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Matthew Rueger

**Individualism in the Christology of Helmut Thielicke's Sermons:
Analysis and Response**

Doctor of Philosophy

2003

Abstract

The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore the difficulty of an individualised christology in the postmodern world and to offer possible avenues for the Church in addressing it. Throughout the thesis we use the example of Helmut Thielicke to demonstrate the nature of an individualistic christology. His sermons are particularly singled out because they serve as the main vehicle through which his christology reached the people.

Thielicke is important to our goals for several reasons. For one, he represents a christological approach that is highly individualistic. Secondly, Thielicke is representative of a shift in the christological paradigm within Lutheranism. Discovering whether that shift is helpful or harmful directly affects how Lutheranism relates in the postmodern world.

The thesis will progress through three stages to accomplish our goals. The first three chapters form the first stage. Their purpose is to establish concrete examples of the way Thielicke's individualised christology affects specific key doctrines in classic Lutheranism, as well as how it impacts the more general areas of Lutheran ecclesiology and sacramental theology.

The second stage involves chapters four and five. The purpose here is to search for additional roots of Thielicke's individualism. Chapter four looks to the influences of both philosophy and secular social thought on Thielicke's christology. Chapter five seeks to find Thielicke's place within the overall development of the individual.

Chapters six and seven form the final stage and represent our response to the kind of individualised christology Thielicke represents. We begin in chapter six by proposing a Theology of Presence as part of the solution to individualism. We conclude in chapter seven offering practical ways this theology can be applied in the postmodern context. Our conclusions will lead us toward the importance of establishing a new metanarrative based on a more corporate form of christology.

**Individualism in the Christology of Helmut Thielicke's
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Matthew Rueger

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Declaration

I confirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. I also confirm that the thesis conforms to the word limit set out in the Degree Regulations.

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Preface

God . . . does not allow us to find him in our thoughts. If we could do this, we would not need God; but because we need him, he has designated a place and a person – showing us where and in what way he ought to be found.

[Martin Luther, (WA 40III:338)]

The basic assumption of classic Lutheranism is that Christ binds himself to physical elements so that we, as limited and fallen creatures, can grasp him. Helmut Thielicke, who was an especially popular Lutheran preacher in Germany following World War Two, did not approach christology with this basic assumption. Instead, he presented a christology that was more subjective in nature, concerned to a greater extent with a spiritual encounter of Christ, and focused more obviously on the individual. The intent of this thesis is to explore the direction of Thielicke's christology and evaluate its applicability in the postmodern world where we live.

Thielicke's sermons offer an especially important focus for our research because it is there in the spoken word where the Church most obviously communicates her christology to the laity. In order to ensure the accuracy of Thielicke's thoughts I have cited the German text whenever his sermons are quoted. Following each German citation I have given the published English translations unless otherwise noted. I have offered my own translation on several occasions because the given published translation was found lacking.

Because Thielicke presents himself as a Lutheran theologian, and because I am myself a Lutheran pastor, exactly how his ideas relate to the broader tradition of Lutheranism is especially important. Throughout this thesis Thielicke's

conclusions are measured back against the standard of classic Lutheranism and Luther himself. References to the American Edition of Luther's Works [55 volumes. Vols. 1-30, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967; Vols. 31-55, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967] will be abbreviated as "LW." References to the standard German collection of Luther's Works, known as the Weimar Ausgabe [127 volumes, 1883] will be shown as "WA." While a great deal of discussion is devoted to Thielicke's relation to Lutheranism, my hope is that the conclusions here reached have application within the broader Christian context.

Being a Christian pastor I am especially concerned for the effectiveness of the christological presentation in the current postmodern world. Thielicke's genius was being able to connect with the common man or woman on the street. His focus was toward the soteriological impact of his christology. This pastoral drive in Thielicke is vital in my own evaluation of his christology. What is of paramount importance is how christology today is going to touch the real daily lives of people caught in the peculiar individualised worldviews of postmodernism.

I am not so bold as to assert that this thesis represents a conclusion to the problem of negative individualism as it is expressed today. What I do hope is that this thesis provides a healthy starting point for the Churches' ongoing struggle to proclaim Christ effectively in a world that seems bent in on itself.

Introduction

The following study of Helmut Thielicke's christology seeks to examine the unique contributions of Thielicke to the field of christology with special reference to his sermons. Thielicke is an especially important subject for christological study because of the impact he has had on Lutheran preaching. While Thielicke has not enjoyed the lasting public recognition of other theologians of his era like Barth, Althaus, or Bonhoeffer, he was a prolific writer and enjoyed great acclaim as a preacher. Churches were filled to overflowing when he preached. This success was evident very early in Thielicke's career, when between 1942 and 1944 he began an experiment with "didactic sermons" aimed at teaching the faith to those unfamiliar with the Church. Immediately at his first Thursday evening didactic sermon in St. Mark's Church in Stuttgart an overflow crowd attended, forcing a change of venue to the nearby cathedral where an estimated three thousand people came to hear him.¹ A little over a decade later in Hamburg the large crowds forced Thielicke to move from the Church of St. James to the more spacious church of St. Michael, where he again regularly filled the three thousand available seats.²

His success as a preacher begs the question "why?" What was unique about his preaching which brought such crowds and what can the Church in the present day glean from him? There seems no reason to disagree with the conclusions of others that his preaching success was largely due to a combination of style and relevancy.

¹ Helmut Thielicke, *Notes from a Wayfarer*, trans. David R. Law (New York: Paragon House, 1995), pp.151-152. In German: *Zu Gast auf einem schoenen Stern*, (Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 1984)

² *Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

Thielicke addressed the real life issues facing the modern German people in a very engaging way. An article in Der Spiegel [December 1955] described Thielicke's preaching as follows:

Er spricht vor Leuten, die ihre Zeitung gelesen haben, über das, was sie in der Zeitung gelesen haben. Er erläutert die Bibelstelle, die an der Reihe ist, mit den Ereignissen, die an der Reihe waren - in der Politik, in der Wirtschaft. Er kennt die Wochenschau, er kennt das Alltagsdeutsch, er kennt den Bündesburger. Er weiß in dieser Welt Bescheid, und er nutzt diese Kenntnis, um sich mit seiner Zuhörerschaft auch über die andere Welt zu unterhalten.³

[My translation: He speaks to people who have read their newspapers about what they have read in those newspapers. He explains the Bible passage for the day in light of current events in politics and in the economy. He knows the newsreels, he knows the daily German language, he knows the West Germans. He knows the information in this world, and he uses this knowledge to talk to his audience about the other world.]

Thielicke's ability to speak to the heart of current issues is reinforced by John W. Doberstein's introduction to Thielicke's The Waiting Father; where Dr. Wilhelm Pauck is quoted as saying, "There's a man who takes you by the scruff of the neck!"⁴ Not only was Thielicke successful in engaging the minds and hearts of the German people but his sermons enjoyed success in other countries as well. This leads to the conclusion that he had his finger on what was vital to humanity throughout the Western world. The fact that no other German Lutheran preacher of Thielicke's era enjoyed the same kind of success is evidence that there was something unique in the content of Thielicke's sermons.

³ "Wohin mit dem Evangelium?" Der Spiegel, 21 Dezember 1955 p. 34.

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, The Waiting Father, trans. John W. Doberstein. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 8.

What then was unique in the content of his sermons? Immediately one notices his stylistic sharpness; his imagery is fresh and he maintains one's interest. Beneath the style there is also great depth of thought that wrestled with some of the most important questions facing humanity. Current in the thought of his generation was the issue of individuality. This was all the more heightened in light of the various utopian views of the time and their corresponding communal philosophies. People were searching to understand who they were as individuals and what that meant for them in relation to God, their fellow human beings, and their government. This ultimately is what drove much of the christology in Thielicke's sermons.

It was also an issue that put Thielicke at odds with the Lutheran Church to which he belonged. By bringing christology more onto the plane of individualism Thielicke moved away from the traditional ecclesiological form of christology as espoused by classical Lutheranism. What this form of christology emphasised was Christ working through the Church via his Word and sacraments.⁵ The Church is both distributor of Christ's salvific work and is itself an expression of Christ's presence.⁶ Thielicke, however, presents a christology that is not ecclesiological in nature but seeks application directly at the level of the individual.

⁵ WA 10^{1,1}:140 "Whoever seeks Christ must first find the Church"

⁶ Ian D. Kingston Siggins, Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 106. "Only Christ, with His word, baptism, and supper, must be all. (These external ordinances are our means of clinging to Christ alone, because in the hands of the Holy Spirit, Who directs only to Christ, they are what we actually have of the man Christ in the Church. To deny them is to deny Him, for they are His.)"

These initial observations have led to several different foci within this thesis. Its main interest is to examine the specifics of how Thieliicke moved toward the individual in his christological presentation and then to explore ways this informs the christological presentation in the postmodern world. We employ the term “postmodern” according to its common usage as a designation for the unique character of present day Western culture. Some of the main features of this culture are its bent toward individualism, its embrace of subjectivism, and the atomisation of community. A more complete analysis of “Postmodernism” is offered in section 5.2.

The role of Thieliicke’s christological method in postmodernism is important because of the way it treats the individual. Obviously what he was saying about the individual captured the interest of the people. What was that, and is it still applicable in the present postmodern context? A secondary interest is the impact this had on classic Lutheranism. The kind of christology that Thieliicke pursued has in fact been taken up by many Lutheran pastors without critical examination of its origin or the impact it has on the Church. This thesis will ask questions about how the classic understanding of Lutheran theology is affected by Thieliicke’s christology and whether or not this is good in light of current cultural concerns.

That being said, it is important for us to define what we mean when we speak of classic Lutheranism. Historically Lutheranism has defined itself by the Confessions found in the Book of Concord. The first of these is the *Augsburg Confession* as delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg on June 25, 1530. Later variations to this confession in the years following 1530 made by its primary author Phillip

Melanchthon caused no little controversy among Lutherans. To distinguish its original confession from the later variations, later Lutheranism began to refer to the original text as the “Unaltered Augsburg Confession,” and it is this version that is considered authoritative. Other defining Confessions of Lutheranism contained in the Book of Concord include the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), the *Smalcald Articles* (1537), *The Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (1537), Luther’s *Small Catechism* (1529), Luther’s *Large Catechism* (1529), and the *Formula of Concord* (1577). Classic Lutheranism, as defined here, is that form of Lutheranism that maintains its subscription to these Confessions.⁷

Use of the term “classic Lutheranism” is not here meant to distinguish a specific “golden era” of Lutheran theology. Instead the term as we use it is meant to speak of that kind of Lutheran doctrine that remains true to its confessional basis. More than simply being at agreement with the letter of the Lutheran Confessions this kind of Lutheranism takes on a definite “incarnational” quality. It flows from the understanding that Christ has bound himself to certain places for the sake of distributing forgiveness; the Word and dominical sacraments bear Christ’s presence, the Eucharist contains the flesh and blood of Christ, and his salvific operation is the primary function of each. We readily admit that within historic Lutheranism this christological binding is emphasised to greater and lesser degrees by various reformers. We will quote Luther throughout this thesis as one who drew constant attention to the salvific action of the christological presence. Yet we also note that the primary author of the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology to the*

⁷ Here too there are two forms of confessional subscription in Lutheranism: *Quantanus* (adherence to the Confessions *in as much* as they agree with Scripture)

Augsburg Confession, Phillip Melanchthon, does not use the same incarnational language. Melanchthon does not disagree with Luther's incarnational direction; he simply does not adopt the same language.

Use of the term "classic Lutheranism" also does not mean to suggest that there was ever a time of complete unity among all Lutherans. After the death of Luther (1546) Lutheranism faced both war (The Smalcald War led by Emperor Charles V on behalf of Pope Paul III) and internal theological division.⁸ The *Formula of Concord*, authored most notably by Martin Chemnitz and James Andreae, helped unite the majority of Lutherans behind a common confession and helped settle the worst of the internal doctrinal controversies.

As we use the term "classic Lutheranism" then, we are identifying a way of thinking that includes consistency with the doctrines of the Lutheran Confessions and is rooted in the broader incarnational christology of the early reformers. Added to what has already been identified as central in this christology one could mention the further importance of Luther's teaching on the forensic sense of Justification and the Lutheran distinction between law and Gospel.⁹

and *Quia* (adherence *because* the Confessions agree with Scripture). The Church body in which I am a member requires a "Quia" subscription of its pastors.

⁸ For a brief summary of these conflicts see: Eugene Klug, Getting into the Formula of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), pp. 9-15. The controversies of this period include disagreements over: Adiaphora, Synergism, Antinomianism, Crypto-Calvinism, Christ's Descent into Hell and Predestination.

⁹ We define classic Lutheranism in these terms while recognising the maturation of Luther's own thought and possible changes in emphasis present in his writings and the writings of the other Reformers.

In that Thieliicke identified himself as Lutheran, it is relevant to ask how he relates to historic Lutheranism. Inasmuch as history can have a cyclical character, where issues that are irrelevant in one age may return to relevance several generations later, it is important to evaluate both Thieliicke and Postmodernism in light of earlier "classical" views. As an example, the way classic Lutheranism promoted the christological community was not seen as particularly relevant to Thieliicke in his era. Thieliicke's greater concern was leading the individual to a personal encounter with Christ. Yet now in the postmodern context where individualism has bred extreme subjectivism and has led to fragmentation of moral and spiritual standards, reconsideration of earlier more corporate models of christology gains greater urgency.

Thieliicke's approach to christology must then be examined both as to his treatment of the Lutheran tradition of which he was a part and in light of current world conditions. Since values and the social consciousness have changed from Thieliicke's day, it follows that his christological presentation will require adjustment for the postmodern context. Beside the scholarly interest in dissecting Thieliicke's method there is also a pastoral interest throughout this thesis in finding more effective ways to present christology for the good of the overall Church at present.

This thesis will progress through seven chapters to achieve these goals. In the first chapter we will show specific examples of how Thieliicke draws attention to the individual through the christology of his sermons. It is necessary at the outset to show the variety of expressions for his individual christology so that we can

establish the centrality of individualism to his overall method. The second chapter will show how his individualistic christology impacts his ecclesiology. Since our concluding response to Thielicke's method directly involves the role of the christological community the impact of individualism on ecclesiology is of central importance. Chapter three will explore the type of sacramental theology that formed around Thielicke's individualised christology. We maintain that sacramental theology holds important value in presenting christology to a postmodern culture.

Our concern in chapter four is the variety of influences that pressed Thielicke toward his unique christological approach. To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his christology for Postmodernism it is necessary to understand what elements in his more modernistic German culture were important in shaping his thought. Next we will examine how Thielicke's individualism fits into the broader context of the developing individual. That form of individualism shaping Thielicke's christology in the years around World War Two was part of a long evolution of thought about the individual. Knowing how the individual has progressed will help us formulate a response. In chapter six we begin moving toward solutions to the problem of an individualistic christology in a culture that takes individualism to extremes. We will offer our own solution to the problem under the title of a "Theology of Presence." This solution will attempt to bring postmodern christology more in line with the corporate elements of classic Lutheranism that Thielicke ignored and will lay the foundation for a greater appreciation of the corporate element in biblical christology. In the final chapter we

will take up the strengths of Thielicke and attempt to show how the Church can better meet his goals as she relates to postmodern people.

Chapter 1

Thielicke's Individualistic Christology: Appeal and Limitations

Thielicke's christological presentation saw some changes in emphasis over his years as a preacher. Early sermons in war-torn Germany¹⁰ obviously would identify different problems in the hearers' lives and therefore different applications of the Gospel than later sermons in the peaceful surroundings of St. Michael's in Hamburg¹¹. Yet despite the differences in emphasis one can still find a consistent thread running throughout his career tying earlier expressions of christology to later expressions. That thread is the relationship between believer and Saviour as a matter of a personal individual encounter.

The goal of this chapter is to show ways that individualism shaped Thielicke's application of christology in some of the more central doctrines of Lutheranism. Five main sections will explore different themes showing movement toward the individual. Both difficulties and positive influences inherent in Thielicke's christological approach will be discussed.

¹⁰ As an example: the sermons found in Our Heavenly Father [German title: Das Gebet das die Welt umspannt (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1964)] were preached in 1944 at the close of WW II.

¹¹ An example of these sermons is found in How to Believe Again [German title: Und Wenn Gott Ware: Reden uber die Frage nach Gott (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1970)]

1.1 Key Concepts Reinterpreted

As Thielicke brings his personal focus into his overall theological system, one finds that individualism redefines a number of important doctrinal suppositions of classic Lutheranism.

1.1a Guilt Rather Than Sin

Christology can be seen as the resolution of the most profound of human problems. What problems the preacher identifies will directly shape the christological presentation. Thielicke's sermons contain a heavy emphasis on "guilt" ("Schuld") as one of the underlying human problems.

Evidence seems to suggest that Thielicke's use of "Schuld" represents a conscious decision to avoid the term "Sünde." An especially important discussion of this is found in Thielicke's Trouble with the Church where he singles out the word "sin" as an example of theological jargon that has lost its effective meaning:

Have we not gone through times like the period of Rationalism, times of ethical reinterpretation of Christianity, which have produced a complete moralization of the concept of sin [Sündenbegriffs]? Where is the average person today who, when he hears the word 'sin,' [Sünde] really hears what the New Testament meant by that word? For whom today does this word still say that here man is being addressed at the point of his resistance and opposition to God, that this means man in his will to assert his autonomy [Selbstherrlichkeit], his insistence that everything centers in man, his incredible passion for security, his lostness in preoccupation with the moment and that which is tangible and immediately at hand? And yet all this must be heard when we hear the word 'sin,' . . .¹²

¹² Helmut Thielicke, The Trouble with the Church, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 36.

As the above quotation demonstrates Thielicke's avoidance of the term "Sünde" is linked directly to what he perceives as the word's loss of meaning with regard to personal accountability. The above words were first published in 1965 but this tendency to avoid the term "sin" (Sünde) and instead focus on "guilt" ("Schuld") is evidenced in sermons written much earlier in his career.

Part of the difficulty in discussing "sin" vs. "guilt" in the sermons of Thielicke is the fact that "Schuld" can be translated as "sin" or "guilt." and often is translated "sin" by Thielicke's premier translator David Doberstein. The following example shows the difficulty:

Unser aller *Schuld* bildet gleichsam - so darf man die biblische Schau der Dinge wohl ausdrücken - ein gewaltiges Kraftfeld. Alles, was in dieses Kraftfeld tritt, wird in den großen Störungs - Zersetzungsprozeß einbezogen, und die schrecklich Krämpfe, die heute unsere gepeinigte Erde schütteln, drängen sich auch dem, der nicht die ganze Tiefe biblischer Erkenntnis besitzt, in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der *Schuld* auf - sehr oft nicht mit einer bestimmten, faßbaren und protokollierbaren *Schuld*, sondern eben mit jener *Schuld* im letzten Hintergrund, mit jener *Schuld*, von der alle Menschen immer schon herkommen.¹³

[translation: (Doberstein) The *guilt* that we all share constitutes, as it were, a tremendous magnetic field and everything that enters into this field is drawn into this massive process of disorder and decay. And the connection between *sin* and the terrible convulsions that shake our tormented earth today forces itself even upon the minds of those who do not possess the full depth of biblical insight. And very often the connection is not with a definite, tangible, registrable *sin*, but precisely with this *sin* in the ultimate background, the *sin* that lies behind every man ever born on this earth.¹⁴]

¹³ Das Gebet, p. 22.

¹⁴ Helmut Thielicke, Our Heavenly Father, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 26.

Doberstein seems aware of the difficulty translating “Schuld” with a comment he makes as a note at the beginning of his translation of Thielicke’s sermon, “Forgive us our Debts . . .” in Our Heavenly Father. Doberstein writes “Here the word *Schuld*, which can be translated as “debt,” “guilt,” “sin,” “trespass,” etc., necessitates a choice that fits the context.”¹⁵ Using the above sermon as an example, “Schuld” is translated as “guilt” twenty-five times; as “debt” (mostly in the formula “Vergib uns unsere Schuld”) eight times; as “sin” three times; “misery” once, “offense” once, and “fault” twice. The variety of possible translations and contextual considerations for each case makes defining “Schuld” in specific terms impossible.

It may well be that “Schuld” was a safer word to use as Thielicke sought to reach those unfamiliar with the Church and her “faith language.” “Sünde” becomes a “Church word” that may lead those of a more secular persuasion to dismiss the term without serious concern. “Schuld” with its variety of definitions presents more readily acceptable idea of the human problem for those of a more secular orientation. Additionally Thielicke’s free use of “Schuld” and limited use of “Sünde” involves his attempt at personalising mankind’s shortcomings.

A general observation of Thielicke’s sermons shows an approach to the whole topic of human sin that describes the particular sin at issue (envy, doubt, worry, squandering blessings, false piety, lust, thirst for power, etc.) while avoiding the term “Sünde”. This practice seems compatible with his concerns over personalising sin. A comment Thielicke makes in Und wenn Gott wäre reinforces

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

this idea: “Wenn man einmal verstanden hat, was in unserem Leben nicht in Ordnung ist, dann stehen wir vor Gott allein - ganz allein. Denn Schuld isoliert immer.”¹⁶ [My translation: “When once we understand what is not in order in our lives, then we stand before God alone - all alone. Because guilt always isolates.”] Thieliicke’s desire in his general treatment of sin is to isolate the individual in his or her particular problem. This isolation serves to force the individual to take responsibility for his or her own failings, and it is there at the level of one’s realisation of self that the Christ encounter takes place.

1.1b The Cosmogonic Premise of Guilt

Thieliicke frames his discussion of the human problem in terms of the “cosmogonic premise” of guilt. The term “cosmogonic” is derived from the idea of the divine formation of cosmological material. Thieliicke explains:

This cosmogonic premise consists in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the creation of the universe from nothing. The point of this doctrine lies in the affirmation that God the Creator did not make use of already existing, curse-encumbered matter which he then formed into a cosmos. . . if creation is thus understood to mean *creatio ex nihilo*, then man caught in the toils of guilt can no longer claim that he is the victim of a flaw in the material of which the creation is made. He is deprived of the pathos that attaches to the tragic victim. . . . Thus *creatio ex nihilo* says in mythical cipher-language that man must say “I” to himself as a whole and undivided being and that he is fixed to himself.¹⁷

Guilt then becomes a matter of self-realisation. It is the personalising of sin. Thus the cosmogonic premise is concerned first of all with removing the blame for mankind’s fallen condition from God and placing it firmly on the shoulders of the

¹⁶ Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 36.

¹⁷ Helmut Thieliicke, The Freedom of the Christian Man, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), pp. 20-21.

individual. A second concern in this premise has to do with God's creation of "self" and one's inability to be one's self. This too is related to the issue of personal responsibility but goes beyond it to self-determination. As one tries to exercise "selfhood" he or she is removed from God. Thieliicke draws attention to this as he explains his cosmogonic premise of justification.

The cosmogonic premise of the doctrine of justification may therefore be formulated as follows: I have received my self from the hands of God, and what is more, received it exclusively from God, without any co-operation of the elements of the world; therefore I must give my self back to him in the same state in which I received it. The discovery that I cannot do this, that I am incapable of "reporting back" in the original state in which I received my self, fixes and binds me down to the same state of being which we found to be the starting point of the doctrine of justification, namely, that I have lost the freedom to be my self; there is a rift in the original relationship between man and God, a loss of 'peace' which I do not have the freedom to restore. The liberation to a new 'ability to be' must come from outside my self, from the other side. What is needed is the freedom of grace and thus to peace which the world cannot give.¹⁸

As Thieliicke discusses the cosmogonic premise of guilt his main concern seems to be personal responsibility. He wants individuals to recognise that the original creation was good, mankind is now bad, and God cannot be blamed for using poor materials. However, where justification is concerned, the cosmogonic premise seems to go to the issue of loss of self. God created the self to be good, mankind's exercise of self is corrupt, the only hope of restoring the lost self is through alien freedom.

This cosmogonic premise of guilt is a recurring theme in Thieliicke's sermons. It is not the main theme relating to the human problem, but it does occur in a number

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

of his sermons. The most common example of this misguided human autonomy is found in the recurring example of the prodigal son.

Die Freunde und die lieben Mitmenschen denken, wenn sie ihn so sehen: ein imponierender, freier Mann, unabhängig von seinem sonst so einflußreichen alten Herrn! Er fragt nicht nach Grundsätzen und nicht nach Erziehung, er ist der Typ des souveränen Herrenmenschen, das Urbild der Autonomie.

Aber er, der verlorene Sohn, der seinen Zustand von innen sieht, weiß es anders. Die Außenwelt sieht nur die Fassade und das, was in den Schaufenstern dieses verpfuschten Lebens ausgelegt ist. *Er* aber hört das Klirren der unsichtbaren Ketten, in denen er geht, unter denen er zu stöhnen beginnt. . . .

“*Ich* wollte frei werden”, so spricht der verlorene Sohn nun zu sich selber – vielleicht *schreit* er es auch heraus -, “*ich* wollte ich selbst werden; und das alles meinte ich zu gewinnen, indem ich mich vom Vater und von meinem Ursprung löste, ich Narr! Nur Ketten habe ich gefunden.”¹⁹

[translation: (Doberstein) His friends and others when they look at him think: “What an imposing, free man, so independent of his otherwise very influential old man! He pays no attention to principles or education; he’s the very type of the sovereign ‘superman,’ the prototype of autonomy,”

But he, the prodigal son, who sees his condition from the inside, knows differently. The world outside sees only the façade and what is put in the show window of this botched-up life. But he hears the rattle of the invisible chains in which he walks and they are beginning to make him groan. . . .

“I wanted to be free,” says the prodigal son to himself – perhaps he cries it aloud, “I wanted to become myself; and I thought I would get all this by cutting myself off from my father and my roots, fool that I am! I have found nothing but chains.”²⁰]

¹⁹ Helmut Thielicke, Das Bilderbuch Gottes: Reden über die Gleichnisse Jesu (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1957), pp. 25-26.

²⁰ The Waiting Father, pp. 25-26.

Thielicke references the parable of the prodigal son in nearly all his books. When he does it is often related to misguided autonomy. In other volumes Thielicke connects this specifically to Nazi Germany. He confronts the German people who either sympathised with or were part of the Nazi party and accuses them of having participated in this godless autonomy. One finds Thielicke using expressions like: “one’s own self-seeking and megalomania” (seiner Eigensucht, seines Größenwahns²¹). The observation of godless autonomy remained with Thielicke as part of his understanding of guilt in his later sermons as well.²²

1.1c Original Sin Personalised

Within classic Lutheranism the doctrine of original sin features prominently. Original sin (Ersünde) is treated under the second article of the *Augsburg Confession* and in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*; it is discussed as the first article under the third part of the *Smalcald Articles*, as the first article in the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord*, and the first article in the *Solid Declaration*. “Ersünde” is central to the classic Lutheran understanding of the human condition. Original sin is by its nature collective sin and while it infects the individual, it is used more to explain the general corruption of all people. It is significant for this discussion of Thielicke’s tendencies toward individualism that the doctrine of original sin finds little expression in his sermons. There are several references but they account for very little of his overall teaching on sin; where they do occur

²¹ Das Gebet, p. 57.

²² Cf. Helmut Thielicke, I Believe: The Christian Creed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 5. “I must also despairingly take charge of my own life; I must be my own creator, a self-creator. In place of an eternal authority and immutable commandments, I have: a program which I myself devise; human, all too human ideologies; and, finally, the dogma of the superman.”

Thielicke's hesitancy to use the term "Sünde" is again apparent. In Das Gebet Das Die Welt Umspannt Thielicke makes reference to "Urschuld"²³ ("original guilt"), "Zeichen der Unordnung und des Risses, der mitten durch die Schöpfung geht"²⁴ ("A sign of the disorder and fracture that runs through the midst of creation"), "Unser aller Schuld bildet gleichsam"²⁵ ("the formation of all our guilt so to speak"), ". . . jener Schuld im letzten Hintergrund"²⁶ ("that offence in the final background"), "jener Schuld, von der alle Menschen immer schon herkommen"²⁷ ("the guilt of every person always drawing near"), and "der ganzen Welt Schuld"²⁸ ("the guilt of the whole world"). When these citations are viewed in the context of his overall proclamation of sin, one can see that they play only a minor role. The shift in terminology serves to demonstrate by silence that Thielicke's focus moves away from collective concepts of sin and toward more personal models for sin.

1.1d Justification Given a More Personal Emphasis

Thielicke's focus on the self as the seat of guilt leads naturally to a soteriological focus beginning at the self. To demonstrate Thielicke's unique approach to christology it is necessary to offer comparisons with classic Lutheranism and its confession of justification. Admittedly the issue of autonomy and individualism

²³ Das Gebet, p. 25, and is spoken of in terms of the "world's sin" pp. 26, 91, 104.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

were not major issues of debate in theology until the enlightenment, but this is not to say that classic Lutheranism did not address the individual in its treatment of justification. The point of departure in Thielicke is not merely that he addresses individualism in his “cosmogonic premise of justification” and classic Lutheranism does not, but rather how Thielicke shapes the article of justification around the individual as its core.

The classic Lutheran formula for the doctrine of justification is found in *Augsburg Confession* Article IV, and reads as follows:

Weiter wird gelehrt, daß wir Vergebung der Sünden und Gerechtigkeit vor Gott nicht erlangen mögen durch unser Verdienst, Werke und Genugtun, sondern daß wir Vergebung der Sünden bekommen und vor Gott gerecht werden aus Gnaden, um Christus' willen, durch den Glauben, so wir glauben, daß Christus für uns gelitten hat, und daß uns um seinetwillen die Sünden vergeben, Gerechtigkeit und ewiges Leben geschenkt wird. Denn diesen Glauben will Gott für Gerechtigkeit vor ihm halten und zurechnen, wie St. Paulus sagt zu den Römern am 3 und 4.²⁹

[My translation: Furthermore it is taught that we may not acquire forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God through our service, work and sufficient deeds, but that we receive forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake, through faith; so we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake, forgiveness of sins, righteousness and everlasting life, are given to us. Then God will hold and count this faith for righteousness before him, as St. Paul said to the Romans in chapters 3 and 4.]

²⁹ Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 44.

One could argue that the references to faith within this article of the *Augsburg Confession* imply a personal concept of justification.³⁰ But influencing the Lutheran Confession's discussion of faith is the broader view of justification under which faith is subsumed. Within confessional Lutheranism the objective nature of justification is stressed as the foundation for a more subjective justification by personal faith. In classic Lutheranism objective justification means that Christ died to forgive the sins of the world, not just of the elect, and because of that universal sacrifice which did cover the sins of all people subjective faith becomes possible. Though the sins of the world are considered forgiven, classic Lutheranism does not understand this objective justification to convey a universalistic salvation; personal faith is still seen as paramount. But this personal faith was not the foundation of Christ's justifying work. Thus mixed with references to the necessity of personal faith, the Lutheran Confessions consistently point to Christ's work as collective or objective in nature:

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV

... but the promise of the remission of sins and of justification has been given us for Christ's sake, who was given for us in order that He might make satisfaction for the sins of the world . . .³¹

Solid Declaration Art. XI

Therefore if we wish to consider our eternal election to salvation with profit, we must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that, as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24,47 ; For this reason Christ has commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations. For God love the world and gave His Son, John 3,16. Christ bore the sins of the world, John 1,29, gave His flesh for the life of the

³⁰ The personal nature of faith in justification is especially clear in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Cf. Tappert, p. 117ff. "We Obtain the Forgiveness of Sins Only by Faith in Christ."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

world, John 6,51; His blood is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 1,7; 2,2.³²

Smalcald Articles Part 2, Art. I, para. 1-3

The first and chief article is this, That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4,25. And He alone is the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world, (*Welt Sünde*) John 1,29; and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all, (*unser aller Sünde*) Is. 53,6. Likewise: All have sinned (*Sie sind allzumal Sünder*) and are justified without merit [freely, and without their own works or merits] by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood.³³

Other scholars have suggested that this collective or “objective” emphasis of justification forms the basis for any individual or subjective applications.³⁴ As an example from my own Church body of how the justification of the individual flows from the justification of the collective consider the following:

When God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, He absolved us with the world from sin, justified us, before we came into being. As ideal persons, as it were, existing solely in God’s thoughts, we were justified. Then the single individual, looking at it *in concreto*, conceived and born in sin, becomes *actu* a child of God in that hour when he believes the Gospel.³⁵

Personal justification is possible only inasmuch as the world has itself been justified according to classic Lutheranism. Thieliicke turns the classic Lutheran

³² Ibid., p. 1071. (Tappert, p. 620 para. 28)

³³ Ibid., p. 461.

³⁴ An argument made by Ken Schurb in Does the Lutheran Confessions’ Emphasis on Subjective Justification Mitigate Their Teaching of Objective Justification? (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press) p. 15ff. Cf. the many references to objective justification as sited in Robert Preus, Justification as Taught by Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press).

³⁵ Theodore Engelder, Objective Justification: A series of three articles by Dr. Theodore Engelder from “Concordia Theological Monthly” July, August, September 1933 (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981), pp. 516-517. In the above quotation he is citing George Stoeckhardt, another Lutheran theologian of the same era.

sense of justification around when he begins at the level of the individual and only then moves to more collective applications. He does this both when speaking of the human problem and when speaking of the justifying solution.

Darum muß ich bei allem, was über die Weltschuld zu sagen ist, bei mir persönlich und bei meiner eigenen Schuld beginnen. . . . und bei dem die Sanierung der Welt zu beginnen hat.³⁶

[translation: (Doberstein) I must therefore begin with myself and my own guilt whenever there is anything to be said about the world's guilt . . . the sanitation of the world must begin with me.³⁷]

And,

. . . daß er das Weltenheil und das Weltgericht an die ganz persönliche Geschichtet bindet, die du und ich mit ihm eingehen sollen. . . . daß "ich" and daß "mein Herz" der Ort sein sollen, wo das Neue, das ganz Neue, wo das "Weltenheil" beginnen soll.

[translation: (Doberstein) . . . he binds up the salvation and the judgment of the world with the utterly personal relationship which you and I should have with him. . . . 'I' and 'my heart' should be the place where the new world begins.³⁸]

In addition to the objective beginning point for justification in classic Lutheranism is a distinctively "forensic" sense to justification. God declares people righteousness by judicial action. Robert Preus explains:

. . . the Law pronounces the sentence of condemnation upon him, a sentence written with the finger of God. Now God does not justify the ungodly through some error, like a judge who passes a verdict when he has not examined or acquainted himself sufficiently with a case. . . . No, God cannot take back His decision of condemnation which is revealed in the Law unless He has been given satisfaction (Matt. 5:18) If God is to justify, justice and satisfaction are required. Luther correctly said, God remits no sin unless satisfaction has been rendered for it to the Law . . . and yet the righteousness of the Law must be fulfilled in the one to be justified (Rom.8:4) - it is necessary

³⁶ Das Gebet, p. 110.

³⁷ Our Heavenly Father, p. 105.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

that a foreign righteousness intervene. . . And by virtue of this righteousness and its being imputed to him he is justified, that is absolved from the sweeping sentence of condemnation, and he receives the decree of life eternal.³⁹

The judicial and “declaratory” aspects of justification again suggest a more corporate nature to justification. The sinner is declared righteous through the Word and absolution spoken by the pastor⁴⁰ and through the sacraments received in the Church.⁴¹ The divine declaration requires a vehicle, which in turn most properly involves one or more additional people. This is not to say that Thielicke completely ignored the role of the other in forensic justification.⁴² Rather, he allows what was primary in classic Lutheranism to become secondary in his system. Replacing the classic Lutheran emphasis on both the forensic nature of justification and its objective basis Thielicke brings the focus to bear on the personal spiritual meeting of Christ and miscreant. This spiritualising of justification implies a lesser role for the community of faith. The individual “sees” Christ or “comes to know” him through personal struggle and by that meeting on the level of self finds renewal.

³⁹ Robert Preus, Justification as Taught by Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press) quoting Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologica*, II. 251). Cf. “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” Tappert, p. 188, para. 48.

⁴⁰ Cf. “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” Art. XII, Penitence, Tappert, pp. 197ff. “Confession and Satisfaction.”

⁴¹ Cf. “Luther’s Small Catechism,” Tappert, p. 351; “The Sacrament of the Altar,” para. 7 & 8.

⁴² An example of Thielicke mentioning this aspect of Justification is found in I Believe: The Christian Creed, p. 53 “He speaks a word of efficacious power, which in the very speaking becomes a deed. ‘Your sins are forgiven!’”

1.2 Personal Rather than Ecclesiological Encounter

As stated above Thielicke directs his hearers toward a primarily “spiritual” or “inner/personal” encounter with Christ. He does this by avoiding language that might locate Christ at any tangible place. The christological encounter is explained through metaphor and left to one’s own private experience. The following two examples from Thielicke’s sermons serve to demonstrate this. While numerous examples could be cited, these were chosen to represent typical elements in his method.

In this first example Thielicke applies justification to those caught in the prodigal son’s guilt.

Ihr habt recht, wenn ihr euch verloren gebt. Aber seht: Nun ist etwas geschehen, was nichts mit diesem eurem Herzen zu tun hat, was euch einfach bereitet ist. Nun ist das Reich Gottes mitten unter euch, nun ist das Vaterhaus weit geöffnet. Und ich – ich bin die Tür, ich bin der Weg, ich bin das Leben, ich bin die Hand des Vaters. Wer mich sieht, der sieht den Vater. Und was seht ihr denn, wenn ihr mich seht? Ihr seht jemanden, der zu euch in die Tiefe gekommen ist, wo ihr nicht in die Höhe konntet. Ihr seht, daß Gott .>also< die Welt geliebt hat, daß er mich, seinen Sohn, in diese Tiefe hineingab, daß er sich’s etwas kosten ließ, euch zu helfen, daß es durch Schmerzen Gottes ging, daß Gott etwas gegen sich selbst unternehmen mußte, um mit eurer Schuld fertig zu werden, um den Abgrund zwischen euch und sich Ernst zu nehmen und ihn doch zu überbrücken. Das alles seht ihr, wenn ihr mich anschaut!

. . . Geht er nicht den Verlorenen nach? Ist er nicht bei uns, wenn wir sterben müssen und die anderen alle zurückbleiben? Ist er nicht das Licht, das in der Finsternis scheint? Ist er nicht die Herzstimme des Vaters, die uns mitten in der Fremde überfällt, überfällt mit jener fröhlichen Nachricht: Du darfst heimkommen?⁴³

[translation: (Doberstein) You are right when you give yourself up as lost. But look, now something has happened that has nothing to

⁴³ Das Bilderbuch Gottes, pp. 29-30

do with your heart, that is simply given to you. Now the kingdom of God is among you, now the father's house is wide open. {1} And I - I am the door, I am the way, I am the life, I am the hand of the Father. {2} Whoever sees me sees the Father. And then what do you see when you see me? You see someone who is coming to you in the depths because you could not go to the heights. You see that God 'so' loved the world that he gave me, his Son, into these depths, that it cost him something to help you, that it went through the suffering of God, that God had to attempt something contrary to himself in order to put an end to your guilt, to earnestly seize upon the gulf between you and himself and then bridge it over. All this you see when you look at me! {3}

. . . does he not go after the lost ones? Is he not by us when we must die and leave all others behind? Is he not the light that shines in the darkness? Is he not the voice of the Father's heart that overtakes us in the midst of the foreign land, overtakes us with such happy news, "You can come home.!" {4} ⁴⁴

[numbers in brackets added for reference]

Thielicke's use of language is as important for what it does not say as for what it actually does say. He does not locate the christological meeting within any ecclesiological vehicles. There are references to an unspecified presence of Christ's kingdom and to the Father's house being open {1} but how the miscreant is placed within them is not told. There is also no further explanation as to how Christ's kingdom is among us; it just is.

Thielicke's language is full of examples of biblical metaphors, thus {2} "I am the door, I am the way, etc." These metaphors are often left without explanation as a means of forcing the individual to draw his or her own application. His use of metaphor will become important when we formulate our response to individualism at the conclusion of this thesis. For now, our concern is that Thielicke's intent is to

⁴⁴ The Waiting Father, pp. 28-29.

use undefined and “open-ended” metaphors as a device to engage individuals in their subjective understanding of the Christ encounter.

In {3} Thielicke speaks of “seeing” Christ as a way of grasping the incarnation as an act of brotherly love and solidarity. This seeing involves understanding the cross and divine suffering (traditional Lutheran themes). But again Thielicke avoids locating this “vision” of Christ in anything tangible within the Church. The seeing he has in mind is spiritual in nature, subjective, personal, and by all indications can be accomplished without mention of the Church. His concern is that “seeing” impacts one at the depth of one’s own experience and is only understood from that individual life experience, not from a more collective experience of grace.

At {4} Thielicke again demonstrates the use of open metaphor. Christ is the “voice of the Father” and the “light that shines in the darkness.” The images are consistent with biblical imagery but do not necessarily help direct the hearer to any location where he or she can receive christological justification. The language used lays the emphasis on a private emotional engagement with God’s heart.

The second example is as follows:

Der Schwerpunkt in dieser seiner Qual lag ganz woanders: Das, was die Menschen ihm Böses taten, war doppelt schrecklich für ihn, weil er alles messen mußte an dem, wozu sie *eigentlich* bestimmt waren. .
..

Sie durften Kinder im Hause seines Vaters sein und trieben sich doch in der Fremde herum; sie waren lieber Knechte bei fremden

Herren. Ihnen war das große gut der Freiheit zgedacht, und sie verstrickten sich statt dessen in finsternen Leidenschaften.⁴⁵

Hier aber ist einer, der dies alles von mir weiß und der trotzdem nicht irre an mir wird, sondern der mir sagt: Gerade für solche Leute bin ich da. Ich leide *mit* dir, wenn du an dir selber leidest.⁴⁶

Jesus von Nazareth mit dem Herzen finden, das heißt aber, dieses Herz selber schlagen hören und sich davon anrühren lassen, daß es ihm ganz allein um *mich* geht, daß es ihm *so* sehr um mich geht, als ob es nur mich allein auf der ganzen Welt gäbe, und daß er sich an mir zu Tode liebt. Dann plötzlich, wenn mich dies anrührt, wird das Inkognito gelüftet, und ich stehe der Majestät des Gottessohnes gegenüber. Dann sind meine Ketten zerbrochen, dann weiß ich überhaupt erst, in welchen Fesseln ich lag, dann erfahre ich, was das Leben zu sein vermag und was es heißt, der Lasten ledig zu sein und eine Freiheit zu gewinnen, die mich schwindeln macht.⁴⁷

[My translation: The focal point of his (Jesus') agony lies completely elsewhere – namely, that what evil things people did to him were doubly frightening because he must measure it all against that for which they were really meant to be . . .

They might have been children in their Father's house but they roamed about in a foreign country. They would rather be slaves under foreign masters. The great goodness of freedom was intended for them, and instead they ensnared themselves in dark passions.

But here is One who knows all this about me and in spite of it is not angry with me. Rather he says to me, "I am there for just such people. I sorrow with you when you sorrow over yourself."

To find Jesus of Nazareth with the heart means to hear that very heart beating and to allow myself to be touched by the fact that it beats for me all alone - that it beats so much for me, it is as if I were the only one on earth, and that he loves me to death. Then suddenly, when this touches me, the *incognito* is lifted and I stand face to face before the majesty of the Son of God. Then my chains are broken and for the first time I know completely in what fetters I have lain.

⁴⁵ Helmut Thielicke, Woran Ich glaube: Der Grund christlicher Gewissheit (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1965), p. 140.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

Then I learn what life can be like and what it means to be rid of the burden and to win a freedom that to me has been dwindling away.^{48]}

The first paragraph of this example demonstrates the link to cosmogonic guilt. The human problem is loss of self – inability to be “what people were really meant to be.” The second paragraph shows the beginning of Thieliicke’s resolution of the human problem. Christ knows what mankind really is and still comes to be with such people. His presence “with us” is spiritual, and as the final paragraph of this example demonstrates, it is personal and individual as well -- “it is as if I were the only one on earth.” Within the final paragraph one finds the use of metaphor as the main christological proclamation: “to find Jesus . . . means to hear that very heart beating . . . to allow myself to be touched.” It seems clear that Thieliicke intends this spiritual “touching” and “hearing” to convey the truth of Christ’s redemptive love, but once more the application is spiritualised. The “hearing” and “feeling the touch” are inner events within each individual heart and no mention is made of coming to them through the Church.

It should be noted that within this sermon Thieliicke makes two references to “objective” justification - that is, Christ was “damit seine Schultern unter die Last der Weltschuld zu stemmen”⁴⁹ [“lifting the weight of the world’s guilt upon his shoulders”] and appears as “der Hieland der Welt im Inkognito” [“Saviour of the world *incognito*.”]⁵⁰ Both mentions of this more traditional theme are brief and

⁴⁸ Anderson’s translation is found in I Believe The Christian’s Creed, pp. 103-104, 105, 107. I’ve used my own translation because of lack of precision especially in the final paragraph.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

certainly cannot be said to play a significant role in the primary christological focus of the sermon.

In the above examples the question of how Christ meets the individual to reconcile his or her misguided autonomy is left hidden by the language of metaphor. Any mention of the Church as the place where one finds the christological solution is avoided. There are a variety of images used to convey the idea of a reconciling christological encounter on a spiritual level, but the question of “how” is not clarified by Thieliicke as it is by classic Lutheranism. As we have mentioned previously, the very forensic nature of justification in classic Lutheranism answers the “how.” Justification is tied to the act of declaration -- thus the “Word” is the how and the Word is corporate. Christ is not heard in an inner voice but heard by the ears of those who listen to the preacher. Thieliicke takes the external declaration of the Word common to classic Lutheranism and turns it inward, so that instead of justification being worked through the ear via declaration it is worked directly in the heart via spiritual encounter or realisation. The language explaining this encounter is deliberately vague so that each may make unique applications as his or her personal situation necessitates. Thieliicke, in speaking of the christological encounter says: “The man who has experienced Christ knows that it happens today and every day exactly as it did to those who saw Him face to face.”⁵¹ Again it is a meeting on a personal spiritual level that becomes the primary form of Christ encounter.

⁵¹ The Waiting Father, p. 53.

1.3 Solidarity Used to Reinforce Individualism

As Thieliicke develops his presentation of the encounter with the spiritual Christ, one of the main themes to which he returns is solidarity. “Solidarity” involves a spiritual bond of understanding and sympathy. It is also a concept that lends itself well to an individualised christology. Christ is in solidarity with each person at his or her own unique level and each can experience this christological solidarity in his or her own way.

As Thieliicke develops this idea one can see it expressed in a variety of ways; Thieliicke speaks of “brotherhood,” “comradery,” Christ “in the depths,” and Christ “with us.” Often these expressions occur together without differentiation, suggesting that for Thieliicke there is no substantial difference between them. One can also see how broad the impact of christological solidarity is on his overall theology. In the subsections that follow this penchant for using solidarity to express a number of different individualistic notions will be explored. Those volumes that best demonstrate variants in the solidarity theme will be examined in chronological order.

1.3a Solidarity with Suffering as a Personal Experience

The first published volume of Thieliicke’s sermons was Das Gebet das die Welt umspannt, published in 1953 (In English as Our Heavenly Father in 1960). The date of these sermons falls during the declining years of World War Two.

Naturally one will notice solidarity themes directed toward the special suffering of a war-torn people. Christ “in the depths” is a Christ who is one with the most severe

human suffering. One can see the principle of solidarity related to both physical and psychological pain.

Ihr, meine Menschenbrüder, lebt in einer Welt der Wunden, der Krankheiten und Kriege, und ich höre, wie ihr hadert mit eurem Vater und meinem Vater . . .

Aber nun seht, wie das alles, was euch quält und in eurem Munde zur Anklage wird, meinem Vater und eurem Vater nahegeht. *Eure* Schmerzen sind *seine* Schmerzen; stände ich sonst unter euch? Er schickt mich ja mitten in eure Schmerzen:

Jede Wunde, auf die ich meine heilende Hand lege, hat erst tausendmal in mir selbst gebrannt, jeder Dämon, den ich austreibe, hat mich selber angegrinst, und jedesmal bin ich den Tod, den ich austreibe, selber gestorben und habe meinen eigenen Leib zerreißen und in die Erde betten lassen. Wer unter euch leidet denn, und ich hätte nicht mitgelitten? Wer von euch muß sterben, und ich wäre nicht mitgestorben? Ich bin der Kamerad und Bruder aller eurer Schmerzen und Schicksale.⁵²

[translation: (Doberstein) You, my human brothers, live in a world of wounds and sickness and war, and I hear you complaining and quarreling with your Father and my Father. . . .

But look, don't you see that everything that torments you and makes you complain grieves my Father and your Father? Your sorrows are his sorrows; otherwise would I be standing here among you? He has sent me into the midst of your sorrows. . . .

Every wound I lay my healing hand upon has ached a thousand times in me; every demon I cast out has leered at me; I died the death that I myself defeated; I let my own body be torn and buried in the earth. Who among you suffers and I do not suffer with you? Who among you dies and I do not die with you? I am your comrade and brother in every pain, whatever your lot may be.⁵³]

Here themes of “brotherhood” and “with you” (“mitgelitten,” and “mitgestorben”) are presented side by side with Christ as our “comrade”. This solidarity represents a spiritual encounter between Christ and the individual

⁵² Das Gebet, pp. 19-20.

⁵³ Our Heavenly Father, p. 23.

wherein Christ is with the individual at the level of his or her own negative experiences. The point of location or vehicle for this solidarity is not defined; it is assumed simply to happen within the psyche and personal experience of the individual.

Though it is not a major element in his proclamation, there are a few examples where Thieliicke does locate the christological encounter outside the individual psyche. Within this same volume Thieliicke connects Christ to the Word in such a way as to make it clear that the Word is a christological meeting ground.

Weil also das Wort zu jeder persönlichen und lebendigen Gemeinschaft hinzugehört, steht auch das Wort im Mittelpunkt der Heilsgeschichte unseres Gottes. Darum wird Jesus geradezu das “fleischgewordene Wort” genannt: denn in allem, was er sagt und tut, wie er lebt und stirbt, spricht Gott ein Wort in mein Leben hinein, das Wort nämlich: Du solst mein Kind sein, und mein ganzes Herz steht dir offen!⁵⁴

[translation: (Doberstein) Because words and speech are an integral part of every vital, personal relationship, the Word is also central in the history of salvation. This is why Jesus is actually called “the Word made flesh”; for in everything that Jesus says and does and how he lives and dies God is speaking his Word into my life. And what he is saying is: You shall be my child; my whole heart is open to you.⁵⁵]

This in a way provides a tangible place of meeting between Christ and believer, but in another sense it remains a Word without location. What exactly does it mean that “God is speaking his Word into my life”? Where does this speaking happen and under what circumstances do I hear him? Questions such as these remain unanswered. Again, though the Word is identified as the location of the encounter

⁵⁴ Das Gebet, p. 36.

⁵⁵ Our Heavenly Father, p. 38.

the Word itself is never located. The result is that the Christ encounter remains predominantly spiritual in nature. Saying that the encounter with Christ is spiritual does not mean to suggest that Thieliicke equated this encounter with mere “feeling” or subjective “religiosity.”⁵⁶ There is a substantial element to the encounter that requires it to be grounded in the actual Christ of history, but the mechanics of how this happens remains largely undefined in his sermons.

While the question of “how” this Christ encounter takes place is left largely unaddressed in his sermons, the themes of brotherhood, Christ “with us,” and Christ “in the depths,” remain strong throughout the sermons. The unique application of these ideas for this volume is that they are almost always linked with the troubles people face as a result of the war.⁵⁷ Thieliicke demonstrates empathy and a pastoral heart for the war-torn people of Germany by bringing Christ into their special sufferings.

Und doch verrate ich einem Christenmenschen kein Geheimnis, wenn ich bekenne, daß wir im Donner der Bombennächte und in den Schreckenskammern unserer Keller und unterirdischen Stollen mehr vom Reich Gottes gelernt und wohl auch erfahren haben, als es jene ruhigen und fast utopischen Zeiten des Behagens nahelegen mochten.⁵⁸

[translation: (Doberstein) And yet I am not telling Christians anything new when I say that we have learned more, and probably also experienced more, about the kingdom of God in the crash of air

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ From Our Heavenly Father,
On brotherhood cf. pp. 41, 42 46, 72, 81, 82, 107, 111, 112, 129, 144, 153.
On “with us” cf. pp. 48, 111, 125-127, 129, 153.
On Christ “in the depths” cf. pp. 60-65, 74-75, 81, 82, 86-87, 97, 98, 106, 108, 144, 151.

⁵⁸ Das Gebet, pp. 62-63.

raids and the terrors of our cellars and underground shelters than those peaceful and almost utopian times of comfort and well-being could ever suggest.^{59]}

The solidarity theme is reflected in the often-repeated idea of God “with us.”

This idea carries strong personal/individual overtones as shown in the following quotation:

Der Seufzer eines Sterbenden zu Gott ist mehr als eine ganze religiöse Weltanschauung; denn bei jenem seufzenden und stammelnden Aufblick ist der Sterbende *allein mit Gott* - - und darauf kommt schließlich alles an; aber in der religiösen Weltanschauung sind die Menschen unter sich.⁶⁰

[translation (Doberstein): The sigh of a dying man to God is more than a whole philosophy of religion; for in that sighing, stammering appeal the dying man is *alone with God* - and ultimately that's all that matters, whereas in a philosophy of religion, people are only *with themselves*.^{61]}

Here something of Thieliicke's anthropology comes through. A later chapter will be devoted to Thieliicke's concept of personhood, which will explore this element at greater length, but for our purposes here it is worth noting how the human condition is grounded in aloneness – either aloneness with God or with self. Further, where aloneness with God is concerned, solidarity is the means to that aloneness. By framing solidarity within the discussion of aloneness or isolation of the individual, Thieliicke entrenches solidarity all the more in the concept of a personalistic spiritualised christology.⁶²

⁵⁹ Our Heavenly Father, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Das Gebet, p. 38.

⁶¹ Our Heavenly Father, p. 40.

⁶² Cf. the statement in Das Gebet, p. 100, “Er sieht nicht nur die verworrene Weltlage im großen, er begnügt sich ja nicht mit der göttlichen Perspektive eines Gesamtüberblicks. Er kommt ja wie in den Stunden, da er über die Erde ging, zu

Later volumes of sermons show that solidarity remains an important element in the treatment of all human suffering, even that which has nothing to do with the war. Das Bilderbuch gottes: Reden über die Gleichnisse Jesu was published in 1957 and contains sermons that began in St. Mark's Church in Stuttgart and later continued at St. James's and St. Michael's in Hamburg. This dates these sermons roughly from 1953-55. One finds the solidarity theme again applied to human suffering, as in the following example:

. . . obwohl in Kammern und an Straßenecken, in Schlössern und in Slums, die nur der Gottessohn sieht, gelitten un gesündigt wird – obwohl also dieses unermeßliche Schlachtfeld des Elends nach dem Arzte schreit, hat er Zeit und Gelassenheit genug, bei dem einzelnen stehenzubleiben. Er geht in die Zöllnerstuben und zu den einsamen Witwen und verachteten Prostituierten, geht zu den Außenseitern der Gesellschaft und ringt um die Seele der einzelnen.⁶³

[translation: (Doberstein). . . though suffering and sinning were going on in chamber, street corner, castle, and slums, seen only by the Son of God – though this immeasurable misery and wretchedness cried aloud for a physician, he has time to stop and talk to the individual. He associates with publicans, lonely widows, and despised prostitutes; he moves among the outcasts of society, wrestling for the soul of the individuals.⁶⁴]

Not only is it clear that Thieliicke continues to preach christological solidarity as an answer to human suffering, it is also manifest that this solidarity remains intimately joined to an individualising of the Christ encounter.

dem einzelnen, dem Namenlosen, der in irgendeinem Hinterhause verlassen lebt.” [translation: (Doberstein) “He does not merely see this whole confused world situation in the large; he is not content with the divine perspective of a total view. No, he comes, as he did in the days when he walked the earth, to the individual, to the nameless one who lives forsaken in some back alley.” Our Heavenly Father, p. 97.]

⁶³ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 121.

⁶⁴ The Waiting Father, p. 88.

1.3b Personalising Solidarity for the Sake of the Unbeliever

The volume Die Lebensangst und ihre Überwindung, published in 1954, contains sermons extending from the war years through the postwar reconstruction period. Within this volume one finds a hint as to Thielicke's motivation for giving solidarity such a central role in his christological presentation. By using the example of the Canaanite woman Thielicke speaks from the perspective of his audience:

Glücklich – denkt er vielleicht bei sich selbst -, wem ein solcher Glaube gegeben ist, der das alles bestehen kann! Aber mir ist es nicht gegeben, ich gehöre nicht dazu.⁶⁵

[translation: (G.W. Bromiley) I can perhaps agree that those to whom faith is given, who can accept all this, are fortunate. But faith is not given to me. I do not belong.⁶⁶]

The identification of his intended audience (those who don't belong but wish they did) goes directly to his reason for featuring solidarity so prominently. In the preface of How to Believe Again, "A Word to the Reader," Thielicke states, ". . . indeed most of those present were not church-going people. They were seeking, straying, but also troubled. My work has been principally intended for them."⁶⁷ This choice of intended audience seems to have developed from his experience in the parish very early in his career.

As early as my time in Ravensburg (1940-1942) it had become apparent to me what disastrous results the Nazis' ban on religious education in the schools had effected. The makeshift institutions

⁶⁵ Helmut Thielicke, Die Lebensangst und ihre Überwindung, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1954), p. 64.

⁶⁶ The Silence of God, p. 16

⁶⁷ How to Believe Again, p. 19.

with which the church sought to compensate for this deficit could not fail but to be inadequate. Very soon the up-and-coming generation was ignorant of the most simple knowledge of the Bible and of the tenets of the Christian faith in general. I thus became increasingly convinced that there was a need for the development of a sort of dogmatics for adults, lessons aimed at combining information and interpretation.⁶⁸

His initial success in the public sphere came while seeking to catechising those outside the Church, and it was this desire for outreach that directed his christological presentation toward the theme of solidarity.⁶⁹ This also helps explain his conscious evading of a location for the christological encounter. An audience comprised mostly of those outside the Church would be more difficult to convince about traditional ecclesiological doctrines about the Church as the location of christological presence. What this suggests is that the desire to move christology toward the individual is not wholly driven by philosophical necessity, but also by a pastor's heart wanting to reach lost sheep.

It is likely that Thieliicke was influenced by Schleiermacher in using solidarity as a point of contact with those outside the Church. In Modern Faith and Thought (published in 1983 as Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit) Thieliicke cites Schleiermacher's On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers and explains Schleiermacher's choice of audience as those who "think of themselves as mature and autonomous people"⁷⁰; by which he means the sceptics of Christianity.

⁶⁸ Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Cf. How to Believe Again, pp. 10, 13, 16 19.

⁷⁰ Helmut Thieliicke, Modern Faith and Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 190.

Thielicke's choice of audience was the same as Schleiermacher's.⁷¹ It is significant that Thielicke notes how Schleiermacher used solidarity as part of his approach:

Regarding the second point, i.e., confession of solidarity, Schleiermacher seeks to win a hearing, not by addressing the cultured authoritatively from outside, but by assuring them that he is one of them and will argue on their own ground.⁷²

Thielicke's style seems to put a christological slant on Schleiermacher's approach. Whereas Schleiermacher himself sought common ground with the cultured despisers by attempting to portray himself as one with them, Thielicke attempts to win the cultured despisers by presenting Christ as the One who finds common ground with them. Schleiermacher's solidarity was personal on a human level, Thielicke's is personal on a christological level, but in both cases solidarity is the stated approach for dealing with those outside the church.

1.3c Recognition of a Minor Corporate Element to Solidarity

Christological solidarity does have application beyond the personal Christ encounter to one's experience with others. In Die Lebensangst und ihre Überwindung, one can find Christ's solidarity with us used to encourage our help and companionship with others.

“Wunden müssen Wunden heilen.” Die eigentlichen Helfer ihrer Menschenbrüder sind deshalb auch immer nur die großen Verwundeten gewesen, die Leute, die selbst unter den größten Schmerzen zu leiden hatten. Nur darum konnte Jesus der Seelsorger werden oder der Hohepriester, wie ihn der Hebräerbrief nennt, weil er selber den Mächten der Schuld, des Leides und des Todes

⁷¹ Doberstein makes the same point in The Waiting Father, p. 8.

⁷² Modern Faith and Thought, p. 190.

standhalten mußte und darum Mitleiden haben konnte mit denen, die im Schatten dieser Mächte sitzen.⁷³

[translation: (G.W. Bromiley) "Wounds must heal wounds." True helpers of their fellow men have always been those who were greatly hurt, who had to suffer great sorrows. Jesus could be our Pastor, our great high Priest, as the book of Hebrews calls Him, only because He Himself had to stand against the forces of guilt and suffering and death and thus He could have sympathy with those who sit in the shadows of these powers.⁷⁴]

Thus one cannot say that solidarity is wholly individualistic. There is clearly an underlying element that seeks the other when solidarity is applied to sanctification.

Where justification is concerned however, solidarity is firmly set on an individualistic plane. As an example, within a letter from this same volume Thieliicke places death in the realm of personal isolation and the salvific resolution to it in the context of solidarity: "For the truth is that one dies alone even though there is comradeship ("Kameradschaft") to give support until the final hour."⁷⁵

Aloneness in death is resolved with the comfort of solidarity; "Not my quality of soul nor my supposed disposition for immortality will see me through, but this Pilgrim who marches at my side as my Lord and Brother."⁷⁶

1.3d Solidarity Moving Toward Isolation of the "I"

In Das Leben kann noch einmal beginnen. Ein Gang durch die Bergpredigt, first

⁷³ Die Lebensangst, p. 40.

⁷⁴ Helmut Thieliicke, Out of the Depths (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 18.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

published in 1956,⁷⁷ Thielicke features solidarity in a more varied and pronounced way than in any of the other volumes studied. Along with ample use of the usual expressions of solidarity, such as Christ as “brother,”⁷⁸ “with us,”⁷⁹ as our “Comrade (einer Kameradschaft mit uns),”⁸⁰ “in the depths,”⁸¹ and as our “Companion” (“Geselle” and “Gefährte”),⁸² one also finds references to being in fellowship with Christ,⁸³ being members of his body,⁸⁴ and to his solidarity with our sin.⁸⁵ The word “solidarity” (Die Solidarität) is used on at least two occasions.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Thielicke fixes the date for the original writing of these sermons between 1946-1948 with the remark that they were delivered during “the worst of the post-war years.”

⁷⁸ Life Can Begin Again. pp. 9, 14, 48, 70, 71, 88, 90, 94, 144, 145, 164, & 172.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 138, 172, also in our midst and one of us pp. 2, 8, 9, 33,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6. [Helmut Thielicke, Das Leben kann noch einmal beginning, (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1956), p. 17.]

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16, 48, 83, 106-107, 135, 140-141

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 144, 172. (Das Leben . . . pp. 106, 169, 200.)

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 157. (Das Leben . . . pp. 178, 184.)

The importance of this volume however lays in the fact that here Thielicke presents his most thorough sermonic discussion of individualism which again is joined with ideas of solidarity.⁸⁷

Da sind die Leute mit ihren Krankheiten, mit dem Aussatz, mit ihrer Blindheit, ihrer seelischen Verfinsterung and der Zerrüttung ihres Geistes. Mit dem allem stehen sie ganz allein vor Jesu. (Wie entsetzlich isoliert und einsam ist gerade ein Geistes kranker!) Unser Päckchen tragen wir ja alle allein in einer letzten Einsamkeit, selbst wenn Tausende dasselbe Schicksal tragen, wenn Tausende mit mir heimatlos und vertrieben, verwaist und entwurzelt sind. Denn jeder erlebt und trägt und leidet dies alles ja wieder auf seine Weise und also ganz anders und also *allein*. Darum sind wir einsam in unseren Leiden. Jedes Leid macht insam. Und darum treten diese alle auch immer aus der Menge heraus, ganz allein vor den Heiland hin, and dieser Heiland gehört ihnen nun auch seinerseits ganz allein.⁸⁸

[translation: (Doberstein) And there are the people with their illness, their leprosy, their blindness, their darkened minds and shattered souls. And with all this they stand quite *alone* before Jesus. (How terribly isolated and lonely is the mentally ill person!) All of us carry our pack alone in ultimate loneliness, even though thousands of others bear the same lot, even though thousands like me are homeless, exiled, orphaned, and uprooted. For every single person experiences and bears and suffers these things in his *own* way and therefore in a totally different way -- and therefore -- alone. So we are alone in our suffering. Every suffering makes a person lonely. And consequently, each one steps out of the crowd and makes his way alone to the Savior, and then too this Savior belongs to him alone.⁸⁹]

Solidarity in suffering places a heavy emphasis on the “aleness” (“einsam,” “ganz allein,” and “isoliert”) of the Christ encounter. What will be explored in more depth later, but which is yet worth mentioning here, is that Thielicke

⁸⁷ Other ideas found in this section will be discussed in more detail under the section on Thielicke’s ecclesiology.

