

DOI:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.00240.x

On Getting First Things First: Assessing Claims for the Primacy of Christ

Myk Habets

Abstract

Adopting modal logic the doctrine of the primacy of Christ is defined and defended in relation to the Thomistic – Scotistic debates over the primary and efficient causes of the incarnation. This leads to a defence of the Scotistic thesis and a reserved affirmation for the Scotistic hypothesis that there would have been an incarnation irrespective of the fall. This hypothesis is tested by reference to the work of four recent theologians, Thomas Weinandy O.F.M. cap., Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Thomas Torrance. Finally, a sketch describing another possible-world incarnation that builds upon the Scotistic hypothesis is provided.

Keywords:

Primacy, Incarnation, Fall, Scotistic, Thomistic

I. Introduction

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.¹ The specific issue this doctrine addresses is the question: Was sin the *efficient* or the *primary* cause of the incarnation? This essay seeks to model the practice of modal logic in relation to the primacy of Christ, not to satisfy the cravings of speculative theologians but to reverently penetrate the evangelical mystery of the incarnation, specifically, the two alternatives: either ‘God became man independently of sin,’ or its contradiction, ‘God became man because of sin’. Examining historical responses to the

¹ ‘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,’ J. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ: Thomistic, Scotistic and Conciliatory Perspectives* (Manassas, VA: Trinity Communications, 1986), p. 5.

primacy of Christ will lead to a consideration of how some recent theologians have taken up these themes and sought to develop them. This in turn provides resources that contribute towards an understanding of the incarnation assuming that the efficient cause was human sin. Finally, an argument will be presented defending the primacy of Christ and a justification for the hypothesis that there would have been an incarnation of the Son irrespective of the fall.

II. Two worlds – one Christ

The specific question as to the primary reason for the incarnation has been a staple theological issue in the West, coming to prominence in medieval scholasticism.² Medieval thinkers found the discussion of counter-factual and counterpossible states of affairs to be particularly useful tools for clarifying tricky theological questions. The practice, however, has not found much support since. Contemporary theologians generally consider such speculative questions as too fanciful for due consideration to be given to them. This contemporary contempt for counter-factual questions is troublesome for it tends to constrain theological imagination and rejects what can be a powerful teaching tool, even heuristic device, enabling the theologian to penetrate age-old questions from new perspectives. E.L. Mascall's whimsical advice is needed today more than ever, 'Theological principles tend to become torpid for lack of exercise, and there is much to be said for giving them now and then a scamper in a field where the paths are few and the boundaries undefined; they do their day-to-day work all the better for an occasional outing in the country.'³ While theology conducted within so-called post-modernity tends to view hypothetical speculation as excessive theorising this is not the case outside of theology. Philosophy continues to work with notions of hypothetical speculation, or more specifically, with 'possible worlds semantics' according to modal logic.⁴

Two views on the primacy of Christ dominate the discussion within medieval theology, those of the Franciscans, led by John Duns Scotus, and those of the Dominicans, led by Thomas Aquinas. According to the first view humanity was created for glory, and sin is merely an episode along the way. The incarnation would have occurred

² See a review of the history of this discussion by O. Jager, 'Is de incarnatie méér dan 'een noodmaatregel?,' in *Rondom het Woord* (10e jaargang 1, Jan., 1968), 73–76.

³ E.L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Green and Co, 1956), p. 45.

⁴ See D. Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); A. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); K. Konyn-dyk, *Introductory Modal Logic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); and R.M. Adams, 'Possible Worlds,' *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edn. ed. R. Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 724.

irrespective of the fall since humanity's ultimate destiny is participation in the being of God and the incarnation guarantees that this will be realized. This Franciscan position is known as the Scotistic thesis. It is what one scholar terms 'elevation-line' theology which sees the incarnation as the way to the elevation or consummation of creation.⁵ The second major view considers the deliverance of creation as secondary to the question of sin. This is the Dominican position known as the Thomistic thesis. It may be characterised as a 'restitution-line' theology, in which the incarnation occurred solely as a remedy for humanity's sin, with the restitution of creation as a corollary. Both 'school's' of thought deserve some articulation before examining some recent contributions to the issue.

Aquinas mentions the primacy of Christ on a number of occasions and initially seems reluctant to take a stand on the issue.⁶ He writes in his *Summa theologiae*:

There are different opinions about this question. For some say that even if man had not sinned, the Son of Man would have become incarnate. Others assert the contrary, and seemingly our assent ought rather to be given to this opinion. For such things as spring from God's will, and beyond the creature's due, can be made known to us only through being revealed in the Sacred Scripture, in which the Divine Will is made known to us. Hence, since everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of the Incarnation, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of the Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had sin not existed, the Incarnation would not have been. And yet the power of God is not limited to this; even had sin not existed, *God could have become incarnate*.⁷

⁵ C.W. Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ: A Study in the Relation of the Incarnation and the Creation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982).

⁶ He speaks of it in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (1253–1258), *In III Sent.*, d. 1, a. 3; in his *Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy*, *In 1 Tim.*, c. 1, lect. 4; and in the most comprehensive and final form in the *Summa theologiae*, pt III, q. 1, art. 3.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt III, q. 1, art. 3 (italics mine). The entire section is important and should be considered. A few comments are in order. Aquinas is adamant in the extended passage that God could have become incarnate even if Adam had not sinned. Second, Aquinas states quite clearly that the opinion of an incarnation non-contingent on the fall of Adam is plausible, but for his part, not probable. Third, according to many Thomistic scholars, the entire tenor of Aquinas' theology is not inherently christocentric but theocentric. This means that it was not, according to Aquinas, the original intention of God to sum up all things in Christ as the head of creation. This is a post-lapsarian condition only. 'That is to say, while there was first an order of grace which did not include Christ, after the Fall such an order had its end in Christ, without any substantial modification having intervened,' F.X. Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ* (Front Royal, Va.: 1984), p. 28, cited in J. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ: Thomistic, Scotistic and Conciliatory Perspectives* (Manassas, VI.: Trinity Communications, 1986), p. 11. This is what is known as the Thomistic thesis: the primary reason for the incarnation was the fall of humanity thus there would not have been an incarnation of the eternal Son had there been no sin to occasion it.

