



Divine Antecedence and Pretemporal Election

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Abstract

The dispute between two of Princeton Theological Seminary's leading Barth scholars concerning theological ontology invites engagement from the contemporary Thomistic tradition. On the one hand, McCormack argues that, in a fully Barthian theological ontology, divine triunity is constituted by the pretemporal election of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Hunsinger contends that this election is expressive of an antecedent trinity. In the light of scholastic disputes between Dominican and Franciscan theologians, McCormack's proposal is seen to resemble aspects of the Bonaventuran account of triune relationality, particularly the account of procession as constitutive of personal distinction and the affirmation of a primordial 'primity' adhering to the Father's innascibility. Whilst McCormack seeks to avoid an undetermined originary plenitude, his treatment of the divine attributes as logically consequent to election risks attributing to pretemporality a status akin to originary primity. Affirming, with Hunsinger, an eternal trinity antecedent to election, the Thomistic tradition nonetheless contains the resources necessary to prevent this antecedence becoming a dissociative antecedence. As such, Thomism preserves divine aseity whilst equally safeguarding against the disconnection of *logos asarkos* from *logos incarnandus* that McCormack regards as an unwarranted metaphysical speculation that bypasses the particularity of revelation in Jesus Christ.

Keywords

Karl Barth, election, theological ontology, Trinity, Bruce McCormack

Introduction

Princeton Theological Seminary, since the presidency of John Mackay (Barth's sometime English tutor),¹ has established itself as one of the leading centres of English-language reception of Karl

¹ Cambria Janae Kaltwasser, "'Transforming Encounters': The Friendship of Karl Barth and John Mackay," in *Karl Barth and the Making of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Clifford B. Anderson and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 178-93 at p. 183.

Barth's theology. If it was once possible to speak of a reasonably unified 'Princeton theology'² of the two Hodges and Warfield,³ however, Princeton's 'Barthianism' could by no means be described as monolithic. The longstanding and well-documented disagreement of the Faculty's two most prominent Barth scholars—Bruce McCormack and George Hunsinger—concerning the relationship of Barth's doctrine of election to the divine triunity has proved to be one of the most stimulating conversations in contemporary dogmatics.⁴ The debate between Hunsinger and McCormack has not remained an internecine dispute, but has welcomed ecumenical and interdisciplinary engagement. Whilst challenging committed Barthians to (re-)examine their account of Barth's theological ontology, the debate has equally engaged non-Barthians in the constructive task of narrating a doctrine of predestination within a fully Christological and Trinitarian framework. Without seeking to arbitrate intra-Barthian debates, the present essay seeks to draw McCormack's provocative reading of *Church Dogmatics* II/2 into dialogue with the medieval disputes between Dominican and Franciscan scholastics concerning the relational ontology of the trinity and its consequences for understandings of the innascibility of the Father.

This is developed in two phases. The first half of the paper traces the contours of the Hunsinger-McCormack debate, by identifying Barth's revolutionary treatment of the doctrine of election in CD II/2 and outlining McCormack's reading of its ontological implications. A second stage offers an analysis of McCormack's thesis from the perspective of Thomistic theological ontology and its commitment to divine antecedence. This takes place in three stages. Firstly, McCormack's decisionism is seen to imperil divine simplicity by requiring God to be *causa sui*. Secondly, McCormack's account of God's being as constituted by election is seen to more closely resemble Bonaventuran accounts of intratrinitarian personal identity than Thomistic accounts based on relations of opposition. Thirdly, it is suggested that pretemporality functions for McCormack in a way analogous to Bonaventure's account of the innascibility of the Father as an undetermined originary plenitude. It is, then, to the development of the dispute between Hunsinger and McCormack that we now turn.

² 'See: Mark A. Noll, *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

³ Moorhead's magisterial historical study of the Princeton Seminary explores the germination of this distinctive theological vision, and the tensions emerging from contested Presbyterian identities, in considerable detail: James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁴ See, for instance, the collection of essays exploring the Hunsinger-McCormack dispute, edited by Michael Dempsey: *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

Pretemporal Election and Divine Trinity

If students are customarily introduced to Barth's theology by way of his doctrine of revelation, it seems more likely that "when the history of theology in the twentieth century is written [...] the greatest contribution of Karl Barth [...] will be located in his doctrine of election".⁵ McCormack and Hunsinger share both a common awareness of the centrality of Barth's doctrine of election to his broader theological outlook,⁶ and an equally trenchant, and decidedly Barthian, commitment to reasoning to God's immanent life and triune perfection only from the economic trinity: no epistemological route can be established to God that attempts to bypass his self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. The common enemy is 'speculation': the tendency of theological scholarship to bypass revelation and reach conclusions about God's nature in ways that are not absolutely determined by his self-revelation. Their point of disagreement, however, centres on whether God's election to be the God-for-us in the man Jesus—himself the hypostatic revelation of the Father—is constitutive of the threefold personhood of the one God (McCormack) or expressive of it (Hunsinger). According to Hunsinger, God's antecedent Trinitarian identity logically grounds the divine decree to elect. Conversely, for McCormack, the pretemporal divine self-constitution as the trinity emerges as a function of God's self-determining decision to be God-for-us-in-Christ. In counterfactual terms, the debate turns on the question of whether the transcendent and self-sufficient glory of the one God would subsist in three hypostases had God not elected to create and redeem.

Importantly, the dispute does not concern 'what comes first' in anything other than a logical sense. Whilst according to the *via inventionis* the decrees of God to create and redeem can be logically ordered on the part of human theologising, *a parte Dei* they are united in an *actus unicus et simplicissimus*.⁷ Neither McCormack nor Hunsinger believe that there was a period of divine deliberation prior to election, nor a time when God existed in pre-triune form. Rather than understanding the dispute in terms of what is 'first' in ontological or chronological terms, then, what is at stake in the

⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being: the role of God's gracious election in Karl Barth's theological ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Bainbridge Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92-110 at 92. Hereafter cited as "GB".

⁶ George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 16.

⁷ Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thompson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), 146-47.