⁸⁸ Das Leben, p. 210.

⁸⁹ Life Can Begin Again, p. 181.

emphasised the solitary relationship between Christ and the sufferer while discussing the Church! He writes, "From the beginning the Church was the community of solitaries, the community of those who were 'called out,' of those who first stood in ultimate loneliness before his eyes."⁹⁰ At the very point where a community emphasis would be expected, Thielicke instead emphasised an individual Christ encounter.

He continues to isolate the sufferer with Christ two pages later.

Als der Gichtbrüchige von seinen Freunden vor Jesus hingelegt wird, vor ihn, der da eingekeilt in der Volksmenge steht, da sind die beiden, der Kranke und der göttliche Arzt, auf einmal ganz allein, obwohl die Menge und auch die nächsten Freunde dicht dabei stehen. Jesus ist auf einmal nur für diesen *einen* da, also ob es nicht noch Millionen andere auf dieser Welt gäbe. Aber dieser eine, dieser verirrt und gequälte Menschenbruder ist ihm wert genug, daß er sich seiner erbarmt, daß er ihm ganz allein gehört. Und sieh, durch diese Zweisamkeit mit Jesus mußst auch du hindurch. In diesem ganz schmalen Tor, wo er dir begegnet, wo er ganz allein vor dir steht und kein Mensch und kein Ding dich begleitet, da mußst auch du stehen und mit ihm reden.⁹¹

[translation: (Doberstein) When the paralytic was brought by his friends and set down before Jesus, wedged in as he was in a crowd of people, at that moment those two, the sick man and the divine physician, were suddenly completely alone, even though the crowd and his closest friends were standing close by. Suddenly Jesus was there for this one man alone, as if there were not millions of others in this world. But this one man, this one erring and tormented human being was worth enough to him to command his compassion, to give himself wholly to him alone. And you too must go through this lonely, personal encounter with Jesus. You too must stand and talk with him in this narrow, constricted gate where he meets you,

⁹⁰ Life can Begin Again, pp.180-181.

⁹¹ Das Leben, p. 212.

standing there before you alone, where no man and no thing can accompany you.^{92]}

To make this “aloneness” of the Christ encounter all the more clear, Thielicke sets it against all the other millions of people in the world and the vast crowd surrounding Jesus and the paralytic. Later chapters will explore reasons why Thielicke feels so compelled to drive his christology toward the individual. For now the need is simply to establish that he does.

Thielicke must have sensed that his focus here was overtly individualistic because at one point he tries to block potential objections to his individualism by saying,

“Du brauchst nicht zu denken und zu fürchten, daß ich dir da einen religiösen Individualismus predige. Mit einem Ismus und anderen törrichten Begriffen aus der Hexenküche der Gottlosigkeit hat das nichts zu tun.”⁹³

[translation: (Doberstein) You need not think or fear that I am preaching a religious individualism. This has nothing to do with an “ism” or any other silly notions that come out of the witches’ cauldron of godlessness.^{94]}

Part of Thielicke’s defensiveness stems from his aversion to being trapped in any single ideology. Thielicke regularly stated that ideologies may contain kernels of truth but their narrow focus prevents them from offering an honest system. Thielicke’s scope will not be so limited. Yet his very objection to a perceived

⁹² Life can Begin Again, p. 183.

⁹³ Das Leben, p. 214.

⁹⁴ Life Can Begin Again, p. 185.

charge of individualism shows an internal tension in his mind about the direction of his argument.

In Thieliicke's defence, his denial of being guilty of individualism is honest in his own estimation. For Thieliicke individualism is an established philosophical system that isolates the "I" from the transcendent "other." Thus in his analysis of the philosophies of Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, Thieliicke complains about a thread of "I-isolation" which runs throughout their systems, and it is this to which he objects.⁹⁵ At the same time Thieliicke continues to recognise the "otherness" of God and divine transcendence; thus according to his definition his approach avoids the traps of true individualism. Yet Thieliicke's objections are not wholly convincing. As this sermon bears out, he does separate the "I" from other "I"s and makes the individual the final and only meaningful meeting ground with the "transcendent other."

1.3e The Influence of Calvinism on Solidarity as Seen in Christ's Decent into Hell

In a sermon preached between 1961 and 1963⁹⁶ (found in Ich Glaube. Das Bekenntnis der Christen), Thieliicke connects solidarity with Calvinist thought. In speaking of the doctrine of Christ's decent into hell Thieliicke says:

Die *einen* wollten damit sagen – es waren vor allem die Calvinisten - , daß Jesus auch diese äußerste Erniedrigung auf sich genommen, daß er sich bis zur Solidarität mit den Verlorenen herabgeneigt und auch *ihr* Bruder geworden sei. Hatte er nicht am Kreuze gerufen: "Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen?" Hatte er

⁹⁵ Helmut Thieliicke, The Hidden Question of God, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p.68.

⁹⁶ I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. v.

nicht schon hier, in seiner letzten Lebensstunde, die äußerste Finsternis der Gottverlassenheit auf sich genommen? Hatte er sich nicht der Verzweiflung des Nichts ausgesetzt, so daß er auch auf der untersten Sohle aller Seelenqualen *bei* uns sein und unsere Hand halten kann? Die Höllenfahrt von Golgatha – wir ahnen, was das heißt und welche Liebe, welches selbstvergessene Opfer daraus spricht. So antwortet der Heidelberger Katechismus auf die Frage, warum Christus zur Hölle herabgestiegen sei: “. . . daß ich in meinen höchsten Anfechtungen versichert sei, mein Herr Christus habe mich durch seine unaussprechliche Angst, Schmerzen und Schrecken, die er auch an seiner Seele zuvor am Kreuz erlitten, von der höllischen Angst und Pain erlöset.”⁹⁷

[translation: (H. George Anderson) Some, especially Calvinists, intended to say in this way that Jesus even took upon himself the extreme humiliation of stooping to solidarity with the lost and becoming their brother, too. Didn't he cry out from the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Here, in the last hour of his life, hadn't he already taken upon himself the uttermost darkness of the godforsaken? Didn't he expose himself to the despair of nothingness so that even on the bottom most level of soul torment he could be with us to hold us by the hand? We sense what it means to journey from Golgotha to hell, and we sense what love and self-forgetting sacrifice it bespeaks. The Heidelberg Catechism answers the question about why Christ went down to hell in this way: "That in my severest tribulations I may be assured that Christ my Lord has redeemed me from hellish anxieties and torment by the unspeakable anguish, pains, and terrors which he suffered in his soul both on the cross and before.”⁹⁸]

This quotation shows expressions of “brotherhood,” Christ “in the depths” of our suffering, and Christ “with us” all occurring together without differentiation, reinforcing an earlier point that these expressions convey the same idea. The connection of these thoughts to Calvinism is significant because it goes to the issue of christological movement. Thieliicke has imported an idea from Calvinism into Lutheran proclamation and made it foundational for his christological approach. As a demonstration that this is no mere passing thought on Thieliicke's part, he makes

⁹⁷ Woran Ich glaube, p.171.

⁹⁸ I Believe, pp. 130-131

the same argument connecting solidarity to Calvinism when he discusses Christ's descent into hell in volume two of his dogmatics texts.⁹⁹ Admittedly his discussion on this specifically addresses Christ's descent into hell but the connection between Calvinism and solidarity as a principle of comfort is obvious.

In contrast, Luther seems to have favoured a view that emphasised Christ's descent as an article of victory. Thus Luther says:

I believe that for me and all his believers Christ descended into hell to subdue the devil [1 Pet. 3:18-20] and take him captive along with all his power, cunning, and malice so that the devil can no longer harm me. . .¹⁰⁰

Yet it must also be said that the exact nature of Christ's descent into hell remained largely a mystery for Luther and on more than one occasion he simply acknowledges that he does not know what it means (especially with reference to 1 Peter 3:18-20).¹⁰¹ He does however qualify his professed confusion by raising questions about the sense that Calvin seems to take wherein Christ descended to endure hellish suffering.¹⁰² After Luther's death the *Formula of Concord* addressed the disagreements that arose over the nature of Christ's descent into hell (including the

⁹⁹ Helmut Thielicke, The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 420.

¹⁰⁰ LW 43:27.

¹⁰¹ Cf. LW 2:86, 10:115, 30:113.

¹⁰² LW 10:115 "I firmly believe that Christ did not feel the punishments and griefs of the damned . . . but that Christ always hoped." Cf. John Calvin, Institutes of The Christian Religion, trans. by Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 443-446. "But after explaining what Christ endured in the sight of man, the Creed appropriately adds the invisible and incomprehensible judgment which he endured before God, to teach us that not only was the body of

matter of whether it rightly belonged to his passion or glory). The conclusion of the *Formula of Concord* is that the important element in this doctrine is simply that through his descent Christ destroyed the power of hell for all believers and saved them from the devil. The exact nature of how Christ did this must remain in the realm of mystery.¹⁰³

By connecting this article to solidarity with our suffering Thielicke is then going further than classic Lutheranism was willing to go. In his own mind his position is shared with that Calvin from whom he draws not only the matter of suffering in hell, but being in solidarity with us through that suffering.

1.3f Thielicke's use of Spiritual Presence as a Departure from Classic Lutheran Localisation

Thielicke's borrowing from Calvin is not limited to a few isolated doctrines like Christ's descent into hell. The very spiritualised nature of his christology can be seen to have affinity with Calvinism. When Thielicke speaks of Christ "with us" in the depths he means that a spiritual encounter takes place in the heart of the individual. Whereas the classic Lutheran treatment of Christ in the depths is tied most obviously to Luther's theology of the cross, which in turn tends to seek a more localised christological resolution. Thus Christ is constantly joining himself to "the

Christ given up as the price of redemption, but there was a greater and more excellent price – that he bore in his soul the tortures of condemned and ruined man." (p. 443); ". . . from it (Christ's descent) we may infer how dire and dreadful were the tortures which he endured when he felt himself standing at the bar of God as a criminal in our stead" (p. 446).

¹⁰³ The Formula of Concord, *Epitome*, IX, *Triglotta*, p. 827.

depths of humanity” by confining his saving presence to the Word and dominical sacraments. Calvinism cannot accept the idea of Christ joined to physical means because of its reliance on *finitum non est capax infiniti* as a governing principle. With Calvinism, and it would seem also with Thielicke, the mystical/spiritual Christ encounter is Christ’s primary *modus operandi*. An example of how Thielicke emphasises solidarity as a Christ encounter on a spiritual level and not through objective means is as follows:

Wenn ich ihn mit meinen Augen suchen will, dann darf ich nicht in die Stratosphäre blicken. . . . Sondern nun muß ich ihn in der Tiefe suchen: im kümmerlichen Stall und bei den Tieren, in der Wüste mit ihrem Durst und ihrer satanischen Versuchung, am Galgen in seiner Preisgegebenheit, in seiner Gottverlassenheit und seiner Todesangst – *vielleicht* aber auch in der heiteren Runde der Hochzeit zu Kana, wo es ziemlich hoch und auf jeden Fall sehr menschlich hergeht.

Er ist an allen Stationen meines Lebens, wo ich lachen oder auch heulen oder verstummen muß. Denn ihm ist nichts Menschliches fremd, und er will mich *dort* abholen, wo ich nun einmal bin.¹⁰⁴

[translation: (Anderson) If I want to locate him with my eyes, I should not look up to the stratosphere . . . No, I must seek him in the depths, in a shabby stable with the animals, in the wilderness with its thirst and its satanic temptation, in the abandonment of the cross with its godforsakenness and its fear of death -- maybe even in the gaiety of the wedding party at Cana, where everything was so human and turned out so well.

He is there at every point of my life, whether I laugh or cry or sit in silence. For nothing human is foreign to him, and he wants to come to me right here where I am now.¹⁰⁵]

After asking the question of where one looks to find Christ, Thielicke concludes that one must find him “in the depths” of his humble life – thus through one’s

¹⁰⁴ Woran Ich Glaube, p. 203.

¹⁰⁵ I Believe, p. 155.

recollection of these narratives. He concludes that Christ wants to come to us “right here where I am now.” Classic Lutheranism would have “jumped on” that statement as a springboard for Christ meeting us in the means of Word and sacrament. Thielicke on the other hand does not suggest such means, but simply leaves the question of “how” open-ended. The fact that he repeats this approach at nearly every mention of solidarity supports the premise that the Christ encounter is primarily (if not exclusively) spiritual and purposely turned away from the incarnational models of classic Lutheranism. A major tenet of classic Lutheran christology is thus replaced with a spiritual Christ-encounter akin to that found in more Calvinistic models.

Further insight into the perceived deficiency with the classic Lutheran treatment of Christ in the depths is found in Thielicke’s dogmatics. Thielicke addresses the issue of solidarity at length while discussing Christ’s threefold office, particularly his priestly office.¹⁰⁶ The threefold office of Christ is primarily a Calvinistic model. The fact that Thielicke locates the concept of solidarity within this model shows once more that Calvinism offers more fertile soil for Thielicke’s ideas of solidarity. This becomes all the more important for our discussion of Thielicke’s individualism when, during Thielicke’s expansion of solidarity under the subject of Christ’s priestly office, he defines it over and against the view of classic Lutheranism. Thielicke speaks of what he calls the “principle of homeopathy,” which is the connection between Christ and people caused when Christ suffers like we do. This principle contains strong individualistic overtones as Thielicke himself points out:

¹⁰⁶ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, pp. 366ff..

They (the sufferings of Christ) include the anguish of the schizophrenic. They include the suffering of the oppressed and of the old and lonely. All these find their own suffering in what is suffered on Golgotha. Hence we are not to rob them of their comfort by constantly shattering the analogy with a 'Yes, but. . . .' If we do, if we allow only that Christ bore vicariously the wrathful judgment of God, that a collective world judgment was focused on him, and that he bore the great burden of the world's weight (Paul Gerhardt), the very exclusiveness of this dogmatic standpoint opens the door again to Docetism. . . . Concentration on the human and psychological aspect is certainly less to be feared than a cold and uninvolved docetic dogmatism. This was what finally caused Lessing and Schleiermacher to attack the orthodoxy of their day. The stiffness of its doctrines of suffering and atonement was offensive to them, not so much for its content as for the fact that it ignored the human dimension of Jesus' existence or dismissed it prematurely.¹⁰⁷

Thielicke's statements here support our previous claims that he objects to the classic Lutheran doctrine of "objective justification."¹⁰⁸ More importantly, by relying on a "principle of homeopathy" Thielicke is purposely connecting the emotions and feelings of Christ to those of his hearers. This is consistent with his idea of the overall spiritual Christ encounter. He is not concerned with the objective fact of Christ's presence in Word and Sacrament, as classic Lutheranism is, but with the subjective impact of Christ's spiritual presence on the emotions and psyche of his hearers. Whether it is true or not that Calvin supported such an emotional connection to Christ more than Luther did is beside the point. What matters for our discussion here is that Thielicke saw Calvin's three-fold office (and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 386.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. with the rather stark condemnation of these classic Lutheran concepts in the sermon "Crucified, Dead, and Buried" I Believe, p. 108 "Why then do we obscure it by talk of an 'atoning death' and a 'vicarious sacrifice'? Why can't we leave that life in the simple framework where it is so obvious and overwhelming in its humanity? . . . A mythological and poetic concept (objective justification) threatens to stifle what was so human and close to us." Cf. Woran Ich glaube, p. 146.

spiritual presence) as the logical place where his homeopathic principles could be best expressed.

1.3g Thielicke's Variation of Luther's "Blessed Exchange"

We have shown several ways that Thielicke has departed from classic Lutheran ideas in the preceding sections. His concept spiritualises the Christ encounter and competes with views of christological localisation. In addition to this it should be noted that Thielicke's use of solidarity generally stands in contradiction to the way solidarity was used as an idea in Luther's christology. The Luther scholar Marc Lienhard shows how Luther developed his own ideas of solidarity:

“. . . he (Luther) also envisages an exchange between God and human beings, or more precisely between the divine righteousness on the one hand and human sin on the other. . . In this passage¹⁰⁹ we again find the idea which has also been developed in the *Operationes in Psalmos* and which associates the incarnation directly with the solidarity of Christ with sinful human beings. The humanity of Christ is not described only in general anthropological categories. It consists of solidarity with the sin of human beings, 'as if they [the sins] were truly his and he had sinned.' And he bears the consequences: 'he suffers, he dies, he descends into hell.' It is however this solidarity which makes Jesus Christ, the just man, the true human being, the new Adam, to whom we are conformed, . . .

„110

“Luther was not content to speak of his body or soul, i.e., of general, but static, anthropological conditions. For Christ to be human means equally to enter into our human condition, to be subject to the law, and to take the consequences of sin, which are the

¹⁰⁹ “Now it is he who by virtue of the marriage of faith takes his part of the sin, death, and hell, which belong to the bride. What do I say? He makes them entirely his own as if they were truly his and he had sinned. He suffers, he dies, he descends into hell: but it is in order to surmount all. For neither sin, nor death, nor hell could swallow him up. And it is he who in a prodigious combat was to annihilate them.” Quoted by Lienhard from WA 7, 55, 7ff.

¹¹⁰ Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. by Edwin H. Robertson, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), pp. 132-133. Cf. pp. 140, 141, 168, 282, 286, 297, 364, 383*.

wrath of God, the assaults of Satan and death. Of course, Luther is perfectly clear in saying that Christ did not himself sin. At the same time, however, he emphasizes his solidarity with sinful human beings. From the beginning the humanity of Christ is thus described with the aid of active, even moral categories. This humanity, which is voluntary submission to the law, is suffering and solidarity with other human beings.”¹¹¹

As Lienhard explores the concept of solidarity in Luther he speaks of two main thrusts of christological solidarity: solidarity with sin and solidarity under the law. Both quotations above demonstrate Lienhard’s insistence that Luther did not speak of solidarity in the sense of solidarity with “general anthropological conditions” as Thieliicke does. By directing solidarity to Christ’s oneness with mankind under sin and the law, Luther was directing solidarity toward the article of justification. That is, by taking human sin upon himself and taking his place under the law,¹¹² Christ was performing a saving act. He was exchanging places with us under the Father’s demand for obedience and under his judgement,¹¹³ and at the same time was giving mankind his righteousness. The exchange was sin for righteousness and the law for the Gospel.

Thieliicke’s development of solidarity does not show the same concern for solidarity with our sin. His concern is directed much more toward solidarity with human suffering and with human problems (not necessarily associated with sin). Solidarity with sin is mentioned only rarely. One such example is as follows:

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 377.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 168, 282.

¹¹³ This is also the classic Lutheran doctrine of vicarious atonement that Thieliicke above calls “a mythological and poetic concept!”

Genau dies geschieht auf Golgatha. In Jesus Christus, dem Leidenden und Gekreuzigten, tritt Gott selbst an unsere Seite. Alle Versuchung und Gefährdung unseres Herzens halt er selber aus. Leiden und Angst, Einsamkeit und Todesfurcht, alles Menschliche in seiner Fragwürdigkeit und Hinfälligkeit nimmt er auf sich, . . .

Dort, wo das Gericht mich treffen müßte, da steht Gott selbst oder besser, da hängt Jesus Christus. Verstehe das, wer kann; ich verstehe es nicht. Aber die Lobgesänge aller Märtyrer steigen darüber zum Himmel empor, und alle, die Vergebung ihrer Schuld erfahren haben und darüber neue Menschen geworden sind, wissen, daß es wahr ist . . . ¹¹⁴

[translation: (Anderson) This is precisely what happens on Golgotha. In the suffering, crucified Jesus Christ, God himself steps up beside us. He himself bears all the perils and temptations of our hearts. He takes every thing human upon himself in all its doubtfulness and infirmity -- suffering and anxiety, loneliness and the fear of death. . .

God stands (or, better, Jesus Christ hangs) at the point where judgment must fall upon me. Let him who *can* understand this; I don't. But all the martyr's songs in praise of it rise to the skies, and all who have experienced the forgiveness of their sins and through it have become new men know that it is true. ¹¹⁵]

This quotation indicates that Thieliicke recognises the need for solidarity under the law when he speaks of Christ's being with us at the point where judgement falls upon us. Yet the variation of the "blessed exchange" that Thieliicke uses most often is not an exchange of Christ's perfect obedience under the law for our disobedience (as in Luther), but of his suffering for ours. This represents a shift from classic Lutheranism on several fronts: The first is a shift in emphasis where use of "solidarity" as a christological theme is only a minor presentation of the Gospel in classic Lutheranism; in Thieliicke it is a major theme. The second is a shift in direction where Thieliicke's major emphasis for solidarity is on mental and physical suffering and the human condition in general (which Lienhard specifically says

¹¹⁴ Woran Ich glaube, p. 155.

¹¹⁵ I Believe, pp. 116-117.

Luther did not do) and not primarily on solidarity under sin and the law. Thielicke goes so far as to blame orthodoxy's aversion to the human side of Christ's suffering as impetus for an overcompensation of anthropology into christology.¹¹⁶ In the same place he accuses orthodox Lutheranism of a kind of docetism for failing to reckon with the human side to Christ's anguish (thus robbing Christ of his true humanity). By redirecting solidarity away from Luther's own model Thielicke hopes to make Christ's incarnation more "real" and more accessible to more people. Yet it can also be argued that by focusing solidarity on the human mental and physical suffering Thielicke is himself robbing solidarity of its deeper salvific action as described in Luther's "blessed exchange."

1.3h A Change in Thielicke's Later Years

The last major volume of sermonic meditations Thielicke published was Faith the Great Adventure (Published in German as Glauben als Abenteuer, 1980). Strictly speaking it is questionable whether this volume should be included in a study of Thielicke's sermonic works. In the Foreword Thielicke describes the works therein as "meditations." Each chapter represents a devotional development on a specific text. The chapters are slightly shorter than a typical Thielicke sermon, but the material contained in them carries the flavour of a Thielicke sermon – the intent is clearly sermonic – "By meditating on a text I mean that we should open ourselves to it in such a way that it permeates our whole being. This is possible only when a text not only touches our person and heart but strikes home at our situation."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, p. 386.

¹¹⁷ Helmut Thielicke, Faith the Great Adventure, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) p. vi.

Within this volume one finds a striking divergence in style and direction from the sermons of his earlier years. Perhaps the most obvious change concerns the theme of solidarity. The theme, which arguably is his most prominent christological theme throughout the first thirty years of his preaching career, is rarely developed in this volume. One can find only a handful of clear references to solidarity.¹¹⁸ The longest treatment of solidarity amounts to only one paragraph.¹¹⁹

What is different about the majority of these references is how the idea of solidarity is so often applied to human relationships. For example, “A sound theology demands the severity of thinking and childlike faith that can unite a genius with one who is mentally handicapped in a common discipleship.”¹²⁰ “. . . many officeholders in the church no longer want to be shepherds but ‘top sheep,’ members of the flock with which they are in solidarity, and with whom they do not come into conflict.”¹²¹

As the above quotations demonstrate Thielicke’s concern is still with the christological message, but now the application of that christology has shifted to a more human-to-human emphasis in solidarity – that is, toward sanctification. Earlier in his career the purpose behind much of his christological solidarity involved a stronger thrust toward a form of justification. He wanted people to

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 65, 134, 136.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 152-153.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 139.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 103.

know that Christ was with them spiritually in their suffering. Evidently the spiritual laxity he saw in society during his final years led him to speak more forcefully to the need for expressing Christ's presence through outward action. One might even say that he moves from a more obvious Gospel proclamation to a more forceful proclamation of law.

The change may simply reflect Thieliicke's recognition of changes in the world. When the need was hope in the midst of human suffering, be it physical pain, emotional stress, loneliness, or feelings of insignificance, then christological solidarity was his logical choice. Solidarity provides an intimacy and an individual focus that is particularly suited for offering comfort to those enduring such things. However, when the issue involves the increeping of worldly philosophies, a spirit of laxness or the rise of secularity, then Thieliicke's focus on Christ's personal solidarity with us gives way to our solidarity in the name of Christ with others in need.

1.3i Application of Schleiermacher's Divinatory Method

We have already identified how Schleiermacher's influence on Thieliicke makes solidarity the theme of choice when reaching the cultured despisers. But it should also be noted that Thieliicke's indebtedness to Schleiermacher extends further. Thieliicke finds support for his use of solidarity in Schleiermacher's divinatory method of understanding. Schleiermacher explains the nature of his divinatory method in the following terms:

The divinatory method is the one in which one, so to speak, transforms oneself into the other person and tries to understand the individual element directly. The comparative method first of all posits the person to be understood as something universal and then

finds the individual aspect by comparison with other things included under the same universal. . . . Both refer back to each other, for the first initially depends on the fact that every person, besides being an individual themselves, has a receptivity for all other people. But this itself seems only to rest on the fact that everyone carries a minimum of everyone else within themselves, and divination is consequently excited by comparison with oneself.¹²²

The divinatory method is further explained as the “interpreter putting himself ‘inside’ the author,”¹²³ and as a kind of “conjecture” to be employed with a text when documentary evidence for meaning is not sufficient.¹²⁴

This method has application to the type of solidarity Thielicke espoused. Beginning with comments in Modern Faith and Thought, one finds Thielicke expanding and developing Schleiermacher’s approach to the Christ encounter:

According to Schleiermacher’s famous definition, the divinatory act consists of changing oneself into the other, of seeing the other from within. In modern terms, it means adopting the self-understanding of the other and judging him by his own criteria. Only thus, thinks Schleiermacher, can we achieve a direct, intuitive, or congenial view of the other’s individuality.¹²⁵

Thielicke addresses the divinatory method under the section on “Historico-Psychologically Determined Hermeneutics,” which in and of itself suggests Thielicke sees Schleiermacher’s approach as being rooted psychological

¹²² Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics and Criticism: and other Writings, trans. by Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 92-93.

¹²³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts, trans. by James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977) pp. 56 & 64.

¹²⁴ Hermeneutics and Criticism, p. 177.

¹²⁵ Modern Faith and Thought, p. 22.

apprehension. Thielicke's interest in this method lies in its value for general anthropological understanding. One truly understands the other by mentally walking in his or her shoes. Understanding requires empathy and emotional attachment. When Thielicke applies this to his christological method he hopes to establish a point of contact between Christ and all people, secular and religious alike, by showing how Christ identifies with our emotional and psychological situation. He avoids classic Lutheran solidarity with its focus on justification and atonement because it simply does not form an immediate psychological connection and therefore, in his estimation, does not strike at the heart of non-religious people.

Thielicke identifies further developments to Schleiermacher's divinatory method by Droysen and Dilthey. Of the two Thielicke seems most indebted to Dilthey. In The Hidden Question of God Thielicke states:

This distinction between scientific explanation and intellectual understanding has become a common one under the influence of Dilthey. What understanding means here in contrast to explanation is that insight into another personal life needs a certain existential pre-condition, namely, that I myself as a person represent the same structure of existence as that other personal life. Only because I have a relation to being and meaning can I understand the other in his corresponding relation. Only for this reason are his boredom and emptiness, his anxiety, his missing or achieving of being, familiar to me. Only for this reason do I understand that this other existence, like myself, is called upon to grasp his destiny, and that it runs the risk of failure. Solidarity with the other in the same type of existence makes understanding possible.

In his work on hermeneutics, Dilthey described this psychologically as a kind of sympathy not unlike the divinatory understanding of Schleiermacher.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ The Hidden Question of God, p. 114.

Here again one can see the importance of the “same structure of existence” for Thieliicke’s christology. He describes this elsewhere as “immersing” one person in the other. The christological union with mankind becomes a deeply spiritual union with the individual formed in the inner recesses of the psyche. Thieliicke’s use of the divinatory method as a function of christology is important to this thesis at two levels. For one, this represents a departure not only from classic Lutheranism but even from classic Calvinism (which we’ve previously noted influenced Thieliicke’s presentation of solidarity) toward the Calvinism of Schleiermacher. Secondly, a christology that begins at this level shows its obvious individualistic bent. Granted, Schleiermacher’s combination of divinatory and comparative methods requires a certain communal bond in that one identifies in the other what is common to all, yet the question of which aspects of that other one identifies is wholly subjective. The very act of emotional empathy required by the divinatory method is also wholly subjective (everyone’s feelings are different) and prone to misunderstanding (how can one really be sure of another’s mental/emotional state or intent?). Thieliicke’s intention is that christology begin at the inner recesses of the subjective mind not necessarily with the communal experience of grace. His goal is to bring Christ’s salvation to all people beginning at the level where they are.

In the concluding chapter we will take up Thieliicke’s goal of reaching people where they are at with the saving message of Christ. We will show then how one can accomplish his goal without relying so heavily on subjective individualistic methods. For now it is enough to establish the fact that an individualistic directive drove his christological method.

1.4 The Deus Absconditus as Support for a Personalised Christology

Another major theme in Thielicke's sermons is God's hidden presence. Thielicke uses this theme as a means of balancing solidarity. Where solidarity shows Christ with us in suffering, the *deus absconditus* is God's seeming absence in our suffering. Exploring the experiential tension between solidarity and the *deus absconditus* runs throughout many of Thielicke's sermons. Often he places the *deus absconditus* in direct juxtaposition to solidarity using the tension between the two for pastoral purposes – to comfort the hurting and explain God's actions to the confused: "Even when He was silent, God suffered with us."¹²⁷

Luther and classic Lutheranism use the idea of a hidden God to explain two main theological ideas. One relates to the *deus absconditus* in the strict theological sense, where God is unknown and unknowable in his majesty (*deus absconditus in majestate*). This is what Luther referred to as the "naked" God, or God in himself. In classic Lutheranism seeking to know God through the *deus absconditus* is understood as belonging to the theology of glory; it is an attempt to gain knowledge of God apart from objective means. Marc Leinhard describes it as the hiddenness "which attracts the speculation of unbelief, it is the consuming fire which burns the curious spirits who try to penetrate it."¹²⁸ The other side of the *deus absconditus* relates more directly to christology; it is referred to as *deus absconditus sub contrario*¹²⁹. This aspect of the *deus absconditus* may arguably be subsumed under

¹²⁷ The Silence of God, p. 14.

¹²⁸ Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, p. 262.

¹²⁹ Dietmar Lage, Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 63.

the *deus revelatus*. This side of the hiddenness of God belongs to the theology of the cross and its purpose is to reveal grace *sub contrario*.

When one examines the ways the hiddenness of God is expressed in the confessional writings of classic Lutheranism one finds a number of uses. In Article XI of the *Formula of Concord* (the Solid Declaration) one finds God's hiddenness used in the "strict" sense of God's impenetrable nature, especially where divine foreknowledge and predestination are concerned. The reader is warned, "Neither should we permit ourselves to try to explore the secret and hidden abyss of divine foreknowledge."¹³⁰ In Article VIII of the Solid Declaration on "The Person of Christ," Christ's divine majesty is portrayed as hidden ("*secreto*") within his person while in the state of humiliation.¹³¹ In Art. VII and VIII of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, which deals with the Church, one finds some discussion about the Church as the hidden kingdom of Christ.¹³² Here *deus absconditus sub contrario* seems intended. There are also references to the *deus absconditus* as a sign of judgement when people seek God through the law and not through the Gospel.¹³³ The sections on the sacraments, particularly those dealing with the Lord' Supper, use language that bespeaks God's hiddenness *sub contrario*. Christ

¹³⁰ Theodore G. Tappert ed., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 620 para. 26.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1024, para. 26.

¹³² Cf. LW 39:xiii where Eric Gritsch sets Luther's discussion of the *deus absconditus* in the context of the Church.

¹³³ Tappert, p. 122, para. 106.

is spoken of as “under” the bread and wine,¹³⁴ and being bodily present “with those things that are seen.”¹³⁵

In regard to the issue of purpose, a wide divergence between classic Lutheranism and Thieliicke can be seen. As explained above, classic Lutheranism holds two main purposes in its use of the *deus absconditus*; either to describe the incomprehensible majesty of God or to show grace “*sub contrario*.” Of the two, the *deus absconditus sub contrario* occupies the position of greatest importance for classic Lutheranism because ultimately it leads to the *deus revelatus* of Word and sacrament and therefore ultimately to the Gospel.

Thieliicke’s goals are much more existential, more deeply concerned with psychological discovery, and therefore more clearly impacting on the level of the individual. One does not see the same emphasis on the Gospel in the narrow sense in Thieliicke’s use of the *deus absconditus* (that is, the Gospel as a source of forgiveness and grace).

Ultimately both Thieliicke and classic Lutheranism seek explanations for the Christ encounter. Both wish to offer a sense of resolution and comfort for those experiencing the *deus absconditus*. Both contain elements of the *deus absconditus* which could be classified as “*in majestate*” and “*sub contrario*.” The point of divergence is most pronounced when dealing in the realms of *sub contrario* with the vehicles through which Christ and his grace are hidden. One quotation in

¹³⁴ Augsburg Confession, Art. X

¹³⁵ Tappert, “Apology to the Augsburg Confession,” Art. X. p.180.

particular demonstrates Thieliicke seeking to express the idea of hidden grace in places outside the traditional means of classic Lutheranism.

So wickelt Gott seine Allmacht in die Freundlichkeiten des alltäglichen Nebenbei ein. So kann mir, wenn ich einmal sehr schlimm dran und vielleicht verzweifelt bin, eine blüende Rose dasselbe dedeuten wie der Regenbogen, den er nach schweren Wettern über die Erde spannt und der mir verkünden soll, daß diese fragwürdige und rebellische Welt unter seiner Gnade weiterleben soll, daß seine Hand diese Welt und uns alle weitertragen will und daß kein menschlicher Wahnwitz sie dieser bewahrenden Hand entreißen und sie kaputtmachen darf – selbst nicht teuflische Spiele mit atomaren Feuern.¹³⁶

[translation: (Anderson) Thus God wraps his omnipotence in the friendly, everyday, close-at-hand things. If I am very bad off, perhaps despairing, a blooming rose can mean as much to me as a rainbow arching over the earth after a storm. It should proclaim to me that this dubious and rebellious world will survive under God's grace; that his hand will support the world and every one of us; and that no human madness, not even our demonic playing with nuclear fire, can tear it out of his protecting hand and destroy it.¹³⁷]

By consistently locating the solution to the *deus absconditus* outside of ecclesiological/sacramental models Thieliicke once more shows his aversion to communal concepts of grace. In the above quotation he replaces the theology of objective means as grounded in ecclesiology, which is so central to Luther's theology of the cross, with a much more individualistic searching for God in one's own observations of nature.

The following material will seek to highlight how the *deus absconditus* as used by Thieliicke impacts the overall discussion of the individual in Thieliicke's

¹³⁶ Woran ich glaube, p. 60.

¹³⁷ I Believe the Christian Creed. p. 36.

christology and how it demonstrates movements from the christological/theological structure of classic Lutheranism explained above.

1.4a The Experiential Concern of the Deus Absconditus

It is necessary for Thieliicke to discuss the *deus absconditus* in light of the daily experience of suffering endured by people. Thieliicke confronts such issues as: 1) *God's allowance of suffering without his interference*. "How many meaningless blows of fate there seem to be! – life, suffering, injustice, death, massacres, destruction; and all under a silent heaven which apparently has nothing to say."¹³⁸ 2) *God's willingness to let evil prosper*. "'This God' cried a ship's captain recently to one of my students who was earning some money, 'this God ought to come on board sometime. I'd throw him over the rail as a deck-hand, because he's always bungling things. He let my best friend go to the dogs, but the real deadbeats get to enjoy life.'"¹³⁹ 3) *Our feelings of forsakenness and aloneness*. "The Lord is absent, he has withdrawn out of sight and is barely believable. Meanwhile we feel forsaken and alone;"¹⁴⁰ 4) *Our contrary observations of life*. "We trust an invisible One. Can this invisible One, however, stand up in competition with what we 'see' in all its gruesomeness? Doesn't our observation, therefore, refute him?"¹⁴¹ 5) *Our feelings of impatience in needing to know Christ*. "Even John the Baptist rebelled against this silence of Jesus. 'How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If

¹³⁸ The Silence of God, p. 14. Cf. The Waiting Father, p. 39, 85, 138; How to Believe Again, p. 82, 136, 178, 183; Faith the Great Adventure, p. 117, 134.

¹³⁹ How to Believe Again, p. 177. cf. p. 199.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69. Cf. p. 78.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

you are Christ, say so! Let a voice from heaven say that you are! Don't you notice that your silence upsets us?"¹⁴²

Thielicke addresses a whole range of possible human reactions and emotions to God's silence. But the definite purpose behind these probing forays is to explain the negative experience of the *deus absconditus* in a positive way. There is a purpose in God's silence and in his absence.

Wahrhaftig: Gottes Schweigen ist anders als das Schweigen der Menschen. . . . Es gibt kein Schweigen der Gleichgültigkeit bei Gott, auch damals nicht bei Jesus, sondern nur die höheren Gedanken – niemals ein schweigendes Schicksal.¹⁴³

[translation: (Bromiley) Truly the silence of God is different from that of men. . . . The silence of God and of Jesus is not of indifference. It is the silence of higher thoughts.¹⁴⁴]

The implication of these "higher thoughts" is that God has a beneficent purpose in mind. The issue of purpose however may differ from individual to individual. Since Thielicke is always highly sensitive to the personal application of doctrine, this doctrine too is presented in such a way as to allow for a variety of individual applications. Methodologically Thielicke accomplishes this by leaving his conclusions "open-ended." Here he resolves the *deus absconditus* in the "higher thoughts" of God but then does not offer an exact definition of what God's "higher thoughts" are. This "open-ended" approach is similar here to what was noted previously about Thielicke's use of metaphor as a method for forcing his audience

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁴³ Die Lebensangst, p. 62.

¹⁴⁴ The Silence of God, p. 15.

to search for their own individual application.¹⁴⁵ How one experiences the hiddenness of God in suffering will determine what one concludes about its ultimate purpose.

1.4b Seeking Resolution in the Deus Revelatus

The *deus absconditus* is in a way a question in need of an answer for Thieliicke. “Why does God hide himself?” Which leads to a second question “How does one find the God who is hidden?”

The question of “why” has a two-fold answer in Thieliicke’s presentation. God hides himself in order to reveal either love or judgement. “A Father,” says Thieliicke, “always has for them (his children) the hidden thought of love.”¹⁴⁶ The only necessary tangible location for God’s love is found in the incarnation of Christ. But since that first incarnation is inaccessible to us now, we must rely on more subjective means to uncover the *deus revelatus* of Christ.

So kam er aus Liebe in großer Stille, und man kann ihn nur hören und sehen, wenn man sein eigenes Herz ganz still macht. Man muß seine guten Worte hören, die er zu den Armen und Stillen im Lande sprach. Aber man kann sie nicht so hören, wie man die lauten Stimmen der Welt hört, wie man das Radio hört und die

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Our Heavenly Father, pp. 65-66 where Thieliicke uses metaphor to describe the *deus absconditus*, “May I tell you how I myself have come to feel and experience the reality of God’s rule in these days of catastrophe, to feel it in all its mysterious hiddenness, and also in that hiddenness which is so oppressive that it almost reduces one to despair? . . . It is like the building of a bridge that goes on beneath a covering of scaffolding, so that we cannot see the bridge itself, and we hear only the drumming of hammers. But one day the scaffolding and planking is removed and the bridge is revealed to our wondering eyes.” (additionally pp. 86-87 and 153)

¹⁴⁶ Out of the Depths. P. 64.

Schlagzeilen der Zeitung liest. Wenn man die Stille scheut, muß man ihn notwendig *überhören*.¹⁴⁷

[translation: (Doberstein) So he came, because of love, in great stillness, and you can hear and see him only if you hold your own heart completely still. You must hear the good words he spoke to the poor, the quiet people. But you cannot listen to them as you listen to the loud voices of the world, as you listen to the radio and read the headlines of a newspaper. If you are afraid of the stillness, then you must necessarily miss hearing them altogether.¹⁴⁸]

The above quotation shows the difficulty of separating the issue of “why” from the issue of “how.” Christ came (he revealed himself) “because of love,” but how one receives Christ and this love is only metaphorically described as “holding your own heart completely still.” Christ is met in one’s own experience of Christ’s stillness. What this stillness is, remains undefined. A second example shows more clearly the goal of God’s hiddenness as love and the revelation of that love as tied to an inner spiritual experience:

Wir wollen mit diesem Herrn ringen, wie das kananäische Weib mit ihm gerungen hat, auch wenn er zu schweigen scheint. Wir wollen ihn nicht lassen, er segne uns denn. Wir wollen ihm unsere leeren und sehnsüchtigen Hände zeigen. Und er, der seinen Kindern Brot und keine Steine gibt, der einer armen Frau Gnade gab, obwohl sie keine Kirchenchristin war und von keinem Menschen beachtet wurde, dieser Herr wird auch denen Gnade geben, die nicht zu glauben wagen, daß sie Berufene und Erwählte sind, und die doch stündlich bitten: “Ja, Herr!” und “Erbarme dich unser!”¹⁴⁹

[translation: (Bromiley) We should wrestle with this Lord, as the woman of Canaan did, even when He seems to be silent. We should not let Him go until He blesses us. We should show Him our empty, longing hands. And He, who gives His children bread and not stones, who showed grace to a poor woman even though she was no churchwoman and enjoyed no high esteem, will also extend His grace to those who dare not believe that they are called and elected,

¹⁴⁷ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 63.

¹⁴⁸ The Waiting Father, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ Die Lebensangst, p. 70-71.

but who yet pray every hour: "Truth Lord," and "Have mercy upon us."^{150]}

Though Christ can seem to be silent (*deus absconditus*), his true loving intentions can be revealed by our individual wrestling. If there is an external element to this wrestling, Thieliicke's words above would suggest it is prayer. Prayer here is private and heart-felt and not portrayed as a communal act. It is also a meeting point for divine grace. Classic Lutheranism has avoided making prayer a definite location for the revelation of christological grace.¹⁵¹ Instead grace is conferred in classic Lutheranism through the more objective means of Word and sacrament, which in turn gives a definite communal flavour to the reception of grace. Understanding divine love behind masks of contrary appearance is a task that need not be relegated to the individual. The Church as a whole struggles to understand God's goodness in a world of suffering. By thrusting the individual on his or her personal struggles, even toward prayer as a personal wrestling, without encouraging the mutual support and admonition of the saints is to invite personal frustration. This matter of how one involves individuals in the mutual searchings of others will become central in our response to Thieliicke's christology. Thieliicke seems to ignore how shared experience leads to shared conclusions about God. Our contention is that this simple observation, avoided by Thieliicke, holds important conclusions about the direction that Postmodern christology should go.

¹⁵⁰ The Silence of God, p. 20-21.

¹⁵¹ "Grace" here is used in the sense of a justifying act or a bestowal of forgiveness.

A lesser element in Thielicke's answer to why God is hidden is found in his presentation of divine judgement. God's hiddenness reveals his conscious withdrawal from the individual.

Es ist aber nun keineswegs so, daß etwa "nichts" geschähe, wenn Gott zu schweigen und passiv zu sein scheint. In seinem Schweigen und Passivsein kann sich gerade das Gericht vollziehen, ja es vermag sogar darin zu bestehen. In der Sprache des Glaubens bedeutet dies beides nämlich, daß Gott seinen Arm abzieht und die Menschen sich selbst überläßt, daß er sie an die Konsequenzen ihres Tuns hingibt, und sie damit dem Selbst gericht ausliefert.¹⁵²

[translation: (Bromiley) Yet it is not true that God is doing nothing when He seems to be silent and passive. Judgment may then be exercised; indeed, it may consist in this very silence and passivity. In the language of faith this means two things. First, it means that God withdraws His arm and abandons men to themselves, thus giving them up to the results of their own actions and delivering them to self-judgment.¹⁵³]

The issue for Thielicke is that the *deus absconditus* is not simply the absence of something, but a sign of the active presence of God's judgement. It is also a means to personalise judgment by making it a matter of "self-judgment." God withdraws because of personal unbelief to allow the individual freedom to pursue his or her own path to destruction. Thielicke references the example of Romans 1:18ff as a biblical demonstration of this principle.¹⁵⁴

Whether it be love or judgement that answers why God is hidden, the matter of how God reveals his will is consistently personal, spiritual, and subjective. Another

¹⁵² Die Lebensangst, p. 212.

¹⁵³ Out of the Depths, p. 86.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 87. also I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 210.

example of Thielicke's "retreat" to metaphorical answers for how God reveals himself is as follows:

Wir erkennen den Herrn nie an seinem Äußerer. Da ist er immer verhüllt (sei es, daß er durch Elend und Wunden entstellt ist, oder sei es, daß er wie am Ostermorgen in verklärter Gestalt vor uns tritt). Wir erkennen ihn immer nur an seiner Stimme . . ."155

[translation: (Anderson) We never recognize the Lord by his outward appearance. Outwardly he is always hidden; he is either disfigured by rags and sores, or he is transfigured as he was on Easter morning when he comes to us. We recognize him only by his voice . . ."156]

God is revealed for Thielicke in the hearer's mind and heart as he or she "hears his voice." Where that voice comes from is as uncertain as how one hears it. Thielicke's personal/spiritual explanations about the *deus revelatus* stand in contradistinction to classic Lutheranism. Luther made the *deus absconditus* a central element in his theology of the cross.¹⁵⁷ But for Luther and Lutheranism there is a clearer principle of localisation that directs the individual to special places where God ultimately reveals himself and dispenses his grace.

Thielicke rarely references his ideas of *deus absconditus* with "grace" in the technical Lutheran sense of God's justifying action. He does speak of God's positive working for us behind his hiddenness, but this "work" is usually undefined

¹⁵⁵ Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 83.

¹⁵⁶ How to Believe Again, p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics, p. 63. "The God revealed in Scripture is a God who works contrary to human expectations. What is apparent in the life and death of Christ is weakness not strength, folly not wisdom, humiliation not victory. The power and glory of God are hidden 'in the humility and shame of the cross.' The underlying reality is not visible, and is in fact in contrast to, ordinary expectations."

or when it is defined it references emotional, psychological, or inner spiritual solutions, not the *sub contrario* of a sacramental/ecclesial presence. What follows is a typical example of the language Thielicke uses with reference to the *deus absconditus*:

Er allein ist in seinem Leben und seinem Sterben der Garant dafür, daß es einen Vater gibt, und daß Gott mitten in dieser so grausamen, harten und vaterlos scheinenden Welt dennoch am Werk ist und in der Heimlichkeit des Kreuzes sein Reich der Barmherzigkeit baut.¹⁵⁸

[translation: (Doberstein) He alone (Jesus), in his life and his death, is the guarantor that there is a Father, that God is nevertheless at work in this cruel, hard, and fatherless world, building his kingdom of mercy in the secrecy of the Cross.¹⁵⁹]

How and through what means God is building His kingdom is left unanswered. The hearer is merely assured that God is doing this somehow and is encouraged to trust in that fact. Again the resolution to God's hiddenness is highly individualised, because each person finds God "building his kingdom" in his or her own way.

1.4c Using the Uncertainties of God to Confront the Self

The use of the *deus absconditus* in Thielicke's individualised christological system serves the purpose of forcing a confrontation with the self. God purposely confounds the individual with the mystery of his Person and work to force the individual to come to terms with his or her own misconceptions about God.

. . . wird er uns wieder und wieder zum Rätsel, damit wir auf ihn selbst hören, uns vielleicht an ihm ärgern, aber dann *in* diesem Hören und Ärgern immer tiefer in sein Geheimnis eindringen. Wir sollen keine Träumer bleiben, sondern Realisten werden, die den wirklichen Jesus finden. Denn nicht unsere Träume machen uns frei und neu, sondern nur dieser wirkliche Jesus. Darum brauchen wir immer das Erstaunen, häufig sogar das Erstarren vor dieser Gestalt,

¹⁵⁸ Das Gebet, p. 26.

¹⁵⁹ Our Heavenly Father, p. 29.

die so ganz anders ist als alles, was unser Träumen und Phantasieren uns vorstellen kann. Jedes Rätsel an seiner Gestalt, mit dem wir fertig werden, bringt uns deshalb ein Stück weiter von uns weg und ein Stück näher zu ihm hin.¹⁶⁰

[translation: (Doberstein) . . . he repeatedly becomes an enigma to us, in order that we may listen to what he himself says and perhaps be offended at him, but in this listening and in this offense penetrate more deeply into his mystery. We should not go on being dreamers but rather become realists who discover the real Jesus. For it is not our dreams that make us free and new but only this real Jesus. Therefore we need repeatedly to be astonished, oftentimes even chilled, by this Figure, who is so completely different from what we make him in our dreams and fantasies. Every enigma of his person that we manage to come to terms with thus brings us a bit farther away from ourselves and a bit closer to him.¹⁶¹]

An interesting dialectic presents itself: the self is the arena of encounter that Thielicke stresses; it is also that which one wants to leave. The location of this encounter with self is within the mind or spirit of the individual. The wrestling is personal. What exactly it means to move away from the self is not stated. The context suggests it has something to do with moving away from false interpretations of Christ that cling to the self. In that way one also moves closer to a proper understanding of Christ and therefore closer to Christ Himself.

Closely related to the inner struggle against the self is the confrontation with decision that one experiences in the *deus absconditus*. Thielicke's best explanation of this is found in How to Believe Again:

Warum gibt er sich nicht zu erkennen, warum verbirgt er sich in der Gestalt eines Ohnmächtigen, Gehängten und Verzweifelten?
Kierkegaard hat uns auf dies sehr elementare Frage die tief sinnige Antwort gegeben: Er war verhüllt in Elend und Niedrigkeit, damit nur der ihn finden kann, der ihn mit unendlicher Leidenschaft sucht.

¹⁶⁰ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 212.

¹⁶¹ The Waiting Father, p. 149. (Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 212.)

. . . Denn alles, was bombensicher ist, braucht uns nicht mehr aufzuregen. Kein Mensch gerät doch in Wallung, wenn er hört, daß zweimal zwei gleich vier ist. . . . Wenn ich aber vor der Frage stehe, ob in dieser einen Gestalt mein Schicksal beschlossen ist und ob alles, buchstäblich alles in meinem Leben anders aussehen würde, falls es stimmen sollte, daß er mir meine Schuld wegnimmt, meinen Tod überwinden und mir Frieden schenken kann – wenn ich vor dieser Frage stehe, dann werde ich mich ganz anders einsetzen, um in sein Geheimnis einzudringen. Und es wird mich um so mehr aufregen und umtreiben, je rätselvoller und unkenntlicher er mir gegenübertritt. Das ist der Grund dafür, warum Jesus so im Inkognito bleiben will, warum er sein Messiasgeheimnis wahrt und warum er es verbietet, sein Geheimnis weiterzusagen, wenn einer einmal dahintergekommen ist. Jesus Christus will, daß unsere Entscheidung nicht erst damit beginnt, daß wir sagen: “Ich will dir nachfolgen,” sondern schon damit, daß wir sagen lernen: “Du bist Christus, des lebendigen Gottes Sohn.” . . . Überall, wo Gott sich verhüllt, will er die Leidenschaft der Frage in uns entbinden, will er unsere höchste Wachheit und unsere Entscheidung.¹⁶²

[translation: (Anderson) Why doesn't he want to be recognized, why does he conceal himself in the form of a weakling, a desperate, doomed man? Kierkegaard has given us a profound answer to that very basic question: He was disguised in misery and lowliness so that only those could find him who searched with infinite passion. . . . for we aren't excited by anything that is absolutely certain. Nobody flies into a passion when he hears that two times two equals four. . . . But when I face the question of whether this one figure holds the key to my destiny, of whether literally everything in my life would look different in case it was true that he took away my guilt, conquered my death, and could give me peace - when I face that question - then I will become involved in a totally different way in order to penetrate his mystery. And the more enigmatic and unrecognizable he is to me, the more it excites and intrigues me. That is why Jesus wished to remain incognito, why he guards his messianic secret and why he forbids those who once learn his secret to tell others. Jesus Christ does not want our first decision to be, “I will follow you”; he wants the prior decision to be our learning to say, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ . . . Wherever God disguises himself, he does so with the goal of releasing passionate questioning in us, he wants our highest truth and our decision.¹⁶³]

¹⁶² Und wenn Gott wäre, pp. 208-209.

¹⁶³ How to Believe Again, pp. 164-165. Cf. I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 66.

As Thielicke explains, the *deus absconditus* is a guard against superficiality and an invitation for passionate inner searching leading to a decision. Kierkegaard is given credit for Thielicke's understanding of the passionate decision. The Kierkegaardian source certainly points toward existential motives. The Christ encounter is experiential, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. It penetrates the inner heart of each individual as he or she personally is forced to answer the question of "Who is Christ?" The language of personal "decision" further presses Thielicke's use of *deus absconditus* toward an individualistic conclusion. In short the basic thrust of the *deus absconditus* presented above is to focus on an appropriation of Christ that involves the total individual in a way consistent with the Schleiermachian divinatory method of understanding.

1.5 "Transcendence" in Relation to the Self

Transcendence usually has the force of pushing apart God and the individual; God's ways are not our ways, his workings are above our comprehension. Thielicke is more apt to use the idea of transcendence in a way that draws people to God rather than pushes them away. Transcendence is used in Thielicke's sermons to balance his prolific use of solidarity. Christ may be a brother with us, but he is more than a brother. He may be in our depths, but he is also above our depths. Without Christ's "otherness" solidarity becomes nothing more than fellowship; it lacks redemptive power. Thielicke explains:

... we are loved to the deepest depth of solidarity and the one who loves thus is more and other than him whom he loves. For this reason the Redeemer has the power to be the Redeemer even in the

impotence of his love. He is not trapped in solidarity. Even in achieving it he is more than solidarity.¹⁶⁴

“Otherness” allows Thieliicke to broach issues normally covered by the more technical language of Christ’s two natures without becoming “doctrinaire”. Theological jargon is out of reach for most individuals and therefore lacks meaning. The language of “other” was more in line with the spirit of theological discussion of his day. The above quotation could be used to draw comparisons to the classic Lutheran discussion of Christ’s divinity within the context of a vicarious atonement. There, as in Thieliicke, the mere participation of Christ with humanity in active and passive obedience is not in itself sufficient. It must be joined to Christ’s divinity so that his death is, in fact, the death of God in our stead.

1.5a The Experience of Transcendence

Thieliicke did not want his individualised christology to be consumed by subjectivity. He recognised that crass subjectivity would lead to implicit denials of Christ’s historicity. Each person would create Christ in his or her own image. The concept of transcendence is used to counter such subjectivity. As Thieliicke analyses Schleiermacher’s subjective consciousness, as taught in the *Speeches*, he notes:

The dynamic element in Schleiermacher’s view of subjectivity - this much we may say already - is that objective (or, better, transsubjective) historical facts correspond to it. For him the Christian religion is by no means an expression or projection of subjectivity. Jesus Christ is its central content - and *he* is an entity that transcends the subjective I and comes to it from history.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2 p. 382. Cf. p. 379.

¹⁶⁵ Modern Faith and Thought, p. 163.

Thielicke's view of Schleiermacher explains his own approach. For Thielicke, as for Schleiermacher, a strong individualistic ("subjective") thrust is a necessary part of the foundation for all theological and christological reflection. Yet faith must be more than subjectivity, lest it be idolatry of self. There must be an objective core from which faith draws. That core is the transcendent "otherness" of Christ.¹⁶⁶

Yet there is irony here, because as Thielicke explains in The Evangelical Faith, vol. II, the paradox between "otherness" and "likeness" (solidarity) is the heart of the personal experience of faith. "Otherness" for all its "trans-subjectivity" leads away from the individual only to fall back on the individual again in the form of a faith experience! Thielicke writes,

This Christ, then, can be encountered only as a paradox, in faith. Faith embraces what is contradictory. It is an elemental personal experience preceding reflection and already possessing that on whose contradictions subsequent reflection founders. . . . What is paradoxical to later objective (i.e., historical) thought, what breaks up for this into God on the one side and individual man on the other, is held together in the act of faith and is in fact the ground of faith. In the very antithesis faith experiences the fact that Christ in his humanity is alongside us in solidarity and weakness and that Christ in his deity, as Lord of time and its creatures, is at the same time over us.¹⁶⁷

"Otherness" would remain outside mankind were it not for the fact that God allows his transcendence to intersect our psyche and experience; a point Thielicke

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Thielicke's discussion in The Hidden Question of God, p. 149, on the tension between God's transcendence and what we can know through autonomous thinking. Personal faith is built on this tension between the tangible and the irreconcilable nature of God's transcendence.

¹⁶⁷ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, p. 280-281.

makes when discussing Christ's encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Even as wholly other the risen Lord did not stay outside the system of co-ordinates of our thinking, feeling, and willing. He entered into it. He did not just cut across the line of our expectation; he was also on this line. The point is that our schemata, being tied to 'normal' history and psychology, could not locate him on it and identify him with the help of it. We simply noted that our hearts burned. This was an indication that he entered our psyche with its hopes and fears.¹⁶⁸

For Thielicke "otherness" would remain an obscure theological point were it not for the individual experience of it. With the individual's encounter with the transcendent, even though the individual cannot fully comprehend this transcendence and can only feel his heart burning, the personal faith of that individual finds someone in whom to hope and trust. The personal experience of paradox becomes an important part of Thielicke's definition of faith. Both christological elements (transcendence and immanence or solidarity) must be experienced together if the fullness of Christ is to be appreciated.

Und doch haben alle, die von der Gestalt Jesu angerührt waren, gemerkt: Er ist bei aller Nähe zugleich *ganz anders* als wir. . . . Darum ist die Weihnachtsgeschichte, die zurückhaltend und voller Scheu auf diesen Ursprung Jesu deutet, auch so ähnlich angelegt wie eine Notenpartitur, bei der man die obere und die untere Linie zu gleich lesen muß. Auf der unteren Notenreihe sind massive, irdische Vorgänge: . . . Darüber nämlich, in der *oberen Reihe*, singen die Engel, darüber steht der Himmel offen. Und wer diese obere Zeile nicht mitliest, hat die ganze Partitur nicht verstanden. In ihr klingt eben beides zumsammen: daß Gott ganz menschlich and nahe in unser Leben kommt, daß ihm nichts Menschliches fremd ist und daß er gleichwohl aus ganz anderen Räumen in unser Leben bricht.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁶⁹ Woran Ich glaube, pp. 119-120.

[translation: (Anderson) Yet everyone who has been touched by the figure of Jesus has noticed that in his nearness he is still “totally other” than we. . . . Thus the Christmas story, pointing to Jesus’ origin in its reserved and modest way, is arranged somewhat like a musical score: its upper and lower lines must be read simultaneously. On the lower clef are concrete earthly events. . . . Above it, in the upper register, sing the angels, above it heaven is open. Whoever fails to read this upper clef has not understood the whole score, for *both* lines harmonize: God comes into our life completely human and near us; nothing human is foreign to him, but nevertheless he breaks in on our life from a totally different realm.¹⁷⁰]

1.5b Constructing a Christology from Below

Though Thieliicke’s christological system does recognise the importance of transcendence for christology, it is still clear that transcendence plays only a minor role. Without offering an exact numerical comparison, one could say that the occurrence of immanence (solidarity) roughly outnumbers “otherness” by nearly ten to one in his sermons. Thieliicke does offer a possible explanation for the numerical difference in occurrence between solidarity and “otherness.”

So ist es immer zunächst etwas ganz *Menschliches* an Jesus, das den Menschen nahekommst und ihnen auffällt. Doch gerade dann, wenn sie sich so an das Nahe und Vertraute halten, wird ihnen plötzlich klar, daß noch ein Rätselvolles und “ganz Anderes” im Hintergrund mächtig ist. Nie aber ist es so, daß Jesus sie mit seiner Gottheit “überfällt”. Die Geschichte mit ihm beginnt stets mit dem Einfältig-Menschlichen, das wir verstehen können.¹⁷¹

[translation: (Anderson) So it is always something quite human about Jesus that strikes people at first. But precisely when they thus cling to the near and dear, they suddenly become aware that there is still something enigmatic and ‘totally other’ at work in the background. Jesus never imposes his divinity on them. With him the story always starts with the understandable, the simple, and the human.¹⁷²]

¹⁷⁰ I Believe, pp. 85-86.

¹⁷¹ Woran Ich glaube, pp. 125-126.

¹⁷² I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 91. Cf. similar thoughts on pp. 12-13 & 183.

The prevalence of immanence over transcendence then is explained by the very nature of the incarnation. It was through his humanity that Christ established the Gospel. Thieliicke notes this and uses the same approach of a “christology from below” - beginning with the humanity of Christ and eventually rising to issues of divinity or “otherness.” In an indirect way this christological approach fits well with Thieliicke’s concern for the individual. Rather than beginning with doctrinal statements about the two natures he begins with the actual concrete situation of people who presumably have no knowledge of doctrinal formulations. He shapes his discussion of Christ around what is most graspable by individuals trying to understand Christ. His concern here as throughout his theology is not to maintain the ecclesiological status quo but to reach the real lives of real people. “Otherness” is a necessary albeit secondary component to that approach.¹⁷³

1.5c The Role of “Otherness” in Self Definition

Thieliicke uses “otherness” as part of his definition of the Christian self. Thieliicke saw the Christian self as one whose true dignity was imparted from the outside. Thieliicke stated: “Our dignity is strange or alien because it is grounded in what God (one who is other, i.e., alien) has done for us, what he has applied to us, and that by which he has bought us with a great price (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).”¹⁷⁴ In the

¹⁷³ As one would expect the most common location for discussions about “otherness” are near discussions on the miracle stories where confrontation with divine elements in Christ is unavoidable. Cf. I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 169 (the Emmaus story) & 200 (the stilling of the storm).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

full paragraph from which the above phrase was taken, Thieliicke attributed this idea to Luther and his concept of "strange dignity."

A similar statement is found in The Hidden Question of God (a non-sermonic work) wherein self-identity is again seen as a relational issue between the self and the transcendent other. This time Thieliicke gives credit to Kierkegaard as the source of his thoughts.

We are not definable inasmuch as the world does not know us, since it does not know God (1 John 3:1). We exist as a relation to God. For this reason we are not more definable than God. Only God defines us. . . . The relation that defines us is not an immanent one, whether to nature above which we lift ourselves, or to society of which we are to be useful members, or to an idea which we burn ourselves up in realizing. All these relations make us a function, a means to some other end. They thus take away our unconditionality. This unconditionality is kept only when man is related to an unconditioned which transcends immanent relations even though present in them and sustaining them. Only in relation to the unconditioned which we call God does human existence take on what Kierkegaard calls infinite reality.¹⁷⁵

The matter of Thieliicke's definition of personhood will be taken up in detail in a later chapter. At this point it is necessary only to note only how the idea of transcendence is important to his definition of "self." Mankind was created in the alien image of God and is recreated before God according to the alien righteousness of Christ. It is this relationship with the God who bears the seal of alien righteousness that defines the self. Certainly in steering the question of self-definition toward otherness in these ways, Thieliicke is moving toward an idea of christological justification. The consistent problem between Thieliicke and classic Lutheranism over this doctrine is in part that the nature of this relationship, even if

¹⁷⁵ The Hidden Question of God, pp. 147-148.

it is ultimately justifying, lacks a vehicle through which it can be built. The implication is that an ecclesiological vehicle is not needed and each forms this relationship through his or her own unique spiritual encounter with Christ. Thus the definition of “selfhood,” even if directed toward a doctrine of justification, remains tied to one’s personal relationship with Christ which one discovers and defines for himself or herself.

1.5d Pressing for Personal Struggle

So sprechen die Menschen aller Jahrhunderte auf Jesus ein, und am Schluß fragen sie ihn: Spürst du denn nicht, wie uns deshalb die Frage umtreibt, wer du bist und aus welcher Macht du das alles tust?

Wer bist du, Jesus von Nazareth?

