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Errata

There is an error on page 285 in the article by Charles A. Gieschen, “The Relevance of the *Homologoumena* and *Antilegomena* Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case,” *CTQ* 79 (2015). The sentence in the first paragraph that reads, “It is ironic that the two primary proof-texts . . . are both from the *antilegomena*” should read: “It is ironic that one of the two primary proof-texts for the divine nature of the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Peter 1:21, is from the *antilegomena*.”

The Editors

All Theology Is Christology: An Axiom in Search of Acceptance

David P. Scaer

Some of the most useless time in seminary classrooms is spent defending the usability of abstract phrases for which no final, definitive explanation is possible. A perennial one concerns the crucifixion of Jesus: Is it law or gospel? Since law and gospel have to do with the character of proclamation and not events in that proclamation, the crucifixion, which is an event, albeit the redemptive one, is neither law nor gospel. In the sixteenth century, Lutherans argued whether good works were detrimental or beneficial to salvation.¹ Choose your poison. We approach the correctness of the phrase “all theology is Christology” with caution. Like the question about the crucifixion, this dictum, apart from a particular context, may have multiple meanings of which some are predictably wrong. On the other hand, the phrase may provide the key for a fuller understanding of God. In fact, it will be argued here that Christology is the overarching category under which theology, that is, our knowledge of God, is to be placed. Instead of opposing attributes against one another, we should first find God in Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily (Col 2:9).

I. Misunderstanding of “All Theology Is Christology”

On an elementary level, the phrase might mean that Christology is the only topic in theology and hence the only course in a seminary curriculum. A student preparing for the ministry would learn nothing except the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In spite of the limitations of such a curriculum, it would certainly be preferable to those wherein Christology is sidelined in favor of such important courses as stewardship, church administration, feminism, or ecology. Surely no serious theologian in the classical Christian traditions holds that such a narrowly defined Christ-

¹ FC SD IV 1. The opposing phrases were: “Good works are necessary for salvation” and “It is impossible to be saved without good works.”

ology encompasses an entire theological program; however, if Christology should include soteriology, it might very well do the job.

Objections to this proposition may falsely identify it with a unitarianism of the Second Person. Such "Jesus religion" can be recognized in sects that baptize in the name of Jesus alone. Christomonism is not a new phenomenon. Without explicitly denying the Trinity, it surfaced in medieval Catholic mysticism, in which the soul merged with Jesus, and in Protestant Pietism, as is evidenced in Zinzendorf's "Jesus only" hymns. The maxim that "all theology is Christology" might suitably describe Karl Barth's system, whose doctrine of revelation rests on the believer's encounter (*Begegnung*) with Christ. Barth's Christological bent was a reaction against Enlightenment rationalists, Immanuel Kant, and F. D. E. Schleiermacher. These forerunners of classical liberalism promoted a theology where Jesus no longer played an exclusive role in revealing God. Rationalists derived knowledge of God from reason interpreting nature. Kant knew God from the moral imperative, and Schleiermacher's God emerged from consciousness. In spite of their diversities, these approaches did not recognize Jesus as the exclusive manifestation of the divine. Theology soon was replaced by *Religionsgeschichte*, which treated all religions as purely historical phenomena. These approaches were more anthropological than theological, since they studied human quests for God and, in some cases, the human situation without reference to God. Godless religion existed long before he was declared dead. Even in some church-related colleges and universities, religion is often another academic discipline among the arts and sciences and is no longer entitled to a separate department. The value of theology, now devolved into religious studies, was measured by its moral and cultural usefulness for society.

Karl Barth countered this homogenization of God-with-culture by holding that Christ was the first and only revelation of God. At first, his *solus Christus* theology appeared to be a promising revival of Reformation beliefs. Sadly, it promised more than what it delivered. By making Christ the sole revelation of God, Barth denied the natural knowledge of God, placed the Scriptures as the word of God in a subordinate position, and had no necessary, salvific role for the sacraments. With Christ as the first, full, and only revelation of God, the gospel, by the inclusion of demand, became law. As a result, Barth appropriately entered the political arena and participated in the Barmen Declaration. His political goals were in line with those of the social gospel, against which he had originally mounted his system. He led Protestantism back into the clutches of the classical liberalism from which he promised to deliver it. In reaction to the theology of immanence spawned by Schleiermacher, Barth revived the concept of a

sovereign God who was “the Wholly Other.” Yet in making the moment of the encounter with Christ the revelatory connection with God, he left the initiative with the individual. The bright Christological promise of his approach faded. His failure to produce an eschatology in which unbelievers were accountable to God showed that he had not gone beyond the horizons of classical liberalism. His equalizing of divine sovereignty and grace resulted in an unspoken universalism.