Hunsinger-McCormack dispute is the *logical* relationship between election and the trinity, and consequently the proper ordering of theological reflection: is the trinity to be understood as a ‘product’ of a determinate pretemporal election, or is that election to be understood in terms of a ‘pre’-established trinity that effects it?

Barth’s Christocentric Reconstitution of Election in CD II/2

Aquinas and the scholastic tradition that follows him treats predestination as a part of the divine providence in respect of all created things.⁸ In Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, the exposition of providence-predestination (qq. 22–23) as an operation of the divine will and intellect falls within the treatise *de Deo uno*, before both the doctrine of creation (qq. 44–49) and the divine triunity (qq. 27–43). Barth, however, reverses this ordering, fearing that a treatment of predestination as an intensified and particularised form of a more general divine care for the world abstracts from the divine decree to redeem in Christ. Barth, therefore, treats election as a part of the doctrine of God, and providence as a component of the doctrine of creation.⁹ In adopting this pattern, Barth mines a classically Calvinist seam, following the structure of the 1539 edition of John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.¹⁰ In the Calvinist tradition more generally, the eternal divine decree of predestination (with its infamous ‘double’) serves as a hinge between the doctrine of God in himself and his works *ad extra* (starting with creation). Though sometimes critiqued as inconsistent with Calvin’s own location of the doctrine, this was the pattern adopted by Heinrich Hepppe, whose *Reformed Dogmatics* were the object of Barth’s personal *Ressourcement* upon appointment to the Honorary Chair of Reformed Theology at Lutheran Göttingen.¹¹

From the *Göttingen Dogmatics* through to his mature *Church Dogmatics*, Barth follows Hepppe and locates election between his doctrine of God (including the divine attributes) and his doctrine of creation. The reconstitution of the doctrine of election in CD II/2 is, however, distinctive on at least four levels. Firstly, the noetic basis of election is entirely Christocentric. Barth refuses to dichotomise an antecedent and consequent will in God, nor does he affirm a

⁸ ST I, qq 22 and 23. See, in particular: ST I, q23, a 1, *respondeo*.

⁹ CD II/2, 3-93; CD III/3, 3-57.

¹⁰ Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer, “Election,” in *Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. Paul T. Nimmo and David A.S. Fergusson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 44-59 at 45.

¹¹ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 153.

dialectic of hidden-revealed election: the election of God is found only in Jesus Christ, the veiled-unveiling of the Word by the Spirit.¹² Secondly, the ontic object of divine election is not fallen human beings (the infralapsarian view) nor the human person in abstraction from this fall (the supralapsarian view), but the concrete person of Jesus Christ, *in* whom the individual Christian is elected to redemption.¹³ Thirdly, Jesus Christ is not only the object of election (elected man), but also its subject (electing God).¹⁴ Fourthly, because of this Christocentrism, the Calvinist ‘double’ of predestination is not the pretemporal division of humanity into two eschatological camps (the elect and the reprobate) but two aspects of the mission of Christ, vicariously assuming the divine ‘no’ on the cross and the election to the glory of the resurrection.¹⁵ The divine ‘no’ is a phase, which is passed through on the way to the divine ‘yes’.

As Gockel has observed, this reconstitution of the doctrine of election is a move in a Schleiermacherian direction.¹⁶ Schleiermacher’s most distinctive contribution to election was his affirmation that God ‘sees’ all of humanity—believer and unbeliever—*in* Christ, and that a single unitary will and decree effects both belief and un-belief alike.¹⁷ The real duality of reprobation and election is grounded in the singularity of the electing God; reprobation, for Schleiermacher, is phasic, only a temporary ‘passing over’.¹⁸ Like Schleiermacher, Barth intends to shift the focus of the doctrine of election from the human recipient to the gracious God of election. Unlike Schleiermacher, however, Barth emphasises the particularity of Jesus Christ as the objective, historical actualisation and manifestation of divine election.

Understanding Jesus Christ as the object of election had the effect not only of ‘universalising’ predestination and subordinating reprobation to electing love, but of providing Barth with a Christocentric fulcrum on which he could stabilise an actualistic rearticulation of Calvin’s ‘unconditional election’.¹⁹ If classical readings of Calvin were guilty of reifying the divine decree into a static abstract fixity, actualistic readings that located the *actuality* of election in the ‘every moment’ of human reception (such as that advanced

¹² CD II/2, 149ff.

¹³ CD II/2, 115ff.

¹⁴ CD II/2, 99-106.

¹⁵ CD II/2, 125-135.

¹⁶ Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-15, passim.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁹ Brandon Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 128-35.

by Barth's younger brother, Peter)²⁰ seemed bound to a capricious occasionalism, in which God appeared to 'gamble' with human eschatological fate.

By making Christ, in all his concrete particularity, the actualised object of election, "[t]he hint of divine arbitrariness which still surrounded the doctrine of predestination in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* [could be] swept away."²¹ There is, however, an attendant risk to such a move. Locating Christ as the object of divine election risks reducing his ontological status to that of an entirely passive recipient of divine action. In other words, not only is Jesus Christ—in the mode of cruciform reprobation—the innocent passive object of divine victimisation, but the intratrinitarian relationship of filiation is modelled on the economic act of justification. In such a passive reading of filiation, the Father elects to love the object of election (the Son), not because the Son is worthy of love (although it could never be denied that he is), but as a function of the Father's gracious will. It is this excessively passive account of the Son's involvement in election that Barth's position in CD II/2 seeks to move beyond.

The decisive feature of CD II/2 that moved Barth beyond the objective Christocentrism that he inherited from Pierre Maury's paper 'Faith and Election', given at the 1936 Calvin Convention in Geneva,²² is the affirmation that the actualistically conceived event of election is identical with its content. Jesus is understood to be both the object and the subject of divine election: the 'elected man' and the 'electing God'. As both the active electing subject and the elected object, Jesus Christ is not only the noetic basis of election (as he was for Heppel and Barth's contemporary Emil Brunner),²³ but also the ontological ground of election itself—the 'location' in which, and by which, election takes place. In the economy, this amounts to a strong affirmation of dyothelite Christology, albeit with an actualistic account of the hypostatic union as a perdurable 'event'. Barth affirms that—in his consubstantial divine-human unity—Jesus Christ's human will and his divine will are in perpetual alignment: Christ is not the passive object of divine electing activity, but actively wills to suffer the reprobation of the cross for the salvation of the world. But how does this economic activity relate to God's life *in se*?

