

*Truthing in love:*  
*The theological nature, purpose and practice*  
*of 'one-another edifying speech'*  
*in the Christian community*

Tony Payne

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## *Abstract*

This thesis examines a form of action that is observed in 25 separate passages in the NT but has received virtually no significant theological attention in the Christian tradition: the ‘one-another edifying speech’ (OES) of the Christian community. This form of speech-act is defined as one in which the *speaker* is a general member of the Christian community (not a recognized or authorized teacher or leader), the *hearer* is a fellow member (or members) of the community, the *content* concerns some aspect or application of Christian revelation, and the *purpose* is to bring spiritual benefit or growth to the hearer.

Ethics is an appropriate discipline of thought within which to examine OES, since it entails exploring the theological nature, purposes and practice of morally significant forms of action in the world (of which OES is one, according to the way that it is portrayed in the NT). The method followed is firstly to trace key apostolic trains of thought regarding OES in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews; then to synthesize and explore three significant theological themes that emerge from this exegetical analysis (the relation of OES to the word of God, to the moral transformation of believers, and to the nature of Christian community); and finally, to construct a coherent theological framework to inform the deliberation of contemporary Christian communities.

The main findings are threefold.

Firstly, OES shares with more recognized forms of congregational teaching and preaching (CTP) a close relation to the apostolic gospel, in source, content and purpose. OES and CTP are, in this sense, different species of the one genus of speech-act—one which by the power of the Spirit seeks to bring the christocentric word of God to bear on the lives of its hearers.

Secondly, the key differences between OES and CTP are to be found in the particular functions they serve in the Christian community, in relation to the moral learning and growth of believers. OES is both itself a form of sanctified human speech, and also a means by which moral transformation and growth proceeds in the lives of believers. OES plays a particularly important role in speaking with practical immediacy to the moral deliberations and actions of fellow believers.

Thirdly, the Christian community is not only created and constituted by Christ's word and Spirit, but continues to live and grow as its members encounter one as 'bringers of the message of salvation' (in Bonhoeffer's words). Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* provides a theologically compelling picture of OES as the highest form of Christian service.

The thesis concludes with an integrated theological understanding of OES, to serve as a framework for the practical deliberation of contemporary Christian communities.

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## *Abbreviations*

### *Dictionaries, lexica and other significant works*

<i>ABD</i>	David Noel Freedman, ed. <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> .
<i>BDAG</i>	Frederick Danker et al, ed. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed.
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> .
<i>DBW</i>	Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <i>Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke</i> (German edition).
<i>Inst.</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> .
<i>LW</i>	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> (American edition).
<i>NDBT</i>	Desmond T. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds. <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> .
<i>TDNT</i>	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> .
<i>SOED</i>	Angus Stevenson, ed. <i>Shorter Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Sixth edition).

### *Biblical commentary series*

AB	The Anchor Bible
AYB	The Anchor Yale Bible
BECNT	Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament
CC	Calvin's Commentaries
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NTL	The New Testament Library
SP	Sacra Pagina
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECSNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament

*Journals and monograph series*

<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BZNW	Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>Conc</i>	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen Zur Theologie
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JPTSS	Journal of Pentecostal Theology: Supplement Series
<i>JRT</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Thought</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PBTM	Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SCE</i>	<i>Studies in Christian Ethics</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament

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## *Introduction*

The subject of this thesis emerges from the similarities and differences between the following two quotations from the same NT epistle:

Him we proclaim, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, that we may present everyone complete in Christ. (Col 1:28)

Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)<sup>1</sup>

The two forms of speech referred to in these verses have a great deal in common. Both feature Christ ('Him' 1:28) or the 'word of Christ' (3:16) as the content of a spoken message, and do so in the context of theological statements regarding Christ's person and work.<sup>2</sup> Both forms of speech are widespread in the scope of their address,<sup>3</sup> and both are undertaken by means of 'teaching' (διδάσκοντες) and 'admonishing' (νουθετοῦντες) and in 'all wisdom' (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ).<sup>4</sup> Both have as their goal the spiritual growth or maturity of their hearers,<sup>5</sup> and both are undertaken under the impress of a moral imperative: in the former case, the apostle's divine commission to preach the gospel, which is undertaken with urgency and toil (1:29); in the latter case, the over-arching and unifying importance

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from the Bible are my own translations.

<sup>2</sup> Col 1:15–27; Col 3: Col 3:1–15.

<sup>3</sup> As indicated by the thrice repeated πάντα in 1:28, and the plurals ὑμῖν and ἑαυτοῦς in 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> The vocabulary is identical in the two verses.

<sup>5</sup> This is explicitly so in 1:28 ('that we may present every person complete in Christ'); and implicitly so in 3:16, given the context of chapter 3 with its strong ethical appeal to mortification and vivification, culminating in the call of 3:17 to do everything, whether in word or deed, 'in the name of the Lord Jesus'.

of love as the virtue which drives all Christian behaviour, including this form of speech (3:15–16).

However, for all these commonalities, there are also two significant differences between the forms of speech represented by these verses.

The *first* is that Col 1:28 describes a form of *proclamation* practised by consecrated or commissioned individuals (καταγγέλλομεν).<sup>6</sup> Col 3:16, by contrast, encourages a form of *mutual speech*, practised towards ‘one another’ (ἑαυτούς) by a range of speakers within a community. If we were to look for recognizable analogues in historic church practice, we would say that the former kind of speech resembles ‘preaching’ as practised by pastors, elders and other recognized office holders, whereas the latter is represented in ‘one-another speech’ that might take place (in a limited way) in congregational gatherings, but also in families, smaller gatherings and other interpersonal interactions.

This leads us to a *second* notable difference between the two forms of speech of which these verses would seem to be representative. Throughout Christian history, ‘preaching’ has been the subject of extensive discussion as to its theological nature, motivation and purpose, its history and development, its role in the church and the world, and the manner and mode of its practice. The breadth and depth of this long-running theological conversation can be seen in the number and variety of readings selected by Richard Lischer in his *Theories of Preaching*. Chrysostom, Augustine, Bonaventure, Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Edwards, Wesley, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Bultmann are represented, to name but some.<sup>7</sup> The literature on preaching is varied and broad, addressing its theological underpinnings and rationale (particularly its relation to the doctrine of revelation), its history and development, its ecclesial role

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<sup>6</sup> In this instance, the apostle and his colleagues.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Lischer, *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1987).

and function, its face towards society, and the practicalities of preparing and delivering sermons in the contemporary church.<sup>8</sup>

However, the ‘one-another speech’ of mutual encouragement has not benefitted from such attention. My extensive bibliographical search for significant discussions of this subject unearthed some brief mentions and some tangentially related discussions, but no *sustained, theologically-focused consideration* of the kind of intra-congregational, one-another speech commended by Paul in Col 3:16, in regard to its scope, nature, purposes, motivations or practice.<sup>9</sup>

Four brief soundings into this relative silence serve to highlight the disparity.

*Luther*, for example, does recognize that his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers implicates all Christians in the priestly task of bringing the word of God to others. On 1 Pet 2:9 he writes:

Therefore when St Peter says here: ‘You are a royal priesthood’, this is tantamount to saying: ‘You are Christians’. If you want to know what kind of title and what kind of power and praise Christians have, you see here that they are kings and priests and a chosen race. But what is the priestly office? The answer follows:

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<sup>8</sup> Recent notable contributions include: David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (London: SCM, 1987); Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, (rev. ed.; Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1992); T. F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994); Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Leicester: IVP, 1996); Michael Pasquarello, *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006); William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); Chris Green, *Cutting to the Heart: Applying the Bible in Teaching and Preaching* (Nottingham: IVP, 2015); Sam Chan, *Preaching as the Word of God: Answering an Old Question with Speech-Act Theory* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2016); Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament* (London: Apollos, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> For example, various contemporary works discuss the theological significance of the laity, or of lay involvement in ministry or church life, but in doing so undertake no significant theological examination of the ‘one-another speech’ of the laity; see Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth, 1958); John R. W. Stott, *One People* (London: Falcon Books, 1969); Paul F. Goetting, *Members Are Ministers: The Vocation of All Believers* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2012); Mark Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton, *God’s Frozen People: A Book for and about Ordinary Christians* (London: Collins, 1964); and Larry Richards and Gib Martin, *A Theology of Personal Ministry: Spiritual Giftedness in the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981).

*That you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

A priest must be God's messenger and must have a command from God to proclaim His Word. You must, says Peter, exercise the chief function of a priest, that is, to proclaim the wonderful deeds God has performed for you to bring you out of darkness into the light. And your preaching should be done in such a way that one brother proclaims the mighty deed of God to the other, how you have been delivered through Him from sin, hell, death, and all misfortune, and have been called to eternal life. Thus you should also teach other people how they, too, come into such light. For you must bend every effort to realize what God has done for you. Then let it be your chief work to proclaim this publicly and to call everyone into the light into which you have been called. Where you find people who do not know this, you should instruct and also teach them as you have learned, namely, how one must be saved through the power and strength of God and come out of darkness into the light.<sup>10</sup>

All the same, for Luther, while all Christians are regarded before God as preaching 'priests', and all have same status and authority as such, only some are selected and authorized as 'officiants' actually to speak on behalf of the others:

Thus those who are now called priests would all be laymen like the others, and only a few officiants would be elected by the congregation to do the preaching. Thus there is only an external difference because of the office to which one is called by the congregation. Before God, however there is no distinction, and only a few are selected from the whole group to administer the office in the stead of the congregation. They all have this office, and nobody has any more authority than the other person has. Therefore nobody should come forward of his own accord and preach in the congregation.<sup>11</sup>

Thus while all Christians have the status and duties of priests, only those rightly selected as 'preachers' actually do so. No consideration seems to be given to the possibility that some form of mutual 'preaching' or instruction or edification might

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<sup>10</sup> LW 30:53–54.

<sup>11</sup> LW 30:55.

take place *between* congregation members in fulfilment of the priestly office.<sup>12</sup>

Despite opening the door theologically to the significance of the ‘word’ being spoken by all believers, Luther hesitates to step through it.

In the post-Reformation period, the logic of the priesthood of all believers, along with the growing availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue, led in some places to more emphasis being placed on lay involvement in forms of mutual edification.

*John Owen*, for example, was not alone among the Puritans in urging that members of the church should exercise the spiritual gifts God had granted to them for the fulfilment of their Christians duties, particularly in family devotion, but also in the general edification of the body:

Most men have, it may be, such duties incumbent on them with respect unto others as they cannot discharge aright without the especial aid of the Spirit of God in this kind. So is it with all them who have families to take care of and provide for; for ordinarily they are bound to instruct their children and servants in the knowledge of the Lord, and to go before them in that worship which God requires of them, as Abraham did, the ‘father of the faithful’. And hereunto some spiritual abilities are requisite; for none can teach others more than they know themselves, nor perform spiritual worship without some spiritual gifts, unless they will betake themselves unto such shifts as we have before on good grounds rejected.<sup>13</sup>

Owen goes on to say that while the practice of mutual exhorting or edification is in a state of ‘utter neglect’ in many places, it is nevertheless still being experienced and practised ‘in the eminent abilities of a multitude of private Christians, however they may be despised by them who know them not!’<sup>14</sup> All the same, of the nature or content of this exhortation and edification—that is, what sort of speech is involved,

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<sup>12</sup> I will return to Luther’s view in more detail in chapter 7.

<sup>13</sup> John Owen, ‘A Discourse of Spiritual Gifts’ in *The Works of John Owen* (ed. William H. Goold; vol. 4; Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–53; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 517.

<sup>14</sup> Owen, ‘Discourse’, 518.

how it relates to the teaching and preaching ministry of the elders, and what its theological grounding or purposes might be—Owen says very little. The subject is broached but not explored.

*John Wesley's* class meetings and bands represent one of the most widespread and systematic attempts in Christian history to mobilize lay believers into structures specifically designed for mutual edification, although the focus of these groups was on the discussion of spiritual experience and the confession of sin, rather than mutual instruction or exhortation as such.<sup>15</sup> There were undoubtedly theological factors underpinning Wesley's convictions about the importance of the class meetings within his overall system of Christian growth and education, but (again) it is difficult to find any significant biblical or theological discussion in his works of the nature and purposes of the speech that should be practised within these meetings.

Our final sounding concerning the lack of theological consideration of 'one-another speech' constitutes something of an exception, if a brief one. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's short book about the practice of Christian community, *Life Together*, does contain a theologically-informed discussion of what he calls the 'free word from person to person that is not bound to office, time or place'.<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer's treatment of the subject is relatively brief, but when taken in the context of his developed christological theology of sociality, community and the word of God, it represents a significant attempt to think theologically about the mutually encouraging speech of Christians within a Christian community.

However (as I demonstrate below in chapter 9), despite the significance of this

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<sup>15</sup> See D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Kindle ed.; Wilmore, Kent.: Rafiki Books, 2016), ch. 3. According to Henderson, teaching or instruction or words of exhortation were specifically reserved for the larger 'society' meeting, and were not to be practised in the class meeting or band.

<sup>16</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben; Das Gebetbuch Der Bibel* (vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*; ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr; Munich: Kaiser, 1987), 87. The translation is my own.

theme within the argument of *Life Together*, the motif has been almost universally ignored in scholarly discussions of the work. In the reception of Bonhoeffer's thought on this subject, it is as if the categories for recognizing the theological significance of mutually edifying speech do not exist, and thus Bonhoeffer's discussion of the matter passes by unobserved.

These four scattered examples illustrate the relative paucity of theological engagement with the phenomenon of one-another speech within the Christian tradition. Even on the (rare) occasions when the tradition observes this form of speech as a phenomenon in the biblical witness or in the life of Christian communities, there is minimal engagement with its theological meaning or practice.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Adam is one of the few to have recognized this issue, even if his own work (which is about preaching) is not focused on addressing it. Having identified the variety of ways in which the NT describes the speaking of the word to others for their benefit, Adam argues that it is important to recognize the rich and variegated nature of 'word ministry' in the NT, '... or we shall try to make preaching carry a load which it cannot bear; that is, the burden of doing all that the Bible expects of every form of ministry of the Word'.<sup>18</sup>

Adam's warning could function as a summary of the history of Christian reflection on this subject. If the history of theological scholarship was our guide, one

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<sup>17</sup> In speaking of a lack of 'theological engagement' with this topic, I do not include the numerous instances in which texts referencing 'one-another speech' are treated in biblical commentaries, or works in which the vocabulary associated with this form of speech (e.g., παρακαλέω) is defined or examined in lexicons, dictionaries or other word studies.

<sup>18</sup> Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 59. A similar point is made by Keller (who quotes Adam) in his exploration of the nature of preaching; Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Redeemer/Viking, 2015), 1–4. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, devotes a brief chapter to recognizing the existence and value of the word ministry of Christians generally, but (like Adam) his book is focused on a theological study of preaching.

could be forgiven for concluding that the ‘ministry of the word’ *was* co-extensive with preaching, and that other more general or mutual forms of Christian speech did not exist or carried no ‘load’ within Christian ministry or practice.

We are left with a set of largely unanswered questions within the history of Christian thought. If the NT does indeed testify to a broader, variegated ‘word ministry’ within Christian communities, undertaken not by preachers or teachers but by Christians more generally, then what exactly is the nature, meaning and significance of such speech? What theological realities undergird and shape it? Who practises it? What are its purposes and functions within a Christian community? What features does it share with ‘preaching’ speech, and in what ways is it different? As far as I have been able to determine, these are questions that have never been adequately addressed. Seeking to answer them will be the task of this thesis.

There is reason to hope that doing so will not only fill a lacuna in theological scholarship, but serve as a framework for the rehabilitation of this form of speech within contemporary Christian communities. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to conduct qualitative research into the state of ‘one-another edifying speech’ within any particular Christian community, it is reasonable to conclude that the marked lack of explicit discussion of the subject within both academic and popular Christian literature is reflective of the state of practice within many churches. It is likely that John Owens’s diagnosis is still accurate for many contemporary Christian communities: that the practice of mutual exhorting or edification is in a state of significant neglect. If, as I shall argue, the ‘one-another speech’ of the Christian community is a significant, theologically-framed action—one that takes its nature and purposes from the revelation of God’s character and works in Scripture—then its neglect is of no small import. It would reflect a deficiency in the understanding and practice of what it means for the word of Christ to ‘dwell richly’ with a Christian community.

As may already be evident from the historical soundings above, the tradition within which this issue will be explored is a Protestant and Reformational one. The centrality of the preached Scriptural word within church life is a Protestant distinctive, and the historic dominance of ‘preaching’ over ‘one-another speech’—in theological discussion and ecclesiological practice—is in one sense a Protestant problem. My hope, however, is that a theological exploration of the place of God’s word within Christian communities, and in particular its place on the lips of its members, will be stimulating and applicable well beyond the Protestant tradition within which I write, and from which most of my conversation partners come.

My first task is to define more carefully the form of speech under consideration, and to establish whether it is a theologically significant phenomenon in the NT vision of the Christian community.



## *PART I*

*One-another edifying speech (OES) as a  
subject for theological investigation*



# *Chapter 1: Is OES a theologically significant practice?*

## *§1 A meaningful category of speech*

An important assumption of this thesis is that the form of speech under consideration is a meaningful category for consideration, neither too diverse a phenomenon to be recognizable as having a common set of distinct features, nor too narrow or antique to be considered worthy of consideration, either for its significance in biblical thought or in Christian communities today.

A common and heuristically convenient model for more closely identifying and defining this form of speech is speech-act theory. In John Searle's expression of the theory (which builds on J. L. Austin's earlier work),<sup>19</sup> there are four inter-related actions that take place in any occurrence of speech between one person and another (or others):

- utterance acts (the morphemes and sentences themselves);
- propositional acts (referring to things and predicating of them);
- illocutionary acts (the thing being done, such as stating, asserting; commanding, promising, and so on); and
- perlocutionary acts (the effect that illocutionary acts may have, such as the hearer being convinced, alarmed, informed, inspired, reassured, and so

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<sup>19</sup> John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (2nd ed.; ed. J. O. Urmson and M. Sbisa; London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

on).<sup>20</sup>

These actions are not consecutive acts, but are part of the one act of speaking. Utterance acts are the means by which (according to the rules of the language of the speaker) something is done (an illocutionary act) invariably by way of referring to things and predicating things of them (propositional acts) resulting in certain effects or events taking place for the hearer (perlocutionary acts).<sup>21</sup>

Following Searle's taxonomy, the phenomenon of speech we are examining can be conceptualized as a speech-act conforming to the following criteria, using Col 3:16 as an exemplary text.

*Criterion 1:* the utterance is performed by Christians *qua* Christians. It is a form of speech that in principle any Christian believer could aspire to utter in the circumstances. In Col 3:16, those whom Paul is encouraging to engage in this form of speech are 'God's chosen ones' (Col 3:15), the 'saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae' (Col 1:2).

*Criterion 2:* the hearer or hearers are other believers. In the body of the thesis, I will argue that the concept of 'Christian community' is a useful description of the set of relationships that bind the speakers and hearers together in this form of speech, but for the purposes of definition it is sufficient to note that the hearer is a fellow believer. In Col 3:16, the hearers of the speech are the 'one another' of the Colossian church.

*Criterion 3:* the utterance refers to and predicates something of Christian revelation and/or the hearer's response to it. In Col 3:16, the propositional act derives its content from the 'word of Christ' that dwells richly among them.

*Criterion 4:* the illocutionary force of the utterance (i.e., the thing being done by

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<sup>20</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts*, 23–24.

<sup>21</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts*, 24–25.

the speech) is variegated, including such actions as informing, exhorting, admonishing and encouraging. In Col 3:16, the thing being done by the speech-act is ‘teaching and admonishing in all wisdom’.<sup>22</sup>

*Criterion 5:* The perlocution (that is, the effect or outcome of the speech, whether actual or desired) is some spiritual benefit for the addressee, such as a growth in knowledge or understanding of God or his work in Christ, or some form of encouragement or exhortation to respond rightly to that knowledge. In Col 3:16, the context of Col 3:1–17 provides the effect that Paul wishes this form of speech to have, characterized in 3:12 as ‘being clothed in the new, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator’ and in 3:17 as doing ‘all things in the name of the Lord Jesus’.

The combined effect of criteria 1 to 3 is to categorize the speech-act as ‘one-another speech’ in the Christian community. The combined effect of criteria 3 and 4 is to characterize the speech-act as ‘edifying’; that is, being aimed at a positive effect that ‘builds’ the hearer in some way in relation to the understanding and practice of Christian faith. Hence the label ‘one-another edifying speech’ that I will employ to describe this form of speech (hereafter, OES).

These five criteria are also useful in distinguishing OES from other similar (and related) forms of speech in the NT that differ from it in one or more important respects. For example, the following forms of speech are related to OES in various respects, but do not meet all five of the criteria, and so do not belong in the category of speech we are examining:

- a. forms of speech in which the speaker or speakers are not Christians *qua* Christians, but occupy a recognized or consecrated office or role, such as

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<sup>22</sup> The relation of the second participial clause (‘singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’) to the first is considered in depth in chapter 3.

apostle, elder, pastor, overseer, deacon or evangelist. Speech-actions of this kind (such as Col 1:28, as noted above) would satisfy criteria 2–5, but not criterion 1, and accordingly do not fit into the category of speech we are examining.

- b. cases where the hearer or hearers are *not* fellow believers, but unbelievers or people considered generally (fails to meet criterion 2). In Col 4:6, for example, Paul urges the Colossians to engage with outsiders in gracious, salt-seasoned speech that answers each person. Also in this category are the multiple instances in the Gospels and Acts where Christians *qua* Christians (or very often in the Gospels, disciples *qua* disciples) engage, or are urged to engage, in speech to unbelievers or other people generally regarding the gospel or the kingdom of God or some mighty work that Christ has done, (e.g., Matt 9:31; 28:18–19; Mark 5:19–20; Luke 9:60–26; 10:1f. Acts 4:31). These forms of speech often satisfy criteria 1, 3, 4 and 5, but not criterion 2.
- c. instances where the propositional content of the utterance is not wholesome Christian doctrine, but some perversion of it or distraction from it, leading to a negative or harmful perlocutionary effect (fails to meet criteria 3 and 5). In Colossians, for example, the word of Christ in which they are to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom stands in sharp contrast to another form of speech in Col 2:21 ('Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch') which has 'an appearance of wisdom' but which Paul judges harshly as emanating from 'the elemental spirits of the world' (2:20) and as having no spiritual value (2:23). Other common NT examples of this form of speech are occurrences of quarrelling or dividing over 'words' (2 Tim 2:14) or of foolish arguments or controversies (e.g., 1 Tim 6:4–5; Titus 3:9).

In focusing this investigation on OES, I am neither denying the reality and importance of these other forms of speech, nor excluding the possibility of there being significant theological connections between them and OES. In fact, such connections are very likely. The nature of these commonalities and differences will not only help to bring the nature of OES into sharper relief, but doubtless provide scope for further research.

## *§2 Prevalence and significance in the NT*

Whatever the reasons for the relative silence about OES in Christian thought, a lack of biblical witness to the subject would not seem to be one of them. The kind of one-another speech defined above is exemplified, described, commanded or encouraged in 25 NT passages. A detailed survey of all these passages is found in Appendix 1, including justification for their meeting of the five speech-act criteria, and a brief outline of the theological significance attached to each occurrence.

Table 1 (below) provides a summary of these instances, including whether the instance is *descriptive* of OES happening in some way, or contains some form of *imperative* urging its practice.<sup>23</sup>

*Table 1: Instances of OES in the NT*

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Instance of OES</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Significant vocabulary</i>
Matt 18:15	rebuke a brother in order to win him	imperative	reprove/rebuke (ἐλέγχω)

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<sup>23</sup> For detailed discussion and justification of the points made in summary form here for each passage, see Appendix 1.

Matt 28:20	disciples teaching other disciples to keep Jesus' commands	imperative	teaching (διδάσκω)
Rom 12:6–8	believers should understand the various verbal gifts they exercise (of prophecy, teaching and exhortation) by the standard of faith	descriptive	prophecy (προφητεία), teaching (διδάσκω), exhortation (παρακαλέω)
Rom 15:14–15	Roman believers competent to admonish or instruct one another	descriptive	admonish/instruct (νουθετέω)
1 Cor 1:4–7	Corinthian believers enriched with all kinds of speech and knowledge	descriptive	words/speech (λόγος)
1 Cor 2:6–16	spiritually mature believers impart christological wisdom to others	descriptive	speak/impart (λαλέω)
1 Cor 11:4–5	prophecy as a widespread activity in the Christian community	descriptive	prophesying (προφητεύω)
1 Cor 12	a range of believers engage in various gospel-centred speech-actions by the Spirit for the common good	descriptive	utterances (λόγος) of wisdom and knowledge (12:8), prophecy (προφητεία v. 10), the pairing of 'kinds of tongues' (γέννη γλωσσῶν) and 'interpretation of tongues' (ἐρμηνεία γλωσσῶν)
1 Cor 14:1–40	in love, believers should seek and prioritize intelligible prophecy in church; the various 'words' that members bring to the congregational gathering should be shared in an orderly way for edification	imperative	Prophesying/prophecy (προφητεύω/προφητεία) leading to encouragement (παράκλησις), consolation (παραμυθία), edification (οἰκοδομή) and learning (μανθάνω), psalm (ψαλμός), teaching (διδασχά), revelation (ἀποκάλυψις), an interpretation (ἐρμηνεία)
2 Cor 2:6–8	exhorting or encouraging a	imperative	Exhorting/encouraging

	repentant offender		(παρακαλέω)
Eph 4:15–16	members of the body should speak the truth in love for its growth	imperative	speaking the truth (ἀληθεύω)
Eph 4:25–29	speak truthful, gracious edifying words to one another, not false or filthy speech	imperative	speak (λαλέω), words (λόγος)
Eph 5:3–4	speak with thanksgiving not in folly or vulgarity	imperative	thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία)
Eph 5:18–21	engage in Spirit-filled speech to one another, including psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and thanksgivings.	imperative	Speak (λαλέω), singing (ᾄδω), making melody (ψάλλω)
Eph 6:4	fathers instructing and admonishing children in the Lord	imperative	instruction/training (παιδεία), admonition/discipline (νουθεσία)
Col 3:16	mutual teaching and admonishing in corporate speech such as singing	imperative	teaching (διδάσκω), admonishing (νουθετέω)
1 Thess 4:18; 5:11	believers encourage and edify one another with the apostolic teaching	imperative	encourage/exhort (παρακαλέω), build up (οἰκοδομέω)
1 Thess 5:12–14	believers should admonish the disruptive, and comfort the fainthearted	imperative	admonish (νουθετέω), comfort (παραμυθέομαι)
2 Thess 3:14–15	warn recalcitrant brothers to heed the apostolic teaching	imperative	admonish (νουθετέω)
Titus 2:3–5	older women should teach younger women	imperative	teach what is good (καλοδιδάσκαλος)
Heb 3:12–13	brothers should exhort one another daily to resist sin and persevere in faith	imperative	exhort (παρακαλέω)
Heb 5:12–13	expectation that well-established believers should be able to teach others the faith	descriptive	teachers (διδάσκαλος)

Heb 10:24–25	mutual spurring on and exhortation towards love and good deeds	imperative	Spurring on (παροξυσμός), exhorting (παρακαλέω)
1 Pet 2:9–10	God’s people declaring to others the praises/excellences of God	imperative	declaring (ἐξαγγέλλω)
1 Pet 4:10–11	whoever speaks (possibly prophetically) in a congregation should do so as if speaking God’s own words	imperative	speaks (λαλέω), God’s own words (λόγια θεοῦ)

This overview of all the NT instances of OES yields a number of preliminary conclusions, and points towards the task ahead.

*Firstly*, it confirms Adam’s observation that Christian ‘word ministry’ in the NT (as he describes it)<sup>24</sup> did not consist of just one form of speech (‘preaching’ or ‘proclamation’), but was a *richly varied* phenomenon, in which members of the church were involved in prophesying, admonishing, exhorting, teaching, comforting, reproving, singing, and various instances described simply as ‘speaking’. The vocabulary is broad, although certain terms recur frequently, most notably prophesying (προφητεύω), exhorting/encouraging (παρακαλέω), admonishing/warning (νουθετέω), and simply speaking (λαλέω).

*Secondly*, it demonstrates that the definition of OES outlined above does identify a *distinctive and widespread form of speech* in the NT, attested to in 25 passages across a range of corpora (with the Pauline epistles containing a majority of occurrences).

*Thirdly*, it shows that OES was a meaningful and important practice that played an essential role in the healthy functioning of Christian communities in the NT. The

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<sup>24</sup> Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 59.

apostolic authors repeatedly recognized and affirmed the practice of OES, and were eager for its orderly and edifying proliferation (18 of the 25 instances above contain commands, exhortations or encouragements for OES to take place).

This finding is confirmed by Claire Smith's recent extensive examination of the vocabulary of teaching and learning with Pauline communities. Smith's detailed research shows conclusively that the Pauline communities were 'learning communities' in which a range of verbal teaching activities took place for the learning and spiritual growth of believers. Smith demonstrates, moreover, that the pedagogical life of the Pauline communities involved each member not only as a learner but as a teacher of others:

... the model of education that emerged was a 'community' model rather than a 'schooling' model. The goal of the latter, in the modern era, is standardized outcomes of attainment, where students do their own work, and there is a clear distinction between teachers and students. The goal of the former is a 'common life', where each member is involved in teaching and learning, the less experienced use the more experienced as resources and guides, and the community is formed as the members learn shared beliefs and values, and these individuals form the community.<sup>25</sup>

Smith's research confirms what my survey also shows: that OES was integral to the life of NT communities and performed an important function in their growth. Exactly what that function is will be an important subject to explore as this thesis unfolds.

*Fourthly*, the survey of OES in the NT shows that the apostolic authors regarded it as a form of action with profound theological foundations and implications. Weighty theological material often grounds, regulates, motivates or shapes the

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<sup>25</sup> Claire Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (WUNT 2/335; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 386.

practice of OES in the passages surveyed.<sup>26</sup> Frequently, this theological undergirding relates closely to major themes of the NT: the gospel of Christ crucified, the new identity of believers in Christ, the eschatological context of the Christian life, the progress of the apostolic mission, the power of the word of God, the power and role of the Spirit in perfecting God's purposes, the centrality of love in the moral life, and the role and place of the church. The nature and purposes of OES are connected at different points to all these themes. For the NT authors, OES is a profoundly significant theological reality. One of the main tasks of this thesis will be to explore the theological realities that give OES its nature and purpose.

*Fifthly*, in many of these passages, an integral relationship exists between the proclamatory speech of the apostles themselves and the OES they wished to see flourish in Christian communities. In basic content, motivation and purpose, the two forms of speech have much in common (as already noted above in relation to Col 1:28 and 3:16).

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There is little doubt, then, that the form of speech-action I have termed 'one-another edifying speech' (OES) is a clearly identifiable, widespread, theologically significant practice within the NT, with an important function to perform within the Christian community. Accordingly, it would seem that the historical lack of attention to its theological nature, purposes and practical significance is well worth addressing.

My next task is to outline a coherent methodology for doing so.

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 1 for an outline of the theological 'train of thought' for each of the 25 passages surveyed.

## *Chapter 2: Understanding OES as a form of moral action*

### *§1 Ethics as a place to stand*

I have argued that ‘one-another edifying speech’ is *an important and meaningful category of action* (that is, speech-action) within the NT vision of the Christian community. How should its significance, nature and purposes be explored?

At one level, to think about any action is to ask familiar questions such as these: What kind of action is this, and how is it similar to or different from related actions? Does it have an end or purpose that gives it intelligibility and meaning? Are there good reasons or bad reasons for doing this thing, or for not doing it? May it be done well or poorly, and what would constitute criteria for saying so? What sort of person would habitually perform this kind of action?

The possibility of asking these sorts of question is in fact what makes something an *action* rather than simply an occurrence.<sup>27</sup> To act is to do something that can be interrogated for its meaning or intelligibility—that can be accounted for by means of a train of thought, even if that train of thought has been boarded and travelled so many times as to have become habitual.

If, as we have already argued, ‘one-another edifying speech’ is rightly conceived of as a meaningful action—as a speech-act in which certain things are intentionally done by means of speaking—then these are the kinds of questions that should be

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<sup>27</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time* (vol. 1 of *Ethics as Theology*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 3.

asked of it.

These questions are, of course, the questions of *ethics* as a discipline of thought, a fact which places this project in a doubly unusual position—not only of seeking to explore a NT phenomenon that historically has received very little systematic examination, but of doing so within an academic discipline that historically has not tended to regard ecclesial forms of moral action as a central part of its remit. Ethics has traditionally concerned itself more with the moral contours of personal identity and virtue, gender and sexuality, family life, interpersonal relations, and (especially more recently) society, culture and politics.

However, as I have already shown in the brief overview of OES in the NT (above) and will demonstrate in more depth below (in Part II), the apostolic authors consistently think of OES as a theologically significant *moral action*—one that *ought* to be performed in certain circumstances,<sup>28</sup> that aims towards certain good ends, that can be practised well or poorly, and that is to be understood within a theological framework of God's perfections and his revelatory action in the world.

If this thesis thus finds itself somewhat awkwardly standing in the ethics department, it must also be recognized that ethics is a department of thought in which it is difficult to *stand still*. Ethics stands at the junction or 'tipping-point ... at which reason becomes action'.<sup>29</sup> It looks not only at *what it is* to act rightly and well in any particular circumstance, but *why* such action is desirable or requisite, and *how* it is to be done.<sup>30</sup>

Ethics, in other words, shuffles back and forth between reflective and

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<sup>28</sup> As noted above, 18 of the 25 instances of OES in the NT take the form of an imperative to engage in the action.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking* (vol. 2 of *Ethics as Theology*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014), viii.

<sup>30</sup> This is Michael Banner's formulation, using Benedict's Rule as a paradigmatic example. Michael C. Banner, *Christian Ethics: A Brief History* (Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 10–22.

deliberative poles of thought. It considers the contours of the action itself—its circumstances, characteristics and possible outcomes—and the grounds or reasons for setting forth upon it. On the one side, there is a task of recognition and deliberation about the characteristics of this moment and what particular action it calls for, and on the other a task of reflective reason about the realities that should drive me to do this thing in a particular way rather than to do it in a different way, or do something else altogether.<sup>31</sup>

Within the Christian tradition, the authoritative realities that ground this task of reflection and deliberation are anchored in the character and works of God, including the revelation of his purposes and will in Scripture. With such a general statement, nearly all streams of the Christian tradition would be comfortable. However, exactly how, and how authoritatively, the Bible informs a theological understanding of reality that in turn frames reflection about moral action—on that question there is considerable difference of opinion, and, within contemporary ethics, a dissatisfying lack of resolution (see further below).

If this thesis is to operate convincingly within a Christian (and specifically Protestant) tradition, then some methodological clarity is required as to how Bible, theology and ethics may be successfully held together.

## *§2 The unresolved divide between the Bible, theology and ethics*

Before what has become known as the ‘Enlightenment’, there was little question in Western culture that Holy Scripture was the authoritative source for a theological knowledge of reality that determined the contours of good action and a good life. In

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<sup>31</sup> These terms—‘deliberation’ and ‘reflection’—are O’Donovan’s; *Self, World, and Time*, 31–32.

fact, prior to developments in the sixteenth century it was not even intelligible, according to O'Donovan, to speak of 'ethics' and 'theology' as separate disciplines: 'In theology the stream of godly knowledge flowed down uninterrupted from *sacra doctrina* to Christian life'.<sup>32</sup>

The upheavals of the Reformation brought to the surface questions about how exactly that stream flowed to each person, what role the Church had in directing its course in relation to the authority of the Bible itself, and how the conduct of Scripturally-founded ethical thinking and action related to the gracious saving action of God in the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

However, it was not until the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that serious doubts were raised as to whether that revelatory stream did really flow from its Scriptural headwaters to us, or whether in fact we were decisively *separated* from any objective or authoritative account of divine and moral reality.<sup>34</sup> Lessing's 'ugly, broad ditch' vividly expressed the problem that the Enlightenment thinkers sought in different ways to solve.<sup>35</sup> If the necessary truths of reason and metaphysics could not validly be anchored in the uncertain and 'accidental truths of history'<sup>36</sup>—that is, in a divine set of teachings from an historically-revealed Scriptural or churchly authority—then how was morality to be accounted for and described?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Michael Banner suggests that Luther unwittingly inserted a wedge between theology and ethics, with his strong contrast between 'law' and 'gospel', and 'works' and 'grace'; a wedge that contributed to the subsequent split between theology and ethics; Banner, *Christian Ethics*, ch 4.

<sup>34</sup> The philosophical roots of this separation arguably go further back to the 'Scotist rupture' of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in which Duns Scotus and others pioneered a move away from a prevailing participationist view of being (whereby creaturely being only exist through God's sustaining gift) towards a univocal view, in which being was 'self-enclosed and abstracted from transcendent origin'; A. Riches, 'Christology and the "Scotist Rupture"', *Theological Research* 1 (2013): 37.

<sup>35</sup> G. E. Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power', in *Lessing's Theological Writings* (trans., Henry Chadwick; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), 53.

<sup>36</sup> Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power', 55.

<sup>37</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3rd ed.; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 18–19, 48–50.

The turn away from an objective, morally coherent order revealed to humanity by God in history, and the corresponding ‘turn to the subject’ as the source of an answer to this question,<sup>38</sup> has been the characteristic feature of theological and ethical thought ever since. We need not trace the many twists and turns of this discussion, except to note its lack of resolution,<sup>39</sup> and the legacy it has bequeathed to the contemporary study of the Bible, theology and ethics.

One of the key features of that legacy is that the exegetical study of biblical texts, the synthesis of biblical thought in theological arguments or systems, and the study of ethics, have become largely separate disciplines within the academy. Bartholomew complains that the contemporary gulf between the Bible, theology and ethics is manifested in the fact that ‘it is rare to find works on theological ethics that are deeply rooted exegetically, just as it is rare to find works on biblical ethics that have a sophisticated theological and philosophical perspective’.<sup>40</sup> The ugly, broad ditch of historical contingency seems to have rendered any close connection between the Bible, theology and ethics difficult to sustain within mainstream Christian scholarship.<sup>41</sup>

There have certainly been efforts to mend this breach, dominated in the first half of the twentieth century by Barth’s massive outworking of dogmatics-as-ethics, and with his equally strong call for ‘exegesis, exegesis and yet more exegesis’.<sup>42</sup> For

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<sup>38</sup> As Banner describes it, *Christian Ethics*, ch 5.

<sup>39</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre’s judgement is that the key figures in the discussion—Hume, Kant and Kierkegaard—were only effective insofar as they showed each other’s failure to answer the question; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 49. Post-enlightenment contributions recognized this failure, and in some cases celebrated it (so Nietzsche), without providing an alternative that proved compelling.

<sup>40</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, ‘Introduction’, in *A Royal Priesthood?: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O’Donovan* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Bartholomew also notes that most biblically-focused ethical studies are now descriptive rather than normative in focus; ‘Introduction’, 6–7.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (WUNT 2/145; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2001), 30.

Barth, theology drew its character from its object of study—that is, from the self-revealing God as witnessed to in Scripture—not from the consciousness, reason, feeling or will of the human subject. Theology likewise received its calling from the purpose of God’s revelation, which was to shape the ethical action, and in particular the proclamation, of the church to the glory of Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Barth and his influence notwithstanding, there remains dissatisfaction with the widespread separation of the disciplines of biblical studies, theology and ethics, and attempts continue to be made to find a satisfactory framework for integrating or at least for promoting constructive interaction between them.

From the *biblical studies* side, for example, I. Howard Marshall has pleaded for a fresh discussion on how one can legitimately move ‘beyond the Bible’ to doctrinal formulations, and to an application of the text to circumstances not envisaged by the text, or not easily comparable (at least on face value) to the circumstances or cultural context of the text.<sup>44</sup> His own proposal is essentially an adaptation of William Webb’s ‘redemptive-movement’ hermeneutic, in which the reader discerns in the unfolding storyline of the Bible a redemptive trajectory, whereby various biblical characters ‘go beyond’ the insights of those who came before them but in the same trajectory, thus providing a warrant for contemporary readers to do something similar.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the weaknesses of Marshall’s proposal,<sup>46</sup> his call for the necessity

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<sup>43</sup> For an account of the ethical direction of Barth’s theology see John B. Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> I. Howard Marshall, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Stanley E. Porter, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 11–79.

<sup>45</sup> William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2001), 30–66.

<sup>46</sup> In responding to Marshall’s proposal, Vanhoozer points out the weakness not only of the ‘beyond’ language as a way to name the problem, and also suggests that the ‘redemptive-trajectory’ approach places too much confidence in our ability to discern whether our contemporary position on a particular issue represents a further stage along the redemptive highway or a detour from it; Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 81–95.

(and possibility) of integrating careful Scriptural exegesis with integrative theological thought and contemporary application has been widely noticed.<sup>47</sup>

From the standpoint of *theology*, the emergence of the ‘theological interpretation’ movement signals a similar recognition of the divide between biblical studies and theology, and a desire to draw the two together, particularly as postmodernity has exposed some of the positivistic weaknesses of historical criticism.<sup>48</sup> This loosely defined movement, exemplified by Vanhoozer and Treier, operates within a broadly realist conception of language (that the text of Scripture does refer to realities beyond itself), and with a concern to ‘recover the Bible’s original governing interest’—‘the word and works of God’.<sup>49</sup>

Speaking from a similar (though by no means identical) position, John Webster has also forcefully argued that there is no neutral place to stand in reading the Bible. If we stand with Lessing and the Enlightenment in denying the divine authorship of Scripture, this does not confer objectivity upon us but merely names the different set of assumptions that we bring with us to the text.<sup>50</sup> Webster insists that Scripture (if it is indeed to be recognized as ‘Scripture’) can only be rightly read and understood within the economy of the triune God, as part of the mission of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>51</sup> Without denying that the human characteristics of biblical texts do signify the historical, cultural and religious conditions in which they were produced, as all

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<sup>47</sup> As borne out by the significant number of reviews of *Beyond the Bible* that appeared in the two years following its publication.

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer writes: ‘The question postmoderns raise for historical critics is whether, in exorcising the spirit of faith from biblical studies, they have not inadvertently admitted even more ideological demons into the spiritual house’; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘Introduction: What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?’ in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al; London: SPCK, 2005), 21.

<sup>49</sup> Vanhoozer, ‘Introduction’, 22.

<sup>50</sup> John B. Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 4–5.

<sup>51</sup> Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 8.

human texts do, Webster argues that they do so ‘only *en passant*, on the way to the matter which is the primary object of signification, namely, God himself ministering his Word to creatures’.<sup>52</sup> The historically contingent nature of the texts does not decisively separate us from them, if indeed their function is determined by the God who providentially sanctifies them for his purposes.<sup>53</sup>

These overtures from theology towards biblical studies have not been universally welcomed, especially in their practical outworking. Porter, for example, in responding to the ‘theological interpretation’ movement, suggests that it lacks a coherent methodological approach for the actual interpretation of Scripture, ambiguously and inconsistently privileges premodern and precritical interpretations, and fails (for the most part) to engage in a thoroughly worked through biblical hermeneutic.<sup>54</sup> Carson, likewise, complains that Webster’s position, while theologically rich, does not deal with the practicalities of how the results of historical-critical research are to be integrated with theological statements or positions on which they bear.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, while the insights of ‘theological interpretation’ have been appreciated as a corrective to the sterility of biblical studies as ‘textual archeology’ (to use Webster’s pungent term),<sup>56</sup> there is yet to be widespread agreement as to how

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<sup>52</sup> Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 10. Webster goes on to suggest that the problem is not that it is inconceivable for divine revelation to take historical form, but that such an instantiation of God’s word cuts radically across our subjective autonomy: ‘... the heart of the difficulty we face in attending to Scripture is not the conceivability of revelation’s taking creaturely form but our antipathy to it’.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Extending himself into the structures and practices of human communication in the sending of the Holy Spirit, the divine Word commissions and sanctifies these texts to become fitting vehicles of his self-proclamation’; Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley E. Porter, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Responsibility’, in *The Future of Biblical Interpretation: Responsible Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013), 39–46.

<sup>55</sup> D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 251–252.

<sup>56</sup> John B. Webster, ‘The Visible Attests the Invisible’, in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005), 111.

exactly a theologically-driven integration of Bible, theology and ethics should proceed.

On the *ethics* side of the discussion, Bartholomew suggests that the situation is no better. He notes the relatively poor record of major 20<sup>th</sup> century theological ethicists in engaging with Scripture, using descriptors such as ‘woolly’, ‘selective’, ‘personalistic’, ‘individualistic’, and ‘proof-texting’.<sup>57</sup> Bartholomew goes on to describe briefly six different approaches or ‘creative renewals in the use of the Bible’ in ethics, none of which are without shortcomings: the Bible as a source of law (as in Rushdoony’s Christian reconstructionism); the Bible as a source of idealistic philosophical categories that shape dogmatic theology and ethics (as in Gabler’s approach to biblical theology); the Bible as normative for theology, which then develops a theological ethic (thus, Barth and those influenced by him); the Bible as a reminder or motivation for natural law ethics (as in recent Roman Catholic ethics); the Bible as supplying the story or narrative into which a Christian community reads itself and by which it understands itself (whether in the postliberalism of Lindbeck and Frei, or the narrative ethics of Hauerwas); and liberationist readings of the Bible for ethics (as practised by Gutiérrez and Fretheim).<sup>58</sup>

Within his somewhat gloomy assessment of the place of Scriptural engagement in contemporary ethics, Bartholomew singles out the work of Richard Hays and Oliver O’Donovan as exceptions. I will return to O’Donovan’s contribution below, but it is worth briefly noting at this point how Hays proposes to bridge the ‘daunting abyss’ of ‘temporal and cultural distance between ourselves and the text’.<sup>59</sup> Through a careful descriptive analysis of the NT, Hays identifies three controlling ‘focal

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<sup>57</sup> Bartholomew, ‘Introduction’, 8, referencing the analysis of J. S. Siker, *Scripture in Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Bartholomew, ‘Introduction’, 12–19.

<sup>59</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 5.

images’—community, cross and new creation—that he uses to ‘keep in balance’<sup>60</sup> the diversity of ethical material across the New Testament, and to guide its application to our contemporary context. Although Hays by no means falls under Bartholomew’s critique of using Scripture lightly or carelessly—his argument features detailed and wide-ranging exegesis of the text—it may be asked whether in practice Hays’s focal images end up constraining rather than facilitating contemporary engagement with the text. For Hays, the focal images (or some version of them) are methodologically essential for the metaphorical transfer that is required for the contemporary reader to bridge the temporal and cultural gap with Scripture.<sup>61</sup> It must not only be questioned whether this form of prior hermeneutical synthesis is practically realistic, and whether it is in fact how Christian communities are and have been shaped by Scripture,<sup>62</sup> but whether such a metaphorical framework devised by the contemporary reader can prevent that reader from assimilating the text to his or her prior understandings.<sup>63</sup>

Another exception that Bartholomew would doubtless have mentioned (had it been written at the time) is Brian Brock’s *Singing the Ethos of God*. Brock conducts a wide-ranging and sophisticated survey of contemporary approaches to the question of how the Bible should inform or be used within Christian ethics, and finds himself dissatisfied with that way of posing the question. In the meditative exegesis of Bonhoeffer, and through an extensive engagement with Augustine’s and Luther’s reading of the Psalms, Brock finds an approach that is less about how the Bible can

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<sup>60</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 310.

<sup>61</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 302–304.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007)

<sup>63</sup> O’Donovan’s critique of ‘two horizons’ hermeneutics is apposite at this point: ‘How can such a fusion [of horizons] be anything other than a selective absorption of the ancient by the modern in accordance with the laws of its own metabolism?’; Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (2nd ed.; Leicester, England: Apollos, 1994), 162.

be situated hermeneutically with regard to ethics, and more about how ethics is created and shaped by *a committed immersion in Scripture*, founded on faith, ‘... a faith that from its first moment has a relationship to Scripture and an ethical posture’.<sup>64</sup> Brock’s essential point is that only by crossing the ‘ugly ditch between biblical hermeneutics and ethics’<sup>65</sup> and experiencing for ourselves the faith-based ‘singing’ of the praises of God (as the Psalms teach us) can we embark on a path of learning the ethos of God. Method is part of the understanding that faith seeks, not its prerequisite.

Where does this brief consideration of the varied and contested proposals for integrating Scripture, theology and ethics leave us? Is it possible to mend the breach (or in Brock’s case, overleap it) in such a way as to provide a coherent methodological approach?

Two recent proposals, taken together, offer a productive way forward.

### *§3 Two recent productive approaches: Vanhoozer and O’Donovan*

#### *a. Kevin Vanhoozer: cultivating ‘the mind of the canon’*

American theologian Kevin Vanhoozer presents a sophisticated and eclectic model for the practice of biblically-informed, practice-oriented theology.

He is regarded as a leading practitioner of ‘theological interpretation’,<sup>66</sup> but unlike others in that movement, has an abiding interest in hermeneutics, and in particular with the potential of speech-act theory to provide insights into how Scripture functions as God’s ‘communicative act’ that initiates and carries forward

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<sup>64</sup> Brock, *Singing*, 242.

<sup>65</sup> Brock, *Singing*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> Porter identifies him as such, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Responsibility’, 40.

covenantal relations with his people.<sup>67</sup>

Vanhoozer would agree with Webster and the neo-Barthians that theology is a reflection upon God's own self-revelation in Christ, and that the canon of Scripture is the word and work of the risen Christ, not of his church.<sup>68</sup> However, he would go further than them in unapologetically describing Scripture as 'the voice of God that articulates the Word of God: Jesus Christ'.<sup>69</sup>

Vanhoozer would also go along with the narrative theologians in emphasizing the power and importance of the Bible as an unfolding *story* with different voices, but insists that such an awareness need not eliminate the sense that the biblical story is *about* something and someone beyond itself; that it does refer to and predicate of supra-narrative realities. He argues that 'drama' is a better category than 'story' or 'narrative' because it highlights that the words of Scripture are part of something that God has done and is doing, a drama that is being played out in history, and of which readers of Scripture continue to be part.<sup>70</sup>

Vanhoozer is also sympathetic to the communitarian emphasis of the 'turn to practice', as exemplified in Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theology, but is critical of its tendency to collapse into a kind of communal form of Schleiermacher's expressivism.<sup>71</sup> If the authoritative source of Christian doctrine is not the biblical story itself but (as Lindbeck would have it) that story 'as read, or rather "practiced" in the Christian community' then what is to prevent doctrine becoming a function (or 'grammar') of the church's own culturally-determined conventions?<sup>72</sup> Vanhoozer does

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<sup>67</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 63–71.

<sup>68</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 196.

<sup>69</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 46.

<sup>70</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 47–55.

<sup>71</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> 'In Lindbeck's regulative theory, doctrine does not direct the community but is directed by it. Doctrine stands in a second-order relationship not to Scripture but to the use of Scripture in the church'; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 97.

see theology as a communal activity inherently related to practice, but in a different way. Rather than regarding the practice of the community as determinative for the reading of Scripture, he sees the reading of Scripture as a set of practices which are authoritative for the practice of the community; not so much Scripture-as-used-by-the-church as Scripture-as-used-by-God in a series of divine communicative acts.

Vanhoozer's own synthesis of these various trends in theological method yields a definition of the theological task that is both Scripturally reflective and related to contemporary action. As a reflection upon the divine speech-acts of Scripture, theology serves to give 'direction as to how individuals and the church can participate fittingly in the drama of redemption'.<sup>73</sup> The directive nature of doctrine means that theology must not only be *scientia*, a knowledge of how things are, but *sapientia*, a knowledge of how to act in wisdom, as disciples of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

This directive or sapiential function of theological thought shapes how Vanhoozer configures the relationship between the Bible and theology. He understands Scripture as a set of divine communicative acts and practices, to which readers *apprentice* themselves for the development of what he calls 'the mind of the canon'<sup>75</sup> or 'love's wisdom'.<sup>76</sup>

Good theological judgment is largely, though not exclusively, a matter of being apprenticed to the canon: of having one's capacity for judging (a capacity that involves imagination, reason, emotion, and volition alike) formed and transformed by the ensemble of canonical practices that constitute Scripture.<sup>77</sup>

The Bible is not just a source of propositions or concepts, which theology mines

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<sup>73</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 78.

<sup>74</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 248–255.

<sup>75</sup> Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 92–93.

<sup>76</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Love's Wisdom: The Authority of Scripture's Form and Content for Faith's Understanding and Theological Judgment', *JRT* 5.3 (2011): 247–275.

<sup>77</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 331 (emphasis original).

and assembles into a coherent conceptual structure. The various literary forms and genres of Scripture each contribute in their own way to what is really a pedagogical project: ‘forming the knowledge and love of God’ in the reader/disciple/community.<sup>78</sup> Vanhoozer is happy to own a kind of propositionalism—that the biblical texts include propositional content and propositional forms—but he casts it as a ‘well-versed propositionalism’,<sup>79</sup> one that seeks a reconciliation between content and form; between the matter of what is being said or done through the speech-act and the way it is being done (whether in narrative, epistle, poetry or apocalyptic): ‘Form and content work together, both to teach us concepts (i.e., convey information) and shape our conceptions (i.e., process information)’.<sup>80</sup>

To summarize Vanhoozer’s view in terms of his ‘theodrama’ metaphor, we read the richly variegated script that is Scripture to prepare us for our action on the stage, but there is an element of improvisation in our performance.<sup>81</sup> That is, we do not simply repeat the words of Scripture, or woodenly imitate the actions of its actors, but by following what they say and how they say it, we have disclosed to us not only the nature of the drama in which we are playing (where we are up to in the story, where it is going, who are the *dramatis personae*, and so on) but what kind of thought process or what manner of ‘information processing’ would lead us to a fitting performance in that drama. We are prepared, in other words, to make judgements about reality and our right participation in it.

This approach is different from seeking to extract timeless principles or imperatives from their historical NT husk, and then applying them to our context.