Bist du eine Persönlichkeit von ungeheurer suggestiver Kraft, daß du das fertigbrinst? Bist du ein Genie der Menschenbehandlung, daß du die Leute so an dich kettest und sie für dich leben und sterben läßt? Bist du ein kluger Psychologe, ein geschickter Taktiker der Seele, daß du die religiösen Bedürfnisse der Menschen ausnützt und dich für Jahrtausende unentbehrlich machst?

Oder - - oder – bist du Gottes Sohn, bist du der ganz Andere, bist du allein “von oben her”, während wir andern alle “von unten” sind? Ist es Gottes eigenes Vaterherz, das in dem deinen schlägt, wenn du dich neiderbeugst zu den Armen und Kranken? Is es Gottes eigene Hand, wenn du die deine heilend auf die verwundeten Gewissen und kranken Körper legst?

Bitte, sag es uns, wer du bist: Woher hast du deine Macht? Von Gott oder den Menschen?¹⁷⁶

[translation: (Bromiley) Thus men in all ages speak with Jesus, and they finally ask Him: Do you not see how we are tormented by the question who you are and by what authority you do these things.

Who are you, Jesus of Nazareth?

Are you a personality of tremendous evocative power to be able to do all this? Are you a genius at handling men that you can bind them to you to live and die for you? Are you a clever psychologist, a skilled manipulator of souls, that you exploit the religious needs of men and make yourself indispensable to the generations?

Or – are you the Son of God? Are you the Wholly Other? Are you alone from above, whereas we are all from below? Does God’s

¹⁷⁶ Die Lebensangst, p. 106.

fatherly heart beat in you when you stoop to the sick and poor?
Does God's hand act in yours when you lay it in healing on wounded
consciences and diseased bodies?

Please tell us, who are you? What is the source of your power? Is
it from God or from men?^{177]}

It has been noted repeatedly how spiritual wrestling bespeaks that side of faith that is highly personal and private. For Thieliicke, personal faith belongs less to the realm of certain knowing than it does to the realm of wrestling with the deeper, more profound questions about God and Christ. "Otherness" provides the perfect platform for wrestling with the most profound questions of all about the person of Christ – questions dealing with the relationship between divinity and humanity in Christ's person. Drawing attention to this inner conflict within the human heart is to focus on the side of faith that involves one's emotions and inner psyche. Thieliicke is never content with outward superficiality in faith but directs his thoughts to the centre of one's being. This too is another sign of movement toward the individual.

The idea of wrestling with the mysteries of God is not unknown in classic Lutheranism. Luther spoke of "*Oratio, Meditatio, and Tentatio*,"¹⁷⁸ as that which makes a theologian. For Thieliicke, personal wrestling leads to the personal decision which defined faith. Classic Lutheranism places faith into a more objective sphere by de-emphasising the personal wrestling/decision on the way to faith and emphasising faith as an objective gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁹ Part of

¹⁷⁷ The Silence of God, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷⁸ Preface to the Wittenberg edition of Luther's German Writings 1539, LW 34:285.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. the meaning of the Third Article of the Creed in Luther's Small Catechism, Triglotta p. 545. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength

Thielicke's move toward a more subjective personalistic model was a result of perceived inadequacies in the traditional sanctification / justification model of classic Lutheranism; this will be explored at greater length under the section dealing with Thielicke's sanctification emphasis. We wish to note here that "otherness" is used by Thielicke to press the christological concern toward the individual by way of a personal inner struggle.

believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; . . . ”

Chapter 2

The Ecclesiological Impact of an Individualised Christology

How Thielicke brings a christology that is highly individualised into his understanding of Church, which by its very nature is highly corporate, is of special interest. A goal of this thesis is to suggest a more corporate form of christology for use against the negative forms of individualism prevalent in our time. Naturally the relationship between ecclesiology and christology in Thielicke's work directly informs the topic of corporate christology versus private christology. Further, the relationship between christology and ecclesiology is vital. What Thielicke says about christology necessarily impacts his overall view of the Church and the relationship people have with the Church. In turn what he says about the Church affords important insights into the limits and directions of his christology.

The previous chapter was concerned in large part with establishing elements of Thielicke's public proclamation that prove he did indeed direct his christology toward the individual. This chapter, while including sermonic material, seeks to expand that view by considering more of Thielicke's non-sermonic works. In addition to establishing the basic elements of Thielicke's ecclesiology, this chapter will attempt to show ways he continues to support and promote the individual and where his ecclesiology represents significant departures from classic Lutheranism. Additionally, the validity or invalidity of his conclusions will be explored.

2.1 The Calvinist Background

To appreciate the nature of Thielicke's ecclesiology some words about his background are necessary. Thielicke's autobiography mentions his beginnings in the Reformed parish of Barmen-Gemarkte. In that parish Thielicke experienced a "Calvinistic sobriety" and a theology that he describes as "a powerful biblical Pietism."¹ Throughout his description of his boyhood church he writes with highly affectionate tones both for her pastors and her members. Later this area was to become famous for the Barmen Declaration of 1934 of which Thielicke again spoke favourably.

During his years of young adulthood the Reformed theologian Karl Barth proved to be an influential force. Thielicke admired Barth for his passion and his profundity, yet he took issue with Barth's separation of theology from anthropology: "Barth did not concern himself with the concrete - either inward or outward - situation of the human being."²

One of the lasting influences Reformed theology had on Thielicke was in the area of sacramental theology. More detail will be devoted to this in our next chapter. At this point it is necessary only to draw attention to Thielicke's affinity with Reformed sacramental theology. This is especially apparent in his exposition of the Lord's Supper. Thielicke leans toward Calvin's teaching on the Eucharist and he states his disdain for Luther's sacramental theology. In Thielicke's dogmatics he speaks of the Lutheran concept of Real Presence as a "crassly magical

¹ Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 37.

² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

view,”³ insists the doctrine of the Real Presence needs correcting,⁴ and goes so far as to call the Real Presence a “sin.”⁵ When Thielicke describes Calvin’s view of the Lord’s Supper he adds his agreement and portrays Calvin as a middle ground between Luther and Zwingli. Thielicke clearly favours Calvin’s spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament and rejects Luther’s ontic presence.⁶ This directly influences his ecclesiology.

Thielicke eventually moved to Erlangen where he studied under the Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus. He acknowledged having taken an “extremely polemical attitude” toward Althaus’ theology, but also admitted admiring Althaus as a preacher. In Erlangen Thielicke was challenged by other Lutheran theologians like Werner Elert. Elert served as dean at Erlangen and represented a kind of Lutheranism that Thielicke despised. Thielicke called Elert an “arch-Lutheran” and said that on one occasion Elert felt, “with some justification” that “I regarded his stubbornly Lutheran, polemical denominationalism as hackneyed, obsolete, and anachronistic.”⁷ Thielicke’s belief was that Elert took offence at his Calvinistic background, his support of the Confessing (Lutheran/Reformed union) Church, and his views on the Barmen Declaration.⁸

³ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 249.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁷ Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Though Thielicke was Lutheran he held no allegiance to any specific denomination. His ecclesiology and the christology which was at its core were ecumenical and highly critical of those who were concerned with “an orthodox, chemically purified Lutheranism.” The fact that Thielicke gives no account in his autobiography of his change in denominational allegiance to Lutheranism certainly suggests that it did not represent a major shift in his theological thinking. This ecclesiological middle ground between the Reformed tradition and the Lutheran tradition holds important christological implications for the whole of Thielicke’s system. It would not be wrong to see his christology as the product of constant wrestling between Lutheranism and Calvinism.

2.2 Perceived Ecclesiological Problems

Thielicke was very open about the weakness he saw in the ecclesiological community of his day. At times his criticisms against the Church seem aimed at establishing common ground with his hearers (the cultured despisers). Other times his criticisms serve as pastoral warnings and at still other times his criticisms seem to serve no other purpose than to throw down the gauntlet before those with whom he disagrees.

The form of ecclesiology Thielicke most severely criticised was that of orthodoxy. On several occasions he complains about a “*chemisch reiner Orthodoxie*”⁹ (“a chemically purified orthodoxy”). At other times he is critical of

⁹ I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 187 (Woran Ich Glaube, p. 241); How to Believe Again, p. 73; Faith the Great Adventure, p. 139; The Waiting Father, p. 129 “. . . one can be an unjustified, case-hardened Pharisee and champion what may

orthodox dogmatism¹⁰ and hyper-theological correctness.¹¹ These barbs seem directed primarily at orthodox Lutheran theologians. While he does not always define them as Lutheran, in his autobiography he makes the same biting remarks in regard to the “chemically pure Lutheran” Werner Elert,¹² the “super-Lutheran fanatic” J.A.O Preus;¹³ only sparingly does he label any Calvinist theologians as “dogmatic” or “hyper-orthodox.” But he does speak of Barth’s “ivory tower,” and offers the example of Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge, a Reformed pastor whom he sites as a negative example of Reformed conservatism.¹⁴

2.2a Appropriation Lacking a Personal Connection

The greatest recurring complaint raised by Thielicke against orthodoxy is in regard to christological appropriation. This is developed in his dogmatics as he differentiates between Cartesian and non-Cartesian theologians.¹⁵ Non-Cartesians, who have also been labelled “conservative” at times, are often thought to hold to “a reactionary form of thought which simply transmits traditions in an authoritarian, immature, and mechanical way with no effort to come to grips with them or to

be a correct and legitimate doctrine of justification with an angry, arrogant fanaticism for orthodoxy.”

¹⁰ Out of the Depths, p. 51, 74; I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 93, 150, 183, 187; Life can Begin Again, p. 3; How to Believe Again, p. 33, 75, 78, 79, 85, 103, 128, 219 (dogmatic pencil pushers! “die dogmatischen Federfuchser”); The Silence of God, p. 17, 30, 39; Faith the Great Adventure, p. 16, 139; The Waiting Father, p. 189.

¹¹ I Believe the Christian Creed, p. 182,

¹² Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 81.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁴ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 1, p. 36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-65.

appropriate them.”¹⁶ Dogmatism for Thielicke is tantamount to empty traditionalism. He complains: “Who knows how many dogmas have been thus carried down through the centuries without having the least effect on our lives? This simple rote-religion of the Christians must be an abomination to God; it must be agony for him.”¹⁷

The problem for Thielicke is that the mere acceptance of dogmatic formulas removes the “I” from the equation of faith. Thielicke felt that orthodox pastors in particular were turning the Church into a collection of “automata” where individuals were not required to subjectively appropriate the meaning of the dogmas through personal struggle. For Thielicke to focus on doctrine as objective truth, as orthodoxy did, is to make an “it” of doctrine and ignore the “I” of appropriation. Thielicke does not mean to suggest by this that all doctrine should be an entirely subjective affair. Christ himself is grounded in historical fact and is therefore an objective reality. Yet the objective character of Christ’s existence is irrelevant for the life and faith of the individual unless there is an act of personal appropriation. The issue then is not one of “Is there truth in doctrine?” but “How does one appropriate that truth?” Thielicke’s solution to the problem of orthodoxy is to build an ecclesiology that does not so much confess an objective body of doctrine as it does provide the most fertile ground for a subjective spiritualised Christ encounter – an ecclesiology that would seat the act of appropriation in the individual will.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁷ I Believe: The Christian Creed, p. 150.

One cannot deny the existence of those who demanded blind obedience over personal appropriation. There undoubtedly were elements within orthodoxy that cared little about a timely and relevant presentation of biblical truth and saw the Church more as a “storehouse” for doctrinal formulas. Yet Thieliicke’s recurring complaints fail to recognise the possibility that many people with an orthodox spirit did face personal struggle as faith was appropriated and did not merely inherit a blind form of dogmatism.¹⁸ Without question the tendency to accept doctrines without personal engagement was and is a problem, but if as it seems Thieliicke’s concern is with mere formulaic acceptance of ideology without serious consideration, then it must be admitted that this is not a unique problem to orthodoxy. One can accept any ideology with the same blindness and lack of personal struggle.

Nor is it fair to lump all the “orthodox” theologians together; classic Lutheranism, which is what Thieliicke most often labelled “orthodoxy,” shows great concern with individual appropriation. In speaking of the grace of Christ as acquired on the cross, Luther’s *Large Catechism* states, “Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness, except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel?”¹⁹ In speaking about

¹⁸ Cf. the way Thieliicke separates orthodoxy from the struggle of faith in the sermon “What the word ‘Faith’ means” in *How to Believe Again*, p. 79: “For that faith (‘great faith’) does not consist in ‘believing something is true’ or in some sort of special antenna for religious questions. It consists in a struggle, a conversation with God.” Thieliicke divorces “believing something to be true” from “struggle” and “conversation with God.” There seems to be an unfair characterization of orthodoxy in general by focusing on the single element of “dead orthodoxy.”

¹⁹ *Triglotta*, p. 759.

the grace given in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Lutheran Confessions state, ". . . what is given in and with it the body cannot seize (fassen) and appropriate (zu sich bringen). But this is done by the faith of the heart, which discerns (erkennt) this treasure and desires (begehrt) it."²⁰ In article XII of the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, the Reformers argued that forgiveness is not given *ex opere operato* because of contrition, but only "by that special faith by which an individual believes that sins are remitted to him."²¹

Thielicke's observations about mechanical appropriation are correct and worthy criticisms for the Church to note, but laying such criticisms at the feet of "orthodoxy" is more the result of Thielicke's personal reaction against his critics than it is an accurate statement of fact. The importance of these criticisms for our research is that they once again reveal a passionate concern for the individual. Belonging to a church, going through the motions of worship, and confessing a given doctrine are inadequate expressions of faith for Thielicke.²² The individual

²⁰ Ibid., p. 761.

²¹ Ibid., p. 267. Note that in classic Lutheranism "faith" even when spoken of here as residing in the individual, does not necessarily always involve an act of the individual will, but does always necessitate receiving Christ. Thus classic Lutheranism can speak of infants believing as well as the handicapped and mentally ill.

²² Cf. Thielicke's comments in *Life Can Begin Again*, p. 184 "Perhaps it is the sight of this big congregation that is carrying you along, the rapt attention and the mighty, uplifting singing of the hymns. Perhaps you are hiding yourself among all these hundreds of people and letting yourself be carried along on a wave; and under the spell of this gathering it may seem to you that there really may be something to this Lord of the church, the Lord of this congregation, after all. Well, if that's what you think, you are still far from the kingdom of God; for then you are still on the broad way, which does not lead to peace."

heart must be engaged and the individual will must appropriate truth in a meaningful way for himself or herself.

2.2b An Inadequate View of Faith

The Lutheran Confessions provide a consistent witness to the need for individual appropriation of Christ via faith.²³ The real issue between Thieliicke and classic Lutheranism seems to involve conflicting definitions of “faith” more than issues of personal appropriation versus blind traditionalism.

How one defines faith and the method one chooses for appropriation of the Gospel will determine a great deal about one’s ecclesiology. For Thieliicke both of these issues lean heavily on one’s personal decision. To be sure, there are instances where Thieliicke’s description of faith is in full agreement with Luther and classic Lutheranism. Following a quotation from Luther, Thieliicke states: “. . . one might perhaps say that faith is ec-centric; it has its basis outside itself (*extra se*). For this reason it is not open to psychological self-observation.”²⁴ Again citing Luther Thieliicke says,

In particular the psychological act of faith, its character as a work, does not justify and save us (as though it could be a meritorious work). No, it does not justify on its own but only because it accepts the promised mercy. The decisive deliverance takes place from outside, on us and not through us. Not our spirit but the Pneuma does the work.²⁵

²³ Cf. *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art IV “Justification” in the section “We Obtain the Forgiveness of Sin only by Faith in Christ,” Tappert, pp. 117f. Also *Apology* Art, XII “Penitence” para. 73-74. Tappert, p. 192, *The Smalcald Articles*, “How Man is Justified Before God, and His Good Works” Tappert, p. 315, *The Formula of Concord*, Art. III, “Righteousness” para. 40-41, Tappert, p. 546,

²⁴ *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 3 , p. 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

This understanding of faith as reception and as being grounded outside oneself is repeated in Thieliicke's sermons:

Man kann eben nicht einer "neuer Kerl" werden, indem man sich vornimmt: "Ich will einer werden," sondern nur so ist das möglich, daß wir uns in diesen Lebensprozeß der Gemeinschaft mit Gott hineinschalten lassen.²⁶

[translation: (Doberstein) A man cannot become a new person by deciding to become one. He can become a new person only when he allows himself to be incorporated into this living process of fellowship with God.²⁷]

The passive character of reception of faith so prominent in classic Lutheran ecclesiology does find expression in Thieliicke's writings.²⁸

Yet other times Thieliicke's definition of faith is more in line with "decision" theology which stands at odds with classic Lutheranism.²⁹ Decision theology accepts the premise that regardless of human depravity or a sinful nature people can choose good or decide to follow Jesus. Lutheranism has historically rejected the ability of the unregenerate will to choose righteousness (see previous footnote). Thieliicke's concern for the individual does not allow him to leave "faith as gift"

²⁶ Das Gebet, p. 52.

²⁷ Our Heavenly Father, p. 52-53.

²⁸ Cf. How to Believe Again, p. 145. "This love of his (God's) passes on to me, so that it literally puts me on, and thus a flow is established from the origin of all love and forgiveness, from that which God does for me and for us all, through me to my neighbor."

²⁹ Luther's Bondage of the Will is often considered the best example of the Lutheran understanding of the spiritual limitations of the will to decide in favour of God. See especially LW 33:249ff.

and faith as “ec-centric” language go without qualification. One finds statements like the following in Thieliicke’s sermons:

Was heißt das? Wenn Jesus hier den engen und breiten Weg einander gegenüberstellt, dann verlangt er zunächst einmal eine Entscheidung von uns.³⁰

[translation: (Doberstein) Well, what does this mean? (“no one comes to the Father, but by me”) It means, in the first place, that when Jesus here contrasts the narrow and the broad way he is demanding of us a *decision*.³¹]

Sie müssen sich darüber klarwerden (und zwar ganz einfach “entscheiden”), ob sie in ihm den Herrn sehen wollen, dem alle Gewalt im Himmel und auf Erden gegeben ist, so daß er den Elementen gebietet und die Schicksals – und Zerstörungsmächte brechen kann. Sie müssen sich darüber klar sein (also wieder “entscheiden”), ob sie in ihm das Wetterleuchten des kommenden Reiches sehen wollen.³²

[translation: (Anderson) Each one must clarify (or, quite simply, “decide”) whether or not he will see in Jesus the Lord to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, so that he commands the elements and smashes the power of fate and destruction. Each has to clarify for himself (once again, “decide”) if he will see in him the heat lightning of that coming kingdom . . .³³]

The fact that Thieliicke makes statements like these in his sermons - that faith and appropriation lay in the decision of the individual – suggests that Thieliicke sees this as the more practical (more authentic) definition of faith. The careful dogmatic distinctions found to be in agreement with classic Lutheranism are more apt to be found when writing to academics and pastors.

³⁰ Das Leben, p. 207.

³¹ Life can Begin Again, p. 178. Italics are Doberstein’s.

³² Woran Ich glaube, p. 95.

³³ I Believe: The Christian’s Creed, p. 64-65.

It would seem that for Thieliicke the sort of “institutional” appropriation that he disliked was linked to the strong emphasis in classic Lutheranism on sacramental theology. This becomes clear when one examines Thieliicke’s thoughts about infant baptism. He makes the following statement about faith as appropriated by the infant:

It is obvious that the relation of Word, sacrament, and baptism is upheld here on the one condition that instead of the simultaneity of baptism and faith, as in the NT accounts, there is a temporal postponement of faith, which with the growth of consciousness “creeps” into baptism and ratifies the baptismal covenant. This act of ratification can be given ritual form in confirmation.

This kind of anticipation of the baptism covenant, which is accepted and confirmed by faith, makes sense, however only if the baptized infant is from the very first placed in the relation of Word, sacrament, and faith even though the child itself is not the believer; but the faith of parents and godparents plays a kind of vicarious role in the establishment of the relation.³⁴

As Thieliicke explains, faith is not actually appropriated in baptism as a gift of grace but faith develops as consciousness develops. For Thieliicke baptism seems to place the infant in a subliminal relationship to faith, wherein faith is present in others and available by example as the infant grows, but is only finally explicitly accepted after sufficient cognitive development. Thieliicke plainly states that faith is “postponed” until the consciousness develops. He goes as far as to say that the baptised infant is “not the believer.” Such statements clearly depart from classic Lutheran understandings of faith and its appropriation, which see faith as a gift given prior to any “growth of consciousness.” In describing what is given in baptism, Luther in his *Large Catechism* states:

Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practise all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil,

³⁴ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 275-276.

forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts.³⁵

While defending the Lutheran view of baptism against the Anabaptists, the Lutheran Confessions explicitly mention the Lutheran conviction that infants can believe.

Thus you see that the objection of the sectarians is vain. For (as we have said) even though infants did not believe, which, however, is not the case, yet their baptism as now shown would be valid.³⁶

“Faith” in the Lutheran view is not relegated to the act of the will nor placed within the context of a personal decision.³⁷ It is rather a Pneumatological gift and simultaneously a receiving of the person of Christ. Thieliicke’s counter to this seems to be that lack of cognitive ability blocks the christological/pneumatological action in infants and that personal decision is needed to unblock it later. One can see within this debate the clear conflict between the individualised christology of Thieliicke and the more communal christological appropriation of classic Lutheranism. By linking the appropriation of individual faith with sacramental means historic Lutheranism has necessarily placed the act of personal appropriation

³⁵ Triglotta, p. 743.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 745.

³⁷ In this regard note also the differences in the baptismal rubrics between Anglicanism and Lutheranism. In Common Worship (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 353, there is a rubric called “The Decision.” During this rubric the candidate speaks of his wilful act of faith, “I reject, I renounce, I repent, I turn, I submit, I come.” This section corresponds to the one in the American book Lutheran Worship (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), pp. 201-202 where the candidate or his or her parents are asked, “Do you renounce the devil . . .” at which point the devil is renounced. But then immediately following the renunciation of the devil the baptismal party speaks the creed in three separate sections in answer to questions about each person of the Trinity. There simply is

within the “institutional” Church. It has also drawn the focus away from the individual and his or her act of personal appropriation and emphasised instead the divine action of giving faith:

Faith is that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure (the remission of sins and justification). It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation, but that a heart comforts itself, and is perfectly confident with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to Him, that He sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ.³⁸

Thielicke is well aware of the classic Lutheran view of faith given in baptism and sharply disagrees with it.³⁹ What one notices in his disagreement is that his initial criticism against classic Lutheranism and “dogmatic” Christianity for failing to address the individual and demanding only blind acceptance of a formulaic faith is not really the issue here. Clearly classic Lutheranism does address the individual and his or her appropriation of grace. The real issue between Thielicke and classic Lutheranism does not lie in the “if” of appropriation but in the “how.” Thielicke sees appropriation more as an act of the will, a decision, a psychological struggle, while classic Lutheranism sees appropriation as a gift, a Pneumatological work, and as a christological union which does (as in the case of infant baptism) precede conscious apprehension. For Thielicke the fact that faith does not necessitate the consciousness in classic Lutheranism creates separation between the “I” and God. It means the “I” is merely an “it” and places baptism back into the realm of *ex opere operato*.

not a corresponding set of questions and answers that could be considered a “decision.”

³⁸ Triglotta, p. 135.

³⁹ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 277.

However, as classic Lutheranism sees itself, this is certainly not the case. Instead, by viewing faith and appropriation as matters that do not depend on the conscious will, classic Lutheranism seeks to offer hope to the disenfranchised. Infants, the severely mentally handicapped, those suffering diseases that impair the mind like Alzheimer's, and the unconscious are all seen to have faith, if they have objectively received it through the Word and dominical sacraments. Admittedly Luther and the Lutheran Confessions do not speak a great deal about the mentally ill as having faith. It is likely that their views of mental illness were not clear in regard to the physical nature of the disease, and they looked upon it more as a spiritual malady. However one can find examples of early Lutheranism speaking about weak or imperfect faith as "saving faith."

So in the midst of sins, death, and anxieties we, too, lay hold on Christ with a weak faith. Yet this faith, tiny though it may be, still preserves us and rules over death and treads the devil and everything under foot.⁴⁰

The passive nature of faith in Lutheran theology is meant to offer hope to those whose conscious will has succumbed to weakness and opposition to God.⁴¹ Only through an initial act of divine grace does the conscious will become regenerate and capable of apprehending the things of God. This also necessarily means that the giving of faith, which occurs prior to the act of the conscious mind (especially in

⁴⁰ LW 12:262.

⁴¹ As an example: LW 25:418 "God saves no one but sinners, He instructs no one but the foolish and stupid, He enriches none but paupers, and He makes alive only the dead; not those who merely imagine themselves to be such but those who really are this kind of people and admit it. For it really was a fact that the Gentiles were not the people of God and were a foolish nation, so that, being saved without any merits or zeal of their own, they might acknowledge the grace of God."

infants), is placed in a social context, namely that of the *Communio Sanctorum*.⁴²

Thielicke shows an understanding of ecclesiology which de-emphasises the communal/social element to faith. Further details of the social context for faith's reception will be explored in more detail in a subsequent chapter. Certainly the individual will is involved in faith, but only in as much as the will is recreated by the indwelling of Christ, and only in as much as Christ was received through Word and sacrament via the *Communio Sanctorum*.

A misguided communal element in popular ecclesiology was a cause for concern with Thielicke. In the section addressing infant baptism Thielicke states:

Whereas in primitive Christianity and in missionary churches an awakening to faith is the normative motive for the reception of new members, in Christendom infant baptism sees to it that birth and tradition constitute the spiritual link between the generations. The question inevitably arises whether infant baptism is legitimate on this basis. But the question is really a rhetorical one. Scepticism as to the continued existence of Christendom gives it a sociological

⁴² The term "*Communio Sanctorum*" is used here as a more precise definition of what is often termed "church." Luther complained about the ambiguity of the word "church" (Kirche) and the multiplicity of meanings it is often given in common conversation. [cf. LW 41, p. 143-144 where Luther speaks of "Kirche" as "this meaningless and obscure word." Also Luther's Large Catechism, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 691 par. 48-50 where Luther discusses his use of the terms "*communio*" and "*Kirche*".] The term "*Communio Sanctorum*" is less ambiguous emphasizing the true spiritual community of believers in Christ. This community is the body of the redeemed wherever they are found around the world – those united not by outward bonds of denominational labels, or by the appearance of faithfulness and piety, but solely by grace and the salvific act of Christ [Cf. LW 39, p. 65, and esp. LW 35, p. 50-51]. It is localized when true saints gather around the Word and Sacrament and receive Christ. A more detailed treatment of Luther's *Communio Sanctorum* is found in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 297ff. In Bonhoeffer's *The Communion of Saints* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963) the term "*Sanctorum Communio*" is used incarnationally as an expression of Christ in the midst of His Church. He is present both to distribute grace and incorporate believers into Himself. His presence is both tangible and mystical. Bonhoeffer states "The church is the presence of Christ, as Christ is the presence of God." (page 101). The term "*Communio Sanctorum*" expresses the idea of the community of faith which is also the body of Christ.

twist. In our pluralistic and secularized society the claim of an institution that at the great points of life, especially birth and death, it can take over the patriarchally inserted function of giving meaning is more than doubtful.⁴³

Thielicke's concern is misplaced faith. People were trusting in a loose association to the Church on the basis of having been baptised, but were not genuine in the faith. When one considers the actual connection of the German people to the Church in Thielicke's day, one can see that his concerns are not without justification. The lack of regular Church attendance and a wide perception in German culture that life in the Church was not necessary to one's secular life no doubt are the basis for Thielicke's concerns. The fact was that people did view baptism as nothing more than an outward rite and were failing to understand it as a new life in Christ connected to the *Communio Sanctorum*. It seems reasonable to assume that there was also at that time a widespread mistrust of the institution of the Church. Its reputation had been tarnished over questions of its role during the war. Perhaps part of Thielicke's focus on individual cognitive apprehension was a capitulation to these legitimate social doubts.

Unfortunately Thielicke's solution to the problem of people's perceptions was to question the whole traditional Lutheran understanding of appropriation. But this was not the root of the problem then and did not need to be abandoned. Where a false magical view of baptism persisted Thielicke could have more openly and strenuously objected to it and countered it with clear explanations of baptism. Where aversion to the Church was a result of failures of the institution then those failures should have been his focus. His desire for honest appropriation and

⁴³ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 274.

genuine faith were sincere and appropriate. His method for how to achieve this however could have been less individually directed. In the concluding chapter we will examine ways that appropriation can be better taught by tying it to the social being of the Church.

2.2c The Institution as Self-serving

As suggested above the institution of the Church had aroused the ire of many in Germany including Thielicke. He recognised that this side of the Church was an unavoidable reality that must be reckoned with, and that the “human” side of the institution often interjected a sinful selfishness.⁴⁴ Thielicke says:

If we take seriously the corporeality of the church, we must also take seriously the institutional problems posed by this corporeality. Not to regard the institutional element, i.e. matters of structure and constitution, as part of the church would lead to Platonic and docetic spiritualizings which would deny to the Word its incarnation and its assumption of historical form.⁴⁵

Denying the human organisational element of the Church or glossing over it in favour of a strictly spiritual view of the Church is for Thielicke a crass spiritualising of Christ himself who was joined to humanity. The threat of Docetism meant that the physical/institutional element of the Church should be embraced and understood in all its apparent weakness. Whether Thielicke effectively does this is highly

⁴⁴ Cf. The Waiting Father, p. 72 “Even in the assemblies of bishops and synods that power mingles the seeds of ambition, the praise of men, and clericalism with this desire to be obedient to God and to act spiritually.” See also p. 89, (Das Bilderbuch Gottes, p. 122 “. . . und darum müssen die Pfarrer sich hüten, zu religiösen Managern ohne Vollmacht und mit vertrockneter geistlicher Substanz zu werden.”)

⁴⁵ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, p. 44.



debatable. Yet as he saw it, it was essential to do because those outside the Church tended to be very suspicious of what they saw as a human institution.⁴⁶

One problem that presented itself in Germany and possibly furthered the suspicion of the institutional mindset was the matter of the Church being supported by state taxes. Many saw these taxes as doing nothing more than paying Church authorities to maintain the institution. Quoting Hans Iwand, Thieliicke complains,

Die Entfremdung der Kirche vom wirklichen Leben nimmt immer mehr zu (Verstehen Sie? Er sagt nicht: die Kirchenfremdheit, der Säkularismus nimmt immer mehr zu; sondern er sagt: die Entfremdung der Kirche vom wirklichen Leben nimmt immer mehr zu!), . . . Das Evangelium, das die Welt heute braucht, wird als bekannt und fertig vorausgesetzt. Man möchte damit alles mögliche in Gang bringen, wie mit einem Motor. Ich muß gestehen, daß ich oft bei diesem Treiben ganz versweifelt bin. . . Was wir haben, ist der Staatszuschuß von einigen Millionen für die kirchlichen Behörden. . . . Und siehe: heir könnte das Wasser des Lebens an sie ausgegeben werden. Aber die Quellen sind offenbar verschüttet. Eine erstarrte Institution scheint nur brackiges Tümpelwasser anbieten zu können, das viele als ungenießbar wieder ausspeien oder um das sie einen weiten Bogen machen.⁴⁷

[translation: (Anderson) The alienation of the church from real life is growing greater and greater. [You see how he doesn't say that secularism or alienation *from* the church is increasing? He says the alienation *of* the church is increasing!] . . . The gospel that the world needs today becomes overfamiliar and is taken for granted. People want to use it as a motor to get everything possible moving. I must confess that this tendency often dismays me completely. . . . What we have is a state subsidy of a few million for the church authorities. . . . The church could provide them with the water of life. But obviously the springs are blocked up. A moribund institution

⁴⁶ Comments made in a sermon on the prodigal son are revealing: "But yet I ask myself why it is that so many 'worldlings,' even the very respectable and definitely serious ones, are so difficult to get inside a church. Many of them have said to me, 'Sure, when you speak in the university or in an auditorium I'm glad to come. But I have the same horror of a church that the devil has of a holy water font.'" The Waiting Father, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Woran Ich glaube, pp. 297-298.

appears to offer only brackish pond water which many spit out as undrinkable or else shun completely^{48]}

Thielicke consistently warns against the Church losing her mission and becoming irrelevant in the world. Fifteen years after the above citation Thielicke published these words (speaking from the perspective of the cultured despisers):

Die Institution Kirche ist unglaubwürdig (schaut euch ihre Bürgerlichkeit, schaut euch die Zerrissenheit ihrer Botschaft, ihre Weltfremdheit oder auch ihre Welthörigkeit an! Jedenfalls tut sie das nicht, wovon sie redet).⁴⁹

[translation: (Doberstein) The institutional church is untrustworthy. Just look at its conventionality. Look at the confusion of its message, its naivety, or at its slavery to the world! At any rate, it does not practice what it preaches.^{50]}

The solution Thielicke offers the cultured despisers is both christological and individualistic. Thielicke reminds his hearers that it was precisely for the weaknesses and sins of people that Christ died. "For Christ did not rise up against all these (problems of sinful people in the church) but rather died and rose for all of them."⁵¹ He further points to Christ as embodying the very opposite spirit of the church that cares only for the institution. Christ lived to reach the individual, not to build the corporation.⁵² The institution of the Church itself is not trustworthy but Christ who died for her is trustworthy.

⁴⁸ I Believe: The Christian's Creed, pp. 232-233.

⁴⁹ Glauben als Abenteuer, p. 56.

⁵⁰ Faith the Great Adventure, p. 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵² Cf. Our Heavenly Father, p. 143.

Such a frank confrontation with the institutional failings of the church shows respect to the valid observations of those outside the Church. At the same time his christological solution refocuses concern away from fallen humanity toward the soteriological work of Christ. Both these elements are helpful in the present context of the world where such suspicions remain. Yet within Thielicke's criticisms of the institution can be seen a subtle attack on the corporate heart of the Church. There is an implication that: "the established institutionalised Church is untrustworthy, therefore seek Christ on a personal level without the dangers of institutional abuses."⁵³ If Thielicke's criticisms of the institution were balanced with a renewed sense of what was good and right with the corporate Church, then it would be less likely that people would choose to resolve their suspicions by avoiding the Church. Unfortunately Thielicke's criticisms of the institution encourage a view of Church that upholds the individual faith of the member while not exploring one's the broader relationship to the community of faith.

Von Anfang an war die Kirche die Gemeinschaft der einzelnen, der Herausgerufenen, die Gemeinschaft derjenigen, die zuerst einmal in letzter Einsamkeit unter seinen Augen standen.⁵⁴

[translation: (Doberstein) From the beginning the church was the community of solitaries, the community of those who were "called

⁵³ Examples of this kind of logic can be found in a sermon where Thielicke even speaks of the collapse of the German institutional *Kirche* in WWII as a blessing (Our Heavenly Father, p. 141). This was because the lack of institutional trappings made the people free to live by the more basic elements of "Scripture and Confession." In Theological Ethics, vol. 1, p. 625 Thielicke goes so far as to claim that Nazis persecuted the church not because the message was offensive to them, but because the Nazis were disgusted at the "pliant and unconvincing character" of the ecclesiastical institution.

⁵⁴ Das Leben kann noch einmal beginnen, pp. 209-210.

out,” of those who first stood in ultimate loneliness before his eyes.^{55]}

2.2d Liturgical Escapism

The liturgical voice of the congregation could itself become a problem for Thieliicke. In particular he complains about people coming to Church for the holy sounds and smells, for the “cozy feeling” of familiar liturgical acts, and the purpose of finding “a pious refuge to which we might withdraw from the evil world.”⁵⁶ The very sacredness of the surroundings in the Church could be seen as isolating people from the world instead of preparing them to live in it. Thieliicke saw this attitude especially in the liturgical “revival” during World War Two. Though Ich glaube das Bekenntnis der Christen was published in 1965, almost two decades after World War Two, the frustration with the wartime liturgical movement is still clear.

Als im Dritten Reich die Verfolgung über die Gemeinde Jesu hereinbrach, gab es Leute, die liturgische Bewegungen inszenierten mit gregorianischen Gesängen und kultischen Gewändern. Das mag für manche von ihnen (sicher nicht für alle und vielleicht nicht einmal für die meisten) so etwas wie ein Druckposten gewesen sein in einer Situation, die das offene Bekenntnis und nicht das heilige “Glasperlenspiel” verlangt hätte. Wo nämlich die Kirche im Angesicht des Anitchristen predigte und ihre harte, unverkürzte Wahrheit hinausschleuderte, da begannen die Puppen zu tanzen, da wurden die Lämmer Gottes sehr bald von den Wölfen umzingelt und die ganze Hitlerei reagierte sauer, weil sie sich getroffen fühlte. Aber wo man nur fromme Kulte zelebrierte, konnte man ungeschoren bleiben; diese Kreise wollte niemand stören. Dietrich Bonhoeffer aber entlud über diesen frommen Betrieb sein Zorneswort: “Nur wer öffentlich für die Juden betet, darf auch gregorianisch singen.”⁵⁷

[translation: (Anderson) When the persecutions under the Third Reich broke over the church, there were people who staged liturgical movements with Gregorian chants and elaborate vestments. For

⁵⁵ Life Can Begin Again, pp. 180-181.

⁵⁶ I Believe the Christian’s Creed, p. 234.

⁵⁷ Woran Ich glaube, pp. 300-301.

many of them (certainly not for all and perhaps not even for most of them) that activity may have been something of a cozy corner in a situation that would have demanded of them an open confession instead of that holy charade. For the fur began to fly wherever the church preached her hard, unvarnished truth in the face of the anti-Christians. Then the lambs of God were very quickly encircled by the wolves. All the Hitlerites reacted negatively because they felt they were being criticized. Where merely pious ritual was celebrated, however, people could remain undisturbed; nobody wanted to shear those sheep. Dietrich Bonhoeffer vented his scorn on this pious business by saying, "Only those who pray publicly for the Jews may sing Gregorian."^{58]}

Thielicke had nothing against the liturgy in itself. He preferred liturgical forms and preached in traditional vestments. What he did object to was religious form that became an end unto itself and which consequently did not effectively communicate the living Christ.⁵⁹ Thielicke praises the Russian Orthodox Church that was very high in its liturgical form for bringing a genuine new life to her people.⁶⁰

Certainly part of the difference between Thielicke's criticism of high liturgy among the German Lutherans⁶¹ of World War Two and his praise of the high liturgy of the Orthodox has to do with the context of each. The liturgical renewal in

⁵⁸ I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. 235.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 217 ". . . Christianity can become so exciting, so fiery and stormy, that it can catapult people out of the previous course of their life. For in our case (honestly, now) the situation often seems to be exactly the reverse. The words we hear from the pulpit or the old liturgies seem to be venerable, of course, but they are often dead as well."

⁶⁰ Thielicke repeats this praise of the Russian Orthodox Church in The Trouble with the Church, p. 103. Specifically he mentions their making the liturgy understandable to "both friend and foe" as a positive step.

⁶¹ Germany and America are identified as the main areas for this liturgical legalism in The Trouble with the Church, p. 85.

Germany during the war was for Thielicke an artificial repristination. It was a legalistic insistence on the liturgical form, not a liturgical practice that flowed from the necessity of the Gospel. Thielicke seems to say that such liturgical legalism also represented the wrong focus for the times. Instead of worship directing the people toward the cross and sacrificial love, the liturgical renewal placed the focus of Christian life on the correctness of the act of worship.⁶²

Thielicke gives an extended discussion about the role of the liturgy in his dogmatics.⁶³ There one sees how he seeks balance in the liturgy between traditional forms and modern expressions. Both sides to the liturgical debate can lead to harmful ends. Escape into the liturgy for the sake of liturgy can ignore the immediacy of genuine human problems and issues. By the same token, escape away from the liturgy for purposes of innovation, if there is not christological necessity to do so, is also highly dangerous. Thielicke writes:

Should we not replace Gregorian chants and similar music with modern idioms (jazz, rock, etc.)? Should we not use trumpets, saxophones, and the like instead of organs? Certainly such a break with traditional worship is not permissible if a secular group is used merely for the sake of being modern and of tickling the ears of (young) people. Psycho-strategy is the worst enemy of the spiritual and self-evident Word, quite apart from the fact that the aim is noticed and is missed for this very reason.⁶⁴

A properly balanced liturgical expression is important for Thielicke. Here he shows sensitivity to the communal nature of worship. His individualised

⁶² Ibid., pp. 83-85.

⁶³ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, pp. 245-247.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 247.

christology does not give free license to subjectively rework liturgical expressions.

The needs of the community of faith must be paramount in changing the liturgy in any direction.⁶⁵

“For it is precisely as the abiding element that the liturgy should pass over into the flesh and blood of the actual, present church. But it can do this only on two conditions, first that it be understood, and second, that it be constantly repeated, from childhood to old age, that it become as familiar as the voice of one’s mother. And this is exactly why I think it is so disastrous that the liturgiologists keep changing the existing liturgies and allow the familiar things to die, that even the hymnals are subjected to radical – and actually very dubious – operation.”⁶⁶

The community of faith for which Thielicke is here concerned is more than just the local congregation but the Church as she exists “trans-temporally.” Thielicke recognises the liturgy as a cohesive element important in transmitting the christological message consistently over time. So while the liturgy was prone to abuse by individuals, a balanced liturgical practice was salutary for the many. Two elements of Thielicke’s thought find expression here: he is concerned that the liturgy function as a consistent voice for the corporate Church, but his criticisms of abusive liturgical practice also reflect his passion for the individual. An underlying problem of liturgical innovation or repristination is that it does not deal seriously with the concrete situation in which individuals live. It glosses over the actual substance of individual lives and focuses instead on the form the corporate voice of worship will take.

⁶⁵ Note Thielicke’s recognition of the liturgy as an expression of the community. Cf. The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 245.

⁶⁶ The Trouble with the Church, p. 100

2.3 Benefits of the Ecclesiological Community

It is true that the numerical balance between negative statements and positive statements reveals a deep-seated scepticism toward the Church; Thielicke's criticisms far outnumber his positive statements. Nonetheless he does provide balance to the criticisms previously noted by pointing out certain benefits to be had in the Church.

2.3a The Church as the Bearer of Christ

The Church for Thielicke was especially important as a bearer of Christ. Despite its weaknesses the active presence of Christ was at work within the Church especially in the Word proclaimed there. The Church was a sort of relay race toward the *eschaton* wherein the message of Christ was handed like a baton from one generation to the next.⁶⁷ The glory of the Church was not outward, but found in the holiness given her through the Word.⁶⁸ In that Word God himself is present to his people.⁶⁹ There is a decidedly corporate character to this christological presence that Thielicke notes:

Nein, ich glaube diese Kirche aus einem ganz anderen Grunde: weil mich nämlich das Wort des Herrn ergriffen und weil es mich an die Quellen des Lebens geführt hat und weil mir nun mit einem Schlage zweierlei klar wird; *einmal*, daß ich dieses schöpferische und verwandelnde Wort nur *hier* gehört habe und auch weiterhin nur *hier* hören kann, daß dieses Wort nur in der Gemeinschaft von Christen zu hören ist, also nur dort, wo zwei oder drei in seinem Namen versammelt sind. Und noch ein *Zweites* wird mir klar: Wo dieses

⁶⁷ I Believe: The Christian's Creed, p. 167.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Wort ausgerichtet wird, da findet es auch seine Leute, da wird der Herr "mitten unter ihnen sein", da wird sich das Wunder der Kirche ereignen.⁷⁰

[translation: (Anderson) No, I believe the church for a far different reason. It is because the word of the Lord grips me there and leads me to the source of life, and because at a stroke two things now become clear to me. The first is that I have heard this creative and transforming word only there, and only there can I hear that this word may be heard only in the fellowship of Christians, that is, where two or three are gathered in his name. And a second thing also becomes clear: his people are found wherever this word is spoken. There the Lord will be "in the midst of them"; there the miracle of the church will take place.⁷¹]

The remarkable aspect about this quotation is that Thieliicke makes the Church the sole source for christological proclamation and the location of the divine presence. Christ's presence is tied to the Word, but uncharacteristically Thieliicke claims that the Church is the only context wherein the Word can be properly heard. This stands in contrast to previously noted statements wherein Christ's presence was said to be found outside the traditional means of Word and Sacrament. Unfortunately the persistence of his individual/spiritual Christ encounter overwhelms this reference to Christ's corporate presence and he never develops the idea further.

As he draws attention to Christ's activity within the Church,⁷² Thieliicke defends the local church, which although human and unimpressive is still the bearer of the

⁷⁰ Woran Ich glaube, p. 302.

⁷¹ I Believe: The Christian's Creed, p. 236.

⁷² In I Believe the Christian's Creed compare two statements: Christ knocking on the doors to our heart within the Church, p. 239. Christ as being in the midst of his people in the Church, p. 241.

Gospel.⁷³ The context of this sermon is the Third Article with its “I believe in the holy Christian Church.” The topic forces a more involved discussion of the Church than is typical in other sermons. The criticisms directed toward the corporate Church that one finds in other sermons are also found here,⁷⁴ but Thielicke does draw attention to more of the positive blessings of the Church. He mentions the warmth of fellowship one can have with other Christians even in transcultural situations⁷⁵ and the christological action of grace that one finds active in the Church.⁷⁶ There is ample evidence in this sermon that Thielicke was well aware of the potential of ecclesiology to offer a necessary foundation for the “I” in reference to the Other of God and other people. The Church is the bearer of Christ for Thielicke, but his persistent concern for Christians as individuals is much more powerful than his concern for Christians as a community. Therefore the Church as bearer of Christ corporately yields to individual hearts as bearers of Christ personally in his overall theology.

2.3b The Church As Vicarious

One of the community models in Thielicke’s ecclesiology which holds great potential is that where the Church carries out a vicarious function. This is seen with particular clarity in prayer:

Vielleicht ist dies das letzte, was uns bleibt, wenn die dunklen
Wogen übermächtig werden wollen: daß es eine Gemeinde gibt, die

⁷³ Ibid., p. 240.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 231, 232.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

lobt und dankt und die stellvertretend für mich ihre Hände erhebt, während ich selbst keinen Ton mehr herausbringe oder auf einem Krankenlager oder als Sterbender meiner Gedanken und Worte nicht mehr mächtig bin.

Um mich herum lebt Jesus Christus in seinen Zeugen. Ihr Lobpreis darf nie verstummen, auch wenn das eigene Herz tot und der Mund versiegelt ist. Zwischen mir und jeder Finsternis steht Jesus Christus, und es gibt kein Dunkel, mit dem jenes Licht nicht fertig würde, dessen Anbruch der Lobgesang des Zacharias bezeugt.⁷⁷

[translation: Perhaps this is the last thing with which we are left, when the dark waves overwhelm us, that there is a congregation that cares, who praises and thanks God and who vicariously raises its hands for me, while I myself can not bring forth a sound or when I am on my sickbed or dying and can no longer control my thoughts and words.

Jesus Christ lives all around me in his witness. Their praise may never be silenced, even when one's own heart is dead and one's mouth is silenced. Between me and every darkness stands Jesus Christ, and there is no darkness which that light cannot bring to an end. Zachariah's song of praise bears witness to that dawn.⁷⁸]

The vicarious action of the *Communio Sanctorum* was especially important for Thielicke during wartime. In The Silence of God Thielicke devotes an entire letter to the subject of "vicarious intercession."⁷⁹ Within that letter he expands on the concept by explaining that his view is not one that would remove responsibility from the individual.⁸⁰ Just the opposite, the nature of the vicarious act requires a binding of one to another. (The comparison he cites is that of sponsors at infant baptism, who in the act of speaking on behalf of the infant who cannot yet speak,

⁷⁷ Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 228.

⁷⁸ Here, because of accuracy, I prefer my translation to Anderson's in How to Believe Again, p. 181.

⁷⁹ The Silence of God, pp. 43-49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47, "Naturally, we cannot speak of it responsibly without mentioning the danger. To quote an expression of Kähler, I might say that the dangers lie especially in 'exclusive substitution.' By this I mean the vicarious representation

bind themselves to that child and obligate themselves to guide and nurture the child in the faith.) The soldier in the field who because of the horrors of war does not know what or how to pray as he ought can at least take comfort in the knowledge that there are those who have bound themselves to him in love and obligated themselves to him before God. He is drawn into this community of faith as a subject before God with them and not merely as an object of prayer. The christological overtones are clear. Thielicke's basis for such vicarious representation is Christ who prayed "Our Father . . ." with fallen humanity. He finds other examples of vicarious representation in Scripture including Abraham's prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah and God shortening the days of judgement for the sake of the elect in Mark 13. As the Church bears the image of Christ she, like him, lives for the sake of the other.

There is a great deal of potential for further elaboration on the vicarious nature of the Church. One could explore further biblical examples of this vicarious action and show present-day applications. One could expand on how the solitary "I" tied to the *Communio Sanctorum* by faith is never really solitary but enjoys a mystical bond of love grounded in the vicarious nature of Christ himself. Yet despite the possibilities for meaningful expansion of thought, Thielicke chooses to mention vicarious intercession only in passing. He does not develop it or return to it as a regular emphasis.⁸¹

which absolves others from personal decision because I illegitimately take it upon myself."

⁸¹ Another example of this is found in: Helmut Thielicke, The Silence of God, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 46.

The building blocks for a strong ecclesiology are clearly present with Thielicke's system. It seems that what may be holding Thielicke back from developing the communal elements of his ecclesiology is more ideological than doctrinal. His method of thought simply favours subjectivism and demonstrates a strong aversion to objective/ontic thought forms. The subjective emphasis necessarily leads toward individualism and away from community models. Certainly in post-World War Two Germany where there was a reaction against Nazi mass fervour, models stressing the collective nature of the Church would have been more difficult to promote. In today's world however, as individualism leads toward social atomisation and hedonism, Thielicke's approach is problematic.

2.4 Two Sources for Personalisation: Spener and Schleiermacher

Thielicke's movement away from the classic Lutheran ecclesiology with its corporate/objective emphasis toward a more personal, spiritual, inner, concept of appropriation is part of a movement that started much earlier. Thielicke gives credit for this movement to Philip Spener, the father of German Pietism. He writes that Spener was the first German theologian who tried to do justice to emphasising subjectivity and individuality in faith appropriation.⁸² Pietism was a significant influence on Thielicke's spiritual growth. We have noted that Thielicke was raised in a pietistic church. He did not accept all for which Pietism stood, but several tendencies characteristic of Pietism can also be seen in Thielicke's christology/ecclesiology. A psychological or experiential emphasis on appropriation is shared between the two, a theology that shuns the dogmatism of

⁸² The Evangelical Faith, vol. 1, p. 41.

orthodoxy is also shared as is the movement away from the sacramental theology of classic Lutheranism.

The other ecclesiological influence on Thielicke that he cites is Schleiermacher. In his dogmatics texts Thielicke explains how Schleiermacher attempted to show that a general secular consciousness included a “religious structure.”⁸³ Even those separated from the Church can appropriate Christ because in a way they had already done so as conscious beings. All that remained for the theologian was to provide the appropriate encouragement for the people to become conscious of this through “contemplation and feeling of the ‘universum’.”⁸⁴ The nature of this consciousness is a feeling of “absolute dependence.” Schleiermacher hoped that by directing the “I” into the self to discover the feeling of dependency that the “I” would then also find the source of the feeling which was God.

One sees this line of reasoning in Schleiermacher’s Speeches; he states, “True religion is sense and taste for the Infinite.”⁸⁵ He then expands on this by saying:

What can man accomplish that is worth speaking of, either in life or in art, that doesn’t arise in his own self from the influence of this sense for the Infinite? . . . What is all science, if not the existence of things in you, in your reason? What is all art and culture if not your existence in things to which you give measure, form and order? And how can both come to life in you except in so far as there lives

⁸³ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958) p. 39.

immediately in you the eternal unity of Reason and Nature, the universal existence of all finite things in the Infinite?⁸⁶

For Schleiermacher, in that humanity possesses an “immediate” sense of the Infinite, so also does humanity inherently possess a sense of true religion. There is certainly a sense in which we can agree that humanity possesses an inherent sense of the divine.⁸⁷ The fact that some form of religion exists in virtually all of the world’s cultures testifies to humanity’s sense of a divine being. Yet the question must be asked whether this is where Christianity should start its engagement with the world. Did the Apostles begin their mission activity with the Gentiles by finding common ground with some sense of “godness” manifest within the mind and intellect of the hearers? Perhaps one could cite Paul on Mars Hill as an attempt to connect with a sense of the divine in the unbelieving world.⁸⁸ Yet even in this example Paul is not building on the god within the mind and intellect, but rather on the sense of the true God as unknown to the people. The question is a thorny one, because in one sense the Church can build on secular mankind’s inner belief in a god and show from that how there is a true God revealed in Christ, but in another sense the Church must be wary of Schleiermacher’s approach because it begins within mankind and directs the hearer to himself or herself for evidence of God. The very nature of the Gospel as something external to humanity located in the person of Christ stands at odds to an attempt to find evidence of the true God by looking within. Which elements within the psyche of secular humanity can be drawn on to provide paths to

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Calvin agrees to this in his *Institutes*, Book 1, chapter 3: “The knowledge of God naturally implanted in the human mind.”

⁸⁸ Acts 17:23ff.

Church are vital for our response to individualism. As we explore these later we will find that there are such internal elements which do not encourage looking for God within, but draw people out to where they can receive word of the God outside of us.

Thielicke identifies this weakness in Schleiermacher's approach as a merging of anthropology with theology, because the beginning point for appropriation in Schleiermacher's system is a general analysis of consciousness. Thielicke is aware of the difficulties this poses for Christian faith. He asks:

. . . are not the doctrines changed in content to fit the consciousness, to make them digestible? Do they not undergo reduction when presented as the expression of a modification of the consciousness? Are they not starved and impoverished?⁸⁹

Thielicke did not embrace Schleiermacher's anthropological starting point for appropriation, but Thielicke did take with him a need to emphasise the psychological act in the process of appropriation. By presenting faith as something dependent on the rational mind and the emotional consciousness rather than on an objective ecclesiological act, Thielicke leans toward an anthropological origin for faith – not by denying the doctrine of faith as a Pneumatological gift, but by making its genuineness depend on a human ability to grasp it.

2.5 The Divorce of Sanctification from Ecclesiology

The subject of sanctification is discussed here under the general section on ecclesiology due to Thielicke's treatment of the subject. It is while discussing the

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

Church that Thieliicke often levels his criticisms of poor sanctification in the people. Sanctification also serves the Church for Thieliicke in several important ways; these will be discussed in the first section below. We will make observations about the nature of Thieliicke's presentation of sanctification and its consequences for the Church under point "2.5b" below, and the final section will address the social implications of sanctification on ecclesiology.

2.5a The Separation of Christian Life from the Church by Her Members

For Thieliicke there was an obvious failing in the relationship of people with the Church. He identifies two main problems: people who had no regular meaningful life with the Church, and those who came regularly to services but who failed to live out the faith they confessed. With the latter group Thieliicke more often than not lays the problem at the feet of orthodoxy. For him dogmatism represented knowledge without action and doctrine without self-denying service. A revealing quotation is found in The Waiting Father:

Ein saftiger Heide ist Gott hundertmal lieber und auch vor den Menschen ungleich sympathischer als ein Schriftgelehrter, der seine Bibel kennt, der religiös erheblich zu diskutieren weiß, der sonntäglich in die Kirche rennt, und in dem nichts zur Buße und zur Tat und vor allem nichts zum Sterben wird. Der reichert sich nur mit Verwesung an, und sein kenntnisreiches Christentum und seine religiöse Gefühllichkeit sind nur phosphoreszierende Fäulnis, die bloß ein armer Laie für göttliches Licht halten kann. Über den tatlosen Vielwissern – auch über den Nur – Theologen – liegt ein schrecklicher Fluch.⁹⁰

[translation: (Doberstein) A salty pagan, full of the juices of life, is a hundred times dearer to God, and also far more attractive to me, than a scribe who knows his Bible, who can discuss religion gravely, who runs to church every Sunday, but in whom none of this results in repentance, action, and above all, death of the self. He is simply accumulating corruption and his knowledgeable Christianity and his

⁹⁰ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 73.

religious sentiment are nothing but phosphorescent putrefaction, which only a poor layman could consider to be divine light. A terrible curse hangs over the know-it-all who does nothing - and also over the theologian who is only a theologian.^{91]}

Thielicke's criticisms are aimed at both laymen and clergy whose faith was lacking genuineness (most often the "orthodox"⁹²). For Thielicke it seems logical to assume that those whose appropriation of Christ is founded on the engaged will and intellect will be more inclined to action than those whose appropriation does not begin with the will. Yet an unbiased examination would find a lack of sanctification also among more liberal thinkers (especially in the form of antinomianism), as well as examples of self-sacrifice among those who were concerned with dogmatic correctness. So while it can be granted that there were examples of dead orthodoxy that deserved condemnation, it must also be acknowledged that Thielicke does show bias in his criticisms by directing the majority of his complaints against orthodoxy.

This does not mean that he completely fails to recognise the broader scope of the problem. There are examples of Thielicke's criticisms being spread generally over

⁹¹ The Waiting Father, p. 57.

⁹² Cf. Life can Begin Again, p. 170. ". . . for there can be no relationship with the Father that does not also include a relationship with our neighbor. . . . And a service of worship which is not at the same time a service to my brethren is not service of God, but merely opium and pious titillation. Then God has no desire to hear the solemn phrases of such prayers, the droning sound of even the great Reformation hymns, and the recitation of even the most correct sermons." Cf. also the quotation from The Silence of God, p. 30-31, (found on page 195).

those who attended Church but saw no need to express the joy of the Gospel they received there:

Die sauertöpfisch-muffigen Gesichter vieler Christen, die oft genug aussehen, als ob sie Gallensteine hätten (alle, die wirklich welche haben, mögen mir verzeihen!), sind schlechte Kündler jener hochzeitlichen Freude. Sie geben eher Anlaß zu der Vermutung, daß sie statt vom Freudenmahl des Vaters vom Gerichtsvollzieher kämen, der ihrer Sünde Maienblüte meistbietend und zu ihrem großen Kummer versteigert hat, so daß sie nicht mehr heran können. Nietzsche hat schon richtig beobachtet, wenn er sagt: "Sie müßten erlöster aussehen, wenn ich an ihren Erlöser glauben sollte."⁹³

[translation: (Doberstein) The glum, sour face of many Christians, who frequently enough look as if they had gallstones (all those who really have them will excuse me!) are poor proclaimers of that wedding joy. They rather give the impression that, instead of coming from the Father's joyful banquet, they have just come from the sheriff who has auctioned off their sins and now are sorry they can't get them back again. Nietzsche made a true observation when he said, 'You will have to look more redeemed if I am to believe in your Redeemer.'⁹⁴]

Thielicke is equally harsh in his statements to those who saw no need for regular contact with the Church:

Es gibt zum Beispiel Christen, die meinen: Einmal im Leben muß man sich bekehren oder in die Kirche eintreten, sich am Altar trauen lassen oder sich entschließen, die Kirchensteuern zu bezahlen. Dann ist alles fertig. Solche Leute kommen mir vor wie eine Frau, die einmal am Altar oder vor dem Standesamt das Jawort ihres Mannes erhalten hat und die nun meint: "Der is mir jetzt sicher. . . kann ich mich gehen lassen, mich vernachlässigen und eine Schlampe werden."

. . . Die erstorbenen Ehen und die erloschenen Lampen der Liebe, deren Ruß nur auf traurige Weise anzeigt, daß hier einmal etwas gebrannt *hat*, sind viel schlimmer.⁹⁵

[translation: (Doberstein) There are some Christians, for example, who think that once in one's life one must be converted or join the

⁹³ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 312.

⁹⁴ The Waiting Father, p. 187.

⁹⁵ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 300.

church, be married at the altar, or decide to pay the church dues. Then everything is finished. Such people strike me as being like a woman who, once she has heard her husband say, "I do," at the altar or in the registry office, says to her self, "Now I've got him. . . . I can let myself go, neglect myself, and be a frump." . . . The dead marriages and the extinguished lamps of love, whose dismal soot is only a sad evidence that once a light had burned here, these are far worse.^{96]}

The sanctification that should be produced through one's ecclesiological connection was vital to Thielicke's christology on several levels. It was a guard against taking individualism to extremes by living only for self; sanctification necessitates love for the other. The sanctified life was also the first point of contact that the cultured despisers would have of Christianity. Thus sanctification was vital for outreach.⁹⁷

It seems likely that Thielicke's Reformed background also contributed to his views on the regenerate or sanctified life. One does find a more central role for the regenerate life in Calvin's theology than one finds in Luther. For Calvin the third

⁹⁶ The Waiting Father, p. 178-179.

⁹⁷ Consider the following quotation where Thielicke speaks of a lack of sanctification as being responsible for people not wanting contact with the church (specifically the pastor). "Wie viele Abschiede von der Kirche haben sich nicht so vollzogen, daß man feststellen mußte: Der Pastor ist unglaublich (schaut sein Privatleben, schaut seine menschliche Interesselosigkeit gegenüber Eltern mit ihren Erziehungsnot, gegenüber Kranken und Alten an!" (Glauben als Abenteuer, p. 56). [translation: "How many of those who have left the Church have not come to the conclusion that a person must see the pastor is untrustworthy? Look at his private life. Look at his human weakness, his loss of interest in regard to parents with their needs in raising their children and his weakness in regard to the sick and the old!" (Doberstein's translation in Faith the Great Adventure, p. 27 was not used here because it lacked exactness.)]

use of the law is held up as its principal use;⁹⁸ in Luther the second use of the law is given primacy.⁹⁹ In Luther the article of Justification dominates, in Calvin's Institutes the nature of good works is explored before the article on Justification because, "it seemed of more consequence first to explain that the faith by which alone, through the mercy of God, we obtain free justification, is not destitute of good works."¹⁰⁰ Thielicke's great concern for a prominent place for sanctification in the lives of believers then seems consistent with his Calvinist background.

Turning to the issue of sanctification preventing over-individualisation one finds Thielicke taking the following argument from a sermon:

Wenn dieser Mann recht haben *sollte* – so sprach die innere Stimme -, *dann* konnte man nicht so bleiben, sie man war. Dann durfte man nicht mehr nur der saturierte Gottesgelehrte sein, der im Worte Gottes forschte, den aber das Elend der Armen nicht weiter umtrieb. Dann konnte man nicht mehr der hochmütige Intellektuelle sein, der seinem Individualismus lebte und den die Plebs, die Masse, den die langweiligen Dummköpfe mit ihren tausend uninteressanten Tagesnöten und Courths-Mahler-Sentimentalitäten nichts angingen. Dann konnte man auch nicht mehr der "reiche Jüngling" bleiben, der seiner persönlichen Kultur, seinen gepflegten Wohnräumen lebte und der darüber vergaß, daß draußen, zweihundert Meter von seiner Villa, Nissenhütten standen, die schmutzig und überfüllt waren.¹⁰¹

[translation: (Doberstein) If this man (Jesus) should be right, said the inner voice, then a man could not remain as he was. Then he could not go on being merely the blasé theologian, who searched the Scriptures but was no longer moved by the misery of the poor. Then

⁹⁸ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 1, trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), p. 309. [Book 2, chap. 7, section 12]

⁹⁹ Cf. LW 9:290, 22:143, 35:172, 39:188, 44:63,

¹⁰⁰ Institutes, Book 3, Chapter 11, section 1.

¹⁰¹ Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 242.

he could no longer be the proud intellectual, who practiced his individualism and had no time for the plebs, the masses, the boring bonehead with their thousand and one uninteresting daily needs and silly sentimentalities. Nor could he go on being the 'rich young ruler,' who lived his cultured, sheltered life and forgot that not two hundred yards from his villa there were dirty, overcrowded huts and tenements. . . ¹⁰²]

Here Thieliicke speaks of sanctification as a divesting of oneself. Individualism is overcome as one gives up oneself for the other. It is also through sanctified acts toward the other that Thieliicke sees the individual as drawing closer to God.

Die letzten quälenden Lebensfragen könnten dann nur dort zur Ruhe kommen, wo man sich selbst und seinen Terminkalender vergißt – wie das der barmherzige Samariter ja tatsächlich tut – und wo man für diesen seinen Mitmenschen da ist, in dem Gott selber uns begegnen will. ¹⁰³

[translation: (Anderson) The ultimate tormenting problems of life can only be laid to rest at the point where we forget ourselves and our appointment books, as the good Samaritan actually did. God himself will meet us where we are present to our fellow man. ¹⁰⁴]

Throughout these discussions on sanctification, some of which are linked to expectations on one's life with the Church and others of which are made issues of personal responsibility, it does become clear that sanctification is highly personal. It is directed toward the other and in that sense has a scope beyond the individual, but how one gains the sanctified life is not joined to a communal experience in the Church. Even when the Church is mentioned as the place where one should expect to gain sanctification there is no exploration of the corporate nature of receiving it. When the discussion is obviously about the Church then the individual seems to

¹⁰² The Waiting Father, p. 159-160. Cf. Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 252. (How to Believe Again, p. 201-202.)

