THE PROBLEM AND PROMISE OF MEDIATION: GUNTON ON BARTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Uche Anizor

Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave. La Mirada, CA, U.S.A. 90639
uche.anizor@biola.edu

INTRODUCTION[1]

In his posthumously published *Barth Lectures*, Colin Gunton asserts concerning Barth's doctrine of Scripture: 'As a matter of fact I think he is wrong, I would want to have a stronger doctrine of scripture as the Word of God, myself.'[2] What lies at the heart of Gunton's critique was an issue of increasing focus in his later theology, namely, mediation. All doctrines purporting to give an account of the triune God's action in the world must reckon with the concept of mediation—the doctrine of Scripture included. According to Gunton, the chief failure in Barth's doctrine of Scripture is his inability or unwillingness to see the variegated and mediated ways God reveals himself.

By piecing together his fragmentary remarks on Scripture, this article outlines Gunton's criticisms of Barth's account, especially those related to his theology of mediation and Barth's supposed lack thereof, it provides an exposition of Gunton's own contribution, and ultimately asks how successful he is in moving beyond Barth while also retaining some desired distance from a traditional Scripture principle. It is hoped that this inquiry into Gunton's bibliology will highlight the challenges and possibilities of trying to navigate the waters between conservative doctrines of Scripture and supposedly mediating positions like Barth's.

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1 Some parts of this article are included in modified and expanded form in my *Trinity and Humanity: An Introduction to the Theology of Colin Gunton* (Paternoster, forthcoming 2016).

2 Colin Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, ed. by P. H. Brazier (London: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 74.

THE PROBLEM OF MEDIATION: GUNTON'S CRITIQUE OF BARTH

Gunton's reading of Barth's doctrine of Scripture flows naturally from his account of Barth's theology of revelation. One of the chief problems in modern views of revelation is the assumption that God relates to us without mediation, either to the mind or experience. Barth, Gunton charges, falls prey to a similar problem; for while not arguing for non-mediation in the human mind or experience, Barth holds to what Gunton calls a 'revelational immediacy', namely, 'a direct apprehension of the content of the faith that will in some way or other serve to identify it beyond question'.[3] Knowledge of God is accomplished by an alien and *immediate* encounter with the objective reality of God. The sovereign God acts freely to give direct apprehension of himself.[4] This belief in non-mediated revelation is expressed in Barth's insistence that revelation is *self*-revelation, and that God is freely revealed through God. To Gunton, mediation basically denotes 'the way we understand one form of action—God's action—to take shape in and in relation to that which is not God; the way, that is, by which the actions of one who is creator take form in a world that is of an entirely different order from God because he made it so.'[5] As this is applied to the triune God, mediation is summed up thus: '[A]ll of God's acts take their beginning in the Father, are put into effect through the Son, and reach their completion in the Spirit.'[6] Therefore, anything we might say about God's self-revelation must be construed along these lines. To be sure, God reveals God, but the precise nature of how that revelation

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3 Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation: The 1993 Warfield Lectures* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 3–4. For a very helpful and moderately critical overview of Gunton's relationship to Barth, see John Webster, 'Gunton and Barth', in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 17–31. I benefited greatly from some of Webster's analysis.

4 Gunton hints at agreement with the charge that Barth's theory of revelation evinces an over-realized eschatology: revelation is here and now, direct and full. He contrasts Barth's with Pannenberg's view that full revelation is solely eschatological and presently indirect. See Colin E. Gunton, *Revelation and Reason: Prolegomena to Systematic Theology*, ed. P. H. Brazier (London: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 68–9.

5 Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 5.

6 Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 77. This theology of mediation was often developed through the use of Irenaeus' image of the Son and Spirit as the Father's 'two hands.' See, e.g., C. E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures*, 1990 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 75.

is mediated by God and in God must be spelled out. Barth does not parse this out, resulting in a tendency to minimize aspects of the roles of Christ and the Spirit in mediating revelation.

