explored by M. S. Peck in People of the Lie (212ff.).
least of a new golden age, was being shattered. Rejection of the line taken by Origen, Eusebius and his kind, even by Augustine's mentor Ambrose, was made a virtual necessity by the advance of the barbarians. Church and state could no longer be confidently portrayed as "twin roots" of divine blessing; the tempora christiana was proving to be something of an illusion. What was to be set in its place? There would be no return to the apocalypticism of earlier times, now tainted by association with sectarian extremists. Robert Markus argues that Augustine eventually confronted both Constantinian triumphalism and Donatist separatism with a more truly eschatological perspective.\textsuperscript{177} Christians were neither at home in the world in the way the former suggested, nor was their homelessness to be understood in sociological terms, as the latter implied. What then? Human society and its unstable history were in fact "secular" or neutral, the bishop suggested, neither promising nor setting at risk the kingdom of God. Salvation history had already reached its conclusion in the ascension of Jesus; the present age was not sacred, then, or demonic either. The church could reside in it without inviting abuse as something subversive, while yet regarding it with a certain indifference as something wholly provisional.

Augustine's alternative is clarified when we notice that the two-histories problem has resurfaced here in modified form. It is no longer directly eucharistic or immediately concerned with the person of Jesus. His last and greatest work, \textit{Civitate Dei}, occupies itself with a struggle between two "cities" that has been going on since Cain and Abel. The invisible church is one of these cities, the visible church its \textit{signum} in the midst of the other—a kind of \textit{vestigium gloriae} witnessing to the rise of the heavenly city as victor over the earthly in connection with the ascension. From our own vantage point here below, however, neither of these cities can be plainly distinguished as such; they are

\textsuperscript{177} See p. 167.
too closely interwoven in the fabric of the *saeculum*. The visible church (as *corpus permixtum*) and the world to which it belongs share a common ambiguity, in which the former is distinguishable from the latter only by virtue of its uncommon orientation to heaven (i.e., by its function as *signum*). But this consideration of the similarity between church and world—forced on him by his dualism and indeed by "the same strange parallelism between creation history and salvation history" we saw in Origen—made it difficult for Augustine not to associate the church rather too closely with the world so far as its temporal aspect is concerned. The city of God and the city of man having alike been pushed behind a discreet veil of secularity, there was little to prevent a steady weakening of the distinction between church and world.

A curious ambiguity thus comes into play in his ecclesiology itself. The visible church with its doctrine and sacraments is, on the one hand, a divinely-fixed point of reference, redeeming the time as a check upon human dissipation and the slide into disorder. Yet it is thoroughly provisional, even fallible, insofar as it belongs to this age. Indeed, from the standpoint of the *saeculum* Augustine sometimes appears ready to allow the dubious status of everything to do with the church except the hidden reality of the elect in their unity with Christ (sacramentally anticipated) as members of the heavenly city. The privatizing of his "eschatological" solution left him open to criticism from the Donatists that he believed not in one church but in two, to which he had no entirely

178 "The *saeculum* for Augustine was the sphere of temporal realities in which the two 'cities' share an interest. In Augustine's language, the *saeculum* is the whole stretch of time in which the two cities are 'inextricably intertwined'; it is the sphere of human living, history, society and its institutions, characterised by the fact that in it the ultimate eschatological oppositions, though present, are not discernible" (Markus 133; cf. C.D. 15.2).

179 "As *res* the Church is lost [hidden] in the 'world'; as *signum* it has distinct being as the world's pointer to the Kingdom" (ibid. 185).

180 The words are von Balthasar's (1967:19), though not the argument.
satisfactory answer.\textsuperscript{181} We might say that in a dualist model the eucharistic tension inevitably breaks down into its vertical and horizontal components, a most hazardous state of affairs inasmuch as the eschatological reserve no longer operates effectively in either direction. At all events, the church in its public or horizontal aspect was free to continue a path of assimilation to the world, that is, of becoming a relatively secure sociological entity in its own right, as a full member of the \textit{saeculum}.\textsuperscript{182} This the Donatists could simply repudiate, of course, if somewhat hypocritically; what gave them cause for fright was that such authority as the church had (an authority ultimately divine in nature) could and would be applied quite deliberately on the very human terms of the \textit{saeculum}, which is to say, under its non–eucharistic conditions.\textsuperscript{183}

It is no accident that Augustine took the fateful step of calling upon the state to coerce the heretics into submission, revealing a deep Constantinian streak. His whole scheme invited him to do so. The note of triumph in the \textit{Acts of the Apostles} had been heavily politicized by running it through the grid of Greek cosmology (itself inherently political) and the christology shaped by it.\textsuperscript{184} A dualist philosophy of history made the

\textsuperscript{181} See Markus 120f., 181ff. Markus, whose otherwise very helpful book lacks a christological analysis, is much too positive about Augustine's eschatology, which is more than a little inconsistent. Augustine could proclaim the "not yet" and the parousia with some vigour, yet his "atomistic personalism" (Markus) and the notion of homogeneity blunt the cutting edge.

\textsuperscript{182} It should not be missed that Augustine at the same time encouraged the monastic communities to aim at the Donatist ideal.

\textsuperscript{183} Since the church is a \textit{corpus permixtum}, its worldly life a tale of two cities inextricably intertwined, what prevents the authority of the heavenly church from being introduced into the world \textit{in a secular form}, through a kind of \textit{communicatio idiomatum} as it were? Since the church, instead of being constituted eucharistically in the tension between the kingdom and our present world, is itself \textit{both} the kingdom and \textit{the world}—hence also a fixed \textit{signum} of the one in the midst of the other—some such purely sociological result is inevitable.

\textsuperscript{184} I.e., with its marginalization of the humanity of Jesus. Whereas Luke, not insignificantly, left the champion of the early church in a Roman prison, Augustine (the new champion) leaves off by justifying the imprisonment of heretics. Markus's section,
church a competitor not merely for hearts and minds but also for the instruments of control in human society; a dualistic ecclesiology secured the right to call the earthly sword to the service of the heavenly keys. The dark places to which all this would lead are now too well marked to need rehearsing here; assisted by the abstraction already discussed, ecclesiastical manipulation in succeeding centuries grew apace. The ex-Donatist Tyconius, from whom Augustine borrowed a good deal of weaponry for his theological assault, himself recognized what Augustine did not, viz., the antichrist capacity of the church insofar as it intended to pursue such a course. He refused to join the official church, which no longer knew how to criticize itself effectively in the light of the cross and its own eschatological precariousness, and so failed to answer the question posed by the Donatist movement. Whether or not Tyconius could foresee the way in which the successors of Augustine would turn the bishop's alternative into an even more dangerous triumphalism than that of the Constantinians, what he did see—Christians persecuting Christians—was enough to convince him that his lonely stance was necessary.

Unfortunately his was indeed a lonely stance. With its advance on the saints' post-parousia authority as operating capital, the official church took on a formidable role in the reconstruction of western society. Before long the ecclesial res would become well...

"Eschatology as Politics" (166ff.) is somewhat ironically titled, for Augustine's eschatology is far more conducive to the politicizing of the church than he allows.

Markus (154ff.) argues that—while Augustine did make some direct contributions to this process—in other hands his whole theology of history was misread and became "the very thing it was designed to undermine: the theological prop of a sacral society, of a Christian political establishment in which the divine purpose in history lay enshrined." Perhaps so; but did Augustine himself provide a basis for the "misreading"?

At bottom, the question—no better answered by the hypocritical "purism" of the Donatists than by the disciplina exercised by Catholic bishops—is this: How is the church to exercise effective self-criticism in the light of its uniquely eucharistic existence? (On Tyconius's refusal to join the Catholic Church—"to Augustine's lasting incomprehension"—after being excommunicated by the Donatists, see Markus 115ff.)
and truly hidden under the welter of secular interests occupying the church as signum,\textsuperscript{187} abuses of power would multiply. The negative side of an often very positive performance cannot be accounted for without reference to a host of other influences, of course. Even where Augustine's own contribution is concerned we should really go on to discuss his defective pneumatology\textsuperscript{188} or the effect of his utilitarianism,\textsuperscript{189} and a whole complex of issues connected with the nature–grace problem,\textsuperscript{190} aggravated in the dispute with Pelagius. Such things others have examined at length, as being more obviously related to this or that development in the church, but usually without sufficient attention to the issues we have attempted to outline; for a great many of the criticisms rightly laid at Augustine's door (such is the price of greatness) have roots just there, those related to the nature–grace dilemma not least.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{187} (To reverse Markus' sense.) This was so already for Augustine in later times; see Brown 239ff.

\textsuperscript{188} Pneumatology was suppressed not only by reason of the stress on unity in his trinitarian theology, but also by his faulty construction of christology and its link with ecclesiology, which rendered the Spirit the "soul" of the church (Ser. 267; for Origen the divine Christ served the same function). Heron (1983a:87ff.) shows how in subtle ways the church may thus come to substitute for the Spirit also.

\textsuperscript{189} See D. Ritschl 1967:102ff. Utilitarian thinking, which has its roots in the theories of the Greeks and the ambitions of the Romans, was much in evidence in Augustine, especially in ecclesiology: "For this Catholic Church, vigourously spreading far and wide throughout the whole world, uses all who are in error to her own advancement.... She uses the heathen as material on which to work, heretics as a test of her teaching, schismatics as a proof of her stability, Jews as a comparison to show her beauty" (\textit{Ver. Rel.} 6.10).

\textsuperscript{190} By wedding the fall–redemption motif to an attenuated neoplatonism in which the human Jesus is marginalized, Augustine destroys his own movement toward a relational ontology based on the pneumatological \textit{vinculum caritatis}. For that reason huge problems emerge around a grace–nature dualism and the problem of the mediation of grace, together with a fateful tendency towards the privatization of sin and an intensely subjective concern with personal justification, detached from the sphere of corporate life (again, see Ritschl).

\textsuperscript{191} The ramifications of the Pelagian affair would help to shape ecclesiology for a very long time; yet they were not at the foundations of Augustine's own ecclesiology. Though to us (partly because of the impact of Augustine) they are the most obviously
It has been our aim, however, simply to indicate that for all its profundity Augustine's work does indeed constitute, after Origen, a second backwards step:\footnote{Augustine's theodicy and anthropology (which underlines the freedom of God rather than man, stressing the corruption of the human will) shows how distinct was his overall course from that of Origen. Yet the likeness must not be underplayed. From Ambrose he learned to appreciate the demythologizing method of Origen in biblical hermeneutics—an important step on the road to his conversion, perhaps, but also to the accommodation of Christianity to a non-Hebraic way of thinking. Through the same source he also learned to privatize eschatology (cf. Kelly 481).} Once again a cosmology favouring discontinuity over continuity inclines towards an internalizing of the ascension, with telling results in ecclesiology. Ascension "in the flesh" is acknowledged in this case, but in such a way that the church's gradual substitution for the marginalized humanity of Jesus is actually encouraged the more:\footnote{Anjali D'Souza's painting of the ascension captures nicely the receding Christ and the larger-than-life Mary (i.e., Ecclesia) of the eastern iconic tradition, a theological motif the post-Augustinian West would translate into institutional terms.} Might we not say, in fact, that this second step, by virtue of being the less obvious, proved the more dangerous of the two? Of the subsequent lengthening of the church's reverse stride throughout the middle ages we must now speak a little in the next section.

**Dualist Ecclesiology in East and West**

With Origen and Augustine the die was cast. In the shadow of these two giants a truce was struck with dualism that would hamper any further wrestling with a worldview based on Jesus-history, or with the sensitive eucharistic ecclesiology that must accompany it. We are not surprised, then, that J. G. Davies should discover a dearth of intelligent "theological," they suffer when isolated from the above considerations, particularly the question of the relation between ontology and soteriology.
references to the ascension "throughout the whole of the next millennium." Nor is it any wonder that the expanding institutional church—which, in Augustine's phrase, "got up by degrees"—should have produced layer upon layer of baptized secularity in the process. While we cannot hope to offer anything like a full account of the flowering of ecclesiastical self-assurance, a few general observations from our own point of view are in order, touching both the Latin and the Greek churches.

It ought to be said first of all that the marginalization of the human Jesus (which lies at the root of the problem) was often keenly felt during the middle ages, as various pietistic movements attest. Yet on the whole, and sometimes even there, the sense of his absence lacked a certain poignancy inasmuch as his presence was no longer thought of as a worldly concern; he belonged to another and very different existence, an existence not quite so human as our own. The hungry soul did not seek Jesus but at best (in the image of the later mystics) the elusive Sacred Heart of Jesus. Jesus himself was not absent enough, since his absence was held to be something quite natural.

On a dualist foundation the eucharistic question could not be properly framed, in other words; neither then could an ecclesial identity turning on a truly eschatological axis be maintained. With the easing of both political and philosophical estrangement the church grew bolder in offering itself as a substitute for the absent saviour, and as a link to the higher realm he now inhabited. The problem of the presence and the absence

---

194 P. 147; it should be noted, however, that Davies passes over some important material.

195 C.D. 18.54

196 According to A. N. Whitehead (1933:pref.) it is one of the tasks of philosophy to criticise cosmological assumptions; so also with theology, whose own unique criticism, in order to remain just that, must be firmly rooted in salvation history and the question of what happened with Jesus. How important such criticism is for ecclesiology in particular the whole of this chapter is intended to demonstrate, as a kind of negative counter-point to the previous one. Yet we remain aware, especially in touching on so vast a tract of history, of the danger of oversimplification.
became less a question about the church's peculiar footing at the border between two ages (or two histories) than about its task of dispensing on earth a useful heavenly commodity called grace. A sense of self-importance set in, as the ecclesiastical scaffolding went up so that grace might trickle down. What began as a precarious community of the Spirit became ever more conscious of its own paracletic role.\(^{197}\)

Too many factors were at work here to grasp easily their relative weight, but it is not hard to fix upon a single image which effectively captured the new sense of identity: This is the period of the ascendancy of the Virgin Mary. Already in Ambrose and Zeno of Verona we have Mary, quite rightly, as a type of the church. But there were other developments as well; after the triumph of the Theotokos title at the Council of Ephesus the questionable practice of praying to Mary and affording her a unique veneration (hyperdouleia) was widely embraced.\(^{198}\) What interests us is the relationship between these two facts, for it is hardly possible to suppose that they are unrelated. The honour and function ascribed to the type belongs also to the antitype—the church itself, as we have seen, was assuming an intercessory role and an exalted status distinct from that of its members. It too had an air of unassailable purity about it. If its membership existed under the eucharistic qualification, the church which made offerings on their behalf did not. It was already holy, and by appealing to it a man or a people might hope to gain

\(^{197}\) Our argument here largely parallels that of Heron (1983b:80ff.), who attributes the marginalization of Jesus and the process of ecclesiastical substitution to the combined effects of anti-Arianism, the church's changing role in society, and liturgical adjustments—e.g., praying to a divine Christ rather than with a human one. We are suggesting, however, that the fact that the problem of discontinuity was again being perceived in cosmological rather than christological terms (a problem inevitably compounded by pneumatological deficiencies) was perhaps even more crucial.

\(^{198}\) See ODCC 882ff.; Kelly 494ff. It was Augustine, conceding a point to Pelagius, who introduced the idea of her sinlessness into mainstream theology. Theodore of Studios went so far as to claim that she participated in the angelic nature (Or. 6.9; Pelikan 2/140). Aquinas eventually formulated the doctrine of "hyperdulia" so as to clarify Mary's status between that of the angels and saints and that of her divine Son.
It can be argued that belief in a heavenly church as the original cosmic reality (variously expounded by the gnostics, Origen and Augustine) naturally came to expression in this way; that it required just such an image, the a-historical and non-eschatological image of a perpetual virgin, as its proper reflection; that Marian dogma is really nothing more than a mirror of ecclesial self-consciousness evolving within a dualist framework. Admittedly this can be pressed too far. But if the precise relationship between ecclesiology and mariology is a matter of speculation, the mariological dimensions of ecclesiology were certainly distorted early on. Cosmological predilections cultivated an idealized view of the church, setting it up to function (by way of its earthly manifestation) as a kind of bridge to God in its own right.

At all events, both Mary and the church rapidly took on elevated features. The impact on the way in which they were subsequently conceived was profound. It is often pointed out that Mary offered a more tangibly human face as a focal point for faith and piety than did a now too-divine Christ, but as she substituted for her receding Son her story increasingly paralleled his in an artificial way. There was talk of an immaculate conception, of bodily assumption, of a Queen in heaven—of Mary the ladder to heaven. Each of these notions had its correlate in ecclesiology, which made of Mary its central myth. The church may have had its feet on the ground but its upper parts receded ever further into the clouds, as it attracted to itself the mediatorial function belonging to Jesus.

---

199 The link between the growth of the sacrificial view of the eucharist (encouraged by Cyril of Jerusalem, e.g.) and dualistic ecclesiology generally should not be passed over.

200 So, of course, is the relationship between mariology and gender-related issues, a more popular topic today (see e.g. S. Heine 1988:141ff.).

201 See Pelikan 3/160ff.; cf. Rev 10. Medieval notions of Mary, taken together with teaching about angels and saints and ecclesiastical princes, can rightly be seen as a
This false mariological shift—this spatializing movement in which the church abandoned its painful place alongside Jesus at the rupture of diverging histories, where the heart is exposed to the sword, for a more comfortable cathedral-building enterprise—began in the East but was only fully realized in the West.

East

Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was built by Justinian, the greatest of Constantine's successors. Here "the worship of God and the cult of the Theotokos ... received their fitting artistic statement," in a triumphant investment of architectural space with the heavenly qualities of a luminous expanse. As it rises towards its great dome all "is fitted together on high with extraordinary harmony," wrote Procopius. "If anyone enters to pray ... his mind is lifted up and he walks in heaven." Church buildings indeed emerged during this period as gateways to another world, as symbolically significant structures having (together with the art they contained) an almost sacramental power. About the same time the liturgies performed in them were becoming increasingly ritualistic; allegorical representations of the life of Jesus grew more complex as a way of making present the benefits of the redemption wrought in him. These actions shared the sacramental potency, for both temporal and spatial structures were meant to be translucent

Christian mythologization of the principle of mediation uniting thinkers from Denys to Dante in an immanentist worldview.

202 Pelikan 1/342f. The emperor too had his monument—appropriately enough, since "God had given Christians 'two gifts, the priesthood and the empire, by which affairs on earth are healed and ordered as they are in heaven'" (2/144; quoting the influential 8th C. theologian, Theodore of Studios, who spoke thus during a moment of peace between the two "gifts").

203 Quoted Wybrew 74; see Janson (1986:217ff.) for further discussion of Santa Sophia's character and significance.
with an eternal light, like the incarnate one himself on the mount of transfiguration.\textsuperscript{204} At the material level, it is important to notice, icons began to proliferate as the preferred means of contact with kingdom personages and realities, gradually replacing reception of the eucharistic elements where the laity were concerned.\textsuperscript{205} Sacerdotalism grew apace, strengthened not only by a sacrificial view of the eucharist (encouraged by Cyril of Jerusalem, e.g.) but by the Dionysian notion of hierarchy (i.e., of the graded transmission and appropriation of divine light). Monasticism, with its own system of upward mobility through mediating ranks, flourished alongside. Presiding over all was the image of the Virgin, which soon came to dominate the apses of Christendom's grand churches as well as the dingy cells of the monks.\textsuperscript{206}

All this represents a huge alteration of the ethos of earlier times, however tradition-conscious the church (the eastern church in particular) may have been in its actual evolution. And this alteration, whatever may be owed to politics and popular

\textsuperscript{204} Janson speaks of the "illusion of unreality" lent to flat surfaces by early Christian mosaics, which contributed to the strangely ethereal effect of buildings like \textit{Hagia Sophia}. In this sense Christian architecture was "antimonumental" (p. 203). Yet both the architectural and the liturgical developments of this period reflect the assimilation of church to state where dignity of form was concerned; the motive behind their evolution was by no means purely religious or philosophical.

\textsuperscript{205} The eucharistic sacrifice was often thought of as too holy for common participation, to the extent that bishops were soon pleading with the people to communicate. Aggravating this situation was the shift to a symbolic approach to the liturgy. Wybrew (60ff.) points to the Antiochene influence which, in drawing attention to the successive stages of Jesus' life, undermined the notion of participation in a present reality in favour of a commemoration of past events. But the real problem is in the fact that for the Greek mind imitation was (or could be) participation.

\textsuperscript{206} In the liturgies of Basil and Chrysostom the Virgin was lauded as "our all-holy, immaculate, supremely blessed Queen, the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary;" to introduce her praises into various nooks and crannies of the liturgical tradition, so that she was verbally as well as visually well-represented, became a common preoccupation. According to Nicephorus, Mary was appointed by God in connection with her Son as "mediator and secure patron," overseeing the welfare of church and empire; see Pelikan 2/139ff.
religion on the one hand, or to the insights of the fathers on the other, found its theoretical
justification in the rehabilitation of Origen by the religious genius of Denys the
Areopagite. It is to him that we must look first in order to understand how the cosmology
of the Greeks (at once dualist and immanentist) and the christological imbalance we have
been describing continued to affect ecclesiology in a detrimental way.

Just as the condemnation of Origen was being made official under Justinian—a
condemnation made necessary, ironically, by the fact that Origen’s followers were causing
disunity in the church, and hence in the empire, which by now depended upon it for moral
and social stability—Denys revived certain essentials of his thought in a more acceptable
form, ensuring them a long afterlife in both East and West. 207 There is also a good deal
of controversy about the interpretation of Denys, of course. Doubtless his strong
apophatic emphasis, balanced by a more positive view of creation, sets him at a safe
distance from Origen; so perhaps does the sturdier communal dimension of his thought
(which Andrew Louth has recently defended) and the theurgic dynamic that generates in
his worldview, as in his ecclesiology, a lively sense of anticipation lacking in the
Alexandrian. Yet he follows a similar path. 208

Denys to some extent resisted neoplatonist rationalism, but this did not mean

207 This second irony has been noted by many. Pelikan (1/348) goes so far as to suggest
that "most of the doctrines on account of which the Second Council of Constantinople
anathematized Origen were far less dangerous to the tradition of catholic orthodoxy than
was the Crypto-Origenism canonized in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite."

208 As Louth (1989:11) points out, the pseudo-Areopagite stands quite consciously "at
the point where Christ and Plato meet;" that is where Origen also stood to take his bearings.
Denys's differences with Origen may stem not only from the requirements of orthodoxy,
on the one hand, and the evolution of neoplatonist thought on the other (cf. Meyendorff
100f.), but also, e.g., from a failure to take the problem of evil with the same seriousness;
to some extent he was content to work within the narrower interests of the more stable
community he enjoyed (but cf. Div. Nom. 4).
dispensing with a theology tilted in favour of unity or with a tiered cosmos. Preoccupation with the problem of the one and the many—answered, if in his own way, by means of a system of processions and returns—persisted together with the mind/matter dualism. Though he did not resort to the doctrine of the fall as a way of explaining the existence of the material world, Denys did subscribe to a graded scale of being which placed possible humanity near the bottom. The ascent of the soul, whereby it achieves a likeness to the "supra-celestial spirits" in their pure contemplation of God, was still the chief object of his soteriology. Eschatology in the biblical sense was a matter of little concern to him, since his principle of descent and ascent was even more strictly vertical than Origen's and essentially a-historical.

One of his most significant innovations within this wider framework was to outline the angelic and ecclesiastical orders which (he claimed) mediate to God's creatures, as far as the nature of each allows, the quickening divine energies in their operation ad extra. These two "hierarchies" (a term he contributed in adapting the forms of late neoplatonism

---

209 Though the transcendent God is ultimately beyond our concepts of either trinity or unity, it can still be said on the economic level, at least, that "in divine matters unions are more important than differentiations" (D.N. 2.11). Emphasis on the absolute simplicity of God was quite in keeping with his apophaticism, of course. Cf. Louth 81ff., who takes account of the fact that Denys was also combatting the polytheism of contemporary neoplatonism.

210 Which thus retains its Greek flavour, i.e., that ambiguity created by confusion between ontological and hamartiological distance from God. This ambiguity is evident in the triad creation, deification, restoration, which is linked to the idea of ascent through purification, illumination, union (cf. Pelikan 2/344f.). The doctrine of Aristotle that what is below is moved by desire and love to emulate what is above (and hence more divine) also exerts an important influence here.

211 Whereas Origen incorporated a horizontal dimension in his theory of progressive worlds, and Augustine tackled directly historical questions, Denys's mystical bent militated against any such interest, in spite of his more positive view of the present creation. After all, just as descent implied "a 'going out' of his own essence by God," so ascent was "based also on an 'ecstasy' outside any properly human function of body, mind, and sight" (Meyendorff 97ff.; his own charge is that of impersonalism).
to the service of Christianity) provide ontic stability; they are the cosmic backbone linking the lower extremities of creation to a common source of life in the One.\textsuperscript{212} To understand the particular role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy it is important to observe that for Denys the stuff of history, insofar as it has a meaningful function, functions \textit{symbolically} by pointing to a higher (more unified) truth.

The beings and orders above us ... are incorporeal, and their hierarchy is spiritual and supramundane. We observe that our own human hierarchy, conformably to our own nature, abounds in a manifold variety of sensible symbols which raise us hierarchically, in proportion to our capacity, to the oneness of deification, to God and divine virtue. Since they are spirits, they know according to laws proper to them, but we are raised up to divine contemplations through sensible images as much as we can be.\textsuperscript{213}

Holy men, especially the divine bishops "standing erect before the holy altar," thus wield in word and sacrament the temporal and material signs of our salvation, assisting us as we strive to ascend to realities ultimately "both unspeakable and unknowable."\textsuperscript{214} They achieve this by symbolically representing to us the history of Jesus, by re-enacting the descending and ascending movement—–from the One to the many and back to the One

\textsuperscript{212} Their combined function "is to 'bring God down out of silence,' to initiate the lower orders into the science of the higher ones, and in this way to serve as a channel to the descending procession of God and also to the ascension of the being toward the transcending Good" (Meyendorff 102; quoting R. Roques). They do not, however, mediate being itself, which is the immediate gift of God; they have rather a \textit{theophanic} character, which is the character of creation as such (Louth 84ff.). This distinction separates Denys from the neoplatonists.

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{E.H.} 1.2 (English quotations of Denys used here, with some changes in capitalization, are taken from Petry 143ff., \textit{q.v.} for original sources). The "as far as possible" notion is a principle of Plato's critical to Dionysian thought and constantly repeated; cf. Louth 107.

\textsuperscript{214} See \textit{E.H.} 1.3ff., 3.3.12; \textit{D.N.} 1.1f. Louth (30) points to Basil's distinction between \textit{kerygma} and \textit{dogma}, written and unwritten tradition, as leading to Denys's view that the latter is even more sacred than the former, by virtue of the fact that it is not materially fixed in ink and paper. This way of thinking is very much bound up with the ascendency of ecclesiastical habit over biblical modes of thought, even if it is also open to an existentialist or anti-ecclesiastical turn.
again—which lies at the heart of his work. 215

But what happens to Jesus himself? Denys calls Jesus "the principle and perfection of every hierarchy," though the reverse might be a truer statement. For the Jesus of the Areopagite is not in any primary sense Jesus of Nazareth, but rather the transcendentally divine mind, the source and essence of all hierarchy, holiness, and divine operation, the divinely sovereign power who illumines the blessed beings superior to us in a manner at once more spiritual and clear, assimilating them to His own light as far as possible. 216

In other words, he is much closer to the cosmic Christ of Origen than of Irenaeus; he is God at work unfolding in its diversity, and renewing again in unity, the rational creation. In the liturgy we are indeed called to "contemplate the most divine life of God incarnate and emulate his holy sinlessness," but ultimately it is to "the Unique, the Uncompounded, the Hidden of Jesus" that Denys would have us look. 217 Seeking the divine in Jesus remains the operative principle in continuity with much patristic thought.

What actually becomes of his humanity is neither clear nor especially important. What is important is that the incarnation be liturgically repeated, so that it may continue to function as a window of revelation through which the divine light can to some extent be perceived here and now—as an elevating Symbol, itself mediated by symbols through sacramental imitation. (It has been charged that Denys's view of the sacraments is not

215 Thus the elevation, fraction and distribution of the host become the holiest moments in the liturgy (E.H. 3.3.12; cf. Louth 60ff., 104), and the bishop in effect the holiest person. We should add here that our language of "they" and "us" is potentially misleading, since the ecclesiastical hierarchy includes a threefold order of laity, along with the clergy; each rank has its proper task.

216 E.H. 1.1

217 We must see through the lens of the former in order to discern the latter; this avoids any false abstraction in our spiritual development. Yet it is still abstraction ("thinking away the particular and the material," Louth 44) at which neoplatonist thinking aims. Denys is certainly not a typical neoplatonist, but the incarnate Jesus nevertheless takes on a heavily utilitarian character here, in keeping with the symbolic value attached to material reality.
only nominalist but presented "in complete separation from the central mystery of Christianity, the incarnation."\textsuperscript{218} We may agree with Louth that the case is overstated; yet it is hard to find anything more than a weak link at best.\textsuperscript{219} This refraction of Christ into divine energies operating through liturgical symbols made room for Denys's mediating hierarchy, which, while purportedly linking us to Jesus Christ, at the same time distances us from him.\textsuperscript{220} In terms of polity and of spirituality, indeed, of the entire psychology and ethos of the medieval church, few developments have proved more important than those springing, however diversely, from this Dionysian intellection; which is to say, from the bold way in which Denys transposed the descent–ascent \textbf{schema} of Origen, and that graded spirituality afterwards encouraged by the likes of Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius, into \textit{something institutionally concrete}.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{218} The sacrament of communion, says Meyendorff, "the very rites of which are interpreted as an ethical lesson, necessary only for the 'imperfect,' appears in its very essence as an 'image' of an intelligible communion: having described the distribution of the Eucharist to the faithful by the bishop, Dionysius comments: 'By offering Jesus Christ to our eyes he show us in a tangible way and, as in an image, our intelligible life'" (106f.; quoting from E.H. 3.13).

\textsuperscript{219} Louth (73f.) argues that the whole liturgy celebrates the climax of God's works (\textit{theourgia}) in the incarnate one; also that all hierarchical activity is for Denys Jesus' own activity. But here it is the divine "Jesus" who is in view. The human Jesus has been marginalized along with history itself. Pelikan (1/346) rightly comments: "In such a system of mystical doctrine, Jesus himself could become no more than a 'chief symbol' for the transcendent reality of man's union with God through mystical ascent."

\textsuperscript{220} Cf. Louth 74. It should be said Origen's notion of the church as \textit{kosmos} of the cosmos, when linked with Aristotelian and neoplatonic notions of the same—i.e., of graded spheres populated by greater and lesser souls—invited just such a development. Origen himself offered many hints pointing in this direction.

\textsuperscript{221} "Nowhere in his thought is Dionysius more clearly dominated by the Platonic opposition between the sensible and the intelligible than in his conception of the Church," writes Meyendorff (102), who argues that Denys "twisted the general perspective" of the ecclesiology of earlier times. Leaving obscure the "corporate, christological, and eschatological" dimensions of the liturgy and sacraments, he opened the door for the emergence of a kind of "magical clericalism" on the one hand, and a private perfectionism on the other (109f.).
What do we mean? We have made the point that, where the soteriological principle of descent and ascent is first of all cosmological rather than hamartiological, the final value of Christ's concrete humanity is called into question. So too is his accessibility, of course, once he returns to the heights of heaven; the problem of presence and absence becomes not so much a problem of eschatology (a conflict of histories) as of existential distance (a disparity of stations). Denys's exposition of the hierarchies helped to create an ecclesiastical firmament in which this distance was at once underlined and overcome, or at least compensated for: "To speak truly, there is one to whom all the godlike aspire, but they do not partake of him who is one and the same in the same manner, but as the divine ordinance assigns to each according to his merits." God, then, "has granted to all rational and spiritual beings the gift of the hierarchy for their salvation." This towering conduit of grace is impressively arranged "in well-fixed and distinct ranks of orders," forming, as it were, a grand staircase on which all may hope to ascend together, each one as far as possible.

Such was Denys's answer, not only to a theological question, but to a highly practical one that had not been satisfactorily addressed by previous speculation in the Origenist tradition—that is, how the rigorous, mystical spirituality there espoused could be integrated with the practical realities of the Christian community as a whole, and of the imperial church in particular. Part of the genius of his answer is that the hierarchies, depending on one's vantage point, provide either the necessary link to Jesus or several layers of insulation between him and the common Christian. It will be recalled not only

---

222 E.H. 1.1ff., 3.3.12. Angels, of course, formed "the missing ontological link" to the invisible world (Pelikan 2/141f.). In all of this Denys is only building upon hints and suggestions made by Origen—for whom "the bishop is the symbol of Jesus, the priests are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the apostles; the deacons are the seven archangels of God," etc. (Wybrew 25)—which the eastern rite had been steadily assimilating, though without benefit of a systematic exposition in cosmological terms.
that very few of the laity were communicating regularly by this point, but that the most integral dimensions of the preceding liturgy were gradually being withdrawn from their view and hearing; in the churches of the East the temple veil was being resewn. This was deemed fitting, since the outcome of the progressive verticalization of the visible church (i.e., its conformation to cosmic structures) was that all the weight began to fall on the disclosure of mysteries to the worthy soul rather than on an eschatological event of a truly communal nature.

What was slowly taking place was nothing less than a major alteration of the whole idea of eucharistic transformation, to which the notion of a graded ascent was originally foreign, accompanied by a false extension of the sacramental principle. We can point to more than the new interpretation of buildings and bishops as proof of this. For example, the so-called sacrament of oil emerges in Dionysian thought as even more holy than the eucharist itself, more holy because more rare, more hidden, more mysterious. On the other end, as has been said, icons were gaining ground as quasi-sacramentals in their own right, as windows to heaven more opaque but better situated for the average man. Denys, by applying the premise of symbolism—that "our nature needs material things for more divine elevation from them to the spiritual"—to an hierarchical

---

223 Justinian unsuccessfully opposed the silencing of the anaphora, regarding which Wybrew (86f.) comments that few changes "have been so far-reaching in their implications and consequences." By the 11th C., n.b., a quite literal veil had been introduced in monastic circles; by the 14th the iconostasis was being erected (ibid. 119, 147). These moves were more or less inevitable, given the ready assimilation of Christian worship to the cosmological speculations that were so popular in the eastern church from Clement of Alexandria onwards.

224 Louth is powerful in his defense of the communal dimension (see esp. 130ff.; but cf. 104ff., since rather a lot rests on his interpretation of Mystical Theology). It seems to us, however, that the liturgical synaxis is better understood in terms of henosis than of koinònia.

225 See Louth 63ff., Pelikan 1/346. The three rites of water, bread, and oil form a triad, the last being that which "makes perfect."
outline of the church, provided a definite grid for this extrapolation, which was to have the most devastating long-term effects.\textsuperscript{226}

Now all of this helped to ensconce in the habits of the church a commitment to the basic tenets of mystical spirituality, while making allowances for the wide range of sincerity among Christians. It also provided considerable scope to the influence of imperial grandeur on liturgical life, since both the church and the emperor's court were considered to be visible adornments of invisible cosmic realities. The product was a popular combination of individual self-effort (often expressed in a rather superstitious piety) with a spectacular corporate ritual, leading to a uniquely eastern form of institutionalism.\textsuperscript{227} Denys himself, perhaps, had relatively little of Augustine's (or any bishop's) interest in the institutional dimension of the church \textit{per se}; he was too close to Origen for that. Yet it may not be wrong to suggest that his real achievement was to wed the Origenist-Evagrian tradition to the fact, and inclinations, of an imperial church.

In the post-Nicene period it was Denys who dealt the East its most important cards, we believe, in spite of Maximus the Confessor's quite brilliant attempt in the seventh century to recover a more genuinely trinitarian and incarnational framework.\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{226} E.H. 1.5. Denys's triadic expansion of sacramental rites parallels that of hierarchical agents; both represent a principle at work in the gnostics and in Origen, namely, the multiplication of intermediaries in order to overcome a false discontinuity with an equally false continuity. The growth of liturgical rites and symbols as a means of participation in invisible realities was already well underway by Denys's time, of course.

\textsuperscript{227} This form was more quickly inclined to imitate the imperial court but not so likely as its western counterpart to promote ambitious competition in the political arena, a point to which we will also return.

\textsuperscript{228} Denys "marked forever Byzantine piety," says Meyendorff (111), esp. the liturgy as "a symbolic drama that the assembly attend as spectators, the mystery of which can only be penetrated by initiated individuals." Curiously he argues that only in the realm of piety did Denys retain any real importance—a very strange claim, since eastern theology is by nature a \textit{liturgical} theology. It sometimes seems that if Orthodox writers do not care for Denys, his impact on the East was minimal; if they do, it was the West who failed to assimilate him properly (Lossky 1983:127f.).
Such pseudo-eucharistic thinking, whatever its advantages, came at a heavy price however. Jesus of Nazareth, whose earthly life was still commemorated in the liturgy but whose risen humanity was already suffering neglect, would all too easily disappear into the vastness of this expanding ecclesiastical space. But about Maximus it is also necessary to speak, before attempting to complete our cursory look at the eastern church by touching on the iconoclastic controversy.

As it happens, Denys owes his own theological afterlife largely to Maximus, who is said to represent Greek theology in its maturity. This maturity derives from a fascinating synthesis between the East's Irenaean and Origenist roots\textsuperscript{229}—of all Maximian "mediations" surely the most significant. Maximus himself was very clear about bodily ascension, which indeed became a vital component of his cosmic vision, a vision that turned on the mediation of certain basic dualities in creation.\textsuperscript{230} Having recognized the soteriological deficiencies of a purely utilitarian approach to Jesus, that is, of an approach on which his humanity disappears under the weight of his divinity, Maximus put the incarnate one back in the centre of the picture. He even revived the notion of recapitulation, if in a quite different form; the very possibility of kosmos (not to mention

\textsuperscript{229} As cultivated by Cyril of Alexandria on the one hand and by Macarius, Evagrius and Denys on the other, and of course by the Cappadocians, who represent an earlier attempt at such a synthesis (cf. Louth 114ff., Zizioulas 1985:89ff.; L. Thunberg, 1985:73ff., notes too the significance of Nemesius of Emessa). Maximus, like Irenaeus himself, also represents an important link between East and West; see the introduction by Pelikan in \textit{Selected Writings}, and von Balthasar's \textit{Liturgie Cosmique}.

\textsuperscript{230} The primary dualities that must be overcome in order for the creation to be realized according to the harmony of the divine plan are five: male and female, paradise and oikoumenē, heaven and earth, intelligible and sensible, uncreated and created. The role of man "is to be 'a natural link ... between the extremities of creation,' in order to unite all things in God" (Meyendorff 139, quoting from the \textit{Ambigua}). It is the God–man, Jesus Christ, who "ascended with the body he had assumed" (\textit{Or. Dom.} 2), who actually achieves this.
its salvation) rests for Maximus on the fact that God became, and remains, man. His corrective surgery—being faithful to which meant subjecting his own body to the cruelty of the imperial surgeon during the monothelite controversy—not only saved the orthodoxy of the Greek church but opened up many interesting avenues for future exploration. Even so, we must question the degree to which this justly famous monk succeeded at liberating Christian theology and the doctrine of the ascension from bondage to dualism, or from the monistic tendency underlying that dualism.

We begin by observing that Maximus operated with a highly anthropomorphic cosmology. He describes the universe as a makranthropōpos, in fact, and each man as a microcosm. The degree to which he developed this model, and the dualism which plainly controlled it, can best be displayed in a diagram:

231 God "has embraced the whole creation through what is in the centre," recapitulating all things in himself (Amb. 41). Maximus speaks of "the mysterious self-abasement of the only-begotten Son with a view to the deification of our nature, a self-abasement in which he holds enclosed the limits of all history" (O.D. prologue); "all time and all that is in time," he says, "has received in Christ its beginning and its end" (Qu. ThaI. 60). Von Balthasar's various writings have consistently wrestled with this insight—which is not, however, identical to that of Irenaeus.

232 Myst. 7; cf. Thunberg 1965:140ff., 1985:73f. Though Gregory of Nyssa (Hom. Op. 16) criticizes the ancient notion of man as microcosm as "dignifying man with the attributes of the gnat or the mouse," the concept is vital to Maximus's incarnational focus. In many respects he follows Gregory, however, e.g., in taking up the fateful notion of universal man.

233 Note that creation, scripture, and Christ constitute a kind of progressive incarnation, as the complete expression of God's will "to effect the mystery of his embodiment" (Amb. 7; Thunberg 1985:75). A panentheistic direction is apparent here, though pantheism is of course repudiated. (On the distinction between the "head" and "feet" of Christ, and scripture as spirit and letter, see Amb. 56 or Pelikan 2/76f.)
To be sure, in the God-man and in deified men generally all such dualities are mediated through integration of the lower element into the higher, generating a unity without confusion or loss of identity. This mediation saves creation from the threat of dissolution\textsuperscript{234} and grounds the new creation to be manifested at the parousia. To a real extent dualism is transcended, then.

Or is it? If the vision of Maximus offers obvious improvements on much monastic speculation, including a modest recovery in the area of eschatology, his essential continuity with the same is even more obvious. Zeal for the notion of the soul's union with God underlies both his cosmic vision and his forays into doctrinal controversy.\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{234} Myst. 1

\textsuperscript{235} Wybrew 94. This fact can be interpreted in different ways. Zizioulas (1985:89ff.) believes Maximus to have achieved a remarkable reconciliation between the Greek concern for cosmos and the Hebrew concern for history by way of a Christian ontology of love, an ontology in which otherness and communion are fundamental. While we can largely affirm Zizioulas's own programme, it appears to us that he is to some extent saving the patristic appearances, so to speak; for all his innovations Maximus preserved rather more of the Hellenistic heritage than Christianity can well manage.
His writings seldom stray far from the old Greek problem of creaturely corruption and dissolution; soteriology is still aimed at the recovery of a primal unity—once we have washed away our fondness for matter "as dust from our spiritual eyes." Descending and ascending are still construed in terms of bridging the ontological gap between the divine and the human, the intelligible and the sensible, the one and the many. Maximus, the last serious theologian of the ascension in ancient times, understood that human nature had somehow to be included, not excluded, in the process of deification. Yet he contributed to a further crucial dislocation of the human Jesus and to the growth of a compensating ecclesiology.

How did this happen? We must look more closely at the teachings of Maximus, though obviously we cannot enter into the full range of questions bequeathed to him by Denys and other monastic theologians, which would take us far beyond our own concerns. Suffice it to say that he found himself wrestling with the basic logic of deification, by now thoroughly established as the leitmotif of Greek theology. Denys's theurgic hierarchies and mystical spirituality provided only a partial response to the problems raised by his greater emphasis (contra Origen) on the distance or discontinuity between God and creation. How was this discontinuity to be overcome without compromising either party, so to speak? Maximus attempted to address that question by renewed attention to the incarnation, that is, by linking the via negativa of mysticism more closely

236 O.D. 4 (quotations of Maximus are taken, where possible, from the widely-available Selected Writings). Whether creaturely unity is primal or entelic, pre-existent or post-existent, is not easy to ascertain. Perhaps the right answer is "both" (see Gnos. 1.35–70; cf. Gregory Nyssa, Hom. Op. 30.34).

237 We note Pelikan's observation that during this period "soteriological consistency seems to have been achieved by means of a christological abstraction far removed from the figure described in the Gospels, so that "practically the whole of Byzantine religion could have been built without the historical Christ of the Gospels" (2/75, quoting Fedotov).
with the via positiva of God's condescending grace in Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, he put the notion of creatio ex nihilo to work in a new way: The mystery of creaturely being is just this, that it has non-being as its own proper ground. Continually threatened in its natural multiplicity by the threat of imminent dissolution, it can exist truly only insofar as it allows this very fact to stand forth as its single, and hence unifying, principle—insofar, then, as it is constantly and deliberately referred back to its Creator.

Such is the task of man, who by virtue of his unique microcosmic constitution becomes (to employ von Balthasar's apt terminology) the cosmic liturgist, the mediator between God and the world. Here, of course, is where the doctrine of the ascension comes into play. What man fails to achieve, in his fragmenting, self-centred fascination with the material world, is achieved in Christ, who binds creation together across the cracks which have opened up in it (see our diagram) by reversing the direction of man's attention. The ontological distance between God and the world is erased in the descent and ascent of the Word, who puts to death the flesh and the fleshly mind, introducing a truly Godward motion into human nature that eventually carries man entirely beyond himself. In this handing over of man to the Father every debilitating breach within

---

238 See, e.g., Gnos. 2.36–39, which begins thus: "In considering the loftiness and divine infinity we should not despair that God's love for man cannot reach all the way to us from the heights." But notice how Maximus here associates both creation and incarnation with "the abyss."

239 Amb. 41; Thunberg 1965:427. Denys "prefers to say that we come from (ek) God than from nothing" (Louth 85) but Maximus is only pressing the following Dionysian thesis: "For since it is necessary that we understand correctly the difference between God and creatures, then the affirmation of superbeing must be the negation of beings, and the affirmation of beings must be the negation of superbeing" (Myst. intro; cf. Denys, Myst. 3, 5). Yet we must ask whether this critical assumption does not violate the principle that "God has no contrary" (Carit. 3.27f.).

240 Gnos. 2.24f., 36.
creation is also mastered, since precisely by arriving at God (through the self-denial and self-referral of Christ) it arrives also at its own integrity.\textsuperscript{241}

Maximus cannot but be admired for the ingenuity of his thought as well as for the relational dynamic which is woven into the very fabric of his worldview; indeed, for the way in which the ontological needs of the Greek and the hamartiological concern of Jews and Christians (more positively, the aesthetic interest and the moral or prophetic) are brought together. Just here, however, we must pursue our criticism. That Greek interests dominate at the theoretical level is clear. Multiplicity and materiality are still regarded with deep suspicion as inherently unstable, and as a constant source of temptation which invites the mind to waver from a pure and uncomplicated adoration of God. This sentiment is betrayed in a variety of ways, but openly set out in the maxim that "all visible things need a cross, all intelligible things a tomb."\textsuperscript{242} We might interpret this narrowly, of course, as an existential requirement of fallen man, who has developed in opposition to his own (unifying) nature. But the telltale simultaneity of creation and fall in Maximus already warns us that the old confusion between ontology and soteriology has not been overcome,\textsuperscript{243} and that underneath his orthodox affirmations lies a lingering doubt about the goodness of the creation we know. His vision is very much a monastic one;

\textsuperscript{241} See e.g. \textit{O.D.} 2, 5; cf. Meyendorff 142f. It is in this priesting of man, as it were, and in man's priestly activity that the hope of creation lies (Zizioulas 1990:5).

\textsuperscript{242} "All visible things need a cross, that is, a capacity which holds back the participation in what is active in them according to sense. All intelligible things need a tomb, that is, the total immobilizing of the activities of the mind in them. For when this natural activity and movement with respect to all things is taken away along with their participation, the Word which alone exists by itself as if he had risen from the dead is manifested anew.... For it is by grace and not by nature that he is the salvation of those who are saved" (\textit{Gnos.} 1.67).

\textsuperscript{243} "The moment man comes into being he departs through sin from his true origin" (\textit{Q.Thal.} 59; von Balthasar 1967:9).
overcoming sin and overcoming nature are pretty much the same thing.\textsuperscript{244}

The opposition between God and the world which Maximus's theology of descent and ascent seeks to resolve thus translates once again into a serious loss of continuity between the old creation and the new: "Who would then say ... that heaven, the kingdom prepared from the world's foundation ... for those who are worthy, is in any way identical to the earth?"\textsuperscript{245} To enter this kingdom man must be prepared to "go out of himself," as Denys taught, attaining to a more angelic mode of life.\textsuperscript{246} This does not mean leaving the body, but the body "will become like the soul" when man arrives at that divine realm "above age, time, and place," at the End which is also the beginning and in which "no middle shall be contemplated."\textsuperscript{247} Here his only motion will be motion into God, which means a cessation of the natural activities of body and mind alike. Here, where the distractions of spatio-temporal existence do not exist, he may hope finally to "behold with the naked mind the pure Word as he is in himself."\textsuperscript{248} All of which means that ascension

\textsuperscript{244} On the thesis noted above (n. 243) it could hardly be otherwise. It is ironic that Maximus accuses the Jews (sic) of despising the visible creation and its Maker, when it is his own teaching that only "by abandoning his body and whatever is the body's" can a man seek after God (O.D. 4).

\textsuperscript{245} O.D. 4. The link Maximus establishes between man's union with God, his horizontal integrity, and the integrity of creation as a whole is at first glance rich in social and ecological potential. Yet curiously these dimensions (the relational virtues excepted) remain largely undeveloped. This discontinuity is the reason.

\textsuperscript{246} He begins by "pulling out the nails" that bind the soul to the flesh (Gnos. 1.99). He proceeds through his rational activity as the image of God in circumscribing all that is and "holding it together in its pure relationship with the Logos" (Thunberg 1965:429). Having come via this contemplative recapitulation to "the border of natural knowledge," and being "no more sinfully attached to the world in its manifoldness," his mind "is naked and open to mystical illumination" (ibid.; cf. Carit. 1.86).

\textsuperscript{247} See Gnos. 1.40f., 68ff., 2.86ff., Myst. 7. The excluded "middle" is the world of becoming in which man "was once nurtured as a child;" an Irenaean theme is here transplanted into an Origenist context, and the latter's doubts about the value of history to some extent retained.

\textsuperscript{248} I.e., the incorporeal Son in his true simplicity (Gnos. 2.73). Note that in Denys and Maximus, and indeed in the mystical tradition generally, \textit{ecstasy} and interiorization are
and *ascesis* are virtually inseparable in Maximus; in other words, that ascension of the mind is in fact closer to his heart than ascension in the flesh.\(^{249}\)

It would appear, in fact, that Maximus overwrites his own correction with the former error. Where Denys had emphasized the mediatorial role of the hierarchies in the "going out" of God towards creation and *vice versa*, Maximus emphasizes the role of man and of the incarnate Logos. His cosmology, if anthropomorphic, is also anthropocentric.\(^{250}\) But this is only half the picture. The *via positiva* involves a movement towards the earthy and the particular: the "thickening" of the Logos and the expansion of the cosmos through the differentiation of its various *logoi*. As with Denys, however, unions are more important than differentiations. Thus the *via negativa* that is bound up with the ascension involves a parallel movement *away* from the particular: the "thinning" of the Logos and the contraction of the cosmos through deification. And once again this means letting go of the earthly Jesus in favour of the cosmic Christ.\(^{251}\) A strong echo of Origen can be heard when we are told that even *Jesus*, from our perspective, requires a cross and a tomb:

---


\(^{250}\) Denys (*D.N.* 2.5) employs the analogy of the centre of a circle, equally participated in by all its radii, to underscore the fact that his hierarchical worldview is not emanationist. Maximus (*Myst.* 1) makes *Christ* this centre, and the circumference too.

\(^{251}\) See Thunberg 1965:420ff. (cf. *Amb.* 33, *Gnos.* 2.37), though he is not making our point; indeed, he insists that none of this ever takes us beyond the incarnation, esp. since descending and ascending remain in a dialectical relationship (1985:173). But in this dialectic there is a self-cancelling symmetry. *Pace* Meyendorff (132ff.), Maximus does not really reverse Origen's creation triad, *stasis*—*kinēsis*—*genesis*, but transfers it to God the Logos, and then completes it with its mirror image, as follows: *stasis*—*kinēsis*—*genesis*—*kinēsis*—*stasis*. 
Those who bury the Lord with honor will also behold him gloriously risen, while to all those who do not he is unseen. For he is no longer caught by those who lay snares, since having no longer the external covering by which he seemed to allow himself to be caught by those who wanted him, and by which he endured the Passion for the salvation of all. 252

Indeed, Maximus has a good deal to say that sounds like Origen, or Augustine for that matter. Since bodily ascension is seen as a function of the ascension of the mind (asceticism), the old temptation to subjectivity is irresistible:

For those who search according to the flesh after the meaning of God, the Lord does not ascend to the Father; but for those who seek him out in a spiritual way through lofty contemplations he does ascend to the Father. Let us, then, not always hold him here below though he came down here out of love to be with us. Rather, let us go up to the Father along with him, leaving behind the earth and what is earthly.... 253

It is no longer necessary "that those who seek the Lord should seek him outside themselves." 254 We follow his trajectory "if we know him not in the limited condition of his descent in the incarnation but in the majestic splendor of his natural infinitude."

Beginners may cling to the one who had "neither form nor beauty," but the advancing gnostic will climb "the lofty mountain of his transfiguration before the creation of the world." All of this only perpetuates the angelomorphic aims of monastic spirituality through a process of interiorization. 255

252 Gnos. 1.62.

253 Gnos. 2.47; cf. 2.94. With subjectivity goes repetition, of course, not only of the act but of the agent: The soul that rises above the passions belonging to worldly dualities receives "the full power of knowing the divine nature insofar as this is possible.... By this power, Christ is always born mysteriously and willingly, becoming incarnate through those who are saved." (O.D. 4).

254 Gnos. 2.35; cf. 2.29. In Simeon the New Theologian this experiential emphasis re-emerged in the teaching that Christ is always present, and that the responsibility for a man's failure of vision is his own (see Pelikan 2/259).

255 Cf. Gnos. 1.97, 2.13, 18, 27ff., 37ff., 59. It may be through the incarnate one that creation finds its repose in God, but he himself has been rarefied in the ascension and the whole material order is to be folded up along with him. This is symbolized by the closing of the church doors after the liturgy of the Word and the dismissal of the catechumens (Myst. 15).
The risk here to Jesus' concrete particularity as the object of Christian faith and hope is a real one, though somewhat difficult to assess. It should not escape our notice that, since descending and ascending are marshalled for the purpose of resolving an ontological opposition, they represent an exchange of natures more than a personal human history. What is really important about Jesus is his ability as the divine Logos to inject into man a deifying unity. To be sure, he does not do this by destroying creaturely particularity, but by overcoming it and manifesting it in relation to the whole. Yet that overcoming means the laying aside of his own "external covering" for a kind of cosmic ubiquity. The language Maximus sometimes uses to describe the ascended Christ puts us in mind of the super-cosmic Nous (Anaxagorus' "world-building spirit") which in pagan Greek theology was responsible for all motion and order. He is regarded somewhat impersonally as the ground of the "christic mystery" of deified man, as

256 The incarnation is important more for the fact that the person of the Logos makes man a partaker of the divine nature in its unity and integrity than for any direct considerations, however valuable, of personhood per se. Though Zizioulas (1975:435) and Meyendorff argue otherwise, Thunberg (1985:33) acknowledges that Maximus "is not all that clear" respecting the ontological priority between natural constitution and personal agency.