Important for our immediate purposes is that a theology derived from attributes, like Barth’s, is problematic. After the attributes are named, they must be defined and, to avoid contradiction or unacceptable conclusions, coordinated.² If some are favored, others must be subordinated. Freedom leaves God at the mercy of an indefinite future.³ Give love the upper hand, and the argument might go like this: “I cannot believe in a God who sends anyone to hell.” What are the alternatives? A God who sends everyone to heaven or a God who annihilates people to avoid the choice? A third option leads to atheism. Divine non-existence is preferable to letting a capricious, non-loving deity survive. Deriving theology from attributes parallels Darwin’s theory of natural selection: some survive and others do not.⁴

In this regard two theorems are offered. First, theological systems locating truth within human experiences, even if they use biblical or Christological terms, eventually prove to be neither Christological nor theological. Rationalism, Schleiermacher, classical liberalism, and a-futurism, in which God depends on his creation, all assign him a subordinate role. He becomes creature-like and with little advantage over his creatures in determining the future. He is simply another player on the team. *Credo in unum deum patrem omnipotentem creatorem coeli et terrae* is rendered impotent over the future. The future dissolves past omnipotence, projected guarantees

² Michael Horton understands that an isolated attribute of divine sovereignty can lead to doubt and despair, so he balances it with the gospel promises: “We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god. For neither is great enough to capture the hearts and minds of our disenchanted age, especially in the face of evil, oppression, violence, and death.” Michael S. Horton, “Is the *New News Good News?*,” *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 18.

³ This view has been discussed in *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999) and *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999). See especially Paul Helm, “Openness Theology and God’s ‘Project’ for the Future,” *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 6 (1999): 46–50. This review of John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), points out that the other side of this argument of a God whose future is at risk is Arminianism, in which man has the final word.

⁴ Horton, “Is the *New News Good News?*,” 11–14.

are annulled, and the “and forever will be” is removed from the *Gloria Patri*. A second theorem, one that comes to definitions of God by sifting through the attributes, runs the risk of equivocation, since some terms can have both biblical and philosophical meanings. For example, love is seen as synonymous with tolerance and leads to universalism.⁵ Divine impartiality, which makes no distinction among people, has led to the ordination of women, as well as revealing a god who wants to be understood as “Mother” at least in equal standing with him (or her) as “Father.”

If it is argued that faultily defined attributes lead to faulty conclusions about God, then our response is that any definition of God, even if it is framed in raw biblical terms, by itself and apart from the person of Jesus, carries the potential for error. An idolatry of stone and wood is replaced by one of abstractions masquerading behind biblical evidences.⁶ In a theology of abstractions, anything can and will go wrong. Love leads to universalism. Wrath leaves sinners at the sporadic, occasional mercy of an otherwise angry God who is free to change his mind. Infinite freedom gives God limitless possibilities including non-existence at the hands of his creatures. Internal self-perfection raises the questions of why God created in the first place and, more importantly, why he then bothered to rescue a creation that rejected him. Introducing divine sovereignty does not help; a completely self-contained God would hardly be moved from anything external. Worse still, God may be totally unconcerned. These theological failings—and that is what they are—result from isolating some attributes to the exclusion of others and then driving the chosen ones to their logical conclusions.

Some methods in defining God are deficient because they introduce the person of Jesus only after the theological dialogue is well under way or, in some cases, completed. Christology becomes secondary and is made to fit the contours of predetermined views of God. Its relationship to theology is only tangential, with the result that we are dealing with two different topics without a necessary relationship. At best, Christology serves to confirm a predetermined theological agenda and often to provide an escape from otherwise unacceptable views of God. Christ serves as a *deus*

⁵ For a treatment of this issue in contemporary theology, see Paul R. Hinlicky, “The Future of Tolerance,” in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 375–389. For example, “[Love] is not some all-condoning leniency, which is indifferent to sin, and righteousness, but a costly grace. It is neither lenient nor permissive, but merciful to sinners” (388).