Certainly Barth was aware of the centrality of Christology to any construal of revelation. However, if one holds too tenaciously to the principle that only God reveals God, Gunton asks, then what space is left for the *humanity* of Jesus, for example, to be revelatory? Is it possible for God to be revealed by that which is other than himself?[7] In Barth, revelation in Christ comes through his divine nature, not his humanity. Yet, according to Gunton, the Son is 'the focus of God the Father's immanent action, his involvement *within* the structures of the world, as paradigmatically in Jesus'.[8] Thus, self-revelation is somehow mediated through Jesus' human life and ministry in the world. He argues that one of the chief weaknesses of Barth's theology is that he buys into an 'Aristotelian principle' that only like can reveal like.[9] However, Gunton contends:

> The Fourth Gospel suggests a more subtle interweaving of revelation not only through the like—he who has seen me has seen the Father—but its counterbalancing by a theology of revelation through otherness. The Father is indeed made known by Jesus, but as one who is greater than he (14:28), and so beyond all we can say and think: one revealed by humiliation and cross, but revealed none the less as other.[10]

The Son, in his humanity, mediates revelation. Creation mediates the Creator. Barth fails to give an adequate account of this fact, often even setting up an either/or proposition: either God (construed generally) reveals himself (directly) or there is no revelation.[11]

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7 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 5. This argument Gunton borrows from Alan Spence, 'Christ's Humanity and Ours', in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), esp. pp. 88–93.

8 Gunton, *Act and Being*, pp. 77–78.

9 Gunton might characterize this as an example of Barth's capitulation to the Augustinian heritage of placing a radical disjunction between God and the created order. For an example of Gunton's critique of Augustine's doctrine of creation, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (New Studies in Constructive Theology; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 76–7.

10 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 123.

11 This failure may be a symptom of a larger problem Gunton finds in Barth's theology, namely, the 'swallowing up' of the humanity of the Son by the divinity. He writes: 'Because the humanity of Christ is for Barth the humanity of God, everything that happens is for Barth the act of God. That is right, but

As a result of his lack of specificity, the mediation of the Spirit is also given short shrift in Barth's theology of revelation. Barth follows Reformation theologies by more or less limiting the Paraclete's work to the application of the benefits of salvation or to the internal confirmation of Scripture's message. On this account, the Spirit's role in revealing or mediating revelation is negligible. Moreover, in Barth there is a tendency to blur the distinctive revelatory roles of the three Persons of the Godhead. With respect to the Spirit, he fails to highlight that the Son's ministry of revealing the Father is carried out in the Spirit, thus making the Spirit a mediator of revelation in that distinct manner. Without an adequate theology of mediation, particular revelatory works of the Spirit wind up underappreciated. What this points to is the need in Barth (and many other theologies) to better specify the different patterns of mediation (in this case, of revelation) within the Trinity.[12] In the end, Gunton maintains that there is little room for mediation in Barth's theology of revelation—whether by Christ, the Spirit, or creatures—and this contributes to the troubled relationship between Scripture and revelation in Barth's thought.

According to Gunton, Barth's actualist vision of revelation, when specifically applied to the Bible, disposes him to place too much of an emphasis on how Scripture becomes the Word of God today and too little stress on how it was *originally* inspired and received as the Word of God.[13] If present revelation is located in subjective response, or revelational immediacy, then it is more difficult to see how it may be located in a text. In

raises the question: in what sense is everything that happens also the action and passion of a man?' (Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 48). Elsewhere he charges that Barth 'orders' the priesthood of Christ to his divinity, therefore diminishing the human character of his priestly work; see Colin Gunton, 'Salvation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by John Webster; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 157.

12 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 122. This failure to specify patterns of mediation might be a result of what Gunton recurrently charges as Western theology's resistance to further distinguish the particular *ad intra* and *ad extra* operations of the Trinitarian Persons, as well as its inability to ascribe real personhood and meaningful agency to the Holy Spirit. See, e.g., Colin Gunton, 'The Spirit in the Trinity', in *The Forgotten Trinity: A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today 3* (London: BCC/CCBI, 1991), pp. 123–35; Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (2nd edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp. 30–55, and Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 188–92.

