

THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST AND ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Bruce McCormack's on-going project to produce a thoroughly post-metaphysical account of the Divine ontology, in correspondence with Barth's doctrines of the Trinity and election, has spawned a mini industry of counter theses and proposals, only to be met by a myriad of replies and further articulation of ideas; most of which has been constructive and useful. The central issues of the current debate revolve around the nature of the *Logos asarkos* to the *Logos incarnandus*, what it means for Jesus to be the subject of election, and the relationship between election and God's self-constitution. This essay argues that one way forward in the debate might be to apply the doctrine of the Primacy of Christ to the discussion, and then to re-evaluate the status of the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos incarnandus* in that light, based upon a relational ontology.

I. ELECTION AS ETERNAL GENERATION?

The ecumenical roots of the received doctrine of the Trinity, including its concomitant doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, are well known and well-rehearsed. As an Evangelical theologian it is my method to work under the authority of Holy Scripture and in line with this Great Tradition. That being said, we are all well aware, no doubt, that the Tradition guides us in an orthodox interpretation of doctrine via something like the *regula fidei*, but it is far from comprehensive. And so, like all traditions, ours is living and active and each generation of disciples and doctors has the opportunity to enrich the Tradition as we stand upon the shoulders of the giants who precede us.

All of which is not to say that theologians of the Church see things the same way, of course. How we interpret the Tradition, here specifically of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, and how we in turn enrich that Tradition is open to intense debate. One such flashpoint of debate today is over the much disputed doctrine of election and its relation to the eternal generation of the Son, and in turn to an understanding of the immanent Trinity. That the doctrine of election has something significant to say to ones doctrine of the Trinity and to the eternal generation of the Son is without dispute; what *exactly* it has to offer, however, is a point of much contention.

In this essay I argue that the doctrines of the Primacy of Christ, of a christologically conditioned doctrine of election, and of a relational ontology, offer critical insights into an understanding of the doctrines of the Trinity and election, and it does so by way of a critique of several contemporary formulations of these doctrines offered in the recent literature. The result, I will argue, is both in line with Holy Scripture and orthodoxy.

The doctrine of election has, as Katherine Sonderegger recently pointed out, “served as a means to speak about God—the divine holiness, justice, and glory—and about the unique relation of grace and of the life with him which this grace effects.”¹ Several recent theologians have sought to reinterpret what divine election means when it is considered as constituent of the doctrine of God and only then what it might mean for creation. Here we may point to a number of thinkers, including Karl Barth,² Colin Gunton,³ Thomas Torrance,⁴ and Robert Jenson,⁵ each of whom situate the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God and in doing so, mount a case against a so-called “classical theism” that had, it is argued, imported false Hellenistic thinking into the doctrines of God and election. Each sought in their own way to expunge such false philosophies and their concomitant ontology’s from the Christian tradition.

The most recent locus of such discussion is found within contemporary Barthian studies.⁶ Amongst Barthian scholarship today a battle rages between so-called “traditionalists” and “revisionists.”⁷ The former read Barth as consistently maintaining the freedom of the immanent Trinity and read his doctrine of the election of Jesus Christ from that perspective. The latter regard the Trinity as coming to be as a result of the election of Jesus Christ. The “traditionalists” are most ably represented by Princeton Seminary theologian George Hunsinger and Roman Catholic theologian Paul Molnar; the “revisionists” are most ably represented by Bruce McCormack, also of Princeton Theological Seminary. While this debate may seem “in-house” and esoteric, it does have significant and important implications. On the one hand, traditionalists would argue the revisionists threaten the freedom of God to be God independent of his creation, while the revisionists would have us believe the traditionalist view fails to reckon with the Christological implications of the faith and fails to properly discern the nature of God. For our purposes, this debate has to do with how one understands the doctrines of the Trinity, election, and the eternal generation of the Son.

Over a number of monographs and lengthy articles Bruce McCormack argues that a fully Barthian (and orthodox he would add) doctrine of God must dismantle all false philosophical accretions, essentialist ontology being near the top of the list, and replace it with what he terms a post-metaphysical actualistic ontology. The mechanism he has chosen to do the work in this regard is the doctrine of election. According to McCormack, Barth’s doctrine of God as Being and Act, as Being and Becoming, was his way of

1 Katherine Sonderegger, “Election,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (ed., J. Webster, K. Tanner, and I. Torrance; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.

2 See especially Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75), II/2, 3–506; especially §33, 94–194.

3 For a concise account see Colin E. Gunton, *Theology Through the Theologians* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 88–104.

4 See Thomas F. Torrance, “Predestination in Christ,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 108–141; “Introduction,” in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (trans. and ed. T.F. Torrance; London: James Clarke and Co, 1959), xi–cxxxvi; *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Vol. 2: The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 83–88; *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 127–137; and *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). Torrance’s work is especially suggestive, as will be seen later in the essay.

5 See Robert W. Jenson’s published doctoral thesis *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 *The Works of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173–178.

6 For an introduction see Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

7 The language comes from George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 179. Something of a middle-line is offered by Kevin W. Hector, “Immutability, Necessity and Triunity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012): 64–81; although it is unlikely this will resolve the issue. McCormack, for his part, rejects these labels, believing Hunsinger gets things “completely backwards” (204), in Bruce McCormack, “Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 203–224.

overcoming a highly classical metaphysical doctrine of God by means of a thoroughly post-metaphysical account.⁸ On McCormack's reading of Barth, there is no such ontological priority of Trinity over election.⁹ This alters the received tradition radically in that God's decision for the covenant of grace is in itself constitutive of God's being from eternity.¹⁰ Accordingly for McCormack, the *Logos asarkos* is from the beginning the *Logos incarnandus* (the Logos "to be incarnate"). As a consequence "there is no Logos in and for himself in distinction from God's act of turning towards the world and humanity in predestination; the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity. For that move alone would make it clear that it is 'Jesus Christ' who is the Subject of election and not an indeterminate (or 'absolute') *Logos asarkos*."¹¹

