GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Department of literature, history of ideas and religion

The Possibilities of Supralapsarian Christology

As Exemplified by Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar

Elias Kjörk

Semester: Spring 2024

Course: RT2901, 15 Credits

Level: Master of Arts (1 Year)

Supervisor: Andreas Nordlander

Contents

Abstract

Supralapsarian Christology suggests superior motives in the incarnation than God's response to humanity's fall. Several advocates thus speculate that the incarnation would occur even without a fall. Since this position has recently been actualized in dogmatic theology by Edvin van Driel, this thesis explores such supralapsarian Christology further in three steps. First, it situates supralapsarian Christology in historical and contemporary theology to show how several areas of theology have generally been complicated by questions raised by supralapsarian Christology. Following various discussions on supralapsarian Christology, this thesis focuses on bringing out especially three tensions regarding revelation, creation, and grace. Second, it relates these discussions to two of the most Christocentric theologians of the 20th century: Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. While Barth's theology of election professes a kind of supralapsarian position, Balthasar's theological metaphysics remains agnostic. However, both theologians admit considerable ambiguity, complicating their conclusions. Ultimately, I contend that their alternative approaches fail to transcend the tensions that I outline. Finally, considering this "failure," I ask what the future possibilities for supralapsarian Christology are. The upshot is, that the future possibilities in reflecting on supralapsarian Christology lie in helping to articulate a more expansive theological grammar.

Keywords: supralapsarian; infralapsarian; Christology; Edvin Chr. van Driel; revelation; creation; grace; nature; Karl Barth; election; Hans Urs von Balthasar; analogy; grammar

Introduction

What is the purpose of the incarnation? A typical response is that the incarnation deals with fallen humanity's sin issue. This designates infralapsarian Christology, where the incarnation is contingent on the fall. Supralapsarian Christology questions this by speculating on motives for the incarnation, that logically precedes the fall. Thus, several advocates affirm that God's eternal word would become incarnate even without the fall. But can inquiry about such speculation be warranted? This thesis answers affirmatively and explores the possibilities of supralapsarian Christology in three steps.

First, it situates supralapsarian Christology in historical and contemporary theology, to show how it brings forth crucial tensions in several Christian doctrines. These tensions consist of areas where the claims of supralapsarian Christology complicate one's ability to speak coherently about the incarnation in connection with Christian doctrines. There are especially

three discussions and doctrines this thesis focuses on. Extensive discussion on Supralapsarian Christology began in Scholasticism, brought on by figures like Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), and Bonaventure (1221–1274). Comparing them, I gather that supralapsarian Christology reveals a tension on what it means to theologically speculate theology considering God's self-revelation. Moving on, in contemporary theology, the matter has recently been actualized by Edwin Chr. van Driel, who argues for supralapsarian Christology from a Reformed perspective.[1] In his perspective, supralapsarian Christology illuminates a tension concerning how creation and incarnation coheres with each other. Finally, theologians such as Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), Kathryn Tanner, and David Bentley Hart concerned with the nature/grace distinction invite supralapsarian Christology in rejecting any "pure nature" not already predisposed to receive grace. This entails that supralapsarian Christology is nested in a tension of nature and grace from the outset. Altogether, these tensions concerning revelation, creation, and grace imply that further investigation into supralapsarian Christology is warranted.

To further explore supralapsarian Christology, this thesis relates the discussion to two of the most influential theologians of the 20th century: Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Barth is a Reformed theologian who has famously emphasized that theology must return to a deep engagement with Christology and scripture to be a relevant contemporary voice. Balthasar on the other side has risen to be one of the most formative contemporary Catholic influences, particularly in his retrieval of the primacy of theological aesthetics for Christian dogmatics. Comparing their approaches to supralapsarian Christology becomes a way to invite broader theological perspectives into the discussion. Briefly put, Barth considers himself as a "purified supralapsarian" whereas Balthasar's analogical metaphysics remains agnostic. However, recent scholarship questions both theologians' conclusions. Regarding Barth, Shao Kai Tseng qualifies Barth's mature position as "basically infralapsarian."[2] Moreover, Balthasar's metaphysics seems all too well fit for supralapsarian Christology, which Junius Johnson perceives to give rise to severe tension.[3] Thus, there is ambiguity in both theologians, which I aim to pick up on. As I will show, this ambiguity

[1] Edwin Chr. van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

[2] Shao Kai Tseng, *Karl Barth's infralapsarian theology: origins and development, 1920-1953* (InterVarsity Press, 2016)

[3] Junius Johnson, *Christ and analogy: the Christocentric metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Fortress Press, 2013)

becomes pronounced in connection to the tensions of revelation, creation, and grace that the broader discussion surrounding supralapsarian Christology brings forth

Finally, I will tie together my preceding discussions to consider the future possibilities of supralapsarian Christology. How can this discourse illuminate contemporary dogmatic theology? Taking a cue from Kathryn Tanner, my proposal is that reflection on supralapsarian Christology might help articulate a more expansive *theological grammar*.[4] Tanner posits that analogously to how the rules of a language, i.e., its grammar, are crucial to understanding it, the "rules" and grammar of dogmatic theology are essential as well. I believe that regardless of whether one accepts or dismisses supralapsarian Christology, the critical tensions it unveils may be a way to help articulate such grammatical rules of speculative inquiry.

This thesis' structure is as follows. The first section remarks on the frame of inquiry. The second section outlines the historical and contemporary trajectories of supralapsarian Christology. The third section engages Karl Barth's Christocentric view of election with supralapsarian Christology. The fourth section characterizes Balthasar's Christocentric metaphysics of analogy in relation to supralapsarian Christology. The fifth section conducts a comparative analysis of Barth and Balthasar regarding supralapsarian Christology. Finally, considering the preceding discussions, the sixth section considers the future possibilities of supralapsarian Christology, concluding that reflection on supralapsarian Christology assists in articulating a more expansive theological grammar.

1. Frame of Inquiry

This section discusses this thesis' overarching systematic-theological frame of inquiry. I reflect on, first, the theological purpose that motivates its endeavor; second, its theoretical framework; third, its comparative method; fourth, earlier research on comparison between Barth and Balthasar; and fifth, my choices and delimitation of material.

1.1. Purpose

To begin with, why might reflecting on speculation into the incarnation be theologically relevant? Throughout church history, several pertinent theologians have entertained the idea

[4] Kathryn Tanner elaborates on this sense of "theological grammar" in her chapter on theological methodology in *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Fortress Press, 2004), esp. 8, 10-36.

that the incarnation had several purposes. There is Athanasius oft-repeated junction that "He was incarnate that we might be made God."[5] Augustine writes that while the incarnation deals with sin and death, "there are many other things to be advantageously examined and thought about in the incarnation of Christ."[6] Moreover, Maximus the Confessor writes regarding the incarnation that "this mystery is the preconceived goal for which everything exists."[7] Still, such speculative indications do not (explicitly) extend the thought to whether the incarnation was contingent on the fall. Whatever diverse theological content theologians put into the fall, Christian orthodoxy insists that a fall has occurred.[8] Considering this, is it not redundant to speculate on further motives and counterfactuals concerning the incarnation? Perhaps such speculation ought simply to be responded to "with that joke someone is said to have made…" that God is "getting hell ready for people who inquisitively peer into deep matters."[9] Additionally, we might consider Paul's awestruck words in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"[10] Altogether, doing theology within Christian orthodoxy, one seems to inevitably encounter an axiomatic tension between human speculation and God's abiding mystery.

The purpose of this thesis lies in reflecting on this axiomatic tension in relation to supralapsarian Christology. What can different approaches to supralapsarian Christology tell us about what it means to do speculative theology? This is what I seek to explore. Notably, this entails that my ambition is *not* to argue for or against supralapsarian Christology. Instead, I aim to analyze the consequences of various approaches to supralapsarian Christology. This becomes interesting, as depending on where one places oneself and attempts to do theology considering this overarching tension accentuates these consequences

This purpose comes back concretely throughout this thesis' three steps. The first step analyses three discussions surrounding supralapsarian Christology, where each discussion reveals tension in a central Christian doctrine. Analyzing these discussions, I will argue that

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[5] Saint Athanasius, *On the incarnation*, 54, trans. John Behr (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 67.

[6] Saint Augustine, *The Trinity.* XIII. 17.22, trans. Edmund Hill (2nd ed, New City Press, 1991), 364.

[7] Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium*. 60. CCSG.22.76, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, in *On the cosmic mystery of Jesus Christ* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 124.

[8] For instance, evolutionary biology has prompted questions regarding the fall's historicity. While elucidating the more precise nature of the fall lies outside the scope of this thesis, it is noteworthy that this has led some to assert an atemporal fall. An illuminating example is Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 168-172. For further discussion of the fall in contemporary theology see Ian A. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Wiley Blackwell, 2010)

[9] Saint Augustine, *Confessions.* XI.12.14, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997), 294.

[10] All bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV)

accepting or rejecting supralapsarian Christology has major consequences that bring tension to the surface in a particular doctrine. The second step is my comparative analysis of Barth and Balthasar. By comparing these influential theologians, I aim to present two alternative approaches to supralapsarian Christology that both attempt to strike a balance between speculation and God's mystery. However, I contend that both theologians struggle to find this balance. Consequently, their approaches to supralapsarian Christology end up impacting their theologies significantly. The third step draws together the preceding discussions to develop a more expansive theological grammar. This step attempts to show how this theological grammar can be more thoroughly explored and actualized in connection with supralapsarian Christology.

With this thesis' purpose set out, namely, to explore this axiomatic tension between speculation and God's abiding mystery through supralapsarian Christology, the rest of this section consists of assembling the various puzzle pieces required to achieve this purpose convincingly.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

In his introduction to *The Modern Theologians*, David F. Ford writes that a large part of contemporary systematic theology consists of critically and creatively retrieving past historical dialogue.[11] This way of theological interaction is pertinent as it underlies prominent theological currents, like *nouvelle théologie* and *radical orthodoxy*. To be transparent, my attempt to recover perspectives on supralapsarian Christology resonates with such theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, this does not entail that retrieval expresses the longing for a return to some premodern "Eden." Instead, I aim to integrate valuable perspectives from the past into a contemporary milieu.

A theoretical note that touches on the contemporary milieu concerns how this thesis describes human nature. The technical term for a general human nature in many theologians this thesis engages with is "man." However, contemporary feminist theology has severely criticized such exclusive language which tends to link divinity with maleness. I find that in contemporary dogmatic theology, Sarah Coakley[12] and Janet Martin Soskice[13] articulate this critique constructively with the suggestion that we broaden our theological language. While I

[11] David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, 3rd ed. (Wiley Blackwell, 2005), 1-17.

[12] See Sarah Coakley, *Powers, and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), esp. 55-68.

[13] See Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 35-51.

am inclined to interpret the theologians I work with charitably, as "man" captures a more general human nature in many classical languages and the Bible, their critique should be taken into account. Consequently, this thesis uses the term "humanity" or "humans" unless directly engaging with a quote that uses the word "man."

As I wrote earlier, this thesis is taking a cue from Kathryn Tanner's concept of *theological grammar*. Let me briefly unpack Tanner's concept. She posits that though there are various valid ways of speaking about God's relationship to creation, there are still universal "rules" that must be followed in doing so. These rules function as theological grammar that allows one to speak the "theological language" coherently. Tanner develops her theological grammar as an attempt to maintain (1) God's transcendence and (2) the free agency of created actors.[14] To speak coherently, she posits that theology must maintain both aspects without playing them off each other. This article extends her concept by proposing that remaining within the axiomatic tension between (1) human speculation and (2) God's abiding mystery, is another instance of theological grammar. This will come back in my final section where I argue that discourse on supralapsarian Christology might help develop such a theological grammar.

To facilitate a wide discussion that might develop such theological grammar, this thesis focuses on several theological traditions. Compare this with van Driel, who has actualized supralapsarian Christology in contemporary dogmatics. He builds his case for supralapsarian Christology almost entirely from the Reformed tradition. As Alasdair Macintyre points out in his critique of enlightenment rationalism, we inevitably argue within traditions, as no self-justifying or wholly neutral viewpoint exists.[15] Following him, I view it as largely positive to proceed from within a tradition. However, rather than composing theology within one specific tradition, this thesis examines how supralapsarian Christology can be informed by questions raised in various theological outlooks. This is a deliberate choice to broaden the discourse on supralapsarian Christology. In short, I contend that by surveying different approaches to supralapsarian Christology, one can evaluate its impact more thoroughly. Thus, this thesis attempts to interlace several traditions to collaborate on the issue. Reflective of this choice is that this thesis comprises a comparative analysis of Barth and Balthasar, who stand as towering figures in their Reformed and Catholic traditions. But what does a comparison of them aim at more pointedly?

[14] Tanner, *God and Creation*, 90-104.

[15] Alasdair Macintyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press 1998), esp. 389-404.