²⁰ See: Suzanne McDonald, "Barth's 'Other' Doctrine of Election in the Church Dogmatics," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (2007): 134-47.

²¹ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 460. Hereafter cited as 'CRDT'.

²² On the impact of Maury, see: CRDT, 456-463.

²³ See: John McDowell, "Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and the Subjectivity of the Object of Christian Hope," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 1 (2006): 25-41.

McCormack's Reading of CD II/2

Having outlined Barth's development of the doctrine of election in CD II/2, this section turns to consider McCormack's understanding of its implications for theological ontology. It is the affirmation that election is *constitutive* of God's life *in se*—the nub of theological ontology—that marks McCormack's distinctive and controversial developmental reading of CD II/2.²⁴ McCormack argues that the Barthian revolution enacted in CD II/2 implies that God constitutes his own immanent divine identity by the subjective-objective election of Jesus Christ. As Barth himself observes, election “belongs to the doctrine of God, because by choosing humankind God determines not only the latter but in a fundamental way also himself”.²⁵ According to McCormack, it is not merely the case that the divine identity cannot be known aside from election (and its consequence, revelation), but that there *is* no divine being outwith election. God's being is his being-in-election, and he has no being aside from this self-constitution. A single act of pretemporal election is thus simultaneously God's determination *vis-à-vis* creation and his definitive self-determination: God's very existence is a function of his election to be God-for-us in Christ and the trinity is a trinity only *in* and *for* revelation. McCormack identifies his reading of Barth as representative of the ‘German school’ of Barth studies reflected pre-eminently in the ‘Hegelian’ reading of Barth mediated by Eberhard Jüngel,²⁶ which reflects Barth's own avowed penchant for ‘a bit of Hegeling’.²⁷ The challenge Barthian theology grapples with is affirming one pole of Hegelian theology without affirming the other: that is, to secure a robustly actualistic account of God as a primordial event, without succumbing to a domestication that makes the divine identity dependent upon creatures for its realisation.

Ultimately, however, McCormack sees the divine identity in somewhat decisionistic terms, as a function of an act of self-determination, behind which there can be no abstracted divine essence or prior principle. “God's act of determining himself to be God for us in Jesus

²⁴ As well as CRDT and GB, see: “Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective,” in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 21-39 at; “Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 62-79; “The Sum of the Gospel,” in *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 41-62 at; “Karl Barth's Historicised Christology,” in *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 201-34 at; “Processions and Missions,” in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, ed. Thomas Joseph White and Bruce L. McCormack (2013), 99-128 at.

²⁵ CD II/2, 3.

²⁶ Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 9-18.

²⁷ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 387.

Christ constitutes God as triune”:²⁸ there is a primordial pre-temporal decision in which God assigns to himself the eternal identity, by way of anticipation, that he will become by way of actuation in temporal history. The trinity, therefore, always already has an external *raison d’être*, and as such there is no *logos asarkos* (un-enfleshed word) that can be logically abstracted from the *logos incarnandus*. From McCormack’s perspective, this explains Barth’s somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the so-called ‘*extra calvinisticum*’.²⁹ Coined by Lutheran polemicists, the *extra calvinisticum* referred to the Calvinist teaching that, after the hypostatic union, the divine *logos* continued to enjoy omnipresence, but did so as the *logos asarkos*, i.e. not *via* the human nature that it had assumed, which did not by dint of the hypostatic union share in the omnipresence of the *logos*. Barth appears to have been concerned that a disproportionate emphasis on the *logos asarkos*, which appeared to remain active ‘behind’³⁰ the *logos ensarkos*, invited a metaphysical speculation that bypassed the dialectical veiled-unveiling of divinity-humanity in Jesus Christ, smuggling in a discredited natural theology. The key point, for McCormack, is that the *logos asarkos* of the *extra calvinisticum* is not the *deus absconditus* of an abstract *decretum absolutum*. The *logos asarkos*, then, is not an undetermined divine principle, but the same self-identical subject as the *logos ensarkos*, whose entire existence is derived from the divine self-determination to be the electing God.

McCormack’s central thesis—that “the works of God *ad intra* (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz. election)”³¹—has implications across the *nexus mysteriorum*, but particularly inverts traditional approaches to theological ontology. Whereas classical theology examined the divine being before the distinctive divine actions *ad extra*, McCormack sees this as a fatally abstractive mistake. McCormack reconciles this view with the apparently contradictory fact of Barth’s having maintained the traditional ordering of election (CD II/2) after the divine perfections (CD II/1) and before creation and providence (CD III/1 and III/3) by a genetic reading of the evolution of Barth’s thought, arguing that Barth gradually developed his doctrine of election in reaction to the abstractive tendencies of the traditional approach (instanced

²⁸ McCormack, “Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel,” 67.

²⁹ CD IV/1, 181-183. See also: Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 90; Andrew M. McGinnis, *The Son of God Beyond the Flesh* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 150-55.

³⁰ See, for instance: CD IV/1, p. 181ff.

³¹ McCormack, “Grace and Being: the role of God’s gracious election in Karl Barth’s theological ontology,” 92-110 (103). Hereafter cited as ‘GB’.

by Heppe) in two stages. Firstly (around 1936), Barth affirms Jesus Christ as the object of election; and secondly (around 1939) he completes this nascent Christocentric turn by establishing Jesus Christ as the subject of divine election. As a result, Barth's ontology of election reaches full maturity only in CD II/2 (after his anti-nominalist doctrine of God's perfections in CD II/1 had already been published).