Aquinas's did not go much further in explicating his position. His disciples, however, did, drawing upon several lines of argument: scriptural, historical, and logical. On Scriptural grounds it appears that whenever a reason is assigned to the incarnation it is invariably the sin of our first parent. Texts most cited include: Mt 1.21; 18.11; 20.28; Lk 5.32; 19.10; Jn 3.17; Rom 8.3; Gal 4.4–5; Heb 2.16–17; 10.3–12; and 1 Jn 3.5. In addition, certain Old Testament texts are also appealed to. Most notable is the so-called proto-evangel of Gen 3.15, a promise which obviously presupposes Adam's sin. In terms of historical support Thomas and his supporters cite at least twenty-eight fathers and ecclesiastical writers who seem to clearly state that God became man for our salvation.⁸ Of these twenty-eight, half explicitly declare that if Adam had not sinned, Christ would not have come. While the array of supporters is impressive it is not clear whether or not many of these thinkers mean that the sin of Adam was the *primary* reason for Christ's incarnation or simply one of the *efficient* reasons, however important.

Carol summarily concludes his examination of the Thomistic thesis with the words: 'The quintessence of that teaching, however, remains the common denominator uniting all Thomists, and it is simply this: No sin, no Incarnation.'⁹ It is clear that the Thomistic thesis is not limited to Dominicans. Many Protestants of the evangelical and reformation traditions also hold this to be the only orthodox position, citing the same texts, fathers, and arguments in support of the thesis that sin is the *primary* reason for the incarnation. But there is another option, the Scotistic thesis, and the force of this argument deserves careful examination.

The Scotistic thesis that follows is the one advocated by John Duns Scotus (d.1308), along with variations on his theory articulated well beyond the pale of Franciscan theology. Discussing the primacy of Christ within the context of his predestination Scotus introduces the question as: Whether Christ was predestined to be the Son of God? Scotus argues that the occasion for the predestination of Christ was not supremely that of sin but rather the glory of God.¹⁰ According to Scotus the glory of God is a much higher good than the

⁸ See Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, pp. 23–34; 35–41 and 81–85. Carol also includes twenty-four contemporaries of Aquinas who agree with his thesis, and a further fourteen authors in the 14th and 15th centuries. Carol then surveys eightyfour Thomists of the seventeenth century, the most important include Joseph Ragusa (d.1624), *Commentariorum ac disputationum in Tertiam partem D. Thomae tomus unus sacra Incarnati Verbi mysteria pertractans*, q. 1, a. 3 and Gabriel Vazquez (d. 1604), *In 111 Patrem Summae*, q. 1, a. 3, disp. X, c. IV-V.

⁹ Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 86.

¹⁰ See Scotus, *Ordinatio*, Lib. III, d. 7, q. 3, Wadding edition (Lyons: 1939; reprinted Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968–69). For an overview see Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, 13–33.

redemption from sin. Consequently, to posit the incarnation solely on the basis of human sin and the need for redemption is a diminution of the incarnation. In his *Ordinatio* Scotus concisely summarises his thesis:

I say that the incarnation of Christ was not foreseen as something occasioned [by sin], but that it was foreseen by God from all eternity and immediately as a good more proximate to the end. . . hence this is the order followed in God's prevision. *First*, God understood himself as the highest good. In the *second* instant he understood all creatures. In the *third* [instant] he predestined some to glory and grace, and concerning some he had a negative act by not predestining. In the *fourth* [instant] he foresaw that all these would fall in Adam. In the *fifth* [instant] he preordained and foresaw the remedy – how they would be redeemed through the Passion of his Son, so that, like all the elect, Christ in the flesh was foreseen and predestined to grace and glory before Christ's Passion was foreseen as a medicine against the fall, just as a physician wills the health of a man before he wills the medicine to cure him.¹¹

In the so-called *Reportationes* or *Opus Parisiense*, notes taken by Scotus's students, further elaboration and argumentation on his thesis is provided. According to one student's report we find that Scotus views the greater good of the incarnation as follows (I have presented this in the form of a *signa rationis* for convenience):

God loves himself.

God loves himself for others.

God wishes to be loved by him or her who can love Him with the greatest love.

Only a theandric person could love God in this way.

The Son had to become incarnate for the reason of love before the reason of salvation from sin.¹²

The Scotistic thesis on the primacy of Christ essentially comes down to one word — love. The predestination of Christ is a completely gratuitous act of God. The corollary is that the incarnation is not conditioned by any creaturely factor such as sin. This utter independence from a creaturely factor is true in the case of all the elect. Therefore, *a fortiori*, it must be true of the predestination of Christ who, as head of the elect, was predestined to the greatest glory. The basic reason given by the Scotists for the works of God *ad extra* is the supreme love of God.

¹¹ Scotus, *Ordination*, III (suppl.) d. 19; cod. Assisi com. 137, fol. 161v, cited in Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, 124–125, where Carol provides notes on the authenticity or otherwise of this text. Whether it is Scotus's work or not it is unquestionably Scotistic.

¹² This is my paraphrase of the logic contained in *Opus Parisiense*, Lib. III, d. 7, q. 4, cited in J. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 127. For Carol's elaboration of a Scotistic *signa rationis* see *Why Jesus Christ*, pp. 135–149.

Integral to the Scotistic thesis, and a point which many consider never to having been persuasively demolished, is the use of the axiom *ordinate volens*, which states: ‘Everyone who wills ordinally wills, immediately after the willing of an end, that which is more immediate and more proximate with respect to the end,’¹³ and further, ‘Everyone who wills reasonably first wills an end; second, that which immediately attains the end; and third, other things that are more remotely ordered to attaining the end.’¹⁴ J. Bissen concisely states the axiom as follows:

God, who wills in orderly fashion, wills first that which is nearer the end.

But the soul of Christ is nearer the end.

Therefore, God wills (predestines) Christ’s soul first.¹⁵

The *ordinate volens* axiom is considered by Scotists as an irrefutable argument in favour of Christ’s absolute predestination.¹⁶

A third feature of Scotus’s argument establishing the absolute predestination of Christ is known as the ‘hierarchy of perfections’ (the *bonum occasionatum*) and is worded as follows:

It does not seem that God predestined that soul [of Christ] to so great a glory only on account of our redemption, since that redemption or the glory of the redeemed soul is not so great a good as that glory of Christ’s soul; nor is it likely that the greatest good among beings would be merely occasioned on account of a lesser good; nor is it

¹³ Scotus, *Ordinatio*, Lib. II, d. 20, q. 2, n.2, Wadding edn. (Lyons: 1639, reprinted, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968–69), 6.2:822.