¹⁰³ Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 158.

¹⁰⁴ How to Believe Again, p. 120.

grow in sanctification (or not grow) from his or her personal contact with the Word found there. The “otherness” of sanctification is then a personal encounter with the other not a model for the corporate reception of a sanctified heart in the Church.

2.5b Reaching for Community through Social Ethics

Yet for Thielicke this personal ethical responsibility toward the other stamps the Church with a social concern and therefore with a limited sense of community.

One cannot be sanctified unto oneself but only in relation to others. As Thielicke defines his concept of Church, it becomes clear that this sociological concern is behind much of his ecclesiology. Ecclesiology that is defined by sociological ethics is found in its most blatant form in the theology of Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher writes:

Now the general concept of ‘Church,’ if there really is to be such a concept, must be derived principally from Ethics, since in every case the ‘Church’ is a society which originates only through free human action and which can only through such continue to exist.¹⁰⁵

Thielicke does not support such a sociological definition of the Church¹⁰⁶ but it is worth noting that ethics, which formed the sociological building blocks of ecclesiology for Schleiermacher, play a very important role in Thielicke’s theological thought as well.¹⁰⁷ Schleiermacher defined the Church via ethics. Thielicke merely borrows the idea that ethics should be included heavily in the idea

¹⁰⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 203 where he calls ecclesiology that begins with sociology as “aberrant.”

¹⁰⁷ In The Trouble with the Church, p. 78 Thielicke points out that he wrote the Ethics volumes as a way of doing the theological groundwork for preaching.

of the Church. Indeed as one examines Thielicke's works one finds that he spends comparatively little time discussing a doctrine of ecclesiology proper while devoting several volumes to ethics. In the quotation below one can see sociological/ethical considerations as part of Thielicke's ecclesiological definitions.

The church may be defined, then, only in terms of a relation that arises when the faith and prayer of those addressed by the efficacious and creative Word of God respond to it. This fundamental relation constitutes the church – the relation between the transcendent Word and the empirical historical reality in which faith in this Word arises and living people respond audibly and visibly to it. The two elements in a definition of the nature of the church are origin in the Word on the one side and historical being on the other.¹⁰⁸

Unlike Schleiermacher Thielicke places a great deal of importance on the Word in his definition of the Church because, as the next chapter will endeavour to show, the Word for Thielicke is the main christological meeting ground (spiritually). Unlike classic Lutheranism the issue of the Churches' "historical being" or its anthropological/relational existence becomes the second element of his definition of "Church." Classic Lutheranism found the marks of the Church in the Word and sacraments; Thielicke finds them in the Word and corresponding human response.

By joining the ethical response of the people to the Word in his definition of Church Thielicke is allowing the element of sanctification to define the Church. The definition of Church given in *Augsburg Confession* Article VII resists allowing sanctification to be part of its definition. The Church in classic Lutheranism is defined primarily by its christology and therefore also by the article of justification.

¹⁰⁸ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 204-205.

Thielicke's need to bring human action into his definition of Church follows an internal consistency in his theological system of elevating individual responsibility over communal receptivity. Ethics provides the necessary "mechanism" for pursuing subjective/individualistic issues of relationship. Thielicke states, ". . .faith is always actualized – wholly actualized – within the concrete relationships of the world."¹⁰⁹ Such a view of faith as a matter of personal ethical "actualisation" in concrete relationships demands a high degree of subjectivity since the application of ethics must take into account situational concerns.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, there is implicit within the ethical consideration a need for community. The need stems more from a necessary arena wherein ethics can be practiced than from a corporate body wherein the ethical imperative is received.

2.5c The Nature and Consequences of Thielicke's Presentation

Thielicke may have borrowed ecclesiological notions from Schleiermacher but by and large his presentation of sanctification attempts to walk a line between classic Lutheranism and a more pietistic Reformed theology. At times he stands in complete agreement with the classic Lutheran view of sanctification proceeding from justification,¹¹¹ at other times, like that quoted earlier, he makes unguarded

¹⁰⁹ Helmut Thielicke, Theological Ethics, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 471.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. cf. "The Conflict Situation as Typical of Man's Ethical Relation to the World," pp. 482-493.

¹¹¹ Cf. The Waiting Father, p. 70 "We can do this (distinguish between true growth and false) only as we grow into him, as his Word is formed in us, as we allow everything we are and think and do to be permeated by him, as we wake with him in the morning and let him be our first thought, as we see in our fellow men and fellow workers the men for whom he died, as we allow our work to be hallowed by him, as we give thanks to him for the joys and fulfillments of our life

statements about the human act preceding God's action. In all probability many such conflicting thoughts are simply the result of difference in context while preaching. In preaching one is more likely to make provocative statements without the kind of dogmatic precision characteristic of academic writings. Yet it also seems clear when one looks at the complete picture of Thielicke's theology that there is a genuine tension between competing theologies. Our previous point is reinforced; his Reformed upbringing (which as he says was pietistic in nature) in combination with his Lutheran self-identification leads Thielicke to the creation of a theology that borrows from both but claims allegiance to neither.

Outside of his sermons his discussion of sanctification is more clearly in agreement with classic Lutheranism.¹¹² In his Theological Ethics he specifically mentions *Augsburg Confession* article VI that deals with "The New Obedience" and registers his agreement with it. Thielicke is adamant that any view of ethics (sanctification in the narrow sense of good works) that does not proceed from justification is ultimately blasphemous, even more, ultimately blasphemes by

and accept the pains and disciplines as from his hand, and finally when death comes, as we 'let him put his hand beneath our head to lift us up and hold us' (Matthias Claudius)." Cf. p. 112 & 118 "Not until we know him who has taken us into his service, not until we know his heart, his wisdom, and his compassion does it become a happy service to be employed by him." Cf. also p. 185. Out of the Depths p. 67, "Jesus Christ is known only in discipleship, or He is not known at all."

¹¹² Helmut Thielicke, Theological Ethics: Foundations, ed. William H. Lazareth, vol. 1. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 51. "The ethical act, then, is simply an expression of the prior fact of justification; it is, as it were, a 'subsequent' demonstration of the given justification." A footnote explains "subsequent" as not

making the self its own god.¹¹³

Yet despite the strength of Thielicke's agreement with classic Lutheran formulations on sanctification in his academic writings, his sermonic statements cannot be ignored. There are numerous places where Thielicke separates sanctification from justification by speaking of sanctified acts as occurring prior to justification, or he speaks of sanctified acts as being the motivation for God's activity instead of the immediate product of God's activity.

Ich will morgen aufstehen und mit meinen Pfunden dann *so* für dich wuchern und meinem Nächsten *so* dienen, *als ob es dich gäbe*. Dann wirst du die große Stille um dich zerbrechen und wirst plötzlich bei mir sein. Dann wirst du sagen: "Ei, du frommer und getreuer Knecht, gehe ein zu deines Herrn Freude!" So ist das also mit Gott. "Wenn wir horchen, redet Gott; wenn wir gehorchen, handelt Gott."¹¹⁴

[translation: (Doberstein) Tomorrow I shall rise and trade with my pound for thee and serve my neighbor as if thou didst exist. Then shalt thou break the silence and suddenly be near to me. Then shalt thou say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!" That's the way it is with God. "When we listen, God speaks; when we obey, God acts."¹¹⁵]

The context of the above statement is in reference to those who doubt God.

They are asked to simply act "as if God did exist" and then on the basis of their act

meaning "temporally" but logically subsequent. Cf. p. 54 "good works arise, as it were, 'automatically' out of the event of justification without human co-operation."

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 61 "For wherever ethics does not understand works with a backward reference as the expression of justification, but instead refers them forward to the ethical goal and understands them as a means to actualize that goal, it is bound to subscribe to the blasphemous idea of a 'self-creation of the ego' according to which works will create the good, the pious, the well-pleasing ego."

¹¹⁴ Das Bilderbuch gottes, pp. 206-207.

¹¹⁵ The Waiting Father, p. 146.

God will come to them, and on the basis of their obedience God will act.

Sanctification is thus separated from the justifying action of God and actually precedes it.¹¹⁶ Thielicke's approach may be borrowing from ideas noted in Schleiermacher earlier, where unregenerate humanity carries within it an instinctive knowledge of God. Thielicke wishes to arouse these suppressed instincts by encouraging performance of the acts of faith the regenerate would do. A similar presentation is seen in a sermon from The Silence of God, but here sanctified acts are demanded of those who claim orthodoxy but in reality are dead in their faith. To reclaim a living faith they are instructed to act first and expect God to follow their actions.

Du wirst nicht fertig mit der Frage: wie ich bin? Du zergrübelst dir den Kopf über die Dogmen, über meine Gottmenschheit, über Jungfrauengeburt und Ähnliches? Versuch statt dessen einmal etwas in meinem Namen zu tun, meinerwegen, "als ob" ich schon in deinem Leben ware. Versuch einmal, dein Leben mir zuzuordnen, reiche einem Durstigen in meinem Namen einen Becher Wasser, vergib einem andern, weil ich dir auch vergab. Übergib mir eine Leidenschaft, an der du hängst; wage, mir dein innerstes Herz bloßzustellen und vor mir ein Sünder zu werden. Wage es, dein Herz vor mir eine Mördergrube sein zu lassen, auch wenn es wehe tut. Sei gewiß, daß du dann auf einmal ganz anders über dich denken, eine ganz andere Stellung zu mir finden wirst, als du es je vermuten und erträumen konntest, da du mit theoretischen Gedanken nach mir suchtest.¹¹⁷

[translation: (Bromiley) Can you not answer the question of who am I? Are you immersing yourself in the dogmas of my divine humanity, Virgin Birth and the like? Instead, do something in my name and for my sake as though I were already in your life. Try to order your life by me. Give a cup of water to the thirsty in my name. Forgive another because I have forgiven you. Surrender to me something to which you cling. Dare to lay bare your soul and become a sinner before me. Dare to let your heart be a den of thieves

¹¹⁶ Within this same volume of sermons note the identical instruction to act "as if there was something to Jesus" and then based on that action getting a response from God. p. 192.

¹¹⁷ Die Lebensangst, p. 113.

before me, however hard it is. Be sure that you will then suddenly think differently of me, and find a very different attitude to me, than you could ever suspect or imagine when you sought me theoretically.^{118]}

In classic Lutheranism one does not attain to right faith through one's acts. Justification is not the reward for sanctified acts, but the soteriological force that instantaneously begins the sanctified movement in the believer.¹¹⁹ In Thielicke's statement quoted above and in other statements made throughout his sermonic works sanctified acts are occasionally seen as preceding faith and thus as preceding justification. There seems little reason to doubt that he knew this put him at odds with Lutheranism. But his desire for a pragmatic method of moving those outside the Church toward an encounter with Christ seems to have superseded his concern for dogmatic correctness. His approach is consistent with his premise that appropriation is founded on the human psyche which is able to arouse a hidden

¹¹⁸ The Silence of God, p. 30-31.

¹¹⁹ The term "logically" is set against "temporally." In classic Lutheranism sanctification occurs in justification. It is given simultaneously with grace and does not develop after one has been justified. Cf. David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," Concordia Theological Quarterly, April-July, 1985, p. 187. "Luther's concept of *simul justus et peccator* is fundamental for a Lutheran understanding not only of justification but also of sanctification. Before God the person is totally justified and the same person is in himself and sees himself as a sinner. What is important in this understanding is the Latin word *simul*, at the same time, and not in a sequential sense as if one followed the other in point of time. Historically this distinction was lost in Lutheranism, as in the case of Pietism, where man is first justified and rescued from sin and then the work of sanctification begins. The end result is perfectionism or at least a mild form of it. The matter is viewed in this way: After a person is justified by faith, the new life of obedience sets in and progresses. Justification is seen as a past event in the Christian life and sanctification as a temporal result, separate and distinct from justification as the cause. Whenever justification and sanctification are separated from each other with this kind of temporal understanding, Lutheran theology is brought to ruin."

consciousness of Christ¹²⁰ and is a function that belongs to the realm of personal decision.¹²¹

As this applies to our discussions here, it is important to note the impact this has on ecclesiology. Thieliicke's stress on one's personal regenerate acts as a means of "finding" Christ drives a wedge between ecclesiology and the Christian faith and life. If even those outside the Church can produce sanctified works through their individual efforts and be assured of a divine comfort in the face of judgement then the need for being part of the ecclesial body of Christ is weakened in the overall scheme of soteriology. The centrality of justification in classic Lutheranism presses the need for the Church to the forefront. By maintaining the necessity for justification to logically precede sanctification, one is maintaining a need for contact with the "vehicles" of justification, and since those "vehicles" are bound up with Church, the Church itself becomes joined to one's daily sanctified life.

¹²⁰ Cf. Glauben als Abenteuer, pp. 40-41. [Faith the Great Adventure, p. 17.]

¹²¹ Cf. Thieliicke's statements in the sermon "How to Love Again" found in the volume How to Believe Again: "If I want to know what faith is – and how I long to have that experience! – then I am not to ask about the dogmas that this faith must energize; I am to keep a lookout to see what discoveries this faith makes, what new, breathtaking image of my fellow man is granted to it and what power of love are released in it." p. 128. Here again faith is sought not in any objective christological encounter but within the works produced by the individual. His aversion to dogmatic orthodoxy is here also evident.

Chapter 3

Reshaping the Sacraments:

The Individual and Community in the Balance

The previous chapter has already shown significant differences between Thielicke's sacramental theology and that of classic Lutheranism. This chapter will explore those differences further and examine how Thielicke's sacramental theology relates to his individualistic christology. We will also in this chapter begin to move more toward an evaluation of the effectiveness of Thielicke's christological focus in a postmodern context.

3.1 The Treatment of the Sacraments in Thielicke's Sermons

The sacraments have always been vital for classic Lutheranism in establishing both the vertical christological relationship and the horizontal relationship within the *Communio Sanctorum*. They are important as vehicles of christological embodiment, giving an immediacy and ontological reality to the present Christ. Consequently they feature prominently in Lutheran preaching. If one is to point to any sort of tangible embodiment principle in Thielicke's thought it would be found in Thielicke's doctrine of the Word which will be explored throughout this chapter. What will be shown is that the value of the sacraments for Thielicke lies in the proclaimed Word surrounding the sacramental rite, not in the means themselves. Of course in classic Lutheranism the empty means without the Word are also of no value.¹ Yet once the Word of promise is joined with the means then classic

¹ Cf. Triglotta, "The Large Catechism," p. 755. "The Word must make a Sacrament of the element, else it remains a mere element." Cf. LW 51:184 "Take the Word away and it is the same water with which the maid waters the cow; but with the Word, it is a living, holy, divine water."

Lutheranism is very willing to speak of the sacraments as being bearers of a unique divine presence.² Thieliicke does not understand the joining of Word with sacrament in the same way as classic Lutheranism. The objective means do not hold an objective/ontological christological presence at any point for Thieliicke. The Word alone holds the unique ability to bear the christological presence.³ That Word may or may not be a thing joined to the Church.⁴

What is immediately noticeable when one reads the volumes of Thieliicke's sermons is the decided lack of allusions to the sacraments. There are ample references to the presence of Christ and the Christ encounter, but it is clear that the location for this christological presence does not lie in the objective means of the sacraments. One also notices when the sacraments are mentioned that negative statements about them dramatically outnumber positive statements. Thieliicke is greatly concerned that false sacramental views lie at the heart of much spiritual laxity. The solution in his sermons is to steer the people away from sacramental

² LW 51:318-319 "Hence, not only are sins forgiven in baptism, but we are also made sure and certain that God is so well pleased with it that he, together with Christ and his Holy Spirit, proposes to be present when it is administered and he himself will be the baptizer. . . . Therefore wherever anybody is being baptized according to Christ's command we should be confidently convinced that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is present there . . ."

³ Cf. Life Can Begin Again, p. 209, "But the Word of the Lord – and Jesus Christ himself is this Word – is relevant at every station of life." This quote simply shows the understanding of Christ as being linked to the Word

⁴ For an example of Thieliicke speaking of the Church as the bearer of the Word cf. I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. 238. "Then (when Christianity is rejected by society) the miracle of the Church (Kirche) will confront us, because only then will it become clear that she lives from the word of her Lord, *only* from that word and from nothing else." Here Thieliicke has in mind the Church catholic. For an example of the use of the Word outside the context of Church see Life can Begin Again, p. 212. Also The Waiting Father, p. 69 which speaks of the Word as the apostolic medium for conversion and deliverance.

spirituality by avoiding the topic of the sacraments as much as possible and focusing the people more on their personal inner faith experience.

3.1a Baptism Viewed in Pragmatic Terms

We have already noted a number of disagreements Thielicke has with infant baptism. These were shown from statements made in his dogmatics texts. These same concerns have also been repeated in less detailed ways in his sermons.

Wir sind von Jugend auf in fast gefährlicher Selbstverständlichkeit dessen versichert und gewiß, daß Gott bereit ist, uns alles zu vergeben, und daß das Siegel unserer Taufe unter diesen Gnadenbrief gedrückt ist. Wir haben schwarz auf weiß ein Dokument in der Tasche. Es lag schon in unserer Wiege, und jetzt können wir es also privilegierte Taufscheinbesitzer und Kirchensteuerzahler jederzeit auf Anhieb aus der Schublade ziehen. Petrus muß uns schon durchlassen, wenn wir unseren Himmelspaß aus der Tasche ziehen. Und einen Stehplatz im Himmel wird er schon noch für uns haben.⁵

[translation: (Doberstein) From our youth up we have been taught to take it almost for granted that God is prepared to forgive everything and that the seal of our baptism has been stamped upon this full pardon. We have in our pocket a document in black and white to prove it. Why, it was there in our cradle and now, as licensed possessors of a baptismal certificate and contributors to the church, we can produce it any time we please. Even Peter will have to let us in when we pull our "pass to heaven" out of our pocket. And certainly there will be at least standing room for us in heaven.⁶]

This quotation is representative of several similar statements made by Thielicke.

For him the abuse of baptism was yet another manifestation of cheap grace.⁷ The

⁵ Das Leben kann noch einmal beginnin, p. 60. Cf. Our Heavenly Father, p. 140, The Waiting Father, p. 178, Faith the Great Adventure, p. 92, How to Believe Again, p. 58.

⁶ Life Can Begin Again, p. 44.

⁷ Cf. comments in Das Bilderbuch gottes, p. 308. With an eye toward the idea of "familiarity breeds contempt" Thielicke numbers baptism among those things

problem with Thielicke's criticisms against baptism is a problem of balance. In his sermons he criticises but does not provide instruction on the correctives offered within the classic Lutheran doctrine. Instead he seems to "throw the baby out with the bath water," leaving in question the validity of baptism itself. His dogmatics texts reinforce his questioning of the validity of infant baptism for the modern era,⁸ and they show his belief that the continued ritual practice of it fosters indifference in faith.⁹ It also becomes apparent that his concerns are not merely concerns of dogmatic correctness but primarily of pastoral care. The concrete situation of individuals is the starting point for Thielicke's consideration of different models of baptism. In this regard he is a pragmatist; what works in practice to remove the abuse justifies the departure in doctrine. Whereas classic Lutheranism answers the question of validity from the standpoint of dogmatics (doctrine), Thielicke seeks an answer from the present life and circumstances of individuals.¹⁰ The way Thielicke

that simply get taken for granted by Christians who have been around the sacrament for many years. Thielicke writes: ". . . um dieses Staunen betrügt, daß nämlich das Unerhörte uns zur Banalität, daß das Wunder uns zur Selbstverständlichkeit und daß das Übernatürliche uns zur zweiten Natur geworden ist. Wir sind beinahe mit Gnaden, die uns im Getriebe der bürgerlichchristlichen Existenz auf dem Wege über Taufe und Konfirmation zuströmen, ein bißchen zu sehr verwöhnt. Darum können wir die Seligkeit jener Einladung kaum noch empfinden. Christliche Stattheit ist aber schlimmer als hungriges Heidentum." [Translation: ". . . We are cheated from this awe when the unheard of things become banal to us, the Wonder becomes matter of fact, and the supernatural becomes second nature to us. We are almost spoiled with a little too much with grace, which is poured into us by the way of baptism and confirmation in the bustle of our middle-class Christian existence. Therefore we can hardly feel the bliss of each invitation. Christian fullness is worse than hungry heathenism." Doberstein's translation is found in The Waiting Father p. 184.]

⁸ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 274-275.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 276, 278.

¹⁰ Consider the following quotation, "The main question is not whether infant baptism is possible in principle but whether in circumstances such as these it is practicable, whether it is a possibility that can be recommended with a good conscience." *Ibid.*, p. 276.

shapes his thoughts about the sacrament of baptism once more betrays the importance of the individual as a foundational element in his thought. What works must not simply be a matter of what is biblically correct but rather how it will be received and understood in concrete situations by individuals who may not have sound theological understanding. In contrast to this classic Lutheranism does not bring proper reception into questions of validity,¹¹ but does allow it to enter into questions of benefit.¹² Luther actually sees the problem of abuse as confirming the ontological validity of baptism: "The saying goes, '*Abusus non tollit, sed confirmat substantiam,*' that is, 'Misuse does not destroy the substance, but confirms its existence.'"¹³

3.1b Different Paths to the Corporate Dimension of Baptism

Thielicke makes it clear that baptism is important for the Church as a community. The validity of baptism may be based on how it is received by individuals, but baptism itself is not an individualistic act nor does it bespeak a crassly individualistic christology for Thielicke. However, the path Thielicke takes to get to the corporate character of baptism is consistent with his spiritualising of the Christ encounter and does show serious departures from classic Lutheranism.

¹¹ "Luther's *Large Catechism*," Tappert, p. 443: "Further, we are not primarily concerned whether the baptized person believes or not, for in the latter case Baptism does not become invalid. Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God. . . . Baptism is valid, even though faith be lacking."

¹² Ibid., p. 441: "Just by allowing the water to be poured over you, you do not receive Baptism in such a manner that it does you any good. But it becomes beneficial to you if you accept it as God's command and ordinance, so that, baptized in the name of God, you may receive in the water the promised salvation. This the hand cannot do, nor the body, but the heart must believe it."

¹³ Ibid., p. 444.

Perhaps the strongest of his sermonic statements about the corporate dimension of baptism is made late in his career. In his last volume of “sermonic meditations” published in 1980 Thielicke observes:

So beantwortet denn auch Petrus die Frage: ‘Was sollen wir tun?’ sehr schlicht: ‘Laßt euch taufen, laßt euch die Vergebung eurer Sünden zuteil werden, laßt euch von eurer Vergangenheit lossprechen und gebt dem Geist Gottes Raum!’ . . . Hier geht es um einen gleichsam automatischen Prozeß. Wer den ersten Knopf seiner Weste ins falsche Loch knöpft, bei dem wird alles schief. Ich zeige euch das richtige Knopfloch. Laßt euch durch die Taufe zur Gemeinde des Herrn ‘hinzutun’ (2,41), werdet Glieder am Leib des Herrn, vertraut auf die Verheißungen, mit denen diese Gemeinschaft beschenkt und gesegnet ist, freut euch der tragenden Kraft dieser Verbindung mit Brüdern und Schwestern, dann werdet ihr den Atem des neuen Lebens erfahren . . .¹⁴

[translation: So then Peter also answers the question ‘What shall we do’ very simply: ‘be baptised, receive forgiveness for your sins, be absolved from your past and give the Spirit of God room!’ . . . It is, as it were, an automatic process. He who buttons the first button of his vest in the wrong hole will make all the rest wrong. I will demonstrate the right way to button for you. Be brought through baptism to the congregation of the Lord. Become members of the body of the Lord, trust in the promises that this community is given and with which it is blessed. Rejoice in the supporting power of this union with brothers and sisters, then you will discover the breath of the new life. . .¹⁵]

On the surface this statement seems in agreement with the traditional views of classic Lutheranism, namely, that through baptism one is united with Christ by faith and given fellowship with the *Communio Sanctorum*. However, referring back to the discussion on infant baptism in the previous chapter, it must be noted again that Thielicke does not believe faith is actually given in baptism, but that

¹⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Glauben als Abenteuer*, (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1980), p. 118-119. Thielicke makes similar statements about baptism as making one a member of the Christian community in *The Silence of God*, p. 49.

¹⁵ Scheidt’s translation in *Faith the Great Adventure*, p. 60 was not used due to the absence of the third and fourth sentences in my translation above.

baptism is a sign of faith that will mature as the intellect grows. That in mind, his statement about being “brought through baptism to the congregation” assumes a different character from classic Lutheranism.

Three possibilities seem to present themselves. One, he is speaking about a mature cognitive faith that has grown after baptism, and when speaking about baptism as an entrance rite is simply referring to what will eventually come of it. Two, he has changed his views on infant baptism; or three, fellowship with the Church is based on something other than faith. The second option is unlikely since his views about faith not being conferred in infant baptism seem fairly well entrenched. As an example: “as he (Luther) sees it, infancy is no barrier to faith, only to its confession. . . . but the fact that this faith is silent and unconscious forces Luther to describe it in ontological categories which he elsewhere rejects . . .”¹⁶ The objective/ontological nature of classic Lutheran sacramental theology is simply untenable for Thielicke.¹⁷ The third option is also less desirable since faith as an act of the personal will is held up as important throughout his sermons. Although a case can (and will) be made that Thielicke’s understanding of faith as a member of the *Communio Sanctorum* is still a very personalised affair, and the Church is seen

¹⁶ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 277. On this same page Thielicke accuses Luther’s ontological schema of being an example of “nominalist scholasticism which seriously disrupts his understanding of grace, faith, and original sin.”

¹⁷ Yet again one must acknowledge that Thielicke at times uses more traditional Lutheran language when discussing baptism. Consider the following, “Baptism is not just teaching about integration into Christ. It does not just illustrate justification. It accomplishes these things.” The Evangelical Faith, vol 3, p. 271. Also in agreement with Luther Thielicke says, (Our Heavenly Father, p. 85) “By nature it (baptismal water) is the same water the maid uses to cook with; in modern terms, it is H₂O. But when ‘God’s Word is comprehended in the water’ it suddenly acquires a dignity and becomes the bearer of the sacrament, and then it is something quite different from H₂O.”

from the perspective of an atomised community not a close knit body united in one faith and doctrine. The more likely answer is the first. Infant baptism is an entrance rite to the Church in as much as it joins one to the Church by way of a sign (albeit a powerful sign which one might also call a future hope) of that which will develop and flourish through cognitive apprehension of Christ. ¹⁸

It seems clear that Thielicke approaches baptism from more of a Calvinist perspective than a Lutheran one.¹⁹ Thielicke seems to agree with Calvin when he speaks of baptism as a sign of grafting into Christ²⁰ and of union with the *Communio Sanctorum*.²¹ Calvin does not believe that the sacrament itself ontologically binds the presence of Christ or gives faith, but that it is a sign of grace, faith, and the blessings of Christ.²² This concept of the baptismal sign

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁹ One finds more in common with Thielicke's language and the language of Calvin whom he quotes, than with his quotations of Luther. Cf. The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 268. "Along the same lines Calvin appealed to baptism as the given sign and seal of the 'initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children.'"

²⁰ Institutes, vol. 2, p. 514 "The last advantage which our faith receives from baptism is its assuring us not only that we are ingrafted into the death and life of Christ, but so united to Christ himself as to be partakers of all his blessings. For he consecrated and sanctified baptism in his own body, that he might have it in common with us as the firmest bond of union and fellowship which he deigned to form with us."

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 513 "Baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being ingrafted into Christ we may be accounted children of God. p. 520 "Baptism serves as our confession before men, inasmuch as it is a mark by which we openly declare that we wish to be ranked among the people of God, by which we testify that we concur with all Christians in the worship of one God and in one religion."

²² *Ibid.*, p. 520 ". . . not that such graces are included and bound in the sacrament, so as to be conferred by its efficacy, but only that by this badge the Lord

becomes very important for Thielicke. It allows him to speak of the *Communio Sanctorum* being one with the baptised and of parents and the members of the Church sharing in responsibility for nurturing the faith of the baptised. This corporate character to the sacrament leads Thielicke to conclude that the rite of baptism should not be divorced from the Church but practised within the community of saints wherein this faith would develop.²³

The problem with Thielicke's chosen path to the Church is that Thielicke is a Lutheran and as such has subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions. Yet here he challenges some of the most basic theological suppositions of the Lutheran confession. The three-way corporate connection between Christ, the individual, and the *Communio Sanctorum* is built on "ontological" thought structures in classic Lutheranism. The candidate in classic Lutheranism receives Christ and justifying grace in baptism²⁴ and as previously noted is given faith objectively through the water and words of baptism even if his or her mind cannot cognitively grasp it. While it is true such an ontological model can be and is misunderstood, it is also

declares to us that he is pleased to bestow all these things upon us." This is not to say that Calvin rejected the idea of a christological presence in baptism. Cf. The Evangelical Faith, vol 3, p. 267.

²³ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3 p. 281.

²⁴ This view is not confined to Luther but held by later Lutheranism as well. One example is, Martin Chemnitz, Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion, trans. by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 137-138. Chemnitz [often called the "second Martin" of the Lutheran Reformation and principle author of the Formula of Concord] speaks not only of a christological presence but of an ontological presence of the entire Trinity: ". . . in it [baptism] the entire holy Trinity is present and deals with the poor sinner through that outward ministry, so that He cleanses him from sins, delivers [him] from death, Satan, and eternal damnation, and instead gives [him] righteousness and eternal salvation." p. 138 para. 231. Chemnitz is careful to distinguish between this unique sacramental presence and God's attribute of omnipresence.

true that classic Lutheranism contains internal correctives for such misunderstandings. For instance, nowhere does classic Lutheranism teach a separation between baptism, the baptismal faith, and the consequent Christian life following baptism; just the opposite, it teaches a close connection between them.²⁵

The path Thielicke takes to corporate relationships in the Church allows for a more spiritualised and subjective bond of communion. A view of baptism that sees the sacrament as an actual conferral of faith by Christ places one immediately into the very essence of the *Communio Sanctorum*. The “I” is joined to the body of faith as a fellow believer. Thielicke’s ideas seem to create a second level of Christians within the *Communio Sanctorum*. One level of Christian exists only by way of sign and promise as it were. Faith is not really present but is in a way vicariously present in the parents and sponsors who bring the child to baptism. At the second level are those who really have faith and believe cognitively utilising the active will. The first level exists in the manner of a seed full of potential, the second level is the plant that has sprung from it.

This distinction is so important to Thielicke’s thought that he actively entertains the idea of postponing baptism until later in life when cognitive abilities are more fully developed.²⁶ In this way he believes the Church can avoid promoting the false “magical” view of infant baptism. There is an obvious logic to his thoughts. If people are baptising their babies with the belief that they have completed their

²⁵ Cf. Luther’s *Large Catechism*, Tappert pp. 439-446.

²⁶ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, pp. 280-281.

responsibilities as parents by completing the rite, then remove the rite and insist parents raise their children in the faith and teach them prior to receiving the rite.

In place of baptism at the stage of infancy Thielicke suggests a rite of dedication or blessing similar to that used by the Reformed Church of Geneva.²⁷ That such a view be seriously entertained reinforces the observation that Thielicke does not believe faith or grace is actually given in baptism. If it were, as in classic Lutheranism, infant baptism would be necessary to join one to Christ and the body of faith united in him.

Thielicke's willingness to consider such a drastic measure as postponement of baptism comes out of a genuine pastoral intent. He undoubtedly is concerned with helping the "I" recognise his or her responsibility to the living faith as a part of real daily life. However, one must ask if by joining baptism to an age of cognitive acceptance he is not adding an element of anthropocentrism that contradicts the very nature of baptism itself? Does not the balance then tip in the direction of the subjective by making the efficacy depend on the right thoughts of the individual? Thielicke's intent is to make baptism meaningful for the real lives of people, but the result of his approach is to make baptism into a matter of individual intellectual acceptance. What then started out as an impetus toward the corporate becomes ultimately situated once more in the individual. In the context of postmodernism where subjective truth claims and negative individualism are rampant, placing baptism in a context where the individual will determines the rite does little to

²⁷ Ibid., p. 280. Thielicke cites as his source Robert Leuenberger, Taufe in der Krise; Feststellungen, Fragen, Konsequenzen, Modelle (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1973), p. 81.

emphasise the fullness of what being joined to the corporate Church means. The beauty of the classic Lutheran view is that fellowship with God and with other Christians is given objectively apart from the individual's force of will. The individual does not set the terms for the relationship. Personal abilities give way in importance to an act of communion external to the self. The divine Other exposes what is lacking in the "I" and gives what the individual cannot gain through mental efforts, namely remission of sins, the indwelling person of Christ, and union with his body.

3.1c The Lord's Supper as an Emphasis for Sanctification

The same trends one sees in Thieliicke's treatment of baptism can be seen in his sermons when he discusses the Lord's Supper. There are not many references to the Lord's Supper in Thieliicke's sermons, but those references there are provide a glimpse of what Thieliicke saw as important for his hearers.

Of major importance in Thieliicke's treatment of the Lord's Supper is his emphasis on sanctification. In Glauben als Abenteuer Thieliicke speaks of the Lord's Supper as a meal offering strength for sending out the people of God into the world.

Ebenso wie das Ursprungsfest des Passahmahles, mit dem das Abendmahl ja in Verbindung steht, sollte die Gemeinschaft am Tisch des Herrn eine Aufbruchfeier sein: sei es, daß wir, von diesem Mahl gestärkt, an unser Fließband, in unseren Haushalt, an unseren Schreibtisch entlassen oder aber wie Schafe mitten unter die Wölfe geschickt werden.²⁸

[My translation: Likewise, as the original celebration of the Passover meal, with which the last supper is associated, the fellowship at the table of the Lord should be a festival of departure -

²⁸ Glauben als Abenteuer, p. 75.

that we be strengthened from this meal and dismissed to our place on the assembly line, to our homes, or at our desk. - or that we be sent out as sheep amid the wolves.^{29]}

Similar thoughts can be found in a sermon on the Holy Christian Church in his volume I Believe the Christian's Creed.³⁰ Calling the sacrament a "festival of departure" is more than grammatical innovation. It effectively moves the emphasis of the sacrament from the christological act in the meal itself to the Christian's sanctified life following the sacrament. Classic Lutheranism would certainly not argue that the Lord's Supper provides one with help for sanctified living,³¹ however sanctification remains the consequence of Christ's act of justification in the sacrament, not the main intent of the sacrament. Luther and classic Lutheranism placed the main benefit of the sacrament on the reception of forgiveness³² which in turn was tied directly to the body and blood of Christ that were understood as objectively present.

²⁹ The above translation is my own. Scheidt's translation is found on p. 40 of Faith the Great Adventure.

³⁰ I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. 234. Cf. Woran Ich Glaube, p. 299.

³¹ Triglotta, *The Large Catechism*, pp. 757-759. "On this account it (the Lord's Supper) is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. . . Therefore it is given for a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so as not to fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger. For the new life must be so regulated that it continually increase and progress."

³² *Ibid.*, *The Small Catechism*, p. 557. "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? Answer. That is shown us in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins;' namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

It seems safe to conclude that it was never Thielicke's intention to rob the sacrament of its christological focus.³³ His intentions here seem consistent with intentions noted in previous pages, namely to face the individual with his or her personal responsibilities and thus make faith part of one's actual life. However his shift in focus toward sanctification does represent a major shift from the sacramental theology of the church body to which he belonged. The issue of what was given in the sacrament diminished in importance and how one was affected in daily life gained prominence; the movement from an objective focus to a more subjective focus asserts itself again.

3.1d A Different Relationship Between Word and Sacrament

We have noted already the embrace of spiritual presence as the christological mode in the Eucharist. This is expanded to a minor degree in his sermons. In I Believe the Christian's Creed he states that the Lord's Supper "is the assurance that the Lord remains with us when the worship *comes to an end*."³⁴ Here the sacrament serves as a reminder of an ongoing divine presence. No unique christological mode of presence is recognised in the sacrament. Rather the sacrament points beyond itself to the spiritual presence of Christ with all believers. The other reference to a presence surrounding the sacrament is found in the same volume in a sermon on "The Resurrection of the Body . . .". There Thielicke says:

Diese Klammer ist ja in dem *Einen*, der jetzt mitten unter uns ist, wo wir in seinem Namen versammelt sind, in dem *Einen*, der zu mir

³³ He does for instance speak of the Lord's Supper as a sign of communion with Christ in Helmut Thielicke, Between God and Satan, trans. C.C. Barber (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 62.

³⁴ I Believe the Christian's Creed, p.234. The German reads "die tröstende Vergewisserung, daß der Herr bei uns bleibt, wenn der Kultus *zu Ende ist* . . ."

spricht: "Fürchte dich nicht, glaube nur," in dem Einen, der mir an den Altären in Brot und Wein begegnet und der als Kindlein in Mariens Schoß liegt, obwohl aller Weltkreis ihn nicht umschloß. Seine Arme sind die Klammer, die Zeit und Ewigkeit, die diese und die zukünftige Welt umfassen.³⁵

[My translation: These clasps are in the One who is still with us where we are gathered in his name; in the One who says to me "Fear not, just believe;" in the One who meets me at the altar in bread and wine and who lays as a little baby in Mary's bosom although the whole universe cannot contain him. His arms are the clasps that encircle time and eternity this world and the next.³⁶]

Christ's presence here is multifaceted. He does indeed meet us at the sacrament but his presence there is not in accordance to the Lutheran view of "real presence." It is spoken of in the same terms as any of the other Christ-encounters thus far exemplified in Thielicke's sermons.

There are simply too few references in Thielicke's sermons to establish any definite doctrine of a unique sacramental presence in the Lord's Supper. What he does not say becomes more important than what he does say. His lack of sacramental christology, which is at the heart of classic Lutheranism, certainly suggests doubts in Thielicke's mind about the validity of this doctrine. His unwillingness to build in any significant way on the concept of grace given in the sacrament likewise suggests doubts as to whether the Lord's Supper itself actually offers justifying grace. Where Thielicke allows for grace, forgiveness, and Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is in the Word of promise surrounding the sacrament. Here his views mirror those discussed under the Word surrounding baptism. Thielicke writes:

³⁵ Woran Ich Glaube, p. 321.

³⁶ Anderson's translation can be found in I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. 252. It was not used because of difficulties in clarity.

Er spricht ein Wort von vollziehender Gewalt, das im Gesprochenwerden schon Tat ist: "Dir sind deine Sünden vergeben!" Er sagt es so, wie es heute noch im Abendmahl zum Ausdruck kommt: daß hier wirklich die Vergebung auf mich zukommt, daß ich sie mit diesen meinen Händen fassen darf. Wenn Jesus auf einen Menschen zukommt, dann handelt er, dann verwandelt er ihn und führt ihn auf eine ganz neue Ebene des Lebens.³⁷

[Translation: (Anderson) He speaks a Word of efficacious power, which in the very speaking becomes a deed. "Your sins are forgiven!" He says it in the same way it is still expressed today in Holy Communion, where forgiveness comes to me so assuredly that I can actually take it up in my own hands. When Jesus comes to a man, Jesus acts; he transforms him and leads him onto an entirely new level of life.³⁸]

Further investigation of Thielicke's sacramental belief reinforces the case that the christological act of forgiveness revealed at the sacrament is in reality a christological act mediated through the *kerygma*.³⁹ The sacrament becomes important for the sake of the Word proclaimed there. Interestingly Thielicke criticises both Zwingli and the theology of Erlangen for this very thing.

The second extreme is the approach represented especially by Zwingli. Here the elements do not have inherently any special quality but have purely symbolical rank as illustrations. . . . This line of thought, too, extends by way of the Enlightenment, which found it most congenial, to our own day. A. von Harnack carried it so far as to recommend, in the name of the sole normativity of the Word, that it might be best to drop the sacrament from divine service. Only God's Word and prayer really have a place in worship (*What is Christianity?*, p. 291). Everything apart from the Word and faith is a matter of indifference (p. 313). The classical theologians of

³⁷ Woran ich Glaube, pp. 80-81.

³⁸ I Believe the Christian's Creed, p. 53.

³⁹ It is worth referring back to an earlier quotation cited from I Believe the Christian's Creed, "Then the miracle of the church will confront us, because only then will it become clear that she lives from the word of her Lord, *only* from that word and from nothing else." p. 238. (italics Thielicke's)

Erlangen Lutheranism reduced the sacrament to simply another form of the Word.⁴⁰

What sets Thielicke's view apart from those he criticises is perhaps a willingness to allow for the spiritual kind of divine presence surrounding the sacraments. Avoiding the "symbol only" thinking of Zwingli and the "est" thinking of Luther, Thielicke seems to lean toward Calvin in granting a mystical spiritual encounter with Christ in the Lord's Supper. From his perspective this avoids the "word only" mentality of Erlangen and Zwingli.

3.2 Thielicke's Challenge of Classic Lutheran Views Outside His Sermons

To get a more complete picture of Thielicke's sacramental christology it is necessary to look outside his sermons.

3.2a Classic Lutheran Ontological Presence Openly Challenged

Thielicke's clearest dogmatic exposition of the Lord's Supper is found in The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3. As Thielicke's views on the Lord's Supper are examined there it can be stated in general terms that he is by his own admission closer to Calvin than to Luther. He calls Luther's view a "crassly magical view."⁴¹ Later in this same volume he cites Calvin's observations that a bodily presence of Christ in

⁴⁰ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 250. Cf. p. 256 where Thielicke gives four points supporting his premise that the sacraments are merely forms of the word: 1. "The enumeration of acts of worship indicates the primacy of the Word over the sacrament." 2. "Luther deals with the sacraments in such a way as to put all the stress on the word." 3. "Where there is no gospel there is no church." 4. "The efficacy that is given to the Word is greater in the testament than in the sacrament. . . For the sacrament cannot exist without the Word, but the Word can without the sacrament." Thielicke concludes the four points by saying, "The priority of the Word over the sacrament shows that the sacrament is a Word-event, an actual Word."

⁴¹ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 249.

the sacrament opens the door for docetism,⁴² and that the doctrine of a physical presence in the Lord's Supper sins against the Holy Spirit.⁴³ In all of Thielicke's comments, the main bone of contention is the idea of an ontic presence of Christ.

Thielicke rightly observes that the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper depends on the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. Christ's presence defines the sacrament and gives the sacrament its power. As in baptism the role of the individual at the Supper is as one who receives with a certain passiveness. The rubric of pastor placing the wafer into the hand has ancient roots intending to convey these elements and thereby proclaim the undeserved and unearned grace of Christ.⁴⁴ The essence of the Supper itself does not depend on the state of the heart that received it. The ontic presence is there the same for believer and unbeliever alike in the teaching of classic Lutheranism.

⁴² Ibid., p.297. The charge of docetism is somewhat ironic since Luther's ontological presence insists on Christ's actual flesh and blood in the sacrament. Docetism of course denies the physical reality of Christ and sees Christ only as a spirit being. Thielicke here bases his charge of docetism on Calvin's statement that an omnipresent physical body is a "monstrous" thing. Luther explains how this is possible through the doctrine of the communication of attributes but this too is a point of contention for Thielicke.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cf. comments made by Cyril of Jerusalem in his Catechetical Lectures "In approaching [the altar] therefore, come not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers spread; but make thy left hand a throne for the right, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed thy palm receive the Body of Christ, saying over it, 'Amen.' . . . Then after thou hast partaken of the Body of Christ, draw near also to the Cup of His Blood; not stretching forth thine hands, but bending, and saying with an air of worship and reverence, 'Amen,' hallow thyself also by partaking of the Blood of Christ." Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Second Series), vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1994) pp. 156-157.

In maintaining an ontic view of the Lord's Supper classic Lutheranism did not refuse to acknowledge the individual as a unique person or belittle the importance of the individual, quite the opposite. Proper reception of the sacrament depended on the individual approaching with right faith. Each recipient was expected to confess the faith of the *Communio Sanctorum* and to have received proper pastoral care, especially in regard to confession and absolution. High expectations were placed on the individual to be sincere in his or her piety and confession so that as he or she received the body of Christ he or she would be spiritually united to that body through faith. Both corporate and individual concerns were implicit in the whole ontic schema of the sacrament.

In sharp contrast to this view, Thieliicke maintains that one should not insist on any specific confessional understanding of the sacrament as a prerequisite for reception.⁴⁵ For Thieliicke the final explanation of the sacramental meal is best left in the realm of one's personal interpretation. A much "looser" concept of the corporate body of Christ is exemplified in Thieliicke's sacramental thought.

3.2b The Question of Ecumenism in the Eucharist: Elert and Sasse at Odds with Thieliicke

The strong ecumenical tone in Thieliicke's sacramental teaching further exposes his distaste for the ontological models of classic Lutheranism and his preference for spiritual/ personal understandings of the sacraments. There are several points at which Thieliicke tries to "demythologise" Luther and make his insistence on the

⁴⁵ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 299.

“*est*” of the sacrament palatable to non-Lutheran tastes. At one point Thielicke tries to build a bridge to Luther by citing a passage from the Babylonian Captivity where Luther states “we have one sacrament and three sacramental signs.”⁴⁶ When Luther writes of one sacrament he is referring to Christ who is called a “*sacramentum*” (“mystery”) in the Vulgate.⁴⁷ Thielicke seizes on the term “mystery” and the christological foundation of the term and states his own distaste for the term “sacrament.” The term “mystery” he feels holds less polemical baggage and may be a term to which all sides of the sacramental debate can agree. Luther’s intent was just the opposite; instead of looking for agreement he was looking for a fight. He spoke of one sacrament to bait the Roman Catholic scholars who numbered the sacraments at seven.⁴⁸

Thielicke also tries to redefine Luther’s disagreement with the Reformed *finitum non est capax infiniti* principle and make it more palatable to the Reformed. He writes:

What Luther wanted to say with his principle that the finite can grasp the infinite is that we should take seriously the full and unconditional entry of the eternal Word into our limited humanity.⁴⁹

Thielicke’s ecumenical objectives here lead him into a corner. He pits what he feels Luther really wanted to say against what he actually did say. The body of Luther’s writings would support a very different conclusion from Thielicke’s about

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 259.

⁴⁷ Luther has in mind the Vulgate rendering of 1 Timothy 3:16. LW 36:18.

⁴⁸ Cf. LW 36:94-95.

⁴⁹ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 298.

what Luther meant. What Luther actually said was the very thing Thieliicke spends so much time contradicting, namely that the finite elements of the Supper contain the infinite God/man Christ according to his ontic presence in the form of body and blood. Thieliicke seems to stretch the facts in his attempt to reconcile Luther with his own thought, yet his intent is obvious. He hopes that by finding common threads of meaning in both approaches he can build ecumenical roads between Lutherans and the Reformed. In a way this demonstrates a concern for the Church as community. His desire is to find theological ground on which different theological points of view can co-exist harmoniously. In another sense, which we will explore in more detail below, the kind of community Thieliicke would build with his ecumenism is something akin to postmodern views of an individualised community.

The same desire for common ground between Reformed and Lutheran views is seen even more dramatically when Thieliicke finally addresses the issue of the mode of christological presence. He states:

Now that we have pierced through the time-bound concepts of the traditional eucharistic doctrines and reached their theological core, we are in a position to sift out the nonnegotiable element in our statements about the Lord's Supper. Reduced to a single formula, this may be described as the real personal presence of Christ in feeding through Word, bread, and wine. Since the real presence is not meant as presence 'in itself' but as presence 'for us,' one might also use for this non-negotiable element in the eucharist an adaptation of Melanchthon's famous saying: 'To know the Lord's Supper is to know its benefits.'⁵⁰

Thieliicke here is only partially correct. It is true that the concept of the real presence is intended to point to grace "for us" but this does not negate the necessity

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.299.

of the ontic presence of Christ in the sacrament. He seems to be trying to tone down the “real (ontic) presence” by speaking of a “real personal presence.” This of course raises the question of exactly what kind of presence it is if it is not ontic? It seems clear that Thielicke’s “theological core” of the Lord’s Supper, which he terms “real personal presence,” is in fact a spiritual presence. His harsh renunciation of ontic modes of presence leaves little room for anything but spiritual modes of presence. So once more Thielicke moves toward the spiritual/personal Christ encounter at the very point where classic Lutheranism moves toward a substantive/objective Christ encounter. In seizing upon the Lutheran insistence on “for us” in the sacrament Thielicke seeks to redirect focus away from his lack of an ontological sacramental presence.

Thielicke’s closing statements in his discourse on the sacraments show he is aware of possible dangers in his ecumenical approach. He writes:

This might be regarded as a tolerance which is related to indifference and which would then be a new way of despising the Lord’s Supper. But this charge cannot stand so long as it is the community that receives the guest at the Lord’s table and does not leave him to his subjective and perhaps erroneous ideas but sets him under its accompanying Word, under proclamation, teaching, and pastoral care.⁵¹

He seems willing to acknowledge that his approach encourages subjectivity but he hopes to overcome that danger by setting the “I” in the context of the Church and her work. The individual with erroneous views is still permitted at the table, but with the understanding that the Church will teach the truth to that individual over time. Thielicke’s view of community here fits well with postmodern views wherein community is a fairly loose association of individuals. The Eucharistic

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 300.

community of classic Lutheranism necessitates closer bonds under a common confession of faith. Thielicke's intent is of course noble in that he wishes to expand the Church and make it more inclusive. But by loosening the bonds of community historically understood under the sacrament, Thielicke's approach may help justify the atomising tendency of individualism instead of combating it.

Thielicke's approach to ecumenism (where the sacraments are concerned) is to examine the different theological understandings of the sacraments, be critical of each, find elements of common ground between the views, then focus on the common ground and simply dismiss the differences as not relevant to the issue of fellowship. Under such an approach the Lord's Supper becomes a gathering point for a multiplicity of doctrinal positions. It is used as a tool to unite people of differing confessions. Thielicke trusts that the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament will foster brotherhood and solidarity among people. This will then empower them to be more sanctified in their actions toward one another and thus further the actual bond of fellowship that was symbolised in the sacramental gathering.⁵²

Classic Lutheranism saw the Eucharist in very different terms where ecumenism is concerned. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* shows both the classic Lutheran definition of "Church" and its approach to ecumenism.

⁵² Hermann Sasse sees a distinctive characteristic of Reformed theology here that is not shared by Lutherans or Catholic churches of the East and West. He states that the Lord's Supper is the "goal of unification" in Lutheran and Catholic circles while it is the "means of unification" in the Reformed tradition. Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p. 11.

Also they (our churches) teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5.6.⁵³

The basis of all ecumenical efforts in classic Lutheranism is simply to find agreement on the “doctrine of the Gospel” and the sacraments. Of course it must also be understood that when the Lutheran Confessions speak of the “doctrine of the gospel” it was not a reductionist view of gospel to which they referred, but a broad application of the gospel through the whole teaching of the Church. The union of the doctrine of the gospel with the sacraments shows how the sacraments themselves were understood. The sacraments were visible tangible gospel. They could not be separated from the Word of the gospel. Christ was in them for salvific action and therefore they were as necessary to the Church as the Word.

The sacraments were not intermediate means to the ends of fellowship but the very basis of fellowship with the doctrine of the gospel. Where sacramental divergence existed, it was understood that divergence in the doctrine of the gospel also existed. Ecumenical efforts then had to include agreement at both points (Word or doctrine of the gospel and sacraments) before divergent parties could gather under the sacrament. The Lord’s Supper was not a sign pointing people with different confessions to the hope of future agreement, but the fullest expression that the body of Christ was intact.

⁵³ Triglotta, p. 47. *Augsburg Confession* VII “of the Church.”

Thielicke's views may well be spurred on as a reaction against the views of Werner Elert, his "archenemy" at Erlangen. Elert argued that there was a marriage between the sacraments and the confessional unity of the people. By analysing the Apostles' Creed Elert shows how the earliest creedal understandings linked the sacraments with the general confession of what the apostolic faith was. Elert claims this creed originated in the East and moved to the West.⁵⁴ In the East "τῶν ἁγίων κοινωνία" was understood as "holy things" or more specifically as the elements of the Lord's Supper. As the phrase moved west and was translated to Latin the meaning of "holy things" became lost in the more uncertain Latin expression *sanctorum communio*. Elert identifies the difference between a "genitive of persons" and a "genitive of things" (τῶν ἁγίων as the genitive of τὰ ἅγια and therefore *sanctorum* as the genitive of *sancta*). He argues that when κοινωνία is meant as a reference to persons, it is far more common to see it used with prepositions such as Athanasius' reference to κοινωνία μετὰ τῶν πιστῶν.⁵⁵

Elert admits:

The connection of *koinonia* with things is also expressed with prepositions. Here, however, the bare genitive is no exception, and innumerable phrases using it are employed alongside the prepositional construction. . . . Even though the meaning of such genitives may have to be explained from case to case, there can be no denying that τῶν ἁγίων κοινωνία fits most naturally in this long list of "holy things" as another genitive of things.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 11 and 214.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Herman Sasse, the onetime secretary of the *Bekennende Kirche* and professor of Church and Dogmatic History at Erlangen, supported Elert's findings and added his own observations. Sasse claimed that the phrase "*sanctorum communionem*" is the last addition to the creed and even in its original Latin meaning would not have been understood as a further explanation of "*sanctam ecclesiam catholicam*," but as an entirely new idea because the Roman Creed bears none of the more clearly Eastern characteristics of explanatory repetitions ("God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God").⁵⁷ The point of these conclusions is to emphasize that the sacraments were essential marks of the early Christian Church and were understood to be part and parcel of their overall unity of faith and confession. They were not merely rites that stood in hope of future doctrinal unity but at the heart of true unity under a common confession.

In his Theological Ethics Thielicke says he favours the understanding of *sanctorum* as a genitive denoting fellowship in holy things.⁵⁸ With that he further speaks positively about the Church as being greater than the sum of the individuals who make it up. But where his contemporaries Elert and Sasse conclude that communion in holy things means also that the sacraments are an expression of close communion under one doctrine, Thielicke sees the sacraments as expressions of hoped-for unity.

⁵⁷ We Confess the Sacraments, pp. 141-142.

⁵⁸ Helmut Thielicke, Theological Ethics: Politics, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 621.

The sum of these arguments supports the idea that in the early Church the marriage between ecclesiology and sacramental theology was undeniable. Ecclesiological fellowship was defined by fellowship in the objective means of the Lord's Supper. The Eastern liturgical expression "τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἀγίοις"⁵⁹ shows the marriage between the Saints and the supper. Fellowship in christological/sacramental things was the supreme mark of fellowship between people.

Thielicke's sensitivity toward doctrinal divergence is laudable. He clearly wants to mend fences and bring to Christ those who live in ignorance of him. However several questions must be asked: Is his approach honest to the historic faith and practice of Christendom? And will his ideas prove healthy for the Church in a postmodern context?

Elert and Sasse admit that the early church was not unfamiliar with confessional divisions. But as they point out the Lord's Supper was not a "Christians' supper" where multiplicity of doctrinal understanding was welcome (as Thielicke's view holds), rather it was understood as "Christ's Supper" where unity of faith and confession was the only acceptable expression of the Body of Christ.⁶⁰ Letters of

⁵⁹ Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, p. 222.

⁶⁰ This view even came to the fore as a point of agreement between the Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church in their ecumenical dialogues held from 1970 to 1986. One report of this meeting states that both sides agreed "that in principle the eucharist should not be made a means of achieving unity, but that eucharistic fellowship expresses the already existing unity of the Church." Hannu T. Kamppuri, editor, Dialogue Between Neighbours: The Theological Conversations between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1970-1986, Publication of Luther-Agricola Society, Band 17 (Helsinki: Vammalan, 1986), p. 17.

Fellowship exchanged between churches and bishops in regard to specific individuals provided the practical means for determining doctrinal unity.⁶¹ It was necessary to establish doctrinal unity prior to receiving the Lord's Supper.⁶²

The contrast between Thielicke's "sacramental ecumenism" and the practice of the early Church in establishing doctrinal unity prior to communing becomes sharper against the background of Postmodernism. The overtones of isolationism in postmodern individualism press more and more toward doctrinal and sacramental disunity. A "don't ask don't tell" policy at the Eucharist serves only to legitimise this atomistic mentality. If the postmodern individual is to learn the importance of "communion" with God and others, then the sacrament provides an opportunity to teach submission of self to what is greater. The "greater" aspect of the sacrament goes to the mystery of the real presence on the one hand and to the body of doctrine that embraces this presence on the other.

As Thielicke views sacramental fellowship he espouses what might be termed "sacramental reductionism" (as long as individuals can agree on general shared threads of meaning they need not agree on the specific nature and character of the sacrament). Elert shows numerous examples of how from the earliest stages the Church has sought to take seriously the biblical call for being of "the same mind."⁶³

⁶¹ Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, pp. 151-154.

⁶² Ibid, p. 121. Elert quotes John of Damascus "We must maintain with all strength that the Eucharist is to be neither received from nor given to heretics." He further cites the Apostolic Constitutions confirmed by the Council of Carthage (345-48) which states that "no person, clerical or lay, may commune in another congregation 'without a letter from his bishop.'" p. 132.

⁶³ I Corinthians 1:10

A practice in the postmodern Church that seeks affinity with the ancient practice promises a powerful impetus away from individualism. The individual may not understand all the elements of that doctrine but he or she is in a position of submission to them as one who has yielded self to the greater corporate confession⁶⁴. This is not an excuse for ignorance or disengaged faith as Thielicke might see it, but it is recognition of human weakness. Human subjectivity is thus placed in service to a divine objectivity, tied to Word and sacrament, and veiling the person of Christ.

Such a view raises certain concerns if qualifications are not made. For instance under the guise of objective doctrinal truth, fundamentalism has gained a stronghold in many American denominations. Thielicke was wary of fundamentalist approaches to Scripture.⁶⁵ He was also wary of the objectivication of truth in general. In his Ethics Thielicke argues:

Truth is not linked merely to the agreement between a certain judgment and the objective and verifiable facts, as positivism maintains. For positivism, the criterion of truth consists in the correspondence between what is said and the ontic data.⁶⁶

For Thielicke truth can only be known when an objective fact is linked to the “more inclusive system or framework within which, and with reference to which,

⁶⁴ The argument for taking seriously the unifying power in one’s historic confession and faith (or “noncontemporaneous religion”) is taken up by Johann Baptist Metz, in “Productive Noncontemporaneity,” in Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age,” ed. Jürgen Habermas, trans. by Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), pp. 169-177.

⁶⁵ Cf. How to Believe Again, p. 160.

⁶⁶ Theological Ethics, vol. 1, p. 522.

this fact arises.”⁶⁷ Truth depends on “the relation to things, forms, and events to their divine ‘foundation.’”⁶⁸ Fundamentalism can be avoided provided the ontic character of doctrine is built on the right divine foundation. Fundamentalism builds on the foundation of law with its “thus saith the Lord” criteria for objective doctrine. Luther and classic Lutheranism sought their “divine foundation” for objective truth in christology. Luther scholars have pointed out the main principle operating within Luther’s system of doctrine was not *sola Scriptura* as is often claimed (and as fundamentalism claims for itself) but *solus Christus*.⁶⁹ The christological principle establishes the objective reliability of the body of doctrine.

Thielicke is also concerned that hermeneutics be governed by the christological principle. Yet there is a marked difference between Luther’s christological principle and Thielicke’s. For Luther the christological principle was established on ontic thought forms and the belief in an objective Christ encounter. Such an objective presence of Christ meant also the existence of an objective body of identifiable doctrine. A christological hermeneutic that yields to one’s subjective Christ encounter will necessarily lead toward the rejection of an objective body of doctrine. That rejection necessarily colours one’s views on the sacrament. The sacrament then becomes a hope for what does not and cannot exist in this life, namely a unity under a given body of doctrine. In the context of Postmodernism, which has seen the near total rejection of absolute truth claims, granting admission to the sacrament without concern for unity in doctrine is not only a denial of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 529.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 528.

⁶⁹ Cf. Lienhard pp. 39-42 and Siggins, p. 17.

early Christian understanding of the deeper meaning of the sacrament, but a capitulation to a new paradigm of knowing that stands counter to an absolute objective Christ.

3.3 *The Genus Majesticum as a Point of Departure*

Behind Thielicke's resistance to an ontological presence of Christ in the sacrament is his objection to Luther's doctrine of the communication of attributes. Thielicke calls Luther's teaching on the communication of attributes a "fateful course,"⁷⁰ "a mental walking on eggs,"⁷¹ and "sheer absurdity."⁷² He seems willing to accept Luther's ideas of God becoming man in Christ but says Luther's thought loses its clarity "when he takes the next and apparently logical step of reversing things so that not only does God become man but the humanity of Christ becomes God."⁷³ At issue then is the Lutheran teaching on the *genus majesticum* or the belief in the communication of the properties of the divine nature to the human nature. Thus where the Lord's Supper is concerned, the divine property of ubiquity is communicated to the human flesh and blood of Christ making it possible to be present in more than one place at a time. This topic has been introduced previously but here must be taken up again in view of the communication of attributes. Thielicke echoes Zwingli's criticisms by stating, "What can be meant by an omnipresent body when the body is ontologically characterized by limitation in

⁷⁰ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, p. 326.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

space?”⁷⁴ The Lutheran Confessions offer a more systematic defence of the *genus majesticum* in Article VIII of the *Formula of Concord*. There Zwingli’s objection is answered with the following:

As the two natures are united personally, i.e., in one person, we believe, teach, and confess that this union is not such a copulation and connection that neither nature has anything in common with the other personally, i.e., because of the personal union, as when two boards are glued together, where neither gives anything to the other or takes anything from the other. But here is the highest communion, which God truly has with the [assumed] man, from which personal union, and the highest and ineffable communion resulting therefrom, there flows everything human that is said and believed concerning God, and everything divine that is said and believed concerning the man Christ; as the ancient teachers of the Church explained this union and communion of the natures by the illustration of iron glowing with fire. . .⁷⁵

Thielicke does not seem to object to the more general *genus idiomaticum* which speaks of communication of properties from the divine nature to the person of Christ,⁷⁶ but the thought that the humanity of Christ was so involved with the divine nature as to give it divine characteristics was more than Thielicke was willing to accept. Luther scholar Marc Leinhard points out that Luther himself did not use the term *genus majesticum* to refer to this communication of attributes but did nonetheless teach the concept clearly.⁷⁷ For Luther the doctrine of the *genus majesticum* was much more than a metaphysical concept defining the substance of the Lord’s Supper; it could also be applied in principle to whole salvific action of Christ. As humanity is joined to Christ by faith, a process of communication

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 327-328.

⁷⁵ Triglotta, *The Formula of Concord*, Art. VIII, p. 819.

⁷⁶ A view which is held also by Calvin. Cf. Institutes, vol. 1, chapter XIV, pp. 415-416.

⁷⁷ Leinhard, p. 339.

with Christ begins wherein Christ's divine properties are given to sinful humanity and mankind's sinful nature is taken into Christ in a "blessed exchange." Luther at times spoke of the salvific action as a kind of *theosis* wherein deity becomes "humanified" so that humanity can become deified ("gantz und gar vergottet," "Godded through").⁷⁸ The doctrine of *theosis* which has found ready acceptance in the Eastern Church has unfortunately caused confusion among modern Lutherans.

Thielicke's agreement with Zwingli's criticism does not mean Thielicke's overall view of the sacrament is any closer to Zwingli's than Luther's. Thielicke is just as harsh in his criticisms of Zwingli's *alloiosis* as he is of Luther's communication of attributes,⁷⁹ and as we have repeatedly said seems to align himself with Calvin.⁸⁰

What Thielicke does seem willing to recognise in Luther's doctrine of the communication of attributes is that this doctrine served the proclamation of Christ's salvific work. Thielicke knows that this was not a metaphysical or academic point for Luther and this at least is something he appreciates. When the communication of attributes is viewed from this perspective, Thielicke finds more agreement

⁷⁸ Quoted from a sermon of Luther's in 1526 by Kurt E. Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," Concordia Theological Quarterly vol. 64 (July 2000), p. 185.