This genetic account of Barthian election is embedded in a much broader reassessment of traditional periodisations of Barth's development.³² McCormack sees Barth as never having fully resiled from dialectical reasoning and as operating within the critical problematic of Marburg neo-Kantianism. The primary target of McCormack's work was Fr Hans Urs von Balthasar's hitherto dominant periodisation of Barth's development as involving two distinct 'turns': the first, from Liberal Protestantism to dialectical theology, associated with the second *Römerbrief*; the second—from dialectic toward analogy—associated with Barth's 'Anselm book'.³³ By contrast, McCormack locates the determinative feature of Barth's entire theological trajectory in a decision for a 'critically realistic' form of theological objectivity, which was seen to be operative as early as the first *Römerbrief*, and which was fully realised in four incremental 'shifts' that are contiguous, in a surprising degree of hermeneutical continuity. McCormack, then, challenges the picture of abrupt ruptures that Barth himself promoted in his somewhat fatalistic autobiographical accounts of his theological development. McCormack understands himself as using Barth to help Barth to become fully Barthian.

As a work of Barth exegesis, McCormack's thesis must necessarily grapple with both a paucity of evidence—Barth never explicitly retracted the view that the trinity precedes election—and a number of counterpoising statements, which George Hunsinger and Paul Molnar, *inter alios*, argue vitiate the force of McCormack's argument.³⁴ Even in CD II/2, where McCormack argues Barth's doctrine of election reaches its apogee, Barth is seen to continue to stress divine antecedence and transcendence over his operations *ad extra*: "the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God does not rest on the election".³⁵ Indeed, affirmations of antecedent divine perfection that are

³² See CRDT, *passim*.

³³ CRDT, p. 421.

³⁴ In addition to works cited elsewhere in this essay, see: Paul D. Molnar, "Can the Electing God be God Without Us?," in *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 63-90 at; George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity," in *Election and Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 91-114 at; See also McCormack's response to Hunsinger: Bruce L. McCormack, "Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger," in *Election and Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 115-37 at.

³⁵ CD II/2, p. 107.

independent of creation and redemption persist into Barth's treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation, long after McCormack holds Barth's doctrine of election to have been finalised: "[t]he triune life of God [...] is the basis of [God's] whole will and action even *ad extra* [...]. It is the basis of his *decretum et opus ad extra*, of the relationship which he has established with a reality which is distinct from himself"³⁶

McCormack, of course, is not ignorant of these strands of Barth's thought, but rather sees them as indicative of an inconsistency or incompleteness: "Barth either did not fully realise the profound implications of his doctrine of election for the doctrine of the Trinity, or he shied away from them for reasons known only to himself."³⁷ In other words, McCormack is pushing Barth further down what he has identified as the 'post-metaphysical' Barthian pathway, leaving behind all vestiges of 'substance ontology' to embrace a thoroughgoing 'actualistic ontology'. For Hunsinger, this fundamental decision on McCormack's part mistakenly identifies the Barthian *motif* of actualism (which is tethered to other motifs, including particularism, personalism, objectivism and realism)³⁸ as a properly basic controlling ontology for Barthian theology.³⁹ For Hunsinger and Molnar, McCormack's reading undermines the foundational commitment of Barth's theology: that of preventing the divine transcendence from being immanentised by the domesticating tendencies of post-Schleiermacherian Liberal Protestantism. The location of election at the heart of theological ontology risks making God dependent upon a process of becoming that is inherently bound up with creaturely actuality. Moreover, making the divine being contingent upon election, which is an election not *in abstracto* nor merely to be creator, but to be precisely the reconciling God of redemption in Christ Jesus, makes the divine identity contingent upon human sinfulness (or else sin is just a harmless *intermezzo*, dealt with *per accidens* by a foreordained Scotistic incarnation as the culmination of creation).

Divine Antecedence

Two directions of pressure can be noted in McCormack's proposal. On the one hand, the doctrine of the trinity is deployed to guarantee a covenantal ontology constituted by the free sovereign act of self-determining election. On the other hand, the doctrine of the trinity

³⁶ CD IV/2, p. 345.

³⁷ GB, 102.

³⁸ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27-42.

³⁹ See: *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal*, 103.

is the principle that guarantees the freedom of that self-constituting election itself. There are tendencies both to ‘eternalise’ the creaturely humanity of the *logos ensarkos*, and to ‘temporalise’ the Trinitarian relations *in se*. McCormack’s proposal, then, demands assessment on two interrelated theological leavenings: the metaphysics of the incarnation,⁴⁰ and the relational ontology of the immanent trinity. Here, it is with the latter of these two foci that we are primarily concerned—with God’s own life *in se* as the one who loves in freedom—deferring an evaluation of the implications of this view for God’s effects *ad extra* for assessment elsewhere.

Paul D. Molnar has been at the forefront of opposition to McCormack’s thesis on the basis of an inadequate (or substantially inoperative) theology of the immanent trinity.⁴¹ For Molnar, a Catholic student of T.F. Torrance, the antecedence of the immanent trinity safeguards divine freedom: the *logos asarkos* (and *extra calvinisticum*) must be operative in Christocentric accounts of election, if the sovereign freedom of God as the subject of election is not overriden.⁴² The doctrine of divine antecedence asserts not only an ontological ‘surplus’ of God over his works in the economy, but that the immanent perfection of God is self-sufficient and in no way determined by anything that is produced by him: God *qua* God has no need of creation. As Barth puts it, “God’s love is in no way coincident with his being for us. He is the One who loves in himself quite apart from his relation to the existence of another” (CD II/1, pp. 347–348).

Indeed, a degree of divine antecedence necessarily accrues to the two key Barthian motifs of the graciousness of grace and the revealedness of revelation. If the historical life of Jesus Christ is constitutive of the divine identity *in toto*, then grace ceases to be the gracious work, freely and gratuitously given, of one who is antecedently free so to do. If the history of the man Jesus Christ is, in fact, the constitutive self-movement of the Godhead, then it is not in fact revelation in the strict sense (the revealer of an antecedent—‘revealed’—God), but only revelatory *per accidens*, insofar as we are given a glimpse into the moment of divine self-constitution.

