t&tclark

GOD WITHOUT MEASURE:
WORKING PAPERS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Volume II
VIRTUE AND INTELLECT

T&T CLARK THEOLOGY

JOHN WEBSTER

BLOOMSBURY

GOD WITHOUT MEASURE
Working Papers in Christian Theology

GOD WITHOUT MEASURE

Working Papers in Christian Theology

Volume II: Virtue and Intellect

John Webster

t&tclark

LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

T&T CLARK
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

BLOOMSBURY, T&T CLARK and the T&T Clark logo are
trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2016
Paperback edition first published 2018

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-56766-409-9
PB: 978-0-56768-604-6
ePDF: 978-0-56766-408-2
ePub: 978-0-56766-410-5

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

To find out more about our authors and books visit
www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A debt of gratitude is owed once again to Tyler Wittman for his diligent preparation of this volume for publication.

The author and publishers acknowledge with gratitude permission to reproduce previously published material as follows:

Chapter 2, '"Where Christ is": Christology and Ethics' = '"Where Christ Is": Christology and Ethics', in F. L. Shults, B. Waters, ed., *Christology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 32–55.

Chapter 3, 'The Dignity of Creatures' = 'The Dignity of Creatures', in P. Middleton, ed., *The Love of God and Humanity Dignity. Essays in Honour of George M. Newlands* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 19–33.

Chapter 5, '*Dolent gaudentque*. Sorrow in the Christian Life' = '*Dolent gaudentque*: Sorrow in the Christian Life', in R. Song, B. Waters, ed., *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honour of Oliver O'Donovan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 250–67.

Chapter 6, 'Courage' = 'Courage', in M. Barnes, ed., *A Man of the Church: Honoring the Theology, Life, and Witness of Ralph Del Colle* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), pp. 40–55.

Chapter 7, 'Mortification and Vivification' = 'Communion with Christ: Mortification and Vivification', in K. Eilers, K. Strobel, ed., *Sanctified By Grace. A Theology of the Christian Life* (London: T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 121–38.

Chapter 8, 'Sins of Speech' = 'Sins of Speech', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 28 (2015), pp. 35–48.

Chapter 9, 'On the Theology of the Intellectual Life' = 'On the theology of the intellectual life', in R. Lundin, ed., *Christ Across the Disciplines. Past, Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 100–16.

Chapter 10, 'God, Theology, Universities' = '*Sub ratione Dei.* Zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Universität', *Communio. Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift* 42 (2013), pp. 151–69; 'God, Theology, Universities', in D. Nelson, ed., *Indicative of Grace – Imperative of Freedom. Essays in Honour of Eberhard Jüngel in his Eightieth Year* (London: T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 241–54.

Chapter 1

Introduction: *Agere sequitur esse*

The essays assembled in the first volume of this collection treated questions concerning the divine nature and persons, and God's immanent and transitive works in creation, providence and the history of grace. The present volume considers the moral and intellectual acts of God's human creatures. Though they were prepared for diverse occasions, the essays work from a common set of judgements about the necessity of treating questions of creaturely life and activity in the full circle of theological science, about the places in a systematic account of the Christian faith at which these questions may be expected to display themselves with especial prominence, and about the movements of theological thought through which answers are to be sought.

Alongside the exegetical and historical duties of theological reason, in which it is required to attend to its *res* as mediated through texts and through the temporally unfolding practices of the Christian religion, it also has dogmatic and practical-ethical responsibilities towards its object. As dogmatics, theological reason fixes its gaze on God, and then on all things *sub ratione Dei*; as practical-ethical theology, it is an exercise of deliberative intelligence, directed to the task of discerning what in particular circumstances the human creatures of God are to do. But consideration of human action does not first arise in practical-ethical theology; it arises also – indeed, it arises *first* – in dogmatics, precisely because the matter to which dogmatics gives attention includes creaturely life. Dogmatics investigates the first principles of moral science; yet it has no monopoly in treating human action, and theology's responsibility to this element of its *res* is only completed in practical-ethical work.

