The Triumph of the Always-Heard Word: A Dogmatic Inquiry into God as Hearer

HELMER-IV, CHARLES,CHESTER

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By Charles C. Helmer IV

Abstract

What does it mean that God hears? The Christian tradition has emphasized God as a speaker, attending to God's speech, word, and voice, but it has neglected the Biblical motif of God as a hearer. Yet Holy Scripture frequently testifies to God hearing, listening, and inclining God's ear. It is the objective of this thesis to redress this neglect by reflecting dogmatically on God's hearing. I argue that God's hearing is a form of attention that is characterized by the loving and just nature of the triune God and that it is accomplished by the significant personal presence of God among God's creatures. Following Karl Barth, I propose that the asymmetry of divine and human agency entails the priority of God's hearing as antecedent to human speech, and that this antecedent prioritization is the source of human confidence in God's hearing. I then seek to relate this understanding of God's hearing to the doctrines of creation, anthropology, and christology. Concerning the doctrine of creation, I argue that God's ontological alterity permits the establishment of a theological grammar whereby God's hearing must be spoken of analogously, neither identical to nor altogether unlike creaturely hearing. God's hearing is not merely human hearing writ large, but is positively characterized by God's perfection and is, as such, infinitely proximate to human speech and is given as an uncompelled, gratuitous gift. Concerning anthropology, this understanding of God's hearing is argued to entail real-world consequences for the becoming of those who are heard by God, and that especially for those heard from the "wilderness". Concerning christology, I argue that the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension inform the character of God's hearing, demonstrate its salvific effects, and ultimately point to the triumph of God's hearing in Christ.

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A Dogmatic Inquiry into God as Hearer

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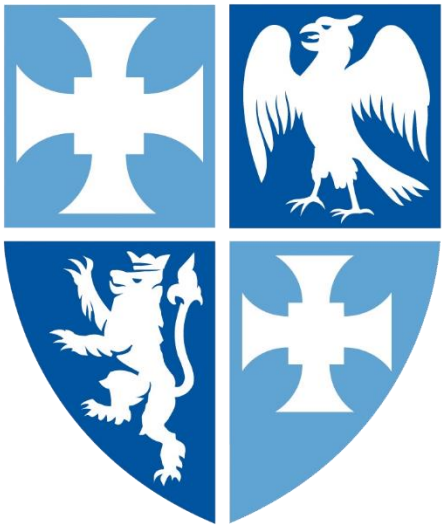

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Acknowledgements

Reflecting on hearing inevitably forces us, at some point, to acknowledge how much we have received from others—that what we speak is inescapably wrapped up with what we have heard. To reflect on hearing for half a decade is to raise the stakes considerably! It is, then, with overwhelming gratitude that I acknowledge those whom I have had the privilege to hear and be heard by.

It was in the fall of 2014 that a brief but disproportionately generative conversation with Kevin Vanhoozer produced in me a theological interest in God's hearing. Fleeting though the conversation was, this thesis and its title find their genesis and seed there. And insofar as my comprehension of "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the love of God has increased as I have sought to understand God's hearing—even if ever so incrementally—it is the fruit of the seed planted then and there.

If being heard by others is a gift that profoundly changes the one who is heard, then I have received a gift of inestimable value from Mike Higton and Karen Kilby—both of whom have heard me with great patience, generosity, attentiveness, and encouragement. To be "gifted" by their hearing and speaking has, indeed, been profoundly formative. I am grateful for the frequent conversations, thoughtful engagement, careful reading, gentle correction, and enduring support that I have received from them both. Each has been a gift in significant and unique ways. Indeed, one of the delights of working on this thesis has been the astonishment by others that I had been gifted with such a "dream" supervisory team—a gift for which I am enduringly grateful.

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Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
O LORD, be my helper!

You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Psalm 30:10-12

For Christy

and for our daughter, Lydia,

the most tangible reminder to us that God hears.

INTRODUCTION

At the temple of Isis in Pompeii, in the niche situated on the rear wall of the cell, there once stood a marble statue of Dionysus Osiris (Bacchus), the god of, among other things, wine. There he stood, pouring wine into the mouth of his panther. Behind him, stuccoed on the wall, were two ears. These ears, like their many counterparts around the ancient Graeco-Roman world, stood as symbols to the belief that the gods could hear. Of course, Dionysus sports his own set of ears, but the secondary temple accoutrements are emphatic—a statement that not only do the gods hear, but that the worshiper has arrived at the place where the god hears.

The ubiquity of such symbols in antiquity is a testimony to the widespread, if tacit, belief that any god worth worshipping is one who will hear. And yet it is the very "tacitness" of that belief which must account, in part, for its near absolute neglect in Christian theology. The neglect is startling on account of not only the two millennia of theological reflection in which such attention might have been paid to God's hearing, but also on account of the more than one-hundred-fifty Biblical references to God hearing, listening, inclining God's ear, and so forth. These are petitions to be heard and to have one's petitions heard; but they are also declarations that the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, is a God who has and does hear. It was with surprise, then, that I heard Nicholas Wolterstorff announce in his 2013 Kantzer Lectures in Revealed Theology that he was unable to find any theologian or philosopher who had given systematic treatment to God's hearing.[1] And, while there *are* some who have given sustained reflection to the topic (who will be engaged subsequently), the point remains: given two millennia of Christian theological reflection, there remains a startling dearth of engagement with the ears of God. Why the neglect? Even if the "tacitness" and ubiquity of the belief that God hears contributes to the theological neglect, there remain no less than two additional causes internal to the Christian theological tradition, namely, the dominance of God's word or speech, and the focus on divine actuality. First, on the dominance of God's word and speech, Amy Plantinga Pauw:

> Many human body parts are metaphorically ascribed to God in Scripture, but it is God's mouth and vocal cords that have had a preeminent hold on Christian theology, especially in its Protestant versions. The metaphor cluster of God's voice, God's speech, and God's words has had an outsized influence on how we think

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), p. 71.

> about God's relating to humanity, and indeed to all that God has made. Verbal divine communication has been our central theological paradigm for how we know God and for how God relates to us. On the one hand, this is not surprising, given the centrality of Scripture for Christian life and the importance of words and speech to human life in general. On the other hand, this *is* a bit surprising, given how little of the Bible is actually said, in context, to be utterances of God.[2]

The theological value of focus on divine speech is certainly warranted. The Bible begins with a God who speaks. The pre-incarnate Christ is the Johannine Word. Christian theology has long believed, albeit with great variety of meaning, that the Bible is the revealed word of God. "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). The historical and theological emphasis on divine speech is, thus, for good reason. Yet as will be shown, the abundance of Biblical testimony to God's hearing certainly demands greater attention than it has henceforth received relative to divine speech. Second, the focus on divine actuality has produced a relative neglect, or even aversion, to considerations of divine receptivity. Put alternatively, if the Christian theological tradition has focused on divine simplicity, eternality, immutability, and the like, it has, at times, done so without reckoning with the Biblical testimony to divine receptivity; if God is *actus purus*, then there need be no attention paid to potentiality or receptivity, so it seems. One result of this neglect: the many reactions that have generated "open" and "di-polar" theologies which seek to give potentiality and receptivity their due. Commendable are the efforts of these theologies to take the language of Holy Scripture with utter seriousness. If the Bible speaks of God hearing prayer, changing God's mind, undergoing temporal succession, etc., then some theological account is demanded for *how* this is the God in whom there is "no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas. 1:17). Without directly engaging theologies that prioritize potentiality and receptivity, it will become evident that I take their either-or arrangement of actuality and potentiality to be misguided. Yet this either-or arrangement has contributed to the neglect of receptive themes like divine hearing within the Christian theological tradition.

It is, thus, the argument of this work that the Triune God revealed in Holy Scripture, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the God who hears—and that not like Dionysus.

That the God of the Bible *hears* is, on the one hand, by no means a novel claim. On account of the Bible's unrelenting testimony to God's hearing, it is likely that only the most contrarian-styled readers of Holy Scripture will have considered that God might do

[2] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "The Voice of God in Israel's Wisdom Literature" in *The Voice of God in the Text of Scripture*, ed. by Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), pp. 78-79. Italics original.

otherwise. On the other hand, that *the God of the Bible* hears will be shown to generate constructive insights for both Christian theology and Christian living. For when God's hearing is understood to be the act and possession of *this* God, the One who has self-revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture and in Jesus Christ, then the nature and contour of that hearing is illumined.

The subsequent inquiry is, then, not intended as an esoteric or peripheral pursuit of a minor Scriptural theme. It is not the pursuit of novelty for its own sake; nor is it the prioritizing of some obscure background theme. I take the following dogmatic reflections on God's hearing to be, fundamentally, reflections on the good news of salvation accomplished by God through Jesus Christ. God's deliverance and redemption throughout Holy Scripture is frequently seen to be affected by God's hearing those who cry out to God. It was God's hearing of the cries of the Egyptian captives which resulted in deliverance (Ex. 2:24; 3:7). It is with astonishing frequency that the Psalmist cries out to be heard and is delivered on account of God's hearing. On account of his obedience, Hebrews reports that Jesus Christ was heard by the Father (He. 5:7) and thus delivered from death. The argument that follows is that God hears our cries and that that hearing is fundamentally, if broadly, salvific. In short, that God hears is fundamental to the divine act of salvation for God's people. Those who cry out to the God who has self-revealed in Jesus Christ as the God who hears—these will find good news in the pages that follow: that God hears their prayers, and that in a way characterized by the plentitude of love and goodness that characterize the very life of God.

A word about my method is necessary. Given the dearth of potential interlocutors, I have sought to chart my own course in order to offer a constructive proposal for understanding God's hearing. While it will become clear that Karl Barth has said quite a bit about God's hearing, I have resisted being pulled entirely into his orbit. I have done so, not because Barth has nothing to offer here—quite the contrary, as will be seen—but because a thesis on Barth's account would mean embracing a focus and accompanying restrictions that would curtail my ability to say all that I hope to say. Rather than embracing the strictures that accompany a singular interlocutor, I have attempted to bring a breadth of theological voices from the Christian tradition into the conversation. I have done so in the hope that these voices will offer a richer, fuller theology of God's hearing as it is portrayed in Holy Scripture. Insofar as I have successfully accomplished this aim, my more general and *ad hoc* approach will be justified. Generally, I have sought to frame God's hearing within the historic Christian theological tradition, what some have come to call, even if pejoratively, "classical theism". This is not due to a personal penchant for history and tradition. Rather, it is on account of my conviction, despite the claims of its detractors, that this received understanding of God remains the most attractive metaphysical proposal insofar as it

corresponds to God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture and is the best account of the Triune God of the Christian faith. I have sought to gesture, when possible, toward the reasons for which I find the received metaphysical tradition most attractive, even if in so doing I have run the risk of playing the antagonist, thereby provoking its detractors. Nonetheless, it is my hope that my argument will make evident, even if indirectly, the strength of the Christian metaphysical tradition to elucidate God's hearing.

Before outlining the argument to follow, it is necessary, first, to acknowledge the important concerns of deaf theology. It might be objected from the outset that a theological reflection on God's hearing runs the risk of alienating and further oppressing deaf people. Resisting oppression and alienation at the hands of the church has been the impetus for deaf liberation theology[3] and research into the theological beliefs of deaf people.[4] Deaf people have been alienated from the discourse of the church, and have been forced either to assimilate to its particular linguistic culture or to remain at a distance. Thus, to magnify the Biblical language of God's hearing might be seen as one more act of marginalization. To think theologically about the God who hears might be understood as irreconcilable with a theology of a "Deaf God".[5] And yet sympathetic readers will find, perhaps surprisingly, considerable overlap between my project and the aims of deaf theology. While my theological reflections are, at one level, an attempt to make sense of the language of Holy Scripture, these attempts to reflect theologically on that language produce an understanding of God's hearing that transcends the spatio-temporal bounds of creaturely acoustics. The anthropomorphic language of speaking and hearing, when predicated of God, produces a speaking and hearing characterized by its subject, who speaks and hears not like creatures. As deaf theology has sought to make sense of how the deaf experience can relate to the God of the Bible, it has concluded that God, too, is "physically deaf" insofar as God is beyond the categories of hearing and deafness.[6] It has also argued that God is "culturally deaf", thereby suggesting that God "knows how to relate to Deaf people and he understands their culture."[7] The understanding of God's hearing for which I argue here will, I am convinced, support those same conclusions and, in that sense, be no less good news to deaf people than to hearing people. If I must face the accusation of magnifying a marginalizing theme in Scripture, my only recourse is to concede that the language is unavoidably given and that

[3] See Hannah Lewis, *Deaf Liberation Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

[4] See Wayne Morris, *Theology Without Words: Theology in the Deaf Community* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

[5] Ibid., pp. 137-156.

[6] Ibid., pp. 148-151.

[7] Ibid., p. 152.

my theological interpretation of that language is, I believe, good news to the deaf and hearing, the mute and the speaking, to all who wish to be known by God, regardless of ability. And while I have adopted the language of speaking/speaker and hearing/hearer as a conventional shorthand, that "speaking" and "hearing", I have labored to make clear, need not be vocalized or audible. Indeed, speaking to and being heard by God need not be linguistic, as evinced in Scripture's reference to inward groans (Rom. 8:23) and sighs that are too deep for words (Rom. 8:26). Yet I have sought to faithfully explore the depth and riches of God's self-revelation as a "hearer" and to follow that revelation wherever it may lead.

The argument begins with an attempt to carefully listen to the testimony of Scripture. If God hears as God, then it is important that God be given the first and authoritative word on God's hearing. The danger lurking in the background of any theological claim is the risk of pure projection. Of course, the use of human language makes some degree of projection unavoidable. But the risk is especially high when anthropomorphic talk of "hearing" and "ears" is involved, heightening the human imagination to conceive of God as one who hears like a creature. And yet if theology is not to be reduced entirely to anthropology, as Feuerbach might have it, then God must be given the first and last word on God's ears. Such is the case when any consideration is made of God's relation to creation. For, "any account of the relation of God's perfect life in himself to created reality will be adequate to the degree to which it is shaped and normed by the Biblical canon. Any such account will have to commend itself by a capacity to illuminate that by which it is illumined, namely, Holy Scripture."[8] It is, then, by a careful listening to Scripture that Scripture itself is to be illuminated, in order that the form and content of God's hearing might be understood as God has revealed it to be. Thus, the aim of Chapter 1 is to develop a theological framework and working definition to better understand Scripture's testimony to God's hearing. The framework and definition are the result of sustained listening to both the text of Scripture and to those who have engaged it. With particular focus on the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar narrative, the Psalms, and the Lazarus narrative, I have sought to demonstrate some of the richness of Scripture's testimony to this neglected theme, while also making a constructive proposal for how it should be conceived. With particular dependence on Simone Weil and Eleonore Stump, God's hearing is conceived of as God's significant personal presence that is accomplished by means of a loving and just attention. As a reflection on God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture, the

[8] John Webster, "Perfection and Participation" in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. by Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 388.

theological framework and working definition are developed with an orientation toward God's *pro nobis* activity to and for creation. The framework and definition are, then, best understood within the economic frame of God's *opera ad extra*. The extent to which these constructive proposals are relevant to God's immanent and eternal life is picked up in Chapter 3. The framework and working definition lay the foundation for the subsequent argument and are returned to in chapters three, four and five, where they receive confirmation and their implications considered for the doctrines of creation, anthropology, and christology, respectively. In this way it is my intention to prioritize God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture as my primary interlocutor and to bring the witness of Scripture to bear on those other dogmatic loci.

Chapter 2 is a sustained engagement with a potentially surprising interlocutor: Karl Barth. Barth's reputation among some as a theologian who is uncompromisingly committed to divine actuality makes his work an unlikely place to reflect on God's hearing. And yet Barth has had more to say about God's hearing than any other theologian, modern or ancient. His work, therefore, serves as an excellent example of the way God's hearing can be understood within a theological frame that takes both actuality and receptivity seriously. After situating Barth's understanding of God's hearing of creatures within his doctrine of creation, I move to show how Barth's understanding of hearing illumines his understanding of the arrangement of divine and human agency. This understanding of God's hearing and agency do not abrogate human speech unto God, but rather arms those who speak to God with unswerving confidence in prayer. I seek to show that Barth's understanding does considerable theological work for him, especially in his consideration of divine constancy. For Barth, God's hearing is at the center of a complex knot of questions concerning the relationship between the immutable, sovereign creator and sinful, finite creatures. As Barth brings God's hearing to bear on the nature of God's constancy, the promise of God's hearing as a theologically illuminating concept is opened up, showing that it can do work not only for understandings of the economy of salvation and the creator-creature relation, but may also illumine the nature of God, *ad intra*.

Chapter 3 takes up this promise through consideration of the doctrine of creation with specific focus on the nature of the creator-creature relation. I seek to develop a grammar by which one may properly speak of God as a hearer while maintaining both God's distinction from and relation to creation. Put concisely, I am asking, How can God hear not-God? The objective is to frame ways of speaking of God's hearing which are illumined by and consistent with a non-contrastive account of transcendence that maintains the uncompromising ontological alterity of God while insisting that this alterity is the grounds for the radical proximity of the God who hears creatures. This understanding of the

creator-creature relation raises the question of God's self-correspondence. What is the relation between God's act and being? If God is a hearer, *ad extra*, what does this mean for God's immanent life, *ad intra*? Here I depart from Barth and his methodological commitment to the order of knowing, preferring to follow Aquinas. Doing so, I propose that there are good reasons to consider that there is a kind of "hearing" in the immanent life of God. It is my contention that God eternally "hears" God, *ad intra.* As such, hearing is prevented from becoming some new divine activity, or an activity that is confined to God's economy and contingent upon the creative act. The theological grammar is then developed such that a positive characterization of God's hearing may be given. I argue that God's hearing is an uncompelled and gratuitous gift that is analogous to, but ultimately dissimilar from, human hearing that is finally ordered toward human creatures' participation in God's superabundant life of love.

The fourth chapter focuses on theological anthropology and makes an argument for the formative effects of being heard by others and by God. In reliance on Alistair McFadyen's anthropology, I propose that human becoming is wrapped up with being heard by others. Whether or not I am heard determines who I am and who I understand myself to be. By engaging with other disciplines, I seek to show how being heard by another is positively formative. To be heard by another leaves the speaker changed in distinct and concrete ways that are advantageous and contribute to the project of self-understanding and identity formation. I also argue for the negative formative effects of going unheard or even silenced. The malformative results can be tragically damaging and undermine the project of self-understanding. When the formative anthropological effects of being heard are brought within the purview of God's hearing, there results existential and pastoral resources for those who cry out to God from the wilderness. I juxtapose a theology of God's hearing alongside what I label "passibilist-liberationist" strategies. In contrast to these strategies, I propose that God's hearing is advantageously formative and more existentially and pastorally satisfying than passibilist-liberationist approaches. Through a theological interpretation of Psalm 22, I propose that God's hearing is understood to produce a concrete response, both in the sufferer's circumstances, externally, and in the identity formation, internally, of the sufferer who cries out to God to be heard. Understood in this way, God's hearing is a profoundly liberating soteriological reality. That God hears is the good news that delivers Israel from Egypt into the land of promise; it is the good news of return from exile; it is the good news of the resurrection that follows from the cross. As such, it is, in one sense, at the very heart of the gospel.

The fifth and final chapter is a focused reflection on christology and its bearing on God's hearing. If God's hearing is to be understood as the hearing of the Triune God of the

Bible, then it must be shaped and normed by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Further, if to be heard by God does, in fact, produce salvific outcomes, such outcomes are unimaginable apart from the person and work of Christ. So, in four christological moments—incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—I seek to think God's hearing through christologically. The incarnation, which is the supreme manifestation of the significant personal presence of God, reveals that God's hearing finds its locus in this incarnate one. In the crucifixion, the character of God's hearing is revealed. In the resurrection, the incarnate and always-heard Word is vindicated. In the ascension, God's hearing triumphs as the incarnate, crucified, resurrected Word, who is always heard, takes humanity with him into God's place. In these four christological moments, I seek to demonstrate that the Word is not only the one who is always heard by the Father, but is the one by whom the Father hears those united to Christ by faith.

The conclusion reflects back on some of the metaphysical and theological claims of the argument by way of their appearance in the book of Job. It also briefly gestures toward some of the ethical implications of God's hearing for those who claim to be heard on account of Jesus Christ. In a world where words are the weapons of war, there is a desperate need for the kind of listening characterized by the Always-Heard Word who is also the King of Peace.

So, into the theological void, it is the objective of this work to speak, to contribute to a needed conversation about God's hearing. In the light of the dominance of speech, the irony is palpable. And yet I hope it will be evident that the subsequent words about God have resulted from concerted and careful listening—to Holy Scripture and to the voices of others. There is no final word to be delivered on God's hearing. Only by continually listening—the kind conditioned by and a reflection of the patient, just, and loving character of God's listening—may God's hearing be theologically illumined. Insofar as I have strived to listen in just this way, it is my hope to have shed light, even if dimly, on the hearing of God.

1. SCRIPTURE: AN AUSCULTATION OF HEARING

"Listening must be examined—itself auscultated—at the keenest or tightest point of its tension and its penetration. The ear is stretched by or according to meaning—perhaps one should say that its tension is meaning already, or made of meaning…"[1]

Bodies are objects that can be heard. Physicians use stethoscopes to auscultate bodies. Attention is usually paid to the heart, lungs, or bowels in order to evaluate the health and functioning of the body. Diagnoses are made and future complications are predicted and prevented by such attention. Conversely, inadequate attention to one or more bodily systems may result in undiagnosed illness of the neglected system, and may even prove detrimental to other bodily systems. The situation is no different for the theologian, the doctor of the Church of Jesus Christ, whose attention is given to a different *corpus,* albeit it, a textual one; and it is the driving concern of this work that theologians have paid insufficient attention to the ears of this body.

Ironically, the ear, too, must be auscultated, and that more fully than it has henceforth. Scripture speaks of God listening, hearing, inclining God's ear, and so forth. It is the contention of this work that when better theological attention is given to God's hearing, there results important insights that not only illumine God's relation to creation, but also provide theological resources scarcely utilized. Put another way, when the theological doctor of the church attends to the ears of the *corpus*, she learns more about the auditory system of *that* body, but also about how to use her own stethoscope.

What makes the ironic task of listening to God's listening so important? It must be remembered that the doctor of the church is always listening to a second *corpus*—the *Corpus Christi*—and that that Body needs doctors who have listened carefully to God's hearing, learned from it, and can teach credibly about listening. Two millennia of Christian tradition have observed the voice of the Church wax and wane with varying historical, cultural, and political circumstances. Might it be that the Church's loss of voice is sometimes preceded and caused by a loss of hearing? Prolonged deafness always compromises speech. When the doctors of the Church better auscultate God's hearing in the

[1] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 26.

corpus of Scripture, they thereby serve the *Corpus Christi* by taking up the ministry of their Lord, who "even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mk 7:37).

In what follows, it is my intention to take some initial soundings of God's hearing in the *corpus* of Scripture. First, in an exploration of the first truly dialogical divine-human interaction in the canon, the Abraham narrative will provide a theological framework for interpreting God's hearing. God's covenantal relationship with Abraham, as well as God's dealings with Hagar and Ishmael, supply a framework that runs with surprising consistency across the entirety of the *corpus* of Scripture. After developing the framework, second, I turn to the Psalter to examine the divinely revealed human experience of God's hearing. Carefully listening to the cries and pleas of the Psalmist furnishes a working definition of God's hearing. Of course, this "definition" can only be proximate and is inescapably plagued by the finitude and failings of the world in which it is formulated. Yet it makes possible an intelligible way of speaking of God's hearing—a speaking that is shaped by both Biblical testimony and the revealed testimony of the Biblical authors.

Of course, speaking about God's hearing inexorably surfaces the question about the extent to which such overtly anthropomorphic language reliably signifies divine reality. This and related issues will be taken up in more detail in subsequent chapters. Here, I must register what space will prohibit from becoming anything more than assertions. First, God's simplicity and transcendence mean that no language about God's hearing, no matter the level of description, can be univocal.[2] Any working definition or description, despite moving away from descriptions of ears and sound waves, remains unavoidably metaphorical. God is wholly Other, thereby making univocal theological predication impossible. Second, anthropomorphism need not reduce to metaphysical nihilism or mere Feuerbachian projection. Aquinas dealt with this through his account of analogy.[3] Calvin argued for divine accommodation, wherein God "lisps" when self-revealing in Scripture.[4] Janet Martin Soskice has argued for the conceptual possibility of theological realism built upon experience.[5] There are numerous ways of articulating a correspondence between God's

[2] Insightfully, Langdon Gilkey has warned against the modern slide toward univocity. See, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language" in *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem*, ed. *Owen C. Thomas* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983).

[3] Thomas *Summa* Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.5. I am mindful that David Burrell has concluded that Aquinas did not have a coherent theory, *per se*. David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 55. See also, William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), Chs. 2, 5.

[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.1.

[5] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 142-152.

self-revelation in Scripture and the reality to which it points. Third, because God has chosen to self-reveal in the canon of Scripture, the written record of experiences in the Psalter is reliably revelatory of a divine reality. These assumptions make possible the explication of God's hearing from the experience of the authors of the Psalter.

Finally, I will turn my attention to the New Testament, with special attention given to the Lazarus narrative of John 11, to ask in what way the developed framework and working definition are supported and transformed in light of the incarnation and the relationship of the Son to the Father in that particular narrative. A final, more developed christology will be the focus of the final chapter of this work.

One remaining cautionary note: while doing the stethoscopic work of auscultating the text, it is important to remember that the doctor of the Church does not stand authoritatively above the text, stethoscope in hand, evaluating, note-taking, and making diagnoses, but rather under the text and its authority. The metaphor breaks down if we forget that the theologian is not only doctor, but patient. What is heard when listening to the ears of the text has authority over all of its listeners, even—or perhaps especially—the theologian. Thus, with an auscultation of the text comes not only the responsibility to hear, but also to heed; not only to listen, but to obey. In this way, hearing the text becomes a moral act that will bring with it moral obligations, if the theologian is to be faithful not only to the text, but to God, the source of and authority behind the text.

1.1 Abraham and the Covenant: An Interpretive Framework

Genesis 15 is the Bible's first canonically-ordered account of divine-human dialogue.[6] As such, it offers insights into the shape and meaning of God's hearing and is a fitting place to start for an auscultation of God's hearing. Indeed, elements of the Abraham narrative in Genesis 15-16 surface critical theological issues and furnish a preliminary framework for understanding God's hearing that will be informed and expanded by the balance of the Biblical canon. Here the intention is to clarify the relationship between God's hearing and the covenant with Abraham. It will be argued that God's listening ear is the special privilege of the covenant people of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; yet it is not exclusively theirs. This conclusion anticipates the relationship between God and Israel that will take

[6] While Genesis 3:8-19 has the appearance of divine-human dialogue, it is best understood as a judgment narrative that merely calls Adam and Eve to account for their actions. God questions, and Adam and Eve respond. Yet there is no indication that God's response is conditioned by their answers. In this way, it lacks the pattern of speaking-hearing-responding that I intend by the word "dialogue".

shape across the remainder of the Hebrew Bible, as well as God's relationship with those who are not members of the covenant.

A literary analysis of Genesis 15 reflects a dialogical form between God and Abram. There are two structurally parallel scenes. The first in vv. 15:1-6, and the second, longer, scene in vv. 15:7-21. The first scene is initiated by a revelation of the LORD to Abraham in a vision. In this vision God assures Abraham, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (15:1, ESV). Thus, it is God who chooses the medium of communication, that is, the vision, and God who speaks first. The divine utterance is best characterized as a promise. Abraham responds to the promise with a question that is an implicit request for some evidence (15:2-3). His question need not be understood as motivated by doubt or faithlessness, for Abraham's faith is praised in 15:6 and functions as a salutary model later in the Scriptures. What is remarkable about Abraham's question is not merely *how* God responds, but that God responds at all. Abraham has asked a question of the "Sovereign Lord", and God *responds*. Put another way, the narrative characterizes God's subsequent speech as conditioned by Abraham's request. While it is not stated explicitly in the passage that God "heard" him, the fact that God did so is evidenced by the response: God speaks reassurance to Abraham and gives him a sign (15:4-5). God's response is a direct and specific response to Abraham's question and request for a sign. If God had not responded at all, or had responded in a way that lacked continuity with Abraham's questions, then God's hearing would be in question. The fact that God's response is a specific and direct reply to Abraham's question demonstrates the narrative's intent to portray a *dialogue* between God and Abraham that is analogous to human-to-human dialogue. Thus, the pattern is as follows: God speaks, Abraham speaks, God hears and responds. In this way, God and Abraham have carried on a dialogue, the likes of which had not yet occurred in the Biblical record.

The second scene is longer, but of a similar structure. Again, God utters a promise to Abraham (15:7). Abraham directs his question to the "Sovereign Lord". It is, again, a request for evidence for the truth of God's promise (15:8). That God hears Abraham's question is again evidenced by the specific way in which God responds. In a series of mysterious actions which have received a variety of interpretations, God instructs Abraham to gather a number of sacrificial animals which Abraham then cuts into halves and lays transversely. Abraham then falls into a deep sleep. God speaks a direct response to Abraham's question, by referring to the coming period of Egyptian slavery and the eventual return to the land promised to Abraham's descendants. This declaration of coming events is a word of assurance addressing Abraham's question. As in the previous scene, the word of assurance is followed by a sign. This sign, however, is more dramatic and of greater

significance for Abraham's relationship with God. For, despite the meaning of many details remaining unclear, what is certain is that the smoking pot and flaming torch passing between the animals is consistent with covenant-making activity.[7] Through this activity, God has cut a covenant with Abraham that binds Godself to fulfill the actions promised. The pattern is again clear: God speaks, Abraham speaks, God hears and responds.

This divine-human dialogue and its role in the establishment of God's covenant people evinces a correlation between God's listening and God's covenant relationship. Hitherto Genesis has described God's engagement with creation in general and with humankind in particular, in the mode of speech. God's word has brought forth creation. God's word has pronounced judgement on Adam, Eve, the Serpent, the generation of Noah, and the builders of the Babel tower. Yet it is here with Abraham that God's *ear* is active. God listens to Abraham's questions and requests.[8] Beginning here, with Abraham, God inclines God's listening ear for dialogical purposes. This makes plausible the suggestion that this mode of engagement is associated with those with whom God makes covenant.

This privileged mode of God's engagement can be further traced along covenantal lines. Moses spoke with God as one does a friend, face-to-face (Ex 33:11). In contrast to the gods of other nations, Deuteronomy 4:7 boldly proclaims, "For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?" Here Israel experiences the nearness of being heard when they call to God. In the giving of the law—a significant moment for the covenant people of God, if ever there was one—Israel communicates to Moses great fear at God's giving of the Decalogue, at which point the latter responds, "The LORD heard your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: 'I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken'" (Deut 5:28). Indeed, there are dozens of passages throughout the Hebrew Bible, which state indicatively that God has heard the people of Israel.

As a collection of texts recording the history of Israel's relationship with the LORD, it should come as no surprise that the Hebrew Bible narrates accounts of God listening to

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[7] Cf. Jeremiah 34:18. Wenham cites an eighth-century treatise that takes a similar form. Though, Wenham acknowledges the numerous interpretations this passage has received. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary Series (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), p. 332. Westermann's argument that God's activity is not an act of covenant-making but akin to an oath is unconvincing. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 225.

[8] While it could be argued that God was listening in the Garden or to the Babel tower-builders, for example, these cases lack the dialogical character of the Abraham narrative. The events that precede the Abraham narrative may involve a kind of divine response to human activity, but none implies divine hearing. More often it is implicitly or explicitly communicated that God *sees* (e.g., When God *sees* that each day of creation is good.).

Israel. Yet in order to establish that God's listening ear is the special privilege of the covenant people, more must be said. Put another way, to come to this conclusion, it is necessary to demonstrate God's willingness to hear the covenant people; but alone, that is insufficient to demonstrate God's listening ear as their special privileged possession. A thorough auscultation of God's hearing must listen carefully to what is said about God's listening to those outside of the covenant. Here, continuing to read the Abraham narrative offers surprising insights that further establish a framework for understanding God's hearing.

Hagar's relationship to Sarah, Abraham, and the covenant with the LORD have too often been the victim of hasty theological judgement. The influence of Paul's allegorical reading presented in his letter to the Galatians has produced interpretations that too tidily sort Sarah and Hagar and their descendants into covenant and non-covenant members, respectively. In doing so, they often dismiss or minimize Hagar's role in the narrative. Sometimes the Hagar narrative is construed as merely background material to the Abraham-Sarah-Isaac narrative. Or it has been suggested that their function is merely literary: protagonists need antagonists.[9] However, to read too quickly over the Hagar sub-plot would be to overlook substantial contributions to a thorough auscultation of God's hearing. In contrast, when the ear is attentive to the setting and details of the narrative, surprising themes can be heard, and rather loudly!

In Genesis 16 barren Sarah has an Egyptian slave, Hagar, whom she gives to her husband Abraham in order that she might bear children. Hagar conceives and, in pride, looks with contempt upon her mistress Sarah. The oppressed becomes the oppressor. In retribution, and with Abraham's permission, Sarah deals harshly with Hagar, such that the latter flees into the wilderness in the direction of Egypt. It is at the spring on the way to Shur that the messenger of the LORD (מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה) meets Hagar, commands her to return to Sarah, and announces the forthcoming birth of a son from whom a great multitude of people will issue. In the annunciation, the messenger supplies the reason for this divine blessing: the LORD has listened to her affliction. More than that, the son whom Hagar bears is to be called Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) or "God-Hears." In response, Hagar declares, "you are a God of seeing" (אַתָּה אֵל רֳאִי) and names the spring "the spring of the living one who sees me" (בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי). Later, in Genesis 21:8-21, after the birth of Isaac, Sarah urges Abraham to dismiss Hagar and Ishmael to avoid compromising Isaac's inheritance. Abraham sends Hagar out, again into the wilderness, where she and Ishmael struggle to find water. Facing the likely

[9] von Rad argues that they serve to "retard the action of the main narrative and to heighten the suspense." Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 196.

death of Ishmael, Hagar cries out to God, who responds, first, by declaring that God has heard the voice of Ishmael and, second, by opening Hagar's eyes to available water.

What can be gathered from the Hagar narrative about God's hearing and about its relationship to the covenant? First, there is God's obvious self-description in the naming of Ishmael—that the LORD is a God who hears. This overt declaration about the activity of God, by God, is easily lost on English readers, buried in the meaning of the Hebrew name. God names the son of Hagar, *God-Hears* because God has heard her affliction (16:11). So significant is the naming of Ishmael and the declaration that God has heard Hagar that Westermann sees it as the goal of the entire Hagar narrative.[10] The theme is a recurring one as, later, the text engages in overt word play when God is said to hear the voice of the boy (21:17). God hears the voice of God-Hears. Both the early canonical position of this divine self-predication, as well as its placement in Israel's founding narrative—these establish the character of the God of Abraham as one who hears.

Second, it should be noted that Hagar is an Egyptian. It has been argued persuasively that Hagar's ethnic identity is not a superfluous textual detail, but an intentional, ironic echo to Israel's Egyptian slavery.[11] Israel's time of slavery in Egypt was already anticipated in Genesis 15:13. Here Sarah, who is to become the mother of the covenant people, enslaves and oppresses Hagar, the Egyptian.[12] This ironic, self-critical interpretation makes a hero out of Hagar the slave and turns Sarah into Pharaoh.[13] Dozeman asserts that "The ethnic identity of Hagar as an Egyptian certainly has a theological function in the text to provide self-criticism of the ancestors and reversal during the exodus."[14] There is then, in God's hearing of Hagar, an anticipation of how God will listen to Israel when under Egyptian oppression. There is further evidence of the overt echo to Israel's Egyptian slavery in Hagar's declaration that God has seen her and in her corresponding naming of the spring. In Exodus 2:24 God "hears" the groaning of God's people and "sees" them. That God heard God's people in Egyptian slavery is a recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible (Ex

[10] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 249.

[11] See esp., Thomas Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 117, No 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 23-43. Also, for an understanding of Hagar's representation of the fruitful and constantly tempting Egypt, see Iain Duguid, "Hagar the Egyptian: A Note on the Allure of Egypt in the Abraham Cycle" in *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 56 (1994), pp. 419-21.

[12] Cf. David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (All Souls Studies 2; London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 23-38; M. Tsevat, "Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1980) pp. 69-70.

[13] Thomas Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," p. 28.

[14] Ibid., p. 29. n. 17.

3:7, 6:5; Num 20:16; Neh 9:9). Here, in the Hagar narrative, God hears the affliction of the Egyptian who is enslaved and afflicted, just as God will hear Israel. The two narratives are linked by shared circumstances and God's listening ear. Taken together, they also forecast the way in which God may hear those unjustly treated by the covenant people, to be discussed below.

Third, the setting of Hagar's encounter with the messenger of the LORD is the מִדְבָּר ("wilderness"). The wilderness takes on social and political connotations in the Hagar narrative due to its echo of Israel's exodus experience.[15] Again, the intertextual echoes of Israel's experience are palpable. Hagar flees from her slave-master into the wilderness two times. In both, the LORD is encountered and hears her cries of affliction. Hagar's wilderness experience anticipates Israel's. As Dozeman concludes, "The points of contact between Hagar and the exodus are undeniable, as is the self-critical nature of the literature."[16] Even at this early point in the Pentateuch, the wilderness—the place where fear, uncertainty, instability, and isolation erupt into desperate cries to God—is already the place where God becomes present and hears. It would appear that God's listening ear is especially attentive to wilderness-circumstances.

Finally, while it is doubtless that Isaac is the child of promise from whom the covenant people issue, the Hagar narrative ends with Ishmael being circumcised (17:22-27). Ishmael, God-Hears, is marked with the sign of the covenant, as is Abraham's whole household, including those foreigners belonging to it. This act of obedience on the part of Abraham makes Ishmael's covenant status at least ambiguous. It might be argued that he was incorporated into the covenant people by this act, even if his descendants were not. Yet even if there remain compelling exegetical or theological reasons for concluding otherwise, Ishmael's circumcision, along with the wilderness setting and Hagar's ethnic identity frustrate neat and tidy divisions between the lines of Sarah and Hagar that too easily dismiss the latter's contribution to fruitful theological reflection.

How is it, then, that the Abraham narrative and the Hagar sub-plot contribute to a theological framework for understanding God's hearing? What conclusions can be drawn? The following will propose four elements of a theological framework, derived from the narrative, which, if correct, will be supported by the remainder of the Hebrew canon and will clarify the relationship between God's hearing and the covenant.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 29.

First, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel, is the God who hears. God's self-revelation as *Ishmael* functions as a definitive act of divine disclosure that predicates a particular activity of the God of the Hebrew bible. This revelation demonstrates, by way of naming the offspring of Abraham and Hagar, one mode by which this God engages with creation. As a listener, this God self-reveals as capable of a kind of responsiveness or receptivity to human speech. Of course, to speak of divine responsiveness is to raise numerous questions that must await further treatment below. At this juncture, God's revelation of God in the narrative stands to establish a particular *oikonomia* in God's relationship with human speakers. And this God, who self-reveals as *Ishmael*, remains the hearing God, beyond the bounds of the narrative. This self-revelation is not limited by the scope of the Hagar or Abraham narratives; nor is it circumscribed by Genesis or even the Pentateuch. The God of Abraham is revealed, in the constancy of God's nature, to be a God who hears. God heard that Leah was hated (Gen 29:33). God heard Rachael's request for children (Gen 30:6). God heard the Israelites groaning in slavery (Ex 2:24, 3:7, 6:5; Num 20:16; Deut 26:7). God heard the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness (Num 11:1, 18; 12:2; 14:27, 28). God heard Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the temple (1 Ki 9:3; para. 2 Chron 7:12). God heard Elijah's petition to raise the widow's son (1 Ki 17:22). God heard the cries of the Psalmist, which gave way to rejoicing (Ps 66:19) and is addressed as "you who hear prayer" (Ps 65:2). God heard the prayer of Hezekiah in his illness (Is 38:4-5). God heard Jeremiah's lament (Lam 3:55). God heard all the words of Daniel (Dan 10:12). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the covenant God who hears. It is this consistent, self-revelation of God in Scripture that allows Moses to exclaim, "For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?"

Second, the God who hears is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel. Put another way, God's listening ear is the special privilege of God's covenant people. The God who hears has bound Godself by way of a covenant to a particular people in such a way that God's ear is inclined to them. This God not only speaks to Abraham, but listens to him. When God hears Israel's groaning under Egyptian slavery, God remembers the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2:24). The God who hears their groaning has promised to be *their* God (Ex 6:7). When Solomon dedicates the newly built temple to the LORD, he prays, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants" and proceeds to ask the LORD to hear the prayers of the covenant people in a vast variety of situations. The temple, the dwelling place of the God of Israel, becomes the place from

where God hears prayer.[17] Indeed, part and parcel to God's covenant with descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the privilege of God's listening ear.

Yet this God is not only the God of the covenant people, but also the "King of all the earth" (Ps. 47:7). Sarah's unjust and oppressive treatment of Hagar is the first example of God's covenant people failing to be faithful covenant partners by neglecting their duty to reflect the mercy and justice of God to others. It is significant that God hears the cries and groans of the covenant people as sojourners in Egypt, because this is transformed into a reminder that Israel, who was once the oppressed, ought not to become the oppressor. For just as God heard the cries of Israel, God will hear the cries of sojourners, widows, and the fatherless (Ex 22:21-24) who are oppressed by Israel. If they are unjustly treated, their cries will invite God's wrath on their oppressors. Thus, just as God's listening ear gave rise to God's justice and compassion for Israel in Egypt, now Israel is to be sensitive to the cries of others and act justly and compassionately toward them. God's hearing of Hagar, as well as God's commitment to hear the sojourner dwelling among Israel, suggests that God's ear is inclined toward the groans of the oppressed, regardless of their covenant status. Already the blood of Abel has cried out to God from the ground (Gen 4:10). Solomon even prays at the dedication of the temple that God would hear the temple-directed prayer of the foreigner who will come to know of Israel's great God. God's listening ear is the special privilege of the covenant people, but this does not mean God's ear is stopped to others (1 Ki 8:41-43; 2 Chr 6:32-33). So, God hears the cries and groans of the oppressed, regardless of their covenant status. God also hears the cries of those outside the covenant who experience the effects of Israel's covenant failings, namely, Israel's failure to treat others with the mercy and compassion with which God treated them. God will hear not only *for* but also *against* the covenant people.

Third, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel, is the God whose ear is especially inclined to those in the wilderness. This God is willing, and does in fact, incline God's ear to those in the wilderness. Hagar's wilderness experiences demonstrate the way God hears the cries of those who find themselves in the place where fear, uncertainty, instability, and isolation erupt into desperate cries to God. God's compassion to Hagar, prompted by God's hearing, becomes paradigmatic for all those who share her experience of oppression and alienation. In light of the ironic and self-critical nature of the Hagar narrative, Hagar may be understood as a type of Israel, running

[17] Samuel Ballentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 82.

from her slave-master into the wilderness, whose cries of affliction are heard by God. In this way, she anticipates God's compassionate hearing of the covenant people in the wilderness.

If God's ear is especially inclined to those who cry out in the wilderness, what does the wilderness look like? While not exhaustive, there are a few distinct and prominent themes in the Hebrew Bible.

There is a surprising correlation in the Hebrew Bible between God's listening ear and what can be generally described as "barrenness narratives". These are difficult passages which reflect the stigmatization of childlessness in the ancient world and can continue to stigmatize and marginalize today. And yet they give special insight into God's hearing. Ishmael, God-Hears, is named in the larger context of Sarah's barrenness. God hears Hagar's cry, but the result is Abraham's firstborn son, who was the will of Sarah's decision. Similarly, in the relationship between barren Rachael and unloved Leah, God hears Leah's affliction and she gives birth, first to Reuben (רְאוּבֵן), whose name means *Behold-* or *Look-a-son,*[18] and then to Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן), or *Hearing-with-acceptance*[19] (Gen 29:32-33). Shortly thereafter, Rachael conceives and declares, "God has […] heard my voice and given me a son" (Gen 30:6). Then, in 1 Samuel 1, barren Hannah must endure rival Peninnah's provocations. The former pours out her soul before the LORD in the temple and is remembered. She conceives and gives birth to a son, whom she names Samuel (שְׁמוּאֵל) (1 Sam 1:1-20). The etymology of Samuel's name has received various interpretations.[20] However, the Hebrew bears phonological similarity to Ishmael's name. So, "[a]lthough the names are associated with different roots, שׁמע 'to hear' and שׁאל 'to ask', the *phonological likeness of the names* יִשְׁמָעֵאל *and* שְׁמוּאֵל should not be dismissed, since up to this point these stories have developed along a similar line."[21] Nikaido has argued that "given the strong background of persecution in these narratives, the attentive reader may have easily heard the echo of the root שׁמע, which is regularly identified with stories of affliction in biblical literature."[22] Whether there is etymological evidence in Samuel's naming, it is clear that,

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[18] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 910.

[19] Wilhelm Gesenius, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003) p. 837.

[20] For the available options and a discussion of the lexical issues, see Morris Jastrow, "The Name of Samuel and the Stem לאש" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol 19, No. 1 (1900), pp. 82-105. See also, Scott C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 78 ff.

[21] S. Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study" in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. LI, No. 2 (2001), p. 231. Italics original.

[22] Ibid.

like Hagar before her, Hannah's prayer has been heard by God. Thus, childlessness, in the Hebrew Bible, is a kind of wilderness experience to which God's ear is inclined. Given that "[f]or a married woman to be without children in the patriarchal world is a misfortune of overwhelming proportions,"[23] it is no surprise that this acute pain erupts into desperate cries that are heard by God.

Broadly speaking, the wilderness is also the place of cries for deliverance, either from danger of enemies or from God's judgment, if these can be categorized as distinctly different. Fear of imminent danger is often the source of cries to God, to which God's ear is inclined. God listened to Moses when he interceded on behalf of Israel after the golden calf incident (Deut 9:19). God listened to Joshua when he asked that the sun stand still for the sake of the battle against the five Amorite kings at Gibeon (Josh 10:14). God listened to David when he cried out for deliverance from Saul and his enemies (2 Sam 22:7). God listened to Hezekiah's request to remember him in his illness (Is 38:5). So frequent is God's hearing in such circumstances that often there is expressed a great confidence that God *will* hear in similar circumstances. Jehoshaphat is confident (with echoes of Solomon's temple dedication prayer) that if sword or judgement or pestilence or famine come upon Israel, God will hear their cries for deliverance (2 Chron 20:9). Micah declares confidently that his looking to the LORD and waiting thereupon will result in God's hearing (Mic 7:7). The Biblical precedent for God's listening also gives way to frequent *requests for God to hear* in those circumstances. The Psalms, which will be treated below, are saturated with these requests. Hezekiah asks God to hear the mocking words of Sennacherib and to deliver Israel from his hand. (2 Ki 19:16; Is. 37:17). Nehemiah asks God to hear his prayer before he approaches Artaxerxes (Neh 1:11) and to hear the taunts of Israel's enemies (4:4). Jeremiah asks God to hear both his own prayer, as well as the malicious plotting of his enemies (Jer 18:19). Solomon's temple-dedication prayer asks God to hear the prayers of the covenant people in a panoply of circumstances, which includes when they go out to battle foreign enemies (1 Ki 8:44-45; 2 Chr 6:34-35). Across the Hebrew Scriptures, God is asked to hear, and is said to have heard, Israel's cries for deliverance from enemies and divine judgement.

Deliverance from God's judgment or from the danger of enemies is often accompanied by an acknowledgement of and repentance from sin. When Israel has violated covenant, the presence or threat of divine judgement provokes contrite repentance that is often characterized by the desperate tone associated with the wilderness. These are not infrequently accompanied by explicit requests to be heard. Isaiah assures Israel that God is certainly and patiently waiting to hear their cry of repentance (Is 30:18-19). Nehemiah prays

[23] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 237.

"O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments," and goes on to ask that God hear him as he confesses the sins of Israel (Neh 1:5-6). With an almost verbatim invocation[24], Daniel confesses, at length, the sins of Israel that have brought upon them the Babylonian destruction, and then cries out, "listen to the prayer of your servant. […] Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. […] O Lord, hear." (Dan 9:4-19). Returning to Solomon's prayer of dedication at the temple, he asks that God would forgive sin and hear the cries of Israel in four distinct circumstances: defeat by an enemy (1 Ki 8:33-34; 2 Chr 6:24-25), drought (1 Ki 8:35-36; 2 Chr 6:26-27), famine by any number of causes (1 Ki 8:37-40; 2 Chr 6:28-31), and exile (1 Ki 8:46-53; 2 Chr 6:36-39). Such passages suggest a relationship between God's willingness to hear and repentance from covenant violations. The relationship receives its definitive statement in the 2 Chronicles account of the temple dedication, in which the LORD responds with specific reference to the divine punishments of drought and famine, stating, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chr 7:14).

From 2 Chronicles 7:14 all of the preceding principles of the framework that appeared in the Abraham narrative are concisely restated. God *hears*. God hears *God's people who are called by God's name*. God hears *those in the wilderness*, the place where fear, uncertainty, instability, and isolation erupt into desperate cries to God. Yet these three principles of the framework imply a fourth, even if it is not explicitly stated in the Abraham narrative.

Fourth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel, will refuse to hear those who are unfaithful to the covenant. The significance of divine hearing is established by the reality, in both Israel's teaching and religious experience, that there are circumstances wherein God does not hear. God's refusal or unwillingness to hear under some circumstances infuses with meaning those moments in which God does. While the covenant God of Israel does hear the covenant people, there are times when, due to Israel's violation of the covenant that God will choose to turn a deaf ear. While not isolated to the prophetic literature, it is no surprise that the majority of declarations of divine unhearing occur there, where prophetic voices are appropriated to call Israel to return to covenant obedience. In Isaiah's indictment of Judah, the voice of the LORD declares, "When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even

[24] Daniel addresses God as "Adonai, the great and awesome God…" instead of Nehemiah's "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God…" (Neh. 1:5-6).

though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (Is 1:15). Similar to the aforementioned prohibitions on oppressing sojourners, God's covenant people are prohibited from oppressing or unjustly treating their labor force, lest God turn a deaf ear. Israel asks, "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Isaiah responds, "Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high" (Is. 58:3-4). Isaiah goes on to prescribe the characteristics of the fast that the LORD prefers: liberating the oppressed and meeting the material needs of the impoverished. "Then," Isaiah declares, "you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, 'Here I am'" (Is. 58:6-9). But in the absence of such covenant faithfulness, Isaiah instructs, "See, the LORD's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear" (Is 59:1-2). Isaiah helpfully articulates a cause-effect relationship between contra-covenant living and God's unwillingness to hear. Significantly, God's unwillingness to hear is not a failure on God's part, but on Judah's. God's ear is not dull. God's ability to hear is in no way inhibited or curtailed by covenant violations. Rather, it is God's willingness. In this way, God's unwillingness to hear belongs to a kind of divine judgment for sin and covenant violation.

