PERFORMING THEOLOGY:
THE NATURE AND GOALS OF THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO
AUGUSTINE, AQUINAS, CALVIN, AND BARTH

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THEOLOGY 3510: ADVANCED STUDIES IN DOCTRINE 1

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Various metaphors have been used to shed light on the nature of theology. Drama¹ and symphony² are two recent analogies. Along those lines, but in an arena familiar to me, I want to argue that theology is like jazz piano. Each aspect of the theological task corresponds to the musical task of a jazz musician: there is the player, the bass note and its corresponding key; the “head”, or, first and final chorus; the inner chord voicings; and the audience. Likewise theology has a subject, the Church; a defining material object, God and his revelation; an ultimate goal, love; a process along the way, spiritual formation; and a watching world. Like most jazz, theology has a basic structure, but it also improvises along the way as it interacts with various contextual factors. Different players will emphasize different aspects, and some of the “inner voicings” will be nuanced and particular. The unique theological styles of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Karl Barth exemplify this variety within basic structural unity. Later theologians will borrow certain motifs, and downplay others. Certain notes will ring out loud and clear in one, and you will have to strain your ear to catch it in another. Nevertheless all the basic elements are there, and our own task will be to play this song in its fullness to our present day audience.

Augustine

Augustine was among the first to think about theological method and purpose, if not as systematically as we are accustomed to. In Teaching Christianity, he sounds all the notes that will continue to ring throughout evangelical theology until today: the Church, using Scripture, in a process of spiritual formation, on the way to wisdom. The Church is not explicitly expounded upon at length in the book, but it is in the background of the entire enterprise. “I am clearly dealing with Christians”³ he says in the prologue, and on the place of the community, he explains “‘If God . . . only thundered out his revelation from the sky and by means of angels .

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² Vern Poythress, Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001)

... then charity itself, which binds people together with the knot of unity, would have no scope for pouring minds and hearts together, and blending them with one another, if human beings were never to learn anything from each other.” 4 Theological reflection is carried out by Christians, in community. With that said, albeit briefly, he is on to his main task.

For Augustine, the material object of the task is “dealing with the Scriptures” 5 Everything else is rooted here, and our aims will be scriptural aims. So the question becomes, How do we understand the scriptures? “There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood”. 6 Discovering, for Augustine, is the process whereby signs are used “in order to signify something else” 7 This practical process of discovery takes up the rest of the book, though the specific analysis of Scripture as defining object is brief.

Augustine spends much time on the “main chorus”, the ultimate purpose for theology. There is a twofold division, between things that are meant to be used and things that are meant to be enjoyed. Enjoyment “consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake,” 8 and under this rubric, God alone is meant to be enjoyed for his own sake, and everything else is to be used for that purpose. For Augustine, “enjoyment”, “love”, “contemplation”, and “wisdom” are all synonymous terms, and this is the ultimate goal of all of life, including theology. “The fulfillment and the end of the law and of all the divine scriptures is love. . . we love the means by which we are being carried along, on account of the goal to which we are being carried.” 9 Theological understanding can be tested by whether it has attained this end: “If it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not yet understood them.” 10 In fact, this goal of love is so determining, that even if someone mistakenly interprets Scripture, but in a way that builds up love, “they are mistaken in the same sort of way as people who go astray off the road, but still proceed by rough paths to the same place as the road was taking them to.” 11 Certainly, they must be “put right”, but love is of greatest importance, for, without love, “you have not understood.” 12