257 God makes all beings, "which are by nature distant from one another," to "converge in each other by the singular force of their relationship to him as origin. Through this force he leads all beings to a common and unconfused identity of movement and existence.... This reality abolishes and dims their particular relations considered according to each one's nature, but not by dissolving or destroying them or putting an end to their existence. Rather it does so by transcending them and revealing them, as the whole reveals its parts...." (Myst. 1).

258 Thunberg (1985:135ff.) links Maximus here to Luther and de Chardin. He comments that the cosmic Christ "is at the same time the Christ of the Cross and the Resurrection," but cf. Gnos. 2.96 for the context of Maximus's own claim to this effect. See also 2.18, where we find a version of Origen's De Princ. 2.11.6, about the Jesus "who is everywhere and runs through all things."

259 See Nebelsick 58f.; cf. O.D. 5f., e.g., where underlying the language of John and James and Paul are concepts common to Anaxagorus, Plato, and Aristotle—a mixture not uncommon in the Greek fathers.
universal man, or even as the revelation of the Logos *incarnate in all things*. It is a highly noteworthy feature of the Maximian vision that it approaches something like a universal incarnation, applying Chalcedonian principles to the entire creation along the lines suggested by our diagram. This reflects, if not a persistent attachment to the universal at the expense of the particular, at least some confusion about the relation between them (evident here in the ambiguous interplay of microcosm and macrocosm) that tends to squeeze out any true concept of sociality and so to minimize the importance of Jesus as the Man of Nazareth.

Much of the difficulty at this point belongs to a discussion of the notion of undivided essences, and especially of universal man, to which the ascension is made to do service. At bottom, however, the problem is a trinitarian one, betraying perhaps the most significant weakness of the Cappadocian theology on which Maximus leaned in order to correct the unitarian tendency of Denys. A great deal must be said in favour of the Cappadocians, who challenged the abstractions of Greek ontology by introducing concepts of personhood and communion as fundamental categories. When charged with tritheistic leanings, however, they took refuge first in an appeal to Plato's concept of the universal (*to koinon*), then in the notion of the Father as the independent source and

---

260 See Thunberg (1965:80ff., 419ff.; 1985:108ff., 132ff.) on "Maximus' dominant idea of a universal incarnation of Christ the Logos in the world." The *tantum-quantum* principle (*Amb. 10*), which renders incarnation and deification a matter of degree—mutually defined by God and man in their response to one another—should not be overlooked in this connection, nor the heretical doctrine of the isochrists, which in Maximus is not fully overturned (cf. *Gnos.* 2.23, 35).

261 Thunberg's comments (1985:115, following R. Bornert) on the relation between *genikos* and *idikos* largely miss the point; it is precisely the close identification between general and particular that constitutes the problem. Christ, cosmos, church, man, the soul—each is coextensive with the whole (like Plato's version of the world soul, which is united "centre to centre" with the corporeal universe) and recapitulates it. But this is not a Christian idea, nor intrinsically personal; just the reverse, perhaps. Its effects on ecclesiology we will touch on in a moment.
cause (aietea) of the deity. In this way they capitulated to the demand for the primacy of the one over the many, and failed to complete their turn from a philosophy of substance and essence to one of persons-in-relation. The subsequent history of Christian dogmatics and spirituality testifies to this failure, or partial success, not just in the survival of Origenism in a host of attenuated forms but even in such an extensive correction of that tradition as Maximus undertook with their help.

But we must turn now, albeit briefly, to the ecclesiological ramifications of his work, and especially of his christology. The idea of the Logos incarnate in all things strengthened the immanentist aspect of Origenist and Dionysian thought, while lending it a more orthodox flavour. It did nothing to alter the fact that the problem of the presence and the absence was regarded primarily as a question of distance and degree, with a stronger existential than eschatological component. Given this fact, we could not very well expect Maximus to muster any effective challenge to the prevailing ecclesiology. Here is a point that ought not to be overlooked by those who prefer to think that he


263 Pace Zizioulas (1985:15ff.) the introduction of the notion of causality into theology proper was a very dangerous move, calling into question the status of the personhood of the Son and the Spirit, and indeed pushing the very notion of personhood, along with that of the Father-person, back behind the fact of trinitarian life, thus rendering them completely obscure. We have argued this at length in an unpublished paper, 'Perichoresis and Personhood,' delivered to the King's College Research Institute in Systematic Theology (1989); cf. Torrance 1988:336ff.

264 It may be, as Zizioulas (1975:433ff., 1985:95ff.) argues, that Maximus can be credited with furthering the Cappadocians positive agenda. Nevertheless, and in spite of his careful balancing act respecting the trinity of God (cf. O.D. 4, Carit. 2.29f., Gnos. 2.1), there is a vestige of impersonalism in his theology and anthropology alike, which shows up especially in christology.

265 See e.g. Gnos. 2.27ff., 45ff., 56ff., 91ff. Maximus's references to the second coming can doubtless be raised in his defense; yet the parousia we are to expect is a parousia beyond space and time, since the kingdom is within us (Gnos. 2.91; though cf. Myst. 15). Zizioulas (1975:418 n.1) amends this to a parousia "removed from historical causality," a perspective with which we can more easily concur.
provides a true departure from Denys: If that be so, how is it that he threw his support behind the Dionysian view of the church? How is it that he left ecclesiastical space intact, if he really recovered the dynamic of the divine koinōnia and of communion with a truly human Christ as a foundation for cosmology and ecclesiology? On the contrary, his notion of the "thickening" and "thinning" of the Word in descent and ascent (the very language betrays that false continuity—in—discontinuity which marks the whole tradition) coalesced nicely with an erect ecclesiology, complete with a clericalized and heavily symbolic view of the church's sacramental life.

In particular, a huge emphasis on contemplation meant that the twin faults of Origenist ecclesiology would not be overcome. In Maximus the tendency to both formalism and individualism drew strength from the old dualist thesis that "the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms," which has of course its ecclesiastical expression: The high priestly Logos descends to us in liturgical figures, at a specific locale—a holy building—and through...

---

266 Louth (115) notes that Maximus "goes beyond Denys in making more of the spatial aspect of the liturgy," though also of the eschatological.

267 There is undoubtedly a difference in tone and a more egalitarian emphasis in his ecclesiology, which is much more accessible than that of Denys. Nevertheless, he who wishes "to touch on matters more mystical and sublime" is instructed to "read what has been divinely worked out by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite and he will find the true revelation of ineffable mysteries granted to the human race through his divine intelligence and tongue 'for those who are to inherit salvation'" (Myst. conc.).

268 Myst. 2. "Contemplation" is a term, by the way, that Maximus uses very much more frequently even than Denys (see Sel. Works 216, n. 21). It belongs to that spirituality of "imitation" (cf. Myst. 5) common to all the ancient philosophers and theologians who attempted to interpret reality from the top down, so to speak, beginning with the heavenly spheres, and with the human mind, as manifestations of divinity.

269 For the first time Christians were bound to the building itself—in which angels are said to remain, taking note "each time people enter and present themselves to God," and in which the grace of the Spirit "is always invisibly present, but in a special way at the time of the holy synaxis" (Myst. 2.4). This was a huge step forward in the false institutionalizing of the church, though the dangerous process of re-sacralization had been going on for some time (Ellul 52ff.).
carefully defined ministrations; the receptive man is snatched up "to the diaphanous air of mystical contemplation" along the path marked out by "the beaming ray of ceremonies." It must be said that the charge of individualism can hardly be avoided here, even if in one sense nothing could be more contrary to the intentions of Maximus. Certainly he maintained a much stronger eucharistic dimension than Denys, but it was seriously compromised by the notion of deification through contemplation. If he also achieved a more powerful emphasis on the church precisely in its unifying function, that is not to say that he offers any compelling vision of ecclesial sociality. Though there are helpful hints in that direction, the general ethos is still that of the church as kosmos of the cosmos, and icon of the soul in its union with God. Indeed, in a telling witness to the confusion of which we have already spoken, each man is potentially a church.

270 "God, who in his mercy for us has desired that the grace of divine virtue be sent down from heaven to those who are on earth, has symbolically built the sacred tent and everything in it as a representation, figure, and imitation of Wisdom" (Gnos. 1.88; cf. 2.59, Myst. intro). Maximus distinguishes law and gospel in terms of types and images, or shadows and symbols; but the analogy between Old and New Testament worship is very strong (see Wybrew 115, Thunberg 1985:162ff.).

271 The liturgy is symbolic of the life of Jesus and that of the soul, linking the two in a manner not altogether clear. Maximus's comments on the eucharist, taken by themselves, are for the most part admirable (see Myst. 21, 24; cf. Thunberg 1985:144–73). There is a spiritual grace, operative especially in the reception of the eucharistic symbols, that "transforms and changes each person" with a view to their participation in Christ in the eschaton (recall however that this grace is in a lesser degree invisibly present in the building at all times).

272 It appears that the enthusiasm for life that ought to come from dwelling on the dynamics between Father, Son and Spirit is somehow overshadowed by the idea that the one deity, whole and undivided, is completely preserved in each (Gnos. 2.1). This carries over into an ecclesiology which, though rightly aimed at overcoming a destructive individuality (Myst. 1) remains somewhat abstract.

273 The church is equally an image of the world and of man, or simply of the soul of man (Myst. 2ff.). The confusion between microcosm and macrocosm and the dislocation of the human Jesus make possible this transformation of the ecclesial mystery into an affair of the soul, into a union between "the unknowable Monad" and the monachos.
Hugh Wybrew writes of Maximus that he was "first and foremost a monk," whose monastic spirituality was nourished by the ascetical and mystical tradition of the desert, which he integrated, in the *Mystagogia*, with the liturgical tradition of the Church. One of his great achievements was to relate Christian mysticism firmly with the mystery of Christ, from which the teaching of Evagrius and of Dionysius ran the risk of detaching it.\(^{274}\)

Perhaps so. But might we not put it the other way round with equal validity? The mystery of Christ (and ecclesiology with it) is here firmly pegged to the monastic heritage. At all events, Maximian systematization brought an end to serious thought about the ascension of Jesus as an event of cosmic proportions and ecclesiological significance, while bequeathing to the eastern church its richest resources along the way of its chosen course.\(^{275}\) Just as important to us is his influence on the West, but we will talk about that in its place.

* 

What happened over the next couple of centuries helped to settle the eastern course; we speak of the famous iconoclastic controversy, naturally, in which the dualism that continued to plague the church degenerated once again into an ugly political and theological conflict. Whatever other reasons we might put forward for the proliferation and veneration of images within the Christian church, or for the dramatic attack on this practice and its subsequent defense, it is quite plain that the verticalization of salvation history in the Origenist tradition was a contributing factor in each case. (The argument, after all, was about means rather than ends: Did the use of material images *elevate* the

\(^{274}\) 94f.

\(^{275}\) In his own words (*Amb*. 91; Lossky 1978:133), "there is not time to tell of all the ascents and revelations of the saints who are being changed from glory to glory, until each one in order (*en to idio tagmati*) receives deification." His successors, up to and beyond Gregory of Palamas, would attempt to do just that, but none would treat with the same systematic seriousness the subject of the ascension of Jesus. Even in John of Damascus, we search in vain "for any extended reference to the ascension" (Davies 149).
soul or only drag it down into the idolatrous mire of "the cult of matter"? It is equally obvious, of course, that the corresponding verticalization of the church must needs have brought it into conflict with the state, from which the practice of image-worship was initially borrowed; two hierarchies cannot be other than a contradiction, though artificial truces may be struck from time to time. Our interest, however, lies not in the political but in the theological sphere, for during the course of the argument over icons the question about the extension of the sacramental principle---so integral to the creation and preservation of ecclesiastical space---came to a head. It was settled affirmatively, if in a qualified way, leading to what is still celebrated today as the Victory of Orthodoxy.

In this hugely complicated and protracted affair, we can do little more than allude to a few matters that concern us directly, as we draw together the themes of our present discussion. We begin by noticing that the defense of the icons required a defense of the personal particularity of Jesus, which betrays the basic tendency of Greek theology to move in just the opposite direction. The iconoclasts complained, inter alia, that their

276 Meyendorff (p. 191) makes reference to John Damascene's enthusiasm for ten hulēn sebō; followed by Theodore of Studios and Nicephorus he led the defense against the iconclasts. As an indication of the common neoplatonic milieu within which this internecine warfare raged, we may point to the ambiguous status of sight in Plato and all his heirs: On the one hand, sight was sensual and a source of distraction; on the other, it was the highest of the senses and took precedence even over hearing as a source of guidance (as John et al. argued; cf. Pelikan 2/120ff.).

277 See Dix 422ff. on the influence of pagan emperor-worship, once the occasion of Christian martyrdom, along with the cult of relics, on the development of the cult of images. It is only fitting that the power struggle between church and state, which tested and to some extent limited the power of "caesaropapism," should have focused on the question of the veneration of images.

278 "Was the eucharistic presence to be extended to a general principle about the sacramental mediation of divine power through material objects, or was it an exclusive principle that precluded any such extension to other means of grace, such as images?" (Pelikan 2/94). That material objects could serve as "the seat of divine power" was a notion common to both sides, as eucharistic discussions show. This notion already undergirded the widespread veneration of relics (a practice supported even by Gregory of Nyssa; see ibid. 93, 104).
opponents were overturning the universality of Christ (making him a mere individual) by circumscribing him in an artist's image.279 Meyendorff speaks of "a new phase of Christianization" of Origen and Denys in the iconophiles' response, which--without abandoning the spiritual traditions shaped by these men--emphasized "the historical reality of the incarnation" and Jesus' distinct human identity even after the ascension.280 That there was a good deal of Eutychian thinking on the one side, met by a certain amount of Nestorianism on the other, is evident, even when the charges hurled back and forth between them are viewed with some suspicion. At all events, and in spite of some very fine expressions of loyalty to the human Jesus on the part of iconophiles like John of Damascus, there was little real progress in christology or its cosmological implications.281 The validity of making visible portraits of Jesus (to accompany the verbal portraits in the Gospels) was established by reasserting his human particularity against pre- or post-ascension docetism; this was deemed sufficient, along with a general reaffirmation of the goodness of created things.

279 Alexandrian theology emphasized the Logos' assumption of anhypostasic humanity and his role as universal man. This was undergirded by the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum, which some of the iconoclasts pushed to a thoroughly Eutychian extreme (Meyendorff 181f.). As Pelikan (2/29) points out, the issue of Jesus' circumscription was a false one in some ways, since it did not apply to other icons.

280 P. 177; see 184ff. Drawing on such diverse sources as Aristotle and Cyril of Alexandria--who liked to emphasize "the concrete scenes of the Gospel" (Pelikan 2/130), thus achieving perhaps the best integration of Alexandrian and Antiochene insights--the iconophiles insisted that Jesus was and remained describable in his human nature. "The very name of Jesus makes him distinct in his hypostatical characteristics, in relationship to other men," said Theodore (Hom. 40.6; Meyendorff 186). This theology had a liberating influence on Byzantine art in general (Janson 227).

281 The iconophiles were accused of falling either into Nestorianism (by isolating his human nature for the purposes of image-making) or into Eutychianism (by confusing his divinity with his humanity in suggesting that the image was somehow adequate to his person). The reasoning here may have been somewhat specious but, in view of their failure to address the cosmic aspect of Christ's humanity in any very meaningful way, the charge of Nestorianism especially might be made to stick, even where it is not so obvious as in Nicephorus e.g. (cf. Meyendorff 187f.).
The legitimacy of a portrait and its veneration are two different matters, though, and the latter could not be addressed simply by repudiating the more radical forms of Origenist theology. The issue on which we have already touched could only be decisive with respect to the general orthodoxy of the combatants. Yet once this question was decided in favour of the iconophiles there could be no doubt as to the final outcome—this for a reason that goes beyond the advantage of owning the doctrinal high ground and enjoying popular support, not to mention favourable changes at the imperial palace. Since both sides in the debate shared the dualist and hierarchical worldview of the Areopagite, the icons could not but prevail in the end; like it or not, they were a natural part of a whole chain of images by means of which the ascent of the soul to its union with God was deemed possible.282

The iconoclasts, of course, wanted to restrict the thick end of this chain to a single link—that is, to the "mysteries," said to be unique by virtue of an identity of essence with their prototype. Yet the bread and the wine were not alone among material things in inspiring their devotion. One of the most telling blows ever struck against the iconoclasts, and it was struck repeatedly, was the charge of inconsistency: How could they venerate the holy cross or the holy books and fail to venerate the icons as well?283 For their part, the iconophiles denied that the eucharist could be interpreted as an icon at all, since icons

282 Indeed, by means of which the universe as such is structured. Pelikan (2/115) thinks it "a matter of great historical significance that one of the favorite technical terms in the Dionysian tradition for this chain of being between the various levels of reality was 'image.'" The case for images was argued by John Damascene right back to the Son as image of the Father and to the world as image of the eternal forms of God's creative will. But this appears to contradict either the homousios or his own concept of imaging.

283 "Why," they were asked, "do you worship the book and spit upon the picture?" (John V of Jerusalem; Pelikan 2/131). In addition, if Christ could be circumscribed in the eucharistic elements why could he not be circumscribed in the icons? Here the iconophiles put the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum to work for themselves (cf. ibid. 129f.).
by their definition were not of the same essence as their prototype. But it was the way in which they now appealed to the eucharist precisely in order to prop up image-worship (thus turning the table on their accusers) that really counted. By emphasizing as far as possible the similarity between the real presence in the mysteries and the spiritual encounter with Christ and his saints achieved through the icons, they made an attack on the latter look like an attack on the former. This oddly inconsistent manoeuver on their own part virtually guaranteed the extension of the sacramental principle, and with it the continued expansion of ecclesiastical space.

Afterwards the distinction between the mysteries and the icons had to be reaffirmed in order to safeguard the church's eucharistic centre against rampant individualism and other side-effects. But the most vital distinction of all, namely, the eschatological character of the communion, had long since slipped out of focus together with the human Jesus. Despite the partial recovery of attention to the latter, that distinction would not be drawn in any serious way, since it could only call into question the desired continuity with the icons. The link between the eucharist and the parousia (other than in an existential sense) was now little considered. The attachment of

284 "The real theological dimensions of the iconoclastic controversy thus appear clearly: the image of Christ is the visible and necessary witness to the reality and humanity of Christ. If that witness is impossible, the Eucharist itself loses its reality" (Meyendorff 190).

285 This centre was constantly threatened by superstitious attention to relics and images, but also by the clericalization of the liturgy, which was only worsened by the whole inflationary spiral set in motion by granting sacramental status to icons. As late as the 17th C. attempts were still being made to distinguish between honouring icons and adoring the eucharist, in view of the "more real" presence belonging to the latter (in support of which formal appeal was now made to transubstantiation or metousiōsis; see Pelikan 2/291f.).

286 Even in the "Antiochene" liturgical commentaries of Cabasilas and Nicholas Andida there is a notable absence of parousia symbolism, which returns in Symeon's "Alexandrian" commentary—only to be overshadowed by the Dionysian interest in "a spiritual reality, which is Christ, considered less in his incarnate economy than as the eternal Word of God" (Wybrew 164). It is not insignificant perhaps that already by the
iconology to the eucharist did not so much "eschatologize" the icons, as Professor Zizioulas suggests, as reduce the eschatological mystery to something iconic. And as the eucharistic liturgy itself became a kind of icon (an imitation of heaven) the concept of the real presence in the mysteries had to be strengthened in a corresponding way; for all practical purposes, Christ was truly localized in the bread. But this distinction was made at the expense of the real absence. Through the prayers of clergy the remote, exalted Christ was now brought altogether near—though more often to behold than to touch or receive.

The victory of the icons, though happily a defeat for renegade dualism, was not so clear a victory for incarnational thinking and for the reality of Jesus-history as it is often made out to be, then, precisely because it failed to take proper stock of the eschatological nature of the problem of the presence and the absence (i.e., of the link between heaven and earth). The ramifications of this criticism, if it is valid, are time of Germanos, at the beginning of the iconoclastic controversy, the OT reading had disappeared and the parousia fixed at 6500 years (ibid. 125).

Zizioulas (1985:99f.) makes the interesting, if less than convincing, claim that icons were understood in the Greek church in a specifically eschatological manner. But this would appear to sacramentalize icons completely, and in so doing to alter the whole meaning of "eschatological" in favour of a fixed relation, from which the proper tension has been eliminated. Perhaps for this reason he can also argue "that there is no room for the slightest distinction between the worshipping eucharistic community on earth and the actual worship in front of God's throne" (233).

Two of the most important liturgical developments in this period were the addition of the rite of the prothesis and the provision of the antidoron as a kind of lay-substitute for the mysteries themselves (Wybrew 103ff.). These additions signify both a runaway clericalism and something of a fixation on the bread—once it had passed from being the offering of the people to being the offering of the clergy (cf. Cabasilas 1977:46)! This passage began in the prothesis and was completed on the altar, where the mysteries were protected even from the laity's "unsanctified glance."

To be sure, saving the icons meant embracing Maximus's correction of the Origenist heritage; but the fact that the icons were saved, i.e., as quasi-sacramentals (Meyendorff), was yet another compromise with that dualism which inevitably turns the conclusion of Jesus-history into a negation of age, time, and place. It is precisely this dualism and this negation which make possible a theology of the liturgy as a "real" imitation of heaven,
enormous, for in the last analysis the problem of the icons is no other than the problem of the church's own existence in the here and now—a question about the meaning and truth of the church's eschatological qualification as a eucharistic entity awaiting the parousia. Certainly it is not at all obvious how objects such as images or relics or buildings, even those blessed by the church, can join heaven and earth in any specifically Christian sense, or realize the presence of a living human being who is otherwise absent. Nor is it clear how the church that blesses them for that purpose is being true to its eucharistic constitution. Is it not rather the case that the confirmation of icons is the confirmation of a church that simply is, a church that exists in its own right as a stable (if finite) reflection of a heavenly reality? In actual fact the sacramentalizing of icons created an inflationary spiral that contributed heavily to the growth of clericalism and formalism and all manner of superstitions, by which the church maintained its comfortable role as the sanctifier of Byzantine society, a role wrested from it only in our own time by the technologically-boosted "caesaropapism" of the Marxists.

This points us to another and darker side of the whole business: We have already made clear that where there is uncertainty about the human Jesus substitutes can and will be supplied. Considering as well the extensive temporal rewards which were among the and of icons as a "genuine" substitute for heavenly persons.

Indeed, insofar as a material image is said actually to make present its subject, it becomes in effect a substitute form of embodiment; but this renders embodiment itself a rather flexible, utilitarian affair, and hence—most ironically—of dubious significance to the human hypostasis, including that of Jesus. (What Meyendorff, 188ff., hails as a victory for "the personalism of patristic theology" was bought at this rather steep price.)

This clericalism and its dualist foundation become evident in the liturgical commentaries. Nicholas of Andida, e.g., while acknowledging the complaints and confusion of the laity, who could not see or hear the important parts of the ritual, actually went so far as to claim that "the holy liturgy is celebrated principally for those who have offered and for those on whose behalf they have offered" (quoted in Wybrew 138). The hand of Denys is clearly visible here (cf. Pelikan 2/134).
spoils of the battle for the icons, must we not ask whether that long and often unholy war was perhaps more about defending the church itself as the essential icon, as the supplier and comptroller of icons, than about defending the humanity of Christ? Might iconoclasm not be acknowledged after all as a legitimate protest—however misguided or even insincere—against the fact that the church was busy setting itself up to be the new mediator between earth and heaven while its Master tarried on the mountain?292

Certainly a whole array of ecclesiastical devices now promised to bridge the gap between God and man, as the church added to its domed and partitioned buildings, its Clerical and monastic hierarchies, its holy men (pole-sitters!) and relics, a graduated series of venerable icons: saints lesser and greater, the holy angels,293 Mary, Christ, the Trinity—a veritable Jacob's ladder with humanity at one end and divinity at the other, and those whom it wished to honour, the Mother of God (its own symbol!) especially, somewhere in between. How far all this in fact led downwards into the abyss of idolatry God alone can judge, though the self-centredness of eastern Christianity has often been marked by others.294 At all events, even a more optimistic view of its vertical progress would have to allow that the East never quite got to grips with the question asked by the angels: "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" This very ambiguity, together with the sometimes

---

292 During this period "Mary"—by now the sinless intercessor—also became a mediator between Christ and the—now obviously fallible—emperor, as Patriarch Photius implies (cf. Wybrew 107, 149). Her position in the semi-dome of the apse and the prominence given her in ascension iconography (see here the telling comments of Dewald, 286f.) speak loudly of her glorification as the "modest" recipient of so great an honour.

293 The "inordinate attention" received by angels (Bromiley 1978:154) in the liturgy and elsewhere can be put down to the fact, already noted, that they "formed the missing ontological link between the visible world and the invisible world" (Pelikan). Theodore described the angels as a "precosmic cosmos before this cosmos, who announce to this cosmos a cosmos that is above the cosmos, namely, Christ" (Or. 6.1; Pelikan 2/142).

294 Perhaps Jews and Baptists, among others, might be allowed to speak to this issue even on Judgment Day, since it is no benign neglect (something they have reason to covet!) they have suffered, but the unconscionable wrath of the offended ecclesiastical icon.
vicious social insularity it helped to produce among the peoples of the autokephalous churches, also belongs to the ecclesiological heritage of that dislocation of Jesus which accompanies a dualist worldview.

West

In the candid words of Michael Psellus, an eleventh-century professor at the university of Constantinople, "the famous Origen ... was the pioneer of all our theology and laid its foundations, but on the other hand all heresies find their origin in him." The irony of this admission is striking to one who stands outside the eastern tradition, yet there is little room for smugness in the westerner. The damage done to the oriental church through its preference for Origen over Irenaeus was to some extent, at least, self-limiting. Insofar as it took its cue from Origen Orthodoxy could hardly approach the capacity for ambitious self-assertion which so marked, and eventually marred, Roman Christianity. Its other-worldliness and distinctly Pythagorean flavour, its intense concern for that heavenly doctrine and worship of which the icons became the symbol, lent it a narrower focus; angelomorphic aims largely outstripped earthly ambitions. Not so the church of Augustine! With some help from the ascension-theorists of the East it laid claim to heaven and earth alike. The hierarchical insights of Denys were combined with the socio-political mandate drafted by Augustine to produce an edifice that would entirely dominate the western landscape for a millennium. In its shadow many would be

295 Acc.Cer. 20; Pelikan 2/244.

296 For its part, the eastern church was prepared to settle for a so-called dyarchy within which it would play an increasingly passive role. For this passivity it has often been criticized, of course, and not without some justification, if recent events in Romania are anything to go by. It is a poignant fact, e.g., that just prior to the uprisings inspired by the courageous stand of Laszlo Tokes of the Hungarian Reformed Church, leading Orthodox bishops signed a document naming the dictator Ceaușescu as that country's "favourite son" and greatest modern hero.
refreshed, but as that shadow lengthened the fears of Tyconius would prove well-founded.

We have already recounted how Augustine's dualism led to an ecclesiology in which the church appropriates for itself, even in the ambiguity of its secular form, something of the divine authority and dignity of the ascended Christ. Now if there was relatively little resistance to the resulting inflation of the ecclesiastical ego, there did arise a certain anxiety about the human Jesus, who was gradually being jostled towards the margins of theology.297 The adoptionist controversy that irrupted in the eighth century testifies to this. Unfortunately the Spanish bishops who created that furor, Felix and Elipandus, so far from detecting the Nestorian tendency already at work, opted for an even more pronounced Nestorianism as a solution. This was answered by renewed stress on the divinity of Christ, often expressed in devotion to the cult of the Theotokos, which at this time gained a popularity previously unknown in the West.298 More and more, Mary attracted the attention and honour that belonged to her Son, a great deal of which passed (consciously or otherwise) from her to the church. The entire problem with which we are concerned was thus exacerbated.

A closer look at its mariological dimension is in order. In the wake of Jesus' disappearing humanity Mary became the required mediator with God. As she had once

297 By a variety of forces, not all of which were appreciated at the time. Ritschl (1967:129) points out, e.g., that Christ was "neither the object nor the subject of the vision of God which occupies such a central position" in Augustinian theology, indeed, in most theology of that period. Since this sought—after vision involved an essentially timeless presence, the Jesus of history could hardly feature significantly in it. Moreover, we have noted that even where his own presence with the church was emphasized, it was his divine presence that was chiefly in view.

298 Cf. Pelikan 3/68ff., 160ff. Though Pelikan is uncertain as to what explanation should be offered for this development, the marginalization we have described must surely be taken into account. Elipandus, e.g., was rebuked for asserting "that God had not created the world through him who was born of the Virgin," a claim made in hopes of preventing the divine or cosmic Christ from swallowing up the human Jesus; yet it was not Jesus who became the focus of subsequent debate, as one might have expected.
delivered Christ to the world, so now she would deliver him and his benefits to the individual believer. She was both "the ladder of heaven on which God descends to earth" and the one "through whom we ascend to him who descended through her to us." Such exalted notions about her person and work (encouraged by the legend of Theophilus, e.g., which told of her maternal influence in heaven) invited a general reconstruction of her life. Mary—history, or what soon passed for such, began to vie openly with Jesus—history, if by a kind of plagiarism. Of her assumption into heaven, officially dogmatized only in our own century, we will speak later. Perhaps the earliest example of this plagiarism, the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, is of more immediate interest, not only for the reason given above, but because in the West it raised anew the fundamental problem of the presence and the absence in a most fateful way. For the famous dispute between Radbertus and Ratramnus—brimming as it was with ecclesiological implications—actually began with the manner in which the Virgin Mother gave birth to Jesus before progressing to the more important question of the integrity with which Mother Church delivers the eucharistic Christ into the hands of the faithful.

---

299 Ambrose Autpert (Nat. Vir.; Pelikan 3/70) and Bernard of Clairvaux (Adv. 2.5; Pelikan 3/165). A prayer of Ildefonsus of Toledo to Mary makes her the mediator of both Christ and the Spirit: "I pray thee, I pray thee, O holy Virgin, that I may have Jesus by the same Spirit by whom thou didst give birth to Jesus" (Vir. Mar. 12; Pelikan 3/69). This line of thought fed a kind of quiet rivalry between Mother and Son, which at times seems to lurk beneath the surface in artistic representations of the Madonna enthroned with Child.

300 Mary's actual history—if artistic attention to the annunciation is anything to go by—already supplied suitable material for emphasis on "a God of epiphany rather than history" (D. Ritschl) and on human merit as a factor conditioning grace, two dominant features of medieval theology. But her mythological history evolved on the premise articulated in the official promulgation of her assumption (1950), namely, that she is "always sharing [her Son's] lot." Ecclesiologically, this principle would be perfectly sound but for its fully realized eschatology.

301 Given the link between mariology and ecclesiology this progression was a natural one, and Radbertus himself made the connection (see Pelikan 3/74). Like many theologians he was in the habit of applying Marian titles to the church, which could also be called Theotokos and discussed in terms of an extended analogy with Mary.
Radbertus insisted that Mary brought Jesus into the world in a miraculous way, that is, without any painful opening of her womb; he also insisted that the elements consecrated by the church become, contrary to our senses, that very same flesh to which Mary gave birth. In this way he meant to guard the dignity of the mediatrix and guarantee the quality of the church's offering. Radbertus's opponent, however, objected to the violence to nature implied in such perfectionism, or rather in the miracles for which it called. The second of these was the most contentious. Like Berengar after him—who insisted that the ascended Jesus could not be "summoned down" by the church—Ratramnus opposed any strict identification of the eucharistic body with the historical body and argued for a more spiritual kind of eating, a partaking of "the power of the divine Word." The opposition mustered by these men to the so-called realism of Radbertus proved insufficient, however, in spite of their proximity to Augustine on the subject. A common loss of focus on the humanity of Jesus had for some time been shifting the emphasis in eucharistic doctrine away from Christ's own offering to that of his church. And the church's task, like Mary's, was precisely to bring Christ down in order to offer him up anew on behalf of others.

---

302 This is not quite fair to Radbertus, since he held that the eucharistic body was a special creation. But his teaching did appear either to demand such a summons or to introduce a (self-contradictory) bifurcation of Christ. Many different answers to this convoluted problem would be attempted by theologians even into the Reformation; cf. W. Walker, 1968:36ff.

303 Corp. 49. Heron (1983b:94) comments: "So while Ratramnus is prepared to speak of the elements as being changed into the body and blood, it is not Jesus' physical body that he understands by this." This is only to repeat Augustine's failure, then.

304 For Radbertus the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist was indeed the most important (Pelikan 3/79). By emphasizing the need to bring Christ down first, so that the sacrifice offered up by the church might be a worthy one, he brought into prominence a mariological movement which certainly was already beginning to compete with the christological heart of the eucharist. From one point of view this ecclesiastically-contrived descent of Christ was the ascent of Mary, in her alter ego as the church.
At all events, the view of Radbertus prevailed. By a miraculous transformation within the sacramental species the literal flesh and blood of Jesus were really present on the altar (i.e., in the space cleared for him by the church in preparation for its offering) just as they had once been present in Mary's womb. This decision helped to fix in the church a deep sense of awe at its own maternal and sacerdotal role, encouraging its clericalism along with a good deal of superstition. Since both sides in the debate were working within a dualist framework, neither could offer any corrective focus on Jesus himself. For Ratramnus, as for Augustine, the Word's humanity remained remote and peripheral; for Radbertus it took on a peculiar form, to say the least. If one and the same Son of Mary really was made present in his humanity, this humanity was no longer recognizable as such, not because of what we have called the ascension-parousia differential but because the claims of Radbertus stubbornly defied that differential, as Berengar recognized. Of course, even Radbertus and his heirs were forced to allow some distinction between the Jesus who ascended and the Jesus who became present at the bidding of the church, but every such bifurcation only confused the issue further. Theological and liturgical manipulation of the body of Christ grew more and more complex, as abstraction was piled on abstraction, and symbol upon symbol. What was not left in doubt was the church's ability to produce Jesus at will.

Now in order to answer the objection of Berengar based on the ascension, various

305 "'No king or emperor on this earth has the power of the priest of God. No angel or archangel in heaven, no saint, not even the Blessed Virgin herself has the power of a priest of God: the power ... to make the great God of Heaven come down upon the altar and take the form of bread and wine. What an awful power, Stephen!!!' (James Joyce 1992:171).

306 Walker refers, e.g., to Peter Lombard's distinction between the exalted humanity and the "sacrificial" body which remains on earth; the former is omnipresent and the latter "multipresent." Heron (1983b:99) notes Aquinas's introduction of the doctrine of concomitance in an attempt to hold these together.
theories were proposed in support of that ability. One prominent approach employed the doctrines of the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* to contrive a "voluntary" body, present not only in heaven but wherever its owner willed, which meant wherever the priests performed their duties.\(^{307}\) Thomas Aquinas followed this line of thought, utilizing a questionable mixture of Christian and Greek ideas to provide the definitive explanation: Christ is indeed absent from earth in his human nature, which through union with his divine nature has ascended to that "most excellent of places" beyond all confinement of space or time.\(^{308}\) But, by virtue of his omnipresence in creation, the divine Logos is able to generate a eucharistic version of his humanity by making present under the "accidents" of the bread and wine, *in this world yet non-spatially*, the actual "substance" of his exalted body and blood.\(^{309}\) This way of reconciling the ascension and the eucharist, while eschewing any crude materialism in defending the real presence, continued to undermine a proper sense of the real absence.

Let us explain briefly. Since the problem of the presence and the absence, like

---

\(^{307}\) "After the ascension, 'the flesh of Christ, which has been exalted by God above all creatures ... is present everywhere, wherever it pleases, through the omnipotence that has been given to it in heaven and on earth.' Therefore, if Christ willed it, his body could be present, completely and truly, in heaven and in the Sacrament at one and the same time" (Pelikan 3/194, quoting Hugh of Metellus). Whether or not such an approach strips Jesus of the attributes belonging to creaturely particularity was a matter of some debate, which produced variations on the theme (cf. Walker 37f.).

\(^{308}\) *Summa* 3/57.5f. Aquinas is not at all clear how Jesus retains his proper bodily dimensions, etc., though he allows for this and attempts to maintain the kind of tension we saw in Augustine: on the one hand, "we no longer think of him as a man on earth but as God in heaven;" on the other, "the presence of his human nature in heaven is itself an intercession for us."

\(^{309}\) *Summa* 3/75ff. A substance, of course, cannot be perceived by the senses; it is recognized and received primarily by the mind, in this case through faith, though it can also be received in a fuller sense by the act of communicating. We note that in all of this Aquinas depends on two very dubious dichotomies: not only does a "substance" not require the body of which it *is* the substance, but the divine Christ is detachable, so to speak, from the human Christ (though the reverse is denied, 76.1). Aquinas is not very far from Augustine here.
that of the ascension itself, was neither identified nor treated in eschatological terms, but in terms of the traditional cosmological opposition between heaven and earth, a pair of dilemmas was created. How are we to have a Christ who is both here—in many places—and in heaven at the same time? And if he really is here, how can we lay hold of him with confidence? To the first question, de-spatialization was the necessary answer. What is given in the bread is not Jesus himself or even his body, to be precise, but rather the "substance" of his body, existing for us under foreign dimensions. To the second question, which was more felt than asked, response was made simply by tightening further the ecclesiastical screws that hold together the heavenly and the earthly: The sacrament of the eucharist, unlike all other sacraments, is constituted through the action of the priest quite apart from any consideration of its use by the people; it is a fait accompli at the moment of consecration, not of communication. In other words, the eucharistic gift was first abstracted from the absent humanity of Jesus and then pinned down with the greatest possible precision to the worldly dimensions provided for it by the church.

This process, justified at each stage by appeal to the miraculous power of God, placed Christ fully in the church's possession. Indeed, it meant that the church now controlled the parousia; at the ringing of a bell, the Christus absens became the Christus praesens. The latter could not but suffer under a false objectification (though Aquinas

---

310 The whole of Jesus is given along with the substance of his body, however, according to the notion of "real accompaniment" or "concomitance" (cf. Heron 1983b:99, noting also his criticism of Aquinas's abuse of the metaphysical framework to which the categories of substance and accidents belong).

311 I.e., having first been de-particularized by being considered non-spatially and non-temporally according to "substance," Christ is then re-particularized according to the liturgical forms of the church. This eucharistic particularity, since it is tied to the act of consecration, is made to depend upon the power conferred in ordination (Summa 3/82). The fact that lay-communication is no longer essential to the sacrament at all reveals the severe institutionalist bent.

312 We are not surprised, though the fact is an alarming one, that there is "practically never any reference in the Western texts of the eucharist to the second coming of Christ"
to some extent sought to prevent this) in which he was laid open, as we have said, to all manner of manipulation, whether literal or ideological. He could be displayed in a monstrance or displaced by a vision with equal ease. Conversely, the slimming of an already thin eschatological reserve freed Augustine's principle, that the heavenly glorification of Jesus is made visible through the earthly glorification of the church, to work itself out in ever more dangerous terms. Seated comfortably with the Christ–child on its lap (may we not see here a distorted eucharistic image?) the church soon became his regent rather than his servant. In short, its Marian ego, already out of control at the beginning of the eucharistic debates, afterwards knew few boundaries.

If the veneration of Mary is indeed, as Otto Semmelroth puts it, "the Church's testimony to herself," that ego is one of the best-attested facts of its history. Mary was lifted up into heaven with Christ and lauded in terms once reserved for God alone. She became "the fountain from which the living fountain flows, the origin of the beginning." She was not only "Queen of the world" but ruler of the universe; there was nothing in

(Wainwright 1978:87f.; cf. 47). Lacking throughout these debates was a proper sense of the qualified nature of the church's hold on Christ "until he comes." (Berengar's criticism moved in this direction but was stymied by his own dualistic framework.)

313 As in the East, the growth of devotion offered "to the consecrated host apart from the celebration of the Mass" (Pelikan 3:201) reflects the staticism which was overtaking eucharistic theology everywhere. Note that for St Francis "Christ's humble descent into the hands of officiating priests" (Petry 277) became a model for self-renunciation in obedience to the hierarchy!

314 Innocent III actually identifies the central reality of the eucharist "as `unity and love' rather than Christ himself," as Heron (1983b:100) notices. Is the impersonal pneumatology for which the western church is often criticized, usually in relation to its trinitarian weakness, not also bound up with this tendency to bypass the particularity of Jesus in favour of a more malleable, a more serviceable, "eucharistic" Christ? Certainly that is true of the inclination to turn sacramental grace into a commodity.

315 Mary, Archetype of the Church 174 (quoted R. P. McBrien 1981:895). Note that one of Mary's titles was Augustine's favourite designation for the church, namely, City of God.
heaven itself "that was not subject to the Virgin through her Son." Even in heaven Mary's standing as the Mother of God threatened to outrank that of Jesus. Anselm, e.g., in a statement remarkable for its christological vacuum, indicates that there is "nothing equal to Mary and nothing but God greater than Mary." Indeed, God himself was said to be subject to her as a son to his mother. (For references see Pelikan 3/160ff., 4/38ff.).

The sentiments to which we refer and the theology behind it are boldly captured in a mural decorating the papal apartments in the Vatican Museum, where Mary replaces Jesus within the Holy Trinity; the latter stands to one side, casting his light below on the figure of the pope. Note that according to Giles of Rome (Ecc.Pot. 3.12; Pelikan 4/111) the pope himself "can be called 'the church,' because his power is spiritual, heavenly and divine, and is ... without measure."

"He was, so he affirmed, Melchisedek, the priest-king, who would bring a centralized Christian society into being..." (ODCC 704).

For centuries Boniface has stood accused—or been excused—on the grounds that he was only jockeying for political advantage; in fact he was serving up the sour wine from grapes grown long before in the fields of Augustine by Gregory I, who already identified the cause of the Roman pontiff as "the cause of Almighty God, the cause of the universal church" (Ep. 5.37; Pelikan 1/352).
Christianum," to borrow Ray Petry's not unkind description,\textsuperscript{320} it also became something of an occupying force. As in the East, radical dualists counter-attacked from time to time, castigating the church for its lofty aspect; but once again this only obscured the fact that dualism had already triumphed, in just this form.\textsuperscript{321} Bolstered by what Boniface called "the law of the universe"—viz., Denys's principle of hierarchical mediation, which had been adapted to a distinctly western understanding of catholicity\textsuperscript{322}—the church of the papacy took on an increasingly imperialistic look. Its institutional face, already hardened by the excessive clericalism associated with its eucharistic doctrine, soon glinted darkly with the old theology of coercion, newly fortified by Aquinas. Individualism also flourished, ironically, encouraged by the very same Dionysian worldview and Radbertian eucharistic doctrine—as, of course, by the rationalism and voluntarism that competed in the medieval synthesis.\textsuperscript{323} The angelic ranks lent their support to the one as to the other,

\textsuperscript{320} P. 316

\textsuperscript{321} Since all challengers, along with heretical dualists like the Cathari, were "lumped together in the minds of churchmen as attackers of the hierarchy" (Petry 317), that very hierarchy became, like the icons in the East, the chief symbol of an orthodox, non-dualist faith. Wielding the two swords as one against these challengers gave new and sinister meaning to Gregory's claim (Mor. 8.2.3; Pelikan 1/335) that the church does not exercise its mandate by commanding but by "persuading"!

\textsuperscript{322} I.e., one which calls for a distribution of grace from the \textbf{centre} as well as the top. Canon I of Lateran Council IV develops this concept theologically on the pattern of Eph. 4: One God and one Christ mean one church, one eucharistic ministry; the guarantee of the latter, however, lies \textbf{not in the Holy Spirit but in a single Supreme Pontiff}. Thus the West's unitarian bent also supported papal ambitions. (Only with the lesser sacrament of baptism, which can be administered "by anyone whatsoever," is appeal made directly to the threeness of God.)

\textsuperscript{323} All these forces converged in sacramental theology, especially in the eucharist. Since it was through the action of the priest that Christ was called down and offered up anew, runaway clericalism was inevitable. But through the appeal to "substance" (which could only be perceived by the mind) and the great emphasis on sacrifice (the benefits of which were made to depend in part on the devotion of its witnesses) there was at the same time a pronounced \textbf{internalization}. To this individualizing turn the advent of private chantries bears clear testimony.
helping to secure that vertical cosmology which justified both the hierarchical machinery of the church and the private, other-worldly aspirations of those who followed its spiritual advice.

The church's double face appears starkly in a paradoxical figure from the twelfth century: Bernard of Clairvaux represents well the bizarre combination of mysticism and militarism that was being nurtured in the West by the breakdown of eschatology. With equal zeal he promoted a passionate commitment to the contemplative life and preached into existence the Second Crusade. Along the one path lay the psychologized ascension-spirituality of Thomas Gallus and Bonaventure, not to mention the erotic fantasies of Mechthild or Gertrude or Hildegard, the other eventually descended into the institutionalized violence which reached its nadir, perhaps, at the time of the Spanish Inquisition. It is the latter course (though the two are linked) that most concerns us. If it is fashionable these days to make of such crimes a reason for rejecting the church altogether, that is a foolish non sequitur rightly repudiated by Bernard when himself roundly criticizing abuses of ecclesiastical power. Yet we cannot regard the church's slide into such wicked behaviour as entirely an aberration, or as unconnected with the issues we have been treating. Under such conditions as are introduced by assimilating the

324 "Bernard disavowed all interest in temporal concerns. Yet no man had more success in controlling what he professed to despise. This little monk, personally shy and retiring, a poet at heart and a recluse by desire and temperament, became under the pressure of events a consummate master of men and virtual dictator over all he surveyed" (Cannon 1960:202). The feudal society into which the life of the church was so tightly woven was of course entering upon an era of contradictions, not all of which were theological in origin; few, however, lacked a theological dimension.

325 The heavenly realm, lit by the divine brilliance and holding the promise of the beatific vision, was usually conceived in terms of a rather cold, intellectual light, often more or less devoid of sociality as of all things earthly. Bernard helped to introduce a more passionate vision which was transposed by some of the women mystics into a "beatific lovemaking," reserved for perfect virgins who were permitted to enter the celestial bridal chamber of Christ (see McDannell & Lang 98ff.). At this extreme Christian spirituality became even more individualistic.
church to an ascending Christ-figure who is to a high degree absorbed back into the eternal divine Reason or (especially in Augustinian quarters) the divine Will, ecclesiology is likely enough to move along an absolutist course. Where the humanity of which he is stripped is given over to the control of the church in its Marian persona, there is indeed nothing to prevent this.

To be sure, Bernard (leaving aside the business of the Crusade) might also be called as a witness for the defense, so to speak. Did he not warn Eugenius III about the dangers of being heir to Constantine as well as to Peter? And did ascension in the flesh not have an unusual place of honour in his theology, such that he could speak boldly of "King Jesus" as disposer saeculorum and returning Judge? Bernard has even been said to represent an "uncompromisingly christocentric" tradition. Yet he, as much as anyone, helped to fashion the mariological shift we have been describing. His sermons In Praise of the Virgin Mother were hugely successful at establishing the piety behind his slogan, "everything through Mary,"—a slogan, by the way, that found architectural expression in the great Gothic cathedrals which became the landmarks of western Europe, "built partly as trophies for a beautiful woman, forever young, forever kind," purveyor of eternal Light. Bernard also employed the celestial hierarchy to buttress escalating clericalism, labouring hard to arrange the church under one earthly head as the angels

---

326 See Pelikan 3/144ff., 298ff. "Uncompromising" is certainly too strong a word. Note also that the Jesus-mysticism encouraged by Bernard remained linked to the Logos theology he inherited; further, that the general renewal of interest in Christ's humanity which emerged in the 12th C. was largely attached to an even greater interest in Mary (i.e., to the popular drama of Mother and Son).

327 See McBrien 874ff.; as "our mediator with that Mediator," Mary could assuage all fear of Christ the Judge. Bonaventure would later imply that "Christ reserved to himself the realm of justice while ceding to his mother the realm of mercy" (ibid. 876), a dichotomy with obvious consequences for Christian piety.

328 C. T. Marshall (Dowley 1977:296)
were arranged under God. All the while, he did his best to hold together a highly spiritual view of the church with its "spotted actuality" as a worldly institution; but in the end he was unable to prevent western ecclesiology from dissolving into dangerous alternatives.

One alternative was constructed by Joachim of Fiore, a younger Cistercian monk who, deeply troubled by what he saw around him, attempted to relegate the institutional church to a passing age—that of the ordo clericorum, which would shortly give way, in apocalyptic fashion, to the ordo monachorum and a truly spiritual church. The whole world would gradually be assimilated to the society of a new ecclesia contemplativa, once the gifts of the former age were replaced by the "more ample grace" of the latter. Despite its monastic idealism, Joachim's scheme proved another critical step in the turning of the West from the vertical axis of its cosmology to the horizontal (a turn begun by the Constantinians and redirected by Augustine). This turn will occupy us further in the next chapter. At the moment we need only observe that Joachim prepared the way for the proferring of a second, somewhat more plausible alternative that had been in the making for a very long time. It was put forward by Innocent III, who offered himself—that is, in his station as Vicar of Christ—as the architect of a universal Christian society. On his scheme, naturally, Joachim's anti-institutionalism had to be eradicated and the apocalyptic element strongly discouraged. Ecclesiastical absolutism was on its way.

---

29 Pelikan 3/298f. There was a powerful Augustinian dimension here, in that the church was a society whose origins were in the eternal realm of the divine will and election.

30 Conc. 5.84 (Pelikan 3/302). Joachim lays out history in a trinitarian or rather Sabellian scheme of three ages, the two we have indicated belonging to the Son and the Spirit respectively. According to H. Bett (Petry 473), it amounts to "a sacerdotal history of the world, beginning with the Levites, prolonged in the secular clergy, and fulfilled in the Benedictine Order as finally reformed under a more rigorous rule."

31 No doubt the Sabellian cast of Joachim's theology of history assisted here; since his parousia was a parousia of the Spirit rather than the Son, it was easier for Innocent's "Vicar of Christ" view of the papacy to coexist with the shared elements of their
Other proposals were soon forthcoming, of course, invited by the combination of grandiose claims and failing powers that characterized the papacy of Boniface VIII, and by increasing turbulence in the political and philosophical climate. A good deal of papal maximalism survived nonetheless alongside its Marian counterpart, even to the present day. What is significant, though, is not the power of the papacy as such, or the lack of it. Rather it is the dangerous undoing of the tension between the presence and the absence to which the dualist ecclesiology of the West leads, with its mariological "vicar" principle. John Wycliffe, whose own theology was of a severely dualist sort, managed to point (more boldly than steadily) towards the issue of substance:

If you say that Christ's Church must have a head here on earth, you say truly; for Christ is the head, who must be here with his Church until the day of doom, as well as everywhere by reason of his Godhead. For since the power of a king must be extended everywhere throughout all his realm, much more is the power of Christ shared with all his children. And if you say that Christ must needs have such a vicar here on earth, you deny Christ's power and place this devil above Christ. 332

In other words, a Christ whose presence must be mediated ecclesiastically, by the ordo clericorum, is a Christ whose power to be present is falsely restricted, however confidently the church may declare the opposite; and, in being thus restricted, it is in danger of being replaced by something quite different.

The first part of this charge can be turned back on Wycliffe, who (aided by Augustine's doctrine of election) reverted to a purely spiritual view of the church; but that does not invalidate it. Indeed, the charge can be put more strongly yet. Fyodor Dostoevsky guides the arrow to its mark in The Brothers Karamazov. Ivan's famous "poem" has the legendary Grand Inquisitor confront Jesus with the bald facts:

'You have transmitted all Your authority to the Pope and now he wields it. As

---

332 Ecc. 2 (Petry 521)
to You, You had better stay away or, at any rate, not interfere with us for the time being.\footnote{1970:302. "The culmination of Doestoevsky's work is the \textit{Legend of the Grand Inquisitor}," according to Konstantin Mochulsky (ibid.:xiv).} What Dostoevsky understood was that western ecclesiology, at its one extreme, actually comes full circle. It requires a completely absent Jesus if it is to provide instead that miraculous Christ who will underwrite the programme of the church—a programme that has become fully \textbf{immanentist}, and hence absolutist, in nature.\footnote{This of course is \textit{antichrist}, as the Cardinal himself confesses: "'We shall tell them, though, that we are loyal to You and that we rule over them in Your name. We shall be lying, because we do not intend to allow You to come back!'" (p. 305). "'Listen then: we are not with You, we are with \textbf{him}—and that is our secret, our mystery!'" (p. 310; referring to "that wise and dreaded spirit" whose counsel Jesus rejected in the desert but which the church embraced under Constantine).}

The mariological construct, for all its heavenward reach, founders at just this point. Eschatology inevitably gives way to immanentism, in one form or another. Where the mediation of Mary is added to that of Christ in order to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, the tension that constitutes ecclesial existence in the present age tends to collapse around its two poles: absence is associated with Jesus, who ascends to the hidden Father; presence is associated with "Mary," who remains behind to continue his work.\footnote{"Nor was it only the function of Christ that Mary took over, but after his ascension into heaven 'the Virgin remains on earth, and, together with the Holy Spirit as Comforter and Teacher, she herself becomes the comforter and teacher of the disciples'" (Pelikan 4/40; quoting the 15th C. Tübingen professor, Gabriel Biel). Note that Richard St Lawrence (\textbf{Laud} 4.19.6) could rewrite even John 3:16 to read, "\text{Mary} so loved the world..."!} In order to account for her ability to do so it is not enough that she should be able to render Christ present on demand. Rather her whole being is at all times penetrated and filled by God himself, as Bernard taught; she is a sacrament of the divine in her own right. As such she competes with Christ for the hearts and minds of men, a fact for which no further evidence is needed than the church's constant disclaimers.

\footnote{\textit{\textup{333}} The cardinal, as the 15th century Erfurt professor, Gabriel Biel, taught: "'The Virgin remains on earth, and, together with the Holy Spirit as the comforter and teacher, she herself becomes the comforter and teacher of the disciples'." (\textbf{Pelikan} 4/40; quoting the 15th C. Tübingen professor, Gabriel Biel). Note that Richard St Lawrence (\textbf{Laud} 4.19.6) could rewrite even John 3:16 to read, "\text{Mary} so loved the world..."!}
It was Duns Scotus, applying his famous principle of "maximalism" to Christ and Mary alike, who achieved something of a reconciliation here. His infectious and persuasive enthusiasm for Mary (in both personae) is well known, but more important is the way he helped to rework christology and the doctrine of the ascension along supportive lines. With Scotus the West began to look towards the mystical idea of the Logos incarnate in all things, that is, to move more confidently in the direction of a universalist or immanentist perspective on christology.336 This lead was followed by Nicholas of Cusa, who (like Maximus) situated the ascended Christ in a spiritual "place" that cannot really be defined in terms of place, but is at once "the centre and the inclusive periphery of all spiritual beings," and thus also of the cosmos as such.337 From that exalted--atopic--position he could indwell and govern all things, bringing them to harmony by means of the church as it radiated throughout the world. To Christ's divine omnipresence and his "voluntary" eucharistic presence there was added, then, his cosmic immanence or ubiquity. This hidden presence was mediated to the sensible world mariologically, that is, through visible ecclesiastical forms.338

336 T. F. Torrance (1969:29f.) brings out the relational dimensions of Scotus' construction, but without a strong eschatology it remains problematic. Scotus, however, may provide a focus for dialogue (cf. J. B. Torrance & R. Walls 1992).