⁶ Horton uses similar language: “We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god.” Horton, “Is the *New News Good News?*,” 18.

ex machina to whom we can assign attributes that do not fit our idea of God. Jesus is capable of involvement in the human situation in a way that God is not. He bridges the unbridgeable in an almost Arian way. By keeping Christology out of theological definition, our ideas of God are kept intact and redemption becomes an afterthought of a deity who had the options of non-redemption or redemption by another means.

Virtually all historical Christian traditions operate with the same set of divine attributes, but they are not agreed upon which are primary. For the sake of exaggeration, add feminism to the divine mix. The result is a book like *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective*, in which the keys to understanding the Third Person of the Trinity are the five senses, which are said to be more keenly developed in the gentler sex.⁷ However, even by confining ourselves to traditional attributes, the theological task goes awry. The Reformed are preoccupied with sovereignty,⁸ and Lutherans with the gospel as in the law-gospel motif.

II. The Historical Reasons for the Importance of "All Theology Is Christology"

Some Lutherans were understandably attracted by Barth's Christologically laden system. They were also drawn to Rudolph Bultmann's definition of the gospel as the proclamation of forgiveness, so they proceeded to make justification the only necessary tenet of their program. Their gospel-shaped theology dispenses with the law in the Christian life.⁹ Barth had fused law into gospel, but Lutherans with a gospel isolated from the law took the path to an antinomianism known as "gospel reductionism,"¹⁰ a phrase popularized by the majority of the faculty at Concordia

⁷ Rebecca B. Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

⁸ So Horton, "This is an important warning for some who seem to regard God's sovereignty as the center of the Christian message." "Is the *New News Good News?*," 18.

⁹ This antinomianism had church-dividing effects, since Lutherans are bound to the Formula of Concord, the Sixth Article of which deals with the third use of the law: "[Those] who have been converted to the Lord and from whom the veil of Moses has been taken away, learn from the law to live and walk in the law" (FC SD VI 1). See also R. D. Linger, "Antinomianism," *Modern Reformation* 9, no. 2 (2000): 31-33. Linger identifies three kinds of antinomianism of which the first is, "once persons are justified by faith in Christ, they no longer have any obligation toward the moral law because Christ has freed them from it" (31).

¹⁰ This Christological or gospel theology relegated biblical injunctions, especially the Pauline ones, to parentheses, which were for particular churches in specific times and places, but not universally binding. The gospel not only rescued the believer from

Seminary, Saint Louis, in the 1970s and still in use.¹¹ Unencumbered by the law, “gospel reductionists” were free from such biblical injunctions as limiting the pastoral office to men. Faith was emancipated from the historicalness of the virgin birth and the resurrection. This new Christ-religion was a radicalized doctrine of justification.¹² A doctrinally-shaped ideology replaced historical reality as the basis of faith.¹³

Discussion about “all theology is Christology” took place in the late 1980s and 1990s at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.¹⁴ Waldo J. Werning, a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor and former ally of J. A. O. and Robert D. Preus¹⁵ during the “gospel

his predicament under law but abolished the law itself, and it became the trump card that took every theological trick. As long as the gospel remained intact, all things were possible. Ethical and doctrinal barriers were temporary. This position’s conclusions were steeped in Christological language but were no different than those of classical liberalism.

¹¹ Carl Braaten, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) clergyman, a one-time professor at its Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and someone who had supported the Saint Louis faculty majority, is described as being “dissatisfied with ‘gospel reductionism.’” See Philip E. Thompson, “A New Question in Baptist History: Seeking A Catholic Spirit among Early Baptists,” *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 1 (1999): 51. “Gospel reductionism” has allowed the ELCA to enter into full fellowship with churches whose doctrines are condemned by the Lutheran Confessions.

¹² John H. Tietjen, in his *Memoirs in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), describes an essay he delivered to the faculty in which he argued that doctrine was not dogma and that dogma was the standard to which the church agreed. Disagreements in theology did not affect the gospel (18). He also provided ample examples of how the gospel principle works. See his listings under “Gospel” in his index (363). For a specific reference in how this applied to the ordination of women see the transcript of Robert Bertram’s interview (37).