¹⁴ Scotus, *Ordinatio* Lib. III, d. 32, n. 6 Wadding edn. 7.2:692.

¹⁵ J. Bissen, *De praedestinatione absoluta Christi secundum Duns Scotum exposition doctrinalis*, in *Antonianum* 12 (1937), 11, cited in Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 235.

¹⁶ In a provocative statement Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 254, goes so far as to assert that: For our part...we submit that if St. Thomas had lived long enough to examine the reasons marshalled by Duns Scotus in defense of his thesis, the Angelic Doctor would have enthusiastically embraced it; and this for the very good reason that the Franciscan vision is eminently grounded on the principles of the *philosophia perennis* which he himself has so brilliantly championed.

When Aquinas says that ‘the less noble is for the sake of the more noble’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologia*, I, q. 65, a. 2), or ‘the imperfect is for the sake of the more perfect’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologia*, I, q. 105, a. 5), he is saying that the more noble and more perfect is always the final cause properly so-called of the less noble and less perfect. Since Jesus Christ is unquestionably the most perfect and noble in the entire hierarchy of creation – the *Opus summum Dei*, as Scotus styled him (Scotus, *Opus Paris*, III, d. 7, q. 4) – we must conclude that Jesus Christ is the final cause of all creation, that everything has been created for his sake, as Col 1.16 teaches. Aquinas also taught that ‘the better a thing is in its effects, the greater its priority in the intention of the agent’ (Aquinas, *Summa Contra gentes*, lib. 2, c. 44, a. 1). Owing to the intrinsic dignity and excellence of the hypostatic union, the man Jesus Christ must have been ontologically first in the mind of the Agent. And if he is first, then he must also be the cause of all those that follow, according to the other metaphysical axiom stated by Aquinas, ‘That which is first in any genus is the cause of all that follow’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologia*, III, q. 56, a. 1).

likely that He [God] preordained Adam to such a good before He predestined Christ, which is what would follow.¹⁷

This is an oft-repeated point within Scotus's theory and the logic is relatively simple to follow: if Christ was primarily intended for our redemption then he would be a *bonum occasioatum*. Since Christ is a greater good by far than humanity's redemption it is not likely that God would have predestined him primarily and essentially for something which is of far less value. Why the insistence on this line of argument? To counter a logical conclusion of the Thomistic thesis that if the incarnation was *primarily* due to the fall of Adam then the life of Christ and the merits incurred by the incarnation are all a result of sin and so Adam should be thanked for falling and sin become an occasion of rejoicing.

A final argument used in the Scotistic thesis is the Scriptural testimony. The following texts are most commonly cited in support: 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 Scotists 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 (v34). Casting ones net wider, those who hold to the Scotistic thesis on the primacy of Christ aver that reasons for the incarnation other than redemption include at least the following: 'I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly' (Jn 10.10); 'I have glorified you on earth; I have carried out the mission you gave me to do' (Jn 17.4); 'The reason I was born, the reason why I came into the world is to testify to the truth' (Jn 18.37); and 'He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour' (Lk 4.18–19).¹⁸

The *sine quo non* of the Scotistic thesis 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*.¹⁹ In order to be aligned to the Scotistic thesis an acceptance of one or more of the following affirmations is needed:

¹⁷ Scotus, *Ordinatio*, Lib. III, d. 7, q. 3, cited in Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 246.

¹⁸ For commentary on these and other verses see Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, p. 168.

¹⁹ This point is made clear by Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, 147.

that the incarnation was necessary to impart creatures the supernatural knowledge of God;
 that the angels and Adam in the state of innocence were sanctified in virtue of the future merits of Christ;
 that Lucifer fell because he rejected the grace of Christ;
 that the God-man was the first of the predestined;
 that Christ is the goal or end of all creation;
 or that Christ was the model God had in mind when he decided to create the world.

This way of presenting the Scotistic thesis has the advantage that it presents Christ as redeemer in the very first logical instant in which his existence is efficaciously decreed by God.²⁰

In a balance-sheet of 1486 theologians from the thirteenth to the twentieth century Carol highlights those who are either pro-Thomistic or pro-Scotistic regarding the primacy of Christ.²¹ His dossier is by no means exhaustive but Carol contends that out of 1486 thinkers, 614 hold to the Thomistic thesis, broadly conceived, and 1179 to the Scotistic thesis.²² Not that all advocates of the Scotistic thesis agree with every aspect of that theory. Most explicitly affirm that Christ's predestination was decreed independently of the fall. That makes them, according to the criteria above, authentic Scotists. A second group affirms that Christ was willed or predestined first, or before any other creature. That makes them mitigated Scotists. The impression given by many contemporary theologians that the Thomistic thesis is the only expression of orthodoxy is clearly incorrect.

There is clearly and importantly a difference between the Scotistic *thesis* and the Scotistic *hypothesis*. The *thesis* is the absolute and universal primacy of Christ, his unconditional predestination, and his final causality over all creation. The *hypothesis* argues for the existence of Christ even if Adam had not sinned.²³ This hypothetical

²⁰ This modified or 'neo-Scotist' position is adapted from the works of W.H. Marshner, *A Logician's Reflections on the Debitum Contrahendi Peccatum*, in *Marian Studies* 29 (1978), and *Marian Studies* 30 (1980), pp. 187–189; J.F. Bonnefoy, *Christ and the Cosmos* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965); and M. Meilach, *The Primacy of Christ* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1964).

²¹ There are a variety of intermediate views which fall somewhere between the Thomistic and Scotistic theses, most notably those of Luis Molina (d. 1601), *Commentaria in Primam Divi Thomae Partem* . . . , q. XXIII, a. IV-V, disp. I, membr. VII-VIII, ed. Venetiis (1594), I, 333–339; Francisco Suárez (d. 1617), *de Incarnatione*, disp. V, sect. 4, n. 4, *Opera omnia*, XVII, ed. Vivès (Paris, 1860), 239; and Gesualdo M. Rocca and Gabriel M. Roschini, *de ratione primariae existentiae Christi et Deiparae* (Romae, 1944).

²² Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, 466.

²³ Scotus was an advocate of and master at modal logic so it is no wonder he applied his thesis to an equally logical hypothesis. See C.G. Normore, 'Duns Scotus's Modal Theory,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 129–160.

position can be denied while still upholding the Scotistic thesis, as we shall see in several contemporary advocates of this position.

III. Contemporary restatements

Having considered the two historical positions on the issue of the primacy of Christ, the Thomistic and the Scotistic, we are now in a position to assess several contemporary thinkers on the issue in order to draw some theological conclusions of our own. While strictly denying any *hypothesis* that there would have been an incarnation of the eternal Son even had there been no fall, Fr Thomas Weinandy O.F.M. Cap. upholds the Scotistic *thesis* on the absolute primacy of Christ.²⁴ Weinandy is a Franciscan monk and a Thomistic scholar, placing him in an ideal position to see the merits of both sides of the traditional debate. Weinandy is also a member of the Mother of God Community who's five point mission statement includes a commitment to 'witness to the primacy of Christ, the firstborn of all creation'.²⁵

Fr Weinandy believes a *via media* in this debate can be found through a return to the place of Jesus Christ in history; he is the 'cosmic Christ' precisely because he defeated sin, Satan, and death.²⁶ To support this position Fr Weinandy appeals to the christological hymn of Col 1.15–20, which he notes was also Scotus's theological inspiration.²⁷ This hymn, along with others in the New Testament, appeals to the primacy of the cosmic Christ on the basis of who he is and what he has done. 'Our approach has been wholly biblical and historical, and thus in keeping with Aquinas's concerns. At the same time, it has upheld Scotus's insight that the supremacy of Jesus was first in the Father's mind,'²⁸ writes Fr Weinandy. He further argues that 'these valid convictions of Aquinas and Scotus form parts of a deeper and more central truth – the primacy of the Incarnate Son,

²⁴ T.G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 135–148; and 'The Cosmic Christ,' *The Cord* 51 no.1 (2001), 27–38.

²⁵ See <http://www.motherofgod.org/> (accessed 26.7.06).

²⁶ The topic has been treated in G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 19–34, who rejects the idea outright on similar grounds to Weinandy. Berkouwer argues that the Scotistic hypothesis separates the incarnation from the cross and results in a diminishment of the latter.

²⁷ Col 1.15–20 is considered by many exegetes to be the *locus classicus* for the cosmological aspect of christology or the mediatorship of Jesus Christ. See a critical exegesis and survey of different interpretations of this text in relation to our present concern in Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, 255–290. Other significant texts cited by Weinandy include Eph 1.3–14; Phil 2.5–11; and the Book of Revelation.

²⁸ Weinandy, 'The Cosmic Christ,' p. 37.

as the Cosmic Christ, is achieved and most fully manifested in the cross.²⁹

While Fr Weinandy believes a third way is tenable following Francis of Assisi what is actually presented is, if we apply Carol's criteria to Weinandy's work, a basic Scotistic thesis that highlights the *efficient* cause of the incarnation, sin, while upholding the *primary* cause, the glory of Jesus Christ. While rejecting any hypothetical approach to the issue and despite assertions to the contrary, Fr Weinandy supports the traditionally conceived Scotistic thesis. As he writes, 'We suggest that we were created, in accordance with the Father's will, to witness the glory of Jesus and to praise him eternally for his glory,'³⁰ and again, 'the principal reason the Father created the world in all its magnificent variation was to give glory to his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.'³¹ What Fr Weinandy does contribute in his brief accounts is the added dimension of pneumatology. According to Fr Weinandy:

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 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.³²

It is this element of pneumatology which has hitherto been missing in the historic discussions concerning the primacy of Christ.³³ While Fr Weinandy has much to offer regarding the trinitarian procession and mission of the Holy Spirit, he has not yet applied these insights directly to the issue of the primacy of Christ.³⁴

The doctrine of the primacy of Christ finds a place within Protestant theology as well.³⁵ Karl Barth presents Jesus Christ as the Mediator between Creator and creation, between heaven and earth,

²⁹ Weinandy, 'The Cosmic Christ,' p. 37.

³⁰ Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh*, p. 137.

³¹ Weinandy, 'The Cosmic Christ,' p. 27.

³² Weinandy, 'The Cosmic Christ,' p. 27.

³³ See M. Habets, 'Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo,' *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 no. 2 (2003), pp. 199–235.

³⁴ For his trinitarian contributions see especially *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995).

³⁵ See J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.15.3; 2.12.1; 2.12.4. It appears that Calvin believed the sin of humanity was not the *primary* cause of the incarnation but rather the *efficient* cause, thus making him sympathetic to the broad Scotistic *thesis* outlined here, while firmly rejecting the Scotistic *hypothesis* of an incarnation irrespective of the fall. According to Calvin the primary reason for the incarnation was to glorify the Father in the Son and to bridge the epistemic and ontological divide between Creator and creature. This view of Calvin is confirmed when, in 2.12.1, we read: 'The situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him... Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a Mediator.'

between eternity and time.³⁶ While time and eternity are distinct, they are not separated in the person of the incarnate Son.³⁷ 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 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.³⁸ 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 the Scotistic tradition.

According to Barth's theology, the primacy of Christ is considered in relation to the doctrine of time and eternity.³⁹ Through the incarnation the eternal Son took to himself time without succumbing to time. Accordingly, Christ recreates and heals time.⁴⁰ It is important to notice that the redemption of time is distinct from salvation from sin. As Hunsinger explains: 'Time's wounds, as here set forth, are inherent in the good creation. They may be exacerbated and corrupted by sin, but they are not identical with it, nor are they hostile to God. When measured by eternity, they are merely imperfections, not corruptions.'⁴¹ Does this provide us with an affirmative answer from Barth as to whether or not there would have been an incarnation irrespective of the fall? According to Hunsinger's reading, while Barth remained cautious on the hypothetical structure of the question he did approach the position of Scotus when he affirmed that 'among other things, the incarnation resolves a plight logically independent of sin, namely, the plight of transitoriness and dissolution into nonbeing.'⁴²

³⁶ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956–1975), II/1, 616. (Hereafter *CD*.)