337 See von Balthasar 1967:297f., who credits Scotus with having "translated the Greek approach to the Ascension into the Western world," where it was taken up by Nicholas. Note that Scotus also turned the tide in favour of the much disputed notion of the immaculate conception, which the Greeks reject; for Cardinal Cusanus, the church too was "immaculate" (Conc. 1.4). Cf. O. Pedersen (Tracy & Lash 17) on Bradwardine and the Hermetic influence.

338 The concept of ubiquity had old roots, as we have seen, but was worked out in new ways—often in connection with the eucharistic dilemma—by Scotus, William of Ockham, Wycliffe, Cusanus et al. For Cusanus' development of "catholic concordance" as a theme in theology, cosmology, and history as well as ecclesiology, see his work by that name, or Pelikan 4/97ff.; note also the dualist framework in which he operates (Ep. 1).
Scotus and Cusanus blazed a trail that is still being followed today, if to destinations then unforeseen. Christology aside, however, the West was remarkably open to the immanentist tendencies that its pagan mentors, given the monist yearnings underlying their dualism, could never dispense with. Indeed, the revival not only of neoplatonism but of Hermeticism, that *prisca theologia* which the Renaissance shared with the later middle ages, testifies loudly to the persistence of a distinctly sub-Christian sacramental worldview, which in Cusanus and others passed over into a form of panentheism.\(^{339}\) This worldview is naturally resistant to eschatology, except perhaps in an alchemist sense.\(^{340}\) On the other hand, it is quite comfortable with the symmetrical logic of Christ who ascends and Mary who brings him "down" again, a logic that translates into an endless liturgical rhythm in which the parousia (not unlike the philosophers' stone) is always within reach yet forever receding. In the regularity of ascent and descent, descent and ascent, there is a divine *stabilitas* similar to that of the heavens themselves; in the rhythm of the church calendar a terrestrial reflection of the so-called circles of God, and the consolation of "an assured presence through apparent absence."\(^{341}\)

---

\(^{339}\) See Nebelsick, *Circles of God* (163ff.), for a discussion of Hermeticism and its role in Nicholas of Cusa and other important thinkers of this period. Among the mystics, by the way, who found both support and theological correction from Cusanus, notions were current which drew the charge of actual pantheism; though Scotus and Cusanus too had a good deal to say about divine transcendence in response, all this was very much a part of their theological and cultural milieu.

\(^{340}\) If Hermeticism had as its aim "nothing less than the deification and rebirth of the whole of reality" (ibid. 181) this had nothing to do with biblical apocalypticism, but rather with accessing a transforming cosmic power through "proper gnōsis of the world—God." Its final hope was a familiar one—unification of the One with the All and the perfection of world harmony. This was Cusanus' own theme, though like most in those troubled times he retained something of the apocalyptic. The Florence of Ficino's Academy and that of Savonarola reveal the deep tension here.

\(^{341}\) The phrase is von Balthasar's (1967:295), who speaks of these matters in a different vein! But is there not rather too much here even of the old pagan cycle of life and death—witness, e.g. The Birth of Venus—even if elevated by Christian content? We never fail
As the problem of the presence and the absence was resolved into this mutual dependency between Christ and Mary—as heaven and earth were brought to such a truce—the balance of western dualism tipped even further towards its horizontal axis. Not surprisingly, the underlying monist drive (preserved by a weak trinitarianism) increasingly assumed its old absolutist potential. The church shaped by both Origen and Augustine has always felt this drive keenly, as Dostoevsky contends. Certainly from Gregory the Great, Augustine's primary interpreter, to Boniface VIII it developed into what can only be described as a dominating impulse. Dante (whose brilliant *Comedia* did for cosmology what Bernard's sermons had done for mariology) consigned the arrogant Boniface to hell; yet he himself called for the establishment of a universal monarchy to oversee the temporal happiness of the human race, while the supreme pontiff would see to its eternal felicity. By pointing the church back towards its vertical axis, in other words, he intended only to liberate society from an increasingly oppressive ecclesiastical regime, not to challenge the monist vision it had cultivated or to subject it to the restraints of a proper eschatological qualification. Through all subsequent upheavals, in which control on the horizontal axis was finally wrested from the church, the vision has not faded; indeed, the "unquenchable thirst for universal unity," as the Grand Inquisitor puts it, is stronger now than it ever was.

---

342 *Mon.* 3.16

343 P. 310. The quest to satisfy that thirst is man's "third and last ordeal," on the pattern of the testing of Jesus. How the Inquisitor envisioned the church's success does not directly concern us, though we may note in passing his confession that the quest itself necessitates a rejection not only of human freedom but also of divine freedom—specifically, of the very idea of election and of the parousia. In other words, it entails a form of Origen's universalist ecclesiology, as we will later observe.
To Dostoevsky's prophetic insight into the church's temptation to join, rather if possible to lead, the quest for such a kingdom—a kingdom very much of this world—we will return by and by. For now we remark only that, whether competing for control or merely blessing the quest in its current form, only from time to time, in this place or that, has the church recovered a sense of its eucharistic precariousness. Only now and again has it been willing to bear the pain of its true position at the crossroads, reckoning honestly with the absence of Jesus in every assertion of his presence. We conclude by suggesting once more that what was most needed to correct the illusions of the mariological construct as it emerged in the middle ages was a thoroughly eschatological treatment of the problem of the presence and the absence. This was not forthcoming, we believe, mainly because the cosmological assumptions of classical times went largely unchallenged, either by trinitarian commitments (but that is another subject) or even by the doctrine of the ascension, discussion of which had a habit of trailing away into moralism and irrelevancy when not busy propping up those assumptions.

We are aware that we have said nothing thus far about an important feature of dualist ecclesiology, namely, the emphasis on human merit that emerged (more or less automatically, if by rather complex mechanisms) in the shift of focus from Jesus to Mary. There can be no doubt that this, together with the ever more blatant "packaging" of grace to meet the inevitable shortfall, was what set the stage for that radical effort at reconstruction we call the Reformation. But it was the scientific revolution more than the Reformation that created the conditions under which eschatology—and in particular the

344 "Not even the great Bernard of Clairvaux," says Davies (161), "could escape the prevailing 'isms' of his age, viz. archaism, plagiarism and moralism, to which may added, as a fourth note, irrelevancy. Thus of his five Ascension sermons, the first has no reference to the Ascension; the second is strongly reminiscent of Caesarius of Arles; the third is devoted to the subject of purity, the fourth to faith and the fifth to the renunciation of evil ways."
vital eucharistic question as to the whereabouts of Jesus—could be fundamentally rethought. For the pagan cosmology which the church had inherited and adapted to its own ends had gradually become a necessary support for all those weighty ecclesiastical structures and dogmas that were built upon it.\textsuperscript{345} The shattering of that cosmology was therefore as traumatic as the shattering of the unity of the western church which preceded it.

\textsuperscript{345} Nebelsick (159) observes that Cecco d'Ascoli et al. paid with their lives for challenging the "orthodox" cosmology of Dante Alighieri.
WHERE IS JESUS?

In Hawking no less than in Homer the word "god" is found liberally sprinkled on the pages of human reflection about the universe, indicating that the ancient bond between theology and cosmology is not easily snapped. But from the standpoint of Christianity things have changed rather dramatically. The modern era has been an era of religious doubt, nurtured in the beginning on advances in scientific cosmology. The church, whose alignment with a now defunct cosmological tradition once encouraged the marginalization of Jesus, has itself been marginalized in the society it dominated. Its want of rigorous self-criticism has been made up in abundance from elsewhere.

This has meant a series of crises in ecclesial identity, and in Christian theology per se, crises which owe a good deal to an unexpected radicalization of the problem of the absence of Christ. Out of that very radicalization, however, have arisen new possibilities for ecclesial self-understanding, possibilities which at one point or another require a new way of reckoning with the ascension, and in particular with the challenging question that stands at the head of this chapter.

That question (raised already in chapter two) cannot be evaded in the modern context, nor can its answer entirely avoid taking a cosmological form if it wishes to be taken seriously. It will be our business here to look at the main options for such an answer. In doing so we will find eventually that our prior journeys, especially those that took us along the paths marked out by Irenaeus and Origen, have equipped us to speak in a fresh way to the peculiar situation in which the church finds itself today.
The Copernican Factor

From the reverent skepticism of Pseudo-Dionysius\(^1\) (who offered ranks of angels and clerics and sacramental mysteries as compensation) to the reverence of skepticism in the heirs of Immanuel Kant (who scorn the above) is a short or a long step depending on one's point of view. At all events, it was clearly hastened by the complete breakdown of the classical tradition in cosmology, with its vertically-structured sacramental universe, a breakdown usually associated with Copernicus.

Copernicus in fact aimed at no such thing, nor did he himself achieve it. Harold Nebelsick rightly speaks of the Copernican non-revolution, pointing not only to his failure to persuade fellow astronomers that the earth was in orbit around the sun, but also to the conservativism of his approach—-that is, to the fact that Copernicus remained committed to the ancient "circles of God" theory of the heavenly spheres, an essentially religious notion which prevented him from discovering the irregularity of planetary motion and thus from arriving at a true heliocentricity.\(^2\) But with the help of Kepler (whose cosmological instincts, interestingly, had an even stronger religious component) and of Galileo ancient schemes were nonetheless undone.

The results were nothing short of revolutionary, not least in those matters directly related to our own inquiry. Where the ascension of Jesus was concerned, Augustine's "little coterie" of skeptics would be heard after all. Ironically, new ammunition came to hand in the form of Kepler's discovery that earth and the heavenly bodies participated in a common, defective (i.e., non-circular) motion, and Galileo's observation of various

---

1 "Whose instruction the church now follows," wrote Roger Bacon in the the 13th C. (Nebelsick 132), though not perhaps accurately, since it is debatable how well Denys's cosmology was understood in the West.

2 This fell to Kepler to discover, both with the aid of, and in spite of, his pronounced Hermeticism; see Nebelsick 248ff. Cf. Prigogine and Stengers, 306f., who refer to the work of Serge Moscovici.
irregularities in the sun and the moon. Such knowledge called into question the logic of
the ascension, since it was doubtful whether the heavens could any longer be thought of
as somehow mediating divinity, or leading upwards to God. But in this context new
questions which might have arisen concerning the whereabouts of Jesus (in the
iconography popular from the Gothic period onwards he was often depicted, more
poignantly than intended, as nothing more than a pair of dangling feet disappearing into
the clouds) were overshadowed by more pressing questions about the whereabouts of God
himself. The deepening of the whole problem of the absence to include divinity we may
call the Copernican factor.

   It has been pointed out that the church "soon learned to make its peace with
Copernican astronomy." That peace was merely pragmatic, however; the intellectual
challenge was not met head on, and the church was ill-prepared for what was still to
come. Even before the full implications of a heavenly realm stripped of its quasi-divinity
could be realized, another momentous change in perspective occurred. Isaac Newton (who
with the publication of his *Principia* in 1687 arrived on the scene in messianic style)
offered a new vision of the universe in perfectionist terms. He pointed to a godlike
simplicity and stability underlying both earthly and heavenly phenomena, based on the
existence of universal and immutable laws of motion. One of the most notable features
of his cosmology was the absence of hierarchy and teleology, and so also of religion. But
if it was now even more clear that the structures of creation did not lead upwards to God,
something of the link with divine immutability had been recovered and invested in the
whole, its creaturely contingence notwithstanding.

3 W. P. Carvin, 1988:51. This in spite of its condemnation of Galileo, overturned only
just recently (October 1992).

4 Newton thus recovered that inveterate tradition in which, by one means or another, time
and process and diversity are negated for the sake of a divine unity.
The wedding of earth to heaven over which Newton presided (a barren union by religious standards) was anticipated in Descartes, of course, whose highly reductionist physics and metaphysics had already posited a homogeneous cosmos, one with which God himself was engaged only peripherally. Not that Descartes or Newton were theologically disengaged! On the contrary, they quite consciously shouldered the theological burden which the church of their day could not or would not carry, and produced (with the aid of certain churchmen who were among their many disciples) something more appropriate to the scientific climate. The panentheistic tendencies of previous mathematico–religious speculation in cosmology, whether Greek or Christian, began to give way to deism, which became (as had Arianism in the fourth century) a serious alternative to credal orthodoxy.

In the natural theologies of the post–Copernican era, the Creator stood in a mainly utilitarian relation to creation, serving only to guarantee spatial and temporal consistency, epistemological integrity, or the soundness of the social order. Little more could with confidence be said or known of him than this external relationship implied. Critics of

---

5 I.e., externally (see Carvin, chap. 5, esp. 64ff.). After Newton had "eliminated the barrier between earthly mechanics and celestial mechanics, and established by empirical and mathematical proof the existence of universal laws," there came into view that machine–like world which, in the eyes of some, "had no need for supernatural guidance, prayer, priests, sacraments, or penance" (Thomas Greer 1982:361, 364). Weizenbaum (1976:22ff.; leaning on L. Mumford 1963:14) points also to the marginalization of man through the advent of homogenous or mechanical time.

6 See Michael Buckley (1987:347), who argues that both Descartes and Newton "registered their recognition of the theological office fallen to them," subsuming theology—–if in very different ways—within the purview of their physics, to the relief of many and the inspiration in particular of Nicolas Malebranche and Samuel Clark, respectively.

7 The association of God with infinite space, which Olaf Pedersen (1983:16ff.) traces from Thomas Bradwardine through to Newton, has both deistic and panentheistic possibilities, it should be noted, depending on how space itself is conceived. Newton's own position was not altogether clear or consistent. However, there can be no doubt as to the importance of his influence in the rise of deism (cf. Torrance 1969:37ff., who also points out his defense of Arius).
such impiety—or false piety—were not wanting, either at the time or later on. But others did not question the utilitarian treatment of God so much as the utility of the theology itself. Were such guarantees actually necessary? A self-consistent and largely self-explanatory cosmos did not, perhaps, require the God-hypothesis; for many deism proved but a half-way house to atheism.

Certainly in this milieu it became more and more difficult to develop or articulate anything so problematic as the doctrine of the ascension, defending the incarnation was challenge enough. The path to Augustine's compromise was now blocked at both ends; in the renovated cosmos of the deists there was less and less room for the ascended Jesus in either his humanity or his divinity. If the church nonetheless went on making its traditional confession, its voice grew fainter and fainter in the ears of the learned. And the situation was to get worse yet.

A deep skepticism had begun to infect biblical scholarship. It appeared most dramatically in the vitriolic attack of Reimarus on the integrity of the Gospel writers, and especially on alleged miracles such as the resurrection and ascension, in a work to which Lessing provided popular access. Among deists the God-man was quickly reduced to homo tantus and his story rewritten to remove the envelope of divinity in which it had long been sealed. The quest for a Jesus confined to history, our history, was launched; the only 'where?' question with relevance would be that of his proper social and religious contextualization by period scholars. Not that history itself or the humanity of Jesus was

---

8 None more merciless, perhaps, than the enigmatic William Blake; we are thinking, e.g., of his "Annotations to Thornton's 'The Lord's Prayer, Newly Translated" (1827) or "To the Deists" (in his widely read work, Jerusalem, at the head of which stands the inscription Monos ho Iesous).

9 Reimarus's work was entitled "Apology for the Reasonable Worshippers of God" but was brought out (in part) by Lessing under the title "Fragments by an Unknown Author" (see Heron 1980:19).
now seen as decisive! Quite the contrary. Lessing's dictum distinguishing the contingent facts of history (including that of Jesus) from the necessary truths of reason makes plain that in the Newtonian period the ancient bias against time and temporality was especially strong. That bias, however, was already beginning to generate its own antithesis. But here it is to Lessing's contemporary, Immanuel Kant, that we must turn in order to set the stage for subsequent developments.

The new focus on the physical sciences—on creation for its own sake—led ironically to the debasing of nature, as something fit only for manipulation, and to a growing sense of alienation from its almost tedious predictability. Such were the results of Cartesian reductionism and of the mechanistic model propounded by Newton. Kant's self-professed "Copernican" revolution in philosophy was a deliberate response to this situation. Kant both justified the science of his day and at the same time deprived it of its messianic glory, by putting the thinking and willing subject squarely in the centre of the picture as the true agent of order, and of change. This was achieved in part by capitalizing on the aforesaid alienation through his famous distinction between phenomena and noumena, and between pure and practical reason. The latter was especially important to Kant, since it pointed to the dignity and freedom of man in his

---

10 The joining of earth to heaven did not at first bring about a new appreciation for time or the contingent; rather the reverse. Yet, as Torrance (Deuser 1986:292) points out, "Lessing himself attempted to work out a more positive approach to history through his notion of the continuous immanent operation of the divine Spirit in the education of the human race," which "had the effect of identifying history [generally] with divine revelation" while at the same time "promoting a dichotomy between fact and meaning." It is former of which we are thinking.

11 When the world, even in the midst of tremendous cultural adjustments, begins to be seen as at bottom "nothing but an immense tautology" (Prigogine & Stengers 77), the ancient hankering after heavenly stability turns back in fear and loathing. That perception has of course changed dramatically with the further advance of science.

12 See Prigogine & Stengers 86ff.
intuition of the noumenal, and hence to his exemption from any merely utilitarian
treatment. 13

We need not pause to take stock of the fact that a number of divine attributes were
now put on permanent loan to the human subject, who got on all the more bravely with
the business of debasing nature even further! 14 It may be observed, however, that these
same distinctions allowed Kant to break with deist tradition by transferring theological
convictions from the realm of rational demonstration, whence Hume had recently evicted
them, to that of moral sensibility. The results were no less resistant to the notion that
Jesus–history should be the fundamental datum of religion; indeed they afforded a clear
alternative. Kant went on to argue that true religion does not depend on considering
what God does in history with man at all, but on what man must do with himself. 15 That
conviction was joined to a theory of social progress which has had a profound impact on
modernity and on the modern church.

It is true that for Kant, as for Augustine, time and history seem to disappear into
the thinking subject. They disappear, however, only to re-emerge (temporarily!) in close

13 Here he had one eye on his hero, Rousseau, appropriating his emphasis on human
freedom while rejecting his attempt to return to a pre–scientific relation to nature.
Ironically Kant bequeathed to modernity a version of the ancient nature–freedom dualism
(cf. Bloom 298ff.) that, in connection with the doctrine of the primacy of the will, has
proved very dangerous to human dignity. His effort to resolve the difficult relation
between will and intellect via aesthetics was also fraught with peril; we have in mind

14 This transfer of dignity had been going on for some time, of course, and was already
implicit in Cartesian thought. It is rightly said that "the debasement of nature is parallel
to the glorification of all that eludes it, God and man" (Prigogine & Stengers 51); but as
God recedes the field is left to man.

15 See Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone (1793) and his other late works.
"Curiously enough, neither here nor anywhere else in his writings does Kant seem to have
been able to bring himself to pronounce the name of Jesus. Instead, he talks abstractly
about one who represents 'the ideal of a humanity pleasing to God' and who thus sets men
an example to follow" (C. Brown 1973:104).
connection with the Enlightenment idea of human perfectibility; that is, in terms of a movement towards that prospective social order in which humanity will one day enjoy the fruit not only of scientific knowledge but of the right exercise of practical reason. Kant was cautious here. He was willing to acknowledge a "radical" evil in man. 16 And if he learned from Rousseau not to despise human nature, he also learned how to criticize unguarded social optimism; indeed, his own philosophy taught him that the kingdom of God might be immanent in moral reason but not wholly so in any outward expression thereof. Nevertheless, by concentrating on man's moral faculty, he lent his support to a growing interest in history as the story of human advance. 17

As John Passmore observes, Kant regarded the perfectibility of man as a necessary myth, the absence of which would mean capitulation to evil and a rejection of the teleology that governed Enlightenment optimism, viz., the belief that all things must obey the law of their own being, rising eventually to their full potential. 18 But here a distinction was required between individual and corporate destiny. Since the perfection of the individual is plainly unrealizable within the limited scope of this mortal life, and

16 Human perfectibility, a highly controversial notion, paralleled the mechanical perfection of nature described by Newton—though of course the perfection of man was only on the way, with the fuller perfection of nature contingent upon it. This concept required attenuation, as Kant could see; by placing limits around human knowledge of nature, and also by admitting the reality of moral evil, he broke with the most optimistic of the philosophes. But he did not deny either the light of science or the ultimate triumph of good.

17 Rousseau, whom Kant dubbed "the Newton of the moral world" (C. J. Friedrich 1949:xi, xxii ff.), taught him to find in society the major source of human ills. However, Kant was more more hopeful about the reformation of society. Not only did he believe in an evolving universe (G. Whitrow [Yourgrau] 167) but he saw in nature a "providence" predetermining the evolution of history towards a social condition in which man's best intentions would find fulfilment; see especially his influential essay Eternal Peace (1795).

18 Kant, as Passmore (1970:215ff.) explains, took over and developed here the thinking of Leibniz, though we may look for early roots in Joachim of Fiore (who also influenced Lessing).
since immortality is inaccessible to reason, we must concentrate instead on the perfection of the species, a socio-political interest.\textsuperscript{19} Kant recognized that any hope of actually achieving that perfection could not rest entirely on the "crooked material" of which society is composed; only God could make the myth a reality. But man must proceed towards it "as though everything depended on himself."\textsuperscript{20}

This lop-sided synergism is not developed without a sidelong glance at Jesus. But Kant, like other deists, does not have in view the one to whom the creeds refer. Jesus is not in any exclusive, hypostatic sense the Son or Word who proceeds from God's eternal being. Mankind "in its complete moral perfection" is that Word, the archetype of which "is to be sought only in our own reason." To clarify the place of Jesus in his scheme Kant takes up the dialectic of descent and ascent, which he thoroughly subjectivizes in the fashion of Origen:

Now it is our common duty as men to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, that is, to this archetype of the moral disposition in all its purity—and for this the idea itself, which reason presents to us for our zealous emulation, can give us power. But just because we are not the authors of this idea, and because it has established itself in man without our comprehending how human nature could have been capable of receiving it, it is more appropriate to say that this archetype has come down to us from heaven and has assumed our humanity....\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} It should not be overlooked that with this turn—in ethics as in eschatology—towards a corporate destiny \textbf{in this present world}, the risk arises after all of a utilitarian view of the individual human life, which must be devoted chiefly to attaining something called "the common good." The progress of that utilitarianism in subsequent thinkers is not hard to spot.

\textsuperscript{20} \textbf{Religion} 3.1.4 (see 3.1.2ff.; cf. Passmore 220). Here Kant is at a great remove from Augustine, of course, both in his much more positive view of man and—what follows naturally—in his more optimistic view of history. History after Christ is no longer homogeneous, but forward-looking (see Passmore 195ff.). All forms of "perfectibilism" are ultimately time-denying, however, including Kant's.

\textsuperscript{21} I.e., in that "godly-minded person" from whom we may learn how "to become acceptable to God" (\textbf{Religion} 2.1). Kant is careful here to guard against western docetism—against that static perfectionism which holds that Jesus did not share in the likeness of sinful flesh—but also to reject altogether any "anthropomorphic" incarnational realism. In what amounts to a demythologized gnosticism, it is not really he who descends but the archetype.
Jesus, that is, provides "as perfect an example of a man well-pleasing to God as one can expect to find in external experience." In him the archetype has found clear expression; through him we are called to an ascension of the mind that will prepare us, too, to sacrifice ourselves for the common good as we stretch out towards the full realization of Man. More cannot be said.

Unlike Origen, of course, Kant has no interest in the elevation of the mind for the sake of the visio dei; he is looking for the parousia of the perfect society. In Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone he begins to restore the foundations of the dominant religious vision in the West, looking for a gradual unfolding of the kingdom of God on earth through the evolution of a universal church. The unifying core of the coming kingdom will not be Christianity, however, with the pope at its head, but what Kant calls an "ethical commonwealth," a notion he develops by drawing on traditional dualist categories in ecclesiology:

An ethical commonwealth under divine moral legislation is a church which, so far as it is not an object of possible experience, is called the church invisible, a mere idea of the union of all the righteous under direct and moral divine world-government, an idea serving all as the archetype of what is to be established by men. The visible church is the actual union of men into a whole which harmonizes with that ideal.

Not surprisingly, this vision is coordinated with a political one, "the progressive organization of the world citizens into a system of cosmopolitan scope." As the inner

---

22 If his views recall something of Origen’s theory of a progressive, universal redemption, progress no longer implies a regress or reversal of the world, but rather the advance of rational and moral reason within it. But this means also that it is no longer aimed directly at God: "Man is his own last end" (Anthropology, Practically Considered).

23 Religion 3.1.4. Kant inherited the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, and the question of the relation of the latter to the state, via Lutheranism of course, the influence of which is evident; but wherever he takes up existing theological structures he transforms them.

24 Quotation from Friedrich, xliii. Kant thus comes to the rescue of both theological and philosophical utopianism, which some had begun to ridicule as "day-dreaming" (Religion
and outer face of the perfect society, the ethical commonwealth and the world state together hold out the promise of eternal peace on earth.\textsuperscript{25}

The advent of peace, in the last analysis, will have little to do with Christ. Kant is prepared to allow that Jesus may have effected "a revolution in the human race," but his deist commitments and horizontal teleology make it impossible for Jesus to stand either at the centre (which is always shifting) or at the end of history.\textsuperscript{26} If the Nazarene is granted a place of honour in the modern worldview, then, the honour bestowed is no more than a relative one. For Kant and those taught by him the pathway to the kingdom knows nothing of the divine intervention bound up with the resurrection and return of Christ. Brought up short by the barriers of Newtonian science, it turns aside to pass through the needle's eye of human subjectivity before entering the broad way of social constructionism. Man as man's own project is the substance of Kantian philosophy.\textsuperscript{27}

It fell first to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who sought to rescue Christianity from its Kantian despisers by delving still deeper into the inner man, to attempt to find a firmer place for Jesus in the evolving post–Copernican world. This stirring preacher developed a christologically informed vision the likes of which, for comprehensiveness and

\textsuperscript{1.3}).

\textsuperscript{25} Each would appear to depend upon the other. The cosmopolitan nature of the church, as the inner moral fibre of the state, is articulated (\textit{Religion} 3.1.4) in terms of the four credal notae, adapted to his secular frame of reference. Surely we are not mistaken to find here also a translation of Origen's "kosmos of the cosmos" idea.

\textsuperscript{26} For a recent and direct statement of this position, see Tom Driver's \textit{Christ in a Changing World} (the quotation is from \textit{Religion} 2.1,B).

\textsuperscript{27} It is worth noting here, with Passmore, "that Kant hoped for "a `Newton of history' who would reduce history to a science just as Newton had reduced physics to a science." His pupil Herder, who set out in that direction, agreed with him that "God's plan is that man shall fully realize, by his own efforts, his humanity" (p. 221). At this point eschatology has broken down completely into its vertical and horizontal factors, the latter being flattened out into a fully human work.
coherence, had not been seen for some time. But to understand the significance of Schleiermacher for our own pursuits we must first backtrack a little.

**An Unresolved Question**

When the procession of scholars at the University of Königsberg reached the door of the church, Kant would turn aside in order to pass quietly to the sanctuary of his own study; the rites of Christian worship appeared to him as so much inherited superstition. A couple of centuries earlier, the Church of Rome was barring its doors to certain scholars who dared to challenge aspects of that worship which they too regarded as superstition. These men, however, were troubled not only by questionable religious practices but also by the open skepticism that existed even in their day; against it they arrayed the common faith of the church with great boldness.

It was not difficult for the reformers to dismiss out of hand the challenge to that faith raised by the new cosmology, which was as yet lacking for scientific proof. In Calvin's words, the ideas of Copernicus were nothing but a demonic attempt "to pervert the order of nature." There was nonetheless a cosmological difficulty to be faced. In the struggle with Rome the stubborn eucharistic problem of the presence and the absence emerged as one of their chief preoccupations; indeed it became the great stone of stumbling so far as Protestant unity was concerned. Though in their treatment of it the theologians of the Reformation sought a deeper christologic than what prevailed in the Marian orbit, they failed to resolve some rather fundamental issues—among them the whereabouts of Jesus. Yet the Reformation is important to us precisely because it was there that the Where? question was last asked with great seriousness.

---

28 Ser. 8 on 1 Cor. (quoted W. Bouwsma 1988:72). Those who "jumble heaven and earth," thought Calvin, also contribute to the breakdown of proper social order.
To proceed we must move quickly down the well-traveled paths of the eucharistic debates of the sixteenth century. It will be necessary to bypass the complex issues arising at the junction between the problem of the presence and the absence and that other sticky affair—the eucharist as sacrifice or offering. On that point the reformers were at least united in their strong opposition to Rome; in different ways each wanted to stress that what finally matters is not the church's offering, but Christ's. They also made common cause on one closely related aspect of the problem at hand. All insisted that the consecration of the elements did not entail removal of the bread and substitution of the corpus Christi, a notion which (as we have seen) arrogates to the church the power simply to resolve absence into presence. Here, however, efforts to suggest an alternative view quickly degenerated into volatile dismutations. What connection should be made between the bread and the body? In what sense is Jesus present with his church as it gathers around his table? Where is he otherwise?

Naturally the doctrine of the ascension figured prominently in all of this. But let us begin with Luther, who at first approached the matter by way of analogy with the incarnation. As God, in becoming man, did not annihilate human nature but rather assumed it to himself, so in the eucharist the consecrated elements receive the body and blood of Christ without themselves being unmade or converted into something else. That Chalcedonian–like model allowed Luther to hold together a heavenly reality (Jesus Christ) and an earthly one (bread and wine) without confusion or separation, so to speak: without confusion, that he might emphasize the faith in which the consecrated elements

---

29 While agreeing that Christ's offering was made hapax, once for all, and that the eucharist was therefore not an offering in the sense held by Rome, they did not agree on exactly what the church's offering was, nor on how it should be related to Christ's. This too is a problem with a cosmological dimension.

30 The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. Part 1 (1520). Luther's position was not entirely new, of course, having anticipations in Wycliffe, e.g. (see Pelikan 4/53ff.).
ought to be received rather than the bare fact of their heavenly contents, so avoiding an essentially Roman ecclesiology; without separation, since the realm of faith and the realm of sight must not be permitted to diverge too sharply, an ever-present danger in his own theological dialectic.

The evolution of this model was determined in part by Zwingli, who ascribed to faith such a dominant role that the body and blood could be identified with the bread and wine only in the much weaker sense that the community obediently invests the latter with a symbolic significance. For this he was rebuked by Luther, who not only saw a great breach opening up between faith and sight but also the danger of a new kind of meritorious work on the part of the church (in the emphasis on remembering, rather than receiving, Christ). For his part Zwingli, like Berengar before him, appealed to the doctrine of the ascension in order to insist upon the bodily absence of Jesus, that is, upon his departure to heaven, from whence none should think to fetch him down again in order to hide him under the consecrated elements.

Luther now responded with a quite different view of the ascension. That Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father (here it was Luther's turn to eschew literalism, pointing out with Berengar's opponents that this phrase signifies the power of God which knows no boundaries) does not mean that he is confined to heaven as to "a place in the sky." On the contrary he shares the divine omnipresence. In other words, Luther turned to the concept of ubiquity as a way of justifying sacramental realism, a decision that was to have huge consequences.

---

31 Pelikan 4/160. Hoen, Bullinger, Zwingli, et al., argued that Christ was present "according to his divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit,' but not according to his human nature which was at the right hand of God" (ibid. 159, quoting Bullinger).

32 See chap. 4 n. 306.
Though he boasted elsewhere that he had "put Origen under the ban" for his marginalizing of Christ, the great reformer produced a christology with at least one remarkable likeness to Origen's. In defense of his eucharistic teaching he essayed an answer to the "Where?" question which had the risen Jesus running through everything, at once everywhere and nowhere. The trinitarian concepts of *perichôrêsis* and *communicatio idiomatum* were reapplied to the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures in such a way as to threaten Chalcedon itself with a new Eutychianism. In the resurrection and ascension, if not already in the incarnation, the human nature of Christ did appear to be converted into something else after all. That something else was what Luther's followers referred to by speaking of the *genus majestaticum*, or by resort to the eastern notion of deification, meaning to affirm the glory of Jesus in his universal lordship and hence his ability to be present in the bread; but their Reformed counterparts rightly protested that such "glory" was purchased at the expense of his human particularity.

Professor Torrance notes how a faulty view of space and time contributed to the Lutheran ubiquity doctrine, arguing that deep-rooted medieval problems were thus carried over into the Reformation and, with the help of Newtonian science, entrenched there.  

---

33 Trigg 256

34 Or so it was argued by his Reformed opponents, and the charge was leveled even from the Roman side (see Pelikan 4/158, 353f.). Luther was hardly on his own here, however; indeed his view had a strong lineage, as we have seen, even if it owed quite a lot to Occam (Torrance 1969:32f.).

35 Luther argued from John 3:13 for Jesus' ubiquity even during his earthly life (ibid. 160), a claim which his followers would modify with their "two state" christology of humiliation and exaltation, i.e., of *kenôsis* and *plerôsis*.

36 Torrance (1969:30ff.) shows how the "container" concept of space seemed to call for a dialectic of *kenôsis* and *plerôsis* in interpreting the incarnation, then in the Newtonian era to undermine that doctrine altogether. We would add that the dialectic in question appears to foster something like the Greek interest in *overcoming nature*, which later on, in secular form, would have catastrophic effects on man and his habitat. But here even
While making real advances towards a more dynamic and relational way of thinking about the eucharist, and hence about the cosmological and anthropological dimensions of the Christian faith, Luther was still trying to fit the ascended Lord spacelessly into our time or (as Torrance would have it) timelessly into our space. His preoccupation with Augustine's conflicting kingdoms, the temporal and the eternal, further exacerbated the problem. According to Luther these two realms could meet only at a mathematical point, as the divine will to be present pro nobis invokes and awakens faith, producing what amounts to a spaceless and timeless encounter with God in Christ. Against the obvious danger of falling into a too–radical dualism (more radical even than Zwingli's) he simply pounded more vehemently on the hoc est corpus meum as if on "the ontological nail that held the two kingdoms together."

In the long run, however, Luther's strategy could only backfire. His compromise of the "without confusion" in christology through the ubiquity doctrine—since that was now combined with a powerful emphasis on faith which had been lacking in the Radbertian tradition—did not support but actually undermined the "without separation" of his eucharistic teaching. Christ's sacramental presence threatened to become "a mere corollary of [his] massive cosmic presence." Conversely, the necessary distinction deeper roots can be found, perhaps, in Luther's extra Christum/in Christo scheme for correlating creation and redemption.

37 Timelessly, inasmuch as it cuts off the presence of Christ from the actual history of Jesus (ibid. 34f.), but it is perhaps more helpful to put it the other way (cf. Heron, 1983:118, who points out the strong similarity between Luther and Aquinas respecting a non-local presence).

38 Torrance 1969:34

39 Pelikan 4/202. Heron (118) observes that "the doctrine of ubiquity, taken by itself, says both too much and too little to establish the identification of the body of Christ with the bread, which it was Luther's primary concern to maintain. Too much, in that it 'proves' the presence of Christ's human nature everywhere, not merely in the consecrated elements; too little, in that the special and particular connexion and presence in and with the eucharistic bread and wine does not follow from it."
between this hidden Christ, who is always present, and the Christ who wills to be present _pro me_ began to focus so much attention on the problem of _revelation_ that all manner of distracting questions arose to obscure the eucharistic centre that Luther wished to preserve.  

Perhaps Augustine's stress on the subjective aspect of the eucharist was bound to run amok once sacerdotalism and transubstantiation, which served to hold it in check, were set aside—unless the humanity of Christ were at the same time brought into sharper focus. This did not happen in the German Reformation. Instead, the loss of Jesus' space-time particularity began to threaten the loss of the church's own particularity (entirely contrary to Luther's intentions) precisely as a eucharistic community. In later Lutheran tradition we observe an even more dramatic breakdown of the eschatological tension into vertical and horizontal vectors than can be seen in the Roman tradition. Of course there are various reasons for that, but from the very beginning a false answer to the Where? question helped to pave the way for Kant and his heirs—which is to say, for that radical interiorizing of faith and historicizing of the kingdom which (under the pressure of deism) would render both Jesus and the church redundant.

The pronounced dualism that already existed on Zwingli's side of things, coupled with an inclination towards Nestorianism well-marked by the Lutherans, meant that Swiss resources for a happier outcome were slim. The Reformation promised to produce little

---


41 We are thinking of Schleiermacher and Hegel, whom we will come to shortly, but also of Kierkegaard, Bultmann, et al.

42 "The neo-Protestant gulf between nature as a closed continuum of worldly events and the action of God, experienced only in the personal life of the believer, is foreign to Luther's thinking" (Dalferth 1988:83). Yet in a number of related ways, including that presently under discussion, Luther contributed heavily to the "neo-Protestant" possibility.
more than a repetition, in somewhat altered terms, of an old and apparently perennial
debate.\footnote{See chap. 4, n. 104.} But here Calvin entered the fray. So richly suggestive (not to mention
controversial) was his eucharistic teaching that we cannot hope to evade the charge of
oversimplification already incurred, no doubt, by the discussion to this point. We will
concentrate, however, on the impact of his quite different answer.

Calvin basically endorsed Luther's Chalcedonian approach to the relationship
between the body and the bread; the maxim \textit{distinctio sed non separatio} well represents
his eucharistic teaching.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Inst}. 4.17.5. On Calvin's frequent and varied application of the formula \textit{distinctio
sed non separatio}, see B. Milner 1970:190ff., who points to its \textit{pneumatological}
connection in Calvin. This pneumatology connection allowed him in the matter at hand
to stress the \textit{distinctio} over against Luther.} At the same time, he followed Zwingli in roundly rejecting the
notion of a ubiquitous Christ, which he regarded as a "monstrous phantasm." The very
idea of a man who was physically \textit{atopos} (without place) was itself \textit{atopos} (absurd)!\footnote{Tracts and Treatises 2/282; cf. p. 240. "Let nothing inappropriate to human nature be
ascribed to his body," argues Calvin (\textit{Inst}. 4.17.19), "as happens when it is said either to
be infinite or to be put in a number of places at once."} Jesus' concrete humanity must be maintained no less carefully with respect to his exalted
state than his humiliated state, if the incarnation were not to be overturned. But if in
Zwinglian circles that same conviction led back around to the marginalization of Jesus,
especially where the sacraments were concerned, it was not so with Calvin. Heaven—
understood as a distant place to which Jesus had departed bodily—was surely the right
answer to the Where? question, insofar as that question could be answered at all.\footnote{Heaven "is opposite to the frame of this world" (\textit{Comm. Acts} 1.9). "And that no
ambiguity may remain when we say that Christ is to be sought in heaven, the expression
implies and is understood by us to intimate distance of place. For though philosophically
speaking there is no place above the skies, yet as the body of Christ, bearing the nature
and mode of a human body, is finite and is contained in heaven as its place, it is
necessarily as distant from us in point of space as heaven is from earth" (\textit{Mutual Consent}
Luther's way of converting absence into presence was no better than Rome's! Yet this did not mean, as some appeared to think, that the bread and wine were empty symbols or that the church's actual participation in Jesus' flesh and blood humanity could be set aside; on the contrary, a true partaking must be firmly upheld lest a gnostic view of salvation prevail after all.⁴⁷

Consequently, Calvin set himself to reckon more bravely than the other reformers with the absence of Christ as a genuine problem. He worked from the ascension to the eucharist, rather than the other way around, a methodological reversal by which he sought to get back behind centuries of eucharistic disputes.⁴⁸ In the process he attempted to wrest from Luther the support of Augustine—not unfairly, perhaps, yet without seeing that Luther was also a legitimate heir to that venerable father. In fact, Calvin's own view represents (if not in letter then in spirit) a more significant departure from Augustine, since he does not follow him in assigning a negative function to the ascension, which the German reformer arguably does. In Calvin the departure of Christ is more closely correlated with his exaltation as a man than with the recognition of his divinity.⁴⁹

"But why," asks Calvin, "do we repeat the word 'ascension' so often?"⁵⁰ As we

⁴⁷ When Calvin (Inst. 4.17.17) rejects the spectre of Marcion he perceives behind the ubiquity doctrine, he has already insisted against some of its Reformed opponents that "communion of Christ's flesh and blood is necessary for all who aspire to heavenly life"—i.e., that Christ is not received "only by understanding and imagination" (4.17.9ff.; cf. 3.1.1), which also tends in a gnostic direction.

⁴⁸ Calvin did not want to inquire yet again into how Christ can be hidden in the bread; the better question asks how we become partakers of "the body of Christ, as once for all it was given for us" (Inst. 4.17.33). This makes christology the proper starting point and invites a fresh look at the ascension (see Walker 39ff.; cf. K. McDonnell 1967:57ff. for a summary of patristic and medieval contributions to Calvin's eucharistic theology).

⁴⁹ See 2.16.14-17, 4.17.26-28. The Lutheran position, though divergent in form, has a great deal in common with Augustine's retraction theory.

⁵⁰ Inst. 4.17.27. In Comm. Acts 1.9 Calvin describes the doctrine of the ascension as "one of the chiefest points of our faith."
have indicated, the lesson he wished to drive home was that absence must not be glossed over. Luther's way of doing that was to propose the ubiquity doctrine as an interpretation of the ascension. Among the negative consequences, according to Calvin, are these: First, an injustice is done to Christ, and to all who depend on him, by making him quite "unlike himself." Second, "a serious wrong is done to the Holy Spirit," whose role in uniting us to the absent Christ goes unnoticed. Third, the doctrine of Christ's return, not to mention the resurrection of the flesh and the judgment of this world, is effectively overthrown, since Jesus has not so much gone from us as diffused himself in our midst. The second and third criticisms buttress the first. By looking to the Spirit Calvin displays a keener sense of the inter-personal, trinitarian dimensions of human existence coram deo. And by introducing the parousia into the debate, as a kind of control on the doctrine of the ascension, he makes a telling soteriological point: To maintain a real absence (and the judgment it implies) is also to preserve a vital sense of continuity with Jesus; to assert his presence at the expense of a real absense is actually to posit too great a discontinuity.

51 Inst. 4.17.29; see §§25–34.
52 §33. A related injury is done to our faith, which is drawn away from heaven and back to earth. Injury is also done to the goodness of God, in that Christ, since he is fully present in the bread, is shared with everyone alike, but does not always bring salvation. (For Calvin Christ is salvation; his approach allowed for a universal offer but a selective appropriation.)
53 §27; cf. n. 56. The tension underlying the eucharist should not be construed in terms of the visible and the invisible, as Luther had it, but in terms of the ascension and the parousia. (The body was not invisible by nature, but as a result of its real absence; nor was there both a visible and an invisible body.) R. S. Wallace (1953:225) comments that it is among "the great merits of Calvin's doctrine in comparison with that of his Lutheran opponents ... that he leaves room for a more significant eschatology than would be possible on the assumption of his opponents."
All of this demonstrates that Calvin had a better grasp than Luther on the way in which the Where? question is bound up with the Who? question. That indeed was his critical insight into the whole debate. Calvin saw that neither a Eutychian response (Jesus is omnipresent) nor a Nestorian one (absent in one nature but present in the other) would do, since either way Christ's humanity is neutralized and his role as our mediator put in jeopardy. It is the God-man who is absent and the God-man whose presence we nevertheless require. Against the Lutherans, then, he applied the dogmas of bodily ascension and bodily return as an antidote to Eutychianism. Against both sides, he appealed to the power of the Holy Spirit as the proper basis for a robust doctrine of the real presence. In the ascension the mediator has indeed been removed from us by a great distance; yet the Spirit, who "overcomes distance," draws us heavenward to participate in him in some mysterious way. A "species of absence" and a "species of

54 In our own time Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1978) has made much of this connection. It appears to us, however, that his construction of the matter, though on the whole very insightful, perpetuates certain shortcomings of Lutheran thought—specifically its occupation with the pro me dimension of Christ's existence at the expense of the pro Patre dimension and, consequently, its pneumatological weakness as well.

55 "Who can be offended when we wish Christ to remain complete and entire in regard to both natures, and the Mediator who joins us to God not to be torn to pieces?" says Calvin (Tracts 2/241). The whole Christ is present everywhere, he argues, but not wholly so (totus non totum, ibid. 2/558; cf. Inst. 4.17.30). By his divine power he fills all things, operating through the agency of the Spirit; yet he is a man who has indeed departed from us, a man into whose presence we must somehow be introduced and whose life we must share.

56 "When Scripture speaks of the ascension of Christ, it declares, at the same time, that he will come again. If he now occupies the whole world in respect of his body, what else was his ascension, and what will his descent be, but a fallacious and empty show?" (Tracts 2/286).

57 Inst. 4.17.12. Notice that Calvin carefully expands Augustine's teaching about the threefold presence of Christ "in majesty, in providence, and in ineffable grace." "Under grace," he says, "I include that marvelous communion in his body and blood—provided we understand that it takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by that feigned inclusion of the body itself under the element" (*26, emphasis ours).
presence" thus qualify our communion with the mediator, but he himself remains in heaven until the day of judgment. It is we who require eucharistic relocation.58

It might be said that the famous Genevan reformer attempted to find a path through the minefield of the eucharistic debates by nothing much more complicated than paying his respects first of all to basic credal truths. People argue a great deal, however, now as then, about the intelligibility of the results. What is perfectly clear is that he wished to return to a much earlier orientation in the eucharist, determined by the trajectory of the ascension and "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Like many others we consider this an important initiative. But from our perspective Calvin's most striking achievement (and perhaps the real reason behind much of the arguing) is to be found in the fact that he stood the ubiquity notion on its head, and with it the whole problem of the presence and the absence.59 In order to preserve the particularity of Jesus without sacrificing sacramental realism, he reached out towards a relational, christocentric concept of space that would resolve the conflict. Jesus of Nazareth is not everywhere, that is, ubiquitous and hence atopic; but in spite of the ascension he *is* everywhere accessible. The vast distance that separates us from him is compressed, so to speak, by the power of the Spirit.

58 On the one hand, *quadam absentiae specie nos ab eo disjungi* (Tracts 2/240). On the other hand, since Christ "so raises us to himself," we may rightly assert a species praeentiae (ibid. 2/286); for the Spirit "truly unites things separated in space" (Inst. 4.17.10).

59 Quenstedt (*Theo*. 3.3.1.2.14; quoted Pelikan 4/357) would put the question thus: "Is Christ, according to the humanity that is united with his divine and infinite person and that is exalted at the right hand of the Divine Majesty, present, in this glorious state of exaltation, to all creatures in the universe with a true, real, substantial, and efficacious omnipresence?" But Calvin had already called for a reversal of the frame of reference. The question ought to be: How far are we able to be made present with and to Christ in spite of our fallen condition?
In short, Calvin's healthier christology (i.e., his insistence on keeping the human Jesus sharply in focus) forced him to seek a pneumatological solution to the problem of the presence and the absence. Unfortunately his solution gives the appearance of being just that—somewhat forced and, to that extent, unconvincing. The reason is obviously not to be found in its inaccessibility to human science; just the reverse. Calvin fails to penetrate far enough into the unique logic of the ascension and the eucharist. It is true that he wished to avoid any false tribute to philosophy or physics in these matters. His resistance to Copernicus, though, speaks loudly of the hold that classical cosmology had on his thinking in general; the "jumbling" of heaven and earth in nature was scarcely more acceptable to him than the mixing of the divine and the human in Christ. We need not explore the various dualistic features that crop up in his theology, nor decide whether he himself succumbed to an attenuated Nestorianism. The critical weakness reveals

---

60 This might well have invited a wholesale reappraisal of theological cosmology and eucharistic theory in trinitarian terms. In point of fact, it did not—until much later on. See below.

61 Inst. 4.17.24. Torrance (1969:29f., 1988:81) suggests that Calvin's exposition of the ascension "in relation to questions of space and time" owes much to John Major and Duns Scotus, not to mention the Greek fathers. Yet we must be cautious about supposing that it rests on a more or less successful alternative to the container concept of space which influenced Luther, both because it is not clear how far Calvin escaped that idea (the Lord's body is "contained in heaven as its place") and because of his own testimony: "I pay no regard to physical arguments..." (Tracts 2/557).

62 Something of the old sense of guilt in creaturely existence per se survived in Calvin (Bouwsma 42; see 69ff.). The need to rise above this world had for him a prior cosmological component not strictly determined by christology. He too could sound like Origen: "Shut up as we are in the prisonhouse of the flesh, we have not yet attained to angelic rank" (hence our need for outward aids like the sacraments, Inst. 4.1.1, 14.3); in the new world we will "make no use of corruptible life" but enjoy creation in a purely aesthetic way (3.25.11; cf. McDannell & Lang 154), etc.

63 Calvin's use of Lombard (quamvis totus Christus ubique sit, non tamen totum, quod in eo est) and Augustine (ubique per id quod est Deus, in coelo per id quod est homo) is certainly not unproblematic from our point of view. See Inst. 4.17.28ff.; cf. Wallace's discussion, 229ff.
itself plainly in the fact that the dialectic of presence and absence is still handled almost exclusively in spatial terms. Bound by the strong verticality of his worldview, Calvin found it very difficult to factor time into the equation; that is, to subject temporal relations to the same pneumatological reinterpretation undertaken with respect to spatial relations. 64

The immediate result was to put in doubt his sacramental realism, which to this day has been disputed not only by his opponents but by many of his adherents as well. 65 Calvin knew that to maintain continuity between Christ's humanity and ours, a discontinuity in kind had to be allowed. That is why he insisted on spatial separation rather than spacelessness or ubiquity, and treated the eucharist as a kind of ladder to heaven. 66 It is exceedingly difficult, however—where there is no temporal, but only a spatial, reorganization by the Spirit in view—to see that this ladder serves the body as well as the soul. That is one reason why the marks of inwardness are everywhere present in Calvin's sacramental writings, belying (if that is not too strong a word) the "true

---

64 We do not deny that Calvin understands a real participation in the actual Christ-event, which certainly implies such a reinterpretation. The eucharist "sends us back to the cross," we "possess Christ entire, crucified" (Inst. 4.17.4, 33). But the relation between yesterday and today is not at all clear. What does it mean, e.g., to say that "the effectiveness and result of his birth, death, and resurrection" is "something eternal and immortal" (17.5, emphasis ours)?

65 Bringing to nothing his hope of church concord; see B. A. Gerrish, 1993, chap. 1.

66 The sacramental ladder is for our ascent not his descent. If Christ came to us, where and as we are, in his glorified humanity, his presence would bring with it judgment (cf. Wallace 225f.)—that very annihilation which the doctrine of transubstantiation teaches. Instead he "lends us his hand" (Tracts 3/280) to help us up. I.e., he gives us his Spirit, who becomes "the bond of this connection" (Inst. 4.17.12), descending and ascending to join us to Christ in heaven. This activity of the Spirit is unceasing, but is especially realized by us in the Supper.
partaking" he nonetheless believed and preached. The *sursum corda* begins to sound rather too much like a call merely to ascend with the mind:

What then is the sum of our doctrine? It is this, that when we discern here on earth the bread and wine, our minds must be raised to heaven in order to enjoy Christ, and that Christ is there present with us while we seek him above the elements of this world.

Two other results will occupy us further in the next section. The first concerns the doctrine of the heavenly session. Since Christ appears to share our time, there is no concept of recapitulation in Calvin such as we found in Irenaeus; for practical purposes, Jesus is "up there" and we are "down here." Within this framework, the fresh attention being paid to his humanity naturally supported a new emphasis on the ongoing work of Jesus, in sharp contrast to the more conventional notion of his retirement. The effect was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, it served to inhibit (though it could hardly prevent!) that ecclesiastical substitution for Jesus which is characteristic of the western tradition. The church on earth mirrors what Jesus is doing in heaven, but in a condition of utter dependence; so far from mediating between heaven and earth in and of itself, it

---

67 See esp. *Inst. 4.17.32*. McDonnell (373ff.) rightly points to the "basic ambiguity" in Calvin's doctrine of the eucharist. "It is not at all clear, nor even tolerably unclear, as to how the Spirit makes present the body of Christ. There is much one could praise in Calvin's pneumatology but one has the impression that the Holy Spirit, to put it bluntly, is used" (376).

68 *C.R. 12:728* (quoted Wallace 229). Were Calvin's eucharistic logic properly eschatological the *ac tum praebeatem nobis esse Christum* could be given more weight, but it is easy to see why he has been accused of "reducing the Eucharist to only a noetic moment," in McDonnell's words. This charge McDonnell (378ff.) rejects, while noting that "the Word character of the sacrament is stressed to the point where there seems little need or use for a sacrament." It is also stressed at the expense of children, who are excluded (*Inst. 4.16.30*)--a most revealing feature.

69 "He doth not now sit idle in heaven" (*Comm. Acts 1.11*; see *Inst. 2.16.14ff.*). Otherwise Calvin's whole eschatological framework is remarkably conventional. Individual eschatology still tends to crowd out corporate eschatology; notably, he wrote no commentary on the Apocalypse. The doctrine of the parousia does not emerge with the force or originality we might expect. (As Bouwsma [73] points out, Calvin was capable of unwittingly conflating "classical cosmology with Christian eschatology."
constantly requires the descent of the Spirit to quicken its dead forms with the vivifying life of him who reigns on high. On the other hand, that same emphasis prepared the way in Reformed circles for another swing to the horizontal. Calvin himself was of two minds about temporal progress. But his lingering reservations eventually gave way (in John Owen, e.g.) to a new confidence in the power of Jesus, working through the church in particular, to mould the affairs of the present age in preparation for his return. Here and there postmillennialist enthusiasm began to supplant a somewhat sober amillennialism, producing a Christian optimism that would gradually coalesce with its secular counterpart into a new form of triumphalism more beguiling than the old.

The second is closely connected to the other two. It concerns the long-term viability of Calvin's response to the Where? question. Limited, like Copernicus, by traditional assumptions, he was nonetheless moving towards something quite exciting in Christian cosmology. In the end, however, we must agree with William Walker that Calvin "was unable to give a clear and logical answer to the question, Where is Christ now?" His answer, at all events, failed to satisfy a good many of his opponents just

70 The promising pneumatological component does not mean a clean escape from dualism. Like Augustine, and with similar results, Calvin tries to rest his ecclesiology on the doctrine of election and on a distinction between visible and invisible churches. The church as pedagogue, as tutor of souls in the angelic arts, as divine agent of social control overseeing civil authorities—these and other dualist motifs remain prominent, together with the corpus permixtum notion (which only the Anabaptists would attempt to jettison, mainly in Donatist fashion). See Inst. 4.1.