If one simply takes notice of the move to not make the *Logos asarkos* either "indeterminate," "abstract," or "absolute," then we may be able to say, so far so good; both traditionalists and revisionists could agree with this point at least. It is how one might interpret and subsequently develop such a theology that is in dispute. In an essay critical of Barth's Chalcedonianism, McCormack argues that "To make Jesus Christ the subject of election—if carried out consistently—is to bid farewell to the distinction between the eternal Word and the incarnate Word."¹² McCormack, by means of Barth, is constructing an argument that would make the immanent Trinity "wholly identical in content" with the economic Trinity,¹³ in order to achieve at least two things: first, to avoid engaging in any speculation regarding the being of God (i.e. to avoid metaphysics); and second, to avoid the charge that God changes in his essence in the incarnation (i.e. Divine mutability). There are, of course, other implications of this position which McCormack seeks to defend, the most important for our purposes is that if the Logos is not the Subject of election then "How coherent can one's affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ be if his being as Mediator is only accidentally related to what he is as Logos in and for himself? Is Jesus Christ 'fully God' or not?"¹⁴ In other words, what of the Primacy of Jesus Christ, a doctrine we shall consider below. In short, it is McCormack's argument that there is no *Logos asarkos* which is independent of his being/existence as Redeemer. A more positive way of saying the same thing is that the immanent Trinity is not accidentally related to the economic Trinity.¹⁵

8 In his Kantzer Lectures at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2011 entitled: "The God Who Graciously Elects: Seven Lectures on the Doctrine of God," McCormack believes Karl Barth's second *Der Römerbrief* is the most consistently post-metaphysical essay in theology ever offered. See lecture 3, "The Great Reversal: From the Economy of God to the Trinity in Modern Theology" (<http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/>). McCormack also differentiates between anti-metaphysics and post-metaphysics. Post-metaphysics, as McCormack intends it, refers to following the revelation of God as witnessed to in Scripture and only knowing God in his act. It is this which justifies my identification of McCormack's position as post-metaphysical actualistic ontology.

9 In a controversial essay McCormack argues this understanding is also evident in the work of Eberhard Jüngel. See Bruce McCormack, "God Is His Decision: The Jüngel-Gollwitzer 'Debate' Revisited," in Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender, eds., *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology. A Festschrift for Daniel L. Migliore* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 48–66.

10 Adam Neder's recent study prefers to call this Barth's "covenantal ontology," which distances Barth from the substantialist ontologies of patristic and Reformational theologies. See Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entryway into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

11 Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 186. McCormack is at this point correcting (or extending) the theology of Barth by following Barth's claim that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election.

12 Ibid., 217.

13 The words are McCormack's, *ibid.*, 191. Later we read: "To put the matter as sharply as possible: God *is* in himself, in eternity, the mode of his Self-revelation in time—God as Jesus Christ in eternity and God as Jesus Christ in time—thus guaranteeing that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity will be identical in content," *idem.*, 218.

14 Ibid., 188.

15 We may add to that that at one stage in his Kantzer Lectures McCormack makes the side-comment that he disagrees with Thomas' stance that any one of the divine persons could have become incarnate. McCormack affirms the necessity of the Son's

Again, both traditionalists and revisionists could agree with this last sentence, however, it is how one might interpret and subsequently develop such a theology that is in dispute.

Distilling the issue to its most specific we may ask about the logical relation of God's gracious election to the triunity of God. It is here that McCormack self-consciously goes beyond Barth to be more Barthian than Barth was himself, when he posits: "these commitments require that we see the triunity of God, logically, as a function of divine election... In other words, the works of God *ad intra* (the Trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (vis., election)."¹⁶ McCormack later adds: "Election thus has a certain logical priority even over the triunity of God," and still further, "Thus the 'gap' between the 'eternal Son' and 'Jesus Christ' is overcome, the distinction between them eliminated... So there is no 'eternal Son' if by that is meant a mode of being in God which is not identical with Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus Christ is the electing God."¹⁷

While many responses could be made to McCormack's thesis, what interests us here is the identity of the divine Being vis-à-vis the divine processions. A cursory examination of McCormack's radical reinterpretation of Barth's theology would conclude, as Paul Molnar does, that "the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God."¹⁸ In short, Molnar and others believe that what is at stake is the issue of divine freedom.¹⁹ I fully understand the charge made by Molnar here and I agree with it in principle. However, I do think McCormack escapes the charge if his entire, radically revised post-metaphysical actualistic ontology, whereby God takes into himself a history, the history of Jesus Christ, is considered. That is to say, I think McCormack's theology has an internal consistency to it, even if notions of God, triunity, and freedom, to name but a few points, are radically revised. Whether such a move is what Barth actually meant and if it is orthodox or not, are another matter and are being debated elsewhere.²⁰

In several essays McCormack addresses a central and pressing question: What does the doctrine of God say regarding human participation in God?²¹ An answer to this question reveals the propriety, one

incarnation alone. See <http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/>. See Thomas Aquinas, *ST* IIIa, q. 3 a. 5. Aquinas goes on, of course, in q. 8 to say it is "most fitting" for the Son to become incarnate, but that is not enough for McCormack. McCormack, it seems to me, is taking up the same argument offered by Karl Rahner that all attempts such as that of Aquinas, vitiate the link between the immanent and economic Trinity, and "in so doing installed a relationship of arbitrariness between the begetting of the Son and the incarnation of Christ. Thus the integrity and knowability of God's act in salvation history was undermined," Travis Ables, "The Word in Which All Things Are Said – Anselm and Bonaventure," (Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Annual Meeting, March 5, 2011, http://eden.academia.edu/TravisAbles/Papers/454107/The_Word_in_Which_All_Things_Are_Said_-_Anselm_and_Bonaventure), 1. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 10-11. More shall be said about this below.

16 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 194. McCormack acknowledges in the footnote that follows this citation that "Barth's position is the opposite," and cites from *CD* IV/1, 45.

17 *Ibid.*, 218 and 219.

18 Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 63.

19 Another notable challenge to McCormack on this score is Edwin van Driel, "Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 45–61.