4 Augustine, Teaching, 103
5 Augustine, Teaching, 101
6 Augustine, Teaching, 106
7 Augustine, Teaching, 107
8 Augustine, Teaching, 107
9 Augustine, Teaching, 123, italics original
10 Augustine, Teaching, 124
11 Augustine, Teaching, 124; cf. Augustine, Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love (tr. J. Shaw; Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1996), 135: “The man who loves aright no doubt believes and hopes aright; whereas the man who has not love believes in vain, even though his beliefs are true;” p. 135
12 Augustine, Teaching, 124
There is a process of spiritual formation for attaining this enjoyment, and theology finds a place in this formation. “Our minds have to be purified, to enable them to perceive that light, and to cling to it once perceived.” Knowledge is one part of this purification, but it is only one part. In Book II of *De Doctrina*, Augustine lays out a seven step process for this purification: 1. Fear of God, 2. Piety, 3. Knowledge, 4. Courage, 5. Counsel, 6. Purging, and 7. Wisdom, “the last and seventh stage, which is to be enjoyed in peace and tranquility.” Knowledge is simply the third stage in this process on the way to wisdom. It is “the stage that every serious student of the scriptures has to occupy himself. And he is not going to find anything else in them but that God is to be loved on God’s account, and one’s neighbor on God’s account.” Proper knowledge “leads one to bewail oneself, not to vaunt oneself; and in this frame of mind one begs with assiduous prayer for the consolation of divine help.” Knowledge of the scriptures has as one of its purposes the producing of a certain “frame of mind”: one that is moving toward greater purification and ultimately, wisdom. “To interpret Scripture, then, is a work of virtue above all, and its goal is the transformation of the interpreter in the love of God and neighbor.”

This distinction between knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) is one of Augustine’s particular motifs which he picks up in *The Trinity*. Knowledge is subsidiary, but necessary. “Nothing can be loved unless it is known.” Knowledge makes “good use of temporal things” whereas wisdom is “contemplation of eternal things,” namely, “the contemplation of God which is to be the supreme reward of the saints.” For Augustine it is wisdom, *contemplation*, that makes us “happy and blessed.” Nevertheless, in Christ, the Word made flesh, he finds a unity for both wisdom and knowledge. “Our knowledge therefore is Christ, and our wisdom is the same Christ. It is he who plants faith in us about temporal things, he who presents us with the truth about eternal things. Through him we go straight toward him, through knowledge toward wisdom,

13 Augustine, *Teaching*, 110

14 Augustine, *Teaching*, 132–133

15 cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 4–5 “Here surely is your answer as to what is the starting-point, and what the goal: we begin in faith, and are made perfect by sight.”

16 Augustine, *Teaching*, 132

17 Augustine, *Teaching*, 132

18 Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 10, cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 4–5, “When the mind has been imbued with the first elements of that faith which worketh by love, it endeavors by purity of life o attain unto sight.”


20 Augustine, *Trinity*, 337

21 Augustine, *Trinity*, 343, 80
without ever turning aside from one and the same Christ.\textsuperscript{22} As fallen creatures not yet in glory, our finite minds need knowledge of temporal things to help us on our way to this higher end. This knowledge is but one part of the process by which wisdom is attained, but it is a necessary part.

Augustine has little to say about the watching world. He is primarily concerned with those in the Church, although he briefly mentions the need to defend true doctrine from false teachers. “Faith will start tottering if the authority of scripture is undermined; then with faith tottering, charity itself also begins to sicken.”\textsuperscript{23} This is not greatly elaborated, but it is present, if a faint note in the chord.

For Augustine, the main theme of love for God is prominent and he plays the particular motif of knowledge and wisdom.

\textbf{Aquinas}

Aquinas was influenced in many ways by Augustine. “Augustine’s teaching stimulated much reflection on Thomas’s part, and Augustine ranks among the most quoted, and most appreciated, of all of Thomas’s authorities.”\textsuperscript{24} Many of the same notes will sound in Aquinas’s account, though with some shifting in emphasis. His main work that deals with theological aims is the \textit{Summa Theologica}.

For Aquinas, too, discussion of the Church in terms of the purpose of theology is brief. “The Master of Catholic Truth ought not only to teach the proficient, but also to instruct beginners.”\textsuperscript{25} Thus, this theological instruction is a task of the Church for the building up of its members.

The material object of theology for Aquinas includes Scripture, but shifts emphasis more toward God Himself, the One who reveals, and not as strictly to the Scriptures revealed. “For Aquinas, Christian theology is the science that approaches its subject matter, God, on the basis of first principles that themselves proceed from God.”\textsuperscript{26} This defining bass note is loud and clear: “Sacred doctrine does not treat of God and creatures equally, but of God primarily; and of creatures only so far as they are referable to God as their beginning or end.”\textsuperscript{27} Scripture does still have an essential place as the revelation of this God. In the very first article of the book, he quotes 2 Timothy 3:16, and explains that since Scripture “is not part of philosophical science . . . It was necessary for man’s salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God.”