13 Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, pp. 73–4; cf. Gunton, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 188.

what sense, then, is the Bible inspired so that it becomes a unique vehicle of revelation? In Barth, the Bible's inspiration is not so much found in the authors' words, but in the act of God's self-disclosure to the person engaging the Scriptures.[14] The Bible is a 'witness' to the real thing, not the thing itself, since a creaturely thing cannot reveal God. Gunton takes issue with Barth's use of the witness metaphor, writing, 'Witnesses speak of what they see, autonomously and in their own strength, or at any rate that they are in external relation to that which they record.' He concludes that the metaphor of witnesses implies that the Spirit works from the outside to transform the human words of the writers into the words of God. This account neglects the Spirit's role in (1) forming a community around Jesus Christ, (2) enabling particular members of that original community to recognize what was redemptively significant in their encounter with Jesus Christ, and (3) empowering the apostolic authors of Scripture to write those words, making those words the medium of revelation.[15] In Barth, the Spirit merely mediates the subjective response of the contemporary hearer or reader. Barth's problem is a 'deficient pneumatology'.[16] Therefore, without jettisoning the notion of the Spirit's work of quickening a proper response to Scripture, Gunton aims to develop a more robust account of Scripture's relationship to revelation.

THE PROMISE OF MEDIATION: GUNTON'S PROPOSAL

Gunton follows Barth in seeking to centre revelation on God's saving action. He defines revelation proper as a unique event, bound up historically in the original encounters of prophets, priests, kings, and apostles with God's redemptive action, and culminating in Jesus Christ as God's saving work incarnate. Whatever else might be defined as revelation must be done so only in a derivative and inferior sense. If revelation proper is *sui generis*, then the issue for us becomes one of mediation: what is the precise nature of this revelation of redemption in Christ and how is this unique revelation made accessible to us?[17] Let us address both of these matters.

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[14] It is probably fair to say that Gunton's main point is that Barth *over-emphasizes* present 'inspiration' to past inspiration. In a response to a question during a lecture, he briefly acknowledges that Barth holds to some view of original inspiration (Gunton, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 81). Yet the brunt of his critique is directed toward the perceived lack of a doctrine of inspiration in Barth.

[15] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, pp. 76–8.

[16] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 68.

[17] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, pp. 109, 113, and 125.

Revelation is defined by Gunton as 'a form of personal relation of God to the world' and brings about the knowledge of the heart—the knowledge of faith—and not merely intellectual knowledge.[18] Although there is an intellectual component to revelation (and the knowledge that follows), it is not at the top of the hierarchy.[19] If revelation is in some sense redemptive, then 'heart knowledge' is superior to 'head knowledge'. Arguing from the Fourth Gospel he writes that the knowledge of the Father mediated by the Son (e.g. John 14:9), and the 'truth' mediated by the Spirit (John 16:13) are not propositional, but personal. As a source of personal, relational knowledge, revelation is a gift, not a possession. Gunton argues that in John's Gospel, gnosis is found most often in its verbal form, so that 'knowing is something that is done as the result of a relation to God in Christ'. If this kind of knowledge is a gift, then it silences boasting and pre-empts presumption, for no one can take hold of this personal relation at a whim; it must be given.[20] Revelation, which engenders the knowledge of faith, is then what Gunton calls a 'success word' in that it 'presupposes that something has actually been conveyed from revealer to recipient'.[21] How does this take place? This takes us to the centre of Gunton's doctrine of revelation—the mediatorial work of the Holy Spirit.

If revelation is the past Christ event, but also somehow a present personal relation, then that which connects God to humanity, the past to the present, and Person to person, is the Spirit. Now, the Spirit's distinctive function in the economy and eternity, according to Gunton, is to establish and actualize particularity—especially of persons divine and human. Thus the particular humanity and mission of Jesus, which function as the very vehicles of revelation, are brought about by the Spirit from start to finish.[22] By emphasizing the mediation of the Spirit, Gunton seeks to draw attention to the revelatory necessity of Christ's human nature—his creatureliness—and vice versa. Unmediated revelation of the Father is not our reality; revelation comes to us through the incarnate Son, by the Spirit.

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18 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 106.

19 Colin E. Gunton, *Intellect and Action: Elucidations on Christian Theology and the Life of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 52.