20 As an overview of the debate and how it is being played out by its major interlocutors—Bruce McCormack, Paul Molnar, George Hunsinger, Paul Nimmo, Edwin van Driel, Aaron Smith, and Kevin Hector—one might initially consult Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

21 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 235–260; and "Union With Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds For A Divinization Theory?" in David W. Hall, ed., *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 504–529.

could say, of any doctrine of God, not to mention of ones soteriology. According to McCormack, all doctrines of *theosis* (what he prefers to call “divinization” or “deification”) are to be ruled out, be they Protestant or Eastern Orthodox, as they each operate out of a metaphysically oriented ontology, something we have seen McCormack criticize already, instead of operating out of a historically oriented and post-metaphysical account.²² Consequently McCormack can say, “The ‘exaltation’ of the human occurs in and through a history—the history of Jesus Christ. It is not the consequence of a metaphysically conceived ‘indwelling’ of the divine on the part of the human; it is the consequence of a human participation in a concrete history in which both the ‘essence’ of God and the ‘essence’ of the human are—in a sense yet to be established—*made real*.”²³ Accordingly both the humiliation of God and the exaltation of the human have their ontological ground in the divine election of grace. In the Incarnation we see the *making real* in time of what was already real and true of both God and the human in the divine decision.

On this reading, the human does not participate in the divine nature as such; rather, divinity and humanity share a common history in the election of the Son as Jesus Christ.²⁴ This comes to a head, or is most acute, perhaps, when, appreciatively citing Barth and Jüngel, McCormack is of the opinion that “the Word” of John 1.1 is not the eternal Logos or Son, but in fact, *Jesus Christ*: “It is the Logos who appears in the text as a placeholder for Jesus, not the other way round. It is Jesus to whom all of the predicates assigned to the Logos belong,”²⁵ writes McCormack. In Christ the God-man, all humanity is included; in his election every human is determined. One can opt out of this, of course, and live as if it was not true, but that would not negate the actual truth of it. Thus McCormack’s post-metaphysical actualistic ontology is applied to soteriology. Such is the broadly defined argument currently being developed by Bruce McCormack; an argument that is as erudite and profound as it is challenging and troubling. Whatever else one might say, McCormack has certainly stimulated the academy to deeper and better thinking on these range of topics, even when one might end up disagreeing with certain parts or even rejecting his proposal outright.

A critical reply to such an account would take many forms and many pages, and that is not my intent here. Rather, I wish to pick up on the central point of McCormack’s doctrines of God, Christology, and soteriology—his post-metaphysical actualism—and argue that the traditional language of Chalcedon is largely correct. I say largely correct as a *relational ontology*, briefly outlined below, not the *substance ontology* of classical theism, is closer to what pro-Nicene and pro-Chalcedonian theology is actually referring to, and such a relational ontology is better placed to account for the essence and freedom of the triune God, for the hypostatic union of the Logos incarnate, and for a doctrine of human participation in God, or more technically—*theosis*. As Ivor Davidson has recently argued:

The appropriate alternative to substantialist construals of participation is neither extrinsicism nor nominalism: it is a properly rich depiction of the action of the Spirit as the one who sets up human

22 While McCormack opposes metaphysics he does not oppose ontology, as, in his terms, an ontology does not have to presuppose a metaphysics. See the Kantzer Lectures, “The God Who Graciously Elects: Seven Lectures on the Doctrine of God,” (<http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/>).

23 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 237.

24 “Both true divinity and true humanity are—on the basis of a free, eternal decision—constituted in and through the same history. It is the singularity of this history which constitutes the unity of the ‘person’ of Christ,” *ibid.*, 246.

25 *Ibid.*, 221, n.49.

subjects in the place for which they were made — the sphere of intimate communicative fellowship with God — by uniting them with the Father's incarnate Son and enabling them to come with that Son, as creaturely sons and daughters, to his Father.²⁶

Consequently a relational ontology is better able than either substance ontology or post-metaphysical actualistic ontology to do justice to the biblical narrative of the Dominical man turned deified person, for the salvation of the world.

II. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Turning first to the divine Being I want to say, with Molnar, that a clearer distinction should be made between the immanent and economic Trinity such that the covenant of grace expresses a logically subsequent will of God to direct *ad extra* the eternal love that is expressed in the intra-Trinitarian relations.²⁷ The divine processions are not willed by God but are 'natural,' if we may use that term. If we take this line of reasoning then, with Edwin van Driel, we can affirm that "Barth's doctrine of election has no ontological consequences for the notions of immanent Trinity, *logos asarkos*, or God-in-and-for-Godself. Instead of 'upstream' of election, the consequences will be 'downstream', in Christology and anthropology."²⁸

In terms of divine ontology we must turn not to the doctrine of election as constitutive of the being of God but to what Thomas Torrance has called "onto-relations" if we are to form a truly relational ontology that does not suffer from the inherent problems of McCormack's post-metaphysical actualistic ontology, or the well-rehearsed problems of a philosophically derived substance ontology. While a full rendition of a relational ontology is beyond the scope of the present essay the following is offered as suggestive for what such a relational ontology may entail.

Building on the doctrines of both the *homoousios to patri* and *perichoresis*, Torrance developed what he termed an onto-relational concept of the divine Persons. By onto-relational Torrance implies an understanding of the three divine Persons in the one God in which the ontic relations between them belong to what they essentially are in themselves in their distinctive *hypostaseis*. In short, onto-relations are being-constituting-relations. The differing relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit belong to what they are as Father, Son, and Spirit; so the *homoousial* relations between the three divine Persons belong to what they are in themselves as Persons and in their Communion with one another.²⁹ In summary, the divine Being and the divine Communion are to be understood wholly in terms of one another.³⁰

26 Ivor J. Davidson, "Salvation's Destiny: Heirs of God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (ed. Ivor J. Davison and Murray A. Rae; Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 174.

27 Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 63.

28 van Driel, "Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," 58–59.

29 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102–103. We should note that this is not an argument that the relations are prior to the persons, such as that argued by, amongst others, Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000); and "Participating in the Trinity," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33 (2006): 375–391. Fiddes defines "subsistent relations" incorrectly when he argues that "there are no persons 'at each end of a relation,' but the 'persons' are simply the relations," *ibid*, 281. This would amount to what we might term a personalistic ontology of sorts.