¹³ Some Luther research has tried to set this forth as the Reformer’s view. For a response to this see Ulrich Asendorf, “*Viva Vox Evangelii*—A Necessary Course Correction,” in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Luther’s *simul iustus et peccator* is not an independent existential principle but one that receives its meaning from the gospel, and the gospel in turn from the resurrection and God’s trinitarian life.

¹⁴ See David P. Scaer, “All Theology Is Christology,” *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 28–32.

¹⁵ Preus was well known in Evangelical circles, and so his defense of the phrase assured its notoriety. He was associated with the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy and later the Association of Confessing Evangelicals. For his book *The Inspiration of Scripture*, he had long been recognized as a defender of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, key doctrines for Neo-Evangelicals. In the course of his lifetime, he had worked with Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, and Earl D. Radmacher, and more lately with Robert Godfrey, Michael Horton, and R. Scott Clark, who dedicated *Protestant Scholasticism* to his memory. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds.,

reductionism" controversy, took exception to a sentence in an article on sanctification and found cause to bring charges against its author and Robert D. Preus, who accepted it.¹⁶ Superficially, "All theology is Christology" may have resembled "gospel reductionism."¹⁷ However, in the new controversy, no one was charged with denying the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, the historical character of its accounts, or the continued validity of the law for Christians. Igniting the controversy was this sentence, "Any attempt to make Christology preliminary to theology, or even only its most important part, but not its only part, is a denial of Luther's doctrine and effectively destroys the Gospel of the message of a completed atonement."¹⁸ This sentence was summed up as "all theology is Christology." At issue was whether Christology is part of all doctrinal definitions, including the one of God, that is, whether theology is defined in relation to Jesus.¹⁹ The conclusion was that Christology is not incidental but is integral to how God is understood. It profoundly informs theology.²⁰

Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999). His reputation as a confessional scholar was tested in preventing the LCMS from sliding into the liberalism that had engulfed mainline Protestant churches by the 1950s.

¹⁶ See David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," *CTQ* 49, no. 2-3 (1985): 181-195 (discussed below). Robert D. Preus had been a major player in the events at the Saint Louis seminary in 1974 and was responsible for keeping the institution afloat. Apart from the politics connected with any dispute, the underlying reason for the faculty majority dismissal was theological. They held to an amalgam of Barth's Christologically defined theology combined with Bultmann's demythologizing exegesis. This allowed the outward form of justification, the major tenet of Lutheran theology, to remain intact. John Tietjen described the gospel in this way: "Works don't justify; faith does. God has already justified you. You believe God's promise. Don't be afraid." Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 7. There was an existential Christology accessible in the proclamation of forgiveness, but it did not require belief in historical incarnation and resurrection. This situation occasioned formal and informal alliances between the conservative Neo-Evangelical scholars, who were conversant in these matters, and often untutored confessional Lutherans. Three months after the "Gospel reductionist" matter was resolved by the faculty majority leaving their posts, Preus became president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

¹⁷ When John H. Tietjen was removed by the seminary board in January 1974, the faculty majority left their posts in protest. When they did not return to their teaching responsibilities, they were removed in February. For a description of these events see Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 161-230.

¹⁸ Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," 194.

¹⁹ Preus delivered a series of essays that provided specific references from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions to demonstrate the correctness and the necessity of the Christological approach to theology. Citing Luther in defense of a theological position may not finally be convincing to the Neo-Evangelical community or for that matter to

In grammatically deciphering an intransitive sentence, the predicative nominative describes the subject. For example, in the sentence, "The dog is brown," "brown" tells us something about "dog" and distinguishes it from dogs of other colors. So in the phrase, "all theology is Christology," Christology is descriptive. Who and what God is happens to be the subject, and the predicate nominative "Christology" describes God. Jesus' life and death are the givens; "all theology is Christology" means that in Jesus we know something about God, a claim that Jesus makes. Since no other word appears in the predicate, it is absolute. Reversing the sentence so that it reads "Christology is theology" carries a different meaning. In this case, it is assumed that we know something about God. Such knowledge would be derived from philosophy or Bible passages apart from Christ. The sentence "all Christology is Christology" is meaningless. After isolating divine attributes, the sentence requires applying them to Jesus. This procedure is problematic, because it assumes an adequate natural revelation of God or a special revelation of God apart from Christ. In designating the appropriate attributes and assigning them *theological* definitions, some attributes will be predictably favored over others. Marcion found an Old Testament God who hardly resembles the New Testament one, and so he anticipated rationalism, Schleiermacher, and many modern biblical scholars. Favoring certain attributes results in different understandings of God and sometimes different gods.²¹ To get around a problem that he probably did not fully recognize, one Lutheran theologian conceded that the attributes were