The Book of Jeremiah is no less clear. After an indictment for a litany of covenant violations, including oppressing the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, God instructs Jeremiah, "As for you, do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you" (Jer 7:16). Interestingly, here, God refuses to hear even the prayers of a third party on behalf of God's unfaithful people, due to the latter's continued covenant violations. In response to these violations, God promises to bring about military defeat. Judah has refused to listen to the LORD. Thus, God is going to bring judgement upon them. Then, "though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them" (Jer 11:11). Repeating the injunction that Jeremiah not expend prayer on Judah, God declares, "I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble" (Jer 11:14). Because God will not hear, not even intercession by Jeremiah is permitted on behalf of Judah. Because God is committed to remembering iniquity and punishing sin, Jeremiah's intercession can only be offered in vain. The injunction is uttered a third time: "The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, I consume them" (Jer 14:11-12). God's judgement of Judah is so certain that God will not entertain any petition to alter the divine plan to mete out punishment on the unfaithful people. Jeremiah changes strategy once Judah begins to

plot against him. Then, Jeremiah's plea is no longer for deliverance from punishment, but for the very judgment God has been promising. In his prayer for judgement on Judah in Chapter 18, Jeremiah begins by crying out, "Give heed to me, O LORD, and listen to what my adversaries say" (Jer 18:19). He then goes on to pray that famine, violence, death, and pestilence would come upon Judah. Thus, it would seem that Jeremiah, though having been censored by God for his intercession that ran contrary to the divine plan, is now making another go at it by praying for the very judgement and justice that God had promised to send upon Judah. While God will turn a deaf ear to covenant unfaithfulness, it may be that God will hear cries for judgement and justice upon those who violate the divine decrees.

Among the other prophets, Ezekiel is no different. After God reveals to Ezekiel all of the ways that Judah has desecrated the temple, God declares, "Therefore, I will act in wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my hearing with a loud voice, I will not listen to them" (Ezek 8:18). Amos similarly indicts Israel for covenant unfaithfulness, warning those who pray for the day of the LORD, because God's visitation will mean judgement rather than mercy. Sin has so dominated the life of the people that feasts and holy gatherings, burnt, grain, and peace offerings are all to no avail. "Take away from me," God demands, "the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps" (Am 5:23). Sin has corrupted melody and turned it into cacophony. God will not listen to their sin-tainted worship. Rather, justice and righteousness are what are desired (Am 2:24).

That God will close God's ear to sin and unfaithfulness is the declaration of Israel's prophets, but it is also present in the religious experience of the covenant people. Proverbs 15:29 declares, "The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous." The prayers of the Psalms imply the same division: "When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles" (Ps 34:17). Similarly, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart," the Psalmist believes that "the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). As representatives of popular Hebrew religion, Job's friends suggest the same economic conditionality of God's hearing. In Job 22, Eliphaz responds to Job that if the latter will but agree with God, receive instruction, repent, forsake wealth, then God will hear him (Jb 22:21-27). Even young Elihu, in condemning Job's perceived pride, insists with regard to men of such arrogance that "they cry out, but he does not answer […] Surely God does not hear an empty cry, nor does the Almighty regard it" (Jb 35:12-13). Thus, it was common belief that personal and corporate iniquity were barriers to the divine audience. What makes God's dialogue with Abraham and God's self-revelation to Hagar as the hearing God so significant is that God does not always hear. God's hearings is not to be

assumed or taken for granted, even by the covenant people. In God's economy, covenant faithfulness by God's own is a prerequisite for God's hearing.

Having listened to the Abraham narrative and isolated four principles of a theological framework for understanding God's hearing, the material content or meaning of God's hearing must now be examined.

1.2 Hearing in the Psalms

In 1938, Friedrich Heiler published his magisterial *Das Gebet: Eine religionsgeschictliche und relgionspychologische Untersuchung*. There, Heiler asserted that "prayer is the heart and centre of all religion"[25] and set out to explore prayer employing the *religionsgeschictlich* method that was then in vogue. His study begins with so-called "primitive prayer" by examining recorded prayers, personal testimony about those prayers, and third-party accounts about prayer experiences. Heiler observed, "Every prayer opens with an invocation to the divine being […] The attention of the god is thus called to the presence of the worshipper, or the god is summoned from a distance to hear him. Sometimes a loud cry precedes the god's name, or to it is added some such word as 'Hear!'"[26] Invocation has always been the doorstep into prayer.

The ubiquity of the invocation, even in the primitive prayers, establishes that prayer is and always has been accompanied by a tacit belief that any god worth petitioning is one who can be called forth as one who will hear. This calling forth, as Heiler observes, may be a request for increased propinquity or for a special kind of attention. The petitioner desires a certain kind of relationship with the god wherein the god will hear the petition. Heiler goes on to state that such primitive prayers imply a rather crude and underdeveloped understanding of God, and that this is carried over into the Hebrew Scriptures.

> The language of the Old Testament has preserved in a remarkable way the sensuous anthropomorphism of the primitive conception of God when it speaks of God's eyes and ears, mouth and hands. God sees, hears, and smells. He perceives, like every human being, by means of His organs or sense. Man comes before Him in

[25] Friedrich Heiler, *Das Gebet: Eine religionsgeschictliche und relgionspychologische Untersuchung* (Oxford: OUP, 1932). All citations come from the 1997 English edition, *Prayer* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), p. xv.

[26] Ibid., p. 16.

> prayer with the reverent demeanour and gesture; God sees him and addressees him by name; God hears his voice.[27]

Heiler's work is both dated and deeply troubling in its understanding of so-called "primitive" invocation. Yet it raises questions that remain relevant. Specifically, his work surfaces theological questions with respect to God's hearing that must be asked, not only of early, extra-Biblical prayer, as was Heiler's concern, but also of the revealed religion of Holy Scripture. These questions run along two themes. First, What is the relationship between God's hearing and *attention*? What sort of attention is being requested when God is asked to hear prayer? What expectations does the petitioner believe accompany such attention? What circumstances usually warrant such attention? Second, What does God's hearing mean for God's *presence or absence*? Is the invocation and request to hear a petition for a certain kind of presence? Is there an experience of absence that motivates such a request?

Answering these questions will allow the development of a working definition of divine hearing. It is an attempt to auscultate God's hearing in the belief that carefully attending to the revealed testimony of the Psalmist's experience will fill out a material definition of divine hearing. The intent is to arrive at a clearer understanding of what the Psalmist, and thereby more generally the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures, believed about the God to whom Israel prayed, and what it meant for that God to hear those prayers. The Psalms, while obviously not the only Hebrew Bible testimony to God's hearing, constitute the overwhelming majority of requests for God to hear. The abundance of petitions for God to hear makes the Psalter an obvious text to investigate the content of such requests.

What is the relationship between God's hearing and attention? Are the two one and the same, with the former being a conceptually unsophisticated and earthier substitute for the latter, more philosophically refined if less obvious, anthropomorphism? Some clarity may be achieved by examining the Hebrew Psalter because the Psalms are replete with requests for God to hear, see, consider, or answer. These petitions may all be considered attention-seeking;[28] but by examining to what God is being asked to attend, it becomes clear that hear-petitions have a particular character that set them apart from other attention-seeking petitions.

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[27] Ibid., p. 55.

[28] Patrick Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 97.

So, to what is God being asked to attend, when the Psalmist requests that God hear? The object of the petition is, "in the great majority of cases words referring to the prayer, such as תפלתי 'my prayer' Pss 4:2, 39:13, 54:4, 55:2, 61:2, (84:9), 86:6, 102:2, 143:1; רנתי 'my cry' Pss 17:1, 61:2, 88:3, 142:7; תהנוני (קול) '(the voice of) my supplications' Pss 28:2, 140:7, 143, 1; 86:6 (תהנונותי); to the voice of the petitioner, קולי 'my voice' Pss 64:2, (119:149), 141:1."[29] These requests for God to hear point beyond themselves to a subsequent request being made by the petitioner. The literary emphasis shifts from the request to hear to the subsequent request or requests being made of God. A similar shift is made when God is asked to hear the petitioner himself, לי/אלי "(incline your ear) to me" (Pss 31:2, 2:2, 102:3; 17:6, 55:3).[30]

The invocation-to-petition shift of these hear-petitions is very common and belongs to what Herman Gunkel, in his introduction to the Psalms, called the "initial plea".[31] Because requests for God to hear so rarely appear alone, Gunkel understood them to be merely preparatory, a sort of formal invocation that "prepared the way for the actual petitions coming later."[32] However, Anneli Aejmelaeus has argued that the request to hear should not be considered merely preparatory, and that for three reasons.[33] First, such requests sometimes appear in the middle (Ps 86:6, 140:7, 142:7) and at the end (Ps 39:13) of some psalms. Second, some psalms request God's hearing with no subsequent request to be heard (Ps 88; 130). Third, even when at the head of the psalm, the request to hear is often combined with additional petitions or a more complex invocation such that it does not stand on its own. Thus, Aejmelaeus seems correct in her conclusion that the request for God to hear should "be understood as a humble prayer for contact with [the LORD];"[34] and, contra Gunkel, when the request appears at the head of the psalm, it "should be regarded as the first full prayer of the psalm, by no means simply preparation for a further prayer."[35]

[29] Anneli Aejmelaeus, *The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms* (New York: de Gruyter, 1986), p. 27. Versification is based on the Hebrew bible.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Herman Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1933), pp. 218-219.

[32] Aejmelaeus, *The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms*, p. 28.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., p. 110.

Thus, requests for God to hear are not merely formal decorum placed at the head of, or scattered throughout, the Psalms.[36] Rather, these requests may be understood and evaluated independently as prayers that reveal something of the petitioner's concept of God. They are requesting a particular kind of attention from God.

This becomes more evident when hear-petitions are examined *vis-à-vis* requests for God to see, answer, and remember. See-petitions are less frequent and only begin appearing more often in texts written at a later date.[37] Answer-petitions do not request only verbal responses, but are more often requesting broader responses to specific petitions. Thus, answer-petitions are broader than hear-petitions in the scope of their request.[38] Remember-petitions share some similarities with hear- and see-petitions but lack the immediacy and urgency of hear-petitions.[39]

So, it can be concluded that hear-petitions are requesting *a particular or unique kind of attention*. Aejmelaeus' reference to a "humble prayer for contact", points toward this conclusion; but the notion of contact is vague and leaves unaddressed the kind and quality of intercourse being requested in hear-petitions. What features characterize hear-petitions that make them so necessary in the mind of the Psalmist?

First, Israel's history testifies to the sure and certain outcome of a petition when God has heard it. God decides to "go down" and take action due to the outcry that has come to God regarding Sodom (Gen 18:21). God takes immediate action against Cain when Abel's blood cries out to God from the ground (Gen 4:10). As demonstrated above, most significant for the history of Israel, God intervenes on behalf of the Israelite slaves when "God heard their groaning" (Ex 2:24; see also Ex 3:7, 6:5). This fact explains the necessity of God's hearing for the petitioner. If God hears the petitioner, God's intervention is sure to follow. Therefore, hear-requests imply a *particular kind of attention that entails a sure response*.

Second, hear-petitions in the Psalms are characterized by an urgency or an emergency-status situation that requires God's immediate intervention. God's hearing seems to take sequential priority over God's seeing or answering. As in the examples of Sodom or Egyptian captivity, God first hears and then proceeds to see or act. Hearing is thus

[36] Even if the request to hear takes on a semi-professional or formal feature in the psalms, such formality does not invalidate the authenticity of the request. Cf. Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), pp. 6-7.

[37] Aejmelaeus, *The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms*, p. 29.

[38] Ibid., p. 31

[39] Ibid., p. 42.

prioritized as the first step of divine intervention from the perspective of the Psalmist. The priority and urgency can be demonstrated when juxtaposed with other prayers. For example, God is never asked to hear a thanksgiving. Aejmelaeus infers from this that hear-petitions "imply a desperate need for […] contact and for help."[40] Similarly, she remarks that, when compared with petitions for God to remember, "These petitions, like the petitions 'hear' and 'see' […] appeal for [the LORD's] attention, but do not imply an immediate emergency as particularly 'hear' does."[41] God's hearing is a requisite first step in addressing an urgent emergency. Hear-petitions are charged with desperation and need which require God's attention in wilderness circumstances and are not found among the more quotidian requests of the Psalter. So, hearing is a *particular kind of attention to an urgent need which entails a sure response.*

Third, the attention that is being requested is not only urgent, but of a particular character. Following Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch has described attention as a form of love.[42] She defines attention as "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality."[43] Attention, of the highest quality and kind, is then an act and demonstration of love. As an act of love, attention becomes an inherently moral phenomenon, such that the character of the attention is a reflection of the moral qualities, commitments, and desires of the attending agent. As argued in the above framework, Israel's history demonstrates God's loving intervention on behalf of the petitioner whenever God has heard. It is not only the desperate nature of the situation, but also the belief that God's attention is the attention of a loving Other whose intervention will be characterized by love and covenant commitment. Similarly, God's attention is the attention of a just Other whose intervention will be characterized by justice and covenant faithfulness. Listening, it has been argued, is an irreducibly moral act.[44] As such, the Psalmist can expect that God's listening attention will have a moral character that is consistent with and testified to by God's historical and covenantal relationship with Israel. Exodus 22 explicitly links God's listening to God's just and covenantal character. For, just as God heard the cries of the Israelites when they were sojourners in Egypt, God will hear the cries of the sojourners among Israel if they are

[40] Ibid., p. 28.

[41] Ibid., p. 42.

[42] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p. 74. Here Murdoch is following Simone Weil, "Attention and Will" in *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), pp. 116-22.

[43] Ibid., p. 34.

[44] See Bernd Wannenwetsch, "'Take Heed What Ye Hear': Listening as a Moral, Transcendental and Sacramental Act" in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135:S1, pp. 93ff.; also, Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 219.

unjustly treated (Ex 22:23). Similarly, God warns that if a neighbor's cloak is offered in a pledge, it must be returned before sundown. If it is not returned, and the neighbor cries out to God, God will hear him (Ex 22:27). Thus, it seems that God's ear is particularly inclined to the cries of those who are unjustly treated—those in the wilderness—and God warns Israel that God will be quick to hear on account of divine justice and compassion. When God hears, God's love and justice come to bear on the situation.

So, to summarize this reflection on the attention requested by hear-petitions, a preliminary definition can be offered. When the Psalmist is making a plea for God to hear he is requesting *a particular kind of loving and just attention to an urgent need which entails a sure response*.

Before proceeding to positively and constructively fill out this definition of hearing's attention, a brief excurses is necessary in order to negatively define what hearing's attention is not. With respect to God's character and nature, there is no reason to suppose that requests for God to hear imply that God is, metaphysically or in the perception of the petitioner, otherwise aloof, ignorant, or unacquainted with the circumstances of the petitioner apart from that hearing. The attention requested by hear-petitions is not identical with divine omniscience; nor does it imply, in any way, a compromise in the divine perfections. Rather, as the Psalmist seems to understand God's hearing, God can have complete and perfect knowledge of some circumstance or petition and yet still not *hear* it. Scripture itself makes this very distinction between God's hearing and God's knowing. Returning again to Solomon's dedication of the temple, he prays,

> If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know—according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart—so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors. (1 Ki 8:37-40)

Solomon's petition is for God to "hear in heaven… forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know." The tacit assumption is that God already *knows* the hearts of God's people, but is being asked to hear them anyway. When Solomon asks God to hear, he is not requesting that God learn or become conscious of something otherwise unknown. This distinction strikes at the very mystery of petitionary prayer, wherein one prays to a God who

antecedently knows the request and the consequent outcome. Yet the exhortation to pray remains, and God's hearing of that prayer is a necessary element of that mystery.

So, when the Psalmist is making a plea for God to hear, he is requesting *a particular kind of loving and just attention to an urgent need which entails a sure response*. Yet such requests imply, presently for the Psalmist, an experience of the absence of attention to the relevant circumstances or needs. The request is for God to direct God's "just and loving gaze" in a particular direction, so to speak. So, what do hear-petitions which request this particular kind of attention imply about the Psalmist's understanding of God's presence or absence?

Eleanore Stump has argued persuasively that a particular kind of attention is necessary for two persons to experience significant personal presence with one another.[45] Stump relies on recent developments in childhood psychology and neurobiology to appropriate the phenomenon of so-called, joint- or shared-attention. While Stump's argument cannot be rehearsed in full here, a thumbnail sketch will suffice to demonstrate its relevance for hear-petitions. Stump is pursuing questions about God's presence to creation, especially in the context of human suffering. For Stump, significant personal presence for two persons is achieved when three phenomena obtain. First, there must be "direct and unmediated causal contact with cognitive access to another."[46] This does not mean there is no intermediary between the two persons, but that there is no additional causal step required by either agent.[47] Second, there must be second-person experience. Second-person experience is a "matter of one person's attending to another person and being aware of him as a person when that other person is conscious and functioning, however minimally, as a person."[48] Third, there must be shared attention.[49] Shared attention has proven difficult to give precise definition, yet a basic description might be that joint attention is achieved when two subjects direct their attention toward some third object and "each subject is aware, in some sense, of the object *as* object that is present to both subjects. There is, in this respect, a 'meeting of minds' between both subjects, such that the fact that both are attending to the

[45] Eleanore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 110-28.

[46] Ibid., p. 111. This condition for significant personal presence was previously developed by Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity, Awareness, and Action," *Faith and Philosophy*, 9 (1992), pp. 463-82.

[47] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 536 n. 8. Seeing through eyeglasses or speaking over the telephone both count as direct, unmediated, causal and cognitive contact.

[48] Ibid., p. 112.

[49] Ibid.

same object is open or mutually manifest."[50] For one person to experience another person as significantly and personally present, all three of these phenomena must obtain.

Now, Stump's argument is relevant by way of its connection between presence and attention—a relationship that Stump claims applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to God.[51] She claims, "God's having direct and unmediated cognitive and causal contact with everything in creation is still insufficient for God's being omnipresent. In order for God to be omnipresent, that is, in order for God to be always and everywhere *present*, it also must be the case that God is always and everywhere in a position to share attention with any creature able and willing to share attention with God."[52] It is this ability that seems to be implied in the Psalmist's requests for God to hear, albeit without all of Stump's philosophical nuance. When the Psalmist requests God to hear his voice, prayer, cry, request, *et cetera*, the request is for God to turn attention to the same object occupying the attention of the Psalmist. There is a desire for a meeting of the minds.

(I should note that Stump's claim that unmediated cognitive and causal contact is insufficient in the absence of shared attention—this claim is analogous to the distinction made in the above excurses distinguishing God's omniscience from God's hearing. The latter requires something in addition to the former. God may have direct and unmediated cognitive and causal contact, but this is insufficient for the existential crises that prompt hear-petitions from the Psalmist. What is desired is more than knowledge. The petitioner is urgently crying out for God's attention to be directed toward the relevant circumstance. When God does so, God becomes *significantly personally present* to the petitioner.)

If hear-petitions are, indeed, requests for God's significant personal presence by way of God's shared attention, we would expect to find them in situations where God's absence is acutely felt. This is, indeed, what is most often observed. Patrick Miller has noted that "this call for a hearing is fundamental especially in those frequent situations when the psalmist feels that God is hidden or silent, when God has forgotten or forsaken the one in trouble."[53] Psalms 28 and 30 both vividly describe the way that God's unwillingness to hear is associated with human isolation or divine absence. "Going down to the pit" (Ps. 28:1) or "Will the dust praise you?" (Ps 30:9) are examples of the experience of the petitioner when

[50] Naomi Eilan, "Joint Attention, Communication, and Mind" in *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 5. Italics original.

[51] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 117.

[52] Ibid. Italics original.

[53] Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, p. 97.

God turns a deaf ear. Again, the connection between God's hearing and wilderness circumstances, developed above, becomes emphatic in the psalms. The Psalmist knows God's hearing means God's presence; God's deaf ear, God's absence. These psalms "speak to the heart of those who have carried on an argument with silence."[54] Yet presence and absence, hearing and deafness, are usually held together in the Psalms. In the face of God's absence and silence, Psalm 30 can still issue forth in praise, declaring that God has turned mourning into dancing, sackcloth into a garb of joy. Psalm 28 can announce, "Blessed be the LORD, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings. The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts."

So how are God's attention and hearing to be understood when human experience and the testimony of the Psalter portrays a divine-human dialogue that is often painfully one-sided?[55] "The distance or separation occasioned by iniquity does not mean that God has moved to another part of the globe; it is a distance *within* relationship."[56] That the Psalmist can and does cry out to God to be heard points beyond the prayer itself to the reality of the covenant relationship that is presupposed by the cry, a relationship testified to by the historical dealings of the LORD with the covenant people and confirmed by God's historical hearing of the cries of those people. The history of the relationship testifies to the reality that if God were to turn attention to the object requested by the petitioner, be it whatever complaint or circumstance, God's love and justice would come to bear on it. God's hearing of such requests is an astonishing gift, and is experienced as such by the Psalmist. When there is a meeting of minds and God hears and lovingly and justly acts for the petitioner, there is a special comfort, consolation, joy, and delight.

Yet a careful auscultation of God's hearing points to a greater gift. Israel's cherished relationship with the LORD is the backdrop of the Psalmist's request for God to hear. *The God who hears is, after all, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel*. It is only because of the LORD's faithful, loving, and just dealings with the covenant people that the Psalmist can with confidence, boldly cry out for God to hear. These requests to hear are a reminder of Deuteronomy 4:7: "For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?" Even in the absence of a meeting of minds, when the cries of the petitioner remain unheard due to sin, rebellion, ignorance, or whatever, God remains present in absence by means of God's

[54] Martin E. Marty, *A Cry of Absence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 147.

[55] Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 292.

[56] Terence E. Fretheim, "Prayer in the Old Testament: Creating Space in the World for God" in *A Primer on Prayer* ed. by Paul R. Sponheim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp. 51-52.

relationship with the covenant people. The greater gift of covenant relationship with the LORD is revealed by bold imperatives for God to hear and act. Whether God hears or not, God remains there. More could be said about the experience of God's deaf ear, God's unwillingness to hear. Here it is sufficient to note that, even in the experience of God's absence, it is an absence in relationship; and that relationship, whether God hears or not, is the greater gift. Yet it is exactly in the desperate experience of that absence that the Psalmist cries out to be heard.

Returning to the inductive march toward a definition of God's hearing, a more comprehensive attempt may be offered. The Psalmist's request for God to hear is a request for *a particular kind of loving and just attention to an urgent need that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the covenant God of Israel, which entails a sure response*.

Finally, just as the above excurses on divine omniscience was necessary, so too I must register a distinction about God's omnipresence. God's omnipresence does not undermine a meaningful understanding of God's ability to attend to particular circumstances or temporal events. Janet Martin Soskice has identified the way Augustine can maintain a classical conception of God's omnipresence while still make sense of God's particular attentiveness:

> For Augustine God's attentiveness does not derogate from God's qualities as classically conceived. This is a philosophical leitmotif of the *Confessions*. It is because God is eternal that God is present to all and every time in Augustine's life. God need not be a creature of change to be attentive to changing creatures. God need not be a particular 'thing' to attend to particulars. And, unlike the God of Aristotle whose timeless perfection entails indifference, indeed obliviousness to anything other than his own thought, the God of Augustine, the God of Scripture, attends to each changing thing—in particular. This is the work of the Spirit, this bodying forth of God in history—in our individual histories and in that of our world.[57]

For Augustine, God remains omnipresent and by virtue of divine omnipresence is able to attend to particulars, as when God is petitioned to hear.

What value is there in developing a definition of God's hearing, as understood by the experience of the Psalmist? What is the payoff of this concatenation of definitional

[57] Janet M. Soskice, *The Kindness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 33. See also, Augustine, *Confessions* V.2; VII.17.

qualifiers? First, it jettisons the entire hierarchy of Heiler and others like him who would consider hearing language to be merely remnants of a "crude" and "sensuous" anthropomorphism. Although, the definition I have offered remains strictly and unavoidably anthropomorphic in nature, it is not to be understood in contrast to or continuity with what are allegedly primitive alternatives. Rather, by avoiding this troubled hierarchy, hear-petitions may be better appreciated for their unique revelatory purpose. The cursory distinction between hear-, see-, answer-, and remember-petitions evinces their unique metaphorical capacity to carry specific meaning for the Psalmist. A definition of hear-petitions marks out its uniqueness and sets it apart from other attention-seeking petitions. It promotes an understanding of God-talk that vindicates it from the naïve assumption that it was uncritically borrowed from so-called primitive prayers.

Second, if being heard by God means an experience of the *covenant God of Israel's loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of God's significant personal presence, which entails a sure response*—then that experience must be of considerable personal consolation to those who find themselves sharing the urgent and dire circumstances of the Psalmist in the face of God's absence. As the Christian prayer book, the Psalms give words to the shared existential experiences. Like the Psalmist, Christians "have carried on an argument with silence,"—an experience that has been described by Martin Marty when he asks, "Why, O Hidden One…? Why, O Silence…? Why, O Absence, when the cry is most intense is the silence most stunning? The passionate heart searches for answers."[58] And while no answer is readily available, I have argued that a better gift than God's hearing is revealed by pursuing it.

Third, God's presence in relationship with the covenant people makes possible the pleas and petitions that are so desperately offered. That relationship is the unique gift of the covenant God with the covenant people. And while being heard by God may be a significant source of consolation, being known by and in relationship with God may prove to be the greater gift in the midst of suffering.

The definition offered remains cursory and unavoidably incomplete. The themes pursued above and the elements of the definition all point to the embryonic nature of this auscultation of hearing. A fuller hearing may be had only by listening to the voice of the New Testament.

[58] Marty, *A Cry of Absence*, p. 147.

1.3 New Testament Continuities and Transformations

With a theological framework and working definition in place, it remains to be asked what bearing the New Testament revelation has on the foregoing. Answering this question in a fuller manner, in view of the entire canon, will be the burden of the balance of this work. Here I am concerned only to evaluate the extent to which the New Testament supports and confirms the framework and definition just developed. Then, I aim to anticipate some varieties of transformation thereof, in light of the coming of Christ. An auscultation of the New Testament *corpus* is necessary because the above framework and definition, in all their tentativeness, receive theological development and verification with the coming of the incarnate Christ revealed in the New Testament. Like the Abraham, Sarah, Hagar narratives in the Hebrew Bible, listening to the body of New Testament texts requires that careful attention be paid to a particular narrative of extraordinarily rich theological value.

In John 11, Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha, falls terminally ill. The sisters send for Jesus, confident that he could right the situation. Yet Jesus tarries for two additional days before heading to Bethany. Jesus informs the disciples, who are understandably hesitant about his return to Judea, that their friend Lazarus had fallen asleep but that they are going to Bethany in order to awaken him. Jesus' description of Lazarus' unconscious state is ambiguous, such that the disciples would prefer Lazarus wake naturally and they avoid the risks of Judea. Jesus clarifies that Lazarus is dead, and the disciples, whose hopelessness and fear are represented by Thomas, become more recalcitrant, and suggest that to return to Judea would mean certain death for them all. Four days post-mortem, Jesus arrives in Bethany. Martha goes out to meet him while he's still en route and expresses her confidence that an earlier arrival by Jesus would have delivered Lazarus from his illness. Jesus re-introduces ambiguity into the narrative by declaring that Lazarus will rise again. Martha agrees, conceding an eschatological revivification. Yet Jesus asserts that he is, himself, the grounds for such eschatological events: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." The statement provokes a confession of faith in Jesus' messianic identity from Martha.

Martha then returns to Bethany and summons Mary to join her. Mary, hastens to Jesus, followed by her comforters. When Mary approaches Jesus, she prostrates herself before him and, like her sister, expresses her confidence that had he been present, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus is deeply moved by the tears of Mary and her comforters. He asks for the whereabouts of Lazarus' body and begins to weep, revealing to the bystanders his deep love for Lazarus.

Upon arrival at the tomb, Jesus instructs that the stone be rolled away. The certain decay of the body prompts hesitation from Martha. Jesus reminds her of his exhortation to believe in verses 25 and 26. The stone is rolled away. Jesus then looks to heaven and says, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." Jesus loudly calls Lazarus out of the tomb. In response, the revived man proceeds from the tomb, still robed in grave clothes. The miracle prompts belief among some, but others report the event to the chief priests and Pharisees whose consequent fear and anger prompt new resolve to put Jesus to death.

The Lazarus narrative is the most explicit—though certainly not the only—account of God's hearing in the New Testament. Given its important and dramatic role as the climax of the Johannine "Book of Signs", its description of Jesus' deep grief and pain, its first-person declaration by Jesus of God's hearing, and its eschatological overtones, the narrative is a fitting part of the *corpus* to auscultate.

To what extent does the narrative comport with the above framework? First, the God of the covenant people of Israel, the Father of "the Christ, the Son of God"[59] is the God who hears. Jesus' definitive statement that the Father hears him is as transparent and unequivocal as God's self-revelation in the naming of Ishmael. The one to whom Jesus prays is a God who hears. Yet there are several questions surrounding Jesus' statement in vv. 41-42, the answers to which are critical for the subsequent argument. So they must be addressed here.

Commentators have often struggled with how to understand this "prayer that is not a prayer."[60] Since the narrative does not contain what the reader would expect—a prayer for Lazarus to be raised to life—Jesus has been accused of merely posturing for the crowd; what Loisy called "*prière pour la galerie.*"[61] The search for an explanation spans the spectrum from, on the one hand, exegetical clues that are internal to the Lazarus narrative, to, on the other hand, more theological explanations that draw on larger Johannine motifs.[62]

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[59] The phrase is considered semi-creedal in John's Gospel. See also, John 20:31.

[60] Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* ed. by Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 221.

[61] A. Loisy, *Le quatrième évangelie* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1903), p. 651. See also H.J. Holtzmann's description as a *Scheingebet* or *Schaugebet* in *Evangelium, Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes* (Handcommentar zum Neuen Testament, 4; Frieburg; J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981), p. 139.

[62] For a detailed and helpful survey, see Wendy Sproston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 102-117.

Among the latter, Bultmann has argued that Jesus' statement is "the request of one who stands in perfect unity with the Father[…] [who] does not need to make prayer requests like others, who have to rouse themselves out of their attitude of prayerlessness and therefore godlessness; for he continually stands before God as the asker and therefore the receiver."[63] Here, Bultmann sees the relationship of the Son to the Father as constitutive of constant ("*ständig*") prayer.[64] This explains the absence of a petition to raise Lazarus by internalizing the request to the Father-Son relationship. Yet Wendy Sproston North contends that Bultmann wrongly imposes a christological emphasis on the narrative that would not have been so prized by the evangelist, and that such an explanation fails to account for Jesus' many recorded prayers elsewhere in the Gospel.[65] She is concerned that Bultmann's more christological reading of the text has exerted too much control on subsequent commentators and argues that exegetical evidence internal to the narrative makes greater sense of the absence of a request to raise Lazarus.[66] Specifically, North believes that John 11:22 provides the relevant clue, suggesting that it is one of seven occurrences in the Johannine corpus of the "ask, and it will be given" logion.[67] When situated in this context, Jesus' "prayer" is exemplary for the confidence the Jesus-community can have when they approach God in prayer. North concludes, "The logion speaks of the certainty that requests made to God in prayer will be granted," and that "it is John's christological application of [the logion] in v. 22 that virtually dictates the terms in which he eventually describes Jesus at prayer before raising Lazarus."[68]

This conclusion is interesting and valuable insofar as it further explains Jesus' heavenward speech in connection with 11:22 and the larger Johannine corpus. It should be noted, too, that North's attempt to free interpreters from the "towering influence"[69] of Bultmann, does not mean she would *wholesale* discount the latter's christological reading.[70]

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[63] Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 408.

[64] Bultmann, with the use of the word *ständig*, seems to understand the asking and hearing to be perpetual. The aorist tense of *ἀκούω* in v. 41 makes this unlikely. Whether the asking and hearing is punctiliar or perpetual has no bearing on my argument.

[65] Sproston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, pp. 104-05.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., pp. 110-11. The seven occurrences are John 11:22, 14:13-14, 15:7, 15:16, 16:23-26; 1 Jn 3:21-23, 5:13-16. North adds Mt 7:7-8, 18:19-20, 21:22; Mk 11:24; Lk 11:9-10; Jas 1:5-6, 4:2-3.

[68] Ibid., p. 114.

[69] Ibid., p. 104.

[70] She does ask, "How far can we be certain that *purely* christological concerns were as much a priority to the fourth evangelist…?" North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, p. 105; emphasis added.

But does her conclusion adequately explain what is happening in vv. 41-42? For while her conclusion takes into account the occurrences of the "ask, and it will be given" logion in the Johannine corpus, it unfortunately elevates this feature of the narrative above the more dominant christological themes in John's Gospel. From the first sentence of the prologue, the fourth evangelist presents his reader with an enduringly high christology that is focused on the relationship between the Father and the Son. The "Book of Signs" brings Jesus into increasing conflict with the Jewish leaders over questions about his authority. With each new *σημεῖον*, Jesus' authority to speak and act is called into question.[71] With each conflict, Jesus further describes his relationship to the Father and the Father's authority.[72] The raising of Lazarus as the ultimate sign brings renewed commitment to put Jesus to death. Additionally, Jesus' statement about the Father's hearing is accompanied by an explicit *ἵνα*-clause, specifying the purpose for which he has publicly announced that God always hears him: so that the crowd would believe that the Father has sent him. This *ἵνα*-clause is important insofar as it explains the odd nature of Jesus' heavenward speech. When it is taken in conjunction with the enduring emphasis on the Father-Son relationship, a more convincing explanation of Jesus' statement about the Father's hearing surfaces: he desires that the crowd (and the Evangelist's readers) would believe that he is "the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (v. 27) on account of his relationship to the Father. So, while Sproston North's argument has merit insofar as the Jesus community may be encouraged to greater confidence in prayer, she has driven too deeply a wedge between the Father's hearing of the Son and his hearing of those who belong to the Son. While both are important in the Johannine corpus, the dominance of christology in the Gospel requires that it take theological and logical priority over the "ask, and it will be given" logion. So, the Father hears the Son. We can now return to the framework in order to evaluate the Lazarus narrative's consistency with it.

Second, this God who hears is the God and Father of Jesus, the Christ of the covenant people of Israel. If this God, as was argued above, has chosen to covenant with people in such a way that they are given the privilege of God's listening ear, this privilege becomes prototypical in the relationship between the Father and Son.

Third, the God of the covenant, the Father of "the Christ, the Son of God" hears those in the wilderness. Here, the wilderness is acutely felt, and in two ways. On the one hand, the grief and tears that accompany the death of Lazarus prompt Jesus to ask, "Where

[71] John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-15; 6:5-14; 6:16-24; 9:1-7.

[72] For an explanation of the dynamics of authority between Father and Son, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology Vol. II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 325-63.

have you laid him?" Jesus, too, weeps in the face of Lazarus' death. On the other hand, the wilderness means not only grief, but also grave. Lazarus has gone into the ultimate wilderness, and while he can no longer act for his own deliverance, Jesus is able to act, on Lazarus' behalf. In the face of both grief and grave, Jesus is compelled to turn to the Father in prayer on behalf of those next to him—Mary, Martha, and even Lazarus—and is confident that he will be heard. While the Father always hears the Son, as Jesus declares, it is consistent with the entire Biblical testimony to God's hearing that the hearing occurs in such painful and desperate circumstances. The tension of the circumstances is heightened by Martha (v. 21), Mary (v. 32), and the Jews (v. 37) all declaring that had Jesus been present, Lazarus would not have died. These expressions of regret only amplify the pain of grief at the death of one so loved by Jesus. It is in the midst of both grief and grave that Jesus, in his unique relationship to the Father, is heard and Lazarus thereby raised.

Fourth, the God of the covenant, the Father of Jesus Christ, hears those who are faithful to the covenant. The obedience and submission of Jesus to the Father is a recurrent theme in John's Gospel.[73] This will be developed further in the final chapter. Here it should simply be noted that the Son has kept the Father's commandments and abides in his love (Jn 15:10). Unlike the warnings encountered above concerning God's deaf ear, the Father always hears the Son who knew no sin, who was faithful to the covenant. The sinlessness and covenant faithfulness of the Son, thus, makes him the Always-Heard Word.[74] In these four ways, the Lazarus narrative is congruent with and confirms the above framework. Yet it does more than that.

What does it mean for the Word to be heard? How does this hearing of Jesus in the Lazarus narrative comport with the above material definition of God's hearing? First, Jesus is asking the Father to attend to the circumstances occupying the attention of Mary, Martha, and their co-mourners. The Father is not unaware of the circumstances surrounding the death of Lazarus, nor is he ignorant of the feelings of grief, pain, and loss. Following Bultmann, if Jesus, in his unique union with the Father, is continually asking and receiving, here he is asking for the eschatological effects of God's love and justice to be realized in the present.[75] In the raising of Lazarus, the Father's love for the Son spills over to those whom the Son loves. The justice and love of God that will be climactically displayed in the raising of the Son from the dead, the inaugural and proleptic event of the general, eschatological

[73] See John 5:19, 30; 14:31; 15:10.

[74] I am indebted to a conversation with Kevin Vanhoozer for this characteristically pithy descriptor, which I have adopted throughout this project.

[75] Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, p. 408.

resurrection of the dead, is brought to bear on Lazarus. The Father's loving and just attention is directed to Lazarus by the asking of the Son. This asking is always heard by the Father. When the Son calls upon the Father, the loving and just attention of God is always directed toward the object of the Son's asking. The unity of the Father and the Son mean that it could not be otherwise. If the Son is continually asker and receiver, the Father is continually hearer and giver. Thus, whenever the Son asks, the Father's loving and just attention is surely brought to bear on the Son's request.

What about requests for God's hearing as a request for the significant personal presence of God? The experience of God's absence is acutely and explicitly felt in the Lazarus narrative. The presence of the Father has already been experienced in the presence of the Son. The Johannine Book of Signs has demonstrated the way that Jesus' presence has already, in the six preceding signs, been revealed as the very presence of God. This explains why the narrative thrice expresses the difference Jesus' presence would have made (v. 20, 32, 37) and why the sisters sent for Jesus when Lazarus first fell ill. The significant personal presence of the Father is experienced in the personal presence of the Son. Because the Son is always heard by the Father, the Father's personal presence is made manifest in the presence of Jesus. As the Always-Heard Word, Jesus bears the presence of God, physically, as God incarnate. The sisters send for Jesus (v. 3) because they know that with him, the significant personal presence of God is made manifest. His absence leads to death, but his presence to the loving and just attention of God. This will be developed substantially in the final chapter of this work.

The material definition developed suggested that when God hears, the response is sure. How much more so for the Son whom the Father always hears. This is where Sproston North's subsidiary theme regarding confidence in prayer becomes more relevant. Indeed, Jesus' heavenward speech in vv. 41-42 is for the crowd—that they may believe the Son is sent by the Father. Yet its aim must be greater than that because it is immediately preceded by Martha's expression of concern about the removal of the stone from the tomb. Her hesitation is laced with doubt, prompting Jesus to revisit tomb-side the conversation that already occurred on the road outside Bethany (vv. 21-27). Martha had already expressed confidence that the Father would grant the Son whatever he asks (v. 22). Yet when she comes face-to-face with death and decay, Martha's faith in Jesus finds its limit. The confidence of verse 22, that the Father would give the Son whatever he asks, could not possibly include the raising of a dead man four days post-mortem! Yet this is precisely the confidence commended by Jesus' heavenward speech. Jesus' confident declaration that he is always heard is simultaneously a confirmation of Martha's original impulse: that the Father gives the Son whatever he asks. When read together, the surety of God's hearing entails the

surety of God's response. Hearing means response. When the Father hears the Son, the Son's every request is granted. North is correct that this would have been a source of confidence for the Jesus community; especially when read in light of 1 John 5:14-15. However, it is because of the more dominant Johannine theme regarding the unique relationship between the Father and Son that Christians may appropriate Jesus' confidence. Jesus' followers may now pray in Jesus' name and appropriate the same confidence because the Father will give them whatever they ask (Jn 16:23).

The continuity of the Lazarus narrative with the above developed framework and definition of God's hearing, as well as its christological and trinitarian context, make it the theological locus of New Testament teaching on God's hearing.[76] As such, it validates the framework and definition; yet not in a way that leaves it unaltered. The revelation of the Triune God in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Word transforms the relationship between God and the covenant people, and this transformation extends to God's hearing of prayer—and that in four ways.

First, who hears prayer? The Abraham-sourced framework attributed hearing to *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant people of Israel*. While this remained true in the examination of the Lazarus narrative, the one who is described as hearing is the Father of the Christ of Israel. Hearing is something that takes place between the Father and the Word. Moreover, in John's Gospel, the Son (Jn 5:19, 20; 8:28, 47; 12:49, 50) and the Spirit (Jn 16:13) are also said to hear the Father. Indeed, in the economic fellowship between Father, Son, and Spirit, the three *hypostases* of the Triune God are said to always hear each other. In the revelation of the coming of Christ, the framework is transformed. It is *the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—who hears.*

Second, who does the Triune God hear? The framework proposed that God's hearing was the special privilege of *the covenant people of Israel*. Yet because the Lazarus narrative reveals that the Father always hears the Son, the Christ of the covenant people of Israel, God's hearing is now unavoidably wrapped up with the Son. The confidence that the Father always hears the Son is bequeathed to Jesus' followers in John 16:23, "On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." Whatever is asked of the Father in the name of the Son, will

[76] Insofar as I am offering a theological exegesis of God's hearing, and that from within the Christian theological tradition, my interpretation assumes a particular ontology of Holy Scripture, viz., that it is more than—but no less than—a merely historical or literary object, and that it must be read and interpreted in light of its Triune Author who has self-revealed not only in its pages, but also in tradition, reason, and experience. This working assumption is, thus, warrant for deploying the historically subsequent resources of the creeds of the Christian tradition in the exegetical task.

be given. Additionally, the Father will hear and answer prayer on account of the petitioner's love for and faith in the Son (Jn 16:26-27). The status of the relationship between the petitioner and God's Always-Heard Word determines the confidence the petitioner can have in being heard. Just as in the original framework, God, in divine freedom, may choose to hear and respond to whomever God so pleases. Neither space nor knowledge permit a discussion concerning the extent to which the covenant people of Israel retain the special privilege of God's hearing. At minimum, God's freedom must be emphasized. For, just as God assured Israel that God would also hear the cries of those unjustly oppressed among them, so, too, God may choose to hear whomever God so pleases. Yet the Lazarus narrative points to a definite transformation in the framework. If God's listening ear was the special privilege of the covenant people, it is now a much more certain privilege of those who belong to God's Always-Heard Word, to the One whom the Father always hears. In the Son, there is a new and greater confidence that the Father will hear, no matter the circumstances. *The Triune God hears those who belong to the Son.*

Additionally, while not observed in the Lazarus narrative, the framework strongly suggests an additional group of speakers to whom God will incline the divine ear: those who are hurt, oppressed, or unjustly treated by those who belong to the Son. Just as God inclined God's ear to Hagar and the victims of Israel's covenant failings, in the same way, when those who belong to the Son betray the nature and character of that belonging, we should expect God to hear those hurt by such betrayal. That God will hear not only *for* but even *against* those who belong to the Son if they fail to live in concord with their belonging—this should serve as a warning to those who claim the gift of belonging to Jesus. Indeed, James issues this very warning in James 5:3-4. Quoting Psalm 18:7 (LXX), he warns the wealthy, "Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." The greed and unjust treatment of laborers serves as one kind of betrayal of Christian belonging. It represents the way God, by way of hearing, will demonstrate justice and compassion *against* those who belong to the Son if they fail to live rightly toward others.

Third, under what kind of circumstances does the Triune God hear? In light of the Father's *always* hearing the Son and those who belong to him, the question may seem superfluous. Yet the framework suggested God's ear was especially inclined to those in the wilderness. Here the Lazarus narrative offers two surprising transformations of the framework, both weakening the sting of the wilderness. The first is with regard to the

urgency of prayer. The Psalms revealed the extent to which cries for God to hear are often provoked by urgent needs. Yet the Lazarus narrative is noteworthy for its lack of urgency. When Jesus was informed of Lazarus' illness, he lingered two additional days. Rather than race to Bethany, Jesus expresses confidence that Lazarus' illness is for the purpose of glorifying God (vv. 11:3-6). The narrative emphasizes the temporal details: Jesus' two-day delay (v. 6); his arrival four days post-mortem (v. 17), the refrain that he arrived too late (vv. 21, 32, 37). The Son's knowledge that he is always heard by the Father has stripped away the sense of urgency. Jesus occupies a different sort of time than do the sisters, their co-mourners, and even the disciples. What is urgent to the latter groups lacks urgency for Jesus. Why? When the Father always hears and answers the Son, temporality loses its power. There are no circumstances that cannot be righted by the Son, because the Father will always hear and answer him. Not even the past has the final word. The *always* of the Father's hearing means that the Son can ask for the past to be undone and for the future to be made present.[77] Time loses its sting in the face of the *always* of God's hearing. Second, the raising of one who is not only dead, but decayed, puts an exclamation point on the *always* of God's hearing. Death, and particularly death of one dearly loved as Lazarus was by Jesus, is an acute wilderness experience, second only to one's own death. Thus, death, insofar as it is the "last enemy" (1 Cor 15:26) is the wilderness experience *par excellence*. Every other experience of the wilderness is derivative. But the *always* of God's hearing means not even death has the final word. The *always* of the Father's hearing makes all things possible and supplies hope, even in the direst of wilderness circumstances. Though, this hope does not necessarily assuage the pain of the wilderness. Jesus wept for Lazarus. Yet confidence in the Father's *always* hearing transforms wilderness circumstances, so that death and temporality lose their sting in the face of the power of the Triune God. When does the Triune God hear? It is no longer *especially* in the wilderness, but *even in the wilderness—always*.

Lastly, under what kind of circumstances does the Triune God not hear? In the development of the framework, numerous passages were cited that insist God will turn a deaf ear to petitioners as a result of their covenant failings. How is the *always* of the Father's hearing affected by the sins and shortcomings of those who belong to the Son? Do the same conditions apply? Interestingly, the New Testament introduces a new set of conditions that do not contravene the *always*, but do nuance it. The principle of the old

[77] Philip Esler and Ronald Piper have argued that the raising of Lazarus should be read as prototypical of the eschatological, general resurrection of the dead, rather than a simple foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection, as some have argued. See *Lazarus, Mary and Martha* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 104-30.

framework is reiterated by the blind man whom Jesus healed when he uttered, "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will" (v. 9:31). On the one hand, this principle validates the reason for which the Father always hears the son: he is the sinless Son of God who always does the will of the One who sent him. On the other hand, how could those who belong to Jesus ever be heard by God, mired in sin as they are? The answer takes us beyond the Lazarus narrative to the effects of the cross and resurrection of the Son. If *the Triune God hears those who belong to the Son*, then God's hearing must be understood as a soteriological benefit of union with the crucified, buried, raised, and ascended Christ. For, while sin persists in the lives of those who belong to the Son, it would seem that the effects of sin, namely, God's deaf ear, have been mitigated by the cross. This is precisely the way Augustine understands God's hearing of the believer. Commenting on Psalm 130 (LXX: Ps 129), he argues that no matter how deep the depths of sin, the forgiveness of sin offered in Christ has made a way for the voice of every sinner to reach God.[78] Thus, the one who belongs to Christ is heard by God, despite personal sin because the effects thereof have been mitigated and a new way made possible by the cross for the Father to hear the voice of those who belong to the Son. The gospel has made God's hearing possible, despite sin. So, the first new condition introduced by the New Testament is that the petitioner must have experienced the forgiveness of sin that thereby makes God's hearing possible.

The only other condition introduced by the New Testament is 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." There, the implication is that confidence in God's hearing is contingent upon a given petition being consistent with the will of God. More existential readings of the passage have surely provoked speculation into what the will of God might be in any given circumstance, as well as epistemic questions about the possibility of such knowledge. These readings assume a static and mysterious will that must be somehow wrested from the heavens in order to truly pray and be heard. Yet the context of the passage points to a less speculative meaning. The burden of these closing remarks of the epistle is to instill confidence in its readers. Verse 13 assures that those who "believe in the name of the Son of God" may know that they have eternal life. It is in that same name that Jesus commanded his followers to pray, reassuring them that doing so would solicit a sure response from his Father (Jn 16:23-24). Thus, it is no surprise that believing in the name and asking according to the will of God are proximate in these closing remarks. Being heard by

[78] Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms (121-150), vol.vi.* trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000), p. 140.

God is promised to those who pray according to the divine will; but this is not so different from praying in the name of the Son. Given the similar aim of both passages—specifying the qualifications for confidence in prayer—as well as their shared mention of the name of the Son of God, it should not be assumed that the meanings of the two passages are so different. Further, both passages belong to a cluster of Johannine motifs about confidence before the Father. In 1 John 3:21-23, answer to prayer is promised to those who keep God's commandments and do what pleases God. Then, the commandment and what pleases God are both specified, respectively: belief in the name of the Son of God and loving one another. Similarly, John 14:13-14 promises that prayers in Jesus' name will be answered. Additionally, abiding in Jesus is the criteria in John 15:7. Then, verse 10 clarifies what it means to abide: to obey Jesus' commandments. These passages about confidence in prayer cluster around obedience and prayer in the name of Jesus. 1 John 5:14-15 should be read in light of these related passages. Doing so makes praying according to God's will less mysterious. It is a matter of praying in Jesus' name and obeying his commandments.

The New Testament thus introduces two criteria for God's hearing. God hears those who have received the gracious forgiveness of sins as they have been united to the Christ, the Son of God, whom the Father always hears; and God hears those who pray in the name of the Christ, the Son of God. Those who approach the Father in prayer are reassured that God will hear and respond to those who belong to God's Son and offer petitions in his name. The effects of sin, which had formerly caused God to turn a deaf ear, have been redressed by the One whom the Father always hears, and the relationship of the petitioner to the Always-Heard Word has now become the grounds for confidence that the petitioner, like the Son, is always heard by the Father. Thus, *the Triune God will always hear those who belong to the Son and ask in His name.*

The New Testament in general and the Lazarus narrative in particular have demonstrated a consistency with the theological framework and definition of God's hearing offered above. Yet the coming of the Christ, the Son of God—to use the Johannine description—has demonstrated a transformation of both the framework and the definition. The result is a similar four-part framework. (1) *The Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is the God who hears.* (2) *That God hears those who belong to the Son.* (3) *That God is the God whose ear is always inclined, even in the wilderness.* (4) *God will always hear those who belong to the Son and ask in his name.* The definition underwent less modification, but was buttressed and developed by the Lazarus narrative. The circumstances of Lazarus' death lost their urgency and desperate features in light of the confidence of the *always* of the Father's hearing. Thus, a request for God to hear is a request for *loving and just attention*

that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that insufficient attention has been paid to God's hearing of the pleas and petitions of creatures, and that this neglect has resulted in a failure to recognize the extraordinary theological value of this Biblical motif. By listening more closely to the body of revealed Scripture, it was shown that descriptions of God listening, hearing, inclining God's ear—that these descriptions are more than crude metaphors borrowed from primitive religion. Rather, they are rich descriptions of God's meaningful, dialogical relationship with creatures. The Triune God has chosen to self-reveal as one who not only speaks, but hears. It was argued that this hearing is a particular kind of loving and just attention that God supplies by means of God's own significant personal presence. While the Hebrew Bible provided grounds for a theological framework for God's hearing in a narrative as early and foundational as the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar narrative, the New Testament demonstrated a continuity with but also a transformation of that framework. With the incarnation of the Word, it was demonstrated that now, those who belong to the Son of God and pray in his name enjoy the *always* of God's listening ear. If the Psalmist found considerable comfort in God's hearing, that same comfort and consolation is now made available in a new and more significant way by means of the Triune God's significant personal presence in the coming of the Son. The *always* offered to those who belong to the Son ensures a presence in relationship that is manifest in all of life's varying circumstances, even the wilderness. These conclusions offer a way forward for thinking theologically about what it means for God to hear creatures, as well as the comfort, consolation, and peace available to those who find themselves in the wilderness. Before moving on to propose, constructively, how this framework and definition might illumine or transform understandings of specific dogmatic loci, we will first consider, descriptively, the work of the theologian who has hitherto written most about God's hearing: Karl Barth.