‘Freedom’: Simplicity and Self-Definition

Having considered McCormack’s reading of Barth’s doctrine of election in the first half of the paper, the second half offers an

⁴⁰ On which, see: Thomas Joseph White, “Classical Christology after Schleiermacher and Barth,” *Pro Ecclesia* 20(2011): 229–63.

⁴¹ Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 61–81.

assessment of it from the perspective of a Thomistic commitment to divine antecedence. At the heart of Aquinas's doctrine of God is the principle of divine simplicity:⁴³ that God is in no way composed of parts; whereas essence and existence are distinct in creatures, they are identical in God. McCormack's emphatic affirmation that there is no divine essence antecedent to God's operations *in se* (i.e. the divine processions) therefore finds a resonance in Thomistic ontology. Divine attributes, together with the immanent divine acts of intellection and will are, on the Thomistic simplicity picture, identical with the divine essence. There can be, for Aquinas like McCormack, no antecedent 'deliberation' prior to the divine decree or God's trinity. There is, however, an antecedence of God over his works *ad extra*, which Aquinas holds to be a consequence of both divine freedom and aseity. These works *ad extra* are, however, present within the divine antecedence that grounds them, by way of God's infallible foreknowledge and first causal relationship to all that exists. In the end, the Thomistic picture agrees with Hunsinger that election is expressive of an antecedent trinity (and not, *pace* McCormack, constitutive of it), but can welcome aspects of McCormack's actualistic emphasis on God's being as *actus purus*.

The decisionistic thrust of McCormack's theological ontology, however, imports a metaphysics that more closely resembles Franciscan voluntarism than it does Dominican intellectualism. Aquinas explicitly resists the view that the generation of the Son in the immanent trinity is a production of the divine will.⁴⁴ Such a view, Aquinas thinks, leads to a subordinationism in which the Son, as willed, is logically inferior to the willing Father *qua* cause of the Trinitarian relations, creating a logical space in which a non-trinitarian or pre-trinitarian God could be conceived by philosophical reasoning. In other words, Aquinas proleptically rejects McCormack's position for very McCormackian reasons: seeing the Trinitarian processions as contingent upon an election of the divine will creates a metaphysical space in which the type of speculation that McCormack trenchantly opposes must necessarily occur. Whereas for McCormack the anchor of concrete particularity is in Jesus Christ, for Aquinas, the trinity, with its *logos asarkos*, is always already *concretissimus*.

Nimmo, along with others sympathetic to McCormack, have attempted to foreclose this subordinationist line of criticism by affirming that, uniquely for divine acts *vis-à-vis* created acts, divine action logically precedes divine being:⁴⁵ election thus generates not

⁴³ ST I, q3. See also: Rudi A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God* (London: Ashgate, 2006), 78-85.

⁴⁴ ST I q42, a2. See also: ST I q4, a2.

⁴⁵ Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

only divine triunity, but the divine being itself. This requires the counterintuitive willingness to think of God acting ‘before’ he exists (possible only because we are dealing with logical relationality and not chronological sequentiality). For Aquinas, however, the problem is not so easily done away with, but accrues to any efforts to think of God in causal terms (even as *causa sui*).⁴⁶ Attempts to model the Trinitarian persons as “effects proceeding from causes”⁴⁷ inscribes an inside-outside picture, in which the effects stand ‘outside’ their causes, leading to an essentialism (like that of Gilbert of Poitiers) that posits the threefold divine personality as standing outside of the divine essence. Aquinas, then, posits a real relationality of the three persons that subsist in the one Godhead, in order that he can secure both the freedom and the particularity of the one God of creation, over and against any abstract metaphysical speculation. It is to Aquinas’s relational account of the divine persons, and in particular the Person of the Father, that we now turn.

Pateriology, Primity and Pretemporal Election

There is an echo of the Hunsinger-McCormack debate in the medieval dispute between the Franciscans and Dominicans concerning the innascibility of the Father.⁴⁸ Specifically, the debate concerned whether the paternity of the Father is constituted and realised by the generation of the Son, or whether the generation of the Son is expressive of the divine Paternity. For the medieval Franciscans, God the Father is the Father because he generates the Son.⁴⁹ On this Franciscan picture there is a metaphysical space for a freely willed decision to be located in a ‘ground’ prior to the generation of the Son, that is, a certain logical capacity of the proto-Father to generate and thus realise his identity as the Father (Friedman translates this characteristic of the proto-Father as ‘primity’).⁵⁰

For Aquinas and the medieval Dominicans, however, the tri-personal distinction in God is brought about only by way of the opposition of relations.⁵¹ The paternity of the Father is not a prerequisite to the generation of the Son, but a function of the relation

⁴⁶ Jamie Anne Spiering, ““Liber est Causa Sui”: Thomas Aquinas and the Maxim “The Free is the Cause of Itself”,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 2 (2011): 351-76.

⁴⁷ ST I q27, a1.

⁴⁸ John Baptist Ku, *God the Father in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 73-140.

⁴⁹ Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 27, I, a. un., q. 2, *solutio*.

⁵⁰ Russell L. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27-30.

⁵¹ ST I, q. 40, a. 2.

of filiation-paternity.⁵² The Father generates the Son because he is the Father, and is established as the Father solely on account of the opposition of relations. Notwithstanding inevitable anachronism, the Franciscan picture approximates McCormack's: divine Fatherhood is constituted by the eternal event of generation. By contrast, the Dominican picture approximates Hunsinger: generation is expressive of, and coinherent with, the personal identities of Father and Son.

There is a second iteration of this differential in the discussion concerning the two-fold mode of procession in the Godhead. The Dominican emphasis on the relations of opposition as the necessary and sufficient condition for personal distinction leads Thomists to place less emphasis on emanational accounts of personal origin than do the Franciscans. Whilst both are committed to the *filioque* (and thus to the triune personhood as being actually constituted by oppositional relations), Franciscans generally affirmed a second principle of distinction emerging from the mode of emanational origin: 'generation' and 'spiration' are two different modes of procession, counterfactually providing a sufficient condition for tripersonal derivation in the (non-existent) case of absence of relations of opposition.⁵³

Although Aquinas does treat procession before relation, nonetheless the distinction between modes of emanation is definitionally posterior to the derivation of the persons by oppositional relation. Generation is known as generation because by it one person proceeds from one person; spiration is spiration because in it one person proceeds from two persons. In other words, for Dominicans the difference in the mode of procession is expressive of antecedently determined personal identity; for Franciscans, the mode of procession could be (although actually is not) constitutive of that identity.