20 Gunton, *Intellect and Action*, pp. 53–4.

21 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 113.

22 On the particularizing role of the Spirit within the Godhead and the created order, see Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, pp. 182–90. Regarding the Spirit's particularizing of Jesus' humanity, Gunton borrows from Edward Irving. See, e.g., Gunton, *Christian Faith*, p. 102; Colin E. Gunton, 'Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited—Edward Irving's Christology', in *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays*, 1972–1995 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 151–68.

A theology of mediation rightly recognizes that the triune God enables the created order—which includes Christ—to bear a ministerial function. 'This means,' Gunton asserts, 'that parts of the world are empowered to serve as mediators of God's creation of other parts'.[23] As this pertains to our main concern, the Spirit's *present* and *ongoing* mediation of revelation takes place primarily through communities, traditions, and texts. Creaturely realities mediate the Creator through the creative Spirit of God.[24] It is at this stage that we might be able to make sense of Gunton's doctrine of Scripture.

According to Gunton, Barth's account of Scripture focused almost exclusively on Scripture becoming the Word of God in the event of revelation, or present inspiration, and under-emphasized original inspiration and original reception. He charges that traditional treatments conflate inspiration and revelation, so that 'the text either replaces or renders redundant the mediating work of the Spirit'.[25] Much of Gunton's work on Scripture is spent attempting to specify the relationship between inspiration and revelation. Following Coleridge, he argues that it is one thing to say something is revelatory, and another to say that it is inspired by the Spirit. Coleridge writes:

> There may be dictation without inspiration, and inspiration without dictation; they have been and continue to be grievously confounded. Balaam and his ass were the passive organs of dictation; but no one, I suppose, will venture to call either of those worthies inspired. It is my profound conviction that St. John and St. Paul were divinely inspired; but I totally disbelieve the dictation of any one word, sentence, or argument throughout their writings. Observe, there was revelation. All religion is revealed...[26]

Gunton holds that this kind of distinction makes space for the human character of Scripture, and allows us to 'dispense with the need to wring equal meaning out of every text'. Put differently, inspiration does not negate the fallibility and limitations of the biblical authors; thus it cannot

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[23] Gunton, *Christian Faith*, p. 7.

[24] He sums up his view of the mediation of revelation thus: 'Revelation is mediated in a number of ways: each way is a different way of revealing something of God and the truth . . . There are a variety of means through which we can gain Revelation' (Gunton, *Revelation and Reason*, pp. 76–7).

[25] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 66.

[26] Cited in Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 66. See also Gunton, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 72.

be straightforwardly equated with revelation.[27] Scripture is not revelation itself, a claim Gunton says is in line with the mainstream Christian tradition, but rather it mediates revelation. The important question has to do with the nature of that mediation.[28]

Revelation might be defined as making things known which otherwise would remain hidden. Inspiration is the unique form of the mediation of revelation that makes known, by the Spirit through the biblical writings, truths about God and his ways that could not be obtained elsewhere.[29] What makes the Bible unique as revelation (in some sense) is that it is the 'bearer of saving knowledge'; it mediates to us the salvation mediated by Jesus Christ.[30] Yet, how does the Bible come to be the bearer of this knowledge? This brings us back to Gunton's original concern regarding the relation between inspiration and revelation, and underscores the need to identify and specify the peculiar character of inspiration.

The Spirit's involvement in inspiration must take account of at least two facets of the Spirit's work more broadly speaking. First, it must be highlighted that the Spirit is the one who forms communion, or community, with God and others. The church is constituted every time the word of the gospel is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit, through that word, calls the community into being—lifting them to the Father through the Son. Gunton frequently emphasizes the Spirit's role in liberating and opening people to exist for their Lord and one another.[31] Therefore, part of the

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27 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 66. On the non-problem of fallibility, he notes: 'In so far as God deals with us humanly then there has to be space between the words and God. In one sense you will want to hold to the infallibility of scripture in a broad sense, but there has to be space between the words and the *Word* as Barth would see it, between the words and *God*' (Gunton, *Revelation and Reason*, pp. 83–4).