2. KARL BARTH AND THE PROMISE OF GOD'S HEARING

"[E]r nicht nur hören, sondern erhören will"[1]

Holy Scripture supplies an abundance of testimony to the reality of God's hearing. Thus, it should be no surprise that one of the twentieth century's most exegetical dogmaticians would have written most substantially on God's hearing and its theological significance. Karl Barth's theology in general, and the *Church Dogmatics* in particular, is well informed by the Scriptures. And it is his great attention to the revealed Word of God in its written form that likely accounts for Barth's attention to and serious engagement with the theme of God's hearing. Barth takes up the Biblical witness to God's hearing into his theological system in two ways. First, Barth is able to give an account of what the Bible means when it speaks of God's hearing. This makes a good start toward an understanding of God's hearing, even if, as it will be noted, Barth's developed concept of God's hearing insufficiently reflects the diversity of the Bible's talk of divine hearing. Second, Barth not only attends to and develops the theme of God's hearing, but actually makes important use of it. It is noteworthy in its own right, but even more significant for some of Barth's theological ends.

In what follows I will attempt to identify the place of God's hearing in Barth's theology, demonstrating where it fits and how Barth conceives of hearing in light of his broader understanding of the relationship between the creator and creature. This will involve an all too brief account of Barth's understanding of the relationship between covenant and creation. It will be shown that Barth's distinctive understanding of creation as the external basis for the covenant is the proper place for understanding God's gracious hearing of human creatures.

After laying that necessary groundwork, I will go on to offer an exposition of two features of Barth's theology of divine hearing. The first will address the sequence of God's hearing and human speaking. It will be shown that, like some contemporary feminist theologians, Barth understands God's hearing to precede human speaking. This will helpfully display the asymmetrical arrangement of human and divine agency by which Barth understands prayer. The second will be with regard to faith and the kind of confidence one

[1] Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (hereafter abbreviated, *KD*), II/1, p. 575.

may have of God's hearing. These two features of Barth's theology of hearing will be noted to have implications for practical theology, including Christian prayer and liturgy.

Finally, the promise of hearing as a theological concept will be demonstrated by an examination of Barth's own theological appropriation of the topic in relation to the question of divine immutability (or "constancy" as Barth prefers). While Barth scholarship is frequently focused on Barth's actualism, here there is to be identified an all too underappreciated, if highly qualified, divine receptivity in Barth's doctrine of God. In this context, Barth's argument reveals the value of hearing as a theological concept that may be appropriated to address classical theological questions. Barth's deployment of divine hearing as an illuminating and useful theological construct to serve dogmatic ends supplies the courage to follow his lead in the subsequent chapters.

There should be noted an inherent danger in this exposition of Barth's concept of divine hearing. Any excising of Barth's thought from his broader theological program will be vulnerable to both imbalance and distortion. Indeed, many of the more recent works on Barth decry the disregard for context, including Barth's theological development,[2] the arrangement or prioritization of his doctrines of covenant[3] and election,[4] failure to recognize him as an exegete,[5] inattention to the ethical nature of his thinking,[6] and his conversation with tacit dialogue partners,[7] to name only a few. Nonetheless, a brief account—as the following must be—of Barth's understanding of hearing, will necessarily leave some things unsaid and run the risk of reduction. The most immediate context for Barth's understanding of God's hearing is, in fact, his understanding of prayer and the creator-creature relation—context that I will foreground below. I hope that those more familiar with Barth's thought

[2] See Christoph Schwöbel, "Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 17-21.

[3] See Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 29.

[4] See Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 92-109.

[5] John Webster, "Introducing Barth" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* ed. by John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 13-14. See also, Francis Watson, "The Bible" in op. cit., pp. 57-71.

[6] See John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 2-9. See also Daniel L. Migliore, "Commanding Grace: Karl Barth's Theological Ethics" in *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics*, ed. by Daniel L. Migliore (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 1-25.

[7] See Mike Higton and John McDowell, "Introduction: Karl Barth as Conversationalist" in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. by John C. McDowell and Mike Higton (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), pp. 1-13.

will hear overtures—albeit incomplete ones—to his larger theological project without expecting everything to be said.

2.1 Creation and Covenant: The Place of God's Hearing

Barth's understanding of God's relation to creation will be explored in more detail in the subsequent chapter. Here, one aspect of that relation must be brought into focus in order to make sense of Barth's understanding of God's hearing: the relationship between God's creative acts and God's covenant with humanity. Barth's construal of the relationship is well known and forms the basis for all of Barth's *Doctrine of Creation* volume. Thus, it will suffice to briefly explicate it and then situate God's hearing of creatures within that context.

For Barth, creation is the external basis of the covenant, and the covenant is the internal basis of creation. That creation is the external basis of the covenant means that the creation is oriented toward the covenant. The creation is the basis, the "theater", in which the covenant takes place. "Creation sets the stage for the story of the covenant of grace."[8] Creation cannot be a generic explanation of human origins or human dependence. It is not merely or primarily about beginnings. Rather, for Barth, a truly Christian doctrine of creation must be shaped by the Triune God and oriented toward God's covenantal, electing work. Creation is, then, "the presupposition of the realization of the divine purpose of love in relation to the creature."[9] Barth claims that "Creation provides the space for the story of the covenant of grace. This story requires a space corresponding to it: the existence of man and his world. Creation provides this."[10] This is so because it is the formal presupposition for God to love what is not-God. Yet it is not "the necessary *ground* of the other works of God, a ground which is complete in itself and can be defined without reference to the history of redemption."[11] As the external basis of the covenant, creation has in view "the institution, preservation and execution of the covenant of grace, for partnership in which [God] has predestined and called man."[12] This understanding of creation is consistent with Barth's well-known and vehement antipathy for natural theology and his corollary

[8] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter abbreviated, *CD*) III/1, p. 44.

[9] *CD* III/1, p. 96.

[10] *CD* III/1, p. 44.

[11] Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, p. 64.

[12] *CD* III/1, p. 43.

prioritizing of revelation. It distinguishes creation from covenant, while maintaining their relatedness.

Covenant, then, is the internal basis for creation. The primary work is not creation but God's act of grace in Christ which constitutes the covenant. The creation is logically secondary and ordered to that saving work. It is covenant that is the material presupposition of creation.[13] The covenant should not be thought of as some later addendum to creation. No, it is the covenant that gives rise and cause to creation. Creation has "its eternal source in God's decision and plan."[14] Consistent with Barth's prioritization of revelation, "The belief of Israel in the covenant God *subsequently* caused it to confess God the Creator."[15] Understanding the covenant as the internal basis of creation demonstrates the relatedness between the two. They do not exist independently of each other, as if creation were somehow "*remoto Christo*."[16] Rather, the creation is "wholly enclosed within the redemptive covenant, in the history of which creation becomes itself."[17] It does not have an existence independent of God's covenant with creation. This means that "The creature does not exist casually. It does not merely exist, but exists meaningfully. In its existence it realizes a purpose and plan and order. […] The creature owes both the fact that it is, and what it is, to the revelation which has this content."[18]

Thus, creation and covenant belong together and remain distinct from each other. For Barth, this relation between the two is a necessary postulate if revelation is to be properly prioritized. The creation and the covenant are revealed, not as the arbitrary work of just any "god", but as the work of the Triune God who loves in freedom and who has determined to reveal Godself in Christ. It is a work that is uniquely characterized by the love and freedom of this God that is manifest and revealed in Jesus Christ. Barth asserts that "The decisive anchorage of the recognition that creation and covenant belong to each other is the recognition that God the Creator is the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Where this is and remains clear, the idea of creation will itself receive the necessary concretely Christian form and meaning."[19] For the doctrine of creation to be truly Christian, it must

[13] *CD* III/1, p. 232.

[14] *CD* III/1, p. 43.

[15] Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p. 182. Italics original.

[16] Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, p. 65.

[17] Ibid., p. 64.

[18] *CD* III/1, pp. 229-30.

[19] *CD* III/1, p. 48.

find its ground and orientation in Christ. "Knowledge of God as Creator does not take its rise in human experience—a sense of contingency or an awareness of ultimacy within human history—but in confession of Jesus Christ whose humanity is the guarantee of the independent existence of the creation."[20]

So how are we to understand the relation between covenant and the *human* creature? When Barth turns to his anthropology, his distinctively Christian approach is maintained. Humanity cannot be understood apart from Christ. It cannot be pondered or approached from any other angle.[21] This is fundamental to the relationship between creation and covenant, such that creation must be understood as the external basis for God's grace; but more specifically, it is fundamental to Barth's very nuanced understanding of humanity. Humanity can only be considered by reflection on this one man. "The ontological determination of humanity," Barth claims, "is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus."[22] Thinking about it otherwise is to merely dabble in abstractions.

Once the nature of humanity is understood to be revealed exclusively in Jesus Christ, then, in this distinctively Christian and trinitarian understanding of creation, are we able to find the basis for God's hearing of human creatures in Barth's theology. Holding together this notion that humanity is thought from the man Jesus Christ with the notion that it is the Triune God who is the creator, we come to understand that the Son, who is true humanity *and* the creator of humanity, is one who both speaks and hears. This is because humanity, insofar as it is wholly understood from the perspective of this one man, Jesus Christ, is related to God as creator in a way that is analogous to the Father's relation to the Son. The critical passage comes from *CD* III/1:

> It is legitimate and imperative that by the expression 'Son' or 'Word of God' we should here understand the second mode of existence ('person') of the inner divine reality in itself and as such. There exists between it and creation the following connexion. In the same freedom and love in which God is not alone in Himself but is the eternal begetter of the Son, who is the eternally begotten of the Father, He also turns as Creator *ad extra* in order that absolutely and outwardly He may not be alone but the One who loves in freedom. In other words, as God in Himself is neither deaf nor dumb but speaks and hears His Word from all eternity, so outside His eternity He does not wish to be without hearing or echo, that is, without the ears and voices of the creature. The eternal fellowship between Father and Son, or

[20] Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, p. 62.

[21] *CD* III/2, p. 132.

[22] Ibid.

> between God and His Word, thus finds a correspondence in the very different but not dissimilar fellowship between God and His creature.[23]

God does not desire to be without the voices of creatures, just as, analogously, God the Father is not without God's Word. Of course, the dissimilarity between the *ad intra* and the *ad extra* infinitely exceeds the similarities. Yet if the one man, Jesus Christ, is the starting point for what it means to be human, then the relation between this man and God must be instructive, even if so greatly dissimilar, for the understanding of humanity's more general relation to God the creator. This Triune God is the creator of a humanity that is bound to its creator by the Word. The creation in general—and this includes the creation of human beings—is teleologically oriented for grace and covenant. While for Barth that covenant majors on God's Word, speech, voice, address, summons to creatures, it is also a covenant that summons into existence human creatures who are united to that Word and, who, like the Word to whom they are united, have voices which God wishes not to be without.

If the covenant is the internal basis for creation in this way and, as such, explains the relation between creation and covenant, then this particular understanding of the human creature, in relation to God, results. For Barth, the nature of creation "is simply its equipment for grace."[24] The nature of creation in general, and human creatures in particular, is fundamentally oriented toward covenant participation. Human creatures are, thus, built for grace. As theirs is a humanity that is revealed in the one man, Jesus Christ, that humanity is revealed to be not only the recipient of God's address, God's Word, but also those who, like the Word to whom they are united, address God and are heard. [25]

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[23] *CD* III/1, p. 50.

[24] *CD* III/1, p. 231.

[25] It is tempting to ground God's hearing in Barth's understanding of the "point of contact". Yet there remains uncertainty in Barth scholarship concerning the development of Barth's position on the *Anknüpfungspunkt*. The ambiguity surrounding this development makes it an ill-suited foundation for an understanding of God's hearing. In contrast to Brunner, Barth believed that the *imago* had been completely annihilated, and with it, any *capax Dei*. Barth agrees with Brunner that the *imago Dei* is the locus of the *Anknüpfungspunkt*, but objects to Brunner's understanding of the condition of the *imago* in postlapsarian humanity. This is because Brunner, in his 1934 essay, *Nature and Grace*, makes the distinction between the formal and material presence of the *imago*. For Brunner, the formal *imago* is present in humanity, *qua* humanity, despite sin's corruption. However, the material content of the *imago* has been destroyed by sin. Brunner argues that the retained formal features of the *imago* are what make possible humanity's "capacity for revelation". This phrase, or word in the German, has been identified as a potential cause of serious misunderstanding between Barth and Brunner. While Brunner consistently uses the word *Wortmächtigkeit*, which could be translated "capacity for words" or "capacity for speech", when Barth refers to Brunner's position, he substitutes without explanation the word *Offenbarungsmächtigkeit* or "capacity for revelation". See the Introduction by John Baillie to *Natural Theology* (Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR: 2002). Yet there seems to have been some development in Barth's position. By the time he pens *CD* I/1, he is able to say, "There can be no receiving of God's Word unless there is something common to the speaking God and hearing man in

2.2 The Priority of Divine Agency in Human Speaking and Divine Hearing

So, for Barth, God does not desire to be without the ears and voice of human creatures. But how does Barth conceive of the human address to God which is heard? From where does it originate and at whose initiative? Given Barth's insistence on God's initiative in God's relationship with humanity, it should be no surprise to learn that Barth sees even human address to God as divinely initiated. However, this will be shown to have interesting and counterintuitive implications for Barth's understanding of God's hearing.

In §3.1 of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth labors to distinguish between proclamation, in its various forms, and address to God. Not all talk about God is proclamation, and talk to God is different than proclamation. This distinction is important for Barth's purposes because he understands there to be a cause and effect relationship between proclamation and address to God. He claims, "The Church's prayers and hymns and confessions of faith obviously are what they purport to be only to the extent that so far as possible they cease to attempt the impossible task of proclaiming something to God or the unworthy one of incidentally proclaiming something to man."[26] None of the various kinds of address to God—prayers, hymns, confessions—inform God of something previously unknown. Further, they do not serve an incidental purpose of proclamation to others who might overhear them. No, he goes on to claim that, addresses to God "are the response to God of the praise, confession and thanksgiving of those to whom proclamation concerning Him has come. They are the sacrifice the bringing of which can have before God only the meaning of a confirmation of what He has done to man, and in respect of which man can obviously have no intentions in relation to others who may also be present."[27] For Barth, all address to God is, at bottom, a response to proclamation that has already come to the speaker. She who addresses God does so as the result of a prior proclamation that has come to her, such that all of her prayers, worship, and confessions are the result of God's gracious initiative in her life. Address to God functions as "confirmation," Barth claims, that God has already wrought a work in the one who addresses God. Thus, all human speech directed toward God is response, and that response is caused by divine initiative.[28]

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this event, a similarity for all the dissimilarity implied by the distinction between God and man, a point of contact between God and man, if we may now adopt this term too", *CD* I/1, p. 238.

[26] *CD* I/1, p. 49.

[27] *CD* I/1, pp. 49-50.

[28] See Trevor Hart, "Revelation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, esp. pp. 38-41.

The radical implications of the divine initiative in human address to God are most acutely felt when considering Barth's understanding of prayer. Ashley Cocksworth has recently elucidated Barth's understanding of prayer, noting the prioritization of petition.[29] Barth is explicit in *CD* III/3 that petition "controls and includes everything else one might say about prayer."[30] Despite how curious petition may appear for Barth's theological program—especially in light of Barth's understanding of the asymmetry between divine and human agency—Cocksworth enumerates several good reasons for the prioritizing of petition.[31] First, Barth finds it significant that the text of the Lord's Prayer is "quite clearly and simply a string of petitions, pure petitions."[32] Second, Cocksworth observes Barth's commitment to the "profound sense of neediness" which constitutes the human agent.[33] Third and ultimately, Cocksworth believes that Barth's prioritization of petition is rooted in the divine command to pray. For Barth concludes that "The real basis of prayer is man's freedom before God, the God-given permission to pray which, because it is given by God, becomes a command and an order and therefore a necessity."[34] So, at this juncture of Barth's thinking, petition takes center-stage. Yet how is petition, among the many different types of address to God, to be understood as divinely initiated, and how does this influence the way Barth thinks of God's hearing of those petitions?

Answering these crucial questions for Barth's understanding of prayer requires following him on what he describes as a "rather strange and apparently circuitous path."[35] Barth has argued pointedly for the neediness of humanity in relation to God. In prayer, one comes to the holy, rich, and great God in profound wretchedness, poverty, and weakness. The fundamental posture humanity takes before God is that of great need. Yet this is not the constitutive element in *Christian* prayer. Barth claims that the "primarily and properly surprising" element in distinctively Christian prayer is not the ontological gulf between God and humanity, but that despite that gulf, God through the Word has moved toward humanity with intimacy analogous to that of Father toward a child. Such intimacy is made possible by the incarnation, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. "It was for the direct nearness between God and man as between Father and child, and child and Father, that Jesus Christ

[29] Ashley Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), pp. 61ff.

[30] *CD* III/3, p. 268. Of course, Barth's later "turn to invocation" in *The Christian Life* is well known.

[31] Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, p. 62.

[32] *CD* III/3, p. 268.

[33] Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, p. 62; citing examples from *CD* III/3, pp. 267-69, 273, 281; *CD* III/4, pp. 91, 93, 95.

[34] *CD* III/4, p. 92.

[35] *CD* III/3, p. 270.

was born a man and crucified. And this nearness is the light of His resurrection."[36] It is this intimacy that makes the Christian able to ask freely without fear or anxiety. Important for his argument is the truth that "The Christian is able to take because God gives him Himself and all that He possess. 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up freely for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' (Rom. 8:32)."[37] For Barth, the asking of the pray-er is a response to the situation in which she finds herself—a situation of intimacy established by the giving of the Word. Thus, her free asking is a response to God's giving of Godself and all that God possesses. Prayer, Barth claims, "derives from what the Christian receives."[38] So, God has established the conditions by which prayer to God may occur. This is the beginning point for Barth's argument.

But God is not only the beginning of prayer, but also its answer. For when Barth conceives of the petitions of the pray-er and all her needs that can be met by asking God, he believes that there is only one answer and "one great gift"[39], namely, Jesus Christ—the answer to all petitions. "Of all the things that are needed by man, and needed in such a way that he can receive them only from God, that only God can give them to him, there is one great gift. And to all the true and legitimate requests that are directed necessarily to God, there is one great answer. This one divine gift and answer is Jesus Christ."[40] How is Christ the answer to all Christian petition? Barth elaborates by describing Christ's reign—his ability to bestow blessing, his power to create, his covenant relationship with creation, his solidarity with humanity in the incarnation, his deliverance offered to humanity, his self-constitution as Lord, Guardian, Helper, and hope of the world, his supreme control over the world which he upholds and rules. Stating it succinctly, "In the fact that Jesus is there, the world is already helped, and everything that creation needs, and at the heart of creation man, is already provided for."[41] Christ "is the one great gift and answer in which all that we can receive and ask is not merely determined but actually given and present and available for us."[42] What is the payoff for tracing Barth's argument here? It is the surprising and profound conclusion that in Christian prayer, the answer to prayer precedes the asking. For Barth, the meaning of human petition is summarized as a "taking and receiving of the divine gift and

[36] Ibid., p. 269.

[37] Ibid., p. 270.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 271.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

answer as it is already present and near to hand in Jesus Christ."[43] Put summarily, Barth claims that

> in asking for it, he takes up towards this God a position which he alone may and can take up. But in doing this, in entering into a suitable and therefore a right and profitable relationship to the gift and answer already given and present, it comes about that he can actually take and receive it, so that God attains His end with him as the Saviour. The Christian asks, and by this asking the doors are opened wide, and the gates are lifted up, that the King of glory may come in.[44]

Petition is, then, the receiving of the gift and answer already given in Christ. This means that the answer precedes the asking and that even in petitionary prayer the initiative rests with God. Petitionary prayer is made possible through two movements. The first is that through Christ God has graciously and freely brought about the conditions wherein the prayer-er may approach God without fear or anxiety. The second is that through Christ God has graciously and freely supplied the answer to all petitions, prior to their asking. In this way, the initiative is entirely God's. The answer precedes the request, and more profoundly for Barth's understanding of God's hearing: God's hearing precedes the asking.[45]

The notion that God's hearing precedes human asking is a theme that appears throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. Already in the earliest pages of *CD* I/1 Barth had written, "Prayer can be the human answer to the divine hearing already granted."[46] Later in *CD* III/4 he claims that "it is only an apparent paradox to say that human prayer has its origin in the divine hearing."[47] Barth is not alone in giving precedent to divine hearing. Modern feminist theologians following Nelle Morton have spoken of a "hearing to speech" that conceives of human speech as being drawn out as a result of God's already listening presence.[48] Morton's and Barth's understandings of hearing and its relationship to speaking are very different and are developed toward different ends. Yet there is considerable similarity. For both Morton and Barth, it is God's hearing that brings about a formal condition that allows speech. Further, both see God's hearing as the efficient cause that

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[43] Ibid., p. 274.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 270.

[46] *CD* I/1, p. 23.

[47] *CD* III/4, p. 109.

[48] See Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 127-29, 202-10; Marilyn Frye, "The Possibility of Feminist Theory" in *Women, Knowledge and Reality*, eds. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 34-47; Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 49-70.

brings about human speaking as a response to the hearing. These similarities are important because they make Barth's argument less surprising and counterintuitive. Barth's prioritizing of divine hearing as the initiation, cause, and temporal antecedent of human speaking becomes more plausible in light of similar accounts.

One important implication of Barth's prioritizing of divine hearing is that it undercuts many of the inadequate conceptions of the God-human relationship, and that in three related ways. First, contrary to popular description, prayer is not a "conversation" with God. Barth rarely uses the term, and when he does, it is with considerable qualification. Cocksworth notes two reasons for Barth's aversion to the term: it tends toward idolatry, as conversation with God is likened to any other conversation; and it will not carry the political and ethical demands that Barth places on prayer.[49] The primacy of divine agency and initiative in God's hearing will not allow for the metaphor of conversation to be of any help. The asymmetry of divine and human agency will not permit it; and prayer accomplishes, for Barth, far more than simple conversing. Second, this understanding of hearing's priority disrupts the temptation to view prayer sequentially, as a sort of hand-off of agency, moving first from speaker and then to hearer. John McDowell describes this as a "crudely anthropomorphic" understanding of prayer and goes on to identify the difficulty in the "sequentiality or successiveness involved in the agencies. 'God' begins where the praying creature leaves off, and vice versa—prayer moves from creature to the God who is purely hearer, and thus something of a passive spectator; God *then* acts in response to the *now waiting* one who had prayed."[50] This "relay-race" approach to prayer and God's hearing is foreign to Barth's understanding of God's activity and initiative. This means, third, that all di-polar models of the creator-creature relationship that follow the process theology of Charles Hartshorne and Alfred N. Whitehead are ruled out due to the openness and reciprocity involved.[51] Barth conceives of God's agency as altogether different in kind and quality such that God hears petitions before they are made and has, thus, brought about the formal conditions that even permit them and the material response to them.

God's hearing is not the receiving and responding to of some temporally offered human speech-act. It operates at what might be imprecisely called "a higher plane". Despite humanity's profound alienation on account of sin, God's hearing graciously, freely, and

[49] Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, pp. 147-48.

[50] John C. McDowell, "Openness to the World: Karl Barth's Evangelical Theology of Christ as the Pray-er" in *Modern Theology* 25:2 (April 2009), p. 265. Italics original.

[51] See Bruce McCormack, "The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism" in *Engaging the Doctrine of God* ed. by Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 185-242.

intimately bridges the ontological gulf like a Father aware of his child's unrecognized need. That gracious hearing makes it possible for the child to verbalize a need and receive a response that was "already" heard by the father.

2.3 Confidence in the God Who Hears

One might worry that Barth's arrangement of divine and human agency just described could have a potentially damaging effect on Christian life and spirituality; for, if God hears prayers before they are uttered, what remains of prayer's purpose? If God knows humanity in all of its alienation and need and has already worked to answer all need in Christ, why is there a need for petition at all? Does God's gracious provision of Christ in response to all human need make petition superfluous? Barth will not be party to undermining the practice of petitionary prayer. Rather, he labors to emphasize the Biblical command to pray and is concerned to supply a theological rationale for the Christian experience of prayer. Christians can and must pray; and even if God has already heard and answered prayer, Barth knows that the subjective experience of the pray-er may tell a different story. What confidence may the pray-er have that her petitions are truly heard by God? Can she have confidence that her petitions really matter to God and God's sovereign rule? What theological reasoning will address the existential need for confidence that the pray-er is doing more than merely talking to herself or telling God something superfluous to God's sovereign plan, that she is actually being heard. While Barth does not himself explicitly enumerate reasons for such confidence, spread across the *Church Dogmatics,* as well his other writings on prayer, there can be identified seven major reasons that the Christian may be assured of God's hearing.

First, prayer offered in faith is heard on account of God's perfect nature. Barth's understanding of divine perfection will be explored in more detail below. Needless to say, he has a very specific understanding of divine perfection such that "God's being consists in the fact that He is the One who loves in freedom," and that "God's being is itself perfection and the standard of all perfection."[52] This notion of God's perfections is the grounds for Barth's confidence in God's hearing. Barth concludes that the Bible is "completely unambiguous" that God is one who hears prayer.[53] "It is," Barth insists, "essential for faith to be faith in the God who listens to prayer," and that because it is God's very nature to do so.[54] God's hearing is a function of divine freedom, but also because "He remains and is, the

[52] *CD* II/1, p. 322.

[53] *CD* II/1, p. 511.

[54] Ibid., p. 512.

Creator and Lord of all creation," and "as such He has now made clear… that He wills not only to hear but to hearken [*er nicht nur hören, sondern erhören will*]."[55] Of course, this does not mean it is necessary, as a function of God's nature, to answer prayer. This would be a distortion of Barth's argument and compromise the divine freedom Barth labors so stridently to defend. Rather, it is due to God's perfect nature that God always hears the prayers of God's people.

Second, prayer offered in faith is heard on account of its consistency with and prioritizing of the will of God. Barth has in mind, here, the experience of prayer identified with the parable of the importunate widow of Luke 18:1-8, whom Jesus commends for her incessant asking. The parable is relevant, for re-petition implies unanswered prayer, and in short time, unanswered prayer may feel like unheard prayer. But this need not be. Without abrogating Jesus' commendation of incessant petition, Barth suggests that "In spite of all its untiring insistence and its likeness to the passionate prayer of the importunate widow, the prayer of faith has also the characteristic of the prayer of Gethsemane, in which the will of God is resolutely and finally set above the will of men. It is only prayer of this kind which has the promise that it will be heard…"[56] Here Barth has in mind the "not my will, but yours be done" of Jesus' prayer. That prioritizing of the divine will in petition gives assurance that the pray-er is heard on account of Biblical promise. The promise Barth has in mind is 1 John 5:14-15, which establishes a cause-effect relationship between petition κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ and God's hearing of prayer. This promise is good news for the pray-er. For even in re-petition, she may be confident that she is heard by God when, like Jesus, she prioritizes the divine will over her own and when she aims to bring her petition in line with τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ. In such cases, the Scriptures supply confidence that the pray-er is heard.

Third, prayer offered in faith is heard on account of the special relationship between speaker and listener. Barth understands prayer to be the special privilege bestowed by God upon the believer, which allows her to share in God's rule and reign over the cosmos. Barth insists, "while God alone exercises the government of the world believers are not simply to be servants under Him. They may stand beside Him as His friends."[57] Barth cites as examples both Moses experience as one who spoke with God face-to-face as one speaks with a friend (Ex. 33:11), and the declaration of Jesus to the disciples: "You are my friends

[55] Ibid., pp. 511-12 = *KD* II/1, p. 575.

[56] Ibid., p. 511. While this certainly implies the reality of unheard and unanswered prayer, Barth does not address unheard or unanswered prayer. Below, I offer a proposal for why this might be, proposing that it is Barth's particular understanding of the divine will and divinely given faith that accounts for this silence.

[57] Ibid.

if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (Jn. 15:14-15). Here Barth is concerned to emphasize that God listens to prayer as a friend listens to the needs and requests of another friend. Above I have already detailed the way Barth sees God's posture toward believers as one of intimacy and analogous to that of a father and child. Bearing in mind that context, it is evident that it is the special relationship that the believer has with God through Christ that allows her to approach God in prayer with confidence that God listens, not as a stranger or an enemy, but as friend or father, who is eager "not only to hear but to hearken."[58]

Fourth, prayer offered in faith is heard on account of the believer's participation in Christ. This is an extraordinarily rich theme in Barth's thinking that has been well-explicated by Cocksworth.[59] Here a summary must suffice. In §53.3.4 Barth states unequivocally that "True prayer is prayer which is sure of a hearing."[60] He then offers the most explicit definition of God's hearing found anywhere in the *CD*: "the reception and adoption of the human request into God's plan and will, and therefore the divine speech and action which correspond to the human request."[61] Confidence in this kind of hearing constitutes the posture of "true prayer" and is its *conditio sine qua non*. This sort of prayer is characterized by and comes under the determination of hope—an unreserved and unquestioning certainty.[62] For Barth, the question cannot be whether or not God hears, but only if the petition is characterized by this confident hope. In this, Barth has the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 129 on his side: "For my prayer is much more certainly heard by God than I feel in my heart that I desire such from Him."[63] Barth concludes from the Catechism that

> It is not as if our prayer were the certain thing and His hearing the uncertain, but precisely the opposite. We can doubt the value, power and sincerity of our own asking, but not God's hearing. Will our request as such ever be anything but weak and poverty-stricken? Well, we are not called upon to believe in its power and richness. We are called upon to believe that it is heard by God even as it is prayed:

[58] *CD* III/1, p. 512.

[59] Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, pp. 134ff.

[60] *CD* III/4, p. 106.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., p. 107.

> ἔχομεν, ἐλάβετε. It is because it is heard that we pray, and not because we are so skilled in asking.[64]

Yet what is the foundation of such confidence and hope in God's hearing? The basis for this confidence comes by the participation of the believer in the life of the Triune God as she is incorporated into Christ by the Spirit. By her incorporation into the "we" of the Church whose head is Christ, she is bound up with God from all eternity. As one who belongs to God through Christ by the Spirit, her asking is an *asking with* Christ. The basis for confidence in God's hearing is here stated by Barth in full:

> [W]hen we pray to God we have Him on our side from the very outset, and we for our part stand on His side from the very outset, so that from the very outset we must be certain that He hears our prayer. In His Son God has become man, and therefore He has actually taken our side and become our Brother. And in His Son we are actually raised as His brethren to the side of God. Now if the Son asks Him, how can the Father possibly fail to hear Him? How can His asking fail to be accompanied by hearing? And how, then, can the Father fail to hear and answer those whom His Son calls His own, who are together with His Son His children, who ask Him in company with His Son, with whom and for whom the Son asks? How can there be even the smallest interval between asking and hearing? As Jesus Christ asks, and we with Him, God has already made Himself the Guarantor that our request will be heard. Indeed, He has already heard them.[65]

Such confidence is entirely consistent with the Johannine theme of praying in Christ's name (Jn. 14:13; 15:16; 16:23ff.). This invocation of Christ's name and identification with him in asking is a recollection of the pray-er's participation in the life of the Triune God who hears. "For this God is not only occasionally but essentially, not only possibly and in extraordinary cases but always, the God who hears the prayers of His own."[66]

Fifth, and related to the believer's participation in Christ, prayer offered in faith is heard on account of Christ's prayers for and with the believer. In §49.4 Barth details the way that Christ is not only the answer to all prayer, but the petitioner *par excellence*. Here Barth's indebtedness to Calvin is evident.[67] Christ petitions the Father for and with his

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., p. 108.

[66] Ibid., p. 109.

[67] See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.XX. Additionally, Barth expounds Calvin's understanding of participation and prayer in his commentary on Calvin's 1545 Catechism of the Genevan Church; see Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 279-80.

people as an intercessor. The elected community "is constituted by the fact that it knows and acknowledges and affirms His intercession as that of the great High-priest, that it is posited on this basis, that it cannot posit itself on any other."[68] In this, Christ as the great High Priest continually teaches his people to pray as he prays for them. This community of the elect "will not allow its Lord to be alone in prayer, but it will be at His side with its own asking, however imperfect and perverted and impotent this may be compared with His."[69] More succinctly: "There is no Church which is not an asking Church."[70] For Barth, the Church, *qua* Church, prays with and in Christ, and "Christian prayer is participation in Jesus Christ; participation, basically, in the grace which is revealed and active in Him, in the Son of God… Christian prayer is life in and with the community of Jesus Christ."[71] So, it is in relation to Christ, the High Priest, and in relation to the community of the elect that the believer is able to pray. This dual relation is brought about by God in the life of the believer and is the grounds for confidence in God's hearing prayer. Barth connects participation in Christ with confidence in God's hearing: "God must set [the believer] in fellowship with His Son, gathering him into the community of His Son and making him a living member of it. In this freedom, he prays, and therefore he asks, and he can do it as we have described—in the fullness of the divine presence, and therefore with a strong assurance that he will be heard even as he asks."[72] So the believer may embrace a posture of confidence in prayer due to her petition with Christ and her position in his community.

Sixth, prayer offered in faith is heard because it is, fundamentally, a gracious work of God in and through the believer. Throughout his work, Barth pushes prayer in two directions. On the one hand, Barth insists that the believer must pray as Christ has taught his disciples to pray. On the other hand, he insists that the believer is unable to pray as she ought.[73] By the writing of *The Christian Life*, Barth declares that prayer is "totally inconceivable."[74] Yet Christ's followers are commanded to pray. Barth's commitment to the avoidance of "religion" or autonomous religious activity is evident here. Barth will allow no understanding of prayer that rests on human effort devoid of God's activity. On the contrary, human prayer is a divine activity, brought about by the grace of God. For Barth, it is "He,

[68] *CD* III/3, p. 277.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 278.

[71] Ibid., p. 282.

[72] Ibid., p. 283.

[73] See Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, p. 132.

[74] Karl Barth, *The Christian Life* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), p. 136.

Jesus Christ, [who] is properly and really the One who prays"[75] in the believer. Prayer then is the activity of God in the believer. This work of grace in the believer accounts for confidence that the prayers of God's people are heard; for they are, at bottom, a work of God that, as such, cannot fail to be efficacious.[76]

Finally, in the creaturely experience of prayer, God's hearing accomplishes something in the pray-er and her experience of the relationship with the One to whom she prays. This is not a specifically textual argument, but a structural one, extrapolated from Barth's prioritization of petition. Petition is prioritized by Barth, in part, on account of its emphasis on the relationship between God and the pray-er. The petitionary posture of the pray-er is, for Barth, the truest and deepest form of relationship with God as the pray-er is, in union with Christ, praying to the Father. "The only possible status of the creature," Barth insists, "is that of one who asks."[77] As the pray-er approaches God as one who asks, the neediness and dependence conform to the divinely willed and commanded structure of the relationship.[78] In that posture of neediness and dependence, the pray-er becomes, in obedience to God and as a gift of the Spirit, more who God has intended her to be. While God has already heard the petitions of the pray-er, she receives *more than* the affirmation of God's hearing in her neediness and dependence. She receives the gift and blessing already given in Christ as she conforms to God's divinely willed and commanded posture of dependence such that she becomes more whom God is making her to be. While God has already heard and already answered in the giving of Christ, the experience of that answer to prayer, in prayer, is a gift and blessing itself. It is a fuller experience of God's *already* and, from the creaturely experience, becomes a gift given again and again as the pray-er approaches God in neediness and dependence. It is, then, in the experience of prayer that the pray-er receives renewed confidence of God's hearing.

Barth leaves no question that when the believer approaches God in prayer, God hears. God's hearing is not and should not be called into question on account of the subjective experience of the pray-er. To suggest that God might only occasionally hear—

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[75] *CD* III/4, p. 94.

[76] Less relevant here is Barth's insistence that prayer is also not a passive phenomenon that takes place in the believer. Elsewhere, Barth warns, "let us not begin by believing that humankind is passive, that we are in a sort of *farniente*, in an armchair, and that we can say, 'The Holy Spirit will pray for me.' Never! Humankind is impelled to pray. We must do it." Karl Barth, *Prayer: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 20. Additionally, Cocksworth argues that Barth's oft-decried pneumatology plays a significant role in particularizing the prayers of the believer. See Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, p. 134.

[77] *CD* III/3, p. 274.

[78] Petition is prioritized by Barth, primarily on account of the divine command to pray; *CD* III/4, p. 92. See also Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, p. 62.

whether it be on account of the prayer-er's effort, skill, or emotion in prayer—would be to deny the believer's identity and gracious participation with Christ in the life of the Triune God, and would be an implicit denial of God's perfect power and lordship over creation. Additionally, God's hearing is not to be denied on account of a response from God that is incongruent with the petition. Barth clarifies this in the *Christian Life* when he writes,

> It would be wholly inappropriate and impossible for the children of God to expect and demand that the glory of the hearing should consist in the congruence of the divine fulfilling with the limited form of the asking, or even to accept as a hearing only a divine fulfilment that conforms to their own thought and intention. The rule is instead that they must accept already a fulfillment, that is, a transformation, of the prayer itself.[79]

In this way Barth fends off any complaints about God's potential failure to hear. While already cited, his position could be summarized as follows: "For this God is not only occasionally but essentially, not only possibly and in extraordinary cases but always, the God who hears the prayers of His own."[80] Therefore, the believer should approach the throne of grace with confidence, knowing that the Triune God is a God who hears (Heb. 4:16).

Before moving on, it is worth briefly pausing to note an apparent tension between Barth and Holy Scripture. As the last chapter demonstrated, Scripture amply testifies to God's refusal to hear and to hearken on account of covenant unfaithfulness. Yet Barth does not anywhere address God's unwillingness to hear. Rather, when he writes of God always hearing prayer, he speaks of a believing, faith-filled prayer. The faith and belief that make prayer possible is a gift, divinely given. Such prayer is, for Barth, "so real" that "where it occurs God positively wills that man should call upon Him in this way."[81] Because prayer is divinely willed by God, it is sure to be heard. Further, because it is divinely willed by the God who hears, it is imbued with a faith that has God's hearing as its content. Barth insists that the faith which produces prayer to God includes faith that God hears. "It is," Barth claims, "essential for faith to be faith in the God who listens to prayer."[82] So, Barth does not address God's unwillingness to hear. But this seems to be on account of his understanding that prayer, as something divinely willed and offered in the faith that has been divinely given, is offered in accordance with God's will and is offered in the belief that God hears.

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[79] Barth, *The Christian Life*, p. 160.

[80] *CD* III/4, p. 109.

[81] *CD* II/1, p. 510.

[82] Ibid., II/1, p. 512.

While this may appear to stand in tension with Scripture's clear assertion that there are prayers which will go unheard, there is a potential resolution. For Barth, the certainty of God's hearing is wrapped up with this particular kind of faith and is the result of the divine will. In contrast, the unheard prayers of Scripture are the prayers of those living at odds with covenant faithfulness. While Barth would certainly reject the introduction of any human contingency in God's hearing, it might be proposed that, for Barth, these so-called "prayers" of the faithless and disobedient are not really prayers at all, because they lack faith and run contrary to the divine will. For Barth, it is the divinely willed, faith-filled prayer in the God who hears to which God always hears and always hearkens. So it may be that the unheard of "prayers" of which Scripture are not what Barth has in mind when he writes of prayer being always heard.

2.4 Hearing and God's Constancy

With an account of Barth's understanding of hearing in place, the question must be asked, What relevance has any of this for Barth's dogmatics? In what way does this particular understanding of hearing do theological work for Barth? As a theological construct, what end might it serve? The remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to demonstrating the theological promise of hearing, as put on display by Barth. It will be shown that Barth appropriates his particular account of hearing so as to qualify and inform his doctrine of immutability. It will be seen that when hearing is brought into theological conjunction with immutability, a certain qualified doctrine of immutability results that affirms God's constancy without impinging upon God's freedom, power, or self-determination all the while bestowing dignity on the believer who petitions God by faith. This will require, first, an explication of Barth's understanding of immutability, explaining its place and context in Barth's dogmatics. Then it will be demonstrated what hearing accomplishes for Barth's concept of immutability.

"God's being consists in the fact that He is the One who loves in freedom. In this He is the perfect being: the being which is itself perfection and so the standard of all perfection; the being, that is, which is self-sufficient and thus adequate to meet every real need; the being which suffers no lack in itself and by its very essence fills every real lack. Such a being is God."[83] Thus, Barth begins his introduction to God's nature. Famously, Barth prioritizes God's love and God's freedom, arranging them dialectically and indexing God's perfections under either God's free love or God's loving freedom. It is under the

[83] *CD* II/1, p. 322.

latter heading of God's loving freedom that Barth, with characteristic dialectic intention, situates his doctrine of divine immutability, or "constancy" as he prefers it. And, while God's loving freedom may seem like an unlikely context for a discussion of God's constancy, Barth has here made an intentional decision to face the theological flashpoint head on.

Barth claims that it is God's constancy that differentiates God from all that is distinct from Godself, and this constancy means that there can be no "deviation, diminution or addition, nor any degeneration or rejuvenation, any alteration or non-identity or discontinuity. The one, omnipresent God remains the One He is. This is his constancy."[84] Yet Barth is quick to qualify this kind of constancy, declaring that it in no way conflicts with God's freedom or love. Rather, "both His freedom and His love are divine for the very reason that they are the freedom and the love of the One who is constant in Himself."[85] This entails that, in a broader sense, God's constancy does not conflict with the life of God. God lives in perfect love and freedom. To understand what it means for *God* to be immutable, the predicate must be qualified by the subject. So, if God is the God who loves in freedom, then it must be *that God* who is immutable. Barth sees this approach as perfectly consistent with both Old and New Testament claims about God's unchanging nature. Yet he observes the way Protestant orthodoxy, and even Augustine, read these passages in a way that created an abstract antithesis between rest and activity, or stasis and movement, which bequeathed to theological heirs an unresolvable paradox. In contrast, Barth claims that "God's constant divine nature lies beyond the antithesis between rest and movement."[86] Barth is motivated by the impulse to honor the Biblical testimony to immutability, without isolating God from any contact with creation or making God *immobile*.[87] The latter would be to make

[84] Ibid., p. 491.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., p. 493.

[87] The problem has been exacerbated by false notions of Aristotelian metaphysics and by the so-called Hellenization thesis. On the metaphysical issue, see William P. Alston, "Substance and Trinity" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity,* ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, Gerald O'Collins SJ, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 179-201. Alston argues, "[T]here is absolutely no justification for saddling substance metaphysics as such with these commitments to timelessness, immutability, pure actuality with no potentiality, and being unaffected by relations to other beings. To see this, we only have to recall that the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance was developed for application to finite created substances, particularly living organisms. And these are far from 'invisible, unchangeable, eternal' [quoting what he takes to be a caricature of Augustine by Ted Peters], pure actuality with no trace of potentiality, and absolutely simple. Quite the contrary!" (p. 195). The issue of divine immutability was less problematic for the Fathers. For one of several responses to the Hellenization Thesis, see Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible* God, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 21-46. For a specifically patristic example of immutability's handling, see J. Warren Smith, "Suffering

immutability God, which could only result in the deifying of death itself.[88] No, it is the God who loves in freedom who does not change.[89] Immutability, as a result, comes to be identified with the fullest sense of a life of love and freedom, rather than *stasis* and death.

This account of the God who is constant in loving freedom goes a long way in addressing the both-and of God's immutability and free engagement with creation. Yet Barth is aware that the Scriptures present cases that appear inconsistent with his account. So, in a seven-page excurses, Barth takes up several special cases generated by salvation history that might confound a "general concept of immutability."[90] Barth claims that God "wills to be understood in His reality, that in [the Scriptures] He wills that we should learn what the really immutable is, and in what sense He, God, is the immutable."[91] While surveying each of these special cases falls outside the purview of this chapter, it is the final case that is immediately relevant. The issue is "the fact that the prayers of those who can and will believe are heard: that God is and wills to be known as the One who will and does listen to the prayers of faith."[92] In this way, Barth takes up the issue of God's hearing and asks what it means for a doctrine of immutability. Here I will trace his argument and highlight the way Barth's understanding of hearing shapes immutability.

Barth's thesis is that, on the basis of God's freedom, God wills "not merely to hear but to hearken [*nicht nur hören, sondern es erhören will*] to the prayer of faith and that He not only permits to faith the prayer which expects an answer but has positively commanded it."[93]

First, Barth musters the Biblical testimony to support his claim:

> The Bible is completely unambiguous about this: 'He heareth the prayer of the righteous' (Prov. 15:29). 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also

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Impassibly: Christ's Passion in Cyril of Alexandria's Soteriology" in *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XI, No. 4, 2002, pp. 463-83.

[88] *CD* II/1, p. 494.

[89] Barth acknowledges that his account of immutability is strongly influenced by I.A. Dorner's famous essay, "Über die richtige Fassung des dogmatischen Begriffs der Unveränderlichkeit Gottes" in *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, (1856) vol 1, pp. 361–416, vol 2, pp. 440-500, vol 3, pp. 579-660.

[90] *CD* II/1, p. 506 = KD II/1, p. 569. See *CD* II/1, pp. 506-12 for the special cases generated by the *heilsgeschichte*.

[91] *CD* II/1, p. 506.

[92] Ibid., p. 510.

[93] Ibid., p. 511 = *KD* II/1, p. 574.

> will hear their cry, and will save them' (Ps. 145:18-19). 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 50:15). 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months, and he prayed again and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit' (Jas. 5:16-18). 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' (Mt. 7:7-11). 'Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily' (Lk. 18:6-8).

What does Barth make of this impressive (if selective) list of Biblical citations? Why does it belong in a discussion of God's loving freedom and constancy? He claims that, "We need not hesitate to say that 'on the basis of the freedom of God Himself God is conditioned by the prayer of faith.' ['*es gibt auf Grund der Freiheit Gottes selbst eine Bestimmung Gottes durch das Gebet des Glaubens.*'] The basis is His freedom."[94] For Barth, God's hearing creates a special case of divine immutability, grounded in God's perfect freedom. God's perfect hearing is essential to God's own nature as the immutable Lord and creator. "What else is revealed when God hears and answers prayer but that He is the Creator and Lord of all things?"[95] In Scripture, God has self-revealed as the one who hears prayer and as the one whose hearing constitutes God's lordship and sovereignty over creation. For Barth, this means, "The living and genuinely immutable God is not an irresistible fate before which man can only keep silence, passively awaiting and accepting the benefits or blows which it ordains. There is no such thing as a Christian resignation in which we have either to submit to a fate of this kind or to come to terms with it."[96] Faith in and prayer to the God revealed in Christian Scripture is faith in and prayer to a God who is willing "not only to hear, but to hearken" ("*nicht nur hören, sondern es erhören will*") to the prayers of the elect.[97] For

[94] Ibid. = *KD* II/1, p. 574.

[95] *CD* II/1, p. 512.

[96] Ibid., p. 511.

[97] Ibid.= *KD* II/1, p. 574.

Barth, God's perfection means the perfect hearing and hearkening of the immutable and living God.

Yet how can it be that God hears and hearkens, yet remains immutable? Barth's understanding of immutability transcends the antithesis between rest and movement in a way that is analogous with his arrangement of divine and human agency. God's hearing precedes human asking because God's agency is altogether different than human agency. Similarly, God's constancy is not compromised by God's free and eternal will as lord and creator to be conditioned by the prayers of faith. God's eternal will is not in competition with creaturely petitions.

> [God] does not alter when he reveals Himself as the One who listens to prayer. He remains the One He was and is, the Creator and Lord of all creation. But as such He has now made clear this other aspect of His being, that He wills not only to hear but to hearken, that He does actually hearken, that His own can meet Him in what is finally not a passive but a supremely active attitude, that He has, indeed, expressly commanded that they should do so—not, of course, in the work of a creaturely freedom, in competition with His sole sovereignty and activity, but in the freedom of friends, a freedom which He has specially given them.[98]

Here it is noteworthy, first, that Barth is committed to avoiding a competitive understanding of divine and human agency.[99] This is consistent with the aforementioned observation by Cocksworth that prayer is not merely and crudely "conversation" for Barth. The arrangement of agencies is too different, too asymmetrical, to allow competition. Second, Barth understands God's hearing as a "supremely active attitude". It is not some passive inactivity in the way a "general concept of immutability" might suggest. On the contrary, God's hearing is a function of the free and loving activity of the living God who is eternally active and eternally listening. This is why Barth can exclaim, "What else is revealed when God hears and answers prayer but that He is the Creator and Lord of all things? And how can this fact be more gloriously revealed, or be revealed at all, except by His hearing and answering prayer?"[100] Indeed hearing reveals something fundamental about God's nature and character for Barth; something so fundamental that we might propose an equally true adaptation of Barth's description of God. God may rightly be described as the *God who hears in freedom*. As the immutable One who hears in freedom, God establishes Godself as

[98] Ibid., pp. 511-12.

[99] On this, see also, Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 120-62.

[100] *CD* II/1, p. 512.

the unchanging Lord and creator of all things, and as the Lord and creator who hears the petitions of God's own.

The significance of hearing in relation to God's lordship is proved later in *The Church Dogmatics.* Barth again takes up the question of God's immutable Lordship over creation in relation to God's hearing. Under the discussion of the life of "The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father" (§49.4), Barth is concerned to articulate God's lordship and the place of prayer in God's plan. It is the most compact weaving of immutability, freedom, sovereignty, prayer, and the significant role that God's hearing plays in it all, in all of *The Church Dogmatics*. It proves the weight and work of God's hearing for Barth. Thus, I will quote it in full, and then offer five brief observations. Commenting on the Christian's share in the universal lordship of God, Barth writes,

> It is a genuine and actual share in the universal lordship of God. The will of God is not to preserve and accompany and rule the world and the course of the world as world-occurrence in such a way that He is not affected and moved by it, that He does not allow Himself to converse with it, that He does not listen to what it says, that as He conditions all things He does not allow Himself to be determined by them. God is not free and immutable in the sense that He is the prisoner of His own resolve and will and action, that He must always be alone as the Lord of all things and of all occurrence. He is not alone in His trinitarian being, and He is not alone in relation to creatures. He is free and immutable as the living God, as the God who wills to converse with the creature, and to allow Himself to be determined by it in this relationship. His sovereignty is so great that it embraces both the possibility, and, as it is exercised, the actuality, that the creature can actively be present and co-operate in His overruling. There is no creaturely freedom which can limit or compete with the sole sovereignty and efficacy of God. But permitted by God, and indeed willed and created by Him, there is the freedom of the friends of God concerning whom He has determined that without abandoning the helm for one moment He will still allow Himself to be determined by them. There is no autonomous and rebellious counter-activity of the creature in opposition to the eternal activity of His own will and action; but on the model of His own will and action there is an individual activity of the creature which is planned and willed and demanded and made possible and actual by His own eternal activity, since it is included within it. There is no divine surrender to the creature, but in the very fact that God maintains and asserts himself as King and Lord there is a divine hearing--in the basis of the incomprehensible grace of God an incomprehensible hearing--even of the creature which is sinful. The grace of God to sinful man is that He encounters him as the hearing God; that He calls him not merely to the humility of a servant and thankfulness of a child but to the intimacy and boldness of a friend in

> the immediate presence of the throne, His own presence; that He not merely permits but commands him to call upon Him in the definite expectation that He will both hear and answer, that his asking will have an objective as well as a subjective significance, i.e., a significance for his own will and action. The will of God is done even as the creature calls and presses and prevails upon it to be done. It is done as the converse with the creature established by this will is entered into by the creature in the form of this calling and pressing and prevailing. It is done as God participates in the creature, and enables it to participate in Himself, and in the purpose and direction of His works. It is done on this condition. And in this way it triumphs as the sovereign will of God which is living even in its divine sovereignty.[101]

How are we to unravel this complex of themes? First, in God's universal governance, God hears as the trinitarian God and, as such, allows creation to speak into God's plans. For Barth, the Triune God actively "converses" with creation as both speaker and hearer, inviting humanity to participate in God's free and loving rule over creation. God remains immutable, but not as one who is deaf to the petitions and cries of creation. On the contrary, God's free and sovereign rule is as the one who hears and hearkens to those petitions and cries.