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<sup>78</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 253

<sup>79</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 260f.

<sup>80</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 266 (emphasis original).

<sup>81</sup> Vanhoozer is aligned here with other contemporary ‘performance’ theories of hermeneutics and action, such as those by Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2005) and Frances M. Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Scripture* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1990).

The texts are not timeless or ahistorical, nor are we. Vanhoozer respects the value of historico-critical exegesis, but he critiques its tendency to think that the task of biblical exegesis is finished once we have gotten behind (or in front of) the text to ‘find out what actually happened’.<sup>82</sup> The task, as he characterizes it, is to pay close attention to ‘the normative judgments that underlie the diverse expressions and forms of biblical discourse’—with all their embeddedness in historical particularity—and to conceptually reformulate those judgements so as to inform ‘what the people of God are to say and do’ in their own context in the unfolding divine drama.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, Vanhoozer’s proposal is similar to Brock’s—it sees hermeneutics as learning-within-performance; as a task that takes place *within* our enacting of the script of the divine drama.

Vanhoozer’s complex and subtle proposal holds some promise for the methodology of this thesis. If we are going to make good judgements that will inform our understanding and practice of the action we are examining (‘OES in the Christian community’), and if the account of reality from which we seek to make those judgements is a theological one, then Vanhoozer would direct us to attend closely to ‘the pattern of judgements’ or ‘canonical practices’ of Scripture. In particular, we would need to conduct a careful, historically aware exegesis of texts that provide *a pattern of theological judgements* about the action we are examining.

For example, if we wish to understand the logic of Paul’s thought about the nature and purpose of mutually edifying prophetic speech in 1 Cor 14, we would need to identify as best we can what he is talking about in the particular historical and cultural context of the Corinthian church—such as what Paul and the Corinthians understood ‘prophecy’ and ‘tongues’ to be, or what the verb *συνάω*

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<sup>82</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 101.

<sup>83</sup> Vanhoozer, ‘Love’s Wisdom’, 267.

means in verse 34. But the end-point of that exegetical work is not so much to identify the precise features of (in this instance) ‘prophecy’ within the Corinthian church, or to reconstruct the historical context in which the instruction was given and heard—which are very difficult aims given the limited information available—but to map *the pattern of judgements* that underlie Paul’s discussion of this phenomenon; the web of descriptions, associations, connections, imagery, allusions and theological reasoning that Paul brings to bear in addressing the particularity of the Corinthian situation. It is this pattern of reasoning and judgement, conceptually integrated with that exhibited in other related passages, that can provide a theologically-driven understanding of reality—which is what we require if we are to reflect about human action, such as ‘one-another edifying speech’.

Whether the process by which this pattern of judgements is instantiated in fitting action should be envisaged as a matter of ‘improvisation’ (as Vanhoozer and others characterize it) is questionable. Improvisation requires a blank space in the playwright’s script. It suggests that the actor is only really free to ‘play’ the character when he or she is given the space to create their own lines and action. However, this doesn’t describe the way that freedom in dramatic performance works—in the vast majority of instances, actors exercise their individual freedom within the confines of the script by ‘playing’ the character in their own way; by interpreting and delivering the lines in their own way, not by improvising the lines. It is also not the way that free moral agency works within the sphere of God’s command, as O’Donovan astutely notes:

To believe that there is a story (in God’s mind) that will include the life I am now leading is one thing; to undertake to perform that story is quite another. I can only pray for it to be formed around faithful action. The guidance we need for that is prescriptive, validated explicitly or implicitly on the basis of descriptive, rather than narrative, meaning. [...] And ‘interpretation’ rather than ‘improvisation’ is the category we need to describe how we apply

our minds to the guidance we receive.<sup>84</sup>

This brings us to a further area in which Vanhoozer's model could benefit from elaboration. In casting theology's task in terms of a grand drama, in which God is scriptwriter, director and participant, and in which all human action is played out, Vanhoozer gives detailed attention to many aspects of the 'divine performance' and our part in it. He describes the nature of the Bible as 'script', the theologian as 'dramaturge', the church as the 'company of the gospel', and the 'fittingness' of the church's performance in the unfolding eschatological theodrama. However, he gives less attention to an understanding of *the stage* on which the action proceeds—that is to the reality that we inhabit, and which throws up the various situations in which we are called to speak and act. In particular, what is the nature of the variability of the staging conditions? Is the stage on which the church plays its part in (say) a 21st century Western culture essentially the same stage—as to its moral shape, nature and characteristics—as that upon which the action of the OT or NT was played out? Or if it is different, what is the dimension or significance of the differences?

To say that the passing of history and development of varying cultural conditions renders our world 'different' from the world of the Bible is to state the obvious, but to leave unaddressed the key point:<sup>85</sup> how significant is the difference? Is it that we wear different costumes, and use different props and scenery, and use a different vernacular in our acting—while the essential shape and nature of the stage on which the action unfolds remains largely unchanged? Or is the stage itself now so materially different that aspects of the script are no longer congruent with it, or are no longer performable upon it? In other words, how stable and consistent over time

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<sup>84</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest* (vol. 3 of *Ethics as Theology*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 182.

<sup>85</sup> Vanhoozer describes our historical situation as 'strikingly different' from the time of the church fathers or the Reformation, and refers to 'a variety of historical stages, each with its own cultural and social scenery and its own cast of characters'; *Drama of Doctrine*, 111.

is the nature of the field of moral action ('stage')?

The assumption that arguably drives much contemporary ethics and hermeneutics is that there is some form of Lessing's ugly, broad ditch that separates our world from the world of the Bible, and that makes appropriation of the thought of the biblical authors a tenuous exercise. While Vanhoozer clearly regards the 'mind of the canon' as normative, and works hard to demonstrate the stability of the biblical text as a word for today, he devotes relatively little attention to this question of the stability of the world as a field of moral action.<sup>86</sup>

The second approach casts some valuable light on that question.

*b. Oliver O'Donovan: trains of thought within moral order*

Starting from the home-base of theology, Vanhoozer suggests that theology should arise from apprenticeship to the biblical text, and should speak to Christian action. Starting from the standpoint of moral action, English ethicist Oliver O'Donovan is equally insistent that any consideration of the meaning of action must be grounded in a Scripturally-informed theological account of the reality in which that action is to take place.

O'Donovan has his own version of Vanhoozer's apprenticeship to canonical practice, which we will return to below, but to understand it we need first to explore a more foundational concept for O'Donovan: namely, that the moral order that all humans observe and experience in the world is, in fact, real, as a matter of created, objective reality:

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<sup>86</sup> In his discussion of the concept of 'fittingness', Vanhoozer does say this: 'It is not, therefore, that language shapes reality but that faithful speech persuades hearers to live one way rather than another precisely because *some shapes accord to reality better than others*'; *Drama of Doctrine*, 108 (emphasis original). However, his extensive discussion of 'fittingness' in relation to the eschatological drama spends little time exploring the 'reality' of the world in which the drama is played out.

Any attempt to think about morality must make a decision early in its course, overt or covert, about these forms of order which we seem to discern in the world. Either they are there, or they are not. This decision, which will shape the character of the whole moral philosophical enterprise, forces itself as much upon secular as upon Christian thought ... On the one hand he [the secular man] may interpret these relations of order as part of a universal world-order, a network of interrelationships forming a totality of which mankind himself is part. If he does so, he steps, despite himself, on to theological ground, and will find himself required to specify rather carefully how he conceives the relation of cosmic order to the presence of mind and reason within it.<sup>87</sup>

O'Donovan contends that creation is given its complex inter-related order by a good and loving Creator, an order that is *generic* (an order of kinds, an ordering-alongside) and *telic* (an order of ends; an ordering-to). The alternative, he argues, is to treat the 'perception' of order as an imposition on the brute material of the world, and to conclude that our moral beliefs 'are not "beliefs" at all but mere "commitments", claiming no correspondence with reality. They are the ways in which the will projects the patterns of the mind upon the blank screen of an unordered world.'<sup>88</sup> This is poignantly descriptive of modernity's long, self-enclosed and ultimately failed quest to 'vindicate freedom as autonomy, that is to say, in terms of an authority for action which belonged entirely to the moral agent himself and was not derived from external reality'.<sup>89</sup>

It is the uniquely Christian and 'evangelical' claim (as O'Donovan labels it) that God has not only created this good-though-fallen order but redeemed it by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in history—at the same time both vindicating it as creation and revealing its authoritative final telos: 'That small segment of reality, elect and chosen of God, shapes all the reality we encounter, so that to be in touch

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<sup>87</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 35.

<sup>89</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 119–120.

with reality in any form we have to be in touch with that reality'.<sup>90</sup> Further, by his Spirit, God has liberated his people to participate in this christologically determined order in faith, love and hope.

O'Donovan's recognition of the reality and stability of the created order as the field of moral action, along with his equally strong insistence that access to authoritative knowledge to act freely within this order is available exclusively in Christ by the Spirit, supplies an important complementary perspective on how Scripture and theology relate to the consideration of contemporary action (like the action of OES). For Vanhoozer, the bridge across the hermeneutical ditch of history is mainly constructed from the history-wide scope of the over-arching purposes of God—the five act theodrama, as he describes it, now deep into a fourth act in which we are players (the fifth act being the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of Christ).

For O'Donovan, the universality of Christ's Scripturally-mediated authority is rooted not just in our participation in the history-wide scope of God's plan, but in Christ's incarnation in *this created order*, and his redemption and eschatological renewal of this created order, of which every human is a common member.<sup>91</sup> By affirming the objectivity and stability of the world as a created moral order, O'Donovan is able to provide a more secure foundation for contemporary thought about our experience of that world and our action within it, including that thought-

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<sup>90</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 121. Bartholomew describes O'Donovan's position at this point as forging a unity between Brunner's insistence that there are objective orders in creation, and Barth's equally strong insistence that we have no epistemological access to that order except through the exclusive work of Christ; Bartholomew, 'Introduction', 23. O'Donovan's own explicit objective is to avoid the disjunction between 'creation ethics' and 'kingdom ethics', although his proposal has not necessarily convinced those on each side of that divide; see, for example, Stanley Hauerwas's critical response (from the eschatological 'kingdom' ethic viewpoint) in *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 174–175.

<sup>91</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 143–144, 160.

process by which we interact with the Scriptural word and its theological judgements about that world. To adopt Vanhoozer's metaphor, O'Donovan would wish to affirm that the *stage* on which the theodrama is itself a component of the drama, a created morally ordered stage, to which the action of the players has to conform, and about which the Script provides an authoritative disclosure to guide our action (as to its nature and ends). In so doing, O'Donovan does not discount the reality of finding other cultures strange or different, including aspects of the biblical culture, but denies that this is anything unusual or finally problematic:

Cultural foreignness, which we meet in our contemporaries almost daily, is not a final barrier to understanding, but a warning against shallow understandings. Novelty in the moral questions we confront is not peculiar to our modern society, but a feature of moral thinking in every age; again, it is a stimulus, not a barrier, to the comprehension of old and new within one moral field.<sup>92</sup>

How then does O'Donovan conceive of a Scripturally-mediated authority within the common generic-teleological order that we inhabit? How does he make the move from the text of the Bible to what he describes as 'obedience to the realities which the Scriptures attest'?<sup>93</sup>

His answer is shaped by his definition of 'ethics'.<sup>94</sup> The study of ethics, according to O'Donovan, is the study of moral thinking, and the conditions under which it can be conducted successfully. Between the text, and the obedience to the realities which the text discloses, there must be space for a process of thought:

There is a necessary indeterminacy in the obedient action required by the faithful reading of the text. Acts are ordered in a basic repertoire of kinds and types, and of these kinds and types Scripture has a great deal of normative force to tell us; but Scripture does not

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<sup>92</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 161; cf. Watson, *Text, Church, and World*, 152.

<sup>93</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 80 (emphasis original).

<sup>94</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 67–89 contains his most recent statement on this question.

determine the concrete act itself, the act we must perform now.

Ethics, then, cannot be collapsed into theology, as if a description of theological reality is all that is required (with moral action happening virtually automatically as a result). Nor is it adequate to consign ethics to a purely descriptive task of how various people have acted or thought in relation their action, or to cast ethics merely as casuistry, the practical management of behaviour case by case. Ethical thought reaches out ‘in both directions, towards the doctrinal and towards the practical’.<sup>95</sup> It is concerned with that middle space, the process that reflects (on the one side) on a theologically-determined disclosure of reality, and then forms a deliberative train of thought that (on the other side) leads to a course of action. Ethics seeks to describe these ‘trains of thought which resolve upon action’.<sup>96</sup>

O’Donovan’s emphasis on rational processes in the ethical task has not gone uncriticized. Stanley Hauerwas’s well-known *bon mot* regarding *Resurrection and Moral Order*—‘too much moral order, not enough resurrection’<sup>97</sup>—expresses his view that O’Donovan is too confident in the knowability of the good order of creation apart from participation in Christ’s resurrection:

O’Donovan seeks an account of natural law that is not governed by the eschatological witness of Christ’s resurrection. We cannot write about *Resurrection and Moral Order* because any order that we know as Christians is resurrection.<sup>98</sup>

Whether Hauerwas’s criticism is quite fair (O’Donovan does explicitly anchor knowledge of the created order in the moral subject’s faith in the resurrected Christ), it does highlight an imbalance in the emphasis of *Resurrection and Moral Order* that

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<sup>95</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 89.

<sup>96</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 71

<sup>97</sup> William Cavanaugh, ‘Stan the Man: A Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person’ in *The Hauerwas Reader* (eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright; Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 175.

O'Donovan himself sought to correct in his more recent *Ethics as Theology* trilogy—the former focusing more on the objectivity of the created moral order, the latter filling out an account of the subjectivity of the redeemed moral agent within that order.

Interacting in detail with the whole body of O'Donovan's work, Andrew Errington has recently questioned whether O'Donovan is quite right to style the over-arching vision of the good order of the world as knowledge or 'wisdom', and whether he is too optimistic about the agent's ability to think his way from 'wisdom' (as a coherent perception of the world) to the practicalities of knowing how to act in the moment. Arguing particularly from Proverbs, Errington suggests that 'wisdom' is a form of more practical, proximate moral 'know-how' that is conveyed in the words of the wise.<sup>99</sup>

Without adjudicating on the appropriateness of how best to apply the terminology of 'wisdom', it would seem that Errington's critique identifies a weakness of emphasis rather than structure in O'Donovan's thought. O'Donovan allows for the importance of the proximate word, including the proverbial 'wisdom' word, but also argues that knowing when and how to apply that word deliberately still requires a larger conception of reality—of what word might be appropriate when, given our larger knowledge of different circumstances and their relation.

The relevant point for our discussion of method is that O'Donovan sees the Scriptures as a school within which we are taught the ways of wisdom as redeemed moral agents. The Scriptures nourish this thought process, according to O'Donovan, not only by disclosing to us the nature and purpose of the reality we inhabit, but by presenting us with exemplary and authoritative *trains of thought*. Every biblical

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<sup>99</sup> Andrew Errington, *Every Good Path: Wisdom and Practical Reason in Christian Ethics and the Book of Proverbs* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 144-191.

argument, story, command or counsel proceeds from ‘some A to some B, led by its practical question, grounding itself on some principles of action, observing some contextual constraints and reaching some resolution’.<sup>100</sup> These trains of thought are authoritative for us as we engage in our own moral thought process, in our own context, ‘from some X to some Y’:

We may express the relation in the formula  $[A>B]>[X>Y]$ . Obeying the text’s authority is not simply a matter of taking up the conclusions which its thought has reached, as in the formula  $A>B>Y$ , a literalism that short-cuts the task of obedient thought,  $X>Y$ . Nor is it simply a matter of thinking from the same principles as the text, as in the formula  $A>X>Y$ , so that we overleap Scripture’s exposition of what its principles imply, lifting the loosest and most generalized expressions out of their argumentative embeddedness to employ them as we will.<sup>101</sup>

This is a very useful and complementary description of Vanhoozer’s notion of apprenticing ourselves to the canonical pattern of judgements, in this case the variegated instances in Scripture of the practice of moral reasoning (from some A to some B). We attend to those Scriptural trains of thought and learn from them; we see in them not just a presentation of moral realities or of moral order (in Vanhoozer’s terms, theological judgements about reality), but a movement of thought from those moral-ordered realities *towards action*.

For example, in 1 Cor 1–4 we read not just a disclosure of the meaning of the cross of Christ and its relation to worldly power and wisdom, nor just an exhortation to the Corinthians to stop ‘boasting in men’ and forming factions around particular leaders, but a thought process that moves from one to the other. In apprenticing ourselves to the Pauline train of thought—from a Christocentric, cruciform A to a rebuke of the faction-riddled Corinthian B— we are equipped for the task of

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<sup>100</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 79–80.

practical reason in a multitude of contemporary situations, even though the particulars of those situations will never precisely correlate to the Corinthian context. We do not, and cannot, simply reproduce the Pauline conclusion (his 'B'), because while the Scripture is fixed and closed, the action in prospect before us is not. It may share certain features with the Corinthian situation, such that we are drawn to Paul's train of thought as an example to learn from, but it will also be different, in ways small and large, such that our own deliberative train of thought will be required (from our 'X' to our 'Y').

We are also not limited to that one Pauline train of thought in reflecting on our own situation. There are many others that may be relevant—ones that address similar kinds of scenarios, or even some that, at first glance, do not seem relevant. The feeding of oxen and the payment of pastors do not, at first sight, seem to address to the same sort of situation, but Paul argues from one to the other in 1 Cor 9:8–10, because both in fact are about the just payment of wages. That the moral order is an *order*, with different but interconnected fields and relations, means that an exploration of one aspect will invariably cast light on related aspects, and indeed tell us something about the whole. This is particularly true, of course, in relation to those larger, over-arching theological judgements and 'trains of thought' within God's unfolding revelation that give meaning and shape to the whole. The new commandment to 'love one another as I have loved you' represents a train of moral thought—from the historical event of Christ's sacrificial love to the similar love his disciples are to have for one other—that conditions all moral reasoning.

O'Donovan's particular contribution is to insist that this sort of 'apprenticeship' in moral thinking presupposes not only the abiding truth of the historical revelation of God in Christ, but the abiding stability of the moral order which this revelation addresses. If Scripture authoritatively discloses to us the nature and purpose of an ordered, created reality, and what it means for humanity to deliberate and act

fittingly within that reality, it can only function as an authoritative disclosure to us if we are inhabitants of that same reality—if between us and the Scriptural author there is a ‘common world about which questions of truth can be raised between us and him; so that moral authority can challenge us, and evoke our free response, even across the gulf of centuries’.<sup>102</sup>

That common world includes not only forms of speech (like OES) that have a certain nature and purpose, but a kind of community (a Christian one) in which that kind of speech comes into being, is nourished, and performs a vital function.

#### *§4 Methodological conclusions*

O’Donovan’s concept of following and learning from Scriptural ‘trains of thought’ is a useful one for further elucidating Vanhoozer’s model of ‘apprenticeship’ to the theological judgements and communicative acts of Scripture. O’Donovan’s model is particularly useful in clarifying the task that this thesis will undertake.

His description of our trains of thought as proceeding ‘from some X to some Y’ can be taken in two complementary ways. The ‘Y’ may be some particular situation in which a moral agent deliberates as to a fitting course of action. A particular person, for example, may be having a particular marriage problem and, in deliberating on what should be done in that particular ‘Y’, draws on a range of Scriptural trains of thought in order to formulate a principled moral understanding of the situation (an ‘X’), so as to resolve upon a course of action (back to ‘Y’).

However, it is also possible to take a step back and consider *in general* how situations like ‘Y’ should be approached on the basis of a theological understanding

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<sup>102</sup> O’Donovan, *Resurrection*, 162.

of reality. This second way of thinking ‘from some X to some Y’ does not consider the complex variables of any one specific situation, nor does it conclude with a resolution to some particular action. Rather, it considers the common characteristics of situations like ‘Y’, and looks for a focused, synthesized set of understandings for acting within such situations. It learns from the range of Scriptural trains of thought from A > B in order to formulate an X that informs moral action in situations like Y.

This latter one-step-removed reflective process of describes the scope and purpose of this thesis. It aims to uncover and articulate *a Scripturally-informed set of theological judgements about the nature and telos of a particular moral action (OES) that can serve as a framework to inform deliberative action within communities today.*

It is worth emphasizing at this point that the process of uncovering an action’s theological nature, purpose and practice by no means exhausts the ethical task, although (as I have argued) it is necessary to it. To resolve upon any particular action in any particular community or communities requires a focused exploration of the particular moral and practical contours of that community—the actual situation (Y) in which the action is to be undertaken. That is a task to be done through careful thought and research into particular situations and problems—in this context, particular Christian communities. It is a task for which this thesis seeks to lay the essential theological groundwork but which for reasons of scope and space it cannot hope to attempt.

My purpose, then, in light of the methodological discussion above, is to construct a coherent theological framework for understanding OES. Through apprenticeship to Scriptural trains of thought, and theological reflection upon them, I will seek to answer the questions that such a framework requires when considering a morally significant action:

- *generic questions* (what sort of action is it? what is its nature? what form of virtue does its right practice represent?);

- *teleological questions* (for what ends should anyone perform this action? what purposes does it serve? what might constitute good or bad reasons for acting in this way?); and
- *practical questions* (how should this action be performed in various circumstances? what would constitute a good performance? when would be a good time or context in which to perform it? how might someone become more proficient in this action?).<sup>103</sup>

The investigation will unfold in three related phases.

The *first* is the immersive task identified by Brock, Vanhoozer and O'Donovan of attending to Scripture on its own terms; to *trace carefully the relevant Scriptural trains of thought* in their context, observing not just the theological judgements that are made nor the practical conclusions that are arrived at, but the 'whole train of thought' that proceeds from one to the other. From my survey of all instances of OES in the NT,<sup>104</sup> I have identified three epistles in which there are significant theological 'trains of thought': 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews. These epistles all contain multiple references to OES, and do so within theologically freighted discussions that cast light on the nature and purpose of OES. In Part II (chapters 3–5), I will conduct a close reading of these epistles, sketching the overall flow of thought within the epistle, particularly as it relates to OES, exegeting each relevant OES passage in its context, exploring broader canonical connections as they arise, and drawing conclusions in each case regarding the what, why and how of OES.

The *second* phase (pursued in Part III) will be to synthesize and further examine the key *theological judgements* that emerge from the immersive, exegetical analysis of

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<sup>103</sup> This way of posing these questions is a blend of Banner's characterization of the basic questions of ethics (in *Christian Ethics*, 10–22) and O'Donovan's conception of the nature of moral order in the world.

<sup>104</sup> See Appendix 1.

Part II, in conversation with significant voices in the theological and ethical tradition. I will look particularly at how the nature and purposes of OES are shaped by its relation to the theological realities of the word of God (chapter 7), the sanctification and moral transformation of believers (chapter 8) and the nature of Christian community (chapter 9).

The *third* and final phase, conducted on the basis of the first two, will be to put forward an organized set of theological judgements and guidelines for action that answer the generic (what), teleological (why) and practical (how) questions in relation to the practice of OES in Christian communities considered generally. This will be the burden of chapter 10 (in Part IV). Chapter 11 will canvass a number of possibilities for further research. Given the relative lack of attention that OES has received, and the amount of territory I will be seeking to traverse, there are fruitful possibilities for further development of the ideas I will put forward, and for exploring the many areas I will touch on all too briefly.



## *PART II*

### *Apostolic trains of thought*



## *Chapter 3: Apostolic trains of thought in 1 Corinthians*

### *§1 1 Corinthians as a whole*

Karl Barth speaks for a prominent stream of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship when he says that ‘according to the usual conception’, 1 Corinthians consists of ‘a great conglomerate of exhortations, rebukes, and doctrinal pronouncements, partly spontaneous, partly prompted by inquiries from the Corinthian community’.<sup>105</sup>

This ‘usual conception’, which was dominant from Barth’s time until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, viewed 1 Corinthians as a document lacking a unified flow of thought, either on account of the exigencies of its composition, or because of the history of its redaction from a number of other letters or documents.<sup>106</sup>

Barth, however, saw a profound unity to the epistle, and in doing so anticipated the shift that has taken place in recent decades towards seeing 1 Corinthians as a single composition with a central theme (or themes) and a rhetorical structure that make sense of the whole.

Mitchell’s influential study, for example, proposed that 1 Corinthians was a coherent example of Graeco-Roman deliberative rhetoric, seeking ‘to persuade its listeners to undertake a particular course of action in the future on the grounds that it

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<sup>105</sup> Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (trans. H. J. Stenning; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 20.

<sup>106</sup> Collins provides a useful summary of the arguments; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 10–14.

is the most advantageous course (among various options) to follow'.<sup>107</sup> The particular course of action in this case, Mitchell argues, is essentially to leave factionalism behind and embrace unity.

Mitchell's proposal has been welcomed, though not without criticism and modification.<sup>108</sup> Malcolm has cogently argued that while it is useful to recognize the influence of Hellenistic rhetorical conventions in the letter's content, it is not these, nor even one dominant pastoral problem at Corinth, that determine the epistle's unifying argument and structure.<sup>109</sup> He argues that it is the theological force of Paul's own *kerygma* that decisively shapes his response to the various issues confronting the Corinthian church. Between the death of Christ that Christians now identify with bodily (expounded in chapters 1–4) and the resurrection hope of a renewed body that is longed for (chapters 15–16) lies the ethical living out in the body (the physical and the ecclesial body) of a new cross-shaped identity (chapters 5–14).<sup>110</sup>

This accords with Furnish's observation that 1 Corinthians shows Paul embarking on his characteristic practice of 'reflecting on how the truth of the gospel *forms and reforms* the lives of those who are in Christ, and urging his congregations

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<sup>107</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 273.

<sup>108</sup> At the level of detail, it has been pointed out that various issues in the letter simply do not fit the 'factionalism/unity' theme very well; see José Enrique Aguilar Chiu, *1 Cor 12–14: Literary Structure and Theology* (Analecta biblica; Roma: Pontificio istituto biblico, 2007), 113–115. At a macro level, it has been questioned whether the project of seeking to explain the structure of NT epistles by seeing them as examples of Hellenistic rhetorical forms has adequate theoretical justification; Stanley E. Porter, 'The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature', in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 108, 115–116.

<sup>109</sup> Malcolm notes the various proposals of factionalism (Mitchell), elitism (Thiessen), lack of Godward holiness (Rosner and Ciampa) and over-realized eschatology (Thiselton); Matthew R. Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians: The Impact of Paul's Gospel on His Macro-Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 155; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78–79.

<sup>110</sup> Malcolm, *Reversal*, 32f. Malcolm suggests that this kerygmatic train of thought—the Christian life seen as a bodily 'living out' of the cross as we await resurrection—is also reflected in the rhetorical structure of Colossians, Philippians, Romans and 2 Corinthians; *Reversal*, 38–39.

to be *conformed* to that truth within the particulars of their own situations'.<sup>111</sup> It also accords with our reflection (above) on the nature of the ethical thought process, that iterates between the poles of *praxis* and *theoria*. The various problems and issues of Corinthian *praxis*—including the issues surrounding OES that are our particular interest—incite Paul to reflect upon aspects of his authoritative *theoria* within which those questions or circumstances can be understood and addressed.<sup>112</sup>

With this in mind, we may appreciate Malcolm's proposal that the central aspect of Paul's *kerygma* that he expounds and applies to the Corinthian circumstances is the motif of 'dual reversal', in which the arrogant, condemned boaster is brought low, and the humble sufferer is vindicated and exalted.<sup>113</sup> This reversal motif, which is rich in OT and intertestamental background, is expounded at length in chapters 1–4, with particular reference to the presenting issue of factionalism. Paul's gospel proclaims the apparently weak and foolish crucifixion of the Christ (1:22–23), a message that is neither understood nor accepted by the 'wise' or the 'powerful' or the 'debater of this age' (1:19–25; 2:8–9), but which (in a stunning reversal) is in fact the wisdom and power by which God brings salvation, righteousness, and redemption for those who are 'in Christ Jesus' (1:22–25). The result is that those who do experience God's wisdom and salvation are left in no doubt that it is all *from him* (ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἀπὸ θεοῦ, 1:30), so that whoever boasts can never boast in men, but only in the Lord (1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:7).

The argument reaches its zenith in 4:7 ('What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?'). This dichotomy is the key point, according to Barth, and the thread that runs through the

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<sup>111</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, 'Belonging to Christ: A Paradigm for Ethics in First Corinthians', *Int* 44/2 (April 1990): 146 (emphasis original).

<sup>112</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 9.

<sup>113</sup> Malcolm, *Reversal*, 27.

entire epistle, ‘the Either-Or, the understanding or the failure to understand the three words *apo tou theou*’.<sup>114</sup> The Corinthian problem is essentially the same throughout: the failure to live on the right side of the Either-Or; the failure to recognize and live in light of the great reversal God has effected in Christ crucified. Malcolm (echoing Chrysostom) describes the Corinthian disease as a stance of ‘*boastful, present-obsessed human autonomy*’—rather than the humble stance of those who identify with Christ crucified.<sup>115</sup> Paul’s essential call to them, his admonition (νουθετω, 4:14), is that they come down from their high ‘kingly’ position (4:8–10), and occupy instead the despised place of the crucified, where he and the other apostles live as scum of the world (4:9–13).<sup>116</sup>

The reversal motif and its corresponding admonition run like a thread through the various ethical questions Paul goes on to deal with in chapters 5–14. As Paul deals with these issues—some raised explicitly by the Corinthians in their correspondence with him (7:1), others stemming from reports he has heard (1:11; 11:18)—he does so in light of his exposition of the christocentric, cross-shaped *kerygma* in chapters 1–4, and its implications for cross-shaped living.

His treatment of OES is no exception, in the brief introductory mention of it in 1:4–7, in the general discussion of its nature in 2:6–16, and in the detailed, extended argument about its nature, purposes and practice in chapters 12–14. Given the scale and depth of the discussion of OES in these passages, this chapter will be (by a significant margin) the longest of the three chapters analyzing the apostolic trains of thought.

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<sup>114</sup> Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (trans. H. J. Stenning; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 28–29.

<sup>115</sup> Malcolm, *Reversal*, 136, 40.

<sup>116</sup> Malcolm, *Reversal*, 148. Thiselton agrees that this section draws together Paul’s critique of factions (1:10), divisions (1:11) and jealousy (3:3) to reveal to the Corinthians that they are in ‘fundamental conflict with the critique of the cross’; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 345.

## §2 1 Cor 1:4–7

The first mention of Corinthian speech occurs in 1:4–7, in which the reason or basis (ἐπὶ, 1:4) for Paul’s thanksgiving is ‘the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus’, namely that they had been ‘enriched in him in all speaking (λόγος) and all knowledge’ (1:5), with the result (ὥστε) that they are ‘not lacking in any gift’ (χάρισμα, 1:7).<sup>117</sup> These gifts of speech and knowledge are co-ordinated with (καθὼς, 1:6) the testimony of Christ that was confirmed or established among them. What they have been graciously given to know and to speak is the message of Christ that had been confirmed in their midst through the apostolic preaching.

However, their giftedness in speech relates not only to what had been given and confirmed among them in Christ, but to their ongoing and future experience *as they wait* (present participle ἀπεκδεχόμενους, 1:7) for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ, who *will confirm* them as guiltless until the end. There is a logical and syntactical connection here between the testimony of Christ that was at first confirmed among them (ἐβεβαιώθη, aorist passive, 1:6), and the ongoing exercise of these gifts of speech and knowledge as the believers are sustained until the end (βεβαιώσει, future active, 1:8). Chrysostom (and others) take this to mean that the *means by which* God-in-Christ sustains or confirms believers to the end is by the ‘constant repetition of his name and work’ in the knowledgeable speech of the believers.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> That Paul is here referring to their exercise of λόγος —that is, gifts of utterance or speaking— rather than, for example, their receiving of the λόγος of the gospel, is confirmed not only by the immediate context (the abundant gifting of 1:7), but by the usage of the term in the key discussions of congregational speech later in the epistle (in 2:13; 12:8; 14:9, 19, 36). Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014), 39.

<sup>118</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 101.

As Paul introduces the subject of congregational speech in these verses, he foreshadows three themes that will emerge as the letter unfolds.

*Firstly*, he introduces the idea that the speech and knowledge gifts that God has given the Corinthians serve an *eschatological function*. They belong to the time of waiting, and serve God's purpose of establishing and sustaining his people until the day of Christ. In the terms of Malcolm's reversal motif, it takes place while Christians live the life of the crucified awaiting resurrection.

We should also notice in passing that the eschatological framing of their speech relates not only to its occasion but to its subject matter. As will become apparent as the flow of thought in 1 Corinthians progresses, the speech that believers engage in not only takes place between the cross and the Day, but concerns the theological meaning and implications of both.

*Secondly*, Paul foreshadows a key point that he will return to in the exposition of chapters 1–4, and then discuss more fully in chapter 12—namely, that the rich manifestations of speech and knowledge that the Corinthian church enjoy are a *gift* from the 'grace of God in Christ Jesus' (1:4). They have nothing that they did not receive (cf. 4:7), and thus all human boasting and arrogance is excluded, as is any divisiveness or status-seeking on the basis of what gifts are received or exercised (which will be the focus of the discussion of *charismata* in chapter 12).

*Thirdly*, the striking repetition of the name of Christ<sup>119</sup> in this opening section introduces the central idea of the epistle that structures and directs Paul's responses to the various pastoral issues arising in Corinth—namely, that the Christian faith as received and lived is nothing else than 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (2:2; cf. 1:23). That their rich gifts of speech and knowledge are introduced in 1:4–7 in these terms,

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<sup>119</sup> There are ten instances of 'Christ', 'Christ Jesus' and 'Jesus Christ' in 1:1–10. Thiselton notes Chrysostom's claim that 'Nowhere else in any other epistle does the name of Christ occur so continuously in a few verses'; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 90, citing Chrysostom, *1 Cor Hom*, 2:7.

foreshadows the discussions of 2:6–16 and chapters 12–14, in which the reality of Christ will be central in determining the nature, content and purpose of their one-another speech.

### §3 1 Cor 2:6–16

This paragraph speaks in general terms of the wisdom-speech that takes place in the Christian community. How does it relate to the flow of Paul's thought, following on from his discussion of the weakness, power and wisdom of God revealed in Christ crucified in 1:18–2:5?

Some commentators don't think it does, and accordingly regard 2:6–16 as a significant digression by Paul, a contradiction of what precedes it, or even an interpolation.<sup>120</sup> This is particularly so if the 'wisdom' of 2:6–16 is seen as referring to a higher-level esoteric form of wisdom spoken only among a spiritual elite of Corinth (the τέλειοι of 2:6).

However, the very strong verbal and thematic links between 2:6–16 and what precedes and follows it, and indeed with the remainder of the letter, make theories of interpolation or digression very unlikely.<sup>121</sup> The Spirit-enabled 'wisdom-speech' (λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν, 2:7) that is the main subject of 2:6–16 relates closely, not only to the wisdom of God that is counter-intuitively revealed in Christ crucified through the apostolic preaching in 1:18–2:5, but also to Paul's own speech in chapters 5–14, and to the speech he will urge the Corinthians themselves to practise

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<sup>120</sup> Conzelman, for example, regards 2:6–16 as a contradictory break in Paul's logic, with substantially non-Christian content; as noted by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (AYB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 169. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 239–240.

<sup>121</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 262–265; Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 187.

in chapters 12–14.<sup>122</sup>

The connection with 1:18–2:5 is particularly important, because it *establishes the essential continuity between Paul's own preaching of the cross and the speech that he wishes to see flourish within the Corinthian church.*

In response to the 'puffed up' factionalism of the Corinthians, Paul argues in 1:18–2:5 that the *kerygma* of Christ crucified, by its very nature, renders quite impossible any boasting in men, or any fleshly divisions among them. It up-ends human pretensions to wisdom and power, because it reveals God's power and wisdom in the seemingly weak and foolish crucifixion of Christ (1:18–25). This dramatic and unexpected reversal is also reflected in those who are chosen to be saved by this message (the lowly and despised of the world), and in the manner of Paul's own preaching, which came not with rhetorical impressiveness, but with weakness and trembling (2:1–5).

This leads directly into 2:6–16, and the nature of the 'wisdom' that it discusses, which is also a wisdom not understood by the powers of this world, but only by those to whom God reveals it. 2:6–16 continues the clash of 'convictional paradigms' outlined in 1:18–2:5, in which a this-worldly understanding represented by 'the rulers of this age' (2:6, 8) and the 'natural person' (2:14), is contrasted with the 'wisdom' that can only come from God himself (2:7, 10, 12).<sup>123</sup>

In other words, the '*wisdom of God*' that is spoken among the mature in 2:6–16 is *materially equivalent to the 'wisdom' of the crucified Christ that Paul has been expounding in 1:18–2:5.*<sup>124</sup> This is confirmed by the two relative clauses that fill out the character and meaning of the 'secret and hidden wisdom of God' in 2:7–8. In the first clause,

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<sup>122</sup> And possibly chapter 15 as well, if Gillespie is correct that chapter 15 represents an example of 'prophetic exposition'; Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 199–235.

<sup>123</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

<sup>124</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 186–188.

the wisdom is described in terms of God's cosmic plan of eschatological salvation; in the second, the wisdom is hidden from the powerful of this age in the crucifixion of Christ, just as it is in 1:18–31.

Not only does 'God's hidden wisdom' consist in the mystery of 'Christ crucified', but it provides that event with its cognitive value. It is precisely this meaning of the cross which Paul aims to articulate in the wisdom spoken among the mature.<sup>125</sup>

On the basis of this essential continuity with the preaching of the cross as God's revealed wisdom, 2:6–16 introduces *four new elements* that connect Paul's own ministry with the one-another speech of the Corinthians.

*Firstly*, there is a new emphasis on *the work of God's Spirit* in making the hidden wisdom known.<sup>126</sup> 2:8–10 locates the ignorance of the 'rulers of this age' within the larger experience of humanity's ignorance of God's purposes,<sup>127</sup> and then asserts (with an emphatically placed ἡμῖν) that 'to us' God has revealed these hidden purposes by his Spirit. As he does in 1:31, Paul joins himself with his readers as recipients from God of something that is inaccessible or unknowable apart from God's initiative: the once secret but now revealed wisdom of Christ crucified.<sup>128</sup> The fresh element here is that the agent of this revelation is God's own Spirit, who alone searches the depths of God (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:10), and knows the things of God (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:11),<sup>129</sup> and communicates this knowledge to those who have 'received' him (λαμβάνω, 2:12). God is only knowable by the revealing action of God.

*Secondly*, the Corinthian believers do not only join Paul in receiving the Spirit-

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<sup>125</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 181.

<sup>126</sup> Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 171.

<sup>127</sup> Whatever the precise burden (and source) of the notoriously difficult quotation in 2:9, its basic point is that God's plans (ὁ ἡτοιμάσεν) are impenetrable to the human eye, ear or heart.

<sup>128</sup> 'And from him you (ὁμεις) are in Christ Jesus, who became to us (ἡμῖν) wisdom from God ...' (1:31).

<sup>129</sup> ESV, CSB and NIV all translate 'thoughts of God'.

mediated knowledge of Christ crucified, they also *join him in the possibility of speaking of this wisdom* to others in words taught by the Spirit (2:6, 7, 13). Collins adduces several reasons for regarding the ‘we’ who speak as believers generally, and their speech as ‘a common activity of the community’:<sup>130</sup>

- the striking shift from the emphatic ‘I’ (ἐγὼ) of 2:1 and 2:3 to the first person plural in 2:6, followed by the return of ἐγὼ in 3:1;
- the corresponding absence of Paul’s characteristic form of address to them as ‘brothers’ (ἀδελφοί, 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1);
- the shift from language of proclamation (κήρυγμα, 1:21; κηρύσσω, 1:23; καταγγέλλω, 2:1) to the more general language of speaking or imparting (λαλέω, 2:6, 7, 13);
- the manner in which this discussion picks up realities already referred to in the opening thanksgiving (the Corinthian giftedness in speech and knowledge, 1:4–5), and foreshadows the more lengthy discussion of the mutual speech in chapters 12–14.<sup>131</sup> Gillespie goes so far as to suggest that 2:6–16 represents a discussion of ‘prophecy’ without the label.<sup>132</sup> He points to the strong commonalities between the kind of speech referenced in this passage and the discussion of prophecy in chapter 14:

In 2:6–16 he ... [advocates] a wisdom that is grounded in the *kerygma* of Christ crucified (2:8), revealed through the Spirit of God (2:10), and articulated in words taught by the Spirit (2:13). The question in other words, concerns what counts as genuine inspired utterance—the same problem that dominates the discussion in chapters 12–14. The substance of the matter addressed in both passages comes to

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<sup>130</sup> Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 122.

<sup>131</sup> Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 122–124. Collins is joined in this assessment by Thiselton (who also notes Schrage’s agreement, *1 Corinthians*, 229–30), Gillespie (*First Theologians*, 187) and David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 91.

<sup>132</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 165.

expression in five common interrelated themes: (1) revelation (*apokalypis*) of (2) God's mystery (*mystērion*) through (3) human agents (*pneumatikoi* = *prophētēs*) who (4) speak in the Spirit (*lalein pneumatī*) and whose utterances must be judged (*anakrinein/diakrinein*) on the basis of their content.<sup>133</sup>

Whether or not Gillespie is correct in identifying the 'wisdom-speech' of 2:6–16 with prophecy *per se*, there seems little doubt that what Paul describes in general terms in 2:6–16 relates very closely to the explicit discussion of prophecy in chapter 14.

*Thirdly*, while Paul posits kerygmatically-grounded 'wisdom-speech' as an activity of the Christian community considered generally, this doesn't mean that all in the community in fact practise or accept such speech. The locus of the speech is ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, *among or with the 'spiritually adult'*.<sup>134</sup> In the flow of the paragraph, the τελείοι of 2:6 are identified with the πνευματικοί of 2:13, 15 and 3:1.<sup>135</sup> Those who have received the Spirit of God gain understanding by the Spirit of the things freely given by God (2:12), and speak to others with Spirit-taught words (ἐν διδακτοῖς πνεύματος, 2:13) about Spirit-related things (πνευματικὰ, 2:13). This speech is received or 'discerned' (ἀνακρίνω, 2:14, 15) only by those who themselves are πνευματικοί (2:13, 14–15).

Thus, the *kerygma* of the cross not only overturns the worldly paradigm of what constitutes 'wisdom', but also institutes correspondingly new criteria for what counts as spiritual maturity and divinely-empowered 'spirit-speech', criteria that many of the Corinthians seem not to have grasped. Their apparently lofty estimation of their own

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<sup>133</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 188.

<sup>134</sup> As Thiselton translates it, noting the contrast with νήπιοι in 3:1, and the similar contrast (with παιδία in 14:20).

<sup>135</sup> I follow Collins (*Corinthians*, 135), Gillespie (*First Theologians*, 183), and Thiselton (*Corinthians*, 264–265) in taking πνευματικοῖς in 2:13 as masculine ('to spiritual persons'), given not only the resumptive 'we speak' (from 2:6, 7) but the immediately following contrasting with the 'natural person' (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, 2:14).

spiritual status ('rich', 'kings', 'wise', 'strong', 4:8–10) contrasts with Paul's estimation of them as fleshly, infantile and all too 'human' (3:1–4).

The tension that this contrast introduces to Paul's argument is important not only to the meaning of 2:6–16 but to the place of this passage in the thought of the epistle as a whole. The tension is this: *on the one hand*, the Corinthians have clearly embraced Paul's counter-intuitive *kerygma*. Paul reminds them that by a work of God's Spirit and power they have put their faith in the message of Christ crucified (2:1–5), so that for them (as for Paul) Christ has become wisdom from God (1:30). *On the other hand*, they don't deserve to be treated as *πνευματικοί*—that is, as people who by the Spirit have come to understand the kerygmatic 'wisdom' and speak of it to others.

In this sense, the unidentified general 'we' of 2:6–16 who impart spiritual wisdom to others could and should be represented among the Corinthians themselves, but it is clear by the way Paul goes on to address them from 3:1 onwards that their spiritual maturity is severely lacking.

This leads us to the *fourth* and final noteworthy element of Paul's train of thought in this passage. The 'wisdom' that is spoken among and by the *τελείοι/πνευματικοί* is not an esoteric or different wisdom, separate from the 'wisdom' of Christ crucified, but *a deeper learning of the meaning and implications of christocentric wisdom for every facet of life*.

The Corinthians have indeed received and embraced the hidden wisdom of Christ crucified, but they are still infants in understanding its implications for their lives (3:1–4). Paul's critique is that their behaviour ('jealousy', 'strife', 'behaving in only a human way', 3:3) is inconsistent with any claim to be *πνευματικοί* (3:1). Thus, to be among the *τελείοι/πνευματικοί* is to understand and speak about a spiritual 'wisdom' *that issues in behaviour*—the wisdom of the cross that shapes a whole way of life.

The Corinthians fail to see this. In particular, they do not yet appreciate how dramatically the Christ-wisdom is in conflict not only with the current dominating ‘wisdom’ of the world, but with the patterns of behaviour that this worldly thinking is still producing in their lives. Christ can only be understood as the beginning of a new world and a new way of life, in which believers steadily disentangle themselves from the interiorized teachings and traditions and ‘wisdom’ of this present age, and embrace more deeply the wisdom of the cross.<sup>136</sup> In describing the Corinthians as fleshly, juvenile and merely human (3:1–4), Paul is saying that in contrast to their own self-assessment, the current world order still dominates their inner lives and their actions, their thinking and feeling, their jealousies and boastings. Their consciousness and behaviour need to be penetrated more profoundly by the ‘mind of Christ’ and the corresponding ability to make moral discernments about ‘all things’ (2:15).<sup>137</sup>

For Paul, then, the ‘wisdom speech’ of 1 Cor 2:6–16, is not only materially equivalent to the ‘wisdom of God in Christ crucified’ but on that basis *provides a framework of reality from which all other judgements about life in the world are made*. The revelation of the crucified Christ as the otherwise inaccessible wisdom of God, climactically reveals God’s purposes for creation *and* redemption, and redirects

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<sup>136</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 262. For a discussion of the psychodynamic ‘learning process’ by which new knowledge overcomes the inner resistance of existing internalized patterns of conviction, see Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (trans. John P. Galvin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 368–379.

<sup>137</sup> This understanding of ‘wisdom’ has profound continuities with the OT tradition of wisdom as an ‘experiential knowledge’ that is based on the fear of the covenant God Yahweh, who created all things. Given the complex, voluminous and controverted status of current scholarship in this area, an examination of the nature and development of these connections is beyond our scope. For an introduction to the issues see Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972); James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (3rd ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel’s Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995); Roland E. Murphy, ‘Wisdom in the OT’, *ABD* 6:920–931.

human life towards its perfection.<sup>138</sup> As Gillespie puts it, the Spirit-enabled utterances of this passage ‘represent the continuing interpretation of the theological and ethical substance of the gospel’.<sup>139</sup>

At this point in his argument, Paul does not pause to explore when or how or by whom precisely the spiritual wisdom-speech does or should take place, or what its relationship is with the affectional element of ‘love’. That will come later (in chapters 12–14). But by discussing it here in chapter 2 in general and ideal terms, he lays down some critical foundations for what is to follow. ‘But we do speak wisdom’ (2:6) is a description of what Paul himself will do in chapters 5–14 in applying the theological and ethical implications of ‘Christ crucified’ to the various issues facing the Corinthian church.<sup>140</sup> It is also, as I will argue below, an anticipatory description of what he will urge the Corinthians themselves to do in the one-another speech of chapter 14. As Paul puts it in chapter 3, there is a need to build on the foundational wisdom of the gospel, but it must be done with great care. The foundation and the superstructure must be made of the same essential materials.<sup>141</sup>

#### *§4 1 Cor 11:2–16*

The next mention of OES in 1 Corinthians comes in Paul’s exegetically controversial discussion of men and women praying and prophesying in 1 Cor 11:2–16. We will not dwell long on this section, because it says little about the nature or purpose of

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<sup>138</sup> Colin E. Gunton, ‘Christ, the Wisdom of God: A Study in Divine and Human Action’, in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World* (ed. Stephen E. Barton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 256, 260.

<sup>139</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 196.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Malcolm’s view of the ‘cruciform’ shape of 1 Corinthians, noted above at §1.

<sup>141</sup> Gillespie makes this point in relation to the building metaphor of 3:10–17. ‘Edification’ is functionally and materially related to the gospel; *First Theologians*, 142–144.

‘prophecy’ (as a form of OES) and offers only tantalizing hints as to its mode of practice.

Prophecy is not defined or described in the passage, but simply put forward (along with prayer) as a practice routinely engaged in by men and women. There is nothing unexpected in this, given the Acts 2 expectation of democratized prophecy (‘sons and daughters’, ‘male and female servants’, Acts 2:17–18), not to mention the description in 1 Cor 1:4–7 of the profusion of speech within the Corinthian community, and the general statements regarding Spirit-taught revelatory speech in 1 Cor 2:6–16. There is no reason in the text to suggest that the prophetic activity being described here is purely hypothetical, as Fee suggests for the idea of men prophesying with a covered head, and as Calvin suggests for the idea of women prophesying in public worship.<sup>142</sup>

This makes explicit what is implicit in references to OES throughout the NT—namely, that OES is regarded as a form of speech-action to be practised widely, by both men and women, throughout the life of the community. Only four of the 25 references in the NT make any reference to gender in the practice of OES: this reference in 1 Cor 11, the gender-based restrictions surrounding prophecy in 1 Cor 14:33–35 (see further below), the instruction to fathers to raise their children in the instruction of the Lord in Eph 6:4, and the encouragement to older women to ‘teach what is good’ to younger women in Tit 2:3–4. In all other contexts, instructions or encouragements regarding OES are directed in an ungendered way to the recipient church community as a whole.

Perhaps ironically, this positive affirmation of the role of both men and women in the mutually beneficial speech in the community has been overlooked somewhat

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<sup>142</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 505; John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John W. Fraser; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1960), 231.

in the debate about whether this passage (in 1 Cor 11) refers to women prophesying *in the public church gathering*, and thus whether it qualifies or negates the gender restrictions of 1 Cor 14:33-35. A majority of modern commentators (but by no means all)<sup>143</sup> take the position that the location of the speech referred to in 11:2-16 is the church gathering, although the arguments provided for this conclusion are insubstantial.<sup>144</sup> On its own terms, there is no evidence that the prophecy referred to in 11:2-16 is prophecy in a public church context; nor, it should be said, is there any evidence that it is taking place in any other specific context. It is simply not specified.

In the absence of any specification, it is better to take 11:2-16 as a reference to the phenomena of prayer and prophecy in a generalized sense, as they may be practised in a variety of contexts. This would concur with the testimony of Acts, in which some instances of prophecy take place in ecclesial contexts (e.g., Acts 15:32), but others not (e.g., Acts 10:44-46; 21:9-10).

Even so, we might note at this point, as Thiselton does, that despite the exegetical complexities of 11:2-16, the themes of *unity and reciprocity* on the one hand, and *order and differentiation* on the other, feature clearly and strongly in the passage.<sup>145</sup> These themes will also feature in chapters 12-14.

### *§5 Excursus: Acts 2 and democratized prophetic speech*

In chapters 12-14, Paul returns in depth to the subject that he introduced in general

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<sup>143</sup> Holmyard lists Lenski, Vine and Grosheide among a number of commentators who see 11:2-16 as referring to prayer and prophecy outside of the church context. Harold R. Holmyard III, 'Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?', *BSac* 154/616 (October 1997): 467.

<sup>144</sup> For an evaluation of these arguments with regard to the location of the prophecy in 1 Cor 11, see the analysis of this passage in Appendix 1.

<sup>145</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 802-805.

terms in 1 Cor 2:6–16; namely, that God has revealed his otherwise hidden thoughts and plans to his people by means of his Spirit, so that they in turn may impart that knowledge in intelligible speech to others. In chapters 12–14, Paul discusses this imparting of Spirit-given knowledge to others under the category of ‘prophecy’, and in so doing draws on a rich vein of OT teaching and expectation regarding the work of the Spirit and the gift of prophetic speech. As with connections to the OT wisdom tradition noted above, the continuities (and discontinuities) between the varied practice of OT prophecy and the ‘prophecy’ Paul describes in 1 Cor 12–14 are deep and complex, and a full examination of them is beyond our scope.

At a minimum however, we should note the connections that the NT itself draws in Acts 2, between the OT promise of an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, and the widespread practice of prophetic speech that results from this outpouring.

In Luke’s account, all the gathered disciples (πάντες, Acts 2:4) are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak of (λαλεῖν, 2:4, 11) the wonders or great things of God (τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ, Acts 2:11). When Peter explains the disciples’ behaviour, he cites Joel’s prophecy of the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, and declares that the outbreak of democratized Spirit-given speech that the crowd is ‘seeing and hearing’ is evidence that the crucified Christ has risen on high and poured out the end-time Spirit (Acts 2:33).

In so doing, Peter explicitly equates the disciples’ telling forth of the μεγαλεῖα of God in 2:11 with the democratized prophecy promised by Joel (Joel 2:28–29).<sup>146</sup> The form of their prophesying (ἐτέραις γλώσσαις, ‘other languages’, 2:4) is significant, and we will consider it further below, but what of the *content* of their

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<sup>146</sup> Contra Peterson, and Turner, who identify the disciples’ speech primarily as ‘praise’; D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009). 137; Max Turner, *Power from on High* (JPTSS 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 271–272.

speech? Peter alludes to it as he quotes the following verses of Joel's prophecy:

‘And I will show wonders (τέρατα) in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;

the sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,

before the day of the Lord comes, the great (μεγάλην) and magnificent day.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

(Acts 2:19–21)

The time of the Spirit-outpouring is the time of the wondrous apocalyptic events that signal the arrival of the Lord's great day of judgement and salvation. In the context of Luke's narrative, there is little doubt as to which great or wondrous events of 'blood' (Lk 22:20) and the sun being 'turned to darkness' (Lk 23:44–45) are being referenced. Peter makes it explicit in the rest of his sermon. In the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth to the position of Lord and Christ, this 'last days' moment of judgement and salvation has arrived, and all who repent and are baptized in the name of this risen Lord will be saved (Acts 2:38–40; cf. 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved', 2:21).