As it inquires into God and all things relative to God, dogmatics assembles a description of creaturely mortal nature: the moral being, powers and condition of human agents considered under the aspect of their origin and end in God, and their historical course between first and final cause. This is the moral theological task of dogmatics. In going about

this task, dogmatics seeks to acquire understanding of what it is to be a human agent, not by asking about particular acts and sets of circumstances, but by coming to a view of what kind of being the human agent is, anterior to and in and after its acts. To accomplish this, dogmatics gives an account of the first principles of human moral history: the origin and preservation of creaturely being, the nature, powers and limits of human agents, their relations to God and other created agents and things, the goods in which they may legitimately find fulfilment, the situations in which those goods are to be pursued – and all this in relation to God. As moral theology, dogmatics does not deliberate on how to be patient with noisy neighbours, or courageous in face of deprivation of dignity; rather, it asks about who the patient or courageous person is, about the historical and social domain in which that person is located, about how and why it is that patience and courage are fitting enactments of our moral nature and condition. It is in this sense that action follows being.

Moral theology is distributed across the corpus of dogmatics, not restricted to, for example, theological anthropology or sanctification. In treating any of its components, dogmatics will also give attention to moral matters, and not simply for the purposes of displaying the use or application of doctrine, but as an intrinsic part of coming to know its object. There is a moral-theological derivate of all Christian doctrines: Trinity, creation, providence, sin, reconciliation, regeneration, perfection, and the rest.

Moral theology is a necessary element of dogmatics by virtue of the object of dogmatic intelligence. There is one principal Christian doctrine, the doctrine of God the Holy Trinity, immanently and transitively considered, of which all other doctrines are extensions. Because dogmatics inquires into God, it inquires also into God's outer works, considering not only their grounds in the divine will and processions but also their temporal forms and effects. Accordingly, dogmatics is required to give its attention not only to God the creator and his act of creation, but also to creatures, their natures and properties, and especially to the human creature. In so doing, dogmatics has not only to inquire into the *origin* of created human nature but also into the history of its actualization by the animating power of the Holy Spirit. In moral theology, that is, dogmatics is always both retrospective, concerned to build up a picture of created nature and action by reduction to *principia*, and prospective, looking to the temporal enactment of that nature. Each moment of dogmatic reflection on God and the works of God is enlarged (though not superseded) by moral theological reflection. And so, by way of example, in speaking of God's works of grace, the reach or force of such topics as justification, regeneration and gospel will be exhibited more fully when dogmatics enfolds within its account of

these works consideration of sanctification, vocation and law. Moral theology is an exponent of dogmatics, yet not in such a way that there occurs a shift away from its matter, but only an amplification prompted by that matter's full scope.

The essays which follow are exercises in moral theology so understood, largely devoted to reflection on the first principles of created moral nature, its condition and history with God. Though they do not venture into the deliberative field of practical-ethical theology, they indicate something of the grounds and orientation of that necessary next step. Why necessary? Because of the kind of creature which the human agent is. Created moral nature is to be grasped first in its origin and setting in relation to God. But that nature is not a sheerly contingent state of affairs; it is a potency pressing for realization, a divine gift which is also a vocation. Dogmatics and moral theology may be drawn to make much of the first principles of moral action in order to resist any suggestion that we can go no deeper than human self-realization, to ensure that talk of what creatures do is, indeed, talk of what *creatures* do. But there is risk in this of mischaracterizing the object of moral theology and of curtailing its scope. Created moral nature bears history within itself. Derived from God the Father's purpose, preserved and renewed by God the Son, it is also quickened by God the Holy Spirit. Created moral history, moreover, does not simply follow a fixed course by natural propensity. It is not instinctive but animate, and so intelligent, intentional and deliberate. It knows its given nature and ends, it makes those ends into elect purposes. Dogmatic knowledge of our created moral nature includes knowledge of the fact that we are practical reasoners, summoned by our nature to its appropriation and enactment. There is a *sequitur* to *esse*; created moral being includes moral time.