Second, while Barth does not use the language of community, he does claim that God is "not alone" in God's lordship and that God hears the petitions and pleas of humanity in a way that allows a chorus of voices to participate in the divine rule. The friends of God are permitted and willed to influence God as God listens to them. God does not abandon the helm, continuing to rule as the Sovereign One, but that rule is a community affair. And as it is "the friends of God" who are permitted and willed to have such influence, this community affair is specifically an *ecclesial* affair. It is not out of ignorance that God inclines God's ear to the community, but out of love for the friends of God, God is concerned to hear and hearken to their desires and pleas.

Third, for Barth, all of this is entirely consistent with God's immutability. It has already been observed that Barth understands God's constancy or immutability as a free and living immutability that is neither static nor immobile. Yet here it is underscored that God's will is conditioned not by some vague and undefined relationship with creation, but by God's willingness to hear the prayers of God's own. God remains immutable, but it is the covenant relationship with those whom God hears that accounts for the latter's co-governance in the divine plans. In this way, Barth entertains a kind of receptivity in God that

[101] *CD* III/3, pp. 285-86. Italics mine.

is often underappreciated in his thought. Yet it is a receptivity that is highly qualified by God's constancy, covenant, and the asymmetry of the creator-creature relation.

Fourth, implicit in this paragraph are some characteristic features of God's hearing. God hears in order to be conditioned by God's friends, but is not controlled or compelled by them. God remains resolutely the king and lord. There remains an asymmetry in the divine-human relationship, even as God hears. Barth maintains that God's hearing does not introduce conflict or competition. Rather, God's hearing is as the king and lord, and the pleas of God's friends will not compete with, control, or rebel against the eternal will. Thus, God's hearing is not a vulnerable one. While God's ear inclines to creatures, no amount of shouting will overtake or coerce God to depart from God's good and eternal will.

Lastly, and most astonishingly, Barth grounds God's immutable hearing in the gospel of grace. Despite human sin and rebellion, it is on account of grace that God can still be encountered as One who hears. Human rebellion, by all counts, deserves an inattentive ear. What right has the sinful creature to be heard by God? Yet that God would not only hear but even hearken is, indeed, a gracious concession by the holy and Triune God to lost and rebellious creatures, and that in three ways. First, there is nothing about the relationship of creator to creature, *simpliciter*, which establishes obligations to listen one to another. It is a gracious and loving concession that God has established a communicative relationship with human creatures. Second, human rebellion and sin, as Barth points out, would be sufficient for God to turn a deaf ear. While Barth neglects to cite the relevant passages, the Scriptures are consistent with this perspective.[102] Yet, as an act of love in the face of human rebellion, God has chosen to hear and hearken to the petitions of those who are in Christ. Numbered among God's acts of redemption is the establishment of a restored communicative relationship that human sin and rebellion had destroyed. Third, God's hearing establishes God's presence as an intimate friend who is willing to listen to and be conditioned by the pleas and petitions of the redeemed. This experience of God's hearing presence is a most profound experience of the grace of the gospel.

Thus, it is God's gracious and intimate hearing of God's own by which they cooperate, albeit asymmetrically, in the divine rule. God's hearing does not create competition, but cooperation in the freedom of friendship. It is not merely tolerated by God, but is constitutive of the divinely given command to pray. It results not only from the believer's participation in God, but God's participation in the life of the believer. By it, the immutable God maintains freedom in the covenantal relationship with creatures. God's

[102] See 2 Chr. 7:14; Ps. 66:18; Pr. 15:29; Is. 59:1,2; Jer. 7:16, 11:11, 14:12; Ez. 8:18.

hearing is the knot that ties together a constellation of theological questions about the relationship between the immutable, sovereign creator and sinful, finite creatures. Were God's hearing of human speech removed from Barth's thought here, what would be left of the creature's relationship to God and God's plan? A kind of deism would result—a relationship devoid of the substance of the covenant relationship—with a gaping chasm between God and creation that would reduce God to an immutable stasis and leave creation abandoned as an orphan. But because God *nicht nur hören, sondern es erhören will*, believers have the dignity of participating in the universal lordship of God. "It is in their official capacity in this respect that [God] allows Christians a voice and a part in the formulation and execution of His will."[103]

I have sought to show how Barth deploys the concept of God's hearing to do theological work. By considering God's immutability in the light of hearing, Barth is able to avoid the "miserable anthropomorphism" of immutability, which "rules out the possibility that God can let Himself be conditioned in this or that way by His creature."[104] It allows Barth to assert that God is most certainly immutable, but is so as the living God who hears in freedom.

2.5 Conclusion

To briefly survey the ground covered: Barth's understanding of the covenant as creation's internal basis means that the creation is oriented toward the covenant, such that God creates creation in general, and human creatures in particular, to be in covenantal relationship with God. Revealed in this covenant relationship and the creation that conforms to it is that God willed not to be alone and not without the voices and ears of human creatures. Creation is the external basis of God's covenant and, as such, is the theater for divine-human dialogue. Further, while sin has damaged the relation between humanity and God, God's gracious work in the life of the believer restores the dialogical covenant relationship and is the cause of human speaking to God. Barth conceives of human speech to God as a response to God's gracious work in Christ that has already been accomplished and provided as the answer to all human asking. This means that God has already heard the petitions and needs of the believer before the asking ever occurs. The hearing precedes the asking and is the ground and cause of that asking. Yet the *already* of God's hearing does not invalidate the experience or value of human prayer; nor does it nullify God's command to pray as Jesus

[103] *CD* III/3, p. 288.

[104] *CD* III/4, pp. 108-9.

taught his disciples to pray. On the contrary, it is the cause of great confidence that, despite subjective experiences, the believer may be confident that she is heard by God. From the Barthian corpus I have isolated seven reasons Barth believes the pray-er may have extraordinary confidence that her prayer is heard by God. Finally, I have shown that Barth puts the concept of God's hearing to work, using it to qualify and clarify the doctrine of divine immutability. For Barth, God is always and unchangingly the living God who freely and graciously hears those who are God's own. God hears them and allows them to cooperate, through their petitions, in the divine governance of the universe.

The implications of Barth's understanding of God's hearing can only be suggested here; though they are many. Christian prayer is shaped and influenced by the *already* of God's hearing and by an acknowledgement of Christ as the supreme and final answer to all asking. The pray-er is armed with additional confidence and boldness in approaching the throne of God. This is accompanied by a deep neediness and humility in prayer, mindful that it is only by God's gracious initiative that human speaking and divine hearing are made possible. What might this mean for Christian liturgies that are frequent in their plea, "Lord, hear our prayer."[105] What of the additional value of hearing for the traditional systematic loci? Barth has brought hearing into the realm of theology proper and deployed it to clarify a number of dogmatic disputes about immutability; but what might be its implications for the doctrines of creation, anthropology, or christology? Barth has not said it all, and the project of exploring hearing's theological import for these other systematic loci will occupy the remainder of this work.

[105] Nicholas Wolterstoff, in his Kantzer Lectures in Revealed Theology, has examined the liturgies of a number of confessional traditions with an eye toward God's hearing and drawn conclusions about the analogical nature of God's hearing of human prayer in the liturgy. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 71-86.

3. CREATION: A THEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR

"agere sequitur ad esse"[1]

In the first chapter, it was argued that the Triune God has chosen to self-reveal in Holy Scripture as one who not only speaks, but hears. It was argued that this hearing is a particular kind of loving and just attention that God supplies by means of God's significant personal presence. This theological framework for understanding the semantic content of the Biblical testimony to God's hearing was developed through a careful listening to Scripture and by way of philosophical engagement with the notion of attention. The result was a more robust understanding of the Biblical testimony. The second chapter examined how Barth sought to make theological sense of God's hearing, with special attention to its implications for his doctrine of God. What follows is neither entirely dependent on Barth's conclusions and approach, nor does it neglect his contributions to the topic. My argument hereafter is inspired by Barth's approach but departs from it in ways that will become evident in order that I might consider more broadly the effects of God's hearing on other dogmatic loci. There is a need to ask what theological import this framework has for dogmatics more generally. For, if God hears—and that in the way I have developed from an auscultation of Scripture—it must be asked of what consequence this is for theological reflection on God, God's being, and God's activity in and on creation. Further, it must be asked how the developed framework squares with the Christian theological tradition and its understanding of its material object: the Triune God. While there are any number of ways in which God's hearing or listening might be spoken of, this speech, in order to be true to its subject, must be formally conditioned by God, God's being, and God's relation to creation. Such conditioning of language finds its rightful home in the doctrine of creation.

The intention of this chapter then is the construction of a dogmatic grammar that will make intelligible God's hearing in light of God's relation to and distinction from God's creation. If God be infinite, eternal, immutable, and ontologically other, what sense does it make to say that the creator brings into being finite, temporal, and transient creatures whom God hears? How can we speak properly of God, as one who hears not-God? The question is an ambitious and dangerous one because concealed behind it are metaphysical questions about the relationship between God's being and activity, ontology and economy, that cannot

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib.3. cap. 69 n. 20.

be exhaustively addressed here. And, while some discussion of those questions is unavoidable, they are presented here only in the service of developing the grammar. For, if the dogmatic grammar is to be successful—that is, successfully establishing the boundaries of appropriate speech about God's hearing—it must avoid two errors. First, it must avoid making God, *qua* hearer, dependent on creation. Put another way, if God is a hearer, God must be so, eternally, *sans* creation, the act of creation in no way changing God's being. Second, it must avoid making God unable to act upon creation, compromising God's loving, outward activity. This would be to deny the realism of the Biblical testimony to God's hearing and undermine the theological framework already developed. Rather, what must be developed is a grammar for speaking about God's hearing that circumscribes it in such a way that God's ontological alterity is uncompromised, and yet the realism of God's hearing is made intelligible.

3.1 God's Radical Ontological Alterity and Infinite Proximity

John Webster has repeatedly declared that the doctrine of creation "treats four principle topics: the identity of the creator, the divine act of creating, the several natures and ends of created things, and the relation of creator and creatures."[2] He goes on to state that these principle topics are materially ordered in such a way that what is known about the first governs what may be said about the subsequent three. Here it is necessary to follow Webster's lead by first clarifying the nature and identity of the creator, then proceeding to understand God's relation to creation.

For our purposes, clarifying our understanding of God's nature begins by way of declaring, with Nicholas of Cusa, that God is *non aliud*, or not another thing.[3] To begin by making such a declaration is to consciously part ways with dipolar, open, or process models which seek to prioritize divine receptivity and potentiality.[4] What unites this diverse family of theological understanding is the placing of God in continuity with the ontological plane of the created order. In doing so, the becoming of creation imposes constraints on divine

[2] John Webster, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness" in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology Volume 1: God and the Works of God*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), p. 100. See also "Trinity and Creation" and "*Non Ex Aequo:* God's Relation to Creatures", op. cit., for similar statements.

[3] Nicholas of Cusa, *On God as Not-Other: A Translation and an Appraisal of* De Li Non Aliud, 3rd edn, trans. by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1987).

[4] See, e.g., Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000), passim. For a historical survey, beginning with Plato, see John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

being. While there is considerable merit in these models insofar as they seek to give due weight to Scriptural language concerning God's responsiveness and openness toward creation, I remain unpersuaded that these understandings offer a better explanation of God and God's relation to creation than the tradition I follow here. I am, rather, convinced that God's being, when conceived of as radically ontologically distinct from creation, actually provides a theologically satisfying and Biblically faithful account of God's relation to creation. So, while this family of models is too diverse to engage directly and substantively here, I trust that the merits and justification for following Cusa will be evident in what follows, offering a preferable account of God's being as well as God's hearing of creation. For, to declare that God is *non aliud* is to insist that God's being is in no wise comparable to creaturely reality. Divine existence does not share, or even mirror, the ontological reality of creatures, but is altogether ontologically other. God does not exist *sui generis*, but, to cite Aquinas, "*Deus non est in generis*."[5] This ontological alterity, which has been called "the distinction" by Robert Sokolowski,[6] is the first principle of all speech about God's nature; all subsequent claims about God, creation, and the kind of relations which exists between the two are materially governed by this principle. Historically, the distinction between God and the world has been developed by way of two distinct but related doctrines: *creatio ex nihilo* and divine simplicity.

As early as Theophilus of Antioch, God's creative act has been understood properly as *ex nihilo*. The second-century bishop was one of the earliest to recognize that God's being was the lesser if creation was formed out of some pre-existent material alongside God. "But how is it great," Theophilus queried, "if God made the universe out of pre-existing material? For a human craftsman, too, when he obtains material from someone, makes from it whatever he wishes. But the power of God is made manifest in this: that he makes whatever he wishes out of what does not exist."[7] And, while Theophilus' insight was not shared unanimously among the early church fathers, his position came to acceptance as the most Biblically satisfying way to understand the creative act.[8] Contrary to the common accusation that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is an intrusive Hellenizing influence on

[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter abbreviated, *ST*) 1.3.5.

[6] Robert Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 31-40.

[7] Theophilus of Antioch, "To Autolycus" 1.4 in *Patrologia Graeca*, 6:1029B. English translation from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

[8] Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology* 59, embraced the Platonic preference for creation out of pre-existent material. See Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 2.

Hebrew Scripture, whatever may be meant by that, Theophilus actually breaks with the well-known cosmogony of Plato's *Timaeus* and with Parmenides axiom, "*ex nihilo, nihil fit*,"—and he does so on Biblical-exegetical grounds.[9] This break sets the doctrine on a trajectory toward catholicity, as both an exegetical conclusion and as a sometimes-useful polemic against heresies like the "gnosticisms" which denigrated the material world.[10] Janet Soskice is correct when she comments that *creation ex nihilo* is a "*biblically compelled* piece of metaphysical theology."[11] While serving exegetical and polemical purposes for some of the fathers, the driving motive behind the broad acceptance of *creatio ex nihilo* was, according to Gerhard May, "the attempt to do justice to the absolute sovereignty and unlimited freedom of the biblical God."[12] For God to be sovereign over creation and entirely free to act upon it, God's being had to be entirely apart from the arena of becoming. Only in this way would God's freedom and sovereignty be absolute. Any claim that the material world existed autonomously alongside God "marked a fundamental limit on God's sovereignty" and was, as such, "inconsistent with Christian confidence in God's power to save."[13] Thus, *creatio ex nihilo* became one way of recognizing God's ontological alterity from creation—a way of establishing the divinely imbued worth of creation without compromising divine freedom, sovereignty, or aseity. If the creator is to be adequately distinguished from creation, creation must be *ex nihilo*.

A second way in which God's ontological distinction from the created universe has been articulated is by way of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Rather than suggesting that God is simplistic or lacks sophistication, the doctrine is an attempt to make an ontological distinction about God's nature that sets it apart from created reality. In Aristotelean language, simplicity asserts that, unlike created reality, there is no distinction between divine substance and accident. Rather, the divine nature is without matter, form, or accident. It is not simply that there are no accidents or properties that are non-essential to God; it is

[9] Theophilus of Antioch, "To Autolycus*"* in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol.*2, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 2.10. See Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 21-46 for a response to alleged Hellenizing. Of course, there were Jewish interpreters who saw pre-existent material in their exegesis of the Genesis account; cf. McFarland, *From Nothing*, pp. 2-5. However, the point remains that Theophilus' priorities are exegetical in nature.

[10] For *ex nihilo* as a response to gnostic heresies, see McFarland, *From Nothing*, pp. 5-10.

[11] Janet M. Soskice, "*Creatio ex nihilo*: its Jewish and Christian foundations', in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. by David Burrell, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 25. Emphasis original.

[12] Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing"* in *Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 8. Note, however, that May does not believe the doctrine was Biblically motivated.

[13] McFarland, *From Nothing*, p. 19.

that God's nature *just is* without form, matter, or accident—without composition whatsoever. God's essence just is, without distinction. God's existence is identical with God's essence, and in that sense, God is simple. Of course, this does not preclude or invalidate creaturely predication of the divine nature. For Aquinas, speaking of God in such a way is a function of human intellect. We may, Aquinas claims, "speak of simple things only as though they were like the composite things from which we derive our knowledge."[14] So, it remains a true proposition that "God is good." However, to predicate goodness of God is not the same as predicating goodness of, say, Odysseus. The predicate "is good" is being employed (whether knowingly or unknowingly) analogically so as to say something similar about God and about Odysseus. Yet the difference between the two statements exceeds their similarity because God is simple and Odysseus composite. God's relationship to God's goodness is distinct from the case of Odysseus, insofar as God's goodness is identical with God's nature. God's nature is God's goodness. In contrast, Odysseus' nature is not identical with goodness. Again, God's essence just is God's existence, without distinction. Thus, importantly, the function of the doctrine of divine simplicity is not to state something about how the theologian is to treat divine properties or accidents. Rather, it is to deny the existence of divine properties or accidents altogether, in order to deny any kind of composition to God. This means that "from first to last the doctrine of divine simplicity is a piece of negative or apophatic theology and not a purported description of God."[15] As an apophatic qualification of God's nature, then, simplicity is a means of distinguishing God from the created world.[16]

The doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and divine simplicity serve to secure one principle identifying truth of the God of the Christian Scriptures: God is radically ontologically distinct from creation. Yet positing such a stark distinction between God and the world immediately generates questions about the nature of the relation between the two. How can God intelligibly be said to act in and on creation? In what way is the created world related to its creator? Due to the distinction between creator and creature, the relation between the two must be understood as an asymmetrical or mixed relation. This characterization finds its warrant as early as Augustine in *De trinitate*[17] but finds its most developed articulation in

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[14] Aquinas, *ST*, Ia. 3.3, reply obj. 1.

[15] Brian Davies, "Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity" in *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honor of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed. by Brian Davies (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), p. 59.

[16] Ivor J. Davidson has noted that the Christian tradition has developed many ways of glossing this distinction, including divine aseity, simplicity, perfection, and sufficiency. See "Divine Sufficiency" in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster* (London: T&T Clark, 2015), pp. 66-67.

[17] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.16.

mediaeval scholasticism. Aquinas argues that the relation is a mixed one insofar as it is "real" (*relationes reales*) in creation, but only "logical" or a "relation of reason" (*relationes rationis*) in God.[18] This kind of mixed relation is found in the created order among items that are not of the same order. Aquinas illustrates that the relation "on the right" is meaningless when applied to a column, until it is made in reference to, say, an animal which occupies that relation to the column.[19] While the relation could change and become "to the left", no change has taken place in the column but only in the animal. This illustrates the way a relation can be mixed between two items of different orders and may be, *mutatis mutandis*, applied analogously to God's relation to creation. Insofar as God is not *sui genres*, but *non est in generis*, God's relation to anything not-God must then be a mixed one. But this understanding of God's relation to creation is more than merely an apophatic qualifier. Webster is clear that characterizing the relation this way is not an attempt

> to deny God's relation to creatures but to invest that relation with a specific character […] by indicating that God's simple perfection is such that he is not one term in a dyad, relatively or contrastively defined, and, by consequence, that God's creative will and action are unrestrictedly benevolent and beneficent, giving life simply for the creature's good.[20]

It is because of God's independence and freedom from any external influence that the *opera Dei ad extra* are demonstrably gratuitous. Were God under the influence of any external compulsion, the pure gratuity of the act would be called into question. Yet, because God is unaffected by the act of creation, the existence of creation itself may be characterized as the result of the sheer goodness of God.

Aquinas has an additional purpose for characterizing God's relation to creation as logical or non-real. Doing so is one way of making evident "that the relation between creatures is not like the relation between creatures and God."[21] Even though mixed relations are found in the created order, Aquinas "destabilizes our sense of familiarity with this relation,"[22] in order to demonstrate its peculiarity. Calling God's relation to creation *rationis* undermines the validity of the category *relationes* to describe God *vis-à-vis* creation. The category simply fails to account adequately for the mysteriousness of the ontological

[18] Aquinas, *De Potentia* III.3 resp.; *ST*, Ia.13.7; 45.3 ad 1.

[19] Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.13.7.

[20] Webster, "*Non ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures" in *God Without Measure* (Vol 1), p. 116.

[21] Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), p. 50.

[22] Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 119.

coordination of God and not-God. Even though creaturely understanding inevitably defaults to thinking of the relation as a reciprocal one, that epistemically convenient construct falls short of acknowledging God's ontological reality. By describing God's relation to creation as logical or rational rather than real, Aquinas is attempting, by way of negation, to safeguard the divine reality as more mysterious than the category of relation can suitably describe.

As a result of this characterization of asymmetrical relations, one of Aquinas' most significant conclusions is elucidated. Because the relation is asymmetrical, God's unmediated intimacy with creation is made intelligible. To think of God's relation to creation in a reciprocal manner envisages God standing outside or alongside creation in an externally coordinated relation. In this way God might be thought to stand at a distance from creation in a way that makes divine agency seem removed from creation. This would be to deny the realism of Biblical language about God's agency in and with creation. But once the relation is understood as rational and non-real in the way described, it becomes possible to imagine a more immediate coordination between the creator and all of creation. Clarity about God's agency among creation is achievable only by this careful understanding of asymmetry. "This is because of the sheer difference between God and creation. God can be infinitely close to creation because there is no mediating principle or act between the terms besides the very act of creation itself."[23] God acts on creation not as another agent in relation to it, but in a categorically distinct manner, uniquely befitting God as the source, foundation, and telos of the relation. God's non-real relation to creation does not lead to distance, absence, or a mediated agency, but to infinite proximity, presence, and immediacy.

How does all of this contribute to a grammar that allows intelligible speech about God's hearing? It does so by furnishing two conclusions about the divine nature. First, like the act of creation itself, God's hearing does not add something new to God. Like all divine works *ad extra*, hearing does not bring about some change in God. The relation of God, as hearer, to creature, as speaker, must be understood as real in the speaker but rational or logical in God as the hearer. This is not to deny the reality of God's hearing. Claiming it to be non-real or logical is to give it a particular character that emphasizes its analogous, yet ultimately dissimilar, character to creaturely hearing. This does not evacuate hearing-language of meaning any more than it would speech of other *opera ad extra*. Rather, it qualifies the speech in a way that says something about the character of God's hearing: it is

[23] Oliver, *Creation*, p. 51.

not like creaturely hearing. It is perfect, "unrestrictedly benevolent and beneficent,"[24] and uncompelled by the creature.

Second, God's radical ontological distinction from creation is the grounds for God's immediate, infinite proximity to creation. Thus, the distinction between God and the world does not prohibit or frustrate God's hearing, as though creatures needed to shout or God needed to lean in close. This would be to arrange God and creatures in a mutually exclusive and ultimately incoherent relationship.[25] On the contrary, the distinction means that God's hearing is infinitely proximate and immediate to creaturely speech. In this way, God, as hearer, is "closer" to creaturely speech than the creature to her own words. Rather than undermine the notion that God's hearing is a particular kind of loving and just attention that God supplies by means of God's significant personal presence, a proper understanding of the distinction buttresses it. The kind of significant personal presence between God and the speaker is not a presence like that between two intimate friends. It is a presence that is infinitely "closer" (to use spatial language) and immediate. This is, again, why "conversation" is an anemic and misleading metaphor for prayer.[26] God's relation to creaturely speech is not as that of a conversation partner, but as one who is present in a way that is wholly unique and ontologically distinct from creaturely presence.

3.2 God as Hearer in Being and Act

The above conclusions about God's nature must be supplemented by an inquiry into the relationship between the nature of God and the actions of God. This is because, in making metaphysical claims about God's nature and its relation to creation, a methodological problem presents itself. Does claiming that God is a hearer mean that God is a hearer *in Godself,* or does it mean only that God is a hearer *as God relates to creation*? I have claimed that God, *ad extra*, hears God's creation; but is God also a hearer, *ad intra*? Could the former be true if the latter is not? The question is important if God is to be known as God truly is. The question is plagued by the complex and varied treatments it has received across the Christian tradition, thus ruling out any attempt here to present a comprehensive treatment of the question and its related issues. Rather than attempting a sweeping answer to this question, it is my intention to suggest that there is methodological route by which we

[24] Webster, "*Non ex Aequo*", p. 116.

[25] See Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) for a treatment of the coherence of divine and human agency in the creator-creature relationship.

[26] See prior chapter on Barth's aversion to "conversation".

might conclude that God is not only a hearer, *ad extra*, but also one *ad intra*, in God's eternally blessed and perfect Triune life.

Contrary to some theologians, I am unpersuaded that everything that is claimed of God, *ad extra*, must be claimed of God, *in se*. While some would claim otherwise, I am unpersuaded that the crucifixion of Christ—to take one principle but particularly complicated example—could be understood as internal to the eternal, blessed life of God. Failure to acknowledge the distinction between God in Godself and God's action, *ad extra*, is crucial for maintaining the distinction outlined above. Certain applications of "Rahner's Rule" wherein the "Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and the Immanent Trinity is the Economic Trinity"[27] have produced different understandings of the relationship between God's being and outward activity, some of which compromise God's freedom and aseity.[28] My intention, as should be clear from the above, is not to assert that God's hearing of creatures is *identical to* a "hearing" that happens in the eternal and blessed life of God, thereby collapsing the very distinction just articulated. Nor is it my intention to appropriate a version of the *analogia entis*, by which God happens to be the supreme hearer who is the more perfect and felicitous version of creaturely hearing. Rather, I want to propose that God has chosen to reveal Godself in Holy Scripture as one who does not merely hear creation, but does so as an overflow of God's own blessed, eternal, Triune life which is marked by a kind of "hearing".

The conclusion will be argued by way of engagement with two recent theological works. The first is Tyler Wittman's *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*.[29] Wittman brings Aquinas and Barth into dialogue with one another in order to adjudicate between their conceptually divergent understandings of the relation between God's nature and outward activity. Wittman carefully demonstrates the way that Aquinas, through both negations (i.e., simplicity in Ia 3) and affirmations (i.e., divine perfection and goodness in Ia 4-6), establishes the distinction between God and creation. He then goes on to show how Aquinas understands creation's correspondence to God's own nature as blessed Trinity. God's creative act is analyzed in light of its principle and telos as a self-

[27] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997). For ways that Rahner has been allegedly misread, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna's introduction, pp. vii-xxi.

[28] For a helpful summary of contemporary theology's attempts to coordinate the immanent and economic Trinity, see Chung-Hyun Baik, *The Holy Trinity—God for God and God for Us: Seven Positions on the Immanent-Economic Trinity Relation in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011). For a critique, see Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 83-124.

[29] Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

corresponding act, with an eye toward demonstrating a correspondence between God's being and God's activity. The analysis of the principle of creation highlights the correspondence between it and God's blessed being through "a perfectly circular divine movement of the divine operations and processions."[30] Aquinas carefully demonstrates creation's correspondence to God's perfect being, while avoiding making creation a necessary divine act that would compromise divine freedom and aseity. For Aquinas, any account of creation's correspondence to its creator must demonstrate a correspondence to God's Triune nature. Thus, Aquinas' doctrine of the Trinity and its model of internal processions of the Word and the Spirit, allows him to argue that creation corresponds, as an external procession, to the internal processions in the Godhead in a way that stamps creation with a likeness to God and as loved by God. Additionally, Aquinas proposes that God's creative act has God's own goodness as its ultimate telos. This consideration of creation's telos reveals that it is ordered according to God's goodness, such that God's self-correspondence is seen in the way creation participates in God's own structured life, being purposed for God's own goodness. Thus, God's self-correspondence in creation allows for Aquinas' conclusion that "act follows being" ("*agere sequitur esse*").[31]

In contrast to Aquinas, Barth's coordination of theology and economy is driven by very different concerns. Despite disagreements about the extent to which Anselm has shaped Barth's thinking,[32] Wittman suggests that Barth approaches the question as an "Anselmian procedure" due to his noetic prioritization of the actual over the possible. This explains Barth's conviction that theology cannot think past or behind God's actual, concrete self-revelation in Christ. Thus, God's being is only able to be understood in light of God's external acts and vice versa. This does not make creation necessary for Barth, but makes *theological inquiry* about God's nature impossible apart from God's creative act. For Barth, what can be known about God's being is restricted to and identified with what can be known about God's act. Being is identified with the concrete act of God's self-revelation in Christ, such that the material object of theological inquiry is, in Barth's well-known formula, "the God who loves in freedom."[33] For Barth, the dialectic of being and activity is so intertwined

[30] Ibid., p. 78.

[31] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib.3. cap. 69 n. 20.

[32] See Bruce L. McCormack's challenge of the so-called "von Balthasar thesis" in *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development (1909-1936)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1-28.

[33] Barth, *CD* II/1, §28.

"that it is difficult to discern which comes first: the inquiry's material object or formal orientation."[34]

So, how are being and act to be coordinated? In the end, Wittman finds Barth's ambiguous coordinating of the order of knowing and order of being to be dissatisfactory because it makes difficult, if not impossible, any theological speech about God apart from the act of creation. Wittman is convinced that in order to sustain the conviction that God would be God in eternal, blessed perfection, *sans* creation, theological inquiry must move beyond Barth's noetic restriction.[35] Aquinas, thus, offers the more satisfactory coordination of being and act by disrupting the orders of knowing and being, thereby permitting speech about God's being, *sans* creation. For Wittman, theological speech about God's perfect being, independent of God's creative activity, is licensed by the Biblical testimony, and that in two ways. First, following Aquinas' reading of Exodus 33:19, wherein God tells Moses, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'," Wittman sees in the "all" of "all my goodness" the plentitude of the divine nature; however, the iteration of the covenantal forms of God's nature in Exodus 34:6-7 is not exhaustive.[36] Here, Wittman agrees with Aquinas' finding of a Biblical distinction between God's absolute, plentiful, incomprehensible nature on which Moses could not look, denominated by "all my goodness," and the specific, covenantal acts of that goodness iterated in 34:6-7.[37] Second, Wittman argues that God's own self-naming demonstrates an ability to speak about God's nature in a way that is not simply reducible to God's activity. Again, following Aquinas, Wittman takes one divine name in Exodus 3:14 as an example: "I AM WHO I AM." The name signifies God's absolute self-subsistence, independent of any causal activity.[38] So, it is Scripture itself that warrants a distinction between being and act which does not limit theological inquiry's object to God's revealed activity. Wittman concludes that

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[34] Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*., p. 173.

[35] Ibid., p. 273.

[36] Ibid., p. 274. See Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians,* 2.2.57.

[37] Ibid. pp. 273-75. Barth, of course, rejected this reading on account of his allergy to semi-nominalism. Yet Wittman points out that Barth's refusal to speak of God's being apart from God's activity in creation is typical of other modern approaches that are implicitly indebted to Hegel, ibid., p. 277. See, also, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p. 360.

[38] Ibid., p 277. See Aquinas, *ST* Ia.13.11.*ad* 2. Wittman further argues that an understanding of God's external acts, esp. the reconciling work of Christ and the Spirit, is inseparable from divine names if they are to be rightly understood.

> While an emphasis on God's action is crucial for the chastening of concepts and names in accordance with the gospel, a retrieval of more traditional accounts of the divine names could help theologians resist the correlationist impulse of some contemporary theology. Theology needs to subvert its noetic restriction in the order of knowing, not to master God but to acknowledge an ontic Object that is infinitely more and greater than the dialectics with which He is confessed.[39]

While only a sketch of Wittman's argument, the above is sufficient to warrant, on Biblical grounds, a method for deploying theological speech about God's nature without reducing it to the *opera ad extra*. Further, Wittman gestures toward a reconsideration of the function of God's self-naming and its fruitfulness for theological inquiry.

Taking direction from Wittman's conclusions, I want to propose that too little theological attention has been paid to divine naming, and that of a unique order. Of course, there is a long and rich history of theological reflection on the divine names.[40] Traditionally, theological attention has been directed toward divine names. While the Tetragrammaton of Exodus 3:15 stands in a class of its own, as a kind of proper name, other names like the "I AM WHO I AM" of Exodus 3:14, or the especially descriptive name, "The LORD, the LORD…" of Exodus 34:6-7 belong in a class of names that have captured theological attention. The reasons for such attention appear to be due to the way these names are uniquely constituted by three criteria. First, in each case, God is the speaker doing the naming. As a divine pronouncement, this imbues the name with superlative authority. Second, in each case, the name carries an ontological "weight". Each offers a description of God that, if Wittman is correct, may speak not merely to God's relation to creation, but reliably to God's being, *in se*. Third, God is the referent of the name. These are examples of God naming *Godself*. For these reasons, these names have proven generative for theological reflection. However, there exists another class of names that may speak to God's eternal, Triune, blessed nature; namely, those names given by God to human beings that are self-revelatory. These are names that are given by God and reveal something about God, but are not self-referential insofar as the names are given of human beings and not of God. In other words, this class of names is like the first group in the first two ways, but not in the third. Concretely, these are names that God gives that are compounded with "Jah" or "El". Writing of names compounded with the name of God, in an older but still relevant work,

[39] Ibid., p. 279.

[40] See esp. R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity, vol. I, Distinguishing the Voices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Scott R. Swain, "On Divine Naming," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. by Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), pp. 207-27.

William Francis Wilkinson suggests that many of these are etymologically ascertainable only when external circumstances provide sufficient context. "But," he goes on to state,

> in most cases in which the etymology of the name is ascertainable, we may discover the sentiment embodied in the word or words composing it—some notion capable of being stated as a proposition which was in the thoughts of him or them who gave the name. In the case of names compounded with the name of God, this sentiment is necessarily of a religious character. Some reference is made in them to the attributes and character, or the acts and dealings of God, or to the relations between Him and man.[41]

These names, then, can be said to reflect some proposition in the mind (or "mind") of the namer. The overwhelming majority of these names are given by human parents at birth and likely "bear reference to circumstances attendant upon the nativity of those who possesses them."[42] Yet among those birth names are those divinely commanded by God. These names satisfy the first two of the three criteria mentioned above. They are names given by God, thus carrying divine authority, and are self-descriptions of God, thus bearing some revelatory content.

The most relevant member of this class of names is, of course, Ishmael. Ishmael is the first example of a divinely given birth name (excluding Adam, for whom there was no proper birth and no alternative namer available) in the canon. The narrative context was recounted in Chapter 1 and need not be rehearsed here. The relevant question is, How are we to understand the revelatory significance of this divinely given name for God's being? Is the relevance of the name restricted to God's dealings with creation? Is it a description *only* of the *opera ad extra Dei*? Or might this divine self-description carry ontological significance for God, *in se*?

Ishmael—as a member of the class of names satisfying the first and second criteria above—varies from the "I AM WHO I AM" by its creaturely referent. Does this make it less likely to describe the divine nature? Would *God* have to be called Ishmael in order for the semantic content of the name to describe God's being? While adding Ishmael to the catalogue of divine names might settle the question more tidily, it is hard to see what makes the referent of the name decisive for this question. If the name is given by God and is a self-description of God, the question of its ontological significance ought to be left open. Indeed,

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[41] William Francis Wilkinson, *Personal Names in the Bible: Interpreted and Illustrated* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865), p. 127. With apologies, I have preserved the original, gendered language of the quotation.

[42] Ibid., p. 256.

what God declares about God ought not be too quickly dismissed as irrelevant for God's being. So how might the question be settled for Ishmael or any other name which belongs to this class?

First, we might ask, Is the etymological significance of the divinely given name something that could be properly predicated of the divine nature; or is it excluded on account of some other theological constraint? The divinely-given name, Israel, for example, could not be properly attributed of the divine nature. For, if the name means "striving with God" or even "God strives," it cannot be a description of the divine nature in any straightforward sense without violating divine omnipotence or simplicity. So, is God's hearing something excluded on similar grounds? Not obviously. Given the working definition developed in Chapter 1, it is evident that the Biblical descriptions of God's hearing do not imply corporeality; nor do they violate divine omniscience or omnipresence. Perhaps it could be argued that hearing is a passive phenomenon that is contingent or even dependent upon another. However, hearing need not necessarily be considered a passive act; for *active* listening is what is often extolled as the more virtuous creaturely activity, over against passive listening, which might be considered lazy or inattentive. The Biblical concept of divine hearing already developed is quite active. Further, hearing need not necessarily be thought of as dependent on another speaker. A listener can hear silence in a way that would be a qualitatively distinct activity from that of a deaf person standing in a silent room. Hearing, even as a creaturely phenomenon, does not require another, a speaker. Moreover, even if hearing necessitated a contingency or even dependency on another, that would hardly exclude it as something properly predicated of the divine nature, given a thoroughgoing doctrine of the Trinity.[43] Indeed, it is not at all obvious that divine hearing, as developed in Chapter 1, must be excluded from God's nature on the basis of prior theological constraints.

Second, we might ask if there are other historical or theological precedents for predicating something like hearing of the divine nature. Here the *verbum internum* and other dialogical analogies of understanding God's Triune life may be of help. Considering the Logos as God's own internal Word, whereby God's own speech is directed toward and known by Godself—this internal Word suggests the possibility of an internal "hearing", an *audio internum*, which corresponds to the *verbum internum*. This internal hearing might be

[43] It should be noted that arguing for hearing belonging to the divine nature need not imply a so-called "social" doctrine of the Trinity. It also need not require a particularly modern or personalizing notion of *hypostasis*. Here it is only my intention to show that hearing, if it did require a speaker, is not necessarily ruled out by other theological constraints, unless put to a strictly unitarian doctrine of God.

understood as the mysterious and perfect means by which God perfectly attends to God's own Word. As a dialogical analogy, there is historical precedent for considering this as an "explanation" of the Trinity that is not merely speculative.[44] Such analogies have been used among both Protestant[45] and Roman Catholic[46] theologians. Notably, Walter Kasper, in an attempt to make sense of modern, personalizing concepts of *hypostasis*, while acknowledging the analogical nature of attributing dialogue to the Godhead, claims, "[T]he divine persons are not less dialogical but infinitely more dialogical than human persons are. The divine persons are not only in dialogue, they *are* dialogue."[47] Such strong claims for the analogy of dialogue establishes a theological and historical precedent for claiming that there is a "hearing" in God.

So, while divine names like the Tetragrammaton and the "I AM WHO I AM" might carry more straightforwardly ontological significance, there are not *prima facie* reasons for excluding a divinely given, self-describing name like Ishmael from carrying a similar significance for the divine nature. Ishmael might describe an activity of El, but act and being are not easily separated, as Wittman's analysis of Aquinas demonstrates. In Aquinas' arrangement, if act follows from being, there must be some ontological self-correspondence to God's hearing activity. This would, no doubt, be wrapped up with God's perfect and blessed Triune life and have God's goodness as its principle and telos. This self-correspondence leaves open the possibility of speaking of God as a "hearer," *in se*, apart from any creative act.

More than merely leaving the possibility open, how might one construct a positive argument for including "hearing" as natural to God's eternal, blessed and Triune life? Rachael Muers has raised this very question in *Keeping God's Silence*.[48] In reliance on Bonhoeffer's christology, Muers takes up the theme of God's hearing in view of the resurrection. She is interested in the "trinitarian implications of the identification of God as a listener."[49] Reflecting on the Johannine theme of Jesus' vindication by the Father in the

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[44] Sammeli Juntunen, "Christ" in *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment* ed. by Olli-Pekka Vainio (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), pp. 60-61. Juntunen notes Luther's antipathy for speculation about the inner life of God, but notes his willingness to use "explanations" like the *verbum internum* in his parish sermons.

[45] Ibid. See also Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. Part II.

[46] See Joseph Ratzinger, "Zum Personverständnis in der Theologie" in *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1973), pp. 205-33.

[47] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), p. 289. Italics original.

[48] Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 95-100.

[49] Ibid., p. 97.

resurrection event, Muers proposes that therein God's "capacity for listening" is shown to be "definitive of who God is."[50] She goes on to state, somewhat opaquely, that "God's 'hearing' of creation is grounded in God's hearing of God's self. To understand God as *in se* the 'one who hears' is to say that the completeness of God's self-possession is a completeness that includes openness to what is not God."[51] What is to be made of this? On the one hand, to claim that "God's 'hearing' of creation is grounded in God's hearing of God's self" could be read in a minimalist way that claims no more than Aquinas' dictum: *agere sequitur esse*. This would be to suggest, unproblematically, that there is something in the nature of God that corresponds to God's good and loving actions toward creation. On the other hand, Muers seems to want more than that. Her concern is to demonstrate what God's hearing means for the innertrinitarian relations. Yet, because the argument is dependent on the resurrection event, which Muers suggests shows the character of God's "capacity for listening", it is unclear *how* she understands an event in the divine economy to correspond to the divine nature. In other words, how does an economic event like the resurrection, occurring in the economy as it does, correspond to something ontological in the blessed, eternal, Triune life of God? The danger of collapsing the *opera ad extra* into the *opera ad intra* is acutely felt at this point of Muers' argument. Her awareness of it is registered in a footnote wherein she simply suggests that it "need not be the case" that "the concrete distinction between God and humanity" be eliminated.[52] The argument is further complicated by the declaration that understanding "God as *in se* the 'one who hears' is to say that the completeness of God's self-possession is a completeness that includes openness to what is not God,"[53] because such a claim is liable to the implication that God is *necessarily* open to something other than Godself. To anchor this kind of openness in the nature of God, rather than the grace of God, eliminates the need for grace, making God constitutionally related to creation. Of course, given the cautions registered in the footnotes, these are unlikely to be Muers' desired conclusions. So, how might the argument be strengthened?

Beginning with a characterization of God's hearing activity in terms of the judgment and vindication that culminates in the resurrection of Christ—an event in the economy—restricts what can be said of God's "hearing," *in se*, to the order of knowing. That restriction makes it difficult, if not impossible, to speak of God as a "hearer," *in se*

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[52] Ibid., p. 98, n. 78.

[53] Ibid., p. 98.

apart from creation because what is claimed about God's "hearing" in eternity is approached "from below" in God's economic dealings with creation. Put another way, in the order of knowing, being follows act.[54] But when it comes to the order of being, there cannot be a straight line drawn from economy to ontology because of divine ontological alterity. As Wittman has argued in his exposition of Aquinas, "the order of knowing is distinct from the order of being […] so it does not follow ontically that being is strictly correlated with activity, understood as either external works or outgoing internal acts."[55] By disrupting the order of knowing and order of being, it becomes possible to acknowledge an ontological reality distinct from creation, thereby maintaining aseity, freedom, and the distinction between God and creation already articulated, while acknowledging the reality of God's acts in creation. So how might theological inquiry proceed in making true (if still analogical) ontological claims about God as a "hearer"? As already observed, Wittman suggests that Aquinas does this by distinguishing between the *all* of God's goodness in Exodus 33:19 and the specific covenantal acts in Exodus 34:6-7.[56] God's goodness is the expansive and inexhaustible being from which God's covenantal acts flow.[57] "Every perfection of goodness includes all the relative perfections of grace, mercy, patience, and so forth."[58] God's goodness is the principle and fount from which God's hearing flows. Further, and in contrast to Muers, our working definition of hearing is broader than judgement and vindication. Understanding God's hearing as a particular kind of loving and just attention that God supplies by means of God's significant personal presence—this is more straightforwardly understood as constituent of God's good, eternal, blessed, Triune life. God's good Triune life, in all its sufficiency and plentitude is not without perfect, loving, attention between Father, Son, and Spirit. Indeed, there is an interpersonal presence that goes beyond being merely "significant". In the trinitarian life of God there is a perfect presence that is constituent of God's good, blessed being. This perfect presence, manifest by an eternal, loving interpersonal attention is in no way contingent upon creation; nor is it, like its creaturely analog, subject to the contingencies of time or space, sin or error. It is constituent of the eternal, blessed, perfect life of the Triune God, and in that sense, we can, without qualification, claim that there is "hearing" *in God*—a perfect "hearing" in the

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[54] Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, p. 273.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, in *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 40. Translated by Fabian R. Larcher. Edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), *Philippians 2.2.57*.

[57] See Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma* II.xx, p. 163.

[58] Ibid., p. 274.

immanent life of Father, Son, and Spirit that is inexhaustibly wrapped up with the "all" of God's goodness. Here we find the being from which act follows and the warrant for taking God's self-revelation in the naming of Ishmael as ontologically significant. That self-revelatory act points behind the economic circumstances of the Sarah-Hagar narrative, or any other hearing of creation, to an ontological Other who is already one who "hears" in eternity.

Hearing is, thus, not a new divine capacity that obtains upon the act of creation. It is in no way contingent upon creation. What is true of God remains unchanged by the creative act. The order of being is not identical to the order of knowing. Were God never to have heard creation, never to have self-revealed as Ishmael, never to have created at all, God would still be a "hearer". Yet the eternal, good, blessed, Triune God has chosen not only to self-reveal as a "hearer," but has chosen to hear God's creation. How is that hearing of creation, that act that follows from God's good being, to be understood and characterized?

3.3 God's Hearing—An Utterly Gratuitous and Perfect Gift of Love

It remains to give an account of the shape and character of God's hearing of creation. For a dogmatic grammar of God's hearing to serve its purpose, it must not only negatively circumscribe the formal limits of theological speech concerning God's hearing—what may not be said—but also positively give account of how God's hearing may be characterized. Having established God's ontological alterity—the qualitative and categorical lacuna that exist between divine and creaturely hearing—and having established that God is a "hearer" *in se* such that God's act of hearing in the economy corresponds, *mutatis mutandis*, to God's being as a "hearer," we must now ask, What kind of act is God's economic hearing? If God's hearing of creatures corresponds to God's "hearing" of God, then that correspondence will give God's hearing a particular order and telos.

What is offered here is not intended to modify or supplant the working definition of Chapter 1. Rather, it is offered to demonstrate the way that definition functions in the light of the above dogmatic constraints. Given God's alterity and self-correspondence, God's hearing of creatures must take on not only specific constraints, but must now be viewed in a particular hue that illumines the act of hearing as the hearing of *that* hearer. Seeing it in this light will clarify the ends toward which the working definition aims.

First, God's hearing of creatures is an utterly gratuitous and uncompelled gift. God's ontological alterity, established and preserved by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, entails a freedom that is uncompromised by creation's existence. The creative act does not

compel God to hear creation. As God's relation to creation is non-real or logical in God, there is no change that takes place in God as a result of the creative act. It is not as though creation now stands within "earshot" of God, making God's hearing inevitable or unavoidable. On the contrary, the act of creation—itself a gift—becomes all the more beneficent and generous when understood to include God's willingness to hear creatures. God's hearing is "an operation of generosity on the part of one who in his inner-trinitarian life is wholly realized, satisfied and at rest."[59] Thus in the act of creation, God, in freedom and generosity, creates the possibility of God's own hearing of creation. The gift of that possibility is magnified by God's ongoing, gracious, sustaining of that possibility. Like creation itself, the possibility of God's hearing is not only established, but preserved, such that the possibility of God's gracious hearing of creatures is maintained in a way that characterizes God's ongoing relation to creation.

The uncompelled and utterly gratuitous nature of God's hearing means that it is best characterized as an undeserved gift to creatures. God gives the gift of hearing not-God, and does so in a way that cannot evoke reciprocity.[60] The asymmetrical nature of the God-creation relation means that what God does in hearing creation is so utterly unique that it can only be a unilateral action. The creaturely possibility of speaking and being heard by God is a possibility that finds its locus in God's grace and mercy toward creatures, not in creaturely effort, skill, or ability. This self-donation of God's hearing is, in the words of John Milbank, "a gift of a gift to a gift."[61] As an uncompelled and utterly gratuitous act, it is a mysterious and benevolent kindness shown by God to creation.

Second, it is analogous but ultimately dissimilar to creaturely hearing in its perfection and radical proximity. The *ex nihilo* doctrine and the asymmetrical relation between God and creation emphasize the distinction between God's hearing of God and God's hearing of creation. And that distinction is a crucial one because its implication for God's hearing of creatures is all the better for it. As was already suggested, the asymmetrical relation between God and creation means that God is maximally and immediately proximate to creation. God's hearing is dissimilar, if analogous, to creaturely hearing insofar as God's hearing does not require any medium of creaturely speech. This immediacy means that there is no third term or principle in the speaker-hearer dyad. "In the

[59] John Webster, "Love is also a Lover of Life" in *God Without Measure* Vol. I (London: T&T Clark, 2016), p. 107.

[60] Notwithstanding questions about the extent to which gift giving is actually possible—a topic to be taken up in the subsequent chapter.

[61] John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), p. 96.

relation between God and creation, there is nothing held in common between the terms, and neither is there a mediating act *besides* the very act of creation *ex nihilo*."[62] In the creative act God is already and always infinitely proximate to creatures, thereby establishing the possibility of God's hearing not-God, in a way that is necessarily without the possibility of error, misunderstanding, or failure of any kind. The perfection and proximity of God's hearing is not despite, but because of God's ontological alterity. It is because "God's relation to creatures is not 'real' that his love is of infinite scope and benevolence."[63]

The perfect, infinite, and immediate nature of God's hearing creatures was well understood by Augustine. In his comments on "the depths" from which the Psalmist cries out to God in Psalm 130, Augustine, in order to make the theological point, calls to mind the earthy narrative of Jonah who,

> was not only beneath the waves, but also in the entrails of the beast; nevertheless, those waves and that body prevented not his prayer from reaching God, and the beast's belly could not contain the voice of his prayer. It penetrated all things, it burst through all things, it reached the ears of God: if indeed we ought to say that, bursting through all things it reached the ears of God, since the ears of God were in the heart of him who prayed.[64]

The passage is remarkable for the way it brings into relief the analogous but dissimilar nature of divine and creaturely hearing. No sooner does Augustine speaks of God's metaphorical ears than he immediately questions the appropriateness of that speech and pivots to acknowledge the infinitely proximate nature in which God hears the cries of creatures. God's hearing is not inhibited by the depth of the sea or the body of the beast because God's hearing is not a mediated act. Its immediacy is characterized by the presence of God's ears in the heart of him who prayed. This validates and illuminates our working definition, characterized as it is by a significant kind of personal presence. It is *because* of the ontological distinction between creator and creature that God may be significantly and personally present. That presence is what makes possible God's loving and just attention to creatures; but it is on account of God's ontological difference.

Finally, God's love is the principle and telos of God's hearing creatures. The Triune God who is love (1 Jn 4:8) creates on account of, by means of, and for the purpose of God's

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[62] Oliver, *Creation*, p. 51. Italics original.

[63] John Webster, "Non ex aequo: God's relation to Creatures" in *God Without Measure* vol. I (London: T&T Clark, 2016), p. 125.

