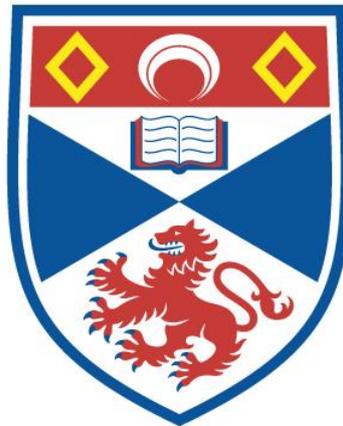


**GOD'S SHINING FORTH:
A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF DIVINE LIGHT**

Andrew R. Hay

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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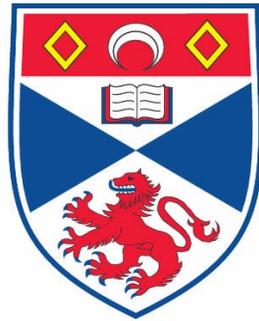
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ANDREW R. HAY



THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

AT THE

SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

26 AUGUST 2014

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks an orderly set of theological reflections on the declaration that “God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5). Such talk of divine light, this study argues, must begin with the doctrine of God, namely, with God’s light *in se* and his “shining forth” *ad extra* towards creatures in the darkness of sin and death. This work therefore follows a precise pathway in expounding this theme. Chapter 1 offers a brief survey of the historical and scriptural uses of the concept of light in order to fix its linguistic and conceptual boundaries. Chapter 2 seeks to reflect upon God’s light as the light of his own radiant triune identity, as well as offering a preliminary examination of God’s economic, covenantal shining forth to creatures. Chapter 3 gives a much more detailed rehearsal of this act of shining forth by an account of God’s light as manifest in the economy of his works with which he lovingly elects, reconciles, and illuminates creatures. Chapter 4 proposes that with the treatment of God’s shining forth there belongs a treatment of the light of the church called out of darkness, gathered into the “marvelous light” of God, and set to proclaiming the “excellencies” of God. Chapter 5 concludes this study by examining what bearing the reality of God’s shining forth as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might have on the work and call of theology as an activity of the “illuminated mind.”

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I wish to especially thank the examiners of the thesis, Prof. John Webster and Dr. Donald Wood. Each provided constructive readings and critical insights of the work; and each embodied for this young scholar the meaning of a "conversation full of grace" during the viva examination. Various members of the St. Mary's College staff receive my thanks as well—notably, Prof. Alan Torrance, N.T. Wright, Drs. Mark Elliott, Scott Hafemann, Gavin Hopps, Bill Tooman, Grant Macaskill, and the ever-amiable librarian Lynda Kinloch—who immeasurably enriched my work and my family's time at St Andrews by their wise words of counsel and hospitality.

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Bawulski, Ash Cunningham, Sean Cook, Kevin McConnell, Matt Gibb, Alden McCray, Rev. Alasdair Macleod, my co-workers at Hillside Christian Church, and its pastor, Tommy Politz—in all, I am humbled by this “great cloud of witnesses.” However, special mention must be made of two colleagues. Sam Adams, who challenged me daily during our many discussions in the Rutherford Room, and whose wonderful family brightened many a dark day in the Auld Grey Toon, shall remain forever in my gratitude. And another, Travis Buchanan, proved not only to be a fierce friend of quick wit but a delightful playing partner on our many (needed) loops around the Old Course. *Clarior hinc honos!* To these two and their beautiful families we are honored to have them as loving friends and fellow sojourners in life.

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Gloria Dei.

For my beloved Kendall

Dum spiro spero

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. 10 volumes. Reprint. Peabody, Hendrickson, 1994.
- CC* Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*. Edited by the Calvin Translation Society. 22 volumes. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- CD* Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. 4 volumes. Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–1975.
- CO* Calvin, John. *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt Omnia*. Volumes 1–59. In volumes 29–87 of *Corpus Reformationum*. Edited by G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Ruess. Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
- Inst.* Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559)*. Translated by F.L. Battles. Edited by J.T. McNeill. Vols. 20 and 21 of Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960.
- KD* Barth, Karl. *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*. 4 volumes. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1932; Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag Zürich, 1938–1967.
- NPNF* *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by P. Schaff. 2 series. 28 volumes. Reprint. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994.
- OS* Calvin, John. *Joannis Calvini opera selecta*. Edited by P. Barth and G. Niesel. Vols. 3 and 4: *Institutionis Christianae religionis 1559*. Reprint. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010.

- PG* *Patrologiae graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 161 volumes. Paris: Garnier, 1857–1866.
- PL* *Patrologiae latina*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 221 volumes. Paris. Garnier, 1844–1855.
- PPS* *The Popular Patristics Series*. Edited by J. Behr, et al. 49 volumes. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996–2013.
- ST* Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Edited by T. Gilby and T.C. O’Brien. 60 volumes. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- WA* Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 120 volumes. Weimar: Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883–2009.
- WJE* Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 26 volumes. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957–2008.

From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.

Ps. 50:2

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

John 12:46

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 4:4–6

The light or revelation of God is not just a declaration and interpretation of His being and action, His judgment and grace, His endowing, directing, promising and commanding presence and action. In making Himself known, God acts on the whole man. Hence the knowledge of God given to man through his illumination is no mere apprehension and understanding of God's being and action, nor as such a kind of intuitive contemplation. It is the claiming not only of his thinking but also of his willing and work, of the whole man, for God. It is his refashioning to be a theatre, witness and instrument of His acts. Its subject and content, which is also its origin, makes it an active knowledge, in which there are affirmation and negation, volition and decision, action and inaction, and in which man leaves certain old courses and enters and pursues new ones. As the work of God becomes clear to him, its reflection lights up his own heart and self and whole existence through the One whom he may know on the basis of His own self-declaration. Illumination and therefore vocation is the total alteration of the one whom it befalls.

Karl Barth, *CD* IV/3.2: 510.

INTRODUCTION

For who would dare to say that there is darkness in God? Or what is the light? Or what is the darkness? God is light. I know that any man might say, "The sun is light, and the moon is light, and a lamp is light." But it ought to be far greater than these, far more excellent, and far more surpassing. How much God is distant from the creation, as far as the Maker from the making, from Wisdom and that which has been made by Wisdom, far beyond all things ought the light of this One be. And, perhaps, we shall draw near to it, if we know what this light is, and apply ourselves to it, so that from it we might be illuminated, because we ourselves are darkness, and only when we are illuminated by it can we become light.¹

This thesis seeks to be a theological engagement with the declaration that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5).² It is not concerned with aesthetic or mystical theology, which might be an expected course for this study. Rather, its concern involves the strange rhetoric of dogmatics, “that movement of believing intelligence by which the church today attends to the instruction of the church past, submitting its received teaching to the rule of Holy Scripture.”³ Thus, in submitting the “received teaching” of the church to “the rule of Holy Scripture,” this thesis tries to voice several soundings regarding the doctrine of God, ecclesiology, and the nature of theology, under the guidance of God’s radiant presence in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—that is, an articulation of the content and conclusions of the “doctrine of divine light.”

¹ Augustine, *In Epistolam Johannis ad Parthos tractatus decem*, 1.4 (PL 35:1980f): “Et forte vicini ei erimus, si quae sit lux ista cognoverimus, et as eam nos applicaverimus, ut ex ipsa illuminemur; quia in nobis tenebrae sumus, et ab illa illuminati possumus esse lux.”

² All scriptural references will be in the ESV unless otherwise noted.

³ Donald Wood, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 4 (October 2012): 381f.

But perhaps further clarity might be offered to the reader by looking at the subtitle to this thesis, namely, a “trinitarian” theology of divine light. More precisely, this thesis is a trinitarian account of God’s light which makes two proposals throughout its course: *God is light in himself*; and *from himself God shines forth his light*.⁴ The first proposal, *God is light in himself*, centers on the doctrine of God proper, namely, that *God is light* as it is the light of his own radiant identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s light is the radiance and unity of the Holy Trinity. The image of God’s light is therefore a conceptual articulation of the biblical witness that *God is light in himself*. Second, however, *from himself God shines forth his light*. That is, this second proposal arises in the forthcoming chapters as the ascription of God’s *shining forth*, which encompasses the divine movement of election, reconciliation, and illumination—that movement of God to his creatures which is published in the gospel. Used properly, this language does not suggest that God’s light can only be maintained by rejecting any relation between God and creatures, guarding God by placing him into a region of strict otherness or “unknowable darkness.” That way of comprehending God’s light is stricken from this thesis, specifically because the logic of the gospel teaches us that God’s radiant way of being includes his setting apart creatures for himself, shining on those creatures in their darkness, and guaranteeing that they will attain their intended *telos*. *God is light in himself*; and *from himself God shines forth his light*.

A theological account of divine light is therefore not *solely* interested in offering an account of *opera Dei ad intra*. Rather, its focus is on the radiant being and action of the triune God, in the execution of his own shining forth, in which he elects, reconciles, and illuminates creatures for fellowship with himself. Thus Webster: “The confession that God is light has to

⁴ This twofold proposal is inspired by John Webster’s guiding statement in his article, “God’s Aseity,” in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. A. Moore and M. Scott (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 158: “From himself he has life in himself [...] ‘from himself God gives himself.’” Webster’s statement is foundational for this thesis, especially in his proposal that “God is not only from himself in his inner life...but also in the external works which correspond to his inner life” (*ibid.*). We concentrate more fully on this theme in chapter 2.

be understood in terms of the divine resolve for fellowship.”⁵ Yet such a notion of a trinitarian theology of light as the “divine resolve for fellowship” is wholly absent from much of contemporary theology. A rather broad aesthetic and psychological concept of divine or noetic “light” does a bit of work in some theological and philosophical circles.⁶ But in dogmatic theology it awaits a detailed contemporary handling, and a lack of such a handling is not often recognized.⁷ Perhaps one factor could be the sheer avoidance of any so-called “analogy” in describing the life of the Trinity over against the more analytic handlings of the subject. But this factor aside, the suggestion explored in this thesis is that a responsible approach to this topic must take the form of our twofold proposal above: *God is light in himself*; and *from himself God shines forth his light*.

Alongside, and often reinforcing, this approach will be several attendant voices from the ancient and modern history of Christian theology. The interlocutors are therefore select and often monovocal. On the one hand, the careful reader will note that this thesis is deeply marked by the “pro-Nicene trinitarian theology” of the fourth-century church. That is, the dogmatic terminology developed in the debates surrounding Trinity and Christology by Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil, is vital to the constructive reflections offered here. The reader will also find reference to the work of John Calvin and Karl Barth. Indeed, pride of place is given to each theologian’s titanic offerings to the doctrine of reconciliation and the doctrine of the Trinity—Barth’s handling of the image of light in his third cycle of the doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics*, for instance, is pivotal for many of our forthcoming claims. And finally, concerning dogmatic style, the perceptive reader will also note that this thesis falls very close within the field of its academic home. The theological vigor and acumen of St. Mary’s own Webster and Davidson have

⁵ John Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 40.

⁶ Uncertainties regarding this use of the concept are set out specifically in Ch. 1.3.2, “Created Light and Uncreated Light.”

⁷ There are remarkable exceptions found in the work of Barth and, most recently, Webster and Ivor J. Davidson.

proven to be a deep resource in the course of this study, particularly in their various glosses on Trinity, Scripture, and the image of light itself.

The chapters which follow are therefore informed by these ancient and modern calls for the use of the concept of light to express the reality of the triune God's radiant self-disclosure. However, found over and above these historical soundings is the *principium theologiae* of such expressions of God's radiant reality, namely, Holy Scripture. It is here that perhaps another clarification for the reader is in order regarding the relationship between exegesis and the theological statements which arise throughout the thesis. In short: the *locus* of theology is exegesis. And such a location will be sustained in the following chapters as we offer a "trinitarian theology of divine light." The reason for the occupation of theology with exegesis is quite simple, says Webster:

Theology is exegesis because its matter is Jesus Christ as he communicates himself through Holy Scripture. And so attention to Holy Scripture is not only a necessary but also—in a real sense—a sufficient condition for theology, because Scripture itself is not only necessary but also sufficient.⁸

The details of this notion will be duly examined in later sections of the thesis.⁹ Yet in attending to Scripture and the historical soundings of theology, the reader ought to note that there is much that these proceeding chapters avoid. They do not offer any *lengthy* handlings of the primary concepts of trinitarian theology, such as *persona* or *unitas*; nor do they give any *extended* account of the debates surrounding the different models of trinitarianism currently residing within the realm of analytic theology. Though this thesis certainly engages with such concepts, critiques such models, and participates in several attendant questions

⁸ John Webster, "Reading the Bible: The Example of Barth and Bonhoeffer," in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh/NY: T&T Clark, 2001), 110.

⁹ See, e.g., Ch. 3.2, "The Reconciling Light," and Ch. 5.2.1, "Claritas Scripturae."

passim, the trajectory here is much more precise: we will try to show how a trinitarian account of God's *light in himself* includes a particular way of thinking of God's *shining forth his light* upon creatures, one which arrests their radical plunge into the confusion and darkness of sin.

This thesis therefore follows a rather narrow pathway. Chapter 2 seeks to reflect upon God's light as the light *in himself* as Father Son, and Spirit, as well as God's economic, covenantal *shining forth from himself* to creatures in the darkness of sin. Chapter 3 offers a much more detailed rehearsal of this *shining forth* by an account of God's loving election, reconciliation, and illumination of creatures. Chapter 4 proposes the necessary treatment of the light of the saints gathered out of darkness and into the "marvelous light" of God. Chapter 5 is concerned with what bearing the reality of God's shining forth as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has on theology as an activity of the "illuminated mind." As we approach this pathway, however, we must first pause in chapter 1 and offer a rather lengthy, albeit necessary, study concerning the historical and scriptural use of the concept of light—with the admittedly perplexing images it invokes—in order to fix its conceptual boundaries for the way forward.

CHAPTER 1

LIGHT AS A CONCEPT FOR THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

*He may most properly be termed light, but he is nothing like the light with which we are acquainted.*¹

As we reflect upon the declaration “God is light,” we are seeking to answer the question: *Quis sit Deus?* Who is this One who is *light in himself*, and *from himself shines forth his light to his creatures*? A theology of divine light, we might therefore say, points to the radiant identity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And such a radiant identity is, further, to be regarded with respect to the divine distance—“he is nothing like that light which we are acquainted”—and with regard to the divine approach—“He may most properly be termed light”—in God’s turning towards his creatures in the darkness of sin and death.

Within such a sketch, the concept of light, we might propose, has two initial features that will trace the entire movement of this thesis. First, the concept of light indicates the glory of the Holy Trinity in its radiant uniqueness (*God is light in himself*). Second, it indicates the notion that God’s radiant uniqueness constitutes the foundation of his self-revelation, his “shining forth” in the economy of his creatures (*from himself God shines forth his light*).² This radiant One scatters the darkness of sin, calls creatures into his light, and illuminates them in the divine resolve for fellowship. “The confession that God is light has to be understood in terms of the divine resolve for fellowship.”³

¹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.13.4 (PG 7a:744; ANF 1:374): “Sensus enim capax omnium bene et recte dicitur, sed non similis hominum sensui et lumen rectissime dicitur, sed nihil simile ei, quod est secundum nos, lumini.”

² See, again, our “Introduction” above.

³ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 40.

In “speaking of the light of God,” this first chapter seeks to give grounding to a “trinitarian theology of divine light” by marking a conceptual boundary. This will be primarily accomplished in three ways. First, by a survey of the scriptural setting of the concept of light; second, by a brief examination of the dogmatic gloss on this scriptural foundation from Nicene trinitarian theology; and third, by an inquiry into the “contingent” misuse of the concept of light.

1. THE SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION OF THE CONCEPT OF LIGHT

We begin by noting that this brief scriptural survey is not meant to cover the entire scope of the biblical concept of light; nor is it strictly concerned with offering an extended exegesis of various texts—though such an occurrence *necessarily* arises here and throughout the later dogmatic discussions of this thesis. Rather, our aim in this initial section is to patiently set out the essential biblical texts for our present study. And in doing so we shall find ourselves, in the words of Barth, involved in “a *conversation* in which One *speaks* [i.e., God through Scripture] and the other *listens* [i.e., the reader of Scripture].” In short: “This listening...is the task of the exegete.”⁴ Of course, “listening” to scriptural witness is necessary for our present exegetical context: tracing the biblical use of light as the “best figure or representation of the Divine Majesty.”⁵ Yet before tracing this path we must at once caution that each instance of the image of “light” or “glory” in the canon is situated in a unique context and *locus*. Thus, it is not our aim here to overlook such contexts; rather, again, we seek to “listen” to the scriptural witness to the light of God so as to provide the necessary boundary for the forthcoming movements of this thesis. We will therefore retrieve several major themes about

⁴ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins 1922*, in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe* II.23, ed. Hans Scholl (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993), 526: “Ein Gespräch muß die Exegese sein, bei dem der Eine redet und der Andere hört. Das Hören...ist die Aufgabe des Exegeten.”

⁵ Martin Luther, *Genesisvorlesung (cap. 1–17)*, 1535/38 (*WA* 42:14).

the image of light from the Hebrew Bible before moving to examine the particular clarity of its meaning in New Testament occurrence.

1.1. Light in Hebrew Bible Occurrence

The standard text for any “listening” to the biblical occurrence of the image of light is often found in the historical narrative of the (first) creation account in the Book of Genesis. It is here that we find a clearly demarcated instance of God and his creation, the creative speech of God, and the creation of light by divine speech. That is, we find at the head of the Pentateuch the astounding fact that even before making the heavenly luminaries (Gen. 1:14f), in the primal chaos of darkness God spoke and created light.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day (Gen. 1:3–5).

We hear in this principal passage of how God has around him light, the “ornament and glory of the whole visible creation.”⁶ By this first creative utterance of v. 3, we see that created light is not itself God but a “creature” and an “ornament,” possessing no inherent capacity of its own.⁷ And from all the gifts through which God as Creator brings forth and blesses creatures, light proves the most sublime. Yet with all its excellence, its sublimity rests wholly on the fact that God, by the power of his Word, spoke light into existence and “saw that it

⁶ John Demascene, *Expositio Fidei orthodoxæ* 2.7 (NPNF 9:23).

⁷ We say “creature” here to denote the creaturely qualities associated with created light—apart from and unequal to its Creator. See Luther’s insistence that these verses should not be rendered allegorically into “light” and “dark” *beings* (see *Genesisvorlesung* [WA 42:15]), which is in contrast to Augustine (*De Genesi ad litteram* 1.17).

was good” (v. 4).⁸ This means that God loves his work and therefore wills to uphold and preserve it.⁹ The fact that God “saw” his work, that he continues to see at it, keeps the world from plummeting into chaos (v. 2). This “seeing” is followed by an allusion to the existence of darkness (אֲדָמָה); but just as it does not state that God created darkness, so it does not state that he saw that this darkness was good. This can be said of light only—that is, of the light which was set apart from darkness. In finding light worthy of this separation, God sees how the light is good, namely, that it is good as his symbol and ornament; that it is a bulwark against darkness and confusion; and that it forms God’s “basic principle of ‘separation.’”¹⁰

This initial divine utterance, therefore, unmistakably differentiates between that radiant identity of God as Creator over against any so-called “god of light”—or, indeed, between the light spoken of here and an admittedly close hermeneutical connection with the Son of God.¹¹ Consequently, any comingling of light—this “firstborn commandment”¹²—with a divinization of light, or with the Word itself, is wholly unwarranted. “Light is not somehow an overflow of the essence of deity,” says von Rad, “but rather an object...of God’s creation.”¹³ Created by God, light therefore not only points to the radiant identity of God over

⁸ A detail often missed in modern commentaries. See, e.g., John H. Walton, et al., *IVP Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: IVP Press, 2000), 28.

⁹ Claus Westermann (*Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, vol. 1, trans. J.J. Scullion [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994], 113) draws a connection between the Creator’s positive self-evaluation and subsequent human praise/worship given to the Creator because of these “good” works. In addition to Westermann’s example of morning stars and heavenly beings giving praise to God (Job 38:7) one could reasonably add Ps. 136:1ff where there is a repetition of the “good” punctuation, this time beginning a litany of praise for God’s wonderful acts including creation and liberation from Egypt.

¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 31: “Grundbegriff des ‘Scheidens.’”

¹¹ We pick up the NT echoes of this in the next sub-section. Suffice it to say here that this has been the classic interpretation of *Fiat lux*, as seen in, e.g., Tertullian (*Adversus Praxeam* 7.12) and Augustine (*Gen. litt.* 1.6). The following centuries of creedal confession, namely the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, concluded as much in placing Christ synonymous with φῶς ἐκ φωτός. Of course, there are often modern distortions of this notion. In a recent commentary, R.R. Reno (*Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010]) states that the “light” referred to in these passages should strictly be interpreted as “the Word.” Thus, the “shining of the first day” is the “divine plan and its unfolding” in Torah and, subsequently, the church (*ibid.*, 46).

¹² Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 40.6 (PG 36:410; NPNF 7:361).

¹³ Rad, *Das erste Buch*, 32.

creation, “the absolute distance between Creator and creature,”¹⁴ but also to God’s gracious turning to his creation in fellowship. Whereas the darkness is seen as that which God has utterly rejected as the threat of death, light, on the other hand, functions in the (first) creation narrative as overcoming darkness.¹⁵ This is why any interpretation of such biblical images as being *coincidentia oppositorum*—that is, as being a “mingling” of concepts—is to be rejected.¹⁶ Such identifications lead some to mistakenly posit that God’s “uncreated Light...does not seem to have the need of differentiation [from] thick darkness”;¹⁷ or that God’s “dazzling light and deep darkness balance the clarity of truth.”¹⁸ According to this initial HB occurrence at the head of the Pentateuch, however, the essence of darkness is unlike that of light.

As our “listening” to the Pentateuch continues, we hear about YHWH’s radiant presence with his people. For instance, it is in a burning bush that God reveals himself to Moses (Exod. 3:1–6); it is from a cleft in the rock that Moses is granted a fleeting glimpse of God’s “glory” (Exod. 33:18–23); it is in a pillar of fire that God leads Israel through the wilderness (Exod. 13:21); and it is the flashing of God’s glory on Mt. Sinai that make the people tremble with fear (Exod. 20:18). The “glory of the Lord” visibly manifests and

¹⁴ Ibid., 34: “... der Distanz zwischn Schöpfer und Geschöpf redet.” Von Rad’s comments come at the end of his thoughts on the second day in vv. 6-8, but the same obviously applies to the first day narrative. This “distance” also guards against the well-known dualistic notion between light and darkness, as found in further intratextual instances from the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. See, e.g., Géza Vermès (trans.), *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 1QS 1:9, 18, 24; 2:5, 16, 19; 3:13. Cf. the title of 1QM: “War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness.” See also the edition of Yigael Yadin, trans., *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁵ For additional exegetical background regarding the image of darkness as “something sinister,” see Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 104f. However, Westermann does a disservice to us with his rather vague treatment of light as merely P’s device to divide creative processes, as creating order in the cosmos, and not as something “sublime” (112).

¹⁶ Gregory Palamas, the great apologist for the Hesychasts, takes up the *coincidentia oppositorum* from the Dionysian writings in stating that the divine light is rightly termed both radiance and darkness: “In the strict sense it is light [but] by virtue of its transcendence” it is experienced by us as “darkness” (*The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983], 2.3.51).

¹⁷ K.K. Yeo, “Light and New Creation in Genesis and the Gospel of John,” in *The Theology of Light and Sight: An Interfaith Perspective*, eds. K.L. Vaux and K.K. Yeo (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 47.

¹⁸ David Brown, “The Darkness and Light are Both Alike to Thee,” in *Light from Light: Scientists and Theologians in Dialogue*, eds. G. O’Collins, S.J. and M.A. Meyers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 181. See section 3.2 below for our hesitations with similar positions.

expresses God’s radiant presence, the overwhelming power and majesty that settles on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24:16), appears at the Tent of Meeting (Num. 14:10; 16:19), and fills the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34f).¹⁹ Glory, for all its intents and purposes, designates the divine reality; that is, God’s light is the worth which God himself creates for himself—in contrast to what he is not—simply by revealing himself. The light of God is therefore in some sense a synonym for his glory.²⁰ Like the implicit affirmations in the (first) creation discourse, so here: all other light and all other glory—namely, the “glory” and “light” of creatures—can only mimic God.

A subsequent result of our “listening” to the HB occurrence of light in the Pentateuch reveals that light is an image of God’s covenant-creating purposes with his creation.²¹ As we saw in the (first) creation discourse, the light which shines in darkness and overcomes darkness is as such God’s guarantee that creation is not abandoned, but that its *telos* is to meet with his *gratiae*. In the center of creation, light is the symbol and ornament of the revelation of grace; with its creation there has been made known the judgment of the goodness of God formerly obscured. As this first work of his occurs, and in it God pronounces his own glory as the Creator of light, God thus gives a mighty testimony of his concern for the creature.

Witness to this revelation of grace is likewise replete in the prophetic and wisdom literature of the HB—which is famous for its poetic expressions of God’s glory as his saving presence with his people. For example, the psalmist pictures God as surrounded by radiant light: “You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a

¹⁹ This notion is eventually taken up in 1 Kgs. 8:10–13 as light filling the Solomonic Temple.

²⁰ See C.C. Newman, “Glory, Glorify,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 576–80. Surprisingly, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (NY: Doubleday, 1992) carries no entry on either “light” or “glory.”

²¹ Walter Brueggeman makes use of this in his comments regarding the “proclamation of covenanting as the shape of reality” in *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 17. We pick up the theme of the covenant in Ch. 2.2.2, “The Light of the Covenant.”

garment” (Ps. 104:1f). God is described as “shining forth” out of Zion (Ps. 50:1f); and the psalmist prays that God will indeed “shine forth” his very presence (Pss. 80:1; 94:1). The repeated interpretation therefore arises in the wisdom literature where “light” (אֹרֶךְ) is indeed ascribed to YHWH. Recapitulating the themes from the Pentateuch, the psalmist ponders regarding the divine will: “Are your wonders known in the darkness?” (Ps. 88:12), to which the answer includes the impossibility of such a union between light and darkness. Light, that is to say, utterly “excels” (תִּרְוֶה) darkness, as is notably stated in Ecc. 2:13: “there is more gain in light than in darkness.”²² This is a light that brings order, wisdom, and salvation; the righteous experience God’s light as the creature’s saving guide: “the LORD is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27:1). That is the sense of “in your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:9), and the notion that the “commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8). The prophetic equivalent of this is captured in Isaiah’s pronouncement regarding those “in the gloom”: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (9:2). The proper response to this “great light” is found in a people who are to be a beacon in the darkness of the world:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa. 60:1–3).

1.2. Light in New Testament Occurrence

The “great light” of the covenant-creating God “arising upon you” in the HB is given its full conceptual weight in NT occurrence. In the Synoptic Gospels, for instance, we find Matthew

²² Here we part with Westermann, who fails to see all “attempts to comprehend...the intangibility of the priority of light over darkness” (*Genesis 1–11*, 115).

interpreting the ministry of Jesus as fulfilling the prophetic utterance from Isaiah mentioned above: “the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned” (Mt. 4:16; cf. Isa. 9:2). In Luke’s Gospel the hymn of Zechariah adopts similar language on the occasion of the birth of Jesus’ “witness” (προφήτης), John the Baptist: “the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78f). When Jesus was born, “the glory of the Lord shone” around the shepherds (Luke 2:9); and on the occasion of the Christ child being presented in the Temple, the aged Simon confessed: “you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30–32).

But an episode recorded in the Synoptics regarding Jesus’ ministry is worth pausing over for a moment, not least because it is an expansion of the identity of Jesus and the revelation of his glory. On Mt. Tabor, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, Jesus was “transfigured” (μετεμορφώθη) and his clothing became “radiant” (στύλβοντα, Mark 9:2f). Standing at the commencement of the journey to Jerusalem, the transfiguration story occupies a strategic position in Mark’s Gospel.²³ The story is situated in the context of Jesus’ teaching at Caesarea Philippi (cf. 8:27–9:13), which has the effect of claiming that Jesus is not only the “earthly” human messiah but also the “beloved Son” (9:8) from heaven. This “two-level Christology”²⁴ at the heart of the Markan narrative finds its peak in the revelation of Jesus’ identity in relation to John the Baptist and Elijah. In the account recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, we find a different view of the scene when we hear that the face of Jesus “shone like the sun” and “a bright cloud overshadowed them” (Mt. 17:1–8). Luke goes further in his

²³ It has been argued that the Markan account is derived from an outside (“Q”) source, and that the Matthean and Lukan accounts are redactions upon this account. However, see R.T. France (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007], 20f) for more on the complexities between the Synoptics.

²⁴ Simon S. Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration and the Believers’ Transfiguration* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 10.

account by saying that the disciples saw “the glory” of Christ (τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ) and of the two heavenly companions who had appeared with him, Moses and Elijah (cf. Luke 9:28–36).²⁵ The modern career of this radiant event from the Synoptics, however, often labels this scene as a “misplaced narrative”²⁶ or a story of the “Hellenistic divine man.”²⁷ But perhaps closer to the point, the story of the transfiguration is one whose importance is often underestimated by contemporary biblical scholars, who emphasize the message of suffering—the way to the cross which commences at the height of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. No doubt that suffering is a lucid christological theme in the Synoptics; however, the necessity of Jesus’ suffering cannot be isolated from this instance of divine revelation on the mountain. That is, the accounts of the transfiguration in the Synoptics portray suffering *and* glory as being at the heart of Jesus’ person and work. What this glorious moment of “two-level Christology” shows us, then, is a glimpse “behind” the human flesh and blood of Jesus to the radiant identity of God. This “Jesus only” is at the same moment the “beloved Son” of the Father (Mk. 9:7f).

The Synoptic interpretation of the radiant identity of Jesus Christ is deepened as we turn to “listen” to the Pauline corpus. Here we find a heavy emphasis upon similar language found in the historical narrative of the Book of Genesis in expressing the way God’s light—or, indeed, its synonym of the divine glory—is revealed in Jesus Christ: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Two verses earlier Paul writes of seeing

²⁵ For more regarding the event of the transfiguration in its Lukan instance, see the insightful commentary of I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), esp. 380–88. For a treatment of the Markan narrative, see H.C. Kee, “The Transfiguration in Mark: Epiphany or Apocalyptic Vision?” in *Understanding the Sacred Texts*, ed. J. Reumann (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), 135–52. For an engagement with historically Eastern theological aspects of the transfiguration, refer to John McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986).

²⁶ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (NY: Harper and Row, 1976), 259f.

²⁷ Cf. Adela Collins, “Rulers, Divine Men, and Walking on the Water,” in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World*, eds. L. Bormann, et al. (Leiden/NY: Brill, 1994), 207–227.

“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). We could well detect here a genitive of identity: the “light of the gospel” (φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) is the “glory of Christ” (δόξης τοῦ Χριστός). Indeed, Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians anticipates the theme that Jesus is the divine light. Of course, the Letter to the Hebrews—if we may insert it here due to its epistolical genre and pastoral rhetoric, and not strictly to authorship²⁸—states this more emphatically when it calls the incarnate Son “the radiance of God’s glory” (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) and “the exact imprint of [God’s] nature” (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, Heb. 1:3).

Naturally, the Pauline epistles adopt the concept of light when exhorting their audience: “For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5). “Darkness,” as signaled in HB occurrence, constitutes sin, death, and terror, while the “illumination” brought forth by faith means turning from such terror to walk in the light. A few years later the apostle Paul exhorts the Christians of Rome: “The night is far gone; the day is at hand [...] So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12, 14).²⁹ Indeed, the ‘Kingdom of the beloved Son,’ Paul assures his readers, is not a “domain of darkness” (ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους) but a domain made up of “saints in light” (ἅγιοι ἐν τῷ φωτί, Col. 1:12f).³⁰

We find the historical background for much of the Pauline (and other) epistolical emphases on the image of light in the threefold description of Saul’s encounter on the road to Damascus as recorded in the Book of Acts. Since in the Lukan scheme the risen Jesus had

²⁸ For a thorough discussion of the historical approach to authorial identity in the Letter to the Hebrews, see Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 2–9. The important thing to remember in his text, says Luke Johnson, “is that in the first decades of the Christian movement, another mind and heart besides Paul’s was at work in interpreting the significance of the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus for the understanding of Scripture, of the world, and of human existence” (*Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 44).

²⁹ Cf. ἡ νύξ προέκοψεν, ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν. ἀποθώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους, ἐνδυσώμεθα δὲ τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός. See Colin Kruse’s comments regarding this Pauline exhortation in *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 503f.

³⁰ See our further reflections on Col. 1:12–14 in Ch. 3.1.1, “The ‘Radiant Event of Love’ and the ‘Domain of Darkness.’”

already “been taken up into heaven” (Acts 1:9–11) to sit in *sessio* “at the right hand of God” (τῆ δεξιᾷ οὐρανῶ τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:33–35), his meeting with Saul did not exhibit the everyday, earthly traits of the Easter appearances in Luke 24 and Acts 1. Saul experienced a “light from heaven” that suddenly shone around him (9:3), and was qualified in the second account as a “great light from heaven” (22:6), and in the third account as a light “brighter than the sun” (26:13).³¹ It was from the light of God that the radiantly risen Christ came to meet Saul on the Damascus road.

However, as we continue along in our “listening” to NT occurrence, we inevitably come upon the seminal set of texts regarding the image of light in the Johannine writings. The prologue to the Gospel of John offers a unique reading of the pre-existence of the Son and the Son’s mission in and for the world.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world (Jn. 1:4–9).

From the first, we might note that the Gospel of John differs from the Synoptic account of transfiguration by identifying Jesus as “the light” (vv. 4f, 7), by announcing that “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (v. 4), and by stating that “the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (v. 9). And as with the HB occurrence, we hear again the connection between “light” (φῶς) and “life” (ζωή), namely, that the life that dwells in the Son is the light of all people, and it shines in the darkness, but the darkness does

³¹ Cf. φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (9:3); ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι φῶς ἰκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ (22:6); τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου (26:13).

not cease to be darkness. This is darkness (σκοτία), yet not the darkness of “all people” in v. 4b, as we can see from 3:19 that the people who love the dark more than the light are distinguished from darkness itself.

In contrast to this reading—and found within the modern intellectual activity surrounding the prologue—there are those biblical scholars who seek to push the pressure of interpretation of these verses (and others) in an entirely different direction.³² Ed L. Miller, for instance, states that v. 4 is the response to a question apparently asked in v. 3: How can all things have come into being from the Son?³³ Likewise, Craig Keener sets the question in its linguistic divergence:

Should we read the phrase [ὁ γέγονεν] with the rest of v. 3, as in, “apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being; in him was life?” Or should we read the phrase with v. 4, “apart from him nothing came into being; what came into being through him was life?”³⁴

³² The scholarly activity surrounding the “source” of the prologue and its image of light is diverse. See, e.g., Paul Minear’s contention that the image “light” (and others), beyond being used in NT literature, draws from the earlier sources of ancient thought in the HB, rabbinic, apocalyptic, Essene, hermetic, and Gnostic literature (*Images of the Church in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977], 128f). Rudolf Schnackenburg famously argued for a prototypical *Grundschrift* (“Logos—Hymnus und johanneischer Prolog,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1 [1957]: 76–82), whereas others traced the generation of the prologue to three sources:

- (1) Judaism or Jewish wisdom hymns (e.g., J.R. Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St. John* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917], 6; Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995], 47–58);
- (2) Christianity or pre-Christian hymns (e.g., Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* [London: Doubleday, 1971], 18ff; and Ernst Käsemann, “Aufbau und Anliegen des Johanneischen Prologs,” *Liberias Christiana*, ed. F. Delekat [1957]: 75–99);
- (3) A “pre-Christian gnosticizing Judaism” (Rudolf Bultmann, “Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannesevangelium,” *Eucharisterion*, ed. H. Gunkel [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923], 2–26; *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray [Oxford: Blackwell, 1971], 17f, 107f).

For more on this interpretive history, see John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), esp. ch. 3; and Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 333–63.

³³ Ed. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3/4*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 60 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 14f. Miller answers this question by pairing it with the incarnation.

³⁴ Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:381f.

However, a proper listening to this heavily debated section of Scripture allows for a simple reading: *because* of the depicted relation to God the Son's content was indeed life. Thus the exposition of v. 4b appears to follow: the power of life that comes from the Son is a means of illumination in association to the creaturely world.³⁵ Yet some have pursued this thought, finding in ζωῆ the general life of creation (with a reference back to v. 3), and in ἡ ζωῆ the life that is the "illuminator of all humanity."³⁶ But the Son's light and life are not something inherent to creation, as we heard in the HB. In line with the (first) creation narrative of Gen. 1:3–5, there seems no passage in John in which this "light" is the same that was uttered and formed in the (first) creation narrative; rather, John is stating that this light is present as the uncreated, revelatory light of the created world.³⁷ God's gracious self-disclosure—what we have so far termed his "shining forth"—is a separate action which goes beyond creation. Thus, we are told in the "scandal" of the prologue,³⁸ God has wrought the miracle that the "light of life" appeared on earth and did not remain hidden; that is, says Luther, by the Son, "God draws so close to men that he is their Light [...] This light, Christ, is not merely a light for itself; but with this light he illumines their hearts for life eternal."³⁹ And this one, this "true light," was present to those that had eyes to see his glory: "the Word became flesh and

³⁵ See Bultmann (*Gospel of John*, 39): "[The *Logos*] is the power which creates life." Thus Bultmann states that something like Keener's distinction of the question is irrelevant, for in "both cases it is stated that life is not inherent in creatures as creatures" (39f).

³⁶ Urban von Wahlde, *Gospel and Letters of John*, vol. 1, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 29. Cf. Bultmann, (*Gospel of John*, 40): "the light for men." We need to distance ourselves here and throughout from Bultmann's thought that φῶς is *merely* the existential indicator of what creatures require, namely, a right orientation in this world and in relation to each other. This seems a rather one-sided account of the image of light, which in its more canonical range bears witness to God's gracious turning to creatures in the darkness.

³⁷ That is, we wish to avoid Peder Borgen's thought that, in view of the parallelism between the prologue and Genesis 1, the theme for 1:4–9 may be presented thus: "primordial light and nightfall in primordial time, vv. 4–5, and light's entry into history, prepared by the coming of John [the Baptist]" (*Logos was the True Light: And Other Essays on the Gospel of John* [Trondheim: Tapir, 1983], 101). For our division of uncreated light and created light, see below section 3.2.

³⁸ Ernst Käsemann ("Aufbau und Anliegen des johanneischen Prologs," 93–6) sees this verse as the paradigmatic and scandalous summary of the Gospel not because "the Word became flesh" but because "he dwelt among us."

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Auslegung des ersten und zweiten Kapitels Johannis* 1.4 (WA 46:562): "...der Sohn Gottes tut sich so nahe zu den Menschen, das er ihr Licht ist."

dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).

These themes are reaffirmed with a closer “listening” to the Johannine letters:

[C]oncerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ [...] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:1–3, 5–7).

Quite clearly, these affirmations repeat the opening claims of the prologue to the Gospel of John. It therefore appears that the purpose of the First Letter of John is the reiteration of the proclamation of the Son as the eternal, pre-existent Word, who had been with God from the beginning, had become flesh in recent history.⁴⁰ And the core of John’s proclamation is of extreme importance for our present study: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (1:5). No doubt John learned this from Jesus, the light of all people who shone in darkness (cf. Jn. 8:12; 9:15; 12:35f.). Anyone who therefore claimed to have fellowship with Jesus yet “walked in darkness”—that is, characteristically engaged in immoral conduct (cf. Jn. 3:19–21)—did not

⁴⁰ Regarding the “Johannine double entendre” of the pre-existent Word and the life-giving message of Christ, see Robert Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 38. Of course, the pre-existence of the Word might also be found in the Synoptics, if one follows a particular reading of the “pre-temporal” sayings and titles of Christ (cf. Mt. 5:17; 8:29; 9:13; 10:34–35; Mk. 1:24, 38; 2:17; 10:45; and Luke 4:34; 5:32). For an intriguing study of this theme, see Simon Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

live out the truth but proved that their conduct was based on a lie, that is, erroneous doctrine concerning the person and work of the Son. However, those who “walk in the light, as he is in the light” have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies them from all sin.⁴¹ It is this humble confession of the need for the cleansing blood of Christ that enables creatures to continue “walking in the light” and thus to enjoy fellowship both with Jesus and with others “in the light.”

Perhaps before concluding our brief “listening” to the NT occurrence of the image of light, however, we might once again pause and point out several important features raised by the various Johannine texts under study. We note that John emphasizes Jesus as the fulfillment of the HB hopes and expectations: the light and life of the Son are not something inherent to creation, but rather the revelation of the “true light,” who is the source of spiritual light for every person. Light is thus part of John’s juxtaposition between fellowship in light and living in sin and darkness.⁴² Such a notion is vital to the Johannine proclamation that the God who “is light” is the very One who seeks and rescues his creatures from the darkness of sin and places them in the light of life through his Son. It is no surprise, then, that we find in the closing passages of the NT a Johannine image of Christ standing among the seven lampstands of gold, his eyes flaming like fire and his face shining “like the sun at full strength” (Rev. 1:13–16). Those in fellowship with this radiant one belong to a city that does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, “for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (21:23). And this Lamb, we finally hear, declares himself to be “the bright morning star” who is “surely coming soon” (22:16, 20).

⁴¹ See William Combs, “The Meaning of Fellowship in 1 John,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 13 (2008): 3–16.

⁴² On this division, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2 (NY: Crossroad, 1990), 352–61.

1.3. The Sweep of the Survey

“Listening” to the sweep of the scriptural survey of the image of light has yielded a clear development by the shift from HB to NT language. When saying “Let there be light,” God creates the symbol and ornament of his glory. Yet this light is other than God and wholly dependent upon God for its existence; it has no capacity of its own; it lives solely by the Word of God. Still, the divine utterance moves beyond this symbol to also include a distinction in created light and uncreated light, the latter being an indication of God’s radiant identity. In the Johannine linguistic turn, then, “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5), suggests that this particular uncreated light, God’s light, is not the created light which is manifest in the (first) creation narrative, but rather the light of God’s gracious revelation and his fellowship-establishing concern for his creatures. With the NT clarification and expansion of the image of light, then, God’s shining forth is a separate action that goes *beyond* creation. And it is precisely from this NT bedrock, coupled with the HB occurrence, that the image of light finds its eventual emergence in the creedal confession of Jesus Christ as “Light from Light.” It is to this historical, dogmatic emergence of trinitarian theology in the Christian tradition that we now turn for additional clarification and limitation of the concept of light.

2. PRO-NICENE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Wrestling with the various gnosticisms of their day, the second- and third-century ante-Nicene theologians often used the image of light to preserve the doctrine of the unity of

God.⁴³ That this biblical image was on the mind of the early church is evident Origen's initial statements in *De principiis*:

Truly [God] is that light which illuminates the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth [...] Because He is called light, shall He be supposed to have any resemblance to the light of the sun? Or how should there be the slightest ground for imagining, that from that corporeal light any one could derive the cause of knowledge, and come to the understanding of the truth?⁴⁴

From such notions the early theology of the church sought to affirm differentiations within the single source of power of the Godhead. In the ante-Nicene period, through the work of the early Apologists, then of Irenaeus, Origen, and Tertullian, an overarching theological structure had emerged to outline distinct subsistences within the unity of an absolutely single “light”—namely, the monarchy of God. In the earlier Christology, however, the unity of the Godhead was primarily secured by the *ἀναρχος* of the Father, whose *voluntas* was exercised in the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ In this structure, the Son and the Spirit tended to be seen as deduced from the *ἀρχή*. As a result, a subordinationist theology of the Son and the Holy Spirit was inherent to the entire conception.⁴⁶ Yet in the initial affirmations of the theological necessity of the Son's identity of being and status with the Father, the ante-Nicene theologians had brought themselves to the advent of a new theological task, namely, to the reiteration of the issue of unity and particularity in God. What was needed was a dogmatic

⁴³ See Mark Edward's treatment of the “Gnostic Beginnings of Orthodoxy” in *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 11–34.

⁴⁴ Origen, *De principiis* 1.1.1 (*ANE* 4:242; cf. *PG* 11:185).

⁴⁵ For additional background on early “*Logos* theology,” see John McGuckin, “Christ: The Apostolic Fathers to the Third Century,” in *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham (Abingdon/NY: Routledge, 2010), 256–70.

⁴⁶ On this tendency in accounts of “light” or “glory” in the celebration of the Paschal Festivals in the early church, see the recent study by Dragoş Giule, *Pre-Nicene Christology in Paschal Contexts: The Case of the Divine Noetic Anthropos* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. 94–6.

appraisal in view of competing notions, and it included the clarification and articulation of the theological concept of light.

The crystalized dogmatic use of the image of light was therefore developed in the trinitarian theology of fourth-century church. The use of the image by the Nicene fathers was primarily prompted by the danger facing the early church, which came in the form of the fourth-century Arian controversy over the Son's ἀνόμοις status with the Father. Are the terms “father” and “son” to be understood as visual, sensual images taken from creaturely relations? And, moreover, is the Holy Spirit to be worshipped along with the Father and the Son as himself God? These were several questions faced by the Nicene fathers, and answered in their unqualified acknowledgment of the deity of Jesus Christ as Lord, savior, and light, and of Holy Spirit as Lord, “life-giver” and “light-giver.”⁴⁷ The resulting Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed represents the dogmatic work of the Greek fathers in reaching a careful, exegetical expression of crucial points in the gospel over against the concepts found both in Sebellianism and Arianism.⁴⁸

And as with the preceding centuries of the church, the Nicene fathers knew that they could make use of creaturely concepts in expressing their understanding of the relation of the Son to the Father, for that is how divine revelation has been mediated to creatures—in and through creaturely language—which was made to point beyond their creaturely content to what God reveals of his own inner *relationes personales*.⁴⁹ This means that, according to the Nicene fathers, we must interpret concepts, such as light, according to the narrational sense

⁴⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 41.9 (PG 36:444; NPNF 7:382).

⁴⁸ More precisely, the fathers sought to establish the doctrine of the Trinity and unity of God, preserving the Trinity from Judaizing tendencies in a Sabellian contraction of the three Persons into an undifferentiated unity, and preserving the unity from Hellenizing tendencies in an Arian severance of the three Persons by a diversity of natures. See, e.g., Gregory Nazianzen, *Ors.* 1.37; 18.16; 21.13; and Basil, *Adversus eos qui per calumniam dicunt dici a nobis deos tres* [On Not Three Gods] (PPS 47:269–77). For a full account of the historical issues at hand, see Rowan Williams, “Arius and the Melitian Schism” *Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 35–52; and Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), ch. 1.