There is a material order to dogmatic-moral and practical-ethical theology, in which inquiry into nature precedes attention to circumstances. Practical-moral theology has a retrospective moment, because answers to the question 'what shall we do?' draw upon an understanding of who 'we' are, and therefore upon what is said about God and God's works. The order of causality, the order of uncreated and created being, is to find its counterpart in the order of thought. This is especially necessary in our fallen state, which engenders ignorance of our moral nature, condition, powers and ends. After the fall, moral excellence, including excellence in moral deliberation, necessitates learning by attention to divine instruction. Dogmatic science is an instance of such learning. But as deliberative reason combs through circumstances, it acquires further knowledge of our nature. Deliberation, the task of practical-ethical science, is not simply the application of already-achieved knowledge. Certainly, it draws on what

renewed intelligence knows, but it is also a further act of discernment, a fresh coming-to-know of our moral nature, confirming and enriching our store of moral knowledge.

In short: well-ordered and spiritually acute Christian moral thought does well to pause long and lovingly over God and created moral being, returning time and again to the *principia actionis*. It will not terminate there, in the false expectation that dogmatic moral ontology furnishes complete moral knowledge. But its deliberative arguments will demonstrate a habitual attentiveness to dogmatics, and so a genuinely theological attitude.

In the note 'To the Reader' which prefaces his *Practical Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, John Owen writes: 'Sin and grace in their original causes, various respects, consequents, and ends, are the principal subjects of the whole Scripture, of the whole revelation of the will of God to mankind. In these do our present and eternal concernments lie, and from and by them hath God designed the great and everlasting exaltation of his own glory. Upon these do turn all the transactions that are between God and the souls of men. That it should be an endeavour needless or superfluous, to inquire into the will of God about, and our own interest in, these things, who can imagine? Two ways there are whereby this may be done – first, speculatively, by a due investigation of the nature of these things, according as their doctrine is declared in the Scripture. An endeavour according to the mind of God herein is just and commendable, and comprehensive of most of the chief heads of divinity. But this is not to be engaged in for its own sake. The knowledge of God and spiritual things has this proportion unto practical sciences, that the ends of all its notions and doctrines consists in practice. Wherefore, secondly, these things are to be considered practically . . .'[1] Undertaken 'according to the mind of God', speculative investigation of the nature of sin and grace, of their causes, respects, consequents and ends, is 'just and commendable'. Without it, how could we pursue our interest in them with intelligence, how could we know these matters in which we are concerned? It is this which is the business of moral theology. But, however indispensable, such investigation does not complete the moral task of Christian theology. It has an end beyond itself: 'The knowledge of God and spiritual things has this proportion unto practical sciences, that the ends of all its notions and doctrines consists in practice'. If the essays which follow have any value, it is that of a set of preparatory exercises whose end is evangelical clarity of mind in the pursuit of moral and intellectual tasks.

1. J. Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX* [1668], in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 325.

Chapter 2

'Where Christ is': Christology and Ethics

I

Moral reasoning is biblical reasoning (for the moral life is within the domain of the Word of God), and biblical reasoning does well not to stray too far from exegesis, because exegesis is a hearing of the Word, and 'the unfolding of [God's] words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple' (Ps. 119.130). Part of the discipline of dogmatic and moral theology is coming to terms – often after some struggle against our own sophistication – with the fact that this is so: that we will not get very far unless moral reason is disciplined by the divine teaching which is ministered by the prophets and apostles, and that, as we do so govern moral reason, we are granted illumination. Exegesis – indeed, the theological enterprise in its entirety, including moral theology – is calling upon God: 'I cry to thee, save me, that I may observe thy testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in thy words' (Ps. 119.146f.). Patiently pursued, as a work of theological intelligence quickened and borne along by the Spirit, exegesis is an act of *hope* in God's words. As it engages in exegesis, churchly intelligence is entitled to expect divine instruction and so – in the case of moral theology – may with good cause count upon being directed to a conclusive word about its perplexities, and not simply to further dilemmas. Moral knowledge, and therefore intelligent moral action, is *possible* because the divine Word in Holy Scripture is law, that is, a truthful command in which God extends his rational government of the church by instructing it about his purposes and about the ways in which he guides ruined creatures into moral fellowship with himself. Scriptural instruction is, of course, no exception to the rule that creaturely moral knowledge is acquired over time, *learned*. But such knowledge is not simply the by-product of improvisation in moral practice; it is taken *to*, as well as taken *from*, the moral situation. It is 'heavenly' doctrine, because both its substance and its source is the church's heavenly master (Col. 4.1), and it generates both

'spiritual wisdom and understanding' (Col. 1.9) and fruitfulness in good works (Col. 1.10).