[64] Augustine, "Exposition on the Book of Psalms" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers vol. 8*, edited by Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 613.

own love. It is the whence and wither of God's hearing. This Triune God whose eternal life is characterized by innertrinitarian "hearing"—a perfect and loving attention paid to God by God—creates creatures loved by God, on account of an overflow of God's own love, in order that they might be loved by God. In Aristotelian terms, the love of God is the efficient, formal, and final cause of God's hearing creatures. The loving and just act of hearing creatures is an act of self-correspondence by which God lives and acts toward creation according to God's eternal and perfect life, *in se*. The love that characterizes God's "hearing" of Godself is the same love that characterizes God's hearing of creatures. In this way, God's ontological alterity does not generate a deistic picture of a God who is "far off" and cannot or will not hear. Rather, the creator-creature distinction becomes the principle for God's significant personal presence with creatures, which makes loving and just attention toward creatures possible. This loving gift is at the heart of the gospel insofar as God's love orients God's activity toward love of finite and fallen creatures in order that they may participate in God's love. As was shown in Chapter 1, Augustine makes the gift of God's hearing central to the gospel:

> But our Lord Jesus Christ did not despise us in our depths. He graciously willed to come down into this life of ours, promising us the forgiveness of all our sins, and he aroused human beings to cry out to him even from those deep places where their sins weighed them down, so that the voice of every sinner might reach God.[65]

God's listening ear is a gracious and merciful act of love on which the good news of redemption in Christ turns. As God hears creatures, those creatures participate in the eternally-hearing and loving life of the Triune God. God's hearing is, thus, a loving act of a loving God to a beloved creature for the purpose of participation in God's loving life. This participation in the love of God is the ultimate telos for which God hears creatures.[66]

3.4 Conclusion

The task of a dogmatic grammar is to circumscribe speech in a way appropriate to its object. It involves the establishment of a set of protocols for speaking in a way that affirms what is proper and denies what is not. With respect to God's hearing, the burden of this chapter has been to do just that, negatively fencing off improper language or implications of God's

[65] Augustine, Psalm 129 (LXX), *Expositions of the Psalms* 121-150 (III/20) (Works of Saint Augustine) (New York: New City Press, 2000), p. 140.

[66] Cf. Daniel Shields, "On Ultimate Ends: Aquinas's Thesis that Loving God is Better than Knowing Him" in *The Thomist*, vol. 78.4, (October 2014), pp. 581-607.

hearing and positively orienting theological inquiry toward a way of speaking of God's hearing that appropriately accords with God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture. This set of protocols finds its dogmatic home in the doctrine of creation, which establishes the identity of the creator and the relation between creator and creature. It was shown, first, that the creator is ontologically distinct from creation and that, as creator, God's hearing does not add something new to God; nor does it bring about some change in God. Rather, God's radical ontological alterity was shown to be the grounds for God's immediate, infinite proximity to creation. Then, following Aquinas and his reading of the "all" of God's goodness in Exodus 33:19, it was shown that God has revealed to creation truths about the divine nature which are not, in contrast to Barth, concealed by the order of knowing. God's acts of self-revelation in Scripture make some ontological claims possible. God's self-revelation in the naming of Ishmael, combined with theological precedent for dialogical analogies of God's Triune life paved the way for the argument that there is "hearing" in God that corresponds to God's *ad extra* hearing of creatures. Finally, the character of God's hearing creatures was informed by God's relation to creation more generally. Without modifying the theological framework and working definition of Chapter 1, this characterization of God's hearing shed new light on God's hearing as an act that is utterly gratuitous and perfect and which finds its principle and telos in the abundant and overflowing love of the Triune God. Speech about God's hearing is located within this matrix of constraints and affirmations.

4. ANTHROPOLOGY: BEING HEARD INTO HEARING BEINGS

"*Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.*"[1]

In the previous chapter we established protocols for proper speech about God's relation to creation in general and to the divine act of hearing, in particular. With those in place, theological speech about divine hearing now becomes possible, and it is this possibility that opens up new questions for theology and hearing's bearing on it. If we can now speak intelligibly and with appropriate theological precision about God's hearing, it must be asked what bearing this has on the human creature. If God is a hearer, what then is the relationship between the doctrine of humanity and God's hearing? How does being heard by God form a person and what shape does that formation take? If humanity is related to a God who hears, how might humanity be different were God not a hearer? The assumption that underlies these questions and this chapter more generally is that human becoming is positively formed by God's hearing, and that this hearing is anthropologically significant.

Yet as soon as that positive formation and becoming are considered, myriad methodological challenges present themselves that must be anticipated and addressed. First, God's hearing of human creatures is not a phenomenon easily identified for measurable impact.[2] Human experiences are formative in subtle and even imperceptible ways that often elude description or narration. How much more so must this be the case for experiences with *God* that may be known only personally, by the subject of the experience? It might seem that evaluating the formative impact of such experiences may be limited to ethnography or otherwise amount to nothing more than sheer speculation on the part of the theologian. Yet persons do self-report and self-narrate ways in which experiences with others have formed them—even if comprehensive understanding is beyond reach and interpretation under constant revision—and no less so experiences with God.[3] The methodological import of such self-reporting raises questions that exceed the scope of this chapter and the knowledge

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), p. 348.

[2] See the helpful discussion on prayer's efficacy by Vincent Brümmer, "Introduction: Putting Prayer to the Test" in *What are We Doing When We Pray?: On Prayer and the Nature of Faith* (Revised and Expanded ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), pp. 3-17.

[3] See T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

of its author. But such self-reporting gives *prima facie* reason to work with the assumptions that humans are formed by and in relationship with God.

So how are such experiences to be evaluated for their formative effects? Here lurks the second methodological challenge: How are we to speak about God's hearing forming human becoming without merely projecting human hearing onto God? The dual worries of Feuerbach and the *analogia entis* have appeared throughout this study, and here they must be acknowledged again. To speak of the formative features of God's hearing is not merely to project a creaturely intersubjectivity and its formative effects onto God. Indeed, avoiding this was, in one sense, the burden of the entire preceding chapter. God's hearing is revealed in Scripture as real and formative, and theological speech about it must be characterized and conditioned by God's self-revelation, rather than by models of inter-human hearing. Similarly, we cannot think of God's hearing as merely better than human hearing, as though a few rungs up the ontological ladder God hears like we do, *a fortiori*. Rather, God's ontological alterity means that God's hearing is also ontologically other; thus, speech about God's hearing can be, at best, analogical. Scripture gives warrant for and invites speech about God's hearing that is realistic and demonstrates its formative role in human becoming. "Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live," declares the Psalmist (Ps 116:2). It is Scripture, therefore, that must guide, control, and condition conclusions about God's hearing and human becoming. At the same time, if Scripture invites us to speak of God's hearing in analogical ways, there may be ways of speaking rightly about God's hearing that are informed by creaturely intersubjectivity. Indeed, theological anthropology has long relied on the social sciences to inform its task. To do so is not an attempt to smuggle Feuerbach back into theological inquiry; rather it is to follow Scripture's lead in speaking of God as God speaks of God: in terms that are often anthropomorphic and analogous to creaturely intersubjectivity. There is, thus, a dual warrant for the procedure that follows. Individuals self-report God hearing their prayers and the effect it has on them and their circumstances; and Scripture invites us to understand God's hearing as akin to human hearing.

In what follows I begin by sketching the model of intersubjectivity with which I will be working in order to further understand human being and becoming. Borrowing from the social sciences, I proceed to offer an account of the ways in which God's hearing *might* prove formative for human becoming, and that in two ways. First, positively, I will bring hearing into dialogue with the concepts of empathy and the related concept of joint attention, the latter having already been treated in Chapter 1. Additionally, I reflect on hearing as a kind of attunement and what that might mean for the one heard. I then extend the discussion begun in the previous chapter, of what it might mean for hearing to be a gift,

and the way in which being the recipient of a gift produces a necessarily positive change in the recipient. Second, negatively, I will examine the formative effects of being unheard or silenced and the way these are destructive for self-understanding. It will be demonstrated that such silencing impairs one's theory of self and is corrosive to personal identity-formation. These positive and negative, constructive and destructive, reflections from the social sciences suggest ways in which the formative effects produced by being heard may also be understood, *mutatis mutandis*, to result from God's hearing of human creatures. Together, these two means of approach bring us very near to the existential burden of this study: questions of human pain, suffering and evil that cry out, like the blood of Abel, to be heard by God. Indeed, if the overwhelming majority of Biblical references to God hearing are human requests—even cries—to be heard by God, as was seen in Chapter 1, there is then warrant for asking how God's hearing might relate to the particularity of human suffering. I conclude with an extended theological reflection on Psalm 22, observing how God's hearing is, indeed, efficacious for human becoming and identity-formation, especially in the concreteness of human suffering—and that in contrast to alternative theological strategies on offer.

It is important to maintain that proceeding along these lines is not simply an attempt to wishfully project the features of creaturely relations onto divine-human relations. Rather, it is to follow God's invitation in Holy Scripture to speak about God in ways that are anthropomorphic and yet real.

4.1 Human Social Formation

In order to make claims about the formative effects of God's hearing, we must first identify the model and understanding of human formation with which we are working. Generally, and in agreement with contemporary anthropology, it is to be assumed that human persons are formed interpersonally and that this interpersonal formation is constitutive of human identity and identity-formation itself. Despite a variety of competing anthropological theories, by the arrival of the twentieth century, there was already an established consensus that "the age of individualism [was] over."[4] Personal identity-formation is not an autonomous task, accomplished by the agency of a subject, as though the "I" had absolute governance over the self and self-formation. That modernist and Cartesian understanding of the self was displaced by social or intersubjective models argued most notably by Ebner,

[4] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), pp. 179f.

Rosenzweig, and Buber.[5] These were followed by many, including the works of Gabriel Marcel in France and of Alistair McFadyen in Britain.[6] While divergent in their approach to the question of the human subject or person—differences that extend to method, vocabulary, definitions and more—there is broad agreement that the "I" is formed in and through encounter with others, intersubjectively and not autonomously. Identity-formation and human becoming result from the intercourse of two or more subjects and cannot be accomplished in a vacuum.

It is important to register here that, while some theological anthropologies have attempted to develop an intersubjective or dialogical account of the human person by way of the *imago dei*, claiming that God's tri-personal nature is reflected in it, such an account is neither necessary nor theologically appropriate.[7] It is inappropriate, first, because these arguments share in common an understanding of the human person that is correlated to divine *hypostaseis*—a correlation that requires reading the mystery of the trinitarian *hypostaseis* onto human nature. I take this move to be the substitution of one mystery for another, and as such, runs a greater risk of anthropological projection onto the Godhead. Second, *hypostasis*- and *prosopon*-language in the doctrine of the Trinity, each with their related intents but distinct histories, were deployed in order to bear unique and specific metaphysical burdens that would not be appropriate to load onto the *imago dei*.[8] "Person", when deployed as a descriptor of the tri-unity of the Godhead, is categorically *sui generis*. Put another way, I take this theological maneuver to be guilty of what Kevin Vanhoozer, adapting James Barr's famous phrase, calls, "Illegitimate Trinitarian Transfer."[9] What is

[5] See Franz Rosenzweig, *Stern der Erlösung* (1922), Ferdinand Ebner, *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* (1921), and Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (1923).

[6] See esp. Gabriel Marcel, *Le Mystère de l'être* (1951) and Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[7] See, e.g., *Persons: Divine and Human* ed. by. Chris Schwöbel and Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). Schwöbel remarks in his introduction, "One of the central questions for the discussion in these essays is whether the Trinitarian mode of reflection can contribute to a perspective for the consideration of what it means to be a person which is both distinctively theological and authentically Christian...", p. 13.

[8] Contra John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1985). Lewis Ayres cautions with reference to *ousia* and *hypostasis* language that "it is important to attempt to understand what meaning was attributed to these terms at the time of Nicaea. By way of a general warning, it is important to note that any attempt to define fourth-century theological terminologies by reference solely to their philological origins or to a history of non-Christian philosophical development runs the constant danger of resulting in an artificial clarity that is not reflected in actual theological usage." *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 93. Note, too, that it was for related reasons that Barth famously preferred "*Seinsweise*" over *prosopon* language. See *CD* 1/1, §9.

[9] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 150. Similar restrictions ought to be observed for incarnation, kenosis, perichoresis, procession, and

proper to the mystery of the Trinity ought not to be transferred to the created order. Third, the modern concept of the human person, despite the post-Cartesian history just narrated, even in its intersubjective or dialogical formulations, continues to refer to a center of consciousness. Thus, the correlating of human persons to divine *hypostaseis* runs the risk of, on the one hand, positing multiple divine consciousnesses—an explicit threat to orthodox trinitarianism, or evacuating the concept of the human person of any meaningful content, on the other. Stated most strongly, when it comes to understandings of the person, the human person and the divine person share *only* a six-letter word in common. Further, this sort of theological maneuver is unnecessary. Theological anthropology, rather than finding its anchor in the doctrine of the Trinity, would do better to look to christology and the person Jesus of Nazareth for an understanding of what it means to be fully human.[10] If Jesus Christ is the perfect instantiation of human nature, albeit hypostatically united to the divine nature, his person ought to inform our understanding of the human person, more generally.

The brief criticism of this species of theological anthropology is important because the method is characteristic of McFadyen's account of personhood, which I intend to follow; but only in part.[11] McFadyen's understanding of person "is both dialogical (formed through social interaction, through address and response) and dialectical (never coming to rest in a final unity, if only because one is never removed from relation)."[12] A "dialogical understanding of personhood [means] that we are what we are in ourselves only through relation to others. Persons are unique centres or subjects of communication, but they are so only through their intrinsic relation to other persons."[13] By working with this understanding of the person, McFadyen is intentionally and admirably bringing the social sciences—especially the thought of Habermas, Luhmann, and Harré—into dialogue with theology. All of this is fair enough. However, his choice of theological dialogue partners makes him unnecessarily vulnerable to the worries of projection and equivocation just raised. Following Moltmann's claim that "Being a person [as Father, Son and Spirit are only insofar as they are related to each other] means existing-in-relationship,"[14] McFadyen expounds, claiming

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other properly trinitarian concepts that have proven too tantalizing for theologians to leave in eternity. For a more thorough rebuke, see Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity" in *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000), pp. 432-45.

[10] For one noteworthy example, see Kathryn Tanner, "Human Nature" in *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-57.

[11] McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, pp. 17-44.

[12] Ibid., p. 9

[13] Ibid.

[14] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 171f. Cited in Ibid., p. 28. "*Personsein bedeutet in dieser Hinsicht In-Beziehungen-Existieren.*" in *Trinität und Reich Gottes* (München: Kaiser, 1980), p. 188. While *Beziehungen* might be translated more generally as "connection" or

with respect to the trinitarian Persons, that "[t]hey are Persons only in so far as they are related in these particular ways, and they may be related only in so far as they are discrete, as Persons, both from one another and from any one of the totality of their relations. Person and relation are inseparable but not the same thing."[15] Going on, McFadyen concludes, "If […] the God whom human being images is not a simple, single individual with certain internal attributes, but is more like a community of Persons, then it would seem more adequate to conceive of the [*imago dei*] in relational terms."[16]

While all of this is consistent with certain so-called "social" models of the Trinity, it must be asked how helpful the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is for informing theological anthropology. Note, first, McFadyen appears unwilling to follow Moltmann wholesale. When speaking of the Persons of the immanent Trinity, McFadyen does not adopt Moltmann's "relationship" ("*Beziehungen*"), opting for the more historically established "relation". Relationship language is only employed by McFadyen when one or both parties are creatures. He appears sensitive to the distinction between the words, carefully adopting the more reserved and theologically established notion of relatedness to describe divine Persons. Thus, tacitly, McFadyen signals that *relationship* is a creaturely reality. Second, has McFadyen adequately demonstrated that person and relation are irreducible in the Godhead? By claiming that person and relation are not identical, it must be asked what remains of say, the person of the Son, if the Son is not identical to his relation to the Father. Recalling that McFadyen's inquiry pertains to the immanent Trinity and to *that* eternal and uncreated notion of Person, how does this distinction between eternal, uncreated person and eternal, uncreated relation not imply an additional *ousia* or *substantia*? If the Son is *more than* God's own eternal relatedness to Godself as eternally begotten, then the Son must be a distinct *ousia* that exists in relation to the *ousia* of the Father. The same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the Spirit. Here the threat to orthodox trinitarianism resurfaces. Third, when the character of the relations historically posited of the *hypostaseis* of the Godhead is considered, those relations reveal both their unique function in trinitarian theology and their incommunicability for theological anthropology. The relations of eternal begottenness, eternal begetting, eternal spiration or procession—these are (like the word *hypostasis*) relations that are befitting only of the Godhead. How could they be translated to creation? In what sense could those kinds of relations inform creaturely relationships or the understanding of created persons? In fairness, McFadyen does not explicitly attempt to draw

"relation", Kohl has rightly followed Moltmann's more general thought by rendering it "relationship".

[15] McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, p. 28.

[16] Ibid., p. 31.

on those categories to inform his understanding of human persons. However, by claiming that it is *that kind of relatedness* that informs the content of the *imago dei,* McFadyen implicitly suggests that his understanding of created persons is constituted by relations derived from the uncreated, innertrinitarian relations that constitute divine persons. I take this to be no different than many methodologically circular approaches to the *imago dei,* which find among human creatures some ostensibly unique feature and then proceed to map that feature back onto the Godhead in order to claim its divine origins. All of this is, I realize, as much a critique of social doctrines of the Trinity as it is of McFadyen. Yet, whatever the merit of social doctrines, McFadyen's account demonstrates their particularly tenuous ability to inform the *imago dei* and the dangers of projection. Especially in theological anthropology lurks the danger to make theology anthropology.

So, to return to McFadyen's claim that "Person and relation are inseparable but not the same thing,"[17] we can agree: in anthropology, yes; in theology, maybe not.[18] Indeed, McFadyen's dialogical understanding of human persons—that they are constituted only through dialogical relation to others—is broadly consistent with the trajectory of the social sciences' understanding of the human person and proves especially valuable insofar as it is a development in that vein.

McFadyen argues convincingly that one's sense of self and personal identity are formed socially through relations of communication with others. "The 'self'," he claims, "is not some internal organ of identity, but is understood in communication terms as a way of organising one's life and communication in a centered way."[19] Thus, persons are formed only in intersubjective, communicative relations. Within particular social contexts persons engage in exchanges within a communication code appropriate for that social context. The social context dictates, regulates, and codifies interpersonal communication according to its system of values. Within this codified system, persons enter into relation with others in a way that is conditioned by how they are recognized and addressed by others. Individual identity is then formed by this recognition and address. It is "both expressed in and derived from the moments in which one responds to others within the framework of given moral order."[20] Personal identity, then, is constituted by a "sedimentation" of these moments,

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[17] Ibid., p. 28.

[18] Aquinas is clear that a trinitarian hypostasis is a "subsistent relation". Robert Jenson claims that, for Aquinas, subsistent relation "is not merely essential to its term, but that just *is* its own sole term." See "Some Riffs on Thomas Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*" in *Theological Theology*, ed. by R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, Justin Stratis (London: T&T Clark, 2015) p. 130. Italics original.

[19] Ibid., p. 70.

[20] Ibid., p. 73.

which should not be understood as discrete or isolated but continuous in their identity-forming ability. Persons are then, in this way, called into being by others. Individuals are linked, McFadyen emphasizes, not by "an abstract metaphysical principle but through concrete relations in which one's individuality is addressed and called into being as a communicative, and therefore moral, subject of a certain form."[21] This emphasis on the communicative nature of personhood leads McFadyen to draw specific conclusions about the human body and the embodied nature of persons. The body of a person is understood as a communicative element of personhood, not only being a means of communication, but itself communicating to others and to oneself. In other words, we communicate by use of our bodies, verbally and non-verbally; but the body itself also communicates, insofar as it communicates our identities that persist over time. Yet this does not mean that personhood is circumscribed or isolated to that body. Rather, "As a subject of public communication, a person is more like a 'place' (a location of communication) than a 'thing' or an object."[22] This means that the physical and social elements of life are inseparable. The self is a communicative agent that is addressed and recognized while addressing and recognizing others. It is this sedimentation of moments of call and response that constitute human personality. What is at the core of this concept of personality is the social achievement of internally organizing and structuring these moments in a socially acceptable account of self-understanding. This internal self-organizing is what constitutes a person and enables engagement in social communication with other subjects. As such, "'Self' is not a thing people have within them, but a theory which they have about themselves which facilitates personal existence."[23] Selfhood is, thus, "an organizational process."[24]

Yet not every relation is significant for identity formation. McFadyen is clear that there must be a distinction between "a person's history of relations and the ossification of this history into a sedimented structure of personal identity."[25] My communicative relationship with my postal deliverer is far less relevant for the formation of my identity than my relationship with my parents. How then might we understand one's identity-formation in dialogical relation with God? Communicative relations are formed by both address and response. That response "must involve attending and returning to the other as

[21] Ibid., p. 74.

[22] Ibid., p. 78.

[23] Ibid., p. 100.

[24] Ibid. To claim that personal identity formation is a social achievement should not be understood to exclude a natural, genetic antecedent that is subject to the social process; and that antecedent has considerable bearing on the experience of the achievement and its resultant formation; i.e., it is not "nurture" all the way down.

[25] Ibid., p. 115.

she or he is present in communication. This is a readiness to allow the calls of others to transform us in response."[26] In the response, both openness and closure are together present. The address of the other may be to a greater or lesser extent received and incorporated into one's organization of self. Such is the case with God's redemptive address to the human creature, who may choose thereafter to understand self as one addressed by God, or to reject such an address as irrelevant for self. McFadyen summarizes:

> In recognising the form of God's presence and intention of and for us in the divine call we come to a better understanding of ourselves and of our true nature. For the form of God's Word communicates a particular intention and understanding of what it is to be a person in relation to God, and calls us to make this understanding our own in a responsible existence before God and others. In our acceptance of God's call and claim by responding to it aright, God's understanding and intention of and for us inform a new self-understanding.[27]

But if this relation is to be truly dialogical, as McFadyen proposes, it must also involve creaturely address to God and divine response; and McFadyen is relatively silent on how God's listening response might be formative for human becoming. In his discussion of asymmetrical relations, McFadyen does acknowledge the identity-forming contribution of a listening other, but in a way that is isolated to intercreaturely relations. Yet because Scripture invites us to consider human creatures' relation to God in anthropomorphic and analogous ways, this discussion can inform the way God's hearing might prove identity-forming for human creatures.

In an example of asymmetry, McFadyen suggests that a listening ear is sometimes an appropriate response in dialogue. What is needed, sometimes, is "an open presence with another rather than communication on his or her behalf."[28] Importantly, he goes on to qualify this by stating that this listening is, in fact, a kind of communication. "Presence, however passive," he claims,

> is still the communication of a particular personal identity. It therefore bears the form and content of a unique communicational spirit. An implicit self-presentation is unavoidable, and this has some determining effect upon the relation and the

[26] Ibid., p. 121.

[27] Ibid., p. 124.

[28] Ibid., p. 146.

> communication of the other, and the way in which one is and is perceived to be present."[29]

Several important comments must be made about this. First, I take McFadyen's use of "passive" in this context to mean non-verbal. If communication still occurs in the act of listening, there is a sense in which the listening cannot be strictly passive. If the listening is to be construed as part of true dialogue, it must be active, engaged, a communicative presence. That presence is charged with intention. McFadyen acknowledges that, were that active listening to change posture, say to uninterested yawning, the dialogical form comes undone. Listening then cannot be passive. Here again the difference between a recording device and a personal listener becomes instructive. The former might be better characterized as passive. The engineer who designed it certainly did so with intentionality; and it may even, in some cases of artificial intelligence, respond accordingly. Yet it lacks the kind of significant personal presence (as developed in Chapter 1) to be an active listener. Personal agency is thus a necessary but insufficient condition for listening. Dialogue is constituted by the active listening of a personal agent who attends to the speaker in ways appropriate to the form and content of the speaking. It is dialogue with another *person* that has the potential to be significantly formative.

Second, the self-presentation of the listener is formative for the communication of the other. Significant for the form and content of the dialogue is the individual character of the listener. Listeners are not interchangeable in their presence. The ear, McFadyen notes, "is always attached to a whole person."[30] This is no less true when speaking of God's, albeit incorporeal, hearing. That one addresses *God* has significant bearing on the form and content of that address. That it is *God* who hears also has significant bearing. God's hearing is uniquely God's and is unsubstitutable and unrivaled by any human hearer. It is the hearing of one who is characterized by all the perfections of divinity. The form and content of the address cannot but be shaped by the speaker's understanding of the character of the listener. Thus, personal identity is uniquely formed through the address to a particular listener, not just any listener.

Third, McFadyen's reflection on listening brings together, not coincidentally, I think, the idea of hearing, presence, and spirit. This both corroborates the exegetical labor of Chapter 1, but with a theological addition. But here it must be pointed out that, just as with our working definition, listening is understood as a kind of significant personal presence that

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 147.

actively communicates the personal identity of the listener (e.g., loving and just), as that listener attends to the address of the speaker. Here it would seem that McFadyen's minimal reflections on human dialogue support our working definition. More than that, however, he remarks that hearing "bears the form and content of a unique communicational spirit." The language is an attempt to positively characterize the activity of the listener, and "spirit" seems to be one way of understanding the presence of the listener. Of course, the collocation of "spirit" and "presence" invites further theological reflection upon the role of *the* Spirit in God's hearing presence in and with creation. Might not God's hearing be understood as God's significant personal presence in and by God's communicational Spirit? Space does not permit an extended reflection on pneumatology, but insofar as the Triune God is present to speakers, that presence is a pneumatological one.

To summarize the relevant findings from McFadyen's anthropology, the self is formed socially and in relations of communication with others. The self is a way of organizing the sedimented history of interpersonal communication in a centered way. Individual identity is formed by the ways in which one is recognized and addressed by others as well as the ways in which one recognizes and addresses others. For interpersonal communication to be genuine, it must be constituted not only by recognition and address, but by response. Being heard by another is a requisite response for genuine interpersonal communication, and that hearing is formative for one's theory of self. Whether or not one is heard by another contributes to one's self-understanding and is constitutive of the sedimented history of interpersonal communication that structures personal identity. Put concisely, whether or not I am heard by another determines who I am and who I understand myself to be. Because the Scriptures invite us to speak of God's hearing in ways analogous to this, possibilities of exploration are opened up to consider the formative effects of God's hearing on human becoming. So, what are the concrete ways in which being heard might be formative?

4.2 Formed by the Hearing of Others

A consideration of the ways being heard forms one must necessarily be incomplete. The vast range of available interpersonal experiences resists taxonomy. As one speaks to and is heard by another, the particularity of *that* dialogue becomes unrepeatable; the totality of its concrete formative effects on human becoming cannot be translated to another person, time, or place. Yet this particularity does not prohibit explication of more generalizable formative effects of being heard by another. And if Scripture invites its reader to use dialogical

language to characterize the God-human relationship, then an explication of hearing's formative effects becomes a matter of theological interest.

Toward that end, I will proceed down two broad methodological approaches. First, positively, I attempt to characterize the effects of hearing on human experience and self-understanding. This will involve a protracted, if nevertheless partial, analysis of relevant anthropological concepts, borrowed from the social sciences. The analysis is partial because these are deep waters; and I desire to avoid being battered by the waves of phenomenology, psychology, philosophy, neurobiology and other disciplines about which I cannot claim expertise. Yet the analysis is protracted because I take it to improve upon some of the theological developments of the twentieth and twenty-first century theology. This will require explanation and defense. These varied anthropological concepts, culled from different disciplines, will serve as different lenses through which to observe the possible formative effects of the unified experience of being heard.

Second, negatively, I will consider what formative effects result when one is not heard. How does identity-formation and self-understanding result from having no hearer, or worse, being silenced? In what ways does this impair human becoming or result in a malformed sense of the self?

One last preliminary note: because Scripture's speech about God's hearing is most often related to human speech from the wilderness, as examined in Chapter 1, I will proceed with an eye toward God's hearing of humans in their pain and suffering. This is consistent with McFadyen's argument that not all dialogical relations are equally relevant for the ossification of a sedimented structure of personal identity. It follows that another's hearing of one's passing greeting is less formative for self-understanding than another's hearing of, say, the recounting of a personal tragedy. The latter experience is likely to be more clearly relevant for the way one organizes one's sense of self. Of course, these are not the only formative experiences. Yet existential experiences of pain, loss, and heartache, being more relevant for identity-formation, are what call out more desperately to be heard by God and others, and will, thus, remain the focus of what follows.

4.2.1 *Deep Hearing: Empathy, Joint Attention, and Human Becoming*

In a large portion of human dialogue, being heard by another is no more than a functional need for getting along in the world. There are four requirements for such dialogue[31]: (1) a shared language; (2) properly functioning faculties of speech, hearing, and cognition; (3) an appropriate environment that does not obstruct or distort that dialogue; and (4) sufficient proximity. When these criteria are met, individuals are able to get along with one another in ways that make everyday life possible. That these criteria are so often met means that much of human dialogue proceeds without need for critical reflection or evaluation. Meals are ordered at restaurants, supervisors direct employees, teachers instruct pupils, new acquaintances exchange contact details, and in each case, as long as responses to speech proceed along predictable patterns, hearing is assumed and the dialogue remains without need for critical reflection. Yet there are conditions under which speakers expect more than these criteria from hearers. All four criteria may be met: sound waves travel from mouth to ears unobstructed and with sufficient proximity that cognition occurs and the spoken words are comprehended and responded to in a way that indicates hearing has occurred. But certain existential circumstances ask for more. Here, the need to be heard by another rises above these criteria and expects a different kind of cognition from the hearer that is more comprehensive of the attendant existential circumstances, thoughts, and emotions of the speaker. This act of more comprehensively hearing and understanding the thoughts, feelings, and circumstances of the speaker approaches what is often labeled empathy.

A more narrative description of the existential need of the speaker is provided by Carl Rogers, one of the early advocates for empathy as a skill in psychotherapy. Rogers well-describes the formative effects of this more comprehensive hearing:

> One thing I have come to look upon as almost universal is that when a person realizes he has been deeply heard, there is a moistness in his eyes. I think in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, 'Thank God, *somebody* heard me. Someone knows what it's like to be me.' In such moments I have had the fantasy of a prisoner in a dungeon, tapping out day after day a Morse code message, 'Does anybody hear me?' And finally one day he hears some faint

[31] Of course, dialogue need not require the use of mouth or ears. "Hearing" of the kind under discussion is just as well accomplished by those differently abled, by use of, e.g., BSL or ASL. Dialogue may happen not only through the use of sign language, but through subtle gestures and body-language. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will proceed with examples from forms of dialogue that involve spoken, audible language, with the analysis intended to include all forms of "speaking" and "hearing".

> tappings which spell out 'Yes.' By that one simple response he is released from his loneliness, he has become a human being again.[32]

To be heard in this way is to become more fully human. This kind of "deep hearing" describes the additional existential criteria I want to work with in what follows. But how is this deep hearing, which proves so formative, to be conceptualized? Rogers understands it as empathy. Yet empathy, conceptually, is fraught with difficulties that make it ill-suited to describe the additional existential criteria for which we are looking. And because something like empathy has played a role in some of the theological developments in the twentieth century, it is worth a brief excurses to identify why I prefer to avoid it and, thus, depart from Rogers' label for the phenomenon he here describes.

First, whether or not empathy, properly defined, requires more than a broader *understanding* of the speaker's circumstances is a matter of dispute among the social sciences.[33] At issue is whether empathy requires the hearer to actually *experience* or *share* similar mental or emotional states of the other, thereby, somehow, inhabiting the experience of the speaker.[34] Second, if a sharing of mental or emotional experience is necessary for empathy, numerous questions immediately arise about the quality and extent to which the experience must be shared. Must emotions, for example, be felt to the same degree of intensity? How much attendant detail of the speaker's experience must be imagined and shared? Given the particularity of the speaker's experience, could the hearer ever truly share the feelings, thoughts, or experiences of the speaker?[35] Third, clinical counseling has emphasized not only the importance of empathy, but also its dangers. Insufficient or excessive empathy has been studied in clinical settings and shown to have adverse impacts.[36] Finally, empathy is an ill-suited category for this description of hearing because our ultimate concern is with God's hearing and its formative effects for human becoming; and describing God as em*path*etic would run contrary to the historical doctrine of divine

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[32] Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* (Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill, 1969), p. 224. Italics original.

[33] For a brief history, see Robert Elliott, Arthur C. Bohart, Jeanne C. Watson, Leslie S. Greenberg, "Empathy" in *Psychotherapy* (2011) 48(1), pp. 43-49.

[34] These concerns have led to the more recent, tripartite division of empathy into cognitive, affective, and compassionate empathy. See Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), p. 180.

[35] The question of whether empathy, defined as "imaginative insight into the lives and experiences of others", is even possible has been thoughtfully raised in the medical community by Jane Macnaughton. See "The Dangerous Practice of Empathy" in *The Lancet* (June, 2009) vol. 373; issue 9679, pp. 1940-41.

[36] A. Shimoda and E. N. Williams, "Problematic empathy in counseling and psychotherapy", *Society for Psychotherapy* (2018), <http://www.societyforpsychotherapy.org/problematic-empathy-in-counseling-and-psychotherapy/> [Accessed Jan 8, 2020]. See also, Elliott, et. al. "Emotion" op. cit.

apatheia.[37] For these reasons, the term "empathy" need not be what characterizes the kind of hearing described in Rogers' vignette. It is preferable, for those reasons, to simply speak of "deep hearing" as a kind of pointer to the concept I am attempting to fill out.

Additionally, the problem with requiring empathy, as a concept, to do the heavy lifting is that it is too dependent on conceptualizing the internal processes and phenomena of the hearer. In contrast, our investigation of the formative effects of being heard in this way is concerned, primarily, with the internal phenomena of the speaker, the heard one.[38] The hearer does, undeniably, have an experience of the speaker, and that experience, too, is formative; but that experience, no matter how it is conceptualized, is not relevant for my argument. The locus of our investigation of human becoming resides with the one who is heard, the speaker. So, rather than attempting an explication of Rogers' "deep hearing" for human becoming, it is our task to investigate the experience of being deeply heard.[39] To use different language, what is under investigation is the speaker's experience of "feeling felt"[40] and the formative effects thereof. Further, studies into the interpersonal effects of a speaker's experience of being deeply heard may offer conclusions that are analogously applicable to being heard by God without having to query the "how" of another's hearing. So, even though Rogers and others will utilize "empathy" as the label to describe this phenomenon, I will avoid the characterization of deep hearing as empathy and, instead, focus on the formative effects of the kind of phenomenon experienced by the speaker in Rogers' vignette.

That experience of feeling felt by another does, indeed, affect human becoming. The experience is formative in profound ways that are categorically non-discrete in the

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[37] See the oft-neglected but important history of the doctrine by J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926). See also, Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God* (Eugene, OR: Paternoster, 2009).

[38] Though it should be noted that this process of hearing another is, as Rowan Williams put it, "not just an optional extra in our human identity and our human repertoire, it's something without which we cannot know ourselves. Without identification with the other, I don't know myself." *Being Human*: *Bodies, Minds, Persons* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), p. 58. Similarly, see Edith Stein, *On The Problem of Empathy*, vol. 3 in *The Collected Words of Edith Stein* (Washington, D.C.: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 116.

[39] Of course, the experience of the speaker cannot be entirely divorced from the nuanced activity of the hearer; but the experience of being deeply heard may be had as a result of any variety of cognitive processes on the part of the hearer. Whether the hearer shares the feelings (which could only ever be approximate and non-identical) of the speaker, or attempts an imaginative process of inhabiting the circumstances of the speaker, or more minimally tries to identify and label the emotions being experienced by the speaker—whatever the cognitive processes of the hearer, it is the speaker who has an additional existential need to be deeply heard in her circumstances; and it is *that* experience of being heard that is under investigation.

[40] Here I am borrowing the phrase of Dan Siegel, *The Mindful Brain* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. xiv.

unified consciousness of the speaker. By no means exhaustive, three ways in which feeling felt might have effect on human becoming are as follows.

First, this sort of hearing liberates from loneliness and isolation. As Rogers' above-quoted description of hearing makes explicit, when a speaker feels heard by another, there is an experience that something known to the speaker is now known or understood by the hearer such that a kind of sharing has taken place. What was previously known by one is now known by two. Through such sharing, loneliness and isolation become distributed in a way that reduces, if not absolutely, their intensity. While speaker and hearer may yet experience loneliness or isolation in what they together know, that they know it *together* produces a psychological transformation of the experience of the speaker. The speaker is no longer alone in her experience or knowledge, but has experienced something interpersonally fundamental in her being heard. The speaker is no longer alone but is with another in this knowledge. The speaker's sense of self, then, is formed through such genuine interpersonal communication insofar as she now understands herself to have been truly heard by another, and this experience contributes to the organizational process of constructing the self. What was known only to her is now shared by another person.

Second, this sort of hearing creates an experience of interpersonal intimacy. Interpersonal dialogue about wilderness experiences of pain, heart-ache, loss, and suffering are of a particularly intimate nature because these experiences are so formative for one's self-understanding. They are so formative, *inter alia*, because already and before the experience is ever brought to speech, the hearing of an other is already having a constructive role on the self-understanding of the speaker. The possibility of being heard exerts a kind of pressure on the speaker, wherein she must give careful thought to how to encode an experience with words. Just because that encoding process occurs internally, within the speaker, does not mean that it occurs in a vacuum or autonomously. It is always aimed at an imagined hearer and is, thus, irreducibly intersubjective. Rowan Williams finds the poet's notebooks to be illustrative. There, one is able to observe the struggle of a thinker to bring something into intelligible speech before the ears of an other. Williams claims, "There is always a struggle to make what we say both recognizable and defensible: speech that aims at truthfulness is speech that invites responsive testing, to establish if it is really recognizable."[41] The encoding of that experience into words, with an aim toward a listener, becomes one means of self-understanding for the speaker. It becomes one way of narrating an intimate and significant experience. Constructing that narrative, to the extent that it is

[41] Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 42.

identity-forming, is risky. Williams claims that doing so "is to acknowledge that the self now speaking is a 'project': I set out in my words and acts an identity formed out of my history […] and implicitly ask if I am intelligible, recognizable."[42] How will the hearer respond? Superficially? Dismissively? With ill-fitting advice? Or with deep hearing that communicates that the speaker is known, understood, and accepted broadly in the fullness of her experience, as encoded? If that encoding is accepted by a hearer, the speaker will have had the experience of disclosing some personally significant and formative matter of her life with another, and will have felt felt. The experience of an other's hearing such intimate and personal matters that are central to one's self-understanding is itself affirming and formative. The risk of disclosing personal pain that is constitutive of one's self-understanding is that its deep or shallow hearing by another is accompanied by a proportionally deep or shallow understanding of the self. To be rejected, dismissed, or misunderstood in matters so constitutive of the self, is to be rejected, dismissed, or misunderstood in one's identity. Conversely, to be deeply heard, accepted, and understood is to have one's identity and sense of self embraced by another. And to be heard, accepted, and understood in one's identity is a profoundly intimate experience. To be heard in this way may then also contribute to the speaker's organization of self, such that she has not only experienced, for example, profound pain and loss, but has been known and understood in that loss.

Closely related, third, is the way being deeply heard by another is an implicit affirmation of the speaker's self-understanding that bestows a particularly human dignity on the speaker. When the speaker discloses something identity-constituting, and that disclosure is heard in a way that the speaker feels felt, that experience affirms the reality of the speaker's experience. If, following McFadyen, being a human person is wrapped up with intersubjective, dialogical call and response, as argued above, then being deeply heard may be understood to be profoundly humanizing. A speaker is given a special and deserved dignity when she is heard and affirmed in this way. That dignity is due to human beings as *human beings*. Importantly, this kind of hearing and dignifying listening need not entail a wholesale endorsement of the speaker's understanding of her experience; nor need it confirm its self-constituting role in the experience of the speaker. It might still be subjected to questions and corrections. Yet, at minimum, it affirms the reality of the experience, *qua* experience.[43] If the hearer fails to fully endorse and affirm the encoded understanding of the

[42] Ibid., p. 82.

[43] Edmund Husserl has similarly argued that empathy makes objective the subjective experience of another. "The things posited by others are also mine: in empathy I participate in the other's positing. E.g., I identify the thing I have over and against me in the mode of appearance α with the thing posited by the other in the mode of appearance β. To this belongs the possibility of substitution by

speaker, the latter may fail to experience the full range of benefits of being heard with absolute agreement and affirmation. But my point here is more modest: to be deeply heard has a dignifying and humanizing effect on the speaker. When a speaker feels felt by a hearer, that experience is a dignifying one insofar as the speaker understands herself to have been worth hearing. Such hearing may, in fact, not just be a necessary dignity due the speaker, but may be a necessary prerequisite for credibly questioning or correcting the speaker's narrative. Regardless, to be heard in this way, in one's wilderness experiences, is to be humanized and dignified as a real subject whose experiences are formative and meaningful. Put another way, one's project of self-organization is thereby affirmed and dignified when another deeply hears the disclosure of experiences that are understood to be self-constituting.

It is to be remembered that our primary aim in this chapter is to ask what effect *God's* hearing may have. Thus, it should be noted that, while these effects of feeling felt by another might colloquially trade under the label of empathy, we need not eliminate them from the possible effects of God's hearing on account of that label. For God's hearing may produce just these effects without the need to introduce *pathos* into God's hearing. The experiences of liberation from loneliness, intimacy, and dignifying affirmation of experience resound throughout the Psalms. "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications," begins Psalm 116, before going on to describe the liberating and delivering experience of God's hearing, which is surely a deliverance from the threat of death, but is no less psychological and affective in its effect. "For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling," declares verse eight. There is, thus, an affective effect of God's hearing, which need not entail any sort of affect in God. God need not "take on" or "feel with" or em*path*ize with the experience of creatures for God's hearing to produce the same effects. Empathy is, thus, not a divine but a creaturely phenomenon; but its effects may be brought about by divine hearing and experienced by those who cry out to God just the same. Edith Stein made a similar point in her classic work *On the Problem of Empathy*: "As the possessor of complete knowledge, God is not mistaken about people's experiences, as people are mistaken about each other's experiences. But people's

means of trading places. Each person has, at the same place in space, 'the same' appearances of the same things—if, as we might suppose, all have the same sensibility. And on this account, even the 'view' of a thing is Objectified." *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. II (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 177.

experiences do not become God's own, either; nor do they have the same kind of givenness for Him."[44]

So, a reflection on empathy's effects informs human formation which may result from God's hearing. Closely related to empathy, however, is the notion of joint attention already introduced in Chapter 1.[45] Triadic joint attention, again, resists precise definition as a phenomenon, but is generally achieved when two subjects direct their attention toward some third object and "each subject is aware, in some sense, of the object *as* object that is present to both subjects. There is, in this respect, a 'meeting of minds' between both subjects, such that the fact that both are attending to the same object is open or mutually manifest."[46] As a constituent of our working definition of God's hearing, it should be asked how this meeting of the minds might shape human becoming.

Stuart Jesson has argued that the experience of receiving compassion from another is very often in the form of shared, or joint, attention.[47] Through a series of fictitious examples, Jesson reflects on the interpersonal and subjective effects of failed and successful bids for shared attention. When shared attention does not obtain, compassion is absent. In these cases, even when the hearer has paid attention to the speaker and the content of communication, she may not have adequately been *with* the speaker in attending to the situation. Conversely, a similar failure of shared attention may obtain if the speaker is unwilling to adequately share attention with the hearer. In such cases, fear, frustration, disappointment, or any number of undesirable emotions might result from the sharing of attention with another, thereby motivating avoidance. Jesson notes that to share attention might, uncomfortably, "make it more real"[48] for the speaker. When either speaker or hearer fail to share attention, there is an absence of with-ness in the experience that falls short of compassion. Yet, when shared attention obtains between speaker and hearer, especially in

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[44] Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 11.

[45] Empathy and joint attention's close relationship is evident in the history of autism studies, which has proposed that autism alters the experience of empathy (see esp. research by Simon Baron-Cohen) as well as joint attention; see Naomi Elian, *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. by Naomi Eilan, Christoph Hoerl, Teresa McCormack, and Johannes Roessler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

[46] Naomi Eilan, "Joint Attention, Communication, and Mind," in *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 5. Italics original.

[47] Stuart Jesson, "Compassion, Consolation, and the Sharing of Attention" in *Simon Weil and Continental Philosophy*, ed. by A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), pp. 121-141.

[48] Ibid., p. 131.

situations of pain and suffering, Jesson argues that something arises between speaker and hearer that is different than a giving and receiving. That shared experience, Jesson notes, is wrapped up with the character, attitude, capacity, or preparedness of the hearer to consider the speaker's situation.[49] Here again, in McFadyen's language, the ear is always attached to the whole person. Not just anyone is adequate to share attention with the speaker about any situation. It must be a particular kind of person standing in a particular kind of relationship to the speaker. What is significant is what happens when that particular kind of person attends with the speaker in a particular kind of way. Jesson notes that when this occurs, the situation under shared attention undergoes a transformation. Its significance is changed. He explains, "There is something paradoxical here, I think: my friend's attention to and with me changes my experience only because she does not try to change it, but enters into it as it is."[50] This meeting of minds need not result in greater optimism or less pessimism about the painful situation. Yet the experience of it has allowed the speaker to react differently to it. In Jesson's example he describes "feeling lighter and calmer, although still frustrated."[51] The speaker has experienced compassion as a product of a hearer's sharing attention. While subtler, these effects of shared attention—feeling lighter, calmer, being enabled to react differently to a situation—demonstrate the kind of change in experience that is accomplished when one is heard by another in a way that shares attention. It may even produce the same, or similar, kinds of effects as noted above with respect to empathy. Yet the notion of sharing attention, as constituent of our definition of God's hearing, demonstrates the way the effects of compassion may be produced when one is heard by God. Indeed, these effects need not require the *passio* of compassion. God might produce similar effects, by whatever divine means, without need of passions; but joint attention offers a means of conceptualizing how God's hearing might produce such effects. The experience of divine attention being jointly directed toward the object of a sufferer's pain, and known to be directed as such, could reasonably be thought to produce the effects consistent with compassion. If these effects are produced by God's hearing, the sufferer who is heard by God will then have available to her a new way of constructing her theory of self. Such a formative and advantageous effect may become sedimented into her self-narrative in a way that transforms her perspective of herself and herself in relation to her suffering.

Jesson's examples of failed bids for joint attention raise other interesting questions about joint attention's formative effects. It may be that an attentive and well-intended hearer

[49] Ibid., p. 132.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

issues a bid for sharing attention with the speaker, and that bid is refused by the speaker. In such a case joint attention fails to obtain. But why? There are myriad possibilities for a speaker's rejection of such a bid: embarrassment, feeling exposed, the discomfort of having to face the situation, timing of the conversation, interpersonal distance, pre-existing conflict, prior exploitation of a similar experience, distrust, etc. Some motivations for rejecting the bid might be external, wrapped up with the hearer or the speaker's relationship therewith. Yet some reasons might be internal to the speaker and thus restrain willingness. Because attention is frequently (though not always) a volitional activity among adult persons,[52] it might be asked what kind of effects joint attention has on the will of the speaker, and whether those experiences of sharing attention form the speaker into the kind of person more or less inclined to share attention in the future. Keeping in mind that the focus of our interest in joint attention is with respect to pain, grief, suffering, or other existentially significant circumstances, it follows that rewarding or regrettable experiences of shared attention are likely to form a speaker in proportionally significant ways. In other words, the advantageously formative experience of having shared attention with a hearer about one's suffering forms a speaker's volition insofar as she is more likely to share attention in the future. The person who is deeply heard is formed into one who is willing to share attention. Conversely, the person who goes unheard (more on this below) may become one who is unwilling to respond to bids for shared attention in the future. In either case, formative effects on the volition of the speaker result, and these results have a bearing on a speaker's willingness to share attention with God.

It is to be remembered from Chapter 1 that Stump's doctrine of omnipresence requires God's willingness to share attention with creatures. Stump claims, "In order for God to be omnipresent, that is, in order for God to be always and everywhere *present*, it also needs to be the case that God is always and everywhere in a position to share attention with any creature able and willing to share attention with God."[53] Thus, given this notion of omnipresence, a speaker's willingness to share attention with God is, in some sense, determinative of whether or not she shares attention with God regarding some painful circumstance. This does not introduce a contingency into God's hearing. In fact, I take this notion of omnipresence to be a strong assertion of divine actuality: God is always, already, everywhere attending to all real circumstances in a maximal way (characterized by God's

[52] There remains disagreement about the extent to which joint attention is a volitional mechanism in infants. See Johannes Roessler, "Joint Attention and the Problem of Other Minds" in *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* ed. by Naomi Eilan, et. al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 239ff.

[53] Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 117. Italics original.

immediate, infinite proximity to creation, as it is) and in a way that, thus, always exceeds the attention of the speaker. Yet whether or not a human speaker joins her attention to God's is a matter of creaturely volition. This does not introduce potentiality into God's hearing, for it is always, everywhere, already a reality. Rather, it emphasizes the potentiality of the speaker's willingness to engage in the project of sharing attention with God.[54]

Phenomenology and psychology have made much of the related phenomena of empathy and joint attention because they are significantly formative in the lives of suffering people. Being deeply heard, as Rogers has described it, changes a person. It liberates from loneliness, produces interpersonal intimacy, validates, and dignifies the reality of one's cognitive and affective experience. In deep hearing there is a meeting of minds that allows the sufferer to respond differently to her circumstances, and if positively experienced, may even incline her willingness to be deeply heard by others. The effects of being deeply heard, or of feeling felt, might be more extensively described or differently categorized. Yet these particular effects will be shown below to have unique relevance for theological anthropology. Here I am only claiming that God's hearing—a loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response—may produce analogous effects in the lives of those who suffer and cry out to be heard. This claim is authorized by Scripture's language as it speaks to God's hearing and the experiences of those Biblical persons heard by God. How else might the formative effects of being heard be described?

4.2.2 *Deep Hearing: Attunement and Interpersonal Neurobiology*

Descriptions of human formation may operate at a variety of non-competitive and complementary levels. Attempts to describe the human mind have come from philosophy, phenomenology, psychology, linguistics, neurology, biology, and anthropology among others. Academic specialization has generated silos that have inhibited interdisciplinary analysis. But one ambitious attempt to produce a more integrative approach to studying human development comes from the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB). Dan Siegel, the founding editor of the *Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology*, which numbers nearly seventy volumes, has pioneered a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the neurobiological implications of interpersonal engagement. Fundamental

[54] And yet this notion of divine actuality does not abrogate what was argued in Chapter 1: that God will refuse to hear those who live in rejection of God's covenant. There is, admittedly, a tension here, but it is one that runs parallel to the tension in God's love for and rejection of sinners—a tension that can only be resolved by God. I take up the resolution of this tension in Chapter 5.

to the field is the idea that human neurobiology is interpersonal and that the human mind and brain are formed interpersonally. Interpersonal interactions—be they physical, like a friendly embrace, or linguistic, like a meaningful conversation—physically alter the brains of those interacting.

Research in IPNB has produced insights into the effects of "attunement". Attunement denotes the focused, resonant attention of one person on the internal world of another.[55] The occurrence of attunement between two persons has the ability to "harness neural circuitry that enables two people to 'feel felt' by each other."[56] What does this look like? Taking up the relationship between parent and child for an example, Siegel suggests that a parent's attuning to a child's internal world in a way that is known by the child means that "the child feels good, connected, and loved. The child's internal world is seen with clarity by the parent, and the parent comes to resonate with the child's state."[57] He goes on to argue that attunement promotes nine brain functions: regulation of body systems, balancing emotions, attuning to others, modulating fear, responding flexibly, exhibiting insight, empathy, intuition, and morality. These are produced because the experience of attunement triggers a firing of neurons in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which holds primary responsibility for those functions. As those prefrontal neurons more frequently fire concurrently, there develops a circuitry, a wiring together of neurons, that over time produces a growth and density within the prefrontal cortex.[58] This increased neural density corresponds to the enhancement of those nine functions. Like a muscle that is frequently used, the prefrontal cortex becomes enhanced. Thus, interpersonal engagements are always more, but never less than biological.

If we are to understand attunement as constitutive of Rogers' deep hearing, we now have a way of understanding the formative effects of being heard in neurobiological terms. It should be remembered that deeply hearing another—just like God's hearing—is not confined to auditory receptivity. Ears are not required. It entails a more comprehensive understanding of the internal thoughts and feelings of the "speaker", who need not necessarily use words to communicate. This broader, more holistic sense of interpersonal communication can be described neurobiologically as attunement. The "hearer" has sufficiently attended to the internal world of the "speaker" such that the speaker both feels

[55] Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. xiii.