On the Dominican picture, then, the immanent processions are more adequately characterised as acts of the divine nature than as decisions of the divine will. They are, therefore, possessed of a certain kind of 'necessity' that divine operations *ad extra*, which are entirely contingent upon the divine decree, are not. This is not to subordinate the divine nature to any form of restriction (in the way that creaturely necessity introduces limitation), but rather to affirm the eternal coherence of God in his simplicity: God is eternally identical with himself (and thus his perfections). An understanding of God's 'freedom' can never be derived from a phenomenology of creaturely choice extrapolated along an infinitely apophatic route, as Barthians and Thomists alike would agree. Rather, divine freedom is the eternal identity of God with himself, a principle which provides not only for the radical transcendence of God over all categories, but

⁵² ST I, q. 33.

⁵³ Bonaventure, I *Sent.*, d. 27, I, a.un., q. 2.

stabilises a fixed and non-abstractive point of divine antecedence, which is expressed in the creation of freedom (a participative sharing in this divine life) as a creaturely possibility.

Undetermined Antecedence: Innascibility and Pretemporality

Ironically, given McCormack's concern to exclude a divine nature antecedent to election, it is the Franciscan picture—which more closely resembles McCormack's decisionism—that has to grapple with the problem of an underdetermined antecedence. The question centres on the notion of the innascibility of the Father.⁵⁴ As was noted above, because Franciscan theologians tended to view the Father's paternity as a function of his generating (rather than vice-versa), there is a 'primity' that can be located in the proto-Father's 'capacity' or 'readiness' to generate. This 'primity'—never affirmed as an ontological actuality, but only as a logical consequence of a certain view of Trinitarian relationality—is an undetermined plenitude which is actualised through a free determination for relationality. Bonaventureans, therefore, emphasise the Father's paternity as 'source' in the sense of a point of originary plenitude, which is then eternally communicated to the Son and the Spirit.⁵⁵ On this account, innascibility is primarily a positive designation of the Father's fullness as the unprincipled principle of the triune life, rather than a negative statement about his relative 'unbegottenness'.⁵⁶ The fact that Aquinas rejects the existence of such a paternal 'primity' logically prior to generation, is a consequence of his relational definition of the person, in which the inherently relational properties (paternity, filiation and procession) carry the burden of personal individuation. The Franciscan account allows for the innascibility of the Father to be posited aside from these inherently relational categories, and is thus prone to a certain subordinationism, in which the Father as the font of divinity stands logically antecedent to the other Trinitarian persons. For Aquinas, by contrast, the Father's being himself without principle is always already relationally defined, and is therefore not divisible from his being the principle of the Son and the Spirit. Notably, Barth seems unwilling to speak of a 'monarchy of the Father' as the *archē* of the trinity, hinting at a more Dominican than Franciscan inclination.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168-75.

⁵⁵ Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 2, a. 1, q. 2.

⁵⁶ ST I, q. 33, a. 4.

⁵⁷ See: David Guretzki, *Karl Barth on the Filioque* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 126-29.

Notwithstanding this isomorphism of McCormack's argument to the Franciscans (operation as constitutive rather than expressive), the entire thrust of his argument seeks to avoid positing an underdetermined divine primity antecedent to election and triunity. Nonetheless, just as the originary plenitude of the Father serves in the Bonaventuran synthesis to metaphysically 'locate' the generation of the Son, the divine election is located in McCormack's synthesis by the category of 'pretemporality'. There is a risk here that the divine decision to elect is modelled as if it occurs 'in' pretemporal eternity, giving divine pretemporality an uncomfortable proximity to originary 'primity', as an undetermined and plenitudinous space that is given content by the divine will. In 1964, Barth himself expressed discomfort with the 'pre-' of predestination, and it is telling that in key essays in 1936 he uses the phrase 'primal decision' rather than predestination.⁵⁸ Indeed, thinking of election as occurring in the divine pretemporality is a particularly risky strategy from both a Barthian and a Thomistic perspective: there is a notable tendency of theological discourse to import pre-theological, philosophically generated, categories of eternity (arrived at by subtracting all limitation from temporal finitude). For Aquinas and Barth alike, there is no abstract eternity aside from the divine being: eternity is a perfection of the divine nature. Barth treats pretemporality as an aspect of the divine eternity (together with supratemporality and posttemporality),⁵⁹ which is understood as a perfection of the divine freedom, coinherent with the divine being itself. Interestingly, Barth couples the divine eternity with a correlate perfection of the divine love, *viz.* glory, which is the antecedent 'legitimation' of revelation:⁶⁰ Barth's use of the language of 'capacity-to-reveal' brings McCormack's use of his correlate notion of pretemporality still closer to Bonaventuran 'primity'.

Barth's account of the relationship between divine eternity and creaturely temporality is among the most creative and provocative of his contributions to theology. He attempts to excise philosophical accounts of eternity as merely the negation of time from theological reflection on the divine nature.⁶¹ These pre-theological accounts of eternity are too broadly marked by abstract concepts of infinity as that which is antithetical to the finite.⁶² "Eternity is not the negation

⁵⁸ Karl Barth, *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (München: C. Kaiser, 1936); For Barth's remarks on the 'pre-', see: Eberhard Busch, Anton Drewes, and Hinrich Stoevesandt, *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Band 25: Gespräche 1959-1962* (Zurich: TVZ, 1995), 79.

⁵⁹ CD II/1, pp. 630-631.

⁶⁰ "God's glory is God himself in the truth and capacity and act in which he makes himself known as God.", see: CD II/1, p. 641.