⁷⁹ Cf. The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, p. 329. (by "alloiosis" Thielicke means a "figure of speech" or a "metaphorical statement." For Zwingli this was a christological principle. Thielicke speaks of Zwingli's view as ultimately teaching Christ is not God but merely represents God, just as Christ is not really in the Eucharist but the sacrament only represents him.)

⁸⁰ The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, p. 297. Thielicke's discussion of Calvin's view is important because he defines "spiritual presence" as that which does not belong only to the intellect or conscious mind but more belongs more to the realm of God's "real acts toward us." The spiritual presence belongs to faith not mind.

between Luther and Calvin than between Luther and Zwingli. Thieliicke then sides with Luther in seeing a salvific importance to the idea of the humanity of Christ being joined to divinity, but remains opposed to this as an ontological doctrine.

Yet Thieliicke may be ignoring the value in Luther's communication of attributes for an individualised society. The communication of attributes offers the postmodern Church an effective angle in combating an autonomous view of self. Christ's flesh sharing divine attributes so as to be present in reality both in this world and in glory means in a roundabout way that the individual is caught up in a mystery of the highest order. The "I" touches the divine in the flesh and in so doing (with faith) is caught up in the blessed exchange of Christ's righteousness for mankind's corruption. The "I" is shown that Christian existence must be an existence of dependence and reception because that to which the "I" is attaining is so far above the "I" as to be unattainable without a constant connection to the Person giving it. The very mystery of Christ's sacramental presence presents a view of reality that begs the "I" to recognise the limitation of the self and embrace that which cannot be fully understood by the rational mind. The more such sacramental piety can exert itself in the postmodern context the greater chance that individuals will recognise the impossibility of existence as monads. Unfortunately Thieliicke's overall direction toward individual subjectivity, which has shown itself again in his sacramental christology, does little to redress the problem of individualism.

Chapter 4

Forces Pressing Toward the Individual

Throughout the previous three chapters we have offered various theological explanations for Thieliicke's individualistic approach to christology and we have shown how his focus impacts other major areas of his theology. Thus far we have been hesitant to suggest that Thieliicke's system is built on a philosophy of individualism. As we will explain in this chapter, the term "individualisation" is a better description for what we have found in Thieliicke's system. Though we have searched for answers in theology that might help explain why Thieliicke moves so strongly in the direction of the individual we have not yet addressed the major philosophical or social forces that pressed Thieliicke's view in this direction. This chapter will focus on the pressure Nihilism placed on Thieliicke's overall thought and will discuss the social pressures this created for him in Nazi Germany.

We take these matters up here because they will offer us a clearer picture of the direction that must be taken for christology in the postmodern context. By examining the social and philosophical influences driving Thieliicke we will find similarities and differences in the present. Discovering such similarities and differences will help us determine what elements of Thieliicke's approach remain vital today and what elements need redirecting.

By looking at the philosophical and social pressures in Thieliicke's mind we hope also to find a root cause or major guiding principle that forced him in an individualistic direction. Thieliicke does not himself define a single principle of individualisation in his theology/christology; one may assume the presence of such

a principle is either thought to be so obvious it does not merit definition, or of such a secondary nature that he was largely unconscious of being driven by it. This thesis assumes the latter. When it is claimed that Thielicke is largely unconscious of having his christological system driven by some broader principle of individualisation, certain qualifications must again be made. Thielicke is conscious of wanting to highlight the individual in his system. The following quotation is one of many where Thielicke reminds the reader of this very point:

One point at least is clear: Jesus Christ wills that the mass be disentangled. He does not view man as merely one member of an ant colony, as merely a particular specimen of his genus or species. He views man rather as a child of God of infinite worth. He views him as one who must die alone, who bears his sins all by himself, and who can only receive forgiveness individually and personally. Each must come to God in a radical solitariness. . . . It is for this reason that on a Christian, and especially a Lutheran view, even the orders of the world, e.g., state, family, or society, do not have the character of a suprapersonal institution in which the individual is done away. On the contrary, the orders are conditioned and sustained by personal love. It is not a case of personhood being overcome but of the person really coming to his own. God does not deal with the mass. He knows only the individual with his eternal destiny. . . . Pre-eminence is thereby attached to "the individual" he is radically singled out from the mass.¹

Like so many other references to an individualised focus Thielicke does not explain in detail why he must do so. Statements like "God does not deal with the mass" and "Pre-eminence is attached to the individual" are left largely unguarded. Thielicke does not see a need to balance such statements with what he would see to be a proper view of spiritual community. In other places one finds statements reflecting appreciation for the ecclesiological community, but he does not develop these at length or refer to them with any consistency in his sermons. This leads to the conclusion that for Thielicke the individual is so central to the basic principles

¹ Theological Ethics, vol. 1, p. 514.

of christology, philosophy, and the nature of God that it is simply a given that the individual is the pre-eminent consideration.

What the above quotation does demonstrate is his concern about the genuine daily needs and issues of people in actual life settings. Beginning at the individual existential level Thieliicke then extends his view to theological/christological conclusions. Rather than adopting the more deductive approach of those "orthodox" theologians he disliked by making blanket dogmatic statements which do not take into consideration the special needs of individuals, Thieliicke opted for a more inductive method.² The language of "inductive" vs. "deductive" does not seem to be part of Thieliicke's evaluation of his own work, yet the distinction between the two approaches is obvious especially in comparison to the aforementioned orthodox dogmaticians.

Secondly the quotation cited above from Thieliicke's Ethics shows a pastoral drive in Thieliicke's method that could be called "disentanglement." The mass must be separated into its singular parts so that God can affect His work at the "atomic" level so to speak. Since the "*Sitz im Leben*" of each individual is unique God's action to deliver the individual must also be unique. Disentanglement becomes the passion of the pastor. Each individual must be separated from all things and people that stand in the way of the divine encounter for simple reasons of pastoral care. Thieliicke approaches his entire theological system with this pastoral concern because God "does not deal with the mass. He knows only the individual . . ."

² The observation is also made in the following work: Frank Stanaland Christian Jr., "The Gospel and Modern Man: A Study of the Theological Method of Helmut Thieliicke in the Context of Modern Secularization" (Doctoral Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), pp. 163-167.

This inner pastoral drive toward the individual and his or her unique “concrete situation” is evident very early on in Thieliicke’s career. The above quotation from Thieliicke’s Ethics came in 1951. Thieliicke would not publish his first dogmatics text until 1968. The order suggests a greater concern for the concrete ethical situation of people over a concern for systematic doctrine. Further evidence of this is apparent already in Thieliicke’s two doctoral theses. His philosophical dissertation was entitled Das Verhältnis zwischen dem Ethischen und dem Ästhetischen and was published in 1932. His doctoral thesis in theology was published in 1934 under the title Das Wesen der “Konkreten Situation”³. In his analysis of Das Verhältnis zwischen dem Ethischen und dem Ästhetischen, Frank Stanaland Christian Jr. concludes:

... the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic senses is a highly abstract problem. Thieliicke concretises the subject when he approaches it from the standpoint of the “superindividual I.” Das überindividuelle Ich is the focal point of reality in his dissertation, as it forms the unifying center for the various subjects of experience. This “multidimensional I” (mehrdimensionale Ich) represents the concrete existence of man with which Thieliicke’s theological and ethical thought repeatedly begins. The concrete existence of the individual is the “anthropological starting point” of his methodical procedure.⁴

Stanaland’s observations prove that Thieliicke’s process of “individualisation” does not gradually develop during his career but is present in a mature way from his earliest works. It is an axiom or unassailable truth for Thieliicke that requires no further explanation. Yet the source of this axiom remains unapparent. As we will

³ Later this was published under the title Geschichte und Existenz: Grundlegung Einer Evangelischen Geschichtstheologie (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1935).

⁴ Frank Stanaland Christian Jr., pp. 71-72.

demonstrate in the pages following, this undeniable truth of the existential individual as the ground of being lies, in large part, in the questions posed by philosophy.

4.1 The Line between Individualism and Individualisation

Having stated in our opening paragraph that Thieliicke's approach is a matter of "individualisation" rather than "individualism," it is necessary for us to explain the difference. Thieliicke does not consider his isolation of the "I" as individualism. Individualism is an ideology unto itself – an ideology that Thieliicke claims is invalid. Thieliicke's "I" isolation is tied rather to his definition of personhood as one who is isolated from the mass in order to have a relationship with God.⁵

Thieliicke is quick to distance his idea of isolation of the "I" from "individualism:"

This notion of being singularly alone, which is not without connections to Kierkegaard, has of course nothing to do with individualism. . . . In order to make the antithesis to individualism graphic, we can say that the singularly alone one is not the individualistic subject of a world event; he is, in the midst of the world events that pass through him and sustain him, the object of the divine address. One dare not get the two mixed up. Individualism is one particular perceptible form of historical existence that occurs among men. To be singularly alone signifies being isolated before God, which is another dimension entirely.⁶

According to Thieliicke's definition "individualism" places the "I" as the only relevant subject in the world (self-deification). In contrast he wishes only to strip

⁵ Consider Thieliicke's discussion of personhood in Death and Life, trans. Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 119. "The biblical message teaches everywhere that I am separable from all the powers that surround me and support me, that in this ultimate dimension of my personhood I have to become singularly alone." Cf. p. 115. This book is a translation of Tod und Leben: Studien zur christlichen Anthropologie (Zweite Auflage: Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1946).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

the “I” from “everything we have sought to hide behind.”⁷ In Thielicke’s approach the “I” is not the subject of existence as a self-enclosed monad or entelechy, but a unique object before God. The principle of disentanglement seeks to wrest the individual from such self-deifying individualism and restore union with God. On the basis of Thielicke’s own definition of “individualism” it is not honest to say Thielicke is guilty of espousing it. Yet the fact remains that his approach consistently points to the individual as the basis for an encounter with the Divine. To differentiate Thielicke’s approach from the ideology of individualism it is perhaps best to refer to his approach as individualisation.

The question must be posed as to whether the lines of demarcation between Thielicke’s “individualisation” and the ideology of “individualism” are as simple to draw as Thielicke would like. By isolating the individual so consistently throughout his theological/christological system Thielicke does turn the idea of being “singularly alone” into something more than a pastoral concern. In the quotation above Thielicke claims that “Individualism is one particular perceptible form of historical existence that occurs among men.” Yet as Thielicke defines the concrete basis of mankind and the starting point for his system, he presents the individual precisely as the one particular form of historical existence that matters most. The individual is clearly the hub around which the spokes of his theology/christology radiate. He may not intend this to reflect the sole form of existence among men, but it is the foundational point of existence for Thielicke before God. He is correct that his approach is not “individualism” in the humanistic sense, but it is individualistic. In the final analysis Thielicke’s

⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

individualisation may prove just as difficult for postmodern christology as individualism.

4.2 The Pressure of Thieliicke's Theology of Meaning

Because the concrete situation of mankind in his actual personal realm of being was of such eminent importance to Thieliicke, it is natural that he would focus on those issues that were particularly pressing on the majority of individuals of his day.

One of the strongest cultural pressures facing the Germans of Thieliicke's day was a feeling of meaninglessness. As Thieliicke treats the issue it becomes clear that this meaninglessness is a reflection of a deeper spiritual emptiness touching the very heart of what it means to be an individual before God.

One finds Thieliicke returning to this theme time and again in his sermons. On the lips of the rich young man of Matthew 19 who asks Christ "what must I do that I may have eternal life?" Thieliicke puts the following paraphrase:

Sage mir etwas von dem Sinn meines Lebens, denn ich bin an ihm irre geworden: und dann lege mir auf, was du willst! Ich will jede Last tragen, auch ein elftes oder zwölftes Gebot für die Elite (noblesse oblige!), wenn ich nur das Gefühl habe, daß ich im Einklang mit mir selbst und mit meiner Bestimmung bin. Ich ertrage das Leben nicht mehr, wenn ich kein Thema habe, für das ich lebe. Ich erstickte an der Sinnlosigkeit.⁸

[My translation: Tell me something about the meaning of my life, because I am in error about it, and then lay on me whatever you want. I will bear any burdens, even an eleventh or twelfth commandment for the elite (noblesse oblige!), if I only have the feeling that I am in harmony with myself and my destiny. I can't bear living any more if I have no theme to my life. I am suffocated by meaninglessness.⁹]

⁸ Und wenn Gott wäre, p. 140.

⁹ I prefer my own translation here to Anderson's in How to Believe Again, (p. 105) due to a lack of accuracy in Anderson's translation.

This example is typical of the way Thielicke uses biblical texts to address the issue of meaning. The sheer number of times Thielicke addresses this issue testifies to the importance of it in his mind.¹⁰ In his book Nihilism Thielicke writes:

Meaning' is the most stirring of all spiritual impulses, just as 'meaninglessness' is an absolutely effectual bacillus for producing paralysis.¹¹

Thielicke's sermons show his pastoral desire to heal the pain at the root of the German psyche – a pain that came from this “most stirring of all spiritual impulses.” Left untreated meaninglessness would fester and produce other negative results in the German psyche, one of which is a painful sense of aloneness and separation from God.

Quoting Jean Paul Richter, whose novel Siebenkäs pictures Christ in a painful realisation of meaninglessness, Thielicke gives voice to the aloneness born in meaninglessness pressing on the German psyche:

Und erschüttert bekennt dieser enttäuschte Christus, dieser >>Christus a.D.<< sozusagen, das Fazit seines vergeblichen Streifzuges durch den Kosmos: Starres, stummes Nichts, kalte, ewige Notwendigkeit, wahnsinniger Zufall! . . . Wie ist jeder so allein in der weiten Leichengruft des Alls . . . O Vater! O Vater! Wo ist deine unendliche Brust, daß ich an ihr ruhe? – Ach, wenn jedes Ich sein eigener Vater und Schöpfer ist, warum kann es nicht auch sein eigener Würgengel sein?¹²

¹⁰ Cf. from the same volume pp. 60, 78f, 120, 136f, 165, 173 186, 208, 211, 213, 216f.

¹¹ Helmut Thielicke, Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature with a Christian Answer, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 31.

¹² Woran Ich glaube, pp. 22-23.

[My translation: Shaken, this disillusioned Christ, this "Christ A.D." so to speak, summarizes his vain expedition through the cosmos: "Stiff, dumb nothingness! Cold eternal necessity! Insane chance! . . . How is it that everyone is so alone in this wide universal burial vault? O Father! Father! Where is your boundless breast that I may rest on it? Oh! If every individual is his own father and creator, why shall he not also be his own angel of death?"¹³]

Meaninglessness brought to the German psyche the kind of aloneness that seizes one in separation from God. For Thielicke this is more than a psychological phenomena; it represents a deep-seated spiritual rift in the German soul, a rift that he hopes to bridge by addressing the individual in his or her isolation. Thielicke takes pains to show the quest for meaning must take seriously the issue of aloneness; it must even embrace the idea of aloneness, but it must redirect that aloneness away from the notion of total isolation toward an isolation that places one before God.

There is certainly value in Thielicke's christological direction for postmodern society. The atomisation of society born of rampant pluralism fosters a kind of aloneness that must be recognised and addressed. Yet the postmodern form of aloneness is even more pronounced than that which Thielicke faced. Today individualism carries a stronger isolation of the "I" in individual judgments and evaluations. Despite the separation inherent in the nihilism of Thielicke's day, it did create a sort of community of people exploring their shared aloneness. And regardless of differences in ideology the overall sense of social community was stronger in Thielicke's day than it is now. Today, in light of individualism and pluralism, that sense of belonging and community enjoyed by previous generations has become more superficial and more difficult to maintain.

¹³ Again Anderson's translation isn't used because of lack of accuracy (I Believe, p. 5)

In one sense Thieliicke's approach offers an effective witness to postmodern individuals. By turning cultural fragmentation and atomisation toward a recognition of how the individual is being isolated, perhaps the Church can build as Thieliicke did on this sense of aloneness. Further this awareness of aloneness can be redirected from total isolation toward an aloneness before God.

But in another sense Thieliicke's approach must be surpassed by taking the next step from isolation to a sense of christological belonging. The shortcoming of Thieliicke's isolation of the individual before God is that it seems to stop there, leaving the individual as a solitary "I" before God. If Christianity is going to impact the selfish individualism of postmodernism then the "I" must be shown a solution to aloneness in the larger picture of belonging to the christological communion and community. Had Thieliicke's ontology carried a greater sense of ecclesial being then his method could prove more directly beneficial for postmodern culture. As it stands Thieliicke's search for meaning in the notion of the "I" before God is still workable with the addition of a stronger sense of the "we" before God (this will be discussed at length in chapter seven).

4.3 The Force of Nihilism

For Thieliicke in the era surrounding World War Two, meaninglessness was all the more dangerous because of the proliferation of Nihilism. Nihilism represents a philosophy of life wherein all traditional dogmatic ways of knowing are challenged. Gone are claims to objective truth or "retreats" into the divine will. Nihilism seeks to throw the individual back on himself or herself as a self-defining monad. It presents a curious mix of subjectivism wherein self-deification is

fostered and cold objectification where the individual is a mere member of a species and of no special worth.¹⁴ Traditional Christian views of an historical *telos* or of a divine purpose for mankind are dismissed. Mankind is confronted with a purposeless existence and forced to build what many nihilists considered an “intellectually honest” ontology.

Thielicke’s perception of the role this philosophy of meaninglessness played within the German psyche of his day can be seen in his book Nihilism:

We may be permitted to begin with the rather banal statement that the word “nihilism” is derived from *nihil*, “nothing,” and the even more obvious statement that the word ends with “ism.” It is evident that these two facts account for the dubious reputation this word has of being really modern and realistic, so that it is considered to be *the* representation of the whole spirit of our age.¹⁵

For Thielicke nihilism is the foundation for the German *Weltanschauung*. It is the force defining the concrete situation of German individuals.¹⁶ Because of that Thielicke returns to the subject of meaninglessness over and over again in his sermons; there is no “ism” cited more often in his sermons than nihilism¹⁷ and no

¹⁴ Nihilism, “Schizophrenia (Thielicke uses this mental condition to describe the nihilistic mind) is characterized by the fact that it sets in destructively at the ego-center itself, that it breaks down ‘self activity, self-feeling, and self-consciousness’ and leaves behind a vacuum. pp. 42-43. “. . . one must necessarily lose the feeling of being a self and simply think of oneself as an object, an effect, a product. This understanding of the self, this evaluation of the self – this is nihilism . . .” p. 46.

¹⁵ Nihilism, p. 17.

¹⁶ Thielicke can even be found giving a backhanded compliment to the “God is dead” theologians “whose serious intentions are nonetheless not to be scorned. They concern themselves almost fanatically with the so-called situation of modern men . . .” I Believe the Christian’s Creed, p. viii.

¹⁷ Examples of how often this subject occurs in Thielicke’s sermons can be seen in the following citations: Faith the Great Adventure, pp. 20, 69, 81, 93, 95, 111. The Silence of God, pp. 3-4, 15, 40. Out of the Depths, pp. 26, 42, 88. Our Heavenly Father, pp. 45, 73, 86, 115. I Believe the Christian’s Creed, pp. viii, 5, 8, 98, 112,

philosopher referred to more often than Nietzsche. Thielicke quotes novelists, scientists, playwrights, newspaper articles and politicians in such a way to show that the issue of meaninglessness pervaded every corner of cultural thought.

The link between Nihilism and meaninglessness was obvious to Thielicke. He wrote, "Nihilism literally has only one truth to declare, namely, the truth that ultimately Nothingness prevails and the world is meaningless."¹⁸ The true offence of this meaninglessness was its assault on Thielicke's concept of personhood. Instead of personhood being defined as the isolated individual before God,¹⁹ nihilism made it the isolated individual without God. God was himself the basis for personhood for Thielicke²⁰ and nihilism did away with God from the German worldview.

What made Nihilism unique among philosophies was the fact that to Thielicke it was more than a philosophy.

The "ism" always proposes to be a physician; it always has at hand a program to cure and reconstruct the world. Nihilism, however, recognizes that one is a patient, that one has been infected by a consumptive bacillus. The "isms" look upon man as the subject, that

122, 186, 233. How to Believe Again, pp. 62-63, 109, 211-212, 217. Christ and the Meaning of Life, pp. 14, 27, 37, 70, 117, 129, 131, 133. Life Can Begin Again, pp. 17-18, 29, 61, 77, 85, 102, 112, 129, 137, 169, 170, 214. The Waiting Father, pp. 12, 31, 37-38, 42, 69, 79-80, 132-133, 144, 174, 177, 183, 187, 189. This does not include the many "back handed" references to "nothingness" that reappear throughout his sermons or the nihilistic struggles of Goethe's Faust which also are referenced numerous times.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 27.

¹⁹ Cf. also Theological Ethics vol. 2, p. 393 ". . . for the Christian, personhood depends not on one's standing before men but on one's standing before God, on an 'alien dignity') p. 277 ". . . God, who is the basis of all personhood." cf. Theological Ethics vol. 1, pp. 151,170.

²⁰ Theological Ethics, vol. 2, p. 277.

is, the creator and achiever of a program; they think of man as the Demiurge, whom they place at the center of glowing eschatologies. Nihilism, on the other hand, sees man as an object. He cannot escape the creeping process of self-disintegration, which is all too euphemistically called the history of the human mind . . . the whole history of the human mind is nothing but a journey through a field of corpses . . . it consists only of graves garlanded with ideologies, but that beneath this camouflage is nothing but dung and dead bones, and that therefore we are gazing at nothing but Nothingness. Therefore we declare that nihilism is not a program but rather a value judgment.²¹

Despite his warnings Thielicke did reserve a certain admiration for the honesty of Nihilism. Nihilists were to be treated with a kind of respect because true nihilists showed more integrity than lukewarm Christians; they, unlike lukewarm Christians who live in a state of denial, at least had the courage to admit their hopeless condition.²²

This admiration for the philosophical discipline of nihilism is implicit in Thielicke's many references to Goethe's Faust. In the character of Faust, Thielicke sees an example of the struggling German spirit in search of ultimate truth.²³ Yet this spirit of struggling, as noble as it might be for its effort, has an inherent fatal flaw – it is goal-less.²⁴ Faustian seekers have courage to seek, but they seek without the intention of finding an object. Their search then is doomed to failure before it starts.

²¹ Nihilism, p. 29.

²² Cf. The Waiting Father, p. 144 and Faith the Great Adventure, pp. 69, 95.

²³ Cf. Christ and the Meaning of Life, p. 129. Life and Begin Again, pp. 11, 200. Out of the Depths, p. 60. The Silence of God, p. 7. How to Believe Again, p. 31.

²⁴ Cf. I Believe the Christian's Creed, pp. 204-205. How to Believe Again, pp. 63, 108. Life Can Begin Again, pp. 118, 199. Christ and the Meaning of Life, p. 182.

As this applies to current circumstances few social/political leaders today openly claim to be disciples of a nihilistic outlook but this is not to say that nihilism has disappeared. While the philosophy called "Nihilism" has fallen out of favour the characteristics of that philosophy, especially those that Thielicke critically identified, have simply become part of the conglomeration of Western thought. Postmodernism has taken certain traits, which in Thielicke's day were more defined as belonging to the school of nihilistic thought, and made them matters of individual freedom. "Pluralism" is now the more common term for nihilistic subjectivism. Such pluralism is no less a bold attempt at truth seeking and rejection of traditional norms than was the more organized intellectual seeking of nihilism in Thielicke's day.

What may have changed somewhat since Thielicke's day is the replacement of pessimism with a more superficial optimism. Thielicke praises the nihilists of his day for the painful admission of purposelessness and lack of trust in anything beyond death. Today, especially in America, it sometimes seems that each individual Christian carries the understanding that his or her self-made beliefs carry a divine imprimatur, and that their salvation is secure no matter what they believe.²⁵ Hopelessness and despair about life remain but they seem to be buried deeper within the subconscious. Likewise in America one can see an increase in the openness of a more deistic/universalistic belief in God since the terrorist attacks of 2001. This revitalised deism acts as a veneer over hopelessness and meaninglessness in many American people.

²⁵ I make this observation as a parish pastor who has dealt with hundreds of parishioners and their sometimes bizarre theological ideas.

It may have actually been easier for Thielicke to present a christological form of meaning in his day to those openly admitting their hopelessness than it is in present times when prevailing moods are less likely to admit such despair. In the context of hidden hopelessness and pluralistic self-justification it becomes all the more important for individuals to look past the self and have an anchor in something meaningful that is both objective and changeless. The growth of Islam may well reflect the inner desire for something objective and changeless. In the case of Islam the objective changeless elements are rooted firmly in law, the Koran, and in the community surrounding both. The Christian hope certainly has the necessary objective changeless elements that can harness the cultural longing for meaning. Instead of law the Christian hope has the timeless truth of the Gospel. Instead of a fundamentalist devotion to a book Christianity has the Word both written, spoken, and Incarnate. And perhaps most significant of all, Christianity has an objective form of divine presence (christological presence) in its midst that promises hopeless individuals the presence of God's person to give hope that cannot be found in either the law or the self.

4.3a Nihilism and Politics

The value judgment of nihilism was manifest for Thielicke in all totalitarian governments. Thielicke would include Marxists, Communists, Fascists, and National Socialists under the umbrella of totalitarian governments. Common to all these systems and to nihilism was the tendency toward depersonalisation. Thielicke complained about the use of propaganda and sloganeering in these systems as indicative of depersonalisation; first because the one issuing the propaganda sees the other only as an object to be won, and secondly because such

forms of communication do not “strike man at his personal center . . . but only at the extremities of his nervous system.”²⁶ Further the impetus toward mass society inherent in these systems leads to the personal identity of individuals being “largely submerged in a muffling collective . . .”²⁷

It should be noted that in contrast to earlier statements from Thielicke about the ultimate meaninglessness of nihilism, those totalitarian systems he condemns as nihilistic do claim to offer meaning in life. Whether it be the creation of a race of *Übermenschen* or some other utopian society the goal of all such totalitarianism is a meaningful existence. However as Thielicke rightly notes in his observations about the depersonalising nature of these systems the cost of totalitarian meaning is the loss of the individual in service to the system.

Additional problems posed by totalitarian political systems involve a kind of deification of the state. Such systems declare themselves the saviour of mankind in the place of the divine Saviour,²⁸ claim their material base of history is the divine base,²⁹ and define humanity as merely an object.³⁰ All these elements present in totalitarian systems are for Thielicke built on basic nihilistic principles.

²⁶ Theological Ethics, vol. 2, p. 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262. cf. p. 153. This charge of losing the individual in the mass is made on page 47 in reference to Communism.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.22, 38, 49.

This distaste for the depersonalisation of totalitarian systems was present throughout Thielicke's career. In his earliest writings the issue of totalitarian depersonalisation is evident.³¹ In several of his sermons from the early 1950's one sees Marxism particularly singled out as a system that demeans personhood by diminishing religion,³² and in one of his later works, Living with Death (originally published as Leben mit dem Tod in 1980), Thielicke strongly criticises Marx for an ideological "bait-and-switch" where he promises better concern and care for individual workers only to make the individual an object of production for the state.³³

Both nihilism and totalitarianism reduce the individual to an object. In Thielicke's Nihilism he decries nihilism for reducing humanity to a "relative thing, a function."³⁴ Nihilism's "death of God" forces the individual into a recognition of himself or herself as a mere member of a species with no higher purpose than to live and die in service to the survival of the mass. Totalitarianism makes an object of the individual in the same way. Concern for the individual is replaced with concern for the ideological mass. This was especially noticeable in Germany under

³¹ In Notes from a Wayfarer Thielicke says that his Theological Doctorate "Geschichte und Existenz," was "diametrically opposed to the Nazi understanding of life and history, it was later one of the reasons for my dismissal in 1940." p. 77.

³² The Waiting Father, pp. 84, 171, 182. I Believe the Christian's Creed, pp. 224, 244.

³³ Helmut Thielicke, Living with Death, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 90-95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Hitler's fascism, but was seen also in the *Weltanschauung* of Germany under Bismark.³⁵

We will explore further in the next chapter how Thielicke's experience with such totalitarian ideology was a major influence for his emphasis of the individual over and against the collective. The need to always begin at the concrete situation of humanity necessitated serious consideration for these social/political conditions. Since the people were negatively affected by the politics and ideology of

³⁵ Pierre Ayçoberry, The Social History of the Third Reich 1933-1945, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 1999) p. 66. Cf. the general public longing for unity prior to Hitler described on p. 66 with the way National Socialism steered that longing toward its own desires, pp. 71-78. The masses faced a barrage of subtle propaganda in cultural art, music, radio and on the printed page along with Hitler's own speeches. According to Ayçoberry the National Socialists pursued a program where "seduction was to replace indoctrination" (p.75). What the people were seduced to believe was that by setting aside personal concerns or objections and following the National Socialist "program" Germany itself would become strong and a "People's Community" could be formed. Personal value and personhood itself became inconsequential compared to the quest for national unity.

In the following book, Steven E. Aschheim, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), the author shows convincingly that Nietzsche was elevated to near mythic proportions within a decade after his death (pp. 18, 32, and 44 as a few examples). By the time of the 3rd Reich Nietzscheanism had been incorporated into the basic foundation and tenets of National Socialism (pp.232ff.). In regards to how this impacted the view of personhood Aschheim states, "Ernst Horneffer insisted that Nietzsche, far from preaching individualism, was interested in setting up a new society based on new bonds and new collective values. The *Übermensch* was 'not a singular concept but a racial and species one [*Art – und Gattungsbegriff*] . . . the fruit of an immense, uninterrupted human breeding project.' The fact, wrote Hildebrandt, that Nietzsche had attacked the Hegelian deification of the state did not make him an antinational individualist. 'He wanted to oppose the cold instrumental state and soulless organization not with the disconnected individual but with authentic *Volksgemeinschaft*.'" p. 249.

Thielicke exemplifies the Nazi depersonalisation for the sake of the mass by referring to a funeral sermon he preached while in Ravensburg. At the graveside he referred to a Nazi pamphlet that described the death of an individual as a leaf falling from the tree of the nation. The living trunk constantly brings forth new leaves and a process of renewal. Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 140. The inference is clear that the individual doesn't matter as long as the nation continues.

totalitarianism in their daily lives, he had to offer them an alternative that would counter the depersonalising influences of the state. Thieliicke was persistent in reminding the people of their individual responsibilities and their individual worth before God. Thieliicke's embrace of the individual then was a bold statement against the prevailing language of fascist culture. Much to Thieliicke's displeasure he found himself surrounded by theologians who had taken up both the politics and language of the Third Reich.³⁶

Robert Ericksen in his book Theologians under Hitler documents the way political depersonalisation wormed its way into the language and writings of prominent theologians. Kittel, Althaus, and Hirsch used depersonalisation both to justify Nazi abuses of the Jews and to give a divine imprimatur to the extreme nationalism of the Third Reich.³⁷ Thieliicke even found himself having to write a character reference after the War on behalf of his old doctoral father, Paul Althaus,

³⁶ In Notes from a Wayfarer Thieliicke describes his strained relationship with Emanuel Hirsch at Göttingen. p. 93. Upon entering Göttingen he knew well of Hirsch's reputation as a "notoriously fanatical National Socialist." At one point Hirsch wrote a letter of criticism against Thieliicke to the German Christian bishops that nearly cost Thieliicke his life. Despite this Thieliicke says that "In spite of everything, I always pitied rather than hated this eminent man" [p. 95]. In Heidelberg Thieliicke again ran into difficulties with his superiors who supported the Nazis. He was dismissed from the faculty in 1940 by the deceitful dealings of the dean of the theological faculty Theodor Odenwald. Odenwald was an open Nazi supporter whose protest to the local Head of Lecturers caused Thieliicke to be relieved of duties at Heidelberg on the grounds that Thieliicke's lectures were not in agreement with the Nazi line, p.113. Of Odenwald Thieliicke says, "I was overcome with pity for a failed human being." p. 114.

³⁷ Robert P. Ericksen, Theologians under Hitler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Ericksen documents the writing and speeches of Gerhard Kittel over the *Judenfrage* wherein Kittel justifies abuses to the Jews on the express basis of ignoring their individuality and concentrating on the Jews in a collective sense. Quoting Kittel, "It is not a question of whether individual Jews are respectable or disrespectable; also not whether individual Jews are unjustly ruined, or whether that occurs justly to individuals. The Jewish question is absolutely not a question of individual Jews but a question of Jewry, the Jewish Volk." p. 55.

who was accused of being a Nazi collaborator. In that letter Thielicke tries to put the best construction on Althaus' pro-Nazi language by dismissing his actions as a case of passionate nationalism.³⁸

4.3b Nihilism and Deification

Nihilistic assaults against personhood also implied attacks against the first commandment for Thielicke. Thielicke identifies two paths that nihilism takes away from the first commandment. As shown above when the nihilistic impulse objectifies the individual, personhood is diminished to the point of irrelevancy. In such cases the state or larger community is deified. However the nihilistic impulse can work in the opposite direction by deifying the individual making him or her the sole ground of truth, creator, destroyer, and thus the subject of being.³⁹ This deifying character of nihilism carries important implications for Thielicke with regard to the relationship between the individual and the community. Thielicke writes:

. . .when the individual is deified and philosophy proclaims nothing but the so-called "right of personality" to develop in accord with its

³⁸ Ibid. p. 111. The letter from Thielicke that Ericksen references is part of a collection of letters known as the Paul Althaus Papers held by Gerhard Althaus, son of Paul Althaus.

³⁹ One can note here Thielicke's citation of Nietzsche in Life Can Begin Again when he quotes the philosopher as saying, "I would like to be the master of all men, but most of all God." p. 85. Again similar thoughts are found in Christ and the Meaning of Life, p. 37 where Nietzsche is quoted as saying, "If there were gods, how could I bear not to be one?" and p. 131 when Thielicke mentions Nietzsche's Twilight of the gods as an example of attempted deification of the creature. In I Believe: The Christian's Creed, p. 5 it is in the nihilism of Jean Paul Richter where Thielicke sees the need to be one's own creator. The self-deification tendency in nihilism is not limited to creative activity but also becomes apparent in the destruction of life. Nietzsche especially sees the self-destruction of suicide as a moral imperative, cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols: or How to Philosophise with the Hammer, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Press, 1927), pp. 88-89.

own nature, then the community is very likely to feel that it is being left out of account and begins to protest against "individualism." On the other hand, when the community is deified and there arises a philosophy of collectivism, which subordinates the individual to the whole in a way that extinguishes the personality, then the individual personality feels that it is being ignored and tyrannized over and proceeds to rebel again in favor of a new individualism. If all the signs are not deceiving, we are now in a new phase of development of this latter kind.⁴⁰

One must admit that while this nihilistic deification of either individual or community may have been fairly obvious during the interwar years when Thieliicke wrote, the matter may be more complicated in the present era. Not all those who profess a nihilistic outlook would speak about themselves in terms of self-creator or self-destroyer. Nor in light of recent movements toward greater freedom in communist countries can one accuse all totalitarian states of embracing the same philosophy of state deification that they may once have embraced.

Further, the signs to which Thieliicke refers are tied to the cultural situation of the early 1960's in which he was writing. In the quotation above Thieliicke has in mind the student rebellions and changing *Weltanschauung* of that era. In retrospect one must ask about the accuracy of Thieliicke's observations. A case can be made that the nihilistic deification of the "I" did not make community "feel left out" in Germany. On the contrary the history of the Third Reich seems to suggest that the "I" deification of a nihilistic outlook led into a deification of the community. The Third Reich, influenced heavily by Nietzschean nihilism, was

⁴⁰ Christ and the Meaning of Life, pp. 129-130. The identical thought is found in Helmut Thieliicke, Man in God's World, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 49.

intent on creating a new *Volk* of *Übermenschen*. The elevation of the community then did not proceed as a counter movement to nihilism but as a consequence of it.

Of course there is also truth in Thielicke's observations. In view of the enforced conformity under the Third Reich it seems logical to assume the German student rebellion was an example of individualism rising up against collectivism. Thielicke does not seem to take into account however that the student rebellion was mirrored in democratic states where there was no forced conformity akin to that of the Third Reich. Nor were such student rebellions sweeping through communist countries with the same fervour as in democratic states though doctrines of collectivism ruled there with much more stringency.⁴¹

Thielicke's statement that deification of the "I" leads to a rebellion of the collective and vice-versa does not remain credible when viewed against the dynamics of world politics, but his observation does show a glimpse into his train of thought. What it shows is that collectivism and individualism are at odds with each other for him. As he presents these two doctrines the "I" is either a cog in the machine or in isolated solitude. Nihilism seems to have forced Thielicke into seeing humanity as either individualistic or collectivistic. Consequently one does not find Thielicke presenting a doctrine of personhood that treats at length the need to view mankind in both individual and social terms.

⁴¹ One could also argue that the student rebellions which claimed individual freedom and non-conformity were in reality simply forming new collectives with different standards of conformity. Thus "counter-culture" establishes a different "culture" with different norms to which individuals are to conform. Freedom then becomes a relative concept.

4.3c *Nihilism and Christology*

Nihilism is the most extreme consequence of secularization, and precisely because of its tie with secularization it is nihilism *post Christum*. By virtue of his contact with Christianity the autonomous man of the Western world has in hand a most ultimate standard by means of which he can measure the interior truth about himself to a terrifying degree. Perhaps it is a curse imposed by Christ on those who desert him, that they have come to knowledge because of him without yet having the comfort that sustains them in this knowledge.⁴²

For Thielicke the nihilistic individual does not simply exist without Christ but stands against him. It is not just that nihilism has no christology, it is more a matter that christology in the nihilistic system stands as judge against it. Nihilism is not then a matter of blind unbelief or ignorance of Christ, rather it is a matter of entering into isolation from God with one's eyes wide open,⁴³ that for Thielicke is the most frightening side to nihilism.

This outright rejection of Christ and the Gospel immediately reverses the normal Christian progression of thought for an honest evaluation of the "I" in relation to life and death. The nihilist interprets death by life because life is the ultimate ground of being and from life comes all value and existence. The Christian interprets life by death because Christians know physical life is not the ultimate ground of being and that in Christ a transcendent truth exists that supersedes this life.⁴⁴ Before one even discusses the variety of christological views, the mere existence of christology turns the evaluation of ontology toward this death-to-life

⁴² Death and Life, pp.57-58.

⁴³ The stated anti-Christian nature of nihilism is obvious throughout the works of Nietzsche who sadly grew up in a faithful Lutheran household.

⁴⁴ Death and Life, p. 60.

direction. Christology introduces transcendence and love into all formative questions of ontology. Nihilism flatly rejects the importance of both and thus condemns itself to a hopeless ontology before it begins.

4.4 Summary

Identifying a single root for Thielicke's focus does not seem possible. The mixture of social, cultural, political and theological forces that contributed together to push Thielicke in the direction of the individual create a structure of different roots feeding his individualisation of christology. In some cases these roots remain a concern in the postmodern context. In other places they are dated and should no longer influence christology. Which elements of Thielicke's context should remain a concern for today will continue to guide our discussions throughout the remainder of this thesis.

The fact that Thielicke was as sensitive as he was to directions in cultural thought is of great importance. The Church in the postmodern world must likewise understand the cultural forces shaping the minds and concerns of the people. One may argue that Thielicke went too far in not only being sensitive to the mind of culture, but in allowing his theology to be shaped by that mind to where important elements of his Lutheran confession were lost. When we suggest that the postmodern Church must be sensitive to trends in current thought we are not suggesting that the Church has to change her theology, only that she must know what issues her theology needs to address and what problems she must redress. How to respect the individual without becoming individualistic must be addressed. Negative directions in individualism must be redressed. In the final two chapters we will search for practical methods to deal with both.

Chapter 5

Thielicke's Place Within the Progression of Individualism

It is self-evident that Thielicke's "individualistic imperative" was not something unique to him. Thielicke's genius was his ability to probe the deep issues of the cultural *Zeitgeist*. We have shown how deep questions about the individual were lurking under the social currents of his day. Those questions were the product of centuries of development. The times in which Thielicke lived were witness to a kind of individualism in flux – modernist but moving quickly toward postmodernism. This chapter will attempt to locate Thielicke's place within the general historical movement of individualism and will discuss at further length how his views fit with postmodern individualism.

5.1 Roots of Individualism

It is impossible to fix an exact date or even an exact era as the time when individualism was born. One can however note movements in certain key areas of history where the idea of the individual gained importance and thus contributed to later advancements of individualism.

5.1a The Individual in the Old Testament

Especially for Western Christians, immersed as they are in a culture centred on the individual, the Old Testament presents immediate barriers to understanding. The witness of the Old Testament shows a strong sense of the corporate that seems alien to those of more individualistic minds. One finds examples of this especially in divine pronouncements of punishment where the many bear the weight for the sins of the one or the few. The consequence for the sin of Adam and Eve passed to all

mankind (the doctrine of original sin). Noah's punishment of Ham for seeing his nakedness extended to Ham's descendants.¹ Achan's individual act of covetousness resulted in God's wrath shown to all Israel and the remarkable statement "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them."² Achan's punishment was equally corporate with his whole family including livestock being put to death. When God sought to punish the whole assembly for the sins of Korah and his sons Moses pleaded with God, "shall one man sin, and you be angry with all the congregation?"³ It becomes apparent that this corporate character in God's judgement presented some difficulty for the Israelites; in Jeremiah 31:29 one sees what must have been an often repeated complaint, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

Similarly, there are corporate overtones in the giving of birthrights. The birthright blessing was not merely intended for the son but for his progeny. Jacob's blessing from Isaac was intended for Jacob's line.⁴ As Jacob blessed his sons in Genesis 49 it is obvious Jacob was speaking to the generations of each son. Even circumcision seems to have a corporate view at work. The mark of circumcision was borne in the very organ of procreation, signifying not only the faithfulness of the one who bore it but his pledge that all those who follow from his line would be raised under the same covenant.

¹ Genesis 9:22-27.

² Joshua 7:11 (New King James Version)

³ Numbers 16:22 (New King James Version).

⁴ Genesis 27:27-28 and 28:4.

Some might posit the argument that these Old Testament corporate views represent the more primitive tribal mentalities of the earliest authors. As culture developed the tribal corporate views were amended to include a clearer consideration for the individual. A cultural corrective then exerts itself on the text, and while maintaining a high degree of appreciation for the community, notions of individual worth begin to find expression. Such a view obviously sees the Old Testament text as evidence for a gradually developing sense of the individual.

Others, who take a more holistic view of the Old Testament, see the strong corporate character of God's relationship with humanity coupled with a recognition for the individual as part of God's divine providence, wherein he establishes checks and balances to ensure that neither community nor the individual are lost. Those who adopt this view would be less inclined to see the Old Testament text in terms of a layering of authorship where later generations added their unique perspective of individuality.

Regardless of one's view, it cannot be denied that the Old Testament presents the reader with a strong sense of corporate punishment and blessing and yet recognises the importance of the individual. In the example of Achan and Ham, it was the failure of the individual that carried consequences for a great many people. In the case of certain Old Testament birthrights, there seems to be a clear assumption that the faithfulness of the *paterfamilias* will translate into the continued faithfulness of his family. In both instances the whole depends on the faithfulness of the one.

Recognition for the individual surfaces again when one examines God's answer to the saying of the Israelites about the children's teeth being set on edge for their

father's sins: "every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."⁵ In 1 Samuel 2:25 one finds the statement, "If one man sins against another, God will judge him," and Proverbs 24:12 states, "will He not render to each man according to his deeds?" Both views of textual development discussed above can agree that the importance of the individual rose over time. The latter holistic view however would insist that this does not necessarily imply that in earlier, more tribal understandings the individual was nonexistent.

As Christianity lives in highly individualistic cultures it has a very difficult task. It has embraced the Old Testament and called it sacred; which in turn means that it has embraced the principles of faith and life revealed in the Old Testament. An undeniable principle at work in the divine revelation of the Old Testament is one that holds corporate being in high regard even as it recognises the individual. The Church can debate the degree of corporate being appropriate for today but she cannot ignore the importance of such being in the Old Testament.

5.1b. Early Christianity and the Individual

By the time of Christ, consideration for the individual does seem to have matured. It is not that any specific corporate principle from the Old Testament had been denied or dismissed, only that one does see a heightened concern for faith weighted more toward an individual application. Undoubtedly the shift reflects an overall movement within the cultural paradigm. Thieliicke notes that Greek tragedy bears a uniquely individualistic stamp by concerning itself with such things as a person's

⁵ Jeremiah 31:30 (New King James Version).

emotions and inner mental anguish. One need only walk through a museum display of sculptures from later Greece and early Rome to see a new concern in art for capturing the exact likeness of individuals. So Christianity in this new context where the individual was being recognised in more pronounced ways seems also to speak more to the importance of the individual.⁶

These observations must however be tempered with the recognition that even with these shifts in emphasis “individualism” as such was nonexistent. Scholars have pointed out that Greek culture began its worldview from the standpoint of the “*polis*” which to them was the natural unit of society.⁷ Further, Jewish culture, which formed the initial body of early Christendom, continued to have a strong view of community and one’s place within that community. Even now the sense of community in Judaism is stronger than most Christians realise. One author, who is probably representative of many Jews, voices his understanding of the place of the individual within the Jewish community:

My participation in the people Israel, in the eyes of the tradition, is not simply a voluntary act, which I can retract at will. It is rather part of my very being, which no act on my part can change. Even if I convert to another religion, I continue to bear the obligations of being a Jew. That is why Hillel’s comment, “If I am here, then everyone is here,” is not just metaphorical (or egotistical!): We are all part of the same ontological entity, the Jewish people, and that entity is present in every one of us.⁸

⁶ eg. Matthew 18:12, Luke 15:7, Rom. 2:5ff., 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:4-5.

⁷ Colin Morris, The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 2.. Also Lenn E. Goodman, “The Individual and the Community.” in Autonomy and Judaism, ed. Daniel H. Frank (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 81. Goodman writes, “Aristotle argues that a person who would live alone is either above or below the level of humanity – a beast or a god; for man himself is by nature a creature of the polis (zoon politikon).”

⁸ Elleot N. Dorff, “Individual and Communal Forgiveness” in Autonomy and Judaism, p. 203.

No doubt some among the Jewish community might argue with his statement about remaining a Jew even if he converted to another religion. Yet his comment does demonstrate a widely held understanding of community which is so strong that the overall sense of corporate being supersedes a common faith.

The New Testament draws attention to this very thing at several points. The conflicting theologies of Pharisees and Sadducees existing together at the Jewish council as described in Acts 23:1ff is an example of the coexistence of such conflicting theological views. One can also point to the toleration (official toleration) of Christian teaching in the temple and the synagogues which ultimately allowed converts to be drawn from Judaism.⁹ Of course the witness of Acts also testifies to widespread opposition and occasional “unofficial” violence because of this teaching, but the willingness of the Jewish officials to allow the Christian message in its synagogues is significant in establishing the strength of the Jewish view of community.

Early Christianity found itself at odds with this broad concept of ecclesial being. It could not define itself in terms of an “umbrella community” wherein divergent theological doctrines could peacefully coexist. Paul offers particularly clear examples of this conflict. In the Corinthian Church Paul confronted competing theologies with the question “Is Christ divided?”¹⁰ He urged the Corinthians, “Now I

⁹ Cf. Acts 13:14ff, 14:1ff, 17:1ff “Then Paul, *as his custom was*, went in to them (in the synagogue), and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 17:10, 17, 18:4, 18:19, 24-26, 19:8.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 1:11-13 (New King James Version),

plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”¹¹ And to Timothy Paul said, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia; remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine. . .”¹²

In a sense Christianity operated under a stricter sense of community, in that a person’s relation to the community of faith depended on oneness of mind and doctrine. Yet in this tighter doctrine of community can also be seen an intense concern for the individual. A loose association with the community of faith was not adequate. An actual engagement with Christ and a personal grasp of Gospel was needed if one was to be part of the body of faith.

Luke 3 records John the Baptist chastising the Jews coming out to be baptised saying, “do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” John is combating the inclination of the people to invest their spiritual hope in a superficial understanding of the Abrahamic covenant – an understanding that united them to an outward “covenant community” but, as John objected, did not necessitate right faith.

That this issue continued to be problematical for Christians is evidenced by Paul’s instruction regarding the practice of circumcision. Circumcision had become ossified

¹¹ I Corinthians 1:10 (New King James Version). Note similar statements in Philippians 3:16, Romans 16:17, Ephesians 4:1-6.

¹² I Timothy 1:3 (New King James Version)

as an outward sign of one's place in the Abrahamic community; it had lost its character of personal engagement with the Messianic hope. In Romans 2:29 Paul states, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter." More to the point of conflict between Jewish views of community and Christian views is Paul's statement later in Romans:

For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.¹³

The Christian need for personal engagement of one's faith in the Messiah challenged the salvific significance of an outward association with the community of Abraham. That same spirit of concern for the faith of each individual in Christ is self-evident throughout the New Testament.

Early Christianity then sets itself apart from prevailing views both with regard to the individual and with regard to the nature of the spiritual community. The community becomes more tightly bound under a common faith, and the individual is more clearly singled out as to his or her sincerity in believing the Christian message.

5.1c Early Medieval Expressions of Individualism

Between the first century and the period of the Reformation there are marked movements toward a further awakening of an individual identity. Prior to the medieval period Augustine (A.D. 354-430) provides what may be the first extended example of personal self-reflection in the writing of his Confessions. There he rehearses the events of his youth and the progression of his spiritual and

¹³ Romans 9:6-8 (New King James Version).

psychological state of mind. Not until later in the medieval period does one see more widespread attempts to personalize one's spiritual experience through autobiography.¹⁴

In the book The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200, author Colin Morris builds a strong case for an awakening recognition of the importance of the individual in society and in the Church during the years from 1050-1200. Within the Church Morris notes a growing willingness during this time to think critically, particularly with reference to the early Church Fathers. There was a conscious effort during this period to reconcile apparent difficulties among the Fathers rather than simply accept contradictions in the faith.¹⁵ One can also notice a new self-awareness in the preaching of the time as sermons spoke more openly of the personal experiences of the preacher. Morris cites the example of Guibert of Nogent as one who promoted the use of self-analysis as a tool for proclamation.¹⁶ The common use of the expression "*know yourself*" led to new more personal expressions of piety. There was an increase in penitential hymns written in the first person,¹⁷ a growing concern for self-examination and confession,¹⁸ and the rise of kneeling during prayer as a sign of personal devotion.¹⁹ The combination of this more personal form of piety and a greater concern for self-introspection led even to a change in the common depiction

¹⁴ The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200, pp. 79-80.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-63.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73-74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

of the crucifix. During the period of 1050 to 1200 Christ was more often portrayed in realistic death poses, thus encouraging a more emotional personal form of self-introspection in one's devotional life.²⁰

Though one sees these early hints at a more open recognition of the individual, medieval thought was still dominated by a worldview that discouraged expressions of individualism. There was a marked unequal treatment under the law between people of various estates²¹ and an understanding that once one occupied a specific estate one was bound to it for life, as well as to one's place within society because of that estate.²² The relationship of Regent to subject and the theological understanding of rule by divine right led to a society of subjects and rulers (as opposed to citizens and governors). Even the art forms of early medieval culture showed little concern for the individual identity or personal characteristics of the one portrayed (unlike earlier Greek sculpture!) and more attention to the trappings of the office that a person occupied.²³

Yet despite the forces working toward the restriction of the individual, there was at least the beginning of a new understanding of the individual in society. From 1964

²⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

²¹ Walter Ullmann, The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 15.

²² Ibid., 40. Ullmann states "Society was pictured as a large organism in which each member had been allotted a special function which he pursued for the common good. . . there was the stratification of medieval society into its estates. The significance of this stratification within the present context is that it was precisely the hallmark of a member of the particular estate that he could not move out of his own estate and that whatever status he enjoyed, he was rigidly controlled by the norms applicable to his estate."

²³ Ibid., p. 44.

to 1965 Walter Ullmann presented a series of lectures on the *Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* at Johns Hopkins University. During these lectures he noted unique occurrences, particularly in the 13th century, which helped individuals gain a more important place in society. There was the signing of the Magna Carta, which placed the king (John) under a rule of law by his own consent and held out the rights of individuals to a trial by their peers. Article 39 of the Magna Carta states:

No freeman shall be captured and imprisoned, or disseized, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way harmed, except by a lawful tribunal of his peers and by the law of the land.²⁴

Of particular interest to Ullmann was the concept of the “law of the land” which he also termed “common law.” It was a form of law born at the grass roots level and not dictated “from the top down.” This common law evolved and changed the relationship between subjects and kings eventually moving the feudal system in the direction of contractual agreements between the feudal lord, barons and vassals.²⁵ Regents were forced into dual roles, occupying the right of rule by divine right, while yielding to the pragmatic operation of contractual agreements and common law. Gradually then individuals gained recognition under common law as possessing certain rights. And it was this right of the individual under the common law that eventually grew into philosophies that formulated the American Declaration of Independence.²⁶

²⁴ As quoted by Walter Ullmann in *The Individual and Society*, p. 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69-71.

²⁶ A conclusion reached by Ullmann, pp. 96, 150, 151.

Social awareness of the individual during the eleventh and twelfth centuries coincides with the growth of cities throughout Europe.²⁷ Economic developments coupled with growth of markets, transportation improvements, and textile manufacture all helped fuel the growth of cities at this time.²⁸ Distinctions between trades-people began to be exposed as cities grew and were divided up demographically according to guilds.²⁹ Increased trade and industry led also to the development of a middle class during this period.³⁰ This gradual evolution of class and trade would have served to draw clearer distinctions between people and therefore ultimately define people according to their unique function or role. These distinctions often led to conflict and repression as unequal distribution of wealth distanced tradesmen from merchants and master craftsmen from assistants.³¹ Such tensions coupled with the more critical mind of the medieval period and the idea of personal rights under the law provided a fertile ground for an increased recognition of self as an individual.

We must also point out that larger cities give rise to a less tangible or quantifiable psychological phenomenon as well, wherein people try to distinguish themselves from each other more dramatically than those who live in rural settings. Of course the present age cannot be a direct measure of medieval expressions; nonetheless

²⁷ David Nicholas, The Growth of the Medieval City (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), pp. 90-91.

²⁸ Nicholas, pp.100, 105-106.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 102-103

³⁰ Henri Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), pp.158-164.

³¹ Paul M Hohenbert and Lynn Hollen Lees, The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1994 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 44-46.

human nature being what it is, one can expect that even in the severely limited economic conditions of the medieval period, this human desire to be noticed would have added to the growing recognition of the individual in the context of larger cities.

5.1d The Individual in the Reformation

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries the once-rapid growth of cities had slowed.³² Yet during the same time specialization in trade increased.³³ Different cities attracted different workers with unique skills. The implication for the individual is an even more pronounced recognition of personal uniqueness as compared to that of earlier medieval times.

Beside social considerations there were ecclesiastical upheavals during this time that further serve to highlight a growing appreciation for the individual. Had the Reformers not been willing to stand alone as individuals against the community of ecclesiastical authority (even to the point of death), the Reformation would not have been possible. Ralph Ketcham in his book Individualism and Public Life states:

Luther, declaring before the Diet of Worms, "Here I stand, I can do no other," defied all authority in the name of faith. Calvin insisted in Geneva on no law other than that which faith and intellect found in the Bible, and John Knox thundered against monarchs, lords, and bishops alike if they thwarted men living according to Christ's law reduced to seven words, "love God and thy neighbor as thyself." Each provided a graphic lesson in individual responsibility.³⁴

³² Hohenberg and Hollen, pp. 106-109 .

³³ Ibid., p. 109.

³⁴ Ralph Ketcham, Individualism and Public Life: A Modern Dilemma (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987), p. 46.

Ketcham's observations capture the distinctions between the kind of individualism upon which the Reformation was founded and that of postmodern culture. Reformation individualism, if one should even call it individualism, was not founded on the autonomous "I" as in the Enlightenment, but upon a perceived submission of the "I" to the higher authority of the Church and the Word. Instead of separating the individual from the *Communio Sanctorum* Luther understood his work as uniting present with past as the true holy catholic Church under the Gospel. In that regard Luther and other Reformers demonstrate typical medieval thought patterns.

C.S. Lewis in *The Discarded Image* shows, via examples of literature, how medievals yielded to the authority of previous generations. Lewis states:

When we speak of the Middle Ages as the age of authority we are usually thinking about the authority of the Church. But they were the age not only of her authority, but of authorities. If their culture is regarded as a response to environment, then the elements in that environment to which it responded most vigorously were manuscripts. Every writer, if he possibly can, bases himself on an earlier writer, follows an auctour: preferably a Latin one. . . . In our own society most knowledge depends, in the last resort, on observation. But the Middle Ages depended predominantly on books. Though literacy was of course far rarer then than now, reading was in one way a more important ingredient of the total culture.³⁵

When the reformers stood against the authority of the Church, they were demonstrating submission to what was understood as a more enduring and therefore more certain authority. Their confessions of faith were in fact tied to their understanding of what came before, namely Scripture and the early Church Fathers (as demonstrated by the many quotations from the Scriptures and early Church

³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 5.

Fathers in the Lutheran Confessions). Yet it is still apparent when we examine Luther in particular, that the Reformer was placing his own understanding of the Scripture and the early Church Fathers ahead of that of the given ecclesiastical authority. In that sense at least the Reformation demonstrates a more open assertion of the individual.

5.1e Individualism in Classical Lutheran Theology

Though the Lutheran Confessions are products of late Medieval or even early Renaissance culture and therefore carry within them the communal assumptions of the age, they do demonstrate a strong concern for the individual. Itself also a growing medieval trend, individual responsibility and personal faith hold an important place in the confessions of classic Lutheranism. Against Roman Catholicism the Lutheran Confessions explicitly reject the impersonal notion of grace given *ex opere operato* and insist on the necessity of personal faith.

But as the adversaries expressly condemn our statement that men obtain the remission of sins by faith, we shall add a few proofs from which it will be understood that the remission of sins is obtained not *ex opere operato* because of contrition, but by that special faith by which an individual believes (den Glauben, da ein jeder für sich selbst glaubt) that sins are remitted to him. For this is the chief article concerning which we are contending with our adversaries and the knowledge of which we regard especially necessary to all Christians.³⁶

Here the issue of personal faith is considered the chief article of contention with Roman Catholicism where the Lutheran confessors take the position that personal

³⁶ Triglotta, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Art. XII., para. 59. p. 267. Under this same topic would be the rejection of Luther in the 95 theses of the treasury of merits. He traces this belief to the 13th century scholastic theologians. Instead of drawing from the excess merits of saints Luther redirected the idea of a treasury of merits to the merits of Christ as all-sufficient. Cf. LW 31:20, 215, 224.

faith is necessary for all Christians. Individual faith as seen here should not be understood in the atomistic sense of Postmodernism wherein personal faith is tantamount to free license, but as the voluntary submission to a shared body of doctrine and a shared understanding of the Gospel. When condemning the Anabaptists the Lutheran Confessions condemn doctrine that is “self-chosen.” Under the section “Articles That Cannot be Tolerated in the Church” the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* lists as its third point,

That our righteousness before God consists not in the sole merit of Christ alone, but in renewal, and hence in our own godliness in which we walk. This is based in great part upon one’s own special self-chosen [and humanly devised] spirituality, and in fact is nothing else than a new sort of monkery.³⁷

So while stressing the importance of the individual in his or her relation to the Saviour, classic Lutheranism seems well aware of the dangers in making the individual autonomous where doctrine is concerned.

In other places, while keeping a strong ecclesiology and an emphasis on the community of faith, Lutheran doctrine lays stress on the place of the individual under Christ. This can be seen in: a) private confession and absolution - the Lutheran confessions uphold the vital importance of private confession and absolution in the

³⁷ Ibid., “*Epitome*” XII para. 5, p. 839. It would be fair to add here that the Anabaptists were not the only group that roused the ire of the reformers for holding doctrines that separated them from the Catholic Church. The Lutheran reformers were equally appalled by the doctrinal individualism of those who were part of the radical reformation.

life of the individual,³⁸ b) personal obligations under the law.³⁹ c) Church discipline,⁴⁰ d) in the experience of faith's ebb and flow,⁴¹ e) in the need to provide a reliable witness during times of controversy or persecution,⁴² and f) at the point of election.⁴³

Whether spurred on by the Reformation or recognizing for itself a new cultural pressure toward the individual, the Roman Church too acknowledged more clearly the need for individual engagement with the faith. A thorough study of the Council of Trent and its recognition of the individual is beyond the scope of this thesis, however two clear examples from this Council present themselves. In the *Decree on Reformation* it is mandated that a catechism be produced for the teaching of the laity

³⁸ Ibid., "*Solid Declaration*" XI, para. 37, p. 1075 "but He seals it through the Sacraments which He attaches as seals of the promise, and thereby confirms it [the certainty of the promise of the Gospel] to every believer in particular. (einen jeden Gläubigen insonderheit)."

³⁹ Ibid., "*The Large Catechism*," para. 180, p. 631 "here now we go forth from our house among our neighbors to learn how we should live with one another, every one himself (ein jeglicher für sich selbst) toward his neighbor."

⁴⁰ Ibid., para. 279, p. 661. Here the biblical imperative in Matt. 18 is under discussion where a person is guilty of sin and must be addressed. "So he whom it concerns is always to be treated personally (man je mit dem selbst handle)."

⁴¹ Ibid., "*Solid Declaration*" II, "Of Free Will" para. 68, p. 907 ". . . each Christian . . . experiences in himself that at one time he is joyful in spirit, and at another fearful and alarmed; at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak."

⁴² Ibid., "*Solid Declaration*" X, para. 10, p. 1055 "at the time of confession, when the enemies of God's Word desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire congregation of God, yea, every Christian (jeder Christenmensch), but especially the ministers of the Word, as the leaders of the congregation of God, are bound by God's Word to confess freely and openly . . ."

⁴³ Ibid., "*Solid Declaration*" XI, para. 23, p. 1069 ". . . God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person (alle und jede Personen) of the elect who are to be saved through Christ."

and that priests and bishops explain the sacraments “in a manner suited to the capacity of those who receive them.”⁴⁴ There is also an emphasis on personal worthiness for the Eucharist wherein people are encouraged to make use of private “sacramental” confession prior to the Eucharist, and in the case of those who might be guilty of mortal sin, sacramental confession is demanded prior to communing.⁴⁵ The need for personal piety is particularly visible in the sacramental theology of Trent.

Our main concern here is with the understandings of classic Lutheranism. Certainly the worldview of late medieval culture gave rise to a greater appreciation of the individual in all Western Christian circles, but again we must recognize that this in no way approaches the individualism of our day. Classic Lutheranism maintains a tension between corporate and individual christology, even as it expresses a tension between objective and subjective justification. The faith of the many as well as the faith of the one is necessary for a complete view of engagement with Christ. Of course the corporate nature of faith understood among the classic Lutheran fathers may reflect in some part a natural expression of Luther’s own spirituality as a monk; still the need for the Confessions to base both forms of christological engagement on scriptural grounds is evident.

Part of the reason why this thesis seeks to draw classic Lutheranism into the discussion of Thielicke is because of this inherent tension between the individual and

⁴⁴ J. Waterworth trans., The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent, (Chicago: The Christian Symbolic Publication Society, date?), pp. 213-214.

⁴⁵ The Canons of Trent, Session XIII, *On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist*, CANON XI, p. 84.

the community of faith. Thieliicke's christology, which purports to be of a Lutheran character (since Thieliicke was himself Lutheran), has resolved the tension in favour of the individual. It is the contention here that a restoration of this tension is desirable for postmodern christology. Not that a late medieval or early renaissance worldview is the answer for the postmodern context, but that an application of a dialectic which balances both communal and personal christology to the new contexts of Postmodernism will allow for re-evaluation of a narrow individualistic worldview.

5.1f The Enlightenment

There is a temptation to lay the responsibility for the emergence of modern ideas of individualism at the feet of the Enlightenment. Certainly the Enlightenment was concerned with self-definition and autonomy. Kant's use of the term "autonomy" is a case in point, but for Kant "autonomy" represented "the idea of a self-appropriated universal rational law."⁴⁶ "Autonomy" was placed in service to rational law, and instead of representing free license (as it often does in postmodern usage) "autonomy" represented a self-chosen obedience:

Kant's idea of autonomy is not absolute self-determination, but self-determination according to the rational and moral being which is given to man and which contains in itself the rational and moral law.⁴⁷

An autonomy in service to moral law (ethics) discourages pure selfism. Its purpose is harmony with others and peaceful coexistence through mutual obedience to moral law. Such autonomy represents the (self-imposed) restriction of the self

⁴⁶ John Macken, The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

under law and is the opposite of postmodern views of the individual which tend toward freedom from law rather than under it and therefore border more on antinomianism than autonomy.