⁴⁹ Refer to our points regarding theological predication in section 3 of this chapter. See also Athanasius’ comments in *In illud*, “*Omnia mihi tradita sunt*” 3 (PG 25:216; NPNF 4:89).

given them in HB and NT occurrence. It was in this way that the fathers of Nicaea brought the scriptural “pattern” (παράδειγμα) of “light” (φῶς) and “radiance” (ἀπαύγασμα) to help them elucidate, first, the relation of Christ as Son and Word to God the Father, and, second, the identity and works of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰

2.1. *The Relation of the Son and the Father*

Regarding the relation of the first and second persons of the Trinity, the image of light had the effect of averting any projection into God of the creaturely component in the terms “father,” “son,” “generation,” and so forth, but it also had the effect of making clear that as light is never without its radiance, so the Father is never without his Son or without his Word. Such language was in reaction to the Arian ἀνόμοις of the being of the Son and the being of the Father; that is to say, can we associate the kind of eternity attributed to creatures brought into existence by the will of God with that of the Son, since “there was once when he was not”?⁵¹

The “pro-Nicene”⁵² reply came in the form of the concept of light. Just as light and radiance are one and are not foreign to one another, so the Father and the Son are one and are not foreign to one another but are of one and the same being (i.e., ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί). And just as God is eternal light, so the Son of God as eternal radiance of God is himself eternally light without beginning and without end. It was thus on biblical grounds, Athanasius stated,

⁵⁰ It is curious that Anatolios’s recent study of Nicene theology, *Retrieving Nicaea*, makes no mention of the use of the biblical image of light with regards to the development of trinitarian terminology during this period. In my mind this does a disservice to the reader, particularly when he omits the concepts of ἀπαύγασμα and φῶς from Athanasius’ thoughts on ὁμοούσιος (cf. 129f). These concepts are essential to understanding his points regarding the identity of the Son and the Father and, moreover, his pneumatology.

⁵¹ See Theodoret, “The Letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia,” *The Ecclesiastical History*, 1.4 (NPNF 3:41f).

⁵² On the label “pro-Nicene” as relating to Athanasius and his Cappadocian heirs, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236–40.

that the pro-Nicene position could “take divine Scripture, and thus discourse with freedom of the religious faith, and set it up as a light upon its candlestick, saying [...] He is the expression of the Father’s Person, and Light from Light, and Power, and very Image of the Father’s essence.”⁵³ The words “Light of Light, true God of true God,”⁵⁴ were therefore inserted into the Creed at Nicaea in order to clarify and define the unique nature of the relation of the incarnate Son to the Father.⁵⁵ Thus the Son “and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead,” says Athanasius.

For the radiance also is light, not second to the sun, nor a different light, nor from participation of it, but a whole and proper offspring of it. And such an offspring is necessarily one light; and no one would say they are two lights, but sun and radiance two, yet one the light from the sun enlightening in its radiance all things.⁵⁶

These preliminary considerations reflect the Nicene reliance on the belief that the fulfillment of the Son’s pre-existent life and the subsequent promise of life and light, as recorded in Heb. 1:3, was requisite for using the concept of light to distinguish the first and second persons of the Trinity.⁵⁷ With regards to the Son’s pre-existence and co-equality with

⁵³ Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* 1.9 (PG 26:26; NPNF 4:311).

⁵⁴ Cf. φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ.

⁵⁵ We must, at the bequest of certain fathers, interpret the phrase φῶς ἐκ φωτός as being *one* light, rather than as one light kindled from another. This latter form of the metaphor is criticized by Athanasius: “For the saints have not said that the Word was related to God as fire kindled from the heat of the sun, which is commonly put out again, for this is an external work and a creature of its author, but they all preach of him as radiance (ἀπαύγασμα)” (*De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 23 [PG 25:456; NPNF 4:165]). It was, however, used by several ante-Nicene theologians (e.g., Tatian) on the grounds that it safeguards the real subsistence of the Word. (Again, see our remarks in the opening paragraph of this chapter regarding the ante-Nicene usage of the image of light.) But Gnosticism seems to have used it in several forms of the radiance of the eons. For more on the ante-Nicene position, see Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 248–50.

⁵⁶ Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26:464; NPNF 4:395).

⁵⁷ Heb. 1:3 was a seminal text for Athanasius and many of the fathers in establishing and defending the pro-Nicene terminology of the identity of the second person of the Trinity, namely, the vocabulary of ὁμοούσιος. See Charles Kannengiesser (ed), *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, vol. 2 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004); and Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church*, esp. 132–34.

the Father, Athanasius asks, “Is it reasonable [that] a man should say that the Son is not always?” Again, the response to this Arian ἀνόμοις was in the negative: “Who can even imagine that the radiance of light ever was not, so that he should dare to say that the Son was not always, or that the Son was not before his generation.”⁵⁸ Here, in his gloss on Heb. 1:3, Athanasius traces this light to its foundation in the Son’s eternal relation to the Father. If there is indeed a present illumination of the life for believers, it can only be because “there cannot be light that does not give light,”⁵⁹ and because the life of the incarnate Son was “very light (αὐτοφῶς)...and brightness.”⁶⁰

How, then, does the Son have light which, in turn, he imparts to creatures? Athanasius proves a good guide here, especially in his constant use of ἀπαύγασμα:

He [the Son] alone who reveals the Father [...] thus the blessing was secure, because of the Son’s indivisibility from the Father [...] And this one may see in the instance of light and radiance (ἀπαύγασμα); for what the light enlightens, that the radiance irradiates; and what the radiance irradiates, from the light is its enlightenment. So also when the Son is beheld, so is the Father, for he is the Father’s radiance; and thus the Father and the Son are one.⁶¹

Thus the Son has light ἐν αὐτῷ as the Father has light ἐν αὐτῷ. The Son’s having light ἐν αὐτῷ, as a mode of divine light, at one and the same time, for Athanasius, distinguishes the Son from creatures and grounds the believers as being “‘delivered’ to him...as to light, to illumine the darkness.”⁶² This is light as the eternal existence of the Father and Son. Yet to this immanent reality there corresponds the Son’s work; the light which the Son receives and

⁵⁸ Athanasius, *De decr.* 12 (PG 25:441; NPNF 4:157f).

⁵⁹ Athanasius, *De sententia Dionysii* 15 (PG 25:501; NPNF 4:182).

⁶⁰ Athanasius, *Oratio contra gentes* 46 (PG 25:93; NPNF 4:29).

⁶¹ Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 3.13 (PG 26:349; NPNF 4:401).

⁶² Athanasius, *Illud Omnia, etc.* 2 (PG 25:212; NPNF 4:88).

has in himself is that which he in turn shines upon creatures, for “Christ has come, and...he illumines absolutely all with his light.”⁶³ Athanasius is, of course, acutely aware of the gap between God and creatures, as he states against the Arians: “He indeed has gained nothing from us.” Similarly, creatures only have light in Christ, not in themselves; ἀυτοφῶς or ἀπαύγασμα is entirely inexpressible, and so the identity of “Son” and divine “light” and “radiance” cannot be replicated in the creaturely realm. But if light differentiates the divine Son from creatures, it is also at the same time the soteriological ground of the fact that he has “shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6).

These important christological claims from Athanasius resulted in the influence of additional “interpretations” of the Son’s relation to the Father. At the end of the fourth century, for instance, the Cappadocian heirs to Athanasius were beginning to read Nicaea in a particular way, one which insisted upon the logic of the ὁμοούσιος. In perhaps a retracing of Athanasius’s earlier Christology, Gregory Nazianzen argued against the Arian concern that “ingeneracy” (ἀγεννησια) constitutes divinity. He therefore highlighted two key elements in this understanding of the relation between God the Father and God the Son. First, the Father’s timelessness made his relation to the Son one which did not involve priority in any temporal sense.⁶⁴ Second, the Son’s γεννήσια from the Father is wholly spiritual, devoid of the notions of passion and division which the Arians read into the act.⁶⁵ In consequence, the Father’s relation to the Son, Gregory says, cannot contain any priority in the sense of superiority or inferiority. Rather, the γεννήσια of the Son “reflects” the ἀγεννησια of the Father. In doing so, we find that the relations of the Godhead have “internal ordering known only to itself,”⁶⁶

⁶³ Athanasius, *De incarnatione Verbi Dei* 40 (PG 25:163; PPS 44b:93).

⁶⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 29.3 (PG 36:77; NPNF 7:301f).

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, 29.4 (PG 36:77; NPNF 7:302).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.22 (in *Select Orations*, Fathers of the Church 107, trans. Martha Vinson [Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003], 20; cf. PG 35:749).

much like a “threefold light forms one single radiance.”⁶⁷ Concluding against the “Arian quibbles,” Gregory states that it is thus evident that the Father is not necessarily prior to the Son (and the Holy Spirit), “just as the sun is not prior to its light.”⁶⁸

Such foundational dogmatic language regarding the relation of the Son and the Father did not, however, reside solely in its Eastern expression. Set squarely in the generation following Nicaea, the Western interpretation of Nicene Christology came from the capable pen of Ambrose.⁶⁹ For Ambrose, the image of light—particularly found in Heb. 1:3 and 1 Tim. 6:16—was an essential concept for affirming the relationship of the Father and the Son: “the Son is the Radiance of his Father’s light, co-eternal, because of eternity of power; inseparable, by unity of brightness.”⁷⁰ The anti-Arian rhetoric here is evident, especially as Ambrose moves to address the Homoian notion of “there was once when he was not” residing at the surface of the debates in the West:

As one who is for ever, as the Word, as the brightness of eternal light, for brightness takes effect in the instant of its coming into existence [...] Think not, then, that there was ever a moment of time when God was without wisdom, any more than that there was ever a time when light was without radiance [...] So, then, since God is Light, and the Son of God the true Light, without doubt the Son of God is true God.⁷¹

Like his Cappadocian counterparts, Ambrose displays a particular indebtedness to the conceptual range offered in the image of light as he rebutted the Western Homoian confusion

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.41 (PG 36:417; NPNF 7:375). For more on the image of light in *Or.* 40, see John McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 340–44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 29.3 (PG 36:77; NPNF 7:302).

⁶⁹ Moreover, it is evident that Ambrose was influenced heavily by Basil and was acquainted with Athanasius’s early arguments against Arianism. See, e.g., Basil’s letter to Ambrose from 375 AD, *Letter CXCVII* (NPNF 8:234f).

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum* 4.108 (PL 16:638; NPNF 10:276 [cf. the incorrect numbering in NPNF as 4.109]): “...quia splendor paternae gloriae lucis est Filius: coaeternus, propter, virtuis aeternitatem: inseparabilis, propter claritudinis unitatem.”

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.79 (PL 16:547; NPNF 10:214): “...quia simul splendor operatur nascitur”; *De Spiritu sancto* 1.14 (PL 16:706; NPNF 10:112).

with orthodox Christology.⁷²

From Athanasius, the Cappadocians and, indeed, the Latin West, we see that the fathers of the fourth century deemed that Christ alone is “very light” (αὐτοφῶς), true God of true God, and that he alone is properly the Son of the Father; but through his divine activity, his divine outshining, creatures are reconciled in him. Pro-Nicene theology, thus broadly construed, applied the image of light to reject the notion that the Son is a created intermediary. Rather, as αὐτοφῶς, “the Son is one,” says Athanasius,

so must the vital activity and gift whereby he sanctifies and enlightens to be one perfect and complete; which is said to proceed from the Father, because it is from the Word, who is confessed to be from the Father, that it shines forth (ἐκλάμπουσιν) and is sent and is given.⁷³

2.2. *The Identity and Works of the Holy Spirit*

The concept of light was used with equal force in affirming the identity of the third person of the Trinity.⁷⁴ Pro-Nicene theology of the fourth century shows a deep conviction that the Holy Spirit reveals the face of the Father in the Son, and reveals the face of the Son in the Father. Thus it could be said by Gregory of Nyssa that the Holy Spirit

ever “searches the deep things of God,” ever “receives” from the Son, ever is

⁷² For an insightful study of Ambrose’s use of light in his theology (and hymnology), see R. Morgan, *The Imagery of Light in St. Ambrose’s Theology* (Melbourne: Carmelite Monastery, 1998). On the seemingly different nature of the Western Arian controversy to that of the East, refer to Daniel Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁷³ Athanasius, *Epistolae ad Serapionem* 1.20 (PG 26:577; cf. *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, trans. C.R. Shapland [London: Epworth, 1951], 116f).

⁷⁴ Indeed, the later Constantinopolitan Creed affirmed the emphasis of the Spirit: “...the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life” (cf. Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, [καὶ] τὸ ζῳοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν).

being “sent,” and yet not separated, and being “glorified,” and yet He has always had glory. It is plain, indeed, that one who gives glory to another must be found himself in the possession of superabundant glory; for how could one devoid of glory glorify another? Unless a thing be itself light, how can it display the gracious gift of light?⁷⁵

He is the one Spirit in whom the Father communicates himself to creatures through his Son, and in whom creatures have fellowship through the Son with the Father. He is the light in whose shining forth creatures see the radiant light of God manifest in Jesus Christ. For, again, the Holy Spirit is

Life and life-giver; light and light-giver...the Lord, the Sender, the Separator...by whom the Father is known and the Son is glorified; and by whom alone he is known [...] All that the Father has the Son has also, except the being ingenerate; and all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except generation. And these two matters do not divide the substance, as I understand it, but rather are divisions within the substance.⁷⁶

The Holy Spirit—“the Lord, the Sender, the Separator”—is indeed present among creatures, but in his radiant way of being, who as co-eternal with the Father and the Son casts his light upon the Father in the Son and upon the Son in the Father. The Holy Spirit is therefore

the place of the saints, and the saint is the proper place for the Holy Spirit [...] So, then...we speak of worship in the Spirit as worship in him who manifests the divinity of the Lord. Therefore, in worship the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the Father and the Son [...] For it is impossible to see the Image of the

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Spiritu sancto* (NPNF 5:233f).

⁷⁶ Gregory Nazianzen *Or.* 41.9 (PG 36:442; NPNF 7:382).

invisible God, except in the illumination of the Spirit, and it is impossible for him who fixes his eyes on the image to separate the light from the image [except by the Spirit].⁷⁷

In this way, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in their indivisible trinity shine through to us in their three-fold light.⁷⁸ For “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the three, no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One,” says Gregory in a famous passage. “When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.”⁷⁹

For pro-Nicene trinitarian theology, the Holy Spirit is the seal that while the eternal being of God transcends creaturely understanding he is not distant from creatures, for the Holy Spirit is the radiant movement of his being whereby he makes himself available to creaturely knowing. That God is ineffable does not mean that he is unfathomable, for he is essentially clear, luminous, and knowable; and as such is the ἀρχῆς and τελειωτὴν (“perfector”) of creaturely knowledge of him through Jesus Christ the Word made flesh and in the Holy Spirit whom he mediates to creatures. Basil could thus speak of the Spirit as “the Spirit of knowledge,” for “in the illumination of the Spirit [...] he shows in himself the glory of the only-begotten and furnishes to true worshippers the knowledge of God himself. The way, then, to knowledge of God is from the one Spirit, through the one Son, to the one Father.”⁸⁰ Yet at the same time, he warned, “we ought to know about what we can speak and about what we must keep silent. Not all words can be uttered by the tongue. For fear that our

⁷⁷ Basil, *De Spiritu sancto* 26.62, 64 (PG 31:183; PPS 42:101, 103); cf. *ibid.*, 22.53.

⁷⁸ Cf. Athanasius, *Ad. Ser.* 1.30: “And when the Spirit is in us, the Word also, who gives the Spirit, is in us, and in the Word is the Father. So it is as it is said: ‘We will come, I and the Father, and make our abode with him.’ For where the light is, there is also the radiance; and where the radiance is, there also is its activity and lambent [radiant] grace” (Shapland, 142; PG 26:601).

⁷⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.41 (PG 36:417; NPNF 7:375); cf. *Or.* 39.11.

⁸⁰ Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 18.47 (PG 31:154; PPS 42:82f).

intellect...will lose even the light that it has.”⁸¹ It is through communion with the Holy Spirit, who is in Christ and is himself God of God, “Light and light-giver,” that creatures are lifted up to have knowledge of God as he is in himself, and yet at the same moment are confined by the majesty of God’s being as “unapproachable light” from transgressing the bounds of worshipful and biblical analysis. Thus the fathers, in tracing the pattern of the concept of light as used in Scripture, could summarily echo Paul:

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:3–6).

What our summary of the dogmatic use of light by pro-Nicene trinitarian theology has shown us is that the concept was imperative for defining the Father-Son relationship and for conveying the guarantee of the radiant nearness of God in the activity of the Holy Spirit. This language was one wholly beholden to the HB and the NT witness and, in the minds of the fourth-century fathers, necessary for the proclamation of the gospel. The fathers had to retrieve the concept of light for the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, for witness to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such theological statements about the Trinity had to “employ images or representations from the visible or tangible world to point out divine realities that cannot simply be reduced to words,” Torrance clarifies. They “arise under the activity of divine revelation and are adapted for special purpose.”⁸² Therefore, it was not that the fathers tried to define the Trinity by the “visible or tangible world,” but that they tried to define the “visible or tangible world” *by* the Trinity in order to be able to speak about the Trinity in this

⁸¹ Basil, *Adv. deos tres* 4 (PPS 47:275).

⁸² T.F. Torrance, “The Problem of Theological Statement Today,” in *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 49f.

world. The fathers did not believe that the Trinity is immanent *in* things—such as the sun, rays, or radiance—or that created light thus has *tertium comparationis* in the Trinity itself. Rather, the Trinity was “just like” these things—namely, light—though at the same moment “nothing like that light with which we are acquainted.”⁸³

3. PREDICATION, CONTINGENCY, AND GOD’S RADIANT IDENTITY

What are we to make of this dogmatic claiming of the biblical occurrence of the image of light? How might this thesis proceed from such conceptual boundaries and trinitarian definitions?

We might initially state that light is an essential concept in Christian theology which is defined positively by the form of God’s radiant way of being. More precisely: the concept of light points to God’s radiant form as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But the theological undertaking of the concept is not found in an apologetic venture imported into certain cosmologies in order to serve an Aristotelian “First Cause” of the universe.⁸⁴ Rather, the concept of divine light endeavors to give a description of the God who self-reveals *a priori* to the cognitive efforts of his creatures. That is, God is objectively radiant, shining forth himself, outstripping any and all conceptual notions *in toto*, and yet making himself graciously perceptible and “speakable.” At this point the repeated idiom from Irenaeus is worth committing to memory: “He may most properly be termed light, but he is nothing like that light with which we are acquainted.”

⁸³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.13.4 (*PG* 7a:744; *ANF* 1:374). Prior this statement Irenaeus affirms that if God is light then he is *totus lumen* (2.13.3).

⁸⁴ Most recently, John Polkinghorn (“Some Light from Physics,” in *Light from Light*, 17–27) uses the concept of light to speak of the primordial “electromagnetic radiation” that is present in the universe. That is, the universe is bathed in “Cosmic Background Radiation,” a universal symbol of cosmic circumstances after the Big Bang.

Yet the concept of light does not suggest that God is in a predicative “beyond” and thus cannot be found; nor is the Johannine confession, “God is light,” rendered a subservient Dionysian concept, making darkness “more suitable” and the language of light “unfitting.”⁸⁵ The “speakability” of the concept of light does not ferry a set of ascriptive freight which, in effect, somehow lessen God’s divinity. On the contrary: although God is “incomprehensible and invisible,” he nevertheless “made himself visible and comprehensible within the capacity of the faithful, that he might give life to those who receive and see him through faith,” says Irenaeus.⁸⁶ The concept of light, that is to say, is a positive concept applied to God by his gracious rendering of himself “visible and comprehensible,” yet at the same time, God totally transcends the notion of the term.

3.1. A Note on Predication

By making these positive statements, however, we approach the notoriously difficult subject of theological predication. That is, in light of God’s rendering himself “visible and comprehensible,” how does creaturely language go about speaking of this “visible and comprehensible” form? Several ways of broaching this topic might be found in comparable trajectories, reaching from Athanasius through to Eberhard Jüngel via Karl Barth.

In commenting on the biblical image of divine light, Athanasius states that it is an “accommodation” to humanity’s inability to grasp the idea of God—“accommodation” here points to God’s gracious upholding of creaturely thought and, subsequently, speech, in its

⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *De coelestia hierarchia* 2.3 (PG 3:141); cf. *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (NY: Paulist Press, 1987), 150.

⁸⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. hær.* 4.20.5 (PG 7a:1035; cf. *ANF* 1:489): “... et incomprehensibilis [et invisibilis] visibilem se, et comprehensibilem, et capacem hominibus [fidelibus] praestat, ut vivificat percipientes et videntes se [per fidem] [...] Quemadmodum enim videntes lumen, intra lumen sunt, et claritatem ejus percipiunt.”

contingent reality.⁸⁷ This notion is particularly evident, for instance, in Athanasius' hermeneutical points regarding the $\phi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\kappa \phi\omega\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ phrase in the Nicene Creed. The crucial point for Athanasius is not the actual terms used in Scripture but the meaning that they convey and the "realities to which they refer" when predicated, "for they do not explain the divine reality but are made to reflect it."⁸⁸ The linguistic and conceptual alteration that takes place under the gospel was expressed by Athanasius as a basic hermeneutical principle: concepts and words do not detract from God's nature; rather, "that nature draws to itself those terms and changes them."⁸⁹ Thus the concept of light applied to the internal relations of God is predicated with the new meaning given it under the transforming impact of divine self-disclosure. The concept of $\phi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$, therefore, was decisive: it expressed the fact that what God is *ad extra* is what he really is *in se*; that he is in the internal relations of his radiant being the very same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that he is in his electing, reconciling, and illuminating activity.⁹⁰

For Athanasius, it was therefore the function of the concept of light to make it noetically possible to form some notion of God, "for such illustrations and such images as Scripture proposed, that, considering the inability of human nature to comprehend God, we might be able to form ideas even from these however poorly and dimly, and as far as is attainable."⁹¹ However, Athanasius's seminal contribution to this issue was found in his

⁸⁷ Cf. Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 2.35. Essentially, Athanasius was set on the place of $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$ in theological thought and speech within the realm of "accommodation." Understanding, or $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$, Torrance tells us, "is not the forcing of objective reality into a concept, but the letting of the mind assume conceptual forms under the pressure of objective reality or being of God" Again, the image of light, therefore, was "taken from the tangible world to point out divine realities," because of creaturely speech and thought being under the realm of "divine revelation" ("Problem of Theological Statement Today," 49f).

⁸⁸ Torrance, "Problem of Theological Statement Today," 50.

⁸⁹ Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 2.3 (PG 26:152; NPNF 4:349).

⁹⁰ See *Ibid.*, 2.11 (PG 26:168f; NPNF 4:354).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.32 (PG 26:216; NPNF 4:365). According to Alasdair Heron, such a statement from Athanasius is in reaction to the fact that "the Arians had fabricated the divine being out of their own minds, thus making their own intellects the measure of ultimate reality and assigning to Christ, the Word made flesh, the place their minds could make for him" ("*Homoousios* with the Father," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. T.F. Torrance [Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981], 70).

thought that the concept of light was a device for protecting creaturely speculation from speaking presumptuously about God.

[D]ivine Scripture, by way of relieving the impossibility of explaining and apprehending these matters in words, has given us illustrations of this kind [i.e., light] that it may be lawful...to speak more plainly, and to speak without danger, and to think legitimately, and to believe that there is sanctification...from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.⁹²

The function of the concept of light, then, is to be interpreted not in order to paralyze constructive and reflective thinking and speaking, but to protect, to “speak without danger,” and to simultaneously illumine.

Further along this trajectory, Barth approached theological discourse by aiming at grace and not nature; that is, while creaturely speech was unqualified to refer to God, it was nevertheless qualified to do so.⁹³ Creaturely speech, as sanctified by grace, was at once “enlisted by God’s revelation to participate in His truth...[creaturely words] are in a certain sense raised from the dead.”⁹⁴

Barth’s initial thoughts are perhaps in reaction to what Aquinas had formulated in his “doctrine of analogy” roughly seven centuries earlier.⁹⁵ True speech about the divine, for

⁹² Athanasius, *Ad Ser.* 1.20 (Shapland, 115f; cf. *PG* 26:577).

⁹³ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [CD], 4 vols., eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75), II/1: 224–43 = *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* [KD], 4 vols. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1932; Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag Zürich, 1938–67), II/1: 252–75. For a thorough study of Barth’s thoughts on the status of images and metaphors in Scripture, see George Hunsinger, “Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth’s Hermeneutical Realism,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 210–25. The key for Barth, says Hunsinger, is that “Scriptural metaphors for God, no matter how ‘anthropomorphic,’ really correspond...to the being of God itself” (217).

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* II/1: 231. Cf. “...gewissermaßen von den Toten auferweckt” (*KD* II/1: 261).

⁹⁵ We say “perhaps” here as it remains an open question as to whether Barth’s approach to theological predication is in fact quite so different from Aquinas’s “doctrine of analogy.” For comparisons of Barth and Aquinas, refer to Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995); and the careful study by Timothy J. Furry, “Analogous analogies? Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 3 (2010): 318–

Aquinas, was therefore possible but only with the proviso that their *modus significandi* could not be known. Analogical predication in theology presupposed truths about God to which Aquinas had already assented on the basis of faith, and those truths took primacy over truths of reason, even if “we cannot understand the essence of God in this life.”⁹⁶ In the end, this meant that a real metaphysical similarity was in force between the creature and God—that is, “no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.”⁹⁷ An essential likeness in the midst of unlikeness helped make analogical predication possible for Aquinas and indeed his heirs.⁹⁸

For Barth, however, theological predication in general was grounded not on some metaphysical “similarity” between God and the creature, nor in its own power, “but solely by virtue of divine grace.”⁹⁹ Creaturely words, without ceasing to be essentially “improper” were graciously made “appropriate.” Yet in “raising” creaturely language beyond its natural faculties, God has a proper claim to creaturely language, even though it has no such claim upon him.¹⁰⁰

He Himself, however, has every...claim on us and on all our views, concepts and words, that he should be their first and last and proper subject [...And] by them all, as by the existence of creation generally, God describes and proclaims Himself. For this reason He, the Creator, claims us and therefore them in His revelation [...] He

30. For background to Aquinas’s thoughts on *analogia*, see the classic work by Bernard Montagnes, *La doctrine de l’analogie de l’être d’après Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Philosophes médiévaux 6 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires; Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1963).

⁹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST], eds. T. Gilby and T.C. O’Brien, repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1a. q13, 2 ad.3. Cf. “...essentiam Dei in hac vita cognoscere non possumus.” Where Latin is used the Leonis text will be consulted: *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita. Summae Theologiae*, vols. 4-12 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888–1906).

⁹⁷ Fourth Lateran Council, canon 2 (quoted in *Readings in Medieval History*, 4th edition, ed. Patrick Geary [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010], 430).

⁹⁸ One thinks of the particular indebtedness of Cajetan to Aquinas in his account of metaphor in *De Analogia Nominum* (ed. P.N. Zammit, rev. edition [Rome: Hering, 1952]). Moreover, Cajetan sought to clarify the *analogia entis*—perhaps a conversation at the heart of Aquinas’s account—by using the word “being” in accordance with creatures because they reflect the nature of the God who created them.

⁹⁹ Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 217.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Barth, *CD* II/1: 229.

causes a miracle to happen by which we come to participate in the veracity of His revelation, and by which our words become true descriptions of Himself. Our words are not our property, but His.¹⁰¹

When God graciously “raises” creaturely words, speech, concepts, and images to “participate in the veracity of His own revelation,” language is not alienated from its intended *telos*, but “returned to it.” God graciously reveals and therefore accommodates himself within creaturely language by raising it to himself and restoring it.¹⁰²

A corresponding trajectory to Barth’s approach is found in Eberhard Jüngel’s concern that biblical language is the site of divine communication as a divinely seized metaphor. Metaphor thus transfers creaturely language from one context to another, bridging the reality of the world and the reality of God in an “event” that yields being and knowledge: “The difference between God and the world, and, indeed, God himself, can only come to speech metaphorically.”¹⁰³ His indebtedness to the “New Hermeneutic” aside,¹⁰⁴ Jüngel’s point is sound: metaphor is indeed an important predication in terms of truth telling when God acts to bestow upon it that status in the movement of his self-disclosure.

Yet what is of upmost importance for our purposes is Jüngel’s notion that metaphorical language is essential to theology, because metaphor does not allow itself to be

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² We might note that Barth is indebted here to Calvin’s language of *Deus se ad captum nostrum accommodans*; that is, in Calvin’s statement that God “has prescribed a way for us...to draw near to him” in the “accommodating himself to our capacity” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559)*, trans. F.L. Battles, ed J.T. McNeill [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], 4.1.1 [hereafter *Inst.*]). See also the fine study on Book 4 of the *Institutio* as the “book of accommodations” in Arnold Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), esp. 106–54.

¹⁰³ Eberhard Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth,” *Theological Essays I*, trans. and ed. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 60.

¹⁰⁴ This is perceived in Jüngel’s insistence that the language-event created by linguistic forms which release the dynamism and power of words, that is, words which serve as channels effecting reality and revealing God’s presence. For more on the “New Hermeneutic,” see Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 56–58.

directed solely by the “horizon of worldly discourse.”¹⁰⁵ Metaphor thus provides a catalyst for comprehending and expressing divine revelation; metaphor neither overlooks the creaturely “horizon of worldly discourse” nor violates it but goes behind it and thus illumines it.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, according to Jüngel, theological metaphors bring a new horizon of meaning to the creaturely domain, from which eschatologically new life arises.¹⁰⁷ Yet metaphors have their limits. As with Barth, Jüngel affirms that metaphors—like all forms of creaturely language—have no intrinsic access to God, no potency of their own. However, we do learn from the function of creaturely language that it holds a significant position in the divine encounter and the way in which we “interpret our world.”¹⁰⁸

Taken together, the trajectory of Athanasius to Jüngel via Barth helps us to gather several linguistic threads when reflecting on the concept of light. In short: by God’s gracious elevation of creaturely language, the use of the biblical metaphor of light at once gestures towards God’s radiant identity without going beyond it. That is, in God’s commandeering, accommodating, or “raising” of creaturely language is found real ontological force. On the one hand, true speech does not rest upon an *analogia entis*—“no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between God and the creature”—but rather upon the divine claiming and transformation of ordinary concepts and creaturely words so that by grace they may and do indeed truthfully refer to God. On the other hand, the difference between God and creatures does not, at the same time, become license for the uninhibited creation of concepts, nor for wholesale apophaticism.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ John Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 40; cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 309.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Webster’s “Introduction” in *Theological Essays I*, esp. 5–7.

¹⁰⁷ Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth,” 66f.

¹⁰⁸ See Janet M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 62.

¹⁰⁹ This is not to deny the fact that Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is absolutely foundational in approaching the images of light and darkness with regards to cataphatic and apophatic theological predication (see, of course,

Divine commandeering or accommodation of language therefore occurs as a result of the reconciliation of creaturely thought and speech, namely, the creature, along with its thought and speech being “raised” or “returned” to its intended *telos*. More precisely: thought and speech are rendered possible, and “actual” in material terms, by divine action, in order that creatures might “speak more plainly...speak without danger, and to think legitimately.”¹¹⁰ Due to *this* gracious divine action, true words about God’s radiant identity are brought to the “horizon of worldly discourse.” Viewed from the creaturely side, then, we may be confident that theological metaphors, such as light, are not “mere” metaphors, but genuinely convey divine reality. And a “trinitarian theology of light,” according to the trajectory offered by the theologians above, does not reduce to linguistic pretext. Because of this, the notion of light and its theological predication will not be seen as an “impersonal analogy,” which might nevertheless ferry the necessary conceptual freight for trinitarian theology.¹¹¹

Yet these points on theological predication need not detain us any longer as we move forward in the dogmatic sections of this thesis. We are content to say here that a trinitarian theology is simply concerned to ensure that its thought and speech of divine light concentrates on that which is proper to the One that “may most properly be termed light, but is nothing like that light with which we are acquainted.” Therefore, concepts developed and metaphors used in articulating the “doctrine of divine light,” must point to the divine reality of the triune God as he has given himself to be known. In short: concepts “must be converted, made serviceable by correction, above all through being filled out by descriptive reference to

De mystica theologia 3 [PG 3:1032f]). However, we note that there is a possible omission of a responsible apophaticism that descends from Dionysian thought into contemporary theology. See sub-section 3.2 below.

¹¹⁰ Athanasius, *Ad Ser.* 1.20 (Shapland, 115f; cf. *PG* 26:577).

¹¹¹ Kathryn Tanner recently proposes this in “The Use of Perceived Properties of Light as a Theological Analogy,” in *Light from Light*, 122–30.

the event and name of God whom they attempt to indicate.”¹¹²

3.2. *Created Light and Uncreated Light*

The use of the concept of divine light is therefore not primarily spoken of in a “contingent” manner but rather as a “descriptive reference” to the God it seeks to indicate. That is, the content of the term cannot be determined simply by analysis of the difference between God and creatures, between the Creator and creation, or between “no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.” Such contingency arises with force by looking at the topics of “uncreated light” (ἀγένητος φῶς) and “created light” (ἐποίησεν φῶς) in the Eastern interpretive tradition of the church.

Echoing much of Gregory Nazianzen’s work,¹¹³ Byzantine Hesychasm affirmed that the light from Jesus Christ in his being μετεμορφώθη on Mt. Tabor is nothing other than the eschatological light of the Kingdom to come, a light that “transfigures” the visionary and all creation.¹¹⁴ According to Palamas, once the creaturely intellect has stripped itself of all props and supports through mental and physical asceticism, it is thus graced by the illumination of God, seeing divine light and becoming light in that vision.¹¹⁵ In this mystical experience, the subject and the means of vision are all light: in the vision of this divine uncreated light,

¹¹² John Webster, “The Immensity and Ubiquity of God,” in *Confessing God*, 94.

¹¹³ See Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 21.1 (*PG* 35:1084): “What the sun is in the realm of the senses, God is in the noetic realm.” Gregory employs the concept of light to compare the created light with the uncreated light of God: like the physical sun, God is dangerously bright to human perception (cf. *Ors.* 2.76; 12.4; 17.8; 20.1; 32.15). See also Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light we shall see Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. chs. 2 and 4.

¹¹⁴ For further background, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1979), 76–78; *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (NY: St. Vladimir’s, 1974), 52–70; and Hannah Hunt, “Byzantine Christianity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Early Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 73–93. Regarding the philosophical nuance of the light of Tabor in Theophanes, see Andrew Louth, “Light, Vision, and Religious Experience in Byzantium,” in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 85–103.

¹¹⁵ Palamas, *Triads* 2.3.36. It must be noted that this light that is “seen” is the Taboric, eschatological light.

everything becomes light in the union with light. The transfiguration of Christ was the paradox of the vision of the uncreated light by created eyes: “This mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, uncreated, deifying, eternal, this radiance of the Divine Nature, this glory of the divinity, this beauty of the heavenly kingdom, is at once accessible to sense perception and yet transcends it.”¹¹⁶ Creatures are to see the divine light of God’s self-revelation with their actual physical eyes, but creaturely eyes as they have been μεταμορφώθη by the Holy Spirit; the immaterial light of God will be seen by material eyes, but through a power other than the natural power of vision. Thus, for Byzantine theology, “light was a way of saying something about the reality of the encounter, rather than a way of describing its psychological modalities.”¹¹⁷

This brief reflection from Byzantium does not reveal the worrisome “contingent” notion we are after in our examination of the use of the concept of light. That is, the Hesychast use of the image of light employs the ἀγέννητος φῶς as a *literal* image for both the glory of God and the resulting illuminating power present in the mind of the visionary. It is not, to the contrary, a substance or somehow a collapse into the ἐποίησεν φῶς. But confusion arises when a contingent comparison between uncreated light and created light is allowed to wholly define the concept.

This point is worth pausing over, not least because the use of the concept of light is often marked by contingent or comparative interpretations, particularly by theologians with deep investments in natural theology. What this often means for the concept of light is that created light is conceptually collapsed into the uncreated, divine light of the triune God.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 3.1.22.

¹¹⁷ Louth, “Light, Vision, and Religious Experience in Byzantium,” 100.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Jeremy Begbie (“Natural Theology and Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Natural Theology*, ed. Russell Re Manning [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013]) regarding the notion that the “diverse particulars of creation” are like the “threefoldness of the creator” (576). Regardless of recent attempts to make natural theology more “complex” in its approach to revelation—and thus less capable of being maligned—the

And the assumption of a collapse of created light and uncreated light into a contingent notion of light rests on the same logic as is found in the notion of natural revelation and the doctrine of the works of God *ad extra*, as relayed by Bonaventure:

In the world there are traces in which we can see the reflection of our God. For since the apprehended species is a likeness produced in the medium and then impressed upon the organ itself, and by means of that impression leads to its principle and source. This clearly suggests that the eternal light generates a likeness of itself.¹¹⁹

Such soundings in the history of theology might trace their lineage back to two interrelated sources: one in the ancient philosophical vein, namely, in Plato himself, the other in a trajectory of arguable Platonist influence in Christian theology, namely, Augustine.

Regarding the former, Plato's insistence that intellectual light mediates between the Forms and the soul, just as created light mediates between the sun and creaturely sight, is crucial for contemporary contingent notions of divine light. This is particularly felt in Plato's "problem" from *Meno*: How does one set out to find the unknown in the first place?¹²⁰ This question is concerned with whether or not the creaturely knower, in this case a slave boy, will have the *sense* that he will be able to know certain truths.¹²¹ Thus the inherent problem is not that the creaturely knower seems to know things *a priori*, but rather how the creaturely knower might pursue a forgotten knowledge. For Plato, the answer is found in the notion that the Forms in some way "reach down" to the knower creating a "pathway" of participation. That is, created light itself comes to meet the creaturely knower; it is this which triggers

conclusion still holds true for theologians of natural religion: "[T]he order and disorder of nature reflects the character of the creator." See Paul Ewart, "The Physical Sciences and Natural Theology," in *ibid.*, 428.

¹¹⁹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum (Opera Omnia ad Clarus Aquas [Quaracchi]*, vol. 5 [Florence: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1891) 2.7: "...omnia sunt vestigia, in quibus speculari possumus Deum nostrum. Nam cum species apprehensa sit similitudo in medio genita et deinde ipsi organo impressa et per illam impressionem in suum principium, scilicet in obiectum cognoscendum."

¹²⁰ See Plato, *Meno and other Dialogues*, trans. Robin Waterfield (NY: Oxford, 2005), 97–143.

¹²¹ *Meno* 80a–b, 84a–c.

“recollection,”¹²² a turning towards the pathway—the pathway of noetic, participatory “light”—which, in turn, invokes the category of desire (ἔρως).¹²³ This ἔρως not only seeks more knowledge but also to “birth” more knowledge.¹²⁴ A potent example of this approach is found in the famous allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, where prisoners bound to a wall are depicted as those turned away from the illumination of knowledge and goodness:

You can look at the soul in the same way. When it focuses where truth and that which is shined forth, then it understands and knows what it sees [...] But when it focuses on what is mingled with darkness...then it resorts to opinion [...] Just as in our example it is correct to think of light and vision as sun-like, but incorrect to think that they *are* the sun [...] the sun gives to what is seen [...] and] this capacity in every soul, this instrument by means of which each person learns, is like an eye which can only be turned away from darkness and towards the light by turning the whole body. The entire soul has to turn with it, away from what is coming to be, until it is able to bear the sight of what is, and in particular the brightest part of it. This part we call the good, isn't it?¹²⁵

Thus the created light (namely, the sun¹²⁶) only illumines for the observing intellect, and this intellect must closely track the paths of light at a higher level. In order to know, the “prisoners” in the allegory of the cave can only comprehend their own “beams” of illumined reason when they fall upon things in such a way that these things *themselves* shape the language of their reasonings.

¹²² Ibid., 81a–b.

¹²³ Ibid., 84c.

¹²⁴ See Plato, *Symposium* 206e (in *Symposium*, trans. Richard Hunter [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]).

¹²⁵ Plato, *Republic* 7.508d–e, 509a–b, 518c (in *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F Ferrari and trans. Tom Griffith [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000]).

¹²⁶ On the Platonic image of the sun, see R.J. Fogelin, “Three Platonic Analogies,” *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971): 371–82.

A second sounding, from the history of Christian theology, proves likewise influential for contemporary contingent notions of light, namely, in Augustine's theological interpretation of Plato. We might stress the word *interpretation* here in order to caution against the reading of Augustine's approach to Platonic *loci* simply as an instance of "ancient thought baptized," as some have suggested.¹²⁷ Rather, Augustine's *interpretation* of several Platonic images—including light—reveals both the conceptual interrelation of Plato and the Western father, and also the contextual separation of the two—one philosophical, the other squarely in the realm of biblical exegesis.¹²⁸

Thus in turning to the doctrine of creation in his exegesis of the Book of Genesis, *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine offers a primordial treatment of uncreated light and created light—the latter he understands as *both* physical light and the light of the human mind. Though Augustine calls it created light, he nevertheless holds that that it is a reflection of the divine, uncreated light, and that it involves a *participatio* by the creaturely mind in that divine light. He could therefore propose a non-material *substantia*; that is, in terms of his concept of light, both uncreated light and divine *illuminatio habitus mentis* could be understood as "true analogies" with physical light.¹²⁹ Thus, for Augustine, the words of Gen. 1:9 indicate the already illumined existence of the first created *intellectualis vita*, which when "turned to its Creator to be illumined...the decree, 'Let there be light,' spoken by the Word of God has been fulfilled."¹³⁰ The creation therefore contains within it various *signa* or *rationes aeternae* of the identity and light of the Creator. It also bears a closer resemblance to the Creator in the higher levels of the *analogia entis*, granting that the higher the order of the creature, the

¹²⁷ See, e.g., John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ Regarding Plato's influence on Augustine, see Ronald Nash, "Some Philosophic Sources of Augustine's Illumination Theory," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 47–66.

¹²⁹ See our brief overview of the Augustinian approach to the theory of *illuminatio* below, Ch. 5.1.1, "Theories of *Illuminatio*."

¹³⁰ Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 1.17 (*PL* 34:252f): "...quae nisi as Creatorem illuminada converteretur [...] factam est quod in Verbo Dei dictum est. *Fiat lux*."

closer it stands in relation to the divine being. Augustine had found significant ground for the notion, moreover, in the first chapter of Genesis, where the revealed action of the entire Trinity in the creation of light was described. The questions surrounding the connection between these passages in the first chapter—that is, the connection between created and uncreated light—were asked and answered by Augustine in the following way:

What is the light itself which was created? Is it something spiritual or material?

In this supposition, we must understand that when God said, “Let there be light,” and light was made, the creature, called by the Creator himself, underwent a conversion and illumination.¹³¹

Yet several problematic modern interpretations of the image of light have emerged from this ancient interpretive bedrock.¹³² One particular proposal is found in the “Radical Orthodox” approach of Catherine Pickstock, whose work betrays a retrieval of certain contingent leanings in Neo-Platonism which fatally collapses created light into the uncreated light of God.¹³³

Pickstock begins her study by stating that God is “light,” indeed as uncreated light, and, in company with Augustine, as “the pure light of love.”¹³⁴ This light is said to be

¹³¹ Ibid (PL 34:218f): “Creatore, conversione ejus facta atque illuminata intelligator.”

¹³² Cf. the studies already mentioned above: G. O’Collins and M. Meyers (eds.), *Light from Light*; and K. Vaux and K.K. Yeo (eds.), *Theology of Light and Sight*.

¹³³ Without belaboring the point, “Radical Orthodoxy” supposes that the Neo-Platonic ontology of *participatio* is the essential ascription for a Christian ontology of *participatio*. Platonic metaphysics therefore founds the conditions necessary for the doctrine of the Trinity rather than the Trinity founding a distinctly Christian metaphysic. This seems a rather upended reading of Augustine. An example of this is found within the context the participation in the trinitarian life as relayed by Michael Hanby’s reading of *De trinitatis*: “[B]oth ‘form’ and ‘content’ of our participation are doxological, and this marks at once *both* our participation in the Son’s response to the Father and our reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit shared between the Father and the Son” (*Augustine and Modernity* [NY: Routledge, 2003], 55). For an outline and, in some cases, critique of Radical Orthodoxy, see James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

¹³⁴ Catherine Pickstock, “What Shines Between: The *Metaxu* of Light,” in *Between System and Poetics: William Desmond and Philosophy after Dialectic*, ed. Thomas Kelley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 118. Cf. Augustine’s thought that love is equal to dwelling in God’s light (*De Trinitate* 8.12f).

“invisible and spiritual,” yet it is integrally linked with created light. “For the light we now see,” says Pickstock, “is *literally*, and not merely analogically, ‘a glance of the glory of God.’”¹³⁵ Moreover, God’s light and created light are said to be “shared without diminution,” and, as such, the eternal light of God “perpetually shines.”¹³⁶ This seems to imply that God’s being is incomparable at some level, at least in terms of his self-revelation, yet at the same time “God is at once the things we seek to know and His own mediation.”¹³⁷ The world, Pickstock continues, is said to have its own rationalities, which are summed up under the headings of various Neo-Platonic terms: “pathway,” “rationality,” “desire,” and seminally, *metaxu*.¹³⁸ The universe is finally said to possess properties of rationality and epistemic resolution in the image of created light.¹³⁹ Created light is thus conceived as visible, intelligible, stable, contingent, and reliable in a way that creates a “pathway” to these features as eminently instantiated by God. In a rather cumbersome passage from Pickstock, we find the Platonic lineage: “Mimicking the imperceptible rapidity of light’s own diffusion...one’s own...inner-illumination discloses something, but what it discloses is things of this world disclosing God.”¹⁴⁰

“What was the light itself which was created?” we might ask Pickstock on behalf of Augustine. “Is it something spiritual or material?” Pickstock’s answer runs thus: Created light *necessarily* mediates knowledge of God. And as created light perpetually shines in the world, so our discernment of objects reflecting the knowledge of God likewise shines. Created light therefore “shows the way,” both in its refracting to us objects that “desire” to be known and

¹³⁵ Ibid., 118f (emphasis mine). Pickstock is here quoting Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 372.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 111f.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 109. When Pickstock uses the term “metaxu,” she is referring to William Desmond’s concept, where analogy expresses something of reality. Desmond, and subsequently Pickstock, affirm a “metaxological” reality, where a participatory metaphysics best preserves “reality” (see *ibid.*, 108). Of course, μετὰξὺ (the “in-between”) is an important term from Plato’s *Symposium* 203b–c.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 109.

also “beaming forth from us as desire,” so too does God’s eternal light meet with created light in the “lives of particular people who follow Christ under the prompting of His spirit.”¹⁴¹ There is thus a *contingent* relation between created and uncreated light: “The manifestation of light in the diverse particularities of creation—consummated in Christ—*co-belongs in equal measure with the source of light.*”¹⁴² The epistemic status of created light is therefore paramount for the creaturely knowledge of God, for “whenever we know anything at all, we already (whether we know it or not) recognize, know and love God.”¹⁴³ Thus light itself, in a rather Socratic way, “shocks” the learner into recollecting the divine already apparent around creatures; one need only look at the created light to see uncreated light.

While it would be one thing to affirm God as the ground of creation on the basis of God’s self-disclosure, it would be quite another thing to do so from an *ad hoc* consideration of the creation. Pickstock’s ideas sometimes seem to move in the latter direction.¹⁴⁴ Pickstock affirms God as uncreated light; however, she wishes to coordinate the uncreated light of God with the created light of the world. Moreover, it appears that what is missing from Pickstock’s thought is an integration of her ideas of uncreated light with that of divine *unitas* and *trinitas*. If divine unity, or *simplicitas*, logically requires the idea that God’s difference from the world is absolute, then God’s light and freedom would need to be “nothing like...any that we are acquainted.” Indeed, Augustine himself may critique Pickstock as he expressly added to his exhortation that *dissimilitudines* are to be found even in the *similitudo*; or, put in our terms, by the fact that the concept of light is to be defined by the radiant identity of the triune God:

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁴² Ibid (emphasis mine).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 118f.