1.3. Comparison as Method

Comparing Barth and Balthasar as towering figures in the Reformed and Catholic traditions is a means of situating supralapsarian Christology in contemporary theological discourse. However, it is not self-evident what a relevant comparison between them constitutes. To clarify this, I consult Oliver Freiberger's articulation of the comparative method's goals. While Freiberger envisions these in comparing religions, his perspective provides resources for this comparison as well. As Freiberger holds forth, comparative methodology has often been loosely defined although it generally follows a similar pattern.[16] He thinks this loose definition has led to a methodological uncertainty that fuels a critique of decontextualization. This critique posits that comparison often disregards context to emphasize similarities or differences to make a certain point.[17] Subsequently, a deficient comparison can be understood as seizing ideas from their context to intentionally accentuate certain similarities and differences. Considering this critique, Freiberger concretizes the goals of comparison into *description* and *classification*.[18] First, comparison must always begin by providing an analytical description of the objects of inquiry. This serves to abstract the objects of inquiry from familiar knowledge and to illuminate the context wherein they can be analyzed. Following description, one should then turn to a classification of similarities and differences found in e.g., language and concepts. The main takeaway is thus that description of the comparative objects must be the ground for any credible classification of similarities and dissimilarities.

My comparative analysis of Barth and Balthasar unfolds to achieve these ends of description and classification. I will mainly compare three aspects of Barth and Balthasar. First, their broader views on revelation; second, their Christocentrism; and third, their explicit stances on supralapsarian Christology. All three aspects are crucial, as their views of revelation and Christocentric theologies provide the descriptive context for their stances toward supralapsarian Christology. Concretely, my description of Barth and Balthasar unfolds in sections three and four, whereas my classification of their convergences and divergences unfolds in section five. Moreover, to make the method of comparative analysis fertile, I will now look at earlier research into comparison between Barth and Balthasar.

[16] Oliver Freiberger, *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 29.
[17] Ibid, 52-53.
[18] Ibid, 35-36.

1.4. *Earlier Research*

Comparing theological giants like Barth and Balthasar is not an easy task. Thankfully, much has been written on how their theologies relate to each other,[19] and Balthasar's own inquiry into Barth is especially constructive.[20] At the outset, two general points are crucial to emphasize. First, Barth and Balthasar are similar in many respects. Both are Swiss theologians who lived during the wake of two world wars, historical-critical scholarship, and the theological currents of the 20th century. Furthermore, both are dogmatic theologians deeply concerned with Christology and trinitarian theology. Also, many have noted how Barthian themes heavily influence Balthasar's theology, such as heavy stress on revelation's importance.

Second, one must also consider the significant differences between them. Their respective traditions are the most glaring. As Barth famously remarks, "I believe that the *analogia entis* is the invention of the antichrist, and I believe that because of it, it is impossible to become a Roman Catholic."[21] As Balthasar's theological project centers on the *analogia entis,* is there not total incompatibility between them? Well, not necessarily. Balthasar is well inclined to Barth's work as he contends that he had an ongoing conversion toward a qualified *analogia entis*.[22] Noteworthy is that Barth's mature work even responds positively to Balthasar's characterization of him.[23] Notwithstanding, Balthasar's reading of Barth is contested as Bruce McCormack argues that Barth never had the intention to leave his developed dialectical theology behind.[24] Regardless of exactly how one views this dispute, an indication of how they still differ can be seen in their epistemology. Barth is a strong opponent of natural theology as he posits that all knowledge of God must come through revelation in Christ. On the other hand, Balthasar has an accommodating affinity towards philosophy and speculation, connected to his analogical metaphysics. This leads his theology in such a direction that he can write that "the

[19] See e.g., Stephen Wigley, *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A critical Engagement* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007); Stephen D. Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Fortress Press, 2014); John Webster. "Balthasar and Karl Barth.", 241–55. in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes, S. J. and David Moss, (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

[20] Balthasar, Hans urs von, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (Ignatius Press, 1992)

[21] Barth, Karl, *The Church Dogmatics*. 4 vols. in 12 parts, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, tans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1975), CD I/1, xiii., Henceforth I will refer to the *Church Dogmatics* as CD followed by the specific volume and page number.

[22] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 166-167.

[23] See Barth's brief discussion of Balthasar in CD IV/1, 768.

[24] See especially, Bruce McCormack, *Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 14-19.

Christian is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time."[25] Nevertheless, this affinity is qualified in a distinctly Christological manner.

Thus, their traditions and theological methods diverge, which I will return to. Notwithstanding, since Barth and Balthasar stand as towering figures in representing two alternative approaches, comparing them clarifies and concretizes these differences. Furthermore, the common perception is that discussions between these theologians have led to a constructive dialogue over boundaries between Protestants and Catholics.[26] Altogether, comparing Barth and Balthasar on many theological topics is perceived as highly relevant to contemporary theology. This also applies to this thesis' relevance, being the first instance of explicitly comparing their stances on supralapsarian Christology. Additionally, my endeavor aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue between Barth's and Balthasar's work.

1.5. *Material and Delimitations*

Deciding to work with several theological traditions leaves me with difficulties, as it is impossible to account for all these comprehensively. Therefore, section two consists of a selection of significant voices in different traditions. Regarding the Scholastic controversy, I focus on Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Bonaventure, three of the most formative Scholastic theologians. These are relevant because they reflect perspectives on whether the incarnation would occur regardless of a fall. Furthermore, they serve as an essential backdrop to Balthasar's Catholic perspective. As van Driel has shaped the contemporary dogmatic discussion, his Reformed contextualization is crucial. Moreover, it helps to elucidate some of Barth's central suppositions. Finally, the nature/grace distinction has become a contemporary point of contention for several Christian traditions. To capture this, I focus on influential Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox voices in Henri De Lubac, Kathryn Tanner, and David Bentley Hart, respectively. Relating supralapsarian Christology to this contemporary discussion may seem excessive. However, it becomes crucial to make my point that perspectives on supralapsarian Christology can greatly clarify contemporary debate.

Moving on to Barth and Balthasar, I do not intend to compare their entire theologies or any substantial part of their Christology, but only what is immediately relevant for supralapsarian Christology. This delimitation complicates the discussion, as their general Christology deeply

[25] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of The Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol 5: The Realm of Metaphysics in The Modern Age, translated by Oliver Davies et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 656.
[26] See John Thompson, "Barth and Balthasar an Ecumenical Dialogue" in *The analogy of Beauty: Introduction to The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (T&T Clark Ltd, 1994)

concerns *how* God restores the fallen world. The analysis would naturally benefit from a more extensive discussion of this theme in both theologians, but it lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Apart from their massive influence, a key reason for engaging with these theologians is that both expressly reflect on supralapsarian Christology in their mature works. Barth's mature reflection is found in his 13-volume *Church Dogmatics*, where the pertinent idea on this topic is *election*, primarily expounded upon in CD II/2. Moreover, I will lean on van Driel's and Tseng's recent scholarship to bring out the subtlety in Barth's viewpoint. Regarding Balthasar, the topic related to supralapsarian Christology is his Christocentric metaphysics of *analogy*. The primary sources that engage this topic are his *A Theology of History*[27] and *triptych*, consisting of aesthetics, dramatics, and logic.[28] A notorious challenge in working with Balthasar's triptych is the spread of his reflections on key topics.[29] Consequently, I will attempt to select several pieces of his thought to unpack his position. To this end, I will lean on Junius Johnson's *Christ and Analogy*, which expounds upon Balthasar's metaphysics and approach toward supralapsarian Christology.

2. Situating Supralapsarian Christology

With my overarching frame of inquiry delineated, I will now situate supralapsarian Christology through the historical and contemporary voices noted earlier. Of further relevance is that these prolonged reflections on supralapsarian Christology serve to reveal tensions in various areas. Regarding the Scholastic controversy, it concerns the tension of how one's doctrine of revelation relates to speculative inquiry. Concerning van Driel's work, it regards the tension of construing a coherence between one's doctrine of creation in connection with the incarnation. Finally, in the nature/grace discussion, tension arises about how the incarnation understood as grace is to be interpreted alongside human nature. As I argue in my final section, I perceive these reoccurring tensions as testament to how reflection on supralapsarian Christology can assist in articulating a more accountable theological grammar.

[27] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)
[28] The triptych consists of the 7-volume *The Glory of the Lord*, 5-volume *Theo-Dramatic* and 3-volume *Theo-Logic*. Henceforth these will be referred to as GL, TD and TL followed by the specific volume and page number.
[29] For a brief treatment of these see Stephen Wigley, *Balthasar's Triology: A reader's guide (*T&T Clark, 2010)

2.1. *The Scholastic Controversy*

According to Marilyn McCord Adams, the key to understanding the Scholastic controversy on the incarnation is that medieval thinkers thought sin and the fall were unnecessary for the perfection of creation.[30] This allowed for the conceptualization of a possible world without sin. Considering this, the 12th century had several strands of advocates for an "incarnation anyway," i.e., an incarnation regardless of the fall. For instance, advocates such as Rupert of Deutz (1075-1129), argued that the incarnation's hypostatic union of human and divine perfected and unified the universe under the one head of Christ.[31] Following such ideas, they argued that the incarnation would occur even without the fall to perfect creation.

Other theologians responded by specifying soteriology, i.e., humanity's redemption from sin, as the cause of the incarnation. Chief among these is Aquinas. Responding to these theological currents, he stresses that "everywhere in the sacred scripture, the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason for the incarnation."[32] Interestingly, he perceives it as *necessary* that God be made flesh to revoke the effects of sin. To qualify this, Aquinas distinguishes between two senses of necessity. Humans cannot be imagined without eating, as they would not survive otherwise. Thus, in the first sense, humans must *necessarily* eat. A second sense of necessity concerns achieving an end in the most fitting way. Aquinas likens this to how a horse is *necessary* for a longer journey as it is a more fitted way to travel than on foot. Aquinas posits that the incarnation is necessary in the second sense, as the most fitting way for God to rescue humanity from sin. While the incarnation is fitted to deal with humanity's sin, there is no other necessity for the incarnation without the fall. Note, however, that this amounts to an epistemological argument and not a rejection of the possibility of an "incarnation anyway." Aquinas writes that "as God's power is infinite, he could have become incarnate even if sin did not occur."[33] Thus, Aquinas' infralapsarian position does not reject the idea that God could have ulterior motives in the incarnation but is sensitive to proclaiming any knowledge thereof.[34]

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[30] Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and horrors: The coherence of Christology* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188.

[31] Ibid, 174–180.

[32] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae* (2nd, rev.ed. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920; New Advent, 2017), ST III, Q.1.art 3, co.

[33] Aquinas, ST III, Q.1.art 3, co.

[34] For a contemporary defense of Aquinas' position see Fellipe Do Vale. "On Thomas Aquinas's Rejection of an 'Incarnation Anyway'", *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 3.1 (2019), 144-164.

Scotus takes the "incarnation anyway" approach the furthest. Scotus' method involves distinguishing a logical order of priorities in God.[35] As God's ends are prior to his means, His ends must be specified before the means. More precisely, Scotus locates creation's end in God's love, developed in a trinitarian peculiarity. Briefly put, he views the love between the divine persons as friendship-love. This entails that the divine persons love each other as ends rather than means in a non-possessive manner. Divine love extends out toward the other divine persons so that God can be said to be a sharing of love. By extending this trinitarian conception of love, Scotus apprehends creation's end as sharing in God's friendship-love. In the event of a creation, God is such that his love invites Humanity to fellowship. Stating this as the end of creation, Scotus perceives the incarnation as the most fitting means to this end. This is because sharing in the trinity's love lies above human possibility. By this, Scotus is not implying that the incarnation is unconcerned with redeeming humanity from sin. However, redemption comes later in God's divine intention. Consequently "Scotus is emphasizing that *Incarnation and redemption are logically independent projects*."[36] The ultimate motive for the incarnation, found in trinitarian love, is already "there" before the need for redemption is actualized. However, when actualized, the incarnation becomes the most fitting means to resolve that issue as well. But even more fundamental is that the incarnation invites humanity into God's love. This all amounts to Scotus' counterfactual supralapsarian Christology, which affirms that the incarnation would occur even if the fall did not.

Finally, I will say something about Bonaventure who stands between these perspectives. Although Bonaventure gave greater weight to scripture and denied the certainty of an "incarnation anyway," he still viewed its argument as forceful and defensible. Regardless, Bonaventure interestingly observes several motives for the incarnation other than redemption from sin. For instance, he viewed the incarnation as God's initial vehicle for humans to be perfected, to receive grace, and to experience God's glory.[37] Moreover, Bonaventure's doctrine of creation depends on the incarnation. This is due to his analogy between the Son as the *medium* which holds together the trinity and Jesus Christ as the *medium* which holds together creation.[38]

[35] Adams, *Christ and horrors*, 181-184.
[36] Ibid, 184.
[37] Marilyn McCord Adams *What Sort of Human Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 24-28.
[38] Adams, *Christ and horrors*, 184-186.