John Macken in his book The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics compares the understanding of autonomy in Kant with that of Fichte and demonstrates a marked difference in Fichte's understanding of autonomy. Fichte operated under the principle of *reflective self-consciousness*. Macken explains it thus: "The reflection of the subject on itself constituted the Ich, the Ego. The Ego posits itself; it looks for no explanation or ground outside itself . . ." ⁴⁸

For Fichte the moral law under which autonomy was founded must be thought of as posited by the self. Autonomy was still a matter of the individual freely subjecting self in obedience to moral law, but the moral law was within the control of the individual rather than above him or her. ⁴⁹ An ethic posited from outside the individual constituted heteronomy and thus undermined the absolute self-determination of true autonomy. ⁵⁰ Yet even here the more severe individualism of Postmodernism is avoided. The pursuit of absolute self-determination is the pursuit

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁹ Cf. the discussion on Fichte's self-positing moral law in Karl Ameriks, Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 189. There, in discussing the practical character of Fichte's system, Ameriks states, ". . . Fichte always held onto the basic twofold Critical idea that, in signifying freedom and autonomy, 'the practical' implies an executive power to determine oneself absolutely, in absolute spontaneity as an uncaused cause of intentional acts, as well as a legislative capacity to do so morally in line with law of one's own general essence, that is, one's rationality."

⁵⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 14-15.

of the ethical community. It depends on others to raise the individual to the ideal of autonomy. Individuality is not the final reality for Fichte but “accidental” and Reason the true reality. Fichte is quoted by Macken as stating:

Reason alone is eternal, in our view, while individuality must constantly decay. Anyone who does not first accommodate his will to this order of things will also never obtain a true understanding of the Science of Knowledge.⁵¹

The concern for self-understanding and self-definition were at the heart of Enlightenment thinking. Descartes’ famous “I think therefore I am” is an attempt to base existence and ontology on the self. Autonomy was an integral part of the definition of the self during the Enlightenment, but individualism as it is now understood cannot be redacted on the Enlightenment concept of the self. It is better to say that the Enlightenment merely gave voice to the cultural need of individuals at that time to define themselves against the backdrop of existence as an “I” in relation to God, the universe, and other people. The philosophical issues revolving around self-definition that came out of the Enlightenment proved to be a very important issue for Thielicke in all his works. Much of what Thielicke says about the “I” can be seen in the context of his ongoing dialogue with Enlightenment philosophies. Ironically, as concerned about self-definition as he was, Thielicke did not seem to perceive the dangers in the rising tide of individualism.

5.1g Post-Enlightenment Developments in Individualism

By the 19th century the French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, had noted dangerous trends in individualism that had evolved under the influence of democratic principles.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 16.

Offering his observations on American society in the late 1830's de Tocqueville

wrote:

“Individualism” is a word recently coined to express a new idea. Our fathers only knew about egoism. Egoism is a passionate and exaggerated love of self which leads a man to think of all things in terms of himself and to prefer himself to all. Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. Egoism springs from a blind instinct; individualism is based on misguided judgement rather than depraved feeling. It is due more to inadequate understanding than to perversity of heart. Egoism sterilizes the seeds of every virtue; individualism at first only dams the spring of public virtues, but in the long run it attacks and destroys all the others too and finally merges in egoism. Egoism is a vice as old as the world. It is not peculiar to one form of society more than another. Individualism is of democratic origin and threatens to grow as conditions get more equal.⁵²

De Tocqueville's “Egoism” could also be called selfishness. It is not new; as Tocqueville asserts, “it is a vice as old as the world.” His observations clearly point to individualism not merely as a social consideration but as a spiritual issue. Tocqueville accurately foresees that individualism will grow as notions of equality grow. Indeed, history has shown that as egalitarian ideals have matured, individualism has matured with it. The irony is that while egalitarianism has sought to unite people by removing authoritarian barriers, further separation and atomisation has been the inevitable result.

⁵² Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), p. 477.

De Tocqueville was not alone in his observations during the 19th century. Steven Lukes, author of Individualism: Key Concepts in the Social Sciences, reveals a unique French school of thought that saw individualism in largely negative terms.⁵³

Lukes concludes:

... the mainstream of French thought, above all in the nineteenth century, was expressed by 'individualisme' - what Durkheim identified by the twin concepts of 'anomie' and 'egoism' - the social, moral and political isolation of individuals, their dissociation from social purposes and social regulation, the breakdown of social solidarity.⁵⁴

The issue for many French observers, like de Tocqueville, was not that there was necessarily more selfishness in their day than in previous generations, but that the form of selfishness was so bound to the basic ideals and principles of Western culture that it carried the force of a *Weltanschauung* capable of atomising every element of society. Indeed, present social and theological circumstances bear out that many of their concerns were justified.

Part of Thielicke's seeming blindness to the French warnings about individualism may be tied to Germany itself. Steven Lukes identifies a very different view of individualism among German thinkers of the same period. The difference, according to Lukes, lies in the influences of Romanticism that saw individuality as an expression of originality and uniqueness.⁵⁵ With time this positive view of self

⁵³ Steven Lukes, Individualism: Key Concepts in the Social Sciences (Bristol England: Western Printing Services Ltd., 1973), pp. 1-16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. One may cite in addition to this that part of the difference between German and French views may have something to do with the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century and their consequent wrestling with issues of autonomy at that time (Cf. the French Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789).

evolved into an idea of nationalistic community. Individuality was no longer ascribed only to persons but to “supra-personal” entities like the nation or state wherein persons could discover their personal individuality. Thus in Germany the idea of individualism was a liberating idea; it did not carry the historical baggage of revolution noted by French scholars. Growing up under these German attitudes toward the individual one would be more willing to focus on the individual with a certain naiveté as to where it might lead. Thieliicke’s approach then seems more understandable in an atmosphere where individuality was accepted without a great deal of suspicion.

Yet the tendency for German individualism to move toward the “supra-personal,” as noted by Lukes, carried a darker side against which one would expect Thieliicke to have reacted. We have commented on Thieliicke’s condemnation of Nazi communal philosophy. What we have not noted is that Thieliicke recognised the Nazi problem as also involving a failure of the individual. Yes, he speaks on occasion of the breakdown of personal responsibility to act rightly under the Nazi regime, but he does not blame the underlying German understandings about the individual. The fact remains however that the German romanticised individual did not carry a sufficiently independent critical mind to stop the domination of the Nazi corporate model. Thieliicke does not give up on the prowess of the individual; instead he refocuses his hopes on the liberating strength of individuals who have come to recognise their position of responsibility and solidarity with God.

5.2 The Nature of Individualism Today

Thieliicke certainly saw some negative elements of individualism, but as a German scholar and one whose views of autonomy were shaped in large part on German

Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking, he does not seem willing to part with his hopeful outlook for the individual. Despite his obvious grasp of the nuances of Enlightenment philosophy one must be critical of his failure to deal adequately with French observations about dangerous individualism. Those observations have expressed themselves in obvious ways in Postmodernism.

Thielicke chided preachers to remain in touch with the culture in which they found themselves.⁵⁶ Thus to be true to Thielicke's own intentions the Church must know what pressures exist in the current social climate.

5.2a Individualism as a Negative Social Influence

Social observers have tagged the postmodern idea of individualism as a potential source of difficulty for the common good throughout the world. In 1995 the United Nations held a conference on "Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Progress." The concern of the conference was to identify both problems and solutions to key issues involving poverty, employment, and social integration. The seminar began with the premise that many of the problems faced in these areas were spiritual in nature and were rife with misguided individualism. A number of issues facing "Western" culture were noted by the seminar:

. . . [the] unprecedented material successes of Western civilization, have created some elements of a universal culture centred on the acquisition of goods and services which render daily life easier and

⁵⁶ Eg. " Thus as a preacher I am involved in an unending dialogue with those to whom I must deliver my message. Every conversation I engage in becomes at bottom a meditation, a preparation, a gathering of material for my preaching. I can no longer listen disinterestedly even to a play in a theater without relating it to my pulpit. . . . Thus life in all its daily involvements becomes for me a thesaurus in which I keep rummaging, because it is full of relevant material for my message." The Trouble with the Church, p. 22 (and throughout this volume). Thielicke lists lack of relevancy with culture as being one of the downfalls of modern preaching.

more comfortable, as well as on the notions of free choice and instant satisfaction of needs. With many nuances in different national communities and different social groups, there is now indeed a common culture based on the search for material well-being, the consumption of goods, images and information, and the pursuits of both self-interest and national interest. The values of efficiency and competition are also prominent in this way of thinking, which is often perceived as a “model”, in the normative sense, and which dominates contemporary societies.⁵⁷

These pursuits of personal comfort, ease of life, accumulation of possessions, instant gratification, and free choice have become the foundation for the “atomistic” individualism of Western culture. The seminar suggested that one of the harmful results of individualism which can and does arise in this cultural situation is “Social Darwinism” which is a survival of the fittest type of mentality working against a spirit of love for those less fortunate.

The seminar took pains to clarify how “individualism” could be used for good or bad.

It would be more productive to show that the only way to reconcile personal interest and the common good is to give to the former a content and orientation that would transform it into a contribution to the latter. It is selfishness, egotism and egocentrism, rather than individualism, that are destructive. It is not the quest for more power or greater profits that is bad for the individual and society, but the motives for that quest, if they are dominated by vanity, the hunger for power or the desire to profit at the expense of others. It is not the desire to develop, improve and expand one’s being, talents and abilities that can be seen as anti-social. On the contrary, and in contrast to narcissism, true individual progress is indivisibly connected to relationships with the other – the family, the community and all humanity – and with nature, the universe and the spiritual or divine whole. Individualism is an empty vessel that can be filled by good or evil.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ United Nations Publication, Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Progress (New York: Litho in United Nations, 1995), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

The positive aspect of individualism, elsewhere termed “enlightened self-interest” by the seminar, is a necessary corrective to the criticisms here brought against common Western notions of individualism. What is truly at issue in this thesis is that form of individual identity that leads into self and away from the *Communio Sanctorum*. While the United Nations seminar identified the possibility of enlightened self-interest, it did little to prove its existence as a living, functioning force in postmodern culture. On the contrary enlightened self-interest that leads to the other is the ideal for which the seminar hoped as it wrestled with the reality of selfish individualism. The same could be said of the Church. Christ-like selfless love is the sanctified ideal that the Church proclaims as she wrestles with the reality of selfishness and sin.

5.2b Consumerism as an Ecclesiological Problem

The cultural situation today provides a number of expressions for the dangerous kind of individualism. “Consumerism” is a descriptive term used for an underlying attitude of self-seeking prevalent in an individualised culture. “Consumerism” here is used to describe people’s desire to have what they want the way they want it to suite themselves. Where this involves the purchase of material goods consumerism is fairly harmless. When it involves the Church it can be disastrous. The term “church shopping” has even become standard fare in the popular vocabulary. Instead of seeking truth or looking for a body of faith into which they could grow, many shop for a church that matches their own private tastes for things that may or may not relate to the faith (the pastor’s personality, the feel of friendliness, ease of parking, dress expectations, length of service, congregational size, support groups, roles of women and men, church architecture). Communities of faith fragment as splinter groups leave one community of faith and begin another that better suites their tastes.

This observation is documented in a study on middle class American morals conducted by Alan Wolfe and reported in his book One Nation After All. Wolfe writes:

A situation in which every individual finds their own way to God is one that a large number of Americans find more comfortable than one in which highly organized institutions fight with each other both for members and for truth. Americans, it has been said, like marriage so much that they constantly get divorced so that they can do it again. Much the same applies to their attitudes toward churches: they appreciate them to the point of constantly quitting one and joining another. "In today's society," Adam Grant of Sand Springs told us, "you know, you can go shopping; you can find anything you want out there. You can find anything that fits your beliefs and how you've come to interpret certain things."⁵⁹

This sort of ecclesiological consumerism leaves little room for notions of self-giving or spiritual growth. What is desired is conformity of the Church and her doctrine to the judgements of the individual and not conformity of the self to the proclamation of the Church.⁶⁰ Consumerism is a particularly dangerous form of individualism because of its seeming innocence. People fail to make distinctions between buying items in a store window and picking and choosing beliefs from the window of Christian faith. Thus consumerism leads to crass doctrinal subjectivism when practised in the Church.

5.2c Moral Centrism and Non-judgmentalism in the Social Fabric

Wolfe turns repeatedly to the observation that postmodern Americans, even of a conservative stripe, are characterised by a liberal spirit that seeks the middle ground

⁵⁹ Alan Wolfe, One Nation After All (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 83-84.

⁶⁰ Wolfe observes, "Rather than starting with an ideal of community into which individual needs should be fitted, they (middle-class Americans) begin with individual need and shape their community involvements accordingly." One Nation After All, p. 262.

of morality.⁶¹ For Wolfe, this attitude can be traced to the fundamental right of choice that is necessary for any democratic state. People are so committed to freedom of choice that they are willing to allow contrary choices from others to stand unchallenged under a sort of mutual agreement of co-existence. People are non-judgmental morally not because they are committed to an ideology of tolerance, but because they demand the right to maintain their own views unchallenged.

The American political critic William Bennett is more blunt than Wolfe in his assessment of American (Western) non-judgmentalism;

Why have we been drawn toward a culture of permissiveness? My former philosophy professor John Silber was correct when he spoke of an "invitation to mutual corruption." We are hesitant to impose upon ourselves a common moral code because we want our own exemptions. . . . What arguments can be made after we have stripped all the arguments of their force, their power, their ability to inspire public outrage? We all know that there are times when we will have to judge others, when it is both right and necessary to judge others. If we do not confront the soft relativism that is now disguised as a virtue, we will find ourselves morally and intellectually disarmed.⁶²

Non-judgementalism and moral centrism as practised by the masses becomes another expression of selfish individualism. As Bennett points out its danger lies in slowly robbing culture of its ability to recognise injustice and corruption. Within the Church the threat is not merely one of creeping social permissiveness but the growth

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 263-268. Wolfe speaks of "morality writ small" which is his characterization of American morality that is not committed to objective rules, such as the Ten Commandments, but to a general sense of right and wrong which may be adjusted to protect individual freedoms.

⁶² William J. Bennett, The Death of Outrage: Bill Clinton and the assault on American ideals (New York: The Free Press, 1998), pp. 120-121.

of a deep-seated spiritual blindness which is unable to stand for any truth or insist on any standards for the exercise of Christian love.⁶³

5.2d Loss of the Metanarrative

What the combination of these individualistic influences have done to the social conscience and individual mind is to create a profoundly myopic focus. People are simply encouraged to think about themselves and the moment in which they live. David Brown in Tradition and Imagination, explains this impact of Postmodernism as a loss of an “overarching metanarrative.” As he explains, the Enlightenment with its promotion of scientific ways of knowing was ultimately wrapped up in a search for an overarching metanarrative – a cohesive truth by which all history and knowing could be better understood.⁶⁴ Such a goal bespeaks an underlying desire for community. Postmodernism has seen not only the loss of desire to find such a metanarrative but the loss of unified criteria for judging the validity of proposed metanarratives.⁶⁵ There is simply no cultural imperative to understand life through the shared experience of the human community.

⁶³ Further support for this is found in other postmodern scholars like Gene Edward Veith who states, “Postmodernism, not only in the arcane world of academia but more importantly in popular culture, affirms and celebrates moral relativism. If there are no moral absolutes valid for everyone, if morality is either a privately chosen code or the imposition of power over someone else, then ‘moral issues’ dissolve. All actions, including Holocausts, become morally neutral – one person’s private opinion against another.” Gene Edward Veith, Modern Fascism (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), pp. 134-135.

⁶⁴ David Brown, Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change (Oxford: University Press, 1999), p. 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

There are those who see this loss of grand narratives as a positive step for human thinking, among them Jean Francois Lyotard stands out.⁶⁶ In his estimation freedom from rationalism as a means for understanding all of reality leads to a release of inventive heterogeneity.⁶⁷ Yet as other authors have noted, the extreme reaction against grand narratives and the “valorization of difference” carries with it an explicit undermining of social unity.⁶⁸ Morality and law are themselves the products of a metanarrative and are therefore suspect; social unity gives way to social anarchy. If the negative aspects of postmodern individualism are to find relief then, part of our goal must be restoration of social unity and with it, recovery of the metanarrative.

This task is made more difficult when one considers that the very tools necessary for restoring a metanarrative of the community seem lost to Postmodernism. In our conclusion we will suggest the use of certain tools like ritual and semiology for the restoration of an overarching metanarrative. Not surprisingly these same tools are central in our approach to finding the christological community as well. One cannot be restored without reclaiming the other. If the Church is going to present the Gospel effectively in such a culture built on principles of atomisation then it must not simply try to “wash the walls” of individualism, but must rework the foundations upon which such individualism is built.

⁶⁶ As an example: Jean Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁶⁷ Gary K. Browning, Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 1-4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5.3 Thielicke's Approach in Light of Today's Individualism

Examining Thielicke's approach in light of current postmodern conditions is not necessarily unfair to him or his system. For one thing his individualised approach to christology continues to exert force in Lutheran preaching.⁶⁹ It is therefore a present problem in need of attention. Another reason is the fact that Thielicke did himself have a taste of the dangers individualism presented in society and therefore should have provided a clearer defence against it. Some of the darkest moments of his life came as a result of a student uprising beginning in 1967. At the heart of the uprising was what Thielicke called "an almost perverse and paralyzing form of 'democratization.'"⁷⁰ Thielicke describes loud protests, slanderous articles appearing in the student papers, and disruption of classes at the university. By January of 1968 these protests carried into St. Michael's when Thielicke preached. These protests in Germany coincided in time with protests throughout the United States. Like their American counterparts the German protests were essentially antiestablishment movements rife with a general spirit of political and social rebellion. But more than simply politically motivated, they were largely motivated by the prevalent spirit of individualism as expressed under the watchword of "freedom" – freedom sociologically (from moral norms, and socially acceptable behaviour), sexually, politically, academically – freedom of choice in general. The mark of Western individualism was stamped all over these protests.

⁶⁹ In a phone conversation with the Rev'd Dr. H. George Anderson, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and translator of several Thielicke volumes, Dr. Anderson spoke of comments made to him from Lutheran pastors who still use Thielicke's sermons to help them in their sermons. Dr. Anderson stated that Thielicke's greatest and most lasting legacy to the Church was in the area of homiletics.

⁷⁰ Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 377.

Of particular interest is Thielicke's statement that it was during these tumultuous years when he wrote the first 2 volumes of The Evangelical Faith.⁷¹ Volume three followed in publication in 1978, five years after the first volume. Nowhere in these volumes is the individualism of the student rebellion addressed at any length. Instead Thielicke develops his individualistic/spiritualistic christological application in even more detail. His concern is self-appropriation. His encounter with Christ is at the level of the spiritual self and consequently his ecclesiology is noticeably weak. In an age when the whole of Western culture is built on the self and the Church is searching for solutions to social and ecclesiological breakdown, an approach to christology which is built predominantly on the self is one that will continue to miss the metanarrative of historic Christianity and will fail to provide postmodern culture with the needed corrective to individualism.

Once more we are confronted by the question of why Thielicke continues to press the individual element of christology. It is especially perplexing here in light of his own experience with negative individualism.

Beside those social and philosophical influences we have already noted, Thielicke's historical setting was undoubtedly a major contributing factor to his approach. Most of his sermons come out the years in and around World War Two. Thielicke saw huge crowds gathered and chanting Fascist slogans with religious zealotry. People followed the charisma of Hitler like sheep. This was no accidental by-product of Nazi doctrine but part of an intentional movement toward communalism.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 399.

“The aim of a German foreign policy of today,” writes Hitler, “must be the preparation for the reconquest of freedom for tomorrow.” Hitler is referring to a collective will, in addition to the isolated will of the individual, and to national freedom, rather than freedom of individuals. Fascists believed in communalism, in which the individual’s will and freedom finds fulfilment in the will and freedom of the group. The goal was not mindless conformity, but masses of individuals all actively willing the same thing.⁷²

In Mein Kampf Hitler himself writes about the importance of Nazi rallies for creating the communal spirit.

The mass meeting is also necessary for the reason that in the individual, who at first, while becoming a supporter of a young movement, feels lonely and easily succumbs to the fear of being alone, for the first time gets the picture of a larger community, which in most people has a strengthening, encouraging effect. . . . When from his little workshop or big factory, in which he feels very small, he steps for the first time into a mass meeting and has thousands and thousands of people of the same opinion around him, when, as the mighty effect of suggestive intoxication and enthusiasm . . .⁷³

From Thielicke’s perspective (and ours) the spirit fostered within these rallies was more than merely a community spirit, the individual was lost and a collective will emerged. Veith observes “Crowd psychologists have studied how individual inhibitions are easily lost when a person becomes a part of a mob.”⁷⁴ As we have previously noted, there is no question Thielicke witnessed the mob mentality at work and lamented the effects it had on his beloved countrymen. The rampant individualism Thielicke witnessed during the student rebellion paled in comparison to the problems that grew out of the zealous communalism he witnessed in the Nazis.

⁷² Gene Edward Veith, Jr., Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Judeo-Christian Worldview (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), p. 90.

⁷³ Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, tr. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 479, as quoted in Modern Fascism, p. 149.

⁷⁴ Modern Fascism, p.152.

It is understandable then at least on this level that he avoided theological communalism.

Chapter 6

The Theology of Presence: Correctives for Individualism

If Thielicke's method lacks the balance of a clearer corporate element, it becomes important to find a way to bridge the gap in Thielicke's system and supply that which is lacking. This chapter is devoted to exploring avenues of theological reflection that are more fully directed toward the corporate. The solution that we offer here will be called a Theology of Presence. A key concept in classic Lutheran theology that is often overlooked is the role of christological presence in the faith and life of the people. A view toward christological presence holds important implications for the individual as a corporate being. It provides a root from which a new metanarrative can spring and directs the individual beyond the self to find meaning and a broader understanding of being.

6.1 The Attempt of Trinitarian Ecclesiology

Before I tackle the Theology of Presence as a possible avenue to a corporate metanarrative, I would like to examine another attempt to introduce a corporate element in contemporary theology. It is helpful to examine this attempt in that it provides certain directions for a Theology of Presence as well as weaknesses I wish to avoid.

In recent years a number of books have emerged which use the model of the Trinity as a corrective to the imbalance created by individualism on both the self and the Church. Jürgen Moltmann is often credited by these authors for his influence on their line of thought. What is particularly helpful in the Trinitarian models is that they do not seek redefinition of God, and thereby toy with heresy,

but they seek a renewed corporate sense through redefinition of the self away from notions of independent autonomy.

Though there are different ways of defining personhood within the Trinitarian model,¹ the self in Trinitarian thought is usually defined in terms of a double transcendence of relation. The first part of this transcendence is bound up in the mystery of the Trinity wherein the human self carries an immediate relational character because it bears within it the remnants of the image of God who is Triune.

God's making us for himself means that we have been created in the triune image, that God's indelible stamp has been placed on us. . . . God, therefore, did make us without ourselves, but he so molded us after his triune nature that everyone bears the Trinity within.²

Thus mankind was not made to be autonomous and self-defining, but was made in the image of a "relational" God (Trinity). From this notion, John D. Zizioulas understands the Fall as a turning from relational personhood back to existence as individuals.³ Creation gave the relational character of the Trinity, while the Fall turned humanity in toward itself. Regardless of other differences between Trinitarian models, the common ground between them is that since God is

¹ Miroslav Volf, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Volf compares and contrasts the definitions of personhood given by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (especially pp. 37, 39) and John D Zizioulas (especially pp. 81-83, 89). Though there are different approaches to personhood by both men the common ground seems to be in defining self (personhood) as relation. The saying of Thomas Aquinas "persona est relatio" appears to be accepted as a given by both men.

² Roderick T. Leupp, Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith and Community (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 107.

³ After our Likeness, p. 81.

relational in his essence, and since he created mankind in his image, there was placed into humanity a relational character. One of the immediate goals of grace is to restore, reawaken, or recreate individuals into the relational nature of their personhood.

The second part of the double transcendence of selfhood is found in the Church.

Miroslav Volf citing the work of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger explains it thus:

The believing self is the self of the *anima ecclesiastica*, that is, “The ‘I’ of the human being in whom the entire community of the Church expresses itself, with which he lives, which lives in him, and from which he lives” (Ratzinger, Church, p. 127). Accordingly, the self of the creed, according to studies of Henri de Lubac, whom Ratzinger follows, is a collective rather than an individual self, the self of the believing *Mater Ecclesiae* “to which the individual self belongs insofar as it believes” (Ratzinger, “Prinzipienlehre,” 23: cf. idem, Dogmatische Formeln, p. 36).⁴

The Christian self carries more than the broken remnants of the Trinitarian image within because it is founded on the soteriological relationship with the Trinity flowing from the Church. Thus selfhood without the Church is an incomplete selfhood in the Trinitarian model.

By defining “self” in terms of its relation with the Church wherein the Trinity is named also connects the self directly to a sacramental theology,⁵ to a community model built around the worshipping community, and to a christology in agreement

⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵ Ibid., p. 42. Volf speaks of Ratzinger’s theology when he says, “Through baptism, human beings step out of isolation and into the Trinitarian communion, and thus also into the communion of the church, thereby becoming ecclesial beings. As ecclesial beings, however, they live from the *Eucharist*. The church itself, which participates sacramentally in making individuals into Christians, realizes its own being as church in the Eucharist.” (cf. Ratzinger, Das neue Volk, p. 82.)

with historic creedal formulations. Ecclesiology becomes necessary to understanding selfhood. This bears a tremendous advantage over Thielicke's individualised encounter with a "spiritual" Christ. In an encounter with Christ that is primarily spiritual in nature the individual can do without the trappings of Church, sacraments, and worship. Ultimately such an encounter will create the need for right psychology over ecclesiology. Trinitarian ecclesiology counters that by showing incompleteness within the self as it exists apart from the full experience with the Trinity in his Church.

While many of the elements of the Trinitarian approach to self and personhood find agreement with the proposals of this thesis, there are certain points of which we must be critical. One criticism must be noted in regard to the validity of comparing the Trinitarian relationship with human beings. Ideas of plurality in the Godhead are not immediately applicable to human communities. The biblical witness of the Godhead bespeaks a perfect unity.⁶ Christ's references to his Father's will show complete harmony between Father and Son.⁷ Possible objections to perfect unity might be raised at Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, wherein Jesus was reluctant to endure the suffering that lay before him,⁸ and in the cry of dereliction from the cross ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"); however, these

⁶ cf. Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." 1 Cor. 8:4 "There is no God but one."

⁷ Cf. John 10:30 "I and my Father are one." Also John 5:19-47 in which Christ speaks to oneness of the Father and Son stating: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do. . . . I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me. . . . I have come in my Father's name." John 17:11 In Christ's High Priestly Prayer as he addresses the Father, ". . . that they may be one as we are." (also vs. 21)

⁸ Though even here Christ prays "Not my will but Yours be done." Luke 22:42

instances do not prove disharmony of two opposing wills. Rather they are demonstrations of the inner conflicts within Christ that define the depth of his vicarious suffering.

Human beings are simply not directly applicable to the divine Trinitarian condition. God as Trinity is complete with himself via his divine unity between Persons. Human beings in relation do not, indeed cannot, exist in complete harmony with others in this life. In fact the very lack of unity between human persons becomes a tool for the Divine to begin growth within the individual. The process of reaction, interaction, and even conflict are used by God for spiritual growth and maturity. Human beings search out self-identity through some mark of "differentness." Self-identity is not foreign to human nature nor an expression of sin, but part and parcel of what it means to be created human.

The Trinity as declared in the biblical witness and as carefully described in such historic confessions as the Athanasian Creed finds no human correlation. A multiplicity of human beings can never be said to be one in essence as can the Persons of the Trinity; nor can God be described simply as a community of Persons, which would be Tritheism. Regardless of the close unity which may exist between people sharing ideology or faith they remain separate individuals. Arguing a new state of human ontology as a direct correlate from divine ontology results either in anthropomorphizing the divine, or in deifying the human.

Another difficulty with the Trinitarian model is that the christology put forth is often based so exclusively on ontological notions of Christ's corporate essence that his soteriological work loses its emphasis. Ideas of justification and redemption

which dominate the christology of classic Lutheranism give way to ideas of being. The result is a christology which does point away from the autonomous individual but which does not fully address the divine solution to the problem of sin.

Of particular value for this thesis is the sacramental ecclesiology of the Trinitarian model. The Trinitarian model recognises that a spiritual/psychological encounter with the Triune God is not enough of a corrective for negative individualism. A major part of the metanarrative encouraged by Trinitarian models is the need for the "I" to find an encounter with God that is not solitary but shared, and more than simply shared, an encounter which carries the salvific promise of the Triune God. Sacramental/ecclesiological theology provides this to the metanarrative.

Classic Lutheranism in particular sought to maintain the sacramental rites within the context of the ecclesiological community. One manifestation of this is the way it took issue with private masses. Classic Lutheranism championed the understanding that the mass belongs properly to the Church and was to be offered to all who desired it and were found to be fit communicants.⁹ Within the sacraments one did not encounter God alone but as part of a flock who together shared the problem of sin, the promise of redemption, and the salvific gift of

⁹ *Triglotta, Augsburg Confession* Art. XXIV, [Of the Mass] "Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holy-day, and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass [the Communion] they speak very much." p. 67. Cf. the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, p. 385 "The fact that we hold only Public or Common Mass [at which the people also commune, not Private Mass] is no offense against the Church catholic. For in the Greek churches even today private Masses are not held, but there is only a public Mass and that on the Lord's Day and festivals."

Christ's presence. The believer is directed away from himself or herself in several ways: he or she partakes of the sacraments as part of the immediate group of fellow believers, is united to the Saviour present in the sacrament, and joined to the stream of faith as it passes throughout all ages. Such forces acting upon the individual directing him or her away from notions of an autonomous or selfish relationship with God are important correctives for the postmodern worldview.

In our presentation of the Theology of Presence we wish to use the desire of the Trinitarian model to stay within the confines of historical Christendom. We further wish to draw on both sacramental and ecclesiological elements in furthering corporate identity. Avoiding the impossible corollaries between human selfhood and Trinitarian Being we wish to redirect the postmodern metanarrative away from destructive individualism and toward a fuller concept of Christian corporate being.

A Theology of Presence does not seek community as a goal, but it does arrive at community as a result. More than simple community, the concept of "communion" highlighted by the Trinitarian theologians is particularly helpful. "Communion" conveys both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions to otherness needed in our solution. By not focusing on community as a goal, a Theology of Presence seeks to avoid anthropocentrism. By focusing on communion as a soteriological and ecclesiological reality, it seeks to be christocentric. What we hope to show is that not only the issue of christological presence but also the whole concept of communion is essential for Christianity to remain true to its biblical foundation and relevant in a postmodern world.

*6.2 Dangers to a Theology of Presence as Exemplified by Osiander
and the Finnish School*

The systematic application of christological presence is not new. One finds obvious examples of this in the theology of Luther and subsequent classic Lutheran theologians that we will explore below. While Luther scholars have pointed to this tendency in Luther, Lutheranism in general has struggled to find a workable place for the idea of Christ's presence in the postmodern Church.

In a paper entitled "The New Finnish School and Melanchthon" prepared for the North American Forum for Luther Research at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Ken Schurb discusses the attempt of Finnish scholars, led by Tuomo Mannermaa, to use Luther's idea of presence to refocus traditional Lutheran understandings of justification. Schurb points to Mannermaa's tendency to rewrite the forensic sense of justification so important to Luther's thought and replace it with a particular form of *theosis*.

The Finnish school downplays the work of Christ as the basis of justification. It looks instead to justification, at least in part, via a transfer of qualities from the person of the Christ who is present in faith to the believer with whom he is present.¹⁰

It has been shown by others that *theosis* certainly has a valid form of expression in Luther's theology,¹¹ but Schurb's contention with the Finnish school is that their views go too far. Instead of *theosis* complementing the forensic sense of justification the Finnish version leaves open the possibility for justification as a process. That is,

¹⁰ Ken Schurb, "The New Finnish School and Melanchthon" (Delivered at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Aug. 9, 2001), p. 3.

¹¹ Cf. Kurt E. Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," Concordia Theological Quarterly, July 2000, pp. 182-205.

it is not so much the work of Christ imputed to sinners that saves but the transfer of righteous qualities to people with whom he is present. This transfer is realised through the righteous life of individuals. This idea has been advanced by Simo Peura to the point where Christian renewal through Christ's presence becomes a condition for grace.¹² The shift in understanding Luther is subtle but the consequences are profound. The Christian's own life could be seen as the assurance of salvation instead of Christ's unique life.

In many ways the Finnish school reflects problems seen during the Reformation with the christology of Andreas Osiander (1498-1552). Osiander likewise brought the issue of Christ's presence into the article on justification in such a way as to deny the forensic sense of justification confessed by classic Lutheranism.¹³ For Osiander justification became a matter of the infusion of Christ's righteousness into a believer's life brought about by the indwelling of Christ's divine nature. Where classic Lutheranism taught instantaneous and complete justification through Christ and his salvific work according to both natures, Osiander's views led to progressive justification through the presence of Christ' divine nature.

Osiander's misapplication of Christ's presence was noticed also by Thielicke. In his Theological Ethics Thielicke engages Osiander's views. Curiously the issue of an "ontic" presence, that we noted as a central point of disagreement in Thielicke's sacramental christology, becomes a problem for Thielicke here as well.

¹² Cited by Ken Schurb on p. 4 from Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift: The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification, Union with Christ, p. 57.

¹³ F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," in Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 152-159.

“...there is a real indwelling of the righteousness of Christ in us, an ontic appropriation into our very being, and it takes place through faith.”¹⁴ Thielicke’s complaint about this ontic presence in Osiander’s theology is tied to his concerns over the method of justification:

Justification in this sense is a being made righteous [*justum effici*] in virtue of that real indwelling of Christ. The term *efficere* [to make] thus involves the sharpest possible antithesis to Melancthon’s *imputare* [to impute] and Osiander believes that his view is true to Luther.¹⁵

Thielicke’s criticisms of Osiander are twofold. The first criticism is that “Osiander does not make it finally clear that this process of renewal has its roots in the divine work of remission.”¹⁶ That flaw for Thielicke leads to the false notion of perfectionism. The indwelling of Christ as Osiander saw it denies the idea of *simul justus et peccator*. Christ is present to the extent that the sinner is disposed of and only Christ remains seated in the human heart. Christ becomes the “state or condition [*habitus*],”¹⁷ of the Christian and the need for a constant granting of remission of sins is no longer necessary. So for Thielicke the “indwelling of Christ” as presented by Osiander ultimately denies the need for an ongoing relationship of repentance and grace.

Thielicke’s second criticism of Osiander is the negative impact his views have on sanctification. The Christian life is no longer a matter of the death of the self

¹⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 79.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

via personal sacrifice for the other, but is known only “in the sense of a statement of location: God’s righteousness has entered into us and been made our own inwardly.”¹⁸ Thieliicke sees here a form of individualism that ultimately denies Christ, wherein faith no longer has to be engaged and active but can be content to have within itself some sense of Christ’s presence. In his assessment of Osiander Thieliicke allows the idea of Christian righteousness to be grounded in “an immanent substantiality,” yet his warning must be heeded that this christological presence not be thought of as a mere *habitus* driving the self inward.

When, on the other hand, the indicative of justification is isolated, as in Osiander, the result is an autarchical form of the ego, to which a *habitus* is imparted and which is thus referred, not primarily to the historically present Christ, but to itself as the mystical tabernacle of Christ’s presence. Faith is thus driven to seek constant reassurance from perfectionistic experiences.¹⁹

In both cases (the *theosis* of the Finnish school and the divine indwelling of Osiander) the problem is not simply a belief in the presence of Christ as necessary to justification; the problem is more the use of this christological presence to deny the forensic sense of justification and turn the individual toward himself or herself as the final location of hope. What is proposed as a solution here to individualism is a return to an understanding of christological presence that does not divide the natures of Christ, as Osiander did, and does not deny the forensic aspect of justification. Yet this presence exceeds the spiritual presence championed by Thieliicke and points rather to the very ontic character that Thieliicke sought to avoid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

6.3 *The Use of Transcendence and Immanence Against Individualism*

The ontic character of this christological presence is important. Not a small part of this importance lies in forcing the individual to confront something beyond the subjective grasp. Additionally it avoids a spiritualising of the faith and concretises the activity of God within the physical life experience of the people. As we develop this below and show the value of such a view in combating negative individualism, it will become apparent that issues of immanence and transcendence are foundational for the creation of a new less individual-centred metanarrative.

Transcendence simply means God is willing to go beyond normal “ontological” or “natural” boundaries to accomplish his will; immanence bespeaks God’s nearness²⁰ and presence. The incarnation becomes the strongest expression of both immanence and transcendence. Human flesh was transcended by the divine nature, yet God’s nearness was so complete as to ensure the existence of a human nature within Christ. The Theology of Presence proceeds with the belief that in as much as God revealed both these characteristics in the flesh of Christ he established a course for dealing with fallen mankind through history.²¹ Divine Transcendence in itself offers no hope for fallen creation. Pure transcendence leads only the *deus absconditus* and therefore

²⁰ Cf. Matthew 1:23, 28:20 “I am with you always,” Heb. 13:5 “I will never leave you . . .” Psalm 139:7 “Where can I flee from Your presence?”, Romans 15:33 “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”, (also in the form of a blessing - 2 Corinthians 13:11, 14; Phil 4:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

²¹ Luther: Witness of Jesus Christ, pp. 112-113. Here Leinhard quotes Althaus who applies this principle to ethics. “The plan by which he (Christ) has become human crosses all his life with an incessant actualization. One can say: the incarnation is a continuous event, an act of Christ constantly renewed . . . the *kenosis* is realized anew without ceasing in the actuality of the gift to sinful human beings, in that Christ, wishing to be similar to persons, placed himself under the misery which weighted on humanity and assumed it, he who was free from all that in *forma dei*. The incarnation is accomplished in the cross of Christ.” Cf. p. 382.

to further separation and isolation from God. But when God combines transcendence with immanence as a soteriological movement then there is hope.²²

The descent of God out of pure unknowable transcendence (*deus absconditus*) to physical reality (*deus incarnatus*) represents a capitulation on the part of God to the limited capacities of humanity.²³ Immanence becomes God's vehicle for overcoming human limitations.²⁴ The Theology of Presence draws on this divine debasement as the chosen means of God to break the grip of negative individualism.

The sacramental christology of classic Lutheranism provides the means for Christ's ontological presence.²⁵ Through physical sacramental realities transcended by the presence of Christ the individual is brought into fellowship first with the One Present and secondly with the *Communio Sanctorum*.²⁶ In order to maintain the salvific relationship with the One Present, the "I" must go to those places where Christ has bound his presence. Speaking of Christ's "bound" presence does not in any way deny the doctrine of omnipresence. Luther stated that God is everywhere

²² Cf. WA 45:520,2ff. WA 33:562,10 and WA 45:481,17-26. Here Luther speaks of grasping God only through the incarnation of Christ.

²³ Cf. Siggins, p. 84, WA 39I:217.

²⁴ LW 1:11, 13.

²⁵ LW 37:71f. "The glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, our heart, our body; moreover for our sakes he allows himself to be treated ingloriously both on the cross and on the altar." Cf. Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. By Robert C. Schultz, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 398.

²⁶ The Theology of Luther p. 377. Althaus quoting Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1917) IV, 323ff. "Luther's concept of the church as the community of saints was developed on the basis of this understanding of the sacrament."

present, but we cannot grasp him everywhere.²⁷ The doctrine of omnipresence does not carry the promise of grace in Lutheran theology. Rather the “binding” of Christ to certain places is for the specific purpose of distributing grace. When the individual discovers that Christ has bound his presence to specific means one also discovers that those means are tied to a community of faith whose members share the benefits of the salvific presence of Christ.

The necessity of personal union with the *Communio Sanctorum* is a principle well known to classic Lutheranism. Luther stated:

The Christian church, on the contrary, keeps all the words of God in her heart and ponders them, compares one with the other and with Holy Scripture. Therefore he who wants to find Christ, must first find the church. How would one know Christ and faith in him if one did not know where they are who believe in him? He who would know something concerning Christ, must neither trust in himself nor build his bridge into heaven by means of his own reason, but he should go to the church; he should attend it and ask his questions there.^{28, 29}

²⁷ LW 37:140.

²⁸ LW 52:39-40. Cf. LW 41:150 “for God’s word cannot be without God’s people and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word. Otherwise, who would preach or hear it preached if there were no people of God?” LW 35:50-51 “Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city. All the saints, therefore, are members of Christ and of the church, which is a spiritual and eternal city of God. And whoever is taken into this city is said to be received into the community of saints and to be incorporated into Christ’s spiritual body and made a member of him.” Similarly *Luther’s Large Catechism, Triglotta*, p. 694 “. . . dazu er (The Holy Spirit) verordnet eine Gemeinde auf Erden, dadurch er alles redet und tut. . . Darum glauben wir an den, der uns täglich herzuholt durch das Wort und den Glauben gibt, mehrt un stärkt durch dasselbe Wort und Vergebung der Sünden.” [Translation “. . . to that end (of carrying out his work) he (the Holy Spirit) establishes a community on earth through which he speaks and does everything. . . Therefore we believe in him who daily brings us (into this community) through the Word and who gives, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins.”]

²⁹ The mode of christological presence encountered within the *Communio Sanctorum* necessarily leads to a discussion of the communication of attributes. However since the communication of attributes is such a crucial point of departure

The transcendence and immanence of Christ leads ultimately to a kind of expression of these same ideas in the individual. Christ embodied in Church and sacrament means the individual who “encounters” this presence salvificly is transcended in his or her individuality and discovers a “nearness” to others. The individual still exists and still maintains a personal “I”/Thou relationship with God and the distinctive characteristics of his or her own person. However, once joined to the Church the individual transcends self and becomes more than just an individual. The very attribute of transcendence that Christ uses with earthly means is placed into work within the individual. The “I” becomes part of the whole community of faith that is itself tied up in the mystery of Christ’s presence.

The combination of transcendence and immanence also means that we can speak of Christ being present according to his person without a re-enactment of his first incarnation. Christ according to his person is able to transcend normal modes of being and draw near through other vehicles.³⁰ Thus when the presence of Christ is mentioned, it is not merely presence in a nebulous spiritual way, but something more concrete albeit mysterious. Faith itself becomes a matter of union with the present person of Christ.³¹

for Thielicke from classic Lutheranism a separate section has been devoted to that topic.

³⁰ Of special mention is the statement in the Formula of Concord: “. . . according to His assumed human nature and with the same, He can be, and also is, present where He will, and especially that in His Church and congregation on earth He is present as Mediator, Head, King, and High Priest, not in part, or one-half of Him only, but the entire person of Christ is present, to which both natures belong, the divine and the human.” *Triglotta*, p. 1044, Formula of Concord, Art. VIII, para 78

³¹ Cf. to Marc Lienhard’s comments, p. 48 “. . . the concept which is fundamental to Luther must be made quite clear, that of the *fides Christi*. Innumerable passages in

Such a christology holds benefits in dealing with individualism. Christology as an encounter with a *personal* Christ removes the Christ encounter from the realm of subjective spiritual experience, wherein one searches for confirmation for the Christ encounter through psychological verification, to the realm of an objective encounter between persons. Thus one who encounters another person on the street does not establish the fact of the meeting on the basis of his or her psychological reaction to the meeting, but on his or her actual proximity to the other person. In a Theology of Presence one's meeting with Christ is tied to the simple objective fact of Christ's presence bound to specific places and one's contact with those places. This does not make the psychological/spiritual element of this encounter irrelevant. How one reacts to the ontic presence of Christ belongs to the realm of consequence (either for salvation or damnation) instead of to the realm of establishing the fact of the Christ encounter itself.

By beginning with the fact of the objective Christ encounter classic Lutheranism would seek to provide a measure of reassurance to troubled souls. Subjective verification of the Christ encounter is liable to create doubt because the subject, human nature, is corrupt in Lutheran theology. Corruption in turn throws into question the validity of subjective feelings, emotions, and judgements. If one establishes the reality of Christ's presence based on the evaluations of such a heart

the Commentary on the Psalms and in his later works put this forward. It is at one and the same time faith in Christ and the Christ present in faith. One may remark in passing that Luther gave preference to the personalist aspect of faith. Faith is not primarily acceptance of supernatural truths, but union with a person, union with the present Christ." Ian Siggins also notes that when Luther put forth his *sola fide* principle he did so with the understanding that *sola fide* was the same as saying *sola Christo* (p. 104-105).

one is always prone to question the correctness of the judgement. A more objective encounter with Christ removes that doubt and moves the discussion immediately to the effect of Christ who was actually present upon that same heart.

Thielicke also identified God's absence as sign of judgement. He stated that a God who doesn't care is a God who withdraws Himself from a subject and leaves that individual to his or her own judgements. The reverse of Thielicke's thought is that a God who is present, who has not withdrawn, is a God who cares. The implicit message of an objective Christ encounter is that there is a Saviour who by his very act of presence proves he also loves.

6.4 Individualism in Light of Christ in Word, Church, and Office

Within Luther and classic Lutheranism the objective character of the Christ encounter is tied largely to the outward means of the Word. The "Word" in Lutheran theology is both the living Word of the *kerygma*, the written Word of Holy Scripture, or the visible Word of the Sacrament.³² The Word (Gospel) is the supreme location for Christ's presence and salvific work.³³ Luther states:

³² Without becoming entangled in the controversy as to whether Scripture *is* God's Word (doctrine of verbal inspiration) or *contains* God's Word, it should be noted that Luther did hold a very high view of the Bible. Though Luther is often cited as being against the doctrine of verbal inspiration (so Thielicke, Notes from a Wayfarer, p. 366), one cannot avoid the conclusion that Luther did in fact equate the "Word" with the Bible. In his Theology of Martin Luther, Althaus essentially blames Luther's understanding of Scripture as God's Word on the rise of Lutheran orthodoxy later in the 17th century (p. 32). Luther's understanding of the Word as Scripture did not prevent him from raising questions about the canon, but even here part of his solution to canonical difficulties is to let Scripture interpret Scripture (Althaus, p. 76).

³³ Cf. LW 35:121. Also Luther's well known definition of worship is given in a sermon at the dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau Oct. 5, 1544, ". . . the purpose of this new house may be such that nothing else may ever happen in it

How, then, do we have Christ? After all, he is sitting at the right hand of the Father; he will not come down to us in our house. No, this he will not do. But how do I gain and have him? Ah, you cannot have him except in the gospel. . . . And since Christ comes into our hearts through the gospel, he must also be accepted by the heart. As I now believe that he is in the gospel, so I receive him and have him already.³⁴

One thing else is necessary. What then? The Word, the Word, the Word, listen, lying spirit do you hear? The Word acts. For even if Christ gave himself for us a thousand times and were a thousand times crucified for us, all would be in vain if the Word of God did not come to distribute it and to offer it to me, saying: It is for you, take it, receive it. . . . If then I want my sins forgiven, I must not run to the cross, for there I do not find the forgiveness of sins attributed. Neither must I simply cling to the remembrance and knowledge of the suffering of Christ . . . but to the sacrament or the gospel; it is there that I find the Word which attributes it to me, offers it to me, presents it to me and gives me that pardon acquired on the cross.³⁵

The danger with such a high view of the Word is of course a sort of fundamentalist bibliolatry wherein the Word is seen in isolation from the Church and the holy ministry. As Luther spoke of the importance of the Word his intent was never to separate the Word from the *Communio Sanctorum*. On the contrary Luther saw the Church and the Word as an unbreakable unity. Luther speaks of the written

except that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise.” LW 51:333.

³⁴ LW 51:114. Cf. Althaus comments “He (Christ) is present for us through the word about him. We have him in no other way, for he is now in heaven with the Father. He does not come down to us in person but only in the gospel. . . . We have him only in faith in his presence in the gospel. . . . This is so indispensable for the knowledge of Christ that Luther can say, God wishes the spoken word to be revered more than Christ’s humanity.” (*The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 193) Also Walther von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), p. 33. “God confronts us first of all in his word. . . . In it he has offered himself to us. . . . God wraps himself in his word He becomes the ‘clothed’ God.”

³⁵ Quoted by Marc Lienhard, p. 200; taken from WA 18: 203, 27-39.

Word as existing for the sake of oral proclamation within the Church,³⁶ and again he sees the written word as a guard for the Church against heretics.³⁷ While the Word was vital to the lives of the common people and to be read and studied by them personally the proper location for administration of the Word as Law and Gospel and for public proclamation was the Church.

In addition, it was also understood that the Word was properly administered through the mediating vehicle of the public ministry in which Christ is again present.³⁸ The *Augsburg Confession* defines the need for the mediating element of the pastoral office in two distinct articles. Article five reads,

Vom Predigtamt: Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das Predigtamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakramente gegeben, dadurch er, als durch Mittel, den heiligen Geist gibt, welcher den Glauben, wo und wann er will, in denen, so das Evangelium hören, wirkt, welches da lehrt, daß wir durch Christus' Verdienst, nicht durch unser Verdienst, einen gnädigen Gott haben, so wir solches glauben.³⁹

³⁶ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 72. Also on p. 73 Althaus cites WA 12, 259 "It [the gospel] is properly not something written down with letters in a book but more an oral proclamation and a living word: a voice which sounds forth into the whole world and is proclaimed publicly so that we may hear it everywhere." fn. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73, fn. 2. Althaus quoting Luther: "The fact that it became necessary to write books reveals that great damage and injury had already been done to the Spirit. Books were thus written out of necessity and not because this is the nature of the New Testament. Instead of godly preachers heretics, false teachers, and all sorts of errorists arose who fed poison to the sheep of Christ. This made it necessary to attempt everything possible so that some sheep might be rescued from the wolves. And then they [the apostles] began to write and thus – insofar as this was possible – to lead the sheep of Christ into the Scriptures so that the sheep would be able to feed themselves and preserve themselves against the wolves when their shepherds did not feed them or became wolves."

³⁸ On a divine presence in the office of ministry – *Triglotta*, p. 311 *Apology*, Art. XIII, para 12-13. Also p. 903 *Formula of Concord*, Thorough Declaration, Art. II, para 55.

³⁹ *Triglotta*, p. 44.

[My translation: **Of the Pastoral Office:** In order to attain such faith, God has instituted the pastoral office for the giving of the Gospel and Sacraments. By those means he gives the Holy Spirit as through an instrument who [in turn] works faith where and when he wills in those who hear the Gospel – which teaches that we have a gracious God through Christ’s merit and not through our merit, if we so believe.]

Here “the Gospel” [*Evangelium*] is the proclaimed word of grace or the “*kerygma*” and belongs with the sacraments to the ordinary mediation of the pastoral office. Through this Gospel the Holy Spirit is present (not of course to the exclusion of Christ himself). The pastoral office and the congregation served by that office exist as a result of the action of Christ through the Word, so that the Word creates and sustains both. By the necessary mediation of the pastoral office a fundamentalist individualism is avoided; the Word is prevented from becoming a static thing merely written on pages of the book and addressed to isolated individuals in their subjectivity. Instead the Word is grounded in an office and able to be applied from person to person based on the pastor’s knowledge of a broader application throughout the Church catholic.

Augsburg Confession article 14 reads:

Vom Kirchenregiment: Vom Kirchenregiment wird gelehrt, daß niemand in der Kirche öffentlich lehren oder predigen oder Sakramente reichen soll ohne ordentlichen Beruf.⁴⁰

[My translation: **Of Ecclesiastical Order:** Of Ecclesiastical order it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach or administer the Sacraments in the Church without a proper call.”

The insistence on the mediation of the regularly called *Predigtamt* in the Lutheran Confessions includes a strong desire to promote unity of doctrine and prevent the atomisation that would result from private interpretations of the Word. The very

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

process of issuing the call to pastors in the 16th century testifies to the deep concern for catholicity.⁴¹ Insistence on the *Predigtamt* as the regular voice of the Word insures that the Word will not become the private possession of individuals but will continue to necessitate one's participation in the *Communio Sanctorum*. The calling process in turn insures that the *Predigtamt* will not deteriorate into the individual interpretations of the pastor but will accord with the doctrine and practice of the historic catholic Church.

These concerns do not reflect a desire for mere sociological cohesion but for christological communion. The concern for catholicity is grounded in the notion of christological union with the Word. One can see in classic Lutheranism the premise that as long as the present proclamation is in agreement with the apostolic Word and intent then the Church can be assured that the Word proclaimed in her midst is Christ's Word and that Christ is indeed present therein.

On the other side of the "salvific event" is the act of reception. The Word in Lutheranism is not merely grasped by an act of the individual will but by Christ's living presence within the believer (faith). Christ is thus on both sides of the *kerygma* as the one proclaimed in the Word (and doing the proclamation through the

⁴¹ Robert David Preus, The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy (Ft. Wayne, IN: Luther Academy, 1991), pp. 33-40. Preus describes the calling process during 16th through the 18th centuries as involving rigorous examination by the "consistory" (p. 38) and confirmation by the magistrates (p. 37). This process of examination prior to the issue of a "call" was to establish theological catholicity.

Predigtamt) and as the One receiving the proclamation who is present in the faith of the believer.⁴²

6.5 Recapturing Ecclesiological Language

In seeking foundational elements for a new metanarrative that will move away from the atomising individualism of Postmodernism, the Church must recognise the importance of language in the formation of that metanarrative. Both the language the Church uses for itself and the language it uses within its body are important. In referring to itself the Church has readily available imagery that conveys ideas of christological immanence and intimate communion.

Biblical images of the Church as mother and as Christ's bride⁴³ bespeak an intimate and direct relationship with the male counterpart of Christ. There can be no bride without a Bridegroom, nor can motherhood exist apart from a Father. Both images make clear that the Church derives its existence from Christ (Thus the expression in the early Church, "*ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*" ["Where Christ is, there is the Church"]). Both images present the Church as single being and not as a conglomeration of individuals. There is also human warmth and love implied in each image, not institutional coldness. Perhaps the political correctness and sexual tension of the postmodern era have caused theologians to shy away from these terms but they can be recovered and put into popular use for positive ends. Through such terms individuals can be taught to see themselves as joined to new sense of corporate yet personal being and intimate closeness to Christ.

⁴² LW 26:129, 130, 168, 283f. Cf. Von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, pp. 103-105.

⁴³ Ephesians 5:25-27.

The language the Church uses within her fellowship in conversation with her bridegroom is also important in contravening an individualistic mindset. Liturgy carries a supracultural character that can prove disruptive of individualism. The liturgy is a blend of spoken language and ritual. It actively promotes community by engaging all present in a common confession of faith. Even with secular communities it has been shown that ritual preserves the stability of the community⁴⁴ and maintains group solidarity.⁴⁵ In its infancy the Christian liturgy provided Jewish converts a sense of belonging by drawing on the style of worship common in the Jewish synagogue.⁴⁶ And yet the genius of the early Christian liturgy was also its power to unite people of different cultures together. As Christianity spread among the non-Jewish nations the basic form of liturgical worship and ritual also proved effective in cementing people of different cultures together. It gave a common language to a people separated by race and language.

The liturgy unites the community of faith not only by providing a trans-cultural form of expression but also a trans-temporal connection.⁴⁷ The words and modes of

⁴⁴ Brian Wicker, "Ritual and Culture: Some Dimensions of the Problem Today," in The Roots of Ritual, ed. James D Shaughnessy (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p. 15.

⁴⁵ Heidi D. Mueller, "Ritual Behavior and Celebration in the Liturgy," Logia, Epiphany 2000, p. 23. She here cites Mark Searle, "Ritual," in The Study of Liturgy, 2nd ed. Ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainright, Edward Yarnold, S.J., and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.53.

⁴⁶ Frank C. Senn, Christian Worship and its Cultural Setting, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 21.

⁴⁷ Dean Wenthe, "God's Character and the Calling of God's People: Contextual Relations," in Church and Ministry: The Collected Papers of the 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, ed. Jerald C. Joerz and Paul T. McCain (Office of the President - LCMS, 1998), p. 28 "The

expression connect a believer to all those before who gave expression to the same faith in similar (if not identical) ways and all those who follow. The liturgy becomes the language of the eschatological community.⁴⁸

The role of the liturgy is not anthropocentric, merely providing a common language and ritual to unite people socially, but should also be understood as christocentric pointing to Christ's work of binding his people to himself. Within Lutheran circles the German term "*Gottesdienst*" has been used to describe a view of liturgy that sees worship primarily as a divine service of God to mankind and not simply of mankind to God. Under such a view "*Gottes*" has been understood as a subjective genitive.⁴⁹ He is the actor; mankind is the recipient. Liturgy then is a shared work or word of the people only in a secondary sense. In the primary sense liturgy unites people through "*Gottesdienst*," as God serves the community of faith through his Word in the liturgy.⁵⁰

Priesthood of All Believers is not simply an assembly of autonomous individuals who have come to the same place by virtue of their sovereign and private decisions. Rather, by God's grace and election, they have been grafted into a common history and participate in a unified reality that goes back to creation itself and forward to eternity."

⁴⁸ As an example the *Sanctus* which expresses the eschatological vision in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

⁴⁹ Cf. Friedrich Kalb, Theology of Worship in Seventeenth Century Lutheranism, trans. Henry P.A. Hamann, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, N.D.), p. 24-25.

⁵⁰ For a discussion about the Lutheran understanding of "*Gottesdienst*" see Norman Nagel, "Whose Liturgy Is It?" Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology (Eastertide/April 1993), pp. 4-8. "It is the Lord who is there for us where his name is, and with his words he delivers what his gifts say. We are there only as those who are being given to. Ours is simply the way of faith, and faith has nothing to say except what it is given to say: 'Amen.'" p. 5.

One also must recognise that liturgy is not static within the community. Liturgy does not mandate a repristinated view of faith, but as a living language is taken up into the community and shaped by the unique circumstances that community faces. So while the basic form of the liturgy was largely established by the fourth century,⁵¹ the community in response to both heresies and changing worldviews made alterations to its common language. The geographical spread of Christianity also led to a “process of indigenisation” of the liturgy. One could argue that Luther’s reform of the Mass and use of the vernacular reflect such a process. Yet despite the influences on the liturgy from Greek, Latin, African, German and even English speaking cultures the catholic community of faith has maintained the basic structure of the liturgy as its unique “language.” Indigenisation runs the risk of atomisation, yet the history of the liturgy shows a strong resistance to liturgical fragmentation.⁵² Despite time and human culture, a higher culture has arisen which maintains a common language with God, thereby cementing people together.

The Lutheran confessions note the twin realities of peculiar liturgical interpretations necessary in different cultural situations and the need for liturgical catholicity. In recognising liturgical variety the *Augsburg Confession* notes:

And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.⁵³

⁵¹ Senn, p. 26. Also note the basic liturgical form present already in Acts 2:42.

⁵² This recognises of course that various sects have departed so far from the historic liturgy that its structure and content are barely recognizable. Yet among those churches with a strong sense of catholicity, there has been a great concern to keep traditional liturgical rubrics.

⁵³ Triglotta, p. 47, *Augsburg Confession*, Art. VII, para. 2-4.

Yet as liturgical variety is recognised the tendency for atomisation and individualisation of the liturgy is kept in check by a strong concern for the state of the community and the effect innovation might have on the whole.

. . . very many traditions are kept on our part, which are conducive to good order in the Church, as the Order of Lessons in the Mass and the chief holy-days. But, at the same time, men are warned that such observances do not justify before God, and that in such things it should not be made sin if they be omitted without offense.⁵⁴

Likewise in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*:

We retain the Latin language on account of those who are learning and understand Latin, and we mingle with it German hymns, in order that the people also may have something to learn, and by which faith and fear may be called forth. This custom has always existed in the churches.⁵⁵

It should be noted that the rites and rituals of the liturgy, while being open to reform, were never consigned to the realm of purely optional forms of expression in classic Lutheranism. The form of the liturgy was itself a confession of the catholic faith, which in times of persecution or confession was not to be yielded in the slightest lest the Church as a whole become guilty of giving an unsure confession of its faith.⁵⁶

The balance of language is a tremendous challenge. The Church must seek relevance and “contemporaneity” with the present cultural situation, but its language must also be distinctive and connected to the stream of historical expression. It must be in time but not time-bound, and must be appreciated in its power to shape the way

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 75, *Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXVI, para. 40-42.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 385. *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, para. 3.

⁵⁶ Cf. The *Formula of Concord*, Art. X, “Of Church Rites which are [Commonly] called *Adiaphora* or *Matters of Indifference*.” *Triglotta*, p. 829ff.

individuals think about themselves as individuals. Merely repeating cultural phrases and the language of the street, even the context of a church gathering, might simply reinforce the individualism inherent in such speech. While using language carefully can help individuals see the unique character of Church in connecting them to something beyond the self.

6.6 Understanding the Relational Character of the Sacraments

Much space has already been devoted to the topic of the sacraments. The negative impact an individualised christology has on sacramental theology has been shown. Here our concern is to point out further how the christological presence in the sacraments builds the *Communio Sanctorum*. In its plainest sense “sacrament” is understood in terms of the dominical sacraments; of those the most profound christological presence is that of the Lord’s Supper. Lutheran theology places special emphasis on the unique mode of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist describing this as the “real presence.”⁵⁷ Within the Lutheran concept Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper is a presence involving both divine and human natures. In Reformed theology because of the principle of *finitum non est capax infiniti*, the human nature

⁵⁷ The exact nature of the “real presence” is more difficult to define. Luther spoke of Christ’s presence in the sacrament according to his physical flesh and blood. Leinhard explains that Luther believed when one denied the necessity for the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist, one would also deny the incarnation of Christ himself. p. 220. Luther’s passion for the real presence is revealed in his oft-quoted statement that he would rather drink blood with the pope than wine with the Reformed. [WA 6:462, 1-5). Later Lutherans in answer to Reformed and Anabaptist interpretation, sought a more systematic / scholastic definition of the real presence. Chemnitz in particular defines the Real Presence from the negative by presenting a seven point list of what the real presence is not. Cf. Martin Chemnitz, The Two Natures in Christ, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 433-434.

of Christ cannot be present in the sacramental elements in the same sense.⁵⁸

Lutheran theology does not limit the christological presence to the Lord's Supper but does confess a unique mode for Christ's presence there.

Curiously the language used by Philip Melanchthon when discussing the sacraments in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* is not as strong in its incarnational flavour as Luther's language when he speaks of sacraments.

Melanchthon's intent seems to favour the emphasis on the soteriological effect of the sacrament rather than the christological presence in it. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states: "A sacrament is a ceremony or act in which God offers us the content of the promise joined to the ceremony,"⁵⁹ and, "There are two parts to a

⁵⁸ Calvin's language concerning the Lord's Supper does carry a sense of christological presence. Calvin states: "Christ is the matter, or, if you rather choose it, the substance of all the sacraments, since in him they have their whole solidity, and out of him promise nothing." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 8th printing, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), vol. 2, p. 502. Yet it is clear that what Calvin means by Christ being the "matter" or "substance" of the Sacrament is not the same as classic Lutheranism. He qualifies the above statement with these words: "In so far, therefore, as we are assisted by their instrumentality in cherishing, confirming, and increasing the true knowledge of Christ, so as both to possess him more fully, and enjoy him in all his richness, so far are they effectual in regard to us." [p. 502] "We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us . . ." [p. 503]. Also, "Meanwhile, we get rid of that fiction by which the cause of justification and the power of the Holy Spirit are included in elements as vessels and vehicles. . ." [p. 504]. It is also clear from Calvin's initial definition of a sacrament that the idea of a christological presence is not necessary to his thought, while the idea of a christological witness is. ". . . a simple and appropriate definition (of a sacrament) to say, that it is an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men. We may also define more briefly by calling it a testimony of the divine favour toward us, confirmed by an external sign, with a corresponding attestation of our faith towards Him." [p. 491-492]. To compare the classic Lutheran response to the *finitum non est capax infiniti* see the *Triglotta, Formula of Concord*, Epitome VII para 13-15.

⁵⁹ Tappert, p. 252. *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, para. 16.

sacrament, the sign and the Word. . . . Therefore the Word offers forgiveness of sins, while the ceremony is a sort of picture or 'seal,' as Paul calls it (Rom. 4:11), showing forth the promise."⁶⁰

Luther is much clearer in his emphasis that the Lord's Supper is incarnational in substance and relational in function. One did not simply receive Christ as an element in the sacrament but was united to Christ and became one with him in the Sacrament.