¹⁴⁴ One may think of Michael Polanyi here, especially his thought that reality falls into “levels” that are opened upwards but not reducible downwards, so that what exists at a lower level can be explained only by recourse to a higher level. “All meaning,” says Polanyi, “lies in the higher levels of reality that are not reducible to the laws by which the ultimate particulars of the universe are controlled” (*Scientific Thought and Social Reality*, ed. Fred Schwartz [Madison, WI: International University Press, 1974], 137).

For the sun also is a light, but it is corporeal; and the spiritual creature is also light, but it is not unchangeable. The Father, therefore, is light, the Son is light, and the Holy Spirit is light; but together not three lights, but one light (*sed unum lumen*).¹⁴⁵

Therefore, Augustine continues:

God is light. I know that any man might say, “The sun is light, and the moon is light, and a lamp is light.” But it ought to be far greater than these, far more excellent, and far more surpassing. How much God is distant from the creation, as far as the Maker from the making, from Wisdom and that which has been made by Wisdom, far beyond all things ought the light of this One be.¹⁴⁶

We therefore seek clarify, *pace* Pickstock, that God’s radiant being does not need this association with the creaturely realm and its “lights.” Rather, God’s light “ought to be far greater than these, far more excellent, and far more surpassing.” God’s light is “far greater” by the sheer fact that he exists; he exists namely as “a creative agency of unrestricted power and undiminished glory.”¹⁴⁷ Once again, therefore, the contrast between divine light and creaturely “light” is colloquial, merely a corollary of the essential confession: “God is light.” God’s light is not a reflection of contingency; nor is it interchangeable with its conceptual and biblical “other,” darkness, as we heard in the sweep of our scriptural survey above. Rather, God’s light is a feature of the radiant identity of God.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6 (*PL* 42:938f): “Est enim et sol iste lumen, sed non incommutabile. Lumen ergo Pater, lumen Filius, lumen Spiritus sanctus: simul autem non tri alumina, sed unum lumen.”

¹⁴⁶ Augustine, *Ep. Joh. tract.* 1.4 (*PL* 35:1981).

¹⁴⁷ Wood, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 385.

3.3. God's Economic Activity

Easing the tension between uncreated light and created light might be further assuaged by looking at how the concept of light is deployed in articulating God's economic activity. A model from the interpretive tradition is useful here, not only for exhibiting a further chastening of the "contingent" notion of light, but also for a glimpse into the forthcoming dogmatic discussions of this thesis.

In his *Commentarius in evangelium Ioannis*, John Calvin turns to expound upon the radiant activity of God as found in Jn. 1:4.¹⁴⁸

God, therefore, is the one who gives us life; but He does so through the eternal Word [...] But because God kindles their minds with his light, it follows that they were created to the end that they might acknowledge that he is the sole author of such a unique blessing. And when the light of this One permeated us from the Word its source (*cuius sermo scaturigo erat, inde ad nos transfudit*), it ought to be a kind of mirror in which we may see clearly the divine power of the Word.¹⁴⁹

For Calvin, the Son's life *in se* is a light that "permeates us" from on high. Therefore, created light is a "borrowed light" (*aliunde mutuatur splendorem suum*), whereas "Christ is *the light*, shining from himself and by himself, and enlightening the whole world by his radiance; so that no other source or cause of splendor is anywhere to be found." That is, "Christ, as the eternal light, has a splendor which is natural [to him]."¹⁵⁰ Calvin's imagery indicates the

¹⁴⁸ "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

¹⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Commentarius in evangelium Ioannis* 1.4 (in *Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt Omnia* [CO], vols. 1-59, in vols. 29-87 of *Corpus Reformatorum*, eds. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Ruess [Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863-1900], 47:5 = *Calvin's Commentaries* [CC], ed. The Calvin Translation Society, 22 vols., repr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009], 17:32).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.9 (CO 47:8; CC 17:37): "Erat lux vita."

practical aspects of divine light, specifically that

God...is called the Father of light, and also light, [and] we first understand that there is nothing in him but what is bright, pure, and unalloyed; and secondly, that he so illuminates all things by his brightness that he lets nothing vicious or perverted, no spots or filth, no hypocrisy or fraud, lie hidden. Hence the sum of what is said is that, since there is no agreement between light and darkness (*nulla sit consensio inter lucem et tenebras*), we are separated from God so long as we walk in darkness; and that therefore the fellowship which he mentions can only exist if we also become pure and full of light (*lucidi simus*).¹⁵¹

The radiance of God is actual, for “there is nothing in him but what is clear, pure, and unalloyed.” But the light in which God alone lives “illuminates all things by his brightness.” The form of this life-giving abundance of God’s light is the Son, the *lumen vivificum*. “Yet this meaning must be grasped,” Calvin clarifies, “that as the sun discovers to our eyes the most beautiful theatre of earth and heaven and the whole order of nature, so God has visibly displayed the chief glory of His work in His Son.”¹⁵² Thus the divine *voluntas* is not simply to retain light as something hidden and dark, but rather “to dispel the darkness and to kindle in us the light of God.”¹⁵³

Calvin’s brief thoughts on this image propose several themes which will occupy the remainder of this thesis. First, light is not only the absence of an external illumination but the eternal light of God *in se*.¹⁵⁴ Second, this light cannot be understood without the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; its radiance comprises the mutual light of the Father, Son, and

¹⁵¹ John Calvin, *Commentarius in Ioannis apostoli epistolam* 1.5 (CO 55:303f; CC 22:163).

¹⁵² Calvin, *Comm. Ioannis* 8.12 (CO 47:240; CC 17:369).

¹⁵³ Calvin, *Comm. Ioannis epist.* 1.6 (CO 55:304): “...ut discussis tenebris lucem Dei in nobis accendat.”

¹⁵⁴ See Ch. 2.1.1, “Triune Light and Life.”

Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁵ Finally, this light cannot be regarded apart from its brightness in shining forth to creatures.¹⁵⁶ God's light, although it signals God's utter difference from creatures, does not entail his utter isolation; rather, God's light includes an outshining of love.¹⁵⁷

Yet as we viewed with Pickstock, a misunderstanding of the divine identity occurs whenever a collapse of uncreated light and created light determines the notion of divine light itself. Instead of pointing towards the radiant being of God, the concept instead seeks to reflect the nature of contingent reality; it becomes a matter of God's "creating light" so as to "make visible" his "uncreated Light";¹⁵⁸ it becomes a merely "mundane" metaphor or analogy snatched from the "perceived properties of light" and predicated about God.¹⁵⁹ The content of the concept of light is therefore distorted; it is no longer a positive proclamation of God's glorious being and his gracious action in the economy, but rather a generic utterance regarding "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). With this abstraction, light is expounded in terms of the contingency of the world. As Calvin reminds us, however, we must always keep before us the fact that created light is a "borrowed light," whereas God in his triune identity is *the light*, "shining from himself and by himself, and illuminating the whole world by his radiance; so that no other source or cause of splendor is anywhere to be found."

4. CONCLUSION

The initial exposition sketched here argues that the concept of divine light must be grounded in the setting and logic of the Trinity and the gospel. When a separation from the trinitarian *antepredicamenta* takes place, the content of light is made into something merely contingent

¹⁵⁵ See Ch. 2.1.2, "The Light of *opera Dei ad intra*."

¹⁵⁶ See chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁵⁷ See esp. chapter 3: "The Light of the Gospel: God's Radiant Event of Love."

¹⁵⁸ Yeo, "Light and New Creation," 47.

¹⁵⁹ This is Tanner's concession in "The Use of Perceived Properties of Light as a Theological Analogy," esp. 130.

or indeed mystical. However, if our study seeks to offer a constructive revision, then we can only do so as the notion of divine light is articulated *together with* the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet as our study progresses in reflecting upon the image of light and Christian *loci*, we must keep before us the fact that theological concepts are truthful only as they are graciously granted to creatures in service to the logic of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Barth reminds us, such “illumination” must be “*granted* to the creature” from the very “presence of the Creator.”¹⁶⁰ The concept of light, therefore, must become a matter of *granted* illumination by “the presence of the Creator, for “he is nothing like that light with which we are acquainted.”

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1: 647 (emphasis mine); cf *KD* II/1: 730: “Wo Licht ist und leuchtet, da findet ja ein Belichten statt und also ein Belichtetwerden und also ein Lichtwerden auch eines Anderen, das als solches nicht Licht ist und ohne jenes Belichtetwerden nicht Licht werden könnte [...] sondern eben aus der der Kreatur geschenkten Gegenwart des Schöpfers.”

CHAPTER 2

**GOD’S SHINING FORTH:
THE LIGHT OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Contemplate the divine nature: permanent, immutable, inalterable, impassible, simple, incomposite, indivisible, unapproachable light, ineffable power, uncircumscribed greatness, supereminent glory. There we find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the uncreated nature, the lordly dignity, the natural goodness. The Father is the principle of all [...] The Son shone forth from the Father’s substance...his equal in goodness, his equal in power, sharing in his glory [...] The Spirit...enlightens all so they may comprehend God.¹

The previous chapter developed a conceptual limit that theology must take note of when talking about the light of God. This limit included the thought that theology will not situate what it has to say about divine light by way of *impropria loquutio*, but rather it will take its lead from God’s radiant form as *light in himself*. Because theological concepts, including the concept of light, must be “filled out by descriptive reference” to God, a “contingent” notion of divine light can therefore only be replaced by a concept defined by the scriptural “attempt to indicate” the radiant identity of the triune God.² Without such a basis, a theological concept of divine light will miss the mark of reflecting upon the way God reveals himself as *distincte in tribus personis*. More to the point: if “the mystery of the Trinity is unknown or denied,” then the “whole economy of salvation is unknown or denied.”³

This second chapter therefore aims to communicate a clarification of this trinitarian trajectory. It proposes a twofold course with regard to a trinitarian theology of divine light. In

¹ Basil, *De fide* 1–3 (PPS 47:235–37).

² Webster, “Immensity and Ubiquity of God,” 94.

³ Johannis Gerard, *Loci theologici: cum pro adstruenda veritate tum pro destruenda quorumvis contradicentium falsitate per theses nervose solide et solide et copiose explicatit* (Tübingen: Georgii Cottae, 1764 [1610]), 3.1.7: “Ignorato vel negate Trinitatis mysterio totus salutis oikovoμία ignoratur vel negatur.”

the first section of the chapter, we will reflect upon the notion that *God is light in himself* is a fitting indicator of God’s own radiant identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which includes the light of the *opera Dei ad intra*. The second section finds the beginnings of much that is to follow in the thesis by examining the notion that *from himself God shines forth his light*; that is, God’s light bound up in his economic, covenantal, *opera ad extra* in which he “shines forth” to creatures in the darkness.⁴

1. THE LIGHT OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

God’s light is the light of the One who has his own radiant identity, his own *substantia individua*.⁵ And this identity is his uniqueness as the One who exists in this precise manner. As the One who has this radiant identity, God is not *Deus otiosus*; nor is he merely conceptual furniture in the creaturely apologetic venture of *An sit Deus*. Rather, he is the self-determining One who is beyond the reach of any comparison or class because he “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16). We therefore approach the topic of God’s triunity with caution:

[L]et us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun’s body, though men’s eyes daily gaze upon it?⁶

⁴ See our explanation of this twofold proposal—namely, *God is light in himself*; and *from himself God shines forth his light*—in the “Introduction” to this thesis.

⁵ See, notably, Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q29, 1–2.

⁶ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.21 = *Joannis Calvini opera selecta* [OS], eds. P. Barth and G. Niesel, vols. 3 and 4, repr. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 3:136: “Quomodo enim immensam Dei essentiam ad suum modulum mens humana definiat...?”

When creaturely thought and speech seeks to reflect upon this radiant identity, therefore, it does not seek to “measure off” by ascription, nor does it come to this task with “irrelevant speculation,”⁷ but rather God’s triune identity is approached as the “highest and most excellent subject” with “modesty and awe.”⁸ In other words, as Ambrose says, we are “bound by the guarantee of [our] voice”⁹ when seeking to speak about God’s radiant triune identity.

In light of this caution, we confess that God receives this identity from himself, for it is entirely self-derived. Theological talk of the divine light, therefore, is not the projection of a creaturely category onto God; it is not the suggestion that there is some *qualitas* called “divine light,” present everywhere in a contingent manner but found supremely embodied in God;¹⁰ nor is such talk merely a synonymous predication of a characteristic placed alongside other *incommunicabilia attributa divina*.

This last point is worth highlighting, not least because some might perceive within Christian talk of God’s light a genitive gloss on several divine attributes—namely, *aseitas*, *simplicitas*, or *relatio*.¹¹ It could therefore be said of this synonymous language that “light” does not (and perhaps ought not) do such work single-handedly in dogmatics. Contrary to this worry we simply state here, as we did in the previous chapter, that light is a dogmatic theme which necessarily *has* to embrace all these concepts—from talk of God’s aseity to God’s co-equality—because the business of this image has to do with attending to the radiant identity of the triune God.¹² And because theological talk of light is a conceptual amplification of

⁷ Barth, *CD I/1*: 301; *KD I/1*: 317: “... unsachgemäßen Spekulation.”

⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci theologici* (Wittenberg: Meisner, 1615 [1591]), 1.31.

⁹ Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 5.28 (*PL* 16: 397): “Credo in majorem et minorem et ultimum: sed eadem vocis tuae cautione constringeris, ut similiter credas in Filium, sicut in Patrem credis: similiter in Spiritam sanctum credas, sicut credis in Filium.” Ambrose is here comparing our “guarantee” of confession during baptism with the “guarantee” or the “cautious voice” when we confess and believe that the three persons of the Trinity are One.

¹⁰ Review our introductory remarks above in Ch. 1.3.2f.

¹¹ As we noted in Ch. 1.1, and as we will see shortly, the biblical image of “light” encompasses the notion of “life”; and, given various patristic witnesses, “light” is an adequate pointer to the eternal divine *processio* in the Godhead. See, e.g., sub-sections 1.1 and 1.2 below. Moreover, we find this identification quite magnificently perceived in Barth’s insistence that life is light, or, more to the point, “reconciliation is revelation” (*CD IV/3.1*: 165).

¹² See our thoughts regarding divine action on creaturely language in Ch. 1.3.1, “A Note on Predication.”

God's radiant identity, it does not therefore add to this self-arising identity nor surpass it but simply "declares" it as it has already been "declared." In other words, therefore, Christian talk of God's immanent light says at base what Scripture already irrevocably states: "God is light," and says it in such a manner that "God" defines the content of "light," not vice versa.¹³ Thus, Christian talk about divine light is ascriptive, because such biblical language is "anarthrous and wholly irreversible."¹⁴

We might once again reiterate here a guiding proposal which was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis: *God is light in himself*. If this holds, then at the beginning of this chapter we must insist that the identity of God is the identity of God the Trinity, *distincte in tribus personis*. It is the radiant identity of the God who, as Calvin notes, "proclaims himself as the sole God as to be contemplated in three persons."¹⁵

1.1. Triune Light and Life

"What," we might therefore ask with Barth, "is the more precise meaning...of God as light in himself?"¹⁶ First of all, we might answer that, according to scriptural witness, God's light is God's life.¹⁷ Because "God *dwells* in unapproachable light," it is thus life precisely as God's life *in se*. This life is the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, light is not a property anterior to God's triune life, but rather describes the absolutely original character of

¹³ Although we may not agree with much of Bultmann's existential exegesis of 1 Jn. 1:5, he nevertheless makes an insightful observation by stating: "the reverse [i.e., "light is God"] cannot be true." Yet prior to this statement he makes a critical error by commenting that the tautology "God is light" tells us nothing about the identity or essence of God (see *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, trans. R. O'Hara, L. McGaughey, and R. Funk [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1973], 16).

¹⁴ Ivor J. Davidson, "Divine Light: Some Reflections After Barth," in *Trinitarian Theology After Barth*, eds. M. Habets and P. Tolliday (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 62.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2; *OS* 3:109: "...nam ita se praedicat unicum esse, ut distincte in tribus personis considerandum proponat."

¹⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1: 643, 646; *KD* II/1: 728f.

¹⁷ The instances of this comparison are many in Scripture, from the creation narratives and wisdom literature (cf. Gen. 1:3–5; Ps. 36:9) to the mission of the Son in the NT. Concerning the latter, we find here, again, the NT instance of ζῶν and φῶς in the prologue to the Gospel of John. For more on this connection, see our thoughts in Ch. 1.1.2.

the relations which are God's life. The inner luminosity of the triune God is his reality in the personal *opera Dei ad intra*. These actions are *relationes personales*, that is, modes of existence in which each person of the Trinity is identified in terms of relations to the two other persons. To be more precise: God's light is the radiant plenitude that he is in himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To speak of God's light is, therefore, an undertaking to exhibit a dogmatic gloss of the Johannine statements: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" and "In him was life" (1 Jn. 1:5; Jn. 1:4).

Thus God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is full of light in himself. And this light "represents the emanation of the internal glory of God," notes Edwards, "the flowing forth, and abundant communication of that infinite fullness of good that is in God."¹⁸ Calvin further comments that this fullness is God's *lucem inaccessibilem* in which his *incomprehensibilis essentiae* dwells.¹⁹ God's incomprehensible nature is therefore the "expression of his majesty,"²⁰ which is not "confined to letters or syllables," because "his name is set before us as an image, as it were, so far as God reveals himself to us, and is known by his own characteristic marks themselves, just as men are each by his own name."²¹ Perhaps expanding on these thoughts from Calvin and Edwards: since God's light is his "characteristic mark" of his "internal glory," and since it represents the lively "infinite fullness" in which God "delights in his own light"²² as the One he is, the image of light does not, therefore, signify some absence of *potentia* in God.²³ Rather, as our guiding principle states, *God is light in himself*. That is, God's light figures his manifold triune life, which is "a unity in essence,"

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation I: Concerning the End for Which God Created the World" (*Works of Jonathan Edwards* 8:521).

¹⁹ Calvin, *Inst.* 3.20.40; *OS* 4:350; cf. 1.13.1.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Commentarii in librum Psalmorum pars prior* 9.10 (*CO* 31:101; *CC* 4:120).

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentarius in Mosis reliquos quatuor libros pars prior*, 'Ex Exodi' 20.7 (*CO* 24:560; cf. *CC* 2:409).

²² Edwards, "Dissertation I," 441f.

²³ We note Denys Turner's recent retrieval of several aspects of medieval mysticism and apophaticism, in which the "God who is beyond" is actually a continual set of negative principles or negations (see *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], esp. 272).

clarifies Aquinas, “because...the persons are co-equals [having] one majesty and essence.”²⁴ The concern of a theology of God’s light is therefore to specify the particular *modus lux* that is proper to God in which the relations between the divine persons is seen as God’s undivided light. But we must stress that these relations do not somehow emanate from the undivided light, as secondary realities buttressed by a simple divine essence, for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “coequals [having] one majesty and essence.” If such relations did emanate from this *modus lux*, it would be, as Aquinas warns, a “further medium” in which the “relationships would be multiplied to infinity.”²⁵ Rather, “God is light primordially in the infinite liberty and uninhibited intimacy of his triune fellowship with himself.”²⁶

Yet to this we must quickly add that the concept of light does not reduce to the notion that God originates himself. Such a notion implies that the Spinozan darkness of non-being is always lurking as the *ex sola* backcloth to God’s radiant existence,²⁷ that “both darkness and light *together* [are] a divine emanation”; that an “originating light *generating*, and *elaborating* God...radiates into the world.”²⁸ Coupled with several of Moltmann’s notions—namely, that God “is the eternal light in which...the divine life *becomes* conscious of its eternal beauty”²⁹—such concepts are to be forcefully rejected. A trinitarian theology of divine light must be used not to conceive God on the basis of a generic metaphysics of causality—where God is “conditioned for existence and action by another cause”³⁰—but

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q42, 1 *resp.*: “...unius magnitudinis et essentiae.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*: “...relatio multiplicaretur in infinitum.”

²⁶ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 63f.

²⁷ We refer here to Benedict Spinoza’s thoughts in *Ethica ordine geometrico pars prima, De Deo in Opera, quotquot reperta sunt*, vol. 1 (Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1895), 235–66. Several propositions are problematic: “By that which is self-caused, I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as existent” (*Per causam sui intelligo id cuius essential involvit existentiam sive id cuius natura non potest concipi nisi existens*) (1.d1); and: “[T]he existence of substance must arise solely from its own nature, which is nothing else but its essence” (*quare ejus etiam existentia ex sola ejus natura sequi debet, quae proinde nihil aliud est quam ejus essentia*) (*Propositio* 11: *scholium*). For Spinoza, then, *est causa per se* can only be applied to God, which, in turn, is identical with *aeternus* (cf. 1.ps8, 19).

²⁸ Kenneth L. Vaux, “Light and Sight in Interfaith Theology and Ethics,” in *Theology of Light and Sight*, 6f (emphasis mine).

²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 176.

³⁰ Spinoza, *Ethica* 1.p28, *dem.*: “causa...determinetur ad existendum et operandum.”

rather to indicate the radiant identity of the divine being itself. For “we do not say that God creates, produces or originates Himself,” Barth clarifies.

On the contrary, we say that (as manifest and eternally actual in the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Ghost) He is the One who already has and is in Himself everything which would have to be the object of His creation and causation if He were not He, God. Because He is God, as such He already has and is His own being.³¹

Indeed, if a Spinozan understanding of divine light is accentuated too forcefully, it can suppress the features of *opera Dei ad intra* on the grounds that such a notion appears to posit God as the “self-caused Cause”³² of ontological monism, which the image of light aims at striking from the conception of the divine. Anselm offers a further clarification as we approach the *opera Dei ad intra*:

In what sense, then, are we to understand that [God] exists through himself and from himself, if he neither made himself, nor provided matter for himself, nor in any way helped himself to be what he was not already? It seems that perhaps this can be understood only in the same sense in which it is said that light shines, or is shining, through itself and from itself. For “light” and “to shine” and

³¹ Barth, *CD* II/1: 306; *KD* II/1: 344: “...daß er (wie es in dem Verhältnis des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes offenbar und in Ewigkeit wirklich ist) der ist, der in sich selber Alles schon hat und ist, was als sein Sein Gegenstand seines Schaffens, Hervorbringens, Verursachens sein müßte, wenn er eben nicht Er, wenn er nicht Gott wäre, der als solcher sein eigenes Sein immer schon hat und ist.” Cf. Barth’s amendment to the notion of *causa sui* as being a matter of God’s self-realization if, and only if, by this one means that God is in no need of origination (*ibid.*).

³² This is essentially what Spinoza means when he defines God as “an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence” (see, *Ethica* 1.d6).

“shining” are related to each other in just the same way as “essence” and “to be” and “being.”³³

These thoughts provide the groundwork for furthering our discussion, particularly centered on the language of the divine generation and divine light. As we said in chapter 1: any “contingent” approach to the notion of light when joined to the Trinity is to be rejected and instead a clarification is registered between the distinction of a “mutual light” (ἀγένητος φῶς) in the immanent, common divine essence and “ingenerate light” (ἀγέννητος φῶς) properly associated to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their own *modus subsistendi*.

1.2. *The Light of the opera Dei ad intra*

As we observed in the previous chapter, pro-Nicene trinitarian theology offers us a particularly helpful dogmatic gloss on the topic of the inner relations of God precisely by its appeal to the biblical image of light. In doing so, it establishes a distinction between the light shared by all three persons by virtue of their sharing in the divine essence (ἀγένητος φῶς) and the light which is the personal property of the Father in his manner, the Son in his manner, and the Holy Spirit in his manner (ἀγέννητος φῶς). Gregory Nazianzen suggests such a formula in his comments on the Gospel of John:

“He was the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world”—yes, the Father. “He was the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world”—yes, the Son. “He was the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world”—yes, the Comforter [...] he was he was he was. There are three predicates—light and light and light. But the light is one, God is One. This is the

³³ Anselm, *De Divinitatis Essentia Monologium* 6 (PL 158:152f): “lux, lucere, lucens...essentia, esse, ens.” Cf. *Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 17f.

meaning of David's prophetic vision: "In your light we shall see light." We receive the Son's light from the Father's light in the light of the Spirit...it is the plain and simple explanation of the Trinity.³⁴

Gregory's "plain and simple explanation" is expounded by the particularly potent language of ὁμοούσιος found in the logic of Athanasius:

He [the Son] is the Same as God. For the radiance also is light, not second to the sun, nor a different light, nor from participation of it, but a whole and proper offspring of it [...] the Godhead of the Son is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but He.³⁵

Thus light, according to Athanasius and Gregory, is the lively and eternal relation of the Father and Son. "This example of the light means," Gregory of Nyssa concurs, "that the Son is to be conceived of inseparably with the Father."³⁶ And if "[a]ll that the Father has the Son has also, except the being unbegotten," then "all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except the generation."³⁷ The Holy Spirit's way of being is, therefore, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, in which he throws his eternal light upon the Father in the Son and upon the Son in the Father.

Subsequently, all that the Father is can be seen in the Son and the Holy Spirit, and all that the Son and the Holy Spirit are in the Father, for they "shine forth" (ἐκλάμπουσιν) and

³⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.3 (*PG* 36:136; *PPS* 8:118). See also Beeley's thoughts on this oration in *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, 197f; and John McGuckin, "Perceiving Light from Light in Light" (*Oration* 31.3) *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Gregory the Theologian*, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, no. 1 (1994): 7–32.

³⁵ Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 3.13 (*PG* 26:348; *NPNF* 4:395). See, again, Heron, "Homoousios with the Father," 58–87.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters* 35.7c-d (quoted in Anna Silvas [trans.], *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, vol. 83, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 258).

³⁷ Gregory Nazianzen *Or.* 41.9 (*PG* 36:441; *NPNF* 7:382).

are “sent and given.”³⁸ Thus, the Father, accordingly, is light not only due to essence but also as a property of his own person; the Son is light not only due to essence but also as a property of his own person and mission; and, the Spirit is light not only due to essence but also as a property of his own person and mission. That is, they are “divided without division...they are united in division,” says Gregory. “And when I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three. Three in individualities or hypostases.”³⁹ This highlights the guiding proposal we mentioned above, namely, that *God is light in himself*; and this radiant identity includes the mutuality of the Father’s giving light to the Son and the Holy Spirit, who in their turn have light in themselves. We may again phrase this in pro-Nicene terms: all three persons are “mutual light” by virtue of their common divine essence, and each person is “ingenerate light” according to their one divine substance subsisting in three modes.⁴⁰

At first sight, however, this distinction appears to disrupt a reading of divine light in terms of the personal relations which make up the Trinity, precisely because it differentiates between a threefold “mutual light” and an “ingenerate light” proper to each person. This might be deemed to focus too much on some kind of Plotinian subordinationism or emanationism in which the “Light becomes dimmer the further it is from its Source.”⁴¹ For instance, if the Father’s “ingenerate light” becomes definitive of the *essentia dei*, then the personal properties *ad intra* of the *filiatio* of the Son and the *spiratio* of the Spirit may easily seem secondary to *paternitas*. And when this happens, light becomes linked with a common

³⁸ See Athanasius, *Ep. Ser.* 1.20 (PG 26:577; Shapland, 116f).

³⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.11 (PG 36:348f; NPNF 7:355).

⁴⁰ Cf. again, the later Constantinopolitan additions to the Nicene Creed: “We believe [...] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father [...] And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son” (quoted in John H. Leith [ed.], *Creeds of the Church: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd edition [Louisville: John Knox, 1983], 33).

⁴¹ On Plotinus’s use of this term in regards to the doctrine of creation, see Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 35. See Tanner’s worry about this in “Perceived Properties of Light,” 125.

divine essence *behind* the relations of the divine life. “And if someone says that this light is an independent reality, separate from the *nature* of Him Whom it signifies, of Whom it is only a symbol,” Palamas says in highlighting our worry, “then let him show where and of what kind this reality is, which is shown by experience to be unapproachable [...] So it is obvious and clearly demonstrated that this light is neither an independent reality, nor something alien to the divinity.”⁴² It is Moltmann, however, who posits this problematic reality *behind* God in the divine act of creation:

Every stage in the creation process contains within itself the tension between the light flooding back into God and the light that breaks forth from him. In other words, every act outwards is preceded by an act inwards which makes the “outwards” possible.⁴³

This withdrawal into such a principle of light is not necessary, however, and can be amended by appealing to the *circumincessio* character of the divine persons in the *opera Dei ad intra*, the free and glorious *opera Dei personalia*.⁴⁴

Therefore, we might say that God’s light is his radiant existence as the Father, the “ingenerate” one who is eternally the Father of the Son and the one from whom the Spirit *procedit*; God’s light is his radiant existence as the Son, who is the “only-begotten” (μονογενής) of the Father and who, with the Father, is the *spirator* of the Holy Spirit; God’s light is his radiant existence as the Holy Spirit, who *procedit ex Patri Filioque*. The light of God is the “antecedently transcendent”⁴⁵ *opera ad intra*. This notion of *opera Dei ad intra*, the *Leiden Synopsis* clarifies, “is to be understood...as referring to an activity internal to

⁴² Palamas, *Triads* 3.1.12, 17.

⁴³ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110.

⁴⁴ The *opera personalia* are stated here to distinguish the begetting of the Son and spirating of the Spirit from the *opera Dei essentialia*.

⁴⁵ See Barth’s reflections on the notion of the eternal, “antecedent” begottenness of the Son, particularly in the creedal formulation of “Wir glauben an Jesus Christus als an den vom Vater vor aller Zeit Gezeugten” (*KD* I/1: 447–52; cf. *CD* I/1: 426–29).

God...that is, the way God acts in his being so that, turned back on himself, he establishes a real relationship through the sharing of the divine essence.”⁴⁶ Yet we must quickly add that the *how* of these “personal works” is, in Barth’s estimation, “beyond the totally questionable truth of our own thoughts and words.”⁴⁷ So, once again, we come to the matter of the eternal *opera Dei ad intra* by first confessing *ignoramus*, lest we “go mad...for prying into God’s secrets.”⁴⁸

Still, without spelling out the *how* of *opera Dei ad intra*, we go on to affirm that the light of God is not merely the property of being *ingenitus*, *uningenitus*, or *qui procedit*; rather, it is the radiant aliveness of the Father *a nemine*, the Son *a Patre*, and the Spirit *ab utroque*. Giving an account of God’s light is thus to speak of the eternal movement of his existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Ὁ ὢν Θεός.⁴⁹ This radiant movement, the “way God acts in his being,” as the Leiden Synopsis has it, is thus founded by the mutual “relationship through the sharing of the divine essence” in which their personal characteristics can be perceived.⁵⁰

What can be said of the properties of each person and of their relations must not propose, as some suggest, a society of fundamentally “distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its own proper intellect, will, and action,”⁵¹ which is thus bound into a unified whole, just as (analogously) the mythical beast “Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness.”⁵² God’s “mutual light” is not the product of his immanent relations, whatever this odd example of Cerberus might imply.⁵³ Still less is it a matter of a

⁴⁶ Doctorum et Professorum in Academia Leidensi, et al., *Synopsis purioris Theologiae*, 6th edition (Leiden, 1652 [1581]), 9.10.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD I/1*: 475; *KD I/1*: 498.

⁴⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.8 (*PG* 36:141; *PPS* 8:122)

⁴⁹ This is Athanasius’s point found in *c. Ar.* 1.7 (*PG* 26:64; *NPNF* 4:321): i.e., the “God who is.”

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q31, 1 *resp.*

⁵¹ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, “The Trinity,” in *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, vol. 1: *Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement*, ed. M. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵³ Moreland and Craig eventually compare this with a view that “God is soul,” and thus can contain “parts” of consciousness, will, etc. (*ibid.*).

divine mathematical equation, where the sum of the relations equals the “unity of the collective.”⁵⁴ Rather, the person of the Father, the person of the Son, and the person of the Spirit may be identified by properties that distinguish each person and so are *incommunicabilia*. That is, the properties of each triune person simply specify what each divine person is in relation to the other persons—*relationes personales*—showing both the particular diversity and the particular unity within the being of the One God.⁵⁵

In stating such notions we do not seek to drive a wedge between the unity and trinity of the divine essence; the light of the Son and the Holy Spirit which they have as partakers in the *una divina essentia* is not a quarantined instance from their personal properties as the one who is eternally *generatio* and the one who eternally *spiratio*. Moreover, it entails that we allow that the relations of the Godhead are not subordinate and that they are mutually *circuminessio*. The Father is, according to his person, light only as he stands in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit; his “very hypostasis...shines forth” in the Son and the Holy Spirit;⁵⁶ his light is not anterior to the act and relation of begetting and spirating. Yet this does not mean, as Calvin warns, that the relation of Father and Son and Spirit is reversible, namely, that “the Father is the Son, and the Holy Spirit the Father, without rank, without distinction.”⁵⁷ Rather, it implies that the relation is mutual because the terms “Father, Son, and Spirit...imply a real distinction.”⁵⁸ Above all, we need to grasp that God’s light is his existence in these *relationes personales*. God is light in himself in the mutuality of *paternitas* (“that which it comes about that the Father is not made, not begotten”), *filiatio* (“that which the Son receives and has in himself his whole and complete essence from the Father”), and

⁵⁴ Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 181.

⁵⁵ See Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 2.62: “κρατεῖν ἂν τις εἴποι δικαίως ἐπὶ τον Αὐγον τό τοῦ μονογενοῦς μᾶλλον ἰδίωμα” (*PG* 26:280).

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.2; *OS* 3:109.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.13.4; *OS* 3:113.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.13.17; *OS* 3:131.

spiratio (“that by which the Holy Spirit from eternity receives is the same complete essence from the Father and the Son”).⁵⁹ Thus: *God is light in himself*.

But a necessary caution arises once again regarding our thought and speech about this immanent light of God. The *opera ad intra* are matters for thought in view of God’s form *ad extra*. But the importance of the economy in the order of the intellect should not be misconstrued for the significantly different claim that “God actualizes himself in the world by his coming into it,” in which the only substantial distinctions of “God’s inner trinitarian life” are those “self-actualized” in “his acts in salvation history.”⁶⁰ God’s triunity is not merely “manifested and experienced in the history of salvation,”⁶¹ nor is it strictly a matter of “what He is in relation to the world which He created.”⁶² On the contrary, Calvin clarifies, the economic eventually “has no effect on the unity of [God’s] essence.”⁶³ Yet the opposite distinction between “economic” and “absolute” must not be “pressed in such a way,” Webster likewise warns, “that the ‘absolute’ acquires greater weight than the ‘economic’ in determining the *essentia dei*.” Thus, in an account of the *opera Dei ad intra*, “theology does not seek to fall into a bifurcation of the *essentia dei* and God’s revealed will and activity.”⁶⁴

What therefore takes place in the *opera Dei ad extra* is not a history in which God, as it were, “eternally and functionally subordinates himself,”⁶⁵ but rather a history occasioned

⁵⁹ Gulielmus Bucanus, *Institutiones Theologicae seu Locorum communium Christianae Religionis ex Dei Verbo et praestantissimorum theologorum orthodoxo concensu expositorum Analysis* (Geneva: Esaias le Preux, 1612), III.12: “Paternitas proprietatem est incommunicabilis primae personae trinitatis, qua fit ut pater...non factus, non genitus, sed gignens ab aeterno filium [...] generatio, sive filiatio...qua filius accipit et in se habet totam et integram suam essentiam a patre [...] Processio...qua spiritus sanctus, ab aeterno eandem illam et integram essentiam a patre et filio accipit et inse totam habet.”

⁶⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 333, 392.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 158. See Moltmann’s further thought that God’s “eternal perichoresis” as Father, Son and Spirit is seen perceived in “their opening of themselves for the reception and unification of the whole creation,” and that the “economic Trinity” is somehow “perfected” and “completed” at an eschatological horizon, and thereafter “raised and transcended in the immanent Trinity.” (*ibid.*, 157, 161).

⁶² Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. O. Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 247.

⁶³ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.6; *OS* 3:116.

⁶⁴ Webster, “Immensity and Ubiquity of God,” 93.

⁶⁵ This thought, usually ascribed to the eternal and functional subordination of the Son in the Godhead, is influential in current evangelical theology. See, e.g., Wayne Grudem, (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to*

by the divine radiance “outside” creation, on the basis of which God shines forth into creaturely time. Though there is no “before and after”⁶⁶ in God’s eternal relations, there nevertheless is really a history of God among creatures, *opera ad extra*, seminally found in the *terminus actionis* of the Son as “the true light” of the world; but this takes place only because of God’s light *in se*. In other words: *opera immanentia donec exeunt*, that is, the *opera ad intra* of God ground his *opera ad extra*. The Son is therefore “of” the world, but he is this because he has been “sent into the world as light” (Jn. 12:46) and is “the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb 1:3); the Holy Spirit is “with” believers, dwelling in them and illuminating them, only because he is “given” to them (Jn. 14:16).⁶⁷ Being sent and being given “reflect.” And in following this line of “reflection,” we come to see that a discerned presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world is the *opera divinitatis ad extra* of the eternal *opera trinitatis ad intra* within the radiant being of God.⁶⁸

1.3. Several Outcomes

Before continuing on to examine the “reflection” of the *opera ad intra* in the *opera ad extra* of God’s saving acts, let us offer several outcomes of the notion that *God is light in himself*.

We began by restating that a trinitarian theology of divine light is an articulation of the radiant identity of the triune God. God is thus present to himself in the radiance of his triune being, and in this radiance he has no need of an external source of illumination: *Deus a se et per se absolute est et existit*.⁶⁹ But the light that is proper to him *in se* includes the

Biblical Doctrine [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 248–52); Stephen Kovach and Peter Schemm, Jr. (“A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son,” *JETS* 42 [1999]: 461–76); and Bruce Ware (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relations, Roles, Relevance* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006]).

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.8; *OS* 3:118. Cf. Calvin’s statement that we cannot ascribe to God any “name which means that something new has happened to God in himself (*aliquid novum in seipso accidisse*)” (*ibid.*).

⁶⁷ The *opera communia* of the emanations of the Son and the Holy Spirit are examined in chapter 3.

⁶⁸ This is Bucanus’ language in *Inst.* III.14.

⁶⁹ Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae I* (Hanover: Abrii, 1610), 2.5: “God is and exists absolutely from himself and through himself.”

repetition of his presence to a dark reality *ad extra*; only by a Gnosticizing origin is God “the cause driven beyond itself to its cause.”⁷⁰ Thus, as we shall soon see, the sphere of God’s “mutual light,” the immanent fellowship that he is as the Father who is *ingenitus*, the Son who is *unigenitus*, and the Spirit who *qui procedit*, is not an enclosed instance of radiance. This aliveness of the *relationes* does not end at the *opera Dei ad intra*. In its entirety, it is a light-giving movement; God shines forth and meets those in darkness as their savior and covenant-creator. That is, God’s radiant life includes the *operationes ad extra*, which, “while He reveals Himself” in his works, God nevertheless “remains at the same time superior to them.”⁷¹

One outcome of this is that, because God the Trinity is the mediator of his own radiant presence, he does not come before the creaturely mind by the categorical result of creaturely experience “above, alongside, and around us”;⁷² nor is God called into the creature’s consideration of the mystery of “*theologia* in time, space, history, and personality.”⁷³ That is, God’s light is not found in that which it seeks to illumine—the object of God’s shining does not “co-belong in equal measure with the source of light”⁷⁴—but rather in the source itself, in the luminous being of God. The light of God is therefore an outline of the identity of the One who beckons creatures into his radiant presence.

Another outcome of the proposal that *God is light in himself* is what we have thus far proposed in the course of this thesis: the doctrine of the Trinity is the basis for any account of

⁷⁰ Cf. Paul Tillich’s musings on comparative causality in the being of God (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951], 196); and see also the notion of *Grundaxiom* from Karl Rahner (*Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978]).

⁷¹ Barth, *CD* II/1: 260; *KD* II/1: 291.

⁷² Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (NY: Crossroad, 1992), 191. Johnson uses feminist-Sophia categories to state: “Sophia-God is beyond, with, and within the world” (*ibid.*).

⁷³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 223.

⁷⁴ Pickstock, “What Shines Between,” 118.

the light of God.⁷⁵ Without a functioning doctrine of the being and action of the triune persons in their unity—that is, the *opera Dei ad intra* and the *opera Dei ad extra*—a trinitarian theology of divine light will reduce to linguistic deception. It will misread both the character of God’s “mutual and ingenerate light” and the manner of his relation to the world; God’s light *in se* will most naturally be thought of as causal will, and his works *pro nobis*, *pro me* will be relegated to some *causa remota*, wholly unconcerned with the logic of the gospel.

We therefore append another proposal to our former one: *from himself God shines forth his light*. That is, a trinitarian account of God’s light will be concerned to specify the fellowship which God is in his own limitless luminosity (i.e., *opera ad intra*) and which he covenantally establishes with his creatures (i.e., *opera ad extra*). As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God graciously shines forth from the light of his own eternal *relationes personales*. We therefore continue in our second section with a sketch God’s loving, radiant, and gracious turn *ad extra* to his creatures.

2. GOD’S SHINING FORTH

This final section is concerned with what Bucanus called the *opera divinitatis ad extra*: God’s triune shining forth into the economy in his relational and covenant-creating turn towards his creatures in the darkness of sin.⁷⁶ Therefore, we keep before us our latter proposal of a trinitarian theology of light: *from himself God shines forth his light*.

⁷⁵ This we noted in the conclusion to our previous chapter.

⁷⁶ See Bucanus, *Inst.* III.14.

2.1. *Light-in-relation*

God's light—that radiance with which he wills and establishes himself—includes his shining forth to creatures. “To speak of the light of God,” then, “is to speak of a personal action and mode of relation, the free self-disposing of the Lord of all things includes his energy or impetus of his self-revelation.”⁷⁷ Talk of God's light is therefore talk of God's “mode of relation” to us as a repetition of his triune identity. Thus if the term “light” signifies *relatio* rather than *qualitas*, then God is specifically revealed to creatures in his gracious shining forth. “God is light,” Webster continues, “enlightening all things effectively and effortlessly breaking forth by virtue of his own spontaneous and unfettered power.”⁷⁸ In other words: “He is the radiance of light that reaches all other beings and permeates them,” says Barth. Thus, “He is not separated from them by any distance, but changes such distance into proximity.”⁷⁹

If he is the “radiance of light” in himself, then how does the language of light further distinguish the particular aspect of the unified identity of the triune God's works and ways *opera divinitatis ad extra*? We might answer by saying that God's light not only signifies the radiant identity which the triune God is in himself, but also his proximate acts towards the lives of his creatures. “God's radiance is not a simple metaphysical formula but a matter of fellowship between himself and those whom he enlightens by manifesting himself, showing them the light of his presence.”⁸⁰

God's light in the economy is therefore what we might term a *light-in-relation*. God's light is thus a light known in shining forth, exhibited in the works of God, namely “fellowship between himself and those whom he enlightens.” It is not, as the Leiden Synopsis has it, a matter of self-enclosed radiance, wherein God is both “glorious in himself” and yet

⁷⁷ Webster, “On the Clarity of Scripture,” 40. Webster's remarks are found within the notion that “Holy Scripture is clear because God is light.” We pick up the topic of *claritas Scripturae* in Ch. 5.2.1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1: 646; *KD* II/1: 729.

⁸⁰ Webster, “On the Clarity of Scripture,” 40.

remains “outward in light inaccessible.”⁸¹ Rather, it is something of what Edwards indicated: if God is indeed light *in se*, then “this infinite fountain of light should, diffusing its excellent fullness, pour forth light all around.”⁸² This *light-in-relation* is simply an articulation of the same reality: the “fountain of light” indeed “pours forth light all around.” For if God’s relation to us were merely subordinate to his “mutual light” (ἀγένητος φῶς), then God’s essence would remain utterly beyond us, forever “light inaccessible,” forever hidden, forever the *Deus absconditus*; and if God’s relation to us were not radiant and bright, that relation would no longer be one in which God shows us “the light of his presence.”

We might posit here a further condition for making theological sense of God’s light: the avoidance of polarizing of God’s light *in se* and his shining forth *ad extra*. That is, there is no “dramatic entrance and exit”⁸³ in the works of God, because *Sicut inseparabiles sunt, ita inseparabiliter operantur*.⁸⁴ In brief: the divine distance (light *in se*) and the divine approach (shining forth) are one movement in God’s being and act. Thus the light manifest in the *opera ad extra* of the triune God is manifest as *relatio*, as a relation between the persons of the Trinity and the creatures whom God summons “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). And though God’s light stresses his utter transcendence in the *opera ad intra*, it nevertheless draws attention to God’s *opera ad extra* as the One who elects, reconciles, and illuminates his creatures.

As we examined above, *God is light in himself*, so here, therefore: *from himself God shines forth his light*. In all that God does he is radiant; thus, all God’s ways are a “lamp” and a “light” (Pro. 6:23), as all his ways are the implementation of his omnipotence. “As the living God is the source of light,” Barth clarifies, “His light is omnipotent, and so

⁸¹ *Syn. Theol.* VI.43.

⁸² Edwards, “Dissertation I,” 433.

⁸³ Barth, *CD I/1*: 374. Barth concludes that such a division would be “pagan mythology.”

⁸⁴ See Augustine, *Trin.* 1.4 (*PL* 42:824): “As they are indivisible, so indivisibly work.”

omnipresent light.”⁸⁵ Light therefore permeates all of the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it is what Gregory calls the “outleaping of Their brightness.”⁸⁶ The triune God is therefore known in his turning to us, his shining forth, and to speak of God’s light is to speak on the basis of his radiant self-revealing and saving presence in our midst. The decisive consequence of this for how we think about the light of God is, therefore, that the idea of God’s light is a *light-in-relation*. That is to say, what it expresses is the origin and “personal action and mode of relation”⁸⁷ in which God stands to his creation; it states the temporal “emanations” of God shining forth from the *opera Dei ad intra*.⁸⁸

In highlighting the relational character of God’s triune light we are not, however, subjectivizing this concept, translating it into a way of talking about the creature’s *contemplatio Dei*. To say that would be to fall into the trap that seems to have caught Coakley: the doctrine of the Trinity is not the result of the “soft underbelly” of creaturely experience and contemplation.⁸⁹ Nor is this a matter of what Symeon the New Theologian “saw” in his third-person accounts of the contemplation of divine light:

[S]uddenly a profuse flood of light appeared above him and filled the whole room [...] He was wholly united to non-material light, so much so that it seemed to him that he himself had been transformed into light.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1: 646; *KD* II/1: 729: “Und so ist sein Licht allmächtiges und also allgegenwärtiges Licht.”

⁸⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.5 (*PG* 36:364; *NPNF* 7:361).

⁸⁷ See, again, Webster, “On the Clarity of Scripture,” 40.

⁸⁸ The term *emanationes* here refers to the begetting and spiration of the Son and the Spirit, which implicitly refers to the three *hypostases* of the Trinity. *Emanationes* does not refer to the Plotinian “emanationist” position in which God impersonally “flows forth” or “diffuses” into the economy from the divine *ēv*. This position eventually reduces to an anti-trinitarian one.

⁸⁹ See the recent work by Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 190ff.; and her earlier article, “Can God be Experienced as Trinity?” *Modern Churchman* 28, no. 2 (1986): 11–23, regarding the “ineluctably tri-faceted” feature of religious experience. Again, see also Johnson’s work in relation here (e.g., *She Who Is*, 36), as well as the insightful discussion from Kathryn Green-McCreight regarding this feminist interpretation in *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112–17.

⁹⁰ Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechesis* 22, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 18.

In such tendencies, the character of God becomes the way of describing religious understandings of the divine; if permitted to do so, God's own being becomes a vacuum which creatures then have to fill with ideas of our own making, *coram hominibus*.