71 Bouwsma (81ff.) points to Calvin's cyclical view of history, which encouraged the notion of progress but also qualified it. Milner, however, suggests that already with Calvin we must think of the church dynamically as "the history of the restoration of order in the world" (194). Such, at all events, was the view of Owen, whose belief in a "latter-day glory" was based on his understanding of the heavenly session of Jesus (cf. Works 1/235ff., 8/Ser. 5–12; Savoy Declaration 26 [1658]; P. Toon 1971:82ff.).

72 Here we have adapted to our own narrow interests Bouwsma's concluding judgment: "The historical Calvin was much like Copernicus: unable to abandon traditional modes of thought, partly because of temperament but above all because he depended on them to make sense of the world; yet he undeniably was fumbling toward a new culture" (p. 233).
because of the sacramental weakness; a century or so later, after the triumph of Copernicus, it would satisfy almost no one. As we have seen, it is precisely the "now" (i.e., the lack of temporal discontinuity) that points to the underlying problem—a problem Friedrich Schleiermacher would place in a quite different light. 73

Discourse on the Dead Christ

The Reformation stalemate made it doubly difficult to face the challenge of a worldview that was being radically altered, but a master mediator eventually appeared in the person of a Reformed preacher who headed the theology faculty in Berlin. Schleiermacher laboured hard to redeem faith and piety from the threat of a servile dependence on the "metaphysical and ethical crumbs" falling from Kant's plate. He did this, however, not by flouting the canons of contemporary science or philosophy but by turning (with other Romanticists) to the affective domain as theology's true ground. Since direct speech about God was increasingly impugnable and the notion of a special salvation history suspect, Schleiermacher proposed that the believer's own self-consciousness, together with that of the church corporately, should afford the immediate subject matter for theological reflection. 74 Only within that domain would he attempt his own answer to the Where? question, which could no longer be asked in the same way but (among Christians) could not simply be dismissed either.

73 Calvin (Inst. 4.17.26; cf. Comm. Phil. 3.20) echoed Augustine's warning against "prying and superfluous" inquiries into Christ's exact location in the heavenly places. What he ought to have done, however, he did not—i.e., inquire a little further into the matter of Christ's temporal location. Walker (124ff.) also observes this, but our analysis diverges widely from his.

74 See the second of his Speeches on Religion and Christian Faith §§3f., 15, 50, passim (cf. Gunton 1983:98). The Romantic critique of Kant's modified rationalism was coupled with a move from deism back to panentheism, apart from which such a proposal would make no sense.
We may preface our attempt to find his answer by observing that what appears to
be an astonishing restriction on the theologian presented itself to Schleiermacher rather
as a liberation from the straitjacket which Kantian epistemology must otherwise impose.
The marginalizing of Jesus and reducing of religion to ethics need not, he believed, be the
end result of Kant's revolution. For Christians are indeed aware, at the very foundations
of their human subjectivity, of a vital relation to God—and that precisely in connection
with the person of Jesus. Such being the case, religion is something more profound than
morality and Jesus something more than an exemplar. He does not belong merely to a
receding past; theology as christology is a legitimate enterprise after all. Kant and the
Reformers thus walk together in Schleiermacher.

His way forward, however, marked a new—and, for Protestant theology, quite
decisive—mariological turn (sic) that left almost nothing unaltered in the faith he sought
to defend. Compromise with Kant produced a method that entailed heavy concessions in
eschatology especially, as he readily confessed, for the data provided by Christian
subjectivity does not extend into the beyond. Doctrines such as the resurrection,

75 "Neither metaphysics nor ethics is the home of religion," observes Heron (1980:24),
which "has to do rather with the infinite universal wholeness of all things, of that all­embracing totality which may or may not be labelled 'God', but which includes and
enfolds everything within itself." Of this wholeness the religious person is conscious at
"another level of being which lies deeper than knowing or acting" (ibid.). The essence
of piety is "the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing,
of being in relation to God" (CF §4).

76 Christianity, in the famous thesis of CF §11, "is a monotheistic faith belonging to the
teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the
fact that in it everythi ng is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of
Nazareth" (emphasis ours; cf. §91). Jesus' sphere of influence, however, is "the inner
life;" it does not include "the governance of the whole world" (§105). Thus if
Schleiermacher distinguishes himself from Kant he also clearly distances himself from
orthodoxy.

77 CF §§157ff. The objective pole of Christian doctrine is everywhere weakened, but here
in particular (see §159.1). Even the question of personal survival after death is one which
leaves room for doubt, though Schleiermacher ventures an affirmation on this point in the
ascension and parousia do not necessarily speak of things that happen for Jesus, then, but of what happens in us; that is, they articulate in various ways our recognition of his "peculiar dignity" and our longing to be united with him in his perfect God-consciousness. Internalizing these doctrines was not a new thing, of course, but for the first time we encounter the bold contention that the Easter events and the parousia "cannot be laid down as properly constituent parts of the doctrine of his Person." In short, Schleiermacher was able to rejuvenate christology only at the expense of the entire eschatological side of Jesus-history.²⁸

The immediate impact on the Where? question, naturally, was to collapse the spatial tension on which Calvin had insisted into something radically Lutheran in form, that is, to render it in strictly "existential" terms.²⁹ But at the same time it opened up the temporal dimension to Christ's absence which the Reformers had largely ignored. Jesus' contemporaneity could no longer be taken for granted. A bridge between past and present was required rather than a bridge between heaven and earth. In building this bridge Schleiermacher did not employ Calvin's innovative pneumatology but followed Luther's lead instead. An extension of Christ, not a sacramental compression or overcoming of temporal distance, met the need: In the society of his followers Jesus' unique God-

In his sermons, when confronted with eschatological texts "he hardly knows what to do but give urgent warnings against enthusiasm" (Barth 1982:43).

²⁸ See CF §99. So far from being "one of the chiefest points of our faith," as Calvin thought, the ascension "is not directly a doctrine of faith" at all (§158.1). It has no organic connection with the religious consciousness or with faith in the Redeemer as such. The only warrant for accepting such ideas as the resurrection and ascension as events in the life of Jesus is their presence in the apostolic witness, which offers meagre attestation for the latter in particular. Walker (141ff.) has chronicled the subsequent decline of attention to the ascension.

²⁹ Our relationship with Jesus Schleiermacher (CF §100) describes as a "mystical" one, moving the whole issue of distance and nearness back into Lutheran territory, so to speak. In effect, it becomes an hamartiological question, related to the waxing or waning of the God-consciousness.
consciousness (which is also his true self-consciousness) survives and indeed widens with the advance of history. In spite of his death, his personal activity is "prolonged" in the common life of the church, according to a scheme that is often labelled neo-protestant but whose Romanist tendencies have regularly been noted. The church itself becomes the topos of Jesus, the only possible answer to the Where? question.

Without the ascension and the parousia to support it, in other words, the heavenly session of Christ is conflated with his earthly life, or rather with its ecclesial consequences. The Gordian knot of the Lutheran-Reformed debate on the status exaltationis is cleanly cut by Schleiermacher, even as he takes up one of Calvin's leading themes: The second or glorified phase of Jesus' existence not only secretly sustains the church, it is the church, to which his high priesthood passes and which itself now "appears before God" as representing the human race. Embarrassing speculations on Jesus' physical dimensions or whereabouts can be forgotten, then; we hear instead about his

---

80 Cf. Calvin, Inst. 1.1.1.

81 Schleiermacher's position allows us to speak of an ongoing incarnation that passes from Jesus to the church: "And so, since the Divine Essence was bound up with the human person of Christ, but is now (his directly personal influence having ceased) no longer personally involved in any individual, but henceforward manifests itself actively in the fellowship of believers as their common spirit, this is just the way in which the work of redemption is continued and extended in the Church" (CF §124.2; cf. §122.3).

82 Christ's "enduring influence" and spiritual presence "may well depend upon his sitting at the right hand of God--by which, however, since the expression may be strictly an impossible one, we must understand simply the peculiar and incomparable dignity of Christ, raised above all conflict--but not upon a visible resurrection or ascension, since of course Christ could have been raised to glory even without these intermediate steps" (CF §99.1). Note that in the end (§105, postscript) the two-states doctrine is simply set aside.

83 CF §104.6. We have put the matter rather more directly and without regard for the nuances introduced by his Platonic conception of Jesus as the "ideal" or universal man (§93).
"total effective influence" working through the community he founded, which is the "selfperpetuating organism" of the very same divine creativity once embodied in him.84

The real significance of Schleiermacher (from our point of view) now begins to emerge. For the church, so understood, is once again situated to offer leadership to the world in the quest for God's kingdom. By mediating the "impulses" flowing from Christ, receptively cultivating the feeling of absolute dependence so wonderfully realized in him, it redresses the imbalance of Kantian synergism and hastens the advent of a truly spiritual Man.85 Origen's idea of Jesus as the soul of the church, which becomes an extension of his unifying activity in the world—the kosmos of the cosmos—is here translated into the modern context to good effect.86 Which is to say, Kant's view of the kingdom as a coming utopia of order and peace is happily embraced, only "the hidden moving force" that drives history towards it is made more definitely Christian.87

Schleiermacher thus tipped the doctrine of the ascension onto its side, so to speak, in order to direct its theological potency into ecclesiology and from thence into the

---

84 CF §100 (cf. Redeker 137ff.). Lutheran revelational subjectivism and Calvinist christological objectivism thus meet and converge in Schleiermacher's ecclesiology, which, as Barth (1982:31) rightly observes, forms the real nerve-centre of his work.

85 Christ, as it were, "sleeps in the soul" of man and requires only to be roused (Sermon, Second Sunday after Trinity, 1931; see Barth 1982:25). This rousing takes place mainly in and through the activity of the church, which (in Barth's well-phrased summary, p. 28) "is a free society of like-minded people founded on common love for Christ with the aim of the common contemplation, fructification, and extension of the stimulus received from him."

86 "But the share of the Redeemer in the common life, viewed as continuing, we are fully justified in calling soul-beselung (Beseelung)..." (CF §100.2; cf. above 231ff.).

87 That one should allow oneself to be carried along by this force is just what Paul learned on the road to Damascus, says Schleiermacher, and what all non-Christian "fellowships of faith" are destined to learn (Sermon, Ninth Sunday after Trinity, 1932; cf. CF §117). See Barth (ibid. 33ff., 47), who speaks of Schleiermacher's Christian "as the ideal civilized man who is distinguished from others only by knowing what is the goal of civilization, namely, the divinely willed mastery of nature by spirit...."
broader channels of an "historical world-plan," to borrow Fichte's expression. Casting aside the doctrine of election in favour of Origen's universalism (more suited both to his monism and to the perfectibility motif) he argued that "the absolute integrity of the church is only to be seen in the totality of the human race." 88

[F]aith in the Christian Church as the Kingdom of God not only implies that it will ever endure in antithesis to the world, but also ... contains the hope that the Church will increase and the world opposed to it decrease. For the incarnation of Christ means for human nature in general what regeneration is for the individual. 89

History, in other words, will resolve the dialectic of church and world in favour of the church. For "the activity of the Redeemer is world-forming, and its object is human nature, in the totality of which the powerful God-consciousness is to be implanted as a new vital principle." 90

In this way the effort of the Enlightenment to liberate history as well as science, time as well as space, from the grip of Christianity was met head on; a bid was made to christen the new theory of progress by finding room for God, and for Jesus too, within

88 CF §125. We might well ask, however, on what this integrity is based and just how inclusive it really is. For Calvin the church exists where the horizontal axis of the preached Word and the vertical axis of the Spirit meet, i.e., supremely in the eucharist (Walker 71); yet, as we noted earlier, he excludes children from the church's eucharistic centre, since they are unable to appreciate its word-character. Schleiermacher (§141.2) excludes not only children but all the mentally incompetent, betraying the cerebral nature of his ecclesiology.

89 CF §113. He continues: "And just as sanctification is the progressive domination of the various functions, coming with time to consist less and less of fragmentary details and more and more to be a whole..., so too the fellowship organizes itself here also out of the separate redemptive activities and becomes more and more co-operative and interactive. This organization must increasingly overpower the unorganized mass to which it is opposed." (See also §121ff.; cf. K. Clements 1987:40ff., 54ff.)

90 CF §100.2 (cf. §114, noting that the triumph of the church can never be more than approximate, since each generation presents a new challenge). Hegel, as we shall see, resolves the dialectic between church and world in the opposite direction.
the conditions laid down by Kant. Coming full circle to the matter of ethics at the very end of *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher makes his intentions plain:

The divine wisdom, as the unfolding of the divine love, conducts us here to the realm of Christian Ethics; for we are now confronted with the task of more and more securing recognition for the world as a good world, as also of forming all things into an organ of the divine Spirit in harmony with the divine idea originally underlying the world-order, thus bringing all into unity with the system of redemption. The purpose of this is that in both respects we may attain to perfect living fellowship with Christ, both in so far as the Father has given him power over all things and in so far as he ever shows Him greater works than those He already knows. Hence the world can be viewed as a perfect revelation of divine wisdom only in proportion as the Holy Spirit makes itself felt through the Christian Church as the ultimate world-shaping power.91

The agenda for theology in the modern era was established just here. Schleiermacher's hopeful vision of an emerging world church, thoroughly oriented to its civil duties, liberated from all distasteful divisions, eventually triumphant (if only imperfectly) in its task of redeeming "human nature in general," caught on both in Protestant and in Roman circles. More than anyone else, save perhaps Hegel, Schleiermacher contributed to the coalescence of Christian and secular optimism mentioned above, which has not entirely failed even in our so-called post-modern period. But the substitution of mere teleology for Christian eschatology is just as disquieting in a horizontal framework as in a vertical, and his answer to the Where? question calls for even sharper criticism than that merited by the medievals or the reformers.

Schleiermacher, it is said, focused Christian thought onto the figure of Jesus with "a new and peculiar intensity."92 His attempt to confess Jesus without the resurrection and ascension, however, brought him to the brink of a great precipice, along which theology had been travelling since the beginning of the third century. Pursuing

---

91 CF §169.3. *Mutatis mutandis*, does Schleiermacher's vision not represent what a post-Copernican Catholicism ought to look like?

92 Clements 40
Augustine's line, he argued that it was altogether necessary for Christ's visible presence to come to an end that his invisible and spiritual work might succeed. But now it was even less clear whether anything more could be said that was not properly pneumatology or ecclesiology rather than christology. Schleiermacher's rejection of supernaturalism and the constraints of his rigorously subjective method were compounded by a prejudice against the particular that marks the idealist tradition even in its Romantic form. In his human concreteness Jesus was finally a distraction that had to be removed for the sake of the church: not so that men might believe in his divinity, as Augustine had it, but that they might believe also, mutatis mutandis, in their own. The "common spontaneous activity" that testifies to the being of God in human society could not arise as long as men and women were immediately dependent on Jesus. In short, he could have remained with us only as an obstruction to the Holy Spirit and to genuine ecclesial being. "For the more a common life depends on an individual life, the less is it an existence in common."  

---

93 CF §115.2, §122.2; cf. Barth 1982:102 (who refers also to an ascension sermon of 1795).

94 With the passing of Jesus in his concrete particularity—i.e., with a theology of extension rather than compression—pneumatology, ecclesiology and christology all run together. Most significantly, the Holy Spirit becomes "the common Spirit" of the church (§116.3, §121ff.).

95 To find the infinite in the finite, the timeless in the temporal, God in the creature, is the essence of religion (see Barth 1982:251ff.). But there is a familiar dialectic at work here: If the One is found only in and through the many, the many have meaning only in relation to the One. Christianity relates everything to Jesus; he is the essential particular, the window on the universum. Yet the possibility that, for the sake of wholeness, there might be "a redemption from him as well as ... through him" (CF §11.4) cannot be entirely excluded. This became Hegel's theme.

96 CF §122; cf. §99, §116.3. The "natural predominance of the common Spirit over persons" (§144.1) was a dangerous assumption supported by Schleiermacher's modalism. "Schleiermacher speaks with surprising force," says Barth (1982:27), "about the unimportance and even valuelessness of the individual as such compared to the task that he is given to serve the spirit of life that flows through the whole."
Here we must agree with Karl Barth that it is doubtful after all how important Jesus really is for Schleiermacher. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that his is a theology in which ecclesial substitution for Jesus is finally perfected. Since (as Troeltsch observes) the point from which the church radiates is not in heaven but in history, there is not, nor ever can be, any contradiction between the two. Otherwise put, since Jesus as a particular man survives only in our "reminiscent apprehension," he no longer stands over against us but only behind us. No new action of his own is to be looked for, then; his very power to act resides in the church. In another striking modification of Augustine the homogeneity notion now restricts, not our expectations of historical progress, but of Christ. He who has not ascended cannot return. He is forbidden, in fact, not by any Grand Inquisitor but (in Barth's phrase) by "the smiling march of the lofty world-spirit," which, having established its course, cannot permit of such unnatural novelties as the parousia.

If Schleiermacher hesitated to let go of Jesus entirely, prising from ecclesiology a new lease on life for him after his physical "disappearance," his more famous colleague in Berlin came to the point with characteristic boldness:

---

97 1982:103ff.

98 Gerrish 188, following Troeltsch ("Schleiermacher und die Kirche" Moderne Philosophie 6, 1910:29–32); the criticism is not his but ours.

99 Bonhoeffer (1978:43f.) is quite right in pointing out that if Christ is understood docetically (sic; see p. 80) "from his historical influence, he is essentially power, dynamis, but not a person."

100 Schleiermacher argues that "to point forward to anything new which is still to occur would necessarily be to preach another gospel" (§103.3; note that the apostolicity of the Apocalypse, the one book on which Calvin left us no sermon or commentary, is here rejected). This is not unconnected to "the maxim everywhere underlying our presentation, that the beginning of the Kingdom of God is a supernatural thing, which, however, becomes natural as soon as it emerges into manifestation" (§100.3).
Christ dies; only as dead is he exalted to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God; only thus is he Spirit. He himself says: "When I am no longer with you, the Spirit will guide you into all truth."  

With G. W. F. Hegel the very obverse of the doctrine of the ascension openly appears; it is he who willingly leaps over the precipice. The ascension is regarded in time-honoured fashion as a retraction of the human Jesus, but here at the nadir of the Origenist–Augustinian tradition that retraction negates his humanity altogether and asserts his divinity only in a most perverse way. Christology has become a discourse on the dead Christ.

Hegel's very different way of rescuing Jesus from the threat of irrelevance was to make that irrelevance the whole point. To enlarge on this we must turn momentarily to the doctrine of the Trinity, which Schleiermacher reduced to a mere theologoumenon of Sabellian (Joachimite) cast. Hegel on the other hand took it up, also in a Sabellian way, but with complete philosophical seriousness. In Hegel we meet not only with a maturing evolutionary view of the universe but with a bold return to pantheism; yet something like a trinitarian principle promised to account for the dynamic he saw at work in the unfolding cosmos. Since his definition of reality remained idealist, however, his trinitarianism was logically rather than christologically derived, and hence quite impersonal. Designed to incorporate world history into theology proper, it had in the

---

101 1956:325. To his left-wing Hegelian opponents, says Redeker (131) in another context, Schleiermacher was "the man who disguises (verschlieere) the naked truth."

102 Its task was to distinguish the being of God in Christ and the being of God "in the common Spirit of the Church" from God's being in himself and in relation to the world generally (CF §172.1).

103 Pace C. J. Friedrich (Introduction to Dover Edition) Hegel's "Christian philosophy" was indeed pantheistic and impersonal. The monism underlying his entire exposition is made plain, e.g., in the thesis that God can "will nothing other than himself" (1956:20; cf. 318ff.).
end no room for Jesus-history in particular.\textsuperscript{104}

To be sure, Jesus plays a critical role in Hegel's system. Is he not (and here we must assume some knowledge of that system) the particular among all particulars, the one true object or mirror in which the World-Spirit is able to discover itself and discern its own future? Is he not then the axis of all history? But if he is that axis he is equally the one through whom the process of divine self-reconciliation begins, whereby the natural limitations of finiteness and particularity are stripped away, annulled and transcended, for the sake of unity and wholeness and independence from all that is not Spirit. Jesus' relevance, then, is exactly in his self-negation as a finite particular. Only his self-negation (the very element generally overlooked by Schleiermacher) finally matters.\textsuperscript{105}

Hegel, like Kant and Schleiermacher, fought for a richer vision of the world than the mechanistic model could offer; he also sought a richer vision of God. Yet there is a utilitarian streak that corrupts his philosophy from the roots up,\textsuperscript{106} visible above all in christology. Jesus is indispensable in his eminent dispensability. His significance is made

\textsuperscript{104} Robert Jenson (1982:134f.) argues that Hegel brought trinitarianism in the West (which Augustine had earlier cut loose from christology) to its inevitable conclusion, by allowing world-history to stand in for Jesus-history as the full expression of God. It is our contention that he did something similar for the doctrine of the ascension, which in both East and West had long been inclined to dispense with the humanity of Jesus, if never in quite so stark a form.

\textsuperscript{105} Salvation is conceived in terms common to the mystical tradition, Greek and German, as the overcoming of nature through suffering, for the sake of the liberation of spirit: "Man realizes his spiritual essence only when he conquers the natural that attaches to him" (1956:377). Now the self-sacrifice of Jesus has brought about that liberation on a universal scale; for through his deed the whole human race, under the priesthood of the Germanic peoples, is becoming a pliable instrument for the self-realization of the divine Spirit (see pp. 318–36).

\textsuperscript{106} It is, after all, "from the special and determinate, and from its negation, that the Universal results" (1956:32, emphasis ours). "The particular," Hegel allows, "is for the most part of too trifling a value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned." Indeed, "as a general rule, individuals come under the category of means to an ulterior end" (though there is one human aspect that does not, since it is itself divine, \textit{viz.}, morality, ethics, religion).
to rest, not in his unique sacrifice, but in the sacrifice of his uniqueness on the altar of Universal History. The similarities between Hegelianism and Christian neoplatonism are often noted, in spite of the fact that the one is construed in temporal, the other chiefly in spatial, terms. Both seek to defend Christianity from the ravages of a too-radical dualism; in both the monist drive (what in Hegel is known as panlogism) undermines the particulars of history, beginning with Jesus of Nazareth. Hegel, however, presses beyond all his predecessors, from Origen to Schleiermacher, with his doctrine of the sublation (Aufhebung) of Jesus.

What were the consequences of exalting the dead Jesus to heaven in place of the living, or even the ecclesial, one? The Romantic poet Jean Paul, Hegel's contemporary, included in his *Siebenküäs* a "Discourse of the dead Christ from atop the cosmos: there is no God." Though Hegel was not an atheist his treatment of the ascension (within the context of his philosophy as a whole) did point to the death of God, that is, the God of traditional Christianity. Moreover it pointed to a successor. Ascension without resurrection, insofar as it is still regarded as an unveiling of divinity, can only lead to

---

107 Hegel (1956:19) employs this cultic metaphor when he speaks of the consciousness of its own freedom as the "sole aim of Spirit," and the cause "to which the sacrifices that have ever and anon been laid on the vast altar of the earth, through the long lapse of ages, have been offered."

108 Allan Galloway (1951:169f.) has observed that just as the early fathers turned to christology to combat gnostic dualism, so did Hegel in his effort to combat Kantian dualism. Hegel, he argues, charted a course roughly parallel to that of Origen as he mounted his own theodicy.

109 I.e., the transformation of his mere factuality into universal self-consciousness, whenever "the death of the mediator is grasped by the self" (1949:781; see Gunton 1983:40ff., 191ff.). This is Hegel's doctrine of the ascension, for the ascension is understood as an historical event precisely in this way.


111 In Hegel, as in Augustine, this is exactly the point (his treatment of the eucharist bears this out, by the way, just as Augustine's does). We are not surprised, then, that Hegel claims for his Lutheran faith that it "involves the entire substance of Catholicism, with the
the divinization of that which Jesus took with him to the cross—viz., man as he is, man as he goes. For Hegel heaven is on the way precisely along our way. It is opened up to us as we grasp the significance of Jesus' death and so cause him, and ourselves, to ascend. The parousia, then, must be sought in Zeitgeist.

Through this giant among modern theologians the subjectivist approach to the ascension thus evolved into a strictly activist answer to the Where? question. The absence of Jesus, though final and absolute so far as his individual person was concerned—far from being acknowledged as a profound difficulty—was made over by Hegel into an unrivaled affirmation of the future, worked out in pneumatological terms. That pneumatology no longer supported the church as such, however, nor could it. Ultimately it supported (Germanic) society and the state to a degree that even the Constantinians might have questioned. Let us explain.

Hegel spoke of the church as a society formed by the friends of Jesus after his death for the purpose of participating in his life as Spirit. By this he meant nothing more trivial than did Schleiermacher. The church is the kingdom of God, inasmuch as it is itself Spirit, the Spirit of Christ which is being realized as the church. Yet Hegel had something further to say, which he set out under the banner of Lutheran insight into the exception of all that results from the element of externality" (1956:415).

112 When Augustine's notion of Christ's daily ascent for us is taken up without its "once only" counterpart (see above), his ascent is seen to depend upon ours, not ours on his. In a related and more fundamental role reversal, man now becomes the means by which God comes to know himself—opening up the whole tradition to Feuerbach's critique.

113 If in Schleiermacher, as Barth (1982:35) notes, "progress" stands out as a major theological motif, in Hegel theology is a theory of progress, or at least of development (cf. Passmore 235ff.). Here the gradualism of Origen, which deems the whole course of history to be making its slow turn around the cross, is no longer compromised by the vertical orientation of the ancients. The end result, of course, is the same; see Gunton 1993:87f. (commenting on Hegel 1949:800).

114 1956:328ff.
eucharist. The medieval church, he argued, had generated a peculiar ecclesiastical version of the kingdom by "isolating the sensuous phase" of salvation in Christ from the spiritual, confusing the holy with the external, the local, the particular—above all by making the host, as a mere Thing, into an object of adoration—and in this way gradually carving up the kingdom into sacred and secular. From that error the Lutheran Reformation effected a liberation, abrogating externality by making "faith and spiritual enjoyment" the essential elements in Christian worship. A principle of inwardness began to break down false dichotomies in society, freeing man from the church's artificial constraints and releasing the Spirit in all areas of human life. On the wreck of ecclesiastical unity the foundations of a greater worldly unity were laid, then, in which man qua man is called to mediate in his own person between God and nature, that God might be all in all.

The echo not only of Origen but of Maximus can be heard here, sounding through a dialectic that (just because it is construed temporally rather than spatially) recognizes its profound consequences for ecclesiology: The church as we know it must be buried along with the earthly Jesus if it is to be "taken up" into the glory of the new age of the Man of the Spirit. According to Hegel the task of the church in its own special history

115 We quite agree that here "the whole question is concentrated" (1956:415).

116 I.e., with the latter being dependent on the mediation of divine reality through the former. Hegel (377ff.) claims that "Christ himself was set aside" by a false—mariological—-notion of mediation, and especially by equating the presence of Christ with the host, which is under priestly control, rather than with that "mental vision and Spirit" which belongs to all the faithful. Not that he wished to dispute the principle of mediation itself, which for him too is the very essence of Christianity; but that principle is to be understood anthropologically not ecclesiastically.

117 See esp. 376ff., 412ff.; cf. 332ff.

118 See chap. 4 above on Maximus; cf. Hegel 318ff., a key section that is full of Maximian language and concepts, though the influence may be indirect: What liturgical or ecclesiastical man could not finally unite (heaven and earth, etc.) the man of science will. Having learned from the church something about his task of conquering nature with Spirit
was to discover that spirituality is "the common property of every man," and so to disclose the fact that in truth the church is, or can be, the world, and the world the church. The church in its traditional form has served well the dialectic of history's march to freedom, but only by first resisting that march in a falsely static (i.e., spatialized) interpretation of its birthright. Like Jesus, then, it must learn to deny itself for the sake of Spirit. It becomes divine, and a conduit of divinity, only in its self-abnegation.119

With this twist the ancient "kosmos of the cosmos" doctrine matured into a theology of convergence par excellence. Where the church once thought to stand in for the absent Jesus, Kant had put forward his ethical commonwealth to stand in for the church; thereafter various efforts were made to achieve a synthesis between church and society that might be acceptable within the Enlightenment framework. After Hegel, however, such a synthesis could only mean an attempt to absorb the former into a religious version of the latter—witness especially the German Christian movement and the great Kirchenkampf it precipitated—leading to a new demonization of the state. But the political dimension is one we cannot pursue further here.120

and having in turn conquered the church itself, this man stands—corporately and individually, for now each man will indeed be a church—at the dawn of a glorious new day, none other than "the day of Universality" (411).

119 Hegel points to the crusades as an early turning point, the beginning of the end of ecclesiastical resistance; see 389ff., 412ff. Let it be said that we can only agree with Hegel that his radical Lutheranism—for all its jarring features—actually stands in the greatest possible continuity with the western tradition, particularly in its habit of adapting Origen, Denys and Maximus to its horizontal interests. The end result is an Irenaean (eucharistic) concept of the church without his eschatology.

120 Idolatry of the One will always take a Marcionite direction inimical to the very being of the church. As "all that is special retreats into the background" the ecclesiological principle transmutes into a socio-political one, while retaining its religious force: "The process displayed in History is only the manifestation of Religion as Human Reason—the production of the religious principle which dwells in the heart of man, under the form of Secular Freedom. Thus the discord between the inner life of the heart and the actual world is removed" (334f.).
With Hegel we stand in close proximity to the end of a long and troubled tradition, in ecclesiology as in the doctrine of the ascension. His criticism of the medieval church's inflated Marian ego we can affirm; his own confident resolution of the tension between church and world points, unfortunately, towards an even more devastating version of the same. Certainly there is something to be said for his dialectical analysis of history, for the worst elements of that inflated ego have indeed been incorporated into the ego of modern man! Hegel not only had a hand in this but (if we may be permitted an ad hominem comment) himself affords a rather good illustration: In offering us what is commonly called "absolute idealism" as the successor to ecclesiastical absolutism, he gives every appearance of holding forth something not unlike the theories of Joachim with the personal presumption of Innocent or Boniface. That Hegelian immanentism is no longer Marian but Aryan does not change its character for the better. That the spiritual process leading to the harmony of all things has seized upon modern Germanic culture (not to mention Hegel in particular) as a more refined instrument than the old churchly hierarchy is, moreover, a thesis which has proved neither comforting nor convincing.121

The optimism represented by Hegel sustained heavy damage in the two great wars. Even before the dramatic failures of our century there were unbelievers, however, among which the most outstanding was Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche recognized the end of a tradition when he saw it. Indeed, he wondered why others could not. The reconstruction of Christian theology in support of contemporary notions of cultural advance he took to be a sign, not of that religion's regenerative power, but of the stubborn failure of

121 We understated ourselves. Modern Germanic culture (by which is meant something much more than what is particular to Germany) has produced spectacles more horrible than anything seen in the "terrible night of the Middle Ages"! Are these sights unconnected to Hegel's own teaching? What was the holocaust but a forced "sublation" of the Jews in view of their unsubsumability—a point belaboured by Fr Smith in Walker Percy's The Thanatos Syndrome (130ff.)—i.e., in view of their stubborn particularity which, like that of Jesus himself, refuses to retreat into the background?
imagination that plagued a whole civilization (pre- and post-Christian). Christianity became his *bête noire*, since to make a god out of the self-sacrificing Jesus, however it was done, was to testify to the worst sort of decadence: the apotheosis of one's own impotence.

If Hegel had more or less completed the marginalization of the living Jesus, Nietzsche sought to marginalize Jesus in his death as well, so as to allow a moribund tradition to die properly. To put it more strongly, we might say that he made a concerted effort to kill even the dead Christ, so that he might not be divinized either. With Nietzsche there is at last a radical sense of absence—"Do we not feel the breath of empty space?"—the burden of which cannot be, *must* not be, alleviated prematurely. The answer to "Where?" is simply "Nowhere," for Jesus and God alike.

Return of the Cosmic Christ

One of the miracles of our time is that Hegel lives on in spite of everything; among artists and the literary community, Nietzsche perhaps, but elsewhere Hegel, if in a variety of disguises. The catastrophes of the twentieth century, and the impending tragedies of the twenty-first, have conspired to suppress most utopian dreams, but the idea of progress (nurtured by Darwinism and latterly by tremendous technological advance)

---

122 See above all his last and most scathing work, *The Anti-Christ*, which is what he regarded Christianity as such to be—in all its forms and permutations, including the philosophy associated with Kant and liberal Protestantism generally. It may be asked, however, whether Nietzsche's own alternative to Christianity would be possible without Hegel's or, for that matter, Kant's.

123 Did he not thus intuit the real point of christology better than Schleiermacher or Hegel, who failed to see just how far God himself is implicated in the fate of Jesus of Nazareth? For Hegel God lives by the death of Jesus: for Nietzsche 'God' dies with Jesus, if we would only let Jesus be quite simply dead—and nothing more. "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?" (*Gay Science* 125)
remains as "the working faith of our civilization," today's necessary myth.\(^{124}\) Grand metaphysical inventions such as Hegel's which once overlaid that notion have to some extent been stripped away, yet they have not disappeared altogether. Ironically, the church itself has provided one haven for them, as we must now observe.

The crisis of absence to which Nietzsche pointed may be held at bay by a tattered optimism or by the neo-Epicureanism of our technological society; the threat of irrelevance faces the church all the same and must be addressed. One way of doing that is to generate a specifically theological version of the myth that supports modern society, propping up the "cult of progress" by attempting to disclose its inner spiritual force and direction. Another, as we shall see, is to challenge that myth quite directly, as Nietzsche himself did.\(^ {125}\) Both ways necessitate giving a serious answer to the Where? question, and hence a theology of the ascension. One of these constitutes a return to Origen via Hegel, the other a recovery of Irenaeus. But here is a point of considerable confusion which must be cleared up if the alternatives are to stand out plainly.

At the New Delhi congress of the World Council of Churches in 1961, the Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler delivered an influential address entitled "Called to Unity."\(^ {126}\) His concern was the growing ecological crisis, a point of considerable stress for social and evolutionary optimism. The target of his criticism was a theology of redemption dislodged from "the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation"—in short, that spiritual inwardness which has rightly been said to signal a massive loss of nerve among

\(^{124}\) See C. Lasch 1991:40ff. (the quoted phrase is Christopher Dawson's), who offers a wide-ranging look at the debate surrounding the notion of progress and its origins. Cf. Passmore, whose final chapters draw out something of the tension between progress and perfectibilism as governing beliefs.

\(^{125}\) Nietzsche, unfortunately, reverted to a classical time-denying doctrine of eternal recurrence.

\(^{126}\) Published in the *Ecumenical Review* 14:2 (Jan 1962) 177–87.
western Christians in the face of post-Copernican realities. Sittler argued that it was high time to do for nature what had already been done first for the soul and more recently for history, namely, to claim it for God's Christ. His plea was for "a daring, penetrating, life-affirming christology of nature" that would root out the vestiges of gnostic dualism (in the form of rationalism or pietism) which now threaten to bring about the damnation of nature. Against every effort to restrict grace to the interior life should be set "the imperial vision of Christ as coherent in ta panta." And that, he said, would mean making Irenaeus our mentor rather than the more popular Augustine.

In the wake of the congress references to an Irenaean type of theology—much to be preferred to the usual western fare because of that early bishop's defense of the goodness of the physical creation and his theories about the advance (evolution?) of man—have become commonplace. Much more frequent as well are references to the cosmic Christ, under which banner the first of the modern ascension theologies is to be found. Among the many noteworthy features of Sittler's famous address, however, is its strange silence about Jesus of Nazareth. At the outset, to be sure, he is once referred to as "this concrete Man who is God with us and God for us." After that we hear mostly about the Christ who coinheres with nature, about the "Christic energy and substance" which permeates creation; indeed "all is Christic," to re-employ the author's own phrase. What Sittler holds out as the beginning of an answer to the ecological crisis, in other words, does not appear to be based on the Jesus-centred vision of Irenaeus at all, but on

---

127 Cf. O. Dilschneider, Gefesselte Kirche, Not und Verheissung (1953; referred to by Lyons, p. 58). Certainly the church can never afford to give up a comprehensive view of reality, even if politics and much of academics has for the moment decided to do without it.

128 P. 179 (see 181ff.). His key biblical text, of course, was Col 1:15–20, though behind the address lay a more contemporary document, viz., Allan Galloway's The Cosmic Christ. We cannot enter here on a discussion of the exegetical liberties taken in saying that Christ "coheres" in all things—more or less the reverse of the text itself.
the cosmic Christ of Origen cloaked in an Irenaean affirmation of the material world.\footnote{Moltmann (1990:276ff.) offers a more positive reading of Sittler over against Lutheran criticism, but do we not find here a Lutheran concept of Christ's glorification and heavenly session mediating between Origen and his modern heirs, particularly Hegel? It could not have served Sittler's agenda to appeal directly to Origen, whose dualism is even more pronounced than Augustine's. But Irenaeus has been drawn into an orbit not his own. We do not mean to say that Irenaeus has no great significance for a theological ecology; what that is, however, we must show elsewhere.}

It is this very synthesis which has proved useful not only in searching for an ecological theology (sic) but in maintaining a Christian version of the myth of progress. Unfortunately, it obscures the fact that with Origen and Irenaeus we are really dealing with two irreconcilable answers to the Where? question, or if you please, with highly dissimilar conceptions of the cosmic Christ. These lead—whether in modern dress or ancient—to quite different views of the church, particularly in its relation to society. For the sake of integrity in both theory and praxis it is therefore essential that they be distinguished. The Origenist character of the option represented by Sittler will become plain as we proceed to examine it.\footnote{In what follows we have again been aided by the extensive research of J. A. Lyons, though his analysis of cosmic christology in the modern era is not ours. In particular, we are not sure how far it "poses a new question for the history of christology" (p. 11); we would say rather that it poses an old question in a new way.}

The roots of that option (and of the ambiguity observed in Sittler's speech) can be traced back to Denmark, in the period of Hegel's ascendency. There Professor, later Bishop, Hans Martensen sought to reinterpret the Lutheran tradition in a manner expressing the consonance of reason with an orthodox faith. We cannot follow out the path of his theology, which was increasingly drawn towards theosophical speculation,\footnote{Like Hegel he was attracted to the German mystical tradition, writing works on Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme.} but his attempt to show the "cosmical significance" of Christ (proof of which he found in Paul and Irenaeus) is noteworthy. Martensen belonged to something of a Scotist
revival, in which Christ was recognized not merely as redeemer but as the centre and
crown of creation. The cosmological appeal of Scotism in the post–Copernican
situation will be obvious. In view of our earlier criticism—not of Scotism's proper
worldliness but of its immanentist tendency in christology—we hasten to add that
Martensen also defended the ongoing particularity (haecceitas) of Christ against runaway
ubiquitarianism. He did not recover the Irenaean frame of reference, however, so as
to escape that danger cleanly. Remaining within the Maximus–Scotist axis, on which
Lutheran kenoticism and Hegelianism also turn, he emphasized what he called the "double
life" of the mediator: that is, his world-creating "logos-energy" in which he goes forth
from God, and his world-perfecting "Christ-energy" in which he returns to God. In
short, descending and ascending were still attached to the divine and the creaturely
respectively, only the vertical orientation had of course been exchanged for a horizontal
one.

This helps us to understand Martensen's specific contribution to cosmic christology,
which took the form of an eschatological modification partly anticipated already in St
Bonaventure. The Franciscan view of history and that which had been evolving since
Lessing (both of which have roots in Joachim of Fiore) converged to support the notion
of a progressive advent, to which Professor Martensen gave clear expression. If Jesus

132 See Christian Dogmatics (1849) §129ff.; a number of Martensen's insights were
shared, e.g., by his influential friend, I. A. Dorner.

133 CD §177 warns against "that error, which has so often appeared among Mystics and
Theosophists, which loses sight of a personal Christ," and which among Lutherans too has
led in the direction of a "pantheistic Christ of nature." For "even a glorified individuality,
a spiritual body, cannot be conceived of without limitations." At the same time, the
Reformed are criticized for acknowledging "only the moral, religious, and spiritual
influences of a Christ who has gone up to heaven," making the rest of creation "wholly
impenetrable by Christ" (§178).

134 See §134, §180. The world-perfecting movement was still seen as the spiritualization
of matter, only there was greater emphasis on matter's inherent goodness.
Christ was "the beginner of the world's perfection," his resurrection and ascension marked the onset of a new economy in which the world is replenished "with the energies of the future," so as to advance with him towards God.\textsuperscript{135} Ascension and parousia are not to be sharply distinguished, then.\textsuperscript{136} They are parallel movements, temporally convergent, since the Spirit operates in history to convert absence into presence. Otherwise put:

The presence of Christ in the universe must be looked upon, not so much as actual being, but rather as an essential becoming;--it must be treated as a progressive advent, a continual coming, in virtue of which, by the growing development of his fulness, he makes himself the centre of the whole creation; and the creation itself is thus being prepared and created anew as a living, organic, and growing temple of Christ.\textsuperscript{137}

The shift from being to becoming in the framing of an answer to the Where? question, joined to an orthodox confession, presaged momentous changes in theology. Fuelled by Darwinism, the idea of the risen Christ who by virtue of his ascension gradually penetrates and perfects every sphere of creaturely existence would quickly evolve into a kind of cosmic "maximalism" rivaling the Marian variety of old; indeed, into

\textsuperscript{135} See §§131, 170ff. For Bonaventure too Christ was the centre of history and the beginning of the perfecting of creation in history. This amounts to a synthesis of Origen and Joachim: "As both Ratzinger and Fischer have argued persuasively, the theology of ascent is identical [here] with the theology of history. The collective history of humanity moves to a future point at which the possibility of a supra-intellectual, affective-mystical contact with God will be granted to all" (Z. Hayes 1981:208f., emphasis ours).

\textsuperscript{136} "When we say that he sits at the right hand of the Father, that he intercedes for us with the Father, that he comes again into the world, we express only different aspects of his exaltation," says Martensen (§175). Nevertheless, for him the ascension was a real departure to a sphere "above the limits of time and space," from whence "for the first time" (?) Christ was able "perfectly to unfold and display his organic relations to the children of men" (§173).

\textsuperscript{137} The context of this passage is Martensen's solution to the Lutheran-Reformed debate over ubiquity, which consists in distinguishing the kingly power of Christ in his heavenly session from "direct omnipotence" of the sort that belongs to the Creator, and finding it instead to be "a world-perfecting power, penetrating in progressive development all ranges of creation in nature and history" (§179). His proposal is not without insight, even if an appeal to time cannot in fact resolve the problem.
a widespread confusion between Christ and Cosmos. The ascension and the parousia would be conflated into a single process in such a way that the notion of two distinct histories (Christ's and ours) could be decisively set aside. What would be left would be a concern only with the ongoing sacralization of the world.

The "reconsecration of the whole universe" by Christ was precisely what J. R. Illingworth focused on in the historic volume, *Lux Mundi*, in his contribution entitled "The Incarnation and Development." By then evolution was in the air, as he said, especially in England. With a backwards glance at the Copernican revolution, Illingworth claimed that history had repeated itself by showing the supposed opposition of science and faith to be no such thing. Indeed, science had this time brought about a real theological advance by recalling our attention from the narrow confines of the doctrine of the atonement to faith in the incarnation as the consummation of creation, a right-minded doctrine which now appeared in a much clearer light. The natural expression of the life-giving Logos, he argued, is "the perpetual development which we are learning to trace throughout the universe around us." What is more, the actual incarnation of that Logos "introduced a new species into the world—a Divine man transcending past humanity, as humanity transcended the rest of the animal creation, and communicating His vital energy

---

138 Already in Martensen we find the two histories so closely identified that we can say "even of him who has gone up heavenward that he grows and advances, not indeed in wisdom, but 'in favour with God and man'" (§176). It should be noted, though, that for Martensen a progressive advent cannot substitute for a final advent; see §§278ff.

139 See pp. 183, 211. *Lux Mundi* was published in 1889 under the editorship of Charles Gore, with intent "to put the Catholic faith into its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems." Once again Hegel stood in the background, providing the philosophical underpinnings.

140 P. 196. This idea is intimately connected with his insistence on "the importance of restoring to its due place in theology the doctrine of the Divine immanence in nature" (192), a subject to which he later devoted a volume of his own.
by a spiritual process to subsequent generations of men."141 With Christ creation has
turned a corner. With the resurrection and ascension (here he too appealed to Irenaeus)
new vistas have opened up before it. From now on, he concluded, "we can conceive of
no phase of progress that does not have the Incarnation for its guiding star."142

*Lux Mundi*, like Henry Drummond's *The Ascent of Man*, may well represent "a
phase of easy optimism" native to the atmosphere of Victorian England.143 Certainly the
lone apocalyptic note weakly sounded in its final essay is drowned out by a sustained
chord of triumphalist expectations.144 Yet it also represents a very resilient theological
movement, for the task of adapting Christian beliefs to an emerging cosmology presents
itself as an urgent and exciting one. That, of course, is what Illingworth's programmatic
essay was attempting to do. More than that, it sought a secure place for those adapting
beliefs—for what the book's subtitle called the Religion of the Incarnation—over against
the relativism implied by the concept of perpetual development.145 To that end the Logos
was identified as the secret source of evolution; his incarnation was treated as an infusion
of power capable of bringing the evolutionary process to its consummation. This idea

---

141 P. 207. The theme is taken up elsewhere. In *Divine Immanence* the incarnation is
seen "not merely as an event in the history of man, but ... in the history of matter;" it
marks "the appearance of a new order of being in the world" (see 114ff.; quoted Lyons
27).

142 213f.; cf. 184.

143 Hick 1968:245

144 As Troeltsch remarked, eschatology was now "closed for repairs" (Wainwright
1989:343). In the main, it was being refashioned along Joachimite lines, as R. L. Ottley's
concluding essay on Christian Ethics well demonstrates.

145 Illingworth's thesis about a new species of man was aimed explicitly at that target.
Heron (Wainwright 1989:114) observes that "his apologia is developed on the horizon of
a horizontal immanenism" in which the triumph of Christianity is seen as a natural
outcome of the incarnation.
followed on naturally from Martensen's notion of a progressive advent. It would gain much ground in the next half-century.

After the war, L. S. Thornton took up Illingworth's agenda with undiminished enthusiasm, using the tools provided by process philosophy to expound the incarnation as the beginning of a divinely-achieved evolutionary climax. More influential, perhaps, was William Temple, who also interpreted the incarnation in these neo-Scotist terms, and saw in the ascension the inauguration of a new age of consummation. Temple's tone was by no means triumphalist, however. Jesus-history and universal history he considered to be mutually expository: The cross (conspicuously absent in Illingworth's essay) has cosmic as well as theological ramifications. Christian hope for the world, for a new order of being, lies ultimately in resurrection. History as we know it cannot produce the kingdom in its fullness; indeed, it might even lead to the passing away of our species and our planet. History must find its fulfillment in eternity. Temple nonetheless regarded the present age as an age of consummation, a fact on which he insisted to the point of equating the events from Calvary to Pentecost with the parousia. The church ought not to look for a so-called second coming, but rather get on with its task of realizing the two unities—that is, the outer harmony of mankind and the inner harmony of specific human beings—which the incarnation has made possible. It should recognize in itself the

146 "With the aid of A. N. Whitehead's process philosophy, Thornton described the universe as an ascending cosmic series which requires for its completion God's intervention through the Incarnation" (Lyons 28).

147 See 1962:viiiff., 75ff., 187ff., 253ff., 271ff.; 1960:427ff. Temple, who attempted to hold together creation and redemption, called for a "Christo-centric metaphysics" setting out "the Christian idea of God, life and the world" in connection with Jesus-history. It should be noted that the cross-event, according to Temple (1962:262) was not determined exclusively by human sin, but was aimed also at "the sin of the world;" it appears to be a necessary form of God's self-expression as creative love.

148 See 1962:154ff.; cf. 1912:35ff. (A. E. Baker 1946:148ff.). The incarnation is "the natural inauguration of the final stage of evolution," impelling human nature towards its goal, i.e., towards this inner and outer unity (1962:139, 158). It was that conviction which
earthly body of the ascended Lord; and not only in itself, but in the world, it should recognize the work of the Spirit drawing all things to God in Christ. 149

Temple's creative blend of doctrines old and new left rather a lot of fuzzy edges; he was, after all, an Anglican archbishop as well as a philosopher. We cannot afford him the space he deserves, but we can at least observe how his--essentially Lutheran--view of the ascension underwrites the christological immanentalism to which he subscribed:

The ascension of Christ is his liberation from all restrictions of time and space. It does not represent his removal from the earth, but his constant presence everywhere on earth. 150

With Mary Magdalene, then, we must learn not to cling to him in the limitations of the body, but look for him among us in another, post-incarnate form:

So He taught her the meaning of that last Appearance, the final withdrawal of His physical presence, which we call the Ascension. It was separation in one sense, for it closed the period of the first form of intercourse. But in a profounder sense it was the inauguration of a fuller union. In the days of His earthly ministry only those could speak with Him who came where He was. If He was in Galilee, men could not find Him in Jerusalem; if He was in Jerusalem, men could not find Him in Galilee. But His ascension means that He is perfectly united with God; we are with Him wherever we are present to God; and that is everywhere and always. Because He is "in Heaven," He is everywhere on earth; because He is ascended, He is here now. Our devotion is not to hold us by the empty tomb; it must lift up our hearts to heaven so that we too "in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell"; it must also send us forth into the world to do His will; and these are not two things but one. 151

energized Temple's ecumenical efforts.

149 1962:229ff.; cf. 169f.: "Democracy and Evolution have together made the thought of the Indwelling Spirit, urging us onward and upward, so natural that in fact many people accept it in a manner much too facile."

150 Quoted in The Tablet (30 May 1992). For Temple (1962:248) the glorified or ascended body is "so transmuted as to be no longer a physico-chemical entity at all." His understanding of the resurrection and ascension bears exploration in connection with his "conception of the relation of the eternal to history, of spirit to matter, as sacramental" (1960:xxx).

151 1947:382, emphasis ours. No one, says Temple (1962:248 n.1), objecting to the ancient preoccupation with space, "now thinks of Heaven as a place 'elsewhere,' and exclusive of 'here.' Perhaps not, but Temple's own point of view is bound up with a temporalizing theology of immanence--i.e., an immanence of the second and third
The physical absence of Christ is thus made over into a spiritual presence, a presence which renders the whole world a sacramental affair if only we will see it as such. The bold answer to "Where?" is again "Everywhere," though there is now (in keeping with the horizontal shift we have been tracing and the advent of process theology) a greater stress on the challenge to realize that presence, to actualize it in history so far as may be possible.

In Temple, one of the great ecumenical leaders of our time, the soteriological interests of East and West, Roman and Protestant, meet and merge in modern form. But the "episodic" nature of the incarnation, as he put it, in the very facility with which it resolves the Where? question, raises serious doubts as to who or what the Christ who inhabits our unfolding cosmos really is. A quite radical answer, though hardly a new one, had already begun to appear in the writings of another influential churchman, W. R. Inge, who contributed a great deal to the twentieth century rehabilitation of Origen and of Christian neoplatonism. Dean Inge attempted to bring christology into touch with science's rediscovery of the connectedness of all things. Calling for a "cosmocentric view of reality," he presented Christ as a cosmic principle, and the church as an extension of persons of the Trinity—which we can only regard as Origenist in effect (see 274ff.).

This spiritual presence is not divine only: "Where Christ is at all, there (I hold) He is altogether" (1962:241 n.1).

"The Incarnation is an episode in the Life or Being of God the Son; but it is not a mere episode, it is a revealing episode. There we see what He who is God's wisdom always is...." Temple (1962:144) is here disputing with kenoticism, which renders not only the incarnate mode but its "very substance" episodic. Temple's separation of mode and substance, however, which is tied up with his symbolic or "sacramental" view of reality, is itself a form of kenoticism. If the incarnation is episodic, Jesus is not the substance, but only the instrument, of revelation.

Inge, we note, was also somewhat cautious on the subject of progress: "Personally, I hope for it, as a matter of reasonable faith.... But the progress of humanity, if there is any, is always slow and precarious; and it cannot go on forever" (1924:84f.; written after the death of his young daughter).
the incarnation; he even toyed with the notion of panpsychism. Various efforts to find a more precise answer would be made, but the direction taken by Illingworth, Inge, Thornton and Temple indicates a common tendency on the part of some British theologians to see in Christ, beyond his divinity and humanity, "a further aspect, which is cosmic"—a third nature in fact. That tendency would find its clearest, most potent expression in the French scientist and theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to whom we must shortly turn.

One British theologian who should not be overlooked, however, is Allan Galloway, whose book *The Cosmic Christ* directly influenced Sittler. Galloway highlighted the changed features of the cosmic Christ in his modern advent by portraying him as the enemy of dualism, even the attenuated dualism of Origen and Augustine. According to Galloway "we must stand by Irenaeus" in affirming christologically the latent value of the natural order. Now the pursuit of the cosmic Christ has indeed an Irenaean basis insofar as that is its aim. Unfortunately, its proponents are inclined to pass over the eucharistic or eschatological matrix of the Irenaean affirmation. Instead, an attempt is

---

155 A notion which he rightly believed would become more popular; see Lyons 35f. Lyons also notes Evelyn Underhill's observation in her contemporary work on mysticism that for the mystic the incarnation is not only the life of Jesus "but also a perpetual Cosmic and personal process," of which the "essential constituents" are dramatized by Jesus (1911:141; cf. Inge's *Personal Idealism and Mysticism* 1907). This "not only ... but also" radically alters the notion of incarnation, of course.

156 Lyons 36. Lyons himself approved of this alteration in the answer to the Who? question—an alteration which is indeed unavoidable if one accepts the neo-Origenist response to the Where? question.


158 "In her efforts to interpret the significance of the Christ in relation to the world, [the church] has been forced to see in Him and His work either the simple condemnation of the whole natural order, or else the revelation and fulfilment of a meaning already latent in the natural order, however partial and obscured it may have been" (p. 238). This is an oversimplification which actually ignores Irenaeus's analysis; it sets up a false dilemma between objective and subjective redemption which he then proceeds—or rather fails—to
made to extend the notion of incarnation beyond the historical Jesus,\textsuperscript{159} such that the whole creation can be said even now to share in the integrity he brought to it; that extension is what generates talk of a third or cosmic nature in Christ.\textsuperscript{160} Galloway's work is not altogether typical in this respect, but it does introduce what is perhaps the chief function of the cosmic Christ today.