³⁷ In Jesus Christ eternity and time have a 'fellowship' (*koinonia*) with one another. Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.

³⁸ G. Hunsinger, 'Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity,' in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 202.

³⁹ See an overview of Barth's theology of time and eternity in *CD* II/1, pp. 608–640.

⁴⁰ According to Barth eternity corresponds to perfection, and time with imperfection. Eternity is the perfect archetype and prototype of time, whereas time is merely the imperfect copy of eternity. This is explained in Hunsinger, 'Mysterium Trinitatis,' p. 198. See an overview of Barth's theology of time and eternity in *CD* II/1, pp. 608–640.

⁴¹ Hunsinger, 'Mysterium Trinitatis,' p. 204.

⁴² Hunsinger, 'Mysterium Trinitatis,' p. 204. Hunsinger goes on to comment that 'He does so, however, in a remarkably Thomistic way. Although Barth disagreed with the standard Thomistic understanding of nature and grace as applied to sin, he agreed with it as applied to transitoriness. Barth agreed with Aquinas, in other words, that in the work of healing time, grace does not destroy nature, but rather perfects and exceeds it' (pp. 204–205).

While Barth never takes an open stand on the issue of whether or not there would have been an incarnation without the fall he often seems to imply that this would have been the case.

It is clear that while reticent over the Scotistic *hypothesis* Barth is committed to the Scotistic *thesis* but for his own reasons. 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.

He continues:

To say that everything is predestined, that everything comes from God's free, eternal love which penetrates and rules time from eternity is just the same as to say simply that everything is determined in Jesus Christ.⁴³

This quotation provides a forceful articulation of Barth's commitment to the Scotistic thesis, even if he does not directly term it as such. 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.

Barth's theology of covenant and creation is also informative regarding his position on the primacy of Christ.⁴⁴ A Reformed teaching on creation-covenant-fall is reversed by Barth to covenant-creation-fall.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Barth is thus committed to an 'elevation-line' theology which sees the incarnation as the way to the consummation of creation. We may summarise Barth's position with the following from Suh:

⁴³ Barth, *CD* II/1, p. 622.

⁴⁴ Other arguments in favour of Barth's support for the Scotistic thesis would include: 1) the eternal election of the man Jesus Christ and his theology on the 'humanity of God,' 2) the epistemological and ontological barriers Barth considers need to be bridged and can only be achieved by Jesus Christ, and 3) Barth's incarnational christology.

⁴⁵ See the discussion in Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, pp. 94–228.

⁴⁷ This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, pp. 42–329.

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.⁴⁸

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 also 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.'⁴⁹ Jesus 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 is an episode or incident, according to Barth.⁵⁰ This reading of Barth's theology confirms his implicit commitment to a Scotistic thesis on the primacy of Christ.

Another contemporary theologian who has considered the issue of the primacy of Christ is Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann asserts, 'So "the Son of God would have become man even if the human race had remained without sin." That is how we should have to answer the question, if we wanted to embark on empty speculation.'⁵¹ How does he come to this assertion? Moltmann considers whether or not from God's perspective the incarnation is *fortuitous* or *necessary*; is it based on God's will or God's nature? The first response Moltmann identifies with those who argue the incarnation is merely

⁴⁸ Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, 66. Suh bases this largely upon his reading of Barth, *CD IV/1*, pp. 22–66.

⁴⁹ Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD IV/1*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 116. Moltmann does not mention Aquinas or Scotus directly but traces the question immediately back to J. Müller, 'Ob der Sohn Gottes Mensch geworden sein würde, wenn das menschliche Geschlecht ohne Sünde geblieben wäre?' *Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte*, ed. J. Wirsching (Gütersloh, 1968).

an ‘emergency measure’ on God’s part, taken in order to counter the crisis of sin in the world. The second response sees the incarnation belonging to the eternally self-communicating love of God himself.

According to Moltmann, the first view, that of the Thomistic thesis, conceives of the incarnation as merely the functional presupposition for the atoning sacrifice made necessary by sin. This is, Moltmann argues, an expression of the saving will of God *outwards*. The problem Moltmann has with this view is that God himself is then unaffected by the incarnation. ‘Once the incarnate Son of God has achieved the reconciliation of the world with God, he himself becomes superfluous.’⁵² Moltmann goes further: ‘Once creation has been redeemed, purified from sin and liberated from death, the God-Man no longer has any place in it. Any functional and merely soteriological Christology is manifestly on the wrong track, simply because it abolishes itself in this way.’⁵³ Moltmann thus mounts a powerful critique of the Thomistic thesis.⁵⁴

The view Moltmann advocates is that the incarnation was *necessary* given the nature of God as grace and love. The love of God is prior to the occasion of expressing it. The occasion (*occasio*) was sin and the fall but the reason (*causa*) was the being and nature of God.

⁵² Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 115.

⁵³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 115. We see this view explicitly affirmed in the work of A. Van Ruler who conceives the incarnation as God’s emergency measure. The incarnation is thus exclusively a means for the restoration of the fallen creation. When the goal is achieved, the means is no longer needed. The conclusions of Van Ruler are that the incarnation will be liquidated in the eschaton. See A.A. Van Ruler, ‘De Verhouding van het kosmologische en het eschatologische element in de Christologie,’ in *Theologisch Werk* (Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1969), deel I, p. 165; De evolutie van het dogma: *ThW* II, p. 53; *Theologie van het apostat*, p. 32; *Die Christliche Kirche und das Alte Testament*, p. 65. All citations from Suh, *The Creation Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, p. 212 (see pp. 212–235 for a full commentary on Van Ruler’s position).

Moltmann specifically critiques this position of Van Ruler in his *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 259–262. Interestingly, Moltmann sees this same tendency, this same ‘functional Christology,’ in the theology of John Calvin. While grossly overstated Moltmann argues that for Calvin once redemption has been completely mediated in the eschaton, and all things are handed back to the Father by the Son, then there will no longer be need for mediation so the Mediator – Jesus Christ – retreats back into the Trinity and direct communion with God (trinity) is achieved (see J. Calvin, *Commentary on Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 15.28). J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 257–259. Further, Moltmann reads Dorothy Sölle (*Christ the Representative* [SCM, 1967]) in the same vein. Based on his reading of Sölle Moltmann believes that when the function of representation, which is inherently for a limited time, is exhausted in the eschaton, then too the representative will be exhausted.