Over against this, talk of God's light preeminently indicates God's radiant being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we examined in the first section of this chapter. But because it indicates the triune being of God, it is squarely a matter of Christian confession; that is, it speaks not of God absconded from creatures, but rather of God's presence as the One who shines forth to creatures in love and grace. God's light is made known to creatures in the way in which, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God enters into relation with them. This *light-in-relation*—this shining forth in which God in utter freedom does indeed direct himself towards his creation—is the place where God manifests himself to creatures, and so the place where his being is understood. It is, as Barth notes, a matter of God's freedom, “wholly inward to the creature and at the same time as Himself wholly outward: *totus intra et totus extra*.”⁹¹ God is who he is in his works, and his works are his shining forth himself to creatures *ad extra* as the One who elects, reconciles, and illuminates. We understand the light of God on the foundation of his *opera ad extra*.

2.2. *The Light of the Covenant*

Yet the history of theology proves that it is perilously easy to think of God's light strictly as a mode of God's otherness, mystery, or transcendence; that is, as “transcendent darkness” or a “darkness brighter than light,” which implies the reverse of relationality, as concerned not with *Deus revelatus*, but with *Deus absconditus*.⁹² But to follow that road is to misread

⁹¹ Barth, *CD* II/1: 315; cf. *KD* II/1: 354: “Gott ist frei, der Kreatur ganz innerlich und zugleich als Er selbst ganz äußerlich zu sein: *totus intra et totus extra*.”

⁹² Again, this is a worry with the *coincidentia oppositorum* found in Eastern mysticism, notably in the Dionysian “ray of divine darkness” or the “darkness brighter than light” (see *Myst. theol.* 1.1–3). Regarding a denial of a

biblical testimony. The light of God is not to be marked as a *tertium quid* which distances God from creatures; rather, God is light precisely as the One who in glory “reaches all other beings and permeates them.”⁹³ He is the One who “out of the brightness of his presence” (2 Sam. 22:13) promises the “everlasting light” (Isa. 60:20) that has “come into the world” (Jn. 3:19). Accordingly, God’s light is not merely to be connected with his “distance” but equally with his “approach.” Put another way: God’s “unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16) is not different from or other than the freedom in which God is the “light for all people” (Jn. 1:4).

Because it is essential to maintain that God’s light is a *light-in-relation*, it is therefore inseparable from the fact that God is a covenant God: *from himself God shines forth his light*. God is not only “the glory of Israel,” but also the “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). That is, God is light specifically in his gathering a people to be his own, in being present with them. The various declarations in Isaiah, for instance, do not figure God’s presence as light merely as God’s utter difference, but rather as that which is known in God’s covenant-establishing work: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (9:2).⁹⁴ The same notion is picked up in the apostle Paul’s testimony before Agrippa:

To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being

human experience of God, and perhaps some corrections concerning the perceived “negation” of experience in mystical theology, see Turner, *Darkness of God*, 252–73.

⁹³ Barth, *CD* II/1: 646.

⁹⁴ Of course, we bear in mind that there is a particular context associated with these (and other) occurrences in Isaiah: “I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (42:6f); “I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them” (42:16); “Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God” (50:10); “for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples” (51:4). Cf. the notion of God’s *כיבוד* which rests with his people: Gen. 9:17, 14:13; Ex. 40:35; Ps. 37:3.

the first to rise from the dead, he would *proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles* (Acts 26:22f).⁹⁵

Commenting on this passage from Acts, Bock notes: “God becomes the occasion for...the Jews and the gentiles to enter into divine promise and life (light).”⁹⁶ That is, God’s shining forth cannot be isolated from God’s *vocatio* and *electio* of a people, from his own kerygmatic message to them. “The creator God has shone ‘in our hearts,’” Wright remarks, “in other words, the act is that which brings people into the new covenant.”⁹⁷ This indestructible bond between God’s shining forth and his “bringing people into the new covenant” is crucial, because it expresses how light is not merely an impersonal or contingent concept but a relational one, the foundation of the loving relation of the radiant God to his creatures sitting in the darkness of sin and death. Thus it “scarcely needs to be said that this divine radiance by which all things are illumined is no impersonal state of affairs,” says Webster. Rather: “It is the presence of God the revealer.”⁹⁸ And this presence, the “purest light which most men cannot approach unto,”⁹⁹ is a saving presence; for in God’s “shining with a far brighter light,” he “becomes the God and salvation of the sinner.”¹⁰⁰

Therefore the *vivificum* of God’s light as being “a light to the peoples” (Isa. 51:4) makes sense only in the realm of salvation which that *light-in-relation* establishes. And so God’s utter separation from the wickedness of darkness is to be understood within the scope of God’s dealings with creatures in darkness. Light is not the opposite of relation—it is not, again, a *coincidentia oppositorum* in which God resides in “mystical darkness” and is “utterly

⁹⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ Darrell Bock, “Scripture and Realisation of God’s Promise,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 42.

⁹⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 189. Wright is commenting here on Paul’s connective themes of “light/glory” and “mirror” in 2 Cor. 3:3, 4:6.

⁹⁸ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 40.

⁹⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 2.76* (NPNF 7:220).

¹⁰⁰ Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quattuor*, 2nd edition (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1685), 2.1.3.

unknowable.”¹⁰¹ Rather, God as the radiant One is the One who does not simply remain in estrangement but has “come into the world as light,” to “purify for himself a people for his own possession,” so that they “may not remain in darkness” (Jn. 12:46; Titus 2:14).

As the radiant One who has light in himself, God passes judgment on darkness and sin and negates it, thus “dispelling creaturely darkness by the sheer potency of his inner splendor.”¹⁰² Yet God does this not from afar, but in the *emanationes* of the the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is, God’s “dispelling creaturely darkness” is consummate with his triune acts of fellowship with creatures, in which the “Father of lights” pardons by taking upon himself the situation of the blinded creature, exposing himself to our darkness, and only in that way “calling us out of darkness into his marvelous light.” God’s hostility to sin and darkness—that event in which “Divine energy of an exquisite order is deployed”¹⁰³—is the union of his judgment and his grace, namely, the *one moment* of “the darkness passing away and the true light already shining” (1 Jn. 2:8).

But it is just at this point that a theology of divine light must resist restricting the scope of God’s relation to the world, and thus identifying God with only one manner of relation. Such a flaw misplaces the doctrine of the Trinity, namely that God, the One who has *light in himself* and *from himself shines forth his light*, is merged beneath the the question of whether or not God’s light *in se* can be regarded as the absolute ground of his historical theophany: When is “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9) the “eternal light” of the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? That is, some might ask, may not the sharp distinction between uncreated light and created light once again mount a challenge to the gospel’s instruction to look for the gospel’s God in temporal appearance? Perhaps the shining forth of God’s radiant presence depletes God’s inner light. We find a related set of reflections from T.F. Torrance:

¹⁰¹ See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst. theol.* 1 (PG 3:1000).

¹⁰² Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 66.

God is Light, uncreated light, and it is in the light of that invisible, uncreated Light that the created lights of the world are visible. Thus, we understand the rationalities of nature, or what I have called its *contingent intelligibility*, in the light of the uncreated Rationality of God. *You understand created light in the light of uncreated Light.* It is because God's Light is constant that we believe in the ultimate stability and reliability of the universe he has *correlated to his Light*.¹⁰⁴

Without rehearsing our conclusions to chapter 1 regarding contingent notions of “created light” and “uncreated light,”¹⁰⁵ we simply say of Torrance that he is here raising several uncertainties, namely, understanding the uncreated light (or “Rationality”) of God with regards to contingent light (or “contingent intelligibility”). The response to Torrance's thought is, however, found in the opposite direction: it is precisely because God is not accountable to contingent creation and created light—because he is light in himself apart from creation, the “wholly gracious affirmation of his freedom to be himself as and with himself”¹⁰⁶—that his commitment to history can be a *light-in-relation*. Thus, there are no realities beyond God that provide the circumstance for the perfecting of God's *light-in-relation*. “God does not come to know himself in shining forth to that which lies outside himself,” relays Davidson. “Perfectly clear to himself, God's external radiance does not perfect the light that he antecedently is, or illumine for divine *hypostaseis* what it means to be

¹⁰⁴ T.F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance between Theology and Science* (Edinburgh/NY: T&T Clark, 2001), 129 (emphasis mine). Of course, anyone acquainted with Torrance's theology will at once recognize that this is not necessarily his accepted view. For instance, he states elsewhere: “While it is in his Light that we see light, the very splendor of God's Light finally hides him from us. In the mystery of his self revelation God reserves the innermost secret of his eternal Being as God, into which...we cannot intrude” (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* [Edinburgh: Continuum, 1996], 81). On the supposed inconsistencies in Torrance's thought, see Paul D. Molnar, “Natural Theology Revisited: A Comparison of T.F. Torrance and Karl Barth,” *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 20 (2005): 53–83. As a note of curiosity, a study awaits regarding Torrance's notion of “correlated light” as a reference to Calvin's idea of the “accommodated light” of God in his revelation.

¹⁰⁵ See above, Ch. 1.3.2: “Created Light and Uncreated Light.”

¹⁰⁶ Wood, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 386.

who they are.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Aquinas adds: “The [created] light is not needed as a likeness in which the essence of God may be seen.”¹⁰⁸ In our terms set above, once again: the *opera Dei ad intra* are shined forth *ad extra* in the temporal *emanationes* into the creaturely realm. Yet this does not entail that creatures or “contingent intelligibility” somehow co-found God by their “correlated light,” but simply that the relations of origin between the persons of the Trinity are the “unapproachable light,” and the radiant source of the economy.

Thus, over against the misconstrual quoted above, the dogmatic *locus* for speaking about creatures and historical “contingent intelligibility” is found in the “light that God antecedently is” in his covenant purposes, namely, in the history of the covenant and in the *emanationes* of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a history which saves “apart from any consideration of merit,” says Calvin. For God “kept it stored away among his treasures until the time came when he could reveal it by the fact that he determines nothing in vain.”¹⁰⁹ It is, therefore, an event grounded in the eternal divine determination; and this determination shines forth *ex pacto* within God’s own radiant identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This eternal *pactum* sounds a doctrinal note for us, namely, that creaturely existence is underpinned by “the fact that God determines nothing in vain,” which is founded on the light of the covenant. Thus the divine determination for the salvation of creatures in their existence reflects the inner radiance of the Father who sends and the Son who agrees to be the *sponsor* of the Father’s *voluntas*. This pact is “an eternall transaction and compact between *Iehovah*

¹⁰⁷ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 64.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q12, 5 ad2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod lumen istud non requiritur ad videndum Dei essentiali quasi similitudine in qua Deus videatur.” Aquinas does add, however, that created light is “not the medium *in* which God is seen, but the means *by* which he is seen” (*ibid*), to which must be added his earlier statement, namely that “light” is the “intelligible form” of understanding that is given to the creaturely mind *ex divina gratia* (1a. q12, 5 *resp*).

¹⁰⁹ John Calvin, *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Timotheum II* 1.9 (*CO* 52:353; cf. *CC* 21:195f): “Dedit ergo quod, nullo merito provocatus, nondum natis assignavit: ac in thesauris suis habuit repositum, donec re ipsa patefaceret nihil se frustra statuere.”

and the second Person the *Son of God*,” Samuel Rutherford clarifies. Thus the Son “gave personall consent that he should be the Undertaker, and no other.”¹¹⁰ Edwards continues:

The persons of the Trinity were as it were confederated in a design and a covenant of redemption, in which covenant the Father appointed the Son and the Son had undertaken their work, and all things to be accomplished in their work were stipulated and agreed.¹¹¹

Of course by sounding this note regarding this divine “confederated” *pactum salutis*, we must also admit that the notion has difficulties, particularly in its Reformed federal key.¹¹² Barth, for instance, famously called this doctrine “mythology, for which there is no place in a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹¹³ Yet against several readings of this abrasive statement,¹¹⁴ it appears that Barth’s thoughts are concerned more with bringing *pactum* to its doctrinal *praedicamenta*; that is, Barth is concerned with what the *pactum salutis* seems to be aiming at, namely, divinity *in abstracto*. Evidently, therefore, it is not a plan to reconcile two attributes of God that are estranged from each other; rather, in Barth’s estimation, it is a plan that foreordains the particular form God’s mercy will take in the *Heilsgeschichte*. Barth seems more cautious, then, in adopting the Reformed federal notion of *pactum* wholesale; and we would do well to note, with Berkouwer, that Barth does not

¹¹⁰ Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened; or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: A. Anderson for R. Broun, 1655), II.7 (emphasis original). Rutherford continues with a meditation on “eternall transaction,” particularly regarding the “consent” of the Son: “[T]he person designated was the Son only, this lot eternally...fell upon him who was...*the Lamb of God for-ordained before the foundation of the world* (1 Pet 1:20)” (*ibid.*).

¹¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (WJE 9:118).

¹¹² Beyond the seventeenth-century British examples from Rutherford and John Owens, support for the *pactum salutis* is found in several voices from the continent, e.g., Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum*, esp. 2.2.16; and, perhaps more famously, Jacob Arminius, *Oratio de Sacridotio Iesu Christi* (Leiden: Thomas Basson, 1611), 1–31. For an insightful study of the various origins of *pactum salutis*, see Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *MidAmerica Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65.

¹¹³ Barth, *CD* IV/1: 65.

¹¹⁴ See, notably, Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, repr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 154.

merely delete the *pactum*, but rather styles his doctrine of election after his own notion of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*.¹¹⁵

Such worries aside, our aim in this sounding is rather narrow: the *pactum* between the Father and the Son simply reflects their eternal personal properties of “mutual light” and “ingenerate light.”¹¹⁶ Yet at the same time the *pactum salutis* is not, to take Barth’s lead, a point at which some vague notion arises in the dark background to the Godhead *in abstracto*; rather, the *pactum* derives from the “order of work,” the *modus agenda*, in the radiant identity of the triune God which accords with his *decretum aeternum* to shine forth into the economy.¹¹⁷ God shines forth in loving grace by making a determination concerning creatures. And so the divine *pactum* and the shining forth towards creatures are therefore indivisible; the aim of the *consilium Dei* is creatures in the darkened realm of sin and suffering.¹¹⁸ Thus the *pactum salutis* is the light of the covenant of grace: the Son with whom the Father covenants is the “the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Eph. 5:33). The *pactum salutis*, then, is essential to God’s dealings with creatures.

2.2.1. *The gathering light and the scattering light*

Talk of the light of God therefore traces the relation of God to the world *ex pacto*, a covenantal relation in which we can discern the full sweep of the drama of God’s works in the acts of “sending,” “giving,” and “coming”—from the *opera Dei ad intra* and their

¹¹⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), esp. 164–67. Michael Horton also notes that Barth may be overlooking the notion of the “individuation of persons” in which each person “knows himself in and through the other.” For Horton, Barth’s conclusion regarding the Reformed notion of *pactum salutis* (i.e., God is the only subject) “raises the question as to whether the Trinity is not only one God but one person (i.e., subject)” (*The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* [Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011], 303).

¹¹⁶ See our thoughts on the *opera Dei ad intra* in sub-section 1.2 above; namely, that all three persons are ἀγέννητος φῶς by virtue of their common divine essence, and each person is ἀγέννητος φῶς regarding their *emanationes*.

¹¹⁷ These are Rutherford’s terms in *Covenant of Life Opened*, II.7.

¹¹⁸ We will turn to the execution of this shining forth in the divine *emanationes* in the next chapter.

execution *ad extra* in the divine *emanationes*—in which the eternal God shines forth to his creatures as *light-in-relation*. Above all, the doctrine of the Trinity thwarts contingent accounts of God’s light—contingent in the sense of being established apart from attention to his having *light in himself*.

Thus—taken with our account of the inner trinitarian *relationes*—God the Father is the one who elects from all eternity the gathering of creatures as “children of light” (Eph. 5:8); God the Son is the one who accomplishes this reconciliation of creatures by being the “great light,” the *sponsor* rescuing creatures from “dwelling in darkness” and the “region of the shadow of death” (Mt. 4:16). God the Holy Spirit is the one who is the *terminus* of that “calling out of darkness” by illuminating creatures, and calling them “into the marvelous light” of fellowship with God. Thus the character of divine light in its relational manner highlights the God who elects, reconciles, and illuminates. In effect, what the doctrine of the Trinity does in this setting is express how God’s light is known in his covenant-establishing work. God’s light is exactly that which is made known in his love, in his coming to the help of his people, in his shining forth, in his scattering of their darkness, in his illuminating action of fellowship.

From himself God shines forth his light: this is what we might label as the light that “gathers” (συνάγω)—light in its electing, reconciling, and illuminating facet. Yet as we move to conclude this chapter, we find within this setting the need to consider what can be labeled as the light that “scatters” (σκοπίζω), that is, light as a power that removes darkness and destroys sin.¹¹⁹ God’s light is the undeflected determination that his will for creatures will not be overcome by darkness. “God really does shine forth, dispelling creaturely darkness by the

¹¹⁹ The notions of “gathering” and “scattering” are evident in the HB and the NT. Regarding the former HB notion, one would naturally think of the various events of exile and diaspora (e.g., 2 Kgs. 17:6; Ezek. 1–3; see further, David Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], esp. ch. 19). Yet here, we are using “gathering” and “scattering” in the NT sense. This might principally be viewed in Christ’s saying recorded in Luke 11:23: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather (συνάγω) with me scatters (σκοπίζει).”

sheer potency of his inner splendor.”¹²⁰ As the radiant One, the triune God labors to insure that the *telos* of the creature—that is, being “called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light”—will be attained, and sin will not be allowed to restrain the creature in darkness, because “As light He penetrates the darkness, even the farthest darkness.”¹²¹ God’s light is thus joined to his determination that the creature will reach its *telos*. Part of that determination is the opposition of God’s light to that which is darkness, “his commitment to scatter the absurdity of the darkness.”¹²² The darkness is that which has been rejected by God; it is the creature’s “willful opposition to light, as a result of which the light becomes that which exposes the creature as sinner”;¹²³ it is the creature’s “shutting their eyes to the light of God in which is formed the prideful barrier to the light”;¹²⁴ it is, therefore, the reason why “people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (Jn. 3:19).

Yet as we turn in the coming chapter to a more precise investigation of this *συνάγω* and *σκορπίζω* aspect of God’s light in the *emanationes* of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we must be mindful not to bracket this into the only feature of *opera Dei ad extra*. To do that would be to make this into the typically “antiquine” reading of light as merely the dualistic principle standing in opposition to darkness.¹²⁵ Such a hermeneutic fails to see the true end of this “scattering” aspect of God’s light, namely as the history of *light-in-relation*. In that history, God’s light shows itself in the eternal *voluntas* of the Father for the creature, which is expressed in the Son’s work of bearing sin, and brought to us in the Holy Spirit’s illuminative work in the reconciled. And it is by that history that the creaturely mind is to be illumined

¹²⁰ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

¹²¹ Barth, *CD* II/1: 646; *KD* II/1: 729: “...er als Licht die Finsternis, auch die äußerste Finsternis durchdringt.”

¹²² Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

¹²³ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 41.

¹²⁴ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 134.

¹²⁵ Of many examples, see the recent study by P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “Dualism in Antiquity,” in *Light Against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World*, Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements, vol. 2, eds. A. Lange, B. Levinson, and V. Noam (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 19–35. McCarter states that the (first) creation account of Gen. 1 is an ancient near eastern instance of a “clearly *eschatological* form of dualism” in its use of a “series of creative separations into binary pairs: light and dark, the super-celestial and sub-celestial waters, the gathered waters and dry land” (*ibid.*, 28f).

and, like Saul on the road to Damascus, “led by the hand” before the radiant presence of God. God’s σκοπίζω light is the destructive power of God’s συνάγω light; it is the light of the triune God who must σκοπίζω everything which thwarts the creature’s life with God. God’s light σκοπίζω the darkness because it attacks and is opposed to the creature’s *telos*. And the end of the σκοπίζω of darkness is the creature’s illumination, that is, the creature’s συνάγω into the light of fellowship with God.

3. CONCLUSION

The theological impact of our motif of light is felt precisely in these last statements concerning the συνάγω and σκοπίζω aspect of God’s light. God’s light is his “commitment to scatter the absurdity of darkness” and his pact to “bind himself to [the] world in spite of everything.”¹²⁶ This was the meaning behind our two proposals: *God is light in himself*; and *from himself God shines forth his light*. We now turn to a more precise description of the triune God’s loving and illuminating work in his shining forth to the world. The next chapter deals specifically with this loving and merciful movement *ad extra*: first, with the electing work of the Father; second, with the coming of the true light into the world, Jesus Christ; and finally, with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁶ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

CHAPTER 3

**THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL:
GOD’S RADIANT EVENT OF LOVE**

God is rather the radiant event of love itself. And so...he is the event in that he, as the one who loves and separates himself from his beloved, not only loves himself but...loves another one and thus is and remains himself.¹

Our preceding chapter established the notion that God’s light is his radiant identity: the radiant One in his threefold luminous being. Thus, as we proposed above, *God is light in himself*. In the totality of the *tres personae in una essentia divina*; in the *coessentialis* and *consubstantialis* of the three persons; in their proper identities and acts as the one who is *ingenitus*, the one who is *unigenitus*, and the one *qui procedit*; in their loving acts as the One who *from himself shines forth his light*—God is the radiant *una divina essentia in tribus modis subsistis*.

An understanding of God’s light is therefore ingredient within God’s loving, covenantal resolve for fellowship with his creatures. Yet an inconsistency looms if the idea of God’s utter difference (what we have thus far deemed the *opera ad intra* of God’s light) is rejected in favor of love.² But a trinitarian theology of divine light must propose that “light” and “love” are to be seen as joined terms, which both serve as mutual pointers to the radiant work of the triune God, particularly in the divine *relationes personales*: the Father’s sending of the Son and, in turn, the Holy Spirit being spirated by both the Father and the Son.

¹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 327f.

² In so many words, Jüngel reacts to a Feuerbachian worry which sees the statement “God is love” as generally interpreted “in a sense of an ontological difference between God and love, so that love certainly ‘recedes and sinks’ into what is truly a ‘dark background’—God” (*ibid.*, 316). In handling this worry, Jüngel—along with Barth—takes the statement “God is love,” and its converse “love is God,” as being permissible only if it is filled out by the triune identity of the predicate itself. This was essentially our conclusion in Ch. 1.3.1, “A Note on Predication.”

Therefore, this third chapter seeks to follow a simple path. If, indeed as we have thus far proposed, God is *light in himself* as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and if it is identical with the particular radiant being which God is, then the light that God is in himself is manifest and active *ad extra* in the works of the gospel with which he lovingly (1) elects, (2) reconciles, and (3) illuminates the human creature for fellowship with himself. It is to these three works of the “radiant event” of divine love in which God “loves another one and thus is and remains himself”³ that we must now attend.

1. ELECTION AS THE RADIANT EVENT OF LOVE

As a point of entry, we might begin by commenting on the structure of the apostle Paul’s thinking in Col. 1:12–14:

The Father...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

With regards to these statements, we first say that God’s “radiant event of love” is active as *electio*. The work of election is a work of God’s light because it is a work which “has delivered us” (ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς), namely, a work in which a human creature has been “qualified” (ικανώσαντι) and “transferred” (μετέστησεν) from residing in the “domain of darkness” (ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους) to have “redemption, the forgiveness of sins,” and inclusion in the “kingdom of his beloved Son.” More precisely, “in the act of election,” Webster relays, “the being of the creaturely object of election is established, in that it is demarcated from all

³ Ibid., 328.

that is not and from all other creatures who are not the recipients of this divine benefit.”⁴ The work of election is therefore the work of the God who is light; it is the work in which God, having “demarcated from all that is not,” has a purposeful aim of his shining forth, namely, those sitting in the “domain of darkness.” And because God is light in himself, even in his *decretum aeternum* and *ex pacto*, he therefore seeks to gather the creaturely “circumference” of his own radiance in *electio*.⁵ Consequently, election prompts the creature to “give thanks” to the Father (Col. 1:12), because the creaturely “circumference” is “qualified” to have its existence by “the superabundance of love operating the production of such a creature.”⁶ The creature, qualified and transferred by God, is not merely qualified in and transferred to a mundane existence. Rather, the creature qualified to “active assumption of destiny in relation to God.”⁷ It is therefore God’s determination that “His light should not be unseen, nor His glory without witness, nor His goodness unenjoyed,” but rather that the end of the creature is to be a “partaker of the good things in God...framed of such a kind as to be adapted to the participation of such good”; in other words, to have “fellowship with the light.”⁸ Thus the *causa impulsiva* of the will of the God who is light is that we should be God’s “saints in light” (ἄγιοι ἐν τῷ φωτί); his “qualifying” has as its aim creatures being “delivered” and “transferred” as saints into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

As God’s light is active in this qualifying, delivering, and transferring manner, then God’s work of shining forth is at its heart a work “impelled by the love of his glory.”⁹ For God “so loved the world” that he gave the “true light of the world” (Jn. 1:9; 3:16); and in

⁴ John Webster, “The Holiness and Love of God,” in *Confessing God*, 122.

⁵ By “circumference” here we echo Barth’s use of the term: “Jesus Christ [is] the illuminating center of which they [i.e., those belonging to God, “His own”] form the circumference saved and illuminated by him.” However, we must keep in mind Barth’s warning regarding this notion: “The center cannot become the circumference nor the circumference the center” (*CD* IV/3.1: 278f); cf. *KD* IV/3: 321f: “...die errettende und nun auch erleuchtende Mitte, in welcher sie den durch ihn erretteten und nun auch erhellten Umkreis bilden.”

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica magna* 5 (*PG* 45:21; *NPNF* 5:478).

⁷ Webster, “Holiness and Love of God,” 123.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. mag.* 5 (*PG* 45:21; *NPNF* 5:478).

⁹ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae Christianae* (Zürich: Typis Joh. Henrici Bodmeri, 1700), 5.29: “Ad eligendum quosdam Deum in universum impulit amor gloriae suae, cuius stupendo hoc opera divitias palam demonstrare et ex quo laudem gloriae gratiae suae praeparare voluit.”

this action there is at work the grace that is given to creatures in “his beloved Son,” in whom they have “redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Just as God’s light *in himself* cannot be understood without the notion that *from himself God shines forth his light*, so also God’s light cannot be understood without attending to its loving magnification *ad extra* in the works which establish the creature by transferring it from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son. Election as the “radiant event of love” is therefore the *opera ad extra* of the eternal *voluntas* of the Father—indeed: “The Father...has qualified you” (Col. 1:12).¹⁰ As the Father, God determines that his loving work is luminous; it is divine “qualification” that there should be “saints in light.”¹¹

1.1. The “Radiant Event of Love” and the “Domain of Darkness”

God’s light is therefore the “radiant event of love” because it is known in his shining forth *ad extra* which delivers creatures from the domain of darkness and transfers them into the kingdom of his beloved Son. This means that God does not shine forth his light in some abstract manner, particularly in a “more fundamental way” through creaturely “materials.”¹² Rather, God upholds the creature to whom he gives light; yet the creaturely “circumference”

¹⁰ The seventeenth-century Protestant dogmaticians were particularly concerned with holding this point. Whereas the *causa electionis princeps* is the triune God, *electio* is nevertheless seen as particularly belonging to the Father himself. Thus, e.g., “the Father’s election is simply called election [*electio Dei Patris electio*]” (Heidegger, *Corp. theol.* 5.28). Still, the *electio* of the Father, the *sponsio* of the Son, and the *obsignatio* of the Spirit does not divide the movement in the divine election but is rather, for the Protestant Orthodox, a reiteration that “The principal cause of election is—God” (Bucanus, *Inst.* XXXVI.16).

¹¹ This “divine qualification” for the creature in the work of election is highlighted by Calvin: although God’s will is “*summa causa*” and is “hidden with him,” nevertheless his “righteousness and his rule” are inseparable by the act of his loving election. See Calvin’s admittedly scathing letter in “A Brief Reply in Refutation of the Calumines of a Certain Worthless Person, etc.” in *Theological Treatises*, trans. J.K.S. Reid, repr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 335 = *Calumniae nebulonis de occulta Providentia Dei cum responsione*, CO 9:288).

¹² See David Brown’s insistence that “human inventiveness” allows for the divine presence to manifest itself by transcending human “materials in a more fundamental way” in his “The Darkness and Light Are Both Alike to Thee,” esp. 181. We might offer Barth’s image as a reply: the creaturely “circumference” of the “illuminating center” of God’s reconciling action in Jesus Christ is never *this* center but always and ever remains the circumference of this illuminating presence and work (cf. *CD* IV/3.1: 278f; *KD* IV/3: 321f). See section 3.2 below for further discussion.

of God's radiant life is not passive repose. That is, the Johannine "walking in the light" which corresponds to "as he himself is in the light" summons the creature to act in a manner chosen by the Father's *voluntas* for "fellowship with himself" (cf. 1 Jn. 1:7).¹³ It is in this way, then, that God loves the creature, determining that the creature should have life and light. "For God is Life and Light, and those who are in God's hand are in life and light."¹⁴

This "radiant event of love"—this electing qualification of the creature—is therefore the scattering of the darkness.¹⁵ The "domain of darkness" is that which has forsaken the will of God—the "outer darkness" (Mt. 8:12; 22:3; 25:30). Specifically, it is the history in which the creature "attempts to wrest itself free of fellowship with God and establish itself in independence from the creator as its own light and giver of life, its own source of truth."¹⁶ This rejection of God's light is a threat to the creature, which can only be what it is destined to be in fellowship with the God who is light. In revolt against the divine determination, the human creature refuses to acknowledge God's radiant presence as *solus bonus per suam essentiam*.¹⁷ Thus the creature falls into sin and darkness: "the enemy of souls, the primary cause of death, the adversary of virtue."¹⁸

Sin is thus the creature's rejection of God's summons to fellowship, an exchange of "the truth about God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25). It is the disobedience in which the creature "boasts" that it can exist in a way other than that founded by God's *voluntas*, and thus "curses and renounces the Lord" (Ps. 10:3). Thus by "despising the Holy One of Israel," the creature

¹³ We reflect on this theme in the following chapter.

¹⁴ John Damascene, *Exp. Fidei* 4.15 (PG 94:1164; NPNF 9:87).

¹⁵ See our conclusions in Ch. 2.2.2.1, "Gathering light and scattering light." Our use of "darkness" to denote the human condition is, of course, principally derived from scriptural instances (e.g., Ps. 18:28; Jn. 1:4-9; 12:35, 46; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8, 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9). However, we must add a caution that these scriptural instances are but one facet in the grand linguistic scheme of the doctrine of the fall and subsequent ruin of humanity: *pollutio spiritualis* and *difformitas naturae*. Henry Blocher is right to address the "seductiveness" of certain metaphors when approaching the topic of sin, in which there arises the "danger of losing sight of the metaphorical distance" (Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, NSBT 5 [Apollos: InterVarsity, 1997], 110f). Thus we keep in mind that our use of "darkness" here and throughout the thesis is a descriptor (an apt one) of *pollutio spiritualis* and *difformitas naturae* that accompanies the creature's life without the radiant, gracious presence of God.

¹⁶ Webster, "On the Clarity of Holy Scripture," 41.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q6, 3 *resp*: "alone good by nature."

¹⁸ Basil, *Hexaameron* 2.4 (PG 29b:35; NPNF 8:61).

paradoxically opposes itself, becoming “utterly estranged” by sitting in the “shadow of death” (Isa. 1:4; Ps. 107:10). The light shines, then, revealing the terror of sin to the creature sitting in the domain of darkness.¹⁹ “The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (Jn. 3:19f).

Darkness is therefore the unavoidable environment in which the creature finds itself; it is the place where, according to Athanasius, the creature chases after its own selfish pleasure.

For as if a man, when the sun is shining, and the whole earth illumined by his light, were to shut fast his eyes and imagine darkness where no darkness exists, and then walk wandering as if in darkness, often falling and going down steep places, thinking it was dark and not light, for, imagining that he sees, he does not see at all; so, too, the soul of man, shutting fast her eyes, by which she is able to see God, has imagined evil for herself, and moving therein, knows not that, thinking she is doing something, she is doing nothing. For she is imagining what is not, nor is she abiding in her original nature; but what she is is evidently the product of her own disorder. For she is made to see God, and to be enlightened by Him; but of her own accord in God’s stead she has sought corruptible things and darkness.²⁰

How does God help and guard the creature from “falling and going down steep places”? In what way does God act to save the creature from the judgment and terror that is brought about by rejecting the will of God?

¹⁹ See T.F. Torrance’s insightful article regarding the “paradoxical” nature of God’s light as both illuminating and blinding those in the darkness in “Immortality and Light,” *Religious Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 1981): 147–61.

²⁰ Athanasius, *c. Gen.* 7.3–5 (PG 25:5; NPNF 4:7).

The triune God himself moves between the creature and its darkness, thereby halting its “defiance of the divine resolve.”²¹ To this darkness, the light of God stands in conflict with an adversary; yet when God shines forth, there can be no possibility that this adversary on the part of the creature will somehow comprise a real threat to the eternal *voluntas* of God, for “even the darkness is not dark to you” (Ps. 139:12). God’s *electio* is wholly original and cannot be repelled by anything the creature does to escape it. This means that the *decretum aeternum* triumphs over the darkness of the creature. The Father’s *voluntas* cannot be defeated by the creature’s fall into sin; his will is utterly resplendent, and it is unaffected by any opponent. In the overthrow of darkness, the Father is once again “the highest and first cause of all things because nothing happens except from his command and permission.”²²

In his eternal “command and permission” for fellowship, the Father also wills reconciliation; thus, God’s light is seen in the will of the Father for the creature which is demonstrated in the Son’s work of reconciliation, and shined forth to us by the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the reconciled. Only within the terms of that luminous course can God’s light be understood for what it is—the “radiant event” of God’s love for the creature in the “domain of darkness,” a love which wills that the creature be vivified and rescued from its “roving state,”²³ and, therefore, a radiant love that indeed scatters barriers to the creature’s entering into fellowship with the triune God.²⁴ In his “radiant event of love” God has ordained us to be his “children of light” and therefore “saints in light.” For “no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from [God], and of which he is not the cause.”²⁵ The Psalmist rejoices thus:

²¹ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 41.

²² Calvin, *Inst.* 1.16.8; *OS* 3:199: “Dei voluntatem, summam esse probat et primam omnium causam, quia nihil nisi ex iussu eius vel permissione accidit.”

²³ Athanasius, *c. Gen.* 23.5 (*PG* 25:48; *NPNF* 4:16).

²⁴ See, again, our conclusions in chapter 2.

²⁵ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.2.1; *OS* 3:34.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
 for his steadfast love endures forever!

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
 whom he has redeemed from trouble
 and gathered in from the lands,
 from the east and from the west,
 from the north and from the south [...]

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
 prisoners in affliction and in irons,
 for they had rebelled against the words of God,
 and spurned the counsel of the Most High [...]

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
 and he delivered them from their distress.

He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
 and burst their bonds apart.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
 for his wondrous works to the children of man! (Ps. 107:1–3, 10-15).

The radiant One is therefore the One whose “steadfast love endures forever,” and whose “wondrous works” include “bursting the bonds” of darkness so that our *telos* comes to pass. What frail creatures cannot do God himself seeks to remove, to the utter astonishment of the captive creature in the “shadow of death.” And in this way God accomplishes his determination by protecting the creature, that is, by “gathering,” “delivering,” “redeeming,” and “loving” his human creature. Indeed, it is fitting that we are implored to “thank the Lord / for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!”

2. THE RECONCILING LIGHT

We see that God’s “radiant event of love” is therefore active “from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (Ps. 107:3). It is at work in the course of divine love in which God shines upon the creature, “bringing them out of darkness and the shadow of death.” God’s radiant love stands between the creature and the threat of darkness, delivering them from this darkness and so “bursting their bonds apart.” This divine love *ad extra*, the economy of God’s luminous works, is willed by God the Father, grounded in the *decretum aeternum* of election. Moreover, it is a divine course with an inclusive aim, namely, gathering up all of God’s acts towards the creature as the “circumference” of his radiance. Yet at the “illuminating center”²⁶ of this wide-ranging course of divine acts lies a particular covenant history, the history of Israel, and—further up and further in, so to speak—the history of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *the* “illuminating center” of reconciliation, in whom God’s “radiant event of love” overcomes the darkness and in whom, therefore, *his* light “which streams into the world is still the eternal light which cannot be vanquished or extinguished.”²⁷

In this overcoming of sin and darkness by the Son of God is found the essential logic of our entire thesis thus far: in the gospel is found the effective declaration that the domain of darkness, the reign of sin, the shadow of death, is scattered and triumphed over by God himself. “Your light has come, the glory of the Lord has come upon you...the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you” (Isa. 60:1f.). The promise of this coming light, God’s loving purpose for fellowship, is accomplished in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ there takes place the decisive reconciliation of the human creature that God the Father wills.

²⁶ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1: 278; *KD* IV/3: 321.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 167. The perceptive reader will note that the thoughts here and throughout our present section are influenced heavily by Barth’s “Jesus is Victor” paragraph in *CD* IV/3.1, §69.3. A guiding statement for what we are arguing for here might be found in Barth’s words: “[A]s a doctrine of Jesus Christ the true light...Christology is a narration of His history, and specifically the shining of His light, the real speaking of the covenant, the revelation of reconciliation” (166).

In him the “light of life” appeared on earth and revealed “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages” (Jn. 8:12; Eph. 3:9). Thus a more precise account of God’s scattering of darkness must be appended to this chapter in terms of the “attempt to trace the movement of the being and act of God the Son who takes flesh [...] because in and as him God is with humankind in free, creative and saving love.”²⁸

2.1 “The Word Lighted Down”

In the Son of God there is “*a movement of his being*.”²⁹ This divine *movement* means a self-presentation grounded *ex pacto divina* in fulfillment of God’s radiant love turned towards the darkened world of creatures. This radiant *movement* of the Son and his “consent”³⁰ to this *movement* entails a self-emptying, a taking upon himself the creature’s “form of a servant” by being “born in the likeness of men” (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος, Phil. 2:7). “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14); that is, “the Word lighted down...and appeared as a man”³¹ among creatures in the domain of darkness. The Son of God thus entered into the creaturely world in a new way, “condescending towards us in his love for human beings.”³² And though the Word is “not obscured by the darkness,”³³ creatures nevertheless “do not know him” and do not wish to “receive him” (1 Jn. 1:6; Jn. 1:10, 11). Though the “Word shone and spread its light in their midst,” Luther says, creatures still

²⁸ John Webster, “Incarnation,” in *Word and Church*, 113.

²⁹ This is part of Webster’s first thesis in his “Prolegomena to Christology: Four Theses,” in *Confessing God*, 134 (emphasis original). Like Barth’s third cycle of the doctrine of reconciliation (CD IV/3.1, esp. §69.1–3), Webster’s chapter is helpful for this current section. For instance: “*Antecedently present in his effulgent majesty as the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christy is known by virtue of the movement of his being in which as Lord and reconciler he freely gives himself to be known by us, and not otherwise*” (*ibid.*, 131; emphasis original).

³⁰ See, again, Rutherford, *Covenant of Life Opened*, II.7 regarding the *pactum* “designating the Son only.”

³¹ Athanasius, *Inc.* 43 (NPNF 4:60; cf. PG 25:173; PPS 44b:96).

³² *Ibid.*, 8 (PG 25:109; PPS 44b:57).

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *c. Eun.* 4.1 (NPNF 5:154).

“despised it and remained in darkness.”³⁴

This means that the Son came to hostile territory, that he “lighted down” into the very heart of the conflict between the light of God and the darkness of creatures. Yet in this meeting of the true light and the domain of darkness, “We do not have the equilibrium of opposing forces,” clarifies Barth, “as though darkness had a claim and power finally to maintain itself against light, as though its antithesis and challenge to light, its restricting of it, rested on an eternal and lasting order.”³⁵ The God who is light does not abandon his creature in the darkness, but comes to the creature in the incarnate Son. “In his majesty as the eternal Son, he is not inert and passive [...] He himself moves towards us; he *comes* to us.”³⁶ And the end of the incarnate Son’s *movement* is to restore fellowship between God and creatures sitting in the domain of darkness. Thus the “particular path of this movement,” Webster continues, “is one along which the Lord faces and overcomes the creature’s opposition.”³⁷ Reconciliation is therefore the place where “the creature’s opposition” is overcome in the Son’s person and work: the Word made flesh, the light of the world. The presence of this Son is his presence as the true light of the world. And it is a radiant presence, because in his presence he is and acts as one who has in himself “*effulgent majesty*,” condescending towards creatures in utter freedom. Thus the “presence of Jesus Christ is this divine effulgence: radiant presence, presence which enlightens and so establishes knowledge of itself.”³⁸

God’s eternal *voluntas*—which is his determination to shine forth to the human creature—is not set aside when he comes to creatures and enters into their darkness. On the contrary, as God takes “pity upon our weakness,” his resolve to “hold us all the closer”

³⁴ Martin Luther, *Auslegung des ersten und zweiten Kapitels Johannis* 1.9 (WA 46:564.30–32): “...das Wort hat durch seine Predigt unter sie geleuchtet und geschienen, habens aber veracht und sind im finsternis blieben.”

³⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1: 168. Barth’s point here is that the “power of light” (i.e., the Word of revelation) must be seen as coming into darkness with “dynamic teleology,” that is, with a superiority that has “not so far attained its goal but is still wrestling towards it, being opposed by the power of darkness” (*ibid.*).

³⁶ Webster, “Prolegomena to Christology,” 133f.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

abounds all the more.³⁹ It abounds in the fact God’s Word is light. And this Word, against the defiant creature and its dark domain, becomes flesh. And as he shines forth to creatures—as he “enlightens those trapped in the darkness of ignorance”⁴⁰—the true light does not become something creatures can handle; the true light is not “summoned by the conditions of darkness that it reaches, as some divine reflex to the self-chosen murk of contingency.”⁴¹ Rather, the true light shines with limitless and uncontrollable radiance. His presence, therefore, has the character of a present “light already shining” (φῶς ἤδη φαίνω, 1 Jn. 2:8); it is the presence of “the one who is visible, who makes himself visible.”⁴² Indeed, God would have “remained hidden afar off,” Calvin reminds us, “if Christ’s splendor had not beamed upon us.”⁴³ Thus this presence is the presence of “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of [God’s] nature” (Heb. 1:3); it is the particular “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6).⁴⁴

Thus by the Word who has “lighted down,” the absolute darkness of sin has been wholly mastered by the reality that the “light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not

³⁹ Athanasius, *Inc.* 8 (PG 25:109; PPS 44b:57).

⁴⁰ Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 8.19 (PG 32:102; PPS 42:48).

⁴¹ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

⁴² Barth, *CD IV/3.1*: 44.

⁴³ Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.1; *OS* 4:8.

⁴⁴ As we noted in chapter 1, these particular scriptural passages were of paramount importance for the pro-Nicene logic of ὁμοούσιος. Taken with Calvin’s statement above (*Inst.* 3.2.1), we may briefly recall an ancient debate in the church, namely against Eunomianism. Gregory of Nyssa (and Basil before him) battled Eunomius’s statement, “so great is the divergence between Light and Light,” and its attendant implications for Christology, namely, “the difference between the generate and the ingenerate is not merely one of greater or less intensity, but that they are diametrically opposed as regards their meaning” (cf. *c. Eun.* 12.2). Thus, as Gregory explains, Eunomius’s confusion with the image of light in regards to the Nicene confession

[I]nferred by logical consequence from [Eunomius’s] premises that, as the difference between the light of the Father and that of the Son corresponds to ingeneracy and generation, we must necessarily suppose in the Son is not a diminution of light, but a complete alienation from light [...] so, if the same distinction is to be preserved between the Light of the Father and that conceived as existing in the Son, it will be logically concluded that the Son is not henceforth to be conceived as Light (*ibid.*).

Gregory, however, explains how the “light unapproachable” of the Father and the “true light” of the Son may be congruent: “For Paul says, ‘dwelling in light unapproachable.’ But there is a great difference between *being* oneself something and *being in* something. For he who said, ‘dwelling in light unapproachable,’ did not, by the word ‘dwelling,’ indicate God Himself, but that which surrounds Him, which in our view is equivalent to the Gospel phrase which tells us that the Father is in the Son. For the Son is true Light, and the truth is unapproachable by falsehood; so then the Son is Light unapproachable in which the Father dwells, or in Whom the Father is.” (*ibid.*).

overcome it” (Jn. 1:5).⁴⁵ This act of “shining” is entirely undefeated by the darkness, by the “power of Satan,” which it overthrows, scatters, and completely destroys.⁴⁶ And this is because the incarnate Son is not merely a facet or reflection of God’s glory; still less is he simply the Baptist’s “witness to the light” (Jn. 1:8).⁴⁷ Rather, he is the true light *of* and *for* the world. To receive him is to behold God’s “presence, radiance, [and] reconciling self-bestowal,”⁴⁸ namely, to see him in the glory of God, which is a “glory as of the only Son of the Father” (Jn. 1:14). For Jesus Christ—shining into darkness, facing creaturely hostility, rejected by his own—is the ultimate fulfillment of the expression: “Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!” (Ps. 4:6), and he is the one in whom there takes place the execution of the *voluntas* of God, namely “fellowship with one another,” that is, “fellowship with him” (1 Jn. 1:6, 7).⁴⁹

2.2 *The Light of and for the World*

In the incarnation of the Son is therefore found the one who has “illumined the inhabited world and has been made manifest bodily to it.”⁵⁰ In this inhabitation, God’s light is at work

⁴⁵ The meaning “to overtake,” which *καταλάβη* perhaps means in 12:35, is not possible here. The meaning “to restrict,” “to overpower,” which Andreas Köstenberger (*John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 31) and Urban von Wahlde (*Gospel and Letters of John*, 2:24) adopt, seems rather vague and yields a sense which disrupts the context of the prologue (see our thoughts in Ch. 1.1.2 above).

⁴⁶ Cf. Paul’s recitation of Jesus’ words in Acts 26:18: “...so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

⁴⁷ At first glance, we might be persuaded to note that the patristic use of the analogies “sun-ray-radiance” (e.g., Tertullian, *Apol.* 21; Ambrose, *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum* 4.9) or “fire and light” (e.g., John Damascene, *Exp. Fidei orth.* 1.8) may do a disservice here. However, as we noted above in Ch. 1.2, what the Nicene fathers were after was precisely the point we are making here: the Son is not a facet or “witness” to the light of the Father, but is in fact the light itself, that is, *ὁμοούσιος*. Thus we affirm that the Son is “never in any way separate from Him, but ever is in Him” (John Damascene, *Exp. Fidei orth.* 1.8 [PG 94: 795; NPNF 9: 8]).

⁴⁸ Webster, “Prolegomena to Christology,” 134.

⁴⁹ The fellowship “with one another” (*μετά ἀλλήλων*) and “with him” (*μετά αὐτός*) can be seen as mutual notions, particularly in this first chapter of First Letter of John. See Bultmann’s insights on this in *Johannine Epistles*, 19f.

⁵⁰ Athanasius, *Inc.* 40 (PG 25:163; PPS 44b:92).

as mercy, as “free mercy” in his *free* presence.⁵¹ The Son has thus become “our intermediary,” says Calvin. “Hence, he calls himself ‘the light of the world.’”⁵² The Son of God, the light *of* and *for* the world, comes to the aid of the sinful creature, the prisoner in darkness and a captive in the shadow of death. But in the inhabitation of God the Son is found the guarantee that the “Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous” (Ps 112:4). As the exact imprint of God’s glory, his shining forth *to* the darkness is entirely for the deliverance of creatures, “in spite of our absurd opposition to it.”⁵³ Yet to what end? That is, *how* does Jesus Christ, in his solidarity with “human nature which has sinned” thereafter “pay the penalty of sin,” and yet at the same time, in his own radiance as the divine Son of God, “bear the burden of the wrath of God in his humanity?”⁵⁴ More precisely: How does this light *of* and *for* the world remain the true light in the darkness of his atoning death?