30 This ontology is worked out more fully in Myk Habets, "Filioque? Nein. A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence," in Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday, eds., *Trinitarian Theology After Barth* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 161–202.

The onto-relations are not modes of existence for Torrance; “They are persons in the fullest sense, constituted by relationality that is homoousial and perichoretic, one with each other in their relational being and mutually inhering in each other,” as Del Colle reminds us.³¹ As a direct result Torrance affirms the traditional *taxis* of the divine Persons (the eternal processions) with the stipulation that the eternal generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit from the Father applies only to the mode of their *enhyposstatic* differentiation and not to the causation of their being.³² If the processions applied directly to the causation of being then the older substance ontology would be in play and the end result can only be tritheism (which includes hard social trinitarianism) or Aristotelian emanationism; or, alternatively, the problematic actualistic ontology of McCormack whereby God wills to be triune by means of the election of Jesus Christ (something which could be seen to move in the opposite direction toward modalism).³³

Torrance affirms a number of trinitarian axioms that contribute to his onto-relational definition of divine ontology.³⁴ He first affirms the personal status of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit but also affirms as orthodox the personal status of the one Being of God. Thus in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity the one Being of God does not refer to static essence or abstract *ousia* (a substance ontology) but to the intrinsically personal “I Am” of God.³⁵ Second, Torrance lays stress on the *monarchy* of God, “or the one ultimate Principle of Godhead, in which all three divine Persons share equally, for the whole indivisible Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them.”³⁶ The *monarchy* is thus the Triune Godhead *and* the Person of the Father, but, strictly speaking, it is the *Being* of the Father, the one Triune Godhead, that *monarchy* actually refers to.³⁷ Third, and consequently, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, but given the previous definition of *monarchy*, “the Holy Spirit proceeds ultimately from the Triune Being of the Godhead.”³⁸ Thus the Spirit proceeds out of the mutual relations within the one Being of the Holy Trinity “in which the Father indwells the Spirit and is Himself indwelt by the Spirit.”³⁹ Finally, it is a natural implication of Torrance’s theology to suggest that the Father himself is personed by the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit and their mutual love in return. There is thus origin and action for all three persons of the Trinity. And in a related point, Torrance recommends an approach to the Trinity that is neither from the three Persons to the one God (Eastern), nor from the one Being of God to the three Persons (Western), but rather, starts with the “*dynamic Triunity* of God as Trinity in Unity and Unity in

31 Ralph Del Colle, “Person’ and ‘Being’ in John Zizioulas’ Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas F. Torrance and Thomas Aquinas,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 79.

32 See Del Colle, “Person and Being,” 80, who cites, Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 179; and idem., *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 135.

33 This is not to suggest that McCormack is a modalist, he is not.

34 These are worked out in relation to “The Agreed Statement” on the Trinity in dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Communion, see “The Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity,” in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol 2 (ed. T.F. Torrance; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), 219–26.

35 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 112. It is on this point that “Torrance and Zizioulas are on the same page,” writes Ralph Del Colle, “Person and Being,” 73.

36 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 112.

37 Torrance accepts the doctrine of the *monarchy* according to Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria over that of the other Cappadocians and in so doing he rejects what may be termed standard, Palamite Eastern theology represented so ably by John Zizioulas. For critical engagement see Del Colle, “Person and Being,” 70–86.

38 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 113. At this point Torrance and Zizioulas find themselves diametrically opposed.

39 Ibid., 113.

Trinity.”⁴⁰ That is, neither the general (*ousia*) nor the personal (*hypostasis*) should be emphasized to the relative neglect of the other. An adequate doctrine of the Trinity must put *ousia* and *hypostasis*, essence and person, on the same level of reality and importance. This is emphasized in the work of Paul Molnar who reminds us that a doctrine of the Trinity must not start with plurality nor with unity, “but with the triune God who is simultaneously one and three.”⁴¹ That there is no other God must be made clear in an evangelical theology.

From this triune Being, with its eternal processions, the doctrine of election must then find its logical place. We may say then, the Son *incarnatus* subsists in the eternal Son without ceasing to be *incarnatus* (the Nicene and Chalcedonian logic of the Word becoming human without ceasing to be the eternal Son). There is a unity-in-distinction between the eternal Son, the Son *incarnandus*, and the Son *incarnatus*. On this basis we may conclude with Hunsinger, “The temporal mode of existence is internal to the eternal mode of existence without ceasing to be temporal.”⁴²

Torrance appreciatively cites the work of Martin Buber who saw through the problem of modern Protestant thought when he attacked it for what he called its “conceptual letting go of God.” Torrance imagines a mountain climber trying to climb the face of a rock cliff: if it is utterly smooth, without any cracks in it, it is impossible. Unless he can get his fingers or spikes into the rock, and thus make use of the interstices or intrinsic relations on the rock, he cannot grasp hold of it. Against notions of mysticism and liberalism Torrance argues the fact that God is a triunity means that there are relations of love inherent to God which allows us to know this God as he is in his inherent relations (onto-relations). “There is a kind of meeting of love, a profound reciprocity, within God, and it is when our knowledge of God latches on to that internal relationship deep in God that we can really conceive him and know him in accordance with his intrinsic nature. And that is the ground, as Buber showed, for a conceptual grasp of God.”⁴³

This onto-relational understanding of person defined as person-in-relationship is also applicable to inter-human relations, but in a created way reflecting the uncreated way in which it applies to the Trinitarian relations in God.⁴⁴ Torrance, clearly influenced by Barth, sees in the creation of men and women in the image of God an otherness and togetherness that is to be expressed in an inherent relatedness, which in turn is a creaturely reflection of a transcendent relatedness in the divine Being.⁴⁵ Torrance understands that “this is the *personal* or *inter-personal* structure of humanity in which there is imaged the ineffable personal relations of the Holy Trinity.”⁴⁶ This means that when Torrance speaks of humanity he does not mean an

40 Ibid., 114, italics in original.

41 Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 232.

42 George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 184, thesis 8.e. This is what makes sense of Barth’s claim that, “In the free act of the election of grace, the Son of the Father is no longer *just* the eternal Logos, but as such, as very God from all eternity, he is also the very God and the very human being he will become in time,” Barth, *CD IV/1*, 66, cited in *ibid.*, 184, thesis 6.g.