Lutherans, but charges against him had to be resolved within the framework of the Lutheran Confessions to which ministers are bound at ordination. Within this scheme Luther's writings play a special role. It was not simply about what was permissible within the context of biblical revelation, but of Lutheran theology. See Robert D. Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1992): 33-43. This series of essays was delivered on October 28-29, 1992, at Bethany Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, three months after he was restored to his post.

²⁰ Good things are said to come from bad situations. Whether or not this is true, the tragedy in Preus's life did allow the phrase "All theology is Christology" to be evaluated, and the phrase continues to enjoy a certain prominence. A Festschrift in honor of this writer is entitled *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000). Several authors weave the "all theology is Christology" theme into their essays. Perhaps the best analogy might be the Old Testament prophets, who instinctively knew that their words carried a greater meaning that only later men of God would more fully understand.

²¹ Michael Horton refers to some later Puritans for whom "'God' had become someone other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Trinity was not as prominent as a single, unitary being of blinding glory and power." Horton, "Is the *New News Good News?*," 12.

communicated in different ways to the human nature.²² This *sic et non* approach was eating your cake and still having your incarnation.

III. "All Theology Is Christology"

"All theology is Christology" was challenged by reference to the Athanasian Creed, where the divine persons share an equality in which none is before or after another. Another objection was the Lord's Prayer's address to the Father.²³ In reply to these, one person of the Trinity and his work cannot be isolated from the others. We can only pray the Lord's Prayer because Christ has made us God's children. Apart from *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, each divine person exists within the Trinity in relation to the others (*perichoresis*).²⁴ This view is undermined, at least in Lutheran circles, when theology is divided into the three articles of the Creed as First Article, Second Article, and Third Article Christianity, as if a theology of each divine person apart from the other persons was possible. In confessing God as Father, belief in Christ is anticipated and included, and so the Second Article does not begin with an additional "I believe," but an "and." If a trinitarian theology is endangered by a detachment of the persons from one another, then understanding God by his attributes apart from his trinitarian character leaves the impression that it is an after-thought. This approach is evident in discourses that first treat at length the doctrine of God and only then proceed to discuss the Trinity. In an earlier time such trinitarian-less theologies might have passed as a conservative unitarianism. "All theology is Christology" is not synonymous with "all theology is *filiology*." Christology has to do with Jesus, the Word made flesh who assumed our humanity, and not merely the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus of Nazareth is the human face of God. In his image we know the Father (Col 1:15), and in his humanity God is fully encased.

²² Francis Pieper writes, "Quenstedt sums the truths on this point in full agreement with Scripture as follows: 'It is correctly said that *all* divine attributes are communicated to the human nature, likewise, that *certain* are not, and that *none* are communicated. All are communicated with regard to indwelling and possession, but certain ones as regards predication and definite statement, as the operative which have state and action, among which we may name omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But this does not hold true of the quiescent attributes, as eternity, infinity, and the like. No attributes are communicated by way of transfusion from one substance into another.'" Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:242.

²³ Waldo J. Werning, *Making the Missouri Synod Functional* (Fort Wayne, IN: Biblical Renewal Productions, 1992), 210-211.

²⁴ ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί (John 14:11).