We begin by saying that the Son of God takes to himself ruined human creaturely nature, making its darkness his own, though it was not his own and though it was absolutely hostile to him and an object of his scorn. And though he has a “shining innocence,” he nevertheless is “burdened with another’s sin,” that is, with human transgressions.⁵⁵ In this is his light *of* and *for* the world: “the Light of the world penetrates into our darkness, even the fearful darkness of death...he destroys death and brings life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”⁵⁶ He, the radiance of the Father, sharing the “mutual light” (ἀγένητος φῶς), takes upon himself the darkness, guilt, and alienation of the sinful creature. His divine light is not in conflict with this assumption of the burden of the creature; he does not have to negate

⁵¹ Davidson, “Divine Light,” 65.

⁵² Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.1; *OS* 4:7. Cf. Huijgen’s insights regarding Calvin’s use of the image of light and his doctrine of “divine accommodation” and epistemology in *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin’s Theology*, esp. 268–70.

⁵³ Ivor J. Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny: Heirs of God,” in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, eds. I.J. Davidson and M.A. Rae (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 156.

⁵⁴ Zacharias Ursinus, *Catechesis religionis christianae, quae traditur in ecclesiis et scholis Palatinus* (Heidelberg: Michael Schirat, 1570), qq. 16f.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Inst.* 2.16.5; *OS* 3: 489: “relucente innocentia.”

⁵⁶ Torrance, “Immortality and Light,” 159.

the “mutual light” to come to the creature’s aid; he is not “extinguished by the darkness.”⁵⁷ On the contrary, the “true Light shone in our darkness, [and] was not itself overshadowed with that darkness, but illumined the gloom with itself.”⁵⁸ That is, “God displays his essential glory by demonstrating that...he graciously wills to share his life with creatures...and that carrying it through means tabernacling among us, in ultimately exquisite lowliness.”⁵⁹ His taking the part of the creaturely gloom and “exquisite lowliness” is the enactment of his light, precisely because in doing so he restores fellowship by summoning the creature into God’s light.

Thus we may affirm that God’s light in the *opera ad intra* is made known *ad extra* not in leaving the creature as a prisoner in the shadow of death but in the supreme act of love, in which he takes the creature’s penalty upon himself. “Seeing that our humanity was in darkness,” Gregory of Nyssa reiterates, “he who shone in our darkened nature dispersed the ray of his divinity through our whole compound...and so accommodated our entire humanity to his own light...which he himself is.”⁶⁰ Thus it is *only* the Son of God who may pronounce: “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn. 12:46). In making the creature’s condemnation his own in the person of the Son, by *oboedientia passiva* God arrests that creature’s plunge into darkness, holding creaturely existence in relation to himself. Without ceasing to be the light *of* and *for* the world—that is, without relinquishing his divine sonship—the Son continues the Father’s “radiant event of love” for fellowship, entering into the creature’s darkened state, taking “for himself a body that is not foreign to our own,” and accommodating the condition to himself.⁶¹

The same one who is the “radiance of the glory of God” is the one who “had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 1:3, 10:12). With this contrast we find an

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters* 17.14 (*Gregory Nyssa: The Letters*, 127; cf. *NPNF* 5:543).

⁵⁹ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 156.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters* 17.15 (*Gregory Nyssa: The Letters*, 127f).

⁶¹ Cf. Athanasius, *Inc.* 8 (*PG* 25:109; *PPS* 44b:57).

exchange: what the unrighteous deserve, the righteous one receives, “the righteous for the unrighteous” (1 Pet 3:18);⁶² what the godless deserve, the “Christ” receives (Rom. 5:6); what those sitting in the darkness deserve, the “great light” receives (Mt. 4:16);⁶³ and, thus, the condemnation due to creaturely “weakness of flesh” is placed upon the eternal Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3).⁶⁴ More pointedly: he was “made sin” (Cor. 5:21) and therefore “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24); he is “put to death in the flesh” for human sins (1 Pet. 3:18); and he thus became to God a “curse for us” by “hanging on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). By this *mirifica commutatio*, the Son of God has “made us sons of God with him,” says Calvin.

[B]y his descent to earth he has prepared our ascent to heaven; by taking on himself our mortality he has bestowed on us his own immortality; by taking on himself our weakness he has made us strong with his strength; by receiving our poverty into himself he has transferred to us his riches; by taking upon himself the burden of the iniquities with which we are weighed down, he has clothed us with his righteousness.⁶⁵

Therefore the blessing of the creature determined by the Father is achieved specifically in the fact that Jesus Christ, the light *of* and *for* the world, who “knew no sin,” becomes the sin-bearer in his “descent to the earth.” He bears human sin, and so bears God’s wrath against human sin and ignorance by his *oboedientia passiva*. Therefore:

When the darkness of God’s judgment surrounds him who in his humiliation called himself the Light of the world, then it is this light which breaks through this darkness. Then the meaning of his life and death becomes manifest, because

⁶² Cf.: δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων.

⁶³ Cf.: φῶς μέγα.

⁶⁴ Cf.: ἐν ὁμοίωμα ἁμαρτία σάρξ.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Inst.* 4.17.2; *CO* 2:1003.

“he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).⁶⁶

He thus accomplishes this reconciliation “in one body” through the “hostile” event of the cross, surrounded by the darkness of Calvary, without any diminution of his divine light (cf. Eph. 2:16). Though “darkness covered the land” where the cross stood (Mt. 27:45), though there was present at Calvary the “power of darkness” (Lk. 22:53), the Son of God was able, in the outworking of the “radiant event of love,” to enter into the terror of the shadow of death and bear, in the same light, the judgment of divine wrath on the cross. And though there was a “subjection to the power of darkness” in the Son’s *poena damni*, it was nevertheless a *subjection* to this power, to this “tasting and realization of the divine wrath,” and never fully an “enslavement” to this *potestas tenebrarum*.⁶⁷ It is thus paradoxical that, even in his humiliation and death, even where the “unfathomable depth is plumbed” in the “darkness of Calvary,”⁶⁸ Jesus Christ reveals himself supremely as the radiant one in “the offering of his own body.”⁶⁹ And because he is God himself, the true light *of* and *for* the world, he could subject himself to the “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) of God against the “power of darkness.” God’s wrath had to be revealed against the darkness and sin of creatures, against the “power of darkness” and the “power of Satan.” But only God could bear his own wrath upon this darkness; only the light *of* and *for* the world could scatter this power; only God’s *free* mercy was capable of bearing the pain and prospect of destruction to which the creature existing in open rebellion to him was due; only God could “crush, scatter, and break the whole force” of darkness;⁷⁰ and only God’s radiant love was strong enough to be committed to, yet not

⁶⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, trans. C. Lambregste (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 180.

⁶⁷ Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum disputationum theologiarum II* (Utrecht: J. a Waesberge, 1655), 9.167.

⁶⁸ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 165.

⁶⁹ Athanasius, *Inc.* 10 (*PG* 25:113; *PPS* 44b:59).

⁷⁰ Calvin, *Inst.* 2.16.6; *OS* 3:490.

reduced nor imprisoned by, this “outer darkness.”⁷¹ Indeed:

Who can plumb the fearful depth of what took place in the passion of Christ, when God incarnate cried out in desperate anguish in his struggle with the powers of darkness made obdurate by his own righteous judgement against them? The Cross tells us that God is not a God who holds himself aloof from mankind in its self inflicted agony of guilt and violence and ontological pain, but has come into the midst of all that we are in our state of perdition in order to bring healing and reconciliation and renewal.⁷²

This *movement* of the Son of God, who has “come into the midst of all that we are,” happened in order that there should be no more condemnation for creatures (Rom. 8:1), no more sitting in darkness, so that those who are subject to the Law should be ransomed (Gal. 4:5), delivered from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13), forgiven their debts (Col. 2:14), healed by his wounds (1 Pet. 2:24), redeemed from all lawlessness (Tit. 2:14), destined for salvation (1 Thess. 5:9), delivered from the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13), and given the promise of resurrection (Rom. 6:5). “This he did in his love for human beings,” says Athanasius getting to the soteriological heart of the matter, “so that, on the one hand, with all dying in him the law concerning corruption in human beings might be undone...and, on the other hand, that as human beings had turned towards corruption he might turn them again to incorruptibility and give them life through death [... For] Christ has come, and...he illumines absolutely all with

⁷¹ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 165. Jürgen Moltmann’s language regarding the “divine sufferings of Christ” is somewhat ambiguous and therefore to be avoided in this section. Of particular note is his insistence that: “What happens on Golgotha reaches into the very depths of the Godhead and therefore puts its impress on the trinitarian life of God in eternity” (*The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. M. Kohl [London: SCM, 1999], 173). Or further—and maybe in contrast both to our affirmations regarding *opera Dei ad intra* and of the Son’s divine light remaining intact *even* in this dark event of the cross—Moltmann notes: “On the cross the Father and the Son are so widely separated that the direct relationship between them breaks off” (*ibid.*, 174).

⁷² Torrance, “Immortality and Light,” 154.

his light.”⁷³ Therefore “He Himself...is the Victory,” says Barth, “the light which is not overwhelmed by darkness, but before which darkness must yield until itself is overwhelmed [...] He shines out to the world around.”⁷⁴ The luminous, victorious work of the Son has significance, therefore, only within the work of God’s “radiant event of love,” which is to shine upon the creature in life by the “death of death” in the “light of life.”

2.3 *The Light of Life*

The *terminus ad quem* of the Son’s temporal *movement* is therefore not the cross and the tomb. To end here would neglect the fact that the shadow of death and the *potestas tenebrarum* “no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9; cf. Acts 2:24), because “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4). That is, there is *terminus* to Jesus Christ’s temporal *movement*, notably captured in Athanasius’s statement: “[N]ot tolerating his temple, the body, to remain [dead] for long...on the third day he immediately raised it up, bearing the incorruptibility and impassibility of the body as trophies and victory over death.”⁷⁵ However, contrary accounts are often found in modern Christology, notably in Tillich’s distilling the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday into separate, *mythic* categories: “The character of this event [Good Friday] remains in darkness, even in the poetical rationalization of the Easter Story.”⁷⁶ Over against this, we might side with Barth in speaking of the “one-sidedness” of the events of the cross, resurrection, *and* ascension.⁷⁷ And by “one-sidedness,” we do not infer a collapse of the Easter light into the darkness of Good

⁷³ Athanasius, *Inc.* 8, 40 (*PPS* 44b:57, 93; cf. *PG* 25:109, 163).

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1: 173.

⁷⁵ Athanasius, *Inc.* 26 (*PG* 25:141; *PPS* 44b:77).

⁷⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 2:154.

⁷⁷ Cf. Barth, *CD* I/1: 180f; *KD* I/1: 188.

Friday—as, perhaps, Balthasar’s work at times implies⁷⁸—but rather that the “inner meaning” of this dark event on the cross is given its “proper weight” in the discrete, subsequent event of the resurrection.⁷⁹ Of course, this “one-sidedness” is due to the fact that the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ are held together not by a symbolic understanding, as Tillich would have it,⁸⁰ nor by “metaphysical pieces”⁸¹ of our own conceptual making, but rather by the particular history of the one whose “eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself;” by the radiant one who is “clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God” (Rev. 19:2f). We continue to speak, therefore, of the light *of* and *for* the world not *only* by the history of the crucified one, but of that continued presence of Jesus Christ as the radiantly risen and ascended one. And if we are to speak responsibly of God’s “radiant event of love” in the *movement* of Jesus Christ, then we must also speak of the *resurrectio*, *ascensio*, and *sessio* of the Son of God.

In sketching this further *movement* of the Son, let us therefore take a cue from what has thus far been an essential (albeit implicit) text from Barth:

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday which includes the notion that, by the *descensus*, “Hell belongs to Christ, and Christ in rising with the knowledge of Hell can communicate that knowledge to us also” (*Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005], 176). More precisely, in his weighty *The Glory of the Lord* von Balthasar sees implicit in the “momentum of the Father’s will” for the Son’s *kenosis* leading directly from the cross to “the burial of his body and the going of his dead soul to the other dead” (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7: *Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. B. McNeill [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989], 229). Or, more acutely still, Balthasar sees that the “whole structure of [the Son’s] being and his time is built upon...his kenosis,” which, by his death and descent to hell, the “whole superstructure of the Incarnation” is subsequently removed. That is, the Son’s obedience to empty himself and go to the farthest region of Hades reveals the “basis of the entire event of the Incarnation” and the “eternal will of the Son within the Trinity” (*ibid.*, 231). By offering these quotations we are not seeking to discount the importance of Balthasar’s work, which is certainly vast; rather, we highlight the instances where he appears to make the event of Holy Saturday the *ultima ratio* through which the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday *must* be interpreted.

⁷⁹ This notion is fundamentally Jüngel’s in “Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes. Ein Plakat” *ZThK* 65 (1968): 121f. It is “fundamentally” his thought because Jüngel goes on to affirm that Good Friday and Easter Day are “two sides of one and the same mystery” (quoted in Webster’s insightful thoughts regarding Jüngel’s notion of death and resurrection in, *Eberhard Jüngel*, 88).

⁸⁰ Cf. the various statements from Tillich; e.g., “This Cross, whatever the historical circumstances may have been, is a symbol based on a fact” (*Systematic Theology* 2:154; cf. *ibid.*, 155–65).

⁸¹ Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 102.

We begin with the statement that he, Jesus Christ, *lives* [... and] as Jesus Christ lives, he also shines out, not with an alien light which falls upon him from without and illumines him, but with his own light proceeding from himself.⁸²

Thus the first-century confession that “this Jesus God raised up” (Acts 2:32) is a witness to the basic reality that this living one is “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). As the living Lord and Christ, Jesus is alive with the divine life “shining in full strength” (Rev. 1:18). His being “raised up” is thus the witness to the fact that “in him is the light of life,” that he has this lively light “proceeding from himself.” His luminous life, therefore, is derived from nothing other than his partaking in the *una essentia divina, omnio immutabilis*. Jesus’ risen life is his triumphant divine light, and his resurrection is the declaration that his own light proceeds from himself: “How did Christ rise? *Totus gloriosus*.”⁸³ From his being “raised up,” the entire movement *ad extra* of the Son is to be seen as the “true light that gives the light” of eternal life. His earthly ministry was the “Light that has come into the world” (Jn. 3:19) from the eternal foundation that “In him was life,” and, at his resurrection, the witness and proclamation that this “life was the light of all people” (Jn. 1:4). Consequently, the resurrection is part of the same free and radiant divine *movement* of the Son’s joyful “consent” to undertake the *voluntas* of the Father *ex pacto*; and this *movement* is the actuality of God’s *lumen vivicum* as the one *vitam habere in se ipso*.⁸⁴ Exhibiting in this way the *lumen vivicum* of the Son, his being “raised up” is his *status exaltationis*, his victory and triumph over darkness and death, his life *totus gloriosus*.

The stages of the *status exaltationis*—*resurrectio*, *ascensio*, and *sessio (ad dextram Patris)*—together found the declaration of the *regnum Christi*. Risen from the dead, he is the one who rules, perforating “any natural sequence of worldly cause and effect,” absolutely

⁸² Barth, *CD IV/3.1*: 39, 46; *KD IV/3*: 41: “Er, Jesus Christus, lebt.”

⁸³ Bucanus, *Inst.* XXVI.18.

⁸⁴ See Heidegger, *Corp. theol.* 4.51.

transcending all limitations.⁸⁵ The stages of *exaltatio* are not, of course, to be seen as the Son's attaining a "status that is not his antecedently,"⁸⁶ but rather the instance of the conclusive pronouncement of his essential lively radiance, "glowing with brightness and glory heavenly and divine."⁸⁷ The *resurrectio Christi*, the *primus gradus exaltatio*, is the public display of the secret "power of light" *of and for* the world, "the proof by which that dead man was proved to be God's Son and was justified."⁸⁸ In the *resurrectio*, the eternal identity of Jesus Christ is sustained and his enemies in the darkness are led "as a host of captives in his train" (Ps. 68:18; cf. Eph. 4:8). The *resurrectio Christi* reveals the reality which until now has been partially hidden, namely the Son's being "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, "God raised him up," and consequently "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (Acts 2:24; 1 Jn. 2:8): true light, because Jesus Christ is the one who is the "exact imprint" of God's nature. The radiantly risen one is therefore exalted "far above all things" (cf. Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:17); he is the one "raised up to the highest ineffable glory."⁸⁹ Thus the continued and unhindered "shining out" with "his own light proceeding from himself" is the work of this one.

To know the radiantly risen one "is to know the coming and indeed the continuous and unequivocal victory of light over darkness which cannot be arrested by any resisting element in man, by any devil."⁹⁰ His *regnum* as the exalted "Lord and Christ" is therefore located in the "heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18) in which he is free from limitation. Thus the second stage of *exaltatio*, ascension, follows resurrection because, as the radiant one shares in

⁸⁵ Davidson, "Salvation's Destiny," 165.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸⁷ Polanus, *Synt. theol.* II.6.22.

⁸⁸ Johannes Coccejus, *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita*, 2nd edition (Geneva: Widerhold, 1665), 42.15: "1) argumentum, quo elle homo mortuus demonstratus est Filius Dei esse, et iustificatus est."

⁸⁹ Polanus, *Synt. theol.* II.6.22.

⁹⁰ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1: 266; *CD* IV/3: 306: "Ihn selbst erkennen, heißt den kommenden endgültigen und damit auch den jetzt schon fortschreitenden, von keinem Widersetzlichen im Menschen, von keinem Teufel aufzuhaltenden, den unzweideutigen Sieg des Lichtes über die Finsternis erkennen."

the eternal light of God, his existence post-Easter involves a transcendent *localem* withdrawal from and over the creaturely realm. At this point there is manifest the fact that “the Word did not suffer loss in taking a body in order that he should seek to receive grace.”⁹¹ But the *exaltatio* of the radiantly risen one, the fact that he is the “light of life,” does not negate his being near to us with *ubietas*. In other words, though the radiantly risen and ascended one’s “presence is no longer in bodily fashion,” he nevertheless expresses the “lordly freedom with which he enters into relation with and, indeed, freely binds himself to those to whom he presents himself in the power of his Holy Spirit.”⁹² Thus the radiantly risen one is not present by “any precarious power or power of created nature,”⁹³ but spiritually present, by virtue of his personal divine will, by virtue of his further *exaltatio* of *sessio ad dextram Patris*. Thus the “nature of that presence which the Lord promises to his followers ought to be understood spiritually,” Calvin comments on Mt. 28:20.

[S]ince he can assist us by the grace of his Spirit, as if he stretched out his hand from heaven. For he who, in respect of his body, is at a great distance from us, not only diffuses the efficacy of his Spirit through the whole world, but actually dwells in us [...] Christ *was taken up into heaven*, not to enjoy blessed rest at a distance from us, but to govern the world for the salvation of all believers.⁹⁴

In his *regnum*, the radiant one shines forth in communicative nearness to creatures sitting in the domain of darkness; this radiantly risen one sets himself in relation to creatures and sheds abroad the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6). Thus the Son’s communicative action is in “no need of supplement [...] It declares itself as reality. It

⁹¹ Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 1.42 (PG 26:97; NPNF 4:123).

⁹² Webster, “Prolegomena to Christology,” 132.

⁹³ Bucanus, *Inst.* 26.3f: “Non ulla precaria aut naturae creatae.”

⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentarius in harmonium evangelicam*, Mt. 28:20 (CO 45:824; CC 17:390, 393).

displays itself. It proclaims itself.”⁹⁵ And the *status exaltationis* of Jesus Christ is therefore part of the positive definition of God’s being *light in himself* and *shining forth his light*. God is light in this manner; the reality of “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.”⁹⁶ Jesus Christ, exalted in all things, is *the* fundamental reality, for his action “displays itself” and “proclaims itself.” He is this, of course, in the *relatio personalis* to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, because “the Holy and blessed Triad is indivisible and one in himself,” says Athanasius. Thus:

When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word. For there is *one grace* from the Father fulfilled through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷

To speak of *resurrectio Christi* is therefore to speak of the *causa resurrectionis* in the *voluntas* of the Father who raises the Son from the dead (cf. Jn. 17:24), and so to speak of the “Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom 8:11) in whom the “*one grace* from the Father [is] fulfilled through the Son and in the Holy Spirit” which shines forth on creation.

This “one grace” which shines forth to creatures in the work of the triune God is, Barth reminds us, “distinguished...from human capacity,” and is instead characterized as “light which shines out of the darkness and back into the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ back into the darkness of our own lives.”⁹⁸ This “one grace,” extending from the resurrection, is the *potentia* of the exalted one, *sessio ad dextram Patris*, and it is the “power which shines into the darkness of our life, by which we are made bright even in the midst of darkness because we are as it were revealed to ourselves as those who belong to this exalted

⁹⁵ Barth, *CD IV/3.1*: 7.

⁹⁶ Anselm, *Proslogion seu Alloquium de Dei existentia* 3 (*PL* 158:228).

⁹⁷ Athanasius, *Ad. Ser.* 1.14 (*PG* 26:564; Shapland, 93f; emphasis mine).

⁹⁸ Barth, *CD IV/2*: 310.

and true man.”⁹⁹ As this risen one, the radiant power of the exalted Son is that light from which all other lights receive their luminosity; more precisely, in him creatures receive the overflow of the light and love of God.¹⁰⁰ The radiantly risen “Lord and Christ” therefore “does not need to receive light from without, from men, the world, or the faith community.”¹⁰¹ Rather, the *resurrectio Christi* is that divine act in which there is manifest the eternal light of God in the Son, who is the ground of all things that exist. Creaturely existence is therefore being faced by the shining of the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). It is in this gracious encounter that creatures are properly “illuminated and moved by him.”¹⁰²

Thus by the *status exaltationes*—the “great sign of the love of God” in which God has reconciled us with himself, in which is made manifest the scattering of darkness by his light¹⁰³—it has become possible that in Jesus Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). By his blood Jesus Christ has justified human creatures (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 1:3), by his *resurrectio* death and darkness are scattered (1 Cor. 15:54; Jn. 1:5), and by his *ascensio* and *sessio* salvation is offered, access to the “throne of Grace” is granted, and light is given to creatures (Heb. 4:16; Jn. 1:9). Jesus Christ has thus procured for creatures the freedom to live in the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *De perf. Christ.* (PG 46:264). Cf. Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, repr. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), esp. ch. 3.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1: 46; *KD* IV/3: 49. Given Barth’s comment, the undertaking in which belief in the resurrection is bracketed from the reality of the radiantly risen Christ misinterprets the object of faith, which is the Son of God himself in his self-radiating reality. Often times, the work of N.T. Wright seems to be lacking such precision. For instance, Wright is of the persuasion that we approach Christology as a “portrait of Jesus as he was in his lifetime” before we embark on the “evidence before us” for the resurrection (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996], 614). Or, perhaps more recently, Wright states that Jesus’ ministerial statements and the event of the resurrection “*joined up with the expectation of YHWH’s return on the one hand and the spirit of God on the other to generate a fresh reading of the messianic texts which enabled a full christological awareness to dawn on the disciples*” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* 2.3 [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013], 692f; emphasis original). Of course, there is a long and perilous history of such an approach to Christology and resurrection itself. For a good treatment of this, at least in light of NT scholarship, see John G.M. Barclay, “The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 13–30.

¹⁰² Athanasius, *Inc.* 42 (*PPS* 44b:94).

¹⁰³ John Chrysostom, *Hom.* II, 1 Tim 1:8–10 (*NPNF* 13:479).

light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). But this becoming light by Christ is a gift, that is, it is always “in the Lord.” Thus the creaturely standing is a standing *in God*, who “puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to him as done to himself. So far love is a binding force, since it aggregates another to ourselves, and refers his good to our own.”¹⁰⁴ That is, in the person of his Son, the God who is light scatters sin and darkness in order that a chosen people will meet with his grace, love, and mercy.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9).

That is God’s “radiant event of love.” God the Son “called us out of darkness,” entering the situation of human ruin in love and grace. He did this in order to bring the creature “out of darkness” to its proper glory in God’s “marvelous light.” In doing so, he has rescued the creature from the domain of darkness which it had constructed for itself. And by the Holy Spirit, God has gathered a people marked above all by proclaiming or praising the “excellencies” of the loving God who has given the “light of life” through the radiantly risen one.

3. THE ILLUMINATING SPIRIT

Inseparably paired with the work of the radiantly risen Son rescuing creatures in the domain of darkness, and his *status exaltationes*, stands a further *movement* of God in the illumination and restoration of creatures to active fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit is the agent of those divine acts through which creatures reach their *telos*. The Holy Spirit gives the light of

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q20, 1 ad.3.

life, acting in and shining upon the creature in such a way that there occurs the *terminus actionis* of the Father's loving *voluntas*. "We receive the Son's light through the Father's light in the light of the Spirit."¹⁰⁵ In this *movement*, which is a gift, the Holy Spirit makes actual in the creature the blessing for which the creature has been "qualified" in God's "radiant event of love." That gift is fellowship between the *God who is light in himself* and his "saints in light." Yet an adequate description of this renewed relationship that the creature participates in must contain an account of the doctrine of the church, as well as an account of the doctrine of illumination. However, before embarking on this narrower course—which chapters 4 and 5 will address—we may offer here a brief sketch on the work of the Holy Spirit in establishing fellowship with God in relation to several further matters.

3.1 *The Identity of the Holy Spirit*

First, in reiterating this divine determination for the creature, we must again affirm—as we did in chapter 2—the identity of the third person of the Trinity. As with the work of the Father and the Son, the work of the Spirit is the radiant work of God. The Holy Spirit is light because he is intrinsic to God's "mutual light" and not merely a divine force *ad extra*, for "unless a thing be light itself, how can it display the gracious gift of light?"¹⁰⁶ That is, God is the "Threefold light" and so the Holy Spirit is light.¹⁰⁷ The Holy Spirit is within the luminous sphere of deity, and only as such is he the light-giver. In his shining in and upon the creature, the Holy Spirit is no mere immanent principle, a *causa* which vanishes into that of which it is the *causa*. Rather, the Spirit is *coaeternus* with the Father and the Son "because of the power of eternity," and the Spirit's work is *inseparabilis* from the works of Father and Son "because

¹⁰⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.3 (*PG* 36:136; *PPS* 23:118).

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Sp. sanc.* 22 (*NPNF* 5:324).

¹⁰⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 33.11 (*PG* 36:228; *NPNF* 7:332).

of the unity of brightness.”¹⁰⁸ As the “radiant event” of the Father’s *voluntas* is the *fons actionis* of reconciliation, and as the “radiant event” of the Son’s work is the *medium actionis* in his triumphing over darkness, so also the “radiant event” of the Holy Spirit’s work is the *terminus actionis* of what has been willed by the Father and achieved by the Son.

Thus the same Spirit whose illuminating gift restores fellowship between God and lost creatures, is the same one that shares in all the properties of the radiant *una essentia divina*: he is in every respect “infinite in power, unlimited in goodness, immeasurable by time or ages.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the Holy Spirit has his personhood in terms of the divine *hypostases*, that is, in the order of the *opera Dei personalia* in which he is spirated by the Father and the Son *ab utroque*, and thus has “unity and indivisibility in every work...from the Father and the Son.”¹¹⁰ Sharing *communio quaedam consubstantialis*,¹¹¹ he is entirely separate from creatures, and only so does he shine in them and give himself *to* them with his own “power” (Luke 24:49)—*to* creatures and not, in Schleiermachian fashion, a “spirit made common” *by* creatures.¹¹² Basil offers a good reminder here:

[W]hoever hears “spirit” cannot impress on his mind a circumscribed nature...or one at all similar to creation [...] Rather, the Spirit perfects others, but himself lacks nothing. He lives, but not because he has been restored to life; rather, he is the source of life. He does not grow in strength gradually, but is complete all at once. He is established in himself and present everywhere. He is the source of

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, *De fide* 4.9.108 (PL 16:638): “...coaeternus, propter virtutis aeternitatem: inseparabilis, propter claritudinis unitatem.”

¹⁰⁹ Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 9.22 (PG 32:107; PPS 42:53).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.37 (PG 32:134; PPS 42:70).

¹¹¹ Augustine, *Trin.* 15.27.50 (PL 42:1007).

¹¹² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, eds. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, repr. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), §§122f. See Schleiermacher’s insistence that the “common spirit [i.e., the common self-consciousness] is only the Holy Spirit insofar as the activity it induces is a prolongation of Christ’s activity” (§122.3). Perhaps more pointedly in Schleiermacher’s complicated “first theorem” of §123, we hear that “the Spirit is not something supernatural or mysterious [...for] the human would be no more human if we had to conceive it united with a higher nature in one person, so our life and the life of other believers would no longer seem to be humanly interconnected [...] Thus, union is realized in the form of a common spirit, [that is,] we share in the Spirit as a common consciousness” (§123.2f).

holiness, an intellectual light for every rational power's discovery of truth, supplying, so to say, through himself. He is inaccessible in nature, but approachable in goodness [...] He is portioned out impassibly and participated in as a whole. He is like a sunbeam whose grace is present to the one who enjoys him as if he were present to such a one alone...and still he sends out grace that is complete and sufficient for all.¹¹³

Thus the Spirit's "complete and sufficient" works *ad extra* are *his* works as the one who has the divine nature, wherein his "supplying" light to the creature he nevertheless remains "complete all at once" with the Father and the Son in a "procession of love."¹¹⁴

3.2 Grace and Participation

Second, as the *sanctificationis indicium* the Holy Spirit's works are works of grace.¹¹⁵ The Holy Spirit is given to creatures—e.g., "I will send" (πέμπω, Jn. 14:26) and "I will pour out" (ἐκχέω, Acts 2:17)—in fulfillment of the divine *voluntas* and as an exercise of God's "radiant event of love." Moreover, the mode of the Spirit's illuminative work on and in the reconciled confirms his being the *medium actionis* on and in all creatures. By the Spirit, God breathes into creatures the breath of life. Creatures therefore have this "light of life" in a particular way, by virtue of an external quickening origin, which is the Holy Spirit. This principle is a pure *donum*, a gift to creatures, which is *proprium Spiritus Sancti*.¹¹⁶ But this gift imparted by the Holy Spirit is, indeed, the "light of life," and not merely a relation to another external light. By the Holy Spirit, therefore, the creature *participates* in the *movement* of

¹¹³ Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 9.22 (PG 32:107–10; PPS 42:53).

¹¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. C.J. O'Neil, repr. (Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 4.26.1.

¹¹⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q43, 7 ad.6.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Aquinas's thought that "Gift" is a proper name given to the Holy Spirit, because it denotes the "proprietas origins Spiritus Sancti, quae est processio" (*ST* 1a. q38, 2 ad.2).

reconciliation, not as its *causa impulsiva* but as one “called out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Of course, we must quickly qualify what is meant here by the term “participation,” as its use in this setting causes confusion. In contemplating such language, modern theology has often turned to the thinking of Calvin—namely, his debate with Osiander in Book 3 of the *Institutio*—as being the quintessential marker of a Reformed account of *participatio Christi* or, more precisely, “partakers of the divine nature” (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, 2 Pet. 1:4).¹¹⁷ Julie Canlis, for instance, is right to mention that *participatio Christi* means a participation in Christ’s humanity. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who “allows true participation in the very life of God—which is the *humanity of Christ*—while acting as a safeguard against substantial participation.”¹¹⁸ That is, according to Canlis, Calvin appeals to the Holy Spirit as the *vinculum* of participation in Christ so that he may posit a *unio cum Christo* that preserves the ontological distance between God and ourselves, “acting as a safeguard against substantial participation.” And yet she also thinks that participation in Christ’s humanity yields a notion of “Trinitarian participation—our adoption.”¹¹⁹ Yet if it is the Holy Spirit who enables the creature “called out of darkness into [God’s] marvelous light” to have a spirit of adoption, and this same Holy Spirit remains ontologically other than the creature in whom he

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., Dennis Tamburello, *Union with Christ; John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Philip Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin’s Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (NY: Oxford, 1995); Craig Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 363–86; and the very capable recent study of Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. 77–99. However, it is in J. Todd Billings’s work, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), where we find an interesting concession regarding justification; namely that Billings replaces Calvin’s concept of “acquittal” with that of “pardon” (206). It seems the attempt to find union with God in Calvin’s thinking is made easier by this move, which begs the question: Is Calvin’s theology still being explained here? Cf. Billings, “Union with Christ and the Double Grace: Calvin’s Theology and Its Early Reception,” in *Calvin’s Theology and Its Reception: Disputes, Developments, and New Possibilities*, eds. J. Todd Billings and I. John Hesselink (Louisville: Westminster John Knox: 2012), 49–71.

¹¹⁸ Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2010), 145. Cf. Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.7; *OS* 4:15f.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. Calvin’s provocative remarks that Osiander misses the “manner of the indwelling” of God in the believer, “namely, that the Father and Spirit are in Christ, and even as the fullness of deity dwells in him, so in him we possess the whole deity” (*Inst.* 3.11.5; *OS* 4:186).

creates the faith that has this spirit of adoption, then how then can *participatio* or *unio per adoptionem* be a “trinitarian participation” in the *opera Dei ad intra* and the “mutual light” of God’s inner relations? Indeed, Calvin can admittedly speak of *adoptio* in ways that appear to point to participation in the triune life. But that is not Calvin’s primary way of speaking about *adoptio*. Rather, Calvin’s primary way of speaking about *adoptio* is simply in terms of regeneration and illumination.

God justifies not only by pardoning but by regenerating [...] Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption, by whose power he remakes them into his image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, shall we therefore say that the earth is warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat? Is there anything more applicable to the present matter than this comparison? The sun, by its heat, quickens and fructifies the earth, by its beams brightens and illumines it [...] Osiander mixes that gift of regeneration with this free acceptance and contends that they are one and the same.¹²⁰

Thus Calvin’s use of the term “adoption” implies that the creature “participates” in the relation of the Son to the Father—a relation that, by the Holy Spirit, is characterized by our participation in the unique relation of the Son to the Father only by a “*creaturely version*” and “*replication* of the relations,” as Davidson so insightfully states.¹²¹ What we thus participate in are the benefits of that radiant work of the Son, namely, “growing together with Christ,” which is effected in the new life of the creature by “the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹²²

From Calvin we might therefore infer that this participation is a *uniopraesentia gratiae tentum*: a union made possible and preserved by grace alone. Of course, this does not

¹²⁰ Calvin, *Inst.* 3.11.6; *OS* 4:187f.

¹²¹ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 174.

¹²² Calvin, *Inst.* 3.11.5; *OS* 4:186.

mean that by the Holy Spirit creatures are made into cooperating or supplementary agents alongside God. The creatures called into the light are therefore “never absorbed or assimilated into God,” says Davidson further, they “never *contribute to* God’s own endlessly self-maintaining and complete life.”¹²³ It is, after all, a *unio spiritualis*, a spiritual union under the auspices of the Spirit. Thus being “in the light” does not entail being “the light” itself (cf. Eph. 5:8f). The partnership with God which the Holy Spirit imparts is a fellowship in which the creature is illuminated *as creature*—that is, as a “*creaturely version*” of participation—in which the creature qua creature is called to reflect in its *creaturely* acts the great divine act of illumination. Illumination is thus not a matter of *participatio* in God’s work but rather of the renewal of the creaturely *vocatio*. And in that is accomplished the “radiant event” of God’s love for the creature.

3.3 *The Spirit’s Loving Illumination*

Finally, then, we see that God loves the creature which he shines forth upon. And so the Holy Spirit’s work in the economy of redemption is to impart the light of life. The Spirit maintains creatures by moving and shining upon them so that their dignity is preserved and destiny achieved. A brief look at what the classical tradition of dogmatics calls the “doctrine of divine illumination” exemplifies this principle in stating how God acts on created intellect.¹²⁴ Consider Calvin’s handling of this matter in Book 2 of the *Institutio*—the context, it is important to note, is not a discussion of cognitive acts *per se*, but a reflection on the fact that creatures are “utterly blind and stupid in divine matters,” in the course of which the regeneration or illumination of the mind by God is treated.¹²⁵ The topic from which Calvin

¹²³ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 174.

¹²⁴ We will look more closely at this “theory” or “doctrine” of illumination in chapter 5, particularly in connection with theology as the “activity of the illumined mind.” See below, Ch. 5.1, “The Illumined Mind.”

¹²⁵ See esp. Calvin, *Inst.* 2.2.19–21; *OS* 3:261–64: “...in rebus divinis caecam prorsus esse et stupidam”

begins—the “blindness” of the unregenerate creaturely mind—commences with quoting Jn. 1:4f, and he goes on to state that this passage “shows that man’s soul is so illumined by the brightness of God’s light as never to be without some slight flame or at least a spark of it; but that even with this illumination it does not comprehend God.”¹²⁶ Calvin’s insistence that “even with this illumination it does not comprehend God” is meant to refute the possibility of comprehending God through the *lumen naturae*.¹²⁷ The person who depends on the “light of nature” to discern “spiritual mysteries,” Calvin says, “comprehends nothing.”¹²⁸ Rather, through the “Spirit of regeneration” there is a *speciali illuminatione* of the creaturely mind.¹²⁹ “Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and is God’s, unless it be illumined by the Spirit of God.”¹³⁰ The mind is therefore not moved or illumined by another. Rather, as the *interior magister*, the Holy Spirit “by a wonderful and singular power forms our...minds to understand.”¹³¹ The effect of this on the matter of illumination is registered in the subsequent trinitarian statements: “[T]he sun rises upon the earth when God’s Word shines upon men; but they do not have its benefit until he who is called the ‘Father of lights’ (James 1:17) either gives eyes or opens them. For wherever the Spirit does

(2.2.19). Of course, Calvin’s “doctrine of illumination” is not limited to this section of the *Institutio*, as Calvin himself would be quick to point out. His early work—particularly his *Catechismus s. christianae religionis institutio genevensis ecclesiae suffragiis recepta* (1538)—is emphatic in depicting the Holy Spirit as the one who “illumines us with his light [*nobis suo lumine illucet*]” in order that we learn the “goodness we possess in Christ” (*ibid.* [CO 5:341]). One may also look to his commentaries, namely, his comments on Ps. 36:9 (i.e., illumination as “supernatural gift”; CC 5:12), 1 Cor. 2:10 (i.e., the “special illumination of the Spirit,” CC 20:110), and 2 Cor. 3:6 (i.e., illumination as regeneration; CC 20:174). Beyond key scriptural passages, Calvin also admits that the tradition guides his course regarding illumination, particularly Augustine’s doctrine of illumination. See Augustine and his idea that the intelligence is illumined “ab eo lumine illo intellegibili perfusa quodam modo et illustrata cernit, non per corporeos oculos” (*De diversis questionibus LXXXIII, Liber unus* 46.2 [PL 40:31]). For a thorough review of Augustine and his heirs, see Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), esp. 52–68.

¹²⁶ Calvin, *Inst.* 2.2.19. Calvin’s emphasis is surely on the latter phrase: “... sed eat amen illuminatione Deum non comprehendere” (*OS* 3:261).

¹²⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

¹²⁸ Calvin, *Inst.* 2.2.20; *OS* 3:263: “nempe qui naturae lumine nititur. Ille, inquam, nihil in spiritualibus mysteriis Dei comprehendit.”

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*; *OS* 3:262.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.2.19; *OS* 3:261.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.2.20; *OS* 3:263.

not cast his light, all is darkness.”¹³² Spelling this out in these sections, Calvin lays down two principles, intended to undermine the assumption that knowledge of God is framed by the natural creaturely mind. First, God—not the creature—is the one who illumines God’s “mysteries”; second, therefore, “God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.” Yet there is no sense here that illumination of the creature’s mind is compromised by the fact that the Holy Spirit is the one who illumines the creature. To speak of divine movement is not to eliminate creaturely movement but to say that, as created, it has its “keenness” as a secondary component. We see this in some of Calvin’s later comments in the *Institutio* regarding the results of illumination:

Therefore, as we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God, so when we are drawn we are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul, illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendor had previously blinded it. And man’s understanding, thus beamed by the light of the Holy Spirit, then at last truly begins to taste those things which belong to the Kingdom of God.¹³³

Thus, having been “lifted up,” “illumined,” and “beamed upon” by the Holy Spirit, the creature is therefore able, through “keenness” as a secondary component, to “contemplate the heavenly mysteries” and “truly begin to taste” the goodness of the Kingdom of God. “God works in his elect...through his Spirit,” Calvin continues, “illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he makes them a new creation.”¹³⁴ In short: God recreates the created intellect and the Spirit who is light “beams upon” its operation, “to the love and cultivation of righteousness” found in fellowship with

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2.2.21; *OS* 3:265: “...quia ubicunque Spiritu suo non resplendent, Omnia tenebris occupatur.”

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 3.20.40; *OS* 4:350.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.5.5; *OS* 3:303.

God.

But we cannot end our outline of the work of the Holy Spirit here with Calvin. Indeed it must extend throughout the rest of the thesis itself. For the time being, however, we may offer a sketch of the pathway ahead. In agreement with the illuminating work of the Spirit is his work in the community of “saints in light,” that is, the church. By the Spirit is gathered a creaturely “circumference” to the Son’s radiant work. Illumination is the regeneration of created nature, and the restoration of all those powers in which it entails. Most of all, the fellowship with God which the Holy Spirit enacts in creatures is a lively, quickened, and radiant movement. The shining of the Holy Spirit upon creatures thus gives a new intellectual nature, pronouncing Jesus Christ to the gathered saints of the church and illuminating the creaturely mind to learn from his teaching.¹³⁵ Thus by the Holy Spirit, God orders creatures as a “circumference” of this divine radiance; and by virtue of God’s self-radiance there takes place a creaturely proclamation: “the coming into being of light outside him on the basis of the light inside him.”¹³⁶ This proclamation is the creaturely movement as a “circumference” and “reflection” of the divine work of illumination.¹³⁷ That is, “the knowledge of God given to man through his illumination,” says Barth,

is the claiming not only of his thinking but also of his willing and work, of the whole man, for God. It is his refashioning to be a theatre, witness and instrument of His acts. Its subject and content, which is also its origin, makes it an active knowledge...in which man leaves certain old courses and enters and pursues new ones. As the work of God becomes clear to him, its reflection lights up his own heart and self and whole existence through the One whom he may know on the basis of His own self-declaration. Illumination...is the *total* alteration of the

¹³⁵ Again, see Ch. 5.1 for further explication of this point.

¹³⁶ Barth, *CD* II/1: 647; *KD* II/1: 729.

¹³⁷ See the forthcoming Ch. 4.4.1, “The Proclamation of the Church.”

one whom it befalls.¹³⁸

The “*total* alteration” of creatures happens in God’s light; for it is here that they really do see light (Ps. 36:9). And this promise of illumination has its fulfillment, therefore, in the gathering of the “saints in light.” In this gathering of saints is realized the “refashioning to be a theatre, witness and instrument” of God through the illuminating love of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This loving “*total* alteration” defines the setting of the church, for it is here that the work of God truly illumines the “heart and self and whole existence through the One whom [we] may know on the basis of His own self-declaration.”

4. CONCLUSION

With this we complete a sketch of the *movement* of God’s “radiant event of love.” In this *movement* we see that the “radiant event” of God’s love for creatures is figured in his shining forth himself into the darkness and sin of the creature. In doing so, God achieves his determination that creatures should be gathered into his “marvelous light.” The divine shining forth takes effect as the act of love in which God elects, reconciles, and illuminates creatures: determined by the Father, accomplished in the temporal *movement* of the Son, and brought to its *terminus* by the Holy Spirit. The gospel is thus the pronouncement of this work of the triune God. By this work God builds and preserves a gathering of “saints in light,” whose task includes a cry of praise: “Hail, gladdening Light!”¹³⁹ This cry may form a proper doctrinal connection between what has been proposed here in chapter 3 and what is to come in chapter 4. God is the radiant One in a threefold manner; and he is the One who has eternally willed to gather the church—that “circumference” gathered around the “illuminating center” of the

¹³⁸ Ibid., IV/3.2: 510; KD IV/3: 586: “...totale Veränderung dessen, dem sie widerfährt.”

¹³⁹ Φῶς Ἰλαρόν.

evangel, Christ—his dwelling place. We therefore turn in the coming chapter to examine God's continued and sustained shining upon the gathering of his "saints in light."

CHAPTER 4

PRO ECCLESIA, PRO ME:
THE SAINTS IN THE LIGHT OF GOD

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:14–16).

The former chapter gave an account of God’s loving works *ad extra* in the “radiant event” of the evangel with which he elects, reconciles, and illuminates a creaturely “circumference” in the radiant *emanationes* of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus an account of the light of God in its threefold form is incomplete without attention to this gathered “circumference” of creatures with whom God is radiantly present. This present chapter is concerned with a description of the church as the gathering of saints in the light of God. It will therefore be concerned with the trinitarian basis of the *saints* and the *saint* “in the light,” followed by several intonations on the visible, “outshining” *notae* of the gathered church.

1. TRINITY, INCARNATION, AND ECCLESIOLOGY

We begin, however, by asking *how* the light of God and the light of the church are to be associated. That is, can we merely reduce talk of God’s light and work to the light and work of the church? That the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational for talk of ecclesiology has been noted since the early theology of the church, particularly in Tertullian’s notion that “properly and principally the church is the Spirit himself in whom is the Trinity of the one

divinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹ This association has found a good deal of renewal in contemporary trinitarian theology, especially in those forms of trinitarian thought which stress that the Trinity is to be styled a “society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities,” not only founded by their *relationes personales* but in their gracious relation to the creaturely gathering of the church.² Such insights from modern trinitarianism often champion the relation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the foundation for the church, and the church is therefore deemed the “political alternative”³ of the creaturely calling to society, and thus as the social extension of reconciliation through its “reproducing on earth the mystery of the unity in diversity” of the *essentia dei*.⁴

A rather engaging study regarding these current factors is found in Volf’s *After Our Likeness*, where he argues that there are “creaturely correspondences to this mystery of triunity,” or, more precisely, that there is an “ecclesial correspondence to the Trinity.”⁵ Volf therefore seeks to examine the “correspondences” between the character of the trinitarian persons, on the one hand, and that of ecclesial persons on the other, so as to highlight how the

¹ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 21 (PL 2:1024): “Nam et ipsa ecclesia proprie et principaliter ipse est spiritus, in quo est trinitas unius diuinitatis, Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus.”

² See Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, eds. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 27.

³ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 41. Beyond these examples, social trinitarian thought has notably been presented by David Brown (“Trinity, Personhood and Individuality,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, 21–47), Moltmann (*Trinity and the Kingdom*, viii, 172f), Miroslav Volf (*Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996]; and *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* [Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998]), John Zizoulas (*Being and Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985]), and John R. Franke (“God Is Love: The Social Trinity and the Mission of God,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, eds. D. Treier and D. Lauber [Downers Grove: IVP, 2009], 105–119). There are also the more “analytic” positions from Richard Swinburne (*Christian God*), Peter Forrest (“Divine Fission: A New Way of Moderating Social Trinitarianism,” in *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, vol. 1), and Moreland and Craig (“Trinity,” *ibid.*, 21–43). In-depth criticisms of these positions are many. See the particularly insightful studies by Sarah Coakley (“‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. by S.T. Davis, D. Kendall SJ, and G. O’Collins SJ. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 123–44), and Karen Kilby (“Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 957 [2000]: 432–45).