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\textsuperscript{22} Augustine, \textit{Trinity}, 367
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\textsuperscript{23} Augustine, \textit{Teaching}, 124
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\textsuperscript{24} Joseph Wawrykow, “Thomas Aquinas,” \textit{Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia} (ed. A. Fitzgerald, et. al; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1999), 830
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\textsuperscript{25} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica} (tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; 5 vols.; New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), lpr
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\textsuperscript{26} Vanhoozer, \textit{Drama}, 247, 248
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\textsuperscript{27} Aquinas, \textit{Summa}, I.1.3
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Throughout the *Summa* he continues to quote Scripture as a rebuttal to objections, but he refers primarily “revelation” rather than “Scripture”, and his main object is God Himself.

God has revealed *himself*, and contemplation of God *himself* is the goal of all theology. “Man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason.” The study of this God-originated knowledge is “sacred science.” Everything in sacred doctrine revolves explicitly around God, and everything else in the world only as it relates to him. This is “the chief aim” of sacred doctrine, namely, “to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their last end.”

In setting God and the knowledge of God as the chief end of man, Aquinas is following in the footsteps of Augustine. After quoting Augustine on contemplation as “the goal of all our actions”, Aquinas elaborates: “Man’s highest operation is that of his highest power in respect of its highest object: and his highest power is the intellect, whose highest object is the Divine Good. . . Consequently happiness consists principally in such an operation, viz. in the contemplation of Divine things. . . Therefore the last and perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation.” Theology serves this purpose. Indeed, *everything*, serves this purpose, for “contemplation is the end of the whole human life,” and this, again, is synonymous with *love*: “Contemplation may be delightful on the part of the object, in so far as one contemplates that which one loves. Since, then, the contemplative life consists chiefly in the contemplation of God, of which charity is the motive, it follows that there is delight in the contemplative life, not only by reason of the contemplation itself, but also by reason of the Divine love.”

There is a formative process necessary for this task. Like Augustine, Aquinas acknowledges that our finite and fallen minds cannot leap straight to this loving contemplation. Matthew Levering sees in Aquinas the same structure as in Augustine. Just as for Augustine knowledge was simply the third step in a process that forms the mind on its way to wisdom, so “Aquinas desires to teach revealed wisdom in a way that forms in the reader the ability to engage truth at the highest intellectual level. . . The value of theological wisdom thus lies in its practice of theocentric contemplative ascent. . .”

Aquinas, too, distinguishes knowledge and wisdom, with the former serving the end of the latter. Under “knowledge”, he includes philosophy. “Therefore it [sacred doctrine] does not depend upon other sciences as upon the higher, but makes use of them as of the lesser, and as handmaidens. . . That it thus uses them is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the defect of our intelligence, which is more easily

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28 Aquinas, *Summa*, I.1.1
29 Aquinas, *Summa*, 1.2.pr.
30 Aquinas, *Summa*, I-II, 3.5
31 Aquinas, *Summa*, II-II, 180.4,7
led by what is known through natural reason to that which is above reason.” 33 He references Augustine, saying that “the higher part of the reason is the province of wisdom, while the lower part is the domain of knowledge.” 34 For Aquinas, the ordering of the lower to the higher can be somewhat complicated, as he is glad to appropriate Aristotle and others as “handmaidens” to the higher contemplative aim. “The Summa is both an explanation of foundational principles [wisdom] that bind together a variety of sources [knowledge]. . .” 35

Aquinas has a more complicated relationship to his audience, the watching world. He too, is keen to defend true doctrine. His dialectic method enacts this throughout the entire work, quoting philosophers and other teachers, and raising their objections before answering them point by point. However, there is also “audience participation” in Aquinas, like there isn’t in any of the other players. If philosophy is the handmaiden to theology, then pagan philosophers can be incorporated into the enterprise, though always as servants.

For Aquinas, the base note of God in Himself and the motif of knowledge and wisdom are clear, as well as a more complicated interaction between player and audience.