28 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 67. Put differently, Scripture is *revelatory* or *revealing*, not revelation, properly speaking. On this distinction, see also Gunton, *Barth Lectures*, p. 74.

29 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, pp. 68, 71–2.

30 Gunton writes: 'The distinct mark of the revelatory character of the Bible is its relation to salvation in Christ the mediator of salvation. The revelatory uniqueness of the Bible derives from its mediation of the life of this man, and particularly his cross and resurrection' (Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 73). He also writes: 'The particular quality of the Bible's mediation of revelation is derived from its mediation of salvation. Its [sic] uniqueness derives from the uniqueness of the Christ who is mediated and of that which is mediated by Christ' (Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 74).

31 See, e.g., Colin E. Gunton, 'The Church: John Owen and John Zizioulas on the Church', in *Theology through the Theologians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 202.

Spirit's work as it relates to inspiration is to form a particular community, from and for whom the writings arise and are compiled. Gunton writes: 'If the Paraclete is the one who guides the community into all truth, as the Fourth Gospel promises that he is (John 16:13), the Bible's inspiration may be perceived to derive from precisely this fact, that it is the book of a community.'[32] The Scriptures are the work of the Spirit inasmuch as they are the result of the Spirit's formation (and guidance) of the church. Second, we must consider that one of the Spirit's primary vocations is to bring us to Christ, who himself reveals the Father. He is the Spirit of Christ, the one who directs attention away from himself to the Son of the Father.[33] Any conception of inspiration must take account of at least these two factors. Hence, the inspiration of Scripture is to be found partially in the idea that the Holy Spirit enabled members of the original community to recognize and articulate what was redemptively significant about the events surrounding Jesus Christ.

This is precisely where Barth's witness metaphor falters. Witnesses can be autonomous observers, whereas the biblical authors are part of a community the Spirit has oriented around and to Christ, out of whom writings emerge that function as the unique medium of revelation—even the words of God in a sense—because of the Spirit's work. Gunton cites P. T. Forsyth approvingly: 'The Apostles were not panes of bad glass, but crystal cups the master filled.'[34] The words that arose from and were used to convey their experience of revelation are in some way intrinsically related to the revelation itself. Moreover, something must also be said for the unique function the apostles had due to their proximity to Jesus. The apostle's role was to mediate revelation, and in doing so mediate salvation. Inspiration consists of the Spirit enabling these apostolic authors to write what they have written and to enable these words to be the unique mediators of revelation.[35]

All this being said, there still must be a distinction made between the words of the apostles and revelation itself. The Bible is revelation, or better revelatory, only insofar as it brings us into contact with the salvation that is found in the Jesus Christ, who alone grants us access—epistemically, relationally, and salvifically—to the Father.[36] Let us now turn to assess Gunton's proposal and some of its related critiques.

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32 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 75.

33 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, pp. 75–6.

34 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 77.

35 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 78.

36 He writes: 'The form of revelation is not identical to the form of that which it reveals, any more than the form of a scientific theory is identical with the form of the world it makes known, though in both cases there is an intrin-

BEYOND BARTH? A MODEST ASSESSMENT

Gunton on Barth. Gunton had two related criticisms of Barth's theology of revelation generally, which set the stage for his move beyond Barth with respect to the doctrine of Scripture: (1) Barth over-emphasized immediacy in revelation and thus did not develop an adequate account of the Son and Spirit's mediation of revelation, and (2) he resisted the notion of creaturely mediation.

Without wading into every detail of whether Gunton reads Barth accurately, it is worth reflecting more carefully on what he sees at work in Barth. To begin, it is not entirely clear how the first charge may reasonably be levelled against Barth, at least not without further specification. While it is true that Barth argues for a form of immediacy with respect to God's giving of himself in the act of revelation, it does not appear true that he leaves the notion of immediacy unbounded and undefined. In Barth, God's knowledge of himself is the only true form of immediate knowledge. Human knowledge of God is derivative; we are given a share in God's own knowledge of himself, but only in mediated form. He writes: 'The fact that God knows Himself immediately is not neutralised by the fact that man knows Him on the basis of His revelation and hence mediately, and only mediately, and therefore as an object.'[37] The 'therefore' is critical here. God makes himself an object of knowledge only as he presents himself in a mediated way—particularly as the Word and Spirit. Indeed, Barth goes on to say:

> The reality of our knowledge of God stands or falls with the fact that in His revelation God is present to man in a *medium*. He is therefore objectively present in a double sense. In his Word He comes as an object before man the subject. And by the Holy Spirit He makes the human subject accessible to Himself, capable of considering and conceiving Himself as object.[38]

Not only do we see an acknowledgement of mediation, but it is Trinitarian mediation: God is made known to us in the Word and by the work of the Spirit.