⁴ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, rev. edition (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 240. Beyond suitable Eastern Orthodox theology, one might find similar statements elsewhere; for instance, LaCugna: “*Trinitarian life is also our life*” (*God for Us*, 228).

⁵ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 192, 194. Volf is essentially arguing that the church, both *particularis* and *universalis*, is an *imago Trinitatis*.

structure of the divine relations structure ecclesial relations.⁶ Of course, this “structure of divine relations” is described as “a communion in which personhood and sociality are equiprimal” which, in turn, makes the church “a communion corresponding to the Trinity.”⁷ The result of this relation of the church to the triune life is that those “assembled in the name of Christ can be an... (‘image’) of the Trinity.”⁸ Volf clarifies this position in his recent work:

So when I speak about human *imaging* of the Trinity, I mean the human beings receive themselves as created in the image of the Trinity by the power of the Spirit [...] Because God has made us to reflect God’s own triune being, our human tasks are not first of all to *do* as God does—and certainly not to make ourselves as God *is*—but to let ourselves be indwelt by God and to celebrate and proclaim what God has done, is doing and will do.⁹

At the heart of Volf’s work is the belief that there is a likeness, correspondence, or “imaging” between the *essentia dei* and the social relations of *esse ecclesiae*. For instance, he rightly claims that “the nature of God...fundamentally determines the character of the Christian life,” yet he fails to show how the being of God is of a fundamentally different order than its creaturely, ecclesial existence.¹⁰ Such appeals to the so-called *imago Trinitatis* suggest that this “image” is a natural predicate of ecclesial existence.

We might place alongside Volf’s reflections on Trinity and ecclesiology the closely linked conception of the church as the “extension of the incarnation”: the church is the ontological union between Christ and the church. One instance might be found in Tillich’s notion that the person and work of “the Christ” is resolvable into the “primacy” of the

⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁷ Ibid., 213.

⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, “Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity,” in *God’s Life in Trinity*, ed. M. Volf and M. Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

“Spiritual Community.”¹¹ We find such affirmations throughout Tillich’s thoughts surrounding the identity of (the) Christ and the church, particularly in his foundational comment that “Christ would not be the Christ without those who receive him as the Christ.”¹² Thus the “Spiritual Community” is *identical* with the “New Being”¹³ of (the) Christ in that

[t]he term “Body of Christ” expresses the unambiguous life created by the divine Presence, in a sense similar to that of the term “Spiritual Community” [...] The Spiritual Community is [therefore] unambiguous; it is New Being, created by the Spiritual Presence. But, although *it is a manifestation of unambiguous life, it is nonetheless fragmentary, as was the manifestation of unambiguous life in the Christ* and in those who expected the Christ. The Spiritual Community is an unambiguous, though fragmentary, creation of the divine Spirit.¹⁴

The outcome is that (the) Christ is “receptively” or “communally” formed. Tillich might be a rather severe illustration; but related forms of thought can be found, for instance, in Bonhoeffer, who notably suggests—in the midst of the rising *Nationalsozialismus* of his time¹⁵—that the *Gemeinde* is the body of the risen Christ as the sole means of his presence and visibility: “The body of the exalted Lord is also a visible body, taking the form of the church-community.”¹⁶ Elsewhere he states emphatically that

¹¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 3:149: “We do not use the word ‘church’ for the Spiritual Community, because this word has been used, of necessity, in the frame of the ambiguities of religion. At this point we speak instead of that which is able to conquer the ambiguities of religion—the New Being—in anticipation, in central appearance, and in reception.” However, Tillich continues, churches may be the “manifest religious self-expression” and the “actualization and the distortion” of the Spiritual Community (*ibid.*, 153f).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “New Being” is defined by Tillich early on in his *Systematic* as “a reality in which the self-estrangement of our existence is overcome, a reality of reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning, and hope” (*ibid.*, 1:49).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:150–53.

¹⁵ For an insightful background Bonhoeffer’s Christology from his “mittleren periode,” see Ernst Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers: Hermeneutik, Christologie, Weltverständnis* (Munich: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), esp. 177–89.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 4*, eds. M. Kuske and I. Tödt (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1989), 242.

[b]etween [Christ's] ascension and his coming again the Church is his form and indeed his only form [...] The Church is the body of Christ. Here body is not only a symbol. The Church *is* the body of Christ, it does not *signify* the body of Christ [...] It is a comprehensive and central concept of the mode of existence of the one who is present in his exaltation and humiliation.¹⁷

A rather blunt expansion of this thought is found in Gary Badcock: “Jesus Christ the Son of God is not who he is without the church.”¹⁸ Badcock offers a clarification of this rather involved statement regarding the identity between the church and the risen Christ, namely that “there needs to be a recognition of the primal theological fact that the church is part of the *mystērion* [μυστήριον], part of the gospel.”¹⁹ Thus Badcock suggests that the best way to grasp ecclesiology is through “sustained reflection on the theme of the body of Christ, especially in its sacramental dimension.”²⁰ However, several worrisome stations are reached by Badcock’s notion. Of note is his insistence that the church is *part* of the gospel; that “room is made” in the “being of God” for the ecclesial gathering; and that the church as μυστήριον is “theologically primary” and of “first importance.”²¹ An idiom from Webster is worth registering here in response: the “gospel and church exist in a strict irreversible order, one in which the gospel precedes and the church follows,” because “its ecclesial character derives solely from and is wholly dependent upon the gospel’s manifestation of God’s sovereign purpose for his creatures.”²² Beyond Badcock’s misinterpreting the *order* of primacy in the life of the church—specifically in its receiving of, what Webster calls, a “unilateral

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin Robertson (NY: HarperOne, 1978), 58f.

¹⁸ Gary Badcock, “The Church as ‘Sacrament,’” in *The Community of the Word: Toward and Evangelical Ecclesiology*, eds. M. Husbands and D.J. Treier (Downers Grove: IVP Press; Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 199.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² John Webster, “On Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in *Confessing God*, 154. Cf. “...ecclesiology may not become ‘first theology’ ...so that it becomes the doctrinal *substratum* of all Christian teaching” (*ibid.*, 155).

grace”²³—it is therefore doubtful if the distinction between Christology and ecclesiology is adequately secured by reference to the “sacramental dimension” of the transcendent presence of Christ to his body, *communio corporis*: much more is required besides the Bonhoefferian reduction of Christ to the “realized” church and sacrament.²⁴

But this talk of the church as μυστήριον conjures the more straightforward incarnational ecclesiology from Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*. Here we find the précises of the problem:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so...a light [is] brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission [...] [T]hrough [the Church] He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community...rather they form *one complex reality* which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body.²⁵

According to *Lumen Gentium*, the church and Christ are “not to be considered as two realities” but rather hypostatically as “one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Badcock, “Church as ‘Sacrament,’” 200. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 59: “Christ as sacrament is also in the Church and is the Church.” Perhaps a more dogmatically ordered “sacramental ecclesiology” might be found in the same collection that Babcock’s article appears, namely in Ellen T. Charry, “Sacramental Ecclesiology,” in *Community of the Word*, 201–18; see Charry’s thought that a “sacramental ecclesiology is dogmatically located at the intersection of the Spirit and the cross of Christ and the sacrament of baptism” (203).

²⁵ *Lumen Gentium* 1, 7, 8 (emphasis mine).

a human element.” Moreover, the church itself communicates “truth and grace to all.” Such reflections, beyond housing a rather problematic view of soteriology, places undue weight on “cooperation” and incites hostility to *the* event of the incarnation of the Word, one which is a function of the community which solely functions “in the *Catholic* Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.”²⁶ Even Balthasar is at lengths to note that:

Only the Catholic Church has [...] inner dramatic tension [of Marian and Petrine holiness] and [this] is what makes her the extension (“fullness”, “body”) of Christ as well as his partner (“Bride”) enabling her to participate in Christ’s redemptive mission and, undergirding this, in his trinitarian being.²⁷

More could indeed be said here, namely the seeming transmission of agency from Christ to the church.²⁸ Yet it should be noted that there is suspiciously lacking a robust notion of *theologia crucis*. Though *Lumen Gentium* affirms that “through the Cross [the Church] arrives at the light which knows no setting,” the cross, we might note, is integrated into the church’s spirituality and the pious Mariology which results.²⁹ It is not expounded in terms of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 (emphasis mine).

²⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 358. Balthasar does note—via Barth—that a “scandal of division” in the church should be treated “as we treat our sins and those of others” (*ibid.*, 446).

²⁸ With regards to “identity,” even Aquinas, as a great *doctors ecclesiae* of the Roman Catholic Church, is measured in his approach to any reduction of the “body” to that of Christ (or vice versa):

In metaphorical speech [of the “body of Christ”] *we must not expect a likeness in all respects*; for thus there would be not *likeness but identity*. Accordingly a natural head has not another head because one human body is not part of another; but a metaphorical body, i.e. an ordered multitude, is part of another multitude as the domestic multitude is part of the civil multitude; and hence the father who is head of the domestic multitude has a head above him, i.e. the civil governor. And hence there is no reason why God should not be the Head of Christ, although Christ Himself is Head of the Church (*ST* 3a. q8, 1 ad.2; emphasis mine).

²⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 62: “This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.” An extreme case of this is also seen in Balthasar’s thoughts that Mary is seen as a “model and...prototype of the Church” (*Theo-drama* 3:338f).

solus Christus but rather the “Hegelian” *totus Christus*³⁰; and the Eucharistic depiction of the cross is reduced to a symbol of the continued communion in the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ.³¹

Of course, much ink might be spilled in response to this and other aspects of incarnational theology and the more “social” approaches to trinitarian theology and their consequences for ecclesiology. Yet for our present purposes two preliminary worries might be noted. First, such descriptions of *esse ecclesiae* as a “correspondence” to or “extension” of the relatedness of God or the incarnation of the Word lack proper attention to the radiant identity of the triune God. The gracious character of the church, its utter dependence on the “unilateral grace”³² of God’s work, is often bracketed by the implementation of the language of “extension,” “correspondence,” or “participation.” The “Hegelian” or, consequentially, the “Moltmannian” pattern of much modern ecclesiology meets little opposition from those who incorporate the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the Trinity.³³

Second, such descriptions of the church’s relation to the triune light and life of God or the event of the incarnation reveal deep investments in divine immanence, as notably captured in LaCugna’s notion that God’s trinitarian life is “the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other.”³⁴ Such immanentist positions often stress the association between the *operationes* of God and the *operationes* of the church,

³⁰ Concerning this tendency in the work of *Lumen Gentium* and Balthasar, see Horton’s comments in *Christian Faith*, 743: “[T]he Hegelian version of *totus Christus* is evident, allowing Christology to be assimilated to ecclesiology.”

³¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 3: “As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and, in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ.”

³² Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 154.

³³ See Rowan Williams’s note that the Hegelian and Moltmannian trinitarian models are “controlled by the desire to take history seriously, to bridge the gap between a remote eternity and the concrete temporal world; but they end in evasions of the temporal.” In the very least, I would add that for Moltmann this means a collapse not only of the “Father’s giving-up the Son” at Calvary, but also the perichoretic identification of the church with the triune life (cf. n.14 below). See Williams, “Trinity and Ontology,” in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 161.

³⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 228. Cf. the critique from Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (NY: T&T Clark, 2002), 128.

which undoubtedly endangers the free shining forth of God's work. Zizoulas further emphasizes this point when he states: "[E]cclesial being is tied to the very being of God."³⁵ Such an ecclesiology places undue weight upon the church as agent, and, likewise, reduces the passivity or receptivity which is at the center of the church as a *creature* of divine light. For if the being of the church is an *exact* image of the inner light of the divine *circumincessio*, or if the church is reducible to the radiant event of the incarnation of the Word, then it is precisely in the *shining forth* of the church that the *shining forth* of the triune God finds its actualization.³⁶ In a way, then, this approach to ecclesiology makes the work of the church a *participation in* the divine *operationes*, rather than a *reflection of* those *operationes*. In short: the light that "shines in the darkness" of John 1:5—the utter resplendence of the work of the Son, by the Father, *terminus* in the Spirit—is to some point threatened when the church is deemed to enter into the undertaking of the *opera Dei*. One consequence of this is that the light of the church is no longer utterly *external*, no longer shining from the outside to the inside, but in some sense infused into the church by the church's *κοινωνία* with God, so that "the community we share is our shared participation in the perichoretic community of trinitarian persons."³⁷

This chapter, however, seeks an alternative definition of the relation between the doctrine of God's light and the doctrine of the light of the church. This is principally due to the fact that it makes what we examined in the previous chapter—namely, election as the "radiant event of love"³⁸—essential to the *esse ecclesiae*. Where the "social" trinitarian and

³⁵ Zizoulas, *Being as Communion*, 15.

³⁶ We might register a worry with Bonhoeffer's statement that "the Word is also itself Church, in so far as the Church itself is revelation and the Word wishes to have the form of a created body" (*Christ the Center*, 59).

³⁷ Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 179. Add to this statement Moltmann's provocative interpretation of 1 Jn. 4:16 as pertaining to the "perichoretic community between the Trinity and the human community" ("God in the World—the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. R. Baukham and C. Mosser [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008], 376).

³⁸ See above, Ch. 3.1: "Election as the Radiant Event of Love."

incarnational language of participation, extension, imaging, perichoresis, or correspondence unduly stresses the connection of divine and ecclesial *operationes*, the language of election as the “radiant event of love,” on the other hand, focuses on the reality that the “miracle of grace...is fundamental to the church’s life and activity.”³⁹ The church lives by the eternal gift of the exalted Christ and the illuminating Holy Spirit who is the *terminus actionis* of the *voluntas* of the Father in gathering saints out of darkness into “his marvelous light.” In this manner, we shall continually speak of the church’s “light” as a circumferential “light,” an external “light,” a non-controllable “light,” a bestowed “light”—in short, a light which the church finds itself *in*, or indeed gathered *around*, through the radiant grace of the triune God.

However, a further *caveat* must be entered so as not to divide God and church. It is true that the *alienum* character of the church—its utter difference from God—can be so emphasized that the ecclesiology which results is “atrophied,”⁴⁰ in the sense that it separates God and the creaturely gathering and interprets God as simply a transcendent reality in which the “*distinctiveness of the church of believers*” becomes the “*prerequisite to the meaningfulness of the gospel message*.”⁴¹ The bulwark against this hazard, however, is not to erode the difference between God and the creaturely historical reality of the church, that is, to swing the pendulum once again towards “ecclesiological hypertrophy.”⁴² Rather, the most effectual bulwark is to offer a theological account of the *esse ecclesiae* called into God’s light: that is, to manage our thinking as we have thus far sought to do in this thesis by the light of the gospel, *juxta evangelium*. The discipline of the evangel will compel us to say both that the church’s light is a visible form of creaturely life and work (“a city on a hill”), and also that the life and work of the church are visible insofar as they have within themselves a

³⁹ Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 155.

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 156.

⁴¹ John Howard Yoder, “A People in the World,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994), 74f (emphasis original).

⁴² Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 156.

primary (albeit dim) “reflection” of the work and word of the God who is light, and that this church “actually shines among men.”⁴³

2. THE TRINITARIAN BASIS OF THE CHURCH’S LIGHT

We therefore seek to investigate the notion that the church is *in* the light of God; but it is *in* the light, not by some ontological participation in the divine light, but by its *vocatio* by God and in its receiving of the divine *benevolentia*. The church’s light is that which it is because of its utter dependence upon God’s “miracle of grace,” upon the fact that *God is light in himself* and thus is a *light-in-relation*.⁴⁴ In developing this notion we will first discuss the basis for the church’s light. That is, we pursue the thought that the light of the church has its basis in the work of the Trinity in electing, reconciling, and illuminating a people to become God’s covenant partners and saints in light.

In pursuing this course, we begin by saying that within the realm of creaturely time there exists a gathering of people who comprise the covenant people “in the light” (ἐν ὁ φω̄ς). Their corporate life is the mark that there is a creaturely response to being called “out of darkness and into [God’s] marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9); to the divine self-pronouncement—“I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12)—there actually corresponds a creaturely reality—“*You are the light of the world*” (Mt. 5:14). But the existence of such a reality is not founded in *creaturely* imaging and correspondence; indeed, from the side of creatures it is nothing other than *complacentia rationalis*, for the realm of creaturely time rests within the domain of darkness, endeavoring to rebel through the “works of darkness” (Rom. 13:12), and thus refuse God’s *vocatio*. Alienated from God, creaturely history is replete with the rebellious enterprise called the “people who loved the darkness” (Jn. 3:19). But part of the gospel

⁴³ Barth, *CD* IV/3.2: 763; *KD* IV/3: 874.

⁴⁴ See Ch. 2.2.1.

proclamation is the claim that there now exists the shocking reality of “children of light” (τέκνα φωτός, Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5). There is a form of common creaturely life which can only be described as children or saints “in the light,” that is, a people for God’s own possession: *congregatio sanctorum*. That such a people in the light exist *donum gratiae*, and that this community does not collapse back into the domain of darkness, lies within the saving work of the God who is light—*from himself God shines forth his light*.

Talk of the church’s being *in* light is thus based on talk of *the* light of the triune God. He, the radiant One, is the basis of the church’s life and of its work. In offering a description of the sum of the church’s history and of its work, including its being “a city set on a hill” (Mt. 5:14), is therefore to be deployed with language about God. God is not merely the church’s *causa remota*; rather, the church *is* because God *is*. “Ecclesial being”—and here we might amend Zizoulas’s statement—is a reality *because* of the “very being of God.” In other words, the church is the “light of the world” because God is the true light of the world. And therefore the light of the church is a matter of humbly turning to face the works and ways of the radiant triune God.

2.1. The Johannine Pattern

Why is the triune God the basis of the church’s light? For an answer, we might pause and look at the “trinitarian” explanation of this point in the First Letter of John.⁴⁵ There, the light

⁴⁵ We say “trinitarian” in light of the “proto-trinitarian teaching” perceived in the First Letter of John. Of course, this “proto-trinitarian teaching” is not *necessarily* derived by direct exegesis, but rather as recognizing conceptual patterns and patterns of divine action, namely, patterns of God’s redemptive action in the economy as revealed in Scripture. Thus, beyond the passages that follow, we find of particular insight the verbs ἔχω and μένω as found in ch. 2 of the letter. Granted, these verbs are rendered within the particular response of the Christian as ἔχω and μένω the Father and the Son simultaneously by confession and abiding; yet there is a near echo of ὁμοούσιος found in 2:23f, marked by the continuous expression of υἱός καί πατήρ: “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.”

of the church, which results in “walking” (περιπατέω) and having “fellowship with one another” (κοινωνία μετά ἀλλήλων, 1:7), is grounded, first, in the loving, electing work of God the Father. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (3:1).⁴⁶ Considered in the general scope of the first, third, and fourth chapters of the epistle, these assertions can be seen as carrying a twofold pronouncement: that the basis of walking “in the light” of fellowship is election, and that the aim of this election is walking “in the light.” If walking “in the light” has an enduring creaturely shape, then that shape is to be located in its creative basis in the loving, electing work of God the Father summarized in the single expression, “that we should be called” (ἵνα κληθῶμεν). But together with this: if there is an election of grace, then it is no mere self-encompassed divine movement, but an effective power in creaturely history, that which has as its *telos* the illumination of “children of light,” bound to God as a reflection of his own proper light, “as he is in the light” (ὡς αὐτός ἐστὶ ἐν τῷ φωτί, 1:7). As we put forth in chapter 3, so here: election is God’s “radiant event of love.”

By this time a significant concern for understanding the church’s light begins to materialize. The dynamic of the church’s light is found in election and gathering by God. The gathered saints *in* light, those elected by the love of God, owe its origin to a shining forth from outside itself—on account that *si eius puritas in nobis luceat*⁴⁷—striking from consideration that this power belongs to us but rather that it “has been *given* [and] it is from mere bounty and generosity that God makes us his children.”⁴⁸ Neither in its foundation nor in its continual work is the gathering of saints in light a self-sufficient and self-generated *congregatio*. Rather, it is a creature of the *given* and *antecedent* light of grace. The dynamics

⁴⁶ Cf. Ἴδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ, ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν καὶ ἐσμέν (3:1).

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Comm. ep. Ioannis* 1.6 (CO 55:304f; CC 22:164): “[H]is purity shines forth in us.” See also Calvin’s further remarks: “What God communicates to us is not a vain fiction (*inane figmentum*); for it is necessary that the power and effect of this fellowship should shine forth in our life; otherwise the possession of the gospel is fallacious” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.1: “...datam esse caritatem, significat hoc merae esse liberalitatis, quod nos Deus pro filiis habet. Unde enim tanta nobis dignitas, nisi ex Dei amore?” (CO 55:329; cf. CC 22:203).

of its light is, therefore, in no self-generating way *potestas ecclesiae*. God sets apart the church from the darkness. The church does not separate itself from the darkness, for it has neither the power nor the ability to do so. The church's light is the outcome of the divine determination, "that we have been called," and not of any human acts of quarantining an "illuminated" group from the "unilluminated." In this manner, the true light of the church is very different from creaturely factionalism. Only God is light (φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5); only God may lovingly elect the "children of light"; only an elect church is a gathering of the illumined. The church's light is thus based on the "radiant event of love" in the Father's election of creatures.

Moreover, if we might continue our review, the gathered church in the light, which is the purpose for election, is based on the reconciling work of the Son of God. Remaining with the First Letter of John, we hear:

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world [...] indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ [...] And if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 4:14; 1:3, 7).⁴⁹

The Father's will is effected in his sending of the Son who is the "Savior of the world" (σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου). If we ask how the *voluntas* of the Father is undertaken in the Son, the First Letter of John gives us a series of additional notions: the one who is "made manifest to us" (1:2); the one who "came by water and blood" and is testified to by the Holy Spirit (5:6); the one who "laid down his life for us" (3:16); the "propitiation" for "the sins of the world"

⁴⁹ Cf. Καὶ ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκε τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου (4:14); ...καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:3); ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν, ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας (1:7).

(2:2); the one who “cleanses us from all sin” and is “faithful and just to forgive us” (1:9); the one in whom the “love of God is perfected” (2:5); the “advocate” (2:1); the one who has “eternal life” (5:12); the one who is the “true God” (5:20); and the one who is the “true light” of the world, as he himself is the victorious light “already shining” (2:8; 1:5, 7). Of course, the image of light, particularly in the first two chapters of the Johannine letter, reiterates the totality of Christ’s reconciling work: the objective work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, which is the divine act of defeating sin and putting an end to the darkness and pollution of human creatures, namely by the fact that “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”⁵⁰ That work, though incomparable and radiant, is nevertheless a work which suggests a creaturely target in the arc of its trajectory: it “is true in him and in you” (1 Jn. 2:8). Thus

the church of Christ has lived and will live so long as Christ reigns at the right hand of his Father. It is sustained by his hand; defended by his protection; and is kept safe through his power. For he will surely accomplish what he once promised: that he will be present with his own even to the end of the world.⁵¹

Finally, we might say that the church’s being *in* the light, which is the purpose of election and which is undertaken and accomplished in the reconciling work of the Son, is illuminated and brought to *terminus* by the Holy Spirit. Again from the First Letter of John: “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn. 3:24). By “abandoning all her own wisdom” and permitting “herself be taught by the Holy

⁵⁰ Cf. I. Howard Marshall’s points regarding this in *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 108–111. See also our conclusions in Ch. 3.2, “The Reconciling Light.”

⁵¹ Calvin, *Inst.* Pref.: “Errors About the Nature of the Church” 6; cf. *OS* 3:23, *Praefatio*: “Vixit sane Christi Ecclesia, et vivet quandiu Christus regnabit ad dextram Patris: cuius manu sustinetur, cuius praesidio defenditur, cuius virtute suam incolumitatem retinet. Praestabit enim ille indubie quod semel receipt, se affuturum suis usque as consummationem seculi.”

Spirit,” the church, gathered and “shone upon,” is made into God’s dwelling place.⁵² The work of the Spirit is to bring to *terminus* the reality which is willed in election and founded in reconciliation: the particular movement of being “called out of darkness” into God’s “marvelous light.” The Spirit completes the plan of reconciliation (cf. Rom. 8:16), whose resolve is that there should be a creaturely existence of “walking in the light, as he is in the light,” that is, a covenant relationship between himself and creatures whom he has *elected*, *reconciled*, and *illuminated* by drawing them into a covenantal relation with himself. The verbiage of “election,” “reconciliation,” and “illumination,” is calculated: it is not talk of mere “imaging,” “extension,” or “participation.” For instance, “abide in him and he in us” (1 Jn. 3:24) does not mean ontological union between God and the church, à la Moltmann, Volf, and LaCugna. The mention of “in God, and God in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ) is not to ontological communion but the saving divine agency which recreates a relationship between God and his creatures, anticipated in the church which is a covenantal “people that have such...one dwelling in the midst of them.”⁵³ The *terminus* of the work of the Son, the light *of* and *for* the world, is delivering creatures from being “in darkness” (1 Jn. 1:9), from alienation. That work of deliverance is turned towards its completion—though not *hic et nunc*, as it is a “present darkness” (Eph. 6:12)—by the Holy Spirit, who not only enacts a transformed relation to God the Father (cf. Rom. 8:15), but also renews “fellowship with one another.” Consequently, the *terminus* of the work of the church’s being illumined and renewed is not the work of the church itself. The church is not the “end of the subject because the Holy Spirit becomes the agent of the triune God’s knowledge *through* the church’s core

⁵² Ibid., 4.8.13; CO 2:855. Calvin is here qualifying the argument that *errare non posse ecclesiam in rebus ad salutem necessariis*.

⁵³ Jonathan Edwards, “God Amongst His People [1734]” (WJE 19:460).

practices and teaching,” as Reinhard Hütter argues;⁵⁴ nor is the Spirit defined as “a dimension of human life” in which the “church” is to be rendered a place where “*it* gives holiness to the religious communities...of which *it* is the invisible Spiritual essence,” as Tillich proposes.⁵⁵ Rather, as Calvin says in commenting on 1 Jn. 3:24,

it hence appears that we are God’s children, that is, when the Spirit riles and governs our life [...and] whatever good works are done by us, *proceed from the grace of the Spirit*, and that *the Spirit is not obtained by our righteousness, but is freely given to us.*⁵⁶

Thus, if there exists a covenant gathering of saints in light—if the will of the Father is to call creatures out of darkness and into his light, if the reconciling work of the Son is realized in creaturely history in a form of common life—then it is because the church exists by the Spirit’s free luminous agency, and by the dynamic coming of the Spirit, in the realm of illuminative renewal in which “the Spirit is not obtained by our righteousness, but is freely given to us.”

Thus far, then, we have proposed that the basis of the light of the church is not the *potestas ecclesia* but the saving work of the trinitarian God. The church’s light is therefore an

⁵⁴ Reinhard Hütter, “The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practices, Doctrine, Theology,” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, eds. J. Buckley and D. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 26 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 3:111,155f. Tillich’s cumbersome language is couched in his discussions regarding the “latency” (i.e., “before”) and “manifestation” (i.e., “after”) of religious communities, which includes the historical “churches.” Of course, Tillich wishes to deny that he is here strictly discussing the classical rhetoric of *ecclesia visibilis* and *ecclesia invisibilis* (cf. 152f); rather, he wishes to recast these terms into his notion of latency and manifestation, so that, for instance, the “churches” contain a “state of being partly actual, partly potential” (153). As is, however, Tillich’s discussion descends into confusion as he continually states that the Spiritual Community is the agent of action in making the “churches” holy, in overcoming “profanization,” “demonization,” and the “ambiguous life.” A glaring hole in Tillich’s account of the divine agency of the triune God is his notorious ascription of speaking “symbolically of God as Spirit” (111). In sum, therefore for Tillich: the “Spiritual Community” is the “inner *telos* of the churches” because of the *symbolic* character of the “Spiritual Presence” of the Spirit, and therefore *itself* is “*the source of everything which makes them churches*” (165; emphasis mine). See our discussion of *ecclesia visibilis* and *invisibilis* below.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Comm. ep. Ioannis* 3.24 (CO 55:345; CC 22:227) (emphasis mine).

external light. Because the church is illuminated by the light of grace, and because this grace is a *movement* of God's "radiant event of love" in his election, then in the case of the church the *nota* of light is not a matter of *attributa ecclesiae*. God's light is proper to him, θεός φῶς ἐστίν, and yet he is "nothing like that light with which we are acquainted."⁵⁷ The light of the church, by contrast, is not a natural condition or *qualitas*. As with all the titles of the church, the church is what it is as a result of the radiant presence and action of the triune God in building a people into a "spiritual house" (πνευματικός οἶκος, 1 Pet. 2:5).⁵⁸ In other words, "the church is called the light of the world not in competition with Christ, Who is the Light of the world, but on account of *His* unique presence."⁵⁹ This reality is, once again, a pronouncement of the ontological imperative for the church announced in 1 Pet. 2:9f:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There we have the *medulla* of what needs to be said about *esse ecclesiam*. The church is what it is "now" by God's gracious and "received" election and love. This requires a rejection of the thought that the work essential to the church is self-generated: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" by virtue of "him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And it entails a "proclamation" (ἐξαγγέλλω) of the fact that the work essential to the church is God's by his "excellencies," for the church is comprised of "a

⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hær.* 2.13.4.

⁵⁸ Regarding the predicate of light ascribed to the church in the context of the NT, see Minear, *Images of the Church*, esp. 127–29.

⁵⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, trans. J.E. Davison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 36.

people of his own possession.” There is, therefore, a suitable docility to *esse ecclesiae*, for faith—that is, proclamation of, assent and trust in, the gracious shining forth of God—is the central act of *esse ecclesiae*. From this ontological imperative about the church’s constitution there follows a further imperative regarding the action of the light of the church: all the acts of the light of the church must exhibit a proclamation of the “excellencies” of the One who *is light in himself*; and *from himself shines forth his light*: the electing Father who reconciles in the Son and renews by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

3. THE SAINT IN LIGHT

Yet before we venture farther afield regarding the church’s “proclaiming” the “excellencies” of the One who alone is *light in himself*, it might be best at this point to pause and offer a necessary aside. We have thus far traced several themes in a communal sense, namely, the election and gathering of the church by the saving work of the triune God. But within the wider purview of this theme of God’s gathering of a people we must state a simple reality which might easily be overlooked: *individual* saints are called out of darkness and into the light of God. But a swift *caveat lector* arises: talk of the individual is not the region in which our talk of ecclesiology and God is to be found. To do so would not only subvert the sense that the light of the individual *saint* occurs within the gathering of God’s *saints* in light; it would also threaten to collapse the transcendent work of God’s shining forth—his election, reconciliation, and illumination of creatures—into an *ecclesiola* of the individual saint and not the realm of “common illumination,” as Edwards calls it.⁶⁰ The danger of collapse is particularly perceived in ecclesiologies which reduce *esse ecclesiae* to the sphere of moral “actors.” That is, in one example, the church is seen as the company of “actors” or

⁶⁰ Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening* (WJE 4:177).

“dramaturges”—namely believers, ministers, and theologians—which contributes to “performing” the “Script” of Scripture or in being an “advisor” to God the “Director.”⁶¹ Here the “actor” must inhabit the subjective role by asking a question: What would I do if I were a certain character? Thus the world of the church is reduced to a methodology in which “One needs to imagine the whole picture [of “performing the Script”] in order to act truthfully.” That is, the church made up of actors “cannot even walk into a room truthfully until you know who you are, where you came from, what room you are entering, who lives in the house, and a mass of other given circumstances that must influence your action.”⁶² Once this happens, *then* the church is able to be a “theater of the gospel,” performing its drama on an assortment of cultural stages throughout the world.⁶³ The church as a company of individual moral “actors,” learning who they truthfully are in their “roles,” must accomplish such tasks *before* they can truthfully “perform” as the church. Thus the sphere of the community has the danger of shrinking to the little world of the actor before it becomes a “theater of the gospel.” Such an approach to ecclesiology is not to deny that Vanhoozer and others have done a good deal of work in the connection between doctrine and practice, especially when taken in accord with their progenitor, Balthasar. Yet we should hasten to add that Vanhoozer’s aim might be somewhat steadied by Balthasar himself, who, in the midst of his magisterial *Theo-Drama*, continually calls the reader to return to the “central fact” of the “unique” drama, namely, that “Jesus by his obedient death takes over the guilty death that is our fate.”⁶⁴

But our aim here is not to decry Vanhoozer’s proposal;⁶⁵ rather, we place this worry to one side for now and simply state that within our larger theological enquiry regarding

⁶¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 244; see a further clarification of this theme in his forthcoming *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 377.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, 4:495.

⁶⁵ We must note here that Vanhoozer is not concerned with reducing *esse ecclesiae* to the image of “drama,” yet it might be a consequence of such thought if taken too far in that direction.

ecclesiology there must always be the reminder that there is a theological legitimacy to talk of *individual* deliverance from “sitting in the darkness” and the *individual’s* restoration to the *telos* found in the “radiant event of love” of the Father’s work of election, the Son’s work of reconciliation, and the Holy Spirit’s renewing work of illumination.⁶⁶ And from this foundation the specific question arises for the individual—as it does for the church—regarding the ontology of *being* “in light.” More specifically: How is the *being* of the saint in the light of salvation to be described?

Answering this question requires we state that Christian light is fellowship in God’s light; it is the rekindling of the relation to God which is the heart of being a saint in light. Yet as we have affirmed elsewhere, to be a sinner in the darkness is to reject and rebel against this relation.⁶⁷ However, this refusal cannot overturn the objectivity of God’s shining forth to be the light *of, for, and with* the saint—the *light-in-relation*—for such is God’s *decretum aeternum*. To be “in light” is to be a saint in whom God’s mercy has shone forth to end the power of darkness. To be a *saint* in light is thus to be a reconciled sinner, renewed in the light of fellowship and illumined to “walk” as a child of light and so produce the “fruit of light” which is “found in all that is good and right and true” (Eph. 5:9). In this, the divine work of illumination, the saint is gathered into the history of lively fellowship: “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). On the side of the saint, this fellowship which constitutes illumination is the renewal of the life of obedience; it is the “walking” in the light and making “visible” the deeds done in the dark, “for anything that becomes visible is light” (Eph. 5:13). “This does not mean,” Calvin clarifies, “that when we have risen from death to life, his light begins to shine upon us, as if our performances came before his grace.” Rather, “those on whom Christ, the Sun of righteousness, has risen [...and] those who are illuminated by the Spirit of God [...] ought to live under the eye of God [...]

⁶⁶ We return to the topic of illumination in chapter 5.

⁶⁷ See Ch. 3.1.1, “The ‘Radiant Event of Love’ and the ‘Domain of Darkness.’”

because by the mercy of God they have been rescued from darkness.”⁶⁸ Saved by God, saints are made to be “in the light” and so produce the “fruit of light.”

This means that the production of the “fruits of light” emerge from the renewal of creaturely existence and activity by God. *Being* “in the light” for the saint is, therefore, a matter of the “light of the gospel.” The “light of the gospel” is not only the light that the gospel pronounces but also the voice of the gospel as a summons to individual action.⁶⁹ *Being* “in the light” is therefore the revelation of the inescapable decision under which individual lives have been placed—namely, that as those elected, reconciled, and illuminated by God, saints are those who are determined for faithful “walking in the light.” But in a trinitarian theology of light, grace is light, extending into the illumination of action.⁷⁰ *Lumen gratiae*—which is, of course, nothing other than an summary of the *movement* of God’s shining forth, at whose radiant center are the *emanationes*, namely the saving work of Jesus Christ and his sending of the Holy Spirit—is a “gift of the Holy Spirit,” which is marked by walking in the “illumination” of the One who is light.⁷¹ “Jesus Christ, when he enlightens the mind,” Edwards says further, “sends forth the Holy Spirit to dwell in the soul, to be as a continual internal light to manifest and make known spiritual things to the believer.”⁷²

This “walking in the light” is at every moment characterized by “no longer walking as the Gentiles do...darkened in their understanding,” because this “alienation from the life of God” (Eph. 4:17f), which produced the “works of darkness” (ἔργον ὁ σκότος, Eph. 5:11), was eradicated at the cross of the Son of God. “Walking in the light” is therefore the living out of that which has been “exposed by the light” of the Son’s resurrection (Eph. 5:13). The notion of “walking” is thus a way of explaining how the new life of the saint resembles the

⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Commentarius in epist. Pauli ad Ephesios* 5.8, 16 (CO 51:217f; CC 21:309, 312).

⁶⁹ We touch on the *vox* of the gospel to which the saints obediently turn to and face in sub-section 4.3.3.1, “The listening church.”

⁷⁰ See Calvin, *Inst.* 3.11.1; OS 4:182.

⁷¹ Calvin, *Comm. Ps. pars II* 119.64 (CC 6:449).

⁷² Jonathan Edwards, “Christ, the Light of the World” (WJE 10:543).

destruction of the sinful life of those “darkened in their understanding.” The notion of “walking in the light” thus traces the great Easter reality: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5:14). This act of faithful “walking” is the act in response to God’s *lumen gratiae*.

With the topic of faithfully “walking in the light,” therefore, we return to the theme of ecclesiology in order to look at how the saints, graciously gathered as the church, “outshine” in their faithful acts.⁷³ What creaturely social form is taken by this reference to the work of God’s *lumen gratiae*? To answer this, we move to examine the fact that the light of the church is visible in its proclamation (ἐξαγγέλλω)⁷⁴ of the radiant identity of God, “who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

4. PROCLAIMING AND OUTSHINING THE “GLADDENING LIGHT”

Our previous sections regarding the *saint* and *saints* in the light were often managed by various reflections from Scripture, particularly the First Letter of John, the First Letter of Peter, and the Letter to the Ephesians. In turning to the “outshining” acts of the gathered saints, however, we might take as a guiding expression a text from third-century Christian worship, that is, the earliest recorded hymn, often entitled Φῶς Ἰλαρόν, *Lumen Hilare*, or

⁷³ The word “outshine” is used in this chapter to differentiate the church’s “visible” acts from the act of God’s “shining forth” of himself in his missions towards creatures in the dark.

⁷⁴ We propose here and throughout that the action of ἐξαγγέλλω is a sufficient description of the church’s action, as found in 1 Pet. 2:9f. Of course, this verb is unique to this passage, yet it bears similarity to the instances of “proclamation” in the NT when ascribed to the church, namely, Paul’s use with regards to the Lord’s Supper: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλλω) the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). Beyond the confessional undertones—and the same primitive word as the Pauline instance—the Petrine instance of ἐξαγγέλλω denotes the specific action of “announcing from within” or “announcing out of” the church (cf. the preposition ἐκ paired with the verb ἀγγέλλω). Thus, “proclamation” in the subsequent pages of this chapter will be synonymous with “recognition,” etc. However, “proclamation,” in this context, continually harkens back to 1 Pet 2:9f and the particular act of faithfully announcing out of the gathered church the “excellencies” of God’s calling a people out of darkness into the marvelous light of fellowship with himself.

“Hail, Gladdening Light.”⁷⁵ This “ancient witness,” as Basil calls it, is believed to have been sung by the early church at the empty tomb of Christ as a candle burned, symbolizing his resurrection.⁷⁶ The hymn—using the translation and arrangement from John Keble—is translated thus:

Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured
 Who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,
 Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!
 Now we are at the sun’s hour of rest,
 The lights of evening round us shine,
 We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine!
 Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung
 With undefiled tongue,
 Son of our God, giver of life, alone:
 Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.⁷⁷

The brief hymn comprises three parts: a “hailing” of the Son, who is the “gladdening Light” and the *fons luminis de lumine*,⁷⁸ a recitation of the act of hymning the divine Trinity;

⁷⁵ The hymn was first recorded in the *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum V*, ed. Franz Xavier von Funk (Paderbornae: Ferdinandi Schoeningh, 1905). See also Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd edition (London: SPCK, 2002), 173; and Suitbert Bäumer, *Histoire du bréviaire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Letouzey, 1962), who notes that the hymn is “se sert comme preuve de la tradition dogmatique” (82).

⁷⁶ Basil deems this hymn to be composed by Athenogenes before his martyrdom “through fire.” Basil continues with a bit of background, saying that the hymn was sung at the “lighting of the lamp,” when believers “put forth the expression as an ancient one, and no one ever considered them impious when they said, ‘we glorify the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit of God’” (*Sp. sanc.* 73 [*PG* 32:205; *PPS* 42:114]).

⁷⁷ Keble’s English translation is the standard in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, though the hymn is often titled (in its American equivalent) “O, Gracious Light.” See Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., *Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal Church, Church Publishing, 1977), 64. The Greek runs thus: Φῶς ἱλαρὸν ἁγίας δόξης ἀθανάτου Πατρὸς, οὐρανοῦ, ἁγίου, μάκαρος, Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλθόντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλίου δύσιν, ἰδόντες φῶς ἐσπερινόν, ὑμνοῦμεν Πατέρα, Υἱόν, καὶ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, Θεόν. Ἄξιόν σε ἐν πᾶσι καιροῖς ὑμνεῖσθαι φωναῖς αἰσίσαις, Υἱὲ Θεοῦ, ζωὴν ὁ διδούς· διὸ ὁ κόσμος σε δοξάζει.

⁷⁸ Cf. “Lumen hilare iucunda lux tu gloriae, fons luminis de lumine, beate Iesu caelitus a Patre sancto prodiens. Fulgor diei lucidus solisque lumen occidit, et nos ad horam vesperam te confitemur cantico. Laudamus unicum Deum, Patrem potentem, Filium cum Spiritu Paraclito in Trinitatis gloria. O digne linguis qui piis lauderis omni tempore, Fili Dei, te saecula vitae datorem personent. Amen.”

and a glorification of the saving work of Christ, prescribing that praise be paired with proclamation: “Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung / With undefiled tongue.” This undertaking of proclamation is visible as the basic character of the church’s light, for, in the act of recognizing the radiant identity of God, the church joins with all those who have been illumined by the divine summons out of darkness and into God’s marvelous light, and become the “spiritual house” which is light in its proclamation of this radiant One, the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine!” To develop our thoughts further, we keep Φῶς Ἰλαρόν before us as we concentrate on three guiding questions: (1) What is it about proclamation that makes it basic to the church’s being the “light of the world?” (2) What is it that the church aims at in proclaiming the triune God? (3) In what acts of proclamation is the church’s light visible?

4.1. *The Proclamation of the Church*

What is it about proclamation that makes it basic to the church’s being the “light of the world?” (Mt. 5:14). Proclamation is, as Barth clarifies, the act of *credo*, that is, “simply the act of recognition of the reality of God.”⁷⁹ It is an act of “recognition” in which the radiant identity and “excellencies” of that which is other than the church is proclaimed. In this “recognition,” the church simply turns to God’s reality, humbly proclaiming its “Amen” to God’s radiant way of being:

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, *Credo: Die Hauptprobleme der Dogmatik, dargestellt im Anschluß an das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis* (Zollikon–Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948), 5; cf. “...schlicht den Akt der Anerkennung der den Menschen angehenden Wirklichkeit Gottes in Gestalt bestimmter, aus Gottes Offenbarung gewonnener Erkenntnisse.” See also Barth’s comment that the “Akt des Credo” is the “Akt des Bekenntnisses” (*ibid.*, 7). We might also pair this with Webster’s notion: “*the act of confession is a responsive, not a spontaneous act*” (“Confession and Confessions,” in *Confessing God*, 72; emphasis original).

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:5f).

Proclamation in this sense is not an activity of the church *in abstracto*. Rather, in the totality of its activities, the church exists by the basic structure of proclamation—it is the collective *laudamus* in all it is by the fact that it is the creature of God's *lumen gratiae*. What the church proclaims, therefore, is "not ourselves" but the One who "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Because of this, the church's being the "light of the world," too, is at its heart a proclamation. The light of the church, as we have seen, is not some inactive *proprium* but an event. That event, the history we call the church's light, is a twofold event. The history of the church's light includes as a first, principal *movement* the condescension of God who, in his *shining forth his light*, elects, reconciles, and illuminates "the church...in splendor" (Eph. 5:27), a *collectio hominum electum*.⁸⁰ And it includes as a secondary, resultant *movement* the *coetum sacrum* of saints in light, gathered by God's grace, among whom and by whom the equiprimordial light of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is proclaimed.⁸¹ The church's light arises as part of this history of grace and proclamation. The church is "*in the light*" and the "light of the world," namely, as it cries "Hail, gladdening Light!"

This proclamation is commenced, of course, in God himself: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts." The church cannot proclaim unless God opens its mouth, "that it may confess [God's] name."⁸² Proclamation is thus generated, not by the church, but by God's disclosure of himself as the radiant One by the "light of knowledge"

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *Corp. theol.* XXVI.6.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, XXVI.4.

⁸² Augustine, *Confessionum* 5.1: "...ut confessitur nomini tuo" (*PL* 32:706; cf. *NPNF* 1:79).

in revelation, “the eloquence of God’s presence and activity, God so acting in relation to creatures that his actions constitute his address of them.”⁸³ Revelation—the “eloquence of God’s presence and activity”—is thus shined forth and pronounced salvation; and revelation produces the *coetum sacrum* of saints in light, the *coetus est vocatorum*,⁸⁴ the gathering of those called out of darkness into the light of fellowship with the everlasting Father, the eternal Son, and the illuminating Holy Spirit. Only on the basis of this divine “address” and “constitution” is it possible for the people of God to proclaim the ancient expression: *Laudamus unicum Deum, Patrem potentem, Filium cum Spiritu Paraclito in Trinitatis gloria.*

4.2. *The Radiant Subject of Proclamation*

What is it that the church focuses on in proclaiming the triune God? In short: the church in the light proclaims the radiant identity of God. The God who is turned to and proclaimed in this way is the radiant subject of the work of salvation—the “eloquent” One who, in “his perfect adequacy,” is the subject of the “universal pertinence of what he has accomplished *ephapax*.”⁸⁵ He is the “Father of lights” (Jms. 1:17); the true Son who is the true “gladdening Light”; the Holy Spirit, the comforter and illuminator—“Light thrice repeated; but One Light and One God,”⁸⁶ manifest in the divine work of delivering creatures from the domain of darkness and sin. And the church realizes the object of its being called out of darkness by God when it proclaims this radiant and eloquent work. In doing so, it joins in the creaturely worship which is due God:

⁸³ John Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London/NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 118.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Corp. theol.* 26.6.

⁸⁵ Davidson, “Salvation’s Destiny,” 166.

⁸⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.3 (*NPNF* 7:318; cf. *PPS* 23:118).

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his majesty is above earth and heaven.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

O Lord my God, you are very great
 You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
 covering yourself with light as with a garment,
 stretching out the heavens like a tent [...]

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his majesty is above earth and heaven (104:1f; 148:11–13).

These distinct praises form a stunning proclamation: “Bless the Lord O my soul! / O Lord my God [...] You are clothed with splendor and majesty / covering yourself with light as with a garment [...] his majesty is above earth and heaven!” More precisely: the church *in the light* proclaims the Father of radiant majesty. God’s majesty as Father is the absolute uniqueness of his being, ways, and works, a radiance which is limitless in scope as his being “has in itself its own particular depth, its own plentitude and perfection.”⁸⁷ This radiant majesty is not an isolated attribute; it is, rather, a property of the *una divina essentia* which characterizes all that God is.⁸⁸ And so God’s light, too, is inseparable from his majesty;⁸⁹ and this is why the church *in the light* praises the Father of radiant majesty by crying: “You are very great!”