⁵⁴ Moltmann does not mention Aquinas or Scotus directly but traces the question immediately back to J. Müller, ‘Ob der Sohn Gottes Mensch geworden sein würde, wenn das menschliche Geschlecht ohne Sünde geblieben wäre?’ *Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte*, ed. J. Wirsching (Gütersloh, 1968). See Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 115, fn.28.

If this is carried through into our understanding of the incarnation then once the reason for the expression of love has ceased, sin, the cause of that love and so love itself does not cease. God is still free to love and because God *is* love, the love of God will continue to be expressed on his creatures even after full redemption has been accomplished.⁵⁵ In addition, the ultimate expression of God's love in Jesus Christ will endure for eternity.

Moltmann's theology revolves around the point that the eternal Son did not become man simply due to the fall but rather for the sake of perfecting creation. It is thus *necessary* for God if he wishes to achieve his covenantal intentions. Moltmann makes it explicit that by *necessary* he does not mean absolutely. 'The incarnation of the Son is neither a matter of indifference for God nor is it necessary for his divinity.' Rather, if God is love then it is his nature to be *ecstatic*, to love the Triune members and his creation, not only to love his "like" but also to love his "other."⁵⁶ Moltmann then constructs a convincing argument that Jesus Christ is *the* image of God while men and women are images of Christ. It is therefore in fellowship with the incarnate Son that believers discover the truth of human existence. Accordingly, the incarnation of the Son has a significance of its own. 'But if God's world is designed for men and women, and if the incarnation of the Son fulfils this design of creation, then in intention the incarnation precedes the creation of the world. The fact that the eternal Son of the Father becomes God's created *ikon* then belongs to his eternal destiny.'⁵⁷ As with Barth, Moltmann does not appeal directly to the Franciscan school of thought but he clearly reflects the Scotistic thesis.

What Moltmann adds to the traditional discussion on the primacy of Christ is the suggestion that love, God as love, is a primary reason for the incarnation and that if the Scotistic model is not endorsed then the eternity of the incarnate Son is called into question. He thus furthers the discussion on the primacy of Christ in meaningful ways.

In his *magnum opus* Thomas Torrance, the final theologian who's ideas we shall examine, declares that in light of the eternal purposes of God, and the proleptic nature of creation conditioned as it is by the incarnation, and:

[w]hile clapping our hands on our mouth, without knowing what we say, we may nevertheless feel urged to say that in his eternal purpose the immeasurable Love of God overflowing freely beyond himself which brought the creation into existence would have become incarnate

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 116.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 117.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 117.

within the creation even if we and our world were not in need of his redeeming grace.⁵⁸

This corresponds remarkably to much that we have already examined in Scotus, Barth, and Moltmann.

From a detailed reading of his theology it is clearly evident that Torrance is committed to a view of the primacy of Christ that is Scotistic in its orientation. At least four main arguments can be employed to support this reading.⁵⁹ In the first instance, Torrance has spent considerable time developing an account of the ontological necessity of the atonement given the Creator — creature distinction. In order for this ontological barrier to be broached God himself had to become human without ceasing to be divine in order to raise humanity up to participate in the Triune communion. This was only possible in Christ and by the Holy Spirit. This distinction has nothing to do with sin in the first instance. To be sure, once Adam and Eve did sin, however original sin is conceived, the rest of their progeny was affected so that now, in the only world we know, the ontological divide has been broadened by sin, but it was not originally occasioned by it.

A second line of reasoning for Torrance's Scotistic theology is the recognition of an epistemological barrier between humanity and God. Torrance has made it clear on numerous occasions that a saving knowledge of God is not 'natural' to human persons. In his Auburn Lectures we read:

⁵⁸ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 210. In his Auburn Lectures at the start of his academic career Torrance had asserted the direct opposite to this. See T.F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2002), p. 154. His thought thus developed considerably in this area, largely due to his later interest in Athanasian theology, contingency, and the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁹ More points could be added such as the redemption of time, for example. But we have limited the discussion here to the main emphases of Torrance's theology. One other argument necessitating Torrance's broadly Scotistic position is his use of the concept of contingency. Contingency plays a major part in Torrance's scientific dogmatics and so it should not be a surprise that contingency is linked to modal logic in philosophical reasoning which itself is linked to possible worlds semantics. Torrance has said the world is contingent simply because God did not need to create it. This immediately presupposes that there is more than one possible world. If God could choose to create or not to create, then there are at least two possible worlds: the world in which God does create this particular universe and the one in which he does not. A logical corollary of accepting divine contingency is a commitment to the Scotistic thesis. In Torrance's work after the 1960's we see him working out the scientific structures of theology more rigorously than he could have anticipated in his early Auburn Lectures. If one had the opportunity to ask Thomas Torrance if what is happening in philosophy today with its interest in essentialism is what his own scientific dogmatics had anticipated would he reply positively in the way Barth did when Torrance pointed out to him how contemporary science conformed to Barth's own theological science, even though he was unaware of it at the time? See J.W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 82–105.

It is sometimes asked if God cannot reveal himself to us without Christ, without this form known to us which he assumed. The answer to that is that if the revelation of God were to take place apart from this veiling in human being or in the form of another being whose form was unknown to us in our world, it would mean the disruption of the conditions of this world and of mankind – it would mean the end of all things. It would mean impossibility! It is the authentic Humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ which betokens real possibility in our world of human being and space and time.⁶⁰

According to Torrance's christology the incarnation of the Son was an absolute necessity – not for God but for revelation and reconciliation. And it is precisely in the form of a human being that the divine person must be revealed. According to Torrance divine revelation and reconciliation occur together in a two-way movement between God and humanity. In reaching an understanding of God as triune we have to take into account not only our drawing near to God but God's drawing near to us in and through the self-humiliation of the Son in the incarnation. It is within the conditions of full humanity that God has made himself known to us. While these points are evident in Barth and Moltmann they are made more central in Torrance's theology.