Standing between the Father and the Spirit, the Son is both produced and productive in the Spirit's generation.[39] In this sense, the Son stands in the middle of the trinity. In an analogous sense, Christ as simultaneously God and human stands in between the spiritual and material aspects of creation. Altogether, these motives for the incarnation do not prompt Bonaventure to accept the supralapsarian position, but it does display deeper nuance on the motives behind the incarnation.

While all these thinkers merit profound individual treatment, what one can distinguish from the Scholastic background is that it primarily concerns speculation on God's action. On the one hand, Aquinas views the lack of supralapsarian motifs in scripture as enough to dismiss such speculation. On the other hand, Scotus views the necessity of the incarnation as a consequence of *who* revelation reveals God to be, namely a trinity of love. Finally, Bonaventure tries to hold both threads together by affirming motives superior to rescue from sin in the incarnation while rejecting a necessary "incarnation anyway."

How revelation is perceived becomes the critical issue. Aquinas is the keenest on staying within "revelation." What scripture does and does *not* say about the incarnation determines his position. Scotus proceeds from the character that revelation does attribute to God and speculates from that given point. Between these theologians, a tension in how to generally approach revelation arises. The dispute is not simply about whether an "incarnation anyway" is plausible but concerns theological method as such. Still, I wish to emphasize that it is precisely reflection on supralapsarian Christology that makes these considerations urgent. Behind their positions lies consideration of what place speculation should occupy in theological theorizing. Tension over this issue becomes the most acute in Bonaventure as he affirms a deep Christocentrism *and* rejects an "incarnation anyway." Such reflection seems to pull in two opposite directions on how to approach revelation. On the one hand, Christ is speculatively described as the center of creation. On the other hand, Bonaventure's respect for scripture makes him dismissive of a necessary "incarnation anyway." It is not immediately apparent what to make of this tension, which I will return to, as Balthasar defends his conclusion through an engagement with Bonaventure. With that said, my inquiry now moves five centuries forward into a protestant milieu, where the discussions turn toward other perspectives.

[39] This theology presupposes a western theology of the *filioque* where the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. See further Zachary Hayes *Bonaventure's Trinitarian Theology,* 189-246. in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay M. Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellman and Jared Goff (Brill Academic Pub, 2013)

2.2. *Van Driel on Supralapsarian Christology*

In contrast to the medieval discussion, the Protestant emphasis comes to concern itself, less with the incarnation's conceptual possibilities, and instead on the incarnation's role in God's eternal will. This becomes evident in van Driel's Reformed contextualization of supralapsarian Christology, which elaborates on three branches of supralapsarian arguments in the theology of Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Isaak Dorner (1809-1884), and Karl Barth (1886–1968). Surveying these thinkers, van Driel contends that they all reason from something that is *not* God to a supralapsarian position.

Schleiermacher finds grounds for a supralapsarian affirmation in *redemption*. He regards history as unfolding in the unchangeable act of God's volition.[40] Thus, he views sin as ordained for humanity to enable a relationship with Christ as redeemer. This differs from infralapsarian accounts, where God eternally perceives humanity's sin and *responds* with the incarnation. Schleiermacher turns this logic on its head and argues that God's motive for redemption in Christ logically precedes humanity's decision to sin. As God's act is not reciprocal, the incarnation is not a response. Instead, the incarnation is primary in God's will. The main point in this is that humanity relates to God through Christ as redeemer from sin.[41] Thereby, Schleiermacher's Christology is supralapsarian as the incarnation logically precedes sin by becoming the basis for humanity's relationship with Christ as redeemer.

Dorner argues from *creation* to supralapsarian Christology. As God is a trinity of persons, Dorner perceives God as a lover of love who wishes to extend his love to others.[42] This relates to his concept of *the ethical.* The ethical is that which is wholly good by itself and flows out of volition. The ethical must, therefore, be an act of will. Ultimately, Dorner identifies the ethical with God. The importance is that for God, "the act of creation is a necessary expression of his ethical nature."[43] As the ethical is act, God must also act towards something, i.e., he must create. Now, the incarnation comes into play as the ultimate fulfilment of this ethical sharing of love, which Dorner calls consummation. The incarnation becomes God's ultimate ethical act, fulfilling the expression of his nature in creation. Thus, the ethical carries a necessity, from creation to consummation in Christ, which provides grounds for supralapsarian Christology.

Barth's supralapsarian position rests on *eschatological consummation.* While I will return to van Driel's reading, he understands Barth's view of election as an eschatological claim about

[40] Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 15.
[41] Ibid, 25.
[42] Ibid, 41.
[43] Ibid, 51.

God's intention with humanity. For Barth, Christ is the centre of God's election, which logically precedes all God's decrees.[44] Even more, apart from God's election stands only his rejection, or what van Driel calls "creational entropy."[45] Apart from Christ, creation will necessarily lapse into evil and non-being as it stands without self-grounding. However, as humanity finds its eschatological identity in Christ, God has eternally resolved humanity's grounding issue. Thus, van Driel interprets Barth's Christology as supralapsarian because the incarnation serves to eternally surpass sin and non-being in the eternal election of Christ.

While describing these, Van Driel observes that these theologians' supralapsarian Christologies are accompanied by inadequate notions of necessity. For Schleiermacher and Barth, this entails making sin and the fall necessary in God's overarching will. In these thinkers, one can thus see a move away from the medieval conception of understanding creation as not necessarily containing sin. While the incarnation is logically prior to the fall, its actualization still implies a fallen world. Moreover, in Dorner, creation becomes necessary for God to act ethically. As van Driel perceives it, all their Christologies becomes supralapsarian to fulfil these doctrines. However, this comes at the expense of necessitating God. Van Driel reacts against this when he provides his arguments for supralapsarian Christology. He argues that one cannot begin with anything else than God's gratuitousness for understanding the incarnation.

His first argument proceeds from eschatological superabundance. This argument posits that the end of humanity's relationship with God must be more intimate than the beginning.[46] According to him, this destiny cannot be contingent on sin as it would disrupt God's intimate connection with humanity. Sin is a possibility for humanity but not a necessary path. If God's ends of creation are not contingent on sin, then neither can the incarnation be contingent on sin. The second argument elaborates on this abundance, stating that humanity's end is the beatific vision. Van Driel reads the biblical corpus as conveying not only an intellectual vision of God but also one involving the senses.[47] While Moses is not allowed to see God face-to-face, such a sensuous relationship becomes possible through the incarnation. If seeing God is humanity's end, then the incarnation is a necessary prerequisite for this end. His final argument proceeds from divine friendship. Van Driel proposes that the biblical category of friendship entails that humanity's end is not simply reconciliation. Reconciliation becomes the means for God's friendship with humanity, but not the end. Van Driel emphasizes this by stating that Christ does

[44] Ibid, 81.
[45] Ibid, 123.
[46] Ibid, 150-151.
[47] Ibid, 156.

not cease to be incarnate but remains so eternally. In its most basic guise, the incarnation answers humanity's longing for intimate friendship. Thus, "if the incarnation is the fullest expression of this divine friendship, the incarnation also logically does not follow human estrangement and divine reconciliation but precedes it – in other words, is supralapsarian."[48]

Ultimately, these arguments perceive the incarnation as God's utmost gift to creation. Thereby, van Driel intends to transcend Schleiermacher, Dorner, and Barth by understanding the incarnation as flowing from God's graceful nature. This undoubtedly reflects another necessity, considering the incarnation fitted to God's nature. However, what is crucial for van Driel is that the incarnation begins and ends as a gift. Thus, van Driel argues that only by beginning with God's supralapsarian love can creation, redemption, and eschatology be freed from implicating God in some additional way.

The broader takeaway from van Driel's discussion is that supralapsarian Christology has been used to articulate a coherence between the incarnation and doctrines like redemption, creation, and eschatology. Still, I would like to summarize van Driel's import as revolving around *creation*. While van Driel's arguments hinge on eschatological fulfillment, it is precisely a fulfillment of creation. One can see this in how he argues for the beatific vision through the sensual and created aspect of humanity. God never leaves humanity's createdness aside but rather actualizes it through the incarnation. Therefore, Creation's rationale is the concrete horizon of the incarnation. One way to understand van Driel's argument for this supralapsarian Christology is to place it in-between, on the one hand, putting forth a necessity of creation or sin, and on the other, losing the coherent horizon between creation and incarnation. To overcome these two positions and the tension between them, van Driel thinks one must begin with a gratuitous supralapsarian Christology.

2.3. *Nature and Grace*

Having articulated some of the historical and contemporary background to supralapsarian Christology, I now extend its relevance to the adjacent theological discussion of nature/grace. The primary influence on the modern discourse has been Henri de Lubac who critiques several strands of contemporary Thomism that sharply distinguish between nature and supernature. At the core lies the proposal of a "pure nature" that tends towards natural goals, juxtaposed to a later graced nature with supernatural goals, such as the beatific vision. The reason for making

[48] Ibid, 162.

such a distinction is to ensure that God's grace is genuinely free and gratuitous.[49] If nature expects grace, how could one consider it a gift? If grace is extrinsic and wholly other to nature, such giftedness seems easier to account for.

De Lubac seeks to contribute by recovering foundational figures like Aquinas. He argues that at the roots of the tradition, there was never an intention of separating nature and supernature. Instead, the inherent human desire for grace pointed toward how grace perfects nature. Still, de Lubac emphasizes that this does *not* entail that God is necessitated to perfect creation with grace. Ultimately, de Lubac perceives a paradox at the issue's core, which John Millbank helpfully characterizes as a "suspended middle."[50] On the one hand, grace is unanticipated and consists of pure gratuity from God. On the other hand, humanity's natural desire for grace already includes a supernatural vocation. For de Lubac, positing some "pure nature" to defend the first part of this paradox makes God's grace become something he is indebted to give humanity in creating her imperfect. Instead, he proposes that one uphold this "suspended middle" between grace as gratuitous *and* natural to keep God's mystery intact.

Kathryn Tanner's account of grace provides an exciting point of contact. Crucial for her is that the *imago Dei* lies not so much in a substantial identity as in an empty space perfected in Christ and drawn into God's trinitarian love. The natural desire and direction humanity has towards grace is thus reflective of its ontological difference towards God. Describing grace from this perspective, she argues that there is no self-sufficient "pure nature": "Existing with the grace of God is the normal condition that God created us to be in … it makes no sense to speculate, as much contemporary Catholic thinking about nature and grace does, about what human beings would have been like if they had not been given grace."[51] So, instead of granting human nature integrity, she argues that a theology that separates nature from the end of grace undermines the *imago Dei.*

David Bentley Hart enters the discussion from another critical perspective. He proposes that creation's end lies in deification. Consequently, any view that strictly separates the natural and supernatural turns God's action into magic.[52] He compares such a God with a magician who successfully turns a turnip into a rabbit. If a magician indeed succeeded in such an endeavor, then it would be outrageous to perceive this as a possible outcome of a turnip's nature. The

[49] Henri de Lubac, *The mystery of the supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Crossroad Publ, 1998), 184.
[50] John Milbank, *The suspended middle: Henri de Lubac and the debate concerning the supernatural* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 39.
[51] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131.
[52] David Bentley Hart, *You are Gods: On Nature and Supernature* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 1-4.

turnip would not have turned into a rabbit but would have been replaced by something else. If grace and deification were wholly alien to human nature, grace would, in a similar sense, be magic. Human nature is *replaced* rather than *transformed* by grace. For Hart, the potential for grace and deification must already lie inherent in nature. Thus,

> Only an understanding of creation as grounded in the event of Christ—only an understanding of this world as the one world of Christ—can make sense at once of the gratuity and the rationality of creation. And that, of course, allows for only a supralapsarian theology of incarnation and deification.[53]

Hence, he thinks Christology must be supralapsarian to achieve coherence between creation and incarnation.

In these rejections of "pure nature," I perceive a great affinity with supralapsarian Christology. If one were to adopt supralapsarian Christology, human nature – in its most basic orientation – would exist for the sake of receiving Christ. Hart's case is akin to this as he argues supralapsarian Christology is required to find coherence between creation and deification. As de Lubac and Tanner do not explicitly draw this connection between supralapsarian Christology and grace, it might be unfair to hold them to such a standard. Still, by invoking supralapsarian Christology it is feasible to articulate the horizon of grace as wholly constituted by Christ.

To summarize, the nature/grace discussion invites a tension between God's freedom and the fulfillment of human nature by grace. I contend that accepting the second aspect, as de Lubac, Tanner, and Hart all do, becomes very concrete through a supralapsarian affirmation. If one does take such a step, then this enables a rejection of "pure nature," as all of creation exists for the sake of Christ. Indeed, this step does not resolve the tension, as the tension also involves God's freedom. It might seem that one has simply moved the tension from "God" to "Christ." However, such a move provides a concrete viewpoint to speak about the fundamental orientation of nature and grace, namely the horizon of Christ. Thus, and as I will continue to argue, supralapsarian Christology might help articulate the tensions that the nature/grace discussion raises.