His rather involved argument, which turns around the problem of the subject–object relationship, merits a separate discussion; we must take the risk of abstracting the pertinent results. These can be put quite simply, for the pattern is a familiar one: In the first place, we are invited to let go of Jesus in his bodily particularity (just as he let go of himself on the cross) while affirming the profoundly personal, and personalizing, nature of our encounter with him. Second, in this encounter we are brought into a new relationship to the rest of reality, such that God is actually encountered in all things.\textsuperscript{161} Thirdly, then, the cosmos itself becomes sacramental in the fullest possible sense; the church's sacraments turn out to be but illustrations of a much wider truth, as Hegel argued. Finally, Galloway invokes the vision of a universalist ecclesiology, in a quite literal sense. "The ultimate destiny of the church is to become the whole cosmos, so that

\textsuperscript{159} See, e.g., H. W. Clark 1943:150ff.

\textsuperscript{160} The project thus comes full circle to Strauss, whose theory that the incarnation includes the whole of humanity C. F. Göschen, R. Rothe and Martensen had tried to correct by appealing to Hegel's concept of the "central individual" in defense of Jesus' uniqueness (Lyons 13f.); only here the circle is widened to include all of nature within the parameters of the incarnation. (That promising Hegelian concept, since it was made to depend not on pneumatology but on various ubiquitarian ideas for its exposition, contributed to this development.)

\textsuperscript{161} "When we have encountered Him as 'Thou' nothing is added to His Meaning by our being able to grasp him as an 'It' within experience. / But once we have been brought face to face with the complete ascendancy of meaning over existence, of 'Thou' over 'It', nothing can ever be meaningless for us again in the ultimate sense... That is to say, once we have encountered God in Christ we must encounter God in all things" (p. 250).
there shall be no more church," he concludes. "So Christ shall be truly 'the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.'"162

The cosmic Christ Galloway helped to popularize has as his task the completion of creation by the personalizing (divinizing) of nature, beginning with man. That is the form of his redemption, and that is what marks him as distinctly modern. The whole project owes much to an evolutionary understanding of human origins, not to mention the growing epistemological and ecological crises of our post-Kantian era. Whatever else it is, however, on close inspection it proves to be yet another attempt to resolve the problem of the one and the many carried out at the expense of the human Jesus, and so (in principle) at the expense of the rest of nature as well. To his universal or cosmic identity Jesus' space-time particularity apparently adds nothing; the redemptive power of his personality is now independent of his incarnate frame. Thus we read also in Paul Tillich, for example: "The finality of his separation from historical existence, indicated in the Ascension, is identical with his spiritual presence as the power of the New Being but with the concreteness of his personal countenance." This sleight of hand, in which absolute bodily absence becomes "concrete" personal presence, betrays the fact that dualism has by no means been overcome; on the contrary, it has been established.163 As we are about

162 P. 259; cf. 256: "When the sacramental principle is thus freed from its distortion in Roman Catholicism, we see that we cannot place any limit upon it. For when we limit it, we bind it to a particular existent and in doing this we contradict the 'mystery' which is Christ—namely the complete ascendency of Ultimate Meaning in Him over His particular existence." Not only in every person, then, but "in every encounter with the material world we meet the same claim upon our ultimate concern in terms of the sacramental principle."

163 1957:162. In Tillich, above all, the symbolic theology of Origen which moves through and away from the historical Jesus finds its most thorough expression. True to that tradition he rejects the notion of bodily ascension, but as a modern immanentist he produces an inverted mysticism of "descent" rather than "ascent," accompanied by an inverted kenoticism in which the human Jesus empties himself into the divine Christ-principle.
to see in Teilhard, the supposed evolution of nature towards the personal comes out in just
about the same place that Origen's scheme came out.\footnote{Galloway himself does not escape the impersonalism he rightly criticizes in Hegel. His is still a metaphysics of the cross (and ascension) without the resurrection, retaining a bias against the concrete particular that cannot be hidden when the Where? question is posed.}

"If Teilhard had not existed," wrote John Passmore in \textit{The Perfectibility of Man}, "it would almost have been necessary to invent him, in order to weave together our diverse themes."\footnote{P. 258} We might have said something similar here. It is not just that we find in de Chardin a more complete (if highly adventurous) sketch of the answer to the Where? and the Who? questions that we have begun to trace. We also find a powerful synthesis of speculative interests ancient and modern, formulated as a theology of the ascension which aims to reconcile "faith in God and faith in the World," "the cult of progress and the passion for the glory of God,"\footnote{Quoted by D. G. Jones (1969:13) from N. M. Wildiers.} what Teilhard called \textit{l'En-Haut et l'En-Avant}.\footnote{Lyons 148}

The cosmic Christ is the instrument of that reconciliation and as such one of his dearest subjects.

Already in 1916 the young Jesuit priest spoke in his journal of "surrender to the cosmic Christ" as the option that would secure what is best both in classical spirituality and a more world-affirming kind.\footnote{Lyons 37. We must pass over the direct influences on Teilhard's cosmic christology, which Lyons and others have already explored. For a concise statement of his programme see "The Heart of the Problem" (1949), published in \textit{The Future of Man} (1964:260ff.), a collection of key essays, chronologically arranged.} Behind this positive concern, however, lay an anxiety that never left him, an anxiety with roots in the Copernican era, renewed in our
own century by discovery of the expanding universe and the fact that the cosmos itself has a history. A loss of bearings in the vastness of the universe; a sense of the futility of human endeavour in a world subject to the law of entropy; the "malady of space–time" which manifests itself as a "fundamental anguish of being," a "sickness of the dead end," a feeling, strangely enough, of confinement—all this deeply impressed itself on Teilhard. So too did the spreading fear of submersion in the whirlpool of modern civilization, of the crushing of one's individual life under the steadily increasing weight of man's world-building project.

As the years go by, Lord, I come to see more and more clearly, in myself and in those around me, that the great secret preoccupation of modern man is much less to battle for possession of the world than to find a means of escaping from it. The anguish of feeling that one is not merely spatially but ontologically imprisoned in the cosmic bubble; the anxious search for an issue to, or more exactly a focal point for, the evolutionary process; these are the price we must pay for the growth of planetary consciousness; these are the dimly-recognized burdens which weigh down the souls of christian and gentile alike in the world of today.

He made it his aim to address this anxiety, to restore confidence in progress, and so to make the Christian faith relevant once again.

To that end Teilhard undertook a "re-cosmologization of our religion" on a scale rarely encountered, commandeering evolution as the vehicle not only of creation but of salvation. The "way out," he was convinced, could only be the way forwards, through

---


169 "There can be no doubt that the burden of continuing the World weighs more and more heavily on the shoulders of Mankind" (1964:42; cf. 262f.).

170 1965:138f.; cf. Henri de Lubac 1967:143ff. This "great secret preoccupation" is by no means peculiarly modern, of course, even if it has been intensified by first embracing, then doubting, the idea of progress. Nor are scientific discoveries its chief source.

171 See "A Note on Progress" (1920) 1964:11ff.

172 1964:44
the sea of seeming futility, which under the staff of his capable imagination parted to reveal something called Omega—that final issue our hearts desire, a point of complete cosmic convergence that quells all fear of perpetual, meaningless becoming.\textsuperscript{173} This combination of evolution and eschatology provided the nucleus of Teilhard's response to the challenge of post-Copernican science and to the spiritual crisis of the modern world.\textsuperscript{174} Around it the themes on which we have already touched find something like their proper orbit. Its christological dimensions, and what answer it affords the Where? question, we will discover by expanding just a little.

For Teilhard evolution is not an impersonal process but one with which we ourselves have a great deal to do. As the "head" of creation, humanity stands today at the crossroads. Cosmological, religious, and social doubts are forcing us to face the question: "Is the Universe utterly pointless, or are we to accept that it has a meaning, a future, a purpose?"\textsuperscript{175} Shall we attempt to go forwards into that future or shall we turn back? \textbf{Can} we still go forwards? The answer he gives is that we can and we must—unless we wish to rebel against the most obvious evidence that the evolving universe is \textbf{not} a mindless affair, namely, ourselves! Our own existence as thinking, questioning beings is the clearest possible proof of a marvelous "noogenesis rising upstream against

\textsuperscript{173} "Essentially the Universe is narrowing to a centre, like the successive layers of a cone: it is \textit{convergent} in structure" (1964:46). It reaches its tip when it arrives at God and is united with him in what Teilhard calls the Pleroma.

\textsuperscript{174} "To our clearer vision the universe is no longer a State but a Process. The cosmos has become a Cosmogenesis. And it may be said without exaggeration that, directly or indirectly, all the intellectual crises through which civilisation has passed in the last four centuries arise out of the successive stages whereby a static \textit{Weltanschauung} has been and is being transformed ... into a \textit{Weltanschauung} of movement" (1964:261f.).

\textsuperscript{175} 1964:42 ("The Grand Option," written on the eve of WWII and published at its conclusion, is one of his most important essays); see also 67ff.
the flow of entropy," as he puts it.176 But how shall we go forwards, how shall we cooperate with evolution and direct it to its proper end? Not by seeking to withdraw from the material world that spawned us, as both Christian and pagan spirituality encourages us to do, nor yet by pursuing our own fulfilment or private aspirations in this world. The one course is premature, a kind of self-abortion in fact, since it is hardly conceivable that the Mind or Spirit that is emerging from the play of matter is already fully formed. Both are falsely individualistic. To move forwards can only mean to press on, whatever the cost, towards a truly cosmopolitan society. "We can progress only by uniting," says Teilhard, by concentration around a common centre; that, he argues, is "the law of life" and the very essence of noogenesis.177

A common centre is just what he sought to provide by promoting these ideas. The theory of noogenesis furthers the process of noogenesis by breaking down the disastrous barriers between devotion to God above or to worldly progress here below. These "rival mysticisms" must not be allowed to divide mankind any longer; the "or" must give way to an "and."178 Recognizing in evolution "a cosmic genesis of the Spirit" makes sense of

176 1970:318. Noogenesis--the universe in the process of "psychic concentration," of "acquiring a personality," of coming to life--offsets entropy. The two are "complementary expressions of the arrow of time," one moving backwards or downwards and the other forwards and upwards "towards zones of increasing improbability and personality" (1964:48f.; cf. 78f.).

177 1964:74. The individual mind can be fulfilled only through growth of the collective mind, since it is the nature of mind to con-centrate. There is a "continual heightening of consciousness in the Universe" through a tightening or contraction produced by increased organization. Having passed through its biological or cephalization phase, this organization is now a "technico-mental process which ... has been irresistibly causing Mankind to draw closer together and unite upon itself" (301).

178 See 1964:76ff., 268f. "The Higher Life, the Union, the long dreamed--of consummation that has hitherto been sought Above, in the direction of some kind of transcendency: should we not rather look for it Ahead, in the prolongation of the inherent forces of evolution? Above or ahead--or both?" That, he says, is "the vital question, and the fact that we have thus far left it unconfronted is the root cause of all our religious troubles" (1964:263).
that "and." It introduces a forwards into the upwards and an upwards into the forwards, linking advance towards God with social progress and furnishing social progress with a truly compelling motive.

Here indeed is the real significance of de Chardin. Between the verticalism (escapism) of classical theology and the faltering horizontalism of the Enlightenment he attempted to fashion a third alternative, an ascension theology for our time. For want of a better term we may call it diagonalism. In an article entitled "The Heart of the Problem" Teilhard himself offers the following diagram, in which OY represents "Christian Faith, aspiring Upward;" OX "Human Faith, driving Forward;" OR "Christian Faith, 'rectified',.., reconciling the two".

"Mankind," as he says elsewhere, "is to achieve a breakthrough straight ahead by forcing its way over the threshold of some higher level of consciousness." All who share this conviction, whether Christian or not, can "advance unequivocally side by side."

Teilhard's unifying diagonalism amounts to a synthesis between ascension in the flesh and ascension of the mind—only the flesh in question is not Jesus' but our own, and

179 "Faith in God and faith in the World: these two springs of energy, each the source of a magnificent spiritual impulse, must certainly be capable of effectively uniting in such a way as to produce a resulting upward movement" (1964:77).

180 1964:269. In pointing the way to human unity OR points also towards Omega, a vectorial sum representing the ascent of the universe, with man at its helm, into the absolute unity of God.

181 "The union sacrée, the Common Front of all those who believe that the World is still advancing: what is this but the active minority, the solid core around which the unanimity of tomorrow must harden?" (1964:80)
its ascent means precisely its increasing animation or assimilation by mind. The "ascent of the Universe towards consciousness," "the general `drift' of matter towards spirit," was his entire theme. The Greek character of the underlying cosmology is difficult to disguise, in spite of Teilhard's characteristically modern concern with the temporal axis. Noogenesis means the gradual "liberation of consciousness" from the more primitive or crudely material layers of cosmic reality, the triumph of the interior over the exterior. Time itself is defined "as precisely the rise of the Universe into high latitudes where complexity, concentration, centration, and consciousness grow and increase, simultaneously and correlative." What results is a conical outline of the universe, whose spatio-temporal dimensions finally reduce to a vanishing-point when the emergent consciousness, satiated on "the whole divinisable substance of matter," breaks away "to

---


183 The notion of layers is borrowed from paleontology, but there is no hiding the anthropomorphism. The newest or uppermost layer (the human) is essentially a layer of thought which surrounds the whole and determines its destiny: "Far from being swallowed up by Evolution, Man is now engaged in transforming our earlier idea of Evolution in terms of himself, and thereafter plotting its new outlines" (1964:87), viz., its "laborious communal ascent towards the summit of consciousness" (1965:106). In this ascent the crudely material is sloughed off and "redescends" (1964:93).

184 All matter has a "within" as well as a "without." The latter, it appears, is of dubious ontological status, since to be is to unite (Lyons 178; cf. 1970:322 n.1: "Following Greek thought—following all thought in fact—are not 'to be' and 'to be one' identical?") and to unite is precisely a process of interiorization: "In the perspectives of cosmic involution, not only does consciousness become co-extensive with the universe, but the universe rests in equilibrium and consistency, in the form of thought, on a supreme pole of interiorization" (1970:338).

185 1964:88. What this means is the transformation of material forms of existence into intellectual: "There is nothing contradictory in itself in the idea of human ecstasy sundered from material things. Indeed, as we shall see, this fits in very well with the final demands of a world of evolutionary structure. But with one proviso: that the world in question shall have reached a state of development so advanced that its 'soul' can be detached without losing any of its completeness, as something wholly formed" (50).
join up with the supreme and universal focus Omega” (i.e., with God).186

All of this invited expression in christological terms, however. Like Schleiermacher, in fact, Teilhard saw himself as making a place for Christ in the modern world. Unlike Schleiermacher, he was quite prepared to speak boldly of Christ's "physical" or cosmic primacy—something the church had always confessed, he said, but had never been able to explain in a convincing way. In consequence our Lord's ascendency was treated too narrowly in moral or juridical terms, and his influence confined to "the extra–cosmic sphere of the supernatural."187 The situation only worsened with the arrival of modern science; in particular, the expanding cosmos (in which even the planet that hosted the incarnation lost its centrality) rendered him virtually irrelevant. On this point, to be sure, Père Teilhard’s defense of the faith was little more than a concession. Jesus of Nazareth, he suggested, was only a face (one among many) on the cosmic Christ, a subdivision appropriate to the needs of our particular planet and race.188

But the primacy of the cosmic Christ he never tired of celebrating.

To secure that primacy Teilhard set out resolutely down the path the Anglican theologians were also beginning to explore. Beyond Christ's humanity and divinity, he claimed, we must reckon today with his third nature—with his relation to the Universe

186 1960:110, 1970:338. "If it is to be adjusted to Man, the high point and effective spearhead of evolution..., Space–time must be given whatever form is most appropriate. Caught within its curve the layers of Matter ... tighten and converge in Thought, by synthesis. Therefore it is as a cone, in the form of a cone, that it can best be depicted" (1964:88). Idealism triumphs soundly in Teilhard, then, for spatiality and temporality prove in the end to be functions of the mind.

187 See 1964:94f. Teilhard did not deal with Schleiermacher’s option.

188 Journal 24.2.1918; see Lyons 192ff. A basic problem "which cosmic Christology has to face is the effect of the Copernican revolution in dislodging mankind, together with the Saviour ..., from the mid point of creation to an obscure corner of the universe" (Lyons 69). Moreover, "owing to the vastness of the universe, it is impossible that Christ's influence should spread out from the earth to every other place..." (194).
rather than the Trinity—as our most pressing theological problem.  

Hitherto the thought of the faithful explicitly distinguished in practice hardly more than two aspects of Christ: the Man–Jesus and the Word–God. Now it is evident that a third face of the theandric complex remained in the background. I mean the mysterious super–human person everywhere underlying the most fundamental institutions and the most solemn dogmatic affirmations of the Church; the One in whom all things have been created,—the One 'in quo omnia constant',— the One who, by his birth and blood, restores every creature to his Father, the Christ of the Eucharist and the Parousia, the consummating and cosmic Christ of St. Paul.  

In his third nature Christ cannot be marginalized. Rather he turns out to be the all-pervasive, attractive force that overcomes the natural rivalry of individual beings and binds them together in the holy unity of noogenesis. He is, in short, the motive power of the world's ascension. But for Teilhard he is also its goal and its product. There is a sense in which he does not yet fully exist.

Since Jesus was born, and grew to full stature, and died, everything has continued to move forward because Christ is not yet fully formed: he has not yet gathered about him the last folds of his robe of flesh and of love which is made up of his faithful followers. The mystical Christ has not yet attained to his full growth; and therefore the same is true of the cosmic Christ. Both of these are simultaneously in the the state of being and becoming; and it is from the prolongation of this process of becoming that all created activity ultimately springs. Christ is the end–point of the evolution, even the natural evolution, of all beings; and therefore evolution is holy.  

189 *Journal* 8.7.1945; see Lyons 190 for exact quotation. Teilhard, as Lyons reminds us, actually thought of his project as an attempt to deal with some of Nicaea's "unfinished business." We cannot help remarking that on the evidence of formulas like this—"The (Human + Divine) 3rd Nature (Omega) of Christ" (*Journal* 5.10.1953; Lyons 191)—his project must be regarded rather as a rejection of Chalcedon. What is this cosmic Christ if not a tertium quid?  

190 Quoted Lyons 189f. ("Christianisme et Évolution," *Oeuvres* 10:209f.). Teilhard is quite right, of course, to intuit a persistent gap in the tradition between "the Man–Jesus and the Word–God." But what is this gap—which he, like Origen, tries to fill with his cosmic Christ—if not a refusal to take the incarnation seriously, a demand for some other, more significant Logos than Jesus?  

191 1965:13. Teilhard seeks to balance the "not yet" of Christ's existence with an emphatic "already," since it is equally essential to his theory that the Omega towards which are moving is able to exert on us an attracting influence here and now (see 1970:294ff.; cf. Lyons 203, on Omega as prime mover and final cause).
To discern in evolution the ongoing work of forming Christ was Teilhard's special intellection. Christ's place is certainly at the centre, as Christianity teaches, but the centre is at the end. That is where we can expect to find him: "In a Universe of 'Conical' structure Christ has a place (the apex!) ready for Him to fill, whence His Spirit can radiate through all the centuries and all beings...." Towards that apex he, and we, continue to ascend.

Who then was Jesus? In him the Christ appeared pro-actively, so to speak, as a particular man. He did so in order to infuse into human nature a grace essential to evolution's "hominization" phase. That phase is the critical one, for in it what has hitherto been a process of ontological diversification is turned back on itself and becomes, through the centring effects of human self-consciousness, a process of unification. By his supreme sacrifice on the cross Jesus provided the impetus to self-transcendence without which unification (incorporation into one infinite person) is ultimately impossible; in his resurrection he anticipated our liberation from "the temporal zones of our visible world" into the oneness of the Pleroma. Having thus demonstrated "a law common to all life," he began to draw the whole world after him as the body of his ascension: "Towards the

---

192 If evolution is noogenesis, noogenesis is christogenesis: "Quite specifically it is Christ whom we make or whom we undergo in all things" (1960:123). The cosmos itself is becoming "one man in Christ," the totus Christus; it is growing up into a single being in which the fullness of God can dwell.

193 "... and because of the genetic links running through all the levels of Time and Space between the elements of a convergent world, the Christ-influence, far from being restricted to the mysterious zones of 'grace,' spreads and penetrates throughout the entire mass of Nature in movement" (1964:94). There is a kind of retroactive relationship here that gives the appearance of a serious eschatology; but see below.

194 Like those who follow him, only more dramatically, he "pre-adheres to God" (1960:119; cf. 101ff.) through the self-denial of the cross, and so anticipates the consummation. Jean Danielou (1988:351) testifies that he finds no trace of Kant or Hegel in de Chardin; a less perceptive judgment would be hard to imagine, unless one were to fail to see Origen here.
peaks, shrouded in mists from our human eyes, whither the Cross beckons us, we rise by a path which is the way of universal progress.\textsuperscript{195} In the vanguard on this climb is the church, that "portion of the world which has reflexively become Christ" already.\textsuperscript{196} Little by little it harnesses "the world's expectancy and ferment and unfolding," sacrificially gathering together mankind's spiritual energies "in their most sublime form" so as to focus them on the Omega-point.\textsuperscript{197}

For Teilhard the incarnation was a decisive but temporary affair, then. The Christ "appeared for a moment in our midst" that we might see and touch him, "before vanishing once again, more luminous and ineffable than ever, into the depths of the future." His withdrawal---both a going up and a going ahead, an ascension and an advance---means a going \textbf{beyond} the humanity he once shared with us.\textsuperscript{198} But these two radii provide a grid on which we can locate and track the post-incarnate Lord. His ascension, spatially interpreted, means that he has become ubiquitous, "an immense and living force" to be encountered already, and worshipped, in all creatures. This is his physical primacy.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{195} 1960:103

\textsuperscript{196} "The Incarnation means the renewal, the restoration, of all the energies and powers of the universe" (1965:144). "Across the immensity of time and the disconcerting multiplicity of individuals, one single operation is taking place: the annexation to Christ of his chosen; one single thing is being made: the mystical body of Christ, starting from all the sketchy spiritual powers scattered through the world" (1960:143).

\textsuperscript{197} See 1960:153f. We note here that the relation between Christ's human and cosmic natures is inherently difficult to articulate. It appears that the cosmic Christ generates the human Christ, who in turn effects the advance of the cosmic Christ by generating the ecclesial Christ as the axis on which the world as a whole turns to embrace God; this in turn completes the cosmic Christ.

\textsuperscript{198} 1960:150ff. (cf. 1965:32ff.). That is what creates the vital sense of expectancy which is Christianity's unique contribution to evolution; for evolution itself is now fuelled by the creative tension between the upwards and the forwards that is propelling all of us towards the superhumanitie of the Pleroma.

\textsuperscript{199} "Because you ascended into heaven after having descended into hell, you have so filled the universe in every direction, Jesus, that henceforth it is blessedly impossible for us to escape you" (1960:127). It should be noted that Teilhard understands omnipresence in
Temporally interpreted, on the other hand, it means that he has preceded us into the future, from whence he is already returning to meet us, exciting in us an enthusiasm for progress. By way of synthesis we may say that his presence is "silently accruing in things," until in the parousia, as if at a kind of flashpoint, it will suddenly break forth in all its splendour. For as the twin vectors of our rectified faith "veer and draw together" they point us to the consummated Christ, the divine soul of a divinized creation.

Such is Teilhard's resolution of the Where? question, so far as our rather crude outline (in which are many lacunae, some his and some ours) allows it to emerge. But has he really provided a place for Christ, or has Christ rather been pressed into the service of his compromise cosmology? To meld two opposing worldviews requires a powerful bond. Since Jesus of Nazareth could not supply that bond Teilhard turned to the cosmic Christ. There is something too convenient about this substitute, however. His own lineaments are established in no other way than by the forwards and the upwards which he is asked to reconcile. Is he something more substantial than a diagram, an invented metaphysic, an empty guarantee that forwards is upwards? And if so, can we follow Teilhard in addressing him as "Jesus"? For this much is clear: the first task of the cosmic Christ is to dispose of the scandal of particularity with which Christianity has hitherto been burdened. Jesus of Nazareth is retained only as a reference point on our terms of action, an action which ultimately conducts us into God's presence by effecting that "unitive transformation" (122) which produces the cone-like shape of the universe—i.e., which undoes our space.


202 Teilhard's way of putting the matter is somewhat different naturally. Lyons (192; following J. Laberge) notes this Journal entry for 30.8.1946: "Neo-Christianity saves and exalts the 3 Christs:
(1) historical (nuclear seed)
(2) cosmic (Hominizing)
(3) transcendent (irreversible)"
evolutionary chart, stretched out on the cross that is constructed for him by the intersection of Teilhard's twin axes. To expect belief in him today, as a living man, would not unite but divide. The resurrected Christ, whose strength bends these axes until they touch again at Omega-point, is someone quite different. He is no longer the incarnate one, with his own human and bodily specificity, but the immanent one. And the place he is securing for himself is, quite literally, no place for Jesus; for diagonalism is a retraction theory on a cosmic scale.

* *

A full critique of Teilhard would be a large and onerous task, complicated not only by the criticisms of fellow scientists but by the fact that the power of his prose far outstrips the clarity of his reasoning in matters theological. If it is tempting, then, for these or other reasons, simply to dismiss his ideas, his enormous influence in and beyond the church dictates otherwise. Fortunately, it will suffice to show that his alternative ascension theology brings us virtually full circle to Origen, while recapitulating in itself the major problems of the intervening tradition. Afterwards we will comment briefly on

But this multiplication of Christs—and Christianities—only underlines the point; Jesus is "saved" only by being superseded.

203 In a passage where Teilhard seeks to defend himself against the charge of modernism, this immanent Christ is described as "an expansion of the Christ who was born of Mary and who died on the cross" (1960:117). In that way he seeks to establish a continuity between Jesus and the Word who is "incarnate in the world" (1965:28). This deliberate confusion between incarnation and immanence must be rejected, however.

204 Teilhard's Nestorianism passes over into a Eutychianism in which the cosmos itself is absorbed into God. That is inevitable where the doctrine of the incarnation has been transformed into a doctrine of immanence. The universality of Christ—i.e., the immanance of God—grows in direct correlation with the contraction of spatio-temporal reality.

205 I.e., in the academically sophisticated western churches—those, it seems, who provide the clearest evidence for the law of entropy! Witness, e.g., the prayers (particularly those after the Psalms) in the Anglican Church of Canada's Book of Alternative Services.
his ecclesiology.

Like both Origen and Hegel, Teilhard sought to counter the materialist streak in western culture while at the same time upholding the goodness of creation against radical dualism. But he also shared their attraction to monism. Teilhard himself pointed to the problem of the one and the many as the key to his work; indeed, he spoke of a life-long quest "for the Necessary, the General, the 'Natural,' as opposed to the Contingent, the Particular and the Artificial." In that light it is not surprising that his theology was for all practical purposes unitarian, or that the spectre of Arianism reappears with his christological innovation. Neither is the fact that he thought evil to be a necessary by-product of creation, a point of view which generally betrays some kind of self-cancelling symmetry in cosmology. And so there is: Teilhard's evolutionism consists of a twofold process of descent into multiplicity (divergent evolution, which is subject to entropy) and ascent into unity (convergent evolution, which is not). There is first a spreading out of material forms and then a regathering through the perfection of

---

206 Jones 26 (following C. Cuénot, 377f.). The Christ he worships, and the Pleroma which he regards as the goal of creation, are precisely the "ineffable synthesis" of the one and the many (1965:75f., 1960:122).

207 Quoted Lyons 148, from Teilhard's autobiographical essay "Le Coeur de la Matière" (Oeuvres 13:26); the association between the multiple and the artificial should not be missed.

208 "Teilhard became aware shortly before he died that his doctrine of a cosmic nature in Christ raises once again the question of Arianism" (Lyons 86). Since the second task of the cosmic Christ is to take over from Jesus as the mediator between God and the world, this too is inevitable.

209 1970:339ff.; cf. D. S. Kim 1976:81f. Where creation is understood strictly in evolutionary terms this is bound to be the case. The fall coincides with creation. From this Origenist feature stems the persistent charge against Teilhard of under-estimating evil. It also makes the cross necessary to creation (cf. Lyons 159ff., who points to the influence of Maurice Blondel), an increasingly common position which badly undermines the freedom of grace—and of Jesus in his Gethsemane experience.
inwardness. The spreading out can rightly be regarded as a fall, just as the regathering is a redemption. "The multitude of beings is a terrible affliction," he avowed; or in the plain words of his Journal, "there is only one Evil = disunity." In short, Teilhard shared the Greek antipathy towards temporal and material existence.

The evil of disunity is what his cosmic christology was designed to rectify, of course.

The principle of unity which saves our guilty world, wherein all is in process of returning to dust, is Christ. Through the force of his magnetism, the light of his ethical teaching, the unitive power of his very being, Jesus establishes again at the heart of the world the harmony of all endeavours and the convergence of all beings.

In other words, the old confusion between Greek and Christian soteriology once again determines the kind of saviour that is needed and the form he must take: "Christ is loved as a person; he compels recognition as a world." Curiously, Teilhard complained that modernist theology "evaporates Christ, dissociates him in the world." For his part, he wanted rather "to concentrate the World in Christ." But could such a project hope to

210 For Teilhard, n.b., God's (1960:77ff.) "two marvellous hands" are "the Within and the Without of myself," or "the life which wells up in me" and "the matter which sustains me;" the latter serves the former.

211 See Passmore 252, H. de Lubac 1967:251; cf. Origen, Princ. 2.9. "At the exact opposite to God, pure multiplicity is Teilhard's notion of absolute nothing" (Lyons 178). For Teilhard "original sin is equivalent to the imperfect state of a creation still in process towards completion" (ibid. 83). Does this not mean that becoming is evil and un-becoming good? At all events, "the final victory of good over evil can only be completed in the total organization of our world" (1960:85), i.e., in the cessation of "regression into plurality."

212 1965:147

213 1965:153. Cf. Nebelsick 58f.: "Anaxagorus posited a 'world-building spirit,' a nous, a single cause upon which the whole of reality was thought to rest and in view of which the different parts were systematised into a single unity. This nous which was responsible for the world's motion was a power which was necessarily 'the finest and purest of all things.'" For Teilhard the symbol of this divine power was the Sacred Heart (Lyons 148).

214 See H. de Lubac 1988:366 n.5. The logic escapes us. Does Christ not evaporate just as quickly into a world that has become his own body?
come out any differently? "Why should we go searching the Judaea of two thousand years ago?" he says to his Jesus; for "you do truly appear to me as that vast and vital force which I sought everywhere that I might adore it."215

The notion of divergent and convergent evolution, with the crucified Jesus as the limit (Horos?) of the former and the cosmic Christ as the goal of the latter, is simply the thickening–and–thinning dialectic of Christian neoplatonism all over again.216 Teilhard's angelomorphic anthropology bears out this conclusion. What he called "Homo progressivus, that is to say, the man to whom the terrestrial future matters more than the present," might not at first glance appear a suitable candidate for the ethereal spheres, but that is precisely what he is.217 The cosmic school has been re–conceived, the curriculum changed, but the objective is the same: that through intellectual and spiritual exertion man should transform himself completely, advancing by degrees into union with God.218 Do we not think it conceivable, Teilhard asks,

---

215 1965:140f. (see 1960:127, 149 for context). This is Augustine's retraction theory.

216 "Within the Cosmos all the elements are ontologically dependent on one another, in the ascending order of their true being (that is, of their consciousness); and the entire Cosmos, as a single whole is held up, 'informed', by the powerful energy of a superior and unique Monad which confers on everything below itself its definitive intelligibility..." (quoted Lyons 161). In the background stand Bonaventure and Denis; in the foreground Hegel, Rothe, Blondel; note that it is the crucified Jesus who represents creation re–ascending "the slopes of being" (1960:104).

217 "They are scientists, thinkers, airmen, and do on— all those possessed by the demon (or the angel) of Research" (1964:137). "There can be no place for the poor in spirit, the sceptics, the pessimists, the sad of heart..." (72)! The difference here is the Kantian–Darwinian concern with the ascent of the species. It is the sacrifice of the brave of spirit that is raised once more to religious heights (reflecting the reversion to pagan ideals in Schelling, Renan, Hegel and Nietzsche, etc.).

218 According to Teilhard it is "through the medium of education that there ensues, directly and indirectly, the gradual incorporation of the World in the Word Incarnate" (1964:35); "to be more is in the first place to know more" (19). And in the end—"the overthrow of equilibrium, detaching the mind, fulfilled at last, from its material matrix, so that it will henceforth rest with all its weight on God–Omega" (1970:316).
that Mankind, at the end of its totalization, its folding—in upon itself, may reach
a critical level of maturity where, leaving Earth and stars to lapse slowly back
into the dwindling mass of primordial energy, it will detach itself from this
planet and join the one true, irreversible essence of things, the Omega Point? A
phenomenon perhaps outwardly akin to death: but in reality a simple
metamorphosis and arrival at the supreme synthesis. An escape from the planet,
not in space or outwardly, but spiritually and inwardly, such as the hyper-
concentration of matter upon itself allows.219

It is worth recalling that Origen once remarked that it was not easy to say whether the
heaven to which the Christ—like soul ascends should be understood as lying above, or
within, the visible world; and it is well known that he regarded the total process of
ascension as requiring a great succession of ages and worlds.220 If we opt for the "within"
rather than the "above," while focusing relatively more attention on the progress of the
race and of the ages than on the advance of the individual soul, we approach very nearly
the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin.

Just here we find ourselves in unexpected agreement with his foremost defender,
Henri de Lubac, who thought it ironic that Origen should be charged with too great a
discontinuity in eschatology and Teilhard—as he often is—with too great a continuity,
when in fact they are saying more or less the same thing. They are indeed. Neither the
proper continuity nor the proper discontinuity is achieved by either.221 Both link the fall

219 1964:122f.; cf. 1970:299: "Thus from the grains of thought forming the ... indestructible atoms of its stuff, the universe—a well-defined universe in the outcome—
go on building itself above our heads in the inverse direction of matter which vanishes.... All round us, one by one, like a continual exhalation, 'souls' break away,
carrying upwards their incommunicable load of consciousness," until the noosphere is
complete. In other words, through a combination of individual and corporate deaths,
being will alleviate the burden of becoming, mind the burden of matter.

220 See Princ. 2.3.6., 3.6.6.

221 De Lubac (1967:30) suggests that Teilhard's thought is "essentially eschatological;
that he actually restores, at least in principle, the balance between continuity and discontinuity
in eschatology that many are in danger of losing in the fog of materialism; that he
represents the tradition well (140ff.). Perhaps he does—if we are willing to accept Origen
and the mystics as its legitimate representatives.
with creation, and both resolve their monist prejudice against matter by a process of incremental change. One obvious difference, of course, is that Teilhard was inclined to downplay the fall while he restored the parousia to a place of prominence. Some passages even lend the impression of a biblical urgency about the latter:

We persist in saying that we keep vigil in expectation of the Master. But in reality we should have to admit, if we were sincere, that we no longer expect anything. The flame must be revived at all costs.\textsuperscript{222}

His occasional diatribes against those "dangerous" folk who hold to an imminent return of Christ speak volumes, however.\textsuperscript{223} The Christian hope must not be spoiled by hasty expectations! The day towards which we must look and labour so eagerly is literally aeons away. "Only twenty centuries have passed since the ascension," he chides. "What have we made of our expectancy?"\textsuperscript{224}

If there is a truly modern element in Teilhard's scheme, it is not his eschatology but the notion that Christian hope invites us to take up the project of perfecting ("personalizing") the species.\textsuperscript{225} By placing greater emphasis on the parousia than on the

\textsuperscript{222} 1960:152. "The whole future of the Earth, as of religion, seems to me to depend on the awakening of our faith in the future" (1964:7).

\textsuperscript{223} Those who doubt that the parousia depends on human progress or are not readily reassured that "the vast industrial and social system by which we are enveloped does not threaten to crush us" (1964:183) worry Teilhard: "It would be criminal or insane to attempt to resist the great explosion of the innate forces of the Earth that is now beginning" (187). Explosion may be taken literally, for the invention of the atom bomb—a triumph of human ingenuity and cooperation—proclaims "the coming of the Spirit of the Earth" (147). Cf. Lyons 208, Passmore 255, de Lubac 1967:30.

\textsuperscript{224} 1960:151. At times one has the impression that Teihard is speaking also to himself respecting over-hasty expectations.

\textsuperscript{225} "Some say, 'Let us wait patiently until the Christ returns.' Others say, 'Let us rather finish building the Earth.' Still others think, 'To speed the Parousia, let us complete the making of Man on Earth.'" The last proposal is Teilhard's though it could be Bergson's or Renan's or Drummond's, e.g. (1964:260; cf. Passmore 250f.). Like Kant, he comes to the rescue of utopianism, but his eschatology is of just that sort that "is no 'answer' now," as Ivan says in \textit{The Brothers Karamazov} (273ff.).
fall—on the end rather than the beginning—the Origenist tradition easily accommodates
itself to this project. It becomes quite natural to focus on corporate, rather than
individual, advance.\textsuperscript{2.26} The parousia, says Teilhard, will coincide with the moment of
man's \textit{collective maturation}, and this means a change in outlook for the church.

We have gone deeply into these new perspectives: the progress of the universe,
and especially the human universe, does not take place in rivalry with God....
To look with longing to the Parousia of the Son of Man we have only to allow
to beat within our breasts—and to christianize—the heart of the world.\textsuperscript{2.27}

Here is Teilhard's message in a nutshell. It may, he allows, require a "simple
readjustment" to orthodox beliefs—\textit{viz.}, the rejection of imminency for immanence,\textsuperscript{2.28} of
"the man who lived two thousand years ago" for one who "shines forth from within all
the forces of the earth."\textsuperscript{2.29} But by way of compensation for the loss of these (Irenaean!)
elements Christianity itself is born again as a catholic faith in a new sense of the word:
a faith "containing and embracing all others," a strong and attractive faith that must
eventually "possess the Earth."\textsuperscript{2.30}

Teilhard's double apologetic, to be successful, could come to no other conclusion
perhaps, yet we cannot help expressing our surprise at the baldness of its expression.

Some minor tinkering and nothing of substance separates church and world; indeed,

\textsuperscript{2.26} At the same time, the inherent Pelagianism of the Origenist tradition comes into focus.

\textsuperscript{2.27} 1965:149 (1960:153f.; cf. Lyons 208f.). Neither Irenaeus nor Origen would ever have
spoken thus! Yet it is the \textit{latter}'s heirs who say it, for in his own scheme of things the
forwards and the upwards were already united in principle. (In this "new" perspective,
Teilhard leaves untouched the relation between ascension and parousia as we found it a
century earlier in Martensen.)

\textsuperscript{2.28} 1964:267f.

\textsuperscript{2.29} 1965:33. It also requires an adjustment to enlightenment orthodoxy, which shares with
Judaism and \textit{naive} Christianity what Teilhard calls "a childishly timid outlook that can
conceive of nothing greater or more vital in the world than the pitiable perfection of our
human organism' (1965:25).

\textsuperscript{2.30} 1964:268f.
Christianity's central symbol, the cross, now represents "the deepest aspirations of our age"?\textsuperscript{231} What is this if not the vision of Hegel (Origen's greatest western heir) christened in a Roman font? But there is a profound lesson here for the whole church: If in his resurrection, ascension and parousia Jesus is not allowed to stand over against us as a man with his own distinct history—for that is the effect if not the object of the tinkering—then on the cross he is not allowed to do so either. To turn it round the other way, on the cross he is made to identify not so much with our sin as with our thirst for righteousness; he does not die "outside the camp." The salvation he brings, then, the life he offers us, is no other than our own life, as Teilhard liked to say.\textsuperscript{232} In that case Christianity may well possess the earth, for it surely belongs to it already.

Before leaving Teilhard behind we must look a little further into the impact of his diagonalism on the doctrine of the church, for it is here that the main lines we have followed in our last two chapters converge. The first thing to be said is that the imprint of Origen is not effaced by the modern component. Augustine's mark also remains visible. The universalist and triumphalist tendencies of their respective ascension theologies are uniquely combined by Teilhard, lending new force to a most familiar theme: that of the church as kosmos of the cosmos. Teilhard's equivalent of that doctrine is his description of the church as a phylum, as a kind of genetic pattern that has emerged to govern the future unfolding of evolution. At the heart of this governance is its catholic drive, the fruit of a heightened consciousness Teilhard identifies with love (super-charité).\textsuperscript{233} Since the ascension itself is precisely a process of synthesis, to grasp its truth


\textsuperscript{232} See, e.g., 1965:142f., 148f.

can only mean to foster convergence, to strive towards a planetary synaxis, to demolish all barriers to social unification—religious barriers in particular. The function of the church is "to Christianise all that is human in Man," cultivating in the name of God "a huge and **totally human** hope." That is how it builds up Christ.

No heir to the tradition we have been describing could fail to expound this in sacramental terms! In a revealing passage in *Le Divin Milieu*, Teilhard speaks of "the onrush of the cult of the Holy Eucharist." Has the church not been busy all along transforming creation, little by little, into an extension of the body of Christ through its daily masses? Not in some crass physical sense, of course, but by the steady assimilation of humanity into the one communion of him who (underlying the visible institutions of the church) ultimately transcends space and time? Here again is the dialectic of divergence and convergence, of **descensus ad inferna** and **ascensus ad caelos**:

As our humanity assimilates the material world, and the Host assimilates our humanity, the eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step it irresistably invades the universe.... [For] in a secondary and generalised sense, but in a true sense, the sacramental Species are formed by the totality of the world, and the duration of the creation is the time needed for its consecration.

The church, then, is engaged in effecting the consecration of **everything**. It is knitting together for Jesus, out of the stuff of creation, an immense body "worthy of resurrection."

---

234 See 1964:265, 1960:151ff. For the sake of this "common great hope" (1964:72) it is no doubt **necessary** that the way of the cross should become "no more nor less than the road of human endeavour supernaturally righted and prolonged" (1960:104).


236 1960:121ff.

237 1960:125f. Who, asks Teilhard (124), "can tell where the diffusion of Christ, with the influence of grace, stops, as it spreads outward from the faithful at the heart of the human family?" For it is "one of the most certain points of our faith" that "the human layer of the earth is wholly and continuously under the organising influx of the incarnate Christ."
It is fulfilling its Marian task of bringing forth the Christ. Through its cooperation with the world, the one who has hidden himself in the womb of the world will reappear. And what is that labour? It is the "sanctification" of matter through the adoration of the holy offspring it is expecting, namely, Unity.

In the theology of Teilhard de Chardin the church's self-idolatry is complete. His famous Mass on the World (what some regard as the offering of strange fire in the Ordos desert) gives ample testimony to the elevation of catholicity, and the power of christogenesis on which it is based, into a god to be worshiped.

'Lord.' Yes, at last, through the twofold mystery of this universal consecration and communion I have found one to whom I can whole-heartedly give this name.... Glorious Lord Jesus Christ: the divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter, and the dazzling centre where all the innumerable fibres of the manifold meet...; it is you to whom by being cried out with a desire as vast as the universe, 'In truth you are my Lord and my God.'

For this it is altogether necessary, as we seen over and over again, that the man of Nazareth withdraw, allowing "our love to escape from the constrictions of the too narrow, too precise, too limited" image of God he represents. But there are other victims on

238 "The greater man becomes and the more humanity becomes one, conscious of its power and able to control it..., the more Christ will find, for the mystical extensions of his humanity, a body worthy of resurrection" (1965:149). Thus in one very striking passage the eucharist is fully reversed: "To allay your hunger and slake your thirst, to nourish your body and bring it to full stature, you need to find in us a substance which will truly be food for you. And this food ... I will prepare for you by liberating the spirit in myself and in everything" (134).

239 Christ will "come to us clothed in the glory of the world" (1960:128).

240 1965:33f.; see 19ff., and note N. M. Wildiers' introduction (13ff.)

241 "How strange, my God, are the processes your Spirit initiates. When two centuries ago, your Church began to feel the particular power of your heart, it might have seemed that what was captivating men's souls was the fact of their finding in you an element even more determinate, more circumscribed, that your humanity as a whole. But now on the contrary a swift reversal is making us aware that your main purpose ... was to enable our love to escape from the constrictions of the too narrow, too precise, too limited image of you which we had fashioned for ourselves" (34).
the altar of universality as well. Next in line, ironically, is the church itself.

According to Teilhard the (Roman) church has become "the principle axis of evolution," the hub of "a perennial act of communion and sublimation" by which Christ "aggregates to himself the total psychism of the earth." But it cannot be this sacrament of universality if it is not prepared to grow and change with the world, to embrace the world in its own advancing humanity, to be fulfilled by the world. We might say that the church's "Jesus" identity must give way to its "Christ" identity; that is, it must allow its faith and praxis to be rectified by the pull of society at large. If it will not thus transcend itself it can hardly hope to lead others in the quest for God, who is the centre of all centres. But the same problem arises in ecclesiology as in christology: To assimilate the world, the church must first be assimilated by the world; to christianize, it must first be humanized. Who then is consecrating whom? Which is really the critical phylum? Is it not more likely that the church will be absorbed into the world than the world into the church?

A further and related victim is the human person as such, whose needs and whose value also appear to be too narrow, too precise, too limited, when compared with the interests of the whole. In the universal Mass the individual is consumed, transubstantiated, totalized—becoming "one and the same person" with the cosmic Christ. Teilhard denied that this meant any loss of distinct identity or any diminishment of personhood. "Union differentiates," he was fond of saying. Totalization must not be confused with eastern pantheism, as if it meant absorption of the human spirit into a god

---

242 See 1970:320ff. (cf. Maloney 214, de Lubac 1988:369). It is most often in a eucharistic or ecclesiological context that the ascension is used to set Jesus aside for "a God to adore" (1960:127; cf. 123ff.).

243 1964:265f.

244 We must not "confuse individuality with personality," he rightly insists (1970:288f.).
with no face. God is person, and whatever is united to God is thereby personalized. Against the rampant individualism of our times he wished to set, not the annihilation of the individual, but his or her "hyper-personalization." Did he not consider it his holy vocation to personalize the whole world in God? But there, of course—and quite apart from the messianic pretensions of such a claim—is the rub. When we begin to speak of a "universal person," or of a world that is slowly "acquiring a personality," what is happening to the meaning of these terms? Can a passion for the One, the All, the Absolute, offer any foundation for the personal? Can it prevent the merely particular (the artificial!) from being regarded with a utilitarian eye? Does transubstantiation not mean just this: that when the consecration is complete there is no longer bread, only Body?

By working without recourse to the trinitarian insights from which the idea of the person arose, Teilhard does indeed produce, as Colin Gunton observes, a suffocating

---

245 See de Lubac 1967:143ff.

246 "'I really believe,' he wrote to a friend in 1917, 'that my vocation has never seemed so stark and clear: to personalize the world in God,' and to that vocation he always remained faithful" (ibid. 145).

247 "A Universe that is in the process of psychic concentration is identical with a Universe that is acquiring a personality" (1964:79).

248 "I do not attribute any definitive or absolute value to the varied constructions of nature. What I like about them is not their particular form, but their function, which is to build up mysteriously, first what can be divinised, and then, through the grace of Christ coming down upon our endeavour, what is divine..." (1960:93, emphasis ours).

249 "When Christ, extending the process of his incarnation, descends into the bread in order to replace it, his action is not limited to the material morsel...: this transubstantiation is aureoled with a real though attenuated divinizing of the entire universe" (1965:14). "Before passing into the Beyond, the World and its elements must attain what may be called their 'point of annihilation.' And it is precisely to this critical point that we must ultimately be brought by the effort consciously to further ... the movement of universal convergence!" (1964:56).

250 Augustine's error in theology becomes Teilhard's in anthropology, for his notion of personhood is based on an interpretation of consciousness (viewed here as an involutionary capacity in matter, as a self-centring movement which is "hyper-centrated" by passing through and beyond its individuating phase to a common centre in God). The
pantheism that leaves little room to be human. 251 By universalizing the incarnation, we would add—turning God with us as a particular Jewish man into God with us as a christic force hidden in the cosmic dust—he sets the stage for a grotesque parody of the personal, with features shaped by the world's homogenizing forces, especially death. 252 John Passmore, who documents the darker side of his thought, makes a telling point when he observes that Teilhard substitutes love of the world for love of one's neighbour as the second great commandment. 253 That is entirely consistent, of course, since he has already substituted love of the world for love of Jesus: "Always from the very first it was the world, greater than all the elements which make up the world, that I was in love with; and never before was there anyone before whom I could in honesty bow down." 254

This brings us back to ecclesiology, for all talk of charity as the church's essential feature, as its special "personalizing" contribution to evolution, must be seen in this light. The loss of Jesus in his human concreteness—the confusion of christology with pneumatology and of anthropology with cosmology—makes itself felt just here. The universal "amorization" presaged by the church is not a matter of koinônia, of persons—

need for "trinitization" was belatedly acknowledged, but taken seriously this would undo Teilhard's whole scheme of abstract relations.

251 "In a 'Phoenician' cosmology, the person is not separable from the world, and so lacks the space to be free." (Gunton is developing here an insight of Coleridge; see 1991:106ff.)

252 We note too that Teilhard finds in eugenics and social engineering and computer technology "liberators of the spirit" (1970:336 n.4; see 310ff., 1964:144ff., 230ff.).

253 P. 254

254 1965:33. This substitution gives new meaning to the way of the cross: "My God, I deliver myself up with utter abandon to those fearful forces of dissolution which, I blindly believe, will this day cause my narrow ego to be replaced by your divine presence. The man who is filled with an impassioned love for Jesus hidden in the forces which bring death to the earth, him the earth will clasp in the immensity of her arms as her strength fails, and with her he will awaken in the bosom of God" (32, emphasis ours; see 1960:130ff.).
in-relation, but of tightened social organization. That is why de Chardin could describe not only Roman Catholicism, but also Fascism and Communism, as being "in line with the essential trend of cosmic movement".\textsuperscript{256} It is true that after the second war he paddled harder against the current of his own ideas, criticizing faceless and de-humanizing collectives.\textsuperscript{257} However, his cosmic Christ (neither fully human nor fully divine but itself a faceless \textit{tertium quid}) pulled him steadily towards the reefs of the impersonal. "Even as late as 1946," notes Passmore, Teilhard "was still prepared to write that it was too early 'to judge recent totalitarian experiments fairly', to make up our minds whether 'all things considered, they have produced a greater enslavement or a higher level of spiritual energy.'\textsuperscript{258}

We do not judge him too harshly, then, if we conclude that Teilhard's synthesis of the forwards and the upwards only reproduced in heightened form that combination of militarism and mysticism we have met before, that disquieting double visage of the Christianity shaped by Origen and Augustine. There is a visible tilt, though. The Mass on the World, conceived and conducted in solitude on the feast of the Transfiguration, 1923, displays as perhaps nothing else could the distorted individualism of Teilhard's thought, but the more powerful pole, and the more worrisome, is always his collectivism. Is not the whole of his work, like the Mass, an urgent expression of that "unquenchable

\textsuperscript{256} 1964:46. Caution should be exercised in criticizing Teilhard on this point, since the totalitarian possibility lurks in every universalist ecclesiology.

\textsuperscript{257} Note his perspective, however (1970:282): "When an energy runs amok, the engineer, far from questioning the power itself, simply works out his calculations afresh to see how it can be brought better under control. Monstrous as it is, is not modern totalitarianism really the distortion of something magnificent, and thus quite near to the truth? There can be no doubt of it: the great human machine is designed to work and \textbf{must} work—by producing a super-abundance of mind."

\textsuperscript{258} P. 246; see Teilhard 1964:118f. "It is not harshness or hatred but a new kind of love we must learn to look for as it is borne to us on the rising tide of planetisation."
thirst for universal unity" which Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor identified as "the third and last ordeal of man".259 Like the Grand Inquisitor, by the way, Teilhard was not blind to the fact that the unification (christification) of human society seems to be producing not harmony but turmoil among the nations—what Irenaeus called "minglings without cohesion." But he had a kind of chaos theory by which to account for this. "Incoherence is the prelude to unification," he said;260 harmony will come in due time. Great goals can be attained only at great cost.261 Meanwhile, we must "look for our essential satisfaction in the thought that by our struggles we are serving, and leading to salvation, a personal Universe."262 Such was Teilhard's understanding of suffering as an ecclesial vocation.

In short, the ascension theology of Teilhard de Chardin represents a total collapse of the tension between Jesus—history and our own, and so also of that between the church and the world.263 Christology has become mariology, and mariology cosmology, virtually

259 "Men have always striven to be organized into a universal whole," says the Inquisitor. The difficulty of achieving it will eventually bring them back to the church, who will provide it at the expense of freedom. (On Teilhard's scheme science and technology will provide the miracles and much of the authority, leaving it to the church—to what Teilhard calls Christian pantheism—only to reintroduce the element of mystery. This is pretty much as Dostoevsky envisioned it; see Karamazov 310f.)

260 Cf. 1970:293f. This chaos theory, so to speak, was Teilhard's version of the eucharistic tension, which will reach final resolution only at Omega-point, "a new break—through and re—birth, this time outside Time and Space" (1964:302).

261 "As the end of time approaches a terrifying spiritual pressure will be brought to bear on the limits of the Real, born of the effort of souls desperately straining in their desire to escape from the Earth. This pressure will be unanimous. But the Scriptures teach us that at the same time it will be rent by a profound schism between those who wish to break out of themselves that they may become still more masters of the world, and those who, accepting Christ's word, passionately await the death of the world that they may be absorbed with it into God" (1964:307).

262 Quoted de Lubac 1967:151. This echoes the words of Renan: "let us console ourselves, poor victims: a God is being made with our tears" (quoted Passmore 251).

263 "In their respective treatments of the cosmic Christ—a Platonizing treatment and an evolutionizing treatment—Origen and Teilhard are both putting, so to speak, the face of Christ on the Logos of the World." That is Lyons' not unfavourable conclusion (218).
without remainder. In varying degrees we are all incarnations, and we are all ascending together. Together we will "force the bars" of our earthly prison and realize for ourselves (in Sittler's words) "the imperial vision of Christ coherent in ta panta." The church, of course, does not disappear; it is made over into the visible sacrament of social progress, the place where our own divinity is acknowledged. 264

*  

We will shortly meet a few of those "dangerous" theologians who have refused to travel this path, which is fast becoming the broad way in theology today. Chief among those who have travelled it is Karl Rahner, who (while far more cautious) also takes an evolutionary world view as the starting point for christology. 265 Rahner differs from de Chardin at several crucial points. 266 Yet he too insists that the driving force of cosmic history is the world's natural attraction to God in his self-communication, that is, to Christ; that "the world as a whole flows into his resurrection and into the transfiguration of his body." 267 Denis Edwards summarizes accurately Rahner's answer to the Where? question:

The risen Christ, freed from the limits of bodily existence in this life, is present to the whole world in a new bodily relationship in and through the resurrection.