Calvin

Calvin sounds all the same notes with his own reformation voicings, and imakes significant adjustments in almost every area.

His theological work in The Institutes is a work within the church. “My object in this work has been, so to prepare and train candidates for the sacred office, for the study of the sacred volume, that they may both have an easy introduction to it, and be able to prosecute it with unfaltering step. . .which will make it easy for any one to ascertain what he ought chiefly to look for in Scripture . . .” 36

Like Aquinas, Calvin wants to keep theological reflection rooted in what has been revealed by God, but he shifts the emphasis back toward Scripture, and not God Himself ever detached from Scripture. Calvin does not want to speculate about God in Himself, but only as He is revealed specifically in Scripture. He compares Scripture to glasses and to a lisping nurse. “These two different images of the Bible point to two important aspects of Calvin’s approach to the special task of theology. . . Positively, true theology is reverent reflection on the revelation of God in the Bible, which is absolutely sufficient (i.e. normative, for belief and conduct). Negatively, theology must not wander into “vain speculations” but stick closely to those things we

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33 Aquinas, Summa, I.1.5

34 Aquinas, Summa, II-II.45.3

35 Paul L. Allen, Theological Method (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 110

may legitimately know, namely to the data of revelation in the Scriptures.”  

37 He wants to stick close to scripture. “In seeking God, the most direct path and the fittest method is, not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence, which is rather to be adored than minutely discussed, but to contemplate him in his works, by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us.”  

38 When discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, he says, “here, if anywhere, we should speculate soberly and with great moderation, cautiously guarding against allowing either our mind or our tongue to go a step beyond the confines of God’s word . . . let us willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself . . . we must conceive of him as he has made himself known, and in our inquiries make application to no other quarter than his word.”  

39 The main end of knowledge is to produce delight in God. “In each of the works of God, and more especially in the whole of them taken together, the divine perfections are delineated as in a picture, and the whole human race thereby invited and allured to acquire the knowledge of God, and, in consequence of this knowledge, true and complete felicity.”  

40 Yet, more explicitly for Calvin, salvation, i.e. regeneration is absolutely necessary for attaining this felicity. “By the knowledge thus acquired, we ought not only to be stimulated to worship God, but also aroused and elevated to the hope of future life.”  

41 Thus, David Clark’s assessment is that, “for Calvin, the purpose of theology is salvation.”  

42 For Calvin, too, knowledge is but one part of the whole of the Christian life, and not the first part either. “All correct knowledge of God, originate in obedience.”  

43 Again, due to the corruption of the finite mind, man needs to be changed along the way to the goal of contemplation by the transformation of the heart: “Error never can be eradicated from the heart of man until the true knowledge of God has been implanted in it”  

44 Knowledge must be accompanied with right action. “We cannot say that God is known where there is no religion or piety.”  

45 The aim of knowledge is piety. Calvin is greatly concerned to oppose “mere” knowledge. “The knowledge of God which we are invited to cultivate is not that which resting satisfied with empty speculation, only flutters in the brain, but a knowledge which will prove substantial and

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38 Calvin, _Institutes_, 57

39 Calvin, _Institutes_, 128

40 Calvin, _Institutes_, 58

41 Calvin, _Institutes_, 58

42 David Clark, _To Know and Love God_ (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 41

43 Calvin, _Institutes_, 66

44 Calvin, _Institutes_, 67

45 Calvin, _Institutes_, 40
fruitful wherever it is duly perceived, and rooted in the heart. . . “46 Doctrine aims to produce obedience: “Those who are taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture . . . we feel a divine energy living and breathing in it—an energy by which we are drawn and animated to obey it.”47

Calvin does not play the familiar knowledge/wisdom motif. Knowledge accommodated to our earthly senses is not a subservient form of knowledge on the way to contemplative wisdom. Scripture itself is accommodated (the lisping nurse), and we must speculate beyond it.

As to Calvin’s audience, he is partly playing for the choir, like his previous fellows. “We should constantly direct our inquiries and meditations to those things which tend to edification, not indulge in curiosity or in studying things of no use.”48 His theology is decidedly polemic. In his preface to the King of France, he specifically calls out “the fury of certain bad men”49 who have argued against sound teaching, and offers this work, in part, as a defense.