Let me reiterate what I have attempted at the end of this lengthy section. I have tried to deliberate on various ways of reflecting on supralapsarian Christology in different contexts and traditions. These various discussions have amounted to three considerable tensions concerning

[53] Ibid, 112.

revelation, creation, and grace. The major importance of these is that they will be used later as hermeneutic lenses to enable a critical discussion of Barth and Balthasar. With that said, I now move on to their respective views of revelation and Christocentrism to discuss their approaches toward supralapsarian Christology.

3. Barth's "Purified Supralapsarian Christology"

This section attempts to exemplify Barth's relation to supralapsarian Christology as a profoundly *theological* approach. What is crucial for Barth is beginning with a theologically determined frame that arises from theological questions and deep engagement with scripture. This is in contrast to Balthasar's more philosophical entry point, but more on that later. The basic point of Barth's approach is that God's election of Christ determines everything in reality, even the fall. In this sense, Barth's approach contains a deep supralapsarian dimension, as Christ proceeds everything else. Still, as the fall becomes a necessary correlate, further questions remain. To provide the context for Barth's approach to supralapsarian Christology and a comparison with Balthasar, this section will delineate and connect Barth's view of revelation, his Christocentrism, and his explicit reflection on supralapsarian Christology.

To begin with, Barth's fundamental view of revelation posits that there is nothing we might deem as general revelation. God *always* reveals himself in his specific triune form as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God's triunity, God is revealed as fully realized, known to himself, and transcendent to everything else.[54] Consequently, God does not require creation in any way, enabling creation to be a pure act of grace without bearing on God's eternal nature. Considering this, an inevitable question preoccupies Barth: If God is wholly other, how does humanity know God? He answers that all knowledge of God must stem from participation in the triune God. Importantly, what enables such participation at all is the incarnation of Jesus Christ as an overflow of the triune God's self-giving.[55] God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is thus what all revelation of God is concerned with. As he (amply) expresses revelation's triune form: "*God* reveals himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself.* He reveals *Himself.*"[56]

This insistence on viewing revelation through God's triunity leads to Barth's foundational claim that "a church dogmatics must, of course, be christologically determined as a whole and

[54] CD II/1, 181.
[55] CD II/2, 121.
[56] CD I/1, 296.

in all its parts."[57] It is only in Christ, as God's self-revelation, that humanity faces God. Therefore, Barth's mature work carries a profound Christological grounding, which as Balthasar remarks, is "radically Christocentric: that is, an approach that interprets all secular and worldly relations and realities in terms of God's self-interpreting Word, Jesus Christ."[58] The rest of this characterization will proceed from this Christocentric starting point. However, as Bruce McCormack stresses, "Christocentric has very little explanatory value unless one goes on to define concretely what "Christocentric" meant in his case."[59] What, then, does Barth's Christocentrism consist of more specifically? In reading Barth, the doctrine of election is where his Christocentrism comes off as most lively. Balthasar even contends that his theology of election is "the heartbeat of his whole theology."[60] Thus, I will present Barth's Christocentrism from the crucial, but still limited, perspective of election.

3.1. *Election in Christ*

Barth begins his account of election by reacting against approaches that tend to shroud a scriptural reflection. Instead of scripture, the doctrine has tended to be founded on things such as church tradition, its usefulness as pedagogy, human experience, and an abstract view of God's omnipotent will. Barth's essential problem is that these all presuppose some general view of humanity and God before consulting revelation. This has also led many to perceive election as constituted by a duality containing simultaneously a "yes" and "no," both salvation and damnation.[61] This is most evident in his own Reformed tradition, where election risks becoming an arbitrary decree, a *decreetum absolutum,* where God elects some and rejects others. Encountering the three underlying points of election, namely God's freedom, mystery, and righteousness, from these perspectives, Barth argues that election becomes distorted.[62] He presents this distortion as follows: When one begins with God's infinite *freedom,* one risks absolutizing God's will as a seemingly arbitrary entity. From such a viewpoint, one might refer to God's freedom as a *mystery*. The reason God decides, in a seemingly arbitrary manner, pertains to his mysterious nature. This is where the interlocutor moves on to the third point. At the very least, God's mysterious election must be *righteous*. Humanity is fallen and sinful whereas God's decree is just, regardless of whether humanity views it as such. Barth grants that

[57] CD I/2, 123.
[58] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 30.
[59] McCormack, *Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 453-454.
[60] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth,* 174.
[61] CD II/2, 13.
[62] CD II/2, 19–34.

this is correct so that the three points come together logically by such a move. The problem is that the interlocutor ends up with a general God it cannot wholly trust.

To critique these construals, Barth declares the doctrine of election determined by Jesus Christ. The inability to see election in this light is what has led to a distorted picture of God. Hence, instead of looking to some absolute decree, one can look to Christ as "God's decree and God's beginning."[63] Following this, Barth considers the three points Christologically. Once again, election starts with God's *freedom*. The content of this freedom is perceived in how the Father, as John 3:16 states, gives his Son to the world. When one asks why God would do this and how he profits, this is where Barth refers to the *mystery* of God's "good pleasure" in Christ. Similarly, when one questions whether God appears *righteous* in election, Barth perceives this as overshadowed by Christ's love for humanity. Thus, Barth construes God's freedom, mystery, and righteousness in election, not as abstract categories, but as concretely pointing toward Christ. Therefore, Barth can note that "the doctrine of the divine election of grace is the sum of the Gospel."[64]

Barth's basic claim is thus that election is wholly constituted by Jesus Christ. Furthermore, his doctrine of election is peculiar in being placed within the dogmatic sphere of the doctrine of God. Other theologians would possibly discuss election in connection with reconciliation or redemption. Barth instead emphasizes that "from all eternity God is the electing God."[65] Election must, therefore, be construed as the act God eternally chose to reveal himself in.

How does this Christocentric view of election impact the significant pieces in the doctrine? This is crucial for us to understand how Barth motivates his approach to supralapsarian Christology. In the doctrine of election, there are three central pieces: the subject that elects, the object that is elected, and the object that is rejected. Barth's proposal is that Christ takes on all three roles. Jesus Christ is the *subject* of election as God and, simultaneously, the *object* of both election and rejection as human. In this, we can perceive the imprint of Chalcedonian Christology on Barth.[66] Unconfused, Christ acts on behalf of both humanity and God in their covenant relationship. I will now unpack what it means that Christ takes on these roles.

First, what does it mean that Jesus is the *subject* of election? It means that "God's eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ."[67] It means there is no abstract God to whom election can

[63] CD II/2, 95.
[64] CD II/2, 10.
[65] CD II/2, 76–77.
[66] For Barth's Chalcedonian Christology see George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131-147.
[67] CD II/2, 146.

be attributed as an absolute decree. Instead, election is attributed to the self-revelation of God we find in Jesus Christ. This essentially corresponds to the Christocentric line of thought I have delineated above. But what does it mean that Christ is the *object* of both election and rejection? To understand this, we must understand how election and rejection relate.

As Barth has it, election in Christ is pure light; even so, it is a light that casts a shadow, which is rejection. God's will eternally "permits" humanity's evil as a shadow cast from election's light.[68] Barth calls this permittance *das Nachtige.* While not identified with sin or even negative aspects of creation such as death, *das Nachtige* allows humanity the possibility to sin. *Das Nachtige* is, so to say, the product of possibilities that gets left behind in God's act of election: "God elects, and therefore rejects what he does not elect."[69] Thus, this shadow is wholly determined by God's "yes" in election so that God's "no" to *das Nachtige* is wholly surpassed. In this sense, we can perceive both a positive and a negative motive for the incarnation of Christ, corresponding to election and rejection.

But if *das Nachtige* is an inevitable part of creation, then does that mean sin is necessary? When discussing the possibility of an unfallen "man," Barth writes that "the man which the eternal will of God has to do is not this man; or rather, it is this man, not good as God had created him, but fallen away from God."[70] Barth underscores that God is *not* concerned with unfallen humanity but rather with electing fallen humanity in Christ. This is also reflected in his broader Christological framework where "It is manhood fallen that He took up into His divine Person."[71] This does not entail that Barth believed Christ had personal sin but that God "made Him … to be sin" (2 Cor 2:51) already in the incarnation.[72] Thus, we can understand that the incarnation stands in direct relationship to the fall.

With that, I have briefly delineated Barth's basic structure of election in Christ, which underlies his approach to supralapsarian Christology that I will now explore. Barth explicitly discusses his own approach alongside the Reformed 17th-century controversy between the supralapsarian and infralapsarian parties. The controversy concerned what one meant by God's eternal election. Barth perceives the supralapsarians as arguing that the cause for election lay in God's infinite glory. While God eternally knew permitting the fall would lead to sin, sin was a necessary means for the teleological ordering of creation. Thus, all that occurs in God's

[68] CD II/2, 170.
[69] CD III/3, 351.
[70] CD II/2, 164.
[71] CD I/2, 154.
[72] For this point, see further Robert B. Price "Barth on the incarnation", in *Wiley Blackwell companion to Karl Barth*, ed. George Hunsinger, and Keith L. Johnson, (Wiley & Sons, 2020), 139.

election, even sin, was attributed to a revelation of God's glory.[73] His perception of the infralapsarians was that they professed ignorance regarding the motive of God's decrees in election. This entails that they did not perceive the fall and creation as necessary revelations of God's glory.[74] The reason behind it is a mystery and humanity should rest content with that.

Interestingly, Barth thinks both positions carry distinct advantages and disadvantages. The supralapsarian position perceives God's eternal glory in *all* things. Barth is fond of the teleology this enables, which sees a continuity in God's act of election from creation, fall, and incarnation to eschatological consummation. Nevertheless, such a perspective might invite the God that is arbitrarily electing and rejecting, which Barth is highly critical of. The infralapsarian position's upside is that it makes it easier to answer the question of sin, as election becomes a response to the fall of humanity. As election is a response, it seems more understandable how God is not responsible for sin. Its flipside is that the reason for God's election is not open to humanity to inquire into, making it difficult to understand election's goal.

While the supralapsarian position's tension with sin remains a challenge for Barth, he accepts this position as he perceives God as only permitting the fall and not causing it. Ultimately, for Barth, eternal election in Christ repudiates the dangers of the supralapsarian position. The God behind election is the God who loves humanity in Christ. Therefore, he feels secure enough to profess himself a "purified supralapsarian."

This brief excursus into Barth's theology of revelation and election in Christ shows how central these ideas are to affirm his purified supralapsarian position. God eternally elects Jesus Christ to take on fallen humanity and reject *das Nachtige*. Thus, the incarnation becomes the vehicle that reveals God's eternal will. This stress on the eternal nature of the incarnation as not simply a reaction against sin is why Barth takes himself to be a purified supralapsarian. But as I will now go on to show, Barth's account permits a fair bit more of ambiguity.

3.2. *The Infralapsarian Barth?*

In this section, I will question Barth's self-proclamation as a supralapsarian by observing the considerable ambiguity that his position entails. Let me begin by recapitulating van Driel's supralapsarian reading of Barth. Van Driel's principal contention is that Barth's view of election hinges on eschatological consummation. This entails that the incarnation precedes the fall as it is an eternal invitation into eschatological fulfilment. It is this positive element of election that

[73] CD II/2, 128.
[74] CD II/2, 129.

supposedly determines Barth's supralapsarian position. Nevertheless, surveying Barth closer he finds great issue with this. Barth proposal is that Jesus Christ precedes any other decision in God. But what becomes of Christ's human nature through this? For Barth, Jesus' human existence "has nothing behind it but the eternal will and counsel of God."[75] However, van Driel thinks that this undermines Christ's human agency. Jesus is the subject of election as determinative of God's eternal will, however, where in this picture does Christ, as a particular human, become responsive?[76] This issue becomes acute as Christ stands for all human beings in election. However, Christ does not adopt a human person but takes on human nature.[77] What then becomes of all other human persons? Where in Barth's picture of election does their agency come into play? According to van Driel, it seems that human persons do not have a concrete place in election, as Christ stands as both subject and object. He finds the reason for this discrepancy in Barth's insistence on Christ as the object of rejection. Barth's supralapsarian drama of election, from humanity's fall to its eschatological horizon, consists primarily of overcoming *das Nachtige*. Hence, van Driel thinks Barth's supralapsarian theology is grounded on overcoming something negative.[78] But then, the primary thing that motivates the incarnation is not God's gratuity. As van Driel's arguments for supralapsarian Christology stress the primacy of God's gratuity, this serves as a critique of Barth's supralapsarian Christology as not going far enough.

Altogether, van Driel perceives that the profound supralapsarian trajectory in Barth risks undermining the human in Christ and implicating a necessary negative aspect. Importantly, these consequences follow precisely from the supralapsarian character of Barth's doctrine of election. As God stands responsible for all of creation in election, he must also be responsible for necessitating the fall in rejection. Because of this, van Driel finds Barth's account unconvincing. Notwithstanding, van Driel's critique hinges on Barth's supralapsarian construal of election. But is van Driel's supralapsarian reading of Barth the most convincing?