---

264 To that extent Teilhard answers the atheistic Hegelians, and those who would make science their substitute for religion: "Evolution has come to infuse new blood, so to speak, into the perspectives and aspirations of Christianity. In return, is not the Christian faith destined, is it not preparing, to save and even to take the place of evolution? (1970:326; see 311ff.).


266 Rahner denied, e.g., that the final victory of Christ has "as its goal the disappearance of his material creation" (G. McCool 1975:358). He was also an innovative trinitarian theologian, though Hegel's influence should not be overlooked (see ibid. xxif.).

Jesus, in his bodily humanity, is a permanent part of this one world and its evolutionary dynamism.\textsuperscript{268}

The very same conflation of resurrection, ascension and parousia is in evidence here; no real disjunction between the way of Jesus Christ and the way of the world, in whose ascension we ought to have "the courage to believe,"\textsuperscript{269} can be posited. Eschatology, though not without a certain sobriety, is chiefly affirmation—which is to say, futurology. Indeed, theology per se is drawn inexorably into that category. God becomes our Absolute Future,\textsuperscript{270} while the incarnation "appears as the necessary and permanent beginning of the divinization of the world as a whole."\textsuperscript{271}

The effect on Rahner's ecclesiology, still the subject of intense debate in and beyond Roman circles, is well known. En Christò the world has become the church "implicitly," and is in its way an authentically Christian affair, just as anyone who accepts their own humanity (and that of others) is an "anonymous" disciple. The church and the world can therefore discern their God-directed future together, as partners in dialogue;

\textsuperscript{268} 1991:11; see Rahner 1978a:333: "Jesus' corporeal humanity is a permanent part of the one world with its single dynamism.... Consequently Jesus' resurrection is ... the beginning of the transfiguration of the world.... [T]he risen Lord, freed by resurrection from the limiting individuality of the unglorified body, has in truth become present to the world precisely because risen (and so by his `going'), and ... his return will only be the disclosure of this relation to the world attained by Jesus in his resurrection."

\textsuperscript{269} 1978:191 (T.I. 5/172).

\textsuperscript{270} "Christianity is a religion of the future. It can indeed be understood only in the light of the future which it conceives as an absolute future gradually approaching the individual and humanity as a whole.... Absolute future is just another name for what is really meant by `God'" (T.I. 6/60ff.).

\textsuperscript{271} T.I. 5/161. Rahner (1978a:332f.; cf. 1961:66) appears to tie the resurrection rather too closely to Jesus' death, creating a false kind of continuity that operates within the terms of linear history. The result is an "inexorable" transfiguration of the world that undermines, inter alia, his stress on human freedom. (Cf. P. T. Forsyth, 1948:324, who insists that "the saving faith that makes a Church" does not view Christ "as the pledge of our human future....")
each is oriented towards the other in mutual dependence.\textsuperscript{272} Hans Urs von Balthasar (for whom openness to the world was axiomatic, but who also recognized the church's proclivity to "paint her cheeks with the changing colours of the world") has pointed boldly to the loss of the distinctively Christian element in much of this dialogue.\textsuperscript{273} More recently Walter Kasper has charged Rahner with nothing less than "a complete reversal" of the church's eucharistic foundations, and with ignoring, \textit{inter alia},

the apocalyptic vision which starts from a continual struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, a conflict which does not gradually come to an end with the progress of history, but which, on the contrary, reaches a climax and is intensified as history draws to a close.\textsuperscript{274}

The debate points up just how fundamental, and how practical, the question of the meaning of the ascension is, though the debaters themselves do not often construe it in that light. What connection is there between Jesus-history and the world's "evolutionary dynamic"? Is history really propelled by an attraction to God? Can christology be done as an extrapolation of evolutionary theory?\textsuperscript{275} Should the church take its cue from the world or no? Are their paths converging—or perhaps colliding?

There are voices aplenty in Rahner's defense, of course, and there are also those who have proceeded much further in the general direction marked out by de Chardin.

\textsuperscript{272} Cf. e.g. T.I. 310ff. Yet the church may well remain a "diaspora" church (McCool 343; see 6/65ff.). Rahner does not fully embrace Teilhard's triumphalism; he also appears to contradict Juan Louis Segundo's call for a church immersed in local, contingent ideologies (see below; cf. McCool 337ff.).

\textsuperscript{273} See esp. 1975:199ff. (quotation 1979:111), which contains a powerful summary and indictment of "the broad way" traveled by Rahner.

\textsuperscript{274} 1989:125ff. John Paul II's encyclical, \textit{Veritatis Splendor} (dated Transfiguration 1993), represents in moral theology the very same concern, namely that the church, as Kasper puts it, is at grave risk of becoming only "a religiously solemn elevation of the world." The Pope, it is worth noticing, calls for a return to a distinctly Christian morality \textit{in the spirit of martyrdom}.

\textsuperscript{275} Or rather—for this is what it always amounts to—of the matter/spirit problem.
Two examples of the latter, both from the Americas, must suffice. The main link between them (besides Teilhard and the British scientist-philosopher Gregory Bateson) is a shift of emphasis from the cult of progress to that of survival—and their willingness, in that connection, to render the church itself anonymous.  

"The sacred everything." That is what *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Matthew Fox's popularization of Teilhard's message, claims to be about. Fox is not shy about letting the world, rather than the church, stand in for Jesus: "I believe that the appropriate symbol of the Cosmic Christ who became incarnate in Jesus is that of Jesus as Mother Earth crucified yet rising daily." A gnostic distinction between the Nazarene and the Christ permits this radical change in "symbols," while the doctrine of the ascension helps to expound it. The technique is familiar: The spatial vector turns us away from the human Jesus to his divine ubiquity (the very thing Augustine, Fox's bête noir: taught us to do); the temporal gives him back to us as "the historical Christ" (sic) we need, that is, as one "who can change history once again and ground that change in a living cosmology." What is new here is the emphasis introduced by Sittler, namely,  

---

276 We must pass over the process theologians such as John Cobb, e.g., all of whom contribute in their own way to an "ascending christology" and an ecclesiology committed to a universal commonwealth of faith communities (see M. Suchoki, 1982:93ff., for an overview; on Cobb, see M. Garascia 1988, G. Boelhower 1988).

277 1988:8. The core of Christianity, he says, "must be a vital and living cosmology, a cosmological mysticism, a Cosmic Christ" (6).

278 P. 145. "This book," he writes modestly (3), "names the paschal mystery for the third millennium of Christianity: matricide, mysticism, and the Cosmic Christ reveal anew the paschal story we have understood as the death, resurrection and second coming of Jesus the Christ. The death of Mother Earth (matricide) and the resurrection of the human psyche (mysticism) and the coming of the Cosmic Christ (a living cosmology) name the mystery of the divine cycle of death and rebirth and sending of the Spirit in our time."

279 "The 'historical Christ' of which I speak will combine the historical and incarnational rootedness of Jesus the prophet with the spatial and cosmic mysticism of the Cosmic Christ to effect a renaissance, a change of hearts and ways" (162). See 140ff., where Fox tries to correct the cult of progress on the one hand, and other-worldly mysticism on the other, with a diagonalism of his own. He is certainly right, p. 79, in describing his
the threat to man's future posed by the ecological crisis. Fox offers the same solution: recognizing, and participating in, the Christ who is incarnate in all things.

Fox defines the cosmic Christ, in words borrowed from Bateson, as "the pattern that connects." Though he has in mind a great many other connections—such abstractions are eminently useful—the connection of the paschal mystery to the suffering planetary ecosystem is uppermost. Reminding us, with a plethora of quotes from mystics ancient and modern, that we are all cosmic Christs, Fox invites us to recreate the paschal mystery and indeed the birthing of the church by sending the Spirit onto the earth for its healing. In short, he quietly corrects Teilhard with Teilhard. Enthusiasm for the manipulation and subjugation of the material world over the course of many millennia must give way to something approaching a full-orbed nature worship, the immediate advent of which may be seen as the longed—for parousia. Imminency is suddenly back in vogue! This lends itself in turn to what he terms "deep ecumenism," for the sake of which he calls the church to repent with all haste for ever imagining that it had a corner dialectic as "a dance between time (Jesus) and space (Christ)"!

See 133ff. (Bateson, 1980:8f., is not speaking of Christ). "The Cosmic Christ is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ (but by no means is limited to that person)." It is also someone who is "needing to be born." We seem to be in its womb and it in ours. In Fox the confusion of christology, mariology, cosmology, and pneumatology is so extensive that the knot he ties is impossible to unravel.

Cf. 8, 137, 147ff., 157ff. The idea of the priest as alter Christus is democratized: "Ironically a commitment to the full spirit of Jesus today requires that we let go of the quest for the historical Jesus and embark on a quest for the Cosmic Christ.... When this historical Jesus is balanced by the Cosmic Christ, then we—and not only Jesus—will be resurrected. We will follow Jesus in becoming true to our vocations as mystic/prophets, as "other Christs" (161).

His diagonalism, in other words, turns back on itself in conformity with the cyclical structure that marks natural religion.

See 228f. Where Origen and Teilhard were fond of the prefix hyper, Fox substitutes hupo.
on the cosmic Christ. It must rid itself of oppressive claims to special revelation; the
county of the cosmic Christ is a church which does not allow religion to divide. 284
"Christ," says Fox, "is a generic name." 285

If Fox's book frequently borders on self-parody, Juan Luis Segundo's *An
Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth* requires to be taken much more seriously. 286
Segundo is more interested in the human crisis than the ecological, though he leans
heavily on theories germinated by the latter. Criticizing Teilhard for a linear approach
that places too much emphasis on negentropy—in brief, for a one-sided view of evolution
and a correspondingly shallow anthropology—he seeks to give entropy and death their
proper due. 287 The result is an interesting synthesis between existentialism and a doctrine
of bodily resurrection. At first glance this seems a promising turn. Particularity makes
a comeback. Where Fox instructs us to leave off looking for the historical Jesus in order
to take up the quest for the cosmic Christ, Segundo moves in the opposite direction. In
his search for a christology *sub specie evolutionis* he rejects both the classical tendency
to abstract from Jesus a timeless, divine Christ and the modern inclination to allow his

284 "The bottom line is not that Christianity survive into the next millennium. In fact, I
propose that Christianity as we know it will not survive for we know it now in wineskins
that are brittle, old, and leaking. Nothing will survive if Mother Earth does not survive.
The issue is survival, and indeed the thriving of Mother Earth. Christianity can assist by,
among other things, lending the rich symbolism of the Paschal mystery to the survival of
Mother Earth" (149).

285 P. 235. From Dorothee Sölle (1982:xvi) he borrows a name for those who object, who
refuse to be so connected—i.e., "fundamentalists": they (sic) are the "christofascists" (see
p. 7).

286 This book concludes a five volume series entitled *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and
Today*. It is not only the North/South divide which sets Segundo's work apart from Fox's,
but his sustained scholarship. Segundo has tempered Teilhard with Bateson in a
significant way.

above.
humanity to recede into a distant and meaningless past. But in the face of the Where? question Segundo retreats to a position between Schleiermacher and Hegel. "Bodily" resurrection turns out to be the definitive manifestation of the value of human projects (Jesus' and ours), a manifestation that takes place in eternity not in time. Jesus, he argues, recapitulates the whole of history by "giving meaning to it" precisely as a figure of the past.

We cannot turn aside to discuss Segundo's scheme in any detail. There are two things he achieves, however, by dropping the cosmic Christ and legitimizing entropy. One is to call the church to a less pretentious form of existence, that is, to a greater participation in the suffering of humanity; the other is to call for its liberation from ecclesiastical rigidity so that it may carry out that mission. According to Segundo, Teilhard himself "prematurely deifies the Church along with Jesus." By continuing the old habit of de-historicizing Jesus (cutting him loose from the conditions of entropy) he also perpetuates an a-historical and triumphalist ecclesiology that serves the status quo. This criticism is not far from ours. But of course Segundo's own way of universalizing Jesus appears highly abstract to anyone who refuses to reduce persons to their "projects." That abstraction shows up in the anonymity he derives from his christology

---

288 18ff., 40f.

289 I.e., as one who "combined negentropy and entropy in the richest way he could," and whose own values will in the end prove to be definitive for the meaning of the whole. (This also is his divinity, it seems, for "God coincides with the meaning of human work;" see 105f.) Note that the definitive reality of the resurrection requires "the abolition of time," which is more or less equated with entropy; here and elsewhere Segundo is closer to Teilhard than he lets on (see 98ff., 117ff., 1985:166ff.; cf. Teilhard 1960:101, 146.).

290 1988:106

291 Both Bateson and Segundo, like Teilhard, show all the signs of their inheritance of the western (Augustinian) tradition, mediated through Hegel, which is inclined to substitute relations in the abstract ("circuitry" to use their own term) for persons in relation, as the primary reality with which we must be concerned.
for the church, which errs, he says, not only when it seeks to embrace everyone (as Teilhard would have it) but also when it struggles to protect its own identity. If the church means to survive it must learn "the lesson taught by evolution" and make flexibility its bye-word. To Segundo this means that it must not resist "the hazardous but inevitable immersion in history that takes place through limited, contingent ideologies." Indeed, in thus embracing the particular it must be prepared to die and rise constantly, that is, to be stripped of all "appearances of continuity." Only so can it effectively "continue Jesus."

If Matthew Fox represents an increasingly desperate christological tradition pronouncing its mea culpa to modern western culture, Segundo can be commended for attempting to restore to that same tradition a more profound eschatological tension. In this he fails, however, for the tension he introduces is still not determined by Jesus-history but read back into Jesus-history from the examination of natural processes. His effort to renew appreciation for the contingent and the particular also fails, and for a similar reason. The naturalization of death in the name of evolution and ecological circuitry still requires him to let go of Jesus in order to continue Jesus. When applied ecclesiologically this can only lead to the domestication of the eucharistic vocation.

---

292 P. 106. These contingent ideologies may represent the lesser of two evils in a given situation—a choice which cannot be determined from afar. Segundo's whole project is itself an experiment in theological contingency, as he makes clear from the outset.

293 P. 107. Segundo concludes (121f.) by moving out again from the particular towards the universal. Establishing "the meaningfulness of Jesus" in a given situation does not necessarily mean speaking or even thinking "in the categories reserved to small groups already united by a particular creed." Can we not "encounter the meaning of what happened in the life of Jesus of Nazareth" under other idioms? (Segundo is also a universalist.)

294 To this extent liberation theology is simply a natural extension of the tradition.

295 Segundo (122) suggests that we need not concern ourselves over our lack of contemporaneity with Jesus; we are able to judge for ourselves the significance of our calling. But it seems to us that contemporaneity with Jesus is the church's calling. In this
The church of Jesus Christ in the service of ideologies (whether comprehensive or contingent matters little) is the inevitable result of making Jesus—history conform to the lessons of cosmology. That being said, it is time to sum up.

In our first main option for a modern doctrine of the ascension a brave counter-claim is made against the threat of pure absence. The course set by Martensen in the wake of Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel, when fully adjusted to an evolutionary worldview, leads to something like the following response to the Where? question: Christ is risen into human history via the church, and continues to rise into the entire universe as its unifying principle. His ubiquity is an unfolding ubiquity, his own ascension an ascension by degrees. He is present as one who is coming, as one who is making himself present in a yet grander way than in the incarnation, for he is carrying out the transformation of all nature from dead matter into living spirit. The history of the universe (its ascent from matter to spirit) is the bodily history of the cosmic Christ, who is the real mediator between God and creation. Revelation and redemption must not be fixed in the short history of the human Jesus, even if it is centred there. It is a process coextensive with time itself, which, having made its turn round the cross, is now steadily resolving transcendence into immanence, otherness into identity.

For most of its proponents this answer—what we will label the "neo-classical" view of the ascension, for Irenaean it most emphatically is not—restores to the church its dignity as kosmos of the cosmos. At the same time it lays on the church the

light consider the poignant question posed by The Mission: Which missionary domesticated the gospel? The one who died taking up arms to defend the natives against the economic imperialism supported by the church for the sake of its wider "catholic" interests, or the one who died leading the eucharistic procession?

296 This represents, of course, a major concession to the Kantian alternative (cf. p. 287 above).
obligation to seek and pursue both the unity of the world and unity with the world. Its chief theological characteristics are to be found in its universalism, its synergism, and its panentheism, inasmuch as Christ's ascension signals the generalizing of the incarnation. That indeed is the basis of the ecclesiology it recommends, which also merits the title "neo-classical."

In some respects, of course, this modern option also stands at a great remove from the teachings of Origen, Augustine, and the medievals, with their conspicuous dualism and verticality. But the similarity of outcome suggests that the differences are relatively superficial. Certainly the pretension of ascension theorists such as Teilhard to have overthrown dualism, indeed, to have restored to Christian faith its proper exuberance about the material world, is just that. If his conicalism were not already sufficient proof, his restless grasping after the coming universality, carried out at the expense of the present and the particular, provides another kind of evidence. Dualism, and the monism it supports, is in fact the common trait that binds the classical and the neo-classical doctrines of the ascension together, as variant forms of the doctrine of the ascension of the mind.

It has sometimes been observed (to translate the distinction entirely into temporal terms) that the ancients were inclined to divinize the past whereas moderns want to divinize the future. Hence Origen, emphasizing the ascension as a return, passes over the parousia; cosmic christology today is essentially a doctrine of the ascension as a doctrine of the parousia. Yet here again their deeper likeness is revealed by a common trait: In

---

297 What a claim from those whose eschatology is aimed precisely at escaping matter by absolute intellectual mastery of it!

298 See e.g. 1965:26f., which illustrates the point in both dimensions: "like the pagan I worship a god who can be touched...: but to take hold of him as I would wish ... I must go always on and on through and beyond each undertaking, unable to rest in anything,..." Cf. Gunton 1993:85ff., on "Modernity's False Temporality."
both cases the end and the beginning are impossible to disentangle, since the redemption of time is really the **abolition** of time. In both cases the fall and the parousia become a pre- and a post-human event, respectively. Otherwise the circle cannot be closed;²⁹⁹ what is more, a **competition** in human projects comes into view and we are forced to withdraw from the universalist alternative altogether. But of that we must speak further elsewhere.

If the chief differences between the classical and the neo-classical view of the ascension prove to be something of an illusion, so is the reason most commonly cited for the change, namely, the science of Copernicus and especially of Darwin. What we have called the Copernican factor could not have arisen in the form that it did were it not for the fact that theology (as Michael Buckley has argued) had **already** strayed so far from its christological foundations by the end of the middle ages as to render sterile such dialogue with science as it was wont to attempt.³⁰⁰ Likewise, the option we have just outlined cannot be put down to the demands of evolutionary theory in biology or in physics, for the simple reason that it already existed, in all its fundamentals, in Martensen. In the thought of Luther and the trio already named its necessary and sufficient conditions were already to be found.

Good reasons for pursuing this option further others may venture to suggest. There is no point in disguising our own judgment: To perpetuate a discourse on the dead Christ by renaming him the cosmic Christ, bold though it may be, gives every appearance

²⁹⁹ Since the common object is to overcome nature rather than sin, what appears on the modern scheme to be a straight line proves to be but the arc of a great circle. In the words of the ancient collect with which Illingworth finished his essay in *Lux Mundi*, "all things are returning to perfection through him from whom they took their origin"—a process that will be complete only when growing consciousness "can peek over the barrier now placed in its way by time" (Segundo 120; cf. Teilhard 1970:322, Lyons 212).

of being an *evasion* of Nietzsche's challenge, an attempt to get the remission we crave from direct encounter with the real absence of Jesus. Either that or it amounts to something far worse, *viz.*, a crass attempt to use the church for ends other than those of its founder, in the fashion of the cynical Inquisitor. At all events, it constitutes a refusal to allow Jesus to be himself. That is, it refuses to allow the Word to remain a man; hence also to allow creation to remain other than God and the church to remain other than the world. For where the ascension is universal there is no *ek-klesia*.

It is time, then, to put Jesus back into the picture; that is what the other main option for a modern view of the ascension attempts to do.

**This Same Jesus**

There was another Dane, a student and staunch opponent of Martensen, who refused to follow Hegel's rising star. For Soren Kierkegaard the crisis of absence was already urgent in a society where the church still had considerable influence. The reason was not cosmological or philosophical but spiritual, an intuition of fraud: Christ was absent just where he was supposed to be most obviously present, namely, among Christians. Kierkegaard did not shy from tackling the current philosophical form of the problem, however. "Incessant talk about world-historical views" and the like had encouraged men "to start making capital of Christianity" at the expense of its own truth, which is the person of Jesus. By converting Christianity into "a development within the category of the human race" the heterogeneity of the God-man, his absolutely unique and

---

301 We have borrowed the language, and adapted an insight, of George Steiner (1989:39).

302 Insofar as that may be the case, it can aptly be described as a sin against the Holy Spirit, whose own personal identity and activity is also at stake in the question as to the nature and whereabouts of Jesus.
paradoxical individuality, was sacrificed for the general divinization of the race. Not Jesus' own life, but only its historical results, were now regarded as valuable. The great "calamity in Christendom," argued Kierkegaard, is that Christ is "neither the person he was when he lived on earth nor the one he will be at his second coming," but a "fantasy God-figure" decked out today in the garb of historical progress. Around that idol were gathered a host of admirers and hangers-on, a pseudo-church virtually indistinguishable from the world at large.

Kierkegaard, who is better known for making himself the enemy of the abstract epistemology that allowed for this exchange of theological currency, was also and especially the enemy of an abstract, malleable Christ. To reassert the concrete particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as the object of faith—and so also the costly particularity of anyone who would be Jesus' disciple—became one of his chief aims. And that required him to deal with the doctrine we are studying. *Practice in Christianity* (which he regarded as the best and truest of his works) shows that he recognized the idolatrous "recasting" of Christ, his metamorphosis into an object fit for the approval of the masses, to rest in part on a triumphalist misreading of the ascension. The book concludes with a series of seven expositions on John 12:32, in which Kierkegaard...
strives to hold together what others wished to separate: Christ in his humiliation and Christ in his exaltation. The doctrine of the ascension does not permit us to exchange the lowly one for the lofty one, he insisted. These are "one and the same" and there can be no choosing between them, no letting go of the Jesus who causes offense in favour of some more winsome Christ—or, worse yet, some pantheistic hallucination about becoming Christ ourselves. 306

This forced him, first of all, to recover something of the Irenaean unity between descending and ascending. The one movement does not negate the other. Christ's lowliness, the ambiguity of his countenance, the scandal of his suffering, is not merely a fact belonging to the past. Such is the form, the only form, his glory takes in a fallen world. Conversely, in his liberty with the Father he is none other than the one we know in his humility. 307 Kierkegaard perceived, in other words, that Christ's two states cannot be set out in a strictly sequential way, since such a scheme would nullify rather than establish the question his life poses to us. At all events, he refused to interpret the ascension as marking a triumphant new phase in our history; it did not signal the beginning but the boundary of Jesus' association with this fallen world. Here a proper eschatological tension (along with a more biblical view of the parousia) began to reappear. 308 It was not the systematic significance of his insight that interested


307 See discourses IV and V, 1991:181ff. Note that Kierkegaard attends to both aspects of the Son's descent—i.e., in becoming a man, and then in going out into this distorted world of ours as a servant. At his ascension Jesus "begins a second time from on high," exalted above that distortion. This recapitulation, so to speak, compels us—if we wish to follow him here and now—to "begin at the very same place, from the beginning" (209), viz., with his abasement. Kierkegaard's concerns and methods are very different from those of Irenaeus, but he is thinking along similar lines and battling a common problem, namely, gnosticism.

308 Though still hampered by too strong an opposition between time and eternity, Kierkegaard makes it plain that he expects the return in glory of "the same Jesus," "the lowly man" (1991:9, 24). The present time is therefore a time of testing, of sifting our
Kierkegaard, however; indeed, he was suspicious of all systematizing. The point he wanted to make was simply that Jesus' ascension into heaven by no means cancelled the possibility of offense which is attached to him.309

But to take up such a position was in fact to repudiate the whole view of history which had been evolving in the Origenist tradition since Joachim and Bonaventure, and more especially since Lessing and Kant--- something Kierkegaard did with considerable vigour:

From now on the human race will no longer be led on by prophets and judges but forced back by martyrs, who will run headlong against that human discovery, progress. Otherwise there can be no progress: in intensity. The problem is set, once and for all; there is nothing further to add.... The result of human progress is that everything becomes thinner and thinner—the result of divine providence is to make everything more inward.310

What is more, it required a quite different way of reckoning with the universality of the God–man than any of the ways offered by that tradition. This Kierkegaard attempted to supply (in a further recovery of Irenaean insight) by replacing the doctrine of ubiquity with his remarkable notion of contemporaneity with Christ,311 what he later described as responses to this man (202): "Christ is the only one who can make his life a test for all people. The examination period begins with his ascension; it has lasted for eighteen hundred years and may last eighteen thousand. But (and this belongs to the intervening period as an examination) he is coming again."

309 Rather it establishes that possibility as a condition of any genuine encounter with him. The ascension binds us to the cross for now-- not, as in Hegel, to the idea of the cross but to the actual scandal of the cross.

310 Dru, entry 787. "Is this Christianity's view of the present world: it is an evil, sinful world, but for that reason Christianity has come into the world to transform the world, and therefore God's purpose and aim is to get a nice, congenial world out of this world and let it stand? Or is not Christianity based more upon the following view: This present world has come into existence through a fall away from God, exists against his will, and every day it exists it is against his will; he wants to have it back again?" (JP 2/1940, emphasis ours).

311 Pointing to the doctrine of ubiquity and echoing Calvin's language about a "fantastic Christ–figure" (1991:99), he remarks: "But now we must really cross out Christendom's fantasies. We proceed to the situation of contemporaneity."
"the central thought of my life."\textsuperscript{312}

"Out with history," protested Kierkegaard in 1848; "in with the situation of contemporaneity."\textsuperscript{313} This was not merely a hermeneutical proposal, an invitation to employ one's imagination in a leap across the centuries (though it was that). Nor was it a flight from historical existence, a more honest and energetic rejection of temporality than anything to be observed among the modern Origenists, whose ideas of progress he had rejected. On the contrary, it was a choice \textit{between} histories, an assertion about the ontic priority of a particular history:

\begin{quote}
It is indeed eighteen hundred years since Jesus Christ walked here on earth, but this is certainly not an event just like other events, which once they are over pass into history and then, as the distant past, pass into oblivion. No, his presence here on earth never becomes a thing of the past, thus does not become more and more distant—that is, if faith is at all to be found upon the earth; if not, well, then in that very instant it is a long time since he lived.\textsuperscript{314}
\end{quote}

The connection with faith, inwardness, and imagination may suggest the kind of subjectivity that wishes to evade the question of objective reality as far as possible, but his intentions were quite otherwise.\textsuperscript{315} For Kierkegaard "contemporaneity" came to mean a genuine co-existence with Jesus of Nazareth \textit{in his own time}, predicated not on any supposed extension or prolongation or repetition of the incarnation but on the absoluteness of Jesus-history \textit{per se};\textsuperscript{316} hence on his real—human!—proximity to all who through

\textsuperscript{312} 1956:242 (cf. 1991:274); for its evolution, see G. Malantschuk 251ff., 348f.
\textsuperscript{313} \textit{JP} 1/691
\textsuperscript{314} 1991:9; cf. in this light Romans 10:5ff.
\textsuperscript{315} Kierkegaard (1968:305) rejected the charge that his ethical—i.e., relational—ontology amounts to "acosmism," while he also repudiated any equation between "cosmism" and Christianity (\textit{JP} 3/195). But see Gunton 1983:141f. for a balanced criticism of Kierkegaard.
\textsuperscript{316} See 1991:23ff., 62ff. "That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality—for you. Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and then with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history" (64). It stands
faith enter upon a mode of existence uniting them to himself across every barrier (including the march of history) which is thrown up against that relationship, or made to substitute for it.317

A host of questions immediately cry out for answers that Kierkegaard, with his passion for the sheer paradox of the God-man, made no attempt to give. We will not try to speak for him, except to repeat that it is only by way of pneumatology—a pneumatology much less evident in Kierkegaard than in Calvin—that we can hope to lend any real meaning or coherence to such a claim.318 Coherently or otherwise, however, it was through this troubled Lutheran319 that Calvin's abortive effort to find the proper footing on which to address the Where? question finally received the fresh impetus it required. Our time as well as our space was made relative to Jesus' own.320 Obviously Kierkegaard was not much concerned with the Where? question for its own sake, or even

alone, outside, not because it negates time or is somehow a-historical, but because here and only here time is linked with eternity, the life of man with the life of God (cf. 1968:512f.).

317 Contemporaneity with Christ, and to that extent temporality itself, Kierkegaard understood as a relational possibility, actualized on our side through personal choice and "prodigious exertion" (JP 1/695). Hence those who were contemporaries of Jesus, but not by choice, lacked true contemporaneity; those who live at a great distance historically can still obtain it—only precisely not by way of the historical connection, i.e., at second hand.

318 Apart from pneumatology the risk of staticism presents itself, i.e., of reverting to something like the iconic christology we criticized in the eastern church—which must indeed throw the whole weight of this doctrine back unto the subjective pole. Kierkegaard does not break free altogether from the time/eternity dualism that pushes one in that direction. But see T. F. Torrance (ed. Deuser et al.) 1986:294f.; note also that Jesus, in his liberty with the Father, is "neither indifferent not inactive" respecting each one of us (JP 1/312).

319 I.e., one who found proof in the fruits of Lutheranism that Luther "did not go back far enough, did not make a person contemporary enough with Christ" (JP 1/691; cf. Dru, entry 1298).

320 "Christ as the absolute explodes all the relativity in which we human beings live," he asserted, if in a quite different context (1991:332).
for that of the eucharist. It was in correcting the faulty answer to the more important Who? question (Who is Jesus, and who then are his true disciples?) that he made the breakthrough. Yet he it was who, out of disgust for the results, turned most decisively from the whole western enterprise of trying to fit Jesus spacelessly into our time—in effect reversing the Where? question altogether.

Christ, as the ascended one and the coming one, puts himself as a question to each of us. It is we who must be fitted into him, our history that is being judged by his. The one who has ascended on high is the absolute; the rest can only be understood in relation to him. To the Where? question Kierkegaard provides a most unusual answer, then, if we read him correctly. To take seriously the fact that Christ has ascended to the Father is not to say that he is everywhere, or nowhere, or somewhere else, but that he is with us in this twofold way: He is there, in first-century Palestine, and there again, at the parousia. Because he is with the Father, he is before us and after us; only so is he with us.

He is with us precisely as a question put to our very existence, so that we too must decide with Pilate—and under essentially the same circumstances—"What shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Christ?"

321 Though Kierkegaard's view of the eucharist was remarkably close to Calvin's in some respects; cf. 1991:155f.

322 He is in "the context of completion," we are not. "Let us talk altogether humanly about it; he has passed his test, has developed the prototype [Forbillede], is now on high; it is just the same as when someone has passed his test and now as one who has finished is occupied in guiding others" (1991:183f.).

323 This "is" cannot be reduced to a "was" and a "will be," though these expressions are also true (cf. Rev 1:8, 17:8). Likewise, it is true that Christ, since he has departed to the Father, is not here but elsewhere; or again, that "invisible on high, he is also present everywhere, occupied with drawing all to himself" (1991:155). But this activity on high, is not a separate activity. It is to and through his own earthly history that he draws us: "His life on earth accompanies the human race and accompanies each particular generation as the eternal history" (64).

324 Matt 27:22; cf. 1991:203ff. We should observe here that the "before" and the "after" are much more than temporal concerns. In keeping with Kierkegaard's relational
Kierkegaard was not unaware of the implications of his position. "If I dare to put it this way," he said,

this form of existence makes the Church's whole existence here upon earth into a parenthesis or something parenthetical in Christ's life; the content of the parenthesis begins with Christ's ascension on high and ends with his coming again.... Christ is the only one who can make himself a test for all people.325

Augustine's retraction theory is thus turned inside out; and just here, in this talk of "something parenthetical," the outlines of a distinctly Christian (i.e., eucharistic) cosmology begin to re-emerge. Begin, we say, since Kierkegaard, having another and more urgent task at hand, did not develop these ideas dogmatically; for that we must look to Karl Barth. But first a word about his un-popular ecclesiology.

The task at hand was to apply his insight to his struggle with the Church of Denmark (over which Hans Martensen was soon to be presiding bishop) and all that it represented. Kierkegaard saw immediately that the concept of contemporaneity demanded "neither more nor less than a revision of Christianity," a sweeping revision that meant "getting rid of 1800 years as if they had never been."326 His famous Attack upon 'Christendom', in intensity leaving nothing to Nietzsche, testifies to the seriousness with which he could make such a statement. If contemporaneity with the despised and crucified One were the real truth of Christianity, then the comfortable legacy of the established church was a lie, and had been from the beginning. Christianity was

ontology, they are the "behind" of Christ's abasement and the "ahead" of his glory (238f.), which transcend and ultimately transform our temporal categories altogether.

325 1991:202 (see n. 308 above). We are "situated between his abasement ... and his loftiness" (153). We are not moving away from the one or towards the other; we simply stand between them. Kierkegaard held to the homogeneity of the present age insofar as it provides the "element" in which we are tested and our answer to Christ is elicited (in JP 2/2027 he admits that the school-house analogy has too much prominence, and so it does). The world, he says, "is going neither forward nor backward; it remains essentially the same, like the sea..." (232).

326 Quoted Malantschuk 348.
impossible under the conditions of universality and worldly success for which it yearned, which amounted not to contemporaneity with Christ but with the rabble who murdered him.

Kierkegaard's alternative was based on the eschatological qualification of ecclesial being that belongs to its parenthetical situation, and on the principle of particularity to which he conjoined that qualification. \(^{327}\) A century before Teilhard, he too announced that Christianity stood at the crossroads, only the path to which he pointed led in the opposite direction. Any thought of "marching forward triumphantly en masse" makes a mockery of the church. \(^{328}\) "Christianity does not join men together—no, it separates them—in order to unite every single individual with God;" and having done so it brings them into collision with human society. \(^{329}\) That, he said, is a problem Christendom attempts to solve "in the following utterly simple manner: it makes being a Christian into a qualification of the species so that all collisions fall away." But for Kierkegaard (and this is what most distinguishes his ecclesiology from the Kantian type we have been considering) the only path towards genuine ecclesial existence leads rather to a clear break with the species. \(^{330}\)

---

\(^{327}\) The way in which the two ideas are put together to some extent falsifies his position, as we shall see. So far does he carry the principle of particularity (JP 2/1997; cf. 1989:8ff.) that he can even suggest that the problem with the church that led to "Christendom" began with the mass conversion at Pentecost (JP 2/2056). Cf. 1956:34ff.

\(^{328}\) 1936:91; cf. JP 2/2004. The "possibility of offense" is the crossroad without which Christianity is impossible (1991:81). It is worth noting that von Balthasar (1975:203) begins an account of his disillusionment with the broad way as follows: "To my misfortune, however, I had read Kierkegaard in my youth...." Had Teilhard done so, perhaps he would have found the latter's prophetic remark about that confusion of Christianity and culture which "quite ingeniously is characterized by the phrase—to possess the world" (JP 3/2712).

\(^{329}\) JP 2/2052, 2080ff. See 1989:153ff. for an indication of the dialectic with which Kierkegaard is working. Both sin and salvation "split people up into individuals"—a fact which it is fatal to obscure by way of an abstraction such as the Race or the Church. (But is there a felix culpa doctrine implied here?)

\(^{330}\) JP 2/2080. "Christendom" (whether in Catholic or Protestant form, but especially the latter, 1956:xvi, 34) is a false synthesis between Christianity and society which actually
Passing as it does through the narrow gate of den Enkelte, the single individual, it forbids every attempt to find comfort in numbers, in "the collective, the association, the community, the parish," even in the church as such. 331

His was a call to isolation, not to unity. The parenthetical situation is a time of testing, and testing belongs precisely to the individual—-to the solitary, abandoned individual. The church militant can never truly be a social reality, then; "the congregation does not really come until eternity." 332 Here of course we must ask whether Kierkegaard really had an alternative. Since he opposed to the "bewildering multiplicity" not the homogeneous whole but one heterogeneous part, namely, Jesus of Nazareth, 333 he quite rightly repudiated every "leveling" or homogenizing tendency (such as we found, at a riper stage, in Teilhard especially). But his analysis shares with that of his opponents a quite fundamental flaw. By associating the individual with time and the ecclesial congregation with eternity, he displays the fact that—-in spite of his loyalty to the human Jesus and his war against monism—-he has not entirely overcome his flawed heritage. For the most part Kierkegaard fights Luther with Luther, if not Kant with Kant; thus in rejecting the collectivist error he apparently falls back into its individualist counterpart, 334 abolishes Christianity. Cf. 2/2054, where Kierkegaard attacks the notion that Christ came to save the race: "'Race' is a category of corruption and to be saved means to be saved out of the race."

331 JP 2/2044; cf. 2038, 2074. Becoming "spirit" means breaking with the herd.

332 Struggling, he says, "is always done by single individuals, because spirit is precisely this, that everyone is an individual before God, that 'fellowship' is a lower category than 'the single individual,' which everyone can and should be." The congregation "does not belong in time but belongs first in eternity, where it is, at rest, the gathering of all the single individuals who endured in the struggle and passed the test" (1991:223; cf. JP 2/2011).


334 See e.g. JP 2/2008: "The task is precisely to work oneself out of sociality more and more, but genuinely and truly, to be able to maintain longer and longer the thought of God—present—with—me." Or 3/3214: "Actually it is the conscience which constitutes a
preparing the way for that radically un-ecclesial misappropriation of his thought to be witnessed in modern existentialism.

It would not be fair to part company with Kierkegaard on this note, however, for he does not really intend to do away with the notion of a temporal Christian community altogether. Rather, the category of the single individual serves as "a middle term in order to make sure that 'community' and 'congregation' are not taken in vain as synonymous with [the] public, the crowd, etc." \footnote{JP 1/595; but cf. 2/2008.} It allows him to place the stress on ecclesial \textbf{becoming}, on the church's eschatological nature and orientation over against the givenness of merely temporal institutions\footnote{Cf. JP 1/593, 2/2011; see esp. 1991:201ff., where for christological reasons he rejects all false anticipations of eternity.}--and, of course, to make the crucial point, very much needed in our time, that in the species of which \textbf{God} is also a specific member the whole is not (nor ever will be) greater than the part.\footnote{Kierkegaard treated the central problem of the human race in terms of a conspiracy to cover up the peculiar honour it derives from Christ: that here the part is greater than the whole; that one, each one, is of infinitely more value than a thousand. This we would learn if we allowed ourselves to be questioned—contemporaneously, as martyrs are questioned—by that Single Individual who took his stand for the race by standing over against it. But we will not; instead we band together, as if to intimidate God by our numbers, and crucify Christ anew (JP 2/2004, 2006, \textit{passim}).} And Kierkegaard does post signs pointing in a more promising direction than sheer individualism. As Michael Plekon observes, he even criticizes the Augsburg Confession for failing to grasp the nub of the ecclesiology of the Apostles' Creed, which is to be found in the notion of the \textit{communio sanctorum}\.\footnote{JP 1/600; cf. Plekon 1992:220.} That is quite in keeping with his rejection of an abstract ecclesiology in which the church personality; personality is an individual determinateness confirmed by being known by God in the possibility of conscience."
is regarded as a person, a third party so to speak, rather than as a fellowship of persons.\textsuperscript{339} It may also be connected to his early conviction (never consistently followed up but never abandoned) that the eucharist, dynamically understood as a \textit{relational} act, provides the proper starting point for ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{340}

For all that, Kierkegaard's ecclesiology certainly suffers from the weakness noted, and from his failure to think more deliberately in trinitarian terms. Did he himself not desire another and better way, an escape from the polarization between the individual and the collective?

How dreadful it is when everything historical vanishes before a diseased probing of one's own miserable history! Who will show us the middle course between being devoured by one's own reflections, as though one were the only man who ever had existed or ever would exist, and---seeking a worthless consolation in the \textit{commune naufragium} of mankind? That is really what the doctrine of an ecclesia should do.\textsuperscript{341}

In order to find it we must take up a yet more robust eschatology than Kierkegaard's—-one less tainted by the remnants of dualism---while pursuing a trinitarian foundation for thinking Christianly about human being. That will require, \textit{inter alia}, allowing the doctrine of ascension in the flesh to fill out the content of the doctrine of the incarnation, something Kierkegaard only began to do rather late in the day. Towards these goals we may hope to make some progress by turning to Barth.

\textsuperscript{339} Each of whom is individually related to God in Christ. Kierkegaard (\textit{JP} 1/603) points to the tendency "to get an abstraction between God and oneself" as a kind of buffer. "Such an abstraction today is 'the Church.' Men have hit upon making it into a person...."

\textsuperscript{340} Plekon 219; see \textit{JP} 5/5089 (May 28, 1835). "Even in the late years, 1850–55, during the attack on the Danish Church and society, there is no criticism of the sacraments themselves, but only of their abuse." Plekon points to a number of passages in Kierkegaard which actually suggest a "rich and nuanced theology of the eucharist" (222), including \textit{JP} 1/450, which speaks of a brotherhood with Christ "which is the condition for our brotherhood with men."

\textsuperscript{341} Dru, entry 163 (cf. \textit{JP} 1/586 for another pointer, in eucharistic terms, towards this middle course).
"We begin with Jesus Christ." The works of Karl Barth breathe a loyalty to the Man of Nazareth that none can mistake. To begin again at the Beginning was what Kierkegaard, in the end, called on us to do. Barth made that call his vocation. Indeed, he turned it into a theological method the fruit of which was a further revival of Irenaean insights, turning the dogmatic enterprise itself back towards its historic roots. Having rejected with Kierkegaard the false objectivity of much modern scholarship, Barth began early (even in Die christliche Dogmatik of 1927) to break loose from Kierkegaard's excessive emphasis on subjectivity, in order "to understand Jesus Christ and bring him from the periphery of my thought into the centre." How to do this he learned while wrestling with Anselm's epistemology, not from Irenaeus, and the results were not strictly true to either of those theologians. Yet the famous Church Dogmatics takes up Jesus-history as its proper theme. In it Barth explores a theology of descent and ascent for insight into the integrity of the incarnation as the ground of all communion between man and God. In it he too treats creation and redemption as contrapuntal movements composed and conducted by the "one Jesus Christ" who, by virtue of his bodily resurrection and ascension, stands at the centre of all things. In it he strives, with varied

342 CD 4/3:1

343 "Dogmatics is possible only as theologia crucis, in the act of obedience which is certain in faith, but which for this very reason is humble, always being thrown back to the beginning and having to make a fresh start" (CD 1/1:14; cf. E. Jüngel 1986:18f.).

344 Quoted E. Busch 1976:173. Barth referred to this one-volume "series" as "my well-known false start" (Heron 1980:83); it was replaced in 1932 by the Church Dogmatics, the writing of which occupied the rest of his life. The title change points quite deliberately (pref., 1/1) to his attempt to go beyond Kierkegaard, whose own evolution he took little notice of.

345 Regarding Anselm (Barth 1960), see G. Watson 1977, 1989. Irenaeus himself does not figure largely in Barth's work, but a comparison of the two ought to have its place in our ongoing digestion of Barth, whom, as G. Hunsinger (1991:xii.) observes, we are still just learning to understand. (The same thing might be said of Irenaeus, in our judgment.)
success, to overturn the offending dualisms that would tear Christ apart—moving, so Ingolf Dalferth has argued, towards a quite daring eschatological cosmology. In it he renews trinitarian discourse. And all the while he steers towards that middle course in ecclesiology which for so many centuries had proved elusive.

The problem of contemporaneity with Christ occupied Barth from the outset. From the first edition of his Romans commentary through the final volume of his unfinished *Dogmatics* it is discussed over and over again, this feature or that being drawn out in a new way. Since the issue is at bottom a relational one, it has always to be confronted existentially and even hamartiologically. Barth therefore followed Kierkegaard (to whom he owed more than he sometimes let on) in superimposing on the cosmological question a more personal one: "how will it stand with us when we are alongside Jesus Christ and follow him, when we are in his environment and time and space?" He was quite prepared to speak about the cosmological dimension of the problem, however. His purpose was not apologetic (i.e., to show how it is that we can be alongside Jesus) but dogmatic. In other words, it was not intended to ease the scandal of particularity but to expound it. For Barth came to see clearly that the common thrust of both the dominant


347 The whole business took a decisive turn early on, of course, when Barth repented of the fact that in *Romans* "play was made and even work occasionally done with the idea of a revelation permanently transcending time, merely bounding time and determining it from without" (CD 1/2:250). His confession of a fully temporal revelation—i.e., that revelation was and is Jesus-history—naturally complicated things.

348 CD 4/1:293 (as elsewhere in this section, we have altered the capitalization to exclude pronouns). This, not the temporal question in and of itself, was what really mattered; see also p. 348.

349 Ibid. 291. "The directness of the encounter with the Lord, the absence of Lessing's 'gaping and wide chasm,' contemporaneity with the historical act of God, does not mean any easing of the relationship to that act, any lessening of the tension...." Indeed, it means a heightening of it, since the real difficulty is "a problem of distance of quite another kind" than that posed by the lapse of centuries (see 286ff.).
and the emerging theological traditions of our time was to undermine the strict identity of the Word of God with Jesus of Nazareth. His monumental battle to renew that identification is what marks him out as a modern Irenaeus.

We will not attempt to describe the battle as a whole, or how exactly Barth came to take it up, most of which is well known. Its most famous front, of course, is not the question of contemporaneity itself or even the controversial "hermeneutics of contemporaneity," but the broad assault Barth launched on natural theology. Here more than anywhere critical reviews have tended to neglect his primary objective. The repudiation of any breach between the Word and Jesus (i.e., of docetism) is what led Barth to refuse to every other constituent part of creation, and especially to creation or to history as a whole, the dignity of being called revelation in its own right.

Not the cosmos is the Son or Word of God, but the unique One whom he sends into the world as his Son and therefore his Word. Not every man is a Christ, but Jesus of Nazareth alone.350

But if Jesus is really and truly God's self, as the church confesses, no genuine communion with God can be had outside of his company; in fact, outside of his company the integrity and viability of every other creature is called into question.351 That, obviously, is where the doctrine of contemporaneity comes in. Barth's regard for the church's answer to the Who? question led him to the twofold conviction "that we have no other time than the time God has for us, and ... that God has no other time for us than the time of his

350 "Not all peoples are Israel. Not all societies are the community of the Lord. Not all writings are Holy Scripture...." Indeed, "theology is not a universal science" (CD 4/3:222). If then there are penultimate words, and there are, that is what they are; they have their truth from him who is the truth (cf. 122f).

351 CD 3/2:148f. "At no level or time can we have to do with God without also having to do with this man" (4/2:33). There is "no knowledge of God..., no single movement towards him, which on any pretext or in any way can escape his humanity.... There is, therefore, no natural religion, no natural theology, no natural law"—where "natural' means apart from Jesus Christ" (4/2:101).
revelation," namely, Jesus-history. And to uphold that conviction it was necessary to think creatively about the most basic structures of our existence in christological terms, providing an answer to the Where? question from within christology's own resources.

According to Barth, if Jesus is the eternal Lord (*vere Deus*) in time and for time (*vere homo*), he is also the Lord of time. He is not merely an occupant of time but also its master; not merely a recipient and as such a co-creator of his own time, but also the mediator, redeemer and consummator of our times. The twofold relation that constitutes his own existence—his radical openness to his Father and also to us—"makes the barrier of his time on every side a gateway." Here is Barth's version of the doctrine of recapitulation, which he refused to convert into an Omega-point theory. Jesus-history, as the life of God in time, is "the centre, beginning and end of all the times," which derive their own possibilities from him and his time. So thoroughly was Barth

---

352 CD 1/2:45. The same can be said of space, but Barth viewed time as the more fundamental category, since the content of revelation seemed to suggest that.

353 "We must let ourselves be told what time is," says Barth (ibid.; cf. 2/1:61ff.), "by revelation itself." Though hardly carried through in a flawless manner, the weaknesses of this programme (pace R. Roberts, Sykes 1979:88ff.) are not to be found in Barth's rejection of natural theology but in his partial succumbing to the same; see below.

354 CD 3/2:437ff. Major discussions of time can be found in each volume (e.g., 14, 31.3, 41.1, 47, 59.3, 69.2). Barth's relational reworking of time included a distinction between creation time, fallen time, and fulfilled time—i.e., revelation time, Jesus-history, which grounds and consummates the first while dissolving the second (see esp. 1/2:49, 2/1:62ff., 3/1: 71ff.). Unfortunately, he did not maintain these distinctions as well as he might have.

355 CD 1/2:45; cf 3/2:440: "The two-fold answer which he gives, to God on the one hand and to men on the other, makes him the Contemporary of all men...."

356 The time of Jesus Christ is "the time of man in its whole extent." But n.b.: "It is as a man of his time, and not otherwise, that he is the Lord of time. We should lose Jesus as the Lord of all time if we ignored him as a man in his own time" (CD 3/2:440f.).
convinced of this that he could even claim that our present age has its final term behind it, in the cross of Jesus. So much for the cult of progress!357

Barth's reworking of anthropology and cosmology along relational lines to accommodate the staggering implications of the incarnation may well represent the beginnings of a far-reaching ontological revolution in theology. But above all it was intended to bar the door against any attempt to establish a relationship with God apart from Jesus, to find God behind Jesus, or to abstract from Jesus an immanent divinity of another sort—including and especially a logos asarkos, which Kierkegaard had already rejected and which Barth regarded, together with the analogia entis, as an invention of antichrist.358 It was also intended, and to the same end, to declare in no uncertain terms the unity of creation and redemption.

By the Word the world exists. A marvellous reversal of our whole thinking! Don't let yourselves be led astray by the difficulty of the time-concept, which might well result from this. The world came into being, it was created and sustained by the little child that was born in Bethlehem, by the Man who died on the Cross of Golgotha, and the third day rose again. That is the Word of creation, by which all things were brought into being.359

In short, Barth confessed the human Jesus, in his own space–time concreteness, to be the

357 "The last time is the time of the world and human history and all men to which a term is already set in the death of Jesus and which can only run to this appointed end" (CD 4/3:295). More positively, and with the resurrection in view: "When we say Jesus Christ, this is not a possibility which is somewhere ahead of us, but an actuality which is already behind us. With this name in our hearts and on our lips, we are not laboriously toiling uphill, but merrily coming down." (4/2:46).

358 "Under the title of a logos asarkos we pay homage to a Deus absconditus and therefore to some image of God which we have made for ourselves" (CD 4/1:52; cf. Kierkegaard, JP 2/2088, 4/4794). This really is the insight expounded, not only by 257, but in the whole of the Dogmatics, namely, that "in Jesus Christ we really have to do with the first and eternal Word of God at the beginning of all things," and at their middle and end as well (4/1:50; cf. 2/2:94ff.).

359 1949:57f.; cf. CD 3/2:456: "There is no god called Chronos. And it is better to avoid conceptions of time which might suggest that there is."
cosmic Christ, thus moving once more towards that revolutionary world view which certain of the New Testament writers had glimpsed.

Here then was "a decisive turn in the direction of the particular," to use Eberhard Jüngel's expression, but one that did not mean following Kierkegaard's existentialist heirs into the morass of a self-absorbed subjectivity, since the particular in question was first of all Jesus of Nazareth. If we do not wish to make this turn we must part company with Barth straight-away. For him Jesus-history is "the history which overlaps all others," and without that overlap God's address to man, which constitutes man as man, disappears without a trace; so too does God's Word to the rest of creation and the very possibility of the church. Of his massive theological output hardly anything compelling remains if on this point there is simply incredulity or outright rejection.

It may be doubted, of course, whether Barth had a clear map of the difficult terrain he was opening up. Even his most thoroughgoing conceptual adjustments (his actualism, e.g., or his account of time and eternity) are far from being unproblematic. What is more, since the lines of his trinitarian grid were somewhat tangled, there is still no proper pneumatological exposition in support of so bold a christology. But what especially

---

360 His own word is concretissimum (cf. Dalferth, Sykes 1989:27ff.). Not until CD 4/3:756 does Barth speak directly of "a third form of existence of Jesus Christ" as the cosmic Lord. This is a weakness that requires correction (see Gunton 1992:95). But the point to be made here is that this third form is not a third alongside his divinity and humanity, but alongside his self-existence and his relation to the church. In his relation to the cosmos, as to the church, he remains the God-man, ruling both through the Spirit. Cf. Lyons 57.

361 Jüngel 1986:19. See Hunsinger 14ff., who, drawing on Robert Jenson, points up the connection between Barth's particularism and the matters we have been discussing: "Veiled behind Barth's appeal to the particularity of Jesus (veiled perhaps even partially to himself) is the extent to which all dimensions of "temporality" are subjected to radical reinterpretation according to christological and trinitarian modes of thought" (see also 236ff.).

interests us is the fact that the whole burden of his witness to Jesus as the one true and sufficient Word of God comes to rest on eschatology. For the message of the resurrection and ascension which runs throughout the New Testament "is the mainstay of everything." To his handling of that message we must give our closest attention.

Barth's eschatological interests also developed early in his career. They were stimulated not so much by the work of Weiss and Schweitzer as by the earlier work of Franz Overbeck (a friend of Nietzsche) and by the two Blumhardts. Overbeck had fearlessly denounced the confusion of Christianity with cultural progress and the substitution of human optimism for eschatology, which he regarded as the very essence of Christianity. Reading Overbeck after the Great War sharpened the focus of Barth's own disillusionment with the consequences of that confusion and substitution. Thus inspired, he began (in the second edition of *Romans*) to turn the prevailing academic approach to dogmatics, which could only treat biblical eschatology as a kind of foreign body, inside out. Here was a decision about the ground of theology itself. If theology was to be done at all, Barth decided, it must be done in and for the church; criticism was to derive from confession of the risen Lord, not confession from criticism. And theology, like all things human, could be done (even if Overbeck did not appear to think

---

363 CD 1/2:23.; cf. 4/1:324. There is no theologia crucis without a theologia resurrectionis (4/2:355).

364 The theological establishment's support for the Kaiser's war effort, e.g.. On Overbeck and the Blumhardts, see Jüngel 54ff.

365 See e.g. 1968:314f. (cf. D. Migliore's introduction to *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, LVIIff.). Even before he discovered Overbeck, Barth began to rediscover the Bible itself.

366 For Barth, theology "from above" was really theology "from inside" (see Jüngel 59). His later study in Anselm helped him to sharpen and to articulate his emerging methodology.
so) precisely because of the resurrection. The resurrection made contemporaneity possible, and contemporaneity made theology possible.