The 'great' things that the disciples tell forth are thus what Peter himself tells forth; namely, the reality and meaning of Christ crucified as the fulfilment of God's purposes for judgement and salvation—a set of purposes that the evil powers of the day did not and could not recognize (Acts 2:23).

The correspondences between the disciples' prophetic speech in Acts and the speech Paul describes in 1 Cor 2:6–16 are striking:

- the content of the speech centres on the great things God has done through the death and resurrection of his Christ to fulfil his plans of judgement and

salvation;

- this action of God was hidden from the powers and authorities of this age, but is now revealed to and proclaimed by those whom God has called;
- the speech is practised not just by a representative few but by the community of God's people as a whole;
- the ability to prophesy is a direct result of the gift of God's Spirit.

As the paradigmatic initiation of democratized NT prophecy, Acts 2 confirms that the Spirit-enabled, gospel-centred speech discussed generally in 1 Cor 2:6–16, and explicitly in 1 Cor 12–14, is a fulfilment of the OT expectation of the eschatological gift of Spirit-given prophecy to God's people.

## *§6 1 Cor 12*

Paul's discussion 'concerning the *pneumatikoi*' in 1 Cor 12–14 constitutes the most extended train of thought regarding OES in the NT. The detailed consideration of the nature and practice of congregational speech in chapter 14 is the conclusion of a continuous train of thought that begins at 12:1 and has strong connections to the argument of chapters 1–4.<sup>147</sup>

Broadly speaking, the section unfolds in three movements. Chapter 12 focuses on the generic nature of 'pneumatic' manifestations, on how the different kinds of

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<sup>147</sup> Joop Smit points out that the section opens with the familiar 'now concerning' phrase (12:1; cf 7:1; 8:1; 16:1) and concludes with an equally standard closing phrase 'so brothers' (14:39; cf. 11:33; 15:58). Joop Smit, 'Argument and Genre of 1 Corinthians 12–14', in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 211. The arguments of some scholars (such as J. Weiss) that the digression of chapter 13 does not belong in this train of thought, and is a later insertion, have been convincingly answered by Mitchell, Hurd, Grosheide and others; see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027–1028 for a survey of the arguments.

gifts are related, and what unifies them. Chapter 13 then unfolds the ‘more excellent way’ of love, on the basis of which chapter 14 encourages the pursuit of intelligible and well-ordered speech (especially prophecy) for the edification of the congregation.<sup>148</sup>

I will trace Paul’s train of thought regarding one-another speech through this section of the epistle, in sufficient detail to observe the important features of his argument, but without dwelling too long on the numerous exegetical knots that these chapters contain.

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In 12:1, Paul opens his discussion ‘now concerning the spirituals’ (περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν). Whether or not this section responds to matters raised specifically by the Corinthians themselves,<sup>149</sup> there is no doubt that it is a subject of considerable importance to Paul, as shown not only by the lengthy treatment it receives but by the striking way it reprises, expands and applies many of the key themes of his theological exposition in chapters 1–4.

The connection with chapters 1–4 is immediately signalled by the return of the significant term πνευματικός (12:1), the label that Paul uses in 2:6–16 to denote the ‘spiritual person’ who engages in spiritual speech—that is, who understands and imparts wisdom in ‘words taught by the Spirit’ (2:12–13).<sup>150</sup> In 2:6–16, receiving the

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<sup>148</sup> For an insightful discussion of Paul’s overall rhetorical strategy in chapters 12–14, see Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 17.

<sup>149</sup> This is suggested by the recurrence of the περὶ δὲ formula as an opening marker for topics of discussion from 7:1 onwards (7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). 12:1 may introduce another ‘of the things about which you wrote’ (7:1), but this is uncertain; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 909.

<sup>150</sup> Commentators are divided as to whether to take πνευματικός to be neuter or masculine in 12:1. Paul’s unambiguous reference at the conclusion of the whole argument to a ‘spiritual person’ (14:37) inclines some to conclude that πνευματικός must be taken as masculine in 12:1 (so Garland, *1*

‘Spirit who is from God’ uniquely allows someone to understand and speak the wisdom of God in Christ crucified, in contrast with those who are incapable of this understanding or speech because they possess instead the ‘spirit of the world’. In 12:1–3, the speech that the Spirit enables again has as its fundamental criterion a christological recognition: that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Lord of all. Jesus is the Lord they confess (12:3), the Lord they serve (12:5), and the ‘one body’ into which they are baptized (12:12–13) and of which they are all members (12:27). As in 2:6–16, 12:3 asserts that this understanding of the lordship of Christ is impossible except by the work of God’s Spirit.

This anchoring of ‘Spirit-speech’ in an understanding of the lordship of the crucified Christ is not the only link with Paul’s argument in chapters 1–4. In chapters 1–4, Paul uses his own ministry and that of Apollos as a case study to teach the Corinthians not to boast in and divide over different leaders (1 Cor 4:6). In so doing, he uses language and concepts that are very similar to his description of the congregational gifts of the Corinthians in chapter 12, as the following table demonstrates.

*Table 2: A comparison of apostolic ministry and congregational gifting in 1 Corinthians*

<i>Paul and Apollos in chapters 1–4</i>	<i>Congregational gifts in chapter 12</i>
They are but servants (διάκονοι, 3:5) given various tasks by the Lord (ὁ κύριος, 3:5).	There are ‘varieties of services’ but the one Lord (διαίρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσιν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος, 12:5).

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*Corinthians*, 562–564). Others note that Paul proceeds (from 12:4 onwards) to examine the various gifts and manifestations that come from the Spirit, and then equates these with the ‘spiritual things’ that the Corinthians should pursue (14:1). Thiselton makes the shrewd observation that the difference between the two options was probably not so significant for Paul and his readers. The question was what criteria were to be applied so as to recognize or evaluate the words or activities of genuinely Spirit-indwelt people. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 909–910. The connection with 2:6–16 seems to confirm this observation.

Each is given his own task, whether planting or watering (ἐκάστῳ ... ἔδωκεν, 3:5).	To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (ἐκάστῳ δὲ δίδοται, 12:7).
God brings the growth (ὁ θεὸς, 3:6, 7).	God empowers all in all (ὁ ... θεός, 12:6).
The workers, though having different tasks, are one (ἓν εἰσιν, 3:8).	The members of the body, though having been apportioned different gifts, are one (ἓν εἰσιν, 12:12).
The purpose of the various tasks is to construct God's building (θεοῦ οἰκοδομή, 3:9; cf. ἐποικοδομεῖ, 3:10)	The purpose is mutual advantage (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, 12:7), which is explicated in chapter 14 as edification or 'building' (οἰκοδομή, 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26; cf. the parallelism between συμφέρω and οἰκοδομή in 10:23).
Paul's ministry stems from the purposes and power of <i>God</i> (1:18, 20, 24, 28–30; 2:5, 7, 12; 3:6, 7, 9, 10, 23, etc.), is defined by his understanding and proclamation of <i>Jesus Christ</i> crucified (1:17, 23, 30; 2:5), and is only possible by the work of God's <i>Spirit</i> (2:6–16).	The variegated individual practices are empowered and apportioned by <i>God</i> (12:6, 18, 24), are defined by the confession of <i>Jesus</i> as Lord (12:3), and are only possible by the work and manifestation of the <i>Holy Spirit</i> (12:4–11).

Significantly for the argument of this thesis, *the theological realities that ground Paul's understanding of his own apostolic speech also drive his approach to the Corinthians' congregational speech*. Whatever differences in function or authority there may be between apostolic speech and the speech of the Corinthian believers generally, Paul anchors both of them in his theological understanding of reality in Jesus Christ. Both are acts of service to the Lord Christ, both have the Christocentric gospel as fundamental content and criterion, both have the character of gift, both only proceed by the work of God's Spirit, and both contribute to the purpose of God to grow his people.

This strong similarity in the trains of thought supports Gillespie's contention that 2:6–16 lays the theological groundwork (in general terms) for what Paul

discusses in detail in chapters 12–14.<sup>151</sup> It also buttresses Malcolm’s argument about the rhetorical shape of 1 Corinthians as a whole; namely, that chapters 5–14 represent an extended application of the *kerygma* of Jesus Christ expounded in chapters 1–14 to the particular issues that are arising within the Corinthian church.

The particular issue in chapters 12–14 is the nature and purpose of congregational speech, particularly in relation to what appears to have been the Corinthians’ most favoured mode of such speech: speaking in tongues. Robinson makes the intriguing suggestion that by opening the section with a reference to τῶν πνευματικῶν, Paul is actually using the Corinthians’ own preferred label for speaking in tongues.<sup>152</sup> Whether or not Robinson is right about this, there appears little doubt that the problem addressed in chapters 12–14 is connected with a mis-estimation of the nature and value of *glossolalia*, quite possibly because of its perceived value as a status-marker for those who practised it.<sup>153</sup> It is possible that under the influence of pagan spiritualities and practices, the Corinthians regarded unusual or ecstatic manifestations like *glossolalia* as more inherently ‘spiritual’.<sup>154</sup>

In countering this misunderstanding, Paul’s essential subject, both in his initial blunt answer in 12:1–3 and in the longer discourse that runs from 12:4–14:37, is *what it means for a person to speak under the influence or by the agency of the Spirit of God*.<sup>155</sup>

If the essential issue is the nature and practice of ‘Spirit-speech’, what is the train of Paul’s thought in addressing it?

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<sup>151</sup> As noted above; see Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 188.

<sup>152</sup> Donald W. B. Robinson, ‘Charismata versus Pneumatika: Paul’s Method of Discussion’, *RTR* 31/2 (May 1972): 49–55. Robinson mounts a closely argued critique of the easy identification of *pneumatika* with *charismata*, and of the translation of the latter as ‘spiritual gifts’.

<sup>153</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 87–92; cf. Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 461.

<sup>154</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 572.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 917.

*In 12:1–3*, as we’ve already noted, he begins by asserting in strong terms the connection between the work of the Spirit and the *confession of Jesus as Lord* (12:3). Just as the ‘wisdom of God’ that is spoken by the Spirit in 2:6–16 is materially equivalent to the ‘wisdom’ of the crucified Christ, so here the one thing by which genuine Spirit-speech may be recognized is its connection with the apostolic kerygma (its acknowledgement of Jesus the Lord). If the Corinthians are inclined to over-value *glossolalia* as a spiritual phenomenon, perhaps because of its ecstatic nature, Paul counters by imposing a stark alternative criterion. The Spirit’s presence is recognized by how it disposes someone to speak of Jesus, not by the unusual or ecstatic mode of the speech.

*In 12:4–6*, the connection between the Spirit and Jesus is expanded into a fully trinitarian formulation of the source and unity of the various congregational gifts or activities. Whether the variety of congregational phenomena is viewed from the perspective of gifts that are given via the Spirit, or acts of service offered to the Lord, or activities empowered by God (the Father), the one triune God is their source and rationale.<sup>156</sup> The various activities are given and empowered and apportioned by God through his Spirit, and are directed back to God as acts of service and loyalty to the Lord Jesus. This trinitarian framework for understanding Spirit-speech (and the other activities) serves as an anchor for Paul’s argument in the rest of the chapter, both structurally and thematically.<sup>157</sup> It not only grounds the essential theme of the chapter (of unity-in-differentiation) in the differentiated unity of God himself, but serves as an implicit critique of any tendency to split ‘Spirit-phenomena’ off from the

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<sup>156</sup> Following Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 576), Collins (*1 Corinthians*, 450), and Gillespie (*First Theologians*, 98–100), I take the three-fold description of 12:4–7 to represent three perspectives or angles on the one set of activities, not three different kinds of activities; contra Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 465.

<sup>157</sup> Smit, ‘Rhetorical Structure’, 211–230.

work and purposes of God and of Christ.<sup>158</sup> Perhaps most significantly, by referring the various human actions he is discussing back to the prior action of the triune God, he is emphasizing again their character as *gifts*.<sup>159</sup> With this understanding, privileging certain gifts above others in order to gain status is impossible, just as human boasting and factionalism are not possible if the *ἐξ αὐτοῦ* nature of God's action in Christ is understood (cf. 1:29–31; 3:21; 4:7).

12:7 is the key verse of the chapter, and perhaps of the entire section: 'To each one (ἐκάστῳ) is given the public disclosure or manifestation (φανέρωσις) of the Spirit for the common advantage (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον)'.<sup>160</sup> The diverse actions of *each person* disclose that God is at work by his Spirit for the good or advantage of the whole congregation. The Spirit's work is not confined to particular (perhaps spectacular) gifts, nor to the apostolic ministry. This thought picks up a key idea from chapters 8–10, where Paul exhorts the Corinthians to follow his own example and the example of Christ in seeking not his own *συμφέρον* but that of many, that they may be saved (10:33–11:1; cf. 10:24). It also anticipates the main point of chapters 13 and 14, that Christ-like love should not only motivate a desire to employ gifts for the benefit of others, but serve as a criterion for their use (the 'edification' principle that will be explicated in chapter 14).

In 12:8–11, Paul then lists nine different gifts, services or activities. Five of the nine phenomena listed in 12:8–10 are speech-acts (a 'word/utterance of wisdom', 'a word/utterance of knowledge', 'prophecy', 'kinds of tongues', 'the intelligible rendering of tongues'), and a sixth relates most probably to the ability to discern the

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<sup>158</sup> 'Any account of 'spiritual gifts' which is merely Spirit-centered rather than christomorphic (12:3) and trinitarian (12:4–6) is untrue to Paul'; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 989.

<sup>159</sup> The shift in language from *πνευματικά* (12:1) to *χαρίσματα* (12:4) underscores this point. See Robinson, 'Charismata', 52; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 576.

<sup>160</sup> Following Mitchell and others, Thiselton argues for 'common advantage' as the best translation of *συμφέρον*; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 936.

spiritual origin of speech-acts.<sup>161</sup> Few details are provided in this context about the various gifts or activities, although most of the kinds of speech referred to are discussed in other parts of the letter (wisdom features prominently in 1:4–2:16; prophecy, tongues and interpreting tongues are the subject of 14:1–40). The effect of the gift-list is not only to confirm the profusion and variety of Corinthian congregational speech that Paul has already alluded to at the beginning of the letter (ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ, 1:5), but to deflate the significance of *glossolalia* within this variegated speech. Tongues is not only just one of many different gifts, but by placing it at the end of the list, Paul relativizes its uniqueness and value as a status symbol.<sup>162</sup>

*In 12:12–26*, the idea of common or mutual advantage through variegated activity is further explained via the extended metaphor of the body of Christ.<sup>163</sup> The unity that the Spirit brings (in 12:4–11) cannot be separated from the Christ into which the Corinthians have been baptized by the Spirit. The key idea in this section is not so much that diversity in the body is an end in itself, but that each different part has its own designated and necessary function (by God’s arrangement) for the health and good functioning of the whole. And accordingly, there can be no rivalry or disparagement of one ‘member’ by another (14:15–17, 21, 25), but instead mutual honour, care and solidarity (14:22–26).

*In 12:27–31*, Paul draws this part of his argument to a close by reaffirming that the variety of speech-acts and other activities are given and allotted by God’s appointment. The series of seven questions expecting the answer ‘no’ (e.g., μὴ

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<sup>161</sup> The ‘discerning of spirits’ in 12:10 most likely relates, in context, to the ability to weigh true from false prophecy.

<sup>162</sup> Collins is one of numerous commentators who regard the placement of tongues at the end of the list as significant in this regard; *1 Corinthians*, 451.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Just as the human body unifies the plurality of its members, so Christ unifies the diversity of endowed Christians’; Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 474.

πάντες προφηται, 12:29) makes this clear. As Gillespie summarizes it: 'The Spirit works something in everyone but not everything in anyone'.<sup>164</sup>

However, within this unavoidable variegation, there is also an *ordering* of gifts: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, healings and the rest. This ordering may be temporal or salvation-historical, but within the context of chapter 12 the point appears simply to be that the most significant or important gifts are those that proclaim, apply and explicate the gospel of Christ. Thiselton nicely captures the dual point Paul is making about unity and order:

All have their place in a single body which shares *the same status in Christ*. However, if any talk goes on about 'the most presentable' parts of the body which authenticate its status as 'spiritual', this is not tongues or kinds of healing; rather, it is first of all whether it coheres with the proclamation of Christ through apostles, next, whether it builds up like the pastoral preaching of prophets, and third, whether it coheres with what teachers expound from the OT and from apostolic tradition. But even if all are not apostles ... prophets ... teachers the other gifts are no less authentic gifts from God, which all have an honored and respected place within the body of Christ.<sup>165</sup>

This is consistent with all that Paul has said thus far about the *kerygma* of Jesus Christ as the criterion by which true 'wisdom', 'power' and Spirit-speech can be recognized (in 1:18–2:16 and in 12:1–3).

This reading of 12:27–31 in the context of the whole chapter also helps make intelligible what some have taken to be the strange conclusion to the chapter, in which Paul urges the Corinthians to seek earnestly after the higher or greater gifts (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα, 12:31). Fitzmyer, for example, cannot see how Paul could be urging them to strive for that which he has so emphatically

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<sup>164</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 115.

<sup>165</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1023. Gillespie likewise comments: 'God has ordered the Spirit's work in the church around those activities that mediate the inspired intelligible word. These charismata are "greater" not in the sense of higher but in the sense of essential'; *First Theologians*, 126.

labelled as a gift that comes by God's apportioning.<sup>166</sup> A second question might also be asked: if a key purpose of chapter 12 has been to critique the Corinthian quest for status-through-inspired-speech, how can Paul now urge them to be ambitious for 'higher' gifts, particularly as 13:1–3 seems to deprecate the value of the *charismata* in comparison with love?

The first question (how Paul could be urging them to strive after that which comes from God as a gift) need not detain us long. That something comes from God as a gift does not negate human agency or responsibility, as Paul himself assumes in 14:31–32, where the prophets are deemed to be quite able to control their own Spirit-given speech (14:31–32).<sup>167</sup> That virtues like love or joy or patience are the work of God's Spirit does not lessen human responsibility for seeking, cultivating and 'walking' in such a character.<sup>168</sup> In much the same way, although the allotment and empowering of gifts (like prophecy) are entirely God's prerogative, this by no means precludes a human effort to seek after and practise such gifts (as 14:1 urges the Corinthians to do).

The second question is more significant, and its answer aligns with the responses Paul has already made to the Corinthian malaise. In answer to their enthusiasm for worldly wisdom in chapters 1–4, Paul's response was not only to dismantle their pretensions but also to say that there is a divine wisdom that can be known and imparted, found only in Christ crucified. Likewise, here, Paul is both dismantling and redefining. Their self-centred enthusiasm for high-status gifts is totally incompatible with what the 'gifts' are, where they come from and what their purpose is (i.e., the argument of 12:4–26); but there is, all the same, a 'higher' or

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<sup>166</sup> Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 484. He accordingly translates 12:31a as an ironic question: 'But are you striving for the greater gifts?'

<sup>167</sup> The compatibilism between divine and human agency is testified to frequently in the biblical witness (e.g., Gen 50:20; Eph 2:8–10; Phil 2:12–13).

<sup>168</sup> E.g., Gal 5:15–26.

‘greater’ to be pursued in the exercise of gifts, *just not in the way they think*. The ‘higher’ or ‘greater’ is found in the more excellent way of Christ-like love. As in chapters 1–4, the *kerygma* radically redefines frameworks and expectations, in this case to provide a different criterion for what ‘greatness’ consists of.

The importance of this different criterion in relation to Paul’s main subject (i.e., what it means for a person to speak under the influence or by the agency of the Spirit of God) will become clearer in chapter 14, to which we now turn.<sup>169</sup>

### §7 1 Cor 14

Paul’s extended discussion in this chapter of various aspects of congregational speech is straightforward in its general argument.

Having turned in chapter 13 to explain the more excellent way of love, he picks up in 14:1 where he left off in 12:31 with the subject of ‘earnestly seeking the greater gifts’ (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα, 12:31).<sup>170</sup> In light of love being their aim or pursuit, the greater or higher form of Spirit-enabled speech that they should earnestly seek is *prophecy* (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε, 14:1). The reason those who prophesy are greater (μείζων, 14:5; cf. 12:31) is that they speak to other people for their edification (ἄνθρώποις λαλεῖ οἰκοδομῆν, 14:3) rather than the tongues-speaker who speaks only to God and edifies only himself (ἐαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ, 14:4).

This affirmation of the superior value of love-motivated prophecy is then expounded in the remainder of the chapter in two main sections:

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<sup>169</sup> The significance of chapter 13 for Paul’s argument will be considered within the discussion of chapter 14.

<sup>170</sup> Garland takes the δε of 14:1 to be resumptive; *1 Corinthians*, 631.

- 14:6–25 explains the basic reason that prophecy (unlike tongues) succeeds in edifying, encouraging, exhorting and even converting others (in the case of the outsider in 14:22–25): because it consists of content that is *intelligible and relevant* to the hearer.
- 14:26–37 then extends the principle of intelligibility to the *practical ordering* of Spirit-enabled congregational speech. The orderly manner in which the various speakers make their different contributions also contributes to the desired outcome of edification (πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν, 14:26). This ordering of the speech includes the appropriate participation of men and women within the gathering (14:33–35).

The argument concludes with a summary (14:39–40) re-emphasizing the main point of the section: that while *glossolalia* has its place and is not to be forbidden, well-ordered prophecy is the form of Spirit-enabled speech the Corinthians should earnestly seek (ζηλοῦτε τὸ προφητεῦειν, 14:39).

The flow of the argument is not hard to follow. All the same, we are confronted by the challenge of discerning what Paul meant by the practice that dominates his discussion of OES in this chapter: ‘prophecy’. What kind of speech was he referring to? Who was to practise it? And why and how was it to be undertaken?

#### *a. What is ‘prophecy’ in 1 Cor 14?*

Attempts to answer the ‘what’ question about NT prophecy generally, and Corinthian prophecy in particular, have taken several directions in recent scholarship, not all of them fruitful. The conclusion of Aune’s extensive evaluation of various attempts to classify Christian prophecy by *form or structure* is that such an analysis produces few meaningful results. Approached in form-critical manner, the study of Christian

prophecy fails to yield ‘any dominant form or structure’, and in fact ‘has no distinctive speech forms which have been readily identifiable as prophetic speech’.<sup>171</sup>

Likewise, Forbes has argued in persuasive detail that the attempt to understand and describe Christian prophecy against the background of *Hellenistic oracular and mantic practices* also produces meagre results. He concludes that prophecy in early Christianity used markedly different terminology and took a very different overall form from that which it took in the wider Hellenistic world.<sup>172</sup>

Forbes (and Grudem) are no doubt correct to see OT background as being important for understanding NT prophecy.<sup>173</sup> However, mapping this background to NT practice is difficult to do, not only because of the variegated and developing nature of OT prophecy, but more significantly because of the *transformation* of prophetic content and practice that comes with Christ.<sup>174</sup> Given that God spoke ‘at various times and in various ways’ through the OT prophets, and that he has now spoken finally and decisively through his Son (Heb 1:1), what can we expect of the phenomenon of prophecy in NT churches?

If we turn to 1 Cor 14 itself, as the most extended discussion of congregational prophecy, certain conclusions can be drawn as to what prophecy is and isn’t, bearing in mind the chapter’s context in its section (chapters 12–14) and in the book as a whole.

*Firstly*, it can be asserted without controversy that prophecy is an *intelligible* speech-act communicating *relevant* information to its hearer. Unlike tongues, prophecy delivers a rationally understandable message (14:6–12) that connects with

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<sup>171</sup> David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 231.

<sup>172</sup> Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 318–319.

<sup>173</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

<sup>174</sup> See the discussion in the excursus above at §4.

the life experience of the listener, such that various positive effects ensue (edification, exhortation, encouragement, conviction and learning; 14:3, 24–25, 31).

*Secondly*, prophecy is the *rational, intentional act of a moral agent*. The speech-act proceeds from a moral intention (to love others; 14:1), and is produced in the mind of the speaker (14:13–19). The prophet can choose to speak, and can likewise choose to refrain from speaking (14:29–31). Prophecy is something that can be cultivated or sought after (14:1). Prophecy in 1 Cor 14 bears little resemblance to ecstatic or mantic speech, in which the speaker is ‘taken over’ by the deity and has no control over the speech-act.<sup>175</sup>

*Thirdly*, while prophecy is the deliberate act of a moral agent, *God by his Spirit is the source of both the ability to speak and the content of the speech* (12:4–7, 10; 14:1). The prophet does not concoct his own message, but receives it as a *revelation* from God, which he is then required to deliver to others for their benefit. Grudem goes so far as to say, ‘...if there is no ἀποκάλυψις, there is no prophecy’.<sup>176</sup>

However, to say that prophecy depends on divine revelation leaves open the question of the *content* of that revelation and the *manner* in which it is received and delivered. A significant number of commentators take the view that the distinguishing mark of prophetic speech is the *spontaneous* manner of the revelation that is given to the prophet and then communicated, usually immediately, to others.<sup>177</sup>

As Thiselton points out, however, there is very little actual evidence to support this common assertion, apart from the now widely discredited influence of form-

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<sup>175</sup> Grudem defines ‘ecstatic’ speech as that in which someone is either forced to speak against his will, or loses self-control, or speaks things that make no sense to him, or becomes unaware of his surroundings. He demonstrates that none of these criteria apply to prophecy in 1 Cor 14; Grudem, *Prophecy*, 150–155. See also G. Friedrich, ‘προφήτης κτλ’, *TDNT* 6:851.

<sup>176</sup> Grudem, *Prophecy*, 143.

<sup>177</sup> Forbes labels the majority view, perhaps optimistically, as a ‘gratifying’ consensus; *Prophecy*, 219.

critical parallels to Hellenistic sources.<sup>178</sup> The evidence in 1 Cor 14 itself does not support spontaneity as an essential characteristic of prophecy. If anything, it leans in another direction. Prophecy is a practice to be sought after (14:1), which suggests the possibility of growth in the ability to understand and practice prophetic speech. It is a product of the mind (14:13–19). ‘Revelation’ is portrayed as something that, like a hymn or lesson, can be brought to the gathering (14:26; cf. 14:6); that is, it is not always provided spontaneously at the time of prophesying. The one verse that does connote spontaneity (14:30) could just as cogently be read as describing a real-time interaction with the words of the previous prophet, which is hardly the kind of spontaneous revelatory act that prophecy is often assumed to be.<sup>179</sup> None of this is to say that the ‘revelation’ on which a prophecy was based could not have occurred quickly or suddenly in the mind of the speaker; only that it did not *necessarily* do so, and that to define prophecy in relation to its spontaneity is to overstep the evidence significantly. As Thiselton notes, there is no evidence to suggest that prophecy was invariably a short utterance rather than a longer discourse (it could be either), nor that it had to arise unprompted, as opposed to being ‘prepared with judgment, decision, and rational reflection’.<sup>180</sup>

This leads us to an important *fourth* point regarding the *content* of ‘revelation’ and thus of prophecy in 1 Corinthians. As argued in detail above, there is compelling evidence for the connection not only between 1 Cor 2:6–16 and 1 Cor 12–14, but between 2:6–16 and the exposition of the ‘word of the cross’ that immediately

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<sup>178</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1091–1093.

<sup>179</sup> Thiselton suggests (following Müller) that in the context of ‘weighing’ prophecy, the ‘revelation’ made to the ‘one sitting there’ is most likely an insight into how to take the theme of the first speaker forward ‘more imaginatively, accurately, or deeply’; *1 Corinthians*, 1092. Regardless of whether this is true, it does show that one could use 14:30 to argue equally as well for the essentially rational and responsive nature of prophecy, as for its spontaneity.

<sup>180</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 964.

precedes it in 1:18–31.<sup>181</sup> These connections are highly significant for understanding the nature of the ‘revelation’ that is given to the Christian and then passed on to others in intelligible words (in both 2:6–16 and 14:1–40). As already noted, the ‘wisdom speech’ of 1 Cor 2:6–16 is not only materially equivalent to the eschatological ‘wisdom of God’ revealed in Christ crucified but also, on that basis, provides a *framework of reality* from which all other judgements about life in the world are made. This wisdom, unknown and unknowable except by the work of God’s Spirit, is the ‘wisdom’ or ‘mind of Christ’ that God has given to his people so that they might understand what he has given them, and discern all things on this basis (2:12–16).

This accords closely with the nature of prophecy as the ‘greater’ form of Spirit-enabled speech in chapters 12–14. The fundamental criterion of pneumatic speech is its confession of Jesus as Lord (12:1–3), and its content is such that it provides a benefit to those who hear, whether that is described generally as ‘the common good’ (12:7) or more specifically (in the case of prophecy) as edification, exhortation, encouragement, conviction and learning for its hearers (14:3, 24–25, 31). As in 2:6–16, there is a kerygmatic *foundation* that can only be understood and confessed by the work of the Spirit, and a Spirit-enabled *application* of that new Christocentric understanding of reality to the ongoing life and growth of the community of God’s people. In this sense, the revelatory content of prophecy is best conceived as *the Spirit-given contextual articulation of the cruciform wisdom of God, the ‘mind of Christ’*.<sup>182</sup>

Interestingly, this gospel-centric view of prophecy accords with the only other verse in the NT that comes close to defining prophecy: ‘... the testimony of Jesus is

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<sup>181</sup> See the discussion on 1 Cor 2:6–16 above at §3.

<sup>182</sup> Contra Grudem, whose definition of NT prophecy leans too heavily on the assumption that the ‘revelation’ on which a prophecy is based consists of a spontaneous miraculous realization of certain otherwise unknown information; *Prophecy*, 139f., 220f.

the spirit of prophecy' (Rev 19:10). Whether 'spirit' here refers to the 'essence' of prophecy or to the 'Spirit' who enables prophecy, and whether 'testimony of Jesus' refers to the message Jesus embodied and brought, or the testimony about him, the point is essentially the same: that the content of prophetic speech is focused on the message of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.<sup>183</sup>

*Fifth*, the five *functions or outcomes* of prophecy described in 1 Cor 14:3, 24 and 31 further reveal the nature of prophecy as practised in Corinth.<sup>184</sup> The one who prophesies speaks to people for their edification (οἰκοδομῆν), exhortation (παράκλησιν), encouragement (παραμυθίαν), conviction (ἐλέγχεται) and learning (μανθάνωσιν).

The metaphorical use of οἰκοδομέω ('strengthen, build up, make more able')<sup>185</sup> is the most significant of the five, both in terms of its prominence within the chapter (14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26) and in its occurrence at key points within the letter. In 3:10–17, Paul uses the building metaphor to insist that the superstructure of the 'building' must be constructed with quality materials consistent with the foundation he has laid, 'which is Jesus Christ' (3:11). Paul sees his own ministry (and that of Apollos) as an ongoing proclamation of the gospel to 'build' the church; that is, both to lay a foundation and to 'build' upon it (ἐποικοδομέω, 3:10).<sup>186</sup> As Schütz comments:

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<sup>183</sup> Woodhouse argues, beginning with Rev 19:10 and looking closely at 1 Cor 14 and 1 Thess, that the content of Christian prophecy is the 'gospel of Jesus Christ'; John Woodhouse, 'The Spirit of Prophecy', in *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation* (Explorations 2; ed. Barry G. Webb; Homebush West, NSW: Lancer, 1992), 105–121.

<sup>184</sup> Carson is right to point out that the threefold description of prophecy's function in 14:3 is not a *definition* of prophecy as such, since other forms of speech also fulfill some or all of these functions; *Showing the Spirit*, 102. However, while not defining prophecy, the functions or outcomes of prophetic speech described in 1 Cor 14 do reveal significant aspects of its nature.

<sup>185</sup> '[T]o help improve ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, *strengthen, build up, make more able*.' οἰκοδομέω, *BDAG* 696.

<sup>186</sup> Peterson anchors Paul's use of the 'building' metaphor in the OT theme of God 'building' a people for himself, particularly through the words he puts in the mouth of his prophets (as in Jer 1:9–10). He also notes the significance of Acts 20:32, where the 'word of grace' is able 'to build you up', and the usage in Eph 2:19–20 and 4:11–16 in which the proclamatory work of the apostles, prophets,

“Building” is simply a metaphor Paul uses to express his sustained interest in and responsibility for the gospel in its durative dimension, with reference to the community’.<sup>187</sup> In 8:1–10, Paul applies this same concept to the Corinthians’ behaviour with one another with respect to idol worship. Knowledge on its own, puffs up. Love, by contrast, ‘builds’ (οἰκοδομεῖ, 8:1) the community by motivating believers to utilize or apply their knowledge in Christ for the sake of others. This section concludes with an exhortation to imitate Paul (and Christ) in seeking not one’s own advantage but the advantage of many that they may be saved (10:31–11:1).

Thus, what Paul himself characteristically does in his ministry (including in his letter to the Corinthians), he also urges the Corinthians to do with one another: *to build the church by applying the gospel of ‘Christ crucified’ to their ongoing communal life as the body of Christ*. This indicates why prophecy passes the ‘edification’ test in chapter 14. As a loving act of intelligible speech, prophecy articulates some aspect or implication of the ‘one gospel that alone creates and builds up the church’.<sup>188</sup>

The other four functional terms Paul applies to prophecy fill out this picture further:

- Prophecy provides ‘exhortation’ (παρακλῆσιν, 14:3), which in this context refers to that aspect or effect of prophetic speech whereby the message of Christ exercises a claim on someone’s life or appeals for a response or brings an exhortation to change.<sup>189</sup>
- Prophecy also supplies ‘comfort’ or ‘encouragement’ (παραμυθίαν, 14:3),

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evangelists, pastors and teachers is echoed in the mutual activity of the church in ‘speaking the truth in love’, so that the body ‘builds itself up in love’. D. G. Peterson, ‘The Biblical Concept of Edification’, in *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation*, 45–58.

<sup>187</sup> John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 224–225.

<sup>188</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 144.

<sup>189</sup> For a discussion of the meaning and usage of παρακαλέω κτλ in the NT, see below at chapter 5.5.

a function that is also paired with *παράκλησις* in its only two other occurrences in Paul, in 1 Thessalonians—one relating to Paul’s exhorting (*παρακαλοῦντες*) and encouraging (*παραμυθούμενοι*) of the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12); the other in relation to the action the Thessalonians themselves were to undertake in encouraging the fainthearted (*παραμυθεῖσθε*, 5:14) as part of their mutual exhortation and edification (*παρακαλεῖτε* and *οἰκοδομεῖτε*, 5:11).

- Prophecy also functions to convict and judge the unbeliever (*ἐλέγχεται ... ἀνακρίνεται*, 14:24),<sup>190</sup> revealing the secrets of the heart (*φανερὰ*, 14:25), and calling forth a heartfelt acknowledgement of God’s presence in the gathering. As Hill comments, it is very unlikely that Paul is describing an exercise in mind-reading at this point: ‘It is much more likely that what is meant is that, on the basis of the prophet’s utterance (cf. 2 Cor 4:2), the unbeliever is made aware, for the first time perhaps, certainly in a comprehensible manner, that his life has been under the power of sin’.<sup>191</sup>
- The final function or outcome of prophecy in the passage is ‘learning’ (*μανθάνωσιν*, 14:31). This again indicates that prophecy conveys intelligible, relevant, beneficial content that adds to the hearer’s understanding. However, it should also be noted that ‘learning’ need not connote only the grasping of knowledge or doctrinal concepts. Paul uses *μανθάνω* to refer to being taught sound doctrine (Rom 16:17) and the

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<sup>190</sup> The repeated *ὑπὸ πάντων* in 14:24 most likely refers to the totality of what is going on: ‘all’ the speech that is taking place as ‘all’ the Corinthians prophesy. It is unlikely that Paul means that the unbeliever experiences conviction on the basis of the prophecy of every individual congregation member towards him; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 657.

<sup>191</sup> David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 124; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1128.

content of the gospel (Col 1:7), but also to describe being educated or trained in *a way of life* that reflects a Christian understanding (Eph 4:20; Phil 4:11).

*Taken together, the five functional descriptions of prophecy indicate that the function of prophetic speech was to bring some aspect of the kerygmatic 'mind of Christ' to the situation of its hearers, in order to produce positive spiritual effects.* This in turn suggests that the particular Spirit-given competence of prophecy is the ability to perceive the *connection* between gospel word and the situation of its hearers. In other words, the genius of prophecy is not so much its capacity to understand, teach and explain the apostolic word, but its perception of the how that word connects with or applies to the circumstances of God's people at a particular time and place.

This examination of the various functions of prophecy leads to a *sixth* and final point regarding the *relationship of prophetic speech to other forms of congregational speech*, such as utterances of wisdom and knowledge (1 Cor 12:8), or Paul's bringing of revelation or knowledge or teaching (14:6), or the congregational contribution of hymns, lessons, revelations, and interpreted tongues (14:26).

Making precise distinctions between these terms is difficult. In fact, my analysis so far has indicated overlapping relations between several of them. For example, 'revelation' and 'prophecy' are treated as almost synonymous in 14:29–32, but are nevertheless listed as distinct items in 14:6. Grudem's suggestion that 'revelation' often refers to the reception of the message, and 'prophecy' to its verbal proclamation makes good sense of the usage.<sup>192</sup> Likewise, we have seen that the activity 2:6–16 describes using the language of 'wisdom', 'revelation', 'Spirit' and 'speech' is strikingly similar to what chapter 14 calls 'prophecy' (cf. the 'utterance of wisdom' in 12:8). In much the same way, 14:26 describes the congregation members bringing with them a

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<sup>192</sup> Grudem, *Prophecy*, 115–139.

variety of words to contribute to the gathering (hymns, lessons, revelations, tongues, and so on) with prophecy somewhat surprisingly absent from the list; but when the practicalities of making those contributions are discussed in 14:27–32, only tongues, prophecy and revelation are mentioned. In light of all this, Gillespie suggests that prophesying is the overarching category, of which other kinds of speech may probably be regarded as types.<sup>193</sup> Fee thinks that ‘revelation’ may be the broader term for all forms of ‘intelligible inspired speech’, including prophecy.<sup>194</sup>

It is certainly true that Paul thinks of prophecy as the ‘higher’ or ‘greater’ form of Spirit-speech to be earnestly sought (14:1, 39).<sup>195</sup> In light of this, it may be better to regard ‘prophecy’ not so much as an umbrella category, of which the other forms of congregational speech are types, but as a *paradigmatic* form of Christian one-another speech. If (as argued above) Paul’s overarching subject in chapters 12–14 is what it means for a person to speak under the influence or by the agency of the Spirit of God, then prophecy emerges in chapter 14 as an *ideal form* such speech should take. Prophecy is the form of Spirit-speech to seek after, because of its foundation in the apostolic confession of Jesus Christ, its nature as intelligible articulation of the *relevance* of the gospel of Christ for particular contexts, and its purpose of providing edification, exhortation and encouragement for its hearers in their eschatologically-framed living of the Christian life.

These reflections on the nature of congregational prophecy raise the question as to how the more broadly practised ‘one-another’ speech of prophecy relates to preaching-teaching speech elders or pastors within the congregation, or the proclamatory speech of evangelists. I will consider these matters further below

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<sup>193</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 161.

<sup>194</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014), 690–691.

<sup>195</sup> Collins notes how prominent prophecy is for Paul. ‘It is the only gift that is cited in all four of his lists of charisms ... It is the only gift of the Spirit that is cited in 1 Thess 5:19–20; 1 Corinthians, 491.

(particularly in chapters 7 and 8).

*b. Who prophesies?*

As noted above, the background to Paul's thinking about prophecy in Corinth lies in the OT expectation of an end-time Spirit-enabled democratization of prophetic speech. On the face of it, 1 Cor 14 would seem to represent the realization of that expectation within the Corinthian church. The 'who' of prophetic speech is all believers, at least potentially, 'since all are Spirit-people'.<sup>196</sup>

Two main arguments have been mounted against this idea, one cessationist and one not

The cessationist form of the argument, ably advanced by Richard Gaffin, contends that NT prophecy was a single (not variegated) phenomenon, practised by a group of prophets whose status and revelatory role was coordinated with the foundational position of the apostles (as seen in Eph 2:20 and 4:11). Just as the apostolate played a particular redemptive-historical role in the establishment of the church, so too did the NT prophets—a role which has now ceased.<sup>197</sup>

The non-cessationist argument against democratized prophecy in 1 Cor 14, put forward by Ellis and Hill, also takes the view that the 'prophecy' of 1 Cor 14 was the activity of a smaller, distinct group of 'prophets', such as those mentioned as being appointed to the role in 12:28. However, on this second view, the function of these sorts of prophets does not cease in the NT era, but continues in subsequent generations through such specific activities as pastoral preaching.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 685.

<sup>197</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 55-116. Unlike some cessationists, Gaffin avoids placing any weight on 1 Cor 13:8-13 ('when the perfect comes') as a reference to the completion of the canon. In fact, he describes this move not 'credible exegetically' (109).

<sup>198</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books,

Against both of these objections, Fee argues with some force that Paul's argument in chapter 14, in its overall point and its details, makes little sense if he is not envisaging and encouraging the widespread practice of prophecy throughout the congregation.<sup>199</sup> The imperatives of 14:1, 12 and 39, addressed as they are to all the recipients of the letter and anchored in the abiding value of love, are difficult to account for if Paul is addressing the minority practice of a designated group rather than the congregation as a whole. Likewise, the threefold repetition of 'all' (πᾶς) in 14:24, while envisaging a hypothetical scenario, is logically part of Paul's argument that prophecy should be earnestly sought by all, since its intelligible nature benefits the hearer. Perhaps most tellingly, Fee argues that in Paul's statement in 14:31 ('For you can *all* prophesy one by one, so that *all* may learn and *all* be encouraged'), it is 'gratuitous to suggest that the first "all" means "all the prophets" while the next two refer to the whole community'.<sup>200</sup>

It is almost certain, then, that when Paul commanded the Corinthians to be driven by love to desire the Spirit-enabled speech of prophecy, he envisaged not a small or designated group engaging in the practice but a growing number of believers within the congregational life becoming proficient in prophetic speech. It was a practice he wanted all to seek. The limiting factor in Paul's mind for the practice of prophetic speech was not office or appointment but *Christian maturity*. Insofar as

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1993), 138–140. Ellis regards this smaller gifted group as being roughly analogous to contemporary preachers who exegete the Scriptures. In a similar vein, Hill argues that while any Christian 'might *on occasion* prophesy' nevertheless Paul is speaking here of a group of designated 'prophets' whose function is largely that of 'pastoral preaching'; *Prophecy*, 120–121 (emphasis original). Thiselton cautiously takes a similar line; *1 Corinthians*, 1017–1018.

<sup>199</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 685–688, 693–696; likewise Friedrich, *TDNT* 6:849.

<sup>200</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 694. Fee also makes good sense of the limitation placed on prophetic speech in 14:29 ('Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said'), suggesting that in context this refers to how many prophecies should be heard before their content is weighed or evaluated, not to the total number of prophets allowed to speak. So also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 662–663.

love is the greatest of the virtues (13:13), the one who grows in love will also seek to grow in the kind of Spirit-enabled speech that benefits others, of which prophecy is the paradigmatic example. This accords also with what was observed in 1 Cor 2:6–16, in which Spirit-given ‘wisdom speech’ is practised by the spiritually mature<sup>201</sup>—something in which the Corinthians were sadly lacking. In other words, if (with Fee and others) we accept that Paul sees prophecy as *potentially* available to all, then the lack or gap (of which that potential speaks) is the problem that Paul has been critiquing throughout the letter.<sup>202</sup> The Corinthian immaturity consists largely of their failure to see how the gospel of ‘Christ crucified’ should shape their entire lives—in this case, a failure to see that Spirit-speech, like everything, should not be a vehicle for personal status-seeking or fulfilment, but an expression of Christ-like love for others.

What then of the statement of 12:28–29, in which it is quite clear that only certain people are appointed by God as ‘prophets’? How does this square with chapter 14’s vision of broadly practised prophecy? The answer is suggested in the change of language that occurs between 12:28–29 (the noun, *προφήται*) and 14:3 (the participle, *ὁ προφητεύων*). That some, by their foundational, regular or leading function in this capacity, could be designated ‘prophets’ (cf. the similar language of Eph 2:20; 4:11), by no means limits the practice of prophecy to their office.<sup>203</sup> There are ‘prophets’, but there is also ‘the one who prophesies’. The same could be said of the ‘teachers’ (12:28–29), whose important and authoritative educative role did not prevent teaching and learning also taking place more broadly within the community (cf. the *διδασχὴν* that is brought by a member to the gathering in 14:26, or the ‘learning’ that takes place as a consequence of prophecy in

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<sup>201</sup> See the discussion above at §3.

<sup>202</sup> See also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 631–632; Forbes, *Prophecy*, 258–259.

<sup>203</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 620–621.

14:31).<sup>204</sup>

In concluding these first two sections (on ‘what’ and ‘who’), it is interesting to note how scholarly views of what prophecy is and who practices it in 1 Cor 12–14 tend to assimilate themselves towards various contemporary ecclesiastical options. Those who (correctly) conclude that prophecy is or should be a widespread congregational phenomenon, tend (incorrectly) to define it as the kind of short, spontaneous, quasi-ecstatic revelatory utterance that is commonly practised today in churches belonging to the Pentecostal tradition.<sup>205</sup> By contrast, those who (correctly) define prophecy not as a spontaneous outburst but as an exposition or application of the revealed gospel of Jesus Christ, tend (incorrectly) to limit its practice to a more specialized group that bears more than a passing resemblance to contemporary preachers or theologians.<sup>206</sup>

The combination that is not given due consideration—perhaps because it does not readily correlate to the practice of many contemporary churches—is that the congregational prophecy Paul has in mind is a potentially widespread phenomenon, in which Spirit-enabled believers intelligibly apply some contextually relevant aspect or implication of the gospel of Christ to others, for their edification, exhortation and encouragement. This, I have argued, is the characterization that Paul’s train of thought reveals in 1 Corinthians.

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<sup>204</sup> Smith’s carefully argued thesis establishes that ‘teaching and learning’ were widely practised at all levels of Pauline communities. ‘Beyond this divine involvement, the participation of the entire believing community of men and women in didactic activities representing all but one semantic grouping [traditioning] shows the prominence and significance of these activities ...’; *Scholastic communities*, 382.

<sup>205</sup> Such as Fee, Grudem and Forbes.

<sup>206</sup> Such as Hill, Ellis, Gillespie and Thiselton.

c. *Why prophesy?*

In considering (above) the various functions or outcomes of congregational prophecy (edification, exhortation, encouragement, conviction, learning), the question ‘Why does Paul want the Corinthians to prophesy?’ has in part already been answered. The reason Paul wants prophecy to flourish is that he wants the Corinthian congregation, as individuals and as a community, to be ‘built up’; that is, for a superstructure to be erected on the foundation that has been laid (cf. 1 Cor 3:9–17). This is prophecy’s rationale for Paul: as the paradigmatic form of OES, it is a vital component in the achievement of this outcome. (It is not the *only* component; for example, the crucial role of congregational preaching in relation to OES has yet to be considered.)

Two further comments need to be made to fill out this picture.

The first concerns the *eschatological frame* in which Paul sees this building work as taking place. As noted above, the rhetorical shape of Paul’s ethical appeals throughout 1 Cor 5–14 corresponds to his eschatological vision of the Christian life as one in which believers live the life of the crucified Christ, and faithfully endure the difficulties and suffering that this entails as they await the glories of the resurrection.<sup>207</sup> The various positive functions of prophecy take place within this eschatological frame, such that its recipients are variously exhorted, challenged, comforted, admonished, encouraged and ‘built up’ in their lived response to the gospel of Christ, as they wait for ‘the revealing of Jesus Christ’ (1:7).<sup>208</sup>

In doing so, the Corinthian believers partake of the same building work that Paul sees himself engaged in.<sup>209</sup> He makes this connection explicit in 1 Cor 15:58 in

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<sup>207</sup> See §1 above.

<sup>208</sup> Gillespie argues with some force for the eschatological nature of the revelation that is proclaimed in prophecy. He notes, following Stuhlmacher, that the terms *apokalypsis* and *apokalypsein* belong to the conceptual world of Jewish apocalyptic literature, and connote a revealing by God through special agents of the eschatological secrets of the end time; Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 189.

<sup>209</sup> See Table 2 comparing Paul’s ministry and that of the Corinthians at §6 above.

which, on the basis of the certain victory that lies ahead in Christ (15:57), he urges them to be ‘steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain’. Orr has shown that in view of Paul’s usage of the phrase (particularly in reference to his own ministry and that of Timothy a few verses later in 16:9–10), the ‘work of the Lord’ that the Corinthians are to abound in is the gospel-centred work of building the church.<sup>210</sup>

The eschaton is the *end* of prophecy, in both senses: it is the goal that shapes its edificatory purpose, and the point after which its practice will no longer be needed (13:8–10).

This leads us to a second comment about the ‘why’ of prophecy, and that is its relation to *love*. Prophecy without love, Paul says, is useless (13:2). And while prophecies gain their rationale from the needs of this age, love does not. Prophecy will cease, but love will abide forever (13:8). The over-riding importance of love in relation to the practice of congregational speech is seen not only in the placement of chapter 13 (as a hinge in the argument) but in the joining of the imperative to ‘pursue love’ (διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην) with the imperative to especially seek the prophetic speech that comes from the Spirit (in 14:1).

Most commentators regard chapter 13, despite its digressive nature and different literary style, as integral to the argument of chapters 12–14.<sup>211</sup> As noted briefly above, its function in Paul’s argument is to provide the ‘more excellent’ criterion by which to understand what would constitute a ‘greater’ gift. In fact, the startling statements that open the chapter emphasize that love is not just a better way, but the indispensable element in the practice of any gift. As Carson puts it, ‘he refuses to recognize *any*

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<sup>210</sup> Peter Orr, ‘Abounding in the Work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58): Everything We Do as Christians or Specific Gospel Work?’, *Them* 38/2 (July 2013): 205–14.

<sup>211</sup> Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 471–472; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027–1029; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 626–627; Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 270; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 52–58.

positive assessment of *any* of them [the gifts] unless the gift is discharged in love'.<sup>212</sup>

However, love is not only integral to the argument of chapters 12–14 but to the ethic that Paul has been establishing in the whole argument of the letter. The exposition of the cross in chapters 1–4 not only profoundly critiques Corinthian factionalism and pride, but establishes a radical alternative ethic that he brings to each of the issues of the Corinthian context. It is an ethic of embodied identification with Jesus Christ in his crucifixion:

Christ died and rose in his 'body of flesh', bringing to fulfilment the ritual and ethical demands of the Torah; and believers are those who are 'in Christ', benefiting from and identifying with Christ's bodily death and resurrection. Believers are called, then, to an ethical identification with Christ that is both *corporeal* (putting away sexual immorality, greed, and impurity of bodies, and rather offering one's body to God) and *corporate* (putting off social vices/autonomy, and rather pursuing edifying love within the body of Christ).<sup>213</sup>

It is on the basis of this 'reversal' ethic that Paul addresses the various issues dealt with in chapters 5–14, including his discussion of their corporate life from chapter 11 onwards. It is thus no accident then that the catalogue of love's characteristics in 13:4–7 presents such a striking critique of the failings of the Corinthian church: such as the impatience of their over-realized eschatology, their boasting and 'puffed-up' arrogance, their tolerance of unrighteous behaviour, and perhaps most simply and cuttingly, their self-regard. They are living as if they were still on the wrong side of the 'reversal'. The assertion that love does not 'seek its own' (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς, 13:5) is particularly important in this context. It echoes the similar statements of 10:24 and 10:33, in which Paul applies his ethical theme of embodying a 'cruciform' life of sacrificial service to others (in imitation of Christ, and of Paul). 13:5 also connects with the key verse of chapter 12, in which the various

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<sup>212</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 61.

<sup>213</sup> Malcolm, *Rhetoric of Reversal*, 219 (emphasis original).

gifts are to be employed for the advantage of others (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, 12:7), and anticipates a central idea of chapter 14, namely that prophecy is superior because it edifies the church, whereas the tongues-speaker edifies *himself* (ἑαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ, 14:4; cf. 14:17; 16:14).

More needs to be said about the relation of love (as a primary form of the moral life) and the practice of OES,<sup>214</sup> but at this point we can simply note the central role of love in Paul's ethic of corporate behaviour, including congregational speech. If love means patiently and sacrificially seeking the good of the other rather than seeking one's own good, then in an eschatological frame where 'the good' consists of edification and growth in expectation of final glorification, love will motivate the seeking of prophecy, since prophecy is the paradigmatic means by which this edification takes place. This, in essence, is the argument of 1 Cor 13–14.

#### *d. How is prophecy practised?*

The main point that 1 Cor 14 makes with regard to the *manner* of congregational edifying speech is that it should be ordered, harmonious and controlled.<sup>215</sup> Just as intelligibility is a prerequisite for understanding and thus edification (14:1–25), so an orderly and thoughtful practice of congregational speech (rather than its opposite) promotes communal encouragement and learning (14:26–40).

The motivating force of cruciform love is significant here as well. Love will exercise self-restraint for the benefit of others, choosing to remain silent or refrain from contributing one's gift to the assembly, for the sake of the common good.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> See chapter 8 below.

<sup>215</sup> Thiselton characterizes the section from 14:26–40 as being about 'controlled speech and building up';  
*1 Corinthians*, 1131.

<sup>216</sup> Malcolm, *Reversal*, 197–199.