Kai Shao Tseng's reading of Barth questions this. Tseng attempts to show that more infralapsarian elements emerged as Barth refined his theology of election. One aspect of showing this is engaging with van Driel's interpretation of Barth. Tseng notes that van Driel rightly stresses supralapsarian aspects in Barth but does not properly engage with his

[75] CD III/2, 160.
[76] Van Driel, *Incarnation anyway*, 105.
[77] Ibid, 117–118.
[78] Ibid, 122.

infralapsarian elements.[79] According to van Driel, a supralapsarian view of election coincides with a supralapsarian Christology. However, according to Tseng, Barth's supralapsarian position can be attributed to a historical inadequacy. He stands in a Reformed tradition and reacts against certain infralapsarian tendencies in earlier thinkers. What Barth believed characterized supralapsarian positions was a teleological order of God's purposes in election. As Barth favored this view, he reacted against infralapsarianism, which would have made connecting election with God's teleological ordering challenging.

However, Tseng shows that what the reformed controversy actually revolved around was whether the object of election was fallen or unfallen humanity.[80] Tseng shows that the supralapsarians thought the object of election was unfallen humanity while the infralapsarians thought it was fallen humanity. Considering this definition, an infralapsarian may hold to the logical priority of election in God's teleological ordering but maintain that the object of election is fallen humanity. As noted earlier, Barth understands God's eternal will as concerning fallen humanity and not unfallen humanity. This is the basis for Tseng's view that Barth is "basically infralapsarian."[81] Still, Barth's position is a combination of infralapsarian and supralapsarian elements. Barth does hold a vital supralapsarian element as the incarnation logically precedes all God's working in election. However, as this eternal election concerns fallen humanity, the incarnation is always entangled with the fall.

Comparing van Driel's and Tseng's readings, it seems important to note that van Driel's reading does not consider the broader consequences of Barth working with fallen humanity in election. Van Driel's reading points out Barth's supralapsarian aspects to benefit his own arguments as advantageous. But if Barth is more infralapsarian, the tensions van Driel perceives do not carry the same weight. Suppose that rejection consists of this "no" to the fallenness of humanity. In that case, rejection does involve humanity's decision to sin just as much as rejecting *das Nachtige.* This point helps to show how Barth's view of election remains God's eternal act *and* response to the fall. As the incarnation involves God's response, humanity's agency lies in deciding to sin. Therefore, it seems to me that God's rejection finds a more coherent place in Barth's theology than van Driel perceives. Tseng's perspective thus undermines part of van Driel's critique of Barth.

Can one then say that Tseng has properly characterized Barth's position by bringing forth its infralapsarian character? If, as Tseng argues, the incarnation is infralapsarian in Barth's

[79] Tseng, *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology*, 77.
[80] Ibid, 41–61.
[81] Ibid, 292.

view, then we do not seem able to make many further reflections. We cannot say much more about his supralapsarian Christology, as God's will is eternally set on rescuing fallen humanity. One who might side with such an interpretation is McCormack, who writes that "the incarnation was necessary, in Barth's view, because of the fall."[82] However, I contend that Barth's work invites further inquiry and questioning. Why does God have to elect and create a fallen humanity? Does this not make the fall necessary or, at the very least, wholly dependent on God in Barth's account? I read van Driel as capturing an intuition that Barth's position draws toward a positive horizon of eschatological consummation. In his foreword to Tseng's work, George Hunsinger seems to agree that while Barth never formally expressed that the incarnation would happen regardless of the fall, his theology often points in that direction.[83] In another place he also remarks regarding an "incarnation anyway" that "Barth regarded it as speculative and unanswerable…" and yet "the incarnation resolves a plight [of creation] logically independent of sin, namely, the plight of transitoriness and dissolution into nonbeing."[84]

Here, I perceive two ways of approaching Barth's project of election. One approach rests content with the "basically infralapsarian" character of Barth's work. In this reading, Barth's corpus explicitly negates the question of an "incarnation anyway," as he does not wish to inquire into God's mind. However, this might have tremendous consequences for how we envision the fall and humanity's role in creation, as necessitated in God's eternal will. Another reading is keen on capturing the tension of Barth's position, which goes in a more supralapsarian direction. This, however, involves stretching certain aspects further than Barth's thought might allow. These are crucial questions, which discussing Barth alongside themes in Balthasar helps illuminate. But before that, I will discuss the shape of Balthasar's alternative approach.

4. Balthasar and Supralapsarian Christology

In focusing on Balthasar, I am exemplifying a deeply *philosophical* approach to supralapsarian Christology. Balthasar's point is that the incarnation solves a thorny metaphysical problem concerning generals and particulars. Still, Balthasar does not want to turn his Christology into a locked system, which is why he in the end rejects supralapsarian Christology. In my estimation, this leads to an ambiguity at the core of his metaphysics. What becomes of

[82] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 360.
[83] Tseng, *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology*, 10.
[84] Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 204.

Balthasar's Christocentrism without a necessary Christ? To contextualize these aspects of his thought, this section will characterize his view of revelation and his metaphysical Christocentrism in connection with his understanding of supralapsarian Christology.

To properly understand Balthasar, it is helpful to comprehend his broader project. Balthasar's thought is characterized as lying between two poles: a univocal relation of identity and an equivocal relation of total difference. Balthasar instead opts for an analogical construal of God's relation to creation. Essentially, creation is ontologically grounded in God's being but in an analogical way. For instance, his triptych understands being's transcendental properties of beauty, goodness, and truth as analogous to God's infinite glory, goodness, and truth.[85] Thus, the basis of Balthasar's project is the analogy of being - the *analogia entis*.

Concerning the *analogia entis,* Balthasar is deeply influenced by Aquinas and his mentor, Erich Przywara (1889-1972).[86] Aquinas states that when speaking of God, "it is taken neither univocally, nor equivocally, but analogically."[87] His real distinction elucidates this ontologically. For Aquinas, there is a distinction between *essence* as the potential "what" of a being and *existence* as the act of exercising that potential "what." Importantly, essence and existence perfectly coincide in God.[88] This contrasts with creatures where essence and existence stand in tension. Created beings do not act out their essence perfectly, implying a gap between their essence and existence. Whereas God *is* his essence, created beings *have* their essence. Consequently, Aquinas posits that creaturely existence must be grounded in something else, namely God. This leads to an analogy where creatures are like God in that they consist of a unity of essence and existence but dissimilar in that they do not exist self-sufficiently.

Przywara elaborates further on this. As he expresses it, essence exists "in-and-beyond existence."[89] This loaded expression conveys that there always remains a tension between how creatures actually exist and how they potentially could exist. Creaturely essence always draws towards something beyond its actual existence. This beyond is secured in the being of God, who reveals himself "beyond-and-in" the creature. According to Przywara, and repeatedly stressed by Balthasar, this analogical insight is a recapitulation and extension of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).[90] He especially picks up on the statement that "between creator and

[85] TD 1, 7.

[86] For a treatment of Balthasar's influences on the *analogia entis,* see Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Eschatology as Communion*. (OUP Oxford, 2005), 19-90.

[87] Aquinas, ST I, Q.13.art 5. co.

[88] Aquinas, ST I, Q.3.art 4. co.

[89] Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, (Grand Rapids: Mi, Eerdmans, 2014), §7.4, 159.

[90] Ibid, §6.7, 234.

creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them."[91] From this understanding, we can now begin approaching Balthasar's idiosyncratic construal of the *analogia entis*.

4.1. *Christocentric Analogy*

Balthasar's view of analogy flows from his peculiar interpretation of the real distinction through his *fourfold difference*. This is considered the core of Balthasar's metaphysics and can be understood as a hermeneutic key to many of his insights.[92] If the tension in Aquinas' real distinction and Przywara consists of what lies beyond existence, then the fourfold elucidates how this beyond reveals itself to beings. Furthermore, the fourfold is also a response to Heidegger's fundamental question: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"[93] Consequently, the fourfold intertwines complex metaphysical questions in Aquinas, Przywara, and Heidegger, into one coherent frame. As D.C Schindler notes: "Balthasar's fourfold difference is a single, complex reality constituted out of four irreducible differences."[94] With this preliminary qualification, let me unpack the four differences.

The difference between the child's "I" and his mother: Balthasar begins by perceiving how a child's consciousness awakens. His idea is that a child's existence is an answer to its mother as "its 'I' awakens in the experience of a 'thou': in its mother's smile."[95] In the mother's thou, the child becomes more than some generic essence by actualizing its unique existence for the first time. Thus, the beginning of the child's existence consists of an answer to something already given, namely its mother's love. Thereby, Balthasar understands the fundamental act of existence as wholly dependent on a giftedness of love. Consequently, existence also begins with a question: To whom does one owe this giftedness?

The difference between being and beings: Balthasar continues by describing how the child eventually understands that every other existent has come to exist in a similar giftedness. Every other existent similarly owes itself to something that lies beyond itself. Behind existence, some

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[91] Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, ii. Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Georgetown University Press, 1990), 232.

[92] For a more in-depth elucidation of the fourfold difference, see David C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (Fordham University Press, 2004), 28-58.

[93] Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Yale University Press, 2000), 1. For Balthasar's appropriation of Heidegger see Fergus Kerr, "Balthasar and Metaphysics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes S. J. and David Moss (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 235.

[94] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 36.

[95] GL 5, 616.

limitless source must lie to this givenness, which we term being. Balthasar writes that "all existents partake in being, yet—to whatever extent we were to multiply them—they never exhaust it, nor even, as it were, 'broach' it."[96] Being does not reveal itself as simply an amalgamation of all things; instead, we perceive it as the source of giftedness behind all unique beings.

The difference between beings and being: Simultaneously, the child will come to realize that there is a reciprocal relationship between being and beings. Although being is the source of existence, it never reveals itself as such but always through beings. Therefore, being can only find its place in the world through beings. Thus: "Just as existents stand in need of being, being stands in need of the existent."[97] Therefore, there is no being without beings, but simultaneously, there are no beings without being. To hold to both clauses, Balthasar posits that this interchange between beings and being cannot consist of a self-caused relationship. This takes him back to the initial question: Whom? To whom do being and beings owe themselves?

The difference between God and the world: Ultimately, the ontological differences in the world are held together by a final difference towards God. Balthasar posits that as God lies beyond all other differences, these differences are safeguarded. These differences do not need to remain in a constrained circular relationship; instead, they can open towards something else. In the end, difference in the world finds its place in opening towards God.[98] The differences we perceive in the world are therefore nested in the ultimate distance between creator and created. This analogically mirrors the relationship between the child and his mother as the giftedness of being and beings find their answer in God's thou.

Delineating the fourfold prepares us to see that for Balthasar, the analogy of being opens from the wonder of the world's differences. This is also how Balthasar envisions the ideal relationship between philosophy and revealed theology. Philosophy is something good that can yield wonder up to the third difference. But ultimately, philosophy needs something beyond itself to avoid becoming constrained in a self-caused circle. In this sense, philosophy flourishes by its difference from theology so that philosophy is not destroyed but perfected by revelation, mirroring nature's perfection through grace. God's revelation does not swallow the differences it has toward existence or philosophy. Instead, it is precisely as wholly different that God can positively relate towards them. Once again, this comes back to the fact that Balthasar envisions

[96] GL 5, 617.
[97] GL 5, 619.
[98] GL 5, 625.

an analogous relation between creation and God instead of one constituted by pure identity or pure difference.

But where are all these differences coming from? The answer lies in how Balthasar perceives creation as analogously grounded in the trinity. As he writes "There is an analogy between the Son's being begotten and the creatures' being freely and sovereignly created by God."[99] Balthasar posits that the Son's begetting reveals an inherent difference in God that analogously becomes the space creation originates from. This includes even the potential for the fall as "the trinity contains the purely positive archetypes of what, within creation, is reflected in potentialities and in the negativities that result from sin."[100] This enables him to say that "the trinity is truly revealed in its overflow into the world (in creation and in the incarnation of Christ) and show itself thereby to be the a priori ground of everything that exists in the world."[101] The differences that the fourfold dramatize, and paradoxically even those of sin, thus have their ontological grounding in the trinitarian differences.

These somewhat convoluted pieces of Balthasar's thought are crucial to understanding the *analogia entis*' role in his project. So far, I have described Balthasar's ideal metaphysics, which answers how creation ideally relates to God. Next, Balthasar further distinguishes the *analogia entis* in his strong emphasis on Christology. Johnson notes that "there are two metaphysical systems in von Balthasar; one based on the pre-Incarnate Christ, and one based on the Incarnate Christ."[102] The first system, based on the pre-Incarnate Christ, examines the ideal ontological relationship between God and creation. I delineated this above by connecting Aquinas' real difference, Balthasar's fourfold, and trinitarian difference. But what then leads to the need for a second metaphysics? The answer lies in Balthasar's critique of a purely ideal metaphysic. A comment in the Theo-Logic captures it well,

> If each and everything were nothing more than an 'instance of. . .' or a kind of algebraic 'x' that could be exchanged for other entities without loss, then things would possess absolutely no intrinsic value of their own as individuals.[103]

[99] TD 3, 229.
[100] TD 5, 121.
[101] GL 2, 261.
[102] Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, 107.
[103] TL 1, 81.