43 Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 150.

44 What Hunsinger says in another connection would also apply to this case: “...it is not the substance but only the grammar of *perichoresis* that is at stake. Whereas the substance is *sui generis*, the grammar can be applied analogously across diverse cases,” George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity,” 183.

45 See Barth, *CD*, III/4, 117.

46 Thomas F. Torrance, “The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective,” in *Religion, Reason, and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hymel D. Lewis* (ed. S.R. Sutherland and T.A. Roberts; Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 109–110.

individual⁴⁷ but rather a person in ontological relation with other persons (and with God).⁴⁸ Jesus Christ is thus the only true human person and the one into whose image all human creatures are to be conformed into. This is what Torrance means by “onto-relations” or being-constituting-relations as applied to human creation.⁴⁹

Given Torrance’s doctrine of onto-relations, the *imago Dei* is thus a dynamic and eschatological reflection that, while initiated and developed in time-space within creation, is ultimately only realised in the eschaton of which the church is currently a foretaste.⁵⁰ The onto-relations work on two levels, vertically and horizontally. Vertically, one is justified and sanctified through a relationship with the triune God; horizontally, one is formed into communion with other believers in the Body of Christ, the Church. But these two levels are one integrated whole, not two separate spheres. What is clear is that *theosis* or communion with God, is a “personal” activity and persons are defined as humans-in-relationship. The ultimate person is Jesus Christ; hence mature men and women are those who have been perfected by grace as they are united to Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Church thus becomes the locus of *theosis* this side of the Parousia.

Due to sin and the Fall the onto-relations that exist between all personal beings—God-humanity, humanity-God, and humanity-humanity—have been radically “disrupted,” resulting in the breakdown of personal relationships on both the horizontal and vertical levels.⁵¹ This disruption affects the “transcendental determinism” of human beings. As fallen humans refuse to listen to the Spirit of God, their transcendental determinism is replaced with a sinful self-determinism. As a result only through the mediation of Christ can the Holy Spirit be poured out on human beings so that they can reflect the *imago Dei* as God intended.⁵²

Given this definition of the *imago Dei*, one that is restored through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ and mediated to us by the Spirit who unites us with Christ, we can see what Torrance means when he uses the concept of *theosis*. As Colyer helpfully summarises:

Theosis or *theopoiesis* is not the divinizing or deification of the human soul or creaturely being, Torrance contends, but rather is the Spirit of God humanizing and personalizing us by uniting us with Christ’s vicarious humanity in a way that both confirms us in our creaturely reality

47 “That is to say by ‘man’ the biblical tradition means ‘man-and-woman’, for it is man and woman who constitute in their union the basic unit of humanity,” Thomas F. Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 311.

48 The faulty idea of *person* being equated with *individual* is attributed by Torrance, as it is by most scholars, to Boethius, *De duabus naturis et una persona Christi, adversus Eutychen et Nestorium*, 2.1–5, cf. Torrance, “The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective,” 117, n.12. Torrance’s view of “person” is partially derived from the work of Richard St Victor as opposed to that of Boethius or Aquinas, both of which are described by Torrance in his *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 174–176. His is thus a relational ontology.

49 Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” 311.

50 Torrance, “The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective,” 109.

51 Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” 313.

52 Ibid., 320–321. An interesting parallel is found in Staniloae’s theology of the *Logos*, whereby the human person is created with an inherent orientation toward the ontological pursuit of “ultimate transcendence.” This ultimate transcendence is made known supremely in the person of Jesus Christ the *Logos* and it is here that *theosis* takes place. Staniloae goes beyond Torrance, however, when he makes this movement one of necessity rather than of grace. See Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa* (Bucuresti: EIBMBOR, 1978), 2:47.

utterly different from God, and yet also adapts us in our contingent nature for knowledge of God, for communion with God and for fellowship with one another.⁵³

By distinguishing between grace and nature, Torrance and the Reformed tradition in general safeguard the distinction between God and creation.⁵⁴ This becomes vital when considering a doctrine of *theosis*. Because of the contingent character of the created order there is no innate “point of contact” between God and humanity. This includes the human soul and rationality, which are also created *ex nihilo*. Torrance believes the creation can know God personally, not through any inherent *analogia entis* but rather by a “created correspondence” between the creature and the Creator, located ultimately in Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ To further this distinction Torrance adopts Barth’s idea of the *analogia relationis*, in contradistinction to classical Western conceptions of an *analogia entis*.⁵⁶ Such are the contours of a relational ontology briefly applied to Divine and human nature.

III. SUPRALAPSARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

Moving back from human ontology in general to Jesus Christ specifically, we must now make a decision regarding how we are to understand the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos incarnandus*. On a traditional reading, adopting the category of substance ontology, the two are only instrumentally related so that creation, incarnation, and salvation seem unnecessary and unrelated to the immutable God. Alternatively, on McCormack’s actualistic reading the two are collapsed into one *simpliciter* (without qualification) and are identified with the election of the man Jesus Christ. A third option is, however, open to us, one that has not received explicit attention in the recent literature, and that is to utilize the doctrine of the Primacy of Christ (or what is alternatively called supralapsarian Christology) in this discussion.⁵⁷

According to Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is pre-eminent over all creation as the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the “beginning and the end” (Rev 1.8, 21.6; 22.13). This belief, when theologically considered, is known as the Primacy of Christ.⁵⁸ Discussing the Primacy of Christ within the context of his predestination, John Duns Scotus argues that the occasion for the predestination of Christ was not *supremely* that of sin but

53 Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding his Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 178.

54 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 65–75; *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.), 64–67; 99–116; “Introduction,” *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (trans. and ed. with Introduction by T.F. Torrance; London: James Clarke and Co, 1959), lii–lv; and *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 23–34, argues that this is true of Reformed theology from Calvin to Barth.

55 Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” 312; and *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 219–220.