The restraint and order Paul speaks of relates to tongues-speaking as well as to forms of prophetic speech. If there is no-one to interpret, the tongues speaker should keep silent (σιγᾶτω, 14:28), and even if there is an interpretation available only ‘two or at most three, and each in turn’ should speak (14:27). Although a total numerical limit is not similarly imposed on prophetic speech,<sup>217</sup> there is all the same a need for orderly practice, in order to allow for appropriate weighing of what is said. As Garland argues, the ‘weighing’ (διακρίνω) that takes place in 14:29 is unlikely to be simply a decision as to whether the speaker is a ‘false prophet’ or not, but a sifting and appraising and digesting of their words, conceivably including dialogue and discussion.<sup>218</sup> If the nature of NT prophecy is essentially that of the contextual application of the gospel of Christ, then the discernment that is called for relates both to the degree to which the prophetic speech is soundly based in the gospel of Christ crucified, and to the personal relevance of its contextual application.

Paul explains the purpose of this orderly speech and its communal evaluation in the ἵνα clause of 14:31 (‘so that all may learn and all be encouraged’). He also grounds its rationale in the nature of prophecy as an activity of the God of peace. Unlike pagan forms of oracular speech that may have been frenzied or ecstatic, and thus beyond the control of the prophetic speaker, Christian prophecy does not violate the volitional capacities of the prophet. In the Corinthian context, the reference to ‘disorder’ and ‘peace’ (ἄκαταστασίας ... εἰρήνης, 14:33) is also not simply an opposition of disorganization to orderliness, but a contrast between the unsettled and chaotic conditions that prevail when there is selfishness, factionalism and competitiveness, and the harmonious, life-giving *shalom* that flows from a right

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<sup>217</sup> As noted above, the ‘two or three’ most likely refers to how many prophecies should take place before ‘weighing’ them, not the total number of prophecies.

<sup>218</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 663.

orientation to God and to others.<sup>219</sup> Restraining one's own speech, waiting for the other, pondering the words of the other—these are the loving actions of someone in full harmony and fellowship with others, who is not 'seeking his own' but 'the common good'.

In this sense, how prophetic speech should be practised is driven by two related aspects of God's character, as reflected in his acts in the world. On the one hand, to control, restrain and practice congregational speech for the benefit of others is expressive of the self-sacrificial love of God seen in the cross of Christ. On the other hand, the orderly non-competitive conduct of prophecy reflects God's characteristic purpose to bring peace, harmony and well-being rather than chaos and divisiveness.

The issue of the speech of women in 14:33–35 comes in this context, and is an application of the same principles. For the sake of what is decent and orderly, the women, like the tongues-speaker who lacks an interpretation, are urged to remain quiet (σιγάτωσαν, 14:34; cf 14:28). If they wish to ask questions and learn (presumably in relation to the prophecies that have been given) they should do so ἐν οἴκῳ not ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ (14:35).

The interpretations that have been put forward to deal with the perceived difficulty of these verses are too many and diverse to evaluate in detail here.<sup>220</sup> Is the silence that is enjoined absolute, or only in relation to various kinds of speech (such as the weighing of prophecy, or unseemly chattering, or socially improper interrogation of their husbands, and so on)? None of the proposed solutions are without problems, the most common of which is simply a lack of sufficient evidence

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<sup>219</sup> Collins notes that ἀκαταστασίας is a term used of 'unsettled conditions and political insurrection';

*1 Corinthians*, 520.

<sup>220</sup> Thiselton and Carson both provide useful surveys and evaluations of the range of options; Thiselton,

*1 Corinthians*, 1147–1161; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 121–131.

to support the proposed scenario.<sup>221</sup>

At this point, the methodological excursus (above) is useful. The movement of Paul's thought is clear enough, even if the details of its application in the Corinthian context are less so. Both in 1 Cor 11 and in 1 Cor 14, Paul reasons from an account of reality in which the unity and differentiation of men and women, and the order that defines their relationships (in particular, between husbands and wives), are to be respected and expressed when edifying speech takes place, both in the home and in the church. The foundation for these differentiations and the corresponding expression of them is located by Paul in God's character (11:3–7; 14:33), the Lord's command (14:37), the created order (11:7–9, 14), the value of peace over disorder (14:33), and the standards of moral acceptability (14:35; cf. 11:14). Contemporary readers may find themselves reluctant to apprentice themselves to this train of thought, but there is little doubt that Paul's model of differentiation-within-interdependent-unity, which he applied to the members of church generally in chapter 12, is applied also to the conduct of men and women in chapters 11 and 14.

## *§8 Conclusions*

Following the apostle's train of thought in 1 Corinthians regarding OES leads to the following conclusions about the nature and purposes of one-another speech in the

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<sup>221</sup> For example, as noted above, there is no positive evidence that the prophecy of 1 Cor 11:5 was envisaged as taking place in church. It is possible that it did, but just as possible (probably more so) that a household setting was in view. However, the majority of the proposed interpretations of 14:33–35 assume that 11:5 unequivocally indicates the reality of women prophesying in church, and that 14:33–35 can therefore not be read as a prohibition of such prophecy. There is thus not only a slim foundation for the basic premise of these interpretations, but the various proposed solutions—for example, as to what *subset* of womanly speech Paul was proscribing—rest on equally fragile exegetical or socio-historical foundations.

Corinthian community.

a. *What kind of speech is it?*

- OES takes various forms in 1 Corinthians (words of knowledge, wisdom, teachings, revelations, prophecies), but its essential nature is revealed in the paradigmatic or ideal form of ‘prophecy’.
- Prophecy in 1 Corinthians is *a rational, intelligible speech-act, in which some aspect or implication of the gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to bear on the situation of its hearers, leading to their edification, exhortation, encouragement, conviction or learning.*
- Prophecy is a form of the wisdom-speech of 1 Cor 2:6–16, in which believers grasp the meaning and implications of ‘Christ crucified’, particularly as it relates to life and behaviour, and impart that understanding to others.
- The OES of 1 Corinthians represents a christologically shaped fusion of the OT traditions of wisdom-speech (as knowledge for living) and Spirit-given-prophecy (as a Spirit-given revelation of God’s word and purposes).
- The ability to practise OES is portrayed as a gift, a practice that is only possible because of the work of God by his Spirit (thus ruling out any boasting or status-seeking).

b. *Why should it be practised?*

- The desired end that motivates the one-another speech of the Corinthians is the eschatological purpose of God to ‘build’ the church of Christ; to call and gather a people who are crucified with Christ, and who live the crucified life as they await the final resurrection and glorification in Christ

(this being also the rhetorical shape of 1 Cor as a whole). OES is a good practice to be pursued because it participates in this work of the triune God; that is, it contributes to the conversion, growth and perseverance of believers within a Christian community.

- The virtue that drives one-another speech is the cruciform ‘reversal ethic’ of love that humbly seeks the good or advantage of the other, rather than proudly promoting the self. Given the eschatological frame of the Christian community (as just mentioned), the pursuit of love will entail a zeal for OES, since the good of the other consists of edification and growth in expectation of final glorification.

*c. How should it be practised?*

- As a Christ-like act of sacrificial love, OES should be practised for the benefit of the other, not self. This entails a stance of humility with respect to one’s contribution, and a willingness to refrain from speaking for the sake of edification (i.e., to allow others also to speak).
- Within the congregational gathering, the speech should be practised in a decent and orderly way so as to promote understanding and encouragement.
- It is seen as highly desirable that the various forms of OES (especially prophecy) should be widely practised by men and women within the Christian community, in a variety of contexts. The practice of OES (whether as wisdom-speech or prophecy) is portrayed as a Spirit-given characteristic of Christian growth; as something to be sought with zeal.

In summarizing how Paul thought about OES in 1 Cor, it is striking how its

characteristics mirror at almost every point the characterization of his own proclamatory ministry. The christocentric theological realities that shape what Paul preaches, why he preaches, and how he preaches also shape the practice of the OES that he wishes to see flourish within the Corinthian community. Both are acts of humble service to the Lord Christ, both have the Christ-crucified kerygma as fundamental content and criterion, both are driven by a Christ-like love for others, both have the character of gift, both only proceed by the work of God's Spirit, and both contribute to the purpose of God to grow his people.



## *Chapter 4: Apostolic trains of thought in Ephesians*

### *§1 Ephesians as a whole*

Scholarly discussion about the Epistle to the Ephesians as a whole focuses less on its setting, structure and literary integrity (as with 1 Corinthians) and more on questions of authorship and destination.

The authorship debate runs wide and deep, extending even to disputes over which side of the question can claim to be in the majority.<sup>222</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it is not an important question to resolve (assuming that the canonical status of Ephesians is accepted in either case). The scholarly consensus on Ephesians regards it either as written by the apostle Paul, or by a disciple of Paul, sometime in the period 50–70AD. As Fowl points out, this means that the social, historical, linguistic and rhetorical background and conventions one would bring to the interpretation of the letter's content are the same, whether one favours Pauline authorship or not.<sup>223</sup> In the terms of this thesis, we can follow the 'trains of thought' of the author of Ephesians, whether that author was the apostle Paul himself or a pseudonymous 'Paul' seeking to expound, defend or pass on apostolic teaching in the tradition of Paul. For convenience, I will simply refer to the author as 'Paul'.

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<sup>222</sup> For detailed recent arguments for and against Pauline authorship (respectively) see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61, and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 2005), lix–lxxiii. Hoehner mounts an extensive statistical rebuttal of Lincoln's claim that the scholarly pendulum has swung decisively towards non-Pauline authorship.

<sup>223</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 11–12.

There are similar unresolved (and seemingly unresolvable) debates about the destination, occasion and purpose of the letter. It is certainly clear that Ephesians is a more general letter than every other letter attributed to Paul, and contains little explicit information about its recipients, occasion or purpose.<sup>224</sup> As Best notes, this has led most interpreters to focus on the dominant themes of the letter, and to deduce from these the purposes for which it was written, and (to a lesser extent) the occasion that called forth these purposes.<sup>225</sup> Arnold offers a synthesis that draws together many of the most common proposals when he writes:

Paul wrote his letter to a large network of local churches in Ephesus and the surrounding cities to affirm them in their new identity in Christ as a means of strengthening them in their ongoing struggles with the powers of darkness, to promote a greater unity between Jews and Gentiles within and among the churches in the area, and to stimulate an ever-increasing transformation of their lifestyles into a greater conformity to the purity and holiness that God has called them to display.

Best (along with many interpreters) emphasizes the close connections between the two halves of the letter, with the more richly theological chapters 1–3 setting out ‘teaching on the unity of the church and its relation to Christ’, and chapters 4–6 instructing ‘believers how they are to live with one another within their Christian communities’, particularly by ‘driving home the nature of the body they joined when they left the pagan world, and the type of behaviour which would produce true growth in their communities’.<sup>226</sup>

As in 1 Corinthians, there is a movement of thought from *theoria* to *praxis*, but with some differences.

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<sup>224</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxii–lxiii; cf. Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010), 28–29.

<sup>225</sup> Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 64.

<sup>226</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 74.

In 1 Corinthians, we noted how the kerygma of Christ crucified drove Paul's call for the ethical practice of a new cross-shaped identity. It was suggested that this represented the general logic of much of Paul's ethics, whereby what believers do in the 'body' (both the physical body and the corporate body of the church) was to be an expression of their union with Christ in his 'bodily accomplishments', that is, in his death, resurrection and ascension.<sup>227</sup>

In Ephesians, the shape of the ethical logic is similar—from kerygmatically-formed new identity to appropriate ethical action—but the aspect of kerygmatic identity focused upon is different, leading to different ethical emphases.<sup>228</sup> For example, Ephesians leads not with the cross but with the resurrection and ascension of Christ (1:15–23), culminating in the declaration of the victorious Christ as head over all things to or for the church (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, 1:22), which is his body. Eph 2:1–10 then argues that the participation of spiritually dead humanity in the glorious resurrected 'body' of Christ is only possible by God graciously uniting them with Christ's resurrection and ascension (the three *syn-* verbs of 2:5–6: συνεζωοποίησεν, συνήγειρεν, συνεκάθισεν).

Only after this in 2:11–22, does Paul turn to the place and achievement of the cross, not (in this case) as the ground of righteousness and sanctification and redemption (cf. 1 Cor 1:30), but as the means by which *all* of humanity, both Jew and gentile, can be reconciled to God through the cross, and can be joined together in a living, growing body.

Markus Barth's judgement that 2:11–12 is the 'key and high point of the whole epistle', seems justified.<sup>229</sup> In much the same way as 1 Cor 1:18–2:16 expounds a vision of the wisdom of God in the cross that Paul then applies to the various issues

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<sup>227</sup> See above, chapter 3.1.

<sup>228</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 75–76.

<sup>229</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (AB; Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1974), 275.

confronting the Corinthian church, so Ephesians 2:11–22 (as the culmination of the flow of thought beginning at 1:15), expounds the ‘calling’ of which they are to ‘walk worthily’ in chapters 4–6.

Two aspects of the *theoria* are particularly significant for the way Paul will go on to talk about *praxis*, including the one-another speech that is our interest: the body of Christ/new man metaphors, and the dynamics of the international apostolic mission.

*a. The ‘body of Christ’ and the ‘new man’ in Christ*

OES is important in Ephesians not only as a vital means by which ‘the body’ grows and builds itself up, but as an expression of the ‘new man’ identity of the Ephesians.

Paul employs the imagery of a ‘body’ and a ‘new man’ in 2:14–16 to describe the reconciliation of Jew and gentile in Christ. The ‘physical body’ as an image of organic unity was an attractive and common one for Paul, although its use is not uniform. In the body similes of Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12, he employs the image to emphasize ‘the diversity of members and of charisms as integral to and constitutive of the oneness of the body’.<sup>230</sup> The field of view is mainly the *local congregation* and the interdependent function of the various members in its health and growth—although there are indications in 1 Cor 12 that the body metaphor refers to a broader reality than just the local congregation.<sup>231</sup>

In Eph 2:14–16, this broader reality is more explicitly referenced. The body

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<sup>230</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “The Body of Christ” in Paul, in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church* (ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige; JSNTSup 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 149.

<sup>231</sup> When Paul says in 1 Cor 12:13 that ‘we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free’, he seems to be referring to the common identity of all believers, not just the Corinthian congregation. Likewise, the reference in 1 Cor 12:28 to the appointment of apostles and prophets suggests a broader focus—that the apostles and prophets had a foundational function that served the church, but not necessarily that every individual congregation had its own apostles and prophets.

metaphor describes the unity of Jew and gentile as *groupings of humanity*, whose enmity has now been dissolved, and who have become ‘one body’ in Christ. The subtlety of the imagery admits various possibilities,<sup>232</sup> but the main point is clear enough: that in Christ’s one act of bodily sacrifice (cf. ‘the blood’, 2:13; ‘his flesh’, 2:14) he reconciled to God both Jew and gentile, who are now ‘one body’ in him—that is, unified by their joint need of deliverance from their trespasses and sins (cf. 2:1–3), and unified as a ‘new man’ at peace with each other and with God through Christ (2:14–18).

As in 1 Cor 12, the ‘body’ in question is the ‘body of Christ’, but in Ephesians the relationship between Christ and the body is given sharper expression.<sup>233</sup> Christ brings the body into existence (he ‘has made us both one’, 2:14), and is the head of the body (4:15; 5:23; cf. 1:22–23), signifying not only his supremacy and rule over it, but the source and nature of the body’s coherence and growth (4:15–16; cf. 5:25–39). It also seems clear that in Ephesians, the ‘body’ metaphor is describing not so much a localized congregation as the unity of Jewish and gentile believers considered as a whole, the reality of which bears in upon the activity and relationships of the local congregation.

In this connection, the linking of the ‘one body’ with the ‘one new man’ (ἐν ἑνὶ καὶ ὁνὶ ἄνθρωπον, 2:15) is highly significant.<sup>234</sup> Paul casts Christ in the role of Creator,<sup>235</sup> bringing into existence a new group or class of redeemed humanity in himself (ἐν αὐτῷ, 2:15), by nullifying on the cross the ‘law of commandments in

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<sup>232</sup> See Best, *Ephesians*, 265–266, for an assessment of these options.

<sup>233</sup> Dunn, ‘Body of Christ’, 150–153.

<sup>234</sup> ἄνθρωπος is translated variously as ‘a single new man’ (Barth, *Ephesians*, 265), ‘one new man’ (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 164), ‘one new person’ (Fowl, *Ephesians*, 84; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 143), and ‘the one new (human) being’ (Best, *Ephesians*, 261). All regard the singular of ἄνθρωπος as referring to a corporate entity or class of humanity.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. 2:10, where the salvific work of God in Christ is described as a work of creation.

statutes' that had separated Jew from gentile.<sup>236</sup> Lincoln sees here an instance of Paul's adamic Christology, 'with its associated ideas of Christ as inclusive representative of the new order and of believers being incorporated into him'.<sup>237</sup> As Fowl also notes, Paul is asking his (mainly gentile) readers at this point to think about both their new status *and* their pre-Christian identity in terms of the story of Israel's Messiah.<sup>238</sup>

By drawing together here the Graeco-Roman image of the body as a metaphor for a group of people in social or political unity,<sup>239</sup> and the Hebrew concept of 'man' as a corporate unity created and redeemed by God, Paul creates a provocative metaphor for what God has done in and through the cross and resurrection of Christ to bring salvation to all the nations of the world through Israel. God has created and is continuing to build a new corporate reality, with Christ as its head, and both Jews and gentiles as its members. Somewhat unusually, in terms of common NT usage, Paul refers to this 'body' as 'the church' (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–32), but in doing so he is unlikely to be referring to a 'universal' or 'worldwide' church in the traditional sense. As O'Brien points out, both the common usage of ἐκκλησία in the NT and the heavenly terms in which the 'church' and the 'body' are described in Ephesians, strongly suggest that the new corporate entity Paul is describing is a spiritual and eschatological one—the gathering of Jews and gentiles who have been 'raised with

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<sup>236</sup> Barth surveys the extensive discussion regarding what Paul means by the abolition or nullifying of the law, particularly as it relates to his teaching on the subject in the non-disputed Paulines (such as Romans and Galatians). His judgement is that Paul is referring in Eph 2:15 not to the abolition of the law *in toto* but that as 'a barrier between Jews and Gentiles it is no longer valid; only its divisiveness was terminated when Jesus Christ died on the cross'; Barth, *Ephesians*, 291; see also Fowl, *Ephesians*, 90–96.

<sup>237</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 143.

<sup>238</sup> Fowl, *Ephesians*, 95.

<sup>239</sup> Dunn, 'Body of Christ', 153–156 argues that the body metaphor comes into Pauline thought as an adaptation of the familiar Graeco-Roman idea of the state as a body. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, makes a similar argument in considerably more detail.

Christ to the heavenly places' (Eph 2:10) and whose presence in the 'heavenly places' testifies of God's wisdom to the spiritual powers (3:10).<sup>240</sup>

It is on the basis of this new theologically-understood corporate reality, expressed in the metaphor of the 'body of Christ', that Paul urges his readers in chapters 4–6 to corporate and individual growth in the face of challenge and opposition. I will investigate further below how different forms of OES are not only integral to this growth, but are expressions of its progress.

*b. The dynamics of the Pauline mission*

The second important facet of the Pauline *theoria* in Ephesians concerns how the revelatory and saving work of God in Christ, achieved in history through Christ's death and resurrection, has now come to be experienced by Paul's (mainly) gentile readers in Ephesus. The reality that shapes the Ephesians' moral action is not simply what God has done in the past in Christ, but *what he is continuing to do through the apostolic mission to the nations*. As I will argue below, the dynamic of the apostolic mission constitutes an important theological frame in Ephesians for the significance of OES.

Barth argues that the obvious structural turning point at Eph 4:1 has sometimes blinded interpreters to this dynamic, and led them to regard the thought of the letter as a simple movement from theological indicative (what God has done in the past in Christ, in chapters 1–3) to ethical imperative (how the church and its members

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<sup>240</sup> Many commentators are content to speak of the 'church universal' or the 'whole church' in this context (e.g., Dunn, 'Body of Christ', 152; Best, *Ephesians*, 190). O'Brien has grappled thoughtfully with the issue of how ἐκκλησία can be applied beyond its normal Greek meaning (of an actual assembly of people) to refer to a grouping or community of people who do not physically gather or assemble. He posits that Paul is speaking in Ephesians of 'church' as a 'heavenly gathering' around the risen Christ; P. T. O'Brien, 'The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity', in *The Church in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster, 1987), 88–119.

should function and grow, in chapters 4–6). He suggests an alternative structuring of Ephesians that emphasizes this movement from what God has done and revealed, to what he is *continuing to reveal and accomplish* through the preaching of the gospel and the witness of his people:

- 1:3–14      overture and benediction of praise;
- 1:15–2:22    God’s perfect work in Christ, his death, resurrection and the new humanity in him;
- 3:1–4:24    the ongoing saving and revelatory work of God through the apostolic ministry and in the church;
- 4:25–6:20    an encouragement for ‘the readers to let their light shine’, to make known the revelation of God in Christ in word and deed to ‘their fellow men on earth, and also to heavenly powers that may seek to obstruct them’.<sup>241</sup>

Windsor has recently taken up Barth’s insight, and argued more fully that the dynamics of the Pauline and Israelite mission to the nations is the form that this revelatory movement of God takes within the epistle, and is integral to the identity that Paul wishes the Ephesians to ‘put on’.<sup>242</sup> In other words, the *theoria* of Ephesians does not conclude with the high point of what God has done on the cross to incorporate Jew and gentile together in Christ (2:11–22) but *includes also the proclamation of this ‘mystery’ to the nations through the apostolic mission*, resulting in the fulfilment of the eternal purpose of God to demonstrate his wisdom through the formation of the church (3:1–12).

Windsor’s approach opens up some particularly fruitful avenues for exploring the significance of OES within Ephesians—not just as a practice that is mutually

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<sup>241</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 55–56.

<sup>242</sup> Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2017), 69.

beneficial for believers, but one that plays a vital role in the dynamics of the apostolic mission.

## §2 *Eph* 4:15–16

These two verses are situated at the conclusion of the first major paraenetic section of the Epistle beginning at 4:1,<sup>243</sup> which starts with the characteristic exhortation of chapters 4–6: to ‘walk’ (περιπατέω) in a manner consistent with the new life in Christ.<sup>244</sup> The focus of the ‘worthy walk’ in this section is the maintenance of unity and peace within the ‘body’ (in 4:1–6), and the unified growth and maturity of the body as its various parts do their work (in 4:7–16).

Verses 15–16 themselves contain numerous exegetical complexities, particularly with regard to the exact nature of the biological imagery that Paul employs.

However, although the details may be obscure at points, the sense of the verses is clear enough: that in the face of the threat posed by erroneous doctrine (4:14), the members of the body of Christ are to speak the truth of Christ in love (4:15), with each part of the body participating in this activity in some way, resulting in the growth of the body to maturity in Christ (4:13, 15, 16).<sup>245</sup> We will explore the nature

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<sup>243</sup> There is debate over the correct application of the term ‘paraenesis’ or ‘paraenetic’ to NT texts, particularly as to whether it should be reserved for particular literary genres or text types that conform to the supposed conventions of Graeco-Roman paraenesis, or whether it is legitimate to use the concept more generally to describe material that is morally focused or exhortatory in style or intent. As per common usage, I will be using the term in latter sense in this thesis. For an extensive discussion of the issues, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen and James M. Starr, *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (BZNW 125; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

<sup>244</sup> Cf. 4:17; 5:2, 8, 15.

<sup>245</sup> This summary is agreeable to the conclusions of Best (*Ephesians*, 406–410), Arnold (*Ephesians*, 268–272), Lincoln (248–254), Barth (*Ephesians*, 478–480, Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 564–578) and Fowl (*Ephesians*, 139–144), even though there is considerable diversity in their assessment of the numerous exegetical complexities of the two verses.

and implications of this mutual love speech below, but if we are to trace Paul's train of thought it is first necessary to examine its contextual rationale. What is the basis and purpose of the OES that 4:15–16 commends?

The answer to these questions is found in the immediately preceding verses 4:7–14, which connect the OES of 4:15–16 with the gifts that the ascended Christ has given for the growth and maturity of his body. There is considerable debate concerning the nature of the foundational gifts given in 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) as to whether they are offices, persons or functions, or some combination thereof; and whether they are all of permanent validity or whether some belong to the apostolic era only. There is further debate about the punctuation of verse 12, and the relationship that is thus specified between the gifts of Christ in 4:11 and the role of the 'saints' in the 'work of ministry' in 4:12.<sup>246</sup>

One curious feature of these debates is that most of the participants frame their arguments on the assumption that Paul is talking in 4:1–16 about the church as a *localized congregation*, and of the relationship within that church between various ministers or offices, and the believers as a whole (the 'saints').<sup>247</sup> This is the case even though almost all the participants also judge that the corporate entity that Paul is discussing in the doctrinal chapters 2–3 (upon which the paraenesis of 4–6 is based) is not the local congregation but a much broader concept: the 'new humanity' (2:15), the one united 'household of God' (2:19), the cosmic, heavenly 'church' that Christ

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<sup>246</sup> If a comma is inserted after 'saints', then the three phrases of 4:12 are read as three functions of the ministers or offices of 4:11. If there is no comma after 'saints', then the function of the leaders of 4:11 is to prepare or equip the saints, who then undertake 'the work of ministry' for the building up of the body.

<sup>247</sup> Barth, Arnold, Hoehner, and Fowl are representative. It is interesting to note how issues of clericalism and anti-clericalism emerge in the debate. Barth, for example, uses unusually strong language to discredit the 'clerical' view of 4:12. "This interpretation has an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavor; it distinguishes the (mass of the) "saints" from the (superior class of the) officers of the church"; Barth, *Ephesians*, 479.

has created by reconciling Jew and Gentile together ‘in one body’ to God (2:16), and that bears witness by its very existence to the manifold wisdom of God (3:6, 10).<sup>248</sup>

In the flow of thought, it would be more natural to assume that when Paul speaks of the ‘one body’ in 4:4 (along with the one Spirit, one hope, one faith, and so on) that he is continuing to refer to the ‘body’ he has been referring to in chapters 2 and 3—that is, the larger trans-local, corporate entity, consisting of Jews and gentiles, that Christ’s work on the cross has created (in 2:11–22), and on which Paul’s own apostolic mission has been focused (3:1–13). The structural *inclusio* of ‘the body’ building itself in love in 4:16 and the body ‘bearing with one another in love’ in 4:2 would further suggest that when Paul speaks in 4:1–16 of the ‘walk’ that is worthy of their calling, the calling he is referring to is their incorporation into the worldwide Jew–gentile mission that is building the body of Christ.

In view of these connections, Windsor advances a proposal that better fits the flow of Paul’s thought.<sup>249</sup> He argues with some force that Paul is speaking in chapter 4 not of the organizational structuring of the local congregation, and the respective roles played by office-holders and members, but about *the ongoing dynamics of the apostolic mission as it makes its way in the world*. Accordingly, he takes the ‘gifts’ given by Christ in 4:7–11 to be a salvation-historical reference to various *people* given to the early (Jewish) apostolic community at Pentecost for the purpose of their mission to the nations.<sup>250</sup> On the basis that ‘the saints’ is often used in the NT, and particularly in Ephesians, as a designation for Jewish believers,<sup>251</sup> Windsor takes the preparation or equipping of ‘the saints’ to refer to the role of the Jewish apostolic community in

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<sup>248</sup> This concept is also carried forward into chapter 3, where the gentiles are members of the ‘same body’ (σὺσσωμα, 3:6), and participate in a ‘gathering’ (ἐκκλησία, 3:10) of cosmic dimensions.

<sup>249</sup> Windsor, *Ephesians*, 175–196.

<sup>250</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244–247, also takes the ‘descent’ of Christ in 4:9–10 to refer to Pentecost.

<sup>251</sup> Windsor, *Ephesians*, 191; cf. D. W. B. Robinson, ‘Who Were “the Saints”?’, *RTR* 22/2 (1963): 45–53.

undertaking the ‘ministry’ to the nations (cf. Paul’s self-description as a ‘minister’ to the gentiles, though being ‘the very least of all the saints’; 3:7–8).<sup>252</sup> The goal of this activity is the unity and growth of the whole ‘body’, the attainment of a ‘full-grown man’ (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, 4:13).<sup>253</sup> In the context of Ephesians and the flow of Paul’s argument, it is difficult to see how this new man/body of 4:12–16 could be anything other than the new man/body that Christ brought into being on the cross, and which is ‘growing’ and being ‘built’ through the gospel ministry of the apostolic mission.<sup>254</sup>

This reading of Paul’s train of thought is significant, because it grounds the one-another speech that is spoken of in 4:15–16 not in a division of roles within a local congregation, but *within the dynamics of the worldwide apostolic mission, in which Christ himself is both source and goal*.<sup>255</sup> There is little question that by the time Paul’s argument reaches 4:15–16 he is talking about the contribution of individuals to the growth of the ‘body’. However, by placing this contribution within the larger missionary purposes of God in Christ, he grants a vital significance to the truthful speech of each member. *What God is doing cosmically in the Christ-directed apostolic mission provides the impetus for the participation of each member in the growth of the body.*

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<sup>252</sup> Windsor also says that while ‘the saints’ is very often a reference to Jewish believers, ‘... in each case, Christ-believing gentiles are said to share in this holy status (cf. e.g., 1:1; 5:27)’; *Ephesians*, 191. The question is whether this inclusion of Christ-believing gentiles in the category of ‘saints’ is intended in 4:12. Windsor judges not, but it makes little difference. By the end of the passage in 4:15–16, it is clear that all the members of the ‘body’, both Jew and gentile, are to participate in speaking the truth in love for the unity and growth of the body. If 4:12 is referring to Jewish ‘saints’ particularly, it is doing so in describing their salvation-historical role in being the ‘ministers’ of the gospel to the nations.

<sup>253</sup> Lincoln argues that the use of ἄνθρωπος in 4:13 (rather than the ἄνθρωπος of 2:15) is accounted for by the emphasis on the maturity of the ‘full-grown man’. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256.

<sup>254</sup> The images of ‘body’ and ‘man’ are used interchangeably in 4:12–16 (‘the body of Christ’), 4:13 (‘a full-grown man ... the stature of the fullness of Christ’) and 4:15–16 (‘the head ... Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together ...’).

<sup>255</sup> Christ is the ‘head’ of the body, indicating both his rule and supremacy (cf 1:20f.) but also that he is the source of its life, and goal of its activity; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 270.

About that individual contribution and the nature of the speech that is involved, five further brief comments are required.

*First*, while it is almost certain that the present, active participle ἀληθεύοντες (lit. ‘truthing’, 4:15) refers to the ongoing practice of speech,<sup>256</sup> Arnold is right to suggest that the choice of the participle indicates a level of communication that is more comprehensive than simply ‘speaking’: ‘In this context, however, it conveys the more specific sense of accepting the truth of the gospel, speaking it out loud in the corporate gatherings of worship, talking about it with fellow believers, and upholding it firmly’.<sup>257</sup>

*Second*, given that the speech of 4:15 is meant to counter the erroneous doctrine and deceit of 4:14, its content must relate to the true doctrine of the gospel of Christ, to ‘the knowledge of the Son of God’ (4:13). This is confirmed by other references to ‘truth’ in Ephesians: the ‘word of truth’ by which they were saved and given an inheritance with the saints (τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, 1:13); the ‘truth that is in Jesus’ which taught them to live a new life (ἀλήθεια ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ, 4:21); and the ‘girding of the waist in truth’ that helps protect them from the attacks of the evil one (περιζωσάμενοι τὴν ὀσφὺν ὑμῶν ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, 6:14). The truth that is to be spoken is centred on the apostolic gospel of Christ that Paul preaches and teaches.

*Third*, the goal or outcome of this truth-speaking is the growth of the body (αὐξήσωμεν, 4:15; τὴν αὕξησιν, 4:16) ‘into’ or, perhaps better, ‘unto’ the head, who is Christ.<sup>258</sup> The ‘head’ is depicted here both as the goal or character towards which the body is growing, *and* as the source of the body’s life and growth (cf. the ἐξ οὗ that introduces 4:16). As argued above, the ‘body’ that is growing to maturity in

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<sup>256</sup> Lincoln summarises the scholarly consensus on this point; *Ephesians*, 259–260.

<sup>257</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 269. He suggests ‘confessing’ as an appropriate translation.

<sup>258</sup> Hoehner argues that ‘unto’ Christ better captures Paul’s meaning, especially given the similar threefold use of εἰς in 4:13 in describing the result of building the body of Christ; *Ephesians*, 566.

Christ because of the work of Christ is not the local Ephesian church as such, but the one, new, united body of Jew and gentile that Christ has brought into being through his cross, and that is being ‘built’ as the apostolic mission proceeds (cf. 2:15–22; 3:1–10; 4:4).<sup>259</sup> The shape of Paul’s argument is that the cosmic should drive the local; that the worldwide and eschatological plans of God in Christ to build his ‘body’ should shape the behaviour (and speech) of individuals within their particular relationships and contexts.

*Fourth*, the proper functioning of the body to elicit unity and growth involves the appropriate working of each part. While the precise nature of the anatomical imagery in 4:16 is elusive, the point is clear. The body is supplied or equipped (ἐπιχορηγία) with a multiplicity of interconnecting parts that perform two functions: they join or unite the whole body (πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον); and as each part works according to its proper measure (ἐν μέτρῳ), the body builds itself in love. Two points of reference are most likely in view at this point, given the context of the argument: a) the way that Jews and gentiles now both contribute to the goal of the (originally Jewish) apostolic mission by together speaking the truth of the gospel for the growth of the body; b) the contribution of each individual believer, in different ways and according to different capacities, to the growth of the body.

*Fifth*, the important place of ‘love’ throughout Ephesians<sup>260</sup> is reflected in 4:15–16 in the repetition of love as the virtue that motivates and conditions the speaking

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<sup>259</sup> The striking combination of body/growth and building imagery in 2:15–22 is reprised in 4:15–16. In 2:15–22, Paul shifts from the image of a ‘new man’ or ‘body’ to the image of a building that ‘being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord’ (οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὐξεῖ εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 2:21). In 4:16, the same imagery and terminology is utilized to describe the body, being ‘joined together’ (συναρμολογούμενον) and of growth (τὴν αὐξησιν) and edification (οἰκοδομήν) being produced as each part does its work.

<sup>260</sup> The noun ἀγάπη occurs ten times; the verbal form occurs a further ten times.

of the truth to one another (ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, 4:15; εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, 4:16). The contrast is with the erroneous teaching of 4:14, which is propagated ἐν human cunning, and ἐν the craftiness of deceitful methods—that is, with a calculated effort to gain advantage. Instead, the true speech of 4:15 focuses on the benefit and growth of others.<sup>261</sup> It is ἐν ἀγάπῃ, as is the interdependent edificatory action of the parts of the body in 4:16.<sup>262</sup>

The prominence of love in connection with OES is not the only connection that Eph 4:15–16 has with Paul’s extended exposition of edifying speech in 1 Cor 12–14 (examined above). The similarity of the main themes is striking. In both passages, the individual members of the body engage in speech-acts that may be various in nature, but which share a common content (related to the true apostolic gospel of Jesus Christ), a common motivation (love), and a common desired outcome (the growth and edification of others in the body of Christ).

Interestingly, both passages also look back to the cross as a determinative event, but with different emphases. In Corinthians, the cross is the paradigm of loving service and sacrifice for the sake of others (of which edifying speech is an example); in Ephesians, the cross is the reconciling act of God that brings into existence a new humanity, the ‘body of Christ’, that is being grown and built around the world by the truth of the gospel (of which localized edifying speech is an example).

The other difference of emphasis worth noting between the two passages is that 1 Cor 14 emphasizes the value of *intelligible* speech for the edification of the church, whereas Eph 4:15–16 stresses the importance of *true* speech in growing or building the body.

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<sup>261</sup> Arnold takes ‘in love’ to refer to the sensitive or tender-hearted manner in which the truth is spoken; *Ephesians*, 269. This is no doubt an application of what love would require (at least in some circumstances), but it would be reductionist to limit Paul’s reference to this.

<sup>262</sup> Note the middle voice of ποιεῖται in 4:16.

### §3 Eph 4:25–29

The four pairs of exhortations in 4:25–29 each feature a form of behaviour to be avoided or discontinued, a new form of action to practised or adopted, and a reason for doing so. Two of the four concern mutual speech within the Christian community, and we will examine them more closely below. However, to understand the rationale for these instructions, we need to examine the immediately prior paragraph in 4:17–24, to which the διὸ in 4:25 points back.

This paragraph introduces the next paraenetic section of the epistle (from 4:17–5:2) with the now familiar language of περιπατεῖν, in this instance focusing not on what would constitute a ‘worthy walk’ (4:1) but on the antithesis between their old or former manner of ‘walking’ and the new life they must now live in Christ.<sup>263</sup> That this intellectually futile, corrupt form of life is described as being how the ‘gentiles’ walk (τὰ ἔθνη, 4:17), alerts us to the connection between the description and exhortation that is to follow and the exposition of the Ephesians’ former manner of life in 2:1–2 and 2:12–13.<sup>264</sup> As he does consistently in chapters 4–6, Paul recapitulates elements of his doctrinal exposition in chapters 2–3 in order to elucidate their ethical implications.

Here, as in 2:1–22, he reminds the Ephesians of the old or former life from which they have been delivered (lit. ‘the old man of your former ways’, 4:22), focusing particularly on its culpable intellectual and volitional corruption. Barth comments:

When knowledge is identified with light and ignorance with darkness, then the ...  
ontological dimension of the mind’s activity is made apparent. Just as knowledge means

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<sup>263</sup> Lincoln notes that the tradition of ethical antitheses (not this ... but that) was common in contemporary Hellenistic exhortation, but equally so in the OT (e.g., Lev 18:1–5, 24–30; 20:23), including in relation to being distinct from ‘the nations’; *Ephesians*, 272–273.

<sup>264</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 282.

participation in life and obedience to God, so ignorance equals the inability to live, to grow, to act sensibly.<sup>265</sup>

The connection between mind, heart and behaviour is reinforced by the striking terms in which Paul urges them to distance themselves from this former manner of life. This is not the way, he reminds them, that you ‘learned Christ’ (ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν, 4:20). The unusual employment of the accusative here emphasizes that when the Ephesians heard the gospel of Christ they learned not only a set of truths about Christ, but the content of a radically new Christ-like life.<sup>266</sup> The ‘Jesus tradition’ that they had learned ‘contained not only teaching about the identity and work of Jesus, but also ethical teaching, namely, how to “walk” as Christians’.<sup>267</sup> They learned Christ, in other words, in a way reminiscent of the first ‘Christ-learners’ (the μαθηταὶ of Jesus), who were taught by Christ that the kingdom of heaven brought with it a new righteousness, superior to that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, and quite different from the behaviour of the gentiles (Matt 5:20; 6:8; 11:29).

This strong connection between understanding the ‘truth that is in Jesus’ (4:21) and the new ‘walk’ of Christ-like living is explicated by the three participles in 4:22–24 that describe what it is they were taught. There is considerable debate as to whether the participles function as imperatives (you were taught to put off ...) or indicatives (you were taught that you have put off ...), but the difference between the two options is not great.<sup>268</sup> The moral logic is characteristically Pauline, in which

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<sup>265</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 500. Lincoln also observes: ‘At the center (sic) of their thinking, feeling, and volition, they [the gentiles] have hardened themselves to God and to the knowledge of him that was available to them’; *Ephesians*, 278.

<sup>266</sup> Although this is the only instance in the NT of taking an accusative in this way (of learning ‘a person’), it is not uncommon for Paul to use the accusative in regard to ‘proclaiming Christ’ (Gal 1:16; Col 1:28) and ‘preaching Christ’ (1 Cor 1:23; 15:12). As Best notes, this connotes ‘in every case something more than the passing on of information about Christ’; *Ephesians*, 426.

<sup>267</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 285.

<sup>268</sup> ‘Paul can easily swivel between indicative and imperative statements when he uses this kind of language, but in either case the overall purpose is imperatival. He urges his readers to live in a way

moral exhortation takes the form of ‘reminding his readers to view their obligations and actions in the light of the new and cosmic work of God in Christ’.<sup>269</sup>

The twist that Ephesians gives to this train of ethical thought is to describe the ‘newness’ as a *corporate identity*, utilizing the image of a ‘man’ or ‘body’ of which believers are now members. Given the background of 4:1–16, and of the letter as a whole, it would be very surprising if the ‘new man’ imagery in 4:24 was anything other than a reference to the fact that, by ‘learning Christ’, the Ephesians have decisively cast off the old man of their former gentile life (with all its futility and impurity) and have been incorporated into the new humanity that has been created in Christ by his representative work on the cross.<sup>270</sup>

In light of all this, it is not surprising to find that each of the ethical demands of 4:25–29 concern relationships between believers in the body,<sup>271</sup> and that each of them strongly contrast the ‘old’ way with the ‘new’.<sup>272</sup> It is also consistent with Paul’s train of thought that *speech* should have such a prominent place:

... in line with the great significance attached to the preaching of the gospel in the rest of Ephesians, it is noteworthy that there is a strong emphasis on proper speech in Eph 4:17–6:9. Those who believed the ‘word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’ (Eph 1:13) are now

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that is consistent with their new identity in Christ’; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 303; cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 287–288.

<sup>269</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 39.

<sup>270</sup> Roels astutely notes that although most interpreters acknowledge the obvious conceptual connection between the ‘new man’ references of 2:15 and 4:24, they struggle to explain how the corporate ‘new man’ of 2:15 has been (or can be) ‘put on’, and how this drives the ethical imperatives of 4:25f. However, Roels suggests that this is not an uncommon mode of ethical reasoning for Paul: that on the basis of what God has decisively accomplished in Christ, and because the inclusion or incorporation of believers ‘in’ that work grants them a comprehensive ‘newness’ of life, status and identity, then an ethical consequence follows—namely that believers should allow the ‘newness’ they now inhabit to be increasingly actuated in their thinking and behaviour (cf. the renewing of the mind in 4:23). Edwin D. Roels, *God’s Mission: The Epistle to the Ephesians in Mission Perspective* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1962), 128–132.

<sup>271</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 444–445.

<sup>272</sup> All four imperatives in 4:25–29 follow the pattern: negative/old way of living, positive/new way to be adopted instead, reason for doing so.

urged to live and to speak in line with this truth in their own situation (e.g., 4:25, 29–31; 5:3–4, 6, 12, 19–20).<sup>273</sup>

Let us look more closely at the two imperatives that specifically relate to speech.

*In 4:25*, Paul connects the indicatives of 4:17–24 to the first of their ethical implications with the inferential conjunction *διό* and the aorist participle *ἀποθέμενοι* (lit. ‘therefore, having put away falsehood’). Since falsehood belongs to the ‘old man’ that has been removed or put aside, then the imperative that naturally follows is to ‘speak the truth each one with his neighbour’. If (as most commentators judge) Paul is quoting here from Zech 8:16, then the equating of the ‘neighbour’ with the ‘members’ of the body expresses a powerful salvation-historical point.<sup>274</sup> As Lincoln points out: ‘The neighbour of the exhortation, who in Judaism would have been a companion in the covenant, now takes on the specific shape of a fellow member of the body of Christ’.<sup>275</sup> When it is observed that Zech 8 concerns the prophetic hope of a restored Judah and Jerusalem that will be a blessing to the nations, Paul’s quotation of Zech 8:16 fits even more snugly within his flow of thought. Given that the Jew-gentile body of Christ has now been created in Christ and is being built through the apostolic mission, and given further that the Ephesians have been incorporated into this body as members, then there is only one way for them to speak: in truth, one with another. As Barth observes, the motive is not sociological or tribal, but christological: ‘In all they say to one another they bear testimony to the revealed secret, that is, the unity and peace created by Jesus Christ’.<sup>276</sup> Falsehood has no place in a new ‘body’ that is Christ’s.

*In 4:29*, after two more pairs of imperatives regarding anger and theft, Paul

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<sup>273</sup> Windsor, *Ephesians*, 197.

<sup>274</sup> E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 301; Best, *Ephesians*, 446; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 300.

<sup>275</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 301.

<sup>276</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 513.

returns to the subject of communal speech, this time more explicitly condemning the corrosive effects of corrupt or ‘evil’ speech on a Christian community. Best suggests that the etymology of σαπρὸς (in connection with rotting or rancid vegetable matter or fish) should not be pressed too hard. Here it simply refers to ‘evil’ speech that corrupts or harms the community, and could encompass such forms as ‘gossip, obscenity, pornography, heresy (cf. 2 Tim 2:14), cynicism, sarcasm, or the attribution of evil motives to those who do good; a list open to indefinite expansion’.<sup>277</sup> By contrast, instead of the mouth spewing forth what is foul, it should only emit what is good πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας (lit. ‘for the building up of the need’).<sup>278</sup>

Depending on how one takes the genitive, τῆς χρείας could refer to good speech that addresses the ‘need’ of a specific occasion (‘as the need arises’), or as something constantly required given the circumstances (‘that which is lacking or needed’).<sup>279</sup>

The difference between the two is not great: whether referring to a generalized or more specific need for ‘building’, Paul wants to see only this grace-bestowing speech come out of their mouths. As Barth puts it: ‘Constructive work has to be done, and in all conversations the choice of language and subject matter has to be such that edification takes place’.<sup>280</sup> As in 4:15–16, Paul casts the Ephesian believers as members of a body that is ‘building itself’, and in so doing are active participants in the work that God is doing through the apostolic mission.

The important role of edifying speech in bringing spiritual benefit to the hearers also makes sense in the context of what Paul has said about the importance of the *mind* (as noted above with reference to 4:17–24). Life in the ‘new man’ involves a

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<sup>277</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 456.

<sup>278</sup> Barth notes the similarity to the Hebraic thought of James 3:10–12 here, with the mouth seen as a ‘spouting source’ of either blessing or curse; *Ephesians*, 518.

<sup>279</sup> Lincoln, Best and Barth favour the former (assuming a genitive of quality); Arnold the latter (an objective genitive).

<sup>280</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 519.

constant renewal of understanding (4:23).<sup>281</sup> The speaking of the truth (4:15) or the good (4:29) relates directly to this intellectual renewal, in two ways.

Firstly, it ‘builds’ it, in the sense of imparting or explaining some aspect of the truth of Christ, such that the hearer’s understanding of reality in Christ is corrected, clarified, deepened or expanded.

However, secondly, truth-speaking also indicates the progressive renewal of the *speaker’s* mind. The logic of Eph 4:29 (in its context) is that edifying speech *is itself an aspect of the renewed behaviour that should flow from a new identity in Christ*. The more that believers actualize their ‘new man’ identity, the more their speech will be marked by truth-telling rather than falsehood, by edifying speech rather than corrupting talk.

In Paul’s train of thought, the imperative to practise edifying speech (rather than corrupting or damaging speech) is as much an aspect of the new life in Christ as any of the other behavioural changes he exhorts them to: generosity rather than stealing, tenderheartedness rather than anger, forgiveness rather than bitterness. OES is an integral feature of the new ‘walk’ that a believer embarks upon in Christ.

#### *§4 Eph 5:18–21; 6:4*

As with Eph 4:25–29, these final two references to OES in Ephesians occur within a section that is governed by the metaphor of ‘walking’. The counterpart to walking ‘as the gentiles do’ (4:17) is to ‘walk in love’ (5:2), to ‘walk as children of light’ (5:8), and to be ‘careful how you walk, not as unwise but as wise’ (5:15).

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. Paul’s prayers that they would more deeply understand their blessings in Christ (1:17–18; 3:18–19), and his expectation in 4:13–16 that mutual speaking of the truth in love (which is co-ordinated with ‘knowledge of the Son of God’) will result in the growth of the whole body.

The reference to wise walking in 5:15 introduces a pericope which extends through to 6:9. Although there are strong grammatical and structural reasons to regard this section as constituting a continuous train of thought, many commentators struggle to see it as a single unit.<sup>282</sup> The earlier listed consequences of being filled by the Spirit (in 5:18–20) are often presumed to concern corporate ‘worship’, whereas the *Haustafel* that follows (in 5:22–6:9) is viewed as marking a distinct shift of perspective and subject.<sup>283</sup>

However, this division is unwarranted. The ‘submitting’ of 5:21 (which is explicated in three examples in 5:22–6:9) is framed in the text as a consequence of the filling by the Spirit, in the same way as the participles that precede it (the ‘addressing’, ‘singing’, ‘making melody’ and ‘thanksgiving’ of 5:19–20).<sup>284</sup> Paul’s point is that the new Spirit-filled life *encompasses every facet of existence*, whether in the mutual speech and singing of 5:19, or in the constant and comprehensive practice of thanksgiving in 5:20, or in the dynamics of household relationships (5:22–6:9).

That the whole section is headed by the call to walk ‘wisely’ confirms this insight. As we have already noted, the OT wisdom tradition sought the ‘experiential knowledge’ of how to live successfully in every facet of life, on the basis of a right understanding of reality (founded on the fear of the LORD).<sup>285</sup>

In 5:18–21, Paul contrasts two kinds of ‘fullness’: the foolish fullness of drunkenness, and the contrasting fullness of the Spirit that issues in a quite different kind of (wise) behaviour.<sup>286</sup> It is probable that the fullness of Spirit refers to that

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<sup>282</sup> As Lincoln and others note, the last of the five participles of result that look back to πληρώω in 5:18 is ‘submitting’ (υποτασσόμενοι, 5:21). 5:22 follows immediately on, depending on 5:21 for its verb; *Ephesians*, 338.

<sup>283</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 502; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 177; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 345.

<sup>284</sup> Hoehner acknowledges this point and suggests that 5:22–6:9 may be a continuation of the ‘walking in wisdom’ motif of 5:15; *Ephesians*, 720.

<sup>285</sup> See chapter 3.3 above.

<sup>286</sup> Fowl notes the conventional linking of drunkenness with folly, as in Prov 23:29–35; *Ephesians*,

which the Spirit *mediates and achieves*, not one in which the Spirit is the ‘filling material’.<sup>287</sup> On syntactical and thematic grounds, O’Brien argues persuasively that the dative ἐν πνεύματι is instrumental, and describes not the content of the filling, but the agent by whom the filling takes place.<sup>288</sup> The Spirit ‘mediates the fullness of God and of Christ to the believer’.<sup>289</sup> In line with what Paul has already said about the fullness of God in Christ (Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:10, 13), his exhortation to them is ‘to let the Spirit change them more and more into the image of God and Christ, a notion which is consistent with Pauline theology elsewhere’.<sup>290</sup>

The nature of the transformation wrought by the Spirit is elucidated in Eph 5:19–20 by five participles of result: speaking (λαλοῦντες), singing (ᾄδοντες), making melody (ψάλλοντες), giving thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες), and submitting (ὑποτασσόμενοι).<sup>291</sup> The dynamic between God’s action by the Spirit and the action of the Ephesians (in implementing these various practices) is similar to what was observed in 1 Corinthians 12–14. That these various practices are a result of the ‘filling’ of the believer by God’s Spirit in no way lessens the imperatival force of the participles (a force that is made explicit in the extended exhortations and imperatives that follow from ὑποτασσόμενοι).

What is the nature of the speech Paul is describing in Eph 5:19? It is difficult to distinguish with precision between the three kinds of lyrical forms that Paul

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<sup>287</sup> As Barth puts it, *Ephesians*, 582.

<sup>288</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 391–392. O’Brien’s commentaries on Ephesians and Hebrews (cited here and below) have been withdrawn by their publisher over some instances of inadequate citation of sources. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, I have utilized them selectively for the quality and originality of their insights into the text.

<sup>289</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344.

<sup>290</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 392. The parallel with Col 3:16 is particularly striking; see further below.

<sup>291</sup> As Hoehner demonstrates, the participles are best designated as indicating result rather than attendant circumstance, because of their position following the main verb, and the fact that they are not in the aorist tense (as participles of attendant circumstances characteristically are); *Ephesians*, 706.

references. The NT reveals that the early Christians made frequent use of the canonical Psalms, and very likely composed various kinds of doctrinal or paraenetic hymns.<sup>292</sup> ‘Songs’ could refer to any other form of lyric.

As to the context and function of these various psalms, hymns and songs, many scholars make two assumptions that somewhat constrain their reading of the text. It is assumed firstly that Paul is speaking *only* here of public worship, although the text itself gives no indication that this is the particular or only context in which the Spirit-enabled speech might take place.<sup>293</sup> In fact, two of the other participles in the sequence (thanksgiving in everything, and relational submission) indicate a broader field of view, as does the initial contrast with drunkenness. It is quite reasonable to suggest that the singing Paul speaks of would have taken place in the church gathering, but it is unnecessary and unwarranted to limit it to that context. Secondly, it is widely assumed that the only purpose of Christian singing is to praise or worship God, although (again) there is no indication in the text that Paul regards this to be the case.<sup>294</sup>

Whether Paul has in mind the assembled church, or other contexts in which Christians were together, it is striking that the verb he chooses to describe the communication of the ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ is the apparently unmusical term λαλέω. The various forms of song are ‘spoken’ or ‘addressed’ to one another. When ‘singing’ does make an explicit entrance, it is in the following verse in describing a God-ward activity that takes place in or with the heart (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ, 5:20). Interestingly, the parallel passage

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<sup>292</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 512; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 708–710; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 345.

<sup>293</sup> E.g., Fowl: ‘They are activities of worship. That much is clear’; *Ephesians*, 177.

<sup>294</sup> Operating on this assumption, Hoehner suggests that Paul is talking about two separate activities — a form of singing that is directed towards one another for edification and one that is directed to God in praise; *Ephesians*, 712–713; see also Best, *Ephesians*, 511–512. Fowl goes so far as to say that the primary activity on view is praising God in song, and that the address to one another is only indirect, as a means of teaching one another how to praise God; *Ephesians*, 178.

in Col 3:16 speaks in very similar terms:

*Table 3: Eph 5:18–19 compared with Col 3:16*

<i>Eph 5:18–19</i>	<i>Col 3:16</i>
Be filled with the Spirit	Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly <sup>295</sup>
so that you speak to one another	so that in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another
with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs	with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord	with thankfulness, singing in your hearts to God

If it can reasonably be assumed that (in both passages) Paul is not describing two different activities—one in which psalms or hymns are spoken or taught to one another, and a separate one in which heart-felt singing is directed to the Lord—then what is the significance of this way of putting it?