He is also emphatically not incorporating the input of the wider audience: Indeed, rather than appropriating philosophy as a handmaiden, Calvin is apt to reject philosophy for Scripture alone. “The doctrine of Scripture concerting the immensity and the spirituality of the essence of God, should have the effect not only of dissipating the wild dreams of the vulgar, but also of refuting the subtleties of a profane philosophy.”50

Calvin has shifted the emphasis in his bass line, incorporated a clear soteriological tone to his main theme, and left of the previous motif.

Barth

Karl Barth found himself in the midst of a theological landscape that had been entirely redrawn by Enlightenment and then Romantic thinkers. What he says about the nature and purpose of theology is in direct interplay and contrast with his setting.

With Barth, more than any other of the theologians considered here, is an emphasis on the subject of theological reflection, the Church. “Dogmatics is the science in which the Church, in accordance with the state of its knowledge at different times, takes account of the content of its proclamation critically that is, by the standard of the Holy Scripture and under the guidance of its Confessions.”51 The purpose of dogmatics “is simply to improve the form of Church proclamation. The correction, the deepening, the increasing

46 Calvin, Institutes, 57
47 Calvin, Institutes, 72–73
48 Calvin, Institutes, 144
49 Calvin, Institutes, 3
50 Calvin, Institutes, 109
51 Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 9; cf., 11, 13
precision of what is taught in our Church can only be God’s own work although not apart from man’s effort. One part of this effort is dogmatics.”52 He elaborates at length on the nature of this entity, the Church. “Jesus Christ . . . thus constitutes and fashions them as His community, He awakens them—this is the origin of their task—as a community to confess Him. And He gives Himself to be known by the community—this is the content of their task—in order that they may and should confess Him.”53

“From the pure hands of its Lord its task comes into the hands of the men united in the community whose creaturely limitation and sinful fallibility make it very doubtful what will be come of it. His light is broken up in this questionable prism . . . His light might well be distorted in this prism . . . In the sphere of conceptions, thoughts and enterprises there has always and everywhere been the actual threat of embellishments and obscurations of the content of its commission on the one side and of its orientation to the addressees envisaged on the other. In the face of this threat there is demanded constant critical vigilance accompanying the action of the community in the discharge of its task.”54

The Church is constituted as a community with a task – to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world, and thereby to win the world for Him. Because this task is essential, the critical examination of the performance of the task is of first importance.

Barth, like Aquinas, is keen to keep theology focused on its object, which is God, and emphatically for Barth the Triune God. This emphasis on the object is in contrast to Romanticism’s emphasis on the subject, man and his experiences. Theology must be tethered to the Word of God. “The subject of theology is the ‘Word of God’. Theology is a science and a teaching which feels itself responsible to the living command of this specific subject and to nothing else in heaven or on earth, in the choice of its methods, its questions and answers, its concepts and language, its goals and limitations.”55 The Word for Barth is not merely Scripture, but Christ. “God is active in His Word; therefore dogmatics must remain bound to His Word, and can undertake only to give an account of that which is revealed in the Word of God . . . and God’s Word is His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore in the most comprehensive sense of the term dogmatics can and must be understood as Christology.”56

Theology has a definite goal. Like Augustine’s “knowledge” which is be used, not enjoyed, theology “cannot be pursued for its own sake, in the manner of ‘art for art’s sake.’”57 Rather, “the service of God and

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52 Barth, Outline, 13–14

53 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (ed. G. Bromiley and T. Torrance; tr. T. Parker et al.; 4 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), IV/3.2:796, italics original

54 Barth, Dogmatics, IV/3.2:812

55 Barth, Outline, 5

56 Barth, Dogmatics, 1/2:883

57 Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1963), 185
the service of man are the meaning, horizon, and goal of theological work.”

Like the others, “love” is intertwined in this ultimate end. “Theological work is a good work when it is permitted to be done in love.”

“To know about the perfect love . . . affords ample occasion to join in the praise of God, the God of the covenant, the God who is love itself. It is the very purpose of theological work, at any rate, to know about this love and , therefore, to join in the praise of God.”