[56] Ibid., p. xiv.

[57] Ibid., p. 27.

[58] Ibid., p. 25. Siegel's research was prompted by observed overlap between the outcomes of research into secure parent-child attachment and that of mindful awareness. Ibid., p. 26.

felt and experiences a substantial neural firing in the prefrontal cortex.[59] In this way, IPNB offers another way of supporting the claim made in Chapter 1, following Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, that attention is a form of love;[60] attention that produces attunement no less so. This kind of loving attention changes the brain of the one who is heard. Being deeply heard by another produces a change in the brain that produces a corresponding change in the lived experience of the speaker. Put concisely, being heard by another changes the speaker's physical body, neurologically. The experience of being heard is inscribed on the brain of the speaker in a way that is empirically observable and measurable.[61] If McFadyen is right when he claims that bodies are places or locations of communication, then it is important to note that the location is one that undergoes a change. Being heard means ongoing development and reinforces, in a very empirical and bodily way, the idea that communication is fundamental to human development. Indeed, one is not only "knit together" in the womb of one's mother (Ps 139:13), but that knitting continues, *ex utero*, as one is spoken to and heard by others, changing and, in the case of attunement, constructively enhancing persons physiologically, neurobiologically, and interpersonally.

One significant example of a change in lived experience that results from a neurological change is as follows. Steven Porges has argued that the vagal system of the brain evaluates interpersonal engagements to determine relative safety or threat. [62] If threat is detected, the nervous system activates one of two possible responses: either the flight-fight response or the freeze response. The former response is activated with a sympathetic accelerator; the latter with a parasympathetic paralyzation or collapse. When safety is detected, there is an increased neurological receptivity, labeled "neuroception". There results a "softening of facial muscles, relaxation in vocal tone, and opening of the perceptual system to receive input from outside itself."[63] Porges has labeled this neurobiological mechanism the "social engagement system," claiming that it "provides a system for voluntary engagement with the environment with special features associated with the prosocial behaviors of communication."[64] That social engagement system is activated

[59] The direction of causality in the experience of feeling felt and of this neural firing may be an important question, but that answer is not relevant to my argument.

[60] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p. 74.

[61] These findings have been confirmed and now popularized in trauma research. See Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

[62] Steven Porges, "Love: An Emergent Property of the Mammalian Autonomic Nervous System" in *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 23(8), pp. 837-861. Cited in Siegel, *op. cit.* pp. 129-30.

[63] Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, p. 130.

[64] Porges, "Love: An Emergent Property of the Mammalian Autonomic Nervous System" p. 850.

interpersonally. Siegel has argued that attunement produces this same neuroception of safety. Borrowing a phrase from Porges, Siegel describes the state more generally as "love without fear."[65] Thus, the experience of attunement not only activates the prefrontal cortex, but activates a general experience of safety and trust that makes one's neurological system more receptive, opening one to receiving external input.

There is, thus, warrant for Siegel's claim that "Attunement is at the heart of caring relationships."[66] When one is deeply heard and attunement is experienced, the speaker is formed in a particular kind of way. The prefrontal cortex is physically changed and its functioning is enhanced, thereby contributing to executive functioning and all variety of self-regulation and self-control. More than that, the speaker's own capacities for empathy and attuning to others—both prefrontal functions—are increased. This means that those who are deeply heard are neurologically improved for the task of deeply hearing others. Feeling felt forms one into the kind of person who can make others feel felt. Those who have the neurobiological experience of love without fear are thereby able to engage in social behavior that produces love without fear. The experience of safety that produces neuroceptivity becomes a social skill, better exercised for others by those who have previously experienced it.

More than the ability to care for others, Siegel's argument is that attunement is critical for not only interpersonal but intrapersonal care. Because attunement produces enhanced prefrontal functioning, the experience of attunement from another makes the speaker better able to attune to herself. Put differently, when I sense that another is attuned to my internal states, I am then better able to attune to my own internal states and achieve a greater level of neural integration. This is a critical ability for developing an integrated and coherent theory of the self. One's understanding of internal states and emotions is a necessary task for developing a coherent self-narrative. Without introspective skills, one's internal world may remain at variance with a self-narrative that is dominated by external factors. This lack of internal attunement produces incoherent or non-integrated theories of the self. Siegel labels this a state of "impaired neural integration."[67] Thus, intrapersonal attunement—a skill that is enhanced when interpersonal attunement is experienced—has the

[65] Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, p. 130. Porges, however, uses this phrase with specific reference to the state of immobilization generally required for mammalian mating. Porges suggests that immobilization accompanied by trust and safety is optimized in human mating. See Porges, "Love", pp. 847-48. Regardless, "love without fear" is accurately descriptive of the safety and trust that produces neuroceptivity.

[66] Ibid., p. 16.

[67] Ibid., p. 204.

ability to produce a more coherent, integrative theory of self and make one better able to attune to others.[68]

4.2.3 *Hearing as Gift*

In the previous chapter it was concluded that God's hearing was a particular kind of act. The character of that act was determined by God's ontological alterity from creation that grounds God's infinite proximity to creation. The act of God's hearing was thus seen to be an utterly gratuitous and uncompelled gift. Categorizing God's hearing as a gift is necessary if God and God's nature are to remain the principle of theological inquiry. Yet to call God's hearing a gift is to claim more than gratuity. Gifts are, by their nature, formative in particular kinds of ways, and therefore warrant a brief consideration of what it might mean for hearing to be a gift.

The kind of deep hearing described above is a kind of gift from one to another. This is not to label it merely a kind sentiment or as a particularly warm thing to offer another. It is a gift in an anthropological sense that goes beyond sentiment. For a gift to be a gift, it must be the sort of thing that is given gratuitously, received *as* a gift, and must be for the real betterment of its recipient.[69] Following Dalferth,[70] first, the gift must be given gratuitously, not under compulsion or under expectation or as deserved. While the distinction between gifts and commercial exchange can be too sharply drawn,[71] the gift cannot be a gift if not given freely. Second, the gift must be received *qua* gift; i.e., it must be understood to have been given gratuitously and must be understood to be given to the recipient, in order for it to be received. This accounts for a distinction between accepting or

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[68] See Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help you Raise Children Who Thrive* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2003), passim.

[69] It is not here necessary to rehearse the history of the anthropological understanding of gifts. See Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le Don: Forme et Raison de l'Échange dans les sociétés Archaïques," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), pp. 145-279; Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps: 1. La fausse monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997); See also, Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Becoming Present: An Inquiry into the Christian Sense of the Presence of God* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 169-209; More recently, John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003); John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015). My argument here is a general summary of Dalferth's understanding of gift, who is following R. Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

[70] Dalferth, *Becoming Present*, pp. 195ff.

[71] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 51-63.

taking possession thereof (e.g., finding or even stealing another's property), and the conscious act of receiving as one's own. Finally, the gift must be for the good of the recipient. The gratuitous giving of something harmful, even if intended as a gift, would not be received as a gift. Indeed, what might be gratuitously given to one person and received as a beneficial gift, might prove detrimental to another person. There is, thus, a particularity to gift-giving and gift-receiving. Dalferth summarizes:

> The decisive aspect of a gift is not the object given, nor the intentions of the donor or of the recipient but the mode and situation in which it is received. Gifts are nothing apart from the practice in which they function, and they function as gifts only by being made present in such a way that they become received as wholesome and beneficial presents made for a particular person in a particular situation. It is not my decision nor intention as the recipient that makes something presented to me a present for me but, before I can relate to it in any way, it has to be presented to me in a particular way, namely as a present *for me* that makes me the recipient of the gift. In short, it is not the recipient who makes the gift but the gift that makes the recipient by making him or her receive it in a particular way—the way of the gift.[72]

This "basic passivity" whereby one becomes the recipient of the gift carries with it two important implications. First, it means that the recipient is acted upon in a way that produces a change. When the criteria for gift-giving are met, the recipient becomes a donee, one who has received something from another and is thereby made different, and that in a way which could not have been achieved apart from the particularity of the gift-giving and gift-receiving. The recipient is made different in both her being and doing. She is now different in her being insofar as her identity has undergone a change: she has become "gifted", a recipient of something outsider herself. Her doing has changed insofar as she is now, as the recipient of something new, enabled to do what she could not before without the gift. "It plays possibilities into my way that enlarge what I can do and how I can live and does not reduce or curb it."[73] In this way, the reception of a gift is anthropologically formative.

Second, this basic passivity that is fundamental to gift-receiving is, according to Dalferth, particularly unique. He claims, "*Receiving* something is my activity, receiving a *gift* is not. Whatever I do I cannot make my receiving become a receiving of a gift. If I

[72] Dalferth, *Becoming Present*, p. 197. Italics original.

[73] Ibid., p. 200.

receive a gift, it is the gift that turns me into a recipient, not my receiving."[74] In this way, the giving of the gift is what makes the recipient a recipient of a gift; not the activity of the recipient. In other words, for one to receive a gift, *qua* gift—and thus meet the criteria outlined for gift-giving—the gift must be given *qua* gift. Insofar as it is given in that way, it turns the recipient into the recipient of a gift. While potentially confusing or counterintuitive, Dalferth points out that this is a common experience. "Falling in love, receiving honorary doctorates, being knighted or becoming a Christian, for example, have all in common that they change me, that is, my personal or religious identity […] They are not the result of my own doings but qualify and change me with all my doings."[75] The receiving of the gift is, then, something done to and not by the recipient.

In addition to Dalferth's account, it should be added that, because gift-giving and gift-receiving are social practices that are unavoidably interpersonal, the recipient is changed in another important respect: in relation to the donor. Just as the ear is attached to the whole body of the listener, so gifts are not just given by anyone. The recipient receives a gift from a particular giver and the identity of the giver is not insignificant. Barclay summarizes a conclusion from Mauss' famous essay by claiming, "[T]he gifts not only belong to people, they are invested with the personality of the donor."[76] The recipient is thus bound in a new way to the donor, insofar as she has become the recipient of a gift from *that* donor and not another. Whatever she was before, she is now in a new relationship with the donor. The extent to which this new relationship is formative, however, may be contingent, *inter alia*, upon the nature of the gift given. The extent to which the donor and gift contribute to one's theory of self may vary. While it is true that the perfunctory "gratuity" given to a server at an American restaurant may fit all of the criteria of gift-giving, and it may indeed change the server's life for the better—who now enjoys increased capital and buying-power—it is unlikely that the particular donor, the gift, or its reception greatly inform the server's theory of self. Here the server's doing and being are changed, but perhaps not strongly. In contrast, one can imagine more magnanimous gifts that might forever change one's self-understanding and capabilities.

If hearing is understood to be a gift, then it must meet the criteria: first, being given gratuitously and not out of obligation. Second, it must be given *as gift*, something that is for the advantage of the recipient, in this case, the speaker. Third, it must be received *as gift* and

[74] Ibid., p. 198. Italics original.

[75] Ibid., p. 199.

[76] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 15. This understanding, Barclay explains, runs counter to the modern Western distinction between persons and property.

be to the real advantage of the speaker who is the recipient of the gift. Given these three criteria, it seems that not all hearing is a gift. Hearing is not always offered gratuitously. Clinical counseling situations involve one person listening to another for an agreed upon sum of compensation. Further, some hearing is not for the good of the speaker, for example, if it involves the intent to exploit. Given these criteria, in what sense can God's hearing be considered a gift and what advantage is to be found in understanding it as such?

My proposal is that God's hearing is, in contrast to creaturely hearing, always a gift; and that because it always meets Dalferth's three criteria. First, God's hearing can only be given gratuitously and not under compulsion. Second, it can only be the product of God's superabundant goodness and love which imbues the gift with an advantageous character, the character of the giver. Third, given as a gift, it turns the recipient into a recipient of a gift. It turns the speaker into one who has been gifted with the hearing of God.[77] In this sense, it is most properly received as a gift; for the speaker has no claim or right to be heard by God and, assuming a knowledge of God's love and goodness, knows it to be to the speaker's advantage. The result is that the gift of God's hearing forms the speaker's doing, being, and relationship to the Hearer. The speaker is now one who has been heard by God, enabling a new way of relating to her world and circumstances. Her ability to engage with and respond to pain, sorrow, heart-ache and the like is now conditioned by having been gifted with this hearing. The speaker's being is changed insofar as she now understands herself to have been heard. As one heard by God, her identity cannot remain the same. Whatever she was before, she is now that *and* heard by God. The project of identity-formation, of constructing a theory of the self, cannot overlook the gift of God's hearing and be true to itself. Being heard by God is fundamentally identity-changing insofar as it is wrapped up with the soteriological realities of God's hearing. If God's hearing entails a sure response, as was argued in Chapter 1, it is necessarily efficacious. The being of the speaker cannot but be changed. The speaker's relationship to God is thus changed. She is one who has been heard,

[77] It might be wondered whether God's hearing can be rejected and thus, fail to achieve the status of a gift. On Dalferth's account the "basic passivity" of the recipient would suggest not. This seems right, insofar as God's hearing remains unavoidably advantageous on account of God's nature, and it does something advantageous to the speaker, regardless of the desires of the speaker. While God's hearing may produce different or more preferable advantages for speakers when they embrace God's hearing as a gift, God's hearing does not fail to be advantageous if it remains undesired. In either case it turns the speaker into the recipient of a gift. While this may produce situations in which a speaker becomes the recipient of an *undesired* gift, Scripture testifies to just this reality when God hears, say, the grumblings of Israel in the wilderness (Nu. 11:1, 18; 12:2; 14:27, 28). The result of this hearing is undesired: God's judgement. Yet it seems that even God's judgement, insofar as it is perfectly good and just, must be understood as an advantageous good for the grumbling speakers. Scripture does, after all, speak of divine judgement, rebuke, and discipline as for the good of the recipients thereof. Thus, I would tentatively propose that, following Dalferth's gift criteria, God's hearing is *always* a gift even if it is not understood to be such from the perspective of a speaker, and I would further propose that this may be a feature unique to *God's* hearing.

not just by anyone, but by God. In all the particularity of her creaturely circumstances, God has gifted her with the hearing of those circumstances such that her relationship with God has now undergone a change.

The ontological distinction between God and creation was, in the last chapter, the impulse for understanding God's hearing as a gift. Yet a greater explication of the nature of gift shows it to be not only a gift, necessarily, for ontological and theological reasons, but also for anthropological ones. God's hearing is a gift that forms creaturely speakers in ways that are particular to their wilderness experiences in ways that could not otherwise be formed. Being heard by God is thus a gift that affects human becoming in ways that are characterized by the goodness and love of the gift-giver and are for the good of the creaturely recipient of that gift of hearing. The Psalmist can thus declare with praise: "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for me. I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me" (Ps. 66:16-20).

4.2.4 *Transposition of Anthropological Lenses: Deep Hearing as Divine Presence*

Having made a examination of hearing through the lenses of empathy, joint attention, attunement, and gift, it must be asked how these varied anthropological tools are to be best brought together into a single theological focus. Even if each represents a different conceptual lens through which to understand the experience of Rogers' "deep hearing"—the experience of having been heard in a way that produces formative effects—the experience of being heard is a unified one. In order to understand not only the intersubjective experience of being heard, but of being heard by God, these anthropological concepts must be put in their proper domain relative to theology. Again, God's hearing is not simply human hearing, writ large. It is conditioned by the nature of the hearer. It thus calls for not only a unified description, but one in an appropriately theological idiom, consistent with God's self-revelation in Scripture.

Above, it was already proposed that listening is a kind of significant personal presence that actively communicates the personal identity of the listener as that listener attends to the address of the speaker. Significant personal presence is another way of characterizing the mode of listening that is formative. It brings together both the listening activity and the character of the listener into a single concept that respects the particularity

of *that* unique dialogical moment. It is a *particular* person who is performing an action—namely, listening—that can only be performed by *that* particular person. Significant personal presence consolidates into one concept both the one who is acting and the action itself. More than that, it more broadly conceptualizes the anthropological lenses discussed above. It is not surprising that empathy, joint attention, attunement, and gift-giving have each resisted precise definition, having been mired in investigations of consciousness and subjectivity. Yet it is agreed that none are isolated to one particular modality, whether visual, auditory, or even tactile. One may experience being deeply heard through the look on another's face, through an unsuspecting embrace, or by comforting words. Thus, feeling deeply heard must operate at another, "higher" register. A particular kind of presence, it seems to me, better characterizes the kind of activity by which a speaker experiences deep hearing. It occurs when another is present in a way that the speaker experiences the effects of attunement, shared attention, or empathy from that particular hearer. The presence is so significant that it can only be characterized as a gift from hearer to speaker, being gratuitously given and being to the advantage of the speaker.

There are several benefits to employing presence as the preferred way of speaking about this formative activity. First, if the experience of being deeply heard or feeling felt, is best characterized by the significant personal presence of the hearer to the speaker, then we have a broader, more capacious category for understanding the activity of the hearer. Presence of this kind can be said to produce the same effects as empathy, joint attention, attunement, and gift-giving, yet need not become mired by attempts at definitional precision. Second, it allows positive and more concrete statements to be made about the activity of the hearer—something which has been avoided until now. Above I proposed to make the locus of this chapter's inquiry the formative experience of the one who is heard. This was done to side-step the question of the subjective process and experience of the hearer, which is surely no less resistant to description than the experience of the speaker. But presence, operating in a different register as it does, may more concretely characterize the work of the hearer. The speaker feels felt when the hearer is personally and significantly present to her such that these formative effects, *inter alia*, are produced. Third, understanding hearing as God's significant personal presence provides a way to incorporate one important conclusion from the prior chapter: that God is infinitely more present to me than I am to myself. When human suffering and pain are brought into view, this conclusion becomes all the more relevant insofar as God's hearing me in my suffering means that God is more present to the particularity of my pain than even I am, yet without being subject to it. It is that significant personal presence that allows Psalm 139 to declare, "If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there." God's hearing, understood

as a kind of significant personal presence, brings human suffering before God in a way that is infinitely more proximate, and yet does not make God its patient. God becomes present to my suffering, in all its uniqueness and particularity, in a way that no human hearer ever could. And yet God need not "feel my pain". Finally, presence is a rich theological category that shakes off much of (though not all of) the anthropomorphic baggage associated with categories like empathy, compassion, etc. Rather than struggling to articulate what it might mean for God to be empathetic or compassionate yet properly apathetic, it is preferable to speak of God's significant personal presence to creation which, when experienced, produces effects that transform creaturely existence. Of course, even "presence" is accommodated language; but it sits more comfortably alongside notions of divine perfection than language that invites a greater degree of anthropomorphic projection. Scripture has authorized God-talk that speaks of God's listening, hearing, inclining God's ear, etc. Yet it is able to do so only in light of an understanding of God's power and presence that, when encountered by creatures, must produce beneficent transformation.

The above effects produced by the significant personal presence of a hearer to a speaker do not exhaust the anthropological import for hearing. It remains to be asked: What are the formative effects of not being heard, or worse, silenced?

4.3 Malformed by Silence

Being deeply heard by another is positively formative for speakers. This is especially the case when the contents of that hearing are of significance to the speaker's theory of self. The personal narrative that is the foundation of one's theory of self is shaped and informed by the hearing of another. Yet what happens to that personal narrative when there is no one to hear? Whether the result of personal isolation, the absence of interest or care on the part of others, fear of transparency, or imposed secrecy, speakers sometimes go unheard. *In extremis*, there is what Dorothee Soelle has called "mute suffering"—the kind of suffering in which the pain is so dominant that the sufferer is reduced to silence, making speech impossible.[78] Indeed, the causes of being unheard are as varied as the effects thereof; but those effects are rarely, if ever, advantageous to speakers. More often such unhearing is likely to produce a malformed understanding of self. This is especially the case when the desire to be heard is great or when there is a therapeutic need to be heard, even if that need is unknown to the speaker. In what follows, I will briefly canvas some of the malformative

[78] Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 68-70.

effects of being unheard or silenced. This sampling is an attempt to show the damaging effects of going unheard for the project of personal identity-formation.

First, going unheard results in obstructed access to the values, codes, and meaning-making frameworks that are constitutive of everyday social experiences. This may develop in situations of loneliness or isolation. The speaker is left alone with her thoughts, without an other to validate, evaluate, or share in the task of interpreting her experiences. Because meaning and value are socially constructed, the project of integrating life's experiences—especially painful and traumatic experiences—requires the ears of others.[79] Going unheard circumscribes and diminishes the context for interpreting one's life and experiences. The immediate context of the speaker is the only available interpretive framework. The result is the inhibition of the processes of understanding, judging, and evaluating one's life.[80] McFadyen has noted the way that life is encoded with a public meaning. Without the hearing of an other, personally held information cannot be encoded with public meaning. Identity-formation, thus, becomes a solipsistic enterprise, with limited resources at its disposal. Indeed, externalizing thoughts and feelings, say, in writing or talking aloud to oneself, may be of benefit. One is thus able to "hear" oneself. Yet the pool of resources, values, and judgements—the whole framework—for integrating such experiences into a theory of self is limited to those antecedently available to the speaker. There can be only one perspective because there is only one interpreter.

It might be objected that one's theory of self could be developed perfectly well by other means, without the need to ever be heard about some *particular* life experience because life experiences inevitably undergo a diachronic evaluation. Over time, it might be argued, one might come to better interpret and understand some particularly painful life event as it is viewed in the expanding horizons of one's life, even having never discussed it with another. One's retrospective assessment of the death of a childhood pet may, after fifty years, have a significantly diminished meaning for one's life. Yet it is not time alone that brings perspective, but the accumulation of life experiences. The death of the pet, even after fifty years, might remain a painful memory, but one that is balanced with other identity-forming life experiences (e.g., marriage, the joy of a child, the death of a spouse, etc.). It is not time alone, but the diachronic interpersonal exposure to social values and codes that

[79] Peter Hobson has theorized that thought itself emerges from the interpersonal experiences between infants and their caregivers. Under such circumstances, even thought itself becomes impossible in extreme isolation. See Peter Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[80] Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 69.

constitute a meaning-making framework in which life experiences may be situated. It is through interpersonal dialogue in general, and the personal evaluation that comes, specifically, from *being heard*, that the values, judgments, and broader interpretive framework of a society is brought to bear on a speaker's own interpretations. In this way, going unheard about one *particular* wilderness experience might not prove malformative for human becoming; but such malformation is more likely if the necessary socially encoded, interpretive resources are not, or do not become, available to the self. Put another way, the meaning-making that is requisite for constructing a theory of the self is an irreducibly social project, even when *particular* experiences remain unheard.

Correlatively, it could be argued that the greater the significance of the life experience for constructing a theory of the self, the more necessary it is to be heard by another. Wilderness experiences vary in orders of magnitude. The greater the suffering, the more complex and disruptive the experience is likely to be for one's self-understanding. Overwhelming complexity and disruption exceed the interpretive resources available to the sufferer in a way that requires an other. Meaning-making abilities can become so overwhelmed that the diachronic exposure to social values, codes, and interpretive frameworks are never sufficient to the task. The particularity of the experience must be brought to the ears of an other, or others, if the project of identify-formation and self-understanding is to proceed unimpaired.

This is because, second, going unheard may produce either a disintegrated or an incoherent self-understanding. This may develop in situations of isolation or loneliness, but also when a speaker is dismissed or ignored. Disintegration or incoherence can vary in form and significance. Presumably the malformative effects of a speaker choosing never to disclose some case of abuse would be different than one in which the speaker discloses abuse and is dismissed or ignored. Varieties of disintegration or incoherence notwithstanding, my point is that one's theory of self is built upon the foundation of a sedimented history of life experiences and interpersonal communication about those experiences, and a failure to be heard may result in painful life experiences remaining unintegrated into one's self-understanding. In such cases, the wilderness experience remains "outside" or "other" to the self. It remains an event, but one with meaning that has not been given sufficient influence for self-understanding. Remaining entirely "outside" of self-understanding, it stands dislocated from one's personal narrative. This is a description of a *disintegrated* theory of self. An example of integration may serve to clarify the concept.

Reflecting back, twelve years after the tragic death of his son, Nicholas Wolterstorff describes the available options:

> Rather often I am asked whether the grief remains as intense as when I wrote. The answer is, No. The wound is no longer raw. But it has not disappeared. That is as it should be. […] So I own my grief. I do not try to put it behind me, to get over it, to forget it. I do not try to *dis*-own it. If someone asks, "Who are you, tell me about yourself," I say—not immediately, but shortly—"I am one who lost a son." That loss determines my identity; not all of my identity, but much of it. It belongs within my story. I struggle indeed to go beyond merely owning my grief toward owning it *redemptively*. But I will not and cannot disown it.[81]

Putting the event behind, getting over it, forgetting about it—these would each exemplify a failure to integrate the pain of losing a child into one's theory of self. Yet Wolterstorff models an integrated approach. Losing a son is now *within* his story. It informs his identity and self-understanding. There is an ownership of it. Importantly and appropriately, it does not overwhelm or dominate his theory of self. It is not *all* of his identity; nor is it his *immediate* response to the question of identity. But it is integrated into his self-understanding. Additionally, what should not be missed, is that Wolterstorff demonstrates the achievement of integration through an imagined dialogue. The question, "Who are you?" is what permits the externalizing, the speech toward the ears of another, and exemplifies the dialogical nature of integration. It is not coincidence that Wolterstorff frames this understanding of integration as a hypothetical dialogue. Even if no such dialogue every took place and it remained purely hypothetical, it demonstrates the way that making sense of oneself is a project that always involves oneself in relation to others. The who-question is always asked and answered in relation to an other. When conceiving of his own identity in relation to others, Wolterstorff understands his unique identity and personal narrative to be significantly influenced by the death of his son. Who he is, in his uniqueness, to another, is one who has lost a son. But this integration has been achieved *in relation to* others. Indeed, Wolterstorff provides only this hypothetical conversation, but it was noted above, following Rowan Williams, that the possibility of being heard exerts a pressure on the way thought and speech are formed. Even if it could only be said that Wolterstorff is *imagining* the dialogue and attendant experience of being heard (on the unlikely chance that such a conversation never *actually* occurred), that imagined bringing-to-speech and imagined hearing of it have contributed to the production of this integrated self-understanding. It is unlikely (though, I would not want to suggest impossible) to have been achieved immediately or independently of the real or imagined ears of others. It appears that this kind of integration is produced diachronically and through the refining of one's self-

[81] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 5-6. Italics original.

understanding within the horizon of another's hearing. Wolterstorff's is, thus, a picture of integration against the backdrop of disintegrating strategies: putting the event behind, getting over it, forgetting about it. These are strategies for *dis*owning. If we were to explore what each of these three strategies have in common, it is, again, not coincidence, that they would all require a lack of communication about the event—a failure to bring to the ears of another. Disintegration results when wilderness experiences go insufficiently heard.

Related to disintegration, an *incoherent* theory of self may result from partial or fragmented integration of wilderness experiences. Incoherence results when one's self-understanding remains at odds with one's wilderness experiences. It could be described as a life event that remains partially integrated, but with unresolved or unresolvable elements to it—elements that do not fit into one's personal narrative. Another example may illustrate.

It was in 1944 that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from his prison cell in Tegel, wrote his now-famous poem reflecting on his own identity:

Who am I? They often tell me
I would step from my cell's confinement
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I would talk to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,

weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.[82]

Here, on full display, is the experience of a personal identity struggling for coherence. For Bonhoeffer, the Tegel experience—in all of its loneliness, exhaustion, and impotence—is what dominates his self-understanding. That experience is how he knows himself. Yet it is a confident, dignified, collected Bonhoeffer whom others claim to know and experience. The question of coherence is just this: "Who am I? This or the other?" The reason for the incoherence is made clear in lines 16-25, which have not been heard by others. The result is a self-understanding that remains at odds with others' understanding. It is not hard to imagine a progression toward coherence if, say, the "warders" of line 6 deeply heard these lines. Yet without the ears of others, Bonhoeffer is left without sufficient resources for achieving coherence. His under-resourced attempt at coherence appears in lines 26-31. His attempt: perhaps he is both confident of a (eschatological?) victory already won, while his daily experience simultaneously bears all the marks of defeat. This is an *attempt* at coherence. Yet "these lonely questions" remain. That this sort of lack of coherence would develop in lonely circumstances should not surprise at this point in my argument and gives weight to the proposal that coherence of personal identity is a social achievement. Questions of personal identity are "lonely questions" when they cannot be brought before the ears of another. Going unheard by another in one's wilderness experiences perpetuates incoherence in one's self-understanding.

What is most remarkable for the purposes of my argument is that, despite the struggle for coherence in his present circumstances, Bonhoeffer does, in fact, acknowledge a coherence of identity that is more definitive for his self-understanding. The whole poem is characterized by an attempt to answer the question, "Who am I?" Yet the question does not

[82] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, pp. 347-48.

go unanswered. Despite the struggle for coherence, Bonhoeffer acknowledges his identity: he is one who belongs to God. It is only in the final line that it becomes evident that the whole poem, in all its searching questions, is directed to a "Thou". This struggle for coherence takes place before God and in the hearing of God. Here it is God who hears, and it is God who anchors Bonhoeffer's struggle for self-understanding. There is, then, a level of achieved coherence that results from dialogue. It is in the speaking to and being heard by God that resolves the incoherence at a more foundational level of personal identity, even if by faith in the face of circumstances that run contrariwise. Most important for the project of self-understanding is not the disjunction between the claims of "I" and "they", but the coherence supplied by the perfect knowledge of "Thou".

Without the ears of another, achieving integration and coherence of personal narrative is not possible. Disintegration and incoherence are the product of insufficient meaning-making resources and perspectives that can only be expanded by their acquisition from others. Of course, in order to be sufficiently formative, the hearing of another must achieve the "deep" level of hearing described above. Being ignored or dismissed would be examples of unhearing; damaging examples that would contribute to disintegration and incoherence of self-understanding.[83] Being unheard—whether due to isolation or dismissal—is a damaging and malformative influence on human becoming insofar as personal narrativity becomes or remains fragmented. Of course, being heard by another does not somehow guarantee an integrated and coherent self-understanding; but the absence of the ears of another contributes to disintegration and incoherence in significant ways that can only be resolved, even if only in part, by being heard.

Third, there are exceptionally damaging results of going unheard when sufferers are enjoined to secrecy. To be enjoined to secrecy is to be cut off from the ears of others, with all of the damaging effects already noted. It is enforced isolation and is one means of intentionally inhibiting the sufferer from bringing experiences within broader or alternative contexts of meaning and understanding, as well as the comfort and assistance needed in that suffering. This can be exceptionally damaging for the self-understanding of children, who lack the interpretive resources and internal fortitude to appropriately understand and respond to the secrecy injunction. McFadyen has reflected at length on the damaging consequences of childhood sexual abuse and on the impact of the secrecy enjoined upon that abuse.[84] One of the unique features of secret-keeping, especially as it relates to abuse, is that it requires a

[83] On the impact of dismissing for psychological and neurological integration, see Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, pp. 204-6.

[84] McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, pp. 69-71.

justification from the abuser to the abused. There is a need to keep this a secret, *because*. That justification is most effective when it co-opts motives that the abused might have for maintaining the secret, such as shame, punishment, personal deficiency, etc. The justification then becomes the dominant framework for interpreting abuse. McFadyen notes the way that *you*-messages of the abuser become the *I*-messages of the abused. The abuser might tell a child, "This is because you are dirty and wicked," or "This is your punishment for being so bad."[85] Those justifications motivate secret-keeping and place the responsibility of the abuse on the abused. These messages "easily become the sole frameworks of meaning by which the child may interpret and evaluate both the abuse and his own identity in its light."[86] Even if the child is of sufficient age and development to evaluate the abuse as morally reprehensible, her personal identity is still confounded by the ambivalence of the relationship with the abuser, who, on account of age, power, and interpersonal status should otherwise be trustworthy.[87] The particularly disturbing example of childhood sexual abuse and the secrecy that accompanies it demonstrate the damaging effects of imposed secrecy. The damage is immediate, insofar as it permits the abuse and suffering to continue, but also persistent, insofar as it radically confounds the abused's understanding of self and self in relation to others. These damaging effects could only be prevented or resolved by the ears of an other.

Finally, going unheard means the absence of care, concern and understanding necessary to be loved. This is the case when a potential hearer is apathetic, uninterested, or even positively invested in the suffering of the speaker. In these circumstances, as well as those noted above, going unheard makes love impossible. One cannot be *known* as a person, in an I-thou relationship, to use Buber's terminology. As an unheard person, one becomes an impersonal It. To be loved as a person means to be known and understood in a way that is only possible through interpersonal communication. Going unheard is, thus, a dehumanizing experience insofar as it depersonalizes human experience and makes love impossible. This is especially so in more overtly evil circumstances wherein the perpetrators of violence oppress and terrorize victims with resolute apathy toward their cries and pain. The unwillingness to *hear* the other is what makes the violence possible. To hear the victim is to relate to the victim as another person, as a thou, with an internal world not unlike the perpetrator's. If being heard is a humanizing and dignifying event, then the absence of hearing may prove extraordinarily damaging for the psychology and self-understanding of

[85] Ibid., p. 70.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., p. 71.

the speaker. Persistent, malicious unhearing may become sedimented into the speaker's theory of self, such that the speaker understands herself to be insignificant, not worthy of the human dignity of hearing, deserving of such apathy or malice, or of subhuman value, etc. Of course, these pose particularly severe threats to one's personal narrative and self-understanding, and are located at the extreme end of the spectrum of potentially malformative effects of unhearing. And yet, sadly, they are nonetheless common.

The above malformative effects, *inter alia*, might summarily be described as a kind of decreation that undermines God's good design for human relationships. If human creatures were not created to be alone (Gen 2:18), then it should be no theological surprise that God's good design for human community comes undone when speakers go unheard. That the ears of another are required to make sense of our circumstances, to integrate our experiences into a coherent self-understanding, and to lovingly dignify our words and thoughts, imbuing them with superlative, human worth—these are not ancillary additions to the human experience, but constitute it, *qua* human experience, by design. Thus, the failure or refusal to hear is at odds with the created order. Going unheard is a kind of erosion to one's personal theory of self, just as it is an erosion of human nature. The sedimentation of silence, the persistent experience of being unheard, chisels away at one's self understanding because it chisels away at the God-ordained *human* experience.[88]

4.4 God's Hearing and Human Becoming

Now it remains to demonstrate the most important theological implications of the foregoing reflections. If, as I have frequently asserted, God's hearing is not simply human hearing, writ large, and yet Scripture invites us to speak of God as a hearer, especially a hearer of our pain and suffering, then it remains to ask: toward what theological ends does Scripture authorize such language? If God has revealed Godself to be a hearer, what bearing does this have on God's economy of relations to and with human creatures? If, as I have argued, being heard is significantly formative for human becoming and one's theory of self, how is being heard by *God* formative in similar or different ways?

Here, the theological payoff of the foregoing exploration comes into its own. Having discussed God's hearing, as Scripture so often does, within the horizon of human suffering, we may now bring the kind of human becoming produced by the hearing of an other into sharp relief with another theological strategy for addressing human suffering;

[88] For ways that the Church has contributed, historically, to the malformations produced by silence, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (New York: Viking, 2013), esp. pp. 191-216.

what I will call the "passibilist-liberationist" strategy. This strategy might be generally described as follows: the existential burden of human suffering, especially in its most horrendous[89] and dehumanizing forms, is so great that, in order to offer a satisfying existential and psychological response, theology must reject the long-held doctrine of impassibility and concede that God, too, is a co-sufferer with humanity; and by doing so, it thus offers a means of psychological and existential liberation from the acute sufferings of this world. I want to engage two familiar examples of the passibilist-liberationist strategy, even if they are by no means the first,[90] the only,[91] or even most rigorous[92] representatives. I raise examples within this theological stream, not because it is currently *en vogue* (it is not[93]), nor because it might make an easy foil (both are ambitious, complex, theological arguments). Instead, I raise them because of my sympathies with theologies which aim to speak into concrete human misery; more than that, in their own unique ways, I take them to be theologies that, by arguing for passibility, are attempting to meet human suffering with something akin to divine empathy. I engage with this particular stream of theology because I imagine a theology of God's hearing qualifying and supporting the broad aim of the passibilist-liberationist stream insofar as it, too, is a response to human suffering.

First, Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God* is an extended argument for the passibility of the Triune God.[94] Yet that argument is oriented toward a particular anthropological aim. The seventh chapter of the work, "Ways Towards the Psychological Liberation of Man," is an attempt at psychological hermeneutics, asking, at one level, what it might mean to be liberated from the "idolatry" of religion. Moltmann follows, positively,

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[89] See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), which I will engage subsequently.

[90] J.K. Mozley's *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926) was commissioned to assess the state of the British discussion on passibility and impassibility at that time. Additionally, by 1938 Oliver Quick could state definitively that "In modern times many theologians outside the Roman Communion, who could hardly be called either eccentric or heretical, have maintained that, since God loves his creatures, he must be said to suffer pain or sorrow on account of the unhappiness and sin." *Doctrine of the Creeds* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938), p. 186.

[91] For other representatives, see Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); Marcel Sarot *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing, 1992); Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991).

[92] Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism* (London: Bloomsbury, 1983).

[93] It is telling that, while some have continued to work within the passibilist-liberationist stream, its most influential voices remain those from the 1960s and 70s.

[94] The following citations, unless otherwise noted, are all from Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Quotations, without endorsement, retain the gender-biased language of the original text.

the historical critiques of religion made by Freud and Marx in order to caricature worship of an omnipotent, immutable, impassible God as a kind of neurosis from which Christians must be liberated. Moltmann understands God, as classically conceived in the Christian tradition, as a created, philosophical idol that holds repressive sway over worshippers. Following Freud, Moltmann understands that "God" to be nothing more than an exalted father figure.[95] His concern is for the flourishing and development of the human being. For Moltmann, "The *homo sympatheticus* should be brought into the field of force of the *pathos* of God and the suffering of Christ, where pattern formations condemn man to a life of apathy,"[96] in order to liberate persons from their psychological repressions. The danger of this idolatry is developed in Moltmann's worry that "the repression of intolerable grief makes the patient increasingly apathetic. He becomes incapable of sorrow, incapable of loving others; his interest in his surroundings diminishes, because it is directed only towards repulsing the threat against him."[97] The solution is to find "freedom in the humanity of God,"[98] by which is meant freedom by understanding God to be mutable, passible, and vulnerable to the vicissitudes of creaturely action. The "God of religion," Moltmann observes, numbers among the many repressive idols such as "fatherland, race, class, profit, consumption, or anti-social attitudes,"[99] noting that these "may not either suffer or die, since they have been erected against suffering and dying. They must be omnipotent and eternal, because they are meant to help impotent and mortal man and to relieve his anxiety."[100] He goes on to propose that

> the crucified God renounces these privileges of an idol. He breaks the spell of the super-ego which men lay upon him because they need this self-protection. In humbling himself and becoming flesh, he does not accept the laws of this world, but takes up suffering, anxious man into his situation. In becoming weak, impotent, vulnerable and mortal, he frees man from the quest for powerful idols and protective compulsions and makes him ready to accept his humanity, his freedom and his mortality. In the situation of the human God the pattern formations of repressions become unnecessary. The limitations of apathy fall away. Man can

[95] Ibid., p. 300.

[96] Ibid., p. 298.

[97] Ibid., p. 301.

[98] Ibid. Note that Moltmann does not, here, have in mind the suffering of Christ, "according to the flesh," as was worked out in the patristic age. His intention, as is argued throughout *The Crucified God*, is to bring the *pathos* of the cross to bear on the immanent life of the Triune God.

[99] Ibid., p. 302.

[100] Ibid., p. 303.

> open himself to suffering and to love. In *sympatheia* with the *pathos* of God he becomes open to what is other and new.[101]

For Moltmann, then, divine passibility is seen to be the necessary means of freeing humanity from allegedly repressive concepts of God which prevent human flourishing and healthy becoming. In the face of human suffering and death, rather than turning to an exalted father figure, it becomes psychologically liberating and emotionally satisfying to turn to a fellow sufferer who has renounced the privileges of omnipotence, impassibility, and invulnerability. This is one example of the passibilist-liberationist strategy.

The second, is James H. Cone's work, *God of the Oppressed*.[102] Cone's work is oriented entirely toward thinking theologically about liberating black peoples, and especially those in North America, from oppression. Cone argues that God is always and unequivocally on the side of the oppressed. As such, Cone's doctrines of God, Christ, salvation, and eschatology are all oriented toward the concrete, historical liberation of black suffering from the hands of white oppressors. Cone is not unconcerned with spiritual or psychological liberation. He declares, "Fellowship with God is the beginning and the end of human liberation. The liberated person is the one who encounters God in faith, that is, in conviction and trust that one's true humanity is actualized in God."[103] Yet he is averse to "spiritualized" understandings of liberation that do not address the concrete, historical realities of oppression. So, when Cone turns to christology, it is from the perspective of black suffering. For that reason, it is the Suffering Servant motif of Isaiah 53 that controls his reading of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. "On the cross," Cone suggests, "God's identity with the suffering of the world was complete."[104] He goes on to conclude that

> The cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of the weak. God is not merely sympathetic with the social pain of the poor but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain. The pain of the oppressed is God's pain, for God takes their suffering as God's own, thereby freeing them from its ultimate control of their lives. The oppressed do not have to worry about suffering because its power over their lives was defeated by God. God in Christ became the Suffering Servant and thus took the humiliation and suffering of the oppressed into God's own history.[105]

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[101] Ibid.

[102] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, New Revised ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

[103] Ibid., p. 130.

[104] Ibid., p. 161.

[105] Ibid.

For Cone, God must suffer vicariously for and with oppressed people. Commenting on Cone's theology, Warren McWilliams notes that the cross is "the clearest revelation we have of the agony of God for the suffering of the oppressed."[106] Like Moltmann, Cone is concerned throughout his work to distance himself from the traditional understanding of divine perfections. He argues consistently against what he takes to be the tradition's Hellenized understanding of God, suggesting that "Unlike the God of Greek philosophy who is removed from history, the God of the Bible is involved in history."[107] For Cone, if God is to address human suffering in its concreteness, then God must be historically conditioned and vulnerable to the suffering and oppression of history.

Much more could be said about these two representatives of the passibilist-liberationist strategy. For the sake of space, I will leave aside questions about theological method, the extent of "liberation" envisaged by each, soteriology more generally, and the varied work that passibility does for each. The observation I wish to make is more specific. These representatives are noteworthy because they are each, in their own way, making an attempt to triangulate the relationship between the divine nature, the experience of human suffering, and anthropological flourishing. In each attempt to coordinate these three, there is an assumed incongruity between them that calls for revision. In the passibilist-liberationist strategy, it is concluded that the divine nature must be the incongruous element that undergoes revision. For this strategy, human suffering is best responded to by the claim that God, too, is a sufferer and that by understanding God as such, suffering is acknowledged as a reality to which God, too, is subject and is, with human sufferers, working historically to overcome. And while space does not permit an extended engagement with these arguments, I will simply register that I am unpersuaded by them, and that I worry that whatever existential rewards they claim to produce, that they come at too great a theological cost. Further, I am persuaded by arguments against the so-called Hellenization thesis,[108] and against the characterization of substance metaphysics to which these arguments object. [109] Rather than making modifications to the historical understanding of the divine nature, it is my suggestion that in this three-termed equation, it *is* the divine nature that is able to

[106] Warren McWilliams, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 33(1) (1980), p.42

[107] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, p. 57. See, also, his concern that Christian soteriology has been Hellenized, Ibid., p. 107.

[108] See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 21-46.

[109] See William P. Alston's especially insightful analysis of substance metaphysics, "Substance and the Trinity" in *The Trinity*, ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 179-201, esp. p. 195.

produce human flourishing in the face of suffering. The passibilist-liberationist departure from the received understanding thereof is not warranted. What is needed, rather, is a fuller, more attentive understanding of God's self-revelation as a hearer. For, if God is a hearer in the way that has been argued thus far, and if God's ears are especially inclined to wilderness situations, one would expect God's hearing—God's loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response—to produce human flourishing, a way of becoming, within the horizon of existential suffering. God's hearing can be expected to produce formative effects, not unlike those above, which form human speakers in ways that bear on their theory of self and, ultimately, toward a beneficent and divinely-ordered telos. This is precisely what is found in the Scriptures, and in the Psalms in particular.

Psalm 22 is a uniquely relevant text for consideration due to its overt reflection on a wilderness experience and its appearance on the lips of Christ in the passion narratives. Its two parts—the cry of extraordinary loneliness, fear, pain, and abandonment (1-21a), and its declaration of salvation and divine faithfulness (21b-31)—are characteristic of the experience of Israel, as well as the dual experiences of cross and resurrection. The Psalm tells of divine forsakenness as well as divine presence. What connects the two parts of the Psalm in the world behind the text is unknown.[110] There is no internal evidence attesting to what transformed the cries of abandonment into rejoicing and praise. Yet some change seems to have occurred, whether in the Psalmist's internal experience of those circumstances or, more likely, in the external circumstances themselves. For these reasons it has a rich and varied history of interpretation as well as devotional appropriation in the Christian tradition. And yet, for all its richness, little has been said about the Psalm within the horizon of God's hearing. This omission is regrettable, given that verse 24 declares, in sharp contrast to vv. 1-21a, "For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him." God's hearing is, then, the way the Psalmist interprets God's response to his cries and pain. In his affliction and pain, what is most astonishing is that God heard when the author cried out. If God's response to vv. 1-21a is to hear, how might that hearing prove formative?

Above it was argued that the deep hearing of another liberates from loneliness, isolation, and abandonment. The Psalmist cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" The

[110] I am not here intending to deny a complex and diachronic composition of the Psalms. However, given its final reception and canonical form, I am choosing to treat the Psalm as a coherent literary unit.

loneliness and abandonment are expressed generally, but also specifically as a distance from the Psalmist's *words*. If God does not hear the Psalmist, the results are loneliness and abandonment. Those are acutely experienced, not only from God, but from others: "But I am a worm, and not a human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads." Yet God has heard the Psalmist in acute loneliness, isolation, and abandonment. Even when it was thought that God had abandoned him, God heard him. This is cause for "telling" (v. 22), "praising" (v. 23a), "glorifying" (v. 23b), and "standing in awe" (v. 23c). God's hearing has liberated the Psalmist—liberated not from psychological subservience to an exalted father figure—but liberated from the acute psychological pain of loneliness and isolation. Having been heard then forms the Psalmist's self-understanding, insofar as he is not one who was alone and forsaken; but rather is one who was heard by God. More than that, his loneliness is contrasted with the ever-widening circle of individuals to whom he declares what God has done, beginning with his kindred (v. 22), the great congregation (v. 25), all the ends of the earth (v. 27), the dead (v. 29) and future generations (vv. 30-31).[111] Having been heard by God, the Psalmist is far from alone.

It was also argued above that being deeply heard by another is a matter of intense intimacy because whether or not an other hears, especially *how* that other hears, is a matter of serious risk, whereby speakers may be affirmed in their self-understanding and theory of self, or they may be rejected, dismissed, or ignored. Had the Psalm concluded at v. 21a, the reader would be left to imagine the Psalmist in utter abandonment and despair, having been unheard or rejected by God. Left would be the image of a person crushed not only by the pressures of this life, but by the outright rejection of God. The negative consequences of this for human becoming could hardly be overstated.[112] Such rejection would be tantamount to a rejection of the totality of one's experience and deeply influential for one's self-understanding. Existentially, this would amount to the denial of God's goodness at best, or the affirmation of outright atheism, *in extremis*. Yet having been heard, the Psalmist is accepted, understood and has a self-understanding that is affirmed by God. The effects of this identity-affirming acceptance, likewise, can hardly be overstated; for the Psalmist has not only known profound pain and abandonment, but has been heard and known *in* that experience. Here God's infinite proximity is made evident in the experience of the Psalmist.

[111] Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms* in *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 117-18.

[112] While Psalm 88 does, in fact, end in just this manner, I do not take this sole counterexample to affect my argument. Rather, as the particularly unusual exception, it is an acute reminder of the painful, lonely, and uncertain time between speaking and being heard, akin to the experience of Holy Saturday.

God was not "far from the words of my groaning," but was, in fact, closer and more proximate to the Psalmist than the words themselves. As the Psalmist cries out, "Do not be far from me… Do not be far away" (vv. 11, 19), we see that God is, indeed, significantly, personally present.

It has been argued that being deeply heard by another may, implicitly, be a means of affirming and dignifying the self-understanding of the speaker. In the first half of Psalm 22, in its perceived unhearing, the Psalmist's self-understanding is called into question. In the absence of God's hearing, there is a sort of totalizing "No" pronounced on the self-understanding of the Psalmist, a dehumanizing and undignifying rejection. The Psalmist is without God's ears, a worm, scorned, and despised (v. 6). Yet God "did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted" in God's hearing. This hearing is affliction-affirming, insofar as in hearing, God issues an implicit affirmation, a "Yes" to the experience of the Psalmist and to his cries for mercy.

In the absence of God's hearing, the portrait given to us in Ps. 22:1-21a, the malformative effects of going unheard are on full display. The Psalmist is cut off from the meaning-making framework necessary to interpret his experience. In sharp appeal and protest he cries out, "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm…" He goes on, "Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast…" He is grasping for historical narrative, for previous interpretations in which to anchor his experience, but knows this immediate experience to be at variance with those historical interpretations. This is reflected in the contrasting conjunctions that head verses six and nine. Without God's hearing, the Psalmist is unable to interpret his experience. He gropes for narratives in which to situate it, but cannot make sense of it unless God hears. Without God's ears, there is no coherent narrative, and incoherence is the only option. It is as if the Psalmist were to say, "I know that our ancestors trusted you. They cried out to you and were saved. But I'm crying out to you, and you are not listening. I don't know how to make sense of this." It is that variance between personal experience and the interpreted historical narrative of God's dealings with the covenant people that make the Psalmist's experience incoherent. And this going unheard means, as was argued above, the absence of care, concern, or understanding that constitutes love. The experience of the Psalmist, in all of his physical, social, emotional, and psychological pain, stands in sharp relief with the covenantal *ḥesed* of God. The stakes in Psalm 22 are high. If God does not hear, it would seem, from the perspective of the reader, that God does not love the Psalmist. The malformative result of God's unhearing is devastating for human becoming. Indeed, if God

did not hear, then pain, suffering, and wilderness experiences in this life could only be interpreted through nihilistic frameworks—frameworks that lack the meaning-making resources supplied by an Other. This would lend itself to either a practical atheism in which, if God exists, God is uninterested and absent and thereby pronounces a denying "No" over human experience, or a metaphysical atheism in which there is no God at all. Were the Psalm to conclude at verse 21a, there would be left something akin to Munch's *Der Schrei der Natur*, and human pain and suffering would be the end.