Paul’s view seems to be that these lyrical speech-acts *have two audiences*. They are at one level communicative acts that convey certain truths to their human hearers, and (in the case of Col 3:16) function to teach or admonish. Given the context of Eph 4–5, with its emphasis on mutually edificatory speech (cf. 4:15–16, 29), it is reasonable to think that the mutual speech of 5:19 may have performed a similar edificatory function. As Barth puts it, ‘Just as in 4:2, 32 love and forgiveness are shown by Christians to “one another”, so in 5:19 “singing” is part of the mutual

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<sup>295</sup> It is worth noting in passing that being the corporate indwelling of the ‘word of Christ’ in Col 3:16 is mirrored by the corporate filling by the Spirit in Eph 5:18. This would seem to confirm the view taken above, that the Spirit is the agent or mediator of the ‘filling’, not the ‘filling material’.

edification of the saints'.<sup>296</sup>

At the same time, however, this interpersonal address (ἐαυτοῦ in both Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16)<sup>297</sup> is also a response of thanksgiving to God in or with the 'heart'. It is as if Paul is saying: with your mouth you address one another for mutual benefit; with your whole inner being, you address the Lord in gratitude for all his benefits to you.<sup>298</sup>

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The final participle of the sequence ('submitting to one another', 5:21), introduces a discussion of three pairs of ordered relationships in 5:22–6:9. The second of these pairs contains an instruction to fathers that, instead of provoking their children to anger, they should nourish or raise them (ἐκτρέφετε, 6:4) in the instruction and admonition of the Lord. According to our criteria, this is a further example of OES.

The two terms that describe the nurturing activity of fathers denote overlapping but distinct forms of educational speech. Παιδεία connotes a pattern of instruction in some form of knowledge, often reinforced with discipline or punishment; νοουθεσία describes verbal admonition, warning and correction.<sup>299</sup> Taken together, the kind of instruction envisaged involves the passing on of knowledge that is lived out in moral experience—in this context, the experience of a child growing to

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<sup>296</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 583. Best also suggests: 'Singing to one another is just one of the ways believers exhort one another (Heb 3:13)'; *Ephesians*, 512.

<sup>297</sup> According to Abbott, not too much should be read into the use of ἐαυτοῦ in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 (i.e., as opposed to ἀλλήλων in Eph 4:2, 32; 5:31). If anything, following classical usage, 'ἐαυτοῖς suggests, more than ἀλλήλοις, that they are addressed as members of one corporate body'; T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1897), 145.

<sup>298</sup> The 'heart' here signifies not just the seat of emotion, but of mind and will; the affective and cognitive centre of personality; cf. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 395.

<sup>299</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 797; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 407.

adulthood.<sup>300</sup>

The nature of the instruction is described by one word, the genitive κυρίου (6:4). This may be taken as a subjective genitive, in which case the instruction and admonition has its source in the Lord, making the fathers ‘the Lord’s agents’ in raising their children.<sup>301</sup> Alternatively, it could be read as a genitive of quality, so that the instruction is ‘in the sphere of the Lord or has the Lord as its reference’.<sup>302</sup> The difference is perhaps not great, although the latter seems to fit the context better. In the flow of thought, it would be surprising if the kind of instruction in view in 6:4 did not look back in some way to ‘learning Christ’ and ‘being taught in him’ and having the mind renewed (in 4:20–23).<sup>303</sup> The educational speech that fathers are to engage in with their children takes as its reference point the ‘truth that is in Jesus’ (4:21), and applies it to the task of raising children to be mature participants in a world that is ruled by the Lord.

In domestic microcosm, this is the nature and function of the one-another speech that we have observed in Ephesians. Its source is the Lord (it is a revelation from him); its content is the Lord (it speaks the truth that is found in him); and its goal is the Lord (a growing maturity to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ).

It is also worth noting that while Ephesians presents OES as a generalized practice within the Christian community, these latter two references in 5:19 and 6:4 show that such speech can take different and distinctive forms, and can be conducted in various contexts, including inter-generational speech in the home.

This inter-generational emphasis resonates with a fascinating instance of OES

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<sup>300</sup> Best notes παιδεία that was a common term for a general Greek education, one that involved not just academic training but ‘moral and philosophical training’. *Ephesians*, 569.

<sup>301</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 799.

<sup>302</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 408.

<sup>303</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 447.

in Titus, in which the older women are to be ‘teachers of the good’ (καλοδιδασκάλους, Titus 2:3), so that they can advise or instruct the younger women in godly living (σωφρονίζουσιν τὰς νέας, 2:4).<sup>304</sup> This teaching-training activity of the older women reflects a key emphasis of the pastoral epistles in general, and of Titus in particular: that right behaviour is inextricably linked with right doctrine, and that both will only be preserved and extended by those who understand this nexus, and who pass it on through their teaching and their lives.<sup>305</sup> This is to be the task of Titus himself (2:1, 7–8), of the elders he appoints (1:5–9), and of the older women of the Cretan Christian community (2:3–5).

This close connection between the content and goals of apostolic speech, and the content and goals of the one-another speech of the Christian community generally, has been a striking feature of our investigation into the trains of thought both of 1 Corinthians and of Ephesians.

## *§5 Conclusions*

Tracing the apostolic train of thought about OES in Ephesians leads to the following conclusions.

### *a. What kind of speech is it?*

- The content of OES in Ephesians is characterized as the ‘truth’ that has been revealed through the gospel of Christ, in contrast with false and

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<sup>304</sup> Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary and an Introduction to Titus, I and II Timothy, the Pastoral Epistles* (AB 35; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 120.

<sup>305</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC; Nashville: Nelson, 2009), 408.

destabilizing speech of erroneous doctrine. Its centre of gravity is the apostolic gospel that Paul preaches.

- It is also portrayed as contextually relevant speech that brings a fitting, gracious truthful word to particular circumstances.
- OES is described as an aspect of the renewal of the mind in Christ: both *springing from* a renewed mind and *imparting* some aspect of the truth of Christ to other minds for their renewal.
- It can take various forms, as the different parts of the body each participate to the upbuilding of the whole. Singing (as a form of mutual speech) and fatherly instruction of children are particularly referenced.
- It is the kind of speech that is characteristic of a Spirit-filled wise manner of life ('walk').

*c. Why should it be practised?*

- The conceptual frame that provides the rationale for OES in Ephesians is the work of God in Christ, extended through the apostolic gospel mission, to create and build one new humanity in Christ. This new 'body' is being built and grown to maturity by the speaking of the true word of the gospel, both in the progress of the apostolic mission, and in the individual contributions of the Ephesian believers. What God is doing cosmically in the Christ-directed apostolic mission provides the impetus for the participation of each believer in the growth of the body through 'speaking the truth in love'.
- In a similar way, a transformation in speech (from false to true, from corrupt to graciously edifying) is explained as a necessary corollary of the transformation in identity that the Ephesian believers have undergone—

from an old sinful identity to being part of the new humanity that God is creating in Christ. They must now ‘walk’ in the new life and identity they have been called to through God’s action in the gospel, one aspect of which is mutually beneficial speech.

- In this sense, OES is portrayed in Ephesians as a moral imperative for the believer in the same way as is generosity, tenderheartedness, mutual forgiveness and sobriety.

*c. How should it be practised?*

- Ephesians does not specifically describe the conduct of mutual speech in the congregational gathering, although some of the forms of speech mentioned would very likely have occurred in church meetings (such as singing). The emphasis in Ephesians falls more on OES as a facet of the ongoing ‘walk’ of the believer, to be practised situationally—whether in responding graciously with speech that befits the circumstances, or in instructing a child in the household.
- Accordingly, it can be concluded that OES is a speech-act to be sought after and practised by every believer in the Ephesian community as the situational opportunities for its exercise arise.

## *Chapter 5: Apostolic trains of thought in Hebrews*

### *§1 Hebrews as a whole*

The scholarly challenge presented by the letter to the Hebrews is nicely captured by Lane:

Undefined are the identity of the writer, his conceptual background, the character and location of the community addressed, the circumstances and date of composition, the setting in life, the nature of the crisis to which the document is a response, the literary genre, and the purpose and plan of the work. Although these undefined issues continue to be addressed and debated vigorously, no real consensus has been reached.<sup>306</sup>

However, it is possible to discern from the letter itself, and from what we know of the prevailing socio-historical and cultural milieu, various aspects of the recipients' situation, and the writer's purpose.<sup>307</sup> It seems clear that this was a Christian community with a history: one that had heard the gospel from evangelists (2:3–4), had remained unified and steadfast in the past in the face of significant external persecution (10:32–34), but was now experiencing a threat that was to some degree external, but more significantly internal. In a much-followed taxonomy, Ellingworth

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<sup>306</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), xlvii.

<sup>307</sup> Koester is among a number of recent commentators who provide fruitful information about the various cultures within which the work was written and that informed both the writer and the Christian community he addressed—such factors as the prevailing Graeco-Roman culture, including the middle Platonism and early Gnosticism of the time; Hellenistic-Judaism, including both its foundations in the language and categories of the OT, and its apocalyptic elements; and the emerging Christian culture of the latter half of the first century, which would have included the influence of Pauline thought; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AYB 36; New Haven; Yale University Press, 2001), 42–63.

characterizes the threat facing the community as having *passive* elements (their own internal weakness, dullness, neglect; e.g., 2:1, 3; 5:11; 6:12; 12:3, 12), *active* elements (such as disobedience, falling away, refusing to listen; e.g., 34:11; 6:6; 10:26, 29), and at least some elements of *outward pressure* (being tested, struggling to resist; e.g., 2:18; 12:4).<sup>308</sup> The focus, however, is not on external opposition (as in their past), but on what Koester describes as ‘friction and malaise’ within the community.<sup>309</sup>

This being the case, the general purpose of the writer is clear enough. In Lane’s words, it is:

The writer’s intention is to address the sagging faith of men and women within the group and to remind them of their responsibility to live actively in response to God’s absolute claim upon their lives through the gospel. He urges his listeners to hold loyally to their confession of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator of salvation in a time of crisis, and warns them of the judgement of God they would incur if they should renounce their Christian commitment.<sup>310</sup>

It is to this general purpose that the writer’s self-designated ‘word of exhortation’ is addressed (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, 13:22).<sup>311</sup>

However, to say that Hebrews has a largely exhortatory purpose raises the question of how the explicitly hortatory sections of Hebrews (2:1–4; 3:1–4:13; 5:11–6:20; 10:26–39; 12:1–3; 12:14–13:25) relate to the doctrinal or expositional sections

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<sup>308</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 78–79.

<sup>309</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 71.

<sup>310</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, c. Attridge takes the two hortatory subjunctives of 4:14–16 as exemplifying the two chief aspects of the writer’s exhortation: to *hold fast* (to show resolution, stability and endurance in holding onto the faith they have embraced), and to *approach* (to draw near, to strive to enter, to carry on to maturity); Attridge, *Hebrews*, 21–22.

<sup>311</sup> A number of scholars, such as Lane, argue on the basis of Acts 13:15 that ‘word of exhortation’ was idiomatic in Hellenistic Judaism for a synagogue homily. Noting also the conversational tone of the work, and the various oral (or aural) features of the language, Lane concludes that Hebrews is a sermon prepared for oral delivery; *Hebrews*, lxx–lxxv; see also Koester, *Hebrews*, 19–80. Ellingworth considers that it is a letter (rather than a formal speech or sermon as such), constructed with considerable literary and rhetorical skill. As with many of the critical debates surrounding Hebrews, resolving this question is not critical for a consideration of how OES functions within the thought of Hebrews; *Hebrews*, 59–62.

that are intertwined throughout.<sup>312</sup> It seems clear that the two are closely connected, although the manner of their connection is not the same as in the Pauline model of Ephesians, where imperative follows indicative in a relatively clearly defined order. As Guthrie has persuasively argued, while the expository and hortatory sections of Hebrews are quite distinct in their genre, characteristics and function, they are intricately linked together by means of various lexical and pronominal elements, and by a range of ‘transition’ techniques, so as to serve the overall purpose of the author’s discourse.<sup>313</sup> Like Lane and others, Guthrie agrees that this purpose is ‘to exhort the hearers to endure in their pursuit of the promised reward, in obedience to the word of God, and especially on the basis of their new covenant relationship with the Son’.<sup>314</sup>

This relationship between exhortation and exposition will be important (as I will argue below) for understanding the nature of the one-another exhortation that the readers of Hebrews are urged to practise. For example, Guthrie argues that while the expository sections of Hebrews contain an unfolding logically coherent argument about the person and work of the Son, the hortatory sections that are linked with each phase of the argument do not. Instead they tend to reiterate the same motifs throughout—the dangers of drifting or shrinking back, the promise of reward or inheritance, the example of others (negative and positive), the importance of faith and faithfulness, the need and possibility of approach or entry, and so on. Guthrie’s point is that while the expository sections of the discourse are ‘educational’, the

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<sup>312</sup> Ellingworth notes that the scholarly consensus now regards the hortatory function of Hebrews as its primary purpose, with the doctrinal or expository material providing the basis, motivations and reasons for the exhortation; *Hebrews*, 58.

<sup>313</sup> George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 112–145.

<sup>314</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 143.

hortatory sections are more ‘emotional’.<sup>315</sup> Whether ‘emotional’ is the right word at this point (‘affective’ may be better), Guthrie’s point seems correct. In the flow of the author’s thought, the hortatory sections do not so much seek to *add* to the hearers’ knowledge as to *challenge them to right action* on the basis of the unfolding exposition about the Son.

This raises an interesting possibility about the one-another communal speech that is recommended in 3:13–14 and 10:24–25. Since both of these texts occur in hortatory sections of the discourse, does this characterize OES as more ‘affective’ than ‘educational’?<sup>316</sup> Is OES more concerned to encourage a right response to doctrine than to teach doctrine as such? How, in other words, does OES function within the overall purposes of the epistle?

In order to answer these questions, it is important to identify the *key theological content* about which the author is seeking to ‘educate’ his readers. Three interrelated themes are prominent.

The *first* is *Christology*. This theme is introduced in the overture of 1:1–4, with Christ portrayed as the *eternal Son* through whom God made the world, the *incarnate Son* who provided a finished, high-priestly purification for sins, and the *transcendent Son* who is now exalted as the heir and ruler of all.<sup>317</sup> Broadly speaking, these themes comprise the unfolding theological argument of the whole letter, in 1:5–2:18, 5:1–7:28 and 8:3–10:25 respectively.<sup>318</sup>

As with many of the epistles of the NT, the form that the Christology takes is closely related to the pastoral purpose of the author (as seen above in Paul’s presentation of the crucified Christ in 1 Corinthians, and of the cosmic unifying

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<sup>315</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 139.

<sup>316</sup> Guthrie labels 10:19–25 as exhortation, but specifically as an ‘overlapping transition’ from the exposition of 7:1–10:18 to the explicit warning passage of 10:26–31; *Hebrews*, 144–146.

<sup>317</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, cxxix.

<sup>318</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 121–127.

Christ in Ephesians). In the case of Hebrews, the emphasis falls on the finished work and present exaltation of Jesus as the eternal Melchizedekian high priest of Ps 110:4.<sup>319</sup> The author's purpose in pursuing this particular Christology is not only to encourage the flagging recipients to regain their confidence in the salvation and inheritance that the high priestly Son has secured, and to 'draw near' through him for help in their struggle, but to warn them of the dire consequences of abandoning their trust in the Son and thus suffering his judgement (2:1–4; 12:25–26).<sup>320</sup>

The *second* key theological theme is also introduced in the opening verses of the epistle: the finality and contemporaneity of the *christologically focused word of God*. At various key points in the argument, the challenge given to the readers is to heed and put their trust in the divine message or voice or teaching that has come to them (2:1–4; 3:7b–4:13; 5:11; 10:23), climaxing in the solemn warning of 12:25: 'See that you do not refuse him who is speaking'.<sup>321</sup>

Although he is fully aware of the progressive and unfolding nature of God's revelation (e.g., 1:1–2), and posits important *discontinuities* between old covenant and new (e.g., 8:7), the author nevertheless perceives a profound continuity that renders the ancient texts living and relevant, grounded in the purposes of God that have come to fruition in Christ. The inscripturated revelation is treated as *contemporaneous speech from God*, which addresses his readers in their 'today' (3:7–13; cf. 4:12).

This divine contemporaneous word is profoundly christological. The word was not only spoken by the Son (in his earthly teaching; cf. 2:3), but *is* the Son, in his

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<sup>319</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 70; see also Koester, *Hebrews*, 105.

<sup>320</sup> Lane argues that this is, in fact, the central theme of the epistle: 'the importance of listening to the voice of God in Scripture and in the act of Christian preaching'; *Hebrews*, cxlii.

<sup>321</sup> Lane argues that the central theme of Hebrews is 'the importance of listening to the voice of God in Scripture and in the act of Christian preaching'; *Hebrews*, cxxvii.

being and in his work.<sup>322</sup> The Son is speech from God, revealing not only God's glory and the character of his being, but unveiling the cosmic purpose of God to provide purification for sins (1:3). His high priestly work is part of his revelatory work.<sup>323</sup>

This christological understanding of God's revelation leads into the *third* key theme of the epistle: the *eschatological tension* into which the word is spoken. The contemporaneous, Christ-centred word of Hebrews is an eschatological word about the future; it is a word of promise. But this promise is heard and trusted within an ongoing context of struggle and challenge. Käsemann leans heavily on this facet of the word in his influential investigation of Hebrews, *The Wandering People of God*. He argues that the antitype of wandering Israel shows that Christian existence consists of receiving an irrevocable promise of fully achieved, eschatological salvation in Christ, and then holding fast to this Logos on a journey of 'confident wandering' towards the heavenly rest.<sup>324</sup>

Hebrews consistently portrays this journey as one of eschatological conflict. As Koester puts it:

The issue is that 'these final days' are the scene of conflict between the powers of the future and the visible realities of the present. The Son of God reigns, but not all of his enemies have been put under his feet (1:13).<sup>325</sup>

The believer experiences this conflict as a *tension*—between the promised inheritance that is grasped now by faith and 'tasted' now in their experience (6:4–5), and the reality of not yet having reached the 'city that is to come' (13:14).

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<sup>322</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 104–5.

<sup>323</sup> In making this point in his exegesis of 1:1–4, Griffiths points out that the blood of Jesus is said to 'speak' in 12:24. Jonathan Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech* (LNTS; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 46.

<sup>324</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 18, 44.

<sup>325</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 101.

Mackie argues that the author's 'potent and vivid eschatological convictions ... are so indissolubly linked to his exhortation that the entire work can be fairly classified as an "eschatological 'exhortation'" (13:22)'.<sup>326</sup> He goes on to offer an extensive analysis of the spatial and temporal aspects of the eschatology of Hebrews, of the nature of the author's hortatory strategies, and of how the two are linked together.

Interestingly, however, Mackie offers no discussion of the two occasions in the letter in which the recipients are urged to *exhort one another* (παρακαλέω ἑαυτοὺς, 3:13; ἑαυτῶν ... παρακαλοῦντες, 10:25). Given that these references constitute two of the four occurrences of the verb παρακαλέω within the letter, this is a strange (if not atypical) omission in a monograph exploring 'exhortation' in Hebrews.

All the same, Mackie is correct to highlight the importance of 'exhortation' within the epistle. The verb παρακαλέω and its cognate noun have four main senses:

- i. to call or summon someone (often to help);
- ii. to beseech or make a strong request;
- iii. to urge strongly, appeal, exhort or encourage;
- iv. to instill someone with courage or comfort (especially in the context of sorrow).<sup>327</sup>

The seven occurrences (four verbs, three nouns) in Hebrews fall into the third category;<sup>328</sup> that is: three times in 13:19–22 to describe the activity of the author in exhorting or appealing to his readers (including his description of the whole epistle as a 'word of exhortation'); twice to describe God's own activity in encouraging his

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<sup>326</sup> Mackie, *Exhortation*, 1.

<sup>327</sup> 'παρακαλέω', *BDAG* 765; Otto Schmitz, 'παρακαλέω, παράκλησις', *TDNT* 5:774. *BDAG* adds a less common fifth: 'to treat someone in an inviting or congenial manner'.

<sup>328</sup> The usage in 12:5 may shade into the fourth semantic field (of providing encouragement or courage in the face of sorrow).

people, including through the Scriptures (6:18; 12:5); and twice to describe mutual speech that the author urges his readers to undertake within the Christian community (3:13; 10:25).

This usage should lead us to consider the extent to which mutual exhortation or encouragement within the Christian community shares important features with the author's own exhortation (in the epistle as a whole), and with the underlying exhortation or encouragement that God provides. I will explore these connections at 6§5 below.

First, however, it is necessary to examine closely the three instances of OES in their contexts.

## *§2 Heb 3:13–14*

The first instance of mutual exhortation occurs within a lengthy exhortatory section of the epistle (3:7–4:13). The section is introduced by a call to consider the example of Jesus, the supremely faithful Son over God's house (3:1–6), with the implicit warning that inclusion in this house of God is conditional upon (ἐάνπερ) following Jesus' example;<sup>329</sup> that is, that the readers must hold fast to their confidence and hope if they are to enjoy the blessings of the 'house' over which the Son rules (3:6).

This implicit warning leads directly into (διό, 3:7) a quotation from Psalm 95 (3:7–11), an exposition of which forms the basis of the exhortation proper, that runs from 3:12–4:11. That the author regards the warning of the Psalm as directly

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<sup>329</sup> Whether ἐάν is read (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 211) or the textual variant ἐάνπερ (Lane, *Hebrews*, 71), the meaning is much the same, and is closely matched by v. 14. Belonging to 'the house' or entry into God's rest is conditional upon the ongoing obedient faith of those who take hold of the promise (cf. 4:2, 11).

applicable to his hearers is shown not only by his attribution of the quotation to a present-tense word of the Holy Spirit,<sup>330</sup> and by his explicit comparison of his readers' situation to that of Israel,<sup>331</sup> but also by his repeated use of words and concepts from the Psalm in the subsequent exhortation (like 'heart', 'today', 'hear', 'harden', 'enter', and 'test').<sup>332</sup>

The main argument of the exhortation is straightforward enough, and is marked by three hortatory subjunctives in 3:12, 4:1 and 4:11:<sup>333</sup>

- take care not to follow the example of the wilderness generation, who failed to enter God's rest because of their faithless disobedience (3:12–19);<sup>334</sup>
- nevertheless, the promise of entering God's rest still stands for those who put their faith in the promise (4:1–10);
- therefore, let us strive to enter that rest (4:11).

The first part of the argument, in which the mutual exhortation reference in 3:13 occurs, begins with a stark description of the danger facing the readers. They are to pay particular attention<sup>335</sup> that not even one person among them<sup>336</sup> possesses 'an evil, unbelieving heart' that leads to falling away or abandoning (ἀποστῆναι) the living God. In the context of the Psalm, and of the wilderness rebellion it references, the 'unbelieving heart' is not one that lacks a certain quality (i.e. of faith), but one that refuses to trust in the reliability of God's promise or will, and so turns away from

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<sup>330</sup> καθὼς λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, 3:7.

<sup>331</sup> As seen in 4:2: '... for we have been evangelized, just as they'.

<sup>332</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Pillar; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 144.

<sup>333</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 215.

<sup>334</sup> The reference to ἀπιστία in 3:12 and 3:19 forms an *inclusio*.

<sup>335</sup> Lit., 'to watch, look to'; βλέπω, BDAG 179.

<sup>336</sup> ἔν τινι ὑμῶν, 3:12; Ellingworth suggests that this is not so much a concern for particular individuals as a concern about the effect that one wayward individual would have on the community; *Hebrews*, 221. O'Brien sensibly argues that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive; one can have a deep concern for each individual's spiritual welfare as well as an eye on the effect each person has on the whole community; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 145; so also Lane, *Hebrews*, 86.

God in disobedience.<sup>337</sup> It is a rebellious, resistant heart; one that is described in the Psalm as becoming ‘hardened’ (Heb 3:8).

However, as the following verse reveals, the writer holds this awful prospect before his readers not as an inevitability or as a possible sudden calamity, but as the *end point of a process of hardening* under the influence of the ‘the alluring deceit of sin’ (Heb 3:13).<sup>338</sup> Bruce comments that the individual in isolation is more prone to ‘beguiling lines of rationalization’ that lead to compromise and surrender, and to ‘a reduced sensitivity of conscience, which makes it difficult to recognize the right path on a subsequent occasion’.<sup>339</sup> This not only connects with the author’s earlier emphasis on ‘drift’ and ‘neglect’ (in 2:1, 3), but provides the rationale for the mutual exhortation of 3:13a. The strong adversative ἀλλὰ at the beginning of 3:13a indicates that there is an alternative to the catastrophic prospect of an ‘evil, unbelieving heart’ (3:12), namely the practice of daily mutual exhortation that counteracts the hardening influence of sin. This form of mutual speech leads to the opposite (and desirable) outcome of holding on firmly to the ‘reality of that in which you first placed your confidence’ (3:14).<sup>340</sup> Thus, the rationale for mutual exhortation can be expressed by reorganizing the clauses in 3:12–14 as follows:

- the desired outcome is to keep trusting firmly in Christ to the end (3:14);

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<sup>337</sup> Lane notes the allusion to God’s words about Israel in Num 14:11 (‘How long will they refuse to believe in me?’); *Hebrews*, 86. A number of commentators (e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 116) also note the close association between unbelief and ‘disobedience’ in the passage; e.g., in 3:19; 4:6, 11.

<sup>338</sup> ἀπάτη has the twin meanings of ‘deception’ and ‘pleasantness’; *BDAG* 90. Lane seeks to capture this by translating it as ‘the delusive attractiveness’ of sin; *Hebrews*, 81.

<sup>339</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 67.

<sup>340</sup> The phrase τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως (3:14) is difficult to translate. Attridge argues persuasively that there is almost no lexical evidence for the common translation of ‘confidence’ in the subjective sense; *Hebrews*, 118; so also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 228. That which they are to hold firmly to relates to the reality or substance of their initial faith, by which they became partners with Christ; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 151. Käsemann describes it as ‘holding fast to what was once seized’; *Wandering People*, 124.

- but the alluring deception of sin has the effect of hardening the heart against God and his promise (3:13b);
- thus, you need to exhort one another daily (3:13a);
- so that no-one among you may come to have an evil, unbelieving, ‘hardened’ heart (3:12a);
- which leads to turning away from the living God (3:12b).

In the author’s train of thought, then, frequent mutual exhortation by members of the Christian community is vital. It plays a critical role in the whole project of his discourse, which is to fortify his readers in their faithful perseverance. In fact, as numerous commentators note, what the author is doing in 3:13–14 is *urging his readers to practise daily with one another precisely what he is doing with them in the epistle as a whole*; namely, to exhort believers to persevering faithful obedience to the supreme Son.<sup>341</sup>

Starling nicely captures the seamless link that the author of Hebrews draws between the Scriptural word, his own word of exhortation and the subsequent speech of the community:

The heart of the hearer needs to be open to the word of God ‘today’ and to be trained and strengthened by the word of God across the years and decades of life, through reminder, encouragement, example, and practice.

Because this is the case, the exhortation of the sermon [of Hebrews] needs to be embedded not only in the succession of similar exhortations given by the congregation’s teachers over time but also within a broader pattern of mutual exhortation among the congregation’s members. The hearers of the word are urged to listen receptively and to participate responsibly in a community of faith, speaking as well as receiving the encouragement of the

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<sup>341</sup> For example, Ellingworth: ‘... the writer in effect asks his readers to give to each other the same personal warning which he gives them ... The author invites his readers to share constantly with one another the appeals and encouragements which are the purpose of the epistle (13:22, cf. v. 19)’; *Hebrews*, 220, 223. See also Attridge, *Hebrews*, 117; Koester, *Hebrews*, 259; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 148.

This set of connections not only underscores the gravity and importance of mutual exhortation, but conditions the *nature* of the exhortation that the community were to undertake with one another. Four of its features in 3:13–14 are worth noting.

*First*, it is very likely that the *content* of the mutual exhortation the author wished his readers to practise with one another was a reflection of his own practise with them. As Peterson argues:

The writer's statement about the ministry of the Spirit through the Scriptures and his own use of Psalm 95 as a means of exhorting his readers suggest that a *similar use of the Scriptures is implied as the means of mutual exhortation*. As they read the Scriptures together and apply them in the manner illustrated by the writer himself in his 'word of exhortation' (Heb 13:22) they will be challenged and encouraged to hold 'their confidence firm to the end' (v. 14).<sup>343</sup>

Peterson's insight relates to the role of exposition and exhortation within Hebrews as a whole. That the two are integrally and intricately intertwined throughout the letter seems in little doubt (as Guthrie has demonstrated), but Peterson's point is that they are also closely connected *within* passages that are hortatory in style and intent (such as 3:7–4:13). The writer's exhortation is based on a detailed and sophisticated exposition of Scripture. He treats this present 'word' not only as the means by which he exhorts his readers to faithfulness, but as the instrument that God himself uses, as a living and active 'sword', to pierce and expose the deepest human thoughts and intentions (Heb 4:12). It would be remarkable if he did not regard the mutual exhortation of the community as having a related content and rationale.

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<sup>342</sup> David I. Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2016), 171.

<sup>343</sup> D. G. Peterson, 'The Ministry of Encouragement', in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy* (ed. Peter T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson.; Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1986), 244 (emphasis original).

It is likely, then, that the envisaged content of the exhortation was not simply an affective encouragement to ‘keep going’ but also a reiteration of the word of promise and hope to which they were to hold fast (3:6, 14).<sup>344</sup> The logical connection between 3:13 and 3:14 confirms this. If the desired outcome of the mutual exhortation is a continued firm adherence to the ‘reality in which they first placed their confidence’, then the content of the exhortation must relate in some way to that reality.

Käsemann argues that the word in which this ‘reality’ is communicated can equally well be described in the language of ‘gospel’ or ‘promise’.<sup>345</sup> It has a ‘fixed content, a clearly outlined goal, a guaranteed realization, and is thus qualitatively superior to every earthly promise’.<sup>346</sup>

This insight leads to the conclusion that the mutual exhortation of 3:13 involves not only the reiteration and confirmation of the gospel ‘word of promise’ but an appeal for faith in that word. The exhortation was to stand firm, and to continue to trust in the word of promise.

This leads to *second* significant feature of the mutual exhortation: that just as the author’s own exhortation in the epistle is strongly framed by the eschatological nature of Christian existence, so the mutual speech of the community has a *temporal and eschatological* character. They receive and participate in the blessings of the promise now, but they await its fulfilment in the future within a daily experience of tension and threat.<sup>347</sup> Mutual exhortation is thus to be practised continually each day (παρακαλεῖτε ... καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν, 3:13)<sup>348</sup> for as long as the time period

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<sup>344</sup> See 5§5 (below) for further discussion of this point, with respect to the nature of ‘exhortation’ as a concept.

<sup>345</sup> He notes that ἐπαγγελία and εὐαγγελίζω are essentially ‘identical’ in Heb 4:1–6; Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 26.

<sup>346</sup> Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 29.

<sup>347</sup> Käsemann describes these present blessings in terms of the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of conscience, and knowledge and fellowship with God as brethren of Jesus; *Wandering People*, 34.

<sup>348</sup> παρακαλεῖτε is a present active imperative.

denoted by the ‘today’ of the Psalmist is in force,<sup>349</sup> that is, for as long as God continues to call on his people to hear his voice, to trust his promise, and to enter his rest. The ‘today’ of the readers, within which mutual exhortation should continue’, is the ‘today’ of eschatological tension.

*Third*, the exhortation is both *individual and communal* in character. The phrases *τινι ὑμῶν* in 3:12 and *τις ἐξ ὑμῶν* in 3:14 indicate that the danger threatens individuals personally, and that each person is in need of exhortation<sup>350</sup>. The task of exhortation in response to this danger is a reciprocal obligation (*ἐαυτοὺς*, 3:13), that individuals are to engage in with one or more others.

While it is possible that this mutual exhortation occurred within a daily gathering of the Christian community,<sup>351</sup> there is no evidential basis for asserting this to be the case in 3:13, nor for suggesting that the mutual speech envisaged by the author was limited to this context. Given the ‘wilderness’ frame that the author is utilizing, it is more likely that he has in mind the kind of multifaceted daily speech that Moses urged upon the antitypical people of God, so that their hearts would remain true to the word of God:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:6–9)

*Fourth*, given the parallels between the author’s own ‘word of exhortation’ and the reciprocal exhortation he urges his readers to practise in 3:13, it is likely that the

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<sup>349</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 224; Lane, *Hebrews*, 87.

<sup>350</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 86; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 145; contra Ellingworth, who argues that the focus on individuals is not out of a concern for each person but with a view to the potential danger that an apostate individual would pose to the community; *Hebrews*, 221.

<sup>351</sup> As Lane speculates, *Hebrews*, 87; so also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 224.

author has in mind a *spectrum* of παράκλησις:

The author of Hebrews models the kind of exhortation that listeners might use with each other, coupling blunt admonitions and warnings with more comforting and encouraging words (e.g., 5:11–14; 6:4–12).<sup>352</sup>

This spectrum from urgent warning to warm encouragement is evident in the hortatory section in which 3:13 occurs. It begins with a stark admonition against faithlessness (3:12–19), transitions to a more positive appeal to strive to enter the rest (4:1–11), and concludes with an assurance of sympathy, mercy and grace from the victorious high priestly Son of God (4:14–16).

While there is little doubt that the mutual exhortation of 3:13 has the flavour of urgent appeal (given the sober nature of the circumstances), the model of the author's own παράκλησις suggests that 'blunt admonition' might not be the only mode in which he wishes communal mutual exhortation to occur. This is confirmed in Heb 10:25, to which we will shortly turn.

### §3 Heb 5:11–14

Before turning to the other passage in Hebrews in which mutual παράκλησις is discussed (in 10:24–25), it is worth briefly noticing the one-another speech that is referenced in Heb 5:11–14.

In what seems like a skillful rhetorical move before he launches into the central theological exposition of the discourse, the author of Hebrews directly addresses his readers' ability to cope with his argument.<sup>353</sup> He chides them specifically for a

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<sup>352</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 259; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 148.

<sup>353</sup> The rhetorical effect of the whole section is to elicit a response that says, 'No, we are not sluggish or childish! We are more than ready to hear what you have to say next'; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 157–158.

culpable lethargy towards the word, and for the corresponding immaturity of their understanding.<sup>354</sup> They have become like children who need milk, rather than the mature who thrive on solid food (5:12–14). In drawing this contrast he mentions two features of ‘the mature’ (τελείων) that relate to our investigation of OES.

*First*, he indicates that a *mark of maturity is the ability to teach others*—an ability in which his readers are sadly lacking: ‘For although by now you should be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God’ (5:12). In saying this, he is not addressing a subset of the congregation with the potential to be teachers—the context makes clear that it is a general statement to his readers.<sup>355</sup> His point is a simple one, and represents a commonplace of the ancient world: that someone who has attained a mature understanding of a subject will be able to pass that knowledge onto others.<sup>356</sup> That his readers are not ready to do so is due not to their lack of ability to teach so much as a spiritual sluggishness that has stunted their growth in understanding. The implication is that if they were to rouse themselves from their torpor, they would in due course be in a position to do what they should be doing by this time (διὰ τὸν χρόνον, 5:12)—that is, teaching others.

In other words, while the author certainly sees an important role for what we might call Teachers (capital ‘T’)—recognized leaders, who speak ‘the word of God’ (13:7), and who should be remembered, imitated and obeyed<sup>357</sup>—at the same time, his expectation is that members of the congregation will also teach one another the

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<sup>354</sup> The adjective νωθρός describes a lazy or sluggish approach to something, such as a negligent or careless workman; ‘νωθρός’, *BDAG* 683. The culpability involved is characterized by O’Brien as ‘spiritual resistance’: ‘They are now unwilling to work out the deeper implications of the gospel in their lives’; *Hebrews*, 206.

<sup>355</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 158.

<sup>356</sup> Koester cites examples in Apollonius, Plato, Xenophon and Seneca; *Hebrews*, 301.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. 13:7, 17. It is likely that the author would also place himself in this category, given the content and style of his ‘word of exhortation’ (13:22).

same message that they have heard from their teacher-leaders.<sup>358</sup>

This leads us to the *second* point: *what is it that he expects them to be teaching?*

The conclusion to be drawn from 5:12 is that, at the very least, the material that they should by now be capable of teaching to others is the material that they have failed to master and have to be taught all over again: ‘the basic principles of the oracles of God’. The phrase ‘oracles of God’ (τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ) only occurs at three other points in the NT, two of which unambiguously refer to the OT Scriptures (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2). However, given how 6:1–2 spells out what the author regards as the ἀρχή of Christian doctrine (cf. ἀρχή in 5:12), it is likely that the ‘oracles of God’ in 5:12 refers to the divine speech of the OT Scriptures ‘interpreted in light of the death and exaltation of Jesus’<sup>359</sup>—that is, the foundational doctrines of the Christian gospel seen as the fulfilment of OT revelation.

Interestingly, however, as the author goes on to describe ‘the mature’ in 5:13–14, more than mastery of doctrinal content is involved. In contrast to the spiritual ‘child’ who ‘lacks the ability to reason about righteousness’,<sup>360</sup> mature believers have through practice trained themselves ‘to distinguish the good and the bad’. Their sound knowledge of the essentials of Christian doctrine is matched with the ability—developed through constant practice—to discern the implications of that doctrine for righteous behaviour.<sup>361</sup> We observe here again the profound connection between doctrine and ethics, exposition and exhortation, indicative and imperative, *theoria*

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<sup>358</sup> This expectation would accord with Smith’s findings in respect of Pauline communities; Smith ‘*Scholastic Communities*’, 386.

<sup>359</sup> O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 207; see also Koester, *Hebrews*, 301; Griffiths, *Divine Speech*, 97–98.

<sup>360</sup> As various commentators note, the λόγος of 5:13 likely refers to an activity or capacity rather than content, since it is something in which one gains proficiency. Attridge suggests ‘speaking about righteousness’, *Hebrews*, 160. The more likely option is ‘discerning’ or ‘reasoning about’ righteousness since 5:14 characterizes the proficiency of the mature as being the ability to discern the good and the bad; Koester, *Hebrews*, 302.

<sup>361</sup> Given the parallelism between 5:13 and 5:14, ‘righteousness’ in 5:13 is related to the ethical discernment of 5:14; cf. the ‘peaceful fruit of righteousness’ (Heb 12:11). Koester, *Hebrews*, 309.

and *praxis*, that has been a consistent feature of our investigation of apostolic trains of thought. It is hard to conceive of any version of ‘foundational Christian doctrine’ that the mature may have mastered and now be teaching to others that did not include its implications for righteous living.

How does this ability of the mature to teach others the foundational doctrines of the gospel relate to the mutual exhortation that the author urges upon his readers in 3:13 and 10:24–25? Given the unqualified instruction he gives them to engage constantly in mutual exhortation, and the recognition that not many of them are sufficiently mature to engage in the kind of teaching mentioned in 5:11–14, it is very likely that he is referring to different forms of communal speech. In each case (as we have seen), the speech is both theologically contentful and directed towards the implications of that ‘word’ for daily life. The difference seems to be one of emphasis:

- *exhortation* reaffirms the truth of the ‘word’ and appeals to the hearer to heed and act in faith; the emphasis falls upon the relevance of the word to a particular situation, and on an appeal to respond rightly in that situation;
- *teaching* explains and instructs in the content of the word, and shows its implications for righteous living; the emphasis falls upon the theological content of the word.

#### §4. *Heb 10:24–25*

The writer’s second exhortation to mutual speech and encouragement (in 10:24–25) occurs in the second of two key transitional or hinge paragraphs that form the major structural *inclusio* of the epistle: 4:14–16 and 10:19–25.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Guthrie, *Structure*, 103–104.

The parallels between these two hinge paragraphs are striking:

*Table 4: A comparison of two hinge paragraphs in Hebrews*

<i>First hinge: 4:14–16</i>	<i>Second hinge: 10:19–25</i>
We have a great high priest (14)	We have a great priest (21)
who has entered the heavenly realm (14)	who has won access to the holiest place (19)
Jesus, the Son of God (14)	Jesus (19)
Let us hold fast our confession (14)	Let us hold fast our confession (23)
Let us draw near (16)	Let us draw near (23)

The first hinge marks the turning point from an extended passage of exhortation into a lengthy theological argument; the second hinge marks a movement in the opposite direction—from the theological exposition of 5:1–10:18 to the mainly hortatory material in the final section of the epistle.<sup>363</sup>

The material surrounding the two hinges is also markedly similar. 4:14–16 is preceded by an exhortation to faith and perseverance, and a warning about the dangers of falling away, within which the important place of mutual exhortation is explained (in 3:7–4:13). Having then expounded and developed the theology of the high priestly ministry of the Son (in 5:1–10:18), the author returns in 10:19–31 to an exhortation to faithfulness and perseverance, and a warning about the dangers of falling away, within which the importance of mutual exhortation is again maintained.

In the author's train of thought, then, mutual exhortation plays a consistent and prominent role (παρακαλέω, 3:13; 10:25). In particular, in both instances the

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<sup>363</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 283; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 361.

*eschatological situation* of believers provides the rationale and context within which mutual exhortation is required. In 3:7–4:11, the antitype of wandering, disobedient Israel is used to frame the readers’ circumstances—namely, that while they have received the sure promise of salvation in Christ, and have come to be sharers in Christ (3:14), a dangerous sin-threatened journey of faith and perseverance lies before them if they are to enter the sabbath rest of God. This is what makes mutual concern and exhortation a daily necessity (in 3:12–14). In 10:19–25, the author similarly emphasizes the believer’s present possession of the benefits of Christ’s work (more strongly than he does in 3:7–13),<sup>364</sup> and urges them to hold fast to their confession in the context of the approaching Day and of the danger of throwing away their ‘confidence’ (10:23, 25, 26–35).<sup>365</sup> It is in this situation of eschatological challenge that the readers are again exhorted to persist in exhorting one another (10:25).

*These commonalities confirm that, in the author’s train of thought, mutually beneficial exhortatory speech plays a vital role in the faith and perseverance of an eschatological Christian community.*

Beyond highlighting these common elements, what particular contribution does 10:24–25 make to the author’s conception of mutual exhortation? Four nuances are worth noting.

*First*, the concern that the community has for its members is expressed differently. In 3:12, there is a note of urgent attention in the face of danger: the community is to ‘watch out’ (βλέπετε) that not one of them should suffer the

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<sup>364</sup> 10:19–20 summarize the argument of 8:1–10:18 regarding the eternal, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, and assert that believers now participate in what Jesus has achieved. ‘The access to God which believers have through Christ is no less close than that which Christ himself has attained’; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 517–518; see also Attridge, *Hebrews*, 284.

<sup>365</sup> The ‘Day’, as Attridge notes, denotes an element of NT eschatology that is so common (‘the day of the Lord’, ‘the day of God’, ‘the day of judgement’) that it can be rendered simply as ‘the Day’; *Hebrews*, 291; see also Koester, *Hebrews*, 446.

disastrous hardening effects of sin (3:13). In 10:24, the tone is more deliberate and reflective. The cohortative *κατανοῶμεν* is best translated as ‘let us direct our attention towards one another’, connoting a continuing thoughtful awareness of the needs and spiritual well-being of others.<sup>366</sup>

This exhortation to mutual thoughtfulness in 10:24 is the counterpart to the more individually focused blessings and exhortations of 10:19–23, where the spiritual possessions and experiences of each member of God’s house are on view: authorized free access to the holy places through Jesus’ blood,<sup>367</sup> a true heart, a cleansed conscience, full assurance of faith, and baptism.<sup>368</sup> The corresponding cohortatives exhort the believer to take full advantage of this access (‘let us draw near’, 10:22; cf. 4:16), and to remain firm in the faith that has been confessed (‘let us hold fast’, 10:23; cf. 4:14).<sup>369</sup> The third cohortative in the series, at 10:24, invites the readers to

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<sup>366</sup> O’Brien notes the careful work of Lee in critiquing the glosses given to *κατανοέω* in a number of lexicons; *Hebrews*, 369–370. The semantic range Lee highlights is similar to that in *BDAG*, namely: i) to notice, observe; ii) to look at in a reflective manner, contemplate; iii) to think about carefully, envisage; ‘κατανοέω’, *BDAG* 522–533; J. A. L. Lee, *A History of New Testament Lexicography* (New York: Lang, 2003), 18–25. The suggestions of Ellingworth (‘let us care for one another’; *Hebrews*, 526) and Lane (‘practical care’; *Hebrews*, 289) fail to give proper weight to the elements of observation and thought.

<sup>367</sup> As a number of commentators note, the more subjective translation ‘confidence’ doesn’t do justice to the objective character of the open and free access (*παρρησία*) that Jesus’ blood has secured for the believer; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 517–518; Lane, *Hebrews*, 274. Van Unnik argues that the term is anchored in the Hellenistic background of the ‘freedom of access’ available to citizens, so that they can speak freely; W. C. Van Unnik, ‘The Christian’s Freedom of Speech in the New Testament’, *BJRL* 44/2 (1962): 485.

<sup>368</sup> Most commentators take ‘the body washed with pure water’ as alluding to baptism, the action by which the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice are appropriated by the individual believer; e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 289; Koester, *Hebrews*, 449.

<sup>369</sup> Koester tracks the movement of thought slightly differently. He suggests that 10:19–22 focus on the heavenly sanctuary and the believer’s access to it, and 10:23–25 on the earthly community that awaits the day (*Hebrews*, 447). Perhaps it is best to see 10:23 as a transition between the two foci. The individual confession to which they are to hold fast leads to the mutual confession that also benefits others (in 10:24–25). Contra Ellingworth and Peterson, who cast the whole section in more corporate terms, and thus interpret ‘drawing near’ as referring to the corporate worship gatherings of believers; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 522–523; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 154–155.

widen their attention to those around them in the community, who are also seeking to draw near and to hold fast the confession.

This thoughtful attention or concern has a particular purpose, and this constitutes the *second* nuance that 10:24–25 adds to author’s understanding of one-another exhortation. In 3:13, the purpose of the mutual daily exhortation is cast in mainly defensive terms: to counteract the deceitful, hardening effects of sin. In 10:24, the purpose of the mutual concern is expressed more positively: ‘to stimulate love and good deeds’ (παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων).

The author has already touched on the contrast between the ‘dead works’ that marked his readers’ former lives, and the works of love that characterized their new Christian existence (6:1, 10). In chapter 6, as in chapter 10, the classic triad of faith, hope and love is presented as the norm of ongoing Christian experience (‘faith’, 6:12; 10:22; ‘hope’, 6:11; 10:23; ‘love’, 6:10; 10:24).

The author’s aim for his readers, then, is not simply that they help one another fend off the deadening effects of sin, but that they positively spur one another to grow in the essential virtue of Christian moral experience: love.<sup>370</sup> (It is worth noting that the element of danger or warning is still not far away. The connective γὰρ in 10:26 connects the mutual spurring on of 10:24–25 with the warnings against apostasy in 10:26–39.)

That the thoughtful ‘spurring on to love’ is essentially *verbal* in nature is indicated by the parallel but contrasting participles in 10:24–25:

Let us direct our attention towards one another (κατανοῶμεν) to stimulate love and good deeds...

Not forsaking (μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες) to assemble together ...

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<sup>370</sup> Attridge notes that 10:24 foreshadows the more detailed exhortation to love in 13:1–7; *Hebrews*, 290.

But exhorting (ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες).

And all the more as you see the Day approaching.

‘Not-forsaking-but-exhorting’ is exegetical of ‘let us direct our attention to stimulate’, indicating that the mutually thoughtful stimulation to love and good deeds takes place by means of mutual exhortatory speech. Whether that speech is best characterized by the common English translation ‘encouragement’ (as opposed to ‘exhortation’) is open to question.<sup>371</sup> ‘Exhortation’ in English connotes a more emphatic and urgent form of speech; ‘encouragement’ suggests a more persuasive, supportive form of address. Perhaps the presence of ‘love’ in 10:24 has attracted translators to the somewhat softer connotations of ‘encouragement’. Even so, there is nothing in the context to suggest that the author regards growth in love and good deeds as any less important or urgent than the avoidance of sin and unfaithfulness (in 3:12–14). If anything, his unusual use of the emotionally intense term παροξυσμός in 10:24 to describe the mutual ‘provocation’ to love and good deeds suggests that the stronger and more specific English word ‘exhorting’ may be a more appropriate translation of παρακαλέω in 10:25.

The *third* distinctive feature of the mutual exhortation in this passage is that, unlike 3:13, where no specific context or location was given for the mutual exhortation, the author here forges a close connection between mutual exhortation and the *gathered congregation*.<sup>372</sup> They are not to forsake their gatherings but instead to exhort.<sup>373</sup> At a practical level, the reason for the connection is obvious enough, as

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<sup>371</sup> Apart from NKJV, (‘exhorting’), every major modern English version prefers ‘encouraging’ in 10:25.

<sup>372</sup> Lane assesses and rejects the case for regarding ἐπισυναγωγή as a Christianized adaptation of the Jewish synagogue. Following Schrage (‘ἐπισυναγωγή’, *TDNT* 7:841–843), he takes it to mean ‘the specific place they assemble’; Lane, *Hebrews*, 289. Attridge prefers the ‘act of assembling’ to the ‘assembly so formed’; *Hebrews*, 290.

<sup>373</sup> Attridge argues that ‘neglect’ does not sufficiently evoke the ‘wrongful abandonment’ implied by ἐγκαταλείπω in this context; *Hebrews*, 289.

Lane comments:

The reason the meetings of the assembly are not to be neglected is that they provide a communal setting where mutual encouragement and admonition may occur.<sup>374</sup>

There is no reason to conclude from this that the nature and significance of the Christian assembly (as far as the author is concerned) is exhausted by the opportunity it provides for mutual exhortation. For the author, Christian corporate life is not only functional (e.g., with respect to exhortation) but is related at a deep level to the person and work of the Son. The work of the Son is to save and gather a congregation of brothers (2:11–14), to be established as a Son over the house of God (which consists of Christian believers, 3:6), and to be at the centre of the heavenly, eschatological congregation of the firstborn (the ἐκκλησία πρωτοτόκων of 12:23). As Koester and others have argued, this imparts a profound theological significance to the Christian congregation, which functions as the ‘earthly counterpart to the heavenly “congregation” (*ekklesia*) of God’s people’.<sup>375</sup>

All the same, given the central role that mutual exhortation plays in the author’s strategy for ensuring the faithful perseverance and growth of his hearers (as argued above), it is not surprising that the practice of exhortation looms large in his description of the congregational gathering.

*Fourth*, and finally, should we conclude from the location of the ‘exhortation’ within the Christian assembly that the kind of exhortation being envisaged is more formal in nature (such as a homily or sermon)? The act of ‘exhorting’ is certainly conducted through longer more sermonic speech-acts at various points in the NT, the author’s own ‘word of exhortation’ being an obvious example (13:22).<sup>376</sup> However,

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<sup>374</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 290.

<sup>375</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 446; cf. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 370–371; cf. Käsemann, *Wandering People*, 21.

<sup>376</sup> Cf. Acts 13:15. Peterson argues that ‘exhortation’ in 1 Tim 4:13 and Titus 1:9 may refer in a similar way to extended expositions and applications of Scripture or apostolic teaching; ‘Ministry of

given that the παρακαλοῦντες of 10:25 is co-ordinate with the mutual thoughtful concern and spurring on of the previous verse (κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους, 10:24), it is highly unlikely that the author is thinking here of the teaching or preaching ministry of elders or leaders.

### *§5 A word of exhortation*

Given the prominence of ‘exhortation’ as a form of one-another speech in Hebrews, two brief summative comments are called for.

#### *a. A common action in different forms by different speakers*

The speech-act of ‘exhortation’ as it occurs in Hebrews has a consistent illocutionary force while taking a variety of locutionary forms and being undertaken by a range of different speakers.<sup>377</sup>

The illocutionary force of ‘exhorting’ in all its occurrences in Hebrews involves the making of a clear, positive appeal for the hearer to adopt certain attitudes or behaviour (such as steadfast faith in the promise, or perseverance in the face of hardship, or growth in love and good works).

However, the form in which this illocution is expressed varies among the different speakers who practise it. The παράκλησις of God comes in the form of Scripture (6:13–18). The ‘word of exhortation’ undertaken by the author of Hebrews takes the form of a lengthy homily or epistle of considerable literary and rhetorical

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Encouragement’, 239.

<sup>377</sup> In the terminology of speech-act theory, ‘illocutionary force’ refers to the ‘thing being done’ in the speech-act; the ‘locution’ is the form in which the utterance takes place (its morphemes and sentences; its character as verbal or written); Searle, *Speech Acts*, 23–24.

sophistication (13:22). The exhortation to be practised by the readers takes the form of mutual speech in the context of daily life and of the community assembly (3:13; 10:24–25).

The act of exhorting, then, cannot be constrained to a particular form of locution, nor to particular persons. Suggestions that ‘exhortation’ is either a particular *form* of Christian communication,<sup>378</sup> or that it becomes a technical term for ‘congregational preaching’ within NT communities,<sup>379</sup> are not supported by the breadth of usage, not just in Hebrews but across the linguistic and conceptual world of the NT.<sup>380</sup> 1 Thessalonians, for example, provides a striking illustration of how the speech-act of *παράκλησις* can take the form of Paul’s initial gospel proclamation to the Thessalonians (2:2–3), his ongoing fatherly encouragement of them (2:12), Timothy’s follow-up confirmation and exhorting of them (3:2), Paul’s current appeal to them in the letter itself (4:10), and the Thessalonians’ own exhortation of one another with the apostolic word (4:18; 5:11).