Accordingly, the gospel dispenses a double knowledge: first, of God and God's acts, and, second, of the will of God for creatures. 'What may be known of God', remarks John Owen, 'is his nature and existence, with the holy counsels of his will.'[1] The matter of Christian theology encompasses dogmatics and morals, because the gospel which theology contemplates concerns God's 'beloved Son' (Col 1.13), in whose 'person and mediation . . . there is made unto us a representation of the glorious properties of the divine nature, and of the holy counsels of the will of God.'[2] Theological apprehension of Christ and his dominion is at once metaphysical and moral – only moral because metaphysical, and because metaphysical necessarily moral.

For a compelling canonical instance of this, we may turn to Colossians. What Colossians has to say about the moral life of believers cannot be restricted to the so-called *Haustafel* (Col. 3.18-4.1), but is an integral element of its entire presentation of Christ. A long tradition of scrupulous (and largely inconclusive) form-critical inquiry into the *Gattung* and *Vorlage* of the household code has heightened its isolation by analysing it diachronically as traditional material originating elsewhere and subsequently implanted into the letter with little relation to the letter's theological impulses.[3] Whatever conclusions may be reached concerning the literary and historical questions surrounding the *Haustafel*, there is surely an exegetical (and theological) misstep here, an inadequate conception of the scope and integrity of Colossians, whose paraenesis is not lightly Christianized Stoic commonplaces, but instruction which flows from a Christologically derived and shaped understanding of the redemption of moral nature and moral situation, and of its integral imperatives: 'As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him . . .' (Col. 2.6).

With this in place, what may be said of the relation of Christology and ethics in Colossians?

1. J. Owen, *Christologia, or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ* [1679], in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 65.

2. Owen, *Christologia*, p. 65.

3. For a thorough critical account of the history of interpretation, see J. Hering, *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context. An Analysis of their Origins, Relationship, and Message* (New York: Lang, 2007).

II

Jesus Christ 'is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col. 1.17). Jesus Christ is the absolutely existent one and, by virtue of that absolute existence, the one in whom creaturely reality in its entirety coheres. Together, this αὐτός and its correlative ἐν αὐτῷ are the principle of creaturely existence, as well as of its intelligible unity and its movement towards perfection. And so to invoke the name of Jesus Christ in a moral context is to indicate the one by whom τὰ πάντα are moved, the one in whom creaturely action has its ground and telos. Creaturely moral action is action in the economy of grace, the ordered disposition of reality in which in Jesus Christ God's goodness is limitlessly potent.

What more may be said of this one? First, he is 'pre-eminent in everything' (1.18); he is 'the head of all rule and authority' (2.10). He is determinative of created reality in a comprehensive way; his rule knows no restriction or competition; he has authority over all other authority because he is the author of all things – 'whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him' (1.16). In another image, he is 'the substance' (τὸ σῶμα, 2.17), the true ultimate reality by which all other realities are rendered provisional, non-final, to be left behind on the way to what is to come.[4] All created dominion is relativized by the stunningly simple Christological confession: ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή (1.18).

Second, all this is attributed to Jesus Christ by virtue of his antecedent deity. In order truthfully to grasp his history and the identity which it enacts, he has to be confessed as 'the image of the invisible God' (1.15), the coming into visibility of the one who entirely eludes creaturely imagining. He is the dwelling place of the utter plenitude of God, the one 'in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (1.19), God's perfect life present in matter and time. 'In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (2.9): the divine πλήρωμα is now also – astoundingly – 'somatic'. And, once again, to grasp this 'somatic' reality, we must talk of a divine movement and presence, the movement of the divine good pleasure, the presence, not simply of divine virtues but, as Bengel puts it, the very divine nature: '*Deitas plenissima: non modo divinae virtutes, sed ipsa divina natura*.'[5] What takes place in Jesus Christ's history is not contingent but an eternal correlate of

4. All citations of the Greek are from E. Nestle, E. Nestle, B. Aland, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

5. J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1862), p. 739.

the Father's will to be manifest to creatures. 'God's mystery' and 'Christ' are identical (2.2): Jesus Christ is not simply the occasion in which that mystery is revealed, but its very content, both mode and matter.