In Balthasar's thought, any metaphysical inquiry that does not protect the unique value of beings is thus insufficient.

While Balthasar's fourfold proposes that existents depend on being for their existence, being is only revealed by way of beings. In this sense, particulars are not only instantiations of being but distinctive in themselves. But how does this come to expression theologically? Informed by the fourfold, Balthasar writes, "There is a very strong downwards tending analogy: the eternal Word of expression knows better and says better what each thing wants to say than the things itself knows."[104] Analogy does not simply progress in the upward direction but also downward. Existents are not only granted their existence from higher analogical ideals in God. Rather, the Word knows their existence from the inside. Theologically speaking, the ground for this lies in the theology of incarnation. Summarizing this interplay, Balthasar writes,

> Herein lies the solution to the theological problem of universals. The life of Christ, as was said, is the "world of ideas" for the whole of history. He is the idea made concrete, personal, historical.[105]

The incarnation of Christ affirms the value of all beings by gathering them into his historical life. While this idea could be developed more substantially in a theological frame,[106] the point is that beings do not simply stand in for ideal representations. Instead, they are found in the concrete representation of the Word made flesh. This all comes together so that Balthasar can say Christ "is the concrete analogy of being."[107] In this sense, Christ inaugurates a second, historical metaphysics, which safeguards the individual value of particulars by having the ideal become historical.

Having accounted for Balthasar's Christocentric view of the *analogia entis* as the basis for revelation, I will now relate these aspects of his thought more concretely to supralapsarian Christology.

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[104] GL 2, 352.

[105] Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 92.

[106] This has been attempted by Ben Quash who is positive to such a Christological view of history. However, he also critiques Balthasar's theology for not living up to his own ideal metaphysics on this point. However, as I am only dealing with Balthasar's metaphysical aspects it would be superfluous to engage with this critique here. See further *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 176 -195.

[107] Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 69.

4.2. *Supralapsarian Agnosticism*

The upshot of the preceding discussion was that Balthasar's view of analogy gave rise to two metaphysics: one ideal and one historical. Balthasar's construal of the two metaphysics gives rise to three possible ways of a more profound unity. The first is a higher synthesis of the two metaphysics. The problem is that this clashes with what metaphysics consists of for Balthasar. The analogy of being is an attempt to construe the space where God and creation meet without becoming identical or totally distinct. If a higher synthesis than analogy were to be found, this would undermine Balthasar's reasons for invoking analogy in the first place.

The second way would be to subsume the historical into the ideal metaphysics. This fails to consider how Balthasar's fourfold difference goes against such a pattern. For Balthasar, being must always be instantiated in particular beings. While this does not mean the ideal or general is without existence, it is only discernible through the particular. To deny this, and thereby to subsume the historical into the ideal, would be to go in the opposite direction.

The third way is to subsume the ideal into a historical metaphysics. What would this entail? That would entail that the pre-incarnate Son was fully encapsulated in the incarnate Christ. The attentive reader may ask itself: Is this not what Christian orthodoxy claims? That would be correct, as Chalcedon interprets Christ as "acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation."[108] The ideal and historical metaphysics come together in the one person of Christ. The incarnation should, therefore, not be understood as a rejection of the ideal metaphysics but rather a dramatic development of it. The historical metaphysics, inaugurated by the incarnation, is a fulfillment of the ideal metaphysics.

However, and this is crucial, the two metaphysics do not necessarily correlate if the incarnation is contingent on sin. Johnson helpfully notes that "if the incarnation was willed apart from human sin, then it was always God's plan for creation: one has succeeded in uniting the two metaphysics but in a supralapsarian affirmation."[109] Notwithstanding, Balthasar does *not* profess supralapsarian Christology to solve this "metaphysical gap" necessarily. This is explicitly stated in Balthasar's reading of Maximus the Confessor and Bonaventure. Reading Maximus, he stresses that,

[108] Statement from the council of Chalcedon 451 in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Tanner, 85.
[109] Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, 125.

> Maximus does not intend to demonstrate a necessity for the incarnation in the metaphysical sense, but rather to point to the meaning of history itself - all history! - he also includes the historical process of sin in this supreme synthesis.[110]

According to Balthasar, Maximus' system does not speak beyond what history has led up to. Therefore, any speculation beyond history becomes unfeasible from the premises of Maximus' theology.

In his exposition of Bonaventure's concept of *liberalitas,* Balthasar becomes even more explicit. Balthasar understands *liberalitas* to be God's "superabundance of love that, as befits its essence, always wills to, indeed, must, give more, in excess of every "proportionate" measure."[111] Given this understanding,

> On the hypothesis that God actually resolves to create a world, Bonaventure, thanks to his idea of *liberalitas*, transcends a priori the Thomist-Scotist controversy over the motive of the incarnation. However much the Logos may appear as the "redeemer" from sin, his becoming man is ultimately conditioned, not by this motive, but by the free and generous love of God that transcends every worldly reality.[112]

Here, Balthasar joins Bonaventure in affirming that the incarnation is more than a mere response to sin. Still, that does not mean one can predict what this "more" consists of. By invoking Bonaventure's view of love, Balthasar thus attempts to transcend the supralapsarian issue.

To summarize, Balthasar's approach toward supralapsarian Christology can be boiled down to two things. First, he does not think a profoundly Christocentric theology like the one we find in Maximus or Bonaventure must entail a metaphysical necessity for Christ. Second, he does not believe that ulterior motives for the incarnation than rescue from sin must necessitate the incarnation. God's love always abounds in generosity so one can never predict God's action beforehand. Noteworthy is that both these points come back to how Balthasar relates to God's freedom. One of Balthasar's analogies summarizes his view well,

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[110] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic liturgy: the universe according to Maximus the Confessor* trans. Brain E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 134.
[111] TL 2, 163.
[112] TL 2, 168.

> Just as a man who sets off on a long journey does not know what will happen to him or how he will be changed when he returns after years of absence, so, too, the subject does not know what the adventure of knowledge will bring it.[113]

Analogously to the man on the journey, God's freedom could not have been determined before history has come to pass. But if it cannot be determined, does that mean God's workings are arbitrary? On the contrary, Balthasar states that "in God it is impossible to distinguish necessity from his self-determination and to make the latter dependent on the former. God's truth is an identity of necessity and freedom."[114] Balthasar does not view God's workings as arbitrarily determined but still wholly constituted by his freedom. In the end, the only reliable source for perceiving God's freedom is how it has revealed itself in history. Most primordially, the incarnation shows us *how* God has determined to use his freedom. But the incarnation is still dependent on history as it has come to pass. To say what God's freedom is in a reality where the fall did not occur oversteps the boundaries of theology. By this, we can understand that Balthasar's refusal of supralapsarian Christology attemps to maintain God's abiding mystery.

In summary, Balthasar's metaphysics tends towards a union of the ideal and historical metaphysics, but he still explicitly dismisses supralapsarian Christology as to tie these together necessarily. This leaves him with two separate metaphysics and an insistence on God's utmost freedom. Does Balthasar then succeed in adopting an agnosticism regarding supralapsarian Christology? There are two primary ways to critique this. The first would be to find reasons within the ideal metaphysics for incarnation. As Johnson writes,

> The problem that *A Theology of History* attempts to solve is not a problem created by human sin, but by the dynamics of universality and particularity. Thus it seems that even in the Ideal Metaphysic, Incarnation is required.[115]

If the interplay between general and particular needs the incarnation, then Balthasar's case seems difficult to uphold. Second, we might argue that Balthasar speaks within an essentially supralapsarian frame without taking the consequences of it. He maintains that we need to preserve the mystery of God regarding the incarnation, but as I have shown, his metaphysics seems dependent on Christ. Like Bonaventure, Balthasar's whole view of reality is built around

[113] TL 1, 62.
[114] TL 1, 240.
[115] Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, 132.

Christ as incarnate. Can Balthasar's metaphysics keep this tension intact? More sharply put, can it even envision reality without the incarnate Christ? To me, it seems that there lies an inherent ambiguity in Balthasar's construal, which will now be taken up together with Barth.

5. Juxtaposing Barth and Balthasar

This next section aims to conduct a comparative analysis of Barth and Balthasar. I will compare three main things: First is their views of revelation in connection to their Christocentrism. How do these aspects contextualize their respective accounts? Second is their initial stances on supralapsarian Christology and the ambiguity their positions admit. How does their work convey different approaches to supralapsarian Christology? Lastly, I will analyze them through the three hermeneutic tensions I framed supralapsarian Christology through earlier. Can Barth's and Balthasar's accounts transcend the tensions concerning revelation, creation, and grace?

5.1. *Revelation and Christocentrism*

As I have characterized Barth and Balthasar, their Christocentric views of revelation determine their approaches to supralapsarian Christology. Furthermore, it is a respective theological device, election and the analogy of being, in which their approaches are found. To begin with, I will describe how their construals of these aspects reflect partly diverging starting points.

Barth insists upon a deep Christological grounding for the doctrine of election. Hence, he reacts against any general view of God to favor the specificity of God's revealed love in Christ. It is by electing Christ that the eternal will of the triune God is revealed to humanity. Election in Christ becomes a theological device that moves from arbitrary possibilities of some unknown God to the revelation that is Christ's concrete life. The incarnation is, therefore, the necessary condition for how God's eternal will gets instantiated in history. This leads Barth to be very critical of thinking philosophically about how God reveals himself outside of Christ.

Balthasar construes his analogy of being by looking at the differences in existence. As the fourfold expresses it, the wonder at existence leads us to a final difference toward God. Theologically this difference becomes an ideal reflection of God's trinitarian difference. However, such ideal metaphysics tends to juxtapose general being to unique existents. Only in the incarnation of Christ are such metaphysical ideals subsumed into a historical metaphysics where the relationship between the general and the particular is resolved. Analogously, all differences in the world and toward God become concrete in Christ as he is the concrete analogy

of being. Thus, Balthasar's metaphysics opens to a distinctively Christian view of revelation, where philosophy opens to theology at the end.

Comparing these aspects in Barth and Balthasar helps us classify their divergence of starting points. For Barth, all thought must begin with Christ to not be led off the rails. This becomes especially clear in what he deems to be a distortion of election in the Reformed tradition. In all avenues of thought, Christ must come before all other considerations; otherwise, God's will becomes arbitrary. For Balthasar, Christ instead becomes an answer to tensions that creation cannot overcome by itself. In this sense, Christ does not become as much of a starting point as a dramatic resolution to reality's tension.

What can these differences tell us? For starters, it reflects the different approaches to natural theology that Balthasar and Barth employ. Balthasar believes starting from the world can lead one to open toward God's revelation. On the other hand, Barth sees a risk in beginning in this way, as God becomes arbitrarily determined outside of revelation. As these differences are substantial, it is interesting that their Christocentric revisions of election and analogy serve surprisingly similar purposes. Both of their Christocentric readings serve as a reaction against the generalization of creation's relationship with God. Barth argues that perceiving election in a more general sense risks reducing God's sovereign will to an arbitrary doctrine. This is also what might lead the doctrine of election to become both salvation and damnation. To overcome such concerns, election must be seen as particular election in Christ. Meanwhile, Balthasar's approach shows how the general can find its place in the particular. An abstract analogy of being risks becoming disconnected from the particular. Instead, analogy must be seen through Christ as the concrete analogy of being. Hence, a significant point for both these theologians is that one must come to God through the person of Christ to understand reality properly and particularly.

This elucidates the great advantage of relating supralapsarian Christology to Barth and Balthasar. For both, everything in reality comes together in Christ, albeit in different ways. For Barth, Christ serves more as the given starting point, whereas Christ instead stands for the coherence of the dynamic whole for Balthasar. While these are widely different starting points, both can be seen as wholly determined by Christ. For both, all authentic understanding of God and creation must be Christologically determined. In investigating supralapsarian Christology, this seems like a radical viewpoint. Is such radical Christocentrism even possible without a supralapsarian affirmation?

5.2. Approaches to Supralapsarian Christology

The preceding discussion showed that Barth's and Balthasar's theological starting points are quite different, although the Christocentrism in their projects serves relatively similar purposes. This difference is of further importance when they approach supralapsarian Christology. If supralapsarian Christology explores whether the incarnation is more than a response to the fall, where might such motives be found?

In Barth, further motives for the incarnation are found in God's teleological ordering of reality in electing Jesus Christ. The incarnation becomes the vehicle for rejecting all possibilities (i.e., *das Nachtige*) that do not correspond to Christ. To clarify, this is true in both Tseng's and van Driel's readings of Barth. Even for Tseng, election in Christ stands over sin in God's decree, although it does involve fallen humanity. Thus, Barth's view of election carries an element of response that van Driel does not grapple with. Nevertheless, election is still logically prior to such a response. So, regardless of how one reads Barth, his view of the incarnation includes a positive statement about God's will, which precedes the fall. This comes back to his starting point of beginning with Christ rather than beginning with an unspecified humanity. The meaning of the incarnation is found by starting in the abundance of Christ rather than in the fallenness of humanity. In this sense, the incarnation is logically prior to sin.