56 See especially Barth, *CD*, II/2, 243. For analyses of Barth’s response to the *analogia entis* see: Eberhard Jüngel, “The Possibility of Theological Anthropology on the Basis of Analogy,” in *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (trans. Garrett E. Paul; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986); and Allan J. Torrance, “Theological Language, Vestigiality and the Question of Continuity between the Human and Divine Realms,” in *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 120–212.

57 For a comprehensive account of this position see Myk Habets, “On Getting First Things First: Assessing Claims for the Primacy of Christ,” *New Blackfriars* 90 (2009): 343–364.

58 The specific issue this doctrine addresses is the question: Was sin the *efficient* or the *primary* cause of the incarnation? ‘Primacy’ is being used here to indicate the “state of holding the highest place or rank within a given order, and/or the state of being logically or chronologically first,” Juniper B. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ: Thomistic, Scotistic and Conciliatory Perspectives* (Manassas, VI.: Trinity Communications, 1986), 5.

rather the glory of God.⁵⁹ According to Scotus the glory of God is a much higher good than the redemption from sin. Consequently, to posit the incarnation solely on the basis of human sin and the need for redemption diminishes the incarnation. The *sine qua non* of the doctrine is that the predestination of Christ took place in an instant which was logically prior to the prevision of sin as *absolutum futurum*. That is, the existence of Christ was not contingent on the Fall as foreseen through the *scientia visionis*.⁶⁰

The following texts are most commonly cited in support of a supralapsarian Christology: Prov 8:22-23; Col 1:13-20; Eph 1:3-10; Rom 8:29-30; and 1 Pt 1:20. From Romans 8:29-30 we may conclude that if Jesus Christ is the exemplar or model which God planned to reproduce in humanity, Christ's existence must therefore be, in God's mind, *ordine intentionis*, prior to the existence of all other persons, including Adam, because the *exemplatum* always presupposes the *exemplar*. The specific *exemplatum* in this text is not the eternal Word, but Christ the God-man, the same who died and came back to life and now intercedes at God's right hand (v.34). This is not to argue that Jesus is only or merely an *exemplar* or model of salvation. Christ is the Saviour, the unique God-man, the object and subject of election.⁶¹

A supralapsarian Christology expressly supports the view that the eternal generation of the Son logically precedes the *Logos incarnandus*, but does not materially separate *Logos asarkos* from *Logos incarnandus*. And that is where human salvation is ultimately to be found—in the final *theosis* of human persons as they are united to the glorified Christ, the Dominical man, who is himself the deified man for the salvation of the world. Now a supralapsarian Christology does the explanatory work of the *Logos incarnandus*. Armed with such a theology we can see that the *Logos asarkos* is the *Logos incarnandus*, but to equate such with Jesus Christ *directly* or *simpliciter* would be a mistake. The *Logos asarkos/incarnandus* becomes *ensarkos/incarnatus* and at such a time “becomes” Jesus Christ of Nazareth, without ceasing to be the *Logos asarkos*. And yet, given that Jesus is *homoousios* with the Father and the Spirit, then we must say that the one person of the incarnate Son is identical with the one person of the eternal Son (a relational ontology here understood, not a substance ontology). We may say the eternal Son is Jesus Christ, but we must say this *secundum quid* (in a certain respect), not, *pace* McCormack, in the sense of a strict or absolute identity.⁶² It is here that the Chalcedonian logic makes perfect sense:

as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer... recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence.

59 See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, Lib. III, d. 7, q. 3 (Wadding edition; Lyons: 1939; reprinted; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968–69). For an overview see C.W. Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ: A Study in the Relation of the Incarnation and the Creation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 13–33.

60 This point is made clear by Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, 147.

61 On Christ as the subject of election see Myk Habets, “The Doctrine of Election in Evangelical Calvinism: T.F. Torrance as a Case Study,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008): 334–54; and on Barth see Edwin Chr. Van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 45–61.

62 In the same way we can say that Jesus Christ is the electing God—but only *secundum quid*. See Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity,” 191.

As a result we do not have a *Logos asarkos* abstracted from the actuality of the *Logos incarnandus*; but conversely, we do not collapse the historical Christ into the *Logos asarkos* as McCormack does.⁶³ In its own way this fully respects what we read in John 1:14, “Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο,” where a real “coming to be” is posited, but not in such a way as to suggest a “ceasing to be” of the Logos or eternal Son. This understanding corresponds to that of Kevin Hector, when he writes: “One can accordingly understand the eternal logos as incarnandus, since he has eternally and wholeheartedly determined to become incarnate, but not as ‘nothing but’ incarnandus, since the Son could have been otherwise than incarnandus and since, even in identifying wholeheartedly with us, the Son maintains the being he would have had apart from the covenant.”⁶⁴ On this reading, the real ἐγένετο is the becoming human (the assumption of a human nature), with all that entails for the triune God.

In his own way Karl Barth presents Jesus Christ as the Mediator between Creator and creation, between heaven and earth, between eternity and time.⁶⁵ Given Barth’s role in the current debate in question his theology is of importance here. While time and eternity are distinct, they are not separated in the person of the incarnate Son.⁶⁶ Hunsinger points out that for Barth the fellowship of time and eternity in the person of Jesus Christ has two vectors, one from above-to-below, and one from-below-to above. He then cites Athanasius’s famous theotic statement, “God became human in order that humans might become gods” to illustrate how Barth conceives of the simultaneity of these two vectors in Christ.⁶⁷ God’s becoming human without ceasing to be divine corresponds to the downward vector, while humankind’s elevation to God without ceasing to be human corresponds to the upward vector. The emphasis of this upward vector in Barth’s theology places him squarely within the elevation-line theology emphatic in doctrines of the Primacy of Christ.

In his trinitarian construction of time and eternity Barth starts with the pretemporal existence of the triune God. In this pretemporal existence God is in perfect fellowship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “And in this pure divine time there took place the appointment of the eternal Son for the temporal world, there occurred the readiness of the Son to do the will of the eternal Father, and there ruled the peace of the eternal Spirit – the very thing later revealed at the heart of created time in Jesus Christ.” And later on the same page he continues: “To say that everything is predestined, that everything comes from God’s free, eternal love

63 Related to this same theological construal is the fact that the Word is not confined in a human body, the doctrine of the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*. We read a statement of this in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; The Library of Christian Classics vols. 20 and 21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.13.4:

They thrust upon us as something absurd the fact that if the Word of God became flesh, then he was confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body. This is mere imprudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning.