Third, in and as this one God has effected the decisive alteration of the condition of creatures. This one, αὐτός, is within the plenitude of the divine being, and as such the reconciler.[6] That is, his eternal being in the godhead is directed towards creatures; in him there takes place a divine mission. 'In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell'; and therefore through him God 'reconciled to himself all things' (1.19f.). Jesus Christ's being is thus doubly defined: by ἐν αὐτῷ, in which his relation to God's inner plenitude of life is stated, and by δι' αὐτοῦ, through which attention is drawn to his 'external' acts as reconciler. This external work, God's goodness in the economy, is not a closed but an open act, whose term is the remaking of creatures and of creaturely relation to God. There is a real καὶ ὑμᾶς, 'and you', which follows inexorably from the indwelling and the objective reconciliation: 'And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death' (1.21f.). What is described as reconciliation can otherwise be indicated: as deliverance from dominion (1.13); as redemption or forgiveness (1.14); as making alive (2.13); as the cancelling of a bond (2.14) or the disarming of hostile forces (2.15). Its result is existence in a sphere of rule which *establishes* creatures after they have been overtaken by enmity with God; that sphere is 'the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son' (1.13). Christian life and activity take place in the domain of God's charity to lost creatures, which has its ground in the perfect inner repose and delight of Father, Son and Spirit. This domain is the kingdom of the eternal Son of the Father's love, and therefore divinely good and secure.

Fourth, in this kingdom of the Son, reality is illuminated and true knowledge made possible. Christ's rule is intelligible and renders intelligible that over which he rules. In view of this kingdom, it makes sense for the apostle to pray that his readers should 'increase in the knowledge of God' (1.10; see also 3.10), precisely because the divine office of the apostle in the

6. Hering's concern to underline the 'benevolent' character of Christ's dominion (*The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context*, p. 65) and to disavow any idea of that dominion as pure power, imaged in hierarchical human relations, lends a distinct 'economic' cast to his reading of the Christology and soteriology of Colossians; this in turn leads to some neglect of the rooting of redemption in the eternal being of the exalted Son.

church is 'to make the word of God fully known' (1.25) on the basis of the fact that in Jesus Christ a revelation has taken place in which the hidden mystery is 'now made manifest to his saints' (1.26). In Christ are 'hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (2.3): 'hidden', because he is the agent of their manifestation and 'in him' because he is their content.

Fifth, Christ's kingdom is a moral commonwealth.[7] To exist within the domain of the Father's beloved Son, to know 'the riches of the glory of the mystery' of 'Christ in you' (1.27) is at the very same time to be drawn into transformation of life-activity. 'Spiritual wisdom and understanding' is thus confirmed as 'knowledge of his will' (1.9); or again, 'increasing in the knowledge of God' entails a 'leading a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work' (1.10). To grow in knowledge of this mystery is also to learn how to act in the wake of its manifestation. Reconciliation in Christ is, similarly, purposeful: the Son's work of reconciliation is 'in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him' (1.22), an end which carries the *moral* entailments of 'continuing in the faith, stable and steadfast . . .' (1.23). This coinherence of acknowledgement of Christ and manner of life is, of course, basic, both to the overall argument of Colossians, and to its most characteristic pattern of moral appeal, which might be called Christological deduction, a pressing of the moral logic of *is*: 'as . . . so' (2.6); 'if . . . why?' (2.20); 'if . . . then' (3.1); 'seeing that . . .' (3.9) and, most of all, the ubiquitous 'therefore', οὖν (2.16; 3.5; 3.12).[8]

All this serves to indicate in an initial way that Jesus Christ presides over a *moral* economy; knowledge of him is in this sense practical. To apprehend his being is to feel the *forward* pressure of the 'therefore' towards modes of action which are impressed by his own: 'as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive' (3.13); 'Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts'

7. In this connection, Hering's presentation of the coordination of the vertical (divine-human) axis and the horizontal (intra-human) axis of what Colossians has to say of Christ's rule is substantially correct: *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context*, pp. 61–105. He argues that the key redemptive 'movements' of Christ's dominion in his death and resurrection 'become a part of the new and unfolding context of life for the hearers, who now partake in them as their identity is increasingly defined in terms of, and therefore intrinsically tied to, Christ' (p. 69).