For Balthasar, further motives for the incarnation can be seen in how it serves as a synthetic answer to the question of ideals. This is true about both philosophy and theology. On the plateau of the third difference that philosophy reaches, there is a risk that beings and being will be stuck in a constrained self-caused circle. Similarly, an analogy that only perceives upward movement into God, has difficulty accounting for the unique value of existents. The incarnation articulates a response to both these issues of ideals. The incarnation helps uphold the ideal analogy of being while affirming the value of unique existents. The incarnation is thus God reaching down to safeguard the differences we perceive in creation. Rather than being subsumed into totality, all individual beings carry a unique value in Christ. Hence, the ideal metaphysics is transfigured in the incarnation. In this sense, the incarnation positively resolves the metaphysical relationship between ideals and particulars prior to any motive brought on by the fall.

Considering this, both Barth and Balthasar fit a specific definition of supralapsarian Christology as both affirm motives for the incarnation that precedes sin. However, as the broader discussion on supralapsarian Christology concerns the counterfactual "incarnation anyway," these conclusions become more complicated. Although both theologians speculate into further motives of the incarnation than rescue from sin, they remain keen to maintain God's

freedom. Thus, they do not wish to speculate on what would happen without the fall, even as an ideal possibility. A question this raises is whether they even give conceptual space for a world without sin or the fall?

My reading of Barth is that he does not provide conceptual space for a world without sin. This is van Driel's critique where God's teleological ordering of reality becomes the only thing of consequence for Barth. In this reality, God replaces human agency in the eternal election of Christ to overcome *das Nachtige* before any fall has even occurred. Tseng's reading might give a more in-depth sense of mystery. If Barth is more infralapsarian, it might be easier to conceive the whole drama of salvation as revolving around God's response to sin. Human agency is involved, albeit negatively, as its decision to sin prompts God to become incarnate. Does Tseng's reading then envision another possible reality where humanity has not fallen? His stress on Barth's concern with fallen humanity seems to imply otherwise. As construed by Tseng, Barth's logic sets God's will eternally on electing Christ and rejecting the fallen aspects of humanity. This must necessarily imply a fallen world in God's eternal will. Thereby, Tseng's reading urges one to consider our actual reality rather than asking speculative questions. So, while Barth affirms motives for the incarnation that precede sin in God's teleological ordering, such an account of election makes it difficult to imagine any possibility other than the fall.

In contrast, Balthasar provides more liberty to imagine a conceptual space for the non-necessity of sin. His trinitarian account of creation perceives sin as a radical privation of creation's analogous potential. If creation exists analogously to God, creation's potential for goodness must be limitless, which provides some grounding for a possible world without the fall. Furthermore, the analogy of being in its ideal form is undetermined by sin, implying that reality at its core is not constituted by a fallen logic. What complicates this is Balthasar's supralapsarian agnosticism. As his metaphysics tends towards the fulfilment of Christ, reality without the incarnation does not necessarily ground the unique value of individual existents. In this sense, a reality without the fall seems possible, but such a reality does not necessarily entail the incarnation. This solicits additional questions. Does a space without sin entail lesser grace from God? Does God resolve this relation between the general and particular in some other way? Balthasar does not inquire how a world without sin would look, but such questions naturally prompt themselves in his system.

One way to explain where these different approaches come from is the two traditions Barth and Balthasar reside within. As I noted in section two, the Scholastic tradition is more inclined to see various conceptual possibilities in creation whereas the Reformed tradition rather views creation as reflective of God's eternal will. Thus, Barth and Balthasar stand as contemporary

representatives of two traditional approaches to supralapsarian Christology. Barth's alternative consists of viewing the incarnation as eternally decided upon, given a fall that necessarily takes place. His theology, thus, becomes a resource for defending the necessity of the incarnation in God's eternal will. As Tseng notes, this position is a mix of supralapsarian and infralapsarian elements, as the object of God's eternal election is fallen humanity. Still, it seems to me that his view of the incarnation comes at the expense of necessitating the fall. Balthasar's alternative affirms a deeply Christological theology without necessitating the incarnation. He provides resources for understanding a world without a necessary fall but does so with an unspecified historical metaphysics. This allows him to affirm the analogical grounding of creation without necessitating the incarnation. While this enables him to construe the incarnation as more than a response to sin, he does not wish to affirm a counterfactual "incarnation anyway" to undermine God's mystery.

Whether these are plausible approaches toward supralapsarian Christology depends on whether Barth's and Balthasar's theologies cohere given their assumptions. Interestingly, both theologians perceive themselves as having transcended a counterfactual supralapsarian Christology. Barth is content to leave any counterfactual situation aside as there is no other possible world than our actual one while Balthasar does not believe that affirming a wholly Christocentric theology must entail a supralapsarian affirmation.

A possible takeaway from this is that counterfactual supralapsarian Christology is a project destined to fail. Barth and Balthasar transcend the issue by referring to God's freedom to determine himself as he pleases. Might that not be the place where theology inevitably must end up? The problem is that their theologies carry a deep impression of such supralapsarian Christology without its conceptual space. This can be perceived in how everything in their theology, both in method and substance, gets determined by Christological claims. Ultimately, it seems to me questionable how their stances on supralapsarian Christology can rightfully correspond to their radical Christocentrism. In this, I discern an ambiguity in their theology. An excellent place to criticize this ambiguity is through the three tensions I delineated earlier regarding revelation, creation, and grace. Through these hermeneutic lenses, Barth's and Balthasar's ambiguity returns as what I suggest are "veiled tensions." What happens when one unveils these? Do their ambiguous positions on supralapsarian Christology remain coherent?

5.3. *Veiled Tensions*

The first tension I brought up concerned *revelation*. For infralapsarians like Aquinas, revelation sets the limits for speculation. This need not reject the possibility of an "incarnation anyway" but rather knowledge thereof. On the other hand, Scotus affirms an "incarnation anyway" from the general trajectory of love that revelation puts forth. Bonaventure captures the tension between their two positions perfectly in his attempt to affirm both sides. Now, how does this tension relate to Barth and Balthasar?

This question concerns the Christocentric view of revelation they both hold. Tseng's infralapsarian reading of Barth takes him quite close to Aquinas' infralapsarian respect for scripture. Still, they differ as Barth does not give a conceptual space for a reality without sin, which Aquinas explicitly does. Meanwhile, Balthasar leans heavily on Bonaventure's way of affirming other motives than soteriological ones in the incarnation without committing to a supralapsarian affirmation. Thereby, he intends to transcend this tension altogether.

What complicates this is how Barth's and Balthasar's construal of revelation is so closely tied to Christ. In Barth, revelation is tied to the incarnation revealing election as God's eternal will. Balthasar's view of revelation revolves around Christ as the concrete analogy of being that holds together creation's differences. But what do we make of such claims without Christ? For Balthasar and Barth, Christ is where all knowledge of the trinitarian God becomes possible. Revelation depends on the utmost difference between God and creation, bridged only by Christ. We might construe this as a *positive* view of revelation, which depends on the ontological difference towards God. In other words, revelation is not simply a response from God due to the fall but depends on something more fundamental. This can be contrasted to a *negative* view of revelation, brought on by a contingent lack of capacity due to sin.

But I question whether their positive Christological view of revelation can be upheld without counterfactual supralapsarian Christology. If revelation through Christ is logically dependent on sin, then revelation does seem to become a negative response rather than a positive encounter. As both theologians favor the priority of such a positive view of God's self-revelation, this strikes a tension with their broader theological visions. How might their theologies possibly solve this tension? Barth does so by referring to God willing this exact world by electing it in Christ and rejecting all other possibilities. In contrast, Balthasar opts for the possibility of not specifying the concreteness of revelation without a fall. Still, both approaches seem to make the positive aspect of revelation challenging to articulate. Suppose revelation, and thus the incarnation, were simply a response to the situation inflicted by sin. In

that case, I imagine it would be easier to reconcile Barth's and Balthasar's views of revelation and supralapsarian Christology. However, as such a positive horizon of the incarnation becomes tied up with revelation for Barth and Balthasar, it seems implausible to abstract from it. Thus, I argue that they both reap fruits that only an import of counterfactual supralapsarian Christology has on the doctrine of revelation.

The second tension I wish to discuss concerns creation. I mentioned earlier that supralapsarian Christology in Reformed theology can be a resource to articulate a coherence of doctrine surrounding creation. However, as van Driel shows, this aspect might be problematic when theologians like Schleiermacher, Dorner, and Barth seemingly necessitate God. Instead, van Driel proposes that such coherence of doctrine is plausible only by beginning with a supralapsarian gratuity. Only such a horizon can adequately articulate how humanity's created beginning is coherent with the incarnation. In this sense, he characterizes supralapsarian Christology as a position in-between necessitating God and incoherent doctrine. Now how does this tension square with Barth's and Balthasar's approaches?

Barth builds the coherence of his theology upon the eternal election of Christ. Everything we perceive, from election to rejection, finds its place therein. Thus, creation becomes coherent only in redemption and eschatology. The empty nature of creation gets fulfilled in the abundance of Christ. However, as Balthasar notes, it is by making God "the author and conqueror of sin"[116] that Barth's theology becomes coherent. I agree that Barth's theology of creation *does* become coherent through election in Christ. The emptiness inherent to creation outside of election ultimately becomes fulfilled in Christ. While one could critically discuss what it means for creation to be an empty space, the overwhelming grace of the incarnation elucidates the rationale of creation. However, this does seem to come at the cost of necessitating sin. Whatever one thinks of this, it seems reasonable to consider this a price to pay for the coherence of doctrine that Barth achieves.

Part of Balthasar's understanding of creation lies in how Christ unites the ideal and historical metaphysics. The tensions in the ideal metaphysic between the general and particular come together in Christ. In this sense, Christ fulfills the potential of creation. Whether this is coherent without a supralapsarian affirmation is challenging to say. As we have seen, Balthasar does not affirm supralapsarian Christology to *definitely* cohere the general and particular in creation. Subsequently, Balthasar seems to forfeit coherence of doctrine to ensure that he does not necessitate God. Still, this does not mean God is unable or unwilling to resolve the relation

[116] Balthasar. *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 230.

between the general and particular if a fall did not occur. While this may very well be true, there remains tension in how Balthasar speaks about creation. Is it Christ that creation points towards, or rather, the metaphysical unity of the general and particular? Without a supralapsarian affirmation, does not Christ become a means rather than an end for creation? As Balthasar believes himself to have transcended supralapsarian Christology, he does not account for these questions. However, because of this, I believe that his position remains with unarticulated tension.

The final tension regards grace. As I discussed, neither de Lubac, Tanner, nor Hart believes that defending God's freedom requires some "pure nature" prior to grace. I argued that a radical way to affirm this is by a supralapsarian affirmation. If the incarnation precedes sin, this articulates how nature is inclined to receive Christ from the beginning. But what does this make of God's freedom as viewed in Christ? How does Barth and Balthasar relate to this tension?

In Barth's theology, grace is put alongside rejection as a precondition for election. Election is not an equality between "yes" and "no" in God, but rather overcomes the "no" through the rejection of Christ. Alongside God's rejection of *das Nachtige*, the grace of election becomes even more apparent. The "yes" of God in Christ shines over all other shadows. Still, this way of understanding grace risks necessitating evil. Is this a plausible way to understand God's gratuity in grace? This once again turns on whether Barth's view of evil is coherent. At the very least, I contend that Barth pays a price for being able to affirm this view of grace. By describing God's gratuity as Barth does, the incarnation's necessity gets entangled in negative aspects. A possible way to avoid this would be the affirmation of a stronger counterfactual supralapsarian Christology where sin is *not* a necessary component of reality.

Balthasar sees the mother's already-given love of the Child as the precondition for its existence. Analogously, the prerequisite for creation is God's 'thou' to whom it owes itself. In the fourfold, we can infer that God's grace safeguards and keeps together all natural differences in creation. All of this finds its place in the incarnation. Rather than creation going up into God, God comes down to hold creation's particularity together. Subsequently, the metaphysical logic of grace is concretely articulated in Christ's historical life. However, by not necessitating the incarnation, grace is only specified in our fallen reality. This could be understood as an attempt to ensure the gratuity of grace and keep intact de Lubac's "suspended middle." However, as Christ constitutes the logic of grace for Balthasar, it seems challenging to envision what nature would even entail without him. As de Lubac does not go as far in his Christocentrism, I do not view this tension as severe. However, Balthasar's radically Christocentric view of grace pays a significant price of clarity by not affirming a counterfactual supralapsarian Christology.

The takeaway from these discussions is that Barth and Balthasar prompt several questions in how their theologies relate to a supralapsarian affirmation. While they think they have transcended the issue, this certainty leaves them with unarticulated tensions or prices to pay due to their radical Christocentrism. Considering this, I think it would be unhelpful to assert that either Barth or Balthasar transcends a more speculative and counterfactual supralapsarian Christology. Whether one is affected more than the other is difficult to evaluate and lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, in my final section I do wish to discuss the importance of their "failure" to transcend supralapsarian Christology in the broader discussion.