The evidence from 1 Thessalonians and Hebrews (not to mention also from 1 Corinthians, as analyzed above) strongly suggests that ‘exhorting’ was a common shared activity, to be undertaken in various forms by various members of the

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<sup>378</sup> Such as in the form critical proposal of James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (SNTSMS 37; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>379</sup> As suggested by Peterson, on the basis that the three activities in 1 Tim 4:13 are each preceded by the article (‘the reading, the exhortation, the teaching’); ‘Ministry of Encouragement’, 239. While the presence of the article in Greek sometimes functions in this way (what Wallace calls the ‘well-known or familiar’ article), it is fallacious to argue that the presence of the article itself warrants the conclusion; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 209–210, 225. Given the varied forms of ‘exhortatory’ speech that are mentioned within the Pastorals, and within 1 Timothy (e.g., 2:1; 5:1; 6:2), it is very unlikely that the word has taken on the character of a technical term at 4:13.

<sup>380</sup> It is not necessary to posit a common (Pauline) authorship of 1 Thess, Heb and the Pastorals to make this point. It is merely to recognize that within the socio-cultural and linguistic culture that produced the NT documents, the likelihood of common Greek words like *παράκλησις* assuming a special technical meaning is small, and requires considerable explicit evidence to support it.

Christian community. Its illocutionary force is essentially the same no matter who practises it: to urge, to appeal, to speak in a way that asks the hearer to act in a certain way. The desired outcome is also the same (e.g., the steadfastness, faith, obedience or love that ensues). There is also a commonality of propositional content in the exhortation, as seen by how the author of Hebrews instructs his readers to do with one another what he is doing with them.<sup>381</sup> Interestingly, this sense of a common content in exhortation is also evident in 1 Thessalonians, where Paul provides apostolic teaching on various aspects of the parousia in 4:13–17 and then in 4:18 instructs the Thessalonians to ‘exhort one another *with these words*’ (παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις).

*b. Relation to doctrinal teaching or exposition*

If the force of the ‘exhortation’ in Hebrews is to appeal to the hearer to adopt certain attitudes or behaviours, what relation does this appeal bear to doctrinal or theological teaching or exposition?

Guthrie has demonstrated that the exhortatory and expositional sections of Hebrews are distinctive in genre, style and purpose, but tightly integrated throughout the discourse.<sup>382</sup> He suggests that the expositional sections are more ‘educative’ (in conveying theological content), and the exhortatory more ‘emotional’ (in calling for action). This distinction is useful in describing the different functions that the various sections play in the author’s overall purpose, and roughly corresponds to the distinction between the classical genres of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> As argued above at §2.

<sup>382</sup> See §1 above.

<sup>383</sup> In classical rhetoric, ‘epideictic’ rhetoric praises or blames something; it distinguishes between what is and is not worth valuing, believing and celebrating. ‘Deliberative’ discourse persuades (or dissuades) with respect to a course of action. Perelman argues that the two work together in most persuasive or deliberative discourses, with the role of epideictic rhetoric being ‘to intensify adherence to values,

However, the expositional and the exhortatory content are closely connected and serve one overall purpose (which is exhortatory).<sup>384</sup> The exhortation arises as an inevitable consequence or implication of the exposition, as seen in the consistent use of logical connectives to link theological arguments with the exhortations that follow them—for example, at 2:1 (διὰ τοῦτο), 3:7 (διο), 4:11 (οὖν), 6:1 (διο), 10:19 (οὖν), 12:1 (τοιγαροῦν).

The implication of this for understanding the mutual exhortatory speech of believers generally is that *it cannot be separated from the theological truths that form the basis of the appeal*. While the mutual exhortation of the readers of Hebrews would in no sense be expected to match length, depth and rhetorical sophistication of the ‘word of exhortation’ of the author of Hebrews, its essential character—as being based on the word of promise concerning the Son—is the same.

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the more informal mutual exhortation that the recipients of Hebrews were to practise with one another consisted of a *theologically-grounded appeal for action*; a confession and reiteration of the promises of the gospel, along with an appeal to continue in faithful perseverance, and to grow in love and good deeds.

## 6. Conclusions

Tracing the apostolic train of thought about OES in Hebrews leads to the following conclusions.

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adherence without which discourses that aim at provoking action cannot find the lever to move or to inspire their listeners’; Chaïm Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 19–20.

<sup>384</sup> See §1 above.

*a. What kind of speech is it?*

- The main mode of OES in Hebrews is mutual ‘exhortation’, in the sense of an urgent, positive appeal to adopt certain attitudes or behaviours; in this case, to continue in faithful perseverance in Christ, and to grow in love and good deeds.
- In a manner analogous to how the author of Hebrews conducts his own exhortation, the mutual exhortation of the readers of Hebrews was not simply to be an affective encouragement to ‘keep going’, but was theologically grounded on the christological ‘word’ that they had received.
- This received ‘word’ that continued to be living and active in their midst was the ‘word of God’—spoken at various times and in various ways through the OT authors, fulfilled in the person and work of the Son, and taught and proclaimed by apostles and leaders (including the author of Hebrews). It declared an eschatological promise of salvation through the death and exaltation of the Son.
- It is thus reasonable to conclude that the mutually exhortatory speech envisaged by the author of Hebrews consisted of a contextually relevant reiteration, confirmation and application of some aspect of the Christ-centred ‘word’ leading to an appeal to respond to that word—(defensively) by resisting sin and continuing in faith, and (positively) by growing in love and good deeds.
- The author of Hebrews also mentions the capacity his readers ought to have to teach one another the basic doctrines of Christianity. This probably refers to a different form of mutual speech than exhortation, with more of an emphasis on foundational instruction in the doctrines of the gospel.

*b. Why should it be practised?*

- Even more starkly than in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, the author of Hebrews frames the need for mutual exhortation as an eschatological imperative. The danger of failing to persevere to the end and enter God's rest (as represented by the faithless example of wandering Israel) provides the rationale for continual mutual exhortation (3:13). The need to provoke and exhort one another to love and good deeds (in 10:24–25) is also framed by the completed work of Christ (on one side) and the approaching day of judgement (on the other).

*c. How should it be practised?*

- Hebrews describes OES as having both individual and communal aspects. Every believer is in need of exhortation, and every believer is encouraged to engage in this form of speech. However, it is also portrayed as an obligation of the community, in seeking the welfare of its members.
- The constant threat of sin requires constant mutual exhortation, in the various circumstances thrown up by everyday life. The author urges his readers to engage in this exhortation daily.
- The congregational gathering is also to be the locus of exhortation (in the sense of a mutual stimulus to love and good deeds).
- While the author of Hebrews regards mutual exhortation as something that ought to be universally practised in the community to which he writes, he also mentions a form of mutual speech that requires a maturity that many of his readers lack—that is, the ability to instruct others in the essential doctrines of the gospel.

Just as strikingly as in 1 Corinthians, if not more so, the author of Hebrews sees the OES of his readers as mirroring his own apostolic activity at key points. He urges his readers to do with one another what he himself is doing with them: to urgently appeal for faith, perseverance and love in light of God's climactic revelation in his Son, Jesus Christ.



*PART III*  
*Synthesis and interaction*



## *Chapter 6: From apostolic thought to theological synthesis*

The apostolic trains of thought we have explored in Part II are, as our methodology has defined them, exercises in *theological ethics*; that is, they are instances of moral reasoning that consider certain kinds of circumstances [B], reflect upon various theological realities that bear upon those circumstances [A], and then elucidate contextually relevant ethical descriptions, purposes, character traits, guidelines and obligations that apply to the circumstances [A>B]—in this instance, in relation to the form of moral action that we have identified and defined as ‘one-another edifying speech in the Christian community’. To put it another way: in various ways relevant to their particular contexts, the biblical texts I have examined seek to answer generic, teleological and practical questions in relation to OES, and do so with recourse to theology; that is, in relation to the character, purposes and works of the triune God.

The procedure of this thesis is to *apprentice* ourselves to these apostolic exercises in theological ethics in order to articulate a coherent theological understanding of the nature, purpose and practice of OES as a moral action within the Christian community—such an understanding being the basis upon which deliberation about particular OES practices might proceed in churches today.

To carry this thought process through to its end, two further steps are required:

- the first (in Part III) is the synthetic task of drawing together and integrating the key theological trains of thought in the biblical material analyzed in Part II (in 1 Cor, Eph and Heb);
- the second (in Part IV) is to articulate, on the basis of Part III, a coherent

theological understanding of OES for the deliberation of Christian communities today.

The next task, then, is to synthesize and further explore the *key theological judgements that the apostolic authors applied to the practice of OES in the Christian communities* to which they were writing. In describing them as ‘judgements’, I am following Vanhoozer’s concept of a ‘judgement’ as an assessment of the reality of something, of what is or not the case. Making a judgement involves ‘the ability to identify things (e.g., this is an x; this is not an x), draw proper distinctions (e.g., true/false; right/wrong), and make fundamental connections (e.g., part/whole; cause/effect) ...’.<sup>385</sup> The various judgements that the apostles applied to the understanding and practice of OES cluster together into a number of major themes, the most significant of which will be the subject of the following three chapters.

Exploring these significant theological themes also requires a level of interaction with the history of theological reflection upon them. This presents a challenge, and no doubt opens up prospects for future research. Each of the themes (outlined below) are major subjects of systematic theology, and doing full justice to the length, breadth and depth of theological discussion concerning each one of them is well beyond the scope of this thesis. To make the task both achievable and effective for the purpose of this argument, I will:

- limit my focus to those aspects of each theological theme that the apostolic train of thought brings to the fore in relation to the understanding and

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<sup>385</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘Is the Theology of the New Testament One or Many? Between (the Rock of) Systematic Theology and (the Hard Place of) Historical Occasionalism’, in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars* (ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer; WUNT 2/369; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 27.

practice of OES; and

- limit my interactions to a small number of representative thinkers whose work is either significant and influential within the theological theme being examined, or who bring particularly productive insights for the relation of that theme to the understanding of OES.

The three major theological themes that emerge from our study of apostolic trains of thought are as follows:

1. The content of OES is closely related to the *christocentric word of God*. In 1 Corinthians, the ‘wisdom speech’ of the congregation was based on the ‘gospel wisdom’ revealed in the proclamation of the crucified Jesus Christ as Lord. In Ephesians, the truth of Christ, which the apostolic mission had been preaching, was to be the word spoken in the body for its growth. In Hebrews, the word that continued to be living and active in their midst, and with which they were to exhort one another, was the divine Scriptural word spoken first through the prophets and climactically in the Son. A synthesis of these theological judgements will need to answer the question: in what manner does the divinely revealed and inscripturated word of God that centres on the gospel of Jesus Christ provide the content for OES, and how does this content relate to other expressions or modes of the word of God (for example, in Scripture itself, or in congregational preaching)?

2. The purpose of OES across all the apostolic writings surveyed is directed to the *moral learning and transformation of members of the Christian community*, or to what has been traditionally discussed in theology as the sanctification of the believer. In 1 Corinthians, OES participates in God’s purpose to edify, exhort and encourage believers in their application of the cruciform word of Christ to every aspect of their lives. In Ephesians, OES is both an expression of the new renewed mind and life of the believer in Christ, and the means by which moral renewal and transformation continues in the context of daily life. In Hebrews, mutual exhortation functions both

as an antidote to the dangerous hardening effects of sin, and as a stimulus to faithful obedience, love and good works. A theological consideration of this theme will need to answer the question: What contribution does OES make, as a contextually applicable word, to the moral learning and growth of the believer?

3. The context within which OES takes place is *ecclesiological*; it is a practice by and for and within the Christian community. In 1 Corinthians, OES takes place for the common benefit and edification of the congregation. In Ephesians, likewise, the growth of the body (whether in the sense of the local congregation or the trans-local 'body of Christ') is achieved as each member does its part by speaking the truth in love. In Hebrews, mutual exhortation takes place both in the context of the community's daily responsibility to watch out for the spiritual wellbeing of each person, and within the gathering of believers for mutual encouragement. A theological reflection on this theme will need to answer the question: What is it about the nature and purposes of the church (or Christian community) that makes OES an essential practice within it?

Before turning to examine these themes more closely, it is worth highlighting three further significant elements that emerge from our study of apostolic thought. It would be possible to explore these three elements as separate themes in their own right, but because of their interpenetration into each of the three themes above, I will instead consider them *en passant*.

The first of these elements is the role of *the Spirit*. The ability to comprehend and embrace the word, and to speak it to others, is the work of God's Spirit in the believer. In 1 Corinthians, both the ability to understand the word *and* to impart it to others in various ways are portrayed as gifts, given to the believer through the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians, the filling that comes by the eschatological gift of the Spirit issues in personal transformation, of which mutually helpful speech is one aspect. In Hebrews, the Scriptural word that motivates and provides the context for mutual

speech is spoken in the present by the Spirit.

The second is that the frame within which the apostles lodge these theological judgements is consistently *eschatological*. I have already highlighted this (above) with respect to the Spirit, but the point could equally be made with the respect to the word (as the climactic, last-days revelation of God's purposes), the sanctification of believers (which takes place within the eschatological tension of living in this world while awaiting the next), and the nature of the Christian community (as the body being built by the eschatological gospel mission, as the people of God journeying towards God's promised rest).

The third is the strong *theological continuity* that has been consistently observed between the 'preaching-speech' of the apostolic authors and the one-another speech of believers. Across all the major themes, the apostles ground their own proclamatory or exhortatory speech on strikingly similar theological foundations as they do OES: as being closely identified with the word of God, as being a gift of the Spirit, as being directed towards the spiritual growth of believers, and of being the means by which the church is exhorted and edified. In considering each of the three major themes, I will reflect at various points on how this continuity relates both to the unity of preaching-speech and one-another speech, and to their differentiation.



## *Chapter 7: The word of God and the one-another word*

As we have seen, in the thought process of the apostles the mutual speech of believers in Christian communities was closely related to the ‘word of God’—whether in terms of the God-revealed apostolic *kerygma* of Christ-crucified (1 Cor), or the ‘truth’ of Christ revealed by God to Paul (Eph), or the living and active Scriptural word that formed the basis of their mutual exhortation (Heb). The content of what believers said to each other was to be based on, conditioned by, and judged in accordance with the content of apostolic and Scriptural ‘words’ that were deemed to be of divine origin.

This raises significant questions: In what manner does the power of OES derive from its connection with the word of God? What authority does OES possess given its basis in the word of God? In what ways is OES similar to or different from ‘preaching’ and other forms of speech in its relation to the word of God?

As far as I can see, these are not questions that Christian theology has addressed with any seriousness. However, a closely related set of questions *has* been debated at some depth, at least since the time of the Reformation, and provides a useful entry point into discussing the relationship between OES and the divine word.

Those questions can be stated in relation to the well-known Reformation dictum from the Second Helvetic Confession: ‘*Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*’ (the preaching of the word of God is the word of God).<sup>386</sup> Is it right to equate the

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<sup>386</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Confessio Et Expositio Simplex Orthodoxae fidei, & dogmatum Catholicorum*

churchly speech of preaching with the ‘word of God’? And if it is (at least in some sense), how can this equation be elucidated in a way that encompasses the fallibility of human speech; that is, which provides some criteria for judging when human preaching is, or is not, to be identified as the ‘word of God’?

In this chapter, I will first consider some key movements in the theological debate about the relation of preaching to the word of God, before exploring how aspects of this debate shed significant light on the theological connection between the divine word and the *one-another word* of congregational speech.

### *§1 The Reformation view*

As an axiom, *Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei* serves as a reasonable representation of how the major Continental Reformers related preaching to the word of God. Luther, for example, regards the preacher as having been called to preach the whole gospel (in its dimensions of law/wrath and of grace/salvation, and in its demand for faith and repentance). When he faithfully fulfils this commission, the hearer can be confident that the preacher’s word is the word of God:

The only means, whether in heaven or on earth whereby the soul can live, and be religious, free, and Christian, is the holy Gospel, the word of God preached by Christ ... Moreover all apostles, bishops, priests, and the whole clergy, were called and instituted only for the sake of the word; although, unfortunately, things happen differently nowadays.

You may ask, however: ‘What then is that word which gives such signal grace, and how shall I use it?’ The answer is: It is nothing else than the message proclaimed by Jesus, as contained in the gospel; and this should, and, in fact, is, so presented that you hear your God speak to

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*syncerae religionis Christianae* ... (Zurich: Froschouer, 1566), 6<sup>v</sup>.

you.<sup>387</sup>

In a similar vein, in his commentary on 1 Pet 4:11, Luther says that ‘no-one should preach anything unless he is sure that it is God’s Word’. He continues: ‘Therefore we must be so sure that God is speaking and working in us that our faith can declare: “What I have said and done, this God has done and said. I stake my life on this.”’<sup>388</sup>

Chan argues that Luther is confident to identify the preached word as the true ‘word of God’ on three grounds: if the *content, source and purpose* of the message are the same as the Scriptural word of God:

The content is the apostolic christological gospel—the same message that was spoken by Christ, commissioned by Christ, and that speaks about Christ. The source of preaching is the God-commissioned and sent preacher, whose gifts have been recognized by the Christian congregation, through whom the Holy Spirit speaks the divinely authored message. And the purpose of the message is that those who hear the word should repent and obey.<sup>389</sup>

The second of these criteria (that the source of the preaching is a God-commissioned human agent) is the most interesting and potentially problematic of the three, not just for Chan’s thesis as it unfolds (to which I will return below), but as a representation of the complexity of Luther’s thought.

It is certainly true that, for Luther, public congregational preaching was a function that no-one should take upon themselves, but which only appropriately

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<sup>387</sup> Martin Luther, ‘The Freedom of a Christian’, in *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther* (trans. Bertram Lee Wolf; 2 vols.; London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 1:350–359. This is a translation of the German version of Luther’s pamphlet.

<sup>388</sup> LW 30:125.

<sup>389</sup> Sam Chan, *Preaching as the Word of God: Answering an Old Question with Speech-Act Theory* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2016), 37. On Luther’s view of the proclaimed word as the ‘word of God’, see also Mark Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther’s Approach to Scripture* (PBTM; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005), 72–77.

gifted people should be duly called, set apart and appointed to do. In fact, Luther was scathingly critical of ‘clandestine’ Anabaptist preachers who ‘sneak about unbidden and uncommissioned’, by which he means without being called and authorized by a congregation, under the appropriate authority of a parish pastor or some other duly appointed official.<sup>390</sup>

However, did Luther regard the necessary authorizing or appointing of public preachers as a theological criterion for identifying the preacher as a speaker of ‘the word of God’ in a way that believers in general were not? Was the preacher’s word able to be identified with the ‘word of God’ because the preacher *himself*, as distinct from the congregation, had been commissioned as God’s messenger through whom the Spirit would speak?

Luther’s exposition of 1 Pet 2 rules out this reading of his thought. Luther insists that *no* theological distinction can be made between priest and laity, or between preacher and congregation, for *all* are called to the office of priest, and are commissioned to do what priests do; that is, to preach, to pray, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice for others. The setting apart of some to do this on behalf of others is a matter of function and order, not one that creates any theological or ontological distinction between preacher and congregation:

No, Christ is the High and Chief Priest anointed by God Himself. He also sacrificed His own body for us, which is the highest function of the priestly office. Then He prayed for us on the cross. In the third place, He also proclaimed the Gospel and taught all men to know God and Him Himself. These three offices He also gave to all of us. Consequently, since He is the Priest and we are His brothers, all Christians have the authority, the command, and the obligation to preach, to come before God, to pray for one another, and offer themselves as a sacrifice to God. [And provided that any one begin to preach the word of God or

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<sup>390</sup> LW 40:379–94.

address it to others, he is then a priest.]<sup>391</sup>

... Now you might say: 'What kind of situation will arise if it is true that we are all priests and should all preach? Should no distinction be made among the people, and should the women, too, be priests?' Answer: In the New Testament no priest has to be tonsured. Not that this is evil in itself, for one surely has the right to have the head shaved clean. But one should not make a distinction between those who do so and the common Christian. Faith cannot tolerate this. Thus those who are now called priests would all be laymen like the others, and only a few officiants would be elected by the congregation to do the preaching. Thus there is only an external difference because of the office to which one is called by the congregation. Before God, however there is no distinction, and only a few are selected from the whole group to administer the office in the stead of the congregation. They all have this office, but nobody has any more authority than the other person has.<sup>392</sup>

Insofar as Luther regarded the duly set-apart and recognized congregational preacher as a commissioned human speaker of God's word to others, he did so on the basis that *every* Christian receives such a divine commission and charge, because all

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<sup>391</sup> The *LW* translation of this final sentence of the paragraph is problematic, and has been replaced in this quote by the translation of E. H. Gillett. The *LW* version is: 'Nevertheless, no one should undertake to preach or to declare the Word of God unless he is a priest'. If 'priest' is taken to mean what it does in the previous sentences, the thought is nonsensical; i.e., 'All Christians have the authority and command to preach because they are all priests, but nevertheless no-one should preach unless he is a priest (that is, a Christian)'. The only other way to make sense of the *LW* translation is to take 'priest' in the final sentence to refer not to the priesthood of believers, but to the existing human office of ordained 'priests'. This leaves Luther saying: 'All Christians have the authority and command to preach because they are all priests, but only those who are officially ordained as "priests" should preach.' This does fit with Luther's view that only duly chosen representatives should preach on behalf of all (in the following paragraph), but it directly contradicts his insistence (commenting on 1 Pet 2:9) that the language of 'priest' should *not* be used to describe the external office of one appointed to preach; *LW* 30:63. Gillett's translation gives appropriate force to *anhebe* ('to begin') in the opening clause, and better preserves the flow of Luther's logic; Martin Luther, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, Preached and Explained by Martin Luther* (trans. E. H. Gillett; New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1859), 91.

<sup>392</sup> *LW* 30:54–55. Cf. his comments on 2:9 a few pages later: 'Some can be selected from the congregation who are officeholders and servants and are appointed to preach in the congregation and to administer the sacraments. But we are all priests before God if we are Christians ... For it must be our aim to restore the little word 'priests' to the common use which the little word 'Christians' enjoys. For to be a priest does not belong in the category of an external office; it is exclusively the kind of office that has dealings before God'; *LW* 30:63.

are priests. The congregational preacher is exercising this ministry on behalf of all, and in humble service of all, but his commission and authority to speak derive theologically not from the circumstances of his churchly appointment but from the standing which he shares with all believers: that of being a priest of God in Christ.

Luther's reading of Peter's thought here is consistent with the apostolic trains of thought we have observed above, where the apostolic proclamation of the word of God shares its essential theological nature with the one-another edifying speech of believers in general. The nature of the word itself, and what the word achieves by the Spirit in the hearts and minds of believers, leads to the apostolic word being found on the lips of believers in mutual exhortation and encouragement. Luther's configuring of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as the basis for the 'preacher-hood' of all believers follows a similar logic. All those who receive the word, and are thus united with Christ, share in the nature of Christ's priesthood, which includes the priestly task of mediating the word of God to others.

It must be said, however, that Luther's embrace of this logic did not seem to express itself in the practice of every-believer speech in the German Reformation. Perhaps the clerical framework—of ordained preachers doing the speaking, and the congregation doing the listening—was a paradigm too deeply established for him to think beyond.<sup>393</sup> It is telling, for example, that in his exposition of Heb 3:13, he does not discuss the possibility of Christians actually exhorting or encouraging one another (which is odd given the content of the verses). Likewise, in his comments on Heb 10:24–25, he speaks of the importance of mutual love in a congregation of mixed maturity, but makes no mention of the verses' instruction for the congregation to 'stir up one another' and 'encourage one another' to this end.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> As shown by his comments on Heb 3:13 and 10:24–25, noted in the Introduction above.

<sup>394</sup> *LW* 29:153–154, 226–227.

It is also very likely that historical and contextual factors strongly influenced Luther's insistence that congregation members should not take upon themselves the prerogative actually to preach. The excesses of Carlstadt, Muentzer and the Enthusiasts, and the growing influence of Anabaptist preaching, led to an increasing emphasis on order, due appointment of pastors and preachers in Luther's writings, and the discouragement of lay enthusiasm and unauthorized preaching.<sup>395</sup>

All the same, Luther's seeming inability to conceive of how Christian believers might fulfil their priestly commission to teach others the things of God, apart from appointing representative speakers to do this on their behalf, remains an unresolved tension in his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

For other major figures in the Continental Reformation, there seemed to be no such tension. Calvin and Bullinger, for example, followed Luther in affirming and teaching the 'priesthood of all believers', but stopped short of extending the priestly nature of Christian existence to being a teacher or interpreter of God's word to others. Like Luther, they repudiated the Roman Catholic appropriation of the 'priesthood' to describe the office of ministry, but unlike Luther, they saw the priesthood of all believers as referring only to believers having access to God, and being able to offer up spiritual sacrifices to him, not to any commission to be 'preachers'.<sup>396</sup> The didactic aspect of the priestly task is seen by Calvin as pertaining

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<sup>395</sup> Herman A. Preus, 'Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry', *Conc* 5/2 (March 1979): 58–60.

<sup>396</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, 'The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566', in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era* (vol. 2 of *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss; trans. Arthur C. Cochrane; 4 vols; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 500. On Heb 10:19, Calvin writes: 'The way into heaven is open for us not only in symbol but in very truth by the mercy of Christ because He has made us a royal priesthood'; John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter* (CC; ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. William B. Johnston; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1963), 140; see also John Richard Crawford, 'Calvin and the Priesthood of All Believers', *SJT* 21/2 (June 1968): 146–153.

only to those called to be pastors, doctors (or teachers) and elders.

For Calvin, just as Scripture is itself an accommodation by God to our humanity, so God also ‘deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them’.<sup>397</sup> Although God could quite easily speak his word to us ‘himself without any sort of aid or instrument’, he ‘takes some to be his ambassadors in the world, to be interpreters of his secret will and, in short, to represent his person’.<sup>398</sup> The preachers and teachers of the church are called to be these chosen instruments, like the priests, prophets and apostles before them. And like their fore-runners as God’s mouthpieces (in fact, even more so), their authority and dignity ‘is wholly given not to the men personally, but to the ministry to which have been appointed; or (to speak more briefly) to the Word, whose ministry is entrusted to them’.<sup>399</sup>

For Calvin, the preacher has a God-ordained place in the economy of revelation, analogous (but subservient) to the place of Scripture itself. Just as God accommodates himself to our finitude by ‘lipping’ to us in Scripture,<sup>400</sup> he also graciously provides for us by appointing human teachers and ‘interpreters’ to explain the truth to us.<sup>401</sup> In appointing shepherds who have the ‘office and charge of teaching’, God ‘chews our morsels for us that we might digest them the better, in that he feeds us as little children’.<sup>402</sup>

There is a difference, then, between Luther and Calvin on the theological grounding of the word ministry of preachers and teachers (even if not a massive

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<sup>397</sup> *Inst.* IV.i.5.

<sup>398</sup> *Inst.* IV.iii.1.

<sup>399</sup> *Inst.* IV.viii.3.

<sup>400</sup> *Inst.* I.xiii.1.

<sup>401</sup> *Inst.* IV.i.5.

<sup>402</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 945; repr. of *Sermons of M. John Calvin on the Epistles of S. Paule to Timothie and Titus* (London: G. Bishop and T. Woodcoke, 1579).

difference in practice). For Luther, the preacher is a steward or official, elected from among all the God-commissioned preaching-priests, to preach the word on behalf of all. The authority and command to speak the word of God to others is given to all, but exercised in practice by those appointed to do so. For Calvin, there seems to be no such universal commission to speak the word. Instead, God ordains and commissions shepherds, teachers and preachers to chew the food of the word of God and feed it to the members of the congregation. This, and this alone, is the means by which the church is built up.<sup>403</sup>

Luther and Calvin were agreed, however, that through the proclamation of human teaching and preaching, God's own speech and words were heard, provided that the content of the preaching was the pure, christological, inscripturated word of God, and that it was preached faithfully to call forth repentance and faith in the hearer (such response only being possible by the inward work of the Spirit).<sup>404</sup>

## *§2 Barth and the speech-actions of God*

Karl Barth's theology of the threefold form of the word of God—revealed, written and preached—connects at significant points with the Reformation view of Luther and Calvin, insofar as it affirms that the human speech of the preacher is a means by which God's word comes to the hearer:

This is how the Reformers understood that event at the heart of the Church's life. They understood it in terms of proclamation, i.e., of the *promissio* repeated by man's act, because they thought they could understand the presence of the holy God among unholy men only as

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<sup>403</sup> *Inst* IV.i.5.

<sup>404</sup> Chan is right to reach this conclusion, although he fails to appreciate the differences between Luther and Calvin on the preacher as a divinely appointed agent; *Preaching*, 55–56.

the grace of the strictly personal free Word of God which reaches its goal in the equally personal free hearing of men, the hearing of faith, which for its part, too, can be understood only as grace.<sup>405</sup>

However, Barth was also insistent that the word of God (whether written or proclaimed) could never be conceptualized as a static human artefact, as a thing to be read and manipulated and grasped as an act of human intellectual effort. The speech or revelation of God could only ever have the character of an event, an act of God by which God revealed God in a moment of divine power and decision.

The Bible is God's Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that He speaks through it. In this second equation no less than the first (namely, that Church proclamation is God's Word) we cannot abstract from the free action of God in and by which He causes it to be true to us and for us here and now that the biblical word of man is His own Word.<sup>406</sup>

Revelation is itself the divine decision which is taken in the Bible and proclamation, which makes use of them, which thus confirms, ratifies and fulfils them. It is itself the Word of God which the Bible and proclamation are as they become it.<sup>407</sup>

In speaking of 'Church proclamation' as a human activity through which God may act in revelation, Barth is referring to the role of the duly authorized pastor in preaching:

This proclamation is preaching, i.e., the attempt by someone called thereto in the Church, in the form of an exposition of some portion of the biblical witness to revelation, to express in his own words and to make intelligible to the men of his own generation the promise of the revelation, reconciliation and vocation of God as they are to be expected here and now.<sup>408</sup>

Although Barth thinks that Scripture should be the standard by which church

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<sup>405</sup> *CD I.1*, 67–68.

<sup>406</sup> *CD I.1*, 109–110.

<sup>407</sup> *CD I.1*, 118.

<sup>408</sup> *CD I.1*, 56.

proclamation is judged, at another level he also emphasizes the common nature of Scripture and the forms of contemporary proclamation that repeat or witness to its message. Both are human words that *become* God's word as God selects or 'commandeers' them to be so in the existential event of revelation.<sup>409</sup>

This raises an interesting possibility. If Scripture and the authorized speech of proclaimers both function on this level theologically, because of God's use of them in the event of revelation, could not *other forms* of contemporary human speech also be used by God in this way? If a lay Christian were to 'express in his own words ... the promise of the revelation, reconciliation and vocation of God', could Barth's theological framework offer any reason why those words, too, could not 'become' the word of God? Barth does not appear to countenance this possibility, but before I go too far in considering whether such an equation would be justified, the weaknesses in Barth's formulation need to be addressed.

Those weaknesses have been highlighted by a number of critics. Wolterstorff, for example, criticizes Barth for seeking to describe that 'extra' whereby the message 'grabs' someone, or elicits a response of understanding and faith, as an act of *speaking*, when that is not really what is happening.<sup>410</sup> In a similar vein, others have argued that Barth inappropriately fuses the Reformed doctrines of revelation and illumination,<sup>411</sup> and fails to give due emphasis to the work of the Spirit, not just in the believer but in the original authoring and inspiration of Scripture.<sup>412</sup> Perhaps most pointedly, it has also been observed that Barth's reluctance to identify the Bible

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<sup>409</sup> Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 124.

<sup>410</sup> Wolterstorff's critique would also suggest that Barth has not appreciated the distinction between 'speaking' and 'revelation'. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63–74.

<sup>411</sup> Paul Helm provides a critique of this and other aspects of Barth's view in *The Divine Revelation: The Basic Issues* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1982), 40–46.

<sup>412</sup> Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 116.

itself as the ‘word of God’ is a reluctance that the witness of Scripture itself does not share.<sup>413</sup>

Recently, a number of scholars have suggested that the shortcomings of Barth’s formulation stem not so much from his instinct to see God’s speech as an event or form of action, but from his lacking the conceptual categories to expound this idea, a lack which speech-act theory supplies. Building on the insights of Frei and Vanhoozer, Timothy Ward argues that Barth was quite right to portray God’s word (in its various forms) as God’s free transcendent action, as ‘fundamentally a way of acting in and on the world’, not as an artefact separate from himself or subject to human control.<sup>414</sup> Barth, in other words, was seeking to describe the word of God as a *performative utterance*, but lacked the framework to clarify and articulate this position. The result was (in speech-act terms) an unfortunate collapsing of the illocutionary act into the perlocutionary act,<sup>415</sup> as if someone’s ‘word’ only counts as their ‘word’ if it achieves the effect towards which it is aiming.<sup>416</sup>

The remedy Ward proposes (along with Vanhoozer) is to construe Scripture as a divine speech-act, an interpersonal communicative action by God that is sufficient to do the thing God wishes to do in speaking it:

Scripture is sufficient for the communicative action (illocutionary force and propositional

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<sup>413</sup> Klaas Runia, ‘What Is Preaching According to the New Testament?’, *TynBul* 29/4 (1978): 37. For a critique that constructively engages with these various weaknesses in Barth’s position, see M. D. Thompson, ‘Witness to the Word: On Barth’s Doctrine of Scripture’, in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange; Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 168–97.

<sup>414</sup> Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 120.

<sup>415</sup> Illocution refers to the act one performs in speaking (asserting, promising, asking, explaining, commanding, and so on); perlocution refers to the effect that the act produces in its hearers. See the discussion in the Introduction, above.

<sup>416</sup> Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 123. Cf. Vanhoozer: ‘One cannot define illocutions—what a speaker does in saying something—in terms of the effect produced on the hearer or reader. There is no place for retroactive causality in the analysis of speech-acts’; *Divine Drama*, 193; see also Chan, *Preaching*, 212.

content, referring to God, humanity, and the world) which God intends to perform by means of it.<sup>417</sup>

However, this is not to say that Scripture is ‘*self-sufficient*’ to achieve the purpose for which God spoke it:

Scripture is sufficient for the performance of the divine illocutionary act, which includes the conveying of its necessary propositional content, but insufficient to bring about the intended perlocutionary effect. For that ... the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word is required.<sup>418</sup>

In a subsequent work, Ward takes this way of conceptualizing what it means for God to perform speech-acts through the medium of Scripture and applies it to the contemporary word of human preaching. According to Ward, a preacher can be confident that he is speaking God’s word because God ‘has uttered it in advance of him’:

...what the faithful biblical preacher does, and what the Holy Spirit does with Scripture through him, is best described as *a contemporary re-enactment of the speech-act that the Spirit performed in the original authoring of the text* ...

Human and divine activity come together most profoundly in preaching at this point ... Some incidental places and practices referred to in Scripture will be modified in the sermon, of course, as the message is applied to contemporary listeners, who live, say, in twenty-first-century Britain and not in ancient Thessalonica. But the text’s original Spirit-given *purpose*, and its fundamental meaningful *content* about Christ, his future appearing and the situation of Christian believers in the world will be faithfully re-enacted. The Spirit is again graciously present in the preached message, if what is preached now is faithful in *purpose* and *content* to what he once inspired.<sup>419</sup>

Interestingly, although Ward’s position is an advance on Barth’s, and offers a

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<sup>417</sup> Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 202; cf. the discussion of Vanhoozer’s view at chapter 2§4.a above.

<sup>418</sup> Ward, *Word and Supplement*, 202–203.

<sup>419</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 164–165 (emphasis original).

more conceptually satisfying account of how both Scripture and human preaching can legitimately be identified with the ‘word of God’, Ward doesn’t go beyond Barth in seeing church proclamation as being anything other than the sermonic speech of preachers. He doesn’t address what would happen if someone *other* than a preacher performed a faithful re-enactment of the Scriptural speech-act—for example, if a believer were to summarize or repeat to others in the congregation the content and purpose of a Scriptural speech-act, or (to use the terms that have emerged in this thesis) if a believer were to present faithfully and contextually some facet of God’s christological word to others for their growth in faith and obedience. Would this too be a coincidence of divine and human activity? Would the Spirit speak through the re-enacted word in the mouth of any believer as much as through the preacher?

The exegetical analysis of Part II would lead us to answer these questions in the affirmative. However, Ward does not consider it as a possibility. His conception of what it means for Christians generally to participate in contemporary divine speech-acts extends only to them *receiving* the word from preachers, and reading the word privately themselves.<sup>420</sup>

All the same, Ward’s work is illuminating. His application of speech-act theory to the question of how contemporary congregational preaching might re-enact or represent Scriptural speech-acts is persuasive, and opens up lines of enquiry about how OES might relate not only to the Scriptural word of God, but to the word as it is proclaimed by preachers and teachers. If God ‘speaks’ through Scripturally faithful congregational preaching, is there any reason to doubt that he also does so through Scripturally-faithful OES? And if so, does this make ‘preaching’ and OES different varieties of the same thing?

It is to these questions that we now turn.

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<sup>420</sup> Ward, *Words of Life*, 170–178.

### *§3 Human speech-acts and the word of God*

To pursue these questions, I will interact more closely with Chan's recent work on the relationship of 'preaching' to the 'word of God'. Like Ward, but in considerably more detail, Chan applies the insights of speech-act theory to the question of how human speech (and in particular the speech of preachers) should be thought of in relation to the 'word of God'.<sup>421</sup>

Using Austin's and Searle's terminology of the speech-act, Chan articulates what would also be the position of Ward and Vanhoozer: that the 'word of God' can be represented as  $F(p)$ , where (p) stands for the propositional content of the utterances (what is referred to, what is predicated), and  $F$  represents the various illocutionary acts God performs in speaking this content (commanding, telling, asking, appealing, judging, promising, asserting, and so on). In this way, the 'word of God' is '*both* propositional and personal, saying and doing, cognitive information and existential encounter'.<sup>422</sup>

To apply this basic insight of speech-act theory to the phenomenon of human preaching, Chan draws on the work of Wolterstorff and Vanhoozer to make two key points.

*Firstly*, for any utterance to count as a speech-act it must be subject to the conventions of its context, such that it acquires a 'normative status'—a conventional complex of rights and responsibilities for both speakers and hearers, such that an utterance *counts* as a speech-act with meaningful content.<sup>423</sup> For example, if a speaker utters the words 'I promise to arrive by next Tuesday', this counts as the speech-act of *promising* only on the assumption that the speaker has adopted the normative

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<sup>421</sup> Somewhat unexpectedly, Chan makes no reference to Ward's earlier and related work on the question.

<sup>422</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 188 (emphasis original).

<sup>423</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 189–191; Chan depends here on Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 75–93.

stance of one who makes a promise (which involves certain obligations and responsibilities), and if the hearer correspondingly understands and adopts the stance of one to whom a promise has been made.

This concept of ‘normative stance’ can be related to the biblical idea of *covenant*—that God has designed human language as an activity that takes place within a schema of mutual obligations and responsibilities, and within which God acts to establish personal relationship with humanity by speaking:

... the God in the Bible who speaks is a divine speech agent, who engages in interpersonal discourse, within the context of a divinely ordained covenant between himself and creation, so that his utterances are to be counted as promises, warnings, requests, blessings, curses and judgments. And it is within this covenant that both God and his creation have normative standings ascribed to them as, respectively, the one who speaks and the ones who hear.<sup>424</sup>

*Secondly*, it is possible for contemporary human speech-acts to count as the speech of God if they are regarded as examples of ‘appropriated’ or ‘*double-agency discourse*’. This sort of double-agency discourse happens commonly in human communication, such as when one person speaks ‘in the name’ of another, or is ‘deputized’ or ‘authorized’ to speak for another. When an ambassador speaks on behalf of a head of state (‘We declare war on you’) his illocutionary acts count as the illocutionary acts of the head of state.<sup>425</sup>

Combining these two points, Chan argues that the speech of contemporary preachers can be counted as the ‘word of God’ because it is an example of deputized double-agency discourse within a covenantal set of normative conditions.<sup>426</sup> This in turn can generate criteria for discerning whether or not a fallible human preacher has performed a ‘successful’ (or, in speech-act terms, ‘happy’ or ‘felicitous’) divine-human

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<sup>424</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 191.

<sup>425</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 188, 192–193, drawing on Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 75–93.

<sup>426</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 193.

speech-act; namely:

- i. that the proclaimer is operating within the divinely ordained convention of being a God-commissioned human messenger;
- ii. that the proclaimer correctly recognizes and re-performs the illocutionary speech-act of the Scriptural text upon his hearers (i.e. the same *F*);
- iii. that the propositional content of the proclaimer's message—the (p)—corresponds with the propositional content of God's revealed message, the essence of which is the christological gospel. (Chan refers to this propositional content as the 'locutionary act', but this seems to be an inconsistent application of speech-act terminology.<sup>427</sup> The 'locution' refers to the utterance itself, the form of words that are spoken. The propositional act, in which something is referred to or predicated of, is treated as an integral part of the illocutionary act by Searle.)

In this sense, Chan's proposal is a persuasive re-statement and clarification, via speech-act theory, of what was essentially the Reformation position: that the human word of preaching can be taken as (or count as) the word of God if it has the same content, source and purpose as the Scriptural word of God.

Two particular issues raised by his argument stand out as being relevant to our discussion of the theological relationship between OES and the 'word of God'. By exploring these I hope to show how a modified form of Chan's model could fruitfully be applied not only to preaching, but also to the practice of OES.

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<sup>427</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 208.

*a. First issue: divine commissioning and human speech-acts*

According to Chan, one of the three necessary conditions that must be met for the word of God to be spoken today, is that the human agent speaks within a divinely ordained normative stance of being a *God-commissioned or deputized speech agent*, and that this is recognized by both speaker and hearers. However, it has to be asked: on what theological grounds is a contemporary speaker 'ascribed the normative status of one who performs God's speech acts'? How does this commissioning take place, such that it is recognized by the speaker and the hearers? Chan doesn't satisfactorily resolve these questions.

For example, in his biblical treatment of the theme of human messengers being commissioned by God to be his speech-agents, Chan traces the biblical trajectory from Moses as the archetypal prophet, through the expectation of the eschatological prophet of Deut 18, and the Spirit-enabled Isaianic servant preacher, to Jesus as the unique and climactic Prophet and Servant, and to the commissioned apostles as agents speaking on Jesus' behalf. However, when it comes to how the status of being a commissioned human messenger of God continues beyond the apostles (including down to today), Chan seems uncertain how to proceed.

At one level, (unlike Luther) he is reluctant to implicate *individual believers* as the objects of such a commissioning. Chan does reference Acts 2 and the last-days expectation of all God's Spirit-filled people being empowered to prophesy, as well as the Great Commission and its implication that Christians are thus 'commissioned to preach God's word',<sup>428</sup> but he takes these passages to mean that the 'Christian church *collectively* follows in the footsteps of Jesus and the apostles as the prophet and servant-preacher',<sup>429</sup> not that Christians as individual believers are commissioned to

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<sup>428</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 109.

<sup>429</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 109 (emphasis mine).

be messengers of God's words to others. The biblical examples he provides are of the church fulfilling this commission in a corporate fashion—such as the church displaying the manifold wisdom of God in Eph 3:10, or the whole people of God declaring God's praises in 1 Pet 2:9.<sup>430</sup>

While Chan regards the commission as having been given to the church viewed collectively, the responsibility actually to preach the word falls on a few individuals:

Those individuals who are particularly gifted by God for the proclamation of his word are recognized as such by other Christians and set aside for this special role.<sup>431</sup>

On the analogy of Paul commissioning Timothy (2 Tim 1:8; 4:2), and Timothy passing that commission onto other faithful men (2 Tim 2:2), the task of gospel proclamation is entrusted to 'worthy and faithful successors'.<sup>432</sup>

The implication of this line of reasoning would seem to be that the process of recognizing or ordaining contemporary preachers is the way in which they receive the normative status of being divinely 'commissioned' to follow in the apostles' footsteps, but Chan is reluctant to say so. In fact, he avoids saying that those set apart for the preaching office in churches today are by virtue of their appointment the ones who have been divinely commissioned to be the human messengers of God—perhaps out of a (quite legitimate) concern not to attach God's divine work of commissioning too closely to a human process of selection, recognition and ordination.

In his summative conclusion, this ambiguity as to how the divine commission actually attaches to any particular contemporary Christian speaker remains:

For a human preacher would be speaking the word of God if he or she is anointed, gifted, and empowered by the Spirit who authors God's word; the preacher is commissioned by

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<sup>430</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 110. It is also hard to see how Eph 3:10 constitutes 'proclamation' or 'preaching' in the way that Chan has defined it to this point.

<sup>431</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 111.

<sup>432</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 111.

God and to speak on behalf of God; the preacher receives the message from God's revelation; and the preacher preaches the message without modification. The significance of this observation is that the Christian church today can also claim to be preaching the authoritative word of God. For, in the present salvation-historical age, God similarly anoints Christians with his Spirit to be his divinely commissioned proclaimers of his word. The Christian church preaches the word because it speaks on behalf of God.<sup>433</sup>

In the first half of this paragraph, it sounds as if the divinely commissioned speech agent is an individual preacher, perhaps extending to the kind of preachers who occupy church pulpits today. In the second half of the paragraph, the speaker is the 'Christian church' or 'Christians'. Who, then, is commissioned exactly? All believers, but only collectively? Or a subset of all believers, such as the pastor-preacher? In a startling admission towards the end of his book, Chan acknowledges that he has not resolved this question:

At this point, one might legitimately ask how one can know if one is commissioned. Does this point not beg the need for further criteria? This is indeed a valid question. However, it is one that is beyond the scope of my present project.<sup>434</sup>

The problem this raises for his thesis is one of recognition. According to Chan, in the successful conduct of a divine-human speech-act, 'hearers *ought* to recognize the normative status of the proclaimer, and they *ought* to recognize their own normative status as persons upon whom God has performed a speech-act'.<sup>435</sup> But upon what basis can this recognition take place if there are no identifiable criteria as to who has been divinely commissioned to speak and who has not? If the church as a corporate whole has been thus commissioned, but only insofar as it engages in collective communication, how does this identify any particular speaker as having the normative status of re-performer of God's speech-acts?

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<sup>433</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 155.

<sup>434</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 207, n. 131.

<sup>435</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 193 (emphasis original).

The issues Chan is grappling with at this point, but not solving, also emerge in the contrasting approaches of his theological predecessors in the debate. Luther wanted to dismantle the idea of a special priestly class of mediators, and so argued that *all* believers were individually commissioned as priests to be preachers of the word—but then didn’t quite know what to do with that assertion apart from requiring that believers *not act* on their commission, but to leave the preaching to one or two gifted and duly appointed individuals. Calvin was more comfortable to say the preacher-teacher did indeed receive a special divine commission to stand as a mediating interpreter between the Bible and the believer, but in so doing left himself open to the accusation of creating a new word-based priestly class to replace the old sacerdotal one. Barth’s position might be seen as more accommodating towards a broader sense of commissioning—in that God could surely commandeer any form of human speech in its becoming the word of God—but his focus on the inward event of revelation (i.e., the perlocutionary effect of the speech) left him with little to say about the semantic content or form of the speech itself (apart from characterizing it as a sermonic exposition).

My investigation into how the apostolic authors thought about OES suggests a way forward at this point, not just for better configuring the relationship between the preacher’s word and the word of God, but for *understanding how all forms of Christian speech relate to the word of God*. The underlying weakness of Ward’s and Chan’s positions at this point (and of Luther’s, Calvin’s and Barth’s) is *a failure to appreciate the significance of the kind of widespread, mutual edifying speech that the apostolic authors regarded as a normative and necessary component of Christian communal life*.

As has been demonstrated extensively above, the apostles perceived a fundamental theological continuity between their own uniquely authoritative proclamatory speech and the one-another speech of the Christian community, the latter being derivative of the former. In speech-act terms, these continuities could be

summarized using the following notation:

- S = a speaker called and empowered by God's Spirit, and motivated by love for his hearers;
- U = an utterance or locution of undetermined length;
- F = a range of illocutionary forces, featuring *assertives* (e.g., tell, proclaim, instruct, teach), *directives* (e.g., implore, command, exhort, appeal), *commissives* (e.g., promise, guarantee, invite), and possibly *expressives* (e.g., thanks, express delight);<sup>436</sup>
- p = some facet of the true content of the christological message of the apostolic gospel, including its call upon the individual to ongoing cruciform faith and repentance;
- PE = that hearers would understand and respond to the message in repentance and faith, and be numbered among those presented 'mature in Christ';<sup>437</sup>
- H = a member or potential member of the Christian community.

If this analysis is correct, then the proclamatory speech-acts of apostles and the OES of Christian believers can be regarded as *species of the same genus*—a genus established by the foundational speech of the apostles, and continued and extended into the apostolic Christian communities by the widespread practice of OES. Just as importantly, if the descriptive analysis of congregational preaching by Ward, Chan and Griffiths is also broadly correct, then *it too is a species of this genus*.<sup>438</sup> The

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<sup>436</sup> In his adaptation and development of earlier categorizations of illocutionary forces (by Austin et al), Alston identifies these four categories, plus the category of *exercitives*, where the illocution itself causes some change in affairs (e.g., adjourning, pardoning, nominating). William P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 33–34.

<sup>437</sup> To use Paul's language about his proclamatory ministry in Col 1:28.

<sup>438</sup> See further on Griffiths's view below.

congregational preaching and teaching undertaken by those set aside for the task likewise seeks to communicate some aspect of the word of God, with a range of illocutionary forces, for the spiritual benefit and growth of its hearers.

We could posit, then, three ‘species’ of speech-acts within the one genus: let us refer to them as apostolic proclamation, congregational teaching-and-preaching (CTP) and one-another edifying speech (OES). All three *stem from a divine command and commission via the Spirit of God*. The speaker (S) in each case is provided with the ‘normative status’ or convention of being one who speaks the word to others, on the basis of being included by God in his work of bringing salvation to other people through his word. In each case, the speakers are empowered and enabled by the Spirit to understand and speak the message, and are driven by love to seek the salvation and edification of others. (My analysis of Paul’s train of thought in 1 Corinthians, above, makes this particularly clear.)

In this sense, the apostles saw their own foundational, *kerygmatic* speech *and* the ongoing apostolically-formed speech they wished to see flourish in Christian communities (both CTP and OES) as the initiative and work of the triune God. In her summary of the significance of teaching-and-learning speech in Pauline communities, Smith concludes:

The prominence and significance of teaching is evident in the participants of the educational activities. Principally, this is seen in the involvement of the Trinitarian God in activities denoted by vocabulary in all nine semantic groupings. God is the addresser of educational activities. He is the revealer and source of content, which may be spoken, written and embodied/enacted. He is the main subject matter of content. God commanded and prescribed the participation of human addressers, enabled and witnessed human teaching activities, and is judge of the addressees’ learning responses. At the last, the didactic result of his end-time revealing activities will be irresistible.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Smith, ‘*Scholastic communities*’, 382–383.

Theologically, we may appreciate at this point the truth that Barth was seeking to emphasize. Whatever character various human forms of speech possess, whether written or oral, proclamatory or mutual, the significance and power that they possess is found in the fact that God is freely active in them in through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Writing in the Barthian tradition, Webster's later dogmatic description of Scripture also has relevance to the re-performing of Scriptural speech-acts by contemporary speakers:

God speaks as in the Spirit Jesus Christ speaks. The eternal Word made flesh, now enthroned at the right hand of the Father, is present and eloquent. His state of exaltation does not entail his absence from or silence within the realm within which he once acted in self-humiliation; rather, his exaltation is the condition for and empowerment of his unhindered activity and address of creatures. This address takes the form of Holy Scripture.<sup>440</sup>

What Webster says here of Scripture could also be said, in a related sense, of the Spirit-given speech of believers that proclaims the word of Scripture. As Jesus Christ wills to speak through the written Scriptural speech-acts, to draw them into his own act of self-utterance, to perform speech-acts by means of them, so he wills to speak through the faithful oral (or written) re-performance of those Scriptural speech-acts by human speech-agents. This way of putting it maintains the primacy and authority of Scripture—contemporary speech is re-performance of a given word, not the first performance of a new word—while also affirming the presence and eloquence of Christ as the one who continues to speak by his Spirit in the words of his people.

All of this leads to two preliminary conclusions.

*First*, if it can be affirmed that CTP and OES *share a common divine source, content and purpose*, then any ambiguity or uncertainty about how God commissions

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<sup>440</sup> J. B Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 8.

contemporary human speech to function as his own speech is removed. On this basis, it can be asserted without hesitation that at any point or in any context when a Christian believer performs a speech-act of the kind outlined above—whether in one-another congregational speech-acts of various kinds, or in the kind of set-apart, recognized speech-acts of teaching and preaching undertaken by congregational leaders—then God grants that this speech should count as his own speech, as the address of the risen Lord Christ to the hearer. God’s own speech takes place through the agency of the human speaker.

Accordingly, whatever differences there are between CTP and OES (and there are significant differences that I will explore below), they are not to be found in any distinctions in the foundational content of the speech, the source or commissioning of the speech, or its overall purposes.

This leads to a *second* conclusion. It is clear that the apostles regarded both their own proclamatory speech, and the OES of the Christian community, as effective to bring about change in the lives of those who heard it. *In both cases, this power stems from the nature of the speech as a divine-human communicative action.* Both forms of speech are portrayed as relying for their effectiveness on the action of God, in three senses:

- i. the human word that is spoken depends for its content on the prior word spoken by God in Jesus Christ, now inscripturated; the human word is only a divine-human word insofar as it re-performs the word that God has given;
- ii. the speaker relies on the empowering and enabling of the Spirit for the ability to understand and perform an illocutionary act that faithfully re-performs some facet of the Scriptural speech-act;
- iii. the faithfully spoken word will only bring about the desired perlocutionary effect if God is at work in the heart of the hearer by his

Spirit.

Theologically speaking, these three facets of the divine action apply as much to OES as to CTP. In this sense, in the thought of the apostles, the speaking of the word of God is no less effective in the parlour than in the pulpit.