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sic relation between the two.' Similarly, he concludes: 'Dogma and theology are revisable, scripture is in certain respects open to question, but revelation, mediated through scripture, is not' (Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 81).

37 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 volumes in 13 parts (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), II/1 p. 10. Henceforth, *CD*.

38 Karl Barth, *CD* II/1, p. 10 (italics added).

Granted that Barth has some broad theology of revelation's triune mediation, it may be that Gunton's discomfort with what he perceives to be Barth's resistance to creaturely mediation, even in the Person of the Word incarnate, has some merit. Indeed, we find passages in Barth that confirm Gunton's charge that the humanity—the creatureliness—of Christ is not revelatory, such as:

> The statement about Christ's deity is to be understood in the sense that Christ reveals His Father. But this Father of His is God. He who reveals Him, then, reveals God. But who can reveal God except God Himself? Neither a man that has been raised up nor an idea that has come down can do it. These are both creatures. Now the Christ who reveals the Father is also a creature and His work is a creaturely work. But if He were only a creature He could not reveal God, for the creature certainly cannot take God's place and work in His place. If He reveals God, then irrespective of His creaturehood He himself has to be God.[39]

Barth certainly does not ignore the Son's place in the mediation of revelation, as we saw above. The question for Gunton, it seems, is in what sense the Son in his entirety—both divinity *and* humanity—is the mediator of revelation. In Barth, the human nature of Jesus is a veil, a form of hiddenness. The humanity of Christ is the form, not content or subject of revelation.[40] He is clear that the *incarnate* Word mediates revelation.[41] However, in defending the axiom that only God reveals God, he may open himself to the question Gunton asks, namely, what is the substantial revelatory significance of Jesus' humanity?[42] Gunton's prescription of a more thoroughgoing connection between Christology and pneumatology might be helpful in this regard. If the human life and ministry of Jesus is formed and carried out by the Spirit, then there might be more room for a notion of his humanity being revelatory while priority is still given to divine action; divine and human doing need not be opposed.

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39 Barth, *CD* I/1, p. 406.

40 See, e.g., Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, Volume 1*, ed. by Hannelotte Reiffen; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 89–91. Henceforth, *GD*.

41 E.g. Barth, *GD*, pp. 88–89.

42 Some writers see this tendency to strictly separate divine and human agency as a result of Barth's supposedly 'Nestorian' Christology. It is not only evidenced (maybe) here in the doctrine of revelation, but also in his view of baptism; cf. John Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* (Barth Studies; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 168–70.

Gunton on Scripture. Amidst the various charges and claims, there are at least two related contributions Gunton purports to the make to traditional and contemporary doctrines of Scripture. First, he provides a more adequate account of the relation of inspiration and revelation. Second, he offers a more robust description of original inspiration—one that attends to the importance and interrelation of the original community, the biblical authors, and the actual words of Scripture.

Gunton alleges that much of the tradition (Barth included) tends to conflate inspiration and revelation, and in doing so replace or render redundant the Spirit's work of mediation. It is not entirely clear to whom and to what he refers. Certainly examples could be given of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation writers who drew clear distinctions between inspiration and revelation, and even spoke well of the Trinitarian patterns of mediation involved in the production of Scripture. Bonaventure, for example, writes: 'Scripture does not take its starting-point in human inquiry; rather it flows from divine revelation, *coming down from the Father of lights, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name*.' [43] It is for revelation that Scripture comes to be, coming principally from the Father. Lest we conclude that he does not think in terms of mediation, he adds later: 'The manifold meaning of Scripture is also appropriate to its source. For it came from God, *through* Christ and the Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and the other holy people who committed this teaching to writing.' [44] To employ one of Gunton's favourite images: scriptural revelation comes to us through the mediation of the Father's 'two hands', especially through the various modes of the Spirit's inspiration. Revelation, inspiration, and Trinitarian mediation are all here present.