The reality of Christ's *homoousia* connects the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity, thus we conclude that according to Torrance's logic, the primary reason for the incarnation was for the Son to glorify the Father by bringing all creation into ontological and epistemological communion with the triune God. This is simply to apply one of Torrance's axioms: 'Since only God can really know God, we may know him only as he reveals *himself* to us *through* himself.'⁶¹ The Father-Son relationship is so intrinsic to an understanding of God that Torrance can assert:

[T]here is a closed circle of knowing between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father. The Father and the Son are inherently and reciprocally related with one another in God in such an exclusive way that there is no knowledge of the Son except that of the Father, and no knowledge of the Father except that of the Son, unless a way is freely opened up by the Son for us to share in the communion of knowing within God himself.⁶²

'This is precisely what may happen,' writes Torrance, 'through the revealing activity of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son'⁶³ and through the communion of the Holy Spirit who is God and dwells in God.

⁶⁰ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 137. With this quotation we find a hint as to the necessity of the incarnation due to creational space-time.

⁶¹ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 115. Italics in original.

⁶² Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 116.

⁶³ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, pp. 116–117.

Torrance argues forcefully and convincingly that only by means of the incarnation of the Son and the conjoint activity of the Holy Spirit is knowledge of God, and so union with God, possible.

A third area which necessitates identifying Torrance's theology with the Scotistic thesis is his stress on the saving significance of the incarnation. Torrance shows how the incarnation is redemptive and he does this by utilising both an Eastern Orthodox strategy of articulating the positive features of the incarnation, what we are saved *for*,⁶⁴ along with McLeod Campbell's emphasis on the prospective aspects of the incarnation.⁶⁵ Torrance's theology thus lends itself in support of the Scotistic thesis *and* hypothesis, the former asserted positively and the latter asserted tentatively. The incarnation involves the transformation of men and women into glorified saints; something inherent within God's will to create in the first instance. Conformity to the incarnate Son was and is the divine intention for men and women regardless of human sinfulness.

One final argument can be offered for how Torrance's theology is consonant with both the primacy of Christ as referring to something other than sin and for an incarnation irrespective of the fall; his anthropology. Along with Moltmann, Torrance considers the incarnate Son is *the* image of God and men and women are made in his image.⁶⁶ If this is the way God created men and women then he did so in conformity to an archetype — Jesus Christ. As the pre-existent Son has no bodily existence then the incarnation was in the mind and will of God from before the creation. The incarnation was logically intended as God's desire before any notion of sin or fall was conceived. As Adam, no less than any of his progeny, was created in the image of *the* image, and that image is the incarnate Christ, then the eternal Son had to be incarnated as the Christ in time and space.⁶⁷

It is Torrance's contention that as God created out of love then the creature is created to participate in the Triune love (*perichoresis*) in a creaturely way, which is by grace and not by nature. This is what leads him to assert the possibility of an incarnation irrespective of

⁶⁴ See P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, trans. N. Russell (1979. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 35.

⁶⁵ See J.M. Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856. Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1996), p. 19.

⁶⁶ For a number of contemporary proposals supporting this thesis see: D. Staniloae, 'Image, Likeness, and Deification in the Human Person,' *Communio* 13 (1986), pp. 64–83; W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 218–231; and S.J. Grenz, 'Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-linear Linearity of Theology,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 no. 4 (2004), pp. 617–628.

⁶⁷ Torrance refers the reader to J.B. Torrance, and R.C. Walls, *John Duns Scotus Doctor of the Church* (Edinburgh: 1992), p. 9, and I. Mackenzie, *The Atonement of Time* (Norwich, 1994).

the fall. Torrance sees in this hypothetical position a deep seated truth: God's ultimate purpose is to unite all things to God through Christ (Col 1.15–20). What Torrance contributes to this discussion is a further articulation of the ontological, epistemological, and anthropological barriers which only God incarnate can bridge. As such, the prospective or positive elements of the incarnation come to the fore in Torrance's theology, something he claims the western church desperately needs to hear today.

The doctrine of the primacy of Christ is an important one as it highlights the intention of the triune God to unite men and women to himself in glorious communion. By participating in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father by the Holy Spirit believers are caught up into immortality, communion, and love. This participation in the divine nature is consonant with an incarnation irrespective of the fall, thus with the Scotistic thesis *and* hypothesis. In light of this it behoves us to present a piece of modal logic of our own, which takes heed of Mascall's advice earlier in the essay to let theological ideas have 'a scamper in a field where the paths are few and the boundaries undefined'.

IV. Modal logic and the possibility of incarnation

What if Adam and Eve had not sinned in the Garden? What sort of world would we have inherited, and more importantly, what sort of nature would we have? While it is in the realms of theological speculation it is not without merit to explore these questions in some detail. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God in the Garden then it is generally accepted, especially within the reformation tradition, that the period of probation⁶⁸ would have come to an end, and, in the cool of the day as God walked with our first parents (Gen 3.8) he would have blessed them for their obedience and invited them to partake of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil along with the Tree of Life (Gen 2.9). The theological import of this scenario is that Adam and Eve, and the human race they represent, would have come to a knowledge of good and evil through *obedience* rather than disobedience, by *invitation* rather than theft. Because there had been no fall and thus no corruption, then the rest of their progeny would not have inherited the guilt, stain, or disease of that original

⁶⁸ On the idea of probation see C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 2: Anthropology* (reprint: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 117–122; and L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1939), 215–218. The covenant idea is also worked out in a unique way by Barth. See Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ*, pp. 34–37, who argues that according to Barth the creation was brought about for the sake of the covenant, and the covenant was concluded for the sake of reconciliation. See further at pp. 56–61.

sin. God, presumably, would have continued to ‘walk’ with humanity and relate to them in meaningful ways.

References in Genesis to God walking with Adam and Eve are metaphorical, representing in some undefined way a relationship between God and themselves. While this relationship would have been intimate and intensely personal it would still have certain limitations, as is evident in the Genesis narrative itself. As God is spirit, unlike human persons, a barrier exists between the Creator and creatures; the ontological barrier. As God is beyond human comprehension then another barrier exists between the Creator and creatures; the epistemological barrier. Because of these and other ‘barriers’ communion with God would be intimate but certainly not mature or perfect. One of the crucial things that would be missing is a knowledge of and an intimate relationship with the three persons of the Trinity. How can the creature know the trinitarian God unless that God reveal himself to them? As blessed and blissful as the vision of life in the Garden without sin is, there are still some very clear limitations even in this hypothetical world. Ultimate fellowship with the triune God would appear to be impossible given these boundaries to communion.