See Myk Habets, “Putting the “Extra” Back into Calvinism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009): 441–456, and Daniel Y.K. Lee, *The Holy Spirit as Bond in Calvin’s Thought: Its Functions in Connection with the extra Calvinisticum* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

64 Kevin W. Hector, “Immutability, Necessity and Trinity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012): 76.

65 Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.

66 In Jesus Christ eternity and time have a “fellowship” (*koinonia*) with one another. Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.

67 George Hunsinger, “Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth’s Conception of Eternity,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 202.

which penetrates and rules time from eternity is just the same as to say simply that everything is determined in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁸ This quotation provides a forceful articulation of Barth’s commitment to something like the Primacy of Christ. The predestination of Christ is explicitly linked to the will of the triune God in the “pure divine time,” which is clearly before any consideration of sin or the fall. This does not, however, establish that for Barth, God constitutes himself triune by means of the election of Jesus Christ. Rather, it supports the reading that the *Logos asarkos* is personally identical to the *Logos incarnandus*—the one elected to be the God-man, and yet the two are logically differentiated.

Barth’s theology of covenant and creation is also informative regarding his position on the Primacy of Christ. A Reformed teaching on creation-covenant-Fall is reversed by Barth to covenant-creation-Fall.⁶⁹ From within God’s “pure divine time” a covenant was established by which God’s *ecstatic* being of love decided to create a counterpoint, an *imago Dei* in a creaturely realm.⁷⁰ Human beings are created to fulfil the prior covenant of God. In the covenant God aims at uniting himself with the creature and at elevating its being by letting it participate in his own being.⁷¹ Barth is thus committed to an elevation-line theology which sees the incarnation as the way to the consummation of creation. While it is true that sin must be atoned for and that has decisively been done in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this does not represent the fullness of the Gospel of the Dominical man. While underplaying the significance hamartiology plays within Barth’s thought, we may summarise Barth’s position in this regard with the following from Suh:

Before the foundation of the world the reconciliation or the union of God with His creatures was intended. God concluded His covenant with His creatures for this purpose. The first thought in God’s counsel from eternity is His union with the creatures and then their elevation which implies their participation in His being. The creation was planned and brought about for the sake of reconciliation. One of the underlying ideas in Barth’s theological arguments is that the first creation is imperfect in itself. Therefore, the creation should be elevated to perfection through the grace of God. If seen in this perspective, reconciliation is not said to be made necessary because of sin or the fall, which is an episode or incident. The reconciliation which is connected with sin is included in the scheme of elevation...If sin would not have entered into the world and the covenant would have proceeded to its original goal, then it would have resulted in the elevation of the created being through the union of God with it.⁷²

The work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the accomplishment of the union between God and humanity which God originally willed and created. This salvation as the fulfilment of being is not, as Suh points out, “inherent to the created being but comes from God to it, because it is the participation in the being of God...It is the free grace of God. God created man to be the participant in His being.”⁷³ Jesus

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 622.

⁶⁹ See the discussion in Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, 38.

⁷⁰ This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, 94–228.

⁷¹ This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, 42–329.

⁷² Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, 66. Suh bases this largely upon his reading of Barth, *CD* IV/1, 22–66.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 69.

Christ is the Mediator and the Reconciler, not only in the juridical sense to take away the sin of the world, but in the broader sense of uniting humanity with God, the original intention of the covenant. Seen in this perspective, the Fall and sin represent an episode or incident, according to Barth.⁷⁴

IV. SOTERIOLOGY

Moving from divine ontology and Christology, we now extend the discussion briefly into soteriology. In a recent work Edwin van Driel presents three arguments for a supralapsarian Christology. First, the eschaton is not the restoration of the proton; in the eschaton there is superabundance, a rich intimacy with God that the proton did not know.⁷⁵ In van Driel's words: "In Christ we gain more than we lost in Adam."⁷⁶ This superabundance involves a transformation of human existence into the form of the resurrected Christ, and an increase in the experience of divine intimacy as humans 'see' God face to face in the face of Jesus Christ. A second argument is an extension of the first and involves Christ's role in the *visio Dei*. If the *visio Dei* is sensory and intellectual, and van Driel rightly thinks it is, then the eschatological goal of humanity in the beatific vision is only possible if God makes himself present in bodily form, that is, through the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The final argument mustered by van Driel is one basic to his proposal and concerns divine friendship. Friendship, divine and human, is motivated by love. When in the Old Testament God calls his people his friends (Abraham, Moses, etc) and in the New Testament Jesus addresses his disciples as friends, this defines these relationships as motivated not only by human sin and need for reconciliation, but by a deeper, preordinate sense of love.⁷⁷ The death of Jesus is motivated by friendship; the friendship is not motivated by death. If the incarnation only happened as a function of God's reconciling action, there would be no need for a continued bodily existence of Christ after crucifixion and death. The humanity of the incarnate Son is not merely instrumental for atonement for sin.

Further, to a relational ontology, witnessed to in the incarnation of the eternal Son, the incarnation establishes an interpersonal relationship of mutual love and commitment. The Son becomes incarnate to establish a kingdom of love, in the form of a suitor, pursuing an answer of his beloved.⁷⁸ Under this schema the incarnation is a gift given to human persons: by assuming a human nature, the Son makes himself available for interpersonal communion, from one human being to the other. This assumes that in the incarnation the eternal Son takes up a human nature like ours, a nature that allows him to be present to us in human form. Stressing the relational aspect of communion by focussing on pneumatology, Thomas Weinandy has expressed the fact that, "the primary task of the Holy Spirit is to gather the whole cosmic order into union with Christ and to empower all human beings, from Adam and Eve to the last person

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD IV*/1, 37.

⁷⁵ For an elaboration of this theme see Myk Habets, "How 'Creation is Proleptically Conditioned by Redemption,'" *Colloquium* 41 (2009): 3–21; and John V. Fesko, *Last things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fern: Mentor, 2007).