6. The Possibilities of Supralapsarian Christology

Let me begin this final section by recapitulating this thesis' broader strokes. I began by situating supralapsarian Christology in historical and contemporary theology. By discussing the Scholastic controversy, van Driel, and the nature/grace discussion, I showed that reflection on supralapsarian Christology gave rise to prominent tensions regarding revelation, creation, and grace. I then picked up on how Barth's and Balthasar's theology relates to the broader questions of supralapsarian Christology. In describing their respective positions, I showed how both admitted more ambiguity on the issue than their initial conclusions appeared to show. Finally, I let their ambiguity square against the tensions to which the prolonged reflections on supralapsarian Christology gave rise. From this, I inferred that neither Barth nor Balthasar transcends these tensions satisfactorily.

A given question is what this comparison of Barth and Balthasar adds to the overarching discussion. It might be helpful to emphasize that both claim to have surpassed counterfactual supralapsarian Christology. If they provide credible accounts, these could possibly help overcome this thorny theological question. However, I hope my comparative analysis has clarified that neither theologian has surpassed such supralapsarian Christology without it entailing further complications. The ambiguity of their work testifies to this, and my inquiry into the veiled tensions hidden in this ambiguity attempts to provide grounds for this assessment. Of course, the reader would be welcome to defend either theologian from my conclusions. But given that my assessment has struck a nerve, what can we take this mean moving forward?

Due to their radical Christocentrism, Barth's and Balthasar's thought actualizes supralapsarian Christology further than most other approaches. What becomes so apparent is

that their theological systems as we know them break apart without the incarnation. The preconditions for speaking about God are found in their Christology, most clearly perceived in how they conceptualize election and the *analogia entis.* As they bring their Christocentrism further than most theologians, it becomes increasingly relevant for them to answer the supralapsarian question reflectively. This is also what they seek to do in their distinctive ways. However, as I have argued, this defense is at odds with other crucial affirmations concerning revelation, creation, and grace. In a certain sense, these remaining tensions amount to a critique of Barth's and Balthasar's approaches to supralapsarian Christology. For Christocentric theologians like Barth and Balthasar, a counterfactual supralapsarian affirmation could be a way to better handle these and similar tensions. Still, insisting that the supralapsarian position comes with a price is also vital. Attempting to venture into the mind of God is a more speculative way of doing theology, that many theologians believe undermines God's freedom. Once again, the axiomatic tension between speculation and God's mystery, which this thesis began with, is one to take seriously.

Whether the highest price lies in accepting or dismissing supralapsarian Christology is not what I intend to explore in this final section. To my mind (and as this thesis has hopefully illustrated) there are good reasons to both affirm and dismiss supralapsarian Christology. Therefore, envisioning the discourse on supralapsarian Christology as a binary of either acceptance or dismissal is *not* the most fruitful way forward. Instead, I am more interested in how this discourse may help articulate a more expansive theological grammar. To reveal my hand, I see the future possibilities of supralapsarian Christology lying in more significant transparency in articulating one's speculative suppositions.

To provide grounds for such possibilities, let me return to Barth and Balthasar. As I have argued, there are several pitfalls that one can observe in their relationship to supralapsarian Christology. As I have shown, the complexity of both these thinkers makes it challenging to understand exactly how one should approach them. Barth's work contains a complex mix of supralapsarian and infralapsarian elements, allowing interpreters to draw his work in different directions. Furthermore, his work seems to problematically necessitate the fall. Balthasar's metaphysics would be completed and more coherent with a supralapsarian affirmation, which he explicitly avoids. This complexity is, in a certain respect, testament to the nuance of these theologians. Aquinas' and Scotus' respective positions seem more straightforward from their initial theological premises. Barth and Balthasar could be viewed as more nuanced theologians as they leave space for both positions to seep in throughout their theology. However, I question whether this complexity is their intention. They both explicitly state that their conclusions

transcend the issue. But as my comparison unfolded, we saw that neither of their conclusions fit easily with other aspects of their theology. Their approaches to supralapsarian Christology appear ambiguous as they seem to veil more than they unveil. This amounts to a substantial critique of both theologians that cannot be easily dismissed.

However, though it may sound paradoxical, I still view their theological projects as two of the most promising vehicles for holding together the various tensions that the discussion on supralapsarian Christology gives rise to. From their respective starting points and theological outlooks, they draw the issue as far as possible while still attempting to keep God's freedom intact. Considering the axiomatic tension between human speculation and God's abiding mystery, we can categorize both Barth and Balthasar as leaning toward the second pole. To reiterate my critical assessment, my main issue with them is that this does not become sufficiently transparent in their theology. Both Barth and Balthasar write as if they have transcended supralapsarian Christology. In actuality, both remain within the axiomatic tension as their approaches are embedded in speculative claims. And precisely because they remain within such tension without transparency, unarticulated tensions appear. Their theologies could become more coherent if they admitted that this overarching tension existed.

It is fruitful to compare their implicit emphasis on the second pole of God's mystery with an alternative reflection, implicitly bent towards the first pole of speculation. In my mind, Hart represents this approach. He claims that one must adopt supralapsarian Christology to pursue a coherent theological vision. One must be a supralapsarian, no further questions asked. While I believe that both Barth and Balthasar pay a price of clarity, I contend that Hart's brisk certainty risks undermining the mystery of God. The interesting point here is that this divergence comes back to a choice of method concerning the tension between speculation and the mystery of God. Considering this axiomatic tension, I contend that none of the theological proposals this thesis has inquired into transcends supralapsarian Christology. This might seem like a disappointing conclusion. But that is only if one has a binary view of what theology ought to be. Here is where I find Tanner's conception of theological grammar to be greatly elucidating. She presents good theology not as a right theology on a binary scale between right and wrong. Rather, good theology speaks with correct theological grammar which holds together coherent speech about God. This in no regard entails that theology is an arbitrary discipline. If we understand the axiomatic tension between speculation and God's freedom as an instance of theological grammar, then maintaining this tension is a primary (and demanding) task for the theologian. Moreover, as I will now show, my analysis of discourse concerning supralapsarian Christology can bring up three distinct advantages such a theological grammar might have.

First, viewing supralapsarian Christology in connection with theological grammar seems to admit both the historical and contemporary nuance of the issue. As I have shown, discourse on supralapsarian Christology has always been a complex issue. Arguing that various positions lean toward either speculation or the mystery of God seems like a way to admit this nuance. Both affirming and dismissing of supralapsarian Christology come with a price that inevitably appears in parts of one's theology. However, acknowledging that prices are to be paid does not mean explicit stances on the issue are unfruitful. Instead, different stances convey different ways of construing theology with advantages and disadvantages. For instance, Hart's supralapsarian theology might become coherent, whereas Aquinas' infralapsarian theology keeps God's mystery intact. Barth's theology has a radical supralapsarian dimension, where the incarnation is emphasized as lying within God's eternal will. However, this also seems to come with the implication of necessitating sin. There are also theologians like Bonaventure and Balthasar, who are keen to maintain God's freedom but whose theology simultaneously points toward a more speculative Christological horizon. Thus, their positions remain in a dynamic tension between two opposite directions. To reduce these alternative approaches to either right or wrong is a foolhardy point of departure. Rather, it is the positions that manage to hold together its tension that become good theology, i.e., coherent speech about God, and thus theology that keeps the theological grammar intact.

Second, working with this theological grammar concerning supralapsarian Christology helps elucidate several tensions. The first step of this thesis showed that prolonged reflection on supralapsarian Christology revealed tensions concerning revelation, creation, and grace. The second step, which compared Barth and Balthasar, attempted to strengthen this claim by showing that the ambiguity in their theology returned as problematic in precisely these areas of tension. I propose that a deeper immersion in theological grammar might help theologians to make these and similar tensions sufficiently transparent. When dealing with speculative inquiry, it is not surprising that such tensions appear. Conversely, one reason that this theological grammar is so important is that it helps one approach, for instance supralapsarian Christology, as embedded in such tension. Theology so conceived always already stands within a tension between speculation and God's mystery. Regarding this, I do *not* have any ambition to suggest whether one should respond to these tensions by invoking supralapsarian Christology or not. As I have stressed, this conception of theological grammar allows several approaches to be valid at the same time. My point is simply that such theological grammar helps to bring to the surface an awareness of approaching such tensions within central Christian doctrines more responsibly.

Finally, as I have let this thesis develop, it should be evident that several Christian traditions contribute fruitfully to this theological grammar. In a binary frame, the discourse on supralapsarian Christology concerns plainly which stance to take. Instead, I propose that the discourse should be more aware of the axiomatic tension as theological grammar. This enables one to relate various advantages and disadvantages of traditional stances toward supralapsarian Christology more readily. In this more open discourse, it seems plausible that one should be able to affirm that different traditions have different contributions. For instance, the Scholastic controversy provides resources to understand revelation more clearly, whereas the Reformed tradition asks how one can achieve coherence of doctrine. Moreover, the contemporary discussion of nature/grace shows that the grammar of supralapsarian Christology might help concretize the grammar of grace. Moving into such a sphere of discourse can be one way of facilitating a more accommodating theological climate.

With that said, a remaining question is how one might envision the discussion moving forward considering this theological grammar. There are two exemplary postures that I would like to pick up on. The first concerns exceptionally bold positions. Let me use Hart as an example. He expressly adopts the supralapsarian position by heavily critiquing all infralapsarian positions. Considering this thesis, one could try to argue that Hart's claim is insufficiently nuanced and does not hold together the theological grammar of speculation. As I discussed earlier, Hart seems to lean in quite a speculative direction. Still, I contend that Hart's transparency is positive. Hart is clear that supralapsarian Christology is a way for him to construe a coherent theology and avoid tensions regarding creation's ends. I would suggest that someone as bold as Hart should express that he is willing to pay the price such a supralapsarian affirmation might give rise to. This would clarify the discussion more than pretending such a price did not exist. In this sense, Hart would admit that he remains within a speculative tension and makes certain choices from that standpoint. In this sense, he would be trying to be coherent with the theological grammar that he initially employed.

The second posture concerns caution. If a theologian were to deem the price of supralapsarian Christology as too high, which there are several reasons for thinking, this ought to lead to greater caution in how one constructs theology. As I have analyzed Barth's and Balthasar's radically Christocentric thought, I have concluded they are not justified in reaping the fruits of a counterfactual supralapsarian affirmation. Suppose other theologians wish to follow their Christocentrism (which I am inclined to do) and simultaneously their stances on supralapsarian Christology. In that case, I suggest they be more cautious and aware of their construal of a Christocentric theology. Otherwise, my critique of Barth's and Balthasar's

alternative approaches would remain considerable challenges. Such caution would entail that one is aware of trying to speak and speculate coherently considering this theological grammar.

To conclude, let me return to the question I posed in my first section: Why might reflecting on speculation into the incarnation be relevant? Let me answer, finally, by returning to Tanner's analogy of theology as language. My attempt at exploring the possibilities of supralapsarian Christology has advanced the view that reflection on the matter might help to develop and be aware of the speculative grammar of dogmatic theology. Consequently, I propose that such reflection might assist one in speaking this wonderfully complex language with more fluency, intelligibility, and transparency. Such "speech" is a desirable end, as in the hands of proficient language users, language becomes increasingly flexible, complex, and beautiful. Such a proficiency is profitable not least because it might inspire others to master it more fully. And mastery of the "theological language" is, I propose, what dogmatic theologians should set out to attain. That which helps in such an endeavor must therefore be of paramount importance. Thus, if the basic contention of this thesis is correct, then elucidating the discussion on supralapsarian Christology is one of the most fruitful ways to develop a sensitivity to the grammar of this language.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to elucidate the broader discussion on supralapsarian Christology. First, I have shown that the historical and contemporary discussion on the matter assists in revealing several critical tensions regarding revelation, creation, and grace. Second, I have compared Karl Barth's and Hans urs von Balthasar's approaches to supralapsarian Christology. In the end, Barth's position contains a complex mix of supralapsarian and infralapsarian elements, whereas Balthasar's analogical metaphysics remains agnostic towards supralapsarian Christology. Nevertheless, juxtaposing them helped classify how their responses to supralapsarian Christology are similarly nuanced and complicated by their broader theologies. Thus, I have contended that both are unable to transcend the tensions concerning revelation, creation, and grace. Finally, I have examined where their "failures" lead discourse regarding supralapsarian Christology moving forward. I have contended that the discussion should resist binary debate over the issue in favor of viewing it within the axiomatic tension between God's mystery and speculative theology. The possibilities of supralapsarian Christology lie in bringing this axiomatic tension to the surface, which is fruitful in three concrete ways. First, it

accounts for the question's historical and contemporary nuance. Second, it helps unveil and make transparent critical tensions in revelation, creation, and grace. Finally, it opens the space for several Christian traditions and perspectives to collaborate on the matter. Subsequently, regardless of whether one accepts or dismisses supralapsarian Christology reflection on the matter can help articulate a more expansive theological grammar.

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