In addition, Richard Muller, in his magisterial *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, provides several accounts of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation writers who drew clear distinctions between inspiration and revelation, and even spoke well of the Trinitarian patterns of mediation involved in the production of Scripture.[45] Aquinas, for example, made the distinction between revelation and inspiration, and brought greater specificity to the modes of the Spirit's mediation. Inspiration, for Aquinas, refers to the work of the Spirit elevating the mind of the prophet and giving it a capacity for divine knowledge, while revelation

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[43] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prol. 0.2.

[44] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prol. 4.4.

[45] See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 2, pp. 38–47, 243–44.

denotes the actual presentation to the mind of inaccessible knowledge. Whether one agrees with Thomas or not, he is aware of the distinction between the two related acts. Even in the twentieth century, the conservative B. B. Warfield, aware of the need to distinguish revelation and inspiration, retorts that this distinction is necessary in the case when revelation is narrowly conceived as 'an external manifestation of God' or 'an immediate communication from God in words'. In such cases, revelation is clearly not identical with inspiration.[46] However, he contends,

> 'Inspiration' does not differ from 'revelation' in these narrowed senses as genus from genus, but as a species of one genus differs from another. That operation of God which we call 'inspiration', that is to say, that operation of the Spirit of God by which He 'bears' men in the process of composing Scripture, so that they write, not of themselves, but 'from God', is one of the modes in which God makes known to men His being, His will, His operations, His purposes. It is as distinctly a mode of revelation as any mode of revelation can be, and therefore it performs the same office which all revelation performs, that is to say . . . it makes men, and makes them wise unto salvation.[47]

Inspiration is a species of revelation, brought about by the Spirit of God, with the ultimate purpose of salvation in Christ. It not only records revelation, but is revelation; it not only records the redemptive acts of God in Christ, but is a redemptive act.[48] Thus, it difficult to see how Warfield and many others miss the important features Gunton identifies as lacunae in traditional treatments. Here in Warfield—the ultra-traditionalist, some might say—we find triune mediation in various modes and a careful delineation of the differences and similarities between inspiration and revelation.

With respect to Barth, Gunton's concern is that an over-emphasis on contemporary 'inspiration' leads to a conflation of it with revelation and to an accompanying lack of attention to the Spirit's inspiration of the original authors and community. In response, it might be observed that Barth sought not to separate original and contemporary 'inspiration', nor

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[46] It appears that Gunton's logic (as he borrows from Coleridge) is similar: (1) revelation equals dictation; (2) inspiration is clearly not dictation; (3) therefore revelation does not equal inspiration. Thus, the traditional assumption that because something is inspired it is revelation apparently falters. However, the problem does not lie in the traditional assumption, but in the first premise of the syllogism.

[47] B. B. Warfield, 'The Biblical Idea of Inspiration', in *The Works of B. B. Warfield*, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1, pp. 106–7.

[48] Warfield, 'Inspiration', p. 107.

to elevate the latter over the former. Rather, his aim was to demonstrate the inseparability of the two. It might even be argued that he held to the priority of the *there* and *then* of inspiration, over the *here* and *now*, since one can only hear God's voice through the voices of the original authors.[49] The issue is not, perhaps, whether or not Barth treated original inspiration with some detail, but rather what the relative weighting of it was in his overall account. The emphasis on inspiration (or illumination, or revelation) being a free gift and not a possession may detract from issues regarding original inspiration and reception. Thus Gunton looks to provide something that supplements or moves beyond Barth.

The uniqueness and promise of Gunton's proposal arises from his distinct pneumatological emphases. Perhaps a way to get at one of his key contributions is to place his account alongside one feature of Warfield's. In a famous dictum, the Princeton theologian asserts concerning the providential work of God in forming the people who would write Scripture: 'If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.'[50] God shapes the key events and forms the writer—personality, training, experiences, gifts—so that what is written freely is the result of divine preparation and direction and is precisely what God desired to be written. God not only inspires the original authors, but directs their course entirely.[51] Gunton's doctrine of the Spirit further specifies and supplements this account.