⁶¹ CD II/1, p. 610.

⁶² CD II/1, p. 460-468.

of time *simpliciter*, on the contrary, time is presupposed in it”,⁶³ and so it is “an illegitimate anthropomorphism to think of God as if he did not eternally have time”.⁶⁴ Barth here opposes the view that *infinitum non capax finiti*, which he sees as establishing a temporal domain over which God cannot exercise authentic Lordship: rather, eternity is both the absolute basis of, and the absolute ‘readiness’ for, all forms of creaturely temporality.⁶⁵ His willingness to use categories of pretemporal ‘history’ of the immanent Godhead does not imply a temporalisation of the divine nature, but that what is revealed in the divine economy is a temporal ‘repetition’ of what occurs in eternity. Eternity is transcendently other to temporality—Kierkegaard’s ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ remains a fundamental Barthian axiom—but the *chorizmos* between God and temporality is not so great as to preclude divine involvement in time. It is not that God is timebound, but that time is necessarily God-bound,⁶⁶ and the “axis of eternity and time [is] the medium through which the ontology [grounded by the infinite qualitative distinction] is diffused throughout the theological structure of [Barth’s work]”.⁶⁷ Here, Barth seems to be groping toward a metaphysics of participation, and there are hints of an *ersatz* analogy of temporality that displaces the *analogia entis*.

In short, the location of election ‘in’ pretemporal eternity avoids the abstractive, under-determined, tendencies of Bonaventuran primity only if eternity is already established as an inherent perfection of the divine nature. This, however, reverses McCormack’s revolutionary relocation of the divine attributes as posterior to the doctrine of election, once again grounding election in the particularity of the divine nature rather than rooting the divine nature in the particularity of the divine decree. In his analysis of the problem of spatial concepts in Nicene theology, Thomas Forsyth Torrance contrasted the tendency to speak of time and space as containers (the ‘receptacle theory’) with a more personalist and relational usage.⁶⁸ Thinking of space-time as availability for interpersonal relationship, and eternity not in terms of an infinite receptacle but as the infinite perichoretic communion of the divine persons, pushes pretemporality in a more Dominican direction, in which there is nothing in the Godhead that

⁶³ CD II/1, p. 613.

⁶⁴ CD II/1, p. 612.

⁶⁵ CD II/1, p. 618.

⁶⁶ “Time itself is in eternity. Its whole extension from beginning to end, each single part of it, every epoch, every lifetime, every new and closing year, ever passing hour: they are all in eternity like a child in the arms of its mother.”, see: CD II/1, p. 623.

⁶⁷ Richard H. Roberts, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Time,” in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Methods*, ed. Stephen Sykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 88-146 at 20.

⁶⁸ T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 56.

is even logically antecedent to the three-fold personhood of the trinity.

‘Actualism’: Nature, Will and Intellect

The ontorelationality of the Dominican account secures one of McCormack’s primary actualistic concerns: God, in his absolute simplicity (as *actus purus*), is always already the pretemporal *event* of infinite communion. This affirmation of triune antecedence, however, does not imply a dissociative antecedence of the Godhead that McCormack fears would ‘disconnect’ God’s life *in se* from his created effects in the economy of election and salvation. Whilst affirming, with Hunsinger, a Trinitarian antecedence to election, can a Thomistic account safeguard McCormack’s non-dissociative impulse to avoid binding God into an ahistorical fixity, and find a place for Christocentric election in the eternal generation of the Son?

For Aquinas, “the processions of the divine persons are the cause” of creation and redemption. Divine antecedence, then, does not mean the cleavage of God’s life *in se* and *pro nobis*. Indeed, as Matthew Levering’s intervention in the debate has observed,⁶⁹ Aquinas distinguished between the eternal processions of the Son and Spirit, and their temporal missions in the economy that are grounded in those eternal processions. “The procession may be called a twin procession—eternal and temporal—not that there is a double relation, [...] but a double term.”⁷⁰ In other words, the temporal mission of the *logos ensarkos* is grounded in, and caused by, the same eternal relationship of eternal Father and Son that is antecedent to creation. Indeed, the visible mission of the Son ‘includes’ within it the eternal procession that it reveals and from which it is constituted. Therefore, whilst election is not constitutive of the divine trinity, it is nonetheless present from all eternity in the procession of the divine persons. Moreover, this is united with God’s own knowledge of himself: in the eternal act of generation God knows himself and all things in a single unitary act.

Logos therefore has a two-fold meaning for Aquinas, reflecting McCormack’s concern that God’s determination vis-à-vis creation should be tethered to his self-determination: firstly, *logos* expresses the perfect self-communication of the Father, and secondly, *logos* denotes the Son as the conceived *ratio* through whom all things

⁶⁹ Matthew Levering, “Christ, the Trinity and Predestination: McCormack and Aquinas,” in *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 244-76 at.

⁷⁰ ST I, q. 43, a. 2, *ad* 3.

are made.⁷¹ God's knowledge of externals is not, however, merely cognitive but causative: from all eternity, the generation of the *logos* freely includes the election in Jesus of Nazareth. Without making election constitutive of trinity, Aquinas tethers God's electing activity to his eternal tripersonal nature, without a reverse tethering of triune ontology to his economic activity. The humanity of Jesus of Nazareth is, then, a temporal term of the eternal procession of the Son, but the eternal procession is causative of the Son's temporal mission, rather than *vice versa*. Indeed, the eternal procession is the vector that animates the incarnate Son's acts in the economy. This causal relationship is far more intimate and dynamic than an expression of a dissociated antecedent reality.