The church *in the light* proclaims the only-begotten Son, *lumen de lumine*, worthy of all praise. Φῶς Ἰλαρόν in its totality is marked by a high Christology, especially in its brief presentation of the Son’s matchless saving work, so that over the entire hymn is found

⁸⁷ Webster, “Immensity and Ubiquity of God,” 94.

⁸⁸ This is Barth’s point regarding “glory” as essentially synonymous with “light” when discussing the perfections of God (see *CD II/1*: 646–49). Cf. Davidson’s discussion of this in “Divine Light,” 54–6.

⁸⁹ See Ch. 3.2.1, “The Word Lighted Down.”

emblazoned the words from the final stanza: “Son of our God, giver of life, alone.”⁹⁰ Here, in the “ancient expression” of the Trinity as the aim of the church’s “hymning,” the focus is on the person who is present in that work. This one is proclaimed as the true light, the *fons luminis de lumine, vere Deus*, and the “everlasting Son of the Father.” In being this, he is appropriately “Worthiest at all times to be sung,” for he shares in the “mutual light” of the Godhead, and is rightly the object of the church’s praise.

The church *in* the light proclaims the Holy Spirit, the one who illuminates creatures. The Spirit appears momentarily in the presentation of the church’s “hymning” section in the middle stanza of Φῶς Ἰλαρόν (i.e., “We hymn ...”). Yet this brief mention of the Holy Spirit is vital for the account of redemptive history which Φῶς Ἰλαρόν seeks to hail. For *Paraclito* (παράκλητος) assembles the idea that the Father and the Son would be *causa remota* if not for the fact that as Spirit, God agrees to be near to his saints in light forever:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you (Jn. 14:16f).

The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father through the Son in order to instruct the saints (cf. Jn. 15:26).⁹¹ Without the Holy Spirit, the “Hail!” of the church would be aimless; indeed, instead of the “bride of Christ” the church would be the “widow of Christ.”⁹² God’s saving of his people, his shining upon, illuminating, and upholding the saints in light—none of this would be conceivable without the proclamation of the Spirit’s deity, without the *credo* that we hymn

⁹⁰ Cf. Υἱὲ Θεοῦ, ζῶντῶν ὁ δίδουζ; *O, Fili Dei, vitae datorem.*

⁹¹ Cf. our account of “The Light of the *opera Dei ad intra*” in Ch. 2.1.2.

⁹² This is Luther’s point in his *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute, concl. 72 (WA 1:620.8)*: “...habet vidua Christi.”

the Spirit along with the Father and the Son. “Das will sagen,” Barth says emphatically, “der Heilige Geist...ist in gleicher Weise ewiger Geist, wie der Vater ewiger Vater, wie der Sohn ewiger Sohn ist.”⁹³ Failure to proclaim this point is the simultaneous failure to proclaim: “Ich glaube an den Heiligen Geist.”⁹⁴

Let us now bring these loose ends together with regard to their association to the church’s light. The church is the gathering of the saints in light as it faithfully proclaims and praises the radiant identity of the God who is *light in himself*. God’s light is God “clothed with splendor and majesty” as Lord and Savior. As he reveals his being *light in himself* and thus *shines forth his light*, he gathers and illumines for himself a people, set apart for his praise and for the work of “proclaiming his excellencies.” In this is formed the humble creaturely reflection of the vision in the Apocalypse: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23).

4.3. *The Visible Outshining of the Light of the Church*

Finally: In what acts of proclamation is the church’s light visible? Our enquiry into the light of the church has thus far implicitly traced the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they

⁹³ Barth, *Credo*, 118: “That is to say: the Holy Spirit...is in the same manner the eternal Spirit, as the Father is the eternal Father, as the Son is the eternal Son.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:14–16).

What is often exegetically garnered from this passage in the Sermon on the Mount is the notion of *ecclesia visibilis*: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Initially, therefore, we need to probe the notion of *ecclesia visibilis* and its proper use in this context.⁹⁵

A good deal of contemporary ecclesiology has been deeply committed to *ecclesia visibilis*, that is, to the church’s tangible and historical character as an ordered *societas* and sphere of “public existence...as ‘political’ community in time.”⁹⁶ Its opposite notion, namely *ecclesia invisibilis*, therefore recedes from view, since it seeks to spiritualize the church without objective social form. One effect is that the externality of the church is preeminently emphasized, that is, the historical activity of the church in which the *esse ecclesiae* is visible is of utmost importance. One instance might be briefly noted.

In *Resident Aliens*, Hauerwas and Willimon claim that the church is “the visible, political enactment of our language of God” and the “visible people of God.”⁹⁷ They are indeed right to state that the church is the “visible people of God” known in its acts. However, in this “colony of heaven” the distinction between “church” and “world” is simply not as clear as Hauerwas and Willimon would want it. The church does not withdraw from, transcend, or surpass the world: not geographically, but certainly not in terms of virtue or political organization. The act of crossing the threshold of a church is not an act of stepping

⁹⁵ Craig Evans, for instance, believes that “implicit in this saying” is that God’s people will, through their good deeds, insure that the “city of Jerusalem will indeed shine throughout the world.” That is, Evans is more concerned to understand Jesus’ saying within the context in which it was spoken. See Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112.

⁹⁶ Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 175. Webster is here seeking to recover the notion of the church’s “‘spiritual’ character of its visible life,” i.e., *ecclesia invisibilis* (*ibid.*). This approach is especially informative for our approach in this sub-section.

⁹⁷ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 82, 171.

up onto higher ground; nor is it a bracing event in which, as Hauerwas and Willimon put it, we “strike hard against something which is an alternative to what the world offers.”⁹⁸ At stake here, especially for the *esse ecclesiae*, is the degree to which the church will be oriented inward in its visibility as a “colony of heaven,” or the degree to which it will be oriented outward as a light, witnessing beyond itself to the radiant identity of God, *juxta evangelium*.

Thus the *ecclesia visibilis* is not simply a socio-political presence that can be examined by a *via empirica*; it is the *visibilis* of the *ecclesia invisibilis*—what Barth called the “*emergence* and *outshining* of the true Church from the concealment in which it is enveloped by the sinfulness of all human volition.”⁹⁹ In speaking of this “*emergence* and *outshining*,” Barth did not aim to deny that the church always has a social form; he simply sought to uphold that the church has its *visibilis* not by virtue of “creating and conferring its [own] reality,” but by virtue of the “continuation of the operation of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁰ *Ecclesia visibilis* is therefore a “phenomenal” and “spiritual” event.¹⁰¹ It is the *emergence* and *outshining* which can only be illustrated by the “freedom of grace; the mighty act of the particular divine mercy” of the presence of the triune God.¹⁰² It cannot be transformed into mere phenomenal form, and it cannot be fully perceived without “faith awakened to this revelation” in the word and work of God.¹⁰³

Barth’s reflections raise a consequence for talk of the church’s being *in* the light of God. The *emergence* and *outshining* of God’s saints in light is visible not merely as something predicated of the church on the basis of its actions; to follow this path would be to

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD IV/2*: 619 (emphasis mine); *KD IV/2*: 701: “...in einem freien Hervortreten und Herausleuchten der wirklichen Kirche aus der Verborgenheit, in die sie durch die Sündigkeit.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ We use this in Webster’s manner: “The ‘visible’ church is the phenomenal church: the church has its form...as a human undertaking, and which is present in the history of the world as a social project,” which is grounded in the “Holy Spirit’s empowerment...and therefore through the same Spirit is the church visible” (“Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 180).

¹⁰² Barth, *CD IV/2*: 619; cf. “[God] stands by His Yes. He accomplishes its actualization. This is the work of God the Reconciler” (*CD IV/3.1*: 3).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

transform the notion of light into something which the church itself created—into that which a recent papal encyclical letter calls “the light of the believing subject which is the Church”¹⁰⁴—and so to oppose the NT occurrence and declaration of “God is light.” Rather, visible light is proclaimed of the church (i.e., “You are the light of the world”); and that proclamation is not a recognition of a *proprium* which the church has *in se*—namely, that creaturely faith “brightens the interior of the Church”¹⁰⁵—but rather a recognition of that which it is by virtue of being “within the sphere of the perfection and sovereignty of God.”¹⁰⁶ In short: the church is “*in* the light” (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ) and not “*the* light” (τῷ φωτὶ).

Yet one could argue for a more “participatory” roll of the church given several biblical expressions, namely 1 Jn. 1:7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” However, as Bultmann rightly notes, the statement “as he is in the light” (ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ) does not denote an equivalency with the creaturely undertaking to “walk in the light” (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν). Rather, the “phrase ‘to be in’ (ἐστιν ἐν) characterizes the being of that same person who is said ‘to be’ (ἐστιν) light.”¹⁰⁷ That is, where some might see the “as” (ὡς) signaling a simultaneity between the work of the church or, perhaps more problematic, between the creature and God’s radiant work, the passage is, if we are correct in our reading, in fact stating something perhaps more in line with the context of the Johannine letter itself: “But if we walk *in* the light and not the darkness, as God is the ground of this walking due to the fact that he is himself *the* light, then we have fellowship not only with our fellow saints in the light but also with God himself through Christ.”

¹⁰⁴ Francis I, *Lumen Fidei* (2013) §36. *Lumen Fidei* possess many merits, particularly the anthropological insistence that “our human lights are not dissolved in the immensity of his [God’s] light, as a star is engulfed by the dawn, but shine all the more brightly the closer they approach the primordial fire, like a mirror which reflects light” (§35). However, the letter ultimately espouses the view that the “visible light” of the church is found in individual faith and piety (cf. §51). This seems rather backward to our conclusions thus far regarding the *alien* and *external* nature of the church *in* the light.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, §51.

¹⁰⁶ Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 181.

¹⁰⁷ See Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 20.

In the church's *emergence* and *outshining*, therefore, its action is wholly oriented towards the action of the Trinity, in electing, gathering, and illuminating. More precisely, the church's actions, or "visible phenomena," are "indications of the presence of the Spirit who bears Christ to the church and the world and so fulfills the Father's purpose."¹⁰⁸ The church's acts do not complete, extend, or continue God's work, which is his own shining forth, and which alone is properly a matter of his being *light in himself*. The church's acts of outshining, having their foundation and their sustaining energy in God; they recognize God's work and attend it with their witness; and, in the "dark riddle" of existence, they reflect the radiant work of the radiant God.¹⁰⁹ Yet *how* does the church act to outshine and reflect the radiant work of God? How does it "emerge" from the "concealment" of the "sinfulness of all human volition?" It is necessary that we add three brief, concluding points to this section regarding the "visible phenomena," or "outshinings," of the church *in* the light.

4.3.1. *The listening church*

First, the church's light is outshined as it listens to the gospel; that is, the church is *in* the light as the *ecclesia audiens*. Listening to the gospel is always an *opus novum*, and so the church's light is always a process of the church being illuminated as it turns to face the "light of the gospel" by the fact that God himself "brings us to the light of the Gospel," thus giving us ears to hear.¹¹⁰ Facing the gospel means being confronted with its pronouncement: "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). In such listening the church is once again confronted with the gospel's declaration that God is the One who shines forth, the One who "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

¹⁰⁸ Webster, "Evangelical Ecclesiology," 182.

¹⁰⁹ Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Johannesevangeliums*, in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe* II.9, ed. W. Fürst (Zürich: TVZ, 1999), 56: "...das dunkle Rätsel." This thought is couched within Barth's comments on Jn. 1:5.

¹¹⁰ Barth, *CD* IV/2: 522; *KD* IV/2: 595.

Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6), the One who is renewing his people and undertaking the divine pledge: “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (1 Jn. 2:8). The message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2); that revelation and action for us is identical with the “advocate...Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1), the one who “laid down his life for us” (1 Jn. 3:16), in order that his people might love as he loved and “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7; cf. 2:10).

But to face that message of the gospel as *ecclesia audiens, juxta evangelium*, is already also to face the *vocatio* of the gospel: the aim of God’s work of salvation is creatures “walking in the light.” “The phrase of ‘walking in the light,’” Edwards clarifies,

implies not only an enjoying and dwelling in [God’s presence], but *living* and *acting* under the influences of it [... And this divine] light of life [is an] animating, quickening light. We read of Christians’ walking as children of light (*Ephesians 5:8*), and [there] is doubtless one thing implied in walking as children of light: [it] is not only walking in the reception and impression of this [light], but so as it were to shine with the reflection of it (*Matthew 5:16*).”¹¹¹

Thus the church also outshines its light as it faces the gospel’s call to walk in this “animating, quickening light.” And this call is a *viva vox*, and thus a call to a “living and acting” way under the impress of its light, to “shine with the reflection of it.” As a *vox*, therefore, the gospel is the declaration of “walking in the reception and impression” of this light as saints in light; it is “to point out the road in which the *children of light* ought to walk.”¹¹² This includes the church facing the pronouncement which corresponds to the “radiant event” of election,

¹¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Of Those Who Walk In The Light Of God’s Countenance” (*WJE* 25:708).

¹¹² Calvin, *Comm. epist. Eph. 5.9* (*CO* 51:217; *CC* 21:309): “...ut viam indicet, qua ambulare filios lucis convenit.”

namely, to the fact that the “dynamic of being chosen determines the modes of common life and activity in which the church is visible.”¹¹³ Thus the the *vox* of the gospel is the *viva vox Dei*. And thus the call of God through the message of the gospel is that the church ought to have as one of its “modes of common life and activity” the especial conduct of walking in the light “before others,” not simply to prevent the corruption of the church, but with the aim that others “may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16).

The church’s being “before others” requires that the church remain faithful above all to its own special task of turning to, facing, and listening to the true words promised to it by the *vox* of the gospel. Yet this listening also includes the very real possibility of “true words” issuing *extra muros ecclesiae* amid creaturely history. These “lesser lights,”¹¹⁴ as Barth famously calls them, are beyond the light of the “circumference” of the church. Yet “in themselves” those truths and lights have “nothing to do with God as Founder and Lord of His covenant.”¹¹⁵ They do, however, in light of the one revelation of God “stand objectively in a supremely direct relationship with the one true Word...Jesus Christ, who is their sovereign.”¹¹⁶ In other words, Barth says in an earlier passage, “even though it is perhaps incontestable that there are real lights of life and words of God in this sphere too, He alone is the Word of God even here, and these lights shine only because of the shining of none other light than His.”¹¹⁷ This language is therefore not one of creaturely capacity, but the “capacity

¹¹³ Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 184.

¹¹⁴ Barth’s notion of “Lichterlehre” has provoked the question of whether he is saying something more than the first sections of the *Dogmatics* allows. For this view, see Hendrickus Berkhof, “Barth’s *Lichterlehre* im Rahmen der heutigen Theologie, Kirche und Welt,” in *Karl Barths Lichterlehre*, Theologische Studien 123, eds. Hendrickus Berkof and Han-Joachim Kraus (Zürich: TVZ, 1978), esp. 36, 48. However, Jüngel is quick to rebut this claim by stating that, beyond several historical errors, “one would scarcely be able to maintain that Barth, in the outline presented in *CD IV/3*, has ‘fundamentally changed his views in these questions’ [regarding the *notitia dei naturalis*]” (*God’s Being is in Becoming*, 22, n.25).

¹¹⁵ Barth, *CD IV/3.1*: 151.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125. Note that Barth says these words are “laid upon their lips” by the true Word (*ibid.*).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

of Jesus Christ” which, as it happens, goes beyond the “sphere of the Bible and the Church,” because “there is no secular sphere abandoned by him or withdrawn from his control.”¹¹⁸

Thus the *ecclesia audiens* must “eavesdrop on the world at large”¹¹⁹ not only to hear the true voice of the gospel, but the voice of secular words that *may* or *may not* confront the community with a *vocatio* to faith and to repentance. These words from the “others,” before whom the church must outshine its light with responsible “living and acting,” are not a louder *vox* in competition with that of the gospel. Rather, the “lesser lights,” the *vox* of the “others,” are simply the agreement with the gospel *extra muros ecclesiae*. And if this is indeed the case, says Barth, then “we may confidently believe that the latter are true words, and thus be ready for obedience, in the direction indicated, not to the words as such, but to the word of scripture illuminated and made more pressing by them.”¹²⁰ Thus these “lesser lights” are not alongside the “one great Light” in Jesus Christ; nor do these “lesser lights” represent some essentially different content or truth which would then need to be reconciled with the “one great Light” by means of some overarching *argumenta naturae*. Rather, these lights sound out in a variety of forms the single truth already present in the self-sufficient and unique form of the “great Light,” Jesus Christ.¹²¹ And if the church is to be *ecclesia audiens, juxta evangelium*, according to Barth, it must listen to such words if, and only if, they repeat the *vox* of the gospel.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 118f.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 125.

¹²¹ For an insightful study of these themes, see the forthcoming work by Sven Ensminger, *Karl Barth's Theology as a Resource for a Christian Theology of Religions* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014), esp. ch. 1.2.3, “The Theory of Lights (Lichterlehre).” My thanks are due to Ensminger for providing an advanced copy of this chapter which seeks to clarify Barth’s *Lichterlehre* in its religio-historical backcloth. Of note for our purposes is Ensminger’s clarification that: “For the Christian community...Barth encourages openness to other lights—yet these will only be recognized as such after encountering the Light that is the one source of light.”

¹²² This is the qualifier for these “true words” according to Barth. He does acknowledge, moreover, that there are words which “derive not from the light which lightens the darkness but from the darkness itself, so that they can be regarded as untrue words” (*CD* IV/3.1: 126).

The *vox* of the gospel—and perhaps the *vocatio* to the gospel by secular words in proximity to the one light of Christ—is thus a *vocatio* to obedience; it is a call, says Barth further, “to our own free action as the men we are.”

Hence the saying of Jesus to His disciples in Mt. 5^{16f.}: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” But the fact that they have or are this light—“ye are the light of the world,” “a city that is set on a hill,” the candle which is not “put under a bushel, but on a candlestick—is not something that they have snatched or resolved of themselves, but something that they have become in virtue of His calling.”¹²³

The *vocatio* of the evangel to walk in the light—the “something” that the church has “in virtue of His calling”—directs the church outwards, away from sinful rebellion and towards life in the light of God’s love for those “sitting in the darkness,” to those who may or may not be speaking “true words.” Thus, “because they have been rescued from the darkness by God’s mercy,” the church is allowed to let its “light shine before others.”¹²⁴ For if “walking as children of light” means—as it does for the *individual*—the emancipation of the church for the truth of “the gospel of the glory of Christ”—that is, the fact that the “works of darkness” have been exposed by the light of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:13f)—then “shining before others” is the free obedience in which the church acknowledges the “other’s” cause and makes it its own, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Thus, as the church is the *ecclesia audiens, juxta evangelium*, the “other” is no longer seen as a hazard, even though they “dwell amidst the darkness,” because the church faces the “light

¹²³ Barth, *CD* IV/2: 593; *KD* IV/2: 671.

¹²⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Eph.* 5.8: “...quia ex tenebris erepti sint Dei misericordia” (*CO* 51:217; cf. *CC* 21:309).

of the gospel.”¹²⁵ This outshining of the church in its “walking” is a counterpoint to the “horrible blindness” wrought by darkness.¹²⁶ And this means, according to Calvin,

that believers must walk in the light because they are “children of light.” This is done, when they do not live according to their own will, but devote themselves entirely to the obedience of God—when they undertake nothing but by his command (*nisi ex illius iussu*). Besides, such obedience is testified by its *fruits of the light*. Such as *goodness, righteousness, and truth*.¹²⁷

Undertaking “nothing but by his command” includes walking in the light, obediently bearing the “fruits of the light” for which the church has been set apart. How, then, is the church *in the light*? It is so by *ecclesia audiens*, that is, by attention to the *vox* of the gospel and obediently walking in the light.¹²⁸

4.3.2. *The witnessing church*

Second, and on a related note, the church’s light is outshined as it bears witness to the world in darkness. “Let your light shine before others [...] that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (Mt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:9). The origin of the church’s light, as we have seen, is entirely external; the consequences of this are that, first, it is manifest as listening to the gospel’s *vox*. Likewise, the goal of the church’s light, *its derivative, reflective outshining*, lies beyond itself. Webster is instructive here:

¹²⁵ Ibid., 5.11 (CO 51:217; CC 21:310).

¹²⁶ Ibid., 5.8: “horrendam caecitatem” (CO 51:217).

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5.10 (CC 21:310; cf. CO 51:217).

¹²⁸ Review our reflections on this theme in an individual sense spelled out in section 3 above.

The church points to the prevenient perfection of the triune God. It witnesses to God the Father's omnipotently effective purpose which in Jesus Christ has broken through the realm of deceit and opposition, which is now supremely real and limitlessly active in his risen presence, and which is unleashed with converting power in the Spirit of Christ. Of all this, the church is the attestation [i.e., witness].¹²⁹

The supreme end of the light of the church is thus the hymning of the radiant triune God; but its intermediate goal is bearing witness to the "most beautiful and glorious object" of God's radiant work in Jesus Christ.¹³⁰ As the gathering of the saints in light, the church "proclaims the excellencies" of the "Father's omnipotently effective purpose...in Jesus Christ," and its being illumined by the Spirit and thus "bent to the service of God."¹³¹

In an important sense, the dynamic of light includes not only withdrawal "out of darkness" but also a sending "into darkness." The light of the saints is not a mere self-illumination, so to speak; if it were, then it would all too quickly become mere factional hostility towards a world held captive in "a hellish night of darkness."¹³² Such withdrawal is dubious, not least because it tends to assume that the line between being "in darkness" and being "called into the light" corresponds with the line between the "church" and the "world." It is also because theories of withdrawal almost inevitably transfer the divine *movement* of the "radiant event" of election into social exclusivity, and so make the church's light into a "pure" sphere over against the dark domain of the world, namely into a superior "island of

¹²⁹ Webster, "Evangelical Ecclesiology," 186; cf. : "...the church simply *points* [...] Yet this does not mean a reduction of the church to pure passivity [...] Attestation is human *activity* bent to the service of God" (*ibid.*, 185f).

¹³⁰ Edwards, "Christ, the Light of the Word," 546.

¹³¹ Webster, "Evangelical Ecclesiology," 186.

¹³² Edwards, "Christ, the Light of the Word," 538.

one culture in the middle of another,”¹³³ or into those “inside the circle” piously looking at those “outside the circle.”¹³⁴ Rather, the church

will be noticeable to others outside, shining for them and usable towards them in the service of divine vocation as “children of God...in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights (φωστῆρες) of the world” [...] The light which is not set on a candlestick but under a bushel could not be bright, nor could the seed which is not sown in the field of the world but left to itself remain alive. The peace of God experienced in the community and by its members could only be a false peace *if limited to this circle and enjoyed only within it.*¹³⁵

It is precisely this transposition of light into a “false peace” which leads to the wrong kind of visibility.¹³⁶ Authentic visible ecclesial light has a quite different character. Being “noticeable to others outside” and “called out of the world [...] the community is genuinely called into it,” Barth continues. “And the reality of its calling out depends upon there being no gap between it and the calling into which ineluctably follows, upon the separation from and the turning to the world taking place in a single movement.”¹³⁷ There is, unquestionably, a radical, manifold gathering, a “calling out” and a “turning to,” which effects the church’s withdrawal and which gathers its members into a company of “saints” and “children” of light. And that withdrawal is visible as “self-denial,” the church’s refusal to return to the darkness, by which, as the apostle Paul reminds us, “at one time” each saint was held captive (Eph.

¹³³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 12.

¹³⁴ This is precisely Schleiermacher’s point in his Pietistic rendering of election entailing those moving from the outer circle to the inner circle in *Christian Faith* §§114, 120.

¹³⁵ Barth, *CD IV/3.2*: 510, 764 (emphasis mine); *KD IV/3*: 586. Cf.: “Es könnte der in der Gemeinde und von ihren Gliedern erfahrene und erlebte Friede Gottes, auf ihren Kreis beschränkt und nur in ihm genossen, nur ein fauler Friede sei” (*KD IV/3*: 874).

¹³⁶ Regarding the topics of ecclesial peace and conflict, see John Webster, “Theology and the Peace of the Church,” in *Domain of the Word*, esp. 157ff.

¹³⁷ Barth, *CD IV/3.2*: 764.

5:8). Ecclesial light is therefore visible as witness, as good works which are transparent to and declare the wonderful deeds of the God who is light in himself. In doing so, its visibility is like John the Baptist: though “He was not the light,” he came “to bear witness about the light” (Jn. 1:8).

Yet it must be added here that such “witness” is met precisely in the church’s obedient response to its commission from Christ: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:18–20). More precisely, the church fulfills its “witness” and summons to “make disciples of all nations” (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) as its saints acknowledge the triune God in the “illuminative” act of baptism.¹³⁸ The church is therefore in the light of God, not because it has already attained the state of being “without spot or wrinkle,” but because through the “radiant event” of God’s election, reconciliation, and illumination of creatures, the church is judged, crucified, buried, and raised to new life in the One who alone has “all authority.” Therefore the nature of the church’s sacramental witness is one in which the church, says Jüngel, lets “God perform his work—this and this alone is the function of the church’s action.”¹³⁹ Agency in the “illuminative” act of baptism is not ecclesial, therefore, but rather found in God’s “work that has already been accomplished.”¹⁴⁰ Baptism is entirely an acknowledgement that “the fruit and efficacy of baptism proceed from God the Father adopting us through his Son, and, after having cleansed us from the filth of

¹³⁸ “Illumination” (φωτισμός; *illuminatio*) is a common title ascribed to baptism by various early fathers. See, e.g. Clement, *Instr.* 1.6.26.1f; *Misc.* 1.5; Hilary *Ps. 118* 3.9; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Epistolam ad Romanos* 10; *Hom. Acta apostolorum* 20; Tertullian, *De bapt.* 6; Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 15.35; and Gregory Nazianzen, esp. *Or.* 39. For a thorough study of this topic, and the early theological undertones associated with baptism, see Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

¹³⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, “The Church as Sacrament?” in *Theological Essays I*, 203.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 204. In reflecting on the claim that the church itself is a sacrament, Jüngel concludes his essay by stating that the church itself is not a sacrament but rather a gathering of saints as the “sacramental sign which represents Jesus Christ” (*ibid.*, 206).

the flesh through the Spirit, restoring us anew to righteousness.”¹⁴¹ Thus central to the church’s outshining is God’s triune work of *regeneratio* signified in baptism. And the church concerns itself with the new creature of God: that event in which the creature’s *telos* is established even as the creature is “put to death” and “made alive” in Christ. “For baptism is the cross,” says John Chrysostom. “What the cross and burial is to Christ, Baptism is to us, even if not in the same respects [...] For if we shared in [Christ’s] death and burial, much more will we share in resurrection and life.”¹⁴²

The church is concerned, therefore, with that *regeneratio* bestowed by the “kindling, warm, and fiery” Spirit in which true human being is to be found as God “cleanses and illuminates the man.”¹⁴³ Baptism is called “illumination” because it is a witness to the world that “in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed.”¹⁴⁴ And in following patristic catechesis further, the rationale for this sacrament of baptism is that the saints will not be ignorant, but rather, by being “illuminated by this splendor of the soul” through the Holy Spirit they are thus given a myriad of blessings:

[A]id to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh...the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. [Baptism] is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of faith, the key of the Kingdom of heaven, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the

¹⁴¹ Calvin, *Comm. harm. ev.*, Mt. 28.19 (CO 45:824; CC 17:387): “...baptismi efficaciam fructumque manare, quod Deus pater in filio suo nos adoptat, et per spiritum a carnis nostrae sordibus purgatos reformat in iustitiam.”

¹⁴² John Chrysostom, *Hom. Ep. Rom.* 10, 6.3f (PG 60:482; NPNF 11:405).

¹⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ* (NPNF 5:520, 522).

¹⁴⁴ Justin Martyr, *Apologia prima* 60 (PG 6:417; ANF 1:183). This is one of the earliest uses of “illumination” as a title for baptism in Christian theology.

whole man. Why should I go into further detail? Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the Gifts of God.¹⁴⁵

In this “magnificent” gift of baptism is found both “a pledge of eternal life before God” and “an outward sign of faith before men.”¹⁴⁶ It is this “outward sign” in which we find the particular outshining of the church. For after the *ablutio* of the saint, “it is not possible for the light of a Christian to be hid; not possible for a lamp so conspicuous as that to be concealed.”¹⁴⁷ To the world in the darkness, therefore, this act reveals the “covenant” which “contains a type of death and of life” in the renewing “pledge of life” from the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸ Through this pledge of regenerating illumination, the church bears “witness to the light.”

4.3.3. *The praying and praising church*

Third, and final, the light of the church is outshined in its prayer that “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb”; that “its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.” (Rev. 21:23–25).¹⁴⁹ If the essence of ecclesial light is the proclamation of the radiant identity of the triune God, then the primordial act in which light is outshined is the church’s prayer that God’s light is the true and saving light, namely, the light *of* and *for* the world. That prayer is not, we must note, a prayer that the church somehow *establishes* the light of God (i.e., “By its light will the nations walk,” διὰ τοῦ φωτός αὐτῆς). On the contrary: it is a prayer that God *himself*, as the true light, “gives it light,” by the “lamp of the Lamb”; it is a prayer that the saints in light

¹⁴⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.3 (PG 36:361; NPNF 7:360).

¹⁴⁶ Calvin, *Comm. har. ev.* Mt. 28.19 (CO 45:822; CC 17:385).

¹⁴⁷ Chrysostom, *Hom. Act* 20, 9.10–12 (PG 60:131f; NPNF 11:134)

¹⁴⁸ Basil, *Sp. sanc.* 15.35 (PPS 42:67).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. καὶ ἡ πόλις οὐ χρειαν ἔχει τοῦ ἡλίου οὐδὲ τῆς σελήνης, ἵνα φαίνωσιν αὐτῆ, ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἄρνιον. καὶ περιπατήσουσιν τὰ ἔθνη διὰ τοῦ φωτός αὐτῆς· καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς φέρουσιν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτήν. καὶ οἱ πωλῶνες αὐτῆς οὐ μὴ κλεισθῶσιν ἡμέρας, νύξ γὰρ οὐκ ἔσται ἐκεῖ.

“may be burning and shining lights, stars in the right hand of Christ, full of light, set to enlighten the world and the church of God.”¹⁵⁰

Moreover, in praying this prayer, the church *in* the Lamb’s light points back to the saving acts of Jesus Christ. It is the proclamation that “[i]n the new covenant, everything that is termed light remains firmly set, without the possibility of being removed.”¹⁵¹ The prayer of the church, its cry that in this matter God will take up its own cause and “give his light,” is thus rooted in the Lamb of God. And so as it prays this prayer, the church outshines its light, namely, its proclamation of the radiant identity of God in his radiant deeds, thereby confirming that “the church *is* by virtue of the being and acts of another.”¹⁵² Yet, again, this prayer does not imply a passive church. Rather, this is a prayer that its “gates will never be shut by day.” That is, to God’s shining forth and outshining there corresponds the church’s “shining forth” or “outshining” in its “*proclaiming* the ἀρεταί, the *magnalia*, the mighty acts of the One ‘who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.’”¹⁵³

But preceding all these acts of outshining—namely, obediently listening to the *vox* of the gospel, bearing witness to the light of God, and praying that God’s light is the true light *of* and *for* the world—will once again be the church’s outshining of praise. At the end of his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin clarifies this point:

If we would have our minds kindled, then, to enlarge in this religious service [of praise], let us meditate upon God’s power and greatness, which will speedily dispel all such insensibility [to his presence]. Though our minds can never take in this immensity, the mere taste of it will affect us [...] that we may worship

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Edwards, “Sons Of Oil, Heavenly Lights” (*WJE* 25:270).

¹⁵¹ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 7:86.

¹⁵² Webster, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 186.

¹⁵³ Barth, *CD* IV/3.2: 510; *KD* IV/3: 586.

God with constant sacrifices of praise, until being gathered into the kingdom of heaven, we sing with elect angels an eternal hallelujah.¹⁵⁴

Praise is the church's protestation against "all such insensibility" to the radiant presence of God; it is the rejection of the creature's former rebellion against God as the light of life; it is the creaturely "struggle to voice" speech to God as being "something irreducibly other than itself";¹⁵⁵ it is the act in which, having their "minds kindled," creatures engage in recognizing God's "power and greatness" as they enlarge their "religious service" to one another and to the world. In sum, therefore: the church outshines its light as it continuously worships God and recognizes his radiant identity with *canamus perpetuum halleluiah*.

5. CONCLUSION

We might draw these reflections to a close with what Barth had to say regarding the goal of the church:

[The church] cannot be an end in itself. It has it for God, who is so very much for us men that He will not have it otherwise than that before He has finished speaking His last Word some, and even many, should already be for Him. And it has it for the world in order that as a provisional representation of the justification which has taken place in Jesus Christ it may be the sign which is set up in it, which is given to it, which summons it, in order that it may be to it a shining light—a feeble and defective but still a shining light—until the dawning

¹⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Commentarius in lib. Psalmorum. Pars II* 150.6 (CO 32:442; CC 7:320f).

¹⁵⁵ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 9.

of the great light which will be the end of all time and therefore of this end-time.¹⁵⁶

With this in mind, we therefore repeat the basis from which the church and its saints shine in the world, though it may be a “feeble and defective but still a shining light,” as found in one of our guiding biblical passages:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9f).

In sum, *Lumen Hilare*:

Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured

Who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,

Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now we are at the sun’s hour of rest,

The lights of evening round us shine,

We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine!

Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung

With undefiled tongue,

Son of our God, giver of life, alone:

Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.

¹⁵⁶ Barth, *CD IV/1*: 739; cf. *KD IV/1*: 826: “...klein, mangelhaft und bescheiden scheinende, aber scheinende—Licht zu sein, bis das große Licht anbrechen wird, das das Ende aller Zeit und so auch dieser Endzeit sein wird.”

CHAPTER 5

**THE ILLUMINED MIND:
THEOLOGY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE RADIANT ONE**

Being informed and informing others by Holy Scripture...let us draw near to theological questions, setting at the head the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of whom we speak; that the Father may show us his will, and the Son may offer a helping hand, and the Holy Spirit may inspire us; or rather that illumination may come upon us from the One light of God, One in diversity, diverse in unity, wherein is a wonder.¹

In this thesis we have been reflecting upon the declaration that “God is light” from the standpoint of Christian theology: “the schematic and analytical presentation of the matter of the gospel.”² Set in the midst of God’s saints *in* light, theology directs the church’s devotion and consideration to the “light of the gospel.” Thus the task of this thesis has been to try to learn how the gospel arranges our thinking on the matter of the light of the triune God. We have seen this in the previous chapters by looking at the nature of God’s light as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; God’s light as shining forth in the economy of his saving works; and the light of the church which glorifies God in its “outshining” acts. In short, we have up to this point been reflecting on the twofold proposal that *God is light in himself; and from himself God shines forth his light*. That is, the One who is light is the radiant One in our midst.

With this final chapter we move to address the topic of the nature of theological thinking as a result of the confession: “God is light.” Yet before starting we must keep in mind that the answer to this question is found within the complex topography of the wider doctrinal landscapes thus far examined, namely, within the doctrines of God and of the

¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 28.1 (*PG* 36:26f; *PPS* 23:37).

² Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 131.

church. Therefore, this chapter shall be concerned at every step with the theological results of what bearing the *given* reality of God’s radiant shining forth as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and his gathering those out of darkness into his marvelous light—have on the work and *vocatio* of theology as an activity of the “illuminated mind.”

1. THE ILLUMINED MIND

The situation for all theological thinking is God’s rescue of the creaturely mind out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of “cognitive fellowship.”³ The mind is thus within the realm of God’s radiant work: “Like all other aspects of created being, weakened and rendered dark and futile by sin, reason is encountered by the assurance and creative power of the forgiveness of sins.”⁴ The creaturely mind, therefore, must be renewed and “enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” (Eph. 1:18). Theology, therefore knowing the hope of Christian *vocatio*, can only occur if it is founded on the mind’s illumination by the radiant presence of the One who alone has *light in himself*.

Yet since the advent of what might loosely be called “modern” thought, the mind or *ratio* has typically been considered a *scientia naturalis* of creaturely ontology. Immanuel Kant’s memorable answer to “Was ist Aufklärung?” displays the spirit of the rise of modernity. The “*Enlightenment*,” he said, is the daring to use understanding “without being guided by another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding! is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.”⁵ Thus, for Kant, creaturely cognition “is itself the

³ Ibid., 119. Several thoughts in our final chapter are influenced by Webster’s work here and in his “Illumination” (*Domain of the Word*, 50–64), particularly in his insistence that “Christian theology is an instance of...redeemed intellectual judgment” (“Biblical Reasoning,” 123).

⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” in *Immanuel Kants Werke. Schriften von 1783–1788*, vol. 4, eds. A. Buchenau and E. Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1913), 169:

legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all.”⁶ Echoing Kant’s pronouncements, modernity often views creaturely cognition as a *lex naturalis*, able to “point out what we ought to do, as well as to *determine* what we shall do,” says Bentham. “On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to [the creature’s] throne.”⁷ Thus the creaturely intellect is its own authorization and magistrate; that is, the mind’s “causes and effects, are fastened to [the creature’s] throne”; and the creaturely mind is, moreover, “the standard of right and wrong.” Thus living for the “Good,” according to current trends in virtue epistemology, is conditioned purely by the inherent “value,” “reliability,” or “*intentional* relation” of creaturely cognition and its ends.⁸ And having “epistemic certainty” derives not from the work of an external, divine source, but the *a priori* condition of the creaturely intellect, namely “a *reasonable belief* to the effect that the activity characteristic of this virtue is a reliable way of achieving one’s epistemic goals.”⁹ The “possibility of natural innate knowledge” is therefore

“Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.”

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A.W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A126. Kant’s modern epistemological program is, of course, set within its own context, namely as a reaction, on the one hand, to the so-called “outmoded” Aristotelianism of medieval cosmology, and, on the other hand, to Cartesian dualism. The former was seminally found in Aquinas, who noted that the “rule and measure of human acts is the reason” (*ST* 1a2ae. q90, 1 *resp.*). Yet Aquinas qualified this with the notion that *sacra doctrina*, based on revelation, could attain knowledge of God when God aids human reason (cf. *ST* 1a. q1, 6 *resp.*); that is, knowledge of God was qualified as a God-given event. The latter, Cartesian, approach entailed prior knowledge of God. Thus Descartes’s famous *cogito, ergo sum* summarily marked the advent of an epistemology that held knowledge of God over against human self-knowledge; namely, knowledge of God served as the requisite ground for human cognition (see René Descartes, *Meditationes de prima Philosophia* [Amsterdam: apud Iohannem Blaev, 1644], esp. *meditatio* IV)]. Against these approaches, Kant saw “knowledge” as arising through the function of what is called “the categories of understanding” and the data received through the senses. And in founding the limits of human reason in this way, Kant brought an end to the idea that the objective ground of the world—that is, God—could be known, for we have no sense data for God. God could only be postulated and not known; human consciousness thus became the starting point, “without being guided by another” (see *idem.*).

⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (NY: Hafner Press, 1948), 1.

⁸ Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137 (emphasis original).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 126 (emphasis original).

aprioristically possible, whether this derives from the mind's conformity to the *lex naturalis* or from the randomness of “natural selection or some other evolutionary mechanism.”¹⁰

Whatever the case, such notions of creaturely cognition from modern culture are, according to Christian confession, deeply flawed. They are flawed simply because they do not set the creaturely mind “under the sign of redemption.”¹¹ They are flawed because they do not apprehend that the “intelligent adoration” of God is “possible only as reason is first humbled into the realization that it is neither author nor magistrate.”¹² The modern claim that the creaturely *ratio* is “the legislator for nature”¹³ or *scientia naturalis* therefore posits the utterly perilous position of the *ratio* as “original or self-founding after the manner of the uncreated divine reason.”¹⁴ And if the mind is the creaturely capacity for rational independence and originality, then the mind's reliance on the Holy Spirit—namely, the mind's ultimate *telos* in God—is rejected, for the creaturely mind does not need to be “illuminated” and rescued from the darkness of sin. Yet contrary to Kant's disapproval of such “dogmatism,” we must summarily depart from this modern venture because the proclamation of the gospel compels us to confess that creatures *in toto*, including the mind or *ratio*, has been blinded to the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” within the darkness of the history of creaturely sin and redemption, namely, the “place of the intellect in creaturely redemption.”¹⁵

1.1. Theories of Illuminatio

In further reflecting upon this last statement—namely, that creatures *in toto*, including the creaturely mind, has been blinded to the “light of the gospel”—we might find a particular

¹⁰ Jennifer Lackey, “Why we don't deserve credit for everything we know,” *Synthese* 158, no. 3 (2007): 358.

¹¹ Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 125.

¹² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A125f.

¹⁴ Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

outworking from the classical understanding of the theory of divine *illuminatio*.¹⁶ In saying this, however, we must quickly make a twofold distinction.

First, in the tradition of *illuminatio* there entails a philosophical meaning, grounded in medieval Augustinianism. Here, *illuminatio* indicates the enlightenment of the mind by God's light with such archetypal ideas as truth, goodness, and perfection. According to this theory of illumination, finite truth, goodness, or perfection is recognized by means of a *habitus mentis* that has been graciously bestowed on the creaturely mind by the illuminating influence of the *rationes aeternae*: "The mind...is not only formed from without by images, but also by receiving simple forms from above (*superiori suscipiendo simplices formas*) and retaining them in itself."¹⁷ In addition, the indirect knowledge that we have of these forms is the foundation of *cognitio certa*. Apart from this illumination of the mind, our knowledge must rest on *cognitio sensus* of the finite order where no absolutes are given and where there is, therefore, no *cognitio certa*. This view of illumination belongs to the Augustinian tradition as "redefined" by Bonaventure of the Middle Ages.¹⁸ In his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, for instance, Bonaventure proposes that the "apex of the mind [is] the illumination of the conscience (*seu synderesis scintilla*)," in which "by a flash of apprehension...the mind turns

¹⁶ We briefly touched on the doctrine of *illuminatio* above in Ch. 3.3.3, "The Spirit's Loving Illumination." There we offered a sketch of "illumination" as that loving, regenerating, sanctifying action of the Spirit on the saint called out of darkness into light. In this sub-section we are much more concerned with detailing the Spirit's work on the mind in the process of sanctification and as the occasion of the "illuminated mind" set to service. It is unfortunate that in "historical" investigations of the "doctrine of divine illumination," the theory is usually cast down as archaic and misinformed in light of "modern science." See such conclusions in Steven P. Marrone, *The Light of Thy Countenance: Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 3.2 (*Opera Omnia* 5:303): "Ex secunda apparet, quod ipsa non solum habet ab exteriori formari per phantasmata, verum etiam a superiori suscipiendo simplices formas, quae non possunt introire per portas sensuum et sensibilibium phantasies." Bonaventure's doctrine of illumination is an expansion of Augustine's remarks on "truth" and "light" in *Conf.* 7.10: "And I entered and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw above that eye of my soul, above my mind, an unchangeable light [...] *Whoever knows the truth knows this light.*" See our brief remarks on Augustine's Platonic use of noetic light in *De Gen.* in Ch. 1.3.2, "Created Light and Uncreated Light."

¹⁸ We say "redefined" here because Bonaventure codified Augustine's thoughts on illumination and, in so doing, may have gone beyond Augustine's theory itself. Recently, Schumacher has done good work to show that Bonaventure may have more differences with the Augustinian theory of illumination than is often realized. As we are using Bonaventure here in a generalized way, we leave it to the reader to consider Schumacher's claims regarding the finer points of this debate in her *Divine Illumination*, ch. 4. Suffice it to say, the underlying realism of this "redefined" Augustinian position made the theory unappealing to more Aristotelian scholastics, namely Aquinas and Scotus.

most directly and intensely to the rays of light.”¹⁹ This mind is an “image” or “reflection” of the *perfectio Dei*, and thus by turning inward in contemplation is found the ascent to the eternal “rays of light descending from the eternal law.”²⁰ The light of God therefore works together with the creaturely intellectual faculties as a “regulative and moving cause,” ensuring that the creaturely *ratio* grasps the immutable truth of the creature; it does not and cannot replace the creaturely intellectual faculties in their proper roles.²¹ The infinite extension of God’s knowledge is what makes divine understanding certain, and the *rationes aeternae* are bestowed upon the creaturely mind.

The intellect is said to comprehend truly the meaning of propositions when it knows with certitude that they are true [...] But since our mind itself is changeable, it cannot see that truth shining forth unchangeably except by some light shining without change in any way; and it is impossible that such a light be a mutable creature. Therefore it knows in that light which illuminates every man that comes into this world [John 1:9], which is true light and the Word which in the beginning was with God [John 1:1].²²

Here Bonaventure makes more precise the Augustinian lineage of *illuminatio*, which concerns “true” intellect with the perception of “light.”²³ Thus creaturely knowledge requires divine illumination; and all other features of creaturely knowledge—namely, *universalia*—come *in re* from a created *causa*.²⁴

¹⁹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* 1.6, *prop*3 (*Opera Omnia* 5:296f): “...et per fulgorem speculationis, qua mens ad radios lucis directissime et intensissime se convertit.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.5f (*Opera Omnia* 5:303).

²¹ Bonaventure, *Quaestiones disputate de scientia Christi* 4 (*Opera Omnia* 5:17).

²² Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* 3.3 (*Opera Omnia* 5:304); cf. *de scientia Christi* 4.

²³ See our thoughts on Pickstock’s interpretation of this “perception” in Ch. 1.3.2, “Created Light and Uncreated Light.”

²⁴ For good guidance on Bonaventure’s theory, refer to Theodore Crowley, “Illumination and Certitude,” in *Sanctus Bonaventura 1274-1974*, vol. 2 (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1973), 431–48; Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20–22; and the many helpful sources in Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, 110f.

A second meaning of *illuminatio*, however, will be our guide in the remainder of this section—one which tends to avoid the philosophical use and retain the dogmatic form of the theory as centered on the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*.²⁵ In other words, the dogmatic *locus* of illumination is found precisely in the *actus gratiae* by which we are “illuminated...in the Spirit” as he “presents himself to our minds”²⁶ through the Word of God, both to judge the sinful mind and to create in creatures an “active intelligent relation” to God.²⁷ Edwards agrees:

[A] saving belief of the reality and divinity of the things proposed and exhibited to us in the gospel, is from the Spirit of God’s enlightening the mind, to have right apprehensions of the nature of those things, and so as it were unveiling things, or revealing them, and enabling the mind to view them and see them as they are.²⁸

Illumination is thus an *actus gratiae applicatricis*, which begins with conversion and baptism but continues through sanctification as the basis of both repentance and assurance in the life of the saint.²⁹ Regarding the “purification” of the mind in the act of baptism and the subsequent “assurance” of such grace, Gregory beckons us to obediently

²⁵ Bonaventure’s theory is indeed philosophical in nature, as his codifications of Augustine’s thought were formed in this fashion. For instance, he takes great lengths in the *Itinerarium* to emphasize that the “sciences”—that is, metaphysics, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, and so forth—“have certain and infallible rules, like rays of light descending from the eternal law into our minds. And thus our minds, illumined and suffused by such great radiance, unless they be blind, can be led through themselves alone to the contemplation of that eternal light (*contemplandam illam lucem aeternam*)” (3.7; *Opera Omnia* 5:305f).

²⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 40.5 (*PG* 36:363; *NPNF* 7:361).

²⁷ John Webster, “Illumination,” in *Domain of the Word*, 57.