This raises the question, of course, as to what *does* differentiate the different species of speech within the genus. A fuller answer to that question will only be possible as the remaining sections of this theological interaction unfold. However, some initial progress can be made via a discussion of a second issue to emerge from Chan's stimulating argument.

*b. Second issue: what, in fact, is 'preaching the word'?*

To 'preach' (in English) is 'to pronounce a public discourse', 'to deliver a sermon or religious address'.<sup>441</sup> It is to engage in a particular form of *discourse* in certain (usually public) contexts. Most discussions of preaching define it in these terms. In a recent exegetical and theological treatment of the subject of preaching, Griffiths adopts as his working definition 'a public proclamation of God's word'. Likewise, Chan takes preaching generally to refer to 'the proclamation of a message'. More particularly, he argues that 'preaching the word' in the Bible refers to the proclamation of the specific message of the gospel, 'which announces that Christ has come as the Savior [sic] and Lord, and that all must respond with a life of faith and obedience'.<sup>442</sup>

In speech-act terms, Chan is saying that the illocutionary act formula  $F(p)$  could be applied to preaching as follows:

*announcing/proclaiming* (the 'word' = that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, and that all must repent and obey him).

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<sup>441</sup> 'Preach', *SOED*, 2316.

<sup>442</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 3.

Chan offers extensive and convincing evidence in support of this claim.

However, his model would be improved by a greater degree of clarity as to what sort of illocutionary act CTP is, with a corresponding clarification of its force and content. Explaining how this is the case requires some (brief) further thought about the nature of speech-acts.

To speak of speech-actions is most often to refer to individual utterances, usually in the form of sentences. As noted above, these actions can be classified into five classes (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and exercitives).<sup>443</sup> However, utterances that are connected together in a *discourse* also have the character of an action, at a discourse level.

Take the following brief fictional discourse:

‘Students, I have something to tell you of great importance. Please listen carefully. Jane was caught cheating in the exam. She smuggled in some notes in her shoe. This is devastating for all of us. The point is: whatever you do, do not cheat on tests! Because if you do, I promise you will be expelled, just as Jane has been.’

This discourse contains several different classes of illocutionary acts: *directives* (‘have you heard?’, ‘do not cheat!’); *assertives* (‘I have something to tell you’, ‘Jane was caught’, ‘she smuggled in some notes’); an *expressive* (‘this is devastating’); and a *commissive* (‘I promise you’).

However, at the *discourse level*, what action is the speaker performing? It could be argued that it is primarily an *assertive* discourse that puts forward a certain state of affairs as being true; namely, ‘I am announcing to you the fact and implications of Jane being caught cheating on the test’. However, given that the second half of the discourse focuses on warning the hearers not to act like Jane, it could also be argued

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<sup>443</sup> See Alston, *Illocutionary Acts*, 33–34.

that this discourse is more *directive* in character: 'I warned you (using Jane's behaviour as a basis) not to cheat on exams'. Perhaps more accurately we could say that this discourse combines these several types of individual illocutionary action into a discourse that, overall, is *directive* on the basis of its *assertives*.

A weakness of Chan's analysis is that he routinely treats 'preaching' (or CTP) as if it is a single, sentential speech-act with an illocutionary force F of 'proclaiming' or 'announcing', when in fact preaching (in Scripture and in Chan's descriptions) is almost always a *discourse* in which a variety of speech-acts take place. At the level of an individual utterance, to 'preach' (or proclaim or announce) is an *assertive* action. It reports or declares a certain state of affairs to be the case. However, the *discourse* of 'preaching' almost always includes not just the announcing of certain things to be the case but the urging of listeners to respond to these truths in repentance, faith and obedience. The discourse contains both assertive actions and directive actions. Chan does not make this distinction himself, but his research provides ample evidence for it, particularly in his discussion of the intention of proclamatory speech-acts in Scripture. He notes the programmatic summary of Jesus' preaching ministry: 'The time has come [assertive]. The kingdom of God is near [assertive]. Repent and believe the good news [directive].' He likewise references Jesus' commission to the apostles to 'preach repentance and forgiveness' (Lk 24:47), the regularity with which the apostolic preaching concluded with a call to repentance (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20), and several other examples from Paul's ministry (e.g., Acts 26:20b; Col 1:28).<sup>444</sup> He is quite right to argue that the discourses labelled as 'preaching' in the NT had both assertive and directive force.

In his treatment of 2 Tim 4:2, Griffiths makes a similar point. He cogently argues that Paul's overarching charge to Timothy to 'preach the word' must be seen

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<sup>444</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 138–139.

as explicated by the imperatives and prepositional phrase that follow:

Preaching the word cannot be reduced to teaching it (in the sense of simply explaining the meaning of the word as a purely didactic activity); it involves the urgent call to respond that is signified by the imperatives 'reprove, rebuke and exhort'.<sup>445</sup>

*The clarifying point is this:* as a single sentential utterance, to 'preach' or to 'proclaim' something is to engage in an assertive action, not a directive one. It reports something to be the case. However, at the *discourse* level, the apostolic thought consistently frames the discourse of 'preaching/proclaiming the word' as consisting of at least *two classes of subsidiary illocutionary act*:

- i. [Assertives] (that something is true of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord)
- ii. [Directives] (to respond in some form to this assertion, such as to have faith, repent or obey him).<sup>446</sup>

Chan's model would benefit from this clarification, not only in more clearly specifying the nature of the twin illocutionary forces (*F*) that are usually entailed in 'preaching', but in further clarifying the content of the 'word' (*p*) that is spoken. The christological gospel 'word' provides the content not only for the assertive forms of action (e.g., the announcement of what 'Christ crucified' means as a true state of affairs) but also for the directive forms of speech-action (e.g., the call to live in line with the reality of 'Christ crucified' in repentance and faith).

This clarification is also of considerable value for this thesis, not only for further articulating the underlying commonalities between CTP and OES, but for beginning to point towards what differentiates them.

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<sup>445</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching*, 56. A related illustration of the same phenomenon can be seen in Paul's description of his gospel preaching to the Thessalonians, in which the phrases 'we preached the gospel' (2:2), and 'our appeal/exhortation' (2:3) are essentially synonymous.

<sup>446</sup> I say 'at least' these two classes of illocutionary act because apostolic proclamation also contained individual speech-acts classed as commissives and expressives. However, at a discourse level, the two classes of illocutionary act specified (assertive and directive) account for the force of the action being performed.

It has been demonstrated in chapters 3–5 (above) that the apostles consistently framed OES, like their own proclamation, as a form of discourse combining two forms of illocutionary act:

- i. [Assertives] (some aspect of the apostolic exposition of Jesus Christ)
- ii. [Directives] (some particular contextual exhortation, warning, encouragement on the basis of the assertive)

In 1 Corinthians, for example, the foundational word of Christ crucified is explicated throughout the epistle as the rationale for a new cruciform life, and this is the word that the ‘spiritual’ are to impart to others for their edification and exhortation (both in a general sense in 1 Cor 2:6–16 and more explicitly in 1 Cor 12–14).<sup>447</sup> Likewise in Ephesians, the mutual speaking of the doctrinally true word of Christ in love is the same word that is spoken graciously to individual circumstances in order to edify the hearer in their new life in Christ.<sup>448</sup> The OES of believers was built around the confession of the truth about Jesus Christ (assertive) and directed towards the exhortation and encouragement of others to live in light of this truth (directive).

Hebrews provides a particularly striking example of the seamless integration of (assertive) exposition and (directive) exhortation, both in the content of the epistle itself, and in the one-another speech that the author urged his readers to practise (in imitation of his own ‘exhortation’). My conclusion in chapter 5§5 was that, in Hebrews, the more informal mutual exhortation that the recipients of Hebrews were to practise with one another echoed the discourse of the letter as a whole; that is, it was to be a *theologically-grounded appeal for action*—a confession and reiteration of the promises of the gospel, along with an appeal to continue in faithful perseverance and

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<sup>447</sup> See chapter 3 above.

<sup>448</sup> See chapter 4 above.

to grow in love and good deeds.

Interestingly, the author of Hebrews designates the overall character of his discourse as a ‘word of exhortation’—that is, as a directive discourse. Could he have just as well characterized the overall action of his discourse as ‘preaching’? Both Griffiths and Chan wish to say so, in order to draw conclusions from the structure and content of Hebrews regarding the nature of NT preaching.<sup>449</sup> Their logic is that because there is evidence that Hebrews was to be read aloud as a sermon or homily, then its exhortation can be considered as an example of ‘proclamation’.<sup>450</sup> However, this evidence (such as it is) could equally well prove the opposite: that the author of Hebrews regarded ‘sermons’ or ‘homilies’ as forms of ‘exhortation’ rather than ‘proclamation’.

The clarification (above) of the nature of apostolic ‘preaching’ discourse as both assertive and directive renders this as something of a false choice. Whether the discourse as a whole should be characterized as an assertive action (‘preaching’, ‘proclamation’) or a directive action (‘exhorting’, ‘urging’, ‘warning’), it is clear that both assertive and directive speech-acts are *integral to the force of the discourse as a whole*. To designate a discourse generically as a directive form of action (an ‘exhortation’) is not necessarily to diminish the integral place of assertive speech-acts within its structure and rationale. In the same way, to designate a discourse as ‘preaching’ (in the NT sense), does not diminish the integral place of directive speech-acts of appeal or exhortation in the overall character of the discourse.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Chan, *Preaching*, 139–140; Griffiths, *Preaching*, 104–117.

<sup>450</sup> See above chapter 5§1, n. 330.

<sup>451</sup> This calls to mind again Perelman’s assessment that the tendency to compartmentalize epideictic and deliberative forms of rhetoric is mistaken; *Rhetoric*, 18–19.

## *§4 Differentiation?*

The emphasis thus far in this chapter has been on the theological continuities between apostolic proclamation, CTP and OES in relation to the divine word. But what may be said about the differences? In particular, what is to be made of the fact that the apostolic discourse is mostly labelled using assertive designations (preaching, proclaiming, evangelizing, announcing), whereas the speech of believers generally is not?

As Griffiths notes, the three words translated ‘preaching’ or ‘proclaiming’ in the NT (εὐαγγελίζω, καταγγέλλω and κηρύσσω) are applied, almost universally, to the action of speakers with a degree of recognized authority to declare a particular message publicly, and not to the word ministry of believers generally:

Furthermore, it is significant that none of our three ‘semi-technical’ verbs for preaching the gospel are used anywhere in the New Testament to frame an instruction, command or commission for believers in general to ‘preach’. Where there are generalized instructions in the New Testament for believers to communicate God’s word, these instructions are expressed using other vocabulary.<sup>452</sup>

Griffiths proceeds to conduct a useful survey of various instances of the word ministries of all believers, and the vocabulary that is used in describing them.<sup>453</sup> He notes (as I have done above) the continuity between the two forms of speech, noting as an example the close linguistic connection between Paul’s ‘proclaiming’ in Col 1:28 and the mutual Colossian speech of Col 3:16. However, he quite rightly concludes:

Nowhere does the New Testament call or instruct believers as a whole group to ‘preach’, but it does call them to minister the word to one another, and does so using language that can

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<sup>452</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching*, 36.

<sup>453</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching*, 45–49.

also describe preaching.<sup>454</sup>

This accords with my survey of all instances in the NT where believers (as believers) engage in various communicative acts within the Christian community, in which the vocabulary of ‘proclamation’ (as Griffiths identifies it) is entirely absent. The discourses of believers are described very often as directive actions (to exhort, encourage, admonish), occasionally as assertive actions (to teach, instruct), and sometimes with descriptions that are difficult to classify—such as to prophesy, which seems to be an action that is inherently both assertive and directive (if my analysis of the nature of prophecy is correct).<sup>455</sup>

However, while vocabulary and usage can point us towards conceptual trends, they are blunt instruments for drawing more definitive conclusions. This is illustrated by an inconvenient fact: just as the three-fold vocabulary of ‘preaching’ is never once in the NT applied to the actions of believers in general, *nor is it ever once applied to the speech-actions of congregational pastors, elders or overseers*. As Griffiths’s survey demonstrates, the subject of ‘preaching’ verbs in the NT ranges from angels and Jesus and John the Baptist, to the apostles and their immediate delegates (like Timothy), but never to the appointed elders, pastors or overseers of congregations. This latter group is portrayed as engaging in various speech-acts, such as teaching, admonishing and speaking, but they never engage in speech-actions marked by the ‘preaching’ verbs of εὐαγγελίζω, καταγγέλλω and κηρύσσω.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching*, 49.

<sup>455</sup> See chapter 3§6.

<sup>456</sup> It is a task for substantial further thought, and beyond the scope of this investigation, to consider why the language of ‘proclamation’ is *not* applied to the didactic activities of congregational leaders in the NT, and whether this fact has any significance. Multiple issues come into view, not least the debate surrounding C. H. Dodd’s now widely criticized distinction between the primitive *kerygma* of apostolic proclamation, regarded as initial gospel preaching addressed to non-Christian hearers, and the subsequent *didache* of Christian teaching, which taught the moral implications of Christian living in ecclesiastical contexts. For a useful critique, see McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache*, 3–6.

To his credit, Griffiths acknowledges this, and attempts to deal with it. He argues that when Timothy passes on his ministry to the ‘faithful men’ of 2 Tim 2:2, that this is the passing on of the apostolic preaching ministry via Timothy to the post-apostolic generation. Even though the ‘faithful men’ are those who will ‘*teach* others’ (διδάσκω) rather than ‘preach’ as such, Timothy is really delegating to them to carry on his own ministry of ‘preaching the word’ (in 2 Tim 4:2), just as Paul had passed it onto him.<sup>457</sup> This is a reasonable line of argument, and seems to capture the dynamic of what is happening. The apostles wanted to see those who were appointed to be elders, pastors or overseers of congregations conduct a ministry that continued and built upon the apostolic foundational ministry, holding fast to the good deposit of the gospel, and teaching it to the congregation. This line of argument is similar in many ways to the argument of this thesis: that the apostles’ trajectory of thought moved from the nature of their own proclamatory speaking of the gospel word to the nature of the one-another speech of believers. What they were doing (in the apostolic preaching), they wanted others to do as well in a variety of ways (e.g., in one-another edifying speech) to achieve the same end (of ‘presenting everyone mature in Christ’).

What Griffiths’s argument in fact demonstrates is that CTP is derivative of the apostolic proclamation, in much the same way as I have demonstrated above that OES is. (A fascinating example of this is seen in the pairing of CTP and OES in 1 Thess 5:11–14, in which the believers encourage and edify one another with the apostolic word, the congregational leaders are to be respected as they ‘admonish’, and then the believers generally also ‘admonish’ and ‘encourage’ each other.)

However, what Griffiths does not and cannot do within his methodology, is to

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<sup>457</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching*, 53–55. The language of ‘teaching’ (διδάσκω) rather than ‘preaching’ is used consistently throughout the Pastorals for the ministry of elders and overseers: 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:9.

show that CTP is fundamentally like apostolic proclamation in a way that OES is not. The stubborn uncooperativeness of the NT usage prevents Griffiths from using ‘preaching’ vocabulary as a means of differentiating CTP from OES. The problem is this: *If the post-apostolic CTP of elders and pastors is never called ‘preaching’ as such but gains its character from the apostolic proclamation that it resembles, then how is it to be differentiated from the OES of believers generally, which is also never called ‘preaching’ and also gains its character from the apostolic preaching that it resembles?*<sup>458</sup>

This problem cannot logically be solved by an examination of the vocabulary and nature of apostolic preaching, for that activity stands in the same essential relation to both forms of speech—as the foundational or initiating speech-act on which the subsequent speech-acts are modelled, or are in some sense derivative. Both CTP and OES are ‘re-performances’ of the divine communicative acts of Scripture (of which the apostolic proclamation is part), and insofar as they are faithful performances, participate in the power of that ‘word’ to achieve the purposes for which God spoke it.

## *§5 Conclusions*

This chapter has demonstrated that whatever does differentiate OES from CTP in the Christian community, the point of difference is not found in the fundamental

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<sup>458</sup> This problem is also encountered when the NT phenomenon of prophecy is considered. Griffiths argues that prophecy as a biblical-theological category ‘is not sufficient to provide a complete framework for understanding what Christian preaching is, but it is unquestionably a central part of the NT’s presentation of preaching’ (Griffiths, *Preaching*, 66). In a similar vein, Chan concludes that ‘although “prophecy” is not restricted to “preaching”, it primarily denotes “preaching”’ (Chan, *Preaching*, 241). However, almost precisely the same point could be made with respect to the speech of believers generally, as my exegesis of 1 Cor in its biblical context has demonstrated. ‘Prophecy’ is a paradigmatic description of the kind of gospel-centred edifying speech that all Christians should strive for in love (see chapter 3§7 above). It may well be a good description of what is also happening in ‘preaching-speech’, but this does not serve to differentiate preaching from other forms of congregational speech.

relation of each kind of speech to the communicative action of God. Both forms of discourse derive their content, commission and purpose from God; both depend for their power and efficacy on the enabling, empowering, illuminating and regenerating action of the Spirit; both are to be judged as faithful and successful insofar as they are judged to be re-performances of the Scriptural word of God; and both essentially take the form:

[*Assertives*] (that something is true in relation to Jesus Christ as crucified and risen Saviour and Lord)

[*Directives*] (to respond in some form to this assertion, such as a call to faith, repentance, obedience, perseverance, and so on).

One implication of these conclusions is that OES, like CTP, should be regarded as a divinely commissioned, divinely empowered, divinely effective means by which faith and obedience grow within Christian communities. Insofar as the word of God is faithfully re-performed in one-another speech-acts, that action represents an encounter with God's own communicative action<sup>459</sup>—no more or less than in the preaching-teaching speech of church leaders.<sup>460</sup> In other words, OES constitutes a God-given means by which God's purposes for his people are realized through the speaking of his word.

The question remains, however: *what does differentiate OES from CTP?* If the two are similar in their relation to the word of God, might Christian communities largely dispense with CTP and subsist solely on various forms of OES (as a small number of Christian sects in history have in fact done)? More relevantly for the practice of many Christian communities today, if the two forms of speech share so

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<sup>459</sup> As Ward, Chan and Griffiths all argue, in slightly different terms.

<sup>460</sup> Accordingly, I cannot agree with Griffiths when he says: 'Unlike other less formal forms of communicating the word (through personal conversation, group discussion, etc.), the public declaration of the gospel to a group of listening people by a herald who represents God uniquely reflects God's sole agency in achieving and offering salvation'; *Preaching*, 129.

much, is anything really lost if CTP dominates and OES barely exists?

This takes us back to Peter Adam's challenge, with which we began this thesis. Adam judges that unless we appreciate the respective roles of 'preaching' and the general word ministry of Christians, '... we shall try to make preaching carry a load which it cannot bear; that is, the burden of doing all that the Bible expects of every form of ministry of the Word'.<sup>461</sup> The same, of course, could be stated in reverse with regard to OES.

The question then is: what are those 'loads' that the various forms of word ministry bear? What functions does the word-based speech of OES perform that the word-based speech of CTP cannot adequately perform, and vice versa?

The contention of the following chapter is that it is precisely this—an analysis of the *functions* of CTP and OES—that provides a secure basis for understanding the related but unique contribution of each kind of speech to the health of the Christian community.

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<sup>461</sup> Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 59.



## *Chapter 8: Sanctified speech and moral transformation*

A second key theme that emerged from our examination of apostolic trains of thought relates to the purpose or function of OES in the life of the believer and the believing community. Throughout 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews the speech of believers to one another *functions to maintain and develop a new, morally transformed life* that befits their new status in Christ.

It was observed in 1 Corinthians, for example, that the childishness of the Corinthians (νηπίοις, 1 Cor 3:1) consisted in their failure to grasp and embody in their lives the meaning of the *kerygma* of ‘Christ crucified’. In fact, the ‘infancy’ metaphor of 3:1–3 is the first of three images in that chapter that cast the life of the believing community as one of growth or progress. As a child grows by milk and solid food (3:1–3), so crops grow by planting and watering (3:5–9), and buildings grow as a superstructure is erected on solid foundations (3:10–15). The Corinthians, however, are not ‘grown up’ so much as ‘puffed up’ (1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2, 8:1), and their lack of spiritual substance manifests itself in the various problems that Paul deals with in the course of the epistle.

In this context, the one-another speech that he urges them to practise (particularly in chapter 14) is not only *itself* a mark of maturity—of being driven by cruciform love for others, rather than pride or self-regard—but aims at *bringing about* the growth and maturity that the Corinthians urgently need; that is, ‘edification and exhortation and encouragement’ (1 Cor 14:3).<sup>462</sup>

Similar themes emerge in Hebrews. The author is concerned that his readers

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<sup>462</sup> See the discussion above in chapter 3§3 and 3§7.

have not progressed as far towards maturity as he would have liked (they are still like children who need milk, rather than those who could instruct others; Heb 5:11–14). He also urges them to practise mutual exhortation so that love and good works might increase (10:24–25). However, there is a greater emphasis in Hebrews on the *preventative or protective* function of mutual exhortation, in counteracting the hardening effects of sin (3:13). There is a need, in other words, not just for growth but for daily *perseverance* in faithful obedience, and OES has a functional role here as well.<sup>463</sup>

In Ephesians, the metaphors of ‘building’ and ‘growing’ come together in the remarkable picture of the body of Christ growing ‘so that it builds itself up in love’ (Eph 4:16). This takes place as the constituent members of the body speak the truth in love.

We should beware needless dichotomies at this point. In Ephesians, as in 1 Corinthians and Hebrews, the metaphors of growth and maturation and building have an individual as well as a corporate referent. The growth and flourishing of the whole body or whole church is certainly on view, but this does not detract from a concern for the perseverance and transformed life of each individual member (cf. Heb 3:13–14; Eph 4:13–24).

Likewise, the kind of maturation on view is quite clearly a growth in knowledge, but is equally concerned with the moral action that derives from this renewed understanding. This is strikingly expressed in Ephesians, where ‘speaking the truth in love’ is related to a knowledge of the true doctrine of Christ (Eph 4:14–16), and ‘learning Christ’ involves not only a renewed understanding of reality, but a radical transformation of lifestyle (Eph 4:20–24).<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> See the discussion above in chapter 5§2.

<sup>464</sup> See the discussion above in chapter 4§2–3.

There is little doubt that in apostolic thought and practice, OES is consistently regarded as a key element in the moral transformation of the believer within the Christian community, in two related and complementary ways. On the one hand, the very practice of OES in the life of the believer *is itself* an indicator in some way of moral transformation, of taking upon oneself in the sphere of speech the ‘newness’ of life in Christ. It is human speech, sanctified. On the other hand, OES is a *means by which* that moral growth takes place in the believer and the community. It is human speech that contributes to the sanctification of others.

In this chapter, I will explore this double character of OES in the moral transformation of the believer. In what sense does OES represent the sanctification of human speech? How does OES make its own particular contribution to the sanctification of believers? And do the answers to these questions advance our understanding not only of OES, but of what differentiates OES from more authorized, recognized forms of ‘teaching-preaching’ speech (CTP) in the Christian community?

Before answering these questions, some clarifying thoughts about ‘sanctification’ are necessary.

### *§1 Clarifying ‘sanctification’*

In speaking of ‘sanctification’ in relation to human speech and OES, I am conscious of venturing into a theological subject area in which active debates abound: about the relationship between justification and sanctification, about definitive versus progressive sanctification, about the degree of moral progress achievable by the believer in this life, about the nature of God’s sanctifying activity in relation to creaturely entities and artefacts (such as Scripture), about the place of faith in

sanctification, and so on.

Although navigating these debates in detail is not germane to my purpose in this chapter, some brief clarifying reflections about the nature of sanctification are necessary for establishing a theological framework within which the dual character of OES may be considered.

We might begin by asking whether ‘sanctification’ is even the right category within which to be discussing the moral progress or transformation of believers. The long history of doing so has been challenged by recent scholarship. Building on the work of John Murray and others,<sup>465</sup> David Peterson has argued that to use the language of ‘sanctification’ as a descriptor for moral transformation or progress, is to fail to account for the distinctive way in which the themes of holiness and sanctification are developed in Scripture. He presents a strong case that ‘sanctification’ in the Bible is primarily about a *definitive consecrated position* that is granted to God’s people by God’s initiative and work.<sup>466</sup> Peterson allows that the NT does speak of change and transformation in the life of the believer, but argues that moral progress is not itself best described as ‘sanctification’, as if ‘sanctification’ were a step-by-step process.

One suspects, however, that Peterson’s useful corrective goes too far in denying ‘sanctification’ a place at the table in a discussion of moral transformation. As Blocher points out, the polarities that Peterson is grappling with cannot be easily separated. To be definitively set apart for divine use (to be ‘sanctified’) ‘entails that the requirements of holiness be expounded in terms of righteousness, truthfulness and solidarity’.<sup>467</sup> Consecration is not just positional, in other words; it is also

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<sup>465</sup> John Murray, ‘Definitive Sanctification’, in *Collected Writings of John Murray 2: Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 277–84.

<sup>466</sup> David G. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (NSBT 1; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2015), 24.

<sup>467</sup> Henri Blocher, ‘Sanctification by Faith?’, in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (ed.

necessarily moral because of the One for whose use or service the believer is set apart.

Likewise, to give due place to the initial decisive moment of sanctification as a divine action does not preclude seeing sanctification as an unfolding event extended in time, as something to be pursued and completed in human moral action (as Heb 12:14 and 2 Cor 7:1 suggest).<sup>468</sup> That is, one can accept Peterson's caution against seeing 'sanctification' simply as an incremental, step-by-step process of moral improvement, while still allowing that it would be hard to conceive of a divine sanctification that did not call forth our active response, and did not 'make its imprint also upon us in our passage through time'.<sup>469</sup>

In other words, the polarities that sanctification encompasses—between divine agency and human agency, and between initial sanctification and ongoing holiness—need to be held together. To speak of moral transformation without connecting it tightly to God's gracious definitive cleansing and consecration of his people in Christ, risks driving a wedge between the divine foundation of the Christian life (received by faith alone) and its ongoing moral outworking (as a project of human moral effort). Likewise, simply assimilating the concept of 'sanctification' to Christian moral transformation not only fails to reflect the biblical emphasis (as Peterson has shown) but risks a collapse in the opposite direction: that is, of conceiving of Christian moral transformation as a sanctifying event wrought by God alone and received through faith alone (as the perfectionist tradition of 'entire sanctification' has done).

In seeking to keep these two essential poles from drifting apart, O'Donovan makes the useful point that sin (and sanctification) relate not only to God but also to

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Kelly M. Kopic; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2014), 58.

<sup>468</sup> Heb 12:14 urges the pursuit of sanctification (ἁγιασμός), and 2 Cor 7:1 of bringing holiness (ἁγιασύνῃ) to completion.

<sup>469</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest* (Ethics as Theology; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids, Ill.: Eerdmans, 2017), 91.

the world. The bondage of sin is a direct consequence of humanity's refusal to acknowledge God as Creator and Ruler of the moral order in which we live, and thus our alienation is not only from God himself but from a coherent understanding of the created moral order and thus from the freedom to act rightly and well within it:

... [F]allen man does not live freely; for, as a free agent, he is bound to the choices he has made for unfreedom. His bondage, quite unlike the passivity of a tree or a stone, is brought upon him by his own free refusal of certain possibilities which would have allowed him the continued exercise of his freedom ...

What, then, are these possibilities which he refused? They are the possibilities of recognizing and rejoicing in the objective reality of the good. The sin by which man has bound himself is the determination to live fantastically, in pursuit of unreality. But freedom can be exercised only in relation to real possibility.<sup>470</sup>

The relevance of all this for sanctification is that it frames God's work of redemption in Christ not only as the reconciling of sinners to himself, but also as a form of *reconciliation with the created order of the world*. In submitting by faith to the call of God's authority in Christ—that is, to the disclosure of the truth about the world and its history that is in Christ—we are placed afresh with the world as the good-though-fallen order of God, and are handed back our freedom to act within it in right relation to God and to his world:

In reaching out to the world as good we are reconciled to it, as those who have previously found it deceptive and opposed to any good of our existence. Now we can enter it with joy as the sphere of our existence, in which we have been granted to act and to live. Humankind quickened from death is given life—so much we may say in speaking of faith—but quickened from death to life humankind is then given a place to live, a worldly context stamped with the resurrection of Christ, opened in hospitality to the service God's people are called to render. Love is the leading out of restored agency in worldly activity.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 109.

<sup>471</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, 'Sanctification and Ethics', in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and*

O'Donovan defines sanctification, accordingly, as '*the gracious work of God in our human living that leads out the gift of righteous agency in Christ into reconciled participation in the world, shaping within us the multifaceted virtue of love*'.<sup>472</sup>

Several important dogmatic principles are successfully held together in this definition. Sanctification is construed as the one gracious work of God, given once for all in Christ but applied consequently to us, not only in setting us apart for God's possession but restoring to us the possibility of thankful and joyful participation in the world. The faith that justifies (and sanctifies) is 'elaborated' or 'carried through' or 'led out into action' in love, to paraphrase Gal 5:6.<sup>473</sup> This not only holds together divine and human agency, but avoids the bifurcation of the Christian life into a once-for-all justification and a subsequent progressive sanctification, with the risks that such a bifurcation entails—notably, the tendency towards legalism or perfectionism on the one hand, or forms of anti-nomianism on the other.<sup>474</sup>

Perhaps we might label this way of thinking as *processive* rather than 'progressive' sanctification. It is sanctification proceeding and unfolding into action in the Christian life over time, within a created moral order that is hospitable to this action, even with the distortions and corruptions that are part of that order's current fallen state. It is sanctification not just as a punctiform act of God to which a believer looks back, but sanctification as a *way*—a cleansed and consecrated path on which the believer walks.<sup>475</sup>

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*Practice* (ed. Kelly M. Kapic; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2014), 158.

<sup>472</sup> O'Donovan, 'Sanctification', 156.

<sup>473</sup> O'Donovan, 'Sanctification', 156–157.

<sup>474</sup> O'Donovan notes, somewhat acerbically, the tendency amongst Protestants to take only the second half of Luther's *simul justus et peccator* seriously, thus leaving sanctification 'bound and gagged, reduced to a disillusioned consciousness of moral possibilities unrealized, speculation on a gracious work of God that was never to be performed'; *Entering into Rest*, 76.

<sup>475</sup> Brian Brock, 'Bonhoeffer and the Bible in Christian Ethics: Psalm 119, the Mandates, and Ethics as a "Way"', *SCE* 18/3 (2005): 7–29.

These clarifying insights regarding sanctification help to sharpen the questions with which we began this chapter; namely: *How, or in what sense, is OES an aspect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in and through our moral action, by which God brings forth or leads out our redeemed agency into a fitting, reconciled, loving participation in the moral order of the world?*

## *§2 OES and the sanctification of human speech*

To speak of how OES might be viewed as sanctification of the human powers of speech, something first must be said not only about what those powers are—that is, the created nature of human speech—but why it would need sanctifying. In God’s creative purposes, what sort of thing is human speech, and what is it ordered to achieve? And in what sense is human speech fallen or enslaved, such that it would require redeeming or sanctifying?

If thinking about sanctification involves dipping into a series of long-running and complex debates, any consideration of the nature of human language and speech offers an even more daunting prospect, particularly given the ‘linguistic turn’ of modern philosophy and theology.<sup>476</sup> The literature is voluminous and multifaceted.

We might take as our starting point the two basic insights of speech-act theory about human speech already noted above:

- that human speech is a performative action, a means by which humans *do* certain things; and

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<sup>476</sup> John Milbank’s densely argued discussion of how theology and philosophy were closely interconnected in the ‘suspicion of substance’ that undergirded the modern linguistic turn is itself an indication of the depth and complexity of the issues. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 84–120.

- that this action takes place by means of referring and predicating.<sup>477</sup>

As also noted above, the aims of speech-act theory are modest in one sense; it aims to understand mainly how *sentences* function as the basic units of doing-by-referring-and-predicating. But these two angles by which to think about human speech—that it *does* something, and does it by *referring and predicating*—provide a useful starting point for a broader consideration of the nature of human speech.

*a. Human speech as representation and action*

In his 2013 Gifford Lectures, Rowan Williams makes a sophisticated case for the essentially *representational* nature of human speech. Williams is fully cognizant of the problems with a correspondence theory of language, in which our words function simply as a catalogue of descriptors that correspond to various things-in-the-world. The unavoidability of metaphor in our speech makes the limitations of this approach obvious.<sup>478</sup> However, he is equally critical of purely phenomenological approaches that seek to reduce language to a mental state of stimulus-and-response, or to the playing of a game that has no referent outside the game.<sup>479</sup>

Williams argues that the ‘world’ that human language creates is not an arbitrary or illusory one. Human speech is a constant response to an environment that invites us to understand and interact with it. In other words, while we do seek to ‘catalogue’ the world in our speech, we do much more as well:

Cataloguing elements of perception, describing, is a particular mode of responsive action.

Imagining the schemata in which that description fits is another, more complex, mode which

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<sup>477</sup> See the discussion above in chapter 7.

<sup>478</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 60.

<sup>479</sup> His interaction with Rorty’s proposal is particularly penetrating; Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 37–42.

comes into focus if we are concerned not only to register what is perceived but to engage with it, to find our way around it, so to speak, and even to discern the patterns of its own activity in such a way as to cooperate with, modify or divert those patterns.

... In other words, the human speaker takes the world as itself a 'project': the environment is there not as a fixed object for describing and managing but as a tantalizing set of invitations, material offered for reworking and enlarging. The intelligibility of the environment is not simply in the fact that it can be reduced to this or that pattern of causal sequence but in its capacity to generate fresh schemata and fresh ways of expressing one identity through another.<sup>480</sup>

This receptivity to the 'signals' that our environment keeps 'sending' is in large part what it means to be human. Humans ceaselessly attempt to make sense of the various invitations the world issues for us to participate in it, and to act on them.<sup>481</sup>

Thus, the various functions of human language are predicated (so to speak) on its representational nature, on language's ability to respond to and engage with an intelligible environment, and to do so in a way that can be described as 'truthful'—that is, as representing an actual or properly imaginable state of affairs. There are obvious connections here with O'Donovan's concept of human *participation* in an objective, moral world order, which gains its coherence (its generic nature and teleological end) from the creative purposes of God.

Williams's proposal also leads to a consideration of the other aspect of language that speech-act theory emphasizes—its capacity to *do* things. The constant stream of representations that human language generates as it participates in the world, are not merely responsive. They engage with the world (including our relationships with other humans) as something 'offered for reworking and enlarging'.<sup>482</sup> Human

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<sup>480</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 43–44, 60.

<sup>481</sup> Williams's larger argument is that this universal and inescapable aspect of human intelligence and interaction is only possible if the environment we inhabit is 'irreducibly charged with intelligibility', which in turn leads him to a modest 'natural theology' proposal about the being and nature of God.

<sup>482</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 60.

language seeks to comprehend the order that is there, to draw it out, to name it; but it does so in order to clarify and develop the ordered reality of the world, *to act upon it and within it*.

What human speech *does*, then, is inseparable from a consideration of what it is that *humans are given to do* in the world. Speech, like the created order itself, is a gift of God's goodness, and is formed for purposes that are related to God's purposes for the world as a whole. This connection between the nature and powers of human speech, and the role and task of humanity within the creation, emerges powerfully within the creation narrative of Genesis.

In Genesis 1–3, God is the first speaker, the one who makes divine declarations that both call things into being from nothing and bring forth from his creation the potentialities it possesses. Gunton argues that the way Genesis 1 narrates God's ordering and filling of the world suggests that creation is an unfolding and developing reality, one in which the created darkness and chaos of Gen 1:2 is progressively dispelled and ordered: '... God creates a world which requires time both to be and to become what it is created to be'.<sup>483</sup>

In this sense, the task of man as God's image-bearer in Gen 2 *is to continue God's 'project' of bringing forth the order of creation through speech*.<sup>484</sup> Humanity's dominion is not just preservational but developmental. The narrative makes clear that the flourishing of the bushes of the field and the small plants of the land was conditional

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<sup>483</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 108. Wenham presents a detailed argument for the exegetical and theological coherence of this traditional view of how God's creative act unfolded—that God created the formless and chaotic 'materials' of the universe, and then ordered and filled them. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (ed. David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 11–13.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Michael Horton, "Let the Earth Bring Forth ...": The Spirit and Human Agency in Sanctification', in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (ed. Kelly M. Kapic; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2014).

upon this activity of the man to ‘work the ground’ (Gen 2:5). He is put in the garden to ‘work it and to keep it’ (Gen 2:15).

This leads to the first recorded human speech-acts, both of which establish order within God’s creation. As God names the light and the darkness (Gen 1:4), so Adam names the animals that God brings to him.<sup>485</sup> And when God brings the woman to the man, Adam not only names her but insists that (unlike the animals) she is to be ordered alongside him (as bone of bone and flesh of flesh; Gen 2:23). Just as God uses speech to create and order the world, so humanity is commissioned to develop and order and participate in the creation through the gift of language.

The narrative places humanity’s exercise of its linguistically-shaped dominion within the field of its own ordering to God. God is the creator, and the source of all that is good. He plants the garden, and places limits on what the man and woman shall know—at least at this point in their activity within the world. Their task as speaking-image-bearers is to unfold within the good order established by authority of the Creator.

*b. Fallen human speech as misrepresentation and corrupt action*

The events of Gen 3 represent a rebellion against God’s order, beginning with the distrust sown in Eve’s mind by the false speech of the serpent, that most crafty of the ‘beasts of the field’ (Gen 3:1). In a reversal of the order established in Gen 2, the beast of the field questions God’s declaration of how things really are (‘Did God really say?’ ‘You will not surely die’), and thus deceives Eve, who in turn passes on the lie to a complicit Adam (Gen 3:17). Through language, the creation comes into being and is ordered and named; also through language, the good order of creation is

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<sup>485</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009), 30.

re-named and overthrown, bringing forth the judgement of God, which is also enacted linguistically as a 'curse'. As a result of human rebellion and God's judgement, the created order is no longer as it was. It is still ordered, but that order is compromised, corrupted and subject to decay.

In other words, from the very beginning, speech is the powerful means by which humanity understands and represents the reality of which it is part, and fulfils its God-given task. Speech is also the means by which humanity *misrepresents* the world and subverts God's purposes, which is seen as Gen 1–11 unfolds. Human speech in these chapters is able to *do* various things in the world: to name, to order, to lie, to bless, to curse, to question, to boast. Perhaps most chillingly, the potency of human speech is seen on the lips of the tower-builders of Babel, who deploy a common language in order to co-ordinate their hubristic construction, seeking not to name the good order of the world under God but to 'make a name for themselves' in the face of God (Gen 11:4). The tower of Babel functions in the narrative as a kind of physical prototype of the degenerate state of human reason and speech under the judgement of God. Having denied and rejected the authority of God over the created order, humanity is reduced to constructing a false, fantastical reality in an effort to keep God at bay, a reality that is focused on themselves and their preservation rather than on 'filling the earth' and bringing it blessing. (In stark contrast, God's promise in Gen 12 is to start again with just one man, to make his name great, and through him to bring blessing to the whole earth.)

This power of human speech to represent and misrepresent, to do good and to do evil, to bless and to curse, runs as a constant thread through the fabric of Scripture. In his analysis of the NT epistle that most prominently demonstrates this polarity, Baker concludes that the focus of James on the powerful agency of the

tongue reflects the consistent concern of the OT and NT.<sup>486</sup> Quoting Prov 18:21 ('The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit'), Baker notes that the emphasis of the Wisdom literature (reflected in James as well) often falls upon controlling and directing this power:

Words have power. Controlled speech is an effort to minimize the negative and destructive power of words; gracious speech is an attempt to maximize the positive and beneficial power of words.<sup>487</sup>

Human speech, in other words, is a central and powerful means by which humanity not only *participates in the created order but fails to*. And, to recall also the twin functions of speech, the nature of that failure is related both to our capacity to represent the world in speech (i.e., a failure of knowledge and reason) *and* to our capacity to act through speech in accordance with the world's reality and order (i.e., a failure of action and will).

### *c. The failure and redemption of human speech*

If this analysis is true, humanity's fundamental disobedience to its place within the created order is what precludes it from rightly knowing, acting or speaking within that order.

Our knowledge of something can only be true knowledge if it is a 'knowledge of things *in their relations to the totality of things*'.<sup>488</sup> We must grasp the true shape and purpose of something as a whole before we are in a position to rightly understand its parts, and to act rightly in relation to it. However, as created beings *within* the

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<sup>486</sup> Baker also demonstrates how ANE, Rabbinic, Philonic and Graeco-Roman literature were preoccupied with similar themes. William R. Baker, *Personal Speech-Ethics in the Epistle of James* (WUNT 2/68; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 283–289.

<sup>487</sup> Baker, *Personal Speech-ethics*, 38.

<sup>488</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 77 (emphasis original).

created order, we cannot rise above our finitude to grasp the whole. That kind of knowledge—of the meaning and purpose of things in their relation to the totality of the created order—can only come from the perspective of one who sees and understands the whole. Thus, humanity’s rejection of God’s sovereign rule, which is the essence of disobedience and unbelief, robs us of the possibility of an integrative understanding of the meaning and purpose of the whole created order, and thus of the true meaning and purpose of the variegated particulars within it.

In other words, humanity’s refusal of the place assigned to it by God (to be his authoritative image-bearers in the world), and the corresponding refusal of the transcendent knowledge that only God can provide for this task, renders humanity incapable of right understanding and faithful action ‘from within’.

The collapse in our ability to comprehend truly the order of the world follows from disobedience; that is, from the will’s determination to defy the Creator’s purposes and pursue its own purposes instead. Human speech thus not only becomes a medium of misknowledge and misrepresentation, but a constant active expression of a heart ‘curved in upon itself’, to use Luther’s arresting phrase.<sup>489</sup> Deluded sinful speech assumes the forms of falsehood, slander, vulgarity and corruption in order to achieve its aims, and responds with jealousy, clamour, bitterness, malice and rage when those aims are frustrated.

As noted above, these are precisely the kinds of speech that Eph 4 describes as characterizing ‘the old humanity, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires’ (Eph 4:22)<sup>490</sup>—to which Paul emphatically responds: ‘But that is not how you learned Christ!’ (4:20). God’s redemptive work in Christ restores to humanity the possibility of a true knowledge of the world’s order,

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<sup>489</sup> *LW*, 25:291, 313, 345.

<sup>490</sup> Falsehood (4:25); corrupting talk (4:29); bitterness, anger, clamour, slander and malice (4:31); vulgar and foolish talk (5:4). See chapter 4§3 above.

including its current state of frustration and fallenness, and its future eschatological re-creation.

God's work also restores the possibility of faithful action within this order, including faithful speech-action. In other words, Christ not only reveals the eschatological truth of the world's order, but redeems our sinful, inwardly-curved agency to participate in it. Through his atoning death and resurrection, Christ redeems sinful humanity through the forgiveness of sins; and through the gift of his Spirit he restores to human agents the freedom to participate in the order of creation by knowledge and action, including the action of speech.<sup>491</sup>

*d. Connection with apostolic trains of thought*

This way of putting it corresponds closely to the trains of thought observed in Ephesians (above, in chapter 4). On the cross, Christ brings into being a 'new man', reconciled to God and to one another as God's creation, and set free for a renewed moral agency, for 'good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Eph 2:10). This 'new man' is a corporate identity, consisting of Jews and gentiles together—raised and seated together in the heavenly realms in Christ (2:6–7), created as one new man together in Christ (2:14–16), citizens together of God's household (2:18–21), being built together as one temple in Christ (2:21–22), growing together as one maturing body in Christ (4:15–16), and—on the basis of all this—living out together in their daily 'walk' the godly life of this 'new humanity' (Eph 4:23–24).

Importantly, *speech* plays a prominent part in Paul's description of what it means for his Ephesian readers to enact this renewed moral agency by the Spirit. Those

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<sup>491</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 106–107.

who have ‘put on the new man’ speak truth rather than falsehood (4:25), gracious, edifying words rather than ‘corrupting talk’ (4:29), thanksgiving rather than vulgarity (5:4), and Spirit-filled thankful songs rather than drunken ones (5:17–20).

The paradigmatic statement that stands over these various linguistic expressions of renewed agency is that of 4:15: ‘Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’. The renewed form of speech that characterizes the new humanity is liberated by its knowledge of Christ to be speech as God intended speech to be. Having been reconciled to the true order of reality under God in Christ, believers are now in a position not only to represent the actual state of affairs in the world (to speak ‘truth’), but to do so for the benefit and blessing of others (in ‘love’). To speak the truth in love is to participate in the moral order of the world as humanity was created to—to order and name it, to engage with it, to act upon it and within it, to bring fruitfulness and blessing to the world by lovingly bringing forth from the world the potentialities of the good order that God has created. In Williams’s terms, it is speech that engages faithfully with the ‘signals’ that the created order ‘sends’ us, that participates in the ‘project’ of the world that is given to us by God.

Seen in this light, the ‘one-another edifying speech’ of Eph 4–5 can rightly be understood as *the sanctification of human speech*. It is human speech redeemed and restored to its rightful role in human agency in the world under God. To put it in terms of the clarified concept of sanctification outlined above, the renewed speech of OES is initiated by the definitive, restorative, sanctifying work of God in Christ, and then led out by the Spirit into ongoing, fitting, reconciled, loving, linguistic participation in the moral order of the world. In O’Donovan’s terms, the believer is restored to a right understanding of the ‘totality of things’ in Christ (a renewed ‘mind’; cf. 4:23), which then makes possible a renewed understanding of and engagement with the particulars of daily experience. The believer now seeks to bring

forth the kind of gracious, situationally-appropriate speech that meet the needs of others in different situations, ‘that it may give grace to those who hear’ (Eph 4:29).<sup>492</sup>

As also seen above, a very similar picture emerges in 1 Corinthians, although with different accents. By the Spirit, the Corinthians are given to understand the secret of the world’s reality: that ‘Christ crucified’ is the wisdom and power of God in whom is their ‘righteousness and sanctification and redemption’ (1 Cor 1:30). Their failure to grasp and live out this truth sufficiently is seen in their selfish and arrogant talk, whether in factionalism (ch 3–4), or in the self-obsessed, status-seeking practice of particular kinds of ‘spiritual speech’ (ch 12–14). The Spirit-mediated understanding of Christ crucified should enable them to understand the world and make right judgements about it and impart that understanding to others (2:6–16); but instead, in their failure to embrace a cross-shaped understanding and way of life, their understanding and behaviour is stunted, arrogant, self-focused and juvenile (3:1–3; 4:6–9; 8:1–3; 11:18–22). This comes out particularly in Paul’s extended discussion of their corporate speech in ch 12–14.<sup>493</sup>

In 1 Cor 12, the redemption and sanctification of human agency—in this case particularly of human speech—is strongly portrayed as the work of the triune God. By the Spirit, and only by the Spirit, is the believer enabled to confess the eschatological world-defining truth that ‘Jesus is Lord’ (12:3). By that same Spirit, the various acts of service to this Lord Jesus are made manifest in the believing community, according to the will and working of God the Father (12:4–11). Likewise, the form that this speech takes is decisively determined by the kind of Christ-like love that chapter 13 describes so profoundly. In 1 Cor 14, this

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<sup>492</sup> See the detailed discussion of this verse above, in chapter 4§3.

<sup>493</sup> See the discussion of these sections of 1 Cor above in chapter 3.

christoform love is brought forth by the Spirit in the community of believers through the pursuit of the paradigmatic form of edifying speech: prophecy. As with ‘speaking the truth in love’ in Ephesians, prophecy in 1 Corinthians is characterized both by a knowledge of the ‘totality of things’ in Christ, and by its intention to do good to others in their particular circumstances. Our examination of prophecy led us to define it as the practice of bringing ‘some aspect of the kerygmatic “mind of Christ” to the situation of its hearers, in order to produce positive spiritual effects’.<sup>494</sup> Prophecy is representing to others some aspect of the christocentric ‘truth’ about reality, such that they themselves in their particular circumstances are led to understand and participate in the reality of the created order more fittingly.

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OES is human speech sanctified, because it exemplifies the restoration to humanity of its God-given powers of speech. In OES, human speech is liberated to represent the world truly, and to act within the world lovingly.

The nature of OES also demonstrates that the two broad functions of human speech (to represent and order the world, and to act within that order) cannot be separated, because the form of the life to which humans are ordered in the world is *love*. To understand the reality of the world’s order in Christ is to understand that my telos as a human is to love God and neighbour. Thus, we cannot speak truly—that is, in line with how the created order really is in Christ—without speaking in love, for love is the true form of life humans are created for. Correspondingly, we cannot speak in love to others—that is, for their benefit or blessing—without representing to them the truth about reality, in its totality (in Christ) or in its particulars (as they

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<sup>494</sup> See chapter 3§6 above.

relate to and are informed by that totality).

This understanding of OES, as the speaking of truth for the benefit of others, leads naturally to a consideration of how OES functions not only as a facet of the sanctified life but as a *means by which* sanctification occurs in the believing community.

### *§3 OES as a distinctive means by which sanctification proceeds*

In one sense, how OES functions as a *means* of sanctification in the believing community can be stated as a simple corollary of the argument of this chapter to this point. Insofar as the Christocentric words that one believer speaks to another help the hearer to understand and live out some aspect of the transformed life in Christ, then such speech functions as a means by which God brings about the sanctification of believers through human agency. Put another way, if sanctification is the leading out of restored righteous agency in Christ into a loving and appropriate participation in the created order, in line with the purposes of its Creator and Redeemer, then every word that grants the restored human agent a better theologically-founded understanding of the world, or encourages a more loving participation in its order, is a word that contributes to his or her sanctification.

To make this point is also to build upon the conclusions of the previous chapter regarding the communicative action of God in the action of OES. It was shown that OES as a form of speech-action shared various key characteristics with CTP forms of speech, notably in its content, commission, purpose, power and illocutionary force (as assertive and directive illocutions).

The conclusion reached was that OES should be regarded as a divinely commissioned, empowered and effective means by which faith and obedience grow

within Christian communities because it mediates the communicative action of God. This confirms, from a different angle, the argument of this chapter to this point, namely, that OES is a means by which God's sanctifying purposes for his people are brought forth by his Spirit through the human activity of speaking certain words.

However, the question left hanging at the end of chapter 7 must now reassert itself. What is the *distinctive* contribution or function of OES in the sanctification of believers in a Christian community? What particular 'load' (to use Peter Adam's term) does the word-based speech of OES bear that we should not assign to CTP?

To answer this question, I will draw on O'Donovan's account of moral communication and moral learning.

*a. Communication in moral learning and action*

Among the meta-ethical accounts of how moral thought and action proceed, O'Donovan's theological ethic is particularly amenable to the place of *communication* within the process of moral thought and deliberation. This is because, for O'Donovan, practical reason is a *train of thought* that engages not only with the particular features of the moral field the agent is encountering, but with an understanding of the (theologically determined) good and the right as realities that exist beyond the agent's own intentions, feelings, personal history or community traditions. The created goodness of the world exists as a moral reality 'out there' and in front us, that calls forth our intelligent interest and action. It is an intelligible reality, and if intelligible then also communicable.

Thus moral thinking and learning is necessarily a communicative and social practice, one that recognizes the limitations and self-deception to which all of us are prone, and which seeks from others not only knowledge or perspectives that we lack, but a process of interrogation, discussion, correction or confirmation of our

judgements.<sup>495</sup> For O'Donovan, the communicative and social nature of the task of moral thought is the basis for his conception of moral teaching and learning. I will briefly synthesize six key facets of this conception, because it provides a very useful framework within which to understand how *OES makes a distinctive contribution* to the moral learning and sanctification of believers.

*Firstly* and foundationally, O'Donovan's theological account of moral deliberation insists on a necessary connection between *knowledge of the truth about reality in Christ and moral action in Christ*. This connection was observed frequently in the key biblical texts analyzed in Part II; that is, the connection between gospel-communicated identity and 'new man' living (in Eph), between exposition and exhortation (in Heb), between the wisdom of the cross and the life of love that embodies it (in 1 Cor). It may seem like a small intellectual victory to maintain that moral deliberation must involve (at least in part) knowing and thinking about the moral meaning of an objectively good reality beyond the agent-self, but by no means all meta-ethical proposals are able to do so convincingly.<sup>496</sup> For O'Donovan, the world's order is intelligible (within certain limitations), and therefore calls forth the intelligence of moral agents as they act within it.<sup>497</sup>

*Secondly*, the knowledge of the truth revealed to us in Christ is *universal and authoritative*. It discloses to all finite humans that which by their finitude and disobedience they are unable to know: the 'totality of things', the meaning and purpose of the whole created order as ordered to the eschatological lordship of Jesus Christ. As the Spirit awakens the sinful human heart to faith in the revelation of

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<sup>495</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 43–45.

<sup>496</sup> For example, O'Donovan critiques Barth's powerful emphasis on the existentially present command of God for leaving little room in principle for deliberative thought; *Finding and Seeking*, 188–190.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. Torrance's argument for the real but contingent intelligible order of the world in T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981).

Christ, it awakens that heart to a renewed moral agency within a world that is now understood as a christocentric moral order (cf. the Spirit-imparted ‘mind of Christ’ that makes possible judgements about all things, in 1 Cor 2:6–16).<sup>498</sup> To say that this disclosure or revelation bears ‘authority’ is to say that it truly discloses the nature of reality so as to call forth an appropriate response.<sup>499</sup>

*Thirdly*, however, this faith-perceived knowledge of the Christ-centred whole, and of our place within it as newly liberated agents, leads to an *ongoing process of learning and unlearning* as we engage with the granularity of the moral order of the world. We do not accumulate radically new moral truths as we go along, for to do so would be to change the shape of the whole. However, in repenting of our misunderstandings, and in learning to apply our new understanding of the whole to the variegated field of particular possibilities, we ‘fill out’ our knowledge:

We can know *better* what we already know in *outline*. Moral ‘learning’ is all the time ‘thinking’. It is the intellectual penetration and exploration of a reality which we can grasp from the beginning in a schematic and abstract way, but which contains depths of meaning and experience into which we must reach. For an analogy we may think of what it is to study a great picture; beginning from the first superficial glance, which takes in the picture whole but as yet entirely without insight, and going on for a lifetime, always discovering ‘new’ things, which are yet not new but were there in the picture from the first.<sup>500</sup>

This multifaceted ‘filling out’ of our knowledge of the created order in Christ parallels the ‘leading out’ of redeemed human agency in sanctification. It involves the development of habits of thought and action, in which certain experiences and

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<sup>498</sup> The other key texts examined in Part II give a similar place to revealed christocentric knowledge as total, climactic and eschatologically final; e.g., Eph 1:3–10; Heb 1:1–4.