The distinction of the divine operations *ad intra* and the operations *pro nobis ad extra* is, nonetheless, real. The Trinitarian persons are a 'production' of the divine nature in which they subsist (but, because they are not the product of a divine decision *per se*, God is not self-caused), whilst the external works of God (including the missions of the Son and Spirit in the economy) are contingent upon the divine will to save. These external works of God, as effects of the trinity's creative love, are nonetheless eternally 'present' through God's causal self-knowledge communicated in the eternal generation of the *logos*. In CD I/1,⁷² Barth, like Aquinas, develops the Damascene's distinction between the begetting of the eternal Son as an *ergon phuseōs* (work of nature) and the creation of the world as an *ergon thelēseōs* (work of will).⁷³ Barth accepts this distinction only with the caveat that the begetting of the Son can also be seen as a work of the divine will, in which "[God wills himself to be God], as the act of will in which God [...] wills himself and, in virtue of this will of his, is himself."⁷⁴ But this 'act of will' is not a decision, "not an act of the divine will in the way that freedom to do this or that is expressed",⁷⁵ for God "has this freedom with respect to creation [...] but] does not have this freedom in respect of his being God [...] for] he cannot not be Father and cannot be without the Son".⁷⁶ The eternal divine begetting is not, then, an *ergon thelēseōs* in the sense that "it could also not happen and yet God would not on that account be any less God":⁷⁷ *ergon thelēseōs* is not, for Barth, synonymous

⁷¹ ST I, q. 34, a. 3.

⁷² Hunsinger argues that this Trinitarian ontology is presupposed by the treatment of the temporal mission of the *logos ensarkos* in CD IV/1, 192-210. See: Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal*, 75-115.

⁷³ CD I/1, 430-436.

⁷⁴ The original uses the Latin, *Deus vult se esse Deum*. See: CD II/1, 435.

⁷⁵ CD I/1, 435.

⁷⁶ CD I/1, 435.

⁷⁷ CD I/1, 435.

with ‘decision’. Rather, the reason that Barth feels obliged to identify the begetting of the son as both *ergon thelēseōs* and *ergon phuseōs* is essentially the divine simplicity: in God, “*thelēsis* and *phusis* are one and the same”.⁷⁸ The sense of the Trinitarian relations as acts of the will is nested within their status as works of the divine nature.

McCormack radicalises this voluntarist strand of Barth’s thought into an ontology of divine decision, in which a divine determination logically constitutes the divine nature. McCormack might, then, be seen as the voluntarist counterpart to the Dominican Meister Eckhart (a radicaliser of Thomistic intellectualism), who sought to logically ground the divine being in the divine intellection.⁷⁹ The intellectualism of Dominican accounts of the eternal generation of the *logos*, however, allows the divine aseity to be affirmed alongside the intimate relationship of the eternal generation of the Son and the temporal activities of the *logos ensarkos*. The infinite transcendence of the *logos asarkos* does not imply the infinite dissociative regress of an impersonal first cause.

Indeed, intellectualism, with its anchor in God’s infallible foreknowledge that is constitutive of all truth (and causative of all creaturely truths)⁸⁰ avoids any sense of capricious occasionalism in its correlate doctrine of election. Nonetheless, the participative metaphysics that accompanies this intellectualist protology invokes an *analogia entis* (albeit an *analogia entis* within an *analogia fidei*) with which Barth and McCormack alike would be uncomfortable. The deepest and most fundamental identity of all that exists can only be located in the divine mind. The resultant metaphysics of creatureliness is, however, notably actualistic and semiotic: the *cosmos* is not a heap of neutral ‘stuff’, but energy soaked with the divine intellect, charged by God’s self-communication of divine ideas. Our knowledge is, indeed, a noetic ‘catching’ of these external manifestations of the divine ideas on their way back to God.⁸¹

A residue of this intellectualism can be located in Barth’s own account of how the divine perfections are protologically communicated: “it is not that God knows everything because it is, but that it is because [God] knows it”,⁸² and “everything that exists [*ad extra*] [. . .] exists first and eternally in God’s knowledge”.⁸³ Yet this is not only an intellectual work but—simplicity again!—also a work of the

⁷⁸ CD I/1, 435.

⁷⁹ See my “Theological Epistemology in Eckhart’s First Parisian Question,” *Medieval Mystical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2013): 27-44.

⁸⁰ I am indebted to my friend Emily S. Kempson for, among a great many other things, enjoyable conversations about ‘truth’ as a divine name.

⁸¹ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 12.

⁸² CD II/1, 559.

⁸³ CD II/1, 559.

will, for “everything that God knows he also wills, and everything that he wills he also knows”.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, then, the Thomistic tradition has a more immediate affinity with Hunsinger’s strong affirmation of divine antecedence than it does with McCormack’s self-constituting God-in-election. Nonetheless, McCormack’s thesis can be welcomed as more than just an invitation to a rigorous re-examination of theological ontology, but as a reminder of the need to avoid positing a radical cleavage between God as he reveals himself *pro nobis* and God as he is *in se*. McCormack invites contemporary theologians of all stripes to develop accounts of God’s external effects (including the doctrine of election) that are robustly Christocentric and fully Trinitarian.⁸⁵ As we have seen, the Thomistic tradition is equipped with the necessary resources through which McCormack’s concern to avoid such a dissociative antecedence of the *logos asarkos* over the *logos ensakos* can be affirmed. This is located, however, in an intellectualism that forecloses McCormack’s voluntarist decisionism. Indeed, adopting a Thomistic ontology of the triune relationality avoids positing the type of under determined, dissociative, antecedence that haunts Bonaventuran accounts of the Father’s primordial innascibility. Far from an abstractive metaphysical speculation, this is obediential fidelity to the infinite particularity of the eternal Trinity, the God who reveals his antecedent Glory in the person of Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

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⁸⁴ CD II/1, 551.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Fr Dominic Legge OP’s recently published monography expounding the Trinitarian structure of Aquinas’s Christology: *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁸⁶ The skeleton of this paper was drafted during a day’s respite at the Barth Center at Princeton Theological Seminary, where the curator Ms Kaitlyn Dugan welcomed me warmly. Dr Peter Zoicher offered an equally warm welcome on my subsequent research trip (or was it pilgrimage?) to the Barth Archive in Basel. Stimulating conversations with both Peter and Kait renewed my conviction of the importance of a renewed engagement with Barth for contemporary Catholic theology. My thanks to them, and to Fr Simon Francis Gainé OP, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.