Christology, therefore, informs what we think about God. Jesus is not a gnostic revealer of dark mysteries, but the one who completely envelops God simply because God has completely enveloped him into the divine being. The order of John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," cannot be reversed, so that either through the Father or the Spirit we may know Jesus. Tampering with the order so that the Father is known before the Son results in a temporary unitarianism, at least until we get to Christology. Defining theology Christologically requires not only holding that Jesus shows us God being God, but also that the revelation of God is accomplished in the humiliation of Jesus by crucifixion. This is the *one, chief*, historic moment of trinitarian self-revelation on which other moments are dependent. The crucifixion goes beyond revealing secret knowledge by including the redemption by which Jesus draws sinners through the cross into the inner recesses of the Father (Matt 11:25–30).²⁵

The Spirit must also be understood Christologically.²⁶ Knowing the Spirit without reference to Jesus allows him to function as a *Weltgeist* who makes God accessible without Jesus. This provides an opening for universalism. The Pentecost of Acts 2 concludes the giving of the Spirit, who received his form in Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10; John 1:32), life (Matt 4:1), death (Matt 27:50; John 19:30), and resurrection (John 20:22). The Spirit who proceeds from the Son (*filioque*) is shaped by Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Spirit of God becomes the Spirit of Jesus (John 16:13–14). *Incarnatus est de spiritu sancti* begins to open the door to a trinitarian understanding of God and renders other theological attempts by themselves inadequate. Only through and after the death of Jesus is God known as Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt 28:19).

IV. "God Crucified"

Richard Bauckham, author of the volume entitled *God Crucified* and former professor at the University of St. Andrew's, moves theology beyond the incarnation to the humiliation of the cross.²⁷ In creedal terms,

²⁵ Compare Martin Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation," especially thesis 21: "God can be found only in suffering on the cross, as has already been said." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 31:53; hereafter AE. This, of course, leads Luther to make personal suffering a qualification for being a theologian (AE 31:40).

²⁶ See David P. Scaer, "Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur: The Spirit Understood Christologically," *CTQ* 61, no. 1–2 (1997): 93–112.

²⁷ Bauckham writes, "The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the

theology is not merely defined by *incarnatus est*, but by *homo factus est*. Theology is no longer obligated to answer philosophical questions asked of the incarnation,²⁸ a practice that arose in the patristic period,²⁹ but it recognizes the agony of the Crucified as the true face of God, the perfect revelation of *who he is*. In the dying of Jesus, God and his glory are known. Crucifixion is not merely the door to the divine reality, but it is the event in which that reality is present and hidden. The impenetrable God is accessible in the crucified Jesus. The cross is both God's humiliation and exaltation, and in it Jesus honors God and God honors Jesus.³⁰ Here God glorifies the Son, and the Spirit's mission is defined.³¹ Christology, defined in the cross, may contradict a philosophically-delineated God to the point of scandal and embarrassment even of believers, but here is Israel's Redeemer who has taken on flesh in Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). The human Jesus receives divine honors. Divine uniqueness is not compromised but expressed by incarnation and crucifixion.³² Bauckham writes, "Jesus, the New Testament writers are saying, belongs inherently to *who God is*."³³ The crucified Christ belongs to the divine identity.³⁴ "This radical self-renunciation was [Christ's] way of expressing and enacting his equality with God, and *therefore* ([Philippians 2:] v. 9) it

crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is." Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 46. See also 56–61, in particular, "The identity of God—who God is—is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving. Only the Servant can also be the Lord" (61). Much of his material on this subject is found in Richard Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9–11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 128–39.

²⁸ Bauckham states, "The question is not: how can the infinite become a finite creature, how can the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God take on human limitations?" See *God Crucified*, 60.

²⁹ Bauckham suggests the real contrast is not between the divine and human natures, but between the image of God as the exalted emperor and the servant; see *God Crucified*, 61–62.

³⁰ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 66.

³¹ "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

³² Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4, 28.

³³ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47; emphasis original.

³⁴ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 48.

qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things.”³⁵ Humiliation, no less than exaltation, belongs to the identity of God.³⁶ The hour of the cross is the glorification of both the Father and the Son (John 17:1).