²⁸ Jonathan Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate” (*WJE* 14:296). Cf. “The foundation of this spiritual knowledge is a regeneration of the heart. ‘Tis not the natural man, whose very nature is sin, whose soul is darkness and filthiness, that is capable of this spiritual, bright and pure light. There is an necessity of the removal of the darkness, deadness and stupidity of the soul before it can be thus enlightened” (*ibid.*, 89).

²⁹ Again, see our brief mention of baptism in the “outshining” of the church in chapter 4, which notes the patristic use of “illumination” to mark this “washing.”

look at and reason upon God and things divine in a manner corresponding to this grace given us. But let us...be grounded and purified and so to say made light by fear, and thus be raised to the height [...] And where there is purifying there is illumination; and illumination is the satisfying of desire to those who long for the greatest things, or the Greatest Thing, or that which surpasses all greatness.³⁰

Illuminatio is therefore intimately connected with the “satisfaction” of the assent to *vocatio*: “[W]e are illuminated by the grace of God alone as to the knowledge of the truth,” says Calvin, “so that our calling corresponds with our election.”³¹

Staying with Calvin, we see that this illumination can further be divided into the external and internal work of the Holy Spirit—the former relating to teaching that prepares the individual for service, and the latter relating to the salvific teaching of the Holy Spirit at conversion. Calvin clarifies this in his comments on 2 Cor. 4:6:

[There is] a twofold illumination (*Duplicem illuminationem*), which must be carefully observed—the one is that of the gospel, the other is secret, taking place in our hearts. For as God, the Creator of the world, pours forth upon us the brightness of the sun, and gives us eyes to receive it, so, as the Redeemer, in the person of his Son, He shines forth, indeed, upon us by His gospel, but, as we are blind, that would be in vain, if He did not at the same time enlighten our understandings by His Spirit [...] Therefore God has, by His Spirit, opened the eyes of our understandings, so as to make them capable of receiving the light of the gospel.³²

Being “made capable of receiving the light of the gospel” marks the mind’s particular need for *illuminatio*. In examining the *ante lapsum* state of humanity, Calvin comments: “God’s

³⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 39.8 (*PG* 36:344; *NPNF* 7:354). See Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, ch. 1.

³¹ Calvin, *Comm. Jms.* 1.18 (*CO* 55:392; *CC* 22:292): “...ita nos mera Dei gratia illuminari in notitiam veritatis: ut vocatio electioni respondeat.”

³² Calvin, *Comm. Cor. II* 4.6 (*CO* 50:53; *CC* 20:200).

image was visible in the light of the mind” and thus the “highest rectitude of [Adam and Eve] was in the mind and will.”³³ Even *post lapsum*, “some sparks [of the mind] still gleam”; yet such sparks of the *imago Dei* “cannot come forth effectively” because this “light [is] choked with [the] dense ignorance” that is inherent in the mind’s fallen state.³⁴ We therefore witness the “dullness” (*hebetudo*) of the human mind in the history of sin, wherein creatures “cannot hold to the right path, but wander through various errors and stumble repeatedly, as if groping in the darkness.”³⁵ The “dullness” of creaturely cognition is therefore “like a traveler passing through a field at night,” Calvin further imagines, “who in a momentary lightening flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step—let alone be directed on his way by its help.”³⁶ The great modern project of the autonomous creaturely mind is, ironically, the very sign of its own “dullness,” ignorance, and fallenness: “Man’s keenness of mind is man’s blindness as far as the knowledge of God is concerned.”³⁷ Yet this noetic “blindness” and “dullness” is also the precise sphere in which God performs his illuminative work of *regeneratio*:

Human reason, therefore, neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes straight aim at...the understanding of who God is or what sort of God he wishes to be towards us [...] [T]hus man’s mind can become spiritually wise only in so far as God illuminates it.³⁸

This history of creaturely sin and its scattering by God therefore involves the remaking of creatures as a whole, not merely of what we classify as their “spiritual” feature. The mind stands before the divine requirement that it be “in the light” as God is “in the light”

³³ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.15.4, 8; *OS* 3:179, 186: “...summa rectitudo.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.2.12; *OS* 3:255. Cf. “reason’s...misshapen ruins appear” (*ibid.*).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.2.18; *OS* 3:261.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.2.19; *OS* 3:261: “...quia eius acumen, quantum ad Dei notitiam, mera est caligo.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.2.18, 20; *OS* 3:261f: “...tantum hominis mentem spiritualiter sapere, quantum abs se illustrata fuerit.”

(1 Jn. 1:7); that it stands beneath the requirement that “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is found only in “the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). And creaturely minds are unable to receive this “light of knowledge” unless they are “illuminated by the Spirit of God.”³⁹ Being “illuminated by God’s grace” is not a “common endowment of nature,” Calvin continues, but a “‘gift’ of special illumination” in which the Holy Spirit “forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand.”⁴⁰ Such a gracious gift of “special illumination,” in which the creaturely mind is formed to understand the “lofty wisdom” of God, thus turns the creature to its *vocatio*. Here, in Calvin’s catechetical tone, we find the aim of Christian *vocatio*:

The Holy Spirit...illuminates us with his light in order that we may learn and plainly recognize what an enormous wealth of divine goodness we possess in Christ [...] The Holy Spirit [thus] kindles our hearts with the fire of love ... and day by day he boils and burns up the vices of our inordinate desire so that if there are in us any good works, they are the fruits of his grace and excellencies. But our gifts [e.g., understanding], apart from him, are darkness of mind and perversity of heart.⁴¹

Alongside, and indeed supporting, Calvin’s conclusions, we might add several recent thoughts from Webster regarding *illuminatio* and its effect upon the creaturely act of scriptural reading. “Illumination,” Webster clarifies, “refers to the ways in which the operation of creaturely intelligence is caused, preserved and directed by divine light, whose

³⁹ Ibid., 2.2.19; OS 3:261: “Dei Spiritu illuminetur.” Cf. “Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom [i.e., knowledge of God] as to conceive God and what is God’s, unless it be illuminated by the Spirit of God” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.2.20; OS 3:262. Cf. our comments on “gift” and “participation” with regards to Calvin’s work in Ch. 3.3.2, “Grace and Participation.”

⁴¹ Calvin, *Catechismus (1538)* (CO 5:341): “Per eam agit, sustinet, vegetat, vivificat omnia: per eam nos iustificat, sanctificat, expurgat, ad sese vocat ac trahit, ut salutem consequamur. Itaque spiritus sanctus, dum in nobis ad hunc modum habitat, is est qui nobis suo lumine illucet, quo discamus et plane agnoscamus, quam ingentem divinae bonitatis opulentiam in Christo possideamus. Qorda nostra incendit ardore caritatis, turn Dei, turn proximi, magisque in dies excoquit et exurit concupiscentiae nostrae vitia, ut, si qua sunt in nobis bona opera, fructus sint gratiae. ipsius ac virtutis. Nostrae vero sine ipso dotes, mentis sunt tenebrae, cordisque perversitas.”

radiance makes creatures to know.”⁴² And in illumination, that is in the Spirit’s work of enlightening church’s reading of Scripture, the “regenerate intelligence comes to know the mind of God.” Thus illumination, as a divine *movement* on the creaturely mind, is the “subjective revelation of the mystery of God” in the “Spirit of revelation”;⁴³ and the notion of illumination therefore necessarily embraces a wide range of works by the Spirit, namely, the church’s reception and interpretation of Scripture, and the regenerating effect of Scripture as the church comes to know God’s *voluntas*.⁴⁴ Yet time and again Webster—like Calvin before him—is clear that the language of illumination is to be set in terms of *regeneratio*:

Our governing affections are corrupt: inclined to vanity, insatiably curious about the surfaces of temporal things, confident in our intellectual powers, nimble in inquiring into what satisfies unregenerate appetite but sluggish in seeking out knowledge of God, in love with falsehood.⁴⁵

The remedy prescribed for this noetic corruption is found in “an objective communication of the divine splendor and a subjective enlightenment of the mind.” Webster is therefore right to conclude in his perceptive study that the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit upon the creaturely mind “engages and redirects a range of human rational powers, advancing them to proper objects and ends as it conducts us out of darkness into intellectual day.”⁴⁶

Given these clarifications about the dogmatic use of *illuminatio*, we might therefore say that theology—as an instance of having our “rational powers” redirected “to proper objects and ends” and being brought into “intellectual day”—is a precise occurrence of the mind’s illumination. In short: “To understand illumination, therefore, theological reason

⁴² Webster, “Illumination,” 50.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁴ We come upon these topics in the sub-sections below.

⁴⁵ Webster, “Illumination,” 61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

needs illumination.”⁴⁷ Here, too, we are to outline what happens as the mind is “kindled with the fire of love” by the radiant work of the triune God. Therefore, if the Pauline images of the “enlightening of the eyes of the heart” (Eph. 1:18) and the “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2) are perceptible, they have to be so in theology, in which the “renewed” and “enlightened” mind is called not to address the *lex naturalis*, but to “discern what is the will of God,” and “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 1:18f). Thus Calvin:

What kind of renovation is required of us? It is not that of the flesh only...but of the mind. [Because] the mind is a most wise queen...it is pulled from off its throne, and is reduced to nothing...in that it *must be renewed* [...] Till the Lord opens them, the eyes of our heart are blind. Till the Spirit has become our instructor, all that we know is folly and ignorance. Till the Spirit of God has made it known to us by a secret revelation, the knowledge of our Divine calling *exceeds the capacity of our own minds*.⁴⁸

In view of the fact that God illumines the “eyes of the heart” and “renews the mind” of creatures for “the knowledge of our Divine calling,” we move to ask, therefore: What is precisely involved in undertaking theology in the presence of the radiant One? How is this *vocatio* to be expounded?

2. THEOLOGY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE RADIANT ONE

The basis of theology, like the church, is the radiant presence of the Father, Son, and Holy

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52; cf. “Christian theology is biblical reasoning” (“Biblical Reasoning,” 128).

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Comm. ep. Rom.* 12.2 (CC 19:453f); *Comm. ep. Eph.* 1.17 (CC 21:212).

Spirit.⁴⁹ Thus the God who is *light in himself* is not merely some abstract *ratio seu sermo* treated by the creaturely mind *in abstracto*; he is the radiant One, the One whose radiant presence makes the undertaking of theology possible. The One who is theology's *finis* and also its *principium*⁵⁰ is the One who "graciously chooses according to his will, of his inexhaustible fullness" to speak his knowledge to "rational creatures."⁵¹ Thus a theology which suggests it "arise from nature and reason" is ultimately "corrupt, half-blind, obscure; it cannot occupy for us the place of a theology that is sufficient for salvation."⁵² Theology conducted in the presence of the radiant One therefore responds to revelation, in which "we do not rely on our own powers," says Luther, "but rely on that which is outside of us."⁵³ In other words, theology is possible because of the shining forth of God, which must be found *ex divina revelatione*, according to Christian proclamation.⁵⁴ Theology, as *sacra doctrina*, comes to creatures "through revelation," which "flows from the fount recognized in the light...namely God's very own which he shares with the blessed."⁵⁵ In short, from Aquinas: "Christian theology...is pictured in the *field of divine revelation*."⁵⁶ That revelatory, radiant presence founds, first, the formative *field* in which theology undertakes its activity as the illumined mind; and that presence also determines, second, the foundational *obiectum* of theology.

First, what does it mean to say that divine revelation is the formative *field* of theology as an activity of the illumined mind? It means principally that theology conducts its work within the realm of the radiant presence of the God who is *light in himself*. Aquinas again:

⁴⁹ See John Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," in *Domain of the Word*, 135–42, regarding the Trinity as the *principium essendi* of theology.

⁵⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1679), 1.50.1, q9.

⁵¹ Polanus, *Synt. Theol.* II.1.4.

⁵² Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia, qua, per singula capita theologica, pars exegetica, dogmatica, elenctica et practica, perpetua successione conjugantur*, new ed. (Utrecht: Apud W. van de Water, 1724 [1698]), 1.1.16.

⁵³ Martin Luther, *Galatervorlesung (cap. 1–4)* 4.6 (*WA* 40.1:589.25): "ut non nitamur viribus...sed eo nitamur, quod est extra nos, Hoc est, promissione et veritate Dei, quae fallere non potest."

⁵⁴ This is Johann Gerhard's point in discussing that the "subjectum Theologiae est Christus" (*Loci theol.* 8).

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q1, 1 ad.2; 1a. q1, 2 *resp.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1a. q1, 3 ad.2 (emphasis mine).

“Christian theology takes on faith its principles revealed by God in *lumine divinae revelationis*.”⁵⁷ Theology is thus not an instance of cognitive docility, a juncture at which theology assumes a posture of *theologia fabulosa*. Theology does not bracket the event of *lumine divinae revelationis* and instead enter a *labyrinthum hominis mentes*.⁵⁸ Rather, theology is governed by God’s radiant presence; it takes place within the formative *field* made perceptible by that presence; and, if it turns away from that luminous presence, then it has merely impatiently collapsed into a disobedient *labyrinthum hominis mentes*. For theology “must always be undertaken as an act of patience and obedience,” says Barth. “But this is possible only as it trusts in the uncontrollable presence of its ontic and noetic basis, in the revelation God promised to the Church, and in the power of faith apprehending that promise.”⁵⁹

Once again, however, the far-reaching illusions of the modern project have been that the processes of the mind or *ratio* are safe from the unthinking “cowardice” of so-called “divine presence” over against the “determination and courage to use one’s understanding without being guided by another. *Sapere Aude!*”⁶⁰ Against such claims, as the activity of the illumined mind, theology can never avoid the utterly serious undertaking that “we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:4). In theology, the material of creaturely discourse is not a “someone” whom is negated from cognitive activities. Rather, theology speaks “to please God who tests our hearts.” That is, when creatures begin to talk theologically about the light of God, as this thesis has sought to do, they soon realize that the setting is upended; it is not theology who tests God and so makes him an object of clever discourse, but quite the contrary: God “tests our hearts” in order to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1a. q1, 2 *resp.*: “...sacra doctrina credit principia revelata a Deo.”

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Inst.* 1.13.21; *OS* 3:137: “labyrinth of the human mind.”

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* I/1: 22; cf. *KD* I/1: 21: “Dogmatik kann als Akt der Buße und des Gehorsams nicht unterlassen und sie kann doch gerade als solcher nur im Vertrauen auf das gänzlich unverfügbare Zurstellesein ihres Real- und ihres Erkenntnisgrundes, auf Gottes der Kirche verheißene Offenbarung und auf die Kraft des die Verheißung ergreifenden Glaubens sich ereignen.”

⁶⁰ Kant, “Was ist Aufklärung?” 169.

“give an account to God for the way in which [creatures] speak.”⁶¹ That testing *itself* is the formative *field* of the illumined mind—among other contexts in the cognitive task of theology. In this “fallible human work,” which is “no more than human talk about God,”⁶² is subservient to the principal testing from God.

Second, the radiant presence of the Trinity also forms the *obiectum* of a theology of divine light. For, as the activity of the illumined mind, theology’s *obiectum* is granted to it by the radiant presence of God, which is the basis for the church’s proclamation. A theology of divine light is therefore a “true science.”⁶³ That is, it travels along a given “path of knowledge” towards a given “object of knowledge.”⁶⁴ That given “object of knowledge” we have already described as the radiant presence of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ Yet to talk of this as the *principium obiectum* of theology may deceive some into thinking that theology’s *subiectum* is simply another set of *loci* that the mind calls before itself in an act of “synthetische Konstruktion.”⁶⁶ Theology’s *obiectum* is continually *subiectum*: the utterly radiant shining forth of God. Thus:

[A]ll things are dealt with in holy teaching under the aspect of God, either because they are God himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end. Hence, it follows that God is truly the subject of this science.⁶⁷

Theology’s position before its object—with God as “truly the subject of this science”—is therefore the humble stance before its given subject as a student “under the aspect of God,”

⁶¹ Barth, *CD I/1*: 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4; *KD I/1*: 2: “Theologie begleitet die Rede der Kirche, sofern sie selbst nichts anderes ist als menschliche ‘Rede von Gott.’”

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9. Of course, Barth’s point here is precisely what we’re after in this section: “If theology allows itself to be called, or calls itself, a science, it cannot in so doing accept the obligation of submission to standards valid for other sciences [given divine revelation as the object of knowledge]” (*ibid.*, 10).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7f; *KD I/1*: 6.

⁶⁵ See Ch. 2.1.

⁶⁶ Barth, *KD I/1*: 8; *CD I/1*: 10: “synthetic construction.” Moreover, we would do well in this section to keep before us Barth’s caution that theology ought not to be reduced to *doctrina revelata* itself (cf. *ibid.*, 13).

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST* 1a. q1, 7 *resp.*: “Unde sequitur quod Deus vere sit subjectum hujus scientiae.”

for this posture before the given “light of the gospel” is the place where the theological task may find its *principium et finis*.

When theology thus seeks to talk positively of the light of God, its undertaking of theological speaking and thinking is not “to interpret [religious symbols] according to theological principles and methods.”⁶⁸ Rather, if it conducts its task in a positive manner, then theology is nothing less than an endeavor to reiterate the radiant identity of God as he reveals himself to be: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). Thus “in the intellectual act of theology the order of being precedes and is actively present to the order of knowing.”⁶⁹ Theology is therefore not in the trade of *granting* identity to God, still less of forming whatever symbols and metaphors for the divine life may be deemed epistemically constitutive, culturally expedient, or prepatory for receiving the “divine truth all around us.”⁷⁰ Rather, theology is “reason following God’s perfect knowledge of himself and of all things.”⁷¹ This is not, of course, to deny that theology has to develop various words and concepts, which has been much of the aim of this very thesis. Nor is it to deny that, in conducting that work, theology has to appropriate such words and concepts from elsewhere and alter them. But in theology the activity of the creaturely mind is an activity that is illumined. Theology, as the activity of the illumined mind, recalls that in speaking and thinking of God’s light it must not be a hypothetical or contingent activity, but rather learn to be speaking and thinking which receives its *subiectum* from the radiant One. The creaturely mind is therefore called before the radiant presence of God: the presence, in all its radiance, which founds both the *field* in

⁶⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 1:266; cf. the “theological circle” in 1:12.

⁶⁹ Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 135.

⁷⁰ See David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience in Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 56. We might further register concern with much of Brown’s insistence that symbols and metaphors create a “new knowledge” or have intrinsic access to God. Brown’s work seems to have its genesis in the opposite end of the spectrum to what we proposed regarding theological predication in Ch. 1.3.1 (“A Note on Analogical Predication”). That is, for Brown, theological predication may convey divine reality due to *our* ascent to truth. Brown, while indebted to Aquinas’s notion of ascent to faith, is missing the other side of Aquinas’s theory, namely, God’s gracious elevation of language beyond its incapacities.

⁷¹ Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 135.

which the illumined mind works, and the *obiectum* to which it must constantly turn.

2.1. Claritas Scripturae

Yet *how* is this presence of the radiant One manifest? The radiant presence of God, we might say, is revealed clearly in Scripture by the Holy Spirit, for Scripture is that “human expression” inspired and chosen by God to attend his shining forth.⁷² And in “speaking to creatures by the Spirit,” Webster further clarifies, God “takes creaturely words into his service, ensuring their adequacy, checking the distortions introduced by fallenness, and restoring their function as a sign of God’s glory.”⁷³ More precisely, these “sacred writings” are “breathed out by God” (θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim. 3:15f) as the product of a divine undertaking. Scripture is thus generated not merely by creaturely impulse but by the power of the Holy Spirit. That power so orders these creaturely, textual acts of being θεόπνευστος that they may properly serve the declaration of the knowledge of God, “their function as a sign of God’s glory.” For our present purposes, then, this means that the illumined mind is situated within the act of exegesis, that is, the mind led by and towards the reading of Scripture which is the attestation of the fact that *Deus dixit*.

Thus in virtue of its relation to the radiant One, Scripture is therefore clear—that is, *claritas* or *perspicuitas*. More precisely: “*The setting of the clarity of Scripture is the effective illuminating presence of God the revealer who is in himself light.*”⁷⁴ The clarity of Scripture is therefore a function of its position in the divine communication, and of the Holy Spirit’s action of illuminating the mind—the *testimonium internum* of the reader—and so guiding it

⁷² Barth, *CD* 1/2: 473. See Barth’s points on Scripture as *the* “witness to divine revelation” or *the* “human expression of God’s revelation” (*ibid.*, 457–71). However, Barth makes plain that “Scripture [as *the* witness] does not violate the dignity and significance of the other signs and witnesses of revelation [i.e., proclamation and sacrament]” (*ibid.*, 501).

⁷³ Webster, “Illumination,” 59.

⁷⁴ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 39f (emphasis original).

to *sacra doctrina*. *Claritas* is not a natural property of the text pondered *in abstracto*; nor is Scripture's perspicuity mere verbal clarity, that is, the clarity of "the meaning of a word sequence" which, in turn, "depends on our ability to relate it to a historical author."⁷⁵ Summoning textual perspicuity in this manner is a rather triumphalist assertion that "what we know from the Bible can, in fact, be known simply by reading it."⁷⁶ Rather, Scripture is clear because through the Holy Spirit the text serves "*the radiant presence of God who through Scripture sheds abroad the light of the knowledge of his reconciling works and ways.*"⁷⁷ Berkouwer continues this thought:

It becomes increasingly clear that the *confessed* perspicuity is not a mere notation of a "quality" of Scripture in the manner in which we attribute certain qualities to other things, after which we can relax. This confession of the church will only be meaningful if it includes an insight into the power of the *Spirit's* way through the world and to men's hearts as the great witness through the Word [...] In the gospel we are dealing with...the *illuminating character of the message*...with its interrelations, depths, and perspectives. This is a light that does not blind but opens eyes to the joy of the gospel's mystery.⁷⁸

Scripture's clarity is therefore neither an intrinsic *qualitas* of the text nor simply the consequence of exegetical endeavor, "after which we can relax." Rather, it is that which the text "*becomes* as it functions in the Spirit-governed encounter between the self-presenting

⁷⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in the Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 109. Vanhoozer may miss the mark when he states: "[C]larity means that the Bible is sufficiently unambiguous in the main for any well-intentioned person with Christian faith to interpret each part with relative adequacy" (*ibid.*, 315).

⁷⁶ John Sailhamer, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 16. See James Callahan's critique of several evangelical renderings of *claritas Scripturae* in *The Clarity of Scripture: History, Theology, and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), ch. 1.

⁷⁷ Webster, "On the Clarity of Holy Scripture," 38 (emphasis original).

⁷⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 296 (emphasis mine).

saviour and the faithful reader.”⁷⁹ And to read in “the economy of grace is not *poiesis*,” Webster states further, “but intelligence directed by and towards God’s self-interpreting, perspicuous Word.” To read, therefore, is to be “wholly dependent upon the illumination of the Spirit,” in order that “exegetical reason may trust the promise of Christ to lead into truth by the Spirit’s presence and power.”⁸⁰ To speak of *claritas Scripturae* is to confess that Scripture is thus perspicuous in God’s work of “opening the eyes to the joy of the gospel’s mystery.”⁸¹

There are *two* results here for the activity of the illumined mind. *First*, because Scripture has “no lack of clarity,” the illumined mind finds there its “common rule” (ἀξιώματα).⁸² The clarity of Scripture for the illumined mind is Scripture’s Spirit-imparted “common rule” to quicken theology to truthful thought and speech—in short, for “training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). And “training in righteousness” follows that which is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction,” and thus shapes the activity of the mind; perspicuity is effective because it bears witness to the truth of this teaching. Hence *claritas Scripturae* is a matter for the church’s proclamation, no matter how “disturbing” it may appear.⁸³ It is the confession that serves “as a reminder of our need to be constantly evaluating our understanding by God’s word,” and a “call to seriousness—before God.”⁸⁴ It is a confession—that is, a “recognition of and decision for divine teaching”—which takes its rise not from “natural perception,” but in “the conversion of reason through divine

⁷⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 91f.

⁸¹ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 296.

⁸² Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci communes* (London: John Kyngston, 1576), 1.6.2. Cf. “Neque deest sanctae Scripturae, quod fideles et pios animos, claritas, et ut Graeci dicunt Neque deest sanctae Scripturae, quod fideles et pios animos, claritas, et ut Graeci dicunt σαφγγία, que est Latinis perspicuitas. Quandoquidem omnia quae disputantur a sanioribus theologis...semper terminant ad testimonia Scripturarum, tanquam illa sint ἀξιώματα Christianis notissima, de quibus fas nemini sit ambigere.”

⁸³ Cf. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*: “No confession concerning Scripture is more disturbing to the church than the confession of its perspicuity” (288). Berkouwer is stating this in light of Scripture’s being the “voice of the Shepherd and not the stranger,” which thus renders any human fatalism and subjectivity in reading Scripture illegitimate.

⁸⁴ Callahan, *Clarity of Scripture*, 272.

instruction.”⁸⁵ Clarity cannot therefore be bestowed on Scripture by the church or by its theology or by “the scholar-prince,”⁸⁶ but only acknowledged as that which is the “common rule” for the illumined mind. As such, Scripture’s clarity is not at all theoretical; it is a feature of Scripture’s witness to the “*effective illuminating presence of God*”⁸⁷ that assists the church in its witness to, exegesis of, and presupposition that: “Scripture is clear in itself as God’s Word; otherwise it will at once disintegrate.”⁸⁸

How does this “common rule” function? If it acts in accord with this given ἄξιωματα, the work of theology must exhibit what can be labeled in biblical terms—and thus, as we mentioned above, in terms foundational to the church—as “walking in the light.”⁸⁹ That is, it must be indicated above all by obedience to the truth of the “light of the gospel” that is announced in Scripture. That obedient “walking” can be conveyed in many ways for theology: by a rejection of the unbridled speculation of human “sense and reason”;⁹⁰ by the refusal to exegete Scripture as anything less than in the light of its “*objektive perspicuitas*”;⁹¹ and by the joy and humility with which the illumined mind turns itself to the interpretive activity of reading Scripture, not as its “magister” but as “subservient,”⁹² in order to understand the “majesty of the subject.”⁹³ All this is included in speaking of Scripture as the clear “common rule” of the illumined mind.

Second, because Scripture is clear, the illumined mind finds there its *principium unicum*. The clarity of Scripture is a vital result of its authority and sufficiency as the inspired

⁸⁵ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 38

⁸⁶ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 93.

⁸⁷ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 39 (emphasis original).

⁸⁸ Barth, *CD I/2*: 712; *KD I/2*: 799: “Schrift als Gottes Wort in sich selber klar ist; sie würde ohne das sofort in sich selbst zusammenbrechen.”

⁸⁹ See our thoughts regarding the church in Ch. 4.2.1: “The Johannine Pattern,” and Ch. 4.4.3.1: “The listening church”; and see our thoughts on “walking in the light” as an *individual* in Ch. 4.3, “The *Saint* in Light.”

⁹⁰ See Vermigli, *Loci communes* 1.6.2: “Caeterum non est haec evidētia ex lumine humani sensus ac nostrae rationis pretēda, sed a luce fidei.”

⁹¹ Barth, *KD I/2*: 799; *CD I/2*: 712.

⁹² Webster, “Illumination,” 59.

⁹³ Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (*WA* 18:606.22–24).

servant of the Word of God.⁹⁴ It could therefore be said that when a sense of *claritas Scripturae* is absent, one may doubt whether assent has been given to Scripture's *authoritas* and *suffientia*. Indeed, such a view is observed in a recent proposal by Christian Smith, namely in his polemic against an evangelical "biblicist" view which naïvely holds to Scripture's "authority, infallibility, perspicuity [and] self-sufficiency" over against a "more truly evangelical" position which strikes these notions from the text and learns to "live with textual ambiguity."⁹⁵ Yet Smith's various proposals are admittedly filled with false dichotomies, notably in his insistence that so-called "biblicists" construct the various attributes of Scripture in order to "produce cognitive and emotional security in a very insecure world," and yet when it suits his rhetorical aim, Smith perplexingly states that Scripture speaks clearly, particularly on the "pervasive, clear, straightforward, obvious, and simple" features of the Christian life and of the gospel.⁹⁶ Moreover, it is striking to observe Smith's lack of understanding regarding the historical context of *claritas Scripturae* in his critical account. This seems the precise point of the older dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, who noted that Scripture is not *equally* clear in every matter, but in matters of dogmatics, *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*.⁹⁷

Therefore, over against Smith's rather perplexing claims, we might once again echo Webster by stating that such an approach "ignores the revelational and pneumatological dimensions of the notion of Scripture's *claritas*, assuming that *claritas* can be understood simply as a text-property without the Spirit's work."⁹⁸ What sets in motion creaturely

⁹⁴ See, again, Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 298. See also Webster's clarification that "These notions...do not eliminate the necessity of reading, making exegesis a purely 'pneumatic' activity which bypasses the processes by which written materials are appropriated. Rather, they set those acts within the domain of God's self-explication" (*Holy Scripture*, 93).

⁹⁵ Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), viii, xi, 146.

⁹⁶ See *ibid.*, 95, 132, 144.

⁹⁷ Cf. the various *Belegstellen* from seventeenth-century Protestant orthodox and scholastic sources in Heinrich Heppe, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Elberfeld: Friderichs, 1861), 12f, 26f.

⁹⁸ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 100. Webster is engaging here with the work of Werner Jeanrod, Garret Green, and, particularly in this passage, James K.A. Smith, whose notion of interpretation "threatens to float free from talk

understanding of the gospel is the radiant presence of God himself: the “communicative activity of God,” which is “served by the sanctified text,” is precisely the realm of the Spirit’s action.⁹⁹ That is to say, *claritas* does not refer to “single passages” of Scripture, *pace* Smith’s confusion, but to “the single heads of Christian doctrine necessary to faith and the worship of God.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, “if you speak of the external clarity,” Luther states, “nothing at all is left obscure or ambiguous, but everything there is in the scriptures has been brought out by the Word into the most definite light, and published to all the world.”¹⁰¹ Scripture is clear for its purpose, which is the “publication” of the saving knowledge of God. The illumined mind therefore finds in Scripture its *principium unicum*—that is, the limit of the illumined mind’s concern.¹⁰²

This limit of the illumined mind, namely Scripture as the *principium unicum*, requires that the activity of theology exhibit a singular focus. In other words, talk of *claritas Scripturae* is a caution against allowing theology’s work to be lured into “exploring and reflecting imaginatively” on all types of sources of “enchantment.”¹⁰³ No matter how inspirational such fascinations may appear to be, in the end they almost always distort proper focus. Theology cannot say everything; yet when theology does endeavor to relate itself to all

of divine action, and the myth of immediacy is countered by a sort of hermeneutical Pelagianism” (*ibid.*).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101. “Sanctification” is a key middle term for Webster (and indeed Bavinck before him) when it comes to the nature of Scripture. It indicates in a “general way God’s activity of appointing and ordering the creaturely realities of the biblical texts towards the end of the divine self-manifestation” (*ibid.*, 9f).

¹⁰⁰ Polanus, *Synt. theol.* 1.1.44.

¹⁰¹ Luther, *De serv.* (WA 18:609.4–9, 11–14). The thrust of Luther’s passage is to contrast between the oppressive interpretative tradition and the clarity of “direct,” unmediated hermeneutics. For Luther, to speak of God as necessary for understanding Scripture is to oppose the idolatrous effect of self-derived, autonomous wisdom. For a succinct account of Luther’s double view of clarity (internal-external), see Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 277. Regarding the historical context on the debate between Erasmus and Luther, see Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL/Nottingham: IVP Press/Apollos, 2006), 143–50; Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 43–6; Rudolf Hermann, “Von der Klarheit der Heiligen Schrift. Untersuchungen und Erörterungen über Luthers Lehre von der Schrift in ‘*De servo arbitrio*,’” in *Studien zur Theologie Luthers und des Luthertums. Gesammelte und nachgelassene Werke*, vol. 2, ed. Horst Beintker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 170–255; and Friedrich Beisser, *Claritas scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), esp. 75–130.

¹⁰² See Horton: “If we divorce illumination...from inspiration, we easily fall into the impersonal view of Scripture as a dead letter” (*Christian Faith*, 169).

¹⁰³ Brown, *God and Mystery*, 14. Much of Brown’s work is set on the conviction that “revealed religion builds on natural religion” (*ibid.*, 1).

types of other fields of intellectual and cultural desiderata, then—however much it may do so with the “delight in the unexpected”¹⁰⁴—it risks losing its originality and, what Luther called, its ability to “repeat” (*nachsprechen*) the *promissio* of the one Word of God.¹⁰⁵ Rather, Luther continues, theological analysis is to portray itself captive to the Word of God, in order that it may

simply cling to the Word and follow [...] allow[ing] reason to be blinded and taken captive. So, not as hairsplitting sophistry dictates but as God says them for us, we must *repeat* these words after him and hold them.¹⁰⁶

Theology thus finds its hand led, not by its authoritative “hairsplitting” before the watching world but by the sheer proclamation that theology indeed *needs*, in light of its creaturely failings, to be led by the *viva vox Dei*. This confession seems to be contrary to what is found in much modern theological queries, namely an active “dismantling—the muzzling of the challenge of God to the idolatrous world.”¹⁰⁷ The illumined mind will therefore respectfully reject the so-called “creative potential” of the dissuaders, and refuse the persistent invitations to join the great “rediscovery” of the “less wooden approaches” to its work.¹⁰⁸ Instead, theology will simply set about its work and call: giving itself steadfastly to training “the saints for work in ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Luther maintains that in the church’s “repeating” it does not substitute its own words for God’s words: “Denn wir werden gewislich feylen, wo wir nicht einfeltiglich yhm nach sprechen, wie er uns fur spricht gleich wie ein iung kind seym Vater den glauben odder Vater unser nach spricht” (“Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis [1528]” [*WA* 26:439.40–440.3]). The verb “nachsprechen” (repeat) is used intentionally by Luther to suggest the frailty of the creaturely intellect in matters of faith. Luther’s concept of the clarity of Scripture serves as a barrier for human speculation: nothing beyond the *deus revelatus* is of any concern to humankind. This concept also guarantees that human intellect be defined as soteriologically ineffective: it is not required to possess the spiritual meaning of the outer word, which would be just one more *sensus proprius*, but to accept that *res significata extra re* given by God. See Kurt K. Hendel, “‘No Salvation Outside the Church’ in Light of Luther’s Dialectic of the Hidden and Revealed God,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35, no. 4 (August 2008): 248–57.

¹⁰⁶ Luther, “Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis” (*WA* 26:439.31–36).

¹⁰⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (NY: HarperCollins, 2005), 103.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *God and Mystery*, 8.

3. THE CALL OF THE ILLUMINED MIND

We have been considering the assertion that, as an outworking of the illumined mind, a theology of light has both its *field* and its *obiectum* in the radiant presence of the triune God as announced clearly in Scripture, and that Scripture thus operates as a *principium unicum* and as theology's "common rule." As we move to conclude this final chapter, we look more closely at how the illumined mind assumes its position under the divine *vocatio*. Thus this final section observes that the *vocatio* of the illumined mind is to the gathering of the saints in light before the radiant presence of God.

3.1. Theology in the Church

As the activity of the illumined mind, theology is called to the gathering of the saints in light, assisting the prayer and proclamation of the church. Because of this, theology shares in the same *vocatio* of "outshining" as does the church.¹⁰⁹ It listens to the same gracious *viva vox Dei* in the gospel; it faces the same *vocatio* of the "light of the gospel"; it bears witness to the world sitting in darkness; it is illumined by the same Holy Spirit; it guides itself by the same proclamation of the "excellencies" of the One who alone is light; it is rescued from the darkness which is ignorant of God's radiant identity; and it is a participant in the same prayer and praise of God's radiant identity. Thus the "subject-matter of Christian theology is the triune God," says Wood, "its generative condition is the healing and illuminating presence of Christ...its proximate rule is Holy Scripture; its characteristic disposition is humility; its

¹⁰⁹ See above Ch. 4.4.3, "The Visibility and Outshining of the Light of the Church."

starting-point is prayer.”¹¹⁰ Thus theology, like the church, beseeches God for direction in its work:

Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!” (Ps. 43:3).

Such prayer is not a secondary matter in theology; it is, indeed, the “starting-point” of theology. Thus, called to the church, theology begins and ends its work with something similar to Anselm’s *credo*:

Let me look up at your light, whether from afar or in the depths [...] I am not trying to scale your heights, Lord; my understanding is in no way equal to that. But I do long to understand your truth in some way, your truth which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe; but I believe in order to understand.¹¹¹

Yet to speak in this way of intellectual work may sound odd. But talk of theology is not psychological jargon nor the deployment of linguistic smoke and mirrors. Though, admittedly, academia has often made it hard to see past these points, theology as an activity of the illumined mind is churchly science—a knowing and inquiring which takes place not within “systematic” schemes but *within* the gathered and illumined church.¹¹² Of course, some might worry that: “If theology is understood primarily as a ‘science’ in the common

¹¹⁰ Wood, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 383f.

¹¹¹ Anselm, *Pros.* 1 (*PL* 158:227b–c): “Neque enim quaero intelligere, ut credam; sed credo, ut intelligam.”

¹¹² This echoes Ellen Charry’s call for a renewal of “sapiential theology”—that is, the quest to know God in order to know ourselves—in which theologians once again see themselves as pastors who help people “find their identity in God.” See *By The Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 235, 239.

understanding of that term, it will assume that its job is to clarify, perhaps to explain...it will be interested in whether or not there are good reasons for saying this or that.”¹¹³ Yet a responsible theology in the presence of the radiant One will not be anxious about this, but simply take up its activity with “integrity” to the *vocatio* of God in the gathering of the saints in light.¹¹⁴

But as it does its work in the gathered church, theology aids in the edification of the church, building up the church’s gathered life, and so attending to the proclamation of the gospel. Theology does this by offering a description of the evangel as that to which all thought and speech in the church must obey. In the activity of the illumined mind, the saints in light test their understandings of God against the backdrop of the “common rule” of all truth, God’s radiant presence as Word. As it conducts its theology, the church questions whether it really speaks and thinks as the gathering of the saints in light; whether the light and the *vox* of the gospel has truly been seen and heard; whether in their proclamation of the gospel the elect of God are truly “walking in the light as he is in the light.”

Critically, then, theology’s work is begun by submission to the gospel—by theology itself standing “under the Word and therefore under Holy Scripture.”¹¹⁵ And by the fact that *ecclesia nata est ex Dei Verbo*, theology works by overseeing its speech and thought in light of the gospel, and by turning to God, recognizing that, like all things in the life of the church, theology is hopeless unless God *himself* makes it possible and “aretegenic.”¹¹⁶ Only in this manner, humbly confessing that “I am not trying to scale your heights, Lord,”¹¹⁷ can the illumined mind, called to the gathering of the saints in light, serve their “good confession.” Thus a “good servant of Christ Jesus” is the one who, “trained in the words of the faith,”

¹¹³ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 13.

¹¹⁴ We use “integrity” to offer the positive definition that Rowan Williams has in mind: “Having integrity [in theology] is being able to speak in a way which allows for answers” (*ibid.*, 5).

¹¹⁵ Barth, *CD I/2*: 586; *KD I/2*: 653.

¹¹⁶ Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Anselm, *Pros.* 1.

makes “a good confession in the presence of many witnesses,” because “Christ Jesus...in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made *the* good confession.” (1 Tim. 4:6; 6:12f). The *vocatio* to speak a “good confession” is also *promissio*—that God will gather the good servant’s “good confession” and allow it to serve the gospel, the “words of faith.” Cognitive idolatry is rebuked, therefore, not by silence and ignorance, but by training in speech that sets forth what God has taught in “good doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:6). And in such “good confessions,” the illumined mind serves the church’s proclamation of the light of the gospel.

4. CONCLUSION

What, then, is the *telos* of theology as the illumined mind? It is what Maastricht calls the “*celebration...of his majesty recognized through its brightness, which is more properly called glorification.*”¹¹⁸ The “celebration” and “glorification” of God is, as we saw in the conclusion to our previous chapter, the fundamental end of all the works of the gathering of the saints in light:

Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured

Who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,

Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now we are at the sun’s hour of rest,

The lights of evening round us shine,

We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine!

Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung

With undefiled tongue,

Son of our God, giver of life, alone:

Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.

¹¹⁸ Maastricht, *Theoretico-prac. theol.* 2.22: “*celebratio...quae magis proprie glorificatio*” (emphasis mine).

Praise, celebration, and glorification add nothing to God; they do not or cannot intensify God's light, which is inexhaustibly and unassailably resplendent and "Worthiest...at all times to be sung." They are simply a proclamation, a pointing of the Baptist's finger to the slain Lamb and true light of life.

To talk of the *telos* of the illumined mind in these terms is once again to refuse to isolate intellectual activity from the "outshining" of the church—namely the call to prayer, proclamation, and praise. The illumined mind is a practice in the life of the gathering of the saints in light; thus, it participates in the "outshining" of the church, sharing its origin and contributing to its work. To separate the illumined mind from that outshining is to obstruct its course. And not only that, to turn theology away from its *telos* in the praise of God nearly always comprises its replacement by other means, the elevation of *scientia naturalis* and its aprioristic detachment from the repentant service of God.

Yet theology is not the *viva vox* of the gospel; it is not a *sacramentum regenerationis*; it does not have the *authoritas* of the teaching office of the church. It is not a *media gratiae*, but the creaturely work of thinking and speaking "to please God." Because it is continually a creaturely work, it shares in the weaknesses of its age. Nevertheless, in its particular creaturely atmosphere, theology can be the mind illumined. It can attend to the radiant One and the creaturely "circumference" which gathers around its "radiant center," Christ Jesus. And in "falling to their knees" as a "sudden light flashes from heaven," theologians may arise dazed and dazzled by the majesty of the triune God, and thus be "led by the hand" as they make their continual cry with the church:

At one time [we] were darkness, but now [we] are light in the Lord [...]

Therefore... "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine

on you” [...] For with you, O Lord, is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light (Eph. 5:8–14; Ps. 36:9).

CONCLUSION

The theological reflections offered in this thesis sought to articulate several proposals regarding the declaration that “God is light.” The *first* proposal made in the course of the earlier discussions concerned the content of a trinitarian theology of God’s light founded on the witness of Scripture and supplemented by the historical use of the concept of light through which the church has sought to express the reality of the triune God’s radiant self-disclosure. We thus explored two avenues of thought: light which is proper to the Holy Trinity (i.e., *God is light in himself*); and the gathering of saints in God’s light (i.e., *from himself God shines forth his light*). The joining of this content derives from the confession that, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God’s light is a way of pointing to God’s radiant identity. And this identity has to further be understood “in terms of the divine resolve for fellowship.”¹ Thus, talk of God’s light is a conceptual attempt to point to God’s radiant identity which is seen in God’s shining forth towards his creatures as the One who elects, reconciles, and illuminates. Light is therefore God’s relation to his creatures sitting in the darkness of sin and ignorance: as Father electing the creature in his “radiant event of love,” as Son scattering the darkness of sin on the cross and in his *status exaltationis*, and as Holy Spirit as the *terminus* of this movement by illuminating those called out of the darkness into God’s “marvelous light.” Thus we explored this shining forth by looking at those “called out of darkness.” The church *in* the light is grounded in the work of the Trinity in a people who are the covenant partners of God. The light of the church is thus always an *external* light: reflective, not original. It is, moreover, an “outshining” light in the primary act of the church, which is proclamation—that is, the recognition of the love and grace of God. The light of the

¹ Webster, “On the Clarity of Holy Scripture,” 40.

church is not self-achieved but a witness to the reality of the God who is light. Its primary “outshinings” are hearing and obeying the *vocatio* of the light of the gospel, witnessing to the light before the world in the domain of darkness, and prayer and praise to the glory of God.

The *second* proposal of this thesis was that a trinitarian theology of divine light is itself an activity of the illumined mind. Theological thinking and speaking, if it is to take place in the midst of the gathering of the saints in light, is not autonomous rational inquiry but an attempt at repeating the identity of the One who is light in himself. The mind illumined is therefore thinking called out of the darkness of sin by God and renewed so that God’s radiant presence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be known. Both the formative *field* and the foundational *obiectum* of Christian theology derive from revelation; and so such a theology is not strictly “imaginative” or “participatory” but one of proclamation. It finds its “common rule” and its *principium unicum* in Scripture as the clear, creaturely instrument through which God shines forth himself. Consequently, it tries to read Scripture as a clear witness to God’s self-disclosure, and is unconcerned with “ambiguous” interpretations. Thus as the mind illumined, theology will appropriately display the marks of being renewed by the Holy Spirit for humble attention to the “light of the gospel.” Theology’s *vocatio* is thus its activity in serving the gathering of the saints in light in its humble and prayerful position before the triune God.

Yet a *confessio* might be registered here at the end of our thesis. We note that our proposals regarding the confession that “God is light” are admittedly foreign to contemporary systematic theology. But perhaps in this *confessio* might be found one final challenge to the reader: a trinitarian theology of divine light is simply incompatible with any *dysteleological* notion of creaturely life. However, an implicit result of this thesis forces the reader to say that the *telos* of the creature is not of its own making but rather the undertaking to “walk in the light” of the One who is in himself light. This “visible” action of faith is, indeed, the fulfilling

of creaturely *vocatio* in history. That is, we *become* “light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8); we *become* “a child of light...following, obeying and corresponding to the light of the world.”² But this *becoming* is not mere mystical contemplation of our own making; nor is it our creation of a creaturely “narrative” or “aesthetics,” but rather the outworking of the creaturely *vocatio*: “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7). Indeed, Barth’s quotation in our “Epigraph” has particular potency here:

The light or revelation of God is not just a declaration and interpretation of His being and action, His judgment and grace, His endowing, directing, promising and commanding presence and action. In making Himself known, God acts on the whole man. Hence the knowledge of God given to man through his illumination is no mere apprehension and understanding of God’s being and action, nor as such a kind of intuitive contemplation. It is the claiming not only of his thinking but also of his willing and work, of the whole man, for God. It is his refashioning to be a theatre, witness and instrument of His acts. Its subject and content, which is also its origin, makes it an active knowledge, in which there are affirmation and negation, volition and decision, action and inaction, and in which man leaves certain old courses and enters and pursues new ones. As the work of God becomes clear to him, its reflection lights up his own heart and self and whole existence through the One whom he may know on the basis of His own self-declaration. Illumination and therefore vocation is the total alteration of the one whom it befalls.³

² Barth, *CD* IV/3.2: 902; cf. “dem ‘Licht der Welt’...folgend, gehorsam und entsprechend ein ‘Kind des Lichtes’” (*KD* IV/3: 1003).

³ *Ibid.*, 510; *KD* IV/3: 586: “Erleuchtung und also Berufung ist eben: totale Veränderung dessen, dem sie widerfährt.”

Such assertions about the illumination of “the whole man” might appear deeply naïve. Yet it should be noted that the history of God’s shining forth to creatures is a “dynamic teleology,”⁴ and its ontology is organized around the fact that it is ever the “true light...coming into the world” (Jn. 1:9). It is those who have been “given light” from this “true light,” not the enthusiasts of the domain of darkness, who ought to be acquainted with their own “*total* alteration.”

Becoming “light in the Lord” is therefore of supreme importance, for the *telos* of the human creature will involve not only the world’s “*total* alteration,” but also the “*total* alteration” of the church by the “light of the gospel.” Reflecting on this reality has been the endeavor of this thesis. Encouraging this reflection, however, resides solely with the work of God, and so it is a matter for praise and proclamation: “At one time [we] were darkness, but now [we] are light in the Lord.” (Eph 5:8).

Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.

⁴ Ibid., 168.

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