⁷⁶ Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151. It is more than coincidental that this phrase redounds throughout the work of Thomas Torrance. See Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 30.

⁷⁷ van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 160.

⁷⁸ van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 57.

conceived, to confess Jesus Christ is Lord. Such a Spirit-filled profession of faith is to the Father's glory, for this is the supreme desire of his paternal heart."⁷⁹

In bringing together the themes of election, theology proper, supralapsarian Christology, and theotic soteriology, we may achieve the sort of eschatological biblical theology McCormack and the other participants in the current debate are after, but one that does not rely on false metaphysical *a priori* for its establishment on the one hand, nor on a post-metaphysical actualistic ontology on the other hand.

V. RAHNER'S RULE REDIVIVUS?

In concluding this essay it is worth noting the similarities between McCormack's proposal and the earlier one of Karl Rahner. In his influential essay *The Trinity*, Rahner mounted a case for an alternative understanding of the Trinity in several well-rehearsed moves. He was critical of Aquinas and others who argued that any of the Divine persons could have become incarnate for that, he believed, would tell us nothing about the personal identity of the Son who did take on human flesh, nor would the incarnation reveal God himself. It would, he believed, dislocate the missions from the processions such that God would remain an absolute mystery to us. Rahner, like McCormack, sees the mission of the Son as proper to him (*proprium*).⁸⁰ In order to correct this perceived mistake Rahner proceeds through several steps, all-too-quickly narrated here with parallels to McCormack's argument already considered.

First Rahner rejects the Neo-scholasticism dominant in Roman Catholic theology at the time, and presents a doctrine of the Trinity informed by the modern concerns of history, personhood, and subjectivity-relationally. McCormack too seeks to reject metaphysics, presumably including the Aristotelianism of scholasticism, but he chooses to replace it with a post-metaphysical actualism. Second, Rahner moves from Christology to the Trinity in his theological method and ties this in with a salvation-historical approach to the development of doctrines. McCormack too moves from Christology to the Trinity, following Barth closely in this account, and ties this in with a robust Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

Third, and most importantly, Rahner develops what has come to be known as Rahner's Rule or his *Grundaxiom*: "*The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity.*"⁸¹ The axiom serves at least two purposes in Rahner's argument; first, it attempts to remove the isolation of the doctrine of the Trinity as it makes it dependent upon and informative about the economy. This is the context within which Rahner makes his now famous quip about most Christians being mere "monotheists."⁸² Rahner is thus concerned to stress the ontological consistency of the economic missions and the divine processions. Second, it further affirms his thesis that *God* did not become incarnate, rather, the *Logos* did.

79 Thomas Weinandy, "The Cosmic Christ," *The Cord* 51 (2001): 27. Interestingly, Weinandy is a Franciscan (Capuchin order), a Thomist scholar, an Athanasian expert, and an advocate of a supralapsarian Christology. The element of pneumatology has often been missing in the historic discussions concerning the Primacy of Christ. See Myk Habets, "Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (2003): 199–235.

80 See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 23.

81 Ibid., 22, italics in original.

82 Ibid., 10.

This impels Rahner to revise the notion of *hypostasis* as it is applied to God, for in that case it “cannot be a universal univocal concept, applying to each of the three persons in the same way.”⁸³ Rahner has other arguments but these are the main ones by which he establishes his axiom. McCormack’s assertion that “...God *is* in himself, in eternity, the mode of his Self-revelation in time—God as Jesus Christ in eternity and God as Jesus Christ in time—thus guaranteeing that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity will be identical in content,”⁸⁴ would appear to warrant the conclusion that his is Rahner’s Rule affirmed in a novel way. Add to this McCormack’s attempt to make the first work of God *ad extra* (election) constitutive of his being *in se* (Trinity) and we see the close parallels between the two projects. Rahner’s words could equally have come from McCormack, “what Jesus is and does as man reveals the Logos himself...”⁸⁵

Fourth and finally, we may note that for both Rahner and McCormack the language of “modes” is preferred over that of “person.” McCormack specifically prefers Barth’s “modes of being” while Rahner, appreciative of Barth’s suggestion, finally settles on “distinct manner of subsisting.” Both object to the term “person” on grounds that the concept is fraught with metaphysical confusion. The different language should not obscure the fact that for both the notions of “person” and “being” are being radically revised and applied first to Divine persons and then to human persons in such a way that a substance metaphysic is being replaced with one both Rahner and McCormack believe is based more directly upon salvation history (*sola Scriptura*).

By highlighting some of the obvious parallels between Rahner’s and McCormack’s trinitarianism there is no suggestion that the two theologies are identical or parallel each other at every step—they clearly don’t! The intent, rather, is to situate McCormack’s proposals into some context and where it does parallel that of Rahner, it is incumbent upon McCormack to answer the standard objections mounted there.⁸⁶ What I have attempted in this essay is to mount some further objections but, more than that, to begin to present an alternate account of the divine ontology and the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. In summary I have shown that the Dominical man is to be identified directly with the eternal Son and his procession or generation from the Father, but not in such a way that would conflate the *Logos asarkos* with the *Logos ensarkos* in anything other than their personal identification—both are the eternal Son but not *simpliciter*. Likewise, the *Logos incarnandus* is the *Logos incarnatus*, but in a very specific way (*secundum quid*).⁸⁷ The triune God covenants to become human in the Son in order to achieve the participation of created human persons in the Divine life in the incarnate Son and by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Primacy of Christ is but one way in which a christologically conditioned doctrine of election makes sense of both Scripture and the tradition. In the Dominical Man—Jesus Christ—humanity is made to participate in the Divine life and love.

83 Ibid., 12, n.12.

84 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 218.

85 Rahner, *The Trinity*, 33.

86 Amongst the many objections the most pertinent in this context would come from Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, especially 126.

87 On this point see Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity,” 182–83, thesis 5.c: “...because the eternal Son is not only eternal but also *incarnandus*, and because the Son *incarnandus* is numerically identical with the Son *incarnatus*, it is not illegitimate to say that in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) it is the Son *incarnatus*, or Jesus Christ, who is the subject of this decision. This statement cannot be made absolutely or without qualification (*simpliciter*),” *ibid.*, 183.