. . . we become one bread, one cake, with Christ, our Lord, so that we enter into the fellowship of his treasures and he into the fellowship of our misfortune.⁶¹

Drawing on Luther's insight the Theology of Presence would build on the relational character of the Eucharist. Part and parcel of the mystery of the sacrament itself is the multifaceted character of the christological union found within the sacrament. This union includes the union of Christ's person – divine and human – with the sacramental elements and Christ's person with the believer who receives the elements.

Beyond the ontic reality of Christ in the Eucharist there is a communal value in understanding how the Lord's Supper can also be seen as a sign. Luther explains:

We all become one bread, one cake, and eat one another. You know when we make bread all the grains of wheat are crushed and ground, so that each grain becomes the flour of the others, they are then mixed together so that we see in a sack of flour all the grains joined together, and that each has become the flour of the other, and no grain of wheat

⁶⁰ Tappert, p. 262. *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, para. 69. Note that according to Lutheran definitions there are properly three dominical sacraments: the Lord's Supper, Baptism and Confession / Absolution. Cf. *Triglotta*, p. 309, *Apology*, Art. XIII, para. 5.

⁶¹ Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, trans. and ed. John Nicholas Lenker, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 232.

retains its own form, but each gives the other its flour, and each loses its body, in order that the body of the many grains may become the body of the one bread. The same way is it when we make wine, each grape mixes its juice with the juice of the other grapes, and each loses its form, so that there comes from it one drink.⁶²

For Luther the sacrament was both sign and reality of the deep fellowship between Christians. The description of a grain of wheat or a grape losing its form for the sake of the other bespeaks the individual losing his or her selfish autonomy for the sake of others. He or she is no longer a person unto himself or herself but surrenders self for other and for the whole. These thoughts are tied by Luther to the biblical witness of 1 Cor. 10:16-17.⁶³ Sacramental theology then encourages the individual to think of himself or herself in terms of sacrificial or self-giving relationships.

The very action of the sacraments in classic Lutheran theology points to relational existence. One receives them from the hand of another within the context of the whole community of faith (taking communion to infirm individuals and the self-communion of pastors notwithstanding). In our final chapter we will explore more fully the unique bonding possibilities for the community of faith as they share in the sacramental mysteries. We will discuss how the very fact that Christ is present in the Eucharist, forces the worshippers to confront a mystery together in a shared experience, which they cannot collectively resolve through the force of raw intelligence, and how such a confrontation draws people into closer unity. For now we note only that such a relational character is carried within the sacraments.

⁶² Ibid., p. 233-234.

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (New King James Version) "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."

Drawing on the inherent strength of the sacraments to create and sustain the christological communion (both horizontally and vertically) is an important element in the Theology of Presence and an important counterfoil for postmodern individualism.

6.7 Drawing on Biblical Imagery to Reinforce Communion

Another important element in a new metanarrative for Postmodernism is the recovery of a deeper appreciation for christological communion as a thoroughly biblical doctrine. Both Thielicke and classic Lutheranism saw Holy Scripture as a vehicle for christological presence. Both acknowledged the inherent power in the sacred text and saw it as a source of enlightenment through which the Holy Spirit worked. We believe that both are correct in this regard. Keeping the postmodern Church grounded in Scripture goes far beyond a simple concern with maintaining a socially cohesive bond with the past through tradition. Scripture is valuable in that it is God's truth and as such accomplishes that for which God sends it. Hans Schwarz touches on this as he explains the role of Scripture in the Church:

There must be a fidelity to the biblical documents, not just because they happened to be received in the canon, but because the church decided that qualitatively there was more to be gained from them than from extracanonical literature. Fidelity to the New Testament also implies an acceptance of its truthfulness.⁶⁴

A corporate model for christology is simply the structure of truth under which God has chosen to reveal himself. As this is unfolded in the New Testament it is clear that this corporate structure is inextricably linked to Christ's presence.⁶⁵ If

⁶⁴ Hans Schwarz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 334-335.

⁶⁵ Cf. James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 400, 401, 404, 408, & 411. Dunn

Christianity is going to remain relevant in the postmodern context then it must be able to clearly demonstrate that the Christ it presents is not a caricature of the one revealed in the sacred text but is in fact true to the overall biblical witness.

We offer the following examples with the recognition that our task is greater than the space available to us. A thorough exegesis of the many corporate christological images would necessitate a book in itself. What we will attempt therefore, is to offer a brief overview of several of the more common biblical images of christological communion. Our purpose is to show the foundational thoughts that must be part of the Christian metanarrative if negative individualism is going to be countered.

6.7a The "Corporate" Body of Christ

The image of the *Communio Sanctorum* as the "body of Christ"

(σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) belongs primarily to the Pauline corpus⁶⁶ (with the possible exception of Hebrews 13:1). The main presentations of this image are found in Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12- 27; and Ephesians 4:11-16. Other references to the σῶμα of Christ include Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:6, 4:4, 5:23 & 30; Colossians 1:18, 24, 2:19, 3:14, and

states that there was an "evident sense of Christ's presence as more or less a constant factor" in Paul's writings (p. 400). This is said in the context of dealing with images that bespeak the corporate experience of Christ. Christological presence and unity among his people are linked concepts. As Dunn states "participation in Christ is irreducibly corporate" (p. 411). Cf. C.D.F. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 96 where Moule admits a kind of "more than individual" understanding of Christ pervades many of the New Testament writers.

⁶⁶ Dunn calls this the "dominant theological image in Pauline ecclesiology." *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 548.

Hebrews 13:1. $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ carries various shades of meaning. While our concern here is primarily with the corporate use of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ we do not wish in the process to deny other uses of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ which may be more individualistic in nature.⁶⁷ Of the passages above the most detailed description of the *Communio Sanctorum* as $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ is that found in 1 Corinthians 12:12f.

It is not our intent here to enter a detailed examination of how $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ is understood in each of these various locations.⁶⁸ What we hope to accomplish is a simple discussion about the role of this image for purposes of redirecting postmodern individualism. What is striking about the 1 Corinthians 12 section is the way both corporate and individual elements are combined with christology. One's experience of Christ is so closely tied to others that an organic unity is formed between Christ, individual, and other. Individuality in the postmodern sense is not possible in such a christology.⁶⁹ To illustrate this deep unity of the

⁶⁷ Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *SŌMA in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, (Cambridge: University Printing House, 1976), p. 222. "Just as *sōma* is both substantial and functional, it is also both individualistic and social. Its sociality does not detract from its individuality. And its individuality is not introvertive. 'The lesser totality exists, then, in dynamic relation to the greater without losing its distinctive individuality' (Dahl, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 62). In its substantiality *sōma* prevents the privatism of flight from the material world of men and events. In its individuation it also prevents capitulation to the facelessness of collectivization in the modern as well as ancient world.'

⁶⁸ Discussions of the various shades of meaning of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ in the different contexts can be found in: Moule's, *The Origin of Christology*, pp. 69-89 and Gundry's, *SŌMA in Biblical Theology*.

⁶⁹ *The Theology of Paul*, p. 406.

corporate body formed in Christ Paul sets up the absurd situation where each member possesses self-awareness.

If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body.⁷⁰

More than simply being self-aware each member takes the persona of a selfish individual. The intent of his absurdity is to contrast human selfishness apart from Christ with the natural unity one experiences with others in Christ. Paul's message is that selfish individualism dissolves when one is part of the $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ Χριστοῦ.

. . .there should be no schism in the body but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.⁷¹

In Christ each individual is bound to the others existentially. When these thoughts are held in comparison to the many references to a Christian's being "in Christ" it becomes more obvious that the christological bond is more than merely spiritual or metaphorical.⁷² In some way, whether directly or indirectly, the corporate $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ image involves genuine union with the physical life of the other and with Christ's presence.⁷³ The pain of one member is felt by all; the honour of

⁷⁰ I Corinthians 12:15-16 (New King James Version).

⁷¹ I Corinthians 12:25-26, (New King James Version).

⁷² This is said despite Moule's statement that "usually, it ($\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$) is a metaphor simply for the community in certain of its aspects." p. 70.

⁷³ Gundry refers to Robinson and the "physicality" of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$. He believes the idea of psycho-physicality enters into the meaning of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$, but is careful not force the term too much into this single aspect. Sōma in Biblical Theology, pp. 243-244.

one is enjoyed by all. If one has needs the others are to supply what is lacking.⁷⁴ Neither autarchy nor autonomy is the governing principle of the members in the body. Rather the image of the body bespeaks interdependence and organic unity in Christ.

Paul's use of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ may be conditioned in part by his Jewish background. It has been pointed out by Martin Buber that the Hebrew mind began with the concept of the whole and saw the individual secondarily.⁷⁵ The section in 1 Corinthians 12 proceeds with this approach of seeing the *Communio Sanctorum* in terms of the whole primarily and only secondarily moving toward the individual. This becomes all the more significant when one notes the particular Gentile ministry of Paul.⁷⁶ He was emphasising a Hebrew perspective to those heavily influenced by Greek concepts of body. The Greek concept was not unfamiliar with the idea of body as a unity or wholeness,⁷⁷ however there was implicit within much of Greek thought a certain platonic distrust of the physical. Paul's use of $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ put

⁷⁴ Cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9-15.

⁷⁵ Buber as quoted by Eduard Schweizer, The Church as the Body of Christ (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), p.21. "Thus, the Hebrew is used to seeing first the nation, the people, mankind, and only afterward the individual member of that nation, people, or mankind. It was Martin Buber who once observed that the Hebrew first sees the woods and only then single trees; whereas we in the Western world would see first the single tree, and only after a process of reflection do we call a thousand trees a wood." One must also recognize of course that the Jewish mind did not deny the individual as has been pointed out previously. However, there is a unique and clear tension between individual and corporate existence in Jewish thought. Cf. J.W. Rogerson, "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-Examination," Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. XXI, Pt. 1, April 1970, pp. 1-16.

⁷⁶ Cf. Acts 9:15.

⁷⁷ Eduard Schweizer, p. 20, 77.

faith on the level of the physical. Being Christ's was not a personal spiritualistic endeavour, but carried real consequences for the flesh. Luther picks up on this "fleshy" reality of the body image when he draws on these texts in support of his teaching on sanctification (explored below).

σῶμα is a significant term for "relational" christology in that it finds use both in reference to the Church and to the sacrament. In his "Adoration of the Sacrament" Luther shows how these dual meanings can cause confusion in Lutheran theology if not properly differentiated. He addresses 1 Cor. 10:16 and the institution narratives in particular. 1 Cor. 10:16⁷⁸ was being interpreted in such a way that κοινωνία was being understood as "the fellowship of the Church." σῶμα was then being understood as a universal reference to the fellowship of the Church and not as a reference to the physical body of Christ. This had the effect of rewriting the institution narratives making "This is my body" the same as "This is my Church." The result for Luther was a denial of the real presence and a replacing of Christ's physical presence with a nebulous spiritual presence. He warns that the two concepts (ecclesiological body and sacramental body) should not be mixed and then explains the different uses of σῶμα in the following terms:

. . . the Scriptures ascribe to Christ two kinds of body: one a natural body, which was born physically of Mary, just as all other men have bodies; the other a spiritual body, which is the whole Christian church, of which Christ is the head . . . And who can tolerate it with good conscience when Christ's statement: 'This is my body, which is given for you' is interpreted to mean: 'This is the participation-in-my-body, which is given for you'? For this interpretation has no

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:16 reads, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

basis in Scripture. 'My body' is a very different expression, a very different thing, from 'the participation in my body.'⁷⁹.

The distinction Luther draws is helpful for establishing the relational character of christology. Through the incarnate $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ (especially that found in the real presence of the sacrament) one is preserved as part of the spiritual $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$. The spiritual body is both metaphor and reality. It is metaphor in that "spiritual" and "body" stand in ontological contradiction. It is reality, however, in that one must say the *Communio Sanctorum* is not merely like the body of Christ but is the body of Christ in some sense. The stark "is" of the Lutheran real presence in the sacrament is mirrored by an equally emphatic "is" with regard to the presence of Christ in the Church.

In Lutheran theology the issue of the christological $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ has a distinctly practical application for the daily piety of common people. The idea of the christological $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ is often joined to concepts of vocation and then necessarily to sanctification, both of which deal directly with the common relational life of the laity.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts in exhortation . . .⁸⁰

Vocation here is understood as one's God given *charismata* which is given for the benefit of others so that the whole may profit. The metaphor of the body is not

⁷⁹ LW 36:282-283.

⁸⁰ Romans 12:6-8 (New King James Version).

possible apart from sanctified relations with others. Thus the individual is not merely directed to a new existence within the ecclesiological community, but to a genuine life of self-sacrifice for others outside the Church as well. It is worth noting that as Luther refers to the Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 passages his discussions about ecclesiology almost always centre on sanctification.

Through the figure of the members of the body Paul teaches in Rom. 12 [:4-5] and 1 Cor. 12 [:12-27] how the strong, honorable, healthy members do not glory over those that are weak, less honorable, and sick as if they were their masters and gods; but on the contrary they serve them the more, forgetting their own honor, health, and power. For thus no member of the body serves itself; nor does it seek its own welfare but that of the other. And the weaker, the sicker, the less honorable a members is, the more the other members serve it 'that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another; to use Paul's words [I Cor. 12:25]. For this it is now evident how one must conduct himself with his neighbor in each situation.⁸¹

The biblical image of $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ is an important point of emphasis for the laity because it encompasses elements of community, christological presence, sanctification, and justification. It extends into Paul's sacramental theology and bespeaks an ontology that will not allow the individual to stand in isolation. By drawing on the fullness of these Pauline images the Church can direct her members into a broader understanding of themselves and their existence as corporate beings in Christ. Postmodern individualism is thus countered by the inclusiveness of the body.

⁸¹ LW 31: 302-303. Cf. LW 34:73, 21:98, 45:97-98, 12:294-295, 44:129-130, 46:166, 13:112, 35:509-510.

6.7b *The Temple of Christ*

Scripture also describes the *Communio Sanctorum* with the image of a holy building.⁸² The biblical images of “*οἶκος πνευματικός*,”⁸³ and “*ναὸς θεοῦ*,”⁸⁴ necessitate a christological “*ἄκρογωνιαίος*” or by implication a “*foundation*.”⁸⁵

As with the image of the body, the temple image conveys both interdependence (among the stones comprising the building) and christological dependence. The clearest explication of the holy building image is found in Ephesians 2:19-20 where the description of the temple is given organic overtones: “in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”⁸⁶ “Being joined together” (“*συναρμολογέω*”) is the same term used in Eph. 4:16 with reference to the body. What might normally be considered a static metaphor for a conglomeration of individuals becomes something more as the *ναὸς* image shows organic qualities in that the self grows (“*ἄύξω*”) into others and is alive with them in dynamic relationship.⁸⁷

⁸² Though again the image is used elsewhere outside of collective applications. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19.

⁸³ 1 Peter 2:5.

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:16, also 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22.

⁸⁵ Cf. Moule, p. 89.

⁸⁶ Ephesians 2:21 (New King James Version).

⁸⁷ Also 1 Peter 2:4-5 and the idea of “*λίθοι ζῶντες*”

One must also note the obvious Hebraic character of the ναός image. Within the Jewish cultus the temple served as a dynamic and multifaceted symbol. It was understood to be the seat for the presence of God among his people, as the centre of all worship, and as integral to the identity of the Jewish people themselves.⁸⁸ In the vision of Ezekiel the very structure and measure of the temple served as an example for the purity of life given to Israel as a nation.⁸⁹ All these elements were set in the “deep structure” of what it meant to be Jewish. Although the past glory of the temple complex now lies in ruins and much of the ancient cultus involving the temple is no longer practised one can still see the vital importance of even the temple ruins in Israeli self-identification. In using this powerful image, which was already set in the minds of the Jewish converts as part of their self-definition, the New Testament authors were drawing the people into a new christological understanding of community that was a further unfolding of past (more static) understandings of community.

⁸⁸ Several observations here present themselves: 1) The Temple became the symbol for Jewish identity during both the Babylonian captivity and the later razing of the Temple in 70 A.D. In Daniel 5 one sees Belshazzar reveling in his domination over the Jewish people by desecrating the sacred objects of the temple that he had captured. In Ezra one also sees the clear connection between the restoration of Israel as a nation and the rebuilding of the temple. 2) Modern pilgrimages to the “Wailing Wall” show the continued connection of the Jewish people to the ancient temple, if even a single remaining wall. 3) One may also note the exclusive access of Jews to certain parts of the temple and the barring of non-Jews [cf. Ez. 44:7-9 and Solomon Zeitlin, *Studies in the Early History of Judaism*, vol. 1 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1973), p. 144.] The Temple complex and restrictions on access set the Jews apart from all others.

⁸⁹ Cf. Ezekiel 41-43:17, esp. 43:10!

The use of the temple image in the Christian epistles might additionally suggest its original metaphorical use by Jesus. The temple metaphor is strengthened by the narrative of Christ driving the money changers out from the temple which was an event important enough to warrant inclusion in all four Gospels. More important than the event itself is Christ's own metaphorical interpretation of the event as recorded in John, where John 2:21 concludes, "ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ." Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus' statement about destroying the temple and raising it in three days as a central issue in his eventual crucifixion. What Jesus meant metaphorically was understood as an actual threat against the temple.

E.P. Sanders argues against the more traditional understanding of the temple incident as a "cleansing" of the temple.⁹⁰ Rather Sanders proposes understanding the "cleansing narrative" as a symbolic demonstration.⁹¹ In this understanding Christ's cleansing was a symbolic act of destruction which Jesus performed in order to point ahead to the eschatological restoration of a new temple (and new Israel).⁹² This argument which is based largely on historic Jewish expectations has much to offer. But added to the historical Jewish expectations of an eschatological restoration of Israel were post-Easter Christian expectations that understood the fulfilment of the new temple promise as manifest in the *Communio Sanctorum*

⁹⁰ E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 61-67.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 75, 77, 90.

itself, which in New Testament understanding embodies both present and eschatological expectations.⁹³

Further complicating Sanders' conclusion is John's mention of Jesus' body as Christ's point of reference. The symbolic act of destruction in the temple is linked to the actual destruction of Jesus' body on the cross. Paul saw a direct connection between the death of Christ's $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$ and the death of sin.⁹⁴ Thus in the destruction of Christ's "temple" the soteriological act of vicarious destruction was carried out and the new temple made of living stones was erected. The temple, Christ himself, and the post-Easter *Communio Sanctorum* are thus all linked as part of a greater unity. The individual who is among those living stones of the new temple is caught up in this "mystical" union with the person of Christ and his people.⁹⁵

6.7c The Flock and the New Israel

Other unavoidable biblical social images are worthy of mention. They are important not so much in terms of offering an original perspective on community or interdependence, but to establish the consistency of the biblical emphasis. The first

⁹³ Cf. Hebrews 9:11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Corinthians 5:1.

⁹⁴ esp. Romans 6:6.

⁹⁵ Here the contribution of N.T. Wright is helpful. In: N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 414, 417, 426, 639, 642, 644, 647-649, 651-653, Wright argues that the incident in the Temple pointed to Jesus own claim to be the Messiah and this in turn suggested that he would reconstitute Israel in himself. Christ was, in Wright's words "embodying YHWH'S return" through the Temple cleansing. He further "believed himself to be the Messiah who would draw Israel's destiny to its climax by embodying the new exodus in himself" [p. 649].

of these images is the “flock” (ποίμνιον).⁹⁶ It too necessitates a christological figure - the Shepherd. Unlike the previous two images, the flock is not so much concerned with the new existence of the “I” in relationship to others, as it is with the “I” in relationship to the Shepherd, who in distinction from other shepherds lays down his life for the sheep.

The image of the ποίμνιον is strongly Hebraic.⁹⁷ Its use by Christ seems more a means to proclaim himself as the messianic Shepherd than to introduce any new ecclesiological ideas. John 10 shows the use of this image to establish the christological nature of communal unity. “But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.”⁹⁸

Unique within the social image of the flock is the dual role of Christ. Similar to the previous two images Christ is figured as separate and above the *Communio Sanctorum* as the One without whom the *Communio Sanctorum* would not exist. Different from the previous images Christ is also one with the flock as πρόβατον. He is the lamb of God;⁹⁹ “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

⁹⁶ Cf. Matthew 26:31; Luke 12:32; John 10; Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25

⁹⁷ Psalm 77:20; 78:52; 80:1; Song of Solomon 2:16; 6:2-3; Isaiah 40:11; 63:11; Jeremiah 13:17, 20; 23:2-3; 25:34-36; 31:10, 12; 49:20; 50:45; Ezekiel 34; 36:37-38; Micah 2:12; 4:8; 5:4; 7:14; Zechariah 9:16; 10:3; 11:4-17.

⁹⁸ John 10:12 (New King James Version).

⁹⁹ John 1:29, 36. Cf. 1 Peter 1:19.

before its shearers is silent, so he opened not His mouth.”¹⁰⁰ Christ as lamb bespeaks an ontological oneness with the sheep. Yet he remains unique as an ἀμνός without spot or blemish.¹⁰¹

The Pauline use of “Israel” is also worth noting as a beneficial image for teaching the deeper nature of Christian Community. For Paul it is a term broader than a nationalistic reference. In Romans 9:6-8 one finds reference to Israel as those who are children of Abraham by virtue of the Messianic promise. In Galatians 6:16 Paul speaks of “τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ” as consisting of those who walk according to the rule of faith. When the term “Israel” is used in Paul’s “expanded” sense, that is in reference also to Christians of any nation, it becomes a term denoting great intimacy with both God and others. James Dunn demonstrates convincingly that “Israel” is a sort of “insider” term used to express a “self-understanding, a covenant understanding.”¹⁰² He shows that it is a decidedly different term from “Jews” or “Judaism” which convey more ethnic/racial ideas. “Israel” bespeaks one’s relationship to God and one’s participation in his covenant. Using this term in reference to Christians is an attempt to avoid portraying Christianity as something different or new and show rather the connection of Christ and his people with the ancient faith and the Messianic schema of salvation.¹⁰³ “Israel” then denotes the idea of “communion” in both vertical and horizontal directions.

¹⁰⁰ Isaiah 53:7.

¹⁰¹ 1 Peter 1:19.

¹⁰² The Theology of Paul, pp. 505-506.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 507-508.

6.7d *The Church and the Son of Man*

The most obvious of communal images in the New Testament and (especially in Paul¹⁰⁴) is that of ἐκκλησία which occurs over one hundred times. There is some debate regarding the Christian origins of the term; Kittel concludes that the term comes from secular Greek which used ἐκκλησία to denote a popular assembly.¹⁰⁵

Dunn suggests Paul borrowed the term from Israel's own self-identity because of its common use in the Septuagint.¹⁰⁶ Within the New Testament the word is used in a variety of contexts to denote both the small house church (Rom. 16:5) and the whole *Communio Sanctorum* (Matt. 16:18). Kittel points out that one should not draw too sharp a distinction between singular and plural uses of ἐκκλησία.

It is not that the ἐκκλησία divides up into ἐκκλησίαι. Nor does the sum of the ἐκκλησίαι produce the ἐκκλησία. The one ἐκκλησία is present in the places mentioned, nor is this affected by the mention of ἐκκλησίαι alongside one another. We must always understand and translate either 'congregation' and 'congregations' or 'Church' and 'churches.' . . . The plural implies assembly in the sense of assembling. The decisive point is not that someone or something assembles; it is who or what assembles.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ The Theology of Paul, p. 537. Dunn states that "'church' is the term with which Paul most regularly conceptualizes the corporate identity of those converted in the Gentile mission."

¹⁰⁵ Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3, 9th printing: (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 513.

¹⁰⁶ The Theology of Paul, pp. 537-538.

¹⁰⁷ Kittel, p. 505.

The rather indiscriminate use of ἐκκλησία to refer to both small and large Christian “assemblings” and even to the general *Communio Sanctorum*,¹⁰⁸ suggests ideas of unity and dignity. As to dignity the use of ἐκκλησία knows no qualitative difference between Christian communities. The larger communities are on an equal basis with the smaller communities. Older and predominantly Jewish congregations such as the one found in Jerusalem are on the same level as newer and predominantly Gentile congregations like Corinth. Ἐκκλησία captures the Pauline insistence that the redeemed share the same value and importance before God (Galatians 3:28). As to unity, Kittel points out, “. . . the sum of individual congregations does not produce the total community or the Church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the Church.”¹⁰⁹ The inexact use of ἐκκλησία itself suggests a oneness in that each part embodies the whole.

Postmodern Christians have shown some difficulty in applying this basic concept. The natural individualistic bent of postmodernism tends to use the concept of “whole church embodied in individual congregations” as an excuse for individual congregations to shun the whole church. There is a tendency for congregations to see themselves as autonomous entities complete in themselves because they are ἐκκλησία.¹¹⁰ This is a persistent danger in Thielicke’s entire

¹⁰⁸ A usage which Dunn calls a later development in Paul’s epistles. The Theology of Paul, p. 541.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 506.

¹¹⁰ This is reflected in particular clarity in American Lutheran congregations which nearly all have constitutions specifying that the congregation is “autonomous.”

christological approach. As individualism and a personal subjective Christ encounter is held up over a more objective shared Christ encounter within the ἐκκλησία an atomistic congregationalism will be encouraged. It is important in postmodern ecclesiology to stress the need for catholicity over and against the separatistic tendencies inherent in Western culture.

Paul also develops the doctrine of ἐκκλησία christologically through the image of the σῶμα as examined above. In Colossians (1:18 and 24) the two terms are linked directly and in Ephesians 5 Paul links the idea of marriage between husband and wife to the idea of marriage between Christ and Church, which in turn is likened to the relationship between head and body. Paul concludes this section by stating: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."¹¹¹ Again, Kittel's observations about Paul's treatment of ἐκκλησία in reference to σῶμα are valuable:

This does not imply a flight to the sphere of the numinous. Rather, that which is always a mystery to human eyes is a revelation from God. What concerns Christ and the ἐκκλησία is conceived, created and sustained by God.¹¹²

If, as we have suggested, ἐκκλησία is one of the most commonly recognised communal images in the New Testament then perhaps ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is one of the least. C.F.D. Moule thinks this expression is important enough that he

¹¹¹ Ephesians 5:32, cf. Ephesians 1:22 & 3:1-6.

¹¹² Kittel, p. 509-510.

devotes the opening section of his The Origin of Christology to it.¹¹³ Moule's basic argument is that the expression the Son of Man, with the definite article, is a clear reference back to Daniel 7 and the vision of the Son of Man (or "like a Son of Man" – no definite article). There the Son of Man image is directly joined to the eschatological community as their Sovereign. Moule believes that the phrase is Jesus' self-chosen designation of vocation and that it is not used primarily as a title.¹¹⁴ Oscar Cullmann agrees that the designation "Son of Man" refers to the task of Christ but he, unlike Moule, continues to speak of it as a title.¹¹⁵ Either way both agree that "the Son of Man" carries a definite corporate character and makes Christ representative of the people of Israel and, indeed, all of mankind.¹¹⁶

Seen in this light, within Jesus' own self-designation is a purposeful reference to his union with God's people. "The Son of Man" becomes a statement denoting his solidarity and self-emptying love for others. This heightens the importance of all biblical corporate images discussed thus far. Christ's very existence and the nature of His earthly ministry are inseparable from the community of faith he creates. He is not merely thought of in this way by those writing about him, but he understands his own existence in these terms.

¹¹³ The Origin of Christology, pp. 11-22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, tran. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A.M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 155.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.156.

6.7e Conclusion

The richness of New Testament imagery holding up christological communion in both vertical and horizontal directions is staggering.¹¹⁷ It is simply impossible to present a biblical christology and maintain an individualistic Christ encounter in light of these images. Christology and ecclesiology become co-mingled. For postmodern Christianity to remain biblically relevant, it must reckon with the unity between christology and ecclesiology. This is precisely why Thieliicke's christological proclamation proves difficult. The difficulty of Thieliicke's approach goes to the very heart of Christian self-definition and biblical models of

¹¹⁷ Mention must be made of other scattered communal images such as those found in Hebrews. Hebrews 12:22-23 reads as follows:

But you have come to Mount Zion (Σιών ὄρει) and to the city (πόλει) of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπουρανίῳ), to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly (πανηγύριε¹¹⁷) and church (ἐκκλησίᾳ) of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Hebrews 2:11-13 provides a further unfolding of the idea of Church.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦς¹¹⁷), saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly (ἐκκλησίᾳς¹¹⁷) I will sing praise to You." And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children (παῖδιά) whom God has given Me."

The combination of images is important. They range from images of Jewish sacred places (Mount Zion and Jerusalem), to familial images (brethren and children), to secular communal images (city), to terms which conjure pictures of a worshipping community (πανηγύριε), to images where temporal and eternal are joined (an innumerable company of angels), to even depictions of the mystery of the believer's union with the Divine ("For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all one"). The juxtaposition of these images in such close proximity communicates in a powerful way the great depth of meaning held in the concept of "Church." As the individual considers himself or herself in relation to the Church, he

soteriology. In creating a saved people Christ created them in a community and relates to them through that community. Biblically, apart from that community, the individual is a limb cut off from the body or a sheep separated from the flock. The implication in both images is that death is the result of separation from this divine community. As one examines Thielicke's ecclesiology, one must be critical of his treatment of the individual's place within the *Communio Sanctorum*.

We also note in conclusion that the ecclesiological connection to christology is not one of superficial contact but of personal union with Christ. The images of building to cornerstone, sheep to Shepherd, and body to head all imply more than mere cognitive apprehension of Christ but bespeak a close bond to One who is present. Even within the image of Church the union with Christ's presence is manifest.¹¹⁸ The solution to individualism must then combine a number of vital elements. Biblical imagery must be combined with christological presence, transcendence with immanence, subjective experience with ontological being. In short the Theology of Presence must strive to redefine the foundational elements for self-examination. Who one is cannot be established through "internal" evaluation but only by that manifestation of Christ that is outside the self, and that binds many selves together by making them members of his body.

or she must also consider this new depth of being which directs one away from self toward both the Divine Other and the human other.

¹¹⁸ Matthew 18:20 "Where two or three are gathered together in my name I am there in the midst of them."

Chapter 7

Individual and Social Concerns United in Christ

7.1 New Directions for a Changed Perspective

Through our proposal of the Theology of Presence we have sought to lay the groundwork for a clearer understanding of corporate being. What remains now is to bring our thoughts into a more direct confrontation with Thielicke. We hope in the concluding pages to solidify our conclusions that postmodern christology must rest on a view of corporate being and not primarily on the individual as in Thielicke's method. Our goal ultimately is to draw on Thielicke's example for help in clarifying paths toward an effective christological approach in the postmodern world.

Toward that end it is important to note that the underlying view of the individual as such has changed from the basic understandings prevalent in Thielicke's day. Simply put individualism has taken on a more radical tone in the postmodernism context. During the years in and around World War Two when most of Thielicke's sermons were written, individualism was not as marked by the selfishness and autarchy of the present time.¹ Now (and largely since the 1960s) individualism includes more tendencies toward a permissiveness that while trying to preclude harm to others still shows no real interest in anything except self-fulfilment. One could argue that human nature is the same now as in Thielicke's day, but

¹ Admittedly this is a difficult point to establish with scientific certainty. The statement comes instead from conversations with people who lived and worked during those years and their observations of cultural tolerance and sympathy during such difficult times.

nonetheless it does seem that the years that were so important in shaping his thoughts were characterised by more sensitivity toward others².

The “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” offers an example of concern over personal and collective responsibility for others at this time. This declaration represents the EKD (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) wrestling with its role in the war. Matthew Hockenos in his doctoral dissertation Coming to Terms with the Past: The Protestant Church in Germany, 1933-1948 has effectively demonstrated the complexity of debates within the German Church over the form and nature of its confession of sin for the war. The result of this debate was the highly controversial “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” issued in October of 1945 to representatives of the WCC from an EKD twelve man council. In it they stated “we know ourselves to be with our people in a great company of suffering, but also in a great solidarity of guilt.”³ Collective guilt is here singled out, yet individual responsibility toward others was a major element of the debate that ensued from it.⁴

² This statement is made recognizing political intrigue and betrayal that was common in Germany under Hitler. The thought here is that during these years the population of Germany was forced to wrestle with issues of personal responsibility toward others. Beside the example of the “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” which follows, one could also cite the very public example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as one who further confronted Germans with their responsibility toward others. In Notes from a Wayfarer Thielicke makes mention of many deeds of kindness and care that people offered to one another during the difficult war years (eg. p. 126-128) and even his many stories of encounters with gruff individuals carry a tone of humour and selflessness. Of course following the war problems like the destruction of the German infrastructure, caring for casualties, and food shortages would have left people dependant on each other for many years.

³ “The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt” translated by the World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Press Service 39 (October 1945), p. 193.

⁴ Matthew Hockenos, Coming to Terms with the Past: The Protestant Church in Germany, 1933-1948, a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the

Again what this demonstrates is that it was a pronounced part of the worldview in Germany at that time to allow concern for the other to temper and determine one's actions. Each was individually responsible and all were collectively responsible for how actions impacted the lives of others. This German *Zeitgeist* then is what shaped Thieliicke's understanding of the individual.

Thieliicke's treatment of community is also coloured by the communitarian models of modernity. In his book Modernity and Postmodernity, Gerard Delanty makes the observation that modernity carried with it a "utopian impulse."⁵ That impulse to which Thieliicke reacted is dated and therefore the need to take on utopianism as a formative issue for society has changed. If the newly forming European Union is any indication of postmodern political communitarianism, it seems that concerns today are less driven by political ideology and more by economic opportunism.

This shift in thinking about both the individual and the community from Thieliicke's day exposes inherent difficulties in the direct application of Thieliicke's

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, (New York University, Sept. 1998) the author shows convincingly how the debate over guilt involved sorting through difficult questions about both individual and corporate responsibility (esp. pp. 155-171). He goes so far as to claim, "Nothing divided churchmen in 1945 more than the manner in which they interpreted the church's guilt of its conduct during the Third Reich" (p. 165). What this demonstrates is a worldview that takes seriously its relationship to others. This does not contradict previous claims of individualism in the worldview of that time but shows how the nature of that individualism was not insensitive toward others.

⁵ Gerard Delanty, Modernity and Postmodernity (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 58-59.

christology in today's world. To continue the individualising bent of his christology in an age when the individual has moved toward hedonism and autarchy is problematic. To continue a critical avoidance of community in an age when many utopian governments are toppling is likewise no longer necessary. It seems clear that these changes in circumstance require a re-evaluation of Thieliicke's christological presentation.

7.1a Adjusting Solutions to Depersonalisation

We begin our re-evaluation of Thieliicke by noting how christological individualisation is intertwined with basic issues of human personhood and ontology. As Frank Stanaland Christian Jr. was quoted earlier as observing, "the concrete existence of the individual is the 'anthropological starting point' of his methodical procedure." This "concrete existence" involves more than a person's life setting; it also involves issues of being and personhood that are influenced by that setting.

The shifts from Thieliicke's period to today have not completely eliminated all the concrete issues that influenced questions of being and personhood. Nihilistic depersonalisation still exists. Deification of the individual and of the collective likewise persist; further, they persist not just in the totalitarian systems of which Thieliicke was so critical but also within progressive democracies. Thieliicke predicted this very thing already in the early 1950s. In his second Ethics volume Thieliicke notes that even in democracies the tendency toward the welfare state carries with it a movement toward depersonalisation where individuals trust the state will provide for the "other." Familial person to person care of the elderly, the

handicapped, and poor become state responsibilities not individual ones.⁶ The observations offered here are in no way intended to suggest that all socialised systems of care for the elderly and infirm are wrong. What is of concern is that Thielicke saw within the tendency toward more collectivistic notions of human care a growing depersonalisation of those who are offered the care. Such concerns about depersonalisation are not unwarranted, and the postmodern Church can profit from Thielicke's observations.

Thielicke addresses the problem of depersonalisation by pursuing a kind of Christian anthropology that isolates the "I" before God.⁷ He bases this on some very daring preconceived notions, namely that God deals only with the individual not the community⁸ and that it is desirable from the perspective of Christian anthropology to isolate the "I."

Part of Thielicke's need to isolate the "I" may stem from his reaction against the anthropological assumptions of socialism. In an analysis of the Marxist scholar Kolakowski, Thielicke summarises his thought in this way:

... the feeling of meaninglessness is the individual's sense of alienation from external or social existence. By not paying heed to their continuity with society individuals are forced to seek the meaning of life in their constricted individual existence and to regard themselves, we might add, as self-enclosed monads or entelechies.⁹

⁶ Cf. Theological Ethics, vol. 2, p. 313.

⁷ Theological Ethics, vol. 2, p. 393. "personhood depends not on one's standing before men but on one's standing before God, on an 'alien dignity'."

⁸ Quoted earlier from Theological Ethics, vol. 1, p. 514.

⁹ Living with Death, p. 94.

Thielicke then observes:

. . . Kolakovski erases the picture of individuality and falls back into a Marxist anthropology in which individuals have meaning in life and death only as they are integrated into an ideologically conceived nexus of history and society and actively cooperate in the humanizing of this nexus.¹⁰

While Marxists may indeed push the social element to the point of denying the individual element of humanity, Thielicke seems to counter by going too far in the opposite direction. He presses the individual element to the exclusion of social considerations. What were basically sociologically correct statements made by Kolakovski and not overtly Marxist are understood as crassly Marxist by Thielicke. Thielicke will not agree here with Kolakovski that human beings are endowed with essential social qualities – qualities which if ignored can cause great harm to people. Yet non-socialist psychologists and sociologists know well the damaging effects of isolating individuals into a forced solitude.¹¹ Admitting that humanity

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ It is recognized, of course, that actual physical isolation is radically different from the theological isolation of the “I” in Thielicke. Yet the issue of isolation and its effects on the individual are relevant for assessing the validity of a broad based system of individualisation. If mankind suffers in the process of physical/social isolation, then it follows that a vital part of the individual’s existence is tied to relationships with others. How honest to the very nature of mankind can a system be that does not take into account the fact that an isolated person lacks true personhood? Cf. Michael Jackson, Prisoners of Isolation: Solitary Confinement in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) pp. 66-68. These pages record testimony from prisoners who were given solitary confinement. Their testimony is that such isolation drove them to more and more hatred for others, hallucinations, and a sense of despair. Prisoners spoke of solitary confinement as a worse punishment than execution and worse than physical torture (p. 77). Dr. Stephen Fox, an expert in the area of incarceration, defines the purpose of isolation as the attempt “to reduce the individual to that condition where there is no conceivable human resistance, where they represent essentially nothing” (p. 72). He further reported that the minds of those who have faced prolonged solitary

was simply not designed by the Creator to be isolated does not make one a Marxist. However Thielicke cannot seem to avoid seeing statements about the social needs of humanity in the light of his preconceived negative notions of communist socialism.¹²

Thielicke's over-reaction to the social element in anthropology is unfortunate and even dishonest to the human condition. A communal element is simply inherent in the very makeup of mankind; it is essential for human development and essential for spiritual development. Thielicke even admits that human beings have close deep-seated bonds with other human beings¹³ and through grace can have an even closer bond with the Saviour.¹⁴ Yet he does not allow these bonds to shape significantly his ideas of Christian personhood.

confinement are irreversibly affected. They are unable to trust or love others in the same way as before (p. 76).

¹² Thielicke here might simply be influenced by the overall German feeling toward Russian Communism. One could point to the obvious political conflicts between the two nations as evidenced by the German invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941. [William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1960), cf. pp. 793-852 esp. p.849.] Yet as Shirer also records the tensions between the two involved ideological disagreements. He records several instances of Hitler giving voice to these deep ideological conflicts. (pp. 830, 846).

¹³ The place where Thielicke gives the most detailed treatment of the close personal bonds individuals have with others is in his volume The Ethics of Sex, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964) pp. 56, 58, 63, 64, 68, 96, 98.

¹⁴ In the same volume as above Thielicke repeats often the need to base personhood on the alien dignity ascribed it by God and the personal union of the individual with the Creator. Cf. pp. 5, 12, 21, 31, 32*, 33, 61, 63, 64, 80, 97.

7.1b Finding the Social Element in Personhood

This of course is not to say that Thielicke's concept of personhood is totally devoid of social elements. He speaks often about "alien dignity" as essential for understanding the nature of mankind (both self and other).¹⁵ If God loves the other and places his alien dignity within that other,¹⁶ then to be a person before God¹⁷ is to be placed in the *agape* relationship with God's "alien dignity" wherever it may be found. One cannot then look at the other and see him or her according to his or her bare humanity. There is an affinity with otherness by virtue of the shared "alien dignity" found in grace.¹⁸ Yet behind Thielicke's "christological social bond" there remains an implicit separation. In Thielicke's doctrine of sanctification the other is the one to whom one acts in kindness and love. In the Church the others are those who pray vicariously for the "I". One sees Christ in the other and thus serves Christ as one serves the other, but in all of these examples the other is always a detached other – the other apart from the self, a separated individual caught up in his or her own personal isolation before God and his or her own personal spiritual Christ encounter.

¹⁵ Theological Ethics, vol. 1 p. 21. (For examples of how Thielicke's sermons reflect the use of Christ's alien dignity for grounding personhood compare Faith the Great Adventure pp. 21-22 and Life Can Begin Again, pp. 70, 78-79.)

¹⁶ The Ethics of Sex, p. 80. "Therefore the real image of man emerges only in love of God, the magnitude which encompasses all I-Thou relationships."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64. "The ground, goal, and meaning of his (man's) existence, which contain this authentic being of man consist in his relation to God. This is what man 'is,' and this can only be believed or denied."

¹⁸ Theological Ethics, vol. 1, p 242. Depersonalisation begins "the moment grace is ontically separated from God."

Throughout Thielicke's writings he embraces the language of Martin Buber in speaking of the relationship between the believer and God as an "I-Thou" relationship. Thielicke was familiar with Buber's writings¹⁹ and understood the "I-Thou" relationship as defining personhood.²⁰ Yet when it comes to using Buber's ideas in his formation of personhood Thielicke does not consider Buber at sufficient depth. Within Buber's work there are broader social implications for the "I-Thou" relationship that Thielicke seems to miss.

As an Hasidic Jew Buber speaks almost mystically of the "I Thou" relationship. His treatise I and Thou reads almost like poetry at times.²¹ Yet within the mystical poetic language of I and Thou one sees an understanding of human ontology that does not view the other as something alien but as something in unity with the "I" – even as touching a unity found at the core of human being. Consider the following statements by Buber:

The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being.²²

The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.²³

¹⁹ As an example Buber is referenced in Modern Faith and Thought, pp. 37, 417. The Evangelical Faith vol. 2, pp. 17 (fn 10), 106, 449, and The Evangelical Faith vol. 3, pp. 150, 261, 303.

²⁰ The Evangelical Faith vol. 2, p.106. Speaking of Buber Thielicke states "Through the word God and man are related as I and Thou, i.e. as persons. Human personality finds its basis here."

²¹ Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 1. Buber's translator, Walter Kaufmann, complains in the acknowledgments to his book that Buber's I and Thou is untranslatable.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

In the beginning is the relation.²⁴

Whoever stands in relation, participates in an actuality; that is, in a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him. . . . The person becomes conscious of himself as participating in being, as being-with, and thus as a being.²⁵

Of course many of Buber's statements regarding this intimacy are in reference to the "I" with the divine "Thou," but Buber also saw this intimacy as reaching into human relations:

There is so much that can never break through the crust of thinghood! . . . But when something does emerge from among things, something living, and becomes a being for me, and comes to me, near and eloquent, how unavoidably briefly it is for me nothing but You!²⁶

In Buber's view the deep intimacy of the "I" with the divine "Thou" establishes the less consistent intimacy of the "I" with the "other" of all relationships. This view of personhood necessitates the "I" as a "being-with." In this relationship the very speaking of the word "I" also necessarily means "You."²⁷ "Otherness" is therefore not a matter of the other possessing an "alien dignity" derived from his or

²⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 146-147. cf. the broader discussion of this on p. 148 when Buber says, "every individual You must disappear into the chrysalis of the It in order to grow wings again."

²⁷ Surprisingly Buber sees this kind of relationship in the person of Jesus. He states in I and Thou, ". . . how powerful, even overpowering, is Jesus' I-saying, and how legitimate to the point of being a matter of course! For it is the I of the unconditional relation in which man calls his You 'Father' in such a way that he himself becomes nothing but a son. Whenever he says I, he can only mean the I of the holy basic word that has become unconditional for him. If detachment ever touches him, it is surpassed by association, and it is from this that he speaks to others."

her own private isolation before God as in Thielicke, but the other is a being with the “I” in intimate closeness to the “Thou.” As Thielicke draws on Buber he does not stand against Buber’s notions of corporate being, rather he seems to ignore the deeper applications of Buber’s thought to communitarian schema.

As this applies to Christian ontology Buber shows a lesser need of distinctions between the “I” and other and a greater emphasis on the “we” before God as those who bear together the “alien dignity” of grace. In isolating the “I” before God as the mark of personhood, Thielicke wanted to highlight the value of each person before God.²⁸ We agree in principle with his goal and feel that individual worth and importance must be maintained in our solution to individualism. Yet value in personhood need not be found exclusively in isolation from others but can just as well be found in union with them. From the perspectives of theology and from anthropology, there seems little reason to continue Thielicke’s isolation of the “I” as a necessary component of Christian personhood.

7.1c Directing Modern Secular Acknowledgements of Community Toward Christian Ends

Was this isolation of the “I” adopted in order to give validity to the anthropological discussion from a secular perspective? Thielicke observed that the secular view was hopelessly tied to a narrow individualized anthropocentric ontology. He did little searching for support for more communal views of personhood in secular

²⁸ The component of individual uniqueness is brought out with special clarity in *Living with Death*, p. 140 “For only in relation to him [the Lord] do I become a person, that is, unique, incapable of being represented, responsible for myself (as I have undoubtedly been loaned this self by him).” Cf. pp. 150-152 in these pages Thielicke ties personhood and uniqueness to the alien dignity of Christ that he gives

thought. Yet there are examples in secular thinking that do not see mankind in exclusively individualistic terms, and it is in these examples that the Church of today can engage the secular world around her. This is in keeping with Thielicke's own method. He sought to engage philosophy and anthropology over their treatments of the ontological "I." In so doing he hoped to reconcile the Christian message with credible secular thought and engage those outside the Church with the Christian message in terms they would more readily receive. The same approach can be taken as we explore the place of the "we" in human ontology and show its connection with Christian communal being.

As one example, Wittgenstein's discussion of "private language" gives an obvious beginning point for a more communal sensitivity in anthropology. Wittgenstein's discussion leads to the conclusion that the existence of language bespeaks community because language exists to link action and interaction with others:

Without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate.²⁹

Wittgenstein extends this thought by arguing against the possibility of "private language." There simply cannot be such a thing as a truly private language because

the individual. ". . . personal uniqueness is connected with the summons of God and the history with him." p. 152.

²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 116e.

“to exist it must presuppose a common language.”³⁰ Even if one were able to invent a language known only to one’s self the meaning of the elements in this language would be attached to pre-existing language. Wittgenstein leads us to this conclusion as he describes the impossibility of inventing a truly private word for pain known as “S”:

What reason have we for calling “S” the sign for a *sensation*? For “*sensation*” is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.³¹

His discussion, which suggests that language is rooted in an already existing sense of community, presents several opportunities for further discussions between christology and secular anthropology.³² For example: what do Wittgenstein’s observations on the communal nature of language say in regards to the Person of Christ as the incarnate *logos*? Does not Christ’s very identification with the Word bespeak a corporate dimension to his being both as touching his godhead and as touching his relation to human beings? Cannot the Church then claim that a proper view to the Word of God must always ground its use in the corporate experience.

³⁰ This is the observation on Wittgenstein offered by Gerd Brand ed., The Central Texts of Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. Robert E. Innis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 60.

³¹ Wittgenstein, p.79e. cf. with comments made on p. 75e, “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments.”

³² Interestingly Habermas, who will be discussed immediately following, also noted that language necessitates community. As Helmut Peukert noted when discussing Habermas’ language-philosophy [Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action, trans. By James Bohman (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), p. 138.] “In every linguistic utterance aimed at communicating something to someone, the ideal of an all inclusive communication community is necessarily implied and raised to the status of transcendental validity and, at the same time, posited practically as a goal to be achieved.”

We do not wish to probe answers at this point, instead we wish only to show that secular anthropology offers opportunity for the Church to build on the importance of the corporate dimension for understanding the human condition in relation to Christ.

One finds that even a scholar like Jürgen Habermas, known for espousing a more individualistic enlightenment philosophy, offers a view of mankind that takes community into account. In The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity Habermas says:

. . . the lifeworld is divided in accord with the “given” components of speech acts (that is, their propositional, illocutionary, and intentional components) into culture, society, and person. I call *culture* the store of knowledge from which those engaged in communicative action draw interpretations susceptible of consensus . . . I call *society* (in the narrower sense of a component of the lifeworld) the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter into interpersonal relationships with one another. *Personality* serves as a term of art for acquired competences that render a subject capable of speech and action and hence able to participate in processes of mutual understanding in a given context and to maintain his own identity in the shifting contexts of interaction.³³

Habermas sees the total “lifeworld” of mankind as including “person,” “society,” and “culture.” Accordingly human beings live and move simultaneously within the three realms. Even more they gather their being as they exist within this threefold ontology. Habermas’ division of the “we” into culture and society offers the Church tremendous opportunities. Habermas opens the door for discourse between the Church and credible secular anthropology over the issue of

³³ Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 343.

personhood.³⁴ Surprisingly Habermas drew little attention from Thielicke. His name is mentioned only once in vol. 3 of The Evangelical Faith (German edition, 1978) and only once in passing in Modern Faith and Thought (German edition, 1983). Some of Habermas's more significant works like the Theory of Communicative Action (2 vol. 1981), were published too late for Thielicke to consider. Still one would expect that even the initial influence Habermas held in intellectual circles with earlier publications³⁵ would have merited more of Thielicke's consideration but it does not.

Be that as it may, for our purposes here Habermas, even though he may represent a more modernist perspective, still holds influence and importance for postmodern secular anthropology.³⁶ His multi-layered view of human being allows

³⁴ We recognize at this point that our engagement with Habermas' thought is extremely limited. Elsewhere it seems clear that Habermas challenges the sort of "historic-conservative" view of objective Christian truth, claiming that "self-reflection as limited to the sphere of the history of the species' has taken the place of the final grounding of metaphysics." (Peukert, p. 162). Such a view would move theology toward a kind of universalism that would discard the possibility of objective or dogmatic truth and would encourage greater individuality and even atomisation of religious truth. The point of our thesis is demonstrate that such atomisation is ultimately harmful both to the Church and to her people.

³⁵ Eg. Theory and Practice (Theorie und Praxis, 1963), Towards a Rational Society (The first three essays were published in Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform (1969); the last 3 essays were published in Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie" (1968), Knowledge and Human Interests (Erkenntnis und Interesse, 1968), Legitimation Crisis (Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus, 1973).

³⁶ Peukert notes that the life-world concept of Habermas remains controversial and will require further examination and debate in the future to help determine to what extent such a concept is "retrievable and redeemable" for present culture (p. 137). That this matter remains controversial demonstrates Habermas' lasting influence and importance for postmodern discussions. Cf. comments in the "translator's Introduction" to Peukert's book which states "Habermas has begun to exercise a perceptible influence on the conceptions of the tasks and methods of a

the Church an opportunity to show how its ontology provides for this exact layering. For Habermas culture exceeds society because it serves as a storehouse and foundation upon which society can draw. Culture is society in sum and total. The “we” transcends present time and individual circumstance as it draws from the culture that preceded and includes it. The individual without a society, as well as the society without a culture, is incomplete. Even from this secular point of view, the Church can present a valid case to a world atomised by individualism that true personhood and meaning are not located in the isolated self because self is incomplete without a society and a culture.³⁷

The Church in her understanding of personhood must, of course, go beyond a simple emphasis on the social dimension. Stressing one’s individual place in the overall culture of the *Communio Sanctorum* or in the society of the localized εκκλησία is insufficient. This is in agreement with Thieliicke’s conclusions as well. The christological element is the core non-negotiable element in any valid presentation of personhood and that core will forever remain outside of the grasp of secular society.

number of disciplines. From the analysis of cognitive interests to the theory of communicative action, he has both appropriated and transformed diverse fields of empirical and theoretical research” (p. vii).

³⁷ Habermas frames the difficulties that a successful practice of socialization faces in today’s world into very practical terms, “The growing number of hospital beds occupied by psychiatric patients, the epidemic proportions of behavioural disturbances, alcoholism, the phenomena of addiction per se, the rising suicide and juvenile delinquency rates are all signs of unsuccessful processes of integration and failed socialization.” Jürgen Habermas, Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age,” trans. By Andrew Buchwalter (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), p. 17. It is because of society’s failing ability to “incorporate future generations into its institutionalised value orientations” (p. 17) that the Church is presented a golden opportunity to engage society with its view of christological communion – a view which ultimately addressed people at a deeper more spiritual level.

What the Church can do and what Thielicke's approach encourages is to establish the solution to the secular problem within its ranks in an engaging and inviting way, to draw on those elements of the secular view that support it, and to redirect those elements to a christological *telos*. Thus from Habermas the Church can formulate the discussion of personhood to consider how ontological over-individualisation can be balanced. A view toward the "society" of the Church at present, the historic culture of the *Communio Sanctorum*, and the individual with his or her own uniqueness can all be borrowed from Habermas and shown to be intertwined around the core of christology. The individual stands in the society of the Church, in turn the Church stands in the culture of the *Communio Santorum*, and finally all elements separately and together stand in the Person of Christ (as One who touches both personal and corporate dimensions).

Thielicke may not have explored the social dimension of secular anthropology with enough passion but what he does do well with secular anthropology is use its conclusions as a means of explaining Christian development. Thielicke's embrace of the individual seeks to rob anthropology of some of its "secular power" and establishes a means of looking at this development as a gift of God.

At the heart of Thielicke's approach to secular thought is a willingness to treat seriously the changing worldview (including the maturation of individualism) and see it more as a matter of coming to adulthood than just a matter of rebellion against God. Thielicke writes:

Das Christentum verhält sich zur technischen Revolution sozusagen wie ein Vater zu seinem Sohne, der unterdessen erwachsen ist. Der

so mündig gewordene Sohn kann nun zweierlei tun: Er kann entweder also Erwachsener das Haus des Vaters verwalten – oder er kann in die Fremde gehen, sich vom Vater lossagen und sich “emanzipieren.”³⁸

[My translation: Christianity acts toward the technical revolution like a father to his son who has grown-up so to speak. As a mature son he can now do two things: he can either manage the house of his father as an adult – or he can go into a foreign land, dissociating and “emancipating” himself from his father.]

This adulthood into which humanity has come challenges what has come before it. An honest view of humanity in accord with prevailing thought is not content with mere dogmatism or retreats into the opinion of earlier fathers, but insists that current rules of reason and logic be followed because these now define the way humanity understands the world. This too Thielicke embraces and holds up as a positive thing for the Christian Church. Thielicke calls it “secularisation” (“Säkularisation”) and sees no reason why it cannot be subsumed under the category of Christian freedom. Thielicke does note, however, that this maturity is a two-edged sword; the same freedom that can give new perspectives on the world can and has been misused to bring about the fall into sin.³⁹ Nonetheless, regardless of the risks, it is essential for Thielicke that christology itself recognise the new adult understanding of reality and become one with it. Thielicke states:

... secularisation might be viewed as the attainment of adulthood, of an independent and autonomous relation to the world, which faith itself initiates. The historical process of emancipation [from a theonomous world view], then is simply another form of Christianity.⁴⁰

³⁸ Helmut Thielicke, Mensch sein Mensch werden: Entwurf einer christlichen Anthropologie (Munche: R. Piper and Co. Verlag, 1976) p. 167.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The Evangelical Faith vol. 1, p. 314.

Important here is Thielicke's view that faith not only accepts the current individualistic *Weltanschauung* but "initiates" it. Faith recognises that advancements in ways of knowing and thinking are also gifts of God. Traditional hermeneutics are immediately challenged by this coming to adulthood. Thielicke explains:

A veritable maze of new problems is thus posed by the Cartesian approach. The feature common to all of them is that they center on the situation of the adult self who is summoned to appropriate the message. The question of understanding thus becomes more and more central until finally hermeneutics becomes a theological discipline of its own. I can appropriate only what I can understand and penetrate.⁴¹

Such challenges to understanding posed by the adult individualistic *Weltanschauung* can again threaten faith. Thielicke admits this in his sermons when he holds up the Prodigal Son as a stereotypical individualist whose coming to adulthood drove him to abandon his father.⁴² Regardless of inherent dangers Thielicke pushes the Church to establish its christology with respect to this new maturity and demonstrate the applicability of Christ.⁴³

In practical terms for Thielicke this means one's search for Christ is influenced "inductively" so to speak; as one examines advancements in knowledge, science,

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 39. Cf. statements made about this newfound adulthood on pp. 49ff.

⁴² The Waiting Father, pp. 21, 27.

⁴³ In a section titled "Dawn of the New Age: Emancipation of Adult Man", p. 90 of The Evangelical Faith, vol. 1, Thielicke writes: ". . . in adulthood man has not achieved control in his own power; he has been empowered. Adulthood is not a domestic *coup d'etat* by which the father is expropriated. It is the institution to the right of sonship at the time appointed by the father." cf. also p. 108 "The anthropological dimension (of Theology A) is that man's adulthood and dignity require that his self-understanding be respected."

and even biblical interpretation and then draws these into one's "I-Thou" relationship. Thieliicke laments the reluctance of classic or orthodox theology to approach the world in such a way.⁴⁴ At times he sharply criticizes "orthodoxy" for its reluctance to embrace critical understandings of textual development and its use of what he considers an archaic view of verbal inspiration.⁴⁵ Such criticisms reflect his desire for theology to be current and "adult" in its approach to matters of faith and anthropology.⁴⁶

Thieliicke of course was right in his observation that christology must be able to function in a changed worldview. In the pages that follow we hope to provide practical examples of how the Church can shape its christological presentation in such way as to provide answers and fill the needs of the postmodern person. The way sermons are presented, for example, must be re-examined in light of postmodern cognitive capabilities. The importance of the individual can be supported through corporate acts of charity and compassion. The postmodern desire for belonging can be recognized and efforts made to show how the Church can fill that longing in a meaningful and lasting way – how the Church can even

⁴⁴ Consider Thieliicke treatment of "borderline situations" like birth control, homosexuality, and more modern views of sexuality in The Ethics of Sex. Several times in this volume Thieliicke chastises modern theology for not treating seriously advancements in science or secular sociology, pp. 269-271, 295.

⁴⁵ Cf. Modern Faith and Thought, pp. 105-107.

⁴⁶ A particularly clear example of this approach can be seen in: Helmut Thieliicke, The Faith Letters, trans. Douglas Crow (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1978). In this work students are Thieliicke's principal audience. This work is the product of the "Faith Information Project Group" and claims to be a compilation of letters by various students addressing current questions of spiritual importance. The letters all seem to bear Thieliicke's unique linguistic stamp,

draw on inherent ritualistic tendencies that the postmodern community uses to reinforce a sense of togetherness.

Thielicke was also right in pointing out that many aspects of individualism are gifts of God and part of a necessary movement toward spiritual maturity. The matters of individual worth and uniqueness that he emphasised were valuable and continue to be necessary elements in christology. The Church does not merely throw postmodern culture a bone by reluctantly admitting these facts. It rightfully claims them as part of God's unique revelation that should be prominent in its teaching.

However, what seems clear in the postmodern climate is that these observations about the mature individual cannot stand alone. As shown above both anthropology and christology remain incomplete without a proper balance of social/communal elements. The Church must then take up this issue of community while preserving the anthropological recognition of the individual.

Thielicke drew attention to an emerging spiritual adulthood. But such maturation need not be seen as complete in individualism. This can be illustrated through the analogy of human maturing: As a young child one depends on the structure and certainty of the parent's decisions. In the teen years the young adult seeks to express his or her individuality and asserts his or her independence of thought. This may lead to varying levels of rebellion against the parental structure.

however, which suggests he was heavily involved in editing them. "Playing" to the notion of intellectual adulthood comes up several times in these letters (cf. pp. 11, 20, 36).

In later years there is a regaining of appreciation for the wisdom of the parent and recognition that one's independence must be tempered by one's interdependence. In normal development the period of what might be termed more crass individual expression is only a mediating phase of development. Eventually the individual discovers that isolated individuality is no longer satisfying. What Thielicke proposed as the adulthood of humanity seems more approximate to young adulthood.

The Church need not simply stand at odds with secular anthropology over the role of the individual because secular anthropology does not demand individualism; just the opposite. There are communal elements within anthropology that invite further exploration and engagement by the Church. The more the communal nature of mankind is self-evident to the secular world, the more opportunity the Church has for showing how its corporate christology supplies inherent needs. The danger for the Church is to allow these observations from secular anthropology to shape its presentation in purely social terms. The corporate nature of the Church may indeed answer the social need of human beings, but the Church does not exist for that purpose. Her purpose must always be rooted in the salvific action of Christ. Such a rooting deepens the nature of the social bond rather than supplants it. Secular anthropology opens a door for the Church to bring this more profound sort of social bond, so necessary to human existence, to an audience that may be suspicious of the Church as an institution or of Christianity as a body of dogma.

7.2 *Understanding Christ from a Social Perspective*

As discussed earlier there was a unique flavour to the individualism and the community models of Thielicke's day but so too was christology coloured by the unique foci of that era. Broad generalities are always dangerous but in this case somewhat necessary. N.T. Wright has noted certain epochs in the approach to christology. There was the initial "Quest for the Historical Jesus" beginning with Reimarus in the 18th century, extending throughout the 19th century, and ending essentially with Schweitzer's The Quest of the Historical Jesus.⁴⁷ This first stage, according to Wright, was interested in rediscovering the personality of Jesus.

Then in the 20th century during the height of Thielicke's career the christological discussions were greatly concerned with critically examining the narratives about Jesus. There was a proliferation of various critical approaches in evaluating the texts themselves and the faith of the early Christian communities to which those texts testified.⁴⁸ Recently, as Wright explains, the push is more toward a synthesis of Jesus' sayings and deeds with reference to the first century Jewish context in which Jesus lived.⁴⁹ This approach offers a more complete historical understanding of Jesus and invites a greater theological evaluation of his actual aims. However Wright hints that questions about the ecclesial nature of Christ's person remain largely unanswered.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Who Was Jesus? pp. 2-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

The christological concerns in Thielicke's day had advanced beyond rediscovering the personality of Jesus, but Jesus as an individual still remained the focus. His uniqueness was explored using the new tools of textual criticism but his existence as a social being was not given much thought. Indeed, as will be discussed more in the following pages, this flaw remains apparent in present-day christology.⁵¹

What will be proposed here is that to be honest with the incarnation itself, the individualising bent of Thielicke's christology (and that of his era) must be re-evaluated with an eye on the innate social character of Jesus the human being. Not that there is anything wrong with exploring the uniqueness of Jesus as an individual. But when his individuality is explored to the exclusion of his life within community then the fuller picture of Christ suffers. As was stated previously, human beings were made to be social creatures. They suffer harm when they are isolated. A closer examination of Christ will discover an obvious and

⁵¹ This is not to say that present day christologies completely ignore corporate dimensions in the person of Christ. For instance N.T. Wright offers several observations in regard to the corporate nature of Christ. He points out that Christ and the Temple were one in the sense that "he (Jesus) was the place where Israel was to meet her God." (Who Was Jesus?, pp. 50-51); and again that the title "Son of God" was in the first century a title both for Israel and for the Messiah (Who Was Jesus? p. 79), which further advances the social/ecclesial connection between Christ and his people. Yet while these observations are made the amount of space devoted to exploring the deeper meaning of Christ's corporate nature remains fairly small. E.P. Sanders in The Historical Figure of Jesus (London: Penguin Books, 1993) notes similar corporate hints in Jesus life but passes by them quickly to explore broader concerns involving the individual uniqueness of Christ and his circumstances. Again John Dominic Crossan in The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991) devotes great space to exploring the cultural circumstances surrounding Jesus in the first century and tries then to explain Jesus' life accordingly but leaves questions of Christ's corporate nature unexplored.

multidimensional side to his existence as a social being and will force the case further for the need of a Theology of Presence.