Barth, too, distinguishes between aspects of theology, but with a completely different motif than “knowledge/wisdom” In fact, he sets his theological structure in distinction with the older division: “As a human concern for truth, it [theology] recognizes its solidarity with other such concerns now grouped under the name of science. It protests against the idea of an ontological exaltation above them such as might easily be suggested by its emphatic and distinctive designation by older writers as doctrina or even sapientia.” His parsing of the various aspects of theology takes a three-fold shape. “The work in which the Church submits to this self-examination falls into three circles which intersect . . Theology as biblical theology is the question of the basis, as practical theology the question of the goal and as dogmatic theology the question of the content of the distinctive utterance of the Church.”

Barth has a distinct view of the relation of the task to its audience. The Church’s main task is proclamation of the Gospel to the World. Barth had seen 19th Century theology become too preoccupied with accommodating to the prevailing philosophical issues and thought patterns of the day. Barth saw this as a reversal of priority: “Obviously theology has always been to some extent open toward and related to the world. It should be so.” What was needed was a recognition of “the absolute primacy of the positive tasks of theology in and for the church, over against the secondary tasks of relating to the various philosophies of the times.” Theology’s task within the church is directly related to the Church’s task outward toward the world. Dogmatics itself is not proclamation, but related intimately to it: “Neither can theology as such claim to be proclamation. Proclamation, however, is its presupposition, its material and its practical goal, not its content or task. Theology reflects upon proclamation It confronts it as a court of criticism.”

In Barth, we see an element with crystal clarity that hardly pronounced at all, and that is a clear melody for the outside world to hear: proclamation. If it is in the other theologians, it seems muffled amidst

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58 Barth, Evangelical, 187
59 Barth, Evangelical, 196
60 Barth, Evangelical, 206
61 Barth, Dogmatics, I/1:11
62 Barth, Dogmatics, I/1:4–5
64 Barth, “Evangelical Theology”, 19–20; cf., 20: “It did not enter their minds that respectable dogmatics could be good apologetics.”; cf. also, 23–24
65 Barth, Dogmatics, I/1:50
the comping of the chords of spiritual formation, and the quest for contemplative bliss. The world is either assimilated as a handmaiden, or opposed as a heretic, but in Barth we have a definitive task.

It is this task that encapsulates theology for Barth. God initiated into the world by sending the Word, His Son, to redeem people out of the World. This people is now constituted to continue this task of proclaiming the Word to the world for the same end. The purpose of theology is to serve this end of this people.

**Synthesis**

Any attempt to evaluate these giants of the faith can take place only provisionally and in tentative appropriation of their own methods. This is done as a member of the redeemed community, having been taught and with the intent to edify. God Himself is the defining and determining source of all theological reflection. Theology exists because He has created subjects, in His own image, and acted graciously toward us. This gracious act has had a long development with its climax in Jesus Christ—his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ordaining of witnesses, and filling them with His Spirit. The ongoing result of this is Scripture in the hands and mouths of the Spirit filled community, and it is to Scripture we must now turn, particularly to the letters written in those initial, direction shaping moments, in which Paul, the first theologian of the new era, instructed Timothy what and how to pass on as διδάσκαλια, or, “teaching”.

This activity takes place within the Church. “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Timothy is to “instruct the brethren,” and specifically, to take what he has learned from Paul and “commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Specifically this should mean the appointing of elders, whose lives are characterized by godliness, and are specifically “able to teach.” This doctrine of the Church has as an aim “godly edification.”

The determining object is God. “God has saved us and called us to a holy calling” and only as a result of this act of God is Paul “appointed a teacher of the Gentiles.” This God, who dwells “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” has been “manifested in the flesh” This free act of God includes breathing out Scripture, which is “profitable for doctrine”

“True knowledge, as distinguished from the false, produces “lovers of God” and following Paul’s doctrine includes his love also.” This

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66 1 Timothy 3:15 (all references NKJV)
67 1 Timothy 4:6
68 2 Timothy 2:2
69 1 Timothy 3:2
70 1 Timothy 1:4
71 2 Timothy 1:8-9, 11
72 1 Timothy 6:16
73 1 Timothy 3:16
74 2 Timothy 3:16
75 1 Timothy 1:5
76 2 Timothy 3:4
highest end of teaching is wrapped up inseparably with salvation. Paul has been appointed to teach “the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