Yet Psalm 22 embraces both Egypt and Zion, exile and return, cross and resurrection. The former is marked by unhearing; the latter by God's loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response. God's loving and just attention can be understood to produce two effects that are only *implied* in Psalm 22, but do not require much stretching of the imagination: the effects of compassion and attunement. First, it is reasonable to interpret the Psalmist's response as the response of one who has had the experience of God sharing attention with him. Above it was suggested, following Stuart Jesson, that the effects of sharing attention with another produce an experience like compassion. By attending to the Psalmist's experience—the experience to which the Psalmist is also attending—God has wrought a change in the way the Psalmist experiences his circumstances, and probably wrought a change in the circumstances themselves. The Psalmist has experienced the effects of God's loving attention in a way that has been efficacious and transformative, and is, thus, now able to look upon those circumstances differently. Something similar can be said, second, about attunement. While not explicit in the text, I do not think it an imaginative stretch, nor a romantic imposition on the text to suppose that the Psalmist has had the experience of feeling felt. In one sense, all Psalms of lament are bids for God to attune to the feelings of the author. Indeed, these Psalms are often those most marked by emotive language. Requests for God to hear should be read not only as a request for God to attend to external states of affairs, but to attune to internal ones as well. As in the above investigation, the mechanisms whereby one may imagine God doing the psychological attuning are irrelevant when the focus is on the experience of feeling felt. I cannot know *how* God may go about hearing or what that might mean, if anything, for God's life. Yet I do know when I have had the experience of feeling felt. In this sense, it is sufficient to suggest that one has had an experience of God's hearing analogous to the experience of being attuned to by another human being. It will be remembered from the above discussion of attunement that what makes attunement such a worthwhile and interesting result of deep hearing is that it produces a neurobiological change in the one heard, the one to whom another is attuned. My experience of being attuned to results in enhanced pre-frontal functioning, which includes

my enhanced ability to attune to the internal states of others. While I cannot imagine any before-and-after brain scans have been performed on those who claim to have been heard by God, there is here, at minimum, an interesting hypothesis: that those who claim to be heard by God *do, in fact*, experience enhancements in their pre-frontal cortex and its associated functioning. I take it that, if that hypothesis was tested and proved, the results would be of little consequence for metaphysics. However, they would be of real significance for understanding the *experience* of the one who reports having been heard by God, namely, indicating that she had an *experience of* being heard by God that was materially similar to being attuned to by another human being, and that, resultantly, she was better suited to attune to the internal states of others. Both compassion and attunement, then, present real possibilities for the way that God's hearing may prove formative for human becoming, and that, especially within the horizon of human suffering and pain.

Psalm 22:21b-31 is evidence that God's hearing is a gift, of the kind outlined above. As gift, it changes the recipient who receives it. The recipient, the one who is heard, receives with the gift new capacities to do what could not previously be done, *sans* gift. In the absence of God's hearing, 21b-31 would not have been possible. But having been heard, the Psalmist may gladly "tell of" and "praise" God's name (v. 22) and call others to worship and do the same (v. 23, 27, 29). The connection between the gift of God's hearing and the new capacities that result is causally connected in verses 22-24. The Psalmist will tell of and praise God, and instruct "all you offspring of Jacob" to praise and glorify and stand in awe of God for a particular reason. The causal "for" that heads verse 24 makes explicit this reason: that God heard when the Psalmist cried out. God's hearing, then, is what generates this new possibility, that was not previously possible under the shadow of vv. 1-21a. By receiving the gift of God's hearing, the Psalmist is not only the recipient of new capacities, having received something previously external to him; but now he is someone different. He is one who has received this gift and its attendant capacities. He is not only someone who *has* something new, but *is* someone new: a *tell-er* and *praise-er* and *worshipper*. Previously he was not these things, but a self-described worm, scorned and despised by others, mocked, and poured out like water, bones disjointed and heart like wax, as though laid "in the dust of death." The gift of God's hearing has, importantly, not erased such experiences, but has wrought a transformation in the experience of them, such that these I-predicates are no longer totalizing of the Psalmist's theory of self. Rather, they are integrated into a coherent narrative that is dominated by God's hearing.

This brings to the foreground another way of understanding what God's hearing has accomplished for the Psalmist's personal becoming. It was argued above that being heard by another is necessary for interpreting one's experience in light of broader values, codes, and

meaning. Without the ears of another, meaning-making frameworks are absent or supplied only solipsistically, thereby impairing one's ability to interpret life experiences. It was also argued that such impairment is all the more dire when those life experiences are significantly formative. This is true, *a fortiori*, with God's hearing. Marilyn McCord Adams has argued that horrendous evil, by which she means "evils the participation in which… constitute prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole,"[113] impose this very kind of inhibition on meaning-making. She suggests that "[l]ike light too bright for the eyes, horrendous evils overwhelm human meaning-making capacities, prima facie stumping us, furnishing strong reason to believe that lives marred by horrors can never again be unified and integrated into wholes with positive meaning."[114] Psalm 22:1-21a would certainly be a candidate for a description of categorically horrendous evil. And because such suffering overwhelms meaning-making capacities, there is the need for an Other to supply the larger interpretive framework. Implicit in Adams' "aesthetic argument" is the notion that the contextual "frame" through which evil is interpreted determines one's ability to attribute meaning to that particular evil.[115] For Adams, crucial are the questions about the scope and stability of the frame in which meaning is interpreted. For my purposes, it is sufficient to agree with Adams that it is God and God's goodness which supply a transcendent frame of reference in which the most horrendous of evils must be situated. Here it is enough to say that, in the absence of God's ears, the Psalmist would be cut off from transcendent frameworks of meaning and interpretation, the very transcendent resources that are necessary to make sense of Psalm 22:1-21a kinds of suffering. The result is the kind of incoherence Adams describes: lacking unity, integration, wholeness, and positive meaning. But because the Psalmist cries out and because God *does* hear him, he is supplied with a meaning-making framework in which to situate his experience. The Psalm concludes with a reflection on God's eternal kingship and universal dominion. "For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations" (v. 28), declares the Psalmist. He continues, "To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him" (v. 29). The Psalmist has been heard by the King of all the nations of the earth, by the King to whom the dead shall bow and future generations will

[113] Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 26.

[114] Ibid., p. 148.

[115] Ibid., pp. 148-51. My argument need not force a judgement on Adams' contention that evil discloses some truth that is contingent upon human subjectivity.

worship. It is within a universal, eternal, frame of reference in which Psalm 22:1-21a is now interpreted, because God has heard.

Finally, the narrative quality of Psalm 22 should be noted for its bearing on the Psalmist's theory of self. The Psalm begins in anguish, horror, and isolation. Effort is made to situate this experience in the history of Israel (vv. 3-5), or at least in God's good provision historically (vv. 9-11). Pleas and cries issue from the Psalmist, asking for deliverance (vv. 11, 19, 20). In response to those requests, God rescued (or answered) the Psalmist (v. 21a). God heard him in his affliction (v. 24). As a result, the Psalmist will joyously declare to an ever-expanding audience what God has accomplished. This narrative arc—that begins in turmoil, grows in tension and anticipation with each cry to be heard, culminates in God's hearing, and resolves in universal declaration of God's hearing—is of real consequence for theories of self and identity-formation. It is *this* narrative arc which culminates in God's hearing and which makes the Psalm so dynamic and potent for both its author and its readers. Personal identity, as argued above, is the product of the centralized organizing of a sedimented history. That history is organized narratively, such that to ask one, "Who are you?" is to invite the telling of a story of that sedimented history. However, it would be a mistake to think that a person is someone who *just happens* to possess an interpretation of a particular series of historical experiences of which she is the subject. Rather, Paul Ricoeur has argued that a person is not distinct from her or his series of experiences. She or he "shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity [of the person]."[116] Put another way, the self just is her narrative. "It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character."[117] Who, then, is the Psalmist? He is one who has endured great suffering, cried out to God, been heard, and now makes God's hearing known to all. Herein lies the potency of Psalm 22. In it we find the identity, in its narrative arc, not just of the author behind the text, but we find the identity of the people of Israel, of the person of Jesus Christ, and by him, all of humanity.

There is no narrative with greater identity-forming significance for the people of Israel than that of the Exodus, the story of slaves who cried out to God in Egypt and were heard (Ex. 2:24) and thus delivered, whom God establishes as a people to make known God's hearing to all. There is no narrative with greater identity-forming significance for the person Jesus Christ than the narrative that he is the one who sweat blood in Gethsemane,

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[116] Paul Ricoeur, "The Self and Narrative Identity" in *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 147-48.

[117] Ibid., p. 148.

cried out to be delivered, endured the forsakenness of the cross, but was heard, delivered, and vindicated in the resurrection. By this narrative, the Son of God, the Always-heard Word, has represented a humanity that cries out to be heard, and by Him, is heard and delivered. The result is an *ecclesia* whose identity has been shaped by this narrative, and who now proclaims to all that God is one who hears. The narrative is formative for personal identity, for all who inhabit it—interpreting the sufferings and evil of this life in light of it—insofar as they have come to understand themselves as heard by God. The sufferings of this life unavoidably inhabit a personal narrative, a personal theory of the self. However, by situating life's pains, even horrendous evils, within this narrative of God's hearing, the narrative of cross and resurrection, they become visible within the broadest possible vista, visible within the most cosmic and timeless frame of meaning. One's identity is formed in relation to an Other. One's personal theory of self becomes character-ized within the expansive, soteriological story of God and God's self-revealed identity as the God who hears.

Who am I? To paraphrase Bonhoeffer, "Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am heard."

That identity, then, is of fundamental importance for an inquiry into human becoming. For I am principally heard by God, then derivatively heard by others. My identity as one heard by God then gives shape and significance to being heard by others. The former is primary, the latter secondary and indexed to the former. To whatever extent I am heard by others, that I am principally heard by God is the more determinative. Further, as Psalm 22 makes clear, in some ways I am able to speak to and be heard by others *only as* the kind of person who has been heard by God. More still, as one who has been heard by God, I now have a self-understanding (and, potentially, enhanced neurobiological equipment!) that better positions me to hear others. This was not lost on Bonhoeffer, who knew well that the ministry of listening "has been committed to [Christians] by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share."[118] He concluded that "[w]e should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."[119]

There is another important sense in which being heard by God is identity forming that requires discussion. As one heard by God, whose identity is determined by the story of God's hearing, I am not only better able to hear others; something more fundamental has happened. As was alluded to at the beginning of the chapter, if understandings of the *imago*

[118] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), pp. 98-89.

[119] Ibid., p. 99.

dei should be derived, not from the Triunity of God, but from the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ, then we might expect to find the anthropological *telos* of God's hearing in the person of Jesus Christ. For in him we find not only one who is heard by God, but, in the fullness of his humanity, one who hears others. Rowan Williams, in his reflection on theological anthropology, concludes,

> Jesus has gone before us into the darkest places of human reality. He has picked up the sounds that he hears. And think of what those sounds are: the quiet cries of the abused child; the despairing tears of a refugee, of a woman in the Middle East, surrounded and threatened by different kinds of mindless violence; the fear of a man watching a flood or hurricane destroying his family's livelihood. Jesus picks up the cry of the hungry and the forgotten. He hears the human beings that nobody else hears. And he calls to us to say, "*You* listen too."[120]

We have here, then, an *imago* toward which humanity is to be formed. To be truly human is, at least in part, to be one who hears like Christ. When those who have been heard by God incline their ears to deeply hear the pain, suffering, and heartache of others, they themselves, in such an act, become more who they were created to be. That is not to say by engaging in some *activity*, the act of listening, they become more human. More than that, the one who has been heard by God is, like Christ, able to *be* in a particular kind of way. One becomes not someone who performs the *act* of hearing, but one-who-hears. This way of being in the world is borne out of a new self-understanding, out of the identifying narrative of one who is one-who-has-been-heard. Like the Psalmist, one's narrative identity does not terminate in God's hearing, but proceeds, subsequently and outwardly, in ministry to others. Being heard by others and proclaiming God's hearing to others—both being heard by God and hearing others—these are constituents of the same narrative, the narrative that identifies the Psalmist, the people of Israel, Jesus Christ, and finally, true humanity.

The passibilist-liberationist strategy suggests that liberation from human suffering is found in God's solidarity in that suffering. The frame for human suffering is there understood to include God as a co-sufferer, struggling mightily toward a glorified, eschatological telos. This picture of "suffering love" has a certain, aesthetic appeal.[121] But more practically, it might be wondered what help a fellow victim to the evils of this life might be in overcoming those evils. As weak, vulnerable, and liable to death, what

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[120] Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), p. 110. Italics original.

[121] For a lucid exposition of the relationship between suffering and love and the aesthetic appeal of narratives thereof, see Karen Kilby, "Julian of Norwich, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Status of Suffering in Christian Theology" in *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 121-37, esp. 134-37.

assurances are human sufferers given that God, too, might not be overcome by the horrors of this life? I have emphasized that "ears" are connected to whole persons. This is no less true of God. There is, then, a great deal that hinges on one's understanding of the divine nature. Were those ears attached to a vulnerable, passible nature that shares in my suffering and pain, what assurance do I have that my grief, sorrow, and pain will not overwhelm such a god? Would God's hearing mean more than a shrug and a wish? Would God's hearing the covenant people in Egypt mean anything more than that God *just so happened* to best Pharaoh, that God lucked out, and that it could have gone either way? Yet God's hearing is God's loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which *entails a sure response*—and that because of *to whom* those ears belong. That is to say, when God hears, it is the hearing of One who dwells in the abundance and plentitude of love and goodness, whose strength and constancy know no limits. God hears as one who both stands outside the frame of suffering, evil, and death, and as one who is intimately and infinitely proximate within the frame, and yet not vulnerable to the vicissitudes and evils which befall those in it. Indeed, being heard by *God* means that it is the Triune God who hears in all of God's perfection, love and goodness. Being heard by God is, thus, not the bringing of our cries to the ears of another sufferer, but into the ambit of the Triune God's superabundant love and goodness. Being heard by God is, then, the experience of the love of God, that brings life out of death. It is the experience of the abundant life (Jn. 10:10). Thus, it is my contention, that the ears of God are better than the suffering of God. Were God not impassible, God would be preoccupied not only with my deliverance, but with God's own need for deliverance. But as an impassible hearer, God's salvific and liberating activity is oriented solely toward creation. The hearing of God is, then, in all of God's perfections, a gift of far greater existential blessing than to experience God as co-suffering. Put another way, if we attempt to triangulate God's nature with human suffering and human flourishing, it is my proposal that God's self-revelation as a hearer is of far greater existential and pastoral advantage than to deviate, theologically, from God's self-revelation as the One in whom "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17).

Of course, this conclusion is given considerable support by the Scriptures, wherein we find near ubiquitous celebration of God's hearing; but a search for the celebration for God's suffering the pains and evils of this world turns up only silence. Of course, there is no dispute that the Scriptures speak of God as subject to certain anthropopathisms; but those particularly negative anthropopathisms of which God might be described as subject—suffering, grieving, weakness, etc.—are imbued with no salvific significance. They offer no hope and are neither welcomed nor celebrated. They are, rather, most often the cause of additional grief and sorrow, especially when incited by Israel's covenantal failings. Yet it is

God's hearing that restores "to life from among those who go down to the pit," and turns "mourning into dancing," and "clothes with gladness" (Ps 30).

It might be objected that a God who hears fairs no better in liberating from human suffering than the passibilist-liberationist strategy. One might object that the cry of the neglected refugee, or the distress of the abused child, or the despair of the systemically oppressed poor—that their historical circumstances are in no way improved by God's hearing. Perhaps "feeling felt" by being heard by God is simply a sort of psychological coping mechanism, a kind of spiritualized and escapist response to the concrete evils of this life. What is to be made of this? First, my efforts here have not been oriented toward the—what I take to be dubious—endeavor of theodicy. Rather, I have asked whether or not God's hearing might prove more existentially liberating, theologically appropriate, and Biblically warranted than the passibilist-liberationist strategy. I have shown that it is. Second, it should be noted that by jettisoning the doctrine of impassibility, the passibilist-liberationist strategy does not attempt to *solve* the problem of human suffering.[122] For Moltmann, the liberation that results is a psychological liberation from a particularly Freudian problem, which he takes to be symptomatic of belief in an impassible God. For Cone, liberation is accomplished by a black God who struggles against white oppressors as one with the oppressed.[123] Yet by sacrificing God's impassibility, liberation comes at a high price. I have proposed, alternatively, that the underexplored anthropological and psychological benefits of being heard produce a more advantageous liberation, and that without sacrificing divine impassibility. Third, to suggest that God's hearing lacks sufficient efficacy to address human suffering in its most horrendous and painful manifestations, one need only return to the testimony of Psalm 22. If the historical circumstances of the Psalmist are to be taken seriously—the circumstances which produced very real anguish, fear, and desperate cries—then the efficacy of God's hearing must be taken just as seriously; for the Psalmist sees God's hearing as God's ultimate "No" to his suffering. If it is to be believed that behind the text of Psalm 22 there stands someone who is intimately acquainted with the deepest and

[122] Richard Bauckham summarizes Moltmann's strategy in particular: "In Moltmann's understanding, the cross does not solve the problem of suffering, but meets it with the voluntary fellow-suffering of love. Solidarity in suffering—in the first place, the crucified God's solidarity with all who suffer, and then also his followers' identification with them—does not abolish suffering, but it overcomes what Moltmann calls 'the suffering in suffering': the lack of love, the abandonment in suffering. Moreover, such solidarity, so far from promoting fatalistic submission to suffering, necessarily includes love's protest against the infliction of suffering on those it loves." See "Jürgen Moltmann" in *The Modern Theologians,* ed. by David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 153.

[123] Cone has also had to address questions of efficacy. Citing William Jones, he claims, "There is no historical evidence that can prove conclusively that the God of Jesus is actually liberating black people from oppression. Thus [Jones] asks: Where is the decisive event of liberation in the experience of black people?" Here, Cone appeals to both mystery and a different "logic"; *God of the Oppressed*, p. 176.

most desperate pains of this life, then with equal confidence we must insist with that person that God's hearing has a bearing on those cries. God's hearing is a far cry from being a mere coping mechanism or an ahistorical and spiritualized response to human suffering in this life. Rather, if the above investigation into the anthropology, psychology, and neurobiology of hearing has demonstrated anything at all, it has demonstrated that being heard changes things, concretely. Finally, if God's hearing is God's loving and just attention accomplished by the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response, then God's hearing is the beginning of the human experience of the divine acts by which God moves to address suffering. Hearing is not the *only*, but rather, the *first* in a temporally experienced sequence. Because God hears the covenant people in Egypt, God then delivers them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Because God heard the cries of Hagar, Rachael, Leah, and Hannah, God then gives them children. Because God heard the cry of the Psalmist, God then delivers him from his circumstances. God's hearing, in other words, does not exhaust God's saving and liberating work, but is an important part of that work.

East of Eden, human flourishing has been at odds with suffering, evil, and horrific pain. The Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that the blood of righteous Abel still speaks today, crying out from the ground; but not for another sufferer, that the blood of God might, too, soak the ground. Rather, it cries out to be heard. It is that same cry to be heard that was made by the author of Psalm 22, who testifies not only to the injustice and horror of this life, but to the reality that God does, indeed, hear, and that this hearing changes everything. It is, then, for good reason that on the cross, Christ takes up the words of Psalm 22. Like the Psalmist, in anguish and despair, Christ is scorned and despised by others, his bones disjointed and his heart like wax; and while his clothes are being divided, he declares his God-forsakenness, as his blood is poured out like water. And yet that spilt blood "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (He. 12:24). It testifies not to the suffering of the divine nature, but it speaks a better word, a word that cries out on behalf of the sufferings of all of creation, a word that is heard by God. That hearing, God's "Yes" to Jesus Christ, is then God's "Yes" to all who are found in him. That "Yes" creates a new people, a heard people, who, having been heard by God are then, like Christ, able to hear others.

4.5 Conclusion

It has been argued that God's hearing matters for human becoming—and that in significant and concrete ways.

First, following McFadyen's account of personhood, I have argued that persons are formed intersubjectively, even if that intersubjectivity is not to be found in the immanent life of the Trinity. In an attempt to balance McFadyen's account, I have suggested that being heard is at least as formative as being addressed by an other. We are not only *called* into personhood, but *heard* into it as well.

Second, by way of engagement with the social sciences, I have attempted to show some of the concrete, formative effects of being heard by an other, while being sensitive to the extent to which God's hearing might prove similar or dissimilar to creaturely hearing. That investigation revealed rich and varied ways in which being heard constructively forms one's self-understanding. It also revealed the destructive and damaging consequences of going unheard. Whether or not one is heard has considerable influence over one's self-understanding and the extent to which one is formed toward one's God-ordained telos, which is found in Christ, the Always-Heard Word who hears others. As we are heard, we become more fully human, and better able, like Christ, to listen to others. As such, we are heard into a particular kind of being: heard and hearing beings.

Third, in reliance on earlier chapters, it was suggested that God's hearing of human creatures is best understood as God's loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of the Triune God, which entails a sure response. Speaking of God's significant personal presence is a more appropriate theological idiom for describing God's hearing that avoids some (but not all) of the anthropological baggage associated with the corporeality and passivity of human hearing.

Fourth, some of the theological significance of God's hearing was shown by bringing it into conversation with passibilist-liberationist theologies, which argue that the incongruity between human suffering and human flourishing requires a revision of the Christian doctrine of God, such that God, too, suffers. These theologies, each in their own way, find a kind of existential comfort in projecting suffering onto the eternal life of God, and in so doing, are seeking the effects of something like human empathy. While supportive of their concrete aim toward liberation from pain, suffering, or oppression. I suggested that their revisionism was unnecessary, and that the underexplored and undervalued notion of God as hearer is more theologically appropriate and pastorally and existentially satisfying than that of a God who is weak, vulnerable, and subject to suffering. Being heard by God is liberating, insofar as it changes not only one's existential experience, but may, too, change one's concrete circumstances, as it did for the author of Psalm 22, in ways that a weak and suffering god cannot. God's hearing is, thus, a means by which humans, in the face of concrete suffering,

become more fully who they were created to be, and are liberated into interpersonal and dialogical communion with the Triune God of love.

Finally, the reflection on Psalm 22 demonstrated the concrete effects of being heard by God. Being heard changed the Psalmist, forming him in particular ways that were consistent with our findings from the social sciences. Being heard by God not only changed the experience of the Psalmist, but formed him into someone he otherwise would not have been, namely, someone who is able to turn outward, speaking to and hearing others. More than that, in Psalm 22 God's hearing was shown to reveal the self-understanding of Israel, Christ, and humanity more generally. Here, we find a hint for God's decision to self-reveal as one who hears; namely, that God's hearing has transformative effects, not unlike human hearing, but in ways that are powerfully constitutive of the transformation wrought by God's savings work in Christ.

5. CHRISTOLOGY: THE TRIUMPH OF THE ALWAYS-HEARD WORD

"*…and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*"[1]

I have characterized God's hearing of creatures as a loving and just attention that is accomplished by means of the significant personal presence of God. In view of the distinction between creator and creation, God's presence has been understood in terms of non-contrastive transcendence, such that God is ontologically other and distinct from creation and is, as such, immanently present in and to creation itself. And yet God's presence to creation takes on a new dimension with the incarnation of the Word. Without abrogating God's distinction from and immanent presence to creation, the incarnation marks a moment in which God's personal presence is made manifest most profoundly. While creation was never without God, the incarnation marks the coming of the one called Emmanuel, which introduces something new in the creaturely experience of God's presence. First, the event of the Word made flesh introduced a temporal-spatial location of God's presence in a new and unique way; if one were to inquire about God's presence in the incarnation, a time and place could be referenced in a way that it could not have previously. Second, the incarnation introduces a fleshly, human, embodied presence of God. God is not only temporally and spatially present, but is so as one who personalizes a human body, a human soul, and even human ears.

There are then important questions to be raised: What does the work of God in the incarnate Christ mean for God's hearing? What does it mean for God to hear human creatures now that the eternal Word has taken on human ears? How do the events of cross, resurrection, and ascension come to bear on God's hearing? How does the ascended Christ, in his priestly or intercessory office, inform the theological picture of God's hearing?

These questions are especially important in view of christology's relationship to soteriology. If the work of God in the coming of Christ was "for us and for our salvation," then christology must be soteriologically oriented. Indeed, I have already construed God's hearing in soteriological categories, even without proposing a thoroughgoing soteriology. The previous chapter examined the effects of God's hearing in contrast to passibilist-liberationist visions of salvation and by considering the extent to which it forms human

[1] Hebrews 5:7.

speakers in Christlikeness. In my reading of Psalm 22, God's hearing was understood to embrace the soteriological narratives of Israel, Christ, and by him, all of humanity. If God's hearing does, as I have argued, produce a sure response, then that response is efficacious, to the advantage of the one heard, and is, like all of God's *opera ad extra*, soteriologically and eschatologically oriented. So, an inquiry into God's hearing, understood in this way, must ask and answer how it is that God in the incarnate Christ has accomplished this salvation. I will gesture toward soteriological conclusions here, but will defer the bulk of them to the Conclusion.

And yet, to avoid misunderstanding, this is not to argue for a purely functional christology, if such a thing is even possible.[2] Being and act are not easily disentangled, epistemically or ontologically. Thus, the subsequent approach requires attention to both the person and work of Christ. I want to attend to the presence and activity of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, as one who is uniquely heard by the Father and who hears his own. So, I will proceed by assuming a broadly Chalcedonian christology, while attending to its soteriological telos. Further, readers looking for greater emphasis on the Spirit in this chapter will be left wanting. Of course, the Word cannot be divorced from the Spirit, neither in the *ad intra* of the divine life, nor in the *opera ad extra*. The indivisibility of the external operations is such that the Father works through the Son and by the Spirit. The Spirit will come into focus, below, when considering Christ's presence following the ascension. This is not meant to imply that the Spirit is irrelevant in, say, the earthly ministry of the incarnate Word. Yet because my intention is to reflect with acute focus on christology, the Spirit will remain largely bracketed from the discussion, even if such bracketing is not possible in the being or act of the Triune God. Speech about the Triune God is simply not able to say it all.

Specifically, it is my intention to think God's hearing through christologically. Preceding chapters have already featured christological conclusions. This is because, "No element in a system of theology is unrelated to Christology: to contemplate any of its parts is to have one's mind drawn irresistibly to the name and figure of Jesus Christ."[3] Yet here I hope to give a more thoroughgoing and focused account of how God's hearing is to be conceived in light of four christological moments—the incarnation, death, resurrection, and

[2] Gerald O'Collins, SJ, comments "[i]t is doubtful that [one] can propose a purely functional Christology, one which attends only to Christ's saving activity on our behalf and refuses to raise, explicitly or implicitly, any ontological questions whatsoever about who and what he is in himself," *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 19.

[3] John B. Webster, "Christology, Theology, Economy. The Place of Christology in Systematic Theology" in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology Volume 1: God and the Works of God*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2016), p. 57.

ascension—of the Word made flesh. Given that Christ is the Always-Heard Word, it will be shown that he is not only heard by the Father, but is also the one by whom the Father hears us.

5.1 Incarnation

In the economy of God's saving work, the incarnation initiates a new mode of divine hearing. We have already examined Holy Scripture's testimony to God's hearing the likes of Hagar, or the enslaved Israelites, or of God's "conversing" with Moses as one does a friend; but now the mode of God's hearing is fundamentally changed with the coming of God incarnate. Because God has eternally self-determined to become present to creation in a new way, this new mode of presence produces a corresponding new mode of divine listening. This new mode is, of course, not new to God. Newness is not possible for the eternal and immutable God insofar as it is a temporal qualifier and implies change. As was argued in Chapter 3, following Aquinas, this newness is real to creatures but "non-real" or "logical" to God.[4] It is in the creaturely experience that God's presence *becomes* something other than it was. And yet this does not mean it is somehow illusory. It is as real as any other event in creation, but is so in a creaturely manner. And it is the metaphysics of this new creaturely reality of God's presence that must be theologically explicated.

The first observation to be made about this new mode of presence is with respect to God's agency in the sending of the Son. The asymmetry between divine and human agency already led to what was only an apparent paradox in Chapter 2, namely, that it was God's hearing that precedes and is the cause of human speech unto God. This prioritization of God's hearing, following Barth and some feminist theologians, resulted in an understanding of petitionary prayer wherein Jesus Christ is God's antecedent answer to human petitions. Human petitions are made possible by God's gracious act of hearing. Human prayer to God, then, is the result of God's initiative and activity. We saw that this asymmetry of divine and human agency means that it is God who prays and God who hears. Petition, I argued, is the receiving of the gift and answer already given in Christ. And it is that *already* that characterizes God's hearing of human petition.

If the incarnation of the Word is the *already* of God's hearing, and God's complete and sufficient response to human need, then it is possible to make the claim that God's

[4] Webster is particularly clear on this matter: "In the course of his movement from immanent origin to economic goal, the Word acquires nothing, remains immutable and simple, entirely resolved and composed." in ibid., pp. 47-48.

eternal self-determination to become incarnate *just is* God's act of hearing—a self-determination to hear that precedes not only human acknowledgement and petition, but even the act of creation itself. This is the natural conclusion drawn from Barth's declaration that "Of all the things that are needed by man, and needed in such a way that he can receive them only from God, that only God can give them to him, there is one great gift. And to all the true and legitimate requests that are directed necessarily to God, there is one great answer. This one divine gift and answer is Jesus Christ."[5] The incarnation of the Word is God's *already* and God's sure response. This manifestation of the significant personal presence of God in Christ is the outworking in time of God's *already* hearing in eternity. There is then no separating God's hearing from the incarnation. That the two are in fact one is reinforced by the "sure response" of our working definition and is supported also in Barth's claim that God "wills not only to hear but to hearken [*nicht nur hören, sondern erhören will*]."[6] God's hearing *just is* God's hearkening. If God hears, God hearkens. God has heard (or, more properly, "is hearing") in eternity and has eternally willed the hearkening: the sending of the Son. It is in that hearkening, that sure response, that is the *already* of God's hearing human speech unto God. It is its foundation, its formal cause, and the means by which it becomes possible. The event of the incarnation just is God's hearing of creatures, already eternally willed, which brings about human speech to God. If the incarnation is the definitive manifestation of the significant personal presence of God by which God justly and lovingly attends to creation, then it should come as no surprise that the incarnation can be theologically conceived in terms of God's hearing. And by conceiving of it in this way, God's agency is prioritized, even as it is understood to be asymmetrical and incommensurable with human agency.

If the incarnation just is God's hearing and is a new mode by which humans experience God's hearing, then what is to be made of the old mode of hearing? Here I think it is sufficient to claim that that hearing remains what it is: the loving and just attention of God that is accomplished by means of God's significant personal presence to the hearer. Yet that hearing, that significant personal presence, can only be a proleptic version of the kind of hearing accomplished by the incarnation. It is fundamental Christian doctrine that the incarnation is a distinct and definitive kind of personal divine presence. Such a conviction does not deny the real and significant presence of God prior to the incarnation. Rather, it sees the incarnation in continuity with that presence insofar as it is the same God who becomes present to Moses and to Peter. Yet the incarnate Christ is the significant personal

[5] Barth, *CD* III/3, p. 271.

[6] Barth, *CD* II/1., pp. 511-12 = *KD* II/1, p. 575.

presence of God such that Jesus Christ is identified with Godself in a way that a burning bush, pillar of cloud, or shekinah glory could not be. The pre-incarnate hearing of God, then, can be said to anticipate the definitive kind of presence to creatures found uniquely in the incarnation.

There is a second way in which the incarnation of the Word comes to bear on God's hearing. It is not only itself God's act of hearing and hearkening, but it is also the medium by which creatures now experience being heard by God. In this new mode of divine presence, God becomes present to creatures by uniting Godself, hypostatically, with the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth. By the hypostatically uniting of divine and human natures, Jesus Christ, the God-human, becomes the locus of God's significant personal presence, such that when God hears, it is by means of Jesus Christ.[7] To speak of the locus of God's presence and hearing is not a new development with the incarnation. Indeed, the temple was understood to be the place of God's dwelling and significant personal presence, and that in a way that did no injury to divine omnipresence. Solomon's temple dedication, examined in Chapter 1, establishes the point insofar as no matter the whereabouts of the pray-er, petitions directed *toward* the temple would be heard by God (1 Ki. 8:28-49; 2 Chr. 6:19-42). Now, Emmanuel becomes the locus of God's listening presence toward whom prayers are directed. More will be said about this subsequently in its relation to Christ's resurrection and ascension, as well as the role of the Spirit. Here a few observations must be made concerning this new and specific medium by which creatures are heard by God.

The medium by which God hears is new because it unites the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, immutable and changeable, the uncreated and the created in a manner that, following Chalcedon, is unconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable. Indeed, Robert Sokolowski has argued that conciliar christology was fundamentally about maintaining the distinction between creator and creature. Thus, it has import for how that distinction is to be maintained and understood with respect to God's hearing. The distinction, Sokolowski argues, is not "an inert background for more controversial issues; it enters into their formulation and helps determine how they must be decided."[8] This "bringing together" of the infinite and the finite is *the* project of Nicaea, Constantinople, and to an even greater extent, of Ephesus and Chalcedon. These hard-fought conciliar formulations sought to take seriously the unity of God and humanity in Christ

[7] Of course, to speak instrumentally is to do so with reference to the divine economy.

[8] Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), p. 34. For a more current account of the uniting of the finite and infinite, see Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

without compromising the fundamental distinction between the two. The resulting single-hypostasis, dual-nature christology provides the orthodox grammar by which unity and diversity are to be maintained; but that grammar was especially contentious in the Nestorian controversy. In Cyril of Alexandria's dispute with Nestorius, the use of the *communicatio idiomatum* became the theological impasse. How are we to speak properly of Christ's properties if some are properly predicated of Christ's divine nature and others of his human nature? For Nestorius, it was theologically clumsy to speak of Mary as "*theotokos*" or to speak of Christ as "suffering impassibly," as Cyril does.[9] Yet for Cyril, to speak in such ways is to reinforce the single-subject which hypostasizes the two natures. For Cyril, to call Mary *merely* "c*hristotokos*" did not do justice to the single divine subject. It was God and no other whom Mary bore. This deployment of the *communicatio idiomatum* is, according to John McGuckin, "like an intellectual firework, a condensed cipher of all that [Cyril] holds to be important in Christology and faith."[10] McGuckin goes on to explain that "the *communicatio* is shorthand for [Cyril's] whole doctrine of the incarnation itself as a transforming transaction whereby human nature is appropriated by God and deified in the process."[11] When the *communicatio* is understood in this way, it allows seemingly paradoxical things to be said of the incarnate Christ, not with the intent to obscure the distinctiveness of the divine and human natures, nor to simply further confound thinking on the mystery of the incarnation. Rather, it permits seemingly paradoxical claims to be made in order to take seriously the single divine subject of which properties are predicated while acknowledging the distinctiveness of each nature.

Why this detour into the Nestorian dispute? This is crucial background for a concise yet profound claim for the incarnation and God's hearing—a thread that will run throughout my argument: the ears that were formed in Mary's womb are God's ears. The young ears that listened to the teachers in the temple are God's ears. The ears that traveled throughout Galilee hearing the voices of the lame, afflicted, and oppressed are God's ears. By way of the *communicatio idiomatum*, those ears are rightfully called the corporeal ears of the incorporeal God. What is profoundly new about God's hearing in the incarnation is that God has taken to Godself human ears by which God now hears. The eternal hearing of the immanent Trinity—God's hearing of God's Word in the eternal, blessed, glory of God's immanent life—that hearing, which was argued for in Chapter 3, is now, *mutatis mutandis*, turned outward, economically, such that God now hears with human ears. Were we to query

[9] John McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), p. 190.

[10] Ibid., p. 191.

[11] Ibid., p. 192.

the *means* of God's hearing before the incarnation, the answer given would be different than the one supplied after the incarnation. Antecedent to the incarnation, God's hearing has been understood analogously, and of far greater dissimilarity than similarity to human hearing. That analogical understanding is not abolished by the incarnation. To speak of the incarnate Christ's hearing with human ears is not to speak of God's hearing in an equivocal manner; for that hearing remains the hearing of a divine hypostasis. It is characterized by the divine perfections and is not vulnerable to postlapsarian corruptions that characterize human hearing. Yet there is a sense that in the incarnation God now hears in a more creaturely mode insofar as God has self-determined to be present in this manner. Whatever it may have meant for Moses to converse with God face to face as one does a friend, in the incarnation God is now spoken to, unequivocally, face to face.

To claim that God hears by way of human ears is to make the incarnate Christ the locus of a certain kind of qualified receptivity. The human ears of the Word hear all manner of creaturely locutions—praises and petitions, truths and falsities, questions and challenges. These are actively received by the attention of the incarnate Word. As has been argued previously, hearing is active insofar as it requires a certain kind of attention and presence, and yet it acts upon that which comes from another and is in that sense receptive. While much theological reflection is focused upon the acts of the incarnate Christ, there has been less theological attention paid to the character of receptivity introduced by the incarnation. That is not to claim that receptivity is somehow theologically novel. It has frequently found its dogmatic home in considerations of Christ's priestly office by which he mediates between God and humanity, receiving from both and giving to the both. Yet the priestly office and its resultant soteriology have too often been restricted to Christ's death (often derived from particular readings of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* where Christ is read as sacrifice)[12] or to Christ's ascension (where the mediatorial role is understood to culminate in the uniting of heaven and earth).[13] Yet Athanasius understood the incarnation to effect the beginning of the priestly office of the Word due to the taking on of human flesh. In the same way that Aaron put on the priestly garments and thus functioned in his priestly office,

[12] For a recent argument breaking with the tradition of Christ as victim, see David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), esp. Chapter 4.

[13] For example, Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019) maps the *munus triplex* onto the creed, associating the priestly office with "he ascended". Though, McFarland acknowledges the priestly office is not strictly limited to the ascension; ibid., p. 173. Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued that the earthly ministry of Jesus is best understood in prophetic terms alone. See *Systematic Theology Vol II*, trans. by G. W. Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 445-46; *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 208ff.

Athanasius argues that, likewise, the Word put on human flesh in order to serve as high priest.[14] O'Collins and Jones come to the same conclusion in two of their "Twelve Theses on Christ's Priesthood," claiming in Thesis Two that "The Son of God became a priest, or rather the High Priest, when he took on the human condition," and in Thesis Three that "The priesthood of Christ and its exercise began with the incarnation."[15] The priestly office is thus to be understood to span the entirety of the Word's incarnate life, such that the receiving and giving, the mediatorial role, is not limited to any one christological moment but runs the compass of the earthly ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.[16] To adopt such a perspective invites a priestly interpretation of Christ's receiving and giving, of divine-human mediation that illumines a christological understanding of God's hearing across the scope of the incarnate work of Christ, which we will trace subsequently.

If the incarnate ministry of the Word, who is always heard by God, is to be understood as a priestly activity, then it should be asked in what sense this is so. In his discussion of Christ's priestly office, Kenneth Oakes claims, "As priest, Jesus Christ is humanity's representative before God, intercedes on our behalf before the Father, fulfils the Law by remaining obedient in life (active obedience), and atones for the sin of humanity by his suffering and death (passive obedience)."[17] While remaining an incomplete profile of the priestly work of the incarnate Christ, such a description provides an instructive framework for considering God's hearing by way of the priestly ministry of the incarnate Word—a framework that will also extend to cross, resurrection, and ascension.

First, Jesus represents humanity before God. As one who hears with human ears and is always heard by the Father, Jesus speaks to the Father on behalf of his disciples, and he speaks to his disciples on behalf of his Father. This mediatorial and representative role is richly, if compactly, described in the Fourth Gospel's so-called "High Priestly Prayer". Whether or not the designation is entirely appropriate, the prayer contains mediatorial and representative features.[18] Here, Jesus looks back to survey the compass of his earthly

[14] Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians" in Philip Schaff (ed.) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, Athanasius: Select Works and Letters* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2.8.

[15] Gerald O'Collins, SJ and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 241-42.

[16] See also Kenneth Oakes, "Normative Protestant Christology" in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. by Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 579.

[17] Ibid., p. 577.

[18] The designation of the prayer as such is most often attributed to 16th c. Reformed theologian David Chytraeus, but its priestly features are noted as early as Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on John (11.8). Attridge nonetheless notes that "we can affirm that the Fathers… and other scholars who have found priestly allusions in this text are not simply fantasizing." in Harold Attridge, "How Priestly is

ministry, and looks forward to his return to glory. He declares to the Father, "for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them" (17:8). Jesus has spoken the words of the Father to his disciples. His disciples have heard those words and received them. Jesus spoke to his disciples on behalf of the Father. He now speaks to the Father "on behalf of" his disciples (17:9). Jesus, as the locus of this bi-lateral speaking, is one who addresses earth with the words of heaven and heaven with the words of earth. Yet it ought not to be missed that this bi-lateral speaking is a function of his bi-lateral hearing. In this particular prayer, Jesus addresses his Father and in so doing speaks "these things in the world" (17:13). The phrase is relevant because expositors link this public prayer with Jesus' public prayer at the raising of Lazarus (11:42) when he both declared himself the Always-Heard-Word and prays aloud for others to hear. Barrett remarks,

> If ταῦτα refers to the prayer, cf. 11.42, where Jesus prays aloud διὰ τὸν ὄχλον. He himself, as the eternal Son in perpetual communion with the Father, has no need of the formal practice of prayer; but this human practice is the only means by which the communion he enjoys can be demonstrated to human observation, and forms the pattern for the communion which his disciples will subsequently enjoy.[19]

The priestly prayer of Chapter 17 and the prayer at Lazarus' grave in Chapter 11 are both didactic. Jesus intends to be overheard. By overhearing, the disciples have learnt that Jesus is not only always heard by the Father, but that he speaks to the Father on their behalf. His disciples have heard the Father's word from Jesus (17:14). They have overheard Jesus pray their needs to the Father at the tomb of Lazarus (11:41-2), in the upper room (17:9), and presumably elsewhere. They have overheard that Jesus is always heard (11:42). They have been invited, as an audience, into the dialogical communion between the Father and Son. And yet Jesus' prayer is that the disciples would be more than an audience who has heard his words. The prayer concludes with a purpose: "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (17:26). Indeed, all that the disciples have heard is for the purpose that the love of the Father for the Son—a love that includes God's listening ear—may be in them. The disciples overhear in order that they, too, may be heard by the Father. This is a constitutive element in the love between Father and Son.

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the 'High Priestly Prayer' of John 17?" in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 75.1 (Jan 2013), p. 11.

[19] C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), p. 509. See also, D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 564.

To summarize, the incarnate Christ, the Always-Heard-Word, the one who hears with human ears, hears the words of his Father and speaks them to his disciples. Further, he hears the words of his disciples and speaks them to his Father. This loving, dialogical communion between the Father and the Son is to be manifest in the disciples. And the priestly office of the incarnate Christ, insofar as it is marked by bi-lateral speaking and hearing, effects a salvific outcome, namely, that the disciples may speak to and be heard by the Father (though, not in the exact same way that the divine Son is heard by the Father). While Jesus prays that this dialogical love of the Father "would be in them," he adds, "and I in them." Indeed, Jesus remains mediatorial, even in the disciples' experience of the filial love. The disciples do not replace him as mediator, but Jesus prays that his dialogical communion with the Father would be experienced in them.

Second, in his priestly office, the incarnate Christ is one who fulfills the law by his active obedience. In Chapter 1, we observed the consistency with which the Scriptures declare that God wills not to hear covenant unfaithfulness. It was observed that Jesus' obedience to the Father's commandments (Jn 15:10) was grounds, *inter alia*, for the Father's unwavering hearing of the incarnate Son. The point is supported here from the priestly perspective. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes the most substantial case for understanding Christ's law-fulfillment as a priest in connection to God's hearing. Hebrews 4:14-5:10 emphasizes the humanity of the divine Son and the accompanying obedience as a high priest. This is done in two ways. First, v. 15 insists that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." Here there is an implicit acknowledgement of the impeccable obedience of the Son as high priest and mediator. To have a tempted-yet-obedient mediator is grounds for a bold approach to the throne of grace in v. 16. Yet the connection between the Son's obedience in v. 15 and the "bold approach" in v. 16 is only tacit. The connection is only fleshed out in what follows. The humanity of the divine Son and his faithful obedience as high priest is further spelled out, second, in v. 5:7: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." Here Jesus is portrayed as a high priest who makes an offering, not of the blood of bulls and goats, but an offering of "prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears."[20] Significantly, he is heard on account of his "reverent submission" (*ἀπὸ τῆς*

[20] While Attridge insists that this is not a reference to Gethsemane, as it is often taken to be, Bruce McCormack suggests that it is "Attridge's own solution to this problem that opens the door to [the possibility that it refers to Gethsemane]." See Bruce L McCormack, "With Loud Cries and Tears" in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver,

εὐλαβείας)—a notoriously vexed translation.[21] But whatever may be made of the translation, the logic of the passage connects God's hearing of Jesus "in the days of his flesh" with the broader themes of sinlessness (4:15), obedience (5:8), and perfection (5:9), which account for Jesus being "designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (5:10). The notions of priesthood and obedience are brought together here and then connected to God's hearing. Moreover, it seems that, for the author of Hebrews, Jesus has been designated a priest by God *on account of* his obedience that resulted in Jesus being heard. If this is the case, Jesus is heard *because of* his covenant faithfulness and obedience; and that obedience and resultant hearing are the grounds of his priestly office. He fulfills the law and is heard by the Father. He is, thus, one who may represent God's people before God. This perfectly obedient priest who fulfills the law of God and lives faithfully to the covenant is the one who is, as such, always heard by God.

The incarnation is then the hearing and hearkening of God to creatures, but also the *how* of God's hearing. The sending of the Son is God's act of hearing which precedes and thus prompts human petition to God. And insofar as it is the taking of human ears to Godself, the incarnation is now the *how* of God's hearing. The incorporeal God hears with the corporeal ears of Jesus of Nazareth. The incarnate Christ's priestly office, which spans the compass of the incarnate life of the Word and is marked by both receiving and giving, is the mediatorial lens through which God's hearing may be illumined. In his priestly office, the incarnate Christ gives and receives, mediates between God and humanity, and does so perfectly, as one who has fulfilled the law faithfully and, on account of his doing so, is always heard by the Father.

5.2 Death

With the trial and crucifixion of the Incarnate Word, we approach a new christological moment that invites further reflection on God's hearing. Considered from the perspectives of Biblical narrative, conciliar christology, and the priestly office, light is shed upon the character of God's hearing in and through the Incarnate Christ. If the incarnation is the *how* of God's hearing, its means, then, something must be said about the *who* of this *how*. If ears

Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), p. 65.

[21] Attridge notes that the translation is troubled by both the preposition, which could just as easily mean "from", and the noun, which has "caution" or "circumspection" as its basic sense. Yet he notes that the *εὐλαβ-* word group in Hebrews is most often a reference to awe or reverence for God. That this reverence or awe is marked by a kind of submission or obedience is then, by most translations, inferred from what follows in verse 8. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, pp. 151-52.

are attached to whole persons, as was claimed in the preceding chapter, then we must ask what it means for God to hear by means of the Crucified One. What does the *who* of the One who was crucified in humility, anguish, and silence mean for the *how* of God's hearing in Christ?

First, a consideration of the Biblical narrative of the Always-Heard-Word's trial and crucifixion is revealing. The *Who?* question is fundamental to the trial, insofar as the ambiguity of Jesus' special relationship to the Father is an inciting (but by no means solitary) cause. The question put to Jesus by the Pharisees in John 8, "Who are you?" is the question around which the Johannine trial is structured. And it is no surprise that Jesus responds to their question with the declaration that he is the one who has heard from the Father (8:25). He then proposes how that identity will be confirmed: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me" (8:28). Thus, the *Who?* question is central and could be paraphrased, "Is this the one who truly hears from God and is always heard by God in the special way in which he claims?" The claims of being heard by the Father and truly hearing from the Father are central to the authority which he tacitly claims for himself—an authority that brings him into conflict with the religious leaders.[22] That the incarnate Word is willing "to be pushed out of this world onto the cross,"[23]—to use Bonhoeffer's famous description—on account of his claim to be the Always-Heard-Word who truly hears from the Father—this is revealing for the character and nature of God's hearing.

Rachel Muers, following Bonhoeffer, has pursued the question of christological hearing with special focus on the *Who?* question. She notes that "Christ appears in Bonhoeffer's writings as the 'humiliated one,' offering no unambiguous manifestations of power, speaking in a way that cannot enforce a hearing."[24] Without a wholesale endorsement of Bonhoeffer's christology, there is much to be gleaned by reflection on God's hearing in and through the humility of the incarnate Word. For, despite being the one always heard by the Father, and the one who truly hears the Father, the incarnate Christ is one who comes in humility such that he may go unheard by the world. That humility reveals a fundamental characteristic of God's hearing. It is marked by the same humility that does not exercise force or dominating power. God's ears are attached to this one who is patient

[22] Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 334-43 for an explication of this conflict of authority.

[23] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), p. 360.

[24] Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 77, 118ff. Here I am broadly following Muers' argument.

and long-suffering of human speech, enduring its infelicities and even its violence, out of love. The character of this patient hearing is on full display in the ironic silence of God's Word before Pilate, and it finds its consummate demonstration at Golgotha, where humility and long-suffering are exercised to the limits of human life. Considering the crucifixion in this way permits two possible conclusions. First, God's Word prioritizes listening over speaking. The incarnate one is not only God's Word but also God's ears. As such, Jesus' earthly ministry may be viewed from the perspective of speaking and listening. If that earthly ministry is viewed in its entirety, such that the whole of it is characterized by its violent terminus at the cross, then we find a prioritization of reception over activity, humility over power, listening over speaking. In the crucifixion we find the consummate prioritization of humble, receptive listening over controlling, active speaking. As I have consistently argued, this humble, receptive listening is not passive, but active. The case is made more strongly at the cross, for the crucifixion was the will of the incarnate Word, who claimed, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again" (John 10:18). When we ask about thecharacter of God's hearing revealed in the crucifixion of the incarnate Word, we find a prioritization of listening over speaking that is a listening-even-unto-death. Second, in the humility and long-suffering that terminates in the crucifixion, we find a hearing that gives abundant dignity, agency, and freedom to the other. This kind of listening makes room for human speech unto God, even corrupted, violent speech. At the cross, the hearing of the incarnate Word has bestowed a dignity on human freedom and agency insofar as it is allowed to be what it is, and is not overpowered, diminished, or spoken down by the Word. The freedom to speak, even wrongfully, is permitted by the ears of God which hung on the cross. The principle is evident in the Psalter, as accusations, frustrations, and disappointments are brought before the ears of God. Now, at the cross, the principle is consummately displayed as error and even violence are permitted on account of the dignity of human freedom and agency permitted by the ears of God. The one who listens with long-suffering and patience, even unto death, will not contravene on human freedom in order to be heard.

Second, if we ask the *Who?* question from the perspective of conciliar christology, we are reminded that in the crucifixion of the incarnate one the listening of God is crucified. The crucifixion is the human rejection of God's listening ears. If God's listening is God's loving and just attention accomplished by God's significant personal presence—a presence that is supremely manifest in the coming of the incarnate Word, then the crucifixion is the outright rejection of God's personal presence that just is God's listening. If the incarnation is, as argued above, God's act of listening itself, then the crucifixion of Christ is just the

rejection and crucifixion of the listening of God, of God's personal presence. In the crucifixion we find the rejection of God's hearing and the acceptance of flawed and self-assured human speech. The world's "no" to God's presence and "yes" to self is manifest at the cross. It is a rejection of God's prioritization of listening over speaking by the shouting down of God's listening presence. The cross is the triumph of human speech over divine listening, a guilty verdict pronounced on God's listening, and an affirmation of the human word over the divine Word. The one who is both God's Word and God's ears is crucified in a wholesale rejection of God. This rejection is, then, not only the rejection of God's hearing presence, but of the formative soteriological benefits of God's hearing. If, as the previous chapter argued, human beings are formed by being heard, then the crucifixion is a rejection of that advantageous formation that attends God's hearing.

Yet the crucifixion is not only the rejection of God's hearing but also the gracious means by which that rejection is overcome. This is evident, third, when the crucifixion is viewed from the perspective of Christ's priestly office. The cross is the place where the one who is both the Word and ears of God fulfills the Law through active obedience and atones for the sin of humanity. Here I do not intend an endorsement of any particular theory of atonement, but only wish to suggest that the incarnate Word, from the perspective of the priestly office, has fulfilled the Law through active obedience unto death. The claim is supported with unique insights for God's hearing, again, from the Epistle to the Hebrews. The epistle's themes of sinlessness, law-fulfillment, and obedience are taken up again in Chapter 10 with regard to atonement. If it was "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4), as the author argues, then it must be asked how the incarnate Word as priest is able to do so "once for all" (10:10). Here I simply wish to demonstrate that the effectiveness of the gracious, atoning work done by this priest is accomplished, in part, due to his ears.