If, as Gunton often remarks, the Spirit is the 'eschatological member of the Trinity',[52] the one who proleptically brings the perfection of the eschaton into the present, and if revelation is ultimately eschatological—God becoming *fully* known—then any revelation occurring in past and present time will occur through the Spirit, who enables a foretaste of revelation to take place and 'so mediates revelation that we may say that the mysteries of God are made known in our time'.[53] As the perfecting Spirit, his work in the production of Scripture is to direct people toward the Father's redemptive *telos*. The biblical authors write as those who are caught in

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49 Barth, *GD*, pp. 222–26; Barth, *CD* I/2, pp. 504–6.

50 Warfield, 'Inspiration', p. 101.

51 He concludes: 'When we think of God the Lord giving by His Spirit a body of authoritative Scriptures to His people, we must remember that He is the God of providence and of grace as well as of revelation and inspiration, and that He holds all the lines of preparation as fully under His direction as He does the specific operation which we call... inspiration' (Warfield, 'Inspiration', pp. 102–3).

52 Gunton, *Christian Faith*, p. 155.

53 Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 120.

the wake of God's salvific work, and are instruments of the Spirit's eschatological perfecting of the people of God. The Spirit is the agent of God's preparation of the human authors of Scripture. He preserves and even establishes their creaturely freedom to write as they would, while bearing them so that they record what would communicate God's work and ways.

Still, however, this is too individual a picture of the Spirit's providential work. If the Spirit is the Spirit of communion, who incorporates a diverse people into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), brings unity in Christ (Eph. 4:3), and leads the apostolic community into all truth (John 16:13), then it is not implausible to conceive of inspiration along more communal lines. Under the guidance of the Spirit, the original authors and communities interact concerning God's salvation in Jesus Christ, employing normal human faculties and ways of relating, to produce writings that may be called the word of God. The New Testament documents, for instance, emerge from and are fundamentally shaped by the engagement of the inspired author with his particular communities, so that inspiration need not be envisioned individually. Therefore, not only does God prepare a Paul, as Warfield asserted, but also the various communities of which Paul is a member. One might say that there is no Paul apart from the communities for and out of which the apostle exists. As Gunton puts it: 'Revelation thus takes place in an ecclesial relation between inspired teacher and inspired taught.'[54] Inspiration, in other words, occurs within a dialogue.

The Spirit's mediation of revelation in this scenario is perhaps more rich and complex; but the complexity helps to highlight how creaturely realities are God's chosen means to disclose his salvation in Christ. The words deployed in Scripture are ultimately, then, the word of God because of the proximity this community and its writers had to the event of revelation in Christ and the unique function they have in proclaiming his redemption. This is what Gunton calls 'the advantage of the contemporary'. The apostolic community testifies to Jesus in an utterly unique way, such that there is 'an intrinsic relation between revelation and the words used to enable it to come to expression'.[55] The words and phrases of the Bible truly matter, as they mediate redemptive revelation by the Spirit's handiwork. The precise nature of the intrinsic relation is not spelled out any further.

[54] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, p. 77.
[55] Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, pp. 77–8.

CONCLUSION

Mediation indeed lies at the heart of Gunton's criticisms and constructive proposal. The Father presents himself through the Son and Spirit, and by them through various creaturely mediums. What is not unique in Gunton's account is the stress on the Spirit's providential involvement, or on the specifically salvific or Christocentric focus of the Spirit's work of inspiration, as both can be found among those he criticizes. However, because his relentless focus was on the question of the specific way the Spirit mediates revelation through means of inspiration, he turned his attention to the Christ-centred, community-forming operations of the Spirit. What results is a doctrine of Scripture's origins that factors in the sometimes-neglected place of the community. In the end, it appears that Gunton does not so much move beyond Barth in specifying why the apostolic writings might more straightforwardly be called the word of God, but supplements him with a way to more fully delineate the Spirit's intimate involvement in making the human authors' words God's own word.