8. On this, see W. Nauck, 'Das οὖν-paräneticum', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 49 (1958), pp. 134–5.

(3.15); 'you are serving the Lord Christ' (3.24). The Christology is *moral* Christology. Yet, there is no ethical nominalism here, in which invocation of Jesus Christ is simple ornamentation. To be summoned to life in this moral economy is to feel the *backward* pressure of the 'therefore', its reference back to Christ as God's fullness. It is ethically crucial that Jesus Christ is an ontological *perfectum*, a complete reality, *a se* and *in se*, not one somehow produced or extended in Christian moral history. If he were so produced, he would not be Lord of the moral life, and Christian action would not be undertaken in reference to a given order. One rule, therefore, for Christian moral determinacy is: 'Him we proclaim' (1.28). Yet, again, proclamation includes 'warning' and 'teaching' (1.28) and has as its end the creature's perfection in Christ. The moral life thus revolves around two affirmations in their necessary connection and their proper sequence: 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (2.9), and 'you have come to fullness of life in him' (2.10).

III

So far, the apostolic gospel in Colossians. We may now stand back a pace and restate the matter in a rather more formal idiom.

Jesus Christ establishes and governs the order of moral being and the order of moral knowing; he is the ontological and noetic foundation of good human conduct; ethical reflection is accordingly an expansion of his name as that name exalts itself in the field of creaturely activity.

To explicate that name requires us to trace two movements from the central point of Jesus's history as the embodied fullness of God. The first is a movement backwards, into the infinite depth of the eternal Son and his relations to the Father by whom he is generated and the Spirit whom with the Father he breathes. In tracing this movement, we come to see that Jesus Christ's name is spoken out of the unrestricted fullness of the triune life. In the more abstract idiom of trinitarian dogmatics: his history is a divine mission, a turning outwards of the abundance of the divine processions, a divine act *ad extra* resting upon the triune life *ad intra*. The second movement is a movement forwards, the movement in which the eternal Word speaks of himself now, making himself present to creaturely knowledge, love and obedience. The eternal Word, made flesh to redeem creatures, is also the Word spoken through the apostles as the consolation and direction of the gospel. To speak of Jesus Christ is to speak of this one: the Father's eternal Son in whom the Father's reconciling will has been accomplished and who through the Holy Spirit is now drawing creatures

back into fellowship with the Father. Such expansions of the name of Jesus can only be assumed here, however; we press on to reflect upon the ontological and noetic corollaries.

1. Jesus Christ determines the order of moral being. In Christian moral theology, Christological statements function as reality-indications. From them we may build up a picture of the moral field, that is, a portrait of the identities of the divine and human agents in their encounter in the economy of God, and of the ways in which human beings ought to conduct themselves in that economy. This is who God and his creatures are, this is where they meet, this is the character of their meeting. In an ethics which is Christologically determined, we are not dealing with an 'indefinite' sphere of human action, but with one which is 'fixed and limited', having a particular character.[9] Put slightly differently: from the church's confession of Jesus Christ as the one in whom God has redemptive dealings with creatures, theology generates a metaphysics of morals – an account of moral natures, a moral ontology. As we have already seen from Colossians, the interpenetration of the moral and the ontological is basic to a Christian theological account of the conduct of *creatures*. To be a creature is to have and enact a particular given nature. The principle here is enunciated by Turretin: 'As the creature has itself in being with respect to God, so also it ought to have itself in working, for the mode of working follows the mode of being'.[10] The kind of *esse* which is proper to creatures takes place as *agere*; the kind of *agere* which is proper to creatures is action in accordance with being. The separation of *esse* and *agere* – in a modern context, by retraction

9. K. Barth, *The Christian Life* (*Church Dogmatics* IV/4) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 7; paragraph 74 of the *Church Dogmatics* in its entirety is an important example of the kind of moral ontology which I am recommending; on the issues here, see further my *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). I remain agnostic about whether the task of theological identity description of moral agents is helped by a 'theodramatic' conception of the Christian faith, as proposed in, for example, K. J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine. A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005), B. Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and (more lightly) M. Horton, *Lord and Servant. A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005).

10. F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), VI.iv.ix (vol. 1, p. 503).