It is at this point that the force and logic of the primacy of Christ and the concomitant hypothesis of an incarnation irrespective of a fall is felt the strongest. For creatures to fully know God they have to experience God in his trinitarian fullness. That experience would have to be one in which the love of the Father for the Son made possible by the Holy Spirit was personally experienced along with the Son’s loving response to the Father in or by the self-same Spirit. How could this happen without an incarnation? The creature cannot directly participate in the being of God (*theologia* or *energeia*). Without the incarnation of God himself we could only know God in a secondary sense. Without the incarnation we could only experience God in an approximate way. In order to feel and know the love of the Father for the Son by the Holy Spirit we would literally have to *be* or *become* a divine person – specifically the person of the Son, but this is impossible. Likewise, in order to lovingly respond to the Father as the *Son* does by the Holy Spirit we would once again have to literally become *the* Son. But there is only one eternal Son – the one God has revealed as the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unless we commit to a doctrine of *divinization* in which the creature literally becomes divine then reconciliation with God is impossible. However, if the creature is somehow included *in* one of the trinitarian persons, the eternal and incarnate Son, then they could experience this trinitarian love in fullness while remaining human, hence the necessity of stressing the *incarnate* Son. We may further hypothesise what would have happened next. In due time God would have revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by sending his Son to reveal the nature of God. The Father would then have sent the

Holy Spirit through the Son to further reveal the trinitarian being of God. So in the 'fullness of time' (at the right time) God would have sent his Son in the image and likeness of humanity in order to, as Athanasius famously stated, 'become like us so that we may become like him.'⁶⁹

This brings into relief the question: Which trinitarian person could most appropriately be incarnated? Along with various theologians of the tradition we conclude that it was most appropriate for the Son to become incarnate, not the Father or the Holy Spirit; and for various reasons.⁷⁰ In the first place, borrowing an argument from Karl Rahner, it would be inappropriate for the Father to be incarnated as this would go against all that the trinitarian *monarchia* of the Father stands for and would invert the direction of the subsistent relations existing between the trinitarian persons.⁷¹ In the second place, and borrowing an argument from Barth, God has elected to create men and women in his image, an image which is specifically christological. Hence the Son is the one who has *eternally* been determined to become human, not the sending Father or the empowering Spirit.⁷²

As a result of the Son's incarnation knowledge of the trinitarian God is made available thus breaking through the epistemological barrier. The ontological barrier is also overcome through the hypostatic union in the incarnate Son, via his model and example as humans come to participate *in* Christ and *through* Christ in the trinitarian

⁶⁹ Athanasius, *Letter 60, to Adelphus*, 4, in *NPNF*, 2nd series, 4. pp. 1334–1340.

⁷⁰ What is not being argued is the impossibility of the other two divine persons being incarnated. In agreement see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q.23, a. 2., who argues there is nothing that would restrict the possible incarnation of the Father or the Holy Spirit as all three share the same eternal divine nature. Duns Scotus argued along similar lines in his *Opera omnia*, L. III, d. 1, t. 2. Within Scripture we read of the Father and the Spirit's active presence within the creation. The language of Scripture suggests that God the Father can assume finite form within the order of creation (i.e. 'the Ancient of Days,' 'He who sits upon the Throne') — as can the Spirit ('like a dove'). See A. Funkenstein, 'The Body of God in 17th Century Theology and Science,' in *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650–1800*, ed. R.H. Popkin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 150–175; and R.W. Jenson, 'The Body of God's Presence: A Trinitarian Theory,' in *Creation, Christ and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, ed. R.W. A. McKinney (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 85–91.

⁷¹ Rahner goes further and rejects the idea a divine person other than the Son could become incarnate for this would, in his opinion, threaten the axiom that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice-versa. K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1960), 1. p. 203; 4. p. 138; *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1976), p. 213; *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 22–33; and *Theological Investigations* vol. 4: *More Recent Writings*, trans. K. Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 90–107.

⁷² Barth, *CD IV/1*, p. 66. G. O'Collins, 'The Incarnation – The Critical Issues,' in *The Incarnation*, eds. S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 22, overemphasises his point but helpfully concludes: 'In short, where inner-trinitarian relations undoubtedly rule out the possible incarnation of the Father, the economy of salvation succeeds better in ruling out the possible incarnation of the Spirit.'

being of God by the Spirit. It now becomes possible for humans to receive the love of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit and then return that love of and in the Son to the Father by the Holy Spirit. The deeper reality revealed by this incarnational model is that it is only *in* Christ that full participation in God is possible. It is to this end the Spirit baptises, fills, and indwells human persons. It is to this end the Father sends the Son. It is to this end the Son willingly goes and lives his life, the one for the many; and all this regardless of sin or a fall in the first instance. It is this incarnational and relational goal, not simply the forgiveness of human sinfulness, which provides the rationale for the primacy of Christ. Christ came to establish a right relationship between the Creator and the creature, and that necessitated the incarnation of the Son.

By spending some time developing this hypothetical model we end up affirming many of the insights that the New Testament itself asserts as being true according to our post-lapsarian world, a world in which atonement becomes a necessity. For human creatures to participate in the divine nature, according to the promise of 2 Pt 1.4, several barriers are required to be bridged: the ontological; the epistemological; and the relational. Sin has merely frustrated and intensified the disunity between Creator and creature. This does not imply, however, that the incarnational model hypothesised so far is unnecessary. What it does highlight is that this model is fully complementary with the juridical or atonement based model of the incarnation developed almost exclusively in the West. It is our conviction that when the two models — incarnation and atonement — are united they will enable a much fuller and more comprehensive picture of God's revelation, one that stands closer to Scripture as well as Eastern and Western concerns.

Myk Habets
Lecturer in Systematic Theology,
Carey Baptist College,
Auckland,
New Zealand.
Email: myk.habets@carey.ac.nz