A new and very different kind of optimism thus began to permeate Barth's own work. It was fed by the Blumhardts, whom he had already encountered, and from whom he learned in word and deed to reckon with the living Jesus as Lord.\footnote{367 See CD 4/3:168ff. Barth (1979:22) described the younger Blumhardt, whom he first met in 1907, as a "priestly person."}

Barth now aimed at a theology that would "dare to become eschatology,"\footnote{368 Quoted Jüngel 62. Interestingly, both Barth and Teilhard (cf. H. de Lubac 1967:244) regarded their own work as potentially "a piece of the 'last things.'"} indeed, a theology that would think christianly on the basis of the fact that in and with Jesus of Nazareth our human nature has been exalted to God. In that sense his entire project moved in the direction of a theology of the ascension, one quite different than those we have been examining.\footnote{369 For Barth the doctrine of the ascension is the whole work of reconciliation as seen from the side of man; it is the subject in particular of CD 4/2.}

Overbeck had accused liberal theologians, who were unable to confess the risen Lord or to live in expectation of his return, of living with a corpse: the corpse of Christianity.\footnote{370 Jüngel 60} Barth, for his part, grew increasingly bold about testifying afresh to the Easter events and to their dogmatic implications:

> The knowledge which the apostles acquired on the basis of Christ's resurrection, the conclusion of which is the ascension of Christ, is essentially this basic knowledge that the reconciliation which took place in Jesus Christ is not some casual story, but that in this work of God's grace we have to do with the word of God's omnipotence, that here an ultimate and supreme thing comes into action, behind which there is no other reality.\footnote{371 1949:126 (capitalization altered).}

In other words, the ground of the church's conviction about Jesus as the Son of God is the Easter revelation that here is a specific human life that exists purely out of divine
possibilities, a life that as such is certainly not that of homo tantus. It is a life that in and through the resurrection has "the power of divine presence," and in that way declares itself as divine.372

Barth recognized, of course, that besides an outright denial of the resurrection there is a way of treating it which more or less discreetly reopens the breach between Jesus and God that he was determined to close. It does so by introducing a breach between Jesus and Jesus. That is the way of Teilhard de Chardin (whose Milieu divin Barth once described as "a giant gnostic snake")373 and indeed of all who deny resurrection and ascension in the flesh. Provoked by Rudolf Bultmann in particular, but also by more moderate figures such as Emil Brunner, Barth mounted an assault on what he rightly regarded as eschatological docetism. The resurrection and ascension took place "in the body." If the identity of Jesus was not to be left up for grabs, that had to be insisted upon.374

Barth's view of the resurrection and ascension was not a naïve one, however, of the sort that Bultmann loved to complain about. Jesus did not just get up and carry on, so to speak, then float away into the heavens. The resurrection was an event with "retroactive force."375 Employing a logic we will examine later, Barth interpreted it as a process of exaltation identical with, and yet transcending, the course of Jesus' earthly life.

---


373 1981:116


375 Barth (CD 4/3:298) uses this expression to indicate that the impact of the resurrection on the world, as the announcing and effecting of its reconciliation to God in Christ, includes the whole scope of history. But we may use it also, and analogously, to speak of the relation between Jesus' life before the cross and afterwards, of the fact that his pre-history participates in his post-history and vice versa (4/1:313). That is not to say with Pannenberg (1968:135ff.), however, that the resurrection "realizes" Jesus' divinity (cf. 4/3:314).
from conception to cross. It was, so to speak, the very same personal history and reality all over again in a new way. As such it involved a transfiguration of Jesus-history rather than an addition to it.\textsuperscript{376} Barth went so far as to divide Jesus' life into two corresponding "sides," the thirty years and the forty days of resurrection appearances, insisting that each is really the whole under a different (and, in the latter case, refracted) aspect. The one history has its climax on the cross, the other in the ascension, yet they are a single event. On no account must ascending be torn away from descending and made over into another Christ who is something other than "this same Jesus." In thus rejecting the notion of two successive "states" Barth did not mean to deny sequence altogether, of course. Life follows death, exaltation humiliation, just as the forty days follow the thirty years. But what follows is what precedes, in a new way.\textsuperscript{377} Resurrection time is not our time, time which merely continues as before. And for that reason it does not add or subtract anything from Christ's identity; rather it engages with our time as the time of the revelation of that identity.\textsuperscript{378}

Barth thus attacked eschatological docetism with a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity that doubled as a theology of revelation. The resurrection, if not mere resuscitation, was certainly something more than a subjective faith experience or a purely

\textsuperscript{376} It is not \textbf{another} someone, nor is it simply a further set of events in the same someone's life. It is "an absolutely new coming of the One who came before" (CD 4/3:308). There is sequence and correspondence, but neither extension nor mere repetition. See 4/1:309ff., 4/2:150, 4/3:310ff. (cf. Hoogland 3f.).

\textsuperscript{377} See CD 3/2:441f., 4/1:309ff., 342f., 4/2:150. Barth (4/1:132ff.) explains his rejection of two consecutive states in favour of "two sides or directions or forms" in connection with his actualist interpretation of the doctrine of the two natures; see below.

\textsuperscript{378} See CD 4/2:132ff. In resurrection time the \textbf{man} Jesus is manifested in the mode of \textbf{God} (3/2:448). "The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are the completed revelation of Jesus Christ which corresponds to his completed work" (4/2:141). "His coming again as the Revealer of the reconciliation effected in him includes this sphere or time of ours within itself" (4/3:333). In doing so it alters our time too; for it is a real coming and not merely the "noetic converse" of his first coming (4/1:304).
spiritual encounter with Jesus. It was a new coming of Jesus himself with his humanity intact and his divinity no longer veiled. It was the time in which God was clearly seen and known to live as this man, and this man as God. It was parousia time: the time of Jesus made contemporaneous with all times, the time of "his manifestation in effective presence in the world." Nor did the final episode of that time—the ascension which set a definite limit to it, preserving its particularity—negate his presence. On the contrary, it signalled that his presence, though now hidden, is hidden with God; that his time, his human living and dying, belongs to God. And by fixing it with God, it fixed it at the heart of every time.

This brings us to the Where? question, to which Barth gave an answer not unlike Kierkegaard's. In one sense Jesus remains right where he was, since his resurrection life is not an extension of his life with us, but rather its vindication and manifestation. That is why the question must indeed be turned around, becoming a question about our whereabouts in relation to his. Barth went so far as to claim that it is we who belong to the past, not Jesus, since we are the ones whose time and space are still slipping away from us.

Jesus Christ's having come ... would answer to what we term the past. But how inappropriate it would be to say of that event that it was past. What Jesus suffered and did is certainly not past; it is rather the old that is past, the world of man, the world of disobedience and disorder, the world of misery, sin and death.... Sin and death did exist, and the whole of world history, including that which ran its course post Christum, right down to our day, existed. All that is past in Christ.... But

---

379 "wirksame Gegenwart" (CD 4/3:293; cf. 4/1:316). For Barth the parousia, though a single event (3/2:490), has a threefold form—the resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the final coming.

380 CD 3/2:454ff., 4/1:316ff. Limits belong to the creaturely, whether in time or eternity, though in eternity limits are not barriers (3/2:438ff., 463ff.). As birth and death delimit Jesus' time en sarki, so the empty tomb and the ascension delimit his time en pneumati, we might say. Barth's inclusion of "natural death" (3/2:639) as proper to the creature is, however, a warning signal that the position he is taking has still a very problematic element of Greek thinking in it; see below.
Jesus Christ sitteth beside the Father, as He who has suffered and has risen from the dead. That is the present.

It is we who belong to the past: That is why, from our vantage point, Jesus is absent as well as present; why this is, "in a certain respect," the time of the church's loneliness on earth.\footnote{1949:128f.; see also \textit{CD} 4/1:319f.} That is why we must not proceed from the Where? question to an answer of our own, which can never be anything but a false projection. Rather we must wait—\textit{warten und eilen}!—for Jesus himself as the one who will come again. His present is our future.\footnote{CD 4/1:115; see 318ff., 4/3:72ff. \textit{Barth turns the Where? question around by arguing that the answer is too great for the question, or rather for those who ask it, since they still inhabit the time of Holy Saturday (cf. Steiner 232). But if in Christ this time is already altered, those who know that wait joyfully for the one who himself is the answer. They do not proceed to establish an answer of their own—i.e., to seize upon a future which is only an extrapolation of their fading present.} On the other hand, Barth's answer had a more optimistic thrust than Kierkegaard's. Grounding contemporaneity in the resurrection (which for Barth signified the concord of time with eternity and hence the participation of the resurrected One in every time) meant that all of us simply are in Jesus' environment, and he in ours. The overlap between his history and ours is not something to be striven for. Contemporaneity is "not a problem" in Lessing's sense or even in Kierkegaard's, nor yet in that of the sacramentalists. It is a given.\footnote{CD 4/2:112f.; cf. 4/3:362f.} To make such a claim, thought Barth, is really only to say with the creed that Jesus is in heaven; that he alone has entered that side of creation on which its true potential is realized; that he alone has secure and concrete reality; that he himself is the \textit{concretissimum}, whose presence is in fact \textit{more} real than ours.\footnote{CD 3/2:466ff. Heaven "is the sum of the inaccessible and incomprehensible side of the created world..., the throne of God, the creaturely correspondence to his glory;" it is to "the God-ward side of the universe" that Jesus disappeared in the cloud (453f.; cf. 4/2:153ff.). Yet he remains present with us, since as man he exists and acts "in the mode
alone" is also to insist with the creed that Jesus is with God absolutely, that in the resurrection and ascension God has laid claim to Jesus-history as his very own act and declared this man to be his one definitive Word. With Barth that is always the crux of the matter.385

Like Kierkegaard, Barth was determined neither to abandon the universality of Jesus nor to universalize him at the expense of his particularity.386 We will have occasion later to question his success. Meanwhile, we may notice affirmatively that Barth takes a middle way between those in the tradition of Schleiermacher who allow no ontological weight to the resurrection and ascension as events that are real for Jesus and those whose doctrine of the ascension is hard to distinguish from an adventure in space. At the same time he avoids the path of those who regard these events as a part of Jesus' own experience but disallow the participation of his body.387 Against the first it is made plain, as Hans Frei puts it, that Jesus "owns his own identity,"388 against the last, that this

of God" at the heart of every time, turning its pastness into his present, converting our time into his time, making himself our "absolute and final future" (4/1:324; cf. 2/1:623ff.).

385 This was "true and actual before," i.e., that this man was with God absolutely; that it was true "is the hidden thing which is revealed in the ascension of Jesus Christ" (CD 4/2:153f.). Likewise, then, he who is present even now is not an altered, ubiquitous, or "divinized" Christ, or one who is present only in his deity; he comes to us as the one he was and is and will be, the mediator, the God-man. But he comes in the hiddenness of one who has exited from the sphere of death into the mystery of God; he comes in the form of "the promise of his Spirit" (4/3:356f.).

386 CD 4/1:313

387 See e.g. E. Brunner 1952:363ff., who argues that here "theology must have the courage to be ready to abandon the ecclesiastical tradition." But in doing so he does not set aside "speculative or mystical theology" for the "historical" Christian message, as he claims, but instead remains rooted in its docetism, with the usual consequences (notice that the church becomes the one and only "body" of the risen Lord). Brunner's comments in The Mediator 585f. are more helpful.

388 1975:32. "Luke, in climaxing the resurrection with the ascension story, highlights the fact to which the mysterious veiledness of the resurrection appearances had already pointed. Jesus has a location of his own, and only as he is able to withdraw from a common location with men to one distinctly his own, does he turn to share his presence
identity is not another but the very same. Jesus—history after the cross is neither reduced to the history of faith nor converted into something unlike itself so as to continue alongside us on our terms:

Since Jesus Christ exists as the person he was, obviously he is the beginning of a new, different time from that which we know, a time in which there is no fading away, but real time which has a yesterday, a today and a tomorrow.... His time is not at an end.  

And this means that even in his contemporaneity, or rather because of it, a breach has indeed opened up, not between Jesus and Jesus, but between Jesus and us.

The breach to which we refer is not that between man and God generally, which in every age has tempted the gnostic mind to search for a cosmological solution, making christology parasitic on the literary or scientific imagination. It is a gap between one particular man and all others, a gap in anthropology and so in cosmology itself. In the end it has but one possible solution, viz., closure from the other side: "He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." Barth was very deliberate about

391 That is why our time is "the time between the times" (CD 4/1:323) of Jesus' appearing—not, as in the Barth who helped to found Zwischen den Zeiten, a time that is no time, a time to be annulled by way of an existential encounter with a timeless God; not, as in Origen and Teilhard, a time to be compressed and overcome through cosmic evolution; but a time for witness to Jesus, a time for confessing a real distance between him and us precisely because of his lordly proximity (289ff.; cf. 4/3:313).

392 Jesus' existence at the right hand of God "is real existence and as such the measure of all existence," a measure that will be taken when he rends the heavens to stand before us once more as the same one he is and was (1949:130ff.). Meanwhile, the Spirit provides a bridge (CD 4/2:345).
restoring to a place of prominence what Origen had long ago trimmed away, namely, the doctrine of the personal return of Jesus Christ. Nor did he shy away from the implications. For both Barth and Kierkegaard the present age stands under judgment; we have already learned that the term towards which it is moving is the cross. But if the heavenly session of Jesus speaks of a distinction, and hence of a confrontation, between his history and ours, denying any attempt (false comfort!) to suggest that our time as such is already resurrection time, it speaks also and more positively of a parenthesis, of the room created by God for our histories. It speaks especially of the church. Before attempting an evaluation of Barth's contribution, we must do likewise.

Christian community, says Barth, is the goal of Jesus-history. Without the gap of which we have spoken, however, there could be no such community, for all history would already be at an end. Indeed, and this is an important point, it could never have been in the first place. For creaturely reality, by analogy to God's own trinitarian being, is ultimately a perichoresis of times and places and the persons who shape and inhabit them, realized "enhypostatically" in God through the mediation of the incarnate Son. But mediation requires both nearness and distance. Barth did not set himself against an eschatology that left no room for the mediator with the intention of establishing one that left no room for us. He did not repudiate a view of the risen One that denies his human

393 Teilhard, we may recall, can and does say something similar. But Barth is speaking quite literally of the cross and of the man who hung on it. To hasten towards that term is not therefore to embrace the "death forces" at work in the world (with a view to the separation of the world soul from the world body) but to wait in hope for the crucified and resurrected One.

394 CD 4/2:337. Conversely, the church is made up of those who confess him and his otherness during this interval (4/1:353).

395 Just as Jesus' own times are "perichoretically" related; cf. Dalferth 27ff., Hunsinger 236ff.
substantiality in order to take up one that assigns man 

qua

man to the margins. Bodily resurrection and ascension may mark Jesus off and set him over against us as the

concretissimum,

but they do so for our sake. In preserving his otherness they preserve ours.396 They do so specifically by inviting a new and positive response to him. It may be that our time is seen in the light of his exaltation to be merely the time between the times—to be "only" something parenthetical—but it is not true to say that it therefore counts for nothing and comes to nothing. On the contrary, in the dialectic of descent and ascent our time is given back to us in the form of a question about communion, and so as a genuine possibility.397 The appearance of "something ultimate and supreme" is aimed, not at the exclusion, but at the inclusion of something parenthetical. To that the existence of the church here and now bears witness, for it too is "marked off from the race, from others, in order that it may make 'a provisional offering of thankfulness for which the whole world is ordained by the act of the love of God."398

Barth's ecclesiology is too complex for us to examine here, but it is certainly shaped by the tension he establishes between the No and the Yes of Jesus' exaltation.399 The latter (as always in Barth) is the word that must be heard first. The distance that opens up between Jesus and us is really the room he makes in himself for us; the time between the times is his own time in the form it takes as he extends it to us. Barth

396 "The interval between the first and the final parousia of Jesus Christ is that of the existence of man" (CD 4/1:333); it is grounded in the affirmation of man in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and in the distance which his exaltation as a man introduces (351ff., cf. 3/2:455f., 4/2:35f.).

397 See CD 3/1:74, 4/3:326ff. In this light consider the following insightful remark (4/1:121): "If man does not seriously wait for Jesus Christ, he will not wait for anything else."

398 CD 4/2:511

399 The "No" is in the first place his exaltation on the cross, but in his resurrection and ascension there is also a "No" to this sphere of sin and death.
differed from Kierkegaard in emphasizing the gift-nature of this time: The parenthesis is definitely not a void; it is filled with the active self-revelation of Jesus. Contemporaneity, as we have already said, is not something we must achieve, as Kierkegaard sometimes seemed to think. It does not point first of all to the heroic journey of the solitary man or woman finding their own way to the cross. The Christ who stands at a distance from us, the Christus absens, is also the Christ who in the power of his resurrection and ascension comes forward to meet us, the Christus praesens. If he gives us room to respond, he certainly does not leave us to our own devices. All are summoned, here and now, "with supreme realism," to share a common life with him.

We will suggest later that Barth over-corrects Kierkegaard on this point, but for now it is enough to observe that our time, as the time Jesus gives to us, is indeed ecclesial time. For Barth, Christian community is not an unattainable ideal or perhaps even a hindrance to spiritual authenticity. Since the contemporaneous Christ is also the risen Christ, the eschatological "already" comes back into prominence. This means that Christianity cannot be equated with the pious individual under any definition. Nor yet is it to be equated with "a pure fellowship of persons" without institutional dimensions or other traces of definite form. Ecclesial time is in every way human time, or rather time that is being humanized. It is corporate and social and socially responsible. "Has the community been first and foremost human in all that it has done?" Barth can ask this question because of his conviction that Jesus has cleared a space in which we can become


401 Barth makes this statement in a liturgical context. He proceeds: "Why with such realism? Because and as he is among us today, and will be among us tomorrow, in his then act. Did any living Christian or Christian community ever live except on this presupposition?" (CD 4/2:112)

402 Thus Brunner; see Hartwell 143.
human through our encounter with him. He stands behind us so that we may put down roots, and before us so that we may grow. In the Spirit "that double proximity is actual presence," a presence (as we have seen) more substantial than our own yet gracious in every way. It is a presence that enables us to exist in this world, and for this world, with something of Jesus' own liberty during the forty days—that is, as "man on the way from here to there," as those who live already, right where they are, in the light of the kingdom of heaven.

But just here the counterpoint is also heard. Kierkegaard and Overbeck are not forgotten, nor the warning implied by the gap itself. Ecclesial time, as a time of invitation and response to Jesus, is definitely not worldly time. The cross and the ascension speak their combined No! to the idea that the church is on the way along the same way as the world. Barth saw the origins of that idea in the faulty notion that the church is an extension of the incarnation, a notion he attacked with equal ferocity in its Roman and Protestant forms. The doctrine of bodily resurrection and ascension exposes that audacity for what it is, a usurpation of Christ's own place and a denial that the church lives only

403 CD 3/2:508. See 4/1:343ff., where Barth effectively stands Kierkegaard on his head by arguing that "in every age, post Christum means post Christum crucifixum et resuscitatum," and that we can and must move forward on that basis. Elsewhere (1986:3) he asks: "Where with Kierkegaard is God's people, community, the Church? Where is the deacon's ministry and the task of mission? And where are man's social and political tasks?" Cf. 4/2:354f.

404 CD 3/2:467, 509; cf. 4/3:333f.

405 Ralph Wood (1988:69) observes that "Barth is untiring in his insistence that the church is set in distinction from culture only in order to stand first and last for it. Christians must always acknowledge how deeply they belong to the world even as they refuse to put their trust in it."

406 See e.g. CD 1/1:48 (where Barth begins his massive project by standing against Tillich's theology of correlation) or 4/2:511: The church is fundamentally a "separated and gathered" community, and so a "holy" community. It does not seek after the future but after "the Person who is coming" (1991:LVIII; Busch 166).
by encounter with its Lord. Only a "de-eschatologized Christianity" could take up such a posture! On Barth's view, nearness remains distance. The contemporaneous Christ, as a living human person who has ascended into heaven, cannot be confused with the church—or, for just that reason, the church with the world. In the parenthesis between the ascension and the parousia, the church comes from the revelation of the man Jesus as it moves towards it, and it moves towards it as it comes from it.... This is what determines the whole logic and ethic of the community of the end.407

In other words, the church has a defining direction all its own, since it is aware that it is bracketed by the presence of Christ. In its encounter with the resurrected One it too is "pure event," existing out of divine possibilities, which means that it cannot even be contained within its own earthly forms much less take its direction from the world. Rather it can and must look away from itself and the world in order to take its direction from Christ.408

At the outset of the final part-volume of the Church Dogmatics, Barth pauses to take stock of the church's marginalization in the modern era. He sees in that marginalization a great benefit to the church, namely, the painful rediscovery of its own true relevance. A new path has been opening up: neither justification of the world nor retreat from it, but a Christ-like service to it. In being freed by the world and thus from

407 See CD 3/2:508ff. So far from being a prolongation of the incarnation, the church continues in the relationship of the disciples to their Lord as established in the forty days, only in a new form of dependency established by the Holy Spirit, who coordinates "Christ in the heights" with Christ in the depths, i.e., the exalted Jesus and his ecclesial co-humanity, which exists enhypostatically in him (4/3:760; cf. 4/1:317ff., 4/2:51ff., 4/3:327, 754ff.).

408 This is the message of the Dogmatics from beginning to end. See e.g. 1/1:41; cf. 1949:141ff., noting that Barth is careful at the same time to reject the visible/invisible ecclesiological dualism. (The combination of these ideas accounts for his particularist approach to catholicity, which has something in common with that of Orthodoxy while steering clear of the latter's temptation to ethnicity.)
it, the church is slowly becoming free for it once more, conscious of the fact that its solidarity with the world cannot rest on the "illusory" assumption that it forms a unity with the world, but that it belongs to it precisely "in its antithesis to it." Barth knew something about this precarious tension from his own experience. When in the Germany of the thirties the church was still very much wanted by the world for its own purposes, when many in the church were only too willing to render service to the world by once again justifying its imperialist ambitions, the Barmen Declaration (drafted mainly by Barth) declared plainly that the church can only serve the world by serving its own Master. The Yes includes and sustains a No. Or to put the matter another way: The stand of the Confessing Church against the German Christian movement demonstrates the truth of one of Barth's later dicta, that only by knowing the real presence of Jesus is it possible to discern his real absence.

If Kierkegaard began turning the retraction theory inside out, and the practice of theology with it, it is plain that Barth came in behind him and gave a much more powerful tug. In support of his attack on overt and covert eschatological docetism, he effectively reversed Augustine's way of appropriating the resurrection and ascension in order to expound the twofold reality of Jesus Christ: It is the former that now attests his divinity, while the latter restores our focus on his humanity. This reversal by itself

---

409 CD 4/3:19ff.

410 See CD 1/2:28f. Here is Barth's answer to Nietzsche. Here too is the right and necessary footing for our own claim that the real absence must on no account be glossed over. See below.

411 Methodus est arbitraria, of course, and since resurrection and ascension are regarded as a single process, it is only a question of relative emphasis. Precisely as a process, however, the ascension—which is or includes Jesus' earthly life—demands that we reckon with his humanity, whereas the event of his resurrection and reappearance discloses his divinity (cf. CD 4/1:300f., 4/2:7, 71f., 154).
constitutes a quite radical correction of the tradition's tendency towards a drop-in view of the incarnation. The humanity which God determined for himself,

in its very creatureliness, is placed at the side of the Creator, pros ton theon.... It is a clothing which he does not put off. It his temple which he does not leave.... He is God in the flesh--distinguished from all the idols imagined and fashioned by men by the fact that they are not God in the flesh, but products of human speculation on naked deity, logoi asarkoi.\textsuperscript{412}

In other words, the ascension is no longer a device for the undoing of Jesus' humanity, but for its establishment. That, from our standpoint, would appear to be Barth's premier accomplishment, particularly when seen in the light of the new perspective on ecclesial identity to which it led.

On the other hand, among those who have concerned themselves directly with his anthropology, it is often argued that Barth has by no means solved the problem of a theological tradition that affords too little attention to genuine human being, and indeed to creaturely being in general. Inasmuch as he had first of all a quite different problem in view---namely, the widespread substitution of a false anthropology for a true---there are already grounds for entertaining such a charge, damaging though it may be.\textsuperscript{413} Yet we must not fail to remark here that the difficulty is inherent in the task of facing up to the tradition itself, both in its ecclesiastical and its secular forms. For the burden the tradition places upon us, as Barth rightly saw, is the burden of fighting first of all to say this one thing: that this man, the foremost and fundamental Man, had and has a name;

\textsuperscript{412} CD 4/2:101. "What the New Testament says about Jesus Christ is all said in the light of Easter and Ascension, that is, in the light of the union, achieved once for all, between the eternal Word and the human existence assumed by him.... Is the name of Christ, is Christ the Son of God, really Jesus of Nazareth? Yes, it [the Christian message] replies; and so with all its might it must maintain that this and no other is his name, that such he is and not something else" (1/2:165).

\textsuperscript{413} In vol. 4 it is the ascension which (thrice over) provides the point of departure for the transition from christology and soteriology to ecclesiology and anthropology. If the charge is justifiable, must there not be implications here regarding his doctrine of the ascension?
that he not only was, but is and will be a man; that he is not an abstraction. Everything else, says Barth, depends on this.\textsuperscript{414} The doctrine of the ascension itself rebukes a general anthropology and demands a much more specific one. An anthropology that does not concern itself first of all with Jesus of Nazareth is an anthropology without regard for the unique act of God with respect to this man, and hence (here the charge may be returned) for the redemption of real people.\textsuperscript{415} Likewise a church in which his name is not the first but only "the third or fourth word" to be heard is the church, not of the new man, but of the old.\textsuperscript{416}

Where then does the problem lie? It lies, apparently, in the place of strength. The charge is that Barth has spoken the name of Jesus so loudly that other names cannot even be heard; that the problem of abstraction thus reappears in another form; that once again humanity is being swallowed up, if not by God directly then by "the humanity of God."\textsuperscript{417} This accusation is sometimes put much too strongly, but in our own look at Barth we have now arrived at the point where a warning signal is sounding. For in the reversal just mentioned we have identified the first of a number of appropriations (and that, to be sure, is all they are) that carry a high degree of risk. Can we afford, even occasionally and as a purely formal device, to use one element in the story of Jesus to speak primarily of divinity and another primarily of humanity? Does that not endanger the story itself, not to mention a sound theology of the incarnation? Is a reversal of emphasis enough, or is

\textsuperscript{414} CD 4/2:31ff.

\textsuperscript{415} "The attempt at a general anthropology, however complete and established, will always founder on the the particularity in which he is a man" (CD 4/2:26f.).

\textsuperscript{416} Indeed, it is the church of antichrist (CD 4/3:231, 258f.).

\textsuperscript{417} CD 4/2:72
an even more radical correction required? It is time to go over the territory we have already covered with a more critical eye.

In our judgment the systematic strength of Barth's position is in the inter-connexion (as he puts it) of descending and ascending, or more specifically, in the rejection of a *logos asarkos* and of a "basically formless" ascended Christ. But just here a second and far more damaging appropriation appears that we can no longer evade. It is the very thing we have had to contend with right along, namely, the notion that God is the one who descends and man the one who ascends. That notion, which Barth uses to structure his climactic fourth volume on the doctrine of reconciliation, is not mistaken in itself. Certainly it is true that God descends and man ascends. It is true soteriologically, and therefore ontologically, but unless the distinction between the way it is true soteriologically and ontologically is carefully noted and preserved the old troubles are bound to surface. And in Barth they do indeed surface. Let us explain as best we can, for our whole criticism reduces to this one point, even if other points must also be made.

Why does Barth fight so tenaciously against any "tearing apart of the unity of descending and ascending"? To defend the unity and integrity of the God–man, that is, the doctrine of the incarnation? Yes. But why is it that, in spite of his famous actualism and the primacy he wants to give to the biblical story, he is so widely accused of having produced a strangely static theology, against which the charge of christomonism is in one way or another brought forward again and again? Most often people look to his doctrine of election, with its over-emphasis on the "pre– temporality" of God. Or to his doctrine of the Trinity, which still appears (for all its important advances) to tilt in the direction

---

418 See CD 4/2:110f. Here we must disagree with David Ford (1981:183), though we shall shortly be drawing on a central aspect of his criticism of Barth.
of unity over plurality. Or, putting these together, to the pneumatological deficiency which he himself recognized.419 We do not dispute any of this; others have observed that old habits are difficult to break, even for a theologian of such immense creativity! But we may point also (and all the more confidently) to the matter the present study brings into focus. Our suggestion is that Barth did not look as far as he might have into the source of the docetic streak that has plagued theology from the beginning. Continuing to work with the descent of God and the ascent of man as a basic paradigm meant that the only way to attack docetism was to clamp the two movements so tightly together that it is sometimes unclear how, or how far, the resurrection and especially the ascension really do represent new events for Jesus—the very point at issue with Bultmann and the rest, and the very thing necessary to an open, dynamic worldview that respects creaturely reality as such.

Our criticism is related to that of David Ford and, more recently, of Colin Gunton, though it begins with Irenaeus.420 Barth puts forward a position that represents only a partial recovery of that early father's vision. Though he reckons courageously with the double aspect of the descent of the Son, that is, with his taking on of fallen humanity,421 he fails to reckon properly with two related facts: first, that in the biblical story itself it is primarily the descending and ascending of a man (the God–man) with which we have

419 Cf. Busch 494. Barth (CD 2/1:631ff.) struggled to find a balance between pre-, supra- and post-temporality; that he did not fully succeed may be due in part to his uncritical acceptance of the notion that the Father "has to be called the fons et origo totius Deitatis" (4/2:339), originally an eastern doctrine, and of the filioque. These ideas combine to weaken his pneumatology and rob his doctrine of election of its best insight, namely, that divine decisions are not made in abstraction from the dynamic of God's actual relations with his creatures.

420 Both Ford (1981) and Gunton (1992) argue that Barth brings premature closure to the story of Jesus.

421 CD 1/2:151ff.; cf. 4/1:130f., 4/2:27.
to do; second, that any appropriation here risks investing a soteriological pattern with an ontological significance it does not have.422 As to the first, Barth rejects it at the outset of volume four as a tautology. The only thing unique about Jesus' descent is that it is God who is undertaking it.423 This was not a reaction to Irenaeus, whose position he did not consider, but to the disastrous results of the unresolved disputes left over from the Reformation. Barth's own proposal is at once innovative and obvious. He unites the doctrine of the two states and that of the two natures into a unified theory of the incarnation, such that the being of "the one Jesus Christ" is understood in terms of two simultaneous and mutually qualifying movements—the humiliation of God and the exaltation of man. In short, he seeks to correct the tradition's tendency to undo the incarnation by translating Chalcedon into actualist terms.424 To put the results as simply as possible, Jesus is who he is as he does what he does. He does not exist first as the God–man so that he might then accomplish something called atonement; he is atonement, in that he is God happening for man and man happening for God. Any inclination to dispense with his humanity after the fact, so to speak, is thus inconceivable. Descending and ascending are not only inter-connected; they are one and the same event. They are

422 We have argued (1986:44ff.) against Oscar Cullmann and others that the carmen Christi in Phil 2:5ff. refers to a two-stage descent: of the Son to creaturehood, and of Jesus to the cross. But that does not mean that the story of the hymn is not concentrated on the history of a man (cf. N. T. Wright 1993:92). Barth, we must now conclude, shares Cullmann's tendency to confuse soteriology with ontology, even if he makes that mistake from the opposite side (i.e., out of ontological interests).

423 "To say that he is lowly as a man is tautology which does not help us in the least to explain his humiliation. It merely contains the general truth that he exists as a man in the bondage and suffering of the human situation..." (CD 4/1:134).

424 Witness especially his substitution of a communicatio operationum for a communicatio idiomatum (CD 4/2:104ff.). We may note here with Jüngel (37) that Barth points to Luther's confusion on this matter, and on the doctrine of the real presence, as leading directly to the confusion between man and God that is characteristic of modern theology (1962:230).
Barth here does something quite unusual, which if not altogether new is at least an improvement over much of what we have seen thus far. But it is fraught with difficulties. To keep his doctrine of the incarnation from coming apart at the seams, he is compelled to reject any history-related distinction between the humiliated Christ and the exalted Christ. No "new qualities or further developments" in Jesus can be contemplated after the cross. A total identification of act and being (of soteriology and Chalcedonian ontology) means that Jesus-history is entirely complete at Calvary, for the nadir of the divine descent necessarily coincides with the pinnacle of human ascent.

All that remains, says Barth, is that we should see and hear and share in what has already been done. Jesus-history from the standpoint of the Emmaus Road is pure revelation, pure unveiling, pure contemporaneity. Nothing is added to it except our histories.

In other words, eschatology has of necessity become a theology of revelation pure and simple. In the fullness of his actualized self, the God-man, the crucified-ascended One, becomes and is revelation, much as the Holy Spirit in Barth's western trinitarianism is the love of the Father and the Son. Since Barth wants at all costs to avoid any compromising third movement in the being of Jesus—a third nature such as Teilhard postulated—he cannot allow that what happens in the forty days is anything other than

---

425 CD 4/1:122ff., 4/2:35f., 106; see Jüngel 135. In what follows we will not be disputing that Jesus is who is as he does what he does, only the particular way in which this is construed.

426 CD 4/2:132ff., 4/4:24. "Where and when is he not both humiliated and exalted... the Crucified who has not yet risen, or the Risen who has not been crucified? ... We have to do with the being of the one and entire Jesus Christ whose humiliation detracts nothing and whose exaltation adds nothing" (4/1:133).

427 Is this not Kierkegaard coming full circle again to Hegel? What saves Barth from that fate is his insistence on "leibliche Aufherstehung."
the "effective manifestation" of a life lived once for all.\textsuperscript{428} What is new about this life is chiefly its universal reach and relevance, its accessibility.\textsuperscript{429} The outcome of descending and ascending, dying and rising, is precisely sovereign presence, the contemporaneous Christ. But the contemporaneous Christ has become an ambiguous figure after all, just because he is rather \textbf{too} definite. His history is already finished.

Barth's struggle to articulate all this in terms of his doctrine of time has led some to suppose that that doctrine, especially the idea of pure duration, is the source of the problem to which we are pointing. The confusion works mainly in the other direction, however. Since he retains the classical appropriation of descending and ascending, his translation of Chalcedon from substantialist to actualist terms only perpetuates the problem—the swallowing up of time by eternity—he meant to overcome. God and man are still defined by their opposition to one another, an opposition which can only be resolved by the death of man and his reconstitution as a moment in God's eternity.\textsuperscript{430}

That is why it is hard to distinguish in Barth between the doctrine of election and the

\textsuperscript{428} The resurrection is God's confirmation of his original decision to give to his eternity creaturely time and space (\textit{CD} 4/1:308). In spite of death and against death, then, Jesus exists. As this same man—still within his own proper form and limits, his beginning, middle and end—he is sovereignly alive and \textbf{un}limited (313). He encounters us all, for he has the double character of divine presence and human apprehensibility (3/2:451, 463ff.). Reconciliation includes revelation (4/3:8).

\textsuperscript{429} But is there not confusion and ambiguity here? On the one hand, Christ's exaltation is his life from conception to cross; his descent is his ascent. Yet this descent that is \textbf{already} an ascent \textbf{becomes} such in the "definite newness" of the forty days (cf. \textit{CD} 4/2:100, 4/3:323). But if the incarnate One is already the resurrected One, the crucified already the reconciled and ascended, what becoming are we talking about? Or are there two resurrections—one private and one public, one as reconciliation, the other as revelation?

\textsuperscript{430} See \textit{CD} 4/1:8ff. This is the real kernel of truth in Richard Roberts' critique, and it stands in direct contradiction to Barth's claim (4/2:106) that he has "left no room for anything static." How can clamping together humiliation and exaltation, humanity and divinity, as "two opposed but strictly related" and mutually interpreting moments lead to anything but the static? Cf. Gunton 1978:181ff.
doctrine of resurrection, between the beginning and the end. Resurrection, as the revelation of the concord of God and man, is God's free decision, hence a new decision; yet that new decision is simply a confirmation of the decision made in the beginning.\textsuperscript{431} The history sandwiched between these decisions—time, the road to the cross—is not free, except in the sense that it is free to be the road to the cross. In other words, Barth's eschatology is more Greek than he admits, and it is no surprise that the determinism that mars the dogmatic tradition begins to reassert itself. Is that not also the case with Jürgen Moltmann, for example, who presses beyond Barth in just the wrong direction, confusing ontology with soteriology to the extent that suffering and the cross (and, we are forced to conclude, evil) take their place in the doctrine of creation, leading once again to a determinist eschatology of apocatastasis?\textsuperscript{432}

In \textit{Barth and God's Story} David Ford has suggested that his whole project "cries out" for integration with a more traditional, substantialist analysis and indeed it does;\textsuperscript{433} that, in fact, is the only way to preserve the dynamic of Jesus-history, both before and after the cross. But no such integration is possible on the classical scheme. Where

\textsuperscript{431} Indeed, it is the first decision; cf. \textit{CD} 4/1:44ff., 296ff. Robert Jenson's dictum (1982:182) that "to be is to rise from the dead" is not an advance on Barth, or a correction of him. It is Barth's mistake all over again, reached after extensive tinkering with another, closely related appropriation, \textit{viz.}, that of God's pre-, supra- and post-temporality to Father, Son and Spirit respectively. (In the said tinkering Jenson departs from Barth into panentheism, but see the following note.)

\textsuperscript{432} We have discussed this in a paper delivered to the King's Research Institute in Systematic Theology (December 1990). As Moltmann tries to correct Barth's narrowly anthropocentric doctrine of creation he winds up with an \textit{apocatastasis} that includes everything that ever was or will be; in Christ resurrection has become "the universal 'law' of creation" (1990: 256ff.). His position is shaped by his panentheism, of course, and hence by a theology Barth (cf. 1981:175ff.) consistently rejected. But does Barth's own christology not pull in just that direction?

\textsuperscript{433} 1981:131. Cf. Gunton (March 1993:8), who argues in another context that "ontology and relation stand or fall together." Barth's weakness here does not allow him to provide an entirely satisfactory alternative to process theology.
soteriological verticality (descent into hell and ascent into heaven) is confused with ontological verticality (the divine–human dynamic that is proper to man in Christ) some form of "thinning" is the inevitable result. Descending into hell and ascending into heaven, as we pointed out in chapter four, are but one contingent form of a history of communion between God and man the true possibilities of which eye has not yet seen, nor ear heard; which is to say, Jesus-history does not end with his ascension but only really begins there. Is that not the whole point of insisting on bodily ascension? Barth appears to agree. 434 But when the soteriological reference to Jesus-history and the ontological inference from it are held too closely together, a transference occurs which yields the static quality for which he is criticized. Salvation history begins to turn back into myth again:

\[
\text{soteriology} + \text{ontology} = \text{a closed history}^{435}
\]

Where can such a history go, except around in circles? The point at which the turn is made is always Holy Saturday, eschatalogical docetism in one form or another being the consequence. Of the docetism Barth was well aware; that is why he attempted to apply his clamp. But inasmuch as he did not reject the whole scheme, the main effect was to run his otherwise brilliant experiment in narrative theology off the rails, with very serious consequences indeed. 436

Professor Ford has rightly argued that Barth's account of the forty days of resurrection appearances forces them to carry a freight not evident in the Gospels. The

---

434 CD 4/1:109ff.

435 Hence one open to the charge of universalism or determinism.

436 Though with nothing quite like the wreckage imagined by Roberts (Sykes 1979:146).
reason for this is that one effect of his Chalcedonian clamp—which requires a strict correspondence between Jesus-history in its two versions—is to compress the status exaltationis into the forty days. Ascension time is really the time that leads up to the ascension; as such it is one with resurrection time, to which the ascension itself brings closure.\textsuperscript{437} This conflation of resurrection, ascension and heavenly session means, as we have seen, that the resurrection already establishes Jesus' lordship over all things, already renders his history universally inclusive, which means in turn that the ascension becomes something of an anti-climax (a common feature in modern theology!) even for Jesus. It is only a sign, like the empty tomb, not something decisive in itself.\textsuperscript{438} But that runs directly counter to the "not yet" of John 20:17, one of the few resurrection passages Barth is content to ignore in his extensive exegetical notes. It also calls into question his talk about distance and room for free participation, contributing to what Ford describes as the "monism of the Gospel story." Resurrection time is not only ascension time, it is already the parousia in the first of its three forms.\textsuperscript{439} How far the whole construction downgrades the role of the Spirit, a feature to which Professor Gunton points,\textsuperscript{440} and whether it leads

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{437} Cf. von Balthasar, 1963:84, in whom the echo of Barth is to be heard: In the forty days, the Church learns to see "the glory of his divinity, the presence of eternity in time. And since it is not possible that the mode of time belonging to the risen Christ should have altered with the ascension (this being rather in the nature of a signing-off gesture, purely for our benefit), it is necessary to grasp that the mode of time revealed during the forty days remains the foundation for every other mode of his presence in time, in the Church, and in the world."

\textsuperscript{438} CD 3/2:452ff.

\textsuperscript{439} See n. 379. The notion of a threefold parousia, which to some extent continues the conflation of resurrection, ascension and parousia we have already rejected, imports into the resurrection events a kind of finality, and into the ascension an act of closure, that belong only to the parousia proper (cf. CD 4/3:292ff.; Ford 13, 149f., 165f.). It also invites the very important question as to what our own resurrection can possibly mean; cf. Davies 170f.

\textsuperscript{440} 1992:48ff., 65ff.; cf. 1986:329. See CD 4/2:129, 323ff., 4/3:296. We will return to this matter later, for it does indeed produce this result.
necessarily to a doctrine of apocatastasis,\textsuperscript{441} may at first be difficult to decide. What is perfectly clear is that it shifts the focus \textit{away from what happens to and for Jesus, in his own humanity, to the question of his revelation to us.} And with the loss of attention to his humanity goes a loss of attention to ours. The biblical story itself begins to peter out.

The appropriation of the two states or histories of Jesus to God and man respectively thus raises a "suspicion of docetism" even in Barth. As resurrection time becomes revelation time, it becomes predominantly \textit{divine} time after all, as no less a proponent of Barth's theology than T. F. Torrance concedes.\textsuperscript{442} If the humanity of the risen Jesus is fully affirmed against a long history of docetism, it nonetheless remains trapped in the circle we have indicated. We cannot help noticing that Barth's attempt to get back on track only deepens his difficulty. Asking how it is that resurrection time is not immediately the time of judgment and fulfillment—a question he is certainly forced to ask—he appeals to the willingness of Jesus to make time for us.\textsuperscript{443} And when he tries finally to say what this means for Jesus himself, what can he do but expound the forty days as a repetition of his sighing and weeping and praying and fighting, as the

\textsuperscript{441} Barth (CD 4/3:477ff.) denies it, of course, while also denying its denial. But cf. W. Künneth, e.g., who also makes the resurrection "the Archimedian point for theology," denies to the ascension \textit{per se} any distinct significance as a saving event, and winds up defending an apocatastasis (1965:90 n.37, 289ff.).

\textsuperscript{442} McKim 62f. Indeed, since contemporaneity is a quality or prerogative of divinity, and since the one thing that is accomplished in the resurrection is precisely that, it is difficult to see how his view does not amount to divinization after all (cf. CD 3/2:455). To Torrance, whose own reasons for criticizing Barth on this score are given somewhat cryptically, we will also return later.

\textsuperscript{443} See CD 4/3:316ff. If in Jesus—history all of history is directly involved, how is it that the actual appearance among us of this new life did not "at once engulf the whole world like a tidal wave"? Barth's answer is less than convincing. Jesus himself, he suggests, is "surprised and startled" (328), but it turns out that his power is simply \textit{too} great to be realized in a single day. Cf. 4/1:734ff.
conducting of a battle not yet fully won? In the resurrection as in his earthly life, Christ is again on the way from here to there, even if this time the victory that lies ahead is assured. Is this not the raising of a history rather than a person? Barth objects to the "rather," but it is doubtful whether his objection can be sustained. And here is another question: Is this not Christ as man going over the territory won by Christ as God, that as man he (and we) may see that it is really God who has done it? If so, is the suspicion of docetism not also retroactive, so to speak? A third question combines the others: If Jesus' pre-history terminated in the cross, can his post-history go further than the ascension, or must it simply repeat itself in ever-widening spheres of influence? Again Barth denies it, but his doctrine of a threefold parousia and his talk of an apocatastasis suggest otherwise. "What happened still happens, and as such will happen."

The only way to break out of this circle and get back on track with the biblical story is to repudiate altogether the identification of "states" with natures, returning to the more primitive notion of the descent and ascent of the God-man. This would open up

---

444 Ibid. 40; cf. 329.

445 Cf. Torrance (McKim) 62f. The Nestorian/Eutychian oscillation which Barth hoped to avoid by his actualism thus by no means disappears.

446 1949:131; cf. CD 4/1:313. Barth (4/1:345) reproves Kierkegaard for a gospel that begins to look something like a doctrine of eternal recurrence, but it may be that he himself is in more danger of falling into that trap. His understanding of sin not only as an episode in human history but "as the original of all episodes, the essence of everything that is unnecessary, disorderly, contrary to plan and purpose" (46), does not prevent but encourages such a mishap, since it fixes Christ's own nature in opposition to everything episodic.

447 This would stabilize the principle that we discover who God is and who man is "by reading the truth about both where it resides, namely, in the fullness of their togetherness" in Jesus (1960b:47). Barth goes astray when he tries to read the story of that togetherness as the progressive resolution of an inherent opposition of natures, which is pretty much how Origen and Teilhard read cosmic history as a whole. Instead we must read it as the story of a mission in which his humanity and divinity are commonly expressed—truly and unsurpassably, but not exhaustively.
the envelope of eternity in which Barth's doctrines of election and resurrection have
conspired to seal Jesus-history from conception to cross. The resurrection and ascension
would then take on real significance not only for his history (retroactively) but in his
history, and the forty days would not be required to bear so much weight. Instead we
would be invited to think more carefully about what it means for Jesus to have gone from
us to the Father's right hand; to think about his heavenly session in terms of the
pneumatological dimensions and possibilities of his new existence, and to take up with
even greater seriousness the prospect of his return. In such an enterprise what is good and
right about the idea of contemporaneity (its concern for the universality of Jesus) might
be salvaged and set on a safer footing, for surely it is in the ascension and not in the
resurrection as such that his lordship over all things is established. At the same time the
temptation to fill up Kierkegaard's parenthesis with abstract repetitions of Jesus-history,
dermining both the need for pneumatology and the particularity of Jesus as a freely-
acting subject, would fall away. And just here we must speak further, and less positively,
about Barth's doctrine of the church.

"Anthropological and ecclesiological assertions arise only as they are borrowed
from christology," writes Barth, and of course it follows that they are no sounder than
the christology from which they derive. What is the effect of the Chalcedonian service
into which he presses the U-shaped story of Jesus? What in particular is the effect of
making resurrection time into ascension time, and thus into the ground of ecclesial time?
What, in other words, is the impact of a notion of contemporaneity with Jesus that is not
properly qualified by his departure? Is it not to misconstrue the problem of the presence

448 See chap. 2 above. Where in Barth is there a serious discussion of the ascension per

449 CD 2/1:148
and the absence, in short, to undermine the very thing for which we commended Barth in our first look at his ecclesiology?

Not to put too fine a point on it, the effect is simply too much real presence. In Barth, as in the Origenist tradition, the eucharistic possibility is generalized. The universalizing of Jesus already in his resurrection means that our time is contained or bracketed by his in such a way that his absence is more apparent than real:

We may rightly point out ... that what really oppresses the world and us in spite of the Easter event, or rather in the light of a true appreciation of it, is not really a lack or failure or absence of its efficacy but simply the fact that this is not evident to us, and therefore its apparent absence.450

In other words, it is still a matter of Christ's hidden co-existence in and with the world, which must be proclaimed and celebrated and brought out into the open.451 But that means, conversely, that in the church there is too little real presence. The distinction between church and world gravitates once again towards the noetic. The church is marked off from the world as the place where what is true everywhere and always—because true in eternity!—is known and confessed to be true. Everyone belongs in principle to the communion sanctorum, though only some know and act upon that fact.452 Christianity as a qualification of the species is still an operative idea in Barth.453

450 CD 4/3:317; cf. 4/1:328.

451 CD 4/3:323ff., 360ff.; cf. von Balthasar 1979:83f. Here we find just a hint of justification for Hans Küng's otherwise groundless and indeed irresponsible suggestion (1988:271ff.) that were Barth to begin again at the beginning today he would write his theology more or less backwards.

452 See CD 4/3:363f. Both the church and the world derive from Jesus Christ and his work. "But the Church is the place where one knows that, and that is indeed a tremendous difference between the Church and the world" (1949:132; cf. 4/1:317, 353). From this perspective the idea of an "anonymouChristian" makes no sense, to be sure, but everyone, according to Barth, is a "designated Christian."

453 At one point Barth asks whether we are not forced to approximate "very closely to the concept of the body of Christ including and uniting all men" (CD 4/1:665). Behind this lies the notion that in Christ "it is not merely one man, but the humanum of all men, which is posited and exalted as such to unity with God" (4/2:49). In short, something of
That is not the whole picture, of course. Barth did believe in the real presence of Jesus in the church in a way distinct from his presence in the world.\textsuperscript{454} It is quite revealing, however, that this is developed, not sacramentally, but chiefly as an epistemology and a (pneumatological) theory of language. It is developed mainly with respect to the liturgy of the word. Barth's insights here are often profound, as we have tried to notice elsewhere; what we did not notice is the dislocation of the whole discussion from the eucharistic ground of ecclesial life.\textsuperscript{455} But Barth—for all his own insistence even in later years that the Lord's Supper should be central in the worship of the church and therefore in its theological reflection—could hardly have countenanced any such recontextualization. For he was not moving towards, but away from, a sacramental understanding of the church.\textsuperscript{456}

Why did Barth, a modern ecumenical theologian \textbf{par excellence}, not pursue the significance of the eucharistic liturgy as a decisive event in the becoming and being of the church? Was it because he wanted to establish Jesus-history as "the one and only sacrament" from which the church draws its life? Though we cannot quarrel with this as a motive, it fails completely as an explanation, for the question of the sacraments is the question of the church drawing its life from Christ.\textsuperscript{457} We may point out that \textit{had} Barth

\textsuperscript{454} \textit{CD} 4/1:20; cf. 3/2:467f.

\textsuperscript{455} 1987:9ff. Barth developed his elaborate doctrine of the Word of God (\textit{CD} vol. 1) in such a way as to secure the dependency of the church's knowing, and hence its being, on Christ's own sovereign act of self-proclamation. In doing so he treated the liturgy of the word as a kind of substitute sacrament; but cf. 4/3:761, Busch 474.

\textsuperscript{456} Cf. Jüngel 47, C. O'Grady 1969:113f.; see also Busch 142f., 184.

\textsuperscript{457} I.e., of "the giving and receiving of this one sacrament," to use Barth's own words; see \textit{CD} 4/2:55 (cf. 1/2:228ff., 4/1:295ff.).
pursued the sacramental way he might have run into considerable difficulty, since he too inserted a comforting "even now" into the eschatological tension between the "already" and the "not yet." But to admit such a thing is really to say that his controversial slide into a non-sacramental ecclesiology cannot be explained as a reaction against abuses ancient or modern; that it is bound up instead with the logic of his whole position. To the extent that neglect of the ascension as a distinct episode in the story of Jesus weights his christology in favour of presence (that is what we had in mind when we spoke of over-correcting Kierkegaard) a eucharistic understanding of the church eludes him. So too does a full appreciation of Christ's priestly office, as Torrance has observed, which is in fact the more fundamental point. Both are easily demonstrated by referring to a third and final appropriation, or rather, set of appropriations.

In Barth's beautifully structured fourth volume Jesus Christ is considered in the light of his threefold office as priest, king, and prophet. The first of these is made to correspond to the descent of God, the second to the ascent of man, and the third to the God-man in his revelation as such. The structure is also an ecclesiological and indeed a liturgical one, presenting the church in the light of its call to gather, to grow up in Christ, and to go forth into the world. At first glance this suggests a quite dynamic view

---

458 The doctrine of a threefold parousia—which is forced on Barth by his association of states and natures, and elaborated in terms of Christ's lordship over the three tenses of human time—necessitates this. The middle form of the parousia cannot be any less a parousia than the first and third forms (CD 4/1:318, 4/3:356ff.); the "is" cannot be anything less than the "was" and the "will be."

459 His answer to the Lutheran-Reformed dispute over the eucharist and the whereabouts of Christ (2/1:489f.) is indicative here. Barth attempts to strike a balance, asserting that the whole Christ, retaining his human particularity, is present "in Israel and the Church in particular, and in the world in general." But since he does not make clear the difference between this "in particular" and "in general"—certainly not as regards the eucharist itself—he does not settle but evades the issue.

460 McKim 62f.
of the church, since the accent naturally falls on the going forth. But the dynamic in question is very much in danger of breaking down into a vertical component (listening for the Word in the words) and a horizontal one (Christian mission), for its eucharistic centre is missing, consigned to ethics.461 This is directly related to the want of any adequate discussion of Christ's priesthood. It is no accident, nor is it a small matter, that Barth's exposition of the same turns out, for all its innovation, to be a basically juridical affair.462

The divine descent/human ascent scheme simply cannot accommodate the wholeness of priestly action. The very attempt at appropriations guarantees that each office will undergo some distortion through abstraction (sic) from Jesus-history, these distortions being passed on to the church. But above all it guarantees that Christ's priestly office, which by nature is a complex movement of descending and ascending and returning with a blessing, will be overshadowed by his kingly and prophetic offices, and particularly by the latter.463

The arrangement of volume four, though it has many compensating merits, betrays Barth's too-narrow Protestant conception of the church as creatura Verbi. But the real reason for his failure to rediscover the priestly ministry of Christ, and with it the eucharistic nature of the church, is the undermining of real absence through the ordering of eschatology to prior ontological interests. Ironically that problem is just the

461 His intention, unfulfilled with respect to the Lord's Supper, was to give to it and to baptism "their appropriate and worthy place as the basis and crown of the fourth and ethical section of the doctrine of reconciliation" (4/2:xif., emphasis ours).

462 Though the judicial metaphor is modified in the direction of relationality, as Gunton (1988:113) observes, and thus towards the priestly, Barth (CD 4/1:277) goes much too far when he simply equates these two aspects of Christ's work.