One author has explained the human life as residing in what amounts to “nesting boxes” of human social settings. Human beings live in multi-layered societies from families to communities to cultures. There are different close-knit communities at the work place, worship place, and neighbourhood. There are loose-knit communities that arise around sporting events and shared group functions. To be a functioning human being is to find one’s place within these many social contexts. Despite the growing individualism of which we have spoken, there still remains a desire in postmodern people to find a place within this multiplicity of social contexts. People who claim their individualism do not in the end want to be isolated in it. By showing Christ as a social being, postmodern individuals can see him as one involved with the same “nesting box” structure in which they struggle to fit. Understanding Christ as a social being goes directly to Thieliicke’s desire of making the Christian message graspable at the level of concern where people actually live.

To begin our evaluation of Christ the social being we note that Matthew precedes the birth narrative with the genealogy of Jesus. Luke places a genealogy of Christ at what is usually thought of as the beginning point in Christ’s public ministry – his baptism. These genealogies are often understood as establishing Christ’s Davidic descent. This they do but, more than that, they also connect Christ to a line of humanity. He is not an alien born in isolation from the human

community but is one with humanity even to the point of having an identifiable human ancestry.

Secondly Christ was placed within the context of family. Much ink has been devoted to speculation about Christ's awakening self-consciousness and self-identification.⁵² When one approaches this issue from a more critical perspective, questioning the reliability of the sacred texts' witness to Christ's divinity, then the role of social influence on Jesus' self-identification becomes even more crucial. If Jesus was an ordinary human child then his Messianic self-understanding was wholly dependant on social, familial, and religious pressures. When Christ's awakening self-consciousness is seen from a more conservative perspective, without doubt as to his divinity or the biblical witness of his life, even then the place of social interaction is important. For example, conservative scholars could point to the role of Mary and Joseph in the formation of Jesus' self-understanding. Luke 2:19 records that "Mary pondered all these things in her heart."⁵³ It seems likely that in the close social/familial bonds of parent to child such remarkable information would have been shared with the boy Jesus at some point (admittedly this is highly speculative).

The point is that regardless of one's theological camp there is every reason to consider Christ's development in terms of a social being who drew in some way on

⁵² Thielicke discusses this topic in The Evangelical Faith, vol. 2, pp. 353-357. Thielicke states "If we take the humanity of Jesus seriously, the question of his self-consciousness necessarily arises." (p. 355)

⁵³ A similar statement is made of Mary following Jesus in the temple as a boy. Luke 2:51.

family and society⁵⁴ and not as one who defined himself through an isolated self-awakening. The New Testament records the various social interactions with the Jewish community that Jesus enjoyed as a child.⁵⁵ There is also the matter of Jesus growing up in the context of a town. Despite later apocryphal attempts to characterise Jesus' youth as remarkable, even supernatural,⁵⁶ the New Testament seems to imply that Jesus' younger years were so "human" within the town of his youth that the town's people could not accept his remarkable character later when he returned as an adult.⁵⁷ What precious little the Gospels do say about Jesus' youth would support the view that his childhood was understood by the Gospel

⁵⁴ One could also cite Jesus in the temple (Luke 2) learning from the teachers of the law as an example of social influence on his understanding. Yet conservative scholars would point out that even by this time the Christ child seems to understand himself as God's unique son: "I must be about My Father's business."

⁵⁵ His circumcision (Luke 2:21ff) is a social and religious bond. His yearly participation in Passover at Jerusalem (Luke 2:41) was also an opportunity for instruction and reflection in a social context.

⁵⁶ Cf. The Infancy Gospel of James (3rd or 4th century) where Christ's birth is more a matter of His miraculous appearing at Mary's breast after a bright light appears in the cave where Mary was (19:15-16). Salome's hand is devoured by flames after giving Mary a pelvic exam only to be healed by the infant Jesus (20:1-10). In the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (2nd or 3rd century) Jesus at age five purifies water in a stream and turns clay shaped into birds into living sparrows (Chapter 2), in a fit of rage causes a young boy to wither up (3:3), causes another boy to die for bumping into him (4:1-2), heals a group of people (8), raises a dead boy back to life (9:4-5), and heals an axe wound (10). At age six Jesus carries water in his cloak (11). At age 8 Jesus is said to have multiplied a measure of grain into a hundred measures (12:1-2) and stretched a board out that was cut too short (13:3). Other miracles attributed to the boy Jesus are also listed but not necessary to recite further. Cited from: Ronald F. Hock, The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas (California: Polebridge Press, 1995), pp. 33-77 and 104-143. Cf. also stories in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew which records all the animals constantly bowing to the Christ child and adoring him, the boy Jesus causing a palm tree to bend down over Mary and give up its fruit and pick up its roots to unplug a spring of water for them to drink. The Arabic Infancy Gospel is another source of supernatural stories of the boy Christ. These are found in J.K. Elliott, The Apocryphal Jesus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp. 23-30.

⁵⁷ Cf. Matthew 13:55ff., Mark 6:3ff., and Luke 4:22ff.

writers as relatively normal. He was subject to his parents in the context of the family and under their tutelage grew “in wisdom and stature.”⁵⁸

Some scholars have found it irresistible to use later apocryphal writings to press the social nature of Christ even further. Authors like Barbara Thiering and Bishop John Spong have pressed the social side of the incarnation to the point of claiming Jesus was married, but as N.T. Wright has shown the apocryphal evidence for such a claim is simply not plausible.⁵⁹

The New Testament image of Christ is not one of a man with antisocial tendencies. The Gospel accounts show Christ gathering disciples around him and being surrounded by crowds of desperate and needy people on a continual basis,⁶⁰ whereas prior to the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was subsumed within society to the point of being virtually “unknown.” After the start of his ministry an identifiable community formed around him.⁶¹ It is undeniable that a major part of

⁵⁸ Luke 2:52.

⁵⁹ Who Was Jesus? pp. 29-32. Thiering basis this claim on a citation in the third century Gnostic Gospel of Philip which speaks of Christ kissing Mary Magdalene on the mouth. Even if such a thing happened it was a normal social greeting and not a sign of sexual attraction. Cf. pp. 70, 90-91.

⁶⁰ Debate exists over the exact size of these crowds that surrounded Jesus. The Gospels speak of crowds that became exceedingly large, in excess of five thousand at times, yet others have argued that the crowds surrounding Jesus were fairly small. E.P. Saunders posits the view that a logical reason for Jesus’ execution from the perspective of Pilate and Caiaphas was that it was clear he could raise a substantial mob at will. E.P. Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 268.

⁶¹ The size of this following has been debated as E.P. Sanders notes in Jesus and Judaism. The evidence in the Gospels points to crowds varying in size but exceeding several thousand at times.

Jesus' life and ministry as recorded in the Gospels was spent firmly encased in this "nesting box" of social contexts. To seek Jesus then only in terms of his uniqueness and individuality and to focus on one's "personal encounter" with Jesus to the exclusion of recognising Christ as found in corporate contexts, seems arguably to be dishonest to the very nature of the incarnation.

To apply this information to Thielicke's christology may in a way be unfair to him. Thielicke's fixation on individuality in christology was after all not wholly his fault. Questions of knowing Christ according to his union with community were simply not asked in the popular christologies of the day. Yet in the present postmodern context it seems that such issues are pushed to the forefront.⁶² It is necessary in our day to ask, "What does it mean for Christianity to know Christ as a communal being?" Zizioulas and the Trinitarian theologians have asked what it means to know Christ according to his corporate nature within the Trinity, but they too seem to miss the issue of Christ within the "nesting boxes" of human social

⁶² David Brown in Tradition and Imagination speaks of "triggers" in the culture and thought of each era that causes the sacred texts to be revealed or interpreted in new ways. Such a "trigger" for recognizing the importance of community in the incarnation may be present in the plurality of postmodernism today. In Modernity and Postmodernity: Knowledge, Power and the Self, p. 120 Gerard Delanty argues, "The revival of community in sociological theory and political philosophy cannot be divorced from the return of community in global political culture. Indeed, it may be that community is becoming the universal ideology of our time and is usurping the idea of the social. The idea of community, after all, is more central to the social movements of the early twenty-first century than is society. The appeal to community was central to Bill Clinton's election campaign of 1992, and Tony Blair's election campaign of 1997 was very much articulated in terms of a neo-republican idea of community. The rhetoric of New Labour favours terms such as 'community' and 'nation' more than 'society.' If liberal individualism was the ideology of the 1980's, community was the ideology of the 1990's." Of course as other authors have warned, the danger of some of this political rhetoric of 'community' is that what is often encouraged is not dissimilar to mild strains of

community. The Social Gospel was an attempt to explore Christ as a social being, but it fell short by reducing Christ to the role of a social reconstructionist and the Gospel to a message of worldly reform. Issues of redemption, justification, and ecclesiology were left underdeveloped by the Social Gospel movement.

Thielicke's more common use of Christ's union with community is largely limited to a principle of sanctification. One loves the other because Christ is in that other. One loves the world and the human community because Christ died for the world and her people. But more than using Christ's universal love as a motivation for sanctification, there needs to be an effort to place Christ's being in community as a necessary part of the incarnation and as a necessary part of the very definition of community. Why was Christ joined to the human community? Why did he not simply live as a hermit sage and answer questions from passing truth seekers? Yet perhaps before an adequate answer can be given to those questions, a more fundamental question presents itself: "How do we as Christians understand community?"

The Christian perspective on the nature of community and society is markedly different from a secular understanding. It is more than a gathering of people with certain bonds of interest or ancestry. It is larger than geographical proximity. An interesting observation on the nature of community is offered by Rowan Williams in his article "Sacraments of the New Society" where he states:

... what constitutes our belonging together, morally and spiritually, is our corporate relation to God. That is to say that what unites us with other human beings is not common culture or negotiated terms

neo-fascism. Cf. Craig A. Loscalzo, [Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern Word](#) (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) pp. 18-19.

of co-operation or common aims, but something external to human community itself, the regard of God upon us. In the Book of Common Prayer's terms . . . we are either bound together by being 'seen' by God as distant, as strangers, or bound together in a common assurance that we are received, affirmed, adopted.⁶³

Williams provides us with a logical extension of Thielicke's isolation of the individual before God. The element of "before God (or Christ)" remains constant, but the matter of self-definition moves from the "I" before God to the "we" before God. This corollary to Thielicke's method draws strength from the very nature of the incarnation where Christ manifested himself to "peoples" or "communities" and not primarily to singular individuals. Christ's joining to the nesting box structures of human society goes far beyond reasons for sanctification with others; it becomes a way to define community and a way of understanding the self.

In the incarnation there was either the community around Jesus that drew new life from him as its Saviour, or there was the community standing apart from Jesus rejecting him as Saviour. In our existence as social beings we too are either joined to a community wherein Christ's salvific presence is manifest⁶⁴ or we are joined to a community standing against him. The incarnation then does not simply define who we think Christ was but ultimately defines who we are as a people. Certainly Thielicke's more individualistic views of personhood can find a place in this evaluation. Those who are joined to a community for or against Christ are then

⁶³ Rowan Williams, "Sacraments of the New Society," in Christ: The Sacramental Word, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), p. 93.

⁶⁴ In mind here is Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (NKJV) This promise is set within the context of the giving of the office of the keys and the binding and loosing of sins. Thus there are strong sacramental overtones in this christological presence.

individually standing for or against Christ. Definition in relation to Christ's presence is not either community or individual but both. However, what is being proposed here is that one's personal definition in relation to Christ flows from one's relationship to the community surrounding him; not as Thielicke suggests, flowing first from one's individual encounter with Christ and only secondarily from one's relationship with the community of faith.

7.3 Joining a Social Perspective to an Individualised World

Thus far we have suggested changes in focus toward more corporate ideas of being. We have shown weaknesses in Thielicke's individualisation and positive directives from Thielicke's approach to help in our postmodern context. What remains is to apply these shifts of idea to practical circumstances. We would point out that this too is very much in keeping with Thielicke's wishes for the Church. His distaste for purely dogmatic forms of theology that failed to offer practical help have been well documented in our thesis so far.

In seeking practical applications for corporate christological being we take heed to a warning given by Martin Heidegger:

Only ages that really no longer believe in the true greatness of the task of theology arrive at the pernicious opinion that, through a supposed refurbishment with the help of philosophy, a theology can be gained or even replaced, and can be made more palatable to the need of the age.⁶⁵

As Heidegger points out there is a fine line between addressing current needs in philosophy with theology and altering theology to fit prevailing philosophies.

⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 8.

While one could argue that Thielicke's individualisation is the result of philosophical influences on his theology, and perhaps even an attempt to make current theology more palatable to prevailing philosophy, one cannot deny that the christological principle upon which his human ontology is based prevents his approach from being swallowed by philosophy.

Thielicke sought always to make this christological principle a matter of real life application for the people. Even as he wrestled with difficult philosophical debates, he did so in such a way as to involve people at the grassroots level and not just in the halls of academia. One finds Thielicke bringing numerous philosophical concerns into his sermons and addressing them in the hearing of the common *Volk*.⁶⁶ It was his desire that common people would learn how the christological principle actually overcame pure philosophy as the ground for human being, and that they would themselves be spared from being swallowed by secular philosophy.

The central place of this christological principle in Thielicke's mind as he addressed his thoughts to the common people are worthy of re-emphasis:

⁶⁶ As an example from his sermons one finds Thielicke confronting numerous philosophers: In Christ and the Meaning of Life, Kant is discussed on pp. 111, 112, 117, Sartre on page 148, Kierkegaard on p. 92, Lessing on p. 11; In Life Can Begin Again, Sartre is discussed on p. 168, Kant on pp. xii, xiii, 89; In How to Believe Again, Kierkegaard is referenced on pp. 134, 147, 164, Pascal on pp. 11, 12, 13, 17, Kant on pp. 32, 134, 142, Sartre is found on p. 196; In I Believe the Christian Creed, Marx is addressed on pp. 122, 224, 244, 248, Kirkegaard on pp. 144, 183, Lessing on pp. 50, 58, 152, 153, 168; In Faith the Great Adventure, one finds reference to the ideas of Kant on pp. 56, 136 and Lessing on p. 112. Not all these references reflect a conscious wrestling with issues of individualisation but they do demonstrate a wrestling with the ultimate questions of philosophy itself. A number of these references do show how philosophical matters pertinent to the "I" were of great concern for Thielicke (esp. Christ and the Meaning of Life, pp. 11, 111, 112; How to Believe Again, pp. 17, 130, 134, 147, 196; Faith the Great Adventure, p. 136).

Indeed, the very image of man – we can even say the very concept of humanity – is not plain to me outside of Christ. If I seek it apart from him, what I come up with is simply the ideal of man in conflict with himself, or the ideal of the beautiful soul, or a labor factor, or a vital potency, or one of the many other variants. What these all have in common is that they construct their image not from what man was at creation and what he is intended to be but from what he presently is; they take fallen man as their model and idealized him. The image which God has of us men has taken form in the humanity of Jesus Christ . . . What man is, I know only in the face of the humanity of Jesus Christ. To become a man is to share in this humanity of Jesus Christ. It is to grow into the union with the Father which Jesus Christ ‘is’ in virtue of his being the God-man. To grow into humanity is to grow into Jesus Christ.⁶⁷

Thielicke’s statement about “growing into Christ” is not tightly defined, but within his statement there is a distinct need of Christ as the defining element for understanding human being, and indeed, for understanding daily life. The challenge for the Church is to present a christological and corporate concept of being in such a way that it accomplishes what Thielicke sought to accomplish in reaching the common people at the grassroots level, and that it does so in such a way as to avoid being overcome by the world’s philosophies.

7.3a The “Social” Ministry of the Church

It goes without saying that Christ’s social existence meant involvement and care with real needs of people. From healing sicknesses to feeding thousands, Jesus directly connected relief for the physical burdens of the people with oral proclamation. This simple combination of physical charity with spiritual care gives shape to the ongoing christological presence in the world.

⁶⁷ Theological Ethics, vol. 2, pp. 613-614.

The fact that this combined focus of physical healing and oral teaching is mentioned in Luke 9 (vs. 1ff) as part of the authority Christ gave the twelve, and was further confirmed by the Church in the establishment of a deaconal office in Acts 6, shows the early Church recognised this combination as essential to ongoing christological proclamation. This also sets the exercise of Christian charity and love in a communal and practical context. Charity was not merely the ethical act of the individual in his or her unique sphere of influence but the duty of the Church in the midst of the world.

The marriage between the proclaimed Gospel and social ethics has not always been an easy one. Overemphasis on the Church's expression of charity in society has led to various shades of "Social Gospel" which effectively turn Christ into a social reformer or liberator and not a Saviour from sin and wrath. Conversely, overemphasis on the isolated proclamation of the Gospel within the confines of the Church proper has led to a kind of dogmatism that seems unconcerned with the people in the world around it. Matthew Harrison offers the following observations about the need for a proper balance:

I'm convinced, on the basis of the New Testament, that there is a threefold reality in the life of the church as church. All three hang inseparably together. The church must be on about proclamation of the gospel of Christ (*martyria*). In fact, to the extent that any mission of the church ceases this proclamation of the vicarious atonement of Christ and salvation by grace through faith, or alters this definition of the gospel, it ceases to be Christian. Second, the church must be on about worship (*leitourgia*). Proclamation produces faith in Christ, and draws the faithful into the full sacramental life of the church. Wherever the church would have a 'mission' or endeavor which is not clearly flowing from, to, and connected with altar, font and pulpit, that mission is sectarian at best, and non-Christian at its worst. Third, wherever the church breathes in the blessed gospel and sacraments, she cannot but exhale mercy and love toward the neighbor (*diakonia*) *Diakonia* is as much a part of the church's life as good works are a part of the life

of faith. This applies to Christians both individually and collectively. Wherever these three realities of the church's life are not functioning in balance, there is a truncation of the church's life, and a diminution of its mission.⁶⁸

In an article Harrison wrote after he penned these comments he clarifies the shape of this christological charity by emphasising the unconditional nature of the gift.⁶⁹ His point is that charity, to be Christian, should not engage in a dishonest "bait and switch," portraying itself as the giver of unconditional help but in reality using charity as an evangelism tool. One sees this with certain soup kitchens that give help but demand those in need sit and listen to a sermon first, or promise to come to Church, or confess a certain belief in Christ. Harrison writes:

The church doesn't reach out to those in need because it's a guaranteed way to fill pews. Proclaiming Jesus and loving our neighbor has to do with who and what the church is as the body of Christ.⁷⁰

Any christology which takes seriously Christ as a social being must in turn take seriously this work of "deaconal" care for and in society. This has been important for Lutheranism historically. Luther spoke of the importance of care for the community⁷¹ and drew up plans for the ongoing care of the poor and needy in

⁶⁸ Matthew Harrison, "The Church's Role of Mercy in the Community," Lecture given at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, 2000. p. 2.

⁶⁹ Matthew Harrison, "The Church Is a Mercy Place!" The Lutheran Witness, November 2002, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ LW 52:223, "Both nature and God's ordinances teach that since people have to live together as a community, they must pool their interests and carry common burdens on a common back, undertake common work with common hands; in this way they are bound together by the common needs of a common life. Contrary to this, the pope and canon law uphold *privilegia, libertates, immunitates, indulta, gratias*, and obvious exemptions, and he and his servants avail themselves of the

Leisnig.⁷² In these plans known as “The Ordinance of a Common Chest,” Luther defines the impetus for communal charity in christological terms. Love for the other flows not from law but from Christ and His love for us.⁷³ The manifestation of that love must include care of widows, orphans, the poor, church workers, and the elderly.⁷⁴ Luther saw this social interaction as including even the maintenance of bridges, schools, and hospitals.⁷⁵ More important than his recognition of charity as a communal act of the Church is his understanding of this charity flowing from the liturgical/sacramental life of the Church. Carter Lindberg explains Luther’s view that “communal service to the neighbor is the continuation of worship in the world, that social ethics is the liturgy after the liturgy.”⁷⁶ As evidence of this one finds Luther pointing to the apostolic practice of gathering gifts for the needy at the time of the mass,⁷⁷ and statements that the collects before and after the mass were prayers spoken over the gifts for the poor as they were being gathered.⁷⁸

advantages of the goods but let others undertake the common work and shoulder the common burdens. . . . They want to be socially uncommitted and to have special privileges, and so St. Paul calls them *aspondos*, those who refuse social commitment, those who are antisocial . . .”

⁷² LW 45:169-194.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-191.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁷⁶ Carter Lindberg, “Luther’s Concept of Offering,” *Dialogue*, Fall 1996, vol. 35, no. 4, p. 251.

⁷⁷ LW 35:94.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Later during the age of Lutheran orthodoxy, which is often considered as a time of preoccupation with cold dogmatism, Johann Gerhard⁷⁹ went so far as to make social charity an essential mark of the office of the public ministry.⁸⁰

Even today charity remains vital to Lutheran christology. Harrison quotes “The Not-for-Profit Times” as reporting that Lutheran Services in America are the largest not-for-profit umbrella in America with a combined budget of nearly 7 billion dollars.⁸¹ So even though dogmatics texts do not often highlight charity as an arm of christology, Lutheran practice has made diaconal service paramount. In practice charity is the natural consequence and the worldly expression of Christ’s incarnate presence within the Word and sacraments of the Church.

The ingrained individualistic philosophy of those who are part of the postmodern Church presents difficulties in establishing an understanding of communal ethics as a natural part of christology. Social observers have noted that

⁷⁹ Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) a recognized scholar, writer, and church father of early Lutheranism.

⁸⁰ Iohannis Gerhardi, *Theologi Quondam Jenesis Celeberrimi Locorum Theologicorum, Tomus Decimus Tertius. Denuo Edidit, Variisque Observationibus adavxit Io. Fridericus Cotta, Theologus Tubingensis. Tubingae, Sumtibus Jo. Georgii Cottae. MDCCLXXV, para. CCLXXXIX, p. 114.* [the following unpublished translation is given by Matthew Harrison] “The seventh officium of ministers is care for the needy (*pauperum cura*) and visitation of the elderly. That which pertains to the care for the needy must not be considered alien to himself by the minister of the church: 1) since Christ in his ministry maintained the most sincere concern for the needy: John XIII.29: 2) Paul gave directions (ordinations) concerning the collections for use by the saints, in the churches of Galatia and Corinth: 1 Cor. 16:1; Gal. II.9, . . . 3) Since in the ancient church the *agapai* or public meals for the use of the needy were instituted by the ministers from the collections. . .”

⁸¹ Matthew C. Harrison, “The Church’s Role of Mercy in the Community,” p. 3.

even when postmodern individuals seek community what they are seeking is not a sacrificial community willing to give freely to the other, but a conglomeration of individuals who are not especially committed to the other.

Bellah et al. (1985) discovered that as they interviewed people throughout the United States there was a strong longing for community, but the language used to discuss the notion of community was often individualistic and psychological. They found community individualized in an attempt to escape the demands of "the other."⁸²

What the individualism of postmodern culture does understand and appreciate (albeit to extremes) is individual worth. Active social charity answers the postmodern yearning for individual importance without yielding to individualism. Each person, even those of unusually depressed social status, become vitally important to Christ and to the community of the Church, so much so that those of higher social status are willing to make personal sacrifices for them. A visible role in social charity seizes upon an essential positive element in the postmodern consciousness. In so doing it invites postmodern people to examine its christological motivation at more depth.

As social charity is examined in terms of its christology, the inherent message of the act shows more than a desire to imitate Christ outwardly; it expresses a core element of the incarnation as an event that defines individuals in relation and love to others. Communion with Christ then has as its counterpart communion with

⁸² Josina M. Makau and Ronald C. Arnett, Communication Ethics in an Age of Diversity (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 29.

others in a self-sacrificing way. One cannot rightly know Christ in isolated individualism.⁸³

Though we have made much of Thielicke's individualising christology, his passion for the concrete situation of humanity readily supports active charity and sacrifice for others. He wants Christianity to touch the real daily lives of ordinary people to help deliver them from the hardships of their "all too human" flesh. This compassionate heart of the theologian is especially apparent in his travel diary, Voyage to the Far East. In this volume Thielicke relates the events of a cruise that took him to ports at Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Yokohama, to name a few. Thielicke's eye is constantly on the people around him. He buys drinks for young sailors as a way of getting to know them more personally and of understanding their lives. He notes the sins with which they struggle in port and ponders practical alternatives to help them avoid such sins. He shows concern for his fellow passengers and for those he visits on shore.⁸⁴ It is obvious that his theology flows from a genuine love for other people. He not only sees their spiritual predicament he searches for ways to alleviate their troubles.⁸⁵ This heart of genuine compassion

⁸³ 1 John 3:17.

⁸⁴ Helmut Thielicke, Voyage to the Far East, trans. By John W Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp. 16, 48-49, 81, 112-113, 116, 119, 129, 174, and 177.

⁸⁵ One particular pastor's approach in Hong Kong caught Thielicke's eye. He would invite young sailors from the streets into well kept rooms where they could read or talk. Young people from the city were there to talk with them. He had some Bible reading but not in a forced atmosphere. In the evening young women were invited to come for dancing and conversation, but then asked to return home a half hour before the men left, so as to avoid adulterous situations. To Thielicke's surprise the young sailors responded well to this and gladly sought out the pastor at later visits (Voyage to the Far East, pp. 112-113). Thielicke noted a genuine love and concern in the heart of the pastor for the lives of these young men – a concern

for the real needs of others is a timeless element in christology and as such must remain prominent in the Churches' interaction with postmodern people.

7.3b Solutions in Liturgical Structure

In chapter two we noted Thieliicke's concern that the liturgy not be abused either by re-creation or by innovation. We noted how he did in fact see the liturgy as important in building community. Thieliicke however did not develop these thoughts into any kind of strategy for furthering his christological goals. Here we intend to take Thieliicke's observations further by exploring the liturgy as an answer to Thieliicke's double concern of reaching those outside the Church and connecting to people at the root of their needs. We will also show how the liturgy helps focus the postmodern participant away from an individualistic mindset.

How the Church treats the individual and furthers the notion of ecclesial community is not a trivial matter but goes to the very heart of what the Church is; and nowhere does the Church express these matters more clearly than in her liturgical conversation with God. It is there in the liturgical action that the Church implicitly and explicitly defines the relationship of her members to the present cultural conditions. Though the following quotation from Miroslav Volf does not directly speak to the liturgy, his words do voice concern that the Church often fails to recognize her function of challenging the currents and views of the day in conflict with the faith.

Our coziness with the surrounding culture has made us so blind to many of its evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own versions of them – in God's name and with a good

that expressed itself in a unique and genuine approach to charity which freely gave and witnessed to Christ but did not make its given conditional.

conscience. Those who refuse to be party to our mimicry we brand sectarians. . . Cultural identity insinuates itself with religious force; Christian and cultural commitments merge. Such sacralization of cultural identity is invaluable for the parties in conflict because it can transmute what is in fact a murder into an act of piety.⁸⁶

When the liturgy is seen as a vehicle for bringing a different worldview to the people, the form and character of her public liturgical voice becomes important. Thielicke recognizes the importance of liturgy and sees the combination of liturgy and preaching as essential for one's understanding of Church, Christ,⁸⁷ and self.⁸⁸ It is disappointing then that Thielicke does not develop his ideas in any detail and does not draw his thoughts about the liturgy into the christology of his sermons.

The liturgy is also important from the perspective of missionary zeal. We identified Thielicke's passion for reaching lost and hurting souls in our previous section. Discussion of the liturgy must take into account how well suited the Church's liturgical expressions are for bringing Christ to those unfamiliar with the Church. Does the historic liturgy invite or repulse those outside the Church? Is it an historic curiosity or a source of spiritual help and nurture?

Debates over the liturgy demonstrate wide differences of opinion about the function and nature of the liturgy in its relationship to community. There are those

⁸⁶ Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 36-37.

⁸⁷ In The Trouble with the Church, (p. 99) Thielicke likens the marriage between the liturgy and the sermon to that of the divine and human natures in Christ; the liturgy with all its splendour and beauty portrays the divinity of Christ while the sermon with all its gritty earthiness is like unto Christ's humanity.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-101.

who argue that the historic liturgy is a mere technique for communicating the Gospel and that the ritualistic “performance” of it discourages community.⁸⁹ Their point is that such ritual encourages only the promulgation of tradition while more non-liturgical styles promote vibrant community building and encourage personal relationships. As evidence of this they point to the rapid growth of community churches in America that offer very little of the traditional liturgical ritual.⁹⁰

Among American Lutherans there has been a fairly heated debate about whether or not historic forms should be maintained or discarded in favour of more “contemporary forms.” Within my own Church body (The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod) there are those who have begun using terms like “missionaries” and “guardians” to describe the different liturgical camps. “Missionaries,” it is suggested, care about the lost and are willing to adapt to forms more suited to those outside the Church; “guardians” care only about preserving the past and will not change ritualistic form for the sake of souls – suggesting of course than anyone wishing to maintain the historic liturgy cares nothing for souls!

Recently a book was published by a source often cited as supportive of more free-form contemporary expressions of worship; in it Thom S. Rainer, Dean of the

⁸⁹ Timothy D. May, “The Liturgy: A Place for Relationships,” Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology vol. XI, No. 1 (Epiphany 2002), pp. 56-58.

⁹⁰ Even within American Lutheranism there are strong currents moving the stylistic emphasis away from ideas of “reverence” and “devotion” toward ideas of “praise” and “enjoyment.” Organs are giving way to contemporary bands. The Theology of the Cross is giving way to a constant focus on glory. Creeds are dismissed because they smack of traditionalism. The Lord’s Prayer is not used because it suggests vain repetition. Liturgical elements such as the Te Deum are cast aside in favour of tunes and lyrics that are snappier and more “praise” oriented. Even American Church architecture reflects design that revolves around a “stage area” where entertainers perform instead of around an altar where Christ is present.

Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth, interviewed over 300 people who were previously unchurched and had joined a Christian congregation within the past several years. He enquired about their reasons for joining a Christian Church. What he found was that only 11% of those interviewed were influenced by the particular style of liturgical worship.⁹¹ Which liturgical style attracted them was not revealed. What was revealed was that the form of liturgical expression mattered less than the sense of orderliness and purpose it conveyed.⁹² The claims then that the historic liturgy conveys a sense of musty formalism that repulses postmodern people is simply unfounded. The unavoidable conclusion of Rainer's study is that in order for the liturgy to be effective in reaching beyond the borders of the Church one does not have to "contemporise" it, but simply make it clear in its purpose and order.

Our other concern when addressing the liturgy goes to the matter of its effectiveness in overcoming negative individualism and conveying a more communal understanding of christology. Sociologist Kieran Flanagan has taken up this question in his book Sociology and Liturgy: Re-presentations of the Holy. There Flanagan argues that the historic liturgical praxis, so full of ritual and structure, is more beneficial for building community than non-ritualistic liturgical forms. The reforms of Vatican II were mild in comparison with many postmodern liturgical "re-workings," yet even in this mild form Flanagan argues that the approach to reform was based on faulty sociology:

⁹¹ Thom S. Rainer, Surprising Insights from the Unchurched (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 21.

⁹² Ibid. p. 102.

The changes in liturgical renewal endorsed in the Vatican II documents were based on a narrowly conceived and inadequate sociology where functional relational aspects of ritual were endorsed. As Luis Maldonado noted, there was an obsessive concern in the key document on Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, that rites should be simple, brief, facile and clear. The Council sanctioned a deficient set of sociological assumptions and launched these in a society, whose cultural assumptions, in the late 1960s, underwent a revolution that denied what they had endorsed. Efforts to make rites relevant made them curiously irrelevant.⁹³

The faulty set of assumptions, as Flanagan goes on to describe, are rooted in the belief that the value of rite lies in its being better understood.⁹⁴ The reforms of Vatican II were based on the belief that culture seeks that which is intellectually oriented, and that which is identifiable, provable, quantifiable, and explainable. These traits are often seen as more modern than postmodern, yet many postmodern liturgical re-constructionists continue to champion these as the necessary guiding principles for liturgical reform. There is perhaps a tension within postmodernism where people seek to live in two worlds, so to speak, yearning for a sense of the metaphysical and non-quantifiable, yet demanding intellectual appropriation of all truths. The demand for intellectual appropriation when applied to the liturgy often leads to a diminishing of liturgical practice to the most basic elements and a forsaking of numerous historic forms.

Flanagan's contention is that this approach (focusing on the intellectual "understandability" of the liturgy) leads to judging the sacred by the methods and assumptions of the secular. Volf's warning about the "sacralization" of cultural

⁹³ Kieran Flanagan, Sociology and Liturgy: Re-presentations of the Holy (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1991), p. 38.

⁹⁴ Not surprisingly an idea that Thielicke shares. Cf. The Trouble with the Church, pp. 102-103.

identity is particularly poignant in this debate. The need for provability and intellectual appropriation arises out of a culture more concerned with the individual than with the community. Intellectual “graspability” is foundational for the individual but not as much so for the community. Flanagan goes on to say:

. . . Franklin comments on Guéranger’s ‘rediscovery of the liturgy as an instrument for the destruction of individualism. For the first time in centuries there was a definition of prayer as a social act’. Most importantly, the quest for community was tied into mystery rather than rationality. It involved the community in an act of reaching beyond the purely material and human to an order that transcended these elements.⁹⁵

Individualism has pressed the liturgical presentation toward an anthropological view that seeks greater meaning through rational means. Yet as Flanagan argues sociology bears out that community is not built from intellectualisation but by sharing an experience beyond itself which may not be explainable. Flanagan quotes Ratzinger who said:

Many people have felt and said the liturgy must be ‘made’ by the whole community if it is really to belong to them. Such an attitude has led to the ‘success’ of the liturgy being measured by its effects at the level of spectacle and entertainment. It is to lose sight of what is *distinctive* to the liturgy, which does not come from what *we do* but from the fact that something is *taking place* here that all of us together cannot ‘make’.⁹⁶

Certainly questions about the meaning of the liturgy must be asked. To claim as Flanagan does, that the power of community inherent in the liturgy is not based on one’s ability to understand it intellectually does not mean that the deeper meaning of the liturgy should remain hidden. Instead what it means is that the historic ritualistic forms of the liturgy must be carefully governed, weighing the importance

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

of the power of the rite as mystery and the ability of each individual to understand every element of that rite. That the liturgy should be so reduced to a simplistic level where everyone can understand its elements is an approach that simply does not foster community but rather individualism.

The historic liturgy does provide unique and important avenues for building the christological community and shaping the mind around the mystery of the present Christ. Thielicke speaks of the liturgy as providing a “stationary element nourished by tradition” to the Church.⁹⁷ But the liturgy is more than an anchor to the ancient Church. It is also an expression of the present Christ. The very nature of the historic liturgy bespeaks an awe before a God who is present among his people. The liturgical building toward the Eucharistic encounter with the flesh and blood of Christ is difficult if not impossible to quantify, yet on a level above the intellectual mind this movement is perceptible and shared by all. The very mysterious nature of this movement and the shared inability to put it in exact words binds the community together in a common experience.

Early on in this thesis it was noted that one of the most prominent christological methods in Thielicke’s sermons is his use of “open metaphor” (which will become important in our concluding section). This method applied so well by Thielicke to the spoken word is just as important in conveying the deep spiritual truths contained in the liturgy. The liturgy is itself in a way an open metaphor inviting wonder and contemplation. It is not a metaphor in the sense of only being a sign pointing beyond itself but rather in the sense of also pointing beyond itself.

⁹⁷ The Trouble with the Church, p. 97.

Timelessness and holiness are two liturgical characteristics that bespeak something of the nature of God. The corporate exercise of the liturgy testifies to the corporate nature of Christ as an ecclesial and social being. Liturgy is not a metaphor for the subjective individual mind and intellect alone, but for the very heart and soul of the community that experiences a taste of the mystery of the present Christ enfolded within the liturgy.

Vatican II has much to commend it in striving to draw people into the notion of ecclesiological community. It sought to do this by reworking the liturgical forms while maintaining the basic liturgical structure.⁹⁸ In “The Constitution On the Sacred Liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) of 1963, the reforms of the Mass reveal the issue of intellectual “understandability” on the one hand and the desire to build community on the other. Certainly as Vatican II points out there is a sense where “understandability” can prove helpful toward building the christological community.⁹⁹ But this is not to say that in achieving this “understandability,” one must sacrifice the power of metaphor and mystery and give up the historic liturgy.

⁹⁸ Cf. Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 5.

⁹⁹ Cf. Chapter I, under III. “The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy,” para. 21 “In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community.” Para. 27 “It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, so far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private.” Para. 30 “To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.” Chapter II para. 48, “The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a

The desire on the part of Vatican II that individuals should better understand themselves as the body of Christ is a worthwhile hope in the postmodern context. The debate over Vatican II seems to involve more the matter of how this understanding is achieved. Flanagan obviously thinks the forms themselves need not be radically changed to convey the idea of the christological community. While acknowledging the need for liturgical enculturation, and further acknowledging the need for the words of the liturgy to be understood by the laity, this thesis agrees in principle with Flanagan. The dignity and awe of the liturgical conversation inherent in the historic forms best acknowledges the mystery of the presence of Christ, and through the power of that mystery and presence the liturgy builds up the community of faith in a shared un-quantifiable experience.

Before we leave the discussion of the liturgy, it is worth noting that the “ritualistic” nature of the liturgy provides us with a tool for fulfilling a major concern of Thielicke’s, namely of reaching people “where they are.” If one looks at Thielicke’s method in general terms, one finds him seeking points of contact with people that are built on their already existing inclinations. Thielicke’s criticisms of missionary efforts in Japan stand as an example; he believes Christendom would fare better among the Japanese if missionaries stressed less of the Western

good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”

incarnational/sacramental theology, which he sees as alien to Japanese thought, and gave greater attention to allowing the Japanese to “arrive at their own elemental encounter with Christ.”¹⁰⁰ Regardless of one’s agreement or disagreement with his conclusions, his strategy is clear: expose that which is already present in the internal make-up of the hearers and build on it.

Liturgy as ritual is one such point of contact with something inherent within human beings. Ritual is found throughout the world in every known culture. It is in itself a form of communication or “communicative action” that touches human beings at a level deeper than simple cognitive apprehension.

Ritual facilitates several forms of communication at the same time. These differ from ordinary, discursive forms of communication in being both richer and less direct. They are both multilayered, in other words, and compact. Typically, their function is not so much to transmit information but to communicate self-recognition, intense and ambivalent feelings, moral principles and invocations.¹⁰¹

Ritual reaches into nearly every aspect of cultural life. As an example one could point to fan activity during organised sport as evidence of ritual; fans “doing the wave” and singing team songs at football matches are ritual. In America the “tail-gate” party prior to American football games has become ingrained in the culture of American football. In college sport especially ritual is seen as a necessary part of the total game experience.¹⁰² Ritual is not foreign to humanity but part of

¹⁰⁰ Voyage to the Far East, p. 175. (Cf. pp. 174-179).

¹⁰¹ Frederick Bird, “Ritual as Communicative Action,” in Ritual and Ethnic Identity: A Comparative Study of the Social Meaning of Liturgical Ritual in Synagogues, ed. Jack N. Lightstone and Frederick B. Bird (Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), p. 39.

¹⁰² The pageantry of pre-game and post-game festivities at University of Notre Dame football games is described in detail by Leonel L. Mitchell and used as an

mankind's natural expression of community. Mary Jo Deegan, in The American Ritual Tapestry writes that:

Rituals create a community stage for cultural experience, symbols, and values. They can generate, change, destroy, and maintain meaning, and in the U.S.A. they can engage in these processes simultaneously and rapidly.¹⁰³

As Deegan suggests, the role of ritual is a complex one. It can create meaning and reflect already existing meaning simultaneously. It can engage the mind but touch the soul at a level that cannot be understood. In order for ritual to be truly effective within a community a certain amount of shared experience and meaning is necessary. In reaching those outside the Church the extent of that shared experience may be minimal but it still remains. Though the deeper meaning of rites and liturgies may not be understood, the non-church goer may well grasp the reverent attitude, solemnity, and awe of the ritual. Thoughts such as otherness, holiness, respect, transcendence, importance and sincerity can be communicated through liturgical ritual even to those who may not yet understand basic Christian doctrine.

Mircea Eliade takes this one step further by suggesting that ritual, even when it takes place in non-religious people, betrays a suppressed memory of religious ritual:

Modern nonreligious man assumes a new existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. . . . But the modern man who feels and claims that he is nonreligious still retains a large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals. As we remarked earlier, the festivities that go with the New Year or with taking up

example of popular yet "extremely formal" ritual in college sports. Leonel L. Mitchell, The Meaning of Ritual (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 118-120.

¹⁰³ Mary Jo Deegan, The American Ritual Tapestry (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 3.

residence in a new house, although laicised, still exhibit the structure of a ritual of renewal. The same phenomenon is observable in the merrymaking that accompanies a marriage or the birth of a child or obtaining a new position or a social advancement, and so on.¹⁰⁴

His thoughts are obviously debatable, but even if he is correct to a degree then ritual becomes a strong point of contact for further outreach to the secular world.

While ritual itself is inherent in human nature, appreciation for any given ritual grows as one establishes his or her place within that community. Shared understanding across a broad range of values and doctrines makes the purpose and richness of a particular ritual clearer. As Bird writes:

When people enact a ritual . . . they do so not only because they think of it in terms of drama, something desirable or entertaining, but also because they think of it in terms of morality, something that ought to be done.¹⁰⁵

Thielicke recognized the importance of building that common understanding in society by offering adult catechetical sessions to the general public.¹⁰⁶ His intent was education for a better understanding of one's personal Christ encounter, but

¹⁰⁴ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. By Willard R Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), pp. 203-205.

¹⁰⁵ Ritual and Ethnic Identity, p. 27. In the following article, Katherine Platt, "Ritual and the Symbolic Geography of Community," in On Community, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp.106-107, the author relates her own Muslim ritualistic heritage and observes: "One's identity as a man, a woman, and a Muslim of good reputation and right practice is established and renewed through a series of life cycle rituals and annual Islamic holidays. . . . the rituals must take place in a context of shared meanings, shared information, and shared standards of evaluation. The place of origin reliably provides such a context for those both in and of the place of origin. As such the place, itself, becomes a powerful symbol of orthopraxy, especially for those who live away.

¹⁰⁶ Notes from a Wayfarer, pp. 149-153.

what he did inadvertently was build the common understanding necessary for ritualistic appreciation. Had his focus included a stronger directive toward the Church and her worship, his catechetical efforts may have had a more profound effect on strengthening the Christian community.

This discussion of ritual as an important form of communication and as a continuation of Thielicke's desire to reach those outside the Church will gain importance in the concluding section of this chapter which deals with the role of semiotics in combating individualism. Ritual is the semiotic expression of the community, and when applied to ecclesiological expressions one may even suggest that ritual becomes a semiotic form of divine communication. As the voice of the community ritual provides a powerful tool against individualism and subjective atomisation. As the voice of God ritual communicates the soteriological action of Christ.

In America the aversion to ritual may have its origin in the puritanical and iconoclastic roots of American Protestantism. Yet as others have pointed out, those who complain about the formal rituals of the Church show no aversion to participating in the rituals of the secular world around them. Formal ritual in the Church is not a problem when engaging the secular world; just the opposite, it may hold a critical role in the solution.

7.3c Emphasising the Communal Aspects of Common Rites

Ritual gains depth and breadth as it gains history. The more recent the innovation of any particular ritual the less mass appeal it will have. As we search for ways to

overcome the effects of negative individualism with a clearer view of the christological “we,” I suggest not inventing new rituals that better stress communion but recognizing the existing opportunities within more traditional liturgical rituals.

As an example, earlier it was noted that Thieliicke complained of a magical view of baptism. People would bring their child to be baptised and then would not set foot in the Church again until it was time for that child to be married. The fulfilment of the rite became an excuse for a self-defined life apart from the Church. Thieliicke’s solution, as we discussed previously, was to dispense with the historic practice of infant baptism. Instead of such a radical solution, the problem (which still exists) can be addressed in other ways that do not do violence to the rite (and the doctrine of infant baptism surrounding it). One way would be to insist on a brief period of catechesis for the parents prior to the act of baptism. Such issues as the union of the baptised to the body of Christ and the mystical indwelling of the person of Christ could be discussed. The parents’ own separation from that body and from Christ who is present within his Church could thus be explored and better direction given.

The importance of directly addressing this matter with people is made more urgent in consideration of the phenomenon of “implicit religion” (a term now being used to describe the religious life of those who do not attend corporate worship but who are involved in regular prayer, listening to religious broadcasting, and reading religious materials). This phenomenon elicits both hope and trepidation. Trepidation because unless all those bringing children to be baptised are instructed

in the meaning of faith as corporate existence, it is only matter of time until people start baptising their own children and celebrating their own private forms of the Eucharist. Yet there is hope, because as they are still clinging to the importance of private devotion, they have not totally abandon religion. It may be easier for the Church to redirect their misunderstandings than to recreate what is no longer present.

This should further instruct the Church to address the wisdom of private baptisms. If part of the message of one's baptism is union with the people of God in Christ, then the location and "audience" for the event of this union itself is important.¹⁰⁷ Private baptisms send a mixed signal that makes appreciation for the true union of the baptised with the Saviour and his people more difficult.¹⁰⁸ Further it separates the sacrament from the overall context of the liturgy of the worshipping community, which as both Flanagan and our discussion on ritual point out is a powerful tool in building community.

Similarly the rites for marriages and funerals are often separated from the regular liturgy of the Church, made matters for immediate friends and family, and not necessarily seen as including the Church as the body of Christ. Efforts could be made to bring these gradually within the context of the regular worshipping

¹⁰⁷ Cf. fn. 104 where Katherine Platt speaks of the importance of location for the overall orientation of ritual.

¹⁰⁸ John Zizioulas notes similar thoughts about the necessary corporate nature of the Eucharist. He states, "The Eucharist . . . is unthinkable without the gathering of the whole Church in one place, that is, without an event of communion." Being and Communion (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 22.

community (especially in smaller parishes where there are fewer marriages and funerals). What better way to emphasise the idea of two being made one flesh in marriage than to set that marriage within the gathering of faith wherein the many members become one body (i.e. the regular Sunday morning worshipping community)? What better way to build the foundation for union between husband and wife than surrounded by the historic liturgy which itself builds union through the shared experience of the christological mystery? When possible funerals too could be brought into the regular worship of the Church so that the community of faith in which the person lived could together celebrate the joining of one of its own with the unseen community of heavenly saints. If joining these “extra” services to a typical Sunday morning worship proves too difficult (especially in larger parishes), then perhaps attention could be given for the liturgical rites of these services to be included in some meaningful way as a time of remembrance during the regular worship so the whole worshipping community could participate after the fact.

The liturgy itself need not undergo significant changes to accomplish the task of better conveying the christological community. The Church need only recognize the historic liturgy as a powerful tool in its own right for building up the sense of mystical communion with the person of Christ and with others sharing that experience.

7.3d Rethinking the Role of the Sermon

Thielicke’s vehicle of choice for furthering his christological method is clearly the sermon. It is not without grounds that one can see the many other non-sermonic

texts he wrote as serving his public proclamation.¹⁰⁹ Many of the recurring themes in his sermons have separate volumes devoted to them. So the sermon as a well-developed, polished, and winsome medium carried much greater weight for establishing his christological method than any other medium. It was in the sermon where Thielicke could most quickly and clearly relate to the concrete situation of mankind and make christology relevant to the individual.¹¹⁰

It was through the sermon that Thielicke reached out to the world at large. In volume two of his Ethics Thielicke writes:

. . . the church acts, if you will, Socratically, or indirectly. It does not debate things; it aims at the conversion of persons. Those who "seek first the kingdom of God" will find not only that certain new things will "be added" [Matt. 6:33] but also that certain old things will drop away. Direct political action is not for the church. Indirect influence by way of infiltration and subversion is more appropriate. In this connection it is perhaps not without significance that the church is constantly referred to symbolically as a wife. . . . By nature the woman influences the world indirectly, through her husband.¹¹¹

Words such as "infiltration" and "subversion" are not words with which the Church is normally comfortable. Yet it is an apt description of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms. Notwithstanding our previous discussion of the

¹⁰⁹ In The Trouble with the Church, p. 78 Thielicke states that his writing of his Ethics volumes was done "in order to do the theological background work for preaching."

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., pp. 66-67, 71-73. Also Helmut Thielicke, How the World Began, trans. John Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961) p.306. "The hearer must be able to say after he has listened to the sermon: 'I was in it'; perhaps also, 'I was in it in a way that doesn't suit me at all, because I wanted to think of myself in a different way, and so I feel challenged to oppose. Nevertheless, I was in it.'"

¹¹¹ Theological Ethics, vol. 2, p. 646. The concluding remark in this quotation is of course somewhat surprising of Thielicke who speaks here with an uncharacteristic insensitivity toward the modern status of women.

Church's social presence as a charitable institution, classic Lutheranism does avoid direct social/political involvement by the Church as a means of changing the world. Instead it tries to influence the world at large through the justified and therefore sanctified acts and minds of her members. For Thielicke the proclaimed word is the main vehicle for christological presence¹¹² and therefore the sermon is the main ecclesiological avenue for indirectly changing the world.

Yet in today's cultural climate it must be asked whether the sermon can or should still bear the load Thielicke placed on it? Can the sermon still function in today's world as virtually the sole point of christological contact with the individual or as the main vehicle through which christology infiltrates the world? It is not our intention here to question the ability of the sermon to bear the christological presence (a necessary point in both classic Lutheranism and Thielicke¹¹³), nor do we wish to cast doubt on the work of the Holy Spirit through the proclaimed word (as Luther and Thielicke both emphasise¹¹⁴). What we wish to explore is the ability of the sermon to function as the main communicative vehicle for reaching the

¹¹² Consider from Glauben als Abenteuer, p. 48. "Sondern ich bin es nur, weil ich auf etwas vertraue: darauf, daß Gott mein kümmerliches Wort in seinen Dienst stellen, daß er selber darin anwesend sein will. 'Das Wort der Predigt ist der die menschliche Natur annehmende und tragende Christus selbst' (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)." [Translation: "However I am it (a letter from Christ) only because I trust in something. I trust that God puts my pitiful word in his service and that he wants to be present himself in that word. 'The Word of the sermon is that which human nature apprehends and which bears Christ himself' (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)"] Scheidt's translation in Faith the Great Adventure, p. 22 was not used due to lack of accuracy.

¹¹³ Cf. LW 36:340, "... the one Christ enters into so many hearts through the voice, and that each person who hears the sermon and accepts it takes the whole Christ into his heart."

¹¹⁴ See fn. 120.

postmodern world in light of emerging cultural dynamics. As previously, pursuing this question lies at the heart of Thieliicke's desire to be most effective in reaching those outside the Church.

We propose below to examine the sermon from the standpoint of communication theory.¹¹⁵ What communication theory suggests initially is that the very nature of the sermon as Christian proclamation presents particular difficulties for postmodern expectations. Secular communication theorists suggest that the more "communicators follow professional or personally chosen – rather than market-dictated – goals, the more potential for tension with the audience."¹¹⁶ The goals of the Church should never be "market-driven," if they were then the sermon itself must further the individualism and hedonism which the market wants. Instead the sermon must remain polemic in its relationship to social desire. Thieliicke offers effective sermonic models for such a critical positioning toward societal and ecclesiological error. As this applies to our goal of furthering the christological "we," the implication is that this message will be a difficult message for the world to hear because it goes against market desires. To be effective in communicating this message, sermons will require constant reinforcement and reiteration.

¹¹⁵ Thieliicke speaks of evaluating the sermon on the basis of "accommodation in speech" [communication theory] and "accommodation in substance" [theology]. How the World Began, p. 306. Our evaluation from communication theory is then in keeping with Thieliicke's own method of evaluation.

¹¹⁶ Denis McQuail, Audience Analysis (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 111.

Communication theory also requires us to examine the audience. When we do so, we discover that the task of preaching is complicated by the apparent degradation of the postmodern ability to think and reason at the level of profound truth that theology often demands. As previous discussions on Postmodernism have shown, the typical postmodern mind has been so influenced by a culture of entertainment that the ability of the average Western mind to engage deep thoughts has been affected.¹¹⁷ So the act of sitting and listening to someone give a well-reasoned speech, with a logical progression of thought, and about what might prove to be a difficult subject, has become a more difficult exercise for the postmodern mind.¹¹⁸

The response suggested by communication theory is to simplify and shorten the length of sermons. Where Luther and other reformers may have preached for well over an hour (several hours at times) and Thielicke's typical sermon ran near to 45

¹¹⁷ George Comstock and Erica Scharrer, Television: What's On, Who's Watching, and What It Means (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999), pp 245-252. The authors show through studies done with hundreds of thousands of American school children (4th – 12th grades) that there is a direct correlation between the amount of television watched and academic achievement. The more television students watched the poorer their scholastic performance. The studies also showed a direct correlation to socio-economic status and the amount of television watched. Those of a higher socio-economic status watched less television and therefore also exhibited less direct negative impact from television watching.

¹¹⁸ Apologetic Preaching, p. 118. Loscalzo argues that the Postmodern mind finds it difficult to grasp logical linear arguments and is more accustomed to thinking "mosaically," which is to say that Postmodern thinkers "draw conclusion by seeing a whole in the parts, no matter how or in what order the parts are presented."

minutes,¹¹⁹ many churches now expect sermon length to be an absolute maximum of 20 minutes and more commonly between 12 and 15 minutes. The sermons of previous generations could be more in-depth and could explore a broader range of tangents than postmodern sermons can. Previously sermons could also build on a more cohesive body of truth and values among the people. Now, assumptions about common values and truth claims cannot be taken for granted.

From a purely communicative standpoint this combination of circumstances challenges the role of the sermon as Thielicke used it. Certainly the sermon still holds power to convince and move people's hearts.¹²⁰ But in the postmodern world its strength may depend more on its overall ecclesiological context and less on its ability to stand alone as oral persuasion.

7.4 Merging Christological Elements into a Semiotic Solution

The solution for the changing role of the sermon is tied directly to our solution for an individualised christology. Thus far we have offered a number of critical comments about Thielicke's individualised approach, and we have listed a number of elements that can help build a new metanarrative of communion with others and with Christ. What has not yet been offered is a cohesive principle binding all these various elements together into a workable solution for postmodern individualism.

¹¹⁹ On a personal note, once when I went on vacation I invited a retired pastor in his 80's to preach for me. He preached for 45 minutes and reported that several families walked out after the half hour mark. There were even suggestions from some of my younger members upon my return that T-shirts be made up saying, "I survived a 45 minute sermon!"

¹²⁰ From the standpoint of classic Lutheranism this is all the more true in light of the work and action of the Holy Spirit in the proclaimed word. Cf. LW 13:272, 15:261, 24:357.

We have offered the view of a Theology of Presence as a means toward building a new metanarrative, but this too needs to be understood as something more than a subjective application of separate principles.

Beneath all the different elements defining a Theology of Presence is an understanding that ontology, meaning, and corporate being are bound together in a semiotic relationship. That is, each element discussed separately above as a part of our solution for postmodern individualism is bound to all the other elements as “sign” relating to an overall “meta-sign.” “Sign” here is not understood as merely “symbol” but that which may have meaning in itself yet simultaneously points to meaning beyond itself.

We justify our use of such a principle by citing Thielicke’s use of metaphor as a chosen method of christological communication. We have discussed several times above how he used open metaphor as a means of subjective christological appropriation. The power of metaphor in Thielicke’s use of it was its subjective nature; it forced individuals to make corollaries to their personal experience and defied attempts to objectify meaning.¹²¹ Metaphor furthered his individualistic christological approach by emphasising the subject element of encountering Christ. Such a use of metaphor is an implicit adoption of a semiotic approach. Metaphors are signs pointing beyond themselves. He may have consciously promoted logical and cognitive forms of apprehension, but by the persistent use of metaphor he

¹²¹ Cf. Gundry’s observations about Pauline metaphors “Perhaps part of the very point of the Pauline metaphors – spatial, horticultural, structural, familial, and somatic – is that they stand for a reality understandable but incomprehensible. If

unconsciously adopts a method of communication that exceeds the logical. What we now propose is to use the “semiotic principle” that Thielicke unconsciously adopted and redirect it away from subjective individualistic points of view. Even more we will attempt to show how the adoption of a semiotic approach touches the totality of theology, ecclesiology, and christology and ultimately ties together an unspoken metanarrative of corporate existence and christological communion.

As a secular discipline “Semiotics” is the study of signs and their relationships as a means of communication. It is not merely concerned with establishing things as signs but it asks questions about the action and interaction of signs.¹²² Semiotics is concerned with signs as narrow as a single thing or as broad as a culture¹²³ or a cosmology. Spoken language is often considered to have a privilege or primacy in the discipline of semiotics.¹²⁴ But what semiotics has to say about how human beings form their understanding of the word or world around them is based on interaction of other signs surrounding those in question. The spoken word never occurs in isolation but is interpreted through other surrounding signs. Thus how one speaks adds to what is being spoken. Hand movements, facial gestures, and

so, the attempt to exhaust its meaning is doomed from the start.” Sōma in Biblical Theology, p. 241.

¹²² John Deely, Basics of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 105.

¹²³ Sydney M. Lamb, “Semiotics of Language and Culture: a Relational Approach” in The Semiotics of Culture and Language, vol. 2 (Dover, New Hampshire: Frances Pinter, 1984), p. 96. Here Lamb states that “a culture as a whole may be characterizable as a vast integrated semiotic in which can be recognized a number of subsemiotics.”

¹²⁴ Pierre Guiraud, Semiology, trans. George Gross (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975), p. 1.

intonations are all additional signs reinforcing the words themselves.¹²⁵ Thus

Guiraud writes:

The receiver of a message must decode it, must reconstruct its meaning on the basis of signs each of which carry elements of that meaning, i.e. indication concerning the relation of each sign with others.¹²⁶

This impacts the sermon by taking it out of the realm of the isolated event and placing it within the highly complex context of liturgical signs and rites all of which work together to convey meaning. If people are to gain the faith and understanding they need to infiltrate the world with a more selfless christology, then they will have to be influenced by the total combination of signs supporting and extending the meaning of the spoken Word. This is so especially now when the force of the spoken word is constrained by limitations of time and cognitive ability.

Communication theorists point out a strong relationship between meaning and action for the postmodern mind. The rejection of objective truth and the fragmentation of meaning has shifted the burden of meaning away from objective truth claims to that which can be subjectively and existentially verified. Verifiable action then becomes an important character for the sorts of signs that can establish meaning for a new metanarrative.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²⁷ James A. Anderson, Communication Theory: Epistemological Foundations (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), p.57. Anderson writes: "What something means, therefore, is answerable only in the present, only at the site of considerable efforts that provide for its construction and must be answered anew at the next asking. . . . One must also understand action, for it is in action that meaning may become."

Through semiotics liturgical action and social charity (as discussed above) lend strength to the spoken word. Eucharistic fellowship, shared doctrinal subscription, and sacramental rites in the context of regular communal worship all work together as a mosaic to build a powerful message of communion with God and with others. These signs may impact some individuals differently, and thus preserve the importance of the individual; while other signs may convey more common meanings. When it comes to matters of Christian faith, the implicit message of all signs is directed to a common christology under the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Signs have been variously categorized as to type and function. Signal signs trigger a reaction in the receiver; Icons are signs that seek to represent in some way another object; Index signs point to something else; and symbols denote meaning through a “conventional link” between signifier and its denotata.¹²⁸ The point is that meaning is established through a variety of ways and in signs differing in character, yet all these work together to convey common meaning in some sense. So maintaining the objective presence of Christ in sacramental signs provides one unique way of receiving him mysteriously that defies attempts at logical/cognitive explanation. Maintaining the different presence of Christ in faith, community, or society, provides ways of perceiving Christ and his work that impact a different level of the consciousness. Christ in the spoken word works more on the cognitive mind. Christ and matters of faith portrayed in art speak to yet a different part of the

¹²⁸ Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 39-63. Within these pages the species of signs are discussed.

mind. Yet together all the unique signs form a complete underlying message about Christ's salvific work and the consequent communion of his people together in him.

The application of semiotics to the Church yields a vast complex web of sign forms from architecture to art, from music to the spoken word, and from social action to sacramental experience; all of which bespeak Christ's saving presence, and all of which carry both communal and subjective/individual elements. They cannot be fully appreciated in isolated solitude as the individual interprets them in his or her own understanding, but they find interrelatedness and fullness in meaning only when viewed from within the body of Christ.

In the end the way signs are able to communicate a kind of "subliminal" or non-quantifiable form of meaning may prove to be more effective in shaping the metanarrative of postmodern individual than any logical argument could. Logical instruction and argument certainly have their place, but a view toward the whole experience of ecclesiology as a unified sign strengthens the force of the meaning underneath. In his discussion on faith, person, and Church Miroslav Volf rightly states:

What George Lindbeck says of proclamation is true of every form of the confession of faith: "[it] gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action."¹²⁹

Volf's comments are embedded in his discussion on personhood as it relates to one's ecclesial being. The identity of a person is bound to the total life of the ecclesial community and to the very life of Christ. Ontology and christology

¹²⁹ After Our Likeness, p. 163.

become one with ecclesiology. When such “ecclesial being” is ingrained within Christians, then as they infiltrate the world they will take with them a deep-seated understanding of themselves as “beings-with.” Such an appreciation for “corporateness” need not stand against the individual. Ecclesial being in no way denies the individual as such. As Zizioulas presents it from a more eastern perspective, there may be a tendency to pit ecclesial being against the individual;¹³⁰ however one need not do so. Instead the total presentation of the Gospel through all the many and various forms available to the Church can communicate both individual importance and corporate being simultaneously. When the Church is aware of the force of its interlocking signs and directs her people toward the inherent message of corporate existence and christological communion in them, she will begin to form the basis of a new and comprehensive understanding of self, other, and God.

This goes directly to the matter of the sermon as well. This thesis began with concern over the christological direction of Thielicke’s sermons. In retrospect the problem with Thielicke and with present-day individualised preaching is a failure to connect the sermon with the obvious communal semiotic structure around it. Some authors have noted that preaching has historically struggled to find a connection

¹³⁰ Zizioulas’ strong language regarding the individual and personhood seems to reveal the tactic of pitting the individual against ecclesial being. The proposal here is that both aspects of human personhood should be acknowledged as important in their own right. Zizioulas writes, “Being a person is fundamentally different from being an individual or a ‘personality,’ for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationships. Taking our categories from our fallen state of existence, we usually identify a person with the ‘self’ (individual) and with all it possesses in its qualities and experiences (the personality). But modern philosophers recall with good reason that this is not what being a person means.” Being and Communion, pp. 105-106.

with its liturgical and sacramental context.¹³¹ Thieliicke can be seen as suffering from just such a disconnection; liturgy and sacraments are seldom bound to his sermonic thoughts. Likewise the rich communal overtones of the myriad of signs throughout the Church go unnoticed by him. If the sermon could be structured in such a way as to direct the hearers to the dual realities of individual worth and corporate existence by using the many surrounding ecclesiological signs as examples of both in harmony, then postmodern hearers could be brought further into this new realisation.

Thieliicke is valuable as an example of how an underlying principle needs to be carried through one's overall theology in order to be effective. Not only his sermons but, as has been shown, his entire theological system is tipped in the direction of the individual. This consistency of theme is very important for the effective communication of an underlying *Weltanschauung*. One cannot merely redress individualism by talking more about community. One must rather see all the elements of theology and christology as a united whole with a common theme. That common theme must be christocentric and relevant to the concrete situation of people in the present day, and it must value the individual while promoting communion.

¹³¹ Richard Lischer, *Theories of Preaching* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1987), p.354-355. In an article by Geoffrey Wainwright entitled "Preaching as Worship," Wainwright points out "that the sermon has sometimes been shifted from its proper place within the liturgy and may even, in certain degenerate periods and places, have disappeared altogether from use, while in Protestantism the service of the word has often been robbed of its sacramental counterpart and context." The marriage then between sermon and liturgy and sermon and sacramental referent has not always been (nor is it now) understood as necessary.

Thielicke's contribution to christology is indispensable to our present discussion in other ways as well. He shows the singleness of mind that must direct future christology. His concern in preaching for a freshness of style and need for understanding one's audience should characterise all postmodern sermons. Issues important to him like reaching the concrete situation of people and challenging both social and ecclesiological error must likewise endure. Only by taking up the gauntlet Thielicke has thrown down and exploring ways to foster a new metanarrative can the postmodern Church be true to the saving heart of Christ that beats within her.

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