This teaching has an “on the way” purpose of practical transformation. Those who teach it must themselves be “blameless”, not just knowledgeable. Timothy is to both teach and “be an example in conduct”. Certain conduct (disrespectful servants) will cause the doctrine to be blasphemed, the opposite of its intent. Indeed, doctrine “accords with godliness,” and conversely, ungodliness “is contrary to sound doctrine.” In Paul, Timothy’s example, doctrine is accompanied by “manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, [and] perseverance.”

There is an emphatic distinction between true and false teaching. Theology serves a strongly polemic purpose. “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification...some have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” There are “doctrines of demons” against which the brethren must be “instructed.” “If anyone teaches otherwise” Timothy must withdraw himself. Timothy himself must “avoid the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.” This seems to read as a warning against incorporating any outside “falsely called” knowledge into the material of theology. He is rather to “hold fast the patter of sound words which you have heard from me.”

In light of this, an additional task of theology is to instruct in suffering: “to this end we suffer reproach...These things command and teach.” Paul’s example includes his doctrine, alongside and surely informing his “persecutions, afflictions.” In the face of “evil men and imposters” growing “worse and worse”, Timothy must “continue in the things which you have learned.”

In the face of this hostile audience, Timothy is given an emphatic task of proclamation: “Preach the word!” Throughout the letters Κήρυγμα appears alongside the διδασκαλία. Paul is appointed a “preacher...and a teacher.”

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77 2 Timothy 3:10
78 2 Timothy 1:10
79 1 Timothy 3:11-12
80 1 Timothy 6:1
81 1 Timothy 6:3
82 1 Timothy 1:9-10
83 2 Timothy 3:10
84 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 6-7
85 1 Timothy 4:1,6
86 1 Timothy 6:5
87 1 Timothy 6:20-21
88 2 Timothy 1:13
89 1 Timothy 4:10-11
90 2 Timothy 3:10-11
91 2 Timothy 3:13-14
92 2 Timothy 4:2
It is in light of a positive exposition of the material that any evaluation can be made, (though not infallibly, as if my proof-texting exercise was itself privileged and “standing over” the others). The verdict is thus: the major contours that shape each of the four accounts appear in this original Scriptural account. The players are theologians in the Church community; their object is God and His revelation; the ultimate goal is love for God; the “along the way” purposes include increasing practical godliness; the, usually unsympathetic, audience is the world.

If some of these notes are played more loudly in some of the players, it is hard to criticize—they were playing to a particular audience, not our own. If one side or another is emphasized (God who reveals Scripture, or God’s revealed Scripture), what matters is that in the emphasis, the counterpoint is not swallowed up completely. In a disputed question like the place of philosophy as either handmaiden or profane and useless, the question could conceivably be recast in terms of philosophy as explicit and analyzed, or implicit and undetected, and the “guilty” charge reversed. It seems difficult to decide by which standard to judge these men, like picking sides when your parents fight.

There is here a self-conscious and deliberate failure to criticize these men in any substantial way. If the theological task is to be done “in the Church” then one must acknowledge one’s real place in the Church, and in relation to those in the Church through the ages. This is an attempt to act fittingly to the nature of theology, and if this note of critique has been played too faintly, perhaps the louder note of love will drown out its absence. I came to critique; I became, rather, a pupil, and I grew to love each of my teachers in almost equal measure. If the “along the way” purposes of theology include growth in humility and charity, my testimony would be to real personal growth in these areas as a result of reading these men. If I feel utterly out of place offering more rigorous critique, perhaps it is because theology is working effectually.

As long as every essential note is played, and the ultimate aim of love for God is kept in prominence, we as theologians can appropriate from each of these men, humbly and hopefully, in faith that even if we (or they) have played a certain note too loudly or softly, or even at times accidently out of key, by the divine direction of the Spirit, we may still proceed by paths, variously rough or smooth, to the same place as the road is taking us to.94

93 1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11
94 5459 words
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