By appending “S. D. G.,” *solī Deo gloria*, to his musical compositions, Johann Sebastian Bach confessed that his music was his vocation. I suspect that today some Lutherans use the phrase synergistically to give God some credit for their accomplishments. For the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), glorifying God is not optional: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”³⁷ The God who gives of himself in begetting the Son also gives of himself in creating and in redeeming. God’s glory is inherent in the Father begetting the Son and their giving procession to the Spirit. The God who is composed of an eternal self-giving in trinitarian life extended that self-giving in creation, redemption, and sanctification. In sacrificing themselves for others, Christians are not only following in Christ but are adopting the divine posture of God’s trinitarian self-giving. Peter’s death glorifies God (John 21:19) and so resembles Christ’s death, which reveals the glory in which the Father and the Son live (John 17:1). Within himself and as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, God is not impassible, that is, without emotion, but passibility and emotion exist in their highest form in God. His sending the Son (John 3:15) does not result from an arbitrary decision, but it is an extension of the Father’s eternal love for the Son (John 3:35). The ontological Trinity in which the Father begets the Son is love in its purest and original form. So R. Scott Clark, “In this case, we know that the Trinity we worship is no static deity, but rather there are dynamic relations among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is out of that dynamic, loving fellowship that both creation and redemption have emerged.”³⁸

In begetting the Son, the Father gives of himself, and in this self-giving he knows himself and is known as Father. The Son, in turn, responds to the Father not out of morbid, resentful obligation but out of the love that he receives from the Father. Apart from the Son, the Father is not Father, and the Son without the Father is not the Son. The inter-trinitarian relationship is a divine necessity marked with the pathos and emotion that inherently

³⁵ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 58.

³⁶ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 61. Also, “Jesus’ self-humiliation actually is exaltation by God” (67).

³⁷ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.

³⁸ R. Scott Clark, “The Splendor of the Three-in-One God,” *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 38.

belong to self-giving. In sacrificing his Son by crucifixion, God is not doing something inexplicably alien to his being (even though it might be alien to some personal views of God), but he accomplishes what intrinsically belongs to who he is. Theology and Christology are now positioned to shape faith and ethics. Commands to love God and the neighbor (Matt 22:27–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27) are not arbitrary regulations of a sovereign God but are necessary extensions of the Father's eternal love in begetting the Son, seen in offering him as a sacrifice (John 15:9–17). Faith is a giving of the self in that we renounce ourselves and put God at the core of our lives by loving him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. God's self-giving caused him to see his fallen creatures as his neighbors and in coming to our rescue made us his friends. In loving the neighbor in place of ourselves, we begin to approach and reflect in ourselves the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ's humiliation.

"All theology is Christology" is only one way of expressing the great commandments to love God and the neighbor. Behind these concepts is divine self-sacrifice, which binds together that enterprise we call theology. The self-sacrificial character of his trinitarian nature does not allow God an indeterminate future. Rather, he must rescue those who cannot rescue themselves, because he must love even those who without him can only love themselves. Any system is doomed by falling on the sword of its own inconsistency. Understanding God as self-giving may seem to be contradictory in that God cannot be understood by coordinating his attributes. In response, what is said about democracy as the most inefficient form of government devised by man might by analogy be applied to divine self-giving: it is superior to all other options. We could also argue that self-giving is not an abstract attribute but a tangible reality in God crucified. From the lowliness of his cross Christ calls those who are burdened to share in the trinitarian mysteries:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, *for I am gentle and lowly in heart*, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:25–30)

“All theology is Christology” does not do an injustice to our doctrine of God but opens it up to the fuller reality of God’s essence by looking at his intentions. Neither does the Christological approach replace justification as the key to the theological task; rather, it provides justification with the necessary content of Christ and God. When the controverted phrase surfaced, no one understood its full implications, even though Robert D. Preus staked his position on it. This essay only makes a modest attempt at a fuller development. My colleague, William C. Weinrich, writes about his “conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theological [is] to speak Christologically.”³⁹ The following citation from N. T. Wright summarizes our view:

The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. *It is a new understanding of God.* Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying image) image, God reveals the truth about what it meant to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present Christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.⁴⁰

³⁹ William C. Weinrich, “The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present,” in *All Theology Is Christology* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215–227. Weinrich also notes Bauckham’s contribution to this discussion (219). Differences in Christology’s role in theology are reflected in differing interpretation of Philippians 2. For a treatment of the stakes in the argument, see the essays in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2. The New International Version*, in translating verse 2, “did not grasp at equality with God,” favors the traditional Reformed view, which is less than fully comfortable in ascribing God-like qualities to Christ’s human nature (*genus maiestaticum*), which is the Lutheran position. For a discussion of the exegetical options, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6),” *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 99–110.

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 84, cited in Gerald F. Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6),” 104–105; emphasis added.