463 Since the God-man himself, considered as such, is the one who becomes and is revelation, it is really the prophetic office with which Barth has been concerned all along. With respect to priesthood, notice that he also combines two typically western errors, a preoccupation with sacrifice and a reduction of the high-priestly ministry to that of justification (see 4/3:5f.).
sacramentalist error in another guise, which may help to explain why the *totus christus* doctrine reappears in such a way that the church once again becomes the "earthly-historical" form of Christ's humanity. Though not a repetition or extension of the incarnation, says Barth, the church *is* the incarnation in this secondary form. And here it is plain enough that the gap between Jesus and us looks rather a lot like the gap between God and man after all.\(^{464}\)

All of this is especially unfortunate in a theologian who sought to make eschatology his mainstay. Barth had many of the tools in hand to correct the weakness we pointed up in Calvin, and to capitalize on his strengths and those of Kierkegaard as well. By falling back into a Zwinglian position on the sacraments, however, he revealed that his worldview was less dynamic than Calvin's and his ecclesiology—in this one crucial respect, where the whole matter is concentrated, as Hegel said—less tenable than that of his Danish mentor. Barth's systematic repudiation of individualism and institutionalism, and of a church that knows lords other than its own, still stands. The spirit of affirmation, of joy and thanksgiving, that pervades his theology and belongs to his very sense of the church is much to be prized. But can we, dare we, follow him in reducing *eucharistia* to ethics?\(^{465}\) Would that not breathe new life into the gnosticism, 

---

\(^{464}\) "To his heavenly form of existence as Son of God and Son of Man he has assumed this earthly-historical—the community as his one body which also has this form.... And these two elements of his one being are not merely related to each other as he himself as Son of God is related to his human nature. But, in this second form, his relation to his body, the community, is the relationship of God and man as it takes place in this one being as Head and body. Thus the community of Jesus Christ can be that which the human nature of its Lord and head is" (4/2:60; cf. 4/1:661).

\(^{465}\) As Migliore (Barth 1991:LIV) points out, the later Barth finds it necessary to show that God's sovereign grace is not "totalitarian." But surely to treat the sacraments as a human response to a prior divine act (*CD* 4/4:90) is only to compound the error by which the overlap between Jesus-history and ours threatens to become overbearing. And is it not the case that in all this Barth is closer to Schleiermacher than he wants to admit (cf. 4/1:656, 665ff.; cf. also the previous note and Redeker 137)?
Pelagianism, and constructivism he so despised? Would it not leave the problem of the presence and the absence hanging in the air?

If we would not part from Kierkegaard on a sour note, however, then not from Barth either, whose further efforts towards a reversal of the Where? question and an alternative ascension theology are certainly not to be despised. In his loyalty to the Man of Nazareth he struck a great blow at the head of the "giant gnostic snake" coiled at the roots of docetic theology, even if in doing so he bruised his own theological heel. Yet in the last analysis his helpful interpreter, Herbert Hartwell, is quite right to describe him as a theologian of the forty days, since Barth does stop short of the full-fledged theology of ascension in the flesh that we are seeking. A more radical correction of the tradition is needed, and that can only come by way of restoring our attention—not first of all to our own stories—but to that of Jesus. For as Barth himself said, it would be tragic if we were to look away from Jesus just at the last moment.

\[466\] See 1981:346f., noting that of the seven points in the draft version of this eucharistic confession no less than six refer to what we do; against this, cf. e.g. James Torrance, "Worship in the Reformed Church." But see also \textit{CD} 4/1:682.

\[467\] "His theology is like a vision dating from what may be termed the resurrection-period. It is as if he had walked with Jesus and His disciples during the forty days between Jesus Christ's resurrection and His ascension..." (98). Precisely between! Emmaus not Damascus. Yet we can only prefer this unreservedly to Teilhard's long and uninterrupted journey of human progress; to that quite different road on which he dreamt that he might "love Christ passionately (by loving) \textbf{in the very act} of loving the universe" (the emphasis is his own; see de Lubac 1967:245).

\[468\] \textit{CD} 4/1:116
Looking away from Jesus is a habit deeply engrained in systematic theology. It begins when we misconstrue the alienation between God and man in terms of ontological distance, and proceed to construct some kind of "collapsible" cosmology designed to mediate that alienation and overcome that distance. Into this cosmology Jesus is fitted, indeed he becomes its very hinge, but at the expense of his humanity. For the only way to overcome this kind of alienation between God and man is to make man God, and there is no way to do that without stripping away that which makes him human. Is that not what the serpent had in mind from the beginning? That, at all events, is where we are led by the doctrine of ascension of the mind, against which Kierkegaard and Barth began to react.

Theology, we believe, will find its "fresh start" only when it begins looking for Jesus rather than away from him, as these two renegade theologians proposed, each in his own way. But that will mean choosing even more decisively in favour of the doctrine of ascension in the flesh, and accepting a radical reconstruction of the matters on which we have just touched. Let us go over the main options once more, making the choice and its consequences as clear as we are able. For though they have existed side by side for centuries it is highly doubtful, in our judgment, whether they can continue to do so for much longer. The strain of divided loyalties has begun to tell in the basic fabric of ecclesial life.
Two Options

We begin with the more popular dualist option, represented in the first instance by Clement and Origen. Its variations are many, but may for convenience be divided (at least in the West) into pre- and post-Copernican groupings; that is, into those that orient themselves vertically or spatially and those that orient themselves horizontally or temporally. If in the last analysis the division, as we have tried to show, is a relatively superficial one—for what has always marked the dualist option is precisely the breakdown of eschatology into vertical and horizontal components—it is nonetheless true that there is indeed a cosmological determinant. In other words, the sequence of the disciplines with which we have chiefly concerned ourselves is *cosmology, christology, ecclesiology.* These are related in a hermeneutical circle, naturally, so that it is certainly not true that among Christian thinkers existing or emergent cosmologies have ever remained unaltered. Origen, Denys, Hegel, Teilhard, etc.—all produced variations interesting in themselves and widely influential, for good or for ill, by factoring in christological and ecclesiological insights. But the influence has worked first in the other direction.

The primary effect on christology has been to cast Jesus-history into the form of a cosmic liturgy that reveals (and in some sense governs) a movement over a long course of ages from the higher realm of the eternal or spiritual to the lower realm of the temporal and material, and back again. From Origen to Teilhard little has changed here; before and after Copernicus history is seen as self-cancelling. Christology therefore does not so much link creation and redemption as articulate the notion that creation is redemption—

---

1 The one sacrificing continuity with present reality and the other discontinuity, as Schleiermacher confessed (CF §§160ff.).

2 When the cosmic Christ has gathered everything together, "he will close in upon himself and his conquests, thereby rejoining, in a final gesture, the divine focus he has never left" (Teilhard 1970:322).
redemption from particularity, from time, from creaturehood. The first and chief victim of this conflation of ontology and soteriology is the redeemer himself, Jesus of Nazareth. He appears at the nadir or midpoint of time as the divine Logos particularized and embodied, and disappears again just as quickly in the universalizing movement of the ascension. In brief, the effect is a "drop in" theory of the incarnation.

The identification of Jesus-history with cosmic history has the knock-on effect in ecclesiology of rendering the church the kosmos of the cosmos. In the East, where the vertical dimension has been the dominant one, the church has presented itself as the mirror-image of the eternal world from which all things come and to which they return. In the West, where the horizontal or temporal has triumphed, the church has identified itself as a prolongation or extension of Jesus-history, and to some extent has even sought to take control of the historical process in his name. It is from the western church that the incorrigible "man of the world" (who today is only too happy to be called such) has taken his cue. But in both cases the deep tension that underlies the eucharist, the tension of the two histories introduced by the ascension, has been artificially resolved and eucharistic dogma adjusted accordingly. The precarious and painful position marked out for the church by the eucharist has been widely ignored.

In place of the proper tension, we should notice, another has emerged—the tension between the past and the future which arises out of the mundane ambiguity of a fallen world. Many now mistake this for the ecclesiological issue, though it has nothing in particular to do with the church. Indeed, the church's preoccupation with the matter is a sign that in looking away from Jesus it has begun to sink like Peter into a dangerous crisis of its own making. Having tried to be certain of its identity within the world, it is no

3 What N. Scott (1966:56) hopes that contemporary theology might help to overcome in the modern literary imagination—viz., its time-denying tendency—it rather feeds.
longer certain about its distinction from it. Having become less and less ambiguous to the world, it is now becoming ambiguous to itself. Internecine warfare between progressivist and traditionalist forces is the natural consequence.

The editorial to which we referred in our opening pages belongs to that warfare. It is worth mentioning again simply because it sets the whole problem in its proper doctrinal light. "What would it mean," asks Mr Kerr, "to explore the theological significance of the hiatus between the first and second coming?" What would it mean to wrestle with the fact that the one who ascended "is no longer present but absent"? That this question needs to be asked again today, and it surely does, witnesses to the depth and durability of our confusion about the ascension. Unfortunately the proffered answer provides further proof of that confusion by arguing the toss on the past–future dilemma: The significance of Jesus' "disappearing act," we are told, is quite simply that we may appeal to the Spirit to "free us from traditional theological and cultural restraints for a new openness to the future;" to enable us to turn from the historical Jesus, whose contemporaries (pace Kierkegaard and Barth) we are not and cannot be, to the cosmic Christ. The opinion is by no means uncommon, though the candour may be. But an aggiornamento of the sort recommended could only mean a complete abandonment of the eucharistic tension, as we have already said. For the eucharist, if it is something more than an exercise in subjectivity, means precisely that we who are not contemporaries of the historical Jesus can become so in the power of the Spirit. And the ascension means

4 See p. 12 above.

5 Here, however, the Spirit is not invited to lead us into the presence of the absent Christ but rather to bring us round to an appreciation of "the presence of the absence," i.e., of the more flexible cosmic Christ. "The perils of 'spiritualizing' are obvious and should be heeded," says Kerr (3), "but in our day what H. Richard Niebuhr once called the 'unitarianism of the Spirit' may be less dangerous and more promising than other theological options before us."
that this eucharistic becoming involves us in a future quite different than that of the world.

There are many, of course, who recognize the above as a threat to the very existence of the church and are therefore inclined to turn the other direction. At present there is a definite entrenchment of conservative forces. It should be admitted, however, that the shared notion of the history of "Christ" as universal history puts the traditionalist at a great disadvantage. The logic of the eucharist, which is not linear and does indeed insist on taking us back to the future offers at least a modicum of support. But that logic makes little or no sense in the context of a thoroughgoing evolutionism. When will we learn that "God has no need of a temporal or historical centre"? When will we face the fact that a Christ "whose features do not adapt themselves to the requirements of a world that is evolutive in structure will tend more and more to be eliminated out of hand"? How the traditionalist can answer these questions is not at all clear. It may be that he or she is simply condemned to walking backwards into a future pioneered by those who (like Mr Kerr) are quite content with an absent Jesus and a present "Christ."

All of this is being played out in today's heated debate over ecumenism. Is ecumenism to be a quest for some specifically churchly unity, long since missing—in-action in the war over tradition, or for some greater global unity that is still coming, to which that of the church is purely instrumental? This question (the Barmen question!)

---

6 John Bowden (1988:173), following Tom Driver in a statement neither Hegel nor Teilhard could have made. Bishop Jenkins' foreword to Bowden's book is entitled "Toward the Next Stage of Christian Catholicity."

7 "Human knowledge is developing exclusively under the aegis of evolution.... So true is this that nothing can any longer find place in our constructions which does not first satisfy the conditions of a universe in the process of transformation. A Christ whose features...," etc. (Teilhard 1971:212; quoted J. Houston 1980:33).

8 The "Christ mission," says Kerr, "could not be fulfilled until the historical Jesus vanished." We note here that Carl Braaten's attack on this sort of thing would have been aided by wrestling himself in a fresh way with the ascension and the parousia (1992; cf. Braaten & Jenson 1/52ff.).
cannot be settled without deciding once and for all whether Jesus himself is to be regarded in a purely utilitarian way, as a temporary form or instrument of some greater Christ. Meanwhile, those who look backwards will remain frustrated by their inability to erase the lines drawn by tradition. Those who look forwards will go on encouraging the church to resolve the ecumenical crisis by abandoning its special identity altogether, as Hegel suggested, or rather by taking up the world's emerging identity as its own. And that indeed is just what is happening in those sectors of the church which have already decided in favour of the cosmic Christ, that is, in favour of ascension of the mind. There, where Jesus of Nazareth is thought to have been too long on the mountain to be taken seriously anymore, ecclesial self-assertion is rapidly rebounding as ecclesial self-negation (which is something quite different than the self-denial that is actually needed).9

It may well be objected at this point that we are making too much of a radical fringe, thus narrowing the options unfairly. This new devotion to the Christus evolutor that seems strangely oblivious to the fact that the Christian faith never did fit any view of history but its own, should it not simply be rejected out of hand, clearing the way for a more meaningful discussion? No doubt it should, but often it is not. We ourselves will offer a defense for it! How? By pointing out that it actually belongs to that long tradition of transference we have been tracing from the outset of our work, in which the ambiguity that is proper to the church has steadily been foisted onto Jesus, whom some would now simply cut adrift and allow to pass into the obscurity of bygone times:

The main purpose of the church is not to remember Jesus. Its main purpose, surely, is to participate now, in present-future time, in the redemption of the world. Here we choose for the sake of illustration perhaps the most innocuous statement to be

9 Cf. Exo 32.
found in Tom Driver's *Christ in a Changing World.* In many church synods it would draw a round of applause. Nor have we misinterpreted it in the least by placing it in the context of tradition. For it is nothing but a modern example of that very ancient inclination to allow the church to supplant the human Jesus. In short, it is still a perverted form of mariology, which may be why we find it so difficult to dismiss.

Let us go a step further, then, in search of the radical fringe, which like that of the cosmos itself seems to recede faster than we can approach it. There is a place here, at the end of our study of the Origenist option, for the *reductio ad absurdum.* We may find it in Thomas Altizer's discussion of the contemporary Christ in his book *The Descent into Hell.* For Altizer (who manages to synthesize Hegel and Nietzsche) the resurrected Christ is none other than "the embodiment of the eternal death of Jesus." Did we say absurd? On second thought, it is only too logical if bodily resurrection and ascension are to be set aside. But consider the consequences of that setting aside, not only for the church, but now for the "Christian" view of man. Altizer's Christ is present and actual for us only insofar as we are open to eternal death. He is there when and as every trace of transcendence, including and especially the unique human person, is "annulled and dissolved," or rather (to employ a Teilhardian term) totalized, reconstituted as identical with the whole:

Has not history itself become the arena and the expression of the negation and dissolution of primordial and transcendent Spirit? ... Is Christ [not] present for us and in us at those points at which we pass through a dissolution of transcendence? ... Only this passage of life unto death realizes the presence of the Kingdom of God, so that wherever death is not fully actual and real, there the Kingdom has not yet fully appeared. An eschatological faith inevitably embodies a judgment of death, an absolute assault upon the givenness of the world which it confronts....

---

10 P. 11

11 "The resurrected Christ who is the embodiment of the eternal death of Jesus is the Christ who has descended into Hell. Hell is the point or arena where Christ is present in the world, and Christ is actual for us only insofar as we are open to eternal death" (142).
When the eternal death of Jesus is incorporated into the body of humanity, and incorporated by a form of faith revolving about a continual dying with Christ, then the original descent into Hell can gradually and progressively be actualized in the universal body of humanity.

The advent of "an actual and universal consciousness," the epiphany of a universal Christ "who is totally here and now," necessitates "the loss of all we have known as identity and selfhood." Once we can accept this, concludes Altizer, "the way 'up' will be the way 'down': an ascension to Heaven will be identical with a descent into Hell."\(^{12}\)

We will make this provocative claim for the provocative Altizer, that he represents at least one legitimate outcome (perhaps the most honest) of the doctrine of the ascension as *nous anabasin*. For that doctrine is the source of the notion that our history is still the history of Christ, the history of the kingdom of God. That doctrine is the justification of redemption as an assault on the givenness of the world. That doctrine is the basis for the *pro nobis* approach to presence which turns upside down the question of contemporaneity and the import of the eucharist. Indeed, that doctrine is the foundation for the final conflation, the conflation of ascending and descending, and for this stunning obversion of the gospel that calls for nothing less than the abolition of God and man together.

* 

In the end the price that must be paid for abandoning the God–man, before or after the ascension, is something more sinister than a return to paganism, for Christianity never leaves anything entirely as it was. But what of the other option, ascension in the flesh? Our treatment of Barth has left us with some unfinished business here, to which we must attend if we wish to make secure the contrast we are now sketching.

\(^{12}\) Quotations from pp. 142–155, 213f. The "transformation" for which Altizer is encouraging us to look is the reverse of the eucharistic transformation, just as the "Christ" whose advent we are to expect is the opposite of the man Jesus.
Right along we have maintained that the doctrine of ascension in the flesh, often charged with being the product of an outmoded cosmology, is precisely not that. Rather it entails a subordination of cosmological interests and claims to those of Jesus-history, liberating theology generally from its captivity to Greek perspectives and concerns. The order here is christology first, then ecclesiology and cosmology. That is Barth's order too, at least in theory. On the other hand, we saw that his rebuilding programme fell short of the more radical efforts of Irenaeus inasmuch as he failed to make good his escape from the idea of a natural opposition between the divine and the creaturely, the resolving of which has always been the driving force of speculative theology and still is today.\(^{13}\) The primary effect of that failure was to bring artificial closure to Jesus-history by means of a construction that in its own way also confused descending with ascending. Its secondary effects on ecclesiology and cosmology have been noted; among them the weakening of the eucharistic tension and the determinist tendency are perhaps the most important.

A theological programme that wishes to take its cue from Jesus-history must therefore work out more thoroughly than Barth the doctrine of ascension in the flesh. That is a point already made by T. F. Torrance's important book, *Space, Time and Resurrection*:

The way we interpret the ascended and advent humanity of Christ and its cosmic and eschatological import for human and physical existence in space and time, will determine more precisely how we regard the resurrection of Jesus Christ in body. A concept of the ascension in which the humanity of Jesus is swallowed up in the Spirit or Light of the eternal God, or a concept of the eschatological future which has little more material content to it than that somehow the future is more real than the past or the present, and in which the humanity of the advent Christ is replaced by 'hope', would appear to reflect in the last analysis a rather docetic understanding of the resurrection, and that in its turn would surely reflect a similar docetic understanding of the incarnation. Hence the 'human realism' with which we interpret the ascension and the final advent of 'this same Jesus' is likely to prove a

\(^{13}\) Even in much post-Barthian and Rahnerian trinitarianism, which continues to bear Hegel's stamp.
real test for the 'human realism' in our understanding of both the historical and the risen Jesus Christ.  

Torrance does not criticize Barth's treatment of the hypostatic union, and seems even to presuppose it at times, which may help to account for certain inconsistencies in his argument. But he does begin disentangling ontology and soteriology just the same. Death is not regarded as something natural to man. Neither is the Son's grounding of the relationship between God and man in his own person run together with his soteriological recapitulation of that relationship. For that reason Torrance's version of retroactivity is more clearly asymmetrical than Barth's. In the transposition by which the earthly life of Jesus is taken up into his new existence there is not only a revelation of that life, but a new movement or development of it. And because it is a movement in his own flesh there are now "two times" rather than one: our own, in which Jesus was crucified, and that of Jesus himself, who has gone to the Father.

Such a construction requires an open, eschatologically-determined cosmology like that of Irenaeus. "The healing and restoring of our being carries with it the healing, restoring, reorganizing and transforming of the space and time in which we now live our

---

14 P. 25f. This work was very much a part of the inspiration for our own, though we also have criticisms of it which we cannot enter into here.

15 P. 54; cf. 73: "the resurrection reveals that what divides man from God is not the discrepancy between the finite and the infinite, since God is not limited by man's incapacities and weaknesses, although that discrepancy does become a real disjunction for us when it is infected by sin and guilt and enmity."

16 Descending and ascending are discussed in terms of the ontology of the incarnation and, quite distinctly, in terms of "the gap between the time of the new man and the time of the old man;" yet the distinction is imperfectly drawn and sometimes badly compromised. See 123ff., noting the Augustinian construction on p. 132.

17 On the one hand, the resurrection is "the same event" taking place in a new way, yet there is a "beyond" to the resurrection which through the ascension is translated into a fully human life and ministry as the heavenly high priest.

18 See 96ff.
lives in relation to one another and to God." And just here an Irenaean–like answer to the Where? question also begins to emerge, even if we have certain reservations about Torrance's own way of approaching the matter. Jesus is neither alone with the Father (though in one sense he is always that) nor walking still along our road, so to speak. In going to the Father he also prepares a place for us, "refounding history from this new beginning," in von Balthasar's expression. Here the Where? question is not only reversed, making Jesus–history primary, but given an answer that demands and allows only baptism and the eucharist as its proper articulation. Jesus ascends to the Father's right hand in the sense that the whole of creation is reorganized around him. That reorganization is not something that works itself out within the terms of our own spatio–temporal process, for ours is the very space and time that requires reorganization. Yet it is a spatio–temporal process, since it is we ourselves who are made the subjects of it, and through union with Christ are also made its beneficiaries. Such is the logic of ascension in the flesh; such is the logic of the sacraments.

In view of adjustments something like these we are not surprised to find that both the high–priestly ministry of Christ and the eucharistic qualification of ecclesial life return to prominence in Torrance. In an earlier book, Royal Priesthood, he was already trying to work out an ecumenical ecclesiology that took into account the idea of ascension in the flesh:

---

19 P. 91

20 See appendix D.


22 See 98ff., 112ff.; he leans on Irenaeus, Calvin, and W. Milligan. Cf. 1993:43: "The crucial issue in eschatology concerns the Humanity of the risen Christ, and our participation in His Humanity through Word and Sacrament in the Church."
In the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ everything turns upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Body and His ascension in the fulness of His Humanity.... To demythologise the ascension (which means, of course, that it must first of all be mythologised) is to dehumanise Christ, and to dehumanise Christ is to make the Gospel of no relevance to humanity, but to turn it into an inhospitable and inhuman abstraction.... Mysticism and rationalism, sacramentalism and institutionalism, always go readily together whether in their 'Catholic' or in their 'Protestant' forms—-and in both man is starved for the sheer Humanity of the Son of God.

But as soon we look to the humanity of Christ, he says, we are forced to reckon with the "eschatological reserve" that belongs to our union with him.\(^\text{23}\) We are forced to reckon, in other words, with the problem of the presence and the absence introduced by the ascension. The church is straddling the "two times" and must accept the pain of the tension between them, affirming both its existence in history and its existence \textit{contrary} to history.\(^\text{24}\) When it does the \textit{pro nobis} approach to contemporaneity that marks both sacramentalism and symbolism largely disappears. A powerful interest in the parousia begins to take its place.\(^\text{25}\)

Torrance thus helps us to get the story of Jesus moving again, and as soon as that happens the whole game from Origen to Altizer is overturned. For when the missing third member (the parousia) is appended to the descent–ascent \textit{schema} the symmetry is broken, the circle is opened up. What emerges as of first importance is not the whole but a particular, namely, "this same Jesus" who will come in like manner as he departed, to present himself as the beginning of the new creation.\(^\text{26}\) Naturally there is not, and cannot


\(^{24}\) "The Church thus lives, as it were, in two times.... Because of its participation in the time of the new creation, the Church can continue to live on earth and in history only through being crucified with Christ to the time–form of this world" (1976:99; see also 1993:51).


\(^{26}\) In like manner, but again asymmetrically, so to speak. Torrance is clear, though, that it is "by the man Jesus that God will finally judge the earth, and by the man Jesus that resurrection and the new creation will finally come upon the old creation." Thus will "the
be, anything like a triumph of the particular to set over against Teilhard or Altizer, since "the particular" is already an abstraction. But there can be, and will be, the triumph of a particular man, and with him of the world of particulars as recreated by God. It is to that vision—the vision of a new creation in which God is God and man is man, and the world a fruitful place—that the doctrine of ascension in the flesh points.

To establish this alternative properly there is something more that requires to be said, however, and here Torrance may not be our best guide. In the background faint echoes of Augustine's retraction theory still linger, mediated through Barth; which is to say, the question of Jesus' universal lordship, precisely as a human particular, is often begged or even undermined by pointing directly to his divinity. What we still miss in Torrance is Irenaeus' thoroughly pneumatological way of thinking about Jesus, about the church, and about the "reorganization of the mystery of the sons of God"—in short, his combination of the creaturely and the epicletic. We note with approval that Torrance takes up Calvin's coordination of Jesus and the Spirit in the doctrine of the eucharist as the basis for a more comprehensive, and indeed eschatological, worldview. But Colin Gunton is right to suggest that in the doctrine of the resurrection itself he gives inadequate attention to the Spirit's role, and that is true as well in the doctrine of the ascension. To look beyond Jesus' humanity to the operation of his divinity in order to explain his "towering authority" over the world is a move that runs counter to everything we have

vast cosmic significance of the incarnation of the Word ... be made clear and manifest to all" (103).

27 Cf. 1976:124, 132, 154f. The influence of the later Alexandrian theologians is powerful here, as elsewhere in Torrance.


29 1992:62f. The Nestorians' insistence on the Holy Spirit's role in the ascension was on the right track, if for the wrong reasons.
been saying. We must look instead to the Spirit, whose task it is in the ascension to present Jesus to the Father, and in his heavenly session to present us to Jesus as well. In that way Jesus' humanity is kept plainly in view and a true pluralism is established that does not front for the creeping monism of the Origenist tradition. 30

*  

"The question at the back of this episode," writes Professor Houlden, referring to the story of the ascension, "is that of the permanent centrality of Jesus." We agree. Almost everything we have written thus far has been in one way or another concerned with just that. But according to Houlden the Where? question is a non-question, and here we must differ. 31 For the Where? question elicits an answer not only about the centrality of Jesus but about the identity of Jesus. 32 That is, it draws out the choice that must be made between ascension in the flesh and ascension of the mind, which turns out to be a choice of visions also about human destiny. The ascension, it has been said, is "the divine ecce homo." 33 What we must decide is whether or not we intend to take up the retort, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

30 "Pluralism, far from being the ultimate end of evolution, is merely a first outspreading whose gradual shrinkage displays the true curve of Nature's proceedings" (Teilhard 1964:46). Cf. Gunton (92) on the Spirit's task of perfecting creation in all its diversity, beginning with Jesus.

31 Allowances being made, of course, for the context of his remark (1991:177ff.). C. Cocksworth (202f.) also regards the question as a "cul-de-sac."

32 Ritschl (1967:215) wants to describe Jesus "not in terms of being, location, or relation of natures, but of function." But location and identity are integrally related for human beings, even if the latter can by no means be reduced to the former. At all events, to reduce identity to function would be an even greater mistake—as each of us from time to time might attest. See Bonhoeffer (1978; cf. Houlden 1992) on the relation of the Who? and the Where? questions, though we are not fully satisfied with his construction.

33 J. G. Davies (1969:16); in that light see Col 3:3f.
Ecclesiology with a Cutting Edge?

On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.34

In the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ John is granted a vision, a eucharistic vision, of the one who "was snatched up to God and to his throne."35 He sees Daniel's son of man now robed in his Melchizedekian glory. And in seeing him he also recognizes in himself one who is "turned away backwards," as Irenaeus would later put it, one whose life is behind him. He is given a word for the churches, a word that passes in a breath from ascension to parousia:

Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all the peoples of the earth  
will mourn because of him.

Is this not a sobering word for those who suppose that we are advancing in the right direction, who are confident that the way of the cross is now the way of the world? Does it not have something to say to those who would resolve by degrees the problem of the presence and the absence, ignoring the challenge of the two histories and trading the eucharistic ambiguity of the church for a more mundane kind--who perhaps have forgotten the bishop's warning about "minglings without cohesion"?36 Does it not confirm

34 Rev 1:10ff., NIV.
35 12:5; cf. 4.1ff.
36 "Finally, there is only one single all-embracing world-history, which for all the
that the absence with which we are dealing admits of no resolution but that which derives
from the resoluteness so powerfully depicted in Michaelangelo's great painting? Does it not underline the fact that there is no way to speak sanely of the presence of Jesus but "in the Spirit"?

But when we come to the Spirit perhaps we need not speak quite so soberly! Perhaps when we take the absence properly into account we will get more excited about the one through whom presence becomes a reality in spite of absence. We may even learn to think of the church once again as the "winepress" of the Spirit—better yet, to experience it as such. Perhaps when we no longer accuse the Spirit of having a "thinning" effect on Jesus, we will begin to see just how substantial, how truly human, is the man or woman full of the Spirit. And then perhaps we will also have the courage to admit that two histories means two competing projects in the making of man, one being the work of God's two hands and the other homo faber ipsius. Today that admission does take courage. But an ecclesiology that evades it has evaded both the ascension and the eucharist. It has got to Damascus without incident.

---

ups and downs, all the forwards and backwards it exhibits, nevertheless has a general direction and goes 'forward'" (J. Ratzinger 1979:245). Cf. Tolkien (Letters #195): "Actually I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat,' though it contains ... some samples or glimpses of final victory" (cf. B. Horne, "Beyond Tragedy" 168ff.).

37 "The Last Judgment" is being unveiled in its new splendour even as we write. It too is embarrassing to some, of course, and requires serious demythologizing (see Kung 1992:168ff.).

38 That will mean uniting what for too long has been separated, viz., the sacraments and the charismata. Elijah's cloak and the double portion of his spirit go together.

Appendix A

Two perennial difficulties will further illustrate our point about the danger of an ecclesiology that does not welcome the eucharistic qualification of the church, or pay proper attention to the doctrine of the ascension.

Catholicity. The problem of catholicity exists at two levels, the theoretical and the practical. At the theoretical level it is the problem of the one and the many. Because Christ is one, and all creation is said to be unified in him, the church also must be one and in its oneness embrace the interests of all creation.\(^1\) But how exactly are we to understand the unity of the church ontologically, or to relate the church universal to its concrete realization in diverse local eucharistic families? And how shall this be displayed or lived out in the actual relationships between these families?\(^2\) As a partial answer to the second question especially, and in response to the specific threats to unity thrown up in the historical course of things, there evolved the episcopacy. But the failure of episcopal harmony quite naturally became both ecclesiastically and ecclesiologically entrenched, generating the scandal of the church's formal fragmentation along national and sectarian lines. A plethora of ecumenical commissions witnesses the degree to which this

\(^1\) Hence the eucharist with its intercessory prayers and its "creatures of bread and wine." Cf. Col 1:15–20.

\(^2\) Or, for that matter, within them; the problems of catholicity are tied up with the question of the presence of the whole in each part, a question germane to the functioning of the local assembly as such.
scandal has occupied the church in our century, and will continue to occupy it for the foreseeable future.\(^3\) Over the last millennium many efforts to repair the damage have run aground on the subject of the eucharist itself, and for good reason, since what is at stake there is everywhere reflected in the other barriers to unity. Only the **Christus praesens** can make the church the church, or the churches one and catholic.\(^4\) But is it not just as important to be clear about the **absence** of Christ? Is it not the case that the problems between us arise especially where one or another part of the church attempts to fix Christ's presence in their midst in such a way that a direct identification between him and his church can be made at just that point?\(^5\) If the drive towards ecumenicity is not to founder once again on old or new arguments over the means of grace, whether the eucharist itself or any other, the answer will be found in a much **more** radically eucharistic ecclesiology than has generally been put forward—one in which it is made clear that the church itself and all its members are constantly relativized by dependence on a transforming union with Christ in the Holy Spirit.

A further reason why it has been difficult to repair the breaches in church relations is the prevalence of a false concept of catholicity. We will see in later chapters how—precisely by way of the doctrine of the ascension—the one has overcome the many, the

\(^3\) It should perhaps be noted that the debates surrounding Vatican II and the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 demonstrate that the issue is as pressing **within** the Roman church as between it and the others.

\(^4\) Zizioulas (1985:159f.) is especially helpful here: "But there is no autonomous **catholicity**, no catholic ethos that can be understood in itself. It is **Christ's** unity and it is **His** catholicity that the Church reveals in her being catholic. This means that her catholicity is neither an objective gift to be possessed nor an objective order to be fulfilled, but rather a **presence** ... the presence of Him who sums up in Himself the community and the entire creation...." (This has important implications for the episcopacy, e.g.; cf. D. Staniloae 1980:51.)

\(^5\) "The eucharistic community constitutes a sign of the fact that the **eschaton** can only **break through** history but never be identified with it" (Zizioulas 161).
universal the particular, leading to notions of unity that can only divide the church because they are not true to its own nature. Unfortunately (for the present work is not an ecclesiological one per se, and must in any case occupy itself mainly with the tradition, ponderously or otherwise) we will not get far in articulating something better. Yet we may hope to point in the right direction once we have exposed both the eschatological and the trinitarian dimensions of the problem, which is a very urgent one indeed. For the ecumenical movement as we know it is in imminent danger of coming to grief on the conflicting agendas of those who seek a unity that is truly ecclesial, and those who seek unity only as a means to some other end (geopolitical harmony, e.g.). See chapter six.

Charismata. This subject, which no longer needs any introduction, is linked to the previous one, as Yves Congar rightly points out. Let us say quite boldly that, on the whole, the degree to which the presence of charismatic gifts unsettles the church reflects the degree to which the purely formal or institutional has been overemphasized through false attempts to secure the presence of Christ. On the other hand, that is how the gifts themselves have been employed in many cases. If too high a regard for the institutional displays an inadequate grasp of the eucharistic activity as a constant breaking and

6 For a much wider discussion of universality and particularity, approached directly through trinitarian discourse and extending to the whole arena of western culture, see Colin Gunton’s recent Bampton lectures, The One, the Three, and the Many.

7 Today, of course, the line between trinitarian and eschatological discourse has been smudged by the rejection of any meaningful distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. But that smudging, for reasons that will become obvious, we judge to be part of the problem rather than a solution to it.

8 “The Renewal and the ecumenical movement were clearly meant to come together...” (2/202). At the moment “a unity among Christians—or rather, a unity of Christians without any corresponding unity of the Churches—is happening just about everywhere. This is because the level at which the unity of the Renewal exists and the type of unity to which the Renewal points are different from those of the unity sought by ecumenism” (206).
reconstituting of the church and its offerings, so also does an uncritical embrace of charismatic activity as if it were itself the one true and sufficient sign of ecclesial life. But that being said, it is clear enough that the charismatic movement confronts today's church with its failure to take seriously the epiclesic role of the Spirit, whose work has been attached too narrowly to this or that dimension of the church's corporate life (usually to some clerical function, perhaps to preaching or to the liturgy itself).

Theologically speaking the charismatic problem, like that of catholicity, belongs both to the breakdown of the trinitarian basis of ecclesiology and to the eschatological or eucharistic tension. Which is to say, it belongs to neglect of the scripture's pneumatological approach to the humanity of Jesus (the very same in which the church is eucharistically invited to share). That is an issue being noticed with increasing frequency today. But it is very important to ask why the doctrines of the Spirit and of the humanity of Christ are so poorly coordinated. The present work will offer at least one major reason for that, directly connected with the treatment of the doctrine of the ascension. Again, see chapter six.

---

9 V. Lossky rightly observes that "every dogmatic error touching the Trinity must find its expression in the conception of the Church, must translate itself into a profound change in the ecclesiastical organism" (1965:185f.; quoted D. Staniloae 1980:64f.).

10 See Gunton 1991:65ff.; cf. the contributions by A. Spence and G. McFarlane (Schwöbel & Gunton 1999), who look for help to John Owen and Edward Irving respectively (on Irving, see also G. Strachan 1988).

11 In the West the problem may well be traceable in part to the filioque, as frequently charged, but only in part.
Appendix B

1. NT Ascension References

The following list of texts touching on the ascension is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to indicate at a glance the high profile of that matter in the documents of the New Testament. Corollary passages (predicting his return from heaven, e.g., or indicating his universal authority) and allusions to the ascension motif in the Old Testament are too many and too difficult to sample effectively in this way, so we have confined ourselves to those which mention the ascension more or less directly, though not all of these are included either. Many of the following texts make no direct statement in support of Luke's account, of course, but that is not the point here. Quotations are from the New International Version.

Mark
14:62 you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven
16:19 he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God

Luke
9:31 they spoke about his departure
9:51 as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven
24:51 he left them and was taken up into heaven

John
1:18 who is at the Father's side
3:13 no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven
6:62 what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!
14:2 I am going [to my Father's house] to prepare a place for you
20:17 I am returning [anabaino] to my Father

Acts
1:9 he was taken up before their very eyes
2:34 David did not ascend to heaven
3:21 he must remain in heaven until the time comes
5:31f. God exalted him to his own right hand ... we are witnesses
7:56 I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand

Romans
8:34 Christ who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God
10:6 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)12

12 Note the parallelism: "Who will ascend into heaven?" is matched to the confession "Jesus is Lord." "Who will descend into the deep?" is matched to "believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead." The resurrection is God's deliverance; the ascension is Jesus' enthronement.
2 Corinthians
12:2  I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven—whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know

Ephesians
1:20  when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand
4:8–10 who ascended higher than all the heavens

Philippians
2:9  therefore God exalted him to the highest place
3:14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize of the upwards call of God in Christ Jesus [adapted]

Colossians
3:1  set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated

1 Timothy
3:16  was taken up in glory

Hebrews
1:3  he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (passim)
4:14  a great high priest who has gone through the heavens
6:19f. the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf
7:26  exalted above the heavens
8:4  if he were on earth, he would not be a priest
9:11  he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man–made, that is to say, not a part of this creation
9:24  he entered heaven itself

1 Peter
3:21f. by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven

Revelation
11:12 they went up to heaven in a cloud
12:5  and her child was snatched up to God and to his throne
2. The Descent and Ascent Motif in Scripture

Eden  Ararat  Babel
      Nod       Abyss  Dispersion

Sinai  Zion  Calvary
       Desert  Babylon  Hades

Olives  anō klēsis
          Pentecost  Parousia  Second Death
3. The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews

The following analysis makes no attempt to display the more complicated substructures in the content of this epistolary sermon, but only to demonstrate that its rhetorical shape consciously mirrors Hebrews' central focus on the significance of the ascension of Jesus. The sermon is clearly moulded (not unnaturally) by a series of carefully balanced exhortations--following on an opening eulogy--to which is matched a series of messianic titles reflecting the ascension motifs of cult and monarchy. In between these exhortations fall the famous warning passages, one for each section, as well as the expositions of Pentecost lections and related passages. The structure, without being at all rigid, is remarkably consistent. Combined with the overall theme of pilgrimage ("bringing many sons to glory," 2:10) it produces a powerful effect indeed.

The Homily


hothen... oun... 'the point' oun... toigaroun... dio...

'HE SAT DOWN'

'DRAW NEAR' 'DRAW NEAR'

'FIX YOUR THOUGHTS' 'FIX YOUR EYES'

OPENING EULOGY 'LET US WORSHIP'

Son H.P. H.P. High Priest H.P. "author Mediator
Apostle Son Liturgist Son [29] and [24]

perfecter"

Chap. 13
epistolary exhortations
benediction: "that Great Shepherd"
post script

448
In its large central section Hebrews invites us to superimpose on this rhetorical structure a simple diagram of the earthly tabernacle, to serve as the symbol of Jesus' reception in the uncreated Holy of Holies. This entry (i.e., his ascension) in turn spells out an altogether new existence for man, and with him, for the whole cosmic order—which must be viewed in dynamic, not static terms:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{aion / oikoumenē mellōn} \\
\hline
\text{CHRISTOS} \\
\hline
\text{aiones / oikoumenē} \\
\hline
\text{KOSMOS}
\end{array}
\]

Some fail to take adequate notice of this dynamic, liturgical way of viewing things, which explains why old/new, inner/outer, higher/lower, visible/invisible, shakeable/unshakeable, etc., are all apt (if inadequate) expressions of a single cosmology: a cosmology of transposition, we might say, a transposition accomplished in and through the ascension of Jesus, who thus becomes the priest-king of creation. He "passed through" and is "exalted above the heavens" precisely in that he reorders the fundamental structures of all created existence around himself, making it presentable to God in and with himself.
4. Christ and Creation in Colossians 1

We have raised a point in connection with Colossians 1 which requires some clarification, namely, Paul's association of ta panta with the lordship of Jesus. Our major thesis in this regard can be put quite simply: Jesus' lordship over all things is a meaningless claim where it remains unattached to an ontology and a cosmology that are able to make sense of it. Col 1:15–20 provides a helpful summary of the Pauline perspective on this matter.

We begin, in a rather roundabout way, with some further assistance from Tom Wright in the form of an article entitled "Adam in Pauline Christology." Wright takes the point of view that "the contrast of Adam and Christ is somewhere near the heart of Paul's thought," which developed in critical dialogue with his Jewish heritage in the aftermath of the Damascus Road encounter. Wright argues that Paul's christological insights turn on the axis of crucifixion-exaltation, and do not flow from the notion of resurrection or exaltation only. Focusing on the stumbling block of the cross from the standpoint of Jesus' astonishing vindication, the apostle saw that the risen Jesus had not only assumed Adam's place as Lord of the world—to which Israel as a nation aspired—but also Israel's place as the world's redeemer, a calling the nation had refused. Jesus, then, was the last Adam and the true image of God "both in his obedience unto death and in his new state of post-resurrection existence as 'life-giving spirit;'" that is, in the old creation as in the new.

How does this background assist us with Colossians 1:15ff., where the relationship between Christ and creation (old and new) is most plainly spelled out? Noting that

---

13 See 1983:384ff. (a revised version of this article can be found in The Climax of the Covenant).

14 Contra Dunn (1980) et al.
Adam-christology and wisdom-christology are not mutually exclusive, Wright points to the presence of the former in a passage that is usually discussed in terms of the latter. In particular, he finds in this hymn an implicit placing of Christ in the spot Israel was inclined (indirectly, by reference to the gift of the Torah) to reserve for herself, namely, the status of being the "pre-existent' blueprint" for creation, as also for redemption. He goes on to argue a point we have tried in our own way to develop elsewhere, namely, that eikōn (1:15) can and should "be given its full force of 'the human image of God.'" With this Karl Barth also agrees: It is "the Son in concreto and not in abstracto, Jesus Christ," of whom we are reading. But, unlike Barth, Wright finds in 1:16f. a reference to the pre-incarnate Lord. He remarks appropriately that "the one the Colossians know as their Lord is Lord of the whole world as well as the church, and he is this not merely by right of redemption (1:20) or conquest (2:15) but, more fundamentally, by right of creation (1:16f.)." Here he has in view, however, the Lord in his "divine splendour prior to becoming human."

We do not wish to match exegetical wits with Dr Wright, whose approach we find convincing except on this last point (just where he represents the majority opinion), but we must inquire as to whether there is anything either textual or theological that demands or justifies the change in referent. The Greek text reads as follows:16

δς ἐστιν εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,
δὴ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς...
τὰ πάντα δὴ ἀυτῷ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσταται.
καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,

15 CD 2/2:98f. Prototokos is to be understood in the same way; see Psa 89:27. Cf. Farrow 1986:93f., 126ff., 176ff. (in this good company we will not trouble to repeat our own exegetical arguments).

καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας:

ὁ ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,

ἐνα γένηται ἐν πάσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων....

Where in this are we invited to draw a line that cuts away the humanity of the Son—very much Paul's concern in the immediate and the wider context (cf. 1:22)—even for a moment? Is it not exactly this Son, the one who suffered the cross and who lives as head of the church, who according to Paul is "before all things," such that "all things consist in him"? There is only one prototokos-eikon. Does the parallelism, "firstborn of creation" and "firstborn of redemption," not point to the one Jesus Christ who holds together the old creation and the new?17

Whatever the processes by which Paul arrived at this insight, it is this insight that gives real meaning to the universal lordship of Jesus. Surely if the powers of the world to come are already invested in him, he truly is, as Barth claims, the Lord of time. Only as the Lord of time (beginning with creation itself) could he possibly be the redeemer and Lord of "all things in heaven and on earth"—unless ta panta means only those things which now exist. And what sort of lordship would that be?

17 Of course we recognize that this requires creation and redemption to be construed in a non-linear and asymmetrical manner, raising all kinds of ontological and cosmological questions well beyond the scope of Paul's letter to the Colossians. What it does not require, we hasten to add, is rejection of the notion of a pre-incarnate Son altogether.
Appendix C

We have noted the charge that Irenaeus gets caught up between two competing anthropological systems, a charge usually expounded with reference to Adv. Haer. 4.38. The claim is made (more recently by Robert Brown, e.g.) that in this passage he begins to look away from the Adam–Christ contrast that otherwise dominates his thought, that is, from Paul's emphasis on the fall and from the negative view of man that is said to characterize classical theology on the Pauline–Augustinian axis. By arguing (in defense of the Creator) for the "necessary imperfection of creation" in its original form, Irenaeus opens up an evolutionary perspective: a forward-looking rather than a backward-looking approach to man's elevation or deification. What is at issue here is not the question of deification per se but the question as to whether and how far we ought to see in 4.38f. an "opposing" line of thought and something like an "evolutionary theology."18

We will make four further observations, which require to be taken together with what has already been said. First, Paul does not have a negative view of man, nor did he invent the doctrine of the fall.19 More to the point, that Irenaeus has here invented a distinct approach to human origins and destiny which requires him to radically reinterpret that doctrine, and so to set aside the Adam–Christ tension which everywhere else pervades his theology, seems a dubious supposition. Second, it is quite astonishing that the elevation theme is discussed in this whole debate with no reference at all to the doctrine of Jesus' ascension in the flesh. When this link is made, it is immediately plain that


19 Augustine is another matter but not germane to Irenaeus; we will deal with him in chapter four.
Irenaeus has in view nothing at all like the general advance of Human Nature through the tests and trials of life in the evolutionary stream.\textsuperscript{20}

Third, the ontology of which we have spoken makes sense of his argument about the fall in a manner more or less consistent with the rest of his work. The necessary imperfection in creation that makes the fall possible (not necessary!) belongs precisely to creation's relational underpinnings. The love for God which is the life of man cannot emerge \textit{ex nihilo} in full bloom; it requires to grow with experience.\textsuperscript{21} But that in turn is what makes the fall—however unsurprising—such a devastating affair. In the fall man is "turned away backwards." He does not in fact grow up in the love of God as he is intended to. The course of his time is set in the wrong direction. Now the cause of his imperfection lies in himself, that is, in his disobedience—a quite different kind of imperfection altogether.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore the nature that must be "overcome" (38.4) is no longer the weakness of infancy alone but the recalcitrance of sin. It is the gnostics' attempt to get round the implications of that very fact which Irenaeus attacks in 4.38f.\textsuperscript{23}

Fourth, the idea that Irenaeus cannot decide whether Christ comes to move us forwards or backwards now appears entirely misguided. Redemption involves a \textit{reversal}

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Brown 20, Hick 54. The man who makes progress "day by day" (48.3) is the man of 2 Cor 3–5. Recall here our point about Christ appearing at the nadir.

\textsuperscript{21} Hick recognizes the relational as Irenaeus' point of departure, but then misconstrues the issue in terms of "an epistemic distance."

\textsuperscript{22} See 4.39 (cf. von Bathasar 2/79), which is much less quoted! The claim that Irenaeus regarded Adam as naturally mortal, with its apparent corollary that death "is not a punishment" (Brown 21), overlooks the fact that Adam's nature or destiny was by no means settled or fixed, according to Genesis, on which Irenaeus is building. If Adam had as yet no immortality, neither was he yet destined to die; his destiny would be determined by his actual relationship with God.

\textsuperscript{23} They intend rather to "ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature." We should admit, however, that because Irenaeus is given to dealing with what \textit{is}, rather than with what might have been, he is not everywhere equally clear about the point we have been making.
that takes us **ahead again**. All of this is worked out in the person of him who descends and ascends. Proto logy and eschatology alike are determined by way of a dialogical interaction between God and creation that is entirely controlled from its centre in Jesus Christ, who is himself the beginning and the end.  

24 His work of recapitulation turns us round and sets us off in the right direction—towards his own kingdom glory in the presence of the Father. But the events of Jesus—history, in which the whole story of man is told, witness to the fact that that direction is a very different one than ours.  

In short, it is only by understanding at a deeper level the Irenaean christology and its implications that the whole matter appears in its proper light. That being said, however, we are quite prepared to admit that Irenaeus is here in some danger of succumbing to the inherent temptation in all theodicy—in particular, of going back on his original refusal to speculate on the origin of evil, and so of leaving himself open, if not exactly to the line of interpretation we have been disputing, at least to the general line of patristic theology with its unhealthy interest in "overcoming nature" through a tutorial cosmology (an interest still evident in John Hick, e.g.). How far he may be held responsible for the latter we cannot say.  

On the positive side, it should be added that

---

24 Thus Irenaeus speaks of a "reciprocal rejoicing" passing forwards and backwards between Abraham and the church (4.7.1; cf. John 8:56ff.).

25 4.34.4 gives a moving if cryptic version: It is our Lord himself who "made the plough, and introduced the pruning-hook, i.e., the first semination of man, which was the creation exhibited in Adam, and the gathering in of the harvest in the last times.... [And] since He joined the beginning to the end, and is the Lord of both, He has finally displayed the plough, in that the wood has been joined on to the iron, and has thus cleansed His land; because the Word, having been firmly united to flesh and in its mechanism fixed with pins, has reclaimed the savage earth."

26 2.28.7; **n.b.** 28.3.

27 By no means would we undertake to defend everything in 4.38f. Though Irenaeus is not wrong in attempting to rout the gnostics with a truer and better notion of "advance," and is indeed largely successful, we are put in mind of Karl Barth's warning: "Always apologetics at the root of Gnosis!"
through his attention to "God's temporal art," as von Balthasar puts it, Irenaeus offers us a window on a truly theological theory of evolution—that is, of the resurrection as the "time of increase"—that might profitably be set over against today's evolutionizing of theology. That is a process that actually begins with Origen, to whom we turn next.

---

38 The futurist approach generally eschews the doctrine of the resurrection along with the doctrine of the fall. But Irenaeus was familiar with those who declare "that the resurrection from the dead is simply an acquaintance with that truth which they proclaim" (2.31.2).
Appendix D

In a recent paper Daniel Hardy has observed that "there is a necessary conjunction of theology with cosmology, history, meaning and practice, not to mention such issues as demography, sociality, humanity and culture." Similarly, David Schindler writes in Communio that

Christian theology cannot abandon cosmology and leave it simply to science. Such an abandonment has profound implications for the self-understanding of Christianity. However unintended, it entails precisely a secularizing of the cosmos: a setting of the cosmos outside of God and his grace. Put another way, it signifies a "naturalizing" of nature. It is of the essence of Christian theology that it attempt to resist this secularizing and "naturalizing" of the world and of nature.

We agree, but do Schindler and Hardy? Not exactly. Schindler begins on theology's own ground, with the person of Jesus Christ and with the "ontological force" of the homoousion, rejecting the idea that theology must "await the theory-construction and appraisal of physics and biology, and then contour its cosmological assertions to fit those theories of science...." Hardy, on the other hand, while critical of the past effects of cosmology on theology, continues to suggest that "the beginning point for theology will be in cosmology itself," thus risking the naturalization of theology.

We note that Hardy too appears to have the incarnation in view—and the pneumatology we miss in Schindler's short article—for he directs our attention to "the continued 'searching' of the Spirit to further develop the congruence of the world and

29 1993:1

30 Fall 1988 (editorial).

31 Though he means by this something more than the theories of physics and biology (see p. 15, and n. 29). Hardy calls for interaction between the "substance" of science and the "substance" of theology. Is that what John Honner (1991:15ff.), e.g., is doing when he tries to think together "incarnation, eucharist, resurrection, and physics" into a new ontology stimulated by quantum mechanics (cf. T. Kelly 1993:189ff.)?
humanity with God's abundance, and thereby to fulfill God's bond in Christ with the unfolding of the cosmos." But something is lacking here. Could it be the eschatological critique we have tried to bring to the surface in our focus on the doctrine of ascension in the flesh? When that critique is missing the inevitable result is that theology is once again appended to cosmology. Which brings us around to Torrance.

Torrance has made it one of his primary aims to reconstruct the relationship between theology and science:

The universe that is steadily being disclosed to our various sciences is found to be characterised throughout time and space by an ascending gradient of meaning in richer and higher forms of order. Instead of levels of existence and reality being explained reductionistically from below in materialistic and mechanistic terms, the lower levels are found to be explained in terms of higher, invisible, intangible levels of reality. In this perspective the divisive splits become healed, constructive syntheses emerge... He calls for a "theologic" that functions "with spatio-temporal factors as internal parameters" in the articulation of the content of revelation. Something like that is what he has in mind when at the end of *Space, Time and Resurrection* he attempts to offer a way of conceiving the resurrection in terms of the *stratification* of reality. But does he not run the risk here of undermining the eucharistic eschatology with which he is working? Is he not in danger of making the whole process of death and resurrection somehow natural after all? That is certainly what is happening in theology and in Christian cosmology generally. But this is only a question.

---

32 P. 20

33 1985:ix

34 "What we evidently need is the elaboration of a new material logic, a *theologic*, appropriate to the nature of the Incarnation, which treats spatio-temporal factors as internal parameters in our interpretive and explicatory formalisations of God's self-revelation" (ibid. 91).

35 See 188ff.; cf. J. T. Fraser's interesting ideas (1982) on "temporal levels."
LIST OF WORKS CITED


"In Retrospect."  Communio 2.3, Fall 1975, 197–220.


37 We have not included incidental references to the Fathers.


Blocher, Henri. **In the Beginning.** The Opening Chapters of Genesis. Inter–varsity, Leicester, 1984.


Garascia, Mary Martha. The Search for an Ascending Christology. An Examination of the Christology of John B. Cobb, Jr. and its Implications for Revisionary Christology. Ph.D. The Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, 1988 (U.M.I.).


"Barth, the Trinity, and Human Freedom." Theology Today 43.3, October 1986, 316–30.


The One, the Three and the Many. God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. Cambridge University Press, 1993.


*Table and Tradition.* Edinburgh, Handsel, 1983 (b).


Hoogland, Marvin P. *Calvin's Perspective on the Exaltation of Christ*. Free University of Amsterdam. J. H. Kok N. V. Kampen, 1966.


Kline, Meredith G. **Images of the Spirit.** Baker, Grand Rapids, 1980.


"Teilhard de Chardin in the Context of Renewal." **Communio** 15, Fall 1988, 361–75.


Schindler, David L. "Theology, science, and cosmology." Communio 15, Fall 1988, editorial.


- **Microcosm and Mediator.** The Theological Anthropology of St Maximus the Confessor. C.W.K. Gleerup, Lund & Einar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1965.


Torrance, James B. "Worship in the Reformed Church: The Purpose and Principles of Public Worship." (n.d.)

Torrance, T. F. **Space, Time and Incarnation.** Oxford University Press, 1969.


**Space, Time and Resurrection.** Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1976.


Tracy, David & Nicholas Lash, eds. **Cosmology and Theology.** Concilium. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1983.


Wallace, Ronald S. **Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament.** Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1953.


The Climax of the Covenant. Fortress, Minneapolis, 1992 (b).