The passage is a quotation of Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX 39:7-9) and is the crux of the argument being made in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews makes the incarnate Word the speaker of the quotation. The author claims that "when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God."'" The passage has been the site of debates about atonement theory and whether or not Christ's death is a satisfaction of some divine precedent. Having neither desire nor knowledge to adjudicate the question, it is my intention to make a more modest, if slightly speculative, observation that illumines a feature of the Word's hearing with regard to the atonement. The argument of Hebrews is that the incarnate Word, as high priest, has made an offering for the atonement of sins. The question in dispute is *what* it is

that has been offered. The author of Hebrews is in clear reliance on the Septuagint, which diverges significantly from the Masoretic Text. While the LXX reads, "a body you have prepared for me,"[25] the Hebrew text reads, "ears hast thou dug for me" or as the NRSV translates, "you have given me an open ear." If we follow the Hebrew text rather than the LXX, we have a specific reference to the incarnate Word describing the human ears given him by God. It remains an unresolvable question why the LXX translated אָזְנַיִם as *σῶμα*,[26] but the Hebrew, had it been available and quoted by the author of Hebrews, would have been consistent with the argument being made. For whatever the extent the *body* of this priest is relevant for the argument, the theme of obedience is consistently present throughout. Attridge suggests that the Hebrew text of the Psalm and its "vivid image of hollowing out the ears, in the Hebrew original, suggests the willing obedience that stands ready to hear and execute God's command."[27] This willing obedience of the open ear stands in contrast to the sacrifices and offerings that God did not desire (Heb 10:5, Ps. 40:6) and is consistent with the "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God" of Hebrews 10:7 and the "I delight to do your will, O my God" of Psalm 40:8. Put more concisely, the Hebrew Psalmist is ready to hear and obey the word of the one who hollowed his ear, and he understands this obedient hearing to be preferable to animal sacrifices. To hear and obey the word of the one who created the ear is a superior offering, and that upon which effective atonement is predicated.

If we return to the text of Hebrews and its implications for the hearing of the incarnate Word, several conclusions might be drawn. First, the obedient hearing of the incarnate Word gains greater focus, as it shifts the balance of imagery in the text away from the sacrifice of a *body*, even if not entirely.[28] In the light of Psalm 40, it could be suggested that Christ's obedient hearing of the father is more fundamentally the grounds for the atonement, rather than the offering of his body. While this is hardly a radical or unorthodox conclusion, it does bring special emphasis to the incarnate Word's hearing of the Father in the atonement discussion and more central to understandings of the crucifixion. So, when we attend to the Hebrew text of Psalm 40, we find greater reason to see the cross and accompanying atonement as the result of the Always-Heard Word's obedient hearing of the Father. Second, this reading of the Hebrews text confirms Barth's *nicht nur hören, sondern erhören will* as well as the "sure response" of our working definition. The incarnate Word's

[25] Attridge notes that later LXX revisers, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion corrected "body" to "ears", Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 274, n. 70.

[26] Attridge's suggestion that it is simply "an interpretive paraphrase for the obscure Hebrew phrase" seems plausible. Ibid., p. 274.

[27] Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 274. See, esp. n. 83 where Attridge acknowledges a similar imagery and purpose in Is. 50:5.

[28] The sacrifice of the body still features in 10:10.

hearing is hearkening. The obedience of the Son is as sure as his hearing of the Father. The Son's hearing of the Father is the Son's hearkening to the Father. Third, if the image does not entirely shift away from the body of the incarnate Word, and if that "body" is a kind of interpretive synecdoche for the "ears" that have been "hollowed out" of the body of this high priest, then it may be suggested that not only the body but more specifically the obedient ears of the incarnate Word have been crucified to accomplish the atonement. From the Johannine perspective, it is the Son's unwavering obedience to the Father that results in his trial and crucifixion. The one who hears and obeys is the one who is crucified on account of that hearing and obeying. Obedient ears get one crucified. Fourth, with respect to atonement theory, this reading offers additional insights to exemplar models insofar as the incarnate Word, in humility and long-suffering, hears the word of God and hearkens, perfectly, even unto death. If Christ's obedient hearing of the Father is grounds for the salvation of the world, then the beneficence of such an obedient hearing should not be underestimated.

Yet the death of the Always-Heard Word does not exhaust the christological implications of God's hearing. For the crucifixion is, by some measure, the silencing of the one who claimed to hear and be heard, and the stopping up of those ears by which he hears. The Word that claimed to be Always-Heard by the Father, who claimed to perfectly hear and hearken at the voice of the Father, and who claimed to hear the words of his disciples and speak them perfectly to the Father—this one is crucified as a blasphemer for this very hearing and speaking. The trial and crucifixion are, in one sense, predicated on the questions: Does this one truly hear from God? Is this one truly heard by God in the special way in which he claims?

5.3 Resurrection

In the resurrection we find the vindication of the one who made such claims about his communicative relationship with the Father. Following the Biblical narrative, four distinct claims made by the Son are vindicated by the Father's raising him from the dead. First, the resurrection vindicates the claim that Jesus is the Word who is always heard by the Father (Jn. 11:42). This claim was, of course, questioned by Jesus' enemies in his own day. In the dispute over the man born blind whom Jesus healed, it is implied that Jesus' enemies thought he could not be heard by God because they understood his actions, especially apparent sabbath violations, to violate the Law. Quoting back to Jesus' enemies their own understanding, the healed man asserts, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes form, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to

sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will" (Jn 9:30-31). The narrative gives us this ambiguity: is Jesus a sinner to whom God does not listen or is he the one he claims to be, the one heard by the Father? If Jesus is tried and crucified as a condemned Law-breaker and blasphemer in light of this ambiguity, the resurrection may be understood as the Father's vindication of Jesus' claim to be heard.

Second and correlatively, the resurrection vindicates the claim that God is the Father by whom Jesus claimed to be heard. The resurrection is God's "yes" not only to Jesus as the incarnate Word, but is God's "yes" to Godself insofar as the Father confirms that he both speaks to and hears the Son, just as Jesus claimed. Jesus' bold assertion that "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me" (Jn. 8:28)—this anticipates the vindication of not only Jesus, but of the truthfulness of the Father who instructs him.

Third, the resurrection vindicates the claim that the Son has heard from the Father and truthfully spoken what he has heard. This is the claim that Jesus makes in the farewell prayer. Speaking to the Father, Jesus acknowledges, "the words you gave to me I have given to [the disciples], and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me" (Jn 17:8). In the resurrection we have the Father's confirmation of this claim. The Father has spoken to the Son. The Son has heard the voice of the Father and spoken the Father's words truthfully to his disciples.

Finally, the resurrection vindicates the claim that the Son has heard his disciples and truthfully spoken to the Father on their behalf. The words offered "on behalf of" in the farewell prayer (Jn. 17:9, 20) are vindicated by the Father's "yes" to the Son, confirming that the Father has heard the prayers of the Son, which include prayer for his present and future disciples.

The resurrection, then, is God's "yes" to the incarnate Word and the claims made regarding the hearing and speaking between Father and Son, as well as the hearing and speaking between the incarnate Word and his disciples. These claims to bi-lateral speaking and hearing, which were foundational for the ministry of the Word in the Fourth Gospel, are validated and confirmed by the Father's raising of the Son. In the resurrection, the Son is confirmed to be the one he claimed to be, the Always-Heard Word who hears his Father, as well as his disciples, and speaks truthfully what he hears.

When we return to the perspective of conciliar christology, to the notion that the corporeal ears of Jesus of Nazareth are, in fact, the ears of God, we are confronted with a

new way the resurrection informs our understanding of God's hearing. If the presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth is properly understood as God's listening presence, God's very act of hearing, then the resurrection, first, is the triumph of God's listening over fallible, erroneous human speech. God's listening has the "final word" so to speak. Sinful efforts to "shout down" the Word incarnate appear successful at the cross but are revealed as unsuccessful and impotent in the resurrection of God's listening presence. The resurrection of God's listening presence is God's gracious provision to hear and overcome corrupt human speech. It is the unstopping of God's ears which were stopped at the crucifixion. God's listening presence, which is loving and just, endures and overcomes despite the human speech that intentionally or unintentionally opposes it. In the raising of God's listening presence, God affirms God's own listening presence in and to a world marked by erroneous, corrupt human speech.

Second, in God's "yes" to God's own hearing of human sin and rebellion, this act of grace makes real and present in God's listening the transformative effects discussed in the preceding chapter. To be lovingly, justly, and graciously heard by God, in all the fallibility of human speech makes possible the transformative effects that result from being truly and perfectly heard and understood by an other. Liberation from loneliness, interpersonal intimacy, the ability to love without fear, a fundamental change in self-understanding, etc.—these are all made possible on account of the resurrection. More still, God's gracious listening that is "closer" or infinitely more proximate to human speech than the speaker herself—this listening permits an honesty and safety of the most authentic of existential human thoughts and feelings to be spoken to God. God's listening triumphs over those thoughts and feelings, no matter how unholy. The rawness of human experience, so frequently displayed in the Psalms, can be brought to God in the confidence that if God's listening was not overwhelmed by its rejection at the cross, it will certainly not be overwhelmed by any other human speech brought to God. In the resurrection, the omnipotence of God's listening is put on display as it overcomes, endures, and transforms.

Yet in the first chapter it was argued that God will, in fact, decline to hear covenant unfaithfulness. Here, in the resurrection, we find God's gracious triumph over covenant unfaithfulness. The result is that, third, in the resurrection God has made a way to for the sinner to be heard anew by God. The resurrection's triumph over human sin, over the rejection of God's listening presence, is the triumph of God's willingness to hear those who have made themselves unhearable. The resurrection is good news for human speech of even the most error-laden and corrupt kind, because in the raising of God's listening presence, God makes Godself available anew to hear those who have rejected God's listening presence. There is a new and living hope for covenant-breakers. While God may decline to

hear, this need not be the final word. In its triumph over sin and death, the resurrection demonstrates the victory of God's hearing—a victory that is eschatological and has the final word. In the darkness of human rebellion which God declines to hear, there remains a hope that God will, in the end, hear.

Related, fourth, is that the Always-Heard Word was crucified for listening to the most unlikely of human speakers: the poor, prostitutes, tax collectors, and other so-called "sinners". In the resurrection, the one who hears the unheard is vindicated in that hearing. Consistent with God's hearing those in the wilderness, as examined in Chapter 1, the resurrection authorizes the listening ministry of the incarnate Word as a listening consistent with God's self-revelation in the Old Testament. God's hearing of the Israelites in Egyptian slavery, or the cries of barren women, or the Psalmist crying out from a place of alienation and fear—God's ear is again shown to be especially inclined to the marginalized, as this hearing is carried on in the earthly ministry of the incarnate Word and is then vindicated by the resurrection. The resurrection, in this way, makes good on God's threat to Israel in Exodus 22:21-27, where God warns Israel not to oppress the alien, widow, or orphan, for just as God heard the Israelite cries in Egyptian slavery, so too would God hear the cries of those whom Israel oppresses. The incarnate Word is crucified, in part, for his listening presence among those outcasts. As a result, he himself becomes an outcast. And as one who has become the oppressed enemy of Israel, who "suffered outside the city gate", he, too, is heard on account of that oppression and alienation, is delivered from death, and raised to new life.

Lastly, in the resurrection we have not only the triumph and vindication of God's listening, but also its glorification. The resurrection of God's listening presence inaugurates an eschatological and proleptic reality for God's listening that exceeds the finite, ante-glorified limitations of the incarnate Word. Scripture and theology have reflected on the unique properties of the glorified body of the incarnate Word and its relation to created history. The glorified Christ continues to hear with the corporeal ears of Jesus of Nazareth, but does so in a way that transcends prior spatiotemporal constraints. Limits of space do not permit an argument for the resurrected Christ's relationship to spatiotemporal history. Others have noted its continuity and discontinuity.[29] Here, if the discontinuity is to be

[29] Scripture speaks of Christ appearing and disappearing before the disciples (Lk. 24:36-37, Jn. 20:19, 26). Recently, Ian A. McFarland has argued that the resurrection cannot be conceived as an historical event insofar as it does not happen in the "spatiotemporal matrix of cause and effect," in *The Word Made Flesh*, p. 165. Barth desired to maintain greater continuity, insisting that the resurrection must belong to human history, but argued that the resurrection occupied a kind of "second history" that follows after any normal person's history would end. Cf. *CD* III/2, p. 441. Similar to Barth, T.F. Torrance sought to maintain the resurrection's continuity with human spatiotemporal history but also acknowledged its discontinuity in that it "bursts through the structures and limitations of space and

acknowledged, even minimally, then it becomes conceivable for the glorified body of the incarnate Word to continue hearing corporeally, but to do so in a way that is supratemporal and supraspatial. For the ears of the incarnate Word, which are the ears of God, are now *glorified* human ears. This anticipates, proleptically, the eschatological means of God's hearing, whereby God continues to hear through the God-human ears of the incarnate Word. The resurrection makes possible the christological shape of God's hearing in the eschaton, when the incarnate Word will hear all and everywhere, and do so by means of his incarnate, corporeal faculties.

Finally, how does the resurrection inform the priestly office? To return to Hebrews 5:7, this high priest was heard, with loud cries and tears, on account of his reverent submission or obedience. The resurrection is God's hearing of the perfect offering of this high priest on behalf of fallen humanity. This is more than simply claiming that the resurrection vindicates the claims of the incarnate Word in his earthly ministry. It goes further, as the ultimate and final hearing of the Father, of this high priest's offering on behalf of the world. There is dispute about whether or not the "loud cries and tears" are a reference to Gethsemane.[30] If Gethsemane is taken to be the apex of Jesus' agony in prayer, then there is good reason to think that phrase, while not necessarily exclusively referring to the garden, ought at least to include it in its purview. One might wonder how the earliest readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews might have understood this phrase. It seems probable that those familiar with the passion narrative, as recorded in the Gospels, could have imagined this as a reference to Gethsemane. Additionally, that these prayers are offered to "the one who was able to save him from death," certainly brings the passion (and with it, the resurrection) into view alongside the "loud cries and tears." Regardless of whether the referent is specific to Gethsemane or to some more general, composite understanding of the tenor of Jesus' prayers,[31] the picture Hebrews supplies is of a high priest, offering not an animal sacrifice, but offering (*προσφέρω*) prayers and supplications to the one who was able to save him from death. That this high priest was heard is an indication that the offering of prayers and supplications was accepted. And that hearing was proved in the fact that he *was* delivered from death—not by avoiding it, but by overcoming it, in God's raising him from

time as we know them where historical, social and human institutions in a fallen world are hopelessly infected by sin and selfishness," *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), p. 88.

[30] Attridge notes no less than seven commentators who take this as an allusion to Gethsemane. Yet Attridge notes that the Gospels lack this description of Jesus' prayer and that it would be difficult to claim Jesus' prayer for the cup to be removed had been heard. Attridge, *Hebrews,* p. 148.

[31] Attridge also notes that the description is consistent with the "traditional Jewish ideal of a righteous person's prayer" *Hebrews,* p. 148-49.

the dead.[32] Such a conclusion is consistent with the theological reflection of Psalm 22 in the previous chapter. The one who cries out, "My God, my God" is the one who is heard, consoled, and delivered. In Hebrews, that this high priest who cried out in loud cries and tears and was, in fact, heard, is proven by the resurrection itself. This deliverance from death, then, becomes the ultimate hearing of the incarnate Word, the accepting of his offering that was heard on account of his "obedient suffering".[33]

The resurrection, then, is good news. It vindicates the claims of the incarnate Word to be the one who hears from and is heard by the Father, as well as the one who speaks truthfully what he hears from his Father to his followers and from his followers to his Father. The resurrection means that God's hearing triumphs over human speaking; it realizes the gracious effects of God's hearing for those who cry out to God; it makes those who have made themselves unhearable able to be heard as it overcomes covenant unfaithfulness and human sin, and it proves once more, and ultimately, that God will hear those whom the world will not, the marginalized and oppressed. The resurrection is God's ultimate act of hearing, wherein we find God's hearing of God's own incarnate Word and God's "yes" to the offering of the high priest who intercedes in prayers, supplications, and a life of obedience, for a fallen world.

5.4 Ascension

With the ascension we are confronted no longer with the presence but the absence of the incarnate Word, the absence of the very listening presence of God. With the cessation of post-resurrection appearances and with Christ's move into "the direction of the mystery of *divine* space, which is utterly concealed from man,"[34] we are confronted with a new christological moment. If God's hearing is conceived of as significant personal presence, how is God's hearing to be understood in light of Christ's removal from created time and space? It cannot simply mean a return to the pre-incarnate experience of being heard by God, as if the incarnation was without continuing effect. No, the Always-Heard Word is now *with* the One who always hears him. The one who heard others and spoke to the Father

[32] That the author of Hebrews understands "able to deliver him from death" as realized in the resurrection seems certain, in contrast to the more suspect notion that Christ was not, in fact, delivered due to his death on the cross.

[33] Here I am in broad agreement with Muers' treatment of the resurrection as God's act of hearing Christ, but am neglecting the broader, important theme of silence with which she is concerned; see *Keeping God's Silence*, pp. 72-73.

[34] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 125. Italics original.

on their behalf is now *with* the Father who hears him, at his right hand. The corporeal ears of the incorporeal God—the ears by which God has self-determined to hear creatures—are now exalted to the "place" of God's omnipotence. If this exaltation and session mark the completion of the mission of the Son, the ascension, then, may be understood as "the goal of [the Son's] activity on earth and in history."[35] It is, as Barth argues, the bringing together of God's grace and omnipotence. As such, it informs the christological shape of God's hearing in several ways.

First, the marriage of grace and omnipotence at the ascension reveals the incarnate Word's ongoing listening presence. Matthew concludes his Gospel by overtly bringing together divine power ("All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.") and the ongoing grace of divine presence ("And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."). In so doing, Matthew anticipates the new mode by which God's power and gracious presence are experienced by those who are heard by God. While the human nature hypostasized by the Word no longer occupies the same earthly spatiotemporal matrix, his power and presence remain undiminished. The incarnate Word remains God's listening presence; and that presence is in no wise diminished after the ascension. It becomes, rather, the significant personal presence of the incarnate Word now mediated by the Holy Spirit. The argument is made concisely by Ian McFarland when he claims,

> Because (as Paul puts it) 'the Lord *is* the Spirit,' through the Spirit we are enabled to see 'the glory of the [incarnate] Lord,' with the result that we 'are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:17-18; cf. 1 Cor. 6:17; 15:45). In this way (and contrary to the impression one might get from passages like John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7), the Holy Spirit is not a replacement for Jesus, but that which mediates Jesus' own presence.[36]

It is for this reason that Holy Scripture sometimes refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" or "the Spirit of the Son" (Phil 1:19; Acts 16:7; Gal 4:6). The Holy Spirit of God is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As such, the Spirit mediates the very listening presence of the incarnate Word, as a gift of grace, to those who speak to him in his risen and ascended state. The new space and time of the incarnate Word, who is present at God's right hand of power, is mediated in a new way by God's Spirit such that he continues to hear corporeally, but in a new way.

[35] Ibid.

[36] McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh*, p. 188. Italics original.

The new presence of the incarnate Word—this listening presence—should not be understood as lesser on account of his invisibility, but greater, on account of his indwelling Spirit. It was, indeed, better that Jesus go away (Jn 16:7). The corporeal hearing of the incarnate Word is not diminished on account of the ascension but perfected, because consistent with the non-contrastive account of transcendence developed and maintained throughout this work, the ascended Christ's corporeal ears are not now more distant, but rather nearer, as the indwelling Spirit mediates the presence of those ears to human hearts. While it may appear paradoxical to suggest that the ascended Christ's ears could be both corporeal *and* more proximate in their absence, I take the claim to be coherent on account of two convictions: that the Word remains incarnate and corporeal, even at God's right hand, in God's place and time; that the Word's presence is, post-Pentecost, mediated perfectly by the Spirit. I take the apparent paradox to lie not in the notion of corporeal ears that are absent but proximate to creatures, but in the nature of eschatological reality that is mediated by the Spirit and proleptically experienced in the present. It is, thus, for good reason that Ephesians connects Christ's ascension with gift giving (Eph. 4:7-14). This gracious gift of divine presence, mediated by God's Spirit, accounts for the proximity and perfect hearing of the ascended, incarnate Word's corporeal ears—an eschatological gift given proleptically to those in whom the Spirit of Jesus dwells, and that for the good of the Church.

Second, the marriage of grace and omnipotence at the ascension reveals the incarnate Word's ongoing mediatorship. It is at the ascension that the priestly ministry reaches its apex. Because the Always-Heard Word is now with God, at God's right hand, in God's space and time, yet infinitely proximate to his own via God's Spirit, he is able to hear and intercede on behalf of those who speak to him in an ultimate way. Hebrews describes this high priest as one who has "passed through the heavens" (4:14), one who "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3), one who was told to "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (1:13), and one who is now "crowned with glory and honor" (2:9). This high priest has been exalted in this way because, although like a high priest who entered "the inner shrine behind the curtain" (6:19-20), he didn't enter "a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24). Thus, in the words of Hebrews, "the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up" (8:1-2). This rich temple imagery reveals the exalted, ascended, incarnate Word who hears from and intercedes for his people, as absolutely present in God's place, triumphantly mediating between God and humanity. In the ascension the mission of mediation is accomplished and

fulfilled by a cosmic high priest who continues to hear with human ears, but does so in God's place and time at God's right hand of power.

Hebrews' teaching on the mediatorship of this ascended high priest is supplemented and pneumatologized by Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Triumphantly, 8:34 declares, "It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us." It is on account of the death, resurrection, and ascension that Paul so triumphantly declares that "If God is for us, who is against us?" For Paul, Christ's ascension and intercession at God's right hand are at the heart of the gospel of grace. God's grace and God's power are so triumphantly brought together here in the intercessory work of the ascended mediator that Paul cannot fathom anything capable of overcoming this act of divine love (8:35-39). But how is such victorious power and grace to be experienced by God's people? Paul, just prior to this triumphant declaration reflects on human weakness and frailty. Here, instead of speaking of Christ's intercession, he speaks of the Spirit interceding "with sighs too deep for words," declaring that "God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (8:26-7). We might say that the Spirit brings the words of Jesus' followers to Jesus' ears, and Jesus' words to the Father's ears. There is no need to entertain a double intercession or mediation—one of the Spirit and one of the Son. Rather, if the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, then we have here another description of the operative mode of Christ's mediating presence. He continues to hear his own and intercede for them, even when they do not know what to say. He does so by his Spirit—even as this remains an indivisibly singular act of the Triune God.

Third, the marriage of grace and omnipotence at the ascension brings human nature, and with it, human ears, into God's time and space. The bringing of human nature into God's place "is the source of our hope and the fountain from which every good thing flows from God to us. Since Christ has entered the heavenly kingdom in our own flesh, we can hope to inherit eternal life with him."[37] When human nature and, with it, human hearing are brought into God's place, they are glorified and, in one sense, deified. That is, with the ascension there is hope that human hearing will, in glory, become God-like in its freedom from sinful self-interest, fallibility and frailty, and less constrained when brought to God's "place". If the ascended, incarnate Word continues to hear with corporeal ears, and continues by his Spirit as God's listening presence among creatures, then there is hope that that very corporeal hearing will be one of the blessed benefits of eternity with God. This is

[37] Randall C. Zachman, "The Christology of John Calvin" in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 293.

not to claim that all who are in Christ will exercise, identically, the privileges of the one who sits at the right hand of God. Rather, it is to suggest that there is hope that, in the gracious taking of human hearing into God's place, that human hearing itself will experience in its own way the unique power of God found in God's place.

Such hope should not become too individualistic in its focus, lest the ecclesial dimension of the ascension be neglected. It is not only that Christ has ascended in human nature, but that he has ascended with the hope and promise that his destination in God's "place" is, too, the destination of his Body-Bride.[38] Ascended with him is not any one individual, but those whom he calls his own. Thus, there is established a hope not only for persons, but for a people, the Church. And insofar as the ascension promises a hope of perfected human hearing, it offers no less hope for a perfected hearing by Christ's people, *qua* people. If Christ is ascended, but present among his people by his Spirit as the very listening presence of God, then the Church is not only a community of the Word spoken to her, but also a community of the ear, which hears her. Bonhoeffer correctly observes that "It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."[39] Ascended as king is the one who hears perfectly from God's right hand. The community that lives under the reign of this king is, then, a community which must reflect that rule and reign with not only its words but with its ears. In the ascension and glorification of Christ's human ears there is found a kingly mandate for those united and ascended with him to manifest his listening presence in the world. The grace and power of God's "place" united in the ascension are to be mirrored on earth by those united to God's ascended listening presence. It is a power and grace experienced not only by the Head, but also shared by the Body. In this way, the ascension is the grounds for the listening ministry of the Church.

Finally, the marriage of grace and omnipotence at the ascension ensures the constancy of God's listening by the corporeal ears of the incarnate Word through his Spirit. There is a confidence provided by the ascension on account of Christ's session. The gift of Christ as God's listening presence is guaranteed, in perpetuity, on account of Christ's enthronement as King who reigns from God's "place" of power and grace. It guarantees the constancy of God's listening presence in Christ and is established as an enduring gift to those united with him. Barth notes the ascension's relation to constancy when he declares, "Whatever prosperity or defeat may occur in our space, whatever may become and pass

[38] Here there are relevant conclusions to be drawn for feminist theology insofar as the ascending of the bridegroom means the dignity and worth of the bride who is both presently and not yet ascended with him. See Michele M. Schumacher, "Feminist Christologies", ibid., p. 419.

[39] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), p. 97.

away, there is one constant, one thing that remains and continues, this sitting of His at the right hand of God the Father."[40] With the session of the mediator, the one who is God's listening presence, the one who has already heard his own, the one who is always heard by God, his presence and activity, as such, are enthroned as constitutive of his enduring kingly rule. There is then, additional confidence, that those who cry out to him will be heard.

5.5 Conclusion

It remains only to recapitulate some christological conclusions—some from prior chapters and some from the present one. I hope to have shown in four christological moments that God's hearing is revealed to be fundamental to God's relationship to creation and to God's saving work for God's people—a work that is grounded in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of the eternal Word. The incarnation was argued to be a fundamentally new experience of God's hearing for creatures. In it, God's significant personal presence, that *just is* God's listening, is manifest in the incarnation of the Word, such that the incarnate Word becomes the means by which God hears. In this sense, it is not an overstatement to claim that Christ is not only the Word of God but also the ear of God. The sending of the Word recalls Barth's argument that God has *already* heard creatures and that Christ is the singular response to all their petitions. The incarnate Word speaks and hears bi-laterally, as the perfect mediator, the high priest who is always heard by God. In the death of Christ, obedient ears result in crucifixion. Yet these ears belong to a particular *who*, and by reflecting on the *Who?* question, we came to understand the nature of God's hearing; namely, that it is characterized by humility, patience, and long-suffering, even unto death. And yet, even as God's ear is rejected, God continues to hear in a way that overcomes that rejection. This hearing-unto-death prioritizes hearing over speaking, graciously granting the freedom of speech that is marred by sin and error. That prioritization of hearing over speaking is central to what is atoned for at the cross. In the resurrection, God's hearing is vindicated. Sinful human speech does not have the last word over God's ear. Christ's claims of bi-lateral hearing and speaking are vindicated. God's listener is resurrected in triumph over covenant unfaithfulness that now permits a boldness before the throne of God—a boldness characterized by existential honesty that is confident, like the Psalmist, that the most desperate and demanding human speech does not threaten to overcome God's hearing. Further, the resurrection confirms that God does, in fact, hear the marginalized and outcasts—those in the wilderness to whom Christ listened in his earthly ministry—just as

[40] Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, p. 126.

God was shown to do throughout the Old Testament. In the resurrection, God's listening is itself glorified—perfected and liberated from its earthly constraints. In it, God hears God's own Word, the one by whom God hears the world. Finally, in the ascension, the significant personal presence of God is both corporeally absent, but infinitely nearer by the Spirit of God's listener. The ascension guarantees the ongoing mediatorship of the One who hears, because that One is now in God's "place" where he continues to be heard. With the ascension, God's listener has brought human ears into God's "place" with him, sourcing a hope that human hearing will—both individually and ecclesially—enjoy the eschatological power and grace of that "place". The session of Christ ensures the constancy of God's listening, an additional source of hope for those who continue to cry out to God.

When these four christological moments are viewed within the horizon of God's love *pro nobis*, it becomes clear that God's hearing—which is so inextricably wrapped up with the person and work of Christ—is fundamental to the good news of the whole sweep of God's saving work. That God hears, and does so through the Son and by the Spirit, is central to the redeeming work of God among creation. It is for this reason that Augustine, when reflecting upon God's redemptive work, can declare: "When I see all he has done for me, all he has wrought on my behalf, how could I not believe that the Lord has bowed his ear down to me?"[41]

[41] Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms (99-120), vol. v.* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), p. 320.

CONCLUSION: "O THAT I HAD ONE TO HEAR ME!"

To conclude this inquiry into God as a hearer, I would like to sharpen the relief between my proposal and one of its alternatives. Doing so will allow for a rehearsing of some of the conclusions for which I have argued. It will also allow me to gesture toward some additional soteriological and ethical implications for those who are heard by God. The distinctiveness of my argument might best be summarized by way of contrasting two works of literature, the first from the world of existential philosophy, and the second from the canon of Holy Scripture.

Albert Camus' play, *The Misunderstanding*, was written during World War II, when Camus was under threat of death as a known part of the French resistance. The play tells the story of a successful and wealthy man, Jan, who has, after living twenty years overseas, returned to his hometown with his new wife, Maria. There he finds that, though his father has died, his mother and his sister, Martha, are operating a small guest house, alongside an irritable, mostly silent, old manservant. The mother and sister do not recognize Jan upon his arrival at the guest house. Unknown to Jan is that his mother and sister have made their living murdering and robbing their guests, always drugging and then drowning their victims in the nearby river. Jan keeps his identity a secret, despite his wife's urgings, preferring to observe his family as an outsider. By doing so, Jan hopes to determine how he might best make his family happy. Toward that end, he uses a pseudonym to book a night at the guest house without his wife Maria, who will return the following morning. He dies at the hands of his sister, Martha, who serves him a poisoned cup of tea, and then proceeds with her custom of taking his money and drowning him in the river. In the morning, upon discovery of Jan's passport, Martha and her mother realize that they have murdered their brother and son. The mother, overcome by grief, takes her own life by drowning herself in the river. Martha is left alone, angry about all that has transpired. Jan's wife, Maria, arrives at the guest house to find Jan missing. After Martha initially lies about his whereabouts, she confesses to murdering him. Realizing the gravity of the situation—that she has killed her brother and is now without her mother—Martha decides to follow her mother, by taking her own life at the river. Before departing to do so, she offers weighty, metaphysical-loaded advice to the bereaved widow:

> And now—before I go, let me give a word of advice; I owe it to you, since I killed your husband. Pray your God to harden you to stone. It's the happiness He has assigned Himself, and the one true happiness. Do as He does, be deaf to all appeals, and turn your heart to stone while there still is time. But if you feel you lack the courage to enter into this hard, blind peace--then come and join us in our common house. Good-by, my sister. As you see, it's all quite simple. You have a choice between the mindless happiness of stones and the slimy bed in which we are awaiting you.[1]

Maria, overwhelmed by grief and confusion, responds with a desperate cry to be heard by God, "Oh, God, I cannot live in this desert! It is on You that I must call, and I shall find the words to say. I place myself in your hands. Have pity, turn toward me. Hear me and raise me from the dust, O Heavenly Father! Have pity on those who love each other and are parted."[2]

At this point, Maria is left alone in the guest house with only the old manservant who has been sitting silently throughout. Barely budged from his silence, the old manservant asks, "What's all the noise, did you call me?"[3] Maria responds, startled by his address to her: "Oh!... I don't know. But help me, for I need help. Be kind and say that you will help me."[4] The play concludes with the manservant's response: "No."[5]

With gripping aesthetic appeal, Camus makes his case for both the absurdity of life, as well as God's "deaf" and "blind" disposition toward that absurdity. The old manservant, who overtly represents God, sits silently throughout the play as the "misunderstanding"[6] unfolds. Martha understands the old manservant. She has observed his silence as she has murdered guest after guest. His is a kind of happiness that comes from a heart of stone and ears that have remained "deaf to all appeals". There are only two responses to the absurd: either the "mindless happiness of stones" or death. Maria disregards these options. She cries out desperately, and the old manservant is hardly disturbed by her desperate cries and pleas. "What's all the noise?" he asks, seemingly irritated that his mindless happiness and silence would be disrupted. His final, monosyllabic, declaration that is followed by the curtain-drop is Camus' final verdict on God. God is silent, "deaf", and "blind" to the absurdities of this

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[1] Albert Camus, "The Misunderstanding" in *Caligula and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 133.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid p. 133-34.

[5] Ibid, p. 134.

[6] How Martha describes the whole affair. Ibid., p. 124.

life, and will not be inconvenienced by them. This god will not entertain a disruption to his "mindless happiness", no matter how great the absurdity or how desperate the pleas to be heard. Like Dionysus, Camus' god has ears of stone. These ears will not hear.

Of course, Camus' is not an abstract metaphysical reflection on just any concept of God. Very specifically, he has in mind the Christian tradition—a fact revealed in even the subtler details of the play, such as the characters' names. Importantly, three times in the play Jan imagines his return to be with his family to be like the return of the prodigal son. His self-description as the return of the prodigal son is most pronounced just as he drinks the poisoned cup of tea. This prodigal son is not welcomed while still far off, as Jesus' parable recounts. He is not welcomed back with joy and celebration. Rather, his return goes unacknowledged. The feast thrown for Jan is, at first, a beer, and now a poisoned cup of tea. This unrecognized son and brother who has returned from a far country is not met with the greeting he deserves. Just before he is made to drink the cup, he prays, "O God, give me the power to find the right words, or else make me abandon this vain attempt and return to Maria's love."[7] He then drinks the cup that leads to his death.

The ironic, Biblical imagery is palpable. Barth appropriated some of the same imagery when he envisioned Jesus Christ as the son who traveled into a far country, as both son and brother.[8] And he was not recognized as either. In the Garden of Gethsemane, just before his death, Jesus cries out to God. He is then made to drink the cup of death. He is put to death by those who should have known him as brother and the son of their father. As Camus sees things, Jesus, like Jan, goes unheard by God and meets his end in the grave. Jan's father, not coincidentally, has died some time ago. God is either dead or is silently enjoying mindless, "deaf" happiness in a corner. God does not hear Jesus Christ; nor does God listen to those who cry out concerning the absurdities of this life.

It is the metaphysically petrified "No" of Camus' "deaf" Old Manservant which has been in the crosshairs of my argument. In contrast to all of Camus' aesthetic and literary energy directed toward making metaphysical sense of the absurdities of life, it has been my contention that the Biblical God which Camus finds so metaphysically deficient—that this God's faithfulness to hear is not "No" but "Yes" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20). The "Yes" of God is seen, profoundly and clearly, in a very different and more ancient literary work.

[7] Ibid., p. 108.

[8] Barth, *CD*, IV/1, §51.

The story of Job is well known and needs little rehearsing. Like the characters of Camus' play, Job has suffered complex and agonizing loss. The loss of his property and servants, the death of his children, and the deterioration of his health—these all contribute to a different kind of "misunderstanding". Ambiguity surrounds Job's personal responsibility for the ills that have befallen him. He knows not why he has become the victim of such evils, but is confident in his righteousness before God, despite the increasingly determined accusations of his friends. Even though Job's "misunderstanding" is traditionally framed as a question of divine justice, it is not unlike the absurdity of life that is the concern of Camus' play. Job's sufferings are similarly mysterious to him, and the concern about divine justice is not entirely distinguishable from Camus' metaphysical critique. Both narratives, interested as they are in the absurdity of this life's sufferings, confront the reader with questions about the divine nature. What kind of God is it that governs a world in which these sufferings torment human creatures? What is God's relation to those experiences of suffering? What is God's responsibility for them? Significantly for this study, both narratives pivot on one fundamental question by which they seek to answer the many others: Does God hear?

After Job has endured several rounds of accusation from his friends (4-28), and before young Elihu dares to offer his determined and self-assured assessment of the matter (32-37), Job makes his final defense (29-31). He has had the experience of divine absence. He has suffered long enough to reflect on the many ways in which his life has been altered by his misery. That misery has been protracted, such that it has taken a toll on every aspect of his life. Speaking to God, he declares, "I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me" (30:20). He continues on: "Surely one does not turn against the needy, when in disaster they cry for help" (30:24). Job's experience would seem to be like Maria, who cries out to God for help and is met with an irritable "No". For Camus, God will not be disturbed from petrified, mindless bliss. Job's experience might be seen to corroborate Camus' metaphysical conclusion. And yet Job continues his protest (31:5-40). He has lived righteously. Thus, he asks, "Does [God] not see my ways, and number all my steps?" (31:4). Exasperated, Job sighs again, just as he did at the beginning of his final defense (29:2). Taking a deep breath, he expresses his wish: "O that I had one to hear me!" He then continues with the language of the courtroom: "Here is my signature! Let the Almighty Answer me!" (31:35) Job wishes to have his defense heard in the cosmic courtroom. He offers his "signature", his "tav", the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, indicating the conclusion of his statement, as well as a declaration of his innocence. His accuser has remained silent. Job has already requested a formal indictment (13:22) and now, before the courtroom of the universe, declares his innocence, despite still not having been

served a formal charge from God to explain why he has endured such suffering. If Job had a formal charge from God, he declares that he would wear it around on his shoulder or on his head like a crown (31:36). It might serve to explain to himself and to others the misery that has befallen him. Thus, this request to be heard by God has been called a moment of "electrifying tension"[9] since Job has called God into the courtroom to give an account for the sufferings endured at the hands of the latter. As part of the final "signature" of Job's defense, the request to be heard is a pivotal moment in the narrative. Will God hear Job? Will God give an account? Or will God remain silent, undisturbed in mindless, stony happiness? If Job is, as he claims, innocent and undeserving, then it is God, it seems, who is guilty of wrongdoing.

Of course, God does hear Job and answers him, according to what God has heard. Unlike Camus' "No" to God's hearing and helping, the book of Job gives a "Yes", but of a very different order than that expected by Job and his friends. With an overwhelming display of divine knowledge and power, God answers Job in the interrogative mood. The response is, at one level, a metaphysical claim about God's omniscience and omnipotence that is beyond human capacity to comprehend. Neither aloof nor silent, God's response reveals the extent to which the intricacies of the universe are known and sustained by God's knowledge and power. Neither "deaf" nor stony, God's knowledge and power exceed human understanding and demonstrate not only God's ability but willingness to hear and hearken to human speech. God's response has satisfied Job, who declares, "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted", and goes on to confess, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:2-3). God's hearing has prompted a response that relativized Job's speech and asking. Job's speech has now been framed within the cosmic context of God's knowledge and power that can only produce humility and repentance in Job: "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6).

"O that I had one to hear me!" is the existential, human cry on which this entire inquiry has been built. And God's "Yes" to Job's plea to be heard serves to recapitulate several of the conclusions for which I have argued.

First, Job is heard by God in the absurdity of this life's sufferings. I have proposed that Holy Scripture reveals the extent to which God's ear is especially inclined to those in the wilderness. Evidence for this claim was found in the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar narrative, in the desperate cries for help in the Psalms, in the Lazarus narrative of John 11, and finally in

[9] Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), p. 319.

Gethsemane, where the Always-Heard Word cries out to be heard. In Job we find an additional occurrence of God's hearing cries that arise from the wilderness. And yet the Job narrative underscores the incredible delay in the creaturely experience of God's hearing. Only after a protracted period of suffering and protest does God reveal to Job that the latter has been heard. For some time, Job's experience of his suffering bears considerable similarity to Camus' "No". The pain, loss, and evil that have been suffered are not immediately redressed at Job's first protest; nor does God's hearing guarantee that it will be redressed. Rather than the immediate restoration of Job's fortunes at the first utterance of protest, God gives something different in God's hearing: further revelation of Godself. In the wilderness, Job has called God to account for the absurdity of this life, and God has heard and responded in a way that is more than sufficient for Job. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (42:5). Job's "vision" of God has been expanded by God's hearing the former's wilderness cries. The Job narrative underscores the reality that God hears those who cry out from the wilderness, that God self-reveals to those who do so, and that God's power and knowledge are not diminished on account of the absurdity of the wilderness, but have the ability to relativize and reframe it.

Relatedly, second, God's hearing of Job reveals the power and knowledge that characterize that hearing. I have argued, following Holy Scripture as well as the theology of Karl Barth, that God's hearing is characterized by an *always* and an *already*, respectively. God always hears the Son and those united to him. And while Job's status in relation to the covenant people of Israel is an ambiguity of the narrative,[10] God's response to Job serves the purpose of situating God's power immeasurably beyond human comprehension. Camus' Old Manservant hardly attended to the recurring murders perpetrated by Martha and her mother, and he hardly notices Maria's cry for help, asking, "What's all the noise, did you call me?" In contrast, God self-reveals to Job to be the one who attends to every detail of the cosmos with absolute and perfect power and knowledge. Beyond the scope of human understanding, God attends to the cosmos in a way that reinforces God's ability to *always* hear that which God chooses to hear. Similarly, the *already* of God's hearing is supported as God's response to Job reveals the asymmetry of divine and human agency. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding," challenges God. From God's good and perfect eternity does God create. The *already* of God's hearing is on account of this prioritization of divine agency. Human speech unto the hearing God was shown to be not the cause, but the effect of God's good and perfect hearing. Speech unto God is the result of God's hearing, not its cause. Rather than undermining prayer to

[10] There is considerable uncertainty about the date of composition and the narrative's relationship to Israel's history.

God, this prioritization of divine agency is the grounds for great confidence in God's hearing. God is neither aloof nor incapable. Rather, God's power and knowledge are revealed to comport with the metaphysics of the Christian tradition, which has been foundational for my argument. God's hearing is better, not worse, on account of God's perfect power and knowledge.

Third, Job is changed by being heard, both in his self-understanding and also in his concrete circumstances. I have proposed that human creatures are heard into personhood, that human becoming is wrapped up with being heard by an other. Indeed, the coherence and integrity of Job's self-understanding is challenged by his friends. Job's claim is that they have not heard him. Rather, they dismissed his speech, which I have argued may produce a disintegrated or incoherent theory of self. Without being properly heard, Job's experience of his losses and suffering remain unintegrated, "outside" of his self-understanding. His identity is of one who has suffered immense loss and remained misheard in his loss. Additionally, he also runs the risk of having an incoherent theory of self, insofar as he cannot reconcile his experience with how others have heard his description thereof. Job claims that his experience has occurred in the context of a personal commitment to righteousness. His friends claim such acute calamity can only be the result of God's righteous judgement on unrighteousness. These two perspectives are unreconcilable. This disintegration and incoherence are the cause of Job's cry to be heard by another. He has gone unheard by his friends and needs another to hear if his theory of self is to be an integrated and coherent one. Thus, it is God's response to Job's plea that produces profoundly formative and advantageous effects. God's hearing produces a theory of self that allows Job to encode his sufferings within a personal theory of self. That self-understanding is revealed in Job's I-statements: "I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4); "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3); "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Job's suffering is now reframed and encoded in his theory of self as a result of the hearing of God, which has relativized Job's suffering in light of the mystery of God's power and knowledge. Significantly, his suffering has not been evacuated of significance or meaning for his theory of self. Rather, instead of being viewed through the lens of justified or unjustified sufferings on account of Job's behavior, they are now understood to belong to God's mysterious dealings with creation that are characterized by perfect power and knowledge. In the light of God's hearing, Job's plight may be integrated and understood coherently in view of God's mysterious workings. They need not remain "outside" of Job's self-understanding nor exist in conflict with his self-understanding. Job is now one who has suffered immensely; but he is also one who has been heard by God in those sufferings in a

way that coheres with God's perfect power and knowledge, such that Job may now construct a theory of self in a way that was not available had he only been misheard by his friends.

Further, God's hearing of Job has produced not only an advantageously formative theory of self, but has also produced a change in Job's concrete circumstances. I have argued that being heard by an other produces concrete, this-worldly, tangible changes for the speaker. These included neuro-biological changes, increased ability to hear others, the experience of comfort and compassion, and the advantages of being "gifted" with the attention and presence of an other. But the Scriptures also testify to God's hearing producing real deliverance from dangers, enemies, and sufferings more generally. Psalm 22 revealed God's hearing to be paradigmatic of the salvific activity among God's people. God's hearing delivered Israel out of Egypt and, later, out of exile. It delivered the Psalmist from his enemies. It delivered the incarnate Word from death itself. Here, God's hearing has produced a different kind of salvific outcome: repentance and a restoration of fortune. While Job's children are not raised to life, the narrative is emphatic that "the LORD restored the fortunes of Job… the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before," (42:10) and "The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (42:12). While Camus' Maria cried out, "Hear me and raise me from the dust, O Heavenly Father!" and was met with a "No", Job does the same and is not only heard, but on account of that hearing is also raised from the dust.

Fourth, the Job narrative anticipates several of my christological conclusions, and in so doing establishes a stark contrast between Camus' Old Manservant and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Job claims to have suffered unjustly. As he cries out to be heard, he invokes the language of the courtroom to declare his innocence before a cosmic court. He has declared himself to be righteous. In his cry to be heard, he declares that if he had a written indictment from his enemy, he would bind it on his head like a crown. His body bears the marks of his suffering. He longs to be vindicated by one who will truly hear him. For Camus, there is no vindication, no helping, no hearing. Absurdity is the conclusion of the matter, for God is either dead or asleep. Yet in the Job narrative we find the anticipation of an ultimate vindication accomplished by God's hearing of God's incarnate Word. The incarnate Word suffered unjustly, bore the marks of that suffering in his body, and stood trial with his indictment over his head like a crown. He patiently endured the sinful human speech of those who refused to hear him. He cried out to be heard and was gloriously vindicated on account of his "reverent submission" before the eyes of those who challenged his claims to righteousness. That vindication is the overcoming of the sinful and error-laden speech of accusers and mockers. More still, it is a vindication that may now be

participated in as the vindicated Word that is always heard by the Father has ascended to God's place and continually mediates bi-laterally between his Father and those who cry out to be heard.

Finally, the protracted nature of Job's suffering in the narrative gestures toward a conclusion yet unacknowledged: that God's hearing is, finally, an eschatological reality. The immediate "No" of Camus' Old Manservant stands in stark contrast to Job's prolonged and enduring desire to be heard. I have argued that God's hearing entails a sure response and that God's hearing means God's hearkening. Yet the immediacy of God's hearkening is nowhere promised. Indeed, neither Job nor Jesus experience immediate hearkening on account of God's hearing. It was not until the third day that the incarnate Word was gloriously vindicated, and his final vindication remains a sure but unresolved and eschatological matter. The Job narrative, portrays a life that has endured sufferings for such a duration that it has been altered so greatly as to be unrecognizable. And while Job's fortunes are restored and his latter days are more blessed than his beginning, God's hearing and hearkening does not guarantee those outcomes in this life—and that for good reason. The Job narrative, enclosed as it is in its literary and canonical form, has a beginning and end. But human life lived before the ears of God is open-ended, with its terminus at the end of time and human history, when it will rest in the new creation of God's time and place. Until then, the creaturely experience of God's hearing remains incomplete. For good reason is God's sure response eschatological in character. For until Christ returns to judge the quick and the dead and all are called to "give an account for every careless word" uttered (Matt 12:36), God's ears remain open to human speech. God's eschatological hearing will mean a sure hearkening, but the character of that hearkening must be wrapped up with the contingencies of God's just and final judgement of human speaking. And the most glorious hearkening of that eschatological event will be the sure response to the speech of God's Always-Heard Word on behalf of creatures.

The eschatological horizon of God's loving and just attention that will finally be accomplished by God's significant personal presence and will entail a sure response—this horizon invites some ethical reflections on how those who are united to the Always-Heard Word might be called to hear. While those ethical implications have been mentioned throughout this inquiry, emphasis demands their summary, even if space permits only the briefest treatment.

Insofar as the Christian theological tradition has prioritized word and speech to the detriment of hearing and listening, there is now need to redress this imbalance not only in theology but in Christian living, where the temptation persists to be, in contrast to the letter

of James, quick to speak and slow to listen. There are, then, ethical imperatives for those united to the Always-Heard Word to hear with that same character. Again, Bonhoeffer: "[we] should listen with the ears of God."[11] And if this listening conforms to the character of Christ's listening, then the prioritization of hearing over speaking means sharing in the risk of being similarly "pushed out of this world".[12] To share in that risk is to prioritize reception over activity, humility over power, listening over speaking, even to the limits of human life. This does not mean there is not a time to speak. There is, indeed, "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecc 3:7b). But it is the former that has been less observed by those united to the Always-Heard Word, and that somewhat surprisingly, given his silence before his accusers, even unto death. I take the risk of hearing unto death to be very much wrapped up with Jesus' call to discipleship, which involves taking up one's own cross. This kind of hearing may prove costly and cruciform in nature; but to the extent that it *is* costly, it reflects a sharing in Christ's sufferings, becoming like him in his death, with the hope, too, of sharing in the vindicating resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11).

Further, as those who have been heard by God on account of the person and work of the Always-Heard Word, those united to him enjoy the advantageous formation that results from such hearing. If, as I have argued, being heard is advantageously formative, such that those who cry out to be heard by God receive not only consolation but enhanced capabilities and proclivities to hear others, there is then an accompanying ethical imperative to hear such that we "console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God" (2 Cor. 1:4). For, as Paul continues, there is a degree to which God's hearing finds its telos in human hearing of others: "if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation" (2 Cor 1:6). Vertical hearing is for the purpose of horizontal hearing. Being heard by God may be the special privilege of God's people, as argued above, but that does not make it a special privilege to be hoarded. Rather, in being so "gifted" by God's hearing, that gift is turned outward, and given to others, such that others are heard unto speech, in a way analogous to the way God has heard God's own people unto speech.

In all of this, like God's hearing, the ethics of being heard by God is an eschatological matter. The coming of the incarnate Word who was always heard was the breaking in of God's kingdom in a profoundly new way. The incarnation, I argued, was the supreme manifestation of God's loving and just attention which God accomplished by means of God's significant personal presence. The listening presence of God in Christ is constitutive of God's rule and reign. With the inbreaking of God's rule and reign in the

[11] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), p. 99.

[12] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), p. 360.

person of Christ, God's kingdom is revealed to be a listening kingdom, ruled by a listening God. Those who live under this rule and reign are, then, called to be a listening people whose lives reflect the character of the listening ruler to whom they submit and follow. When God's people listen in a way that reflects and conforms, even if only analogously, to God's listening, then God's rule and reign are experienced as a present reality. An ethic of Christian listening then, insofar as it reflects God's rule and reign, may prove to be of profound ethical and political significance.

This inquiry into the concept of God as a hearer may have run the same risk as Job, the speech of whom was guilty of "darkening counsel without knowledge". Such is the risk of all speech about God and the theological enterprise more generally. Yet insofar as I have sought to faithfully listen to the Scriptures and the voices of the Christian tradition, I have proposed that God's response to the creaturely need to be heard is not "No" but "Yes" and that that "Yes" is wrapped up with the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension—the triumph—of the Always-Heard Word of God.

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