<sup>499</sup> O’Donovan’s discussion of the nature of ‘authority’ is complex and evolves from his earlier statements (in *Resurrection and Moral Order*) to the view put forth in *Self, World, and Time*, where he defines it as ‘an event in which a reality is communicated to practical reason by a social communication’; 53, (emphasis original).

<sup>500</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 53.

aspects of the world's order become familiar to us, such that we are able to 'draw on a certain legacy of acquired experience and instinct' in different situations.<sup>501</sup> It involves accumulating a knowledge not only of particular moral commands and practical proverbial insights, but of how they fit together, and of where and when they are applicable (e.g., discerning when to answer a fool according to his folly, and when not to; Prov. 26:4–5). In many ways, it is the kind of learning that may be described as an *apprenticeship*, in which an integrated knowledge of the whole and the parts, of theory and of practice, forms over time within the learner's mind and informs their daily practice.

*Fourthly*, this process of moral learning and enquiry is 'of its nature a *communicative* enquiry with a social basis'.<sup>502</sup> Because the moral reality of the world is intelligible, then it can be represented in human thought and speech. The knowledge we receive and the meaning we discern can be shared, discussed, interrogated, sharpened, clarified. (This accords with Williams's insights about the nature of speech as a 'representation' of a world that gives itself to be understood.)

From the outset, the agent hears the authoritative 'news' of the saving, liberating authority of the crucified Christ from someone else through a social communication. The faith that understands the whole of reality afresh in Christ comes by hearing the gospel from human lips (Rom 10:17). However, the same is true of ongoing moral action. Human finitude and ongoing sinfulness leave believers open to error in moral deliberation and action, whether in simply failing to recognize fully or accurately the contours of the moral situation that confronts them, or because they are deceived (often self-deceived) about what this situation requires. In the words of Heb 3:12–19, sin remains an ongoing, deceptive, heart-hardening reality for the believer, one

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<sup>501</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 89.

<sup>502</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 44.

that leads to disobedience rather than faithful agency. In this context, the ‘word’ needs to be heard every day that is called ‘today’, in order to fortify the believer for action that participates rightly in the Christ-centred moral order.

*Fifthly*, the way in which this communication takes place corresponds to the nature of the knowledge about which it communicates; that is, it involves a disclosure of the ‘totality of things’, as well as a more immediate, proximate communication about the granularity of moral experience. O’Donovan labels these two modes of communication ‘*moral teaching*’ and ‘*moral advice*’ respectively.<sup>503</sup> Both are needed.

On the one hand, the moral learner requires a coherent, intelligible, authoritative disclosure of the good order of the world. More is needed than a piecemeal collection of commands or proverbs. Something is required that binds reality together as a comprehensible whole:

What is needed is the doctrine of a single teacher, [sic] comprehensive, coherent instruction that does not stop at isolated observations but pulls everything together, liberating us to learn from them all and live in harmony with nature and events.<sup>504</sup>

This kind of teaching has as its object God’s climactic disclosure of himself and his authority in Christ, the ‘evangelical mediation of all reality, breaking into and re-constituting all our pre-existing traditions of wisdom about the world’.<sup>505</sup> Its goal is ‘the liberation of the disciple to understand and live well’.<sup>506</sup>

In this sense, the moral teaching that O’Donovan speaks of can be co-ordinated with the apostolic preaching and teaching of the gospel, which proclaims the single, unifying truth that reconciles humanity to God and to each other, and calls forth a new life that is worthy of this calling (Eph 4:1). It is what Paul tells Titus to do when

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<sup>503</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 49–65.

<sup>504</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 60.

<sup>505</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 62.

<sup>506</sup> O’Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 60.

he commands him to instruct the various groups within his congregation to live in way that ‘fits with the sound teaching’ (πρέπει τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ, Titus 2:1). In other words, O’Donovan does not mean by ‘moral teaching’ the *teaching of morals*, if what is meant by that phrase is a form of instruction that focuses solely on moral commands and principles, or which speaks of the possibility of moral living independent of the authoritative disclosure of the gospel. ‘Moral teaching’ for O’Donovan is an ‘evangelical’ teaching of the ‘meaning by which all live’.<sup>507</sup> It is the initiatory and foundational teaching that opens the eyes of the learner to a new and truthful understanding of the world’s order within the purposes of God.

However, as vital as this form of authoritative, singular ‘moral teaching’ is, it is not the only form of moral communication, nor should it attempt to be so:

We may observe initially what this exercise of moral teaching does not attempt to do—and in this it is typical of all moral teaching. It does not attempt to give precise and concrete advice. Advice is occasional, addressed to the specific practical need of a given agent at a given moment. Moral teaching is different. It trains the disciple to think truthfully about what may need to be done. It is addressed to those ‘who have ears to hear’, which is to say, those who will use their intelligence in framing their lives and making their decisions. It has enough generality to be valid from one situation to the next, transmissible by one disciple to another. Its purpose is to produce competent moral agents.<sup>508</sup>

The moral teacher forms the ‘mind of Christ’ within disciples, providing a form of instruction that is sufficiently general to be valid for a variety of learners facing a variety of situations. The teacher may even point to different kinds of generic situations that require different kinds of responses (‘if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also’; Matt 5:39). However, even these more situationally specific moral teachings are still generic in nature. They do not bind any

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<sup>507</sup> O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 195.

<sup>508</sup> O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 63.

particular agent to an action that must be carried out at all times and in all circumstances. That is to say, *moral teaching does not and cannot subsume the morally deliberative aspect of practical reason as it takes place in particular circumstances*. In fact, the more that teaching seeks to do so—the more it seeks to govern every possible circumstance with a specific, concrete moral command—the more it descends into the error of Pharisaic legalism.

The task of practical reason remains. Equipped with a unified, coherent teaching that makes sense of the moral field in its unity, complexity and fallenness, individual agents are still faced with a task of moral discernment and deliberation as each new situation confronts them. The moral communicator that is provided for this moment is not a ‘teacher’, suggests O’Donovan, but an *adviser*—someone who offers a point of objectivity from outside to the agent facing a particular moment of moral action. The adviser’s role is neither to help negotiate a compromise (between the adviser’s and the recipient’s perspective), nor to project his or her own experience directly onto the other, but to help the moral agent reflect upon some aspect of the authoritative truth that is revealed in Christ, to help interrogate the circumstances that are being faced, and to help deliberate and resolve upon a faithful action for which the agent can take responsibility.<sup>509</sup>

O’Donovan’s delineation of the inter-related functions of moral teaching and advice resonates with the insight of Peter Adam with which this thesis began; namely, that the social communication of the Christian community is rich and variegated, and that to load just one form of that communication (‘preaching’) with the burden of ‘doing all that the Bible expects of every form of the ministry of the Word’ is to place upon preaching a burden it cannot bear.<sup>510</sup> (I will return to this

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<sup>509</sup> O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 49–52.

<sup>510</sup> Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 59.

point below.)

*Sixthly*, O'Donovan argues that moral advice and teaching both rely on a measure of *authority*, where authority is defined as 'an event in which a reality is communicated to practical reason by a social communication'.<sup>511</sup> Authority is a disclosure of the truth of how things really are, such that our action is called forth. Understood in this way, authority can be seen to exist on two spectra:

- The spectrum of *practical immediacy*; that is, an authority may shape action more closely and proximately, or more generally and distantly. For example, my general understanding of the value of a properly functioning heart (based on my acceptance of the authority of medical science) may influence my behaviour in various ways; but the authority of the doctor across the table from me who recommends an immediate heart operation will direct my action rather more immediately.
- The spectrum of *cognitive plenitude*; that is, while an authoritative disclosure must be true, it may represent a small portion of the truth or a more far-reaching, integrated discernment of reality. At one end of this spectrum is the intellectual authority of wisdom, which grounds its communications in a rich, coherent, plenary understanding of reality. At the other end of this spectrum may be a proverbial snippet of wise advice, a 'goad' that prompts us to action (Ecc 12:11), but which doesn't claim to represent a larger authoritative picture of the truth of the world.

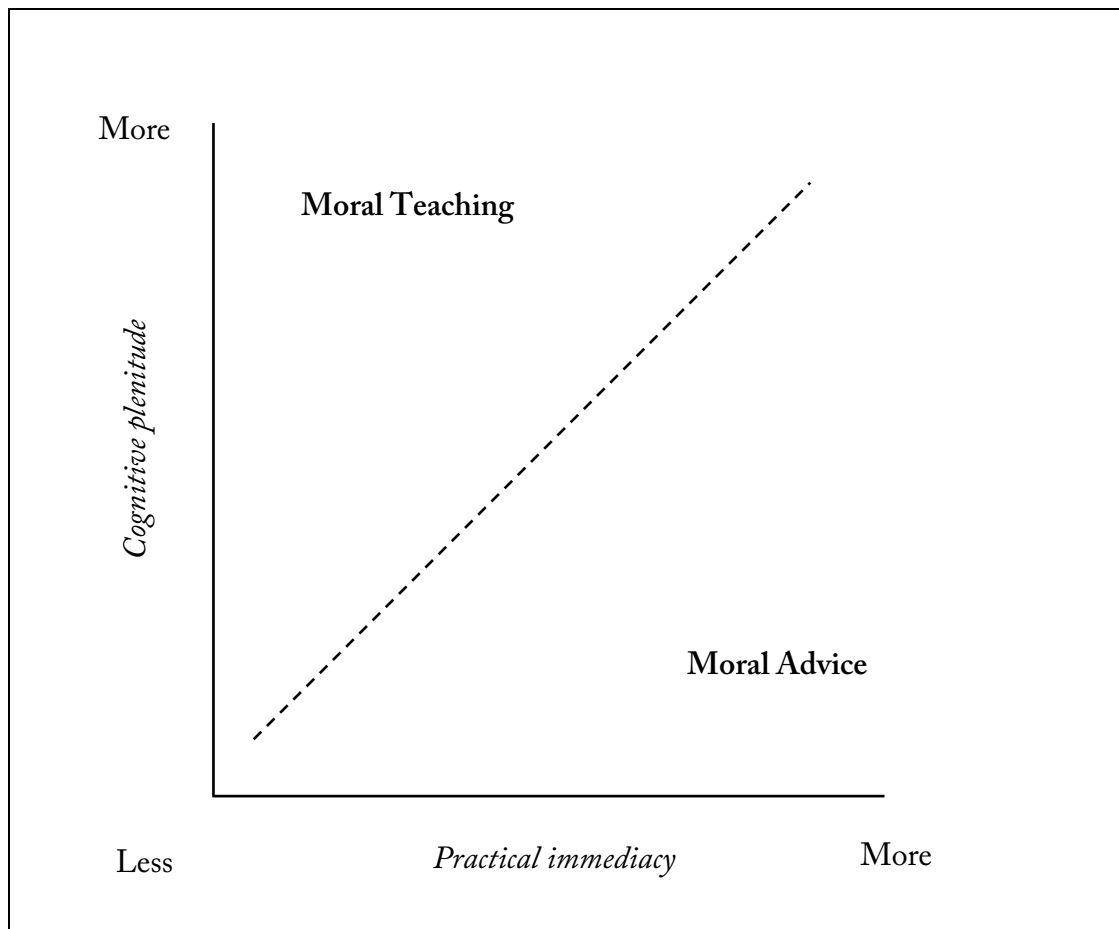
The relationship between these two spectra provides a very useful framework for thinking about the relationship between moral teaching and moral advice. It can be

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<sup>511</sup> O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 53. See 53–59 for his whole discussion of this point. In this formulation, O'Donovan is not *reducing* authority to an event—he does not deny that the trustworthy source of this communication (e.g., the Scriptures) has 'authority'. However, he does wish to emphasize that this authority is exercised or becomes active in a communication that calls forth action.

envisaged on two axes:

*Figure 1: Moral teaching and moral advice*



Moral teaching in its purest form draws on an authoritative truth about everything, and directs all human action in its light. It is in this sense a single unified proclamation requiring a single faithful and obedient response. It is full of cognitive plenitude, but it lacks practical immediacy to the particular instance of deliberative thought I am facing at this moment. Thus, Jesus' summary of the two greatest commandments is moral teaching *par excellence* (Matt 22:37–40), but a further train of thought is needed if I am to discern what love of God and neighbour requires of me at 7:30 in the morning when my children are squabbling over the plastic toy in the Cornflakes packet.

Moral advice in its simplest and purest form might take the form of my wife's

intervention at that point—one individual bringing one aspect of the truth to another, and helping that person discern how that nugget of wisdom might bring forth good and loving action in that moment. Such speech is full of practical immediacy, but it does not pretend to cognitive plenitude.

The two forms of moral communication, however, are interdependent. Moral advice depends upon moral teaching for its coherence. The better one comprehends the universality and coherence of moral teaching, the better one may apply a relevant portion of that authoritative truth to a particular agent at a particular moment. Correspondingly, moral teaching depends on moral advice for the extension of its wisdom into specific moments of moral action; that is, into the moment of *deliberation*, which must co-ordinate what is known to be true about the good of reality with the particulars of the moral field that confront me at this moment of time.

Moral teaching and moral advice should therefore be seen as *interrelated fields of moral communication*, not isolated points or roles. In other words, a congregational leader whose task might particularly involve the responsibility of imparting ‘moral teaching’ to a believing community, could hardly avoid also functioning as an ‘adviser’, quite possibly within the one discourse or conversation. Likewise, those individuals who provide ‘moral advice’ in particular contexts to others, could well repeat and explain various aspects of the ‘moral teaching’ upon which their advice draws, perhaps at some length; in fact, it would be difficult to avoid doing so, at least to some extent.

To recall the argument of the previous chapter, moral teaching and advice are species of the same genus of activity—the speaking of words that authoritatively assert something regarding the truth that is in Christ, and that direct human moral action in light of that truth.

However, while their common genus cannot be forgotten, nor should the

distinctive contribution of each kind of speech be ignored or downplayed. When moral teaching colonizes the zone of moral advice, the result is an over-specified legalism that allows no room for the deliberation of each moral agent. When moral advice expands to fill too much of the landscape, the result is moralism, in which the evangelical source and rationale of the righteous life is diminished and denied.

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O'Donovan's understanding of moral learning and communication, as encompassing 'teaching' and 'advice', has obvious connections with the apostolic trains of thought regarding OES that have been explored above, even if O'Donovan himself does not seem to observe them.<sup>512</sup> The next step is to articulate how this paradigm of moral communication might clarify the distinctive part that OES plays in the sanctification of believers, particularly in relation to the congregational teaching and preaching of pastors and elders (CTP).

*b. The distinctive place of OES within moral learning and communication*

To recap briefly: in my analysis of the apostolic trains of thought in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews, a consistent picture emerged of OES as a form of speech that was *grounded in the apostolic gospel of Christ, and which brought the world-defining wisdom of that message to the particular circumstances of Christian existence*. OES was

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<sup>512</sup> O'Donovan makes no such connection in *Self, World, and Time*, alongside the specific discussion of moral teaching, authority and advice. When he returns to the subject of the 'communication of meaning' in Volume 3 of the trilogy, and to how the 'lay ministries of the church' might participate in such communication, he does briefly acknowledge that 'There is no member of the body who may not from time to time be privileged to take it in his mouth to speak it to another person, believer or unbeliever'. However, he moves without further comment onto an extended consideration of the role of the ordained ministry in this communication. In his conception, the role of the laity is 'chiefly in the sphere of service and care'; *Entering into Rest*, 196.

portrayed as a speech-act or discourse that brought a fitting, truthful word to the needs and situations of the believer's life, and appealed for a response to that word—whether (defensively) to resist some aspect of sin, or (positively) to build up or spur on believers to act faithfully and lovingly in their circumstances.

In chapter 7, I drew on these conclusions to argue that OES shares with CTP its nature as a 're-performance' of the Scriptural word of God, with both assertive and directive force. Whatever it is that differentiates OES from CTP, I argued, it was not its fundamental relationship to God's communicative action in his word, nor in the work of the Spirit in empowering both the speech and the response to it.

The argument of this chapter, and in particular the model of moral learning and communication that we have explored with O'Donovan, suggests a more fruitful way of understanding the distinctive contribution of OES to the sanctification of believers. If the social communication that informs moral action within a community encompasses both 'moral teaching' and 'moral advice', then it can be seen that OES does its work in the 'moral advice' zone of communication, while CTP functions to provide the over-arching, gospel-based 'moral teaching' on which such advice depends.

In suggesting this correlation, I am not advancing more detailed claims about the nature of OES or CTP—for example, that OES is best labelled as 'advice' or that the essence of congregational preaching speech is 'moral teaching'. The picture is more complex than that. On one side, 'advice' is a slightly soft word (in English) to describe the robustness of directive appeal that is implied by the practice of mutual 'exhortation', 'admonition' or 'prophecy'. On the other side, 'moral teaching' does not quite capture the assertive proclamatory element that the practice of CTP will often involve.

However, for convenience (and in the absence of better labels) I will use O'Donovan's two terms—'moral teaching' and 'moral advice'—to describe two

*categories or fields* of moral communication: one that is high in cognitive plenitude but necessarily lower in practical immediacy, and the other which focuses on the immediate questions of the moment and brings to that moment the framework of teaching it has been taught.

This latter zone is where the work of OES is done. It is situated in the life circumstances of a fellow-believer, and seeks to discern the relevance of the apostolic gospel (the ‘moral teaching’) for the particular deliberative action in view. This is what differentiates OES from the set-aside, recognized speech of CTP: not its relation to God’s authoritative word, but that *it brings the wisdom and authority of that word to the proximate moment of deliberation and action*. OES stands alongside the moral agent in the practical immediacy of action, and lovingly speaks some aspect of the truth into a deliberative train of thought. To the moral agent in that situation, OES brings a word that is ‘good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear’ (Eph 4:29). In Peter Adams’s terms, this would seem to be one of the essential ‘loads’ that OES bears within the variegated word ministry of NT Christianity.

The vocabulary that dominates the apostolic description of OES (and CTP) would seem to reflect this understanding. The speech of congregational elders and overseers is most often described in the language of ‘teaching’,<sup>513</sup> whereas the vocabulary of OES clusters more around concepts of ‘exhortation’, ‘admonition’ and ‘encouragement’. While both forms of speech usually contain assertive *and* directive forces (as discussed above in chapter 7), the emphasis of CTP rests more on the assertive task of proclaiming, teaching and explaining the truth of the gospel, in its framework and connections and content, and making more general appeals for

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<sup>513</sup> For example, διδακτικός in 1 Tim 3:2; διδάσκω in 2 Tim 2:2; διδασκαλία in 1 Tim 5:17 and Titus 1:9

response on that basis. This accords with the functions that NT assigns to congregational elders and overseers in their speaking of the word: to bring the foundational, christocentric word of God to the congregation (Heb 13:7), to guard it faithfully (2 Tim 2:2), to labour in educating the congregation in its meaning (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17–18), to exhort according to sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Tit 1:9).

OES brings this foundational gospel framework of ‘moral teaching’, with its overarching meaning and purpose, and its generic guidance for various circumstances, and focuses it upon the particular circumstance unfolding at this particular time before a particular believer (or believers). In social communication, OES seeks to interrogate and understand this particular aspect of the world’s order, at this particular time in God’s history, for this particular moral agent, with his or her own character and history.

In doing so, OES can be seen to function as human speech was intended to function, as a means of representing the world’s intelligible order and acting in love within it (as CTP does as well). As sanctified human speech, OES brings the ‘mind of Christ’ to bear on the good that is to be sought in this one instance of the world’s reality. It seeks to inform and clarify the particular deliberative trains of thought being undertaken, to share insights that have been neglected, to question presuppositions, to help identify errors, self-deceptions and imbalances of emphasis, to stiffen resolve when it flags, to encourage faithfulness when it grows anxious, to spur on towards love when the soul has turned inward. It is for this reason that the practice of OES is consistently portrayed by the apostles as a normative feature of the Christian life.

Further, if sin involves a fracture between our reason and will—that we choose evil against all reason, and thus are forced to compromise our reason in order to justify our choices—then OES is in many respects the everyday medicinal treatment

that preserves and strengthens the newly healed bond between reason and will in Christ. It addresses the 'renewed mind' with some aspect of the christocentric truth about reality, and urges the liberated will to embrace and act fittingly with this reality. This is also the general function of moral teaching (and CTP), but OES particularly addresses the moment where the will faces the call of action, where something is to be done, and a specific train of deliberative thought is required.

In doing so, OES demonstrates the fundamentally *social* nature of moral learning and action. As the exegetical analysis above also made clear, mutual participation in the moral task is a social necessity and a social responsibility. Believers need each other, and have a responsibility to each other, particularly given the ongoing reality of sin. Sin continues to deceive reason and harden the heart, says Heb 3:13. It seeks to divide us against ourselves; to sunder the reason and will that God has joined in Christ. The daily word of exhortation is portrayed as the antidote, and is thus both a necessity and an obligation, given the bonds of mutual care and responsibility that exist.

All the same, OES should also be conducted in such a way as to preserve the individual responsibility of each agent for their actions. Speakers of OES stand alongside other agents, and interact with them in love, but they cannot (and should not) subvert the agent's will to their own. The opening verses of Gal 6 provide an apt description of this personal-social dynamic, without the subject of OES being explicitly mentioned:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each will have to bear his own load. (Gal 6:1–6)

How OES functions as a communal activity—that is to say, an ecclesiological one—will be explored further in the following chapter.

#### *§4 Conclusions*

If the distinctive function of OES advanced in this chapter is accurate, then it has significant implications for the practice of Christian communities today—not only with respect to the nourishing of OES as a communal norm, but with regard to how CTP speech is understood and practised. I will explore these implications in chapter 10, but before moving on from the present discussion, one final point will help further lay the groundwork for that exploration.

The place of *prophecy* within this conception of the distinctive role of OES should be considered. It was argued (in chapter 3), that Paul portrayed prophecy in the Corinthian church as an ideal or paradigmatic form of OES, and one to be sought after by all those who are pursuing the more excellent way of love. Prophecy, as I defined it, served to ‘bring some aspect of the kerygmatic “mind of Christ” to the situation of its hearers, in order to produce positive spiritual effects’.<sup>514</sup>

How does this view of prophecy relate to the distinctive function of OES in the sanctification of believers (as advanced in this chapter)? In most respects, it relates extremely well. If the particular characteristic of NT communal prophecy was its capacity to *apply* the apostolic gospel of Christ crucified to the particular needs and circumstances of its hearers, then this fits neatly with the characterization of OES as operating in the zone of moral advice or practical immediacy.

However, it might be asked: if prophecy is to be practised within the

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<sup>514</sup> See Chapter 3§6.ii above.

congregational gathering (if not exclusively so), is it functioning in that context as ‘moral advice’, in which the deliberative trains of thought of particular agents are addressed? Or does its corporate nature put it more in the category of ‘moral teaching’, which forms the moral response of the whole community as a whole?

These questions help clarify a potential misreading of the conceptual framework outlined above. Neither of the two axes that define the field of moral communication are necessarily correlated with *the number of people* being addressed by the speech. A moral teacher may convey the plenitude of his authoritative proclamation to a single individual or to a crowd of thousands (as Jesus did). Likewise, specific moral advice that bears upon particular circumstances can be provided not just to an individual, but to a group of people who have those specific circumstances in common.

Prophecy therefore properly belongs in the OES field of ‘moral advice’, even if the shortcomings of the word ‘advice’ are only highlighted by this juxtaposition. Prophecy, as a paradigmatic form of OES, brings some aspect of the testimony of Jesus to bear on the particular circumstances of its hearers. It may do so in individual or smaller contexts (as, in my view, 1 Cor 11 represents), or it may do so as various individuals prophesy within the congregational gathering concerning particular realities that this particular congregation faces. Perhaps it is this aspect of prophecy that has led a number of scholars to conclude that prophecy in 1 Corinthians shares a number of characteristics with contemporary ‘preaching’, given that congregational preachers often apply some specific aspect of the biblical word to some specific context that congregation members are confronting.

All the same, even if contemporary ‘preaching’ discourses contain speech that could be called ‘prophecy’ in the 1 Cor 14 sense (and it seems likely that they do), this by no means warrants the assimilation of prophecy to ‘preaching’ without remainder. In fact, such an assimilation, which has had its advocates in Christian history, denies key aspects of the apostolic train of thought. Prophecy, according to

Paul, is a form of communal speech to be aspired to and widely practised, not a form of the singular and unifying ‘moral teaching’ that is properly the responsibility of the congregational leaders.

This tendency to absorb all forms of Christian communication into the preaching ministry of congregational leaders was observed at the outset of this thesis. The importance of OES as a theologically significant and widespread practice within NT Christianity has been almost entirely overlooked, certainly within the realm of Christian scholarship and (arguably) within the practice of large swathes of historic Christendom.

My thesis has sought to demonstrate that this neglect is not only unwarranted in terms of prevalence and theological importance of OES in the apostolic teaching, but deprives the Christian community of one of the key functions of the sanctifying work of God that happens in and through human speech. OES makes a distinctive and vital contribution to the sanctification of believers by bringing to them, within the circumstances of everyday moral deliberation and action, a word of moral ‘advice’; that is, a word of exhortation, admonition, encouragement or prophecy that applies some facet of the cruciform wisdom of God in Christ to the outworking of their Christian faith.

## *Chapter 9: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the community word*

So far in Part III, I have explored the relationship of OES to the ‘word of God’, and considered what distinctive load or function it performs in the sanctification of believers. But what does it mean for this word-related function to take place in ‘the Christian community’? At one level, the answer is simple enough: the relations that exist within a Christian community provide the interpersonal location within which one-another speech takes place. The ‘one’ and the ‘another’ are both members of this community.

However, this set of relations is much more than a convenient context for mutually helpful conversation. The community or church of Christ is a weighty *theological* reality.<sup>515</sup> As observed in the analysis above, it is described as the field in which God works (1 Cor 3:9), the sacred temple which he is building through the apostolic mission (1 Cor 3:10–16; Eph 2:19–22), the new humanity that has been created in Christ (Eph 2:14–16), and the body of Christ that grows as each part does its work (Eph 4:12–16; 1 Cor 12:12–30). We are therefore led to ask: *How does the theological meaning and significance of the Christian community further deepen our understanding of the mutually beneficial speech that takes place within it?*

A choice of conversation partner in this endeavour is not difficult. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is not only one of the very few significant theologians to reflect on the

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<sup>515</sup> The degree to which ‘community’ and ‘church’ are co-extensive descriptions of Christian corporate life will be discussed briefly below.

meaning and practice of OES, but he does so explicitly within an understanding of the theological significance of Christian community. In *Life Together* [*Gemeinsames Leben*], Bonhoeffer argues that the most significant service a Christian can do for another within the community is ‘the service of the word of God’, by which he means ‘the free word [*freie Wort*] from person to person, not the word that is bound to a particular office, time or place’.<sup>516</sup> Bonhoeffer’s discussion of the nature of this ‘free word’ in *Life Together* is, like the book itself, neither lengthy nor especially complex. However, it draws on and develops the theologically rich account of the nature of Christ-centred community that Bonhoeffer had laid out in his earlier writings.

I will return below to the question of how the theological account of one-another speech in *Life Together* relates to Bonhoeffer’s earlier theology. First, however, it is necessary to perform a task that has been largely ignored in scholarly treatments of Bonhoeffer’s work, and that is simply to attend closely to what Bonhoeffer says about the mutual speech of the Christian community in *Life Together*.

## *§1 One-another speech in Life Together*

*Life Together* belongs to what is commonly referred to as Bonhoeffer’s ‘middle period’, which runs approximately from 1932, when Bonhoeffer underwent some form of spiritual transformation, through to 1940, when the situation in Germany saw Bonhoeffer’s life take a turn towards political action, prison and eventually death

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<sup>516</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben; Das Gebetbuch Der Bibel* (vol. 5 of *DBW*), 87. All quotations from Bonhoeffer’s works in this chapter are my own translation.

at the hands of the Nazis.<sup>517</sup> During this period, Bonhoeffer's focus was on pastoral ministry and especially the training of the next generation of pastors, culminating in the establishment of the seminary and Brother's House at Finkenwalde, in the summer of 1935.

The community established at Finkenwalde was in many ways a specialized one, consisting of young men in training for the pastorate, who not only studied together but lived together. However, Bonhoeffer begins his reflection on the principles and practice of this kind of visible, lived community by insisting on its *essential continuity* with all varieties of true Christian community:

Christian community [*christliche Gemeinschaft*] means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it is a short, isolated meeting or the daily community of many years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.<sup>518</sup>

Christian community may be experienced in the casual meeting of two believers, in the regular contexts of family life or Sunday church gathering, or in the privilege of being granted to live with other Christians. In each case, the community consists not in the human relational structures that we create, nor indeed in anything that we create, but solely in the presence of Christ, who mediates relationship between us. In

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<sup>517</sup> The idea of Bonhoeffer's life and theology being divided into three broad periods was established initially by his friend, biographer and literary executor, Eberhard Bethge; see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times; a Biography* (trans. Victoria Barnett; rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). The scholarly consensus largely accepts the validity of this threefold typology, but debates the significance of each period, and the relation between them. For a survey of this debate, see John W. de Gruchy, 'The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (ed. John W. de Gruchy; Cambridge Companions to Religion; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 93–109. For more recent developments, see Adam C. Clark and Michael Mawson, 'Introduction: Ontology and Ethics in Bonhoeffer Scholarship', in *Ontology and Ethics: Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Scholarship* (ed. Adam C. Clark and Michael Mawson; Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 1–18.

<sup>518</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 18.

this sense, although Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* is specifically discussing how Christian community might be expressed as a permanent lived reality (among Christians who live and work and worship together every day), he sees his conclusions as applicable to every instantiation of Christian community.

The idea that Christ stands between us, and that we only have access to true relationship with others through Christ, is a key theme of Bonhoeffer's socially-oriented Christology and ontology.<sup>519</sup> In *Life Together*, the emphasis falls particularly on Christ's constitutive presence in the Christian community in the speaking of his word. Bonhoeffer argues that Christian community exists solely through Christ in three senses.

*Firstly*, we need other Christians to speak the truth of God to us, because the word that brings us life and creates the community can only come from outside:

We do not decide our own death and life, but we find it only in the word that comes from outside [*das von außen auf ihn zukommt*]. This is the Reformation doctrine of 'alien righteousness' [*fremde Gerechtigkeit*], a righteousness from outside (*extra nos*) ... The Christian lives only from the truth of the word of God in Jesus Christ. We hunger and thirst for this word, but it can only come from outside.<sup>520</sup>

This '*von außen*' word comes to us from the lips of other people. In a passage that is critical for the whole argument of *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer insists that the goal of all Christian community is the mutual speaking of God's word, since it is solely in this word that the Christian lives, and that true Christian community is created:

Christians live wholly by the truth of the word of God in Jesus Christ. If they are asked: 'Where is your salvation, your blessedness, your righteousness?', they will never point to

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<sup>519</sup> This is widely acknowledged. See particularly Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999). I will return to Green's thesis below.

<sup>520</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 19.

themselves, but to the word of Jesus Christ that grants them salvation, blessedness and righteousness. They look for that word wherever they can. Because they hunger and thirst daily for righteousness, they therefore desire this redeeming word again and again. It can only come from the outside. In themselves, they are poor and dead. Help must come from the outside, and it has come and comes anew every day in the word of Jesus Christ, who brings us redemption, righteousness, innocence and blessedness. But this word God has placed in the mouth of men, so that it might be repeated [*weitergesagt*] among the people. When someone is struck by the word, he tells it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find his living word in the testimony of brothers, in human mouths [*Menschenmund*]. Therefore, the Christian needs Christians, who speak to him the word of God; he needs them again and again, when he becomes uncertain and fails [*ungerwiß und verzagt*], because from himself he cannot find help, without cheating himself of the truth. He needs the brother as a bearer and proclaimer [*Träger und Verkündiger*] of the divine word of salvation. He needs the brother solely for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of the brother; the one is uncertain, the other is certain. Therefore, the goal of all Christian community is clear: to encounter each other as bringers of the message of salvation [*sie begegnen einander als Bringer der Heilsbotschaft*].<sup>521</sup>

Bonhoeffer explicitly anchors his understanding of community in ‘the biblical and Reformational message of the justification of people by grace alone’; that is, in the free justifying act of God that comes to humanity as a word *from outside*.<sup>522</sup> Christian life is created and sustained—and Christian community likewise—only by the speaking of this word of truth, and this word comes to us via the daily heartfelt testimony of brothers, of other Christians. This leads to the very strong statement that the goal of all Christian community is ‘to encounter each other as bringers of the message of salvation’.

The necessity of this ‘word from outside’ relates to Bonhoeffer’s conception of

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<sup>521</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 19–20.

<sup>522</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 19–20. The words ‘*von außen*’ ring like a bell throughout this section.

sin, and leads to the *second* sense in which community can only exist in and through Christ. In rebelling against God, the human self has rebelled against community—both with God and with others. For Bonhoeffer, sin involves the deliberate and culpable retreat of the human ego into self-centred isolation. True relationship and community with others is impossible on these terms, and can only be restored by the work of Christ. Christ is the mediator not just between us and God, but *between each other*.

Christ has become the mediator [*der Mittler*] and has made peace with God among men. Without Christ we did not know God; we did not call upon him, nor come to him. But without Christ we also did not know the brother and did not know to come to him. The way is blocked through one's own ego [*das eigene Ich*]. Christ has freed us [*freigemacht*] to go to God and to the brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can only do so from now on through Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through him are we bound together. He remains the only mediator for all eternity.<sup>523</sup>

This in turn leads to his *third* point, namely that the community that Christ has created between us is an eternal and spiritual community. We become brothers in community, he argues, not out of a human longing for togetherness, but only because of what Christ has done:

It is not the person seeking community with us who is our brother, and is in fact in community with me, but the one who has been absolved from sin and called to faith in Christ.

The true and deeper our community becomes, the more will all other things between us recede, the clearer and purer will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is life between us.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 20.

<sup>524</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 23.

This insistence on Christian community being created and sustained only through Jesus Christ is also the basis for the lengthy contrast Bonhoeffer subsequently draws between two kinds of community and two kinds of love: the ‘spiritual’ [*pneumatisch*] community and the ‘spiritual’ [*geistlich*] love which characterizes it; and the ‘fleshly’ [*psychisch*] community and the ‘emotional’ or ‘self-centred’ [*seelisch*] love that is its mark.<sup>525</sup> Bonhoeffer was very aware of the human desire for community, and of the various ways in which selfishness and ego could derail Christian community. There is, he repeatedly argues, no unmediated access between us. Our selfishness and sin make that impossible. Only as Christ brings us out of ourselves, and redeems us, and stands in the centre—that is, between us and God, and between us and other people—can we be liberated to know and love others truly. And again, the mediating presence of Christ is found in his word:

Spiritual love [*Geistliche Liebe*], however, comes from Jesus Christ; it serves him alone; it knows that it has no unmediated access to other people. Christ stands between me and others. I do not know in advance what love for others means on the basis of a general idea of love, growing out of my own emotional longing [*seelische Verlangen*]<sup>526</sup>—all of which in the sight of Christ may instead be hatred and the worst kind of selfishness. What love is, only Christ in his word can tell me. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what love for the brother truly looks like. Therefore, spiritual love is bound to the word of Jesus Christ alone.<sup>526</sup>

The importance of mutual word-speaking for the Christian community can be readily deduced from the logic of Bonhoeffer’s view of ‘community’ in the first chapter of *Life Together*. Christian community is only possible through the mediation of Christ; the Christ who mediates is present in his word of truth; God has willed that this word should be brought to each of us *extra nos*, from outside, on the lips of

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<sup>525</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 22–34.

<sup>526</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 30.

other Christians.

The obvious conclusion is that the word of God should constantly be spoken in the life of the community, and this is indeed what Bonhoeffer proceeds to emphasize, firstly in urging that extensive Scripture reading and singing should form the centrepiece of the daily corporate worship of the brothers,<sup>527</sup> and climactically in arguing that the highest form of ‘service’ that a Christian can render to their neighbours is to ‘serve them with the word of God’.<sup>528</sup> In fact, Bonhoeffer draws a strong connection between the reading of Scripture and the practice of mutual helpful speech:

How should we manage to help a Christian brother in his need and suffering [*Not und Anfechtung*] if not with God's own word? All our words quickly fail. But the one who like ‘a good household manager brings forth out of his treasure the old and the new’ (Matt 13:52), who can speak out of the fullness of God’s word, out of the abundance of instructions, exhortations, and consolations of Scripture, is the one who through the word of God can cast out devils and help the brothers.<sup>529</sup>

In the chapter on ‘service’, Bonhoeffer turns explicitly to the mutual speaking of the word, casting it as the ultimate form of mutual Christian service. However, he also warns that this speech needs to be exercised with care, and alongside other forms of service:

How then should true brotherly service [*rechte brüderliche Dienst*] take place in the Christian community? We are easily inclined to answer quickly that the single real service to the neighbour is to serve them with the word of God. It is true that no service can equal this, and even more, that other forms of service are aligned to it. Nevertheless, a Christian community does not exist only out of proclaimers of the word. The misuse of this idea could become very

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<sup>527</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 35–64.

<sup>528</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 82.

<sup>529</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 47–48.

damaging, if a number of other things were overlooked at this point.<sup>530</sup>

These ‘other things’, that are aligned with speaking the word, but without which speaking the word might be dangerous, are threefold.

The *first* is the importance of *listening* to the brother, rather than seeking to dominate or manipulate him. The sinful impulse of the human ego to dominate or use others for our purposes can rise up even in speaking of the word of God. We should be quick to listen, and slow to speak, lest we speak past our brother’s needs. Just as love for God starts with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for the brother is that we learn to listen to him.<sup>531</sup> Bonhoeffer also notes that this is mainly what distinguishes this form of brotherly word from the word of preaching:

Brotherly pastoral care [*bruderliche Seelsorge*] differentiates itself from preaching essentially through this, that here the task of the word is joined to the task of listening.<sup>532</sup>

This corresponds to the conclusions I drew in chapter 8 about the relationship of CTP and OES in moral learning and growth. The latter involves an interaction with the particular circumstances that the brother is encountering; it requires listening.

The importance both of listening and of speaking is also what lies behind Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on personal, mutual confession of sins.<sup>533</sup> This practice, which was as unusual and off-putting for Bonhoeffer’s students as it may be for many modern readers, was for Bonhoeffer simply the logical outworking of his theological view of sin, community and the speaking of the word.

The *second* and *third* subsidiary forms of service Bonhoeffer commends are

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<sup>530</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 82.

<sup>531</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 82.

<sup>532</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 83.

<sup>533</sup> See the final chapter on ‘Confession and the Lord’s Supper’ [*Beichte und Abendmahl*]; Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 93–102.

*active helpfulness* [*tätige Hilfsbereitschaft*], and *forbearance* [*Tragens*]. Both of these forms of service lodge the speaking of the word within the context of genuine relationship with others. To be devoted to the ministry of the word but not be willing to serve the brother in immediate, practical matters is to be like the Levite and the priest who passed by on the other side of the road.<sup>534</sup> It is to fail to see the brother as he really is: a created being in need of help in manifold ways. Likewise, to speak the word impatiently or overbearingly—that is, to fail to bear the burden of the brother’s weakness—is to fail to treat him as he really is: a fellow sinner to be loved and respected, rather than an object to be controlled.<sup>535</sup>

With these caveats in place, Bonhoeffer then turns specifically to discuss what he calls ‘the ultimate and highest’ form of service:

Wherever the service of listening, of active helpfulness and of forbearance is being truly done, then also can the ultimate and highest occur: service with the word of God.

This has to do with the free [*freie*] word from person to person, not the word that is bound to a particular office, time or place [*Amt, Zeit or Ort*]. It has to do with the unique situation in the world [*Welt einzigartige Situation*], in which one person testifies to the other of the whole consolation of God and the exhortation, the goodness and the severity of God.<sup>536</sup>

Bonhoeffer doesn’t describe the ‘free word’ as the highest form of mutual service lightly. In fact, he emphasizes the sober responsibility that comes with speaking this word, as well as the difficulty of knowing exactly when and how to speak:

What is more dangerous than to speak the word of God superfluously? Then again, who wishes to answer for staying silent when he should have spoken? How much easier is the ordered word from the pulpit [*geordnete Wort auf der Kanzel*] than this wholly free word [*gänzlich freie ... Wort*], standing in the place of responsibility between speaking and

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<sup>534</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 84–85.

<sup>535</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 85–86.

<sup>536</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 87.

silence.<sup>537</sup>

Nevertheless, the difficulty of speaking the word to the other cannot deter Christians from doing so. In fact, to fail to render this service to others is ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unchristian’:

When Christians live together, the point must come at some time and in some way that one personally testifies to the other of God’s word and will [*persönlich Gottes Wort und Willen bezeugt*]. It is unthinkable that the things which are most important to each individual should not also be spoken among brothers. It is unchristian when one knowingly fails in this decisive service [*entscheidenden Dienst*] to the other ...

The basis upon which Christians can speak with one another is that each knows the other as a sinner, who in all his human honour is forsaken and lost unless given help. This does not mean contempt or dishonour for the other; rather, here the only real honour that any man has is rendered to the other, namely that as a sinner he should participate in God’s grace and glory, that he is a child of God. This realization gives the brotherly word [*brüderlichen Wort*] its necessary freedom and openness. We speak to one another from the position of the help we both need. We admonish one another to the Way that Christ called us to go. We warn each other about the disobedience which ruins us. We are gentle and we are tough with one another, because we know God’s kindness and God’s severity. Why should we be afraid of each other, if we both have only God to fear?<sup>538</sup>

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I have quoted extensively from the text of *Life Together* in this section in order to establish how central the mutual speaking of the word was to Bonhoeffer’s theological vision of Christian life in community. Bonhoeffer described the practice in various ways—the ‘wholly free word’, the ‘brotherly word’, ‘personal testifying to

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<sup>537</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 88.

<sup>538</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 88–89.

God's word and will', 'brotherly pastoral care', and simply 'serving others with the word of God'— but there can be no doubt that he regarded it as a central element of Christian community.

In one sense, that Bonhoeffer should come to this conclusion is not surprising, given the logic of his theology: since Christian community is available only in and through Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is available only through his word that comes to us '*von außen*'; and further, since that word is brought to us through the human mouths of other Christians, then the mutual speaking of the word of God is the central service and goal of true Christian community.<sup>539</sup>

What *is* surprising is that this conclusion by Bonhoeffer, which constitutes (as I shall argue) a logical development in his theology, seems quite invisible to mainstream Bonhoeffer scholarship.

## §2 Life Together, *OES* and the reception of Bonhoeffer's theology

In his introduction to *Life Together* (in the standard English edition of Bonhoeffer's complete works), Geoffrey Kelly summarizes Bonhoeffer's vision of community life at Finkenwalde as follows:

Bonhoeffer's entire approach to the community life experienced at Finkenwalde depends on a strong faith in the vicarious action of Christ in Word, sacrament, intercessory prayer, and service that makes it possible for Christians to be both 'with one another' [*miteinander*] and 'for one another' [*füreinander*]. The seminarians were to live with one another, but only in the spirit of being for one another. His community was a gathering of theological students whose 'togetherness' was to be characterized by an unselfish love for one another expressed in

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<sup>539</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 20. Bonhoeffer himself seems to have taken time to reach this conclusion. I will note below the development of his thought in this area.

the willingness to serve each other, even to be inconvenienced by one another, to intercede for one another in prayer, to extend forgiveness in the name of the Lord, and to share the bread of the Lord's Supper.<sup>540</sup>

This is an excellent summary in most respects. However, there is no mention here of the mutual speaking of the word, let alone any recognition that Bonhoeffer regarded it as the 'goal of all Christian community' and as the 'ultimate and highest form' of being 'for one another' in community. This is a remarkable omission, given the prominence of the interpersonal word in the content and logic of the book.

Likewise, in the editors' afterword to the German edition, something is strikingly absent from the summary of the main concepts of *Life Together*:

Such commitment to Jesus Christ opens up a number of elementary Christian concepts: community, solitude, service, Scripture reading, prayer, intercession, meditation, the ability to listen, forgiveness, confession and forgiveness of sins, Christians' breaking of bread together, the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the church of Christ, as well as the hope of breaking bread together eternally.<sup>541</sup>

It is difficult to account for this. How is it that the central and climactic form of service within the community, which is not only described and explored at length by Bonhoeffer, but which is integral to the theological argument of the book, is the single concept *omitted* in this summary of the work's elementary concepts?

The same question can be asked in regard to Clifford Green's powerful analysis of the foundational place of 'socialty' in Bonhoeffer's theology.<sup>542</sup> Green's work,

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<sup>540</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly, 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition', in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*; ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly; trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtress; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>541</sup> Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr, 'Editors' Afterword to the German Edition', in Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 128.

<sup>542</sup> Green, *Theology of Sociality*. A shorter form of his argument is found in Clifford Green, 'Human Sociality and Christian Community', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (ed. John W. de Gruchy; Cambridge Companions to Religion; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113–33.

which has had a major influence on the direction of Bonhoeffer scholarship (particularly in the English-speaking world), charts how the social ontology first laid out in *Sanctorum Communio* (1927) is further developed in *Act and Being* (1930) and finds its theological culmination in the Christology lectures of 1933. Green argues that this socially-framed ontology of both divine and human being continues to be a central theme of Bonhoeffer's thought in his middle and later periods, modified and developed via the two major turning points of his life: the personal transformation of 1932, and the rising political crisis of Nazi rule in Germany.

However, it is again fascinating to observe that even though Green seeks to explain how Bonhoeffer's personal transformation in 1932 affected this theological development, and in particular his theology of *community*, he entirely passes over *Life Together*—the work of Bonhoeffer's middle period that most explicitly explores his theology of community in the context of his new-found emphasis on the personal power of the word of God. In Green's major work, *Life Together* receives one perfunctory sentence.<sup>543</sup> In a shorter essay, he says a little more, but his summary of the practical outworking of Bonhoeffer's Christ-mediated community has a familiar ring to it:

That one sees others—and oneself—through the eyes of Christ has very practical effects. These include among others: refraining from judging people, resisting our desire to impose our will and ideals on others, praying for one another, forgiving enemies, regarding ourselves and others as sinners forgiven by the grace of God, and helping one another with deeds of love and mercy.<sup>544</sup>

Again, something is noticeably absent.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> '*Life Together*, written in September, 1938, and published the following year, was one theological reflection on the experience of the Finkenwalde community'; Green, *Socialty*, 180–181.

<sup>544</sup> Green, 'Human Sociality', 126.

<sup>545</sup> Earlier in the essay, in three paragraphs about daily life at Finkenwalde, and how it was shaped by Bonhoeffer's theology of community, Green does mention 'mutual admonition' in a list of numerous

Further examples could be enumerated,<sup>546</sup> but the point is sufficiently established, and raises a puzzling question: What is it about the presuppositions of Bonhoeffer scholarship that seems to render invisible Bonhoeffer's interest in the one-another speech of the Christian community?

This is a difficult question, not only because of its scope, but because examining the meaning of silence is always a challenging exercise. Perhaps the most that can be said is that the marked lack of attention to the OES of the Christian community within Christian theological thought generally is reflected also in contemporary Bonhoeffer scholarship.

All the same, what makes this neglect surprising is that Bonhoeffer's emphasis on mutual communal speech in *Life Together* is readily explicable as a natural development from his earlier theology.

### §3 *Life Together and OES as a development in Bonhoeffer's thought*

There is little dispute among Bonhoeffer scholars that the themes of his major early

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other activities. He does not mention that Bonhoeffer regarded mutual 'service with the word' as the highest form of Christian communal service; 'Human Sociality', 125.

<sup>546</sup> For example, in surveying the nature and development of Bonhoeffer's Christology, Feil's examination of the middle period has only two sentences on *Life Together*, and fails to notice how the mutual speech of the community serves as a significant form of 'participation in God's action' in Christ; Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 82. Likewise, in his discussion of the themes of *Life Together*, André Dumas makes no mention whatsoever of the mutual 'service of the word', despite taking the view that the 'mediation of the word' between community members is the key emphasis of the work; André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality* (trans. Robert McAfee Brown; London: SCM Press, 1971), 131–138. Similarly, in a paper looking at how Finkenwalde served as Bonhoeffer's experiment in seeking a form of community life that would restore the German church, Fergus makes no reference to the mutual service of the word; Donald Fergus, 'Finkenwalde—an Experiment to Restore a Failing Ecclesiology?', *SJT* 69/2 (May 2016): 204–220.

theological works—*Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being* and the Christology lectures—heavily influence the writings of his middle and later periods.<sup>547</sup> There is significant debate, however, as to how these earlier works should be assessed, and how exactly their themes play out.<sup>548</sup> Exploring the complexities of this debate is beyond our scope, but it is useful and necessary at this point to isolate the key themes of Bonhoeffer’s early theology that lay the foundation for the conclusions he comes to in *Life Together*. Four ideas, in particular, are important.

*Firstly*, a key plank of Bonhoeffer’s thought is that the individualism of the standard Enlightenment view of the self is unsustainable, and that *human personhood is inherently social*. Bonhoeffer derives this insight not from a prior sociological concept or theory, but from an understanding of sinful, fallen humanity before God. God confronts us in our rebellion against him, and in that address ‘the human being recognizes that it is not, in fact, an atomistic and self-sufficient subject, but one who already stands in concrete, personal relationships’.<sup>549</sup> In fact, the impulse to regard ourselves as self-sufficient subjects is, for Bonhoeffer, the essence of sin. Having rejected God, and asserted our autonomy, humanity finds itself isolated, fragmented and alone. As he puts it powerfully in *Act and Being*, channeling Luther:

[Being ‘in Adam’] means being in untruth; that is, in a culpable reversing of the will ...into itself, *cor curvum in se*. The human person has ripped itself out of community with God and with other people, and now stands alone, that is, in untruth. And because human persons are

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<sup>547</sup> Green, as already noted, has been influential in making this case at length in his *Theology of Sociality*.

<sup>548</sup> For example, in a recent carefully argued monograph, Michael Mawson reassesses the main arguments of *Sanctorum Communio* and argues that it has been significantly misunderstood, both by those (like Green) who regard its supposed basis in social philosophy and sociology as a strength, and those (like Berger and Feil) who see it as problematic. I am particularly indebted to Mawson’s close reading of *Sanctorum Communio* for his exposition of the relationship between Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of sin, human personhood and the vicarious representative action of Christ. Michael Mawson, *Christ Existing as Community: Bonhoeffer’s Ecclesiology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>549</sup> Mawson, *Christ Existing as Community*, 62.

alone, and the world is 'their' world, their fellow human persons have sunk into the world of things.<sup>550</sup>

For the sinful human, other people are objects to be manipulated, dominated, feared or otherwise used (like objects) for our purposes.

This means, *secondly*, that to become a truly human person is to be restored to relationship with God and with others, to be restored to community, and this can only happen through *the mediation of Christ*. On the cross, Christ establishes a new social reality by being himself a true person—that is, one who exists with and for others in love (more on this below). He confronts humanity not as a judge of our sinful isolation but as a gracious saviour, who restores and liberates people to relate rightly to God through him, and to relate rightly to others through him. As Marsh puts it:

Christ is the divine subjective ground of the I and other; Christ as *between* is the source of community ... So as we go to our neighbour we become Christ to him. Christ stands between us. Through and in him we meet the other.<sup>551</sup>

This sense of Christ as the mediating 'between' or 'centre', through whom alone we have access to God *and* to other people, is a key theme of the Christology lectures, and lays the groundwork for the position worked out in *Discipleship and Life Together*—namely, that when we encounter the other person in community, we are standing in the place of Christ as we meet them. It is in this sense that we are 'Christ to the other person'.

*Thirdly*, the way in which Christ does his mediatorial work of reconciliation is by *vicarious representative action* ('*Stellvertretung*'). This is a vital concept for

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<sup>550</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie* (vol. 7 of *DBW*), 136; cf. Luther, *LW*, 25:291, 313, 345.

<sup>551</sup> Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 76.

Bonhoeffer. Just as Adam functions as a ‘collective person’ in whom humanity are sinners, so Christ is a collective person who represents us and acts as our substitute. He stands *with* us, as a human, as our representative; he acts *for* us, taking the wrath and judgement of God in our place.<sup>552</sup>

Most importantly, this vicarious action of Christ establishes a new principle of vicarious representative action for human personhood and community, of being *with each other (miteinander)* and *for each other (füreinander)*.<sup>553</sup> Through Christ’s work and mediation, the members of the church-community can now truly exist in community, not regarding the other as a threat or an object to be controlled, but as a gift of God’s grace to me, for whom I am also a gift:

The other person in the community [Gemeinde] is no longer essentially claim but gift, a revelation of his love (that is, the love of God), his heart (that is, the heart of God) ... The fact that my claim is met by another I who loves me (that is, by Christ), fulfils me, humbles me, releases me from my self-imprisonment and enables me (again, only in the power of faith in Christ) to love the other and to completely give and reveal myself to the other.<sup>554</sup>

In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer describes how ‘being-for-each-other’ in the Christian community is instantiated in acts of love, but interestingly his description of these acts does *not* include mutual service with the word:

Three great, positive possibilities of ‘working-for-each-other’ [*Füreinanderwirken*] present themselves in the community of the saints: self-denying, active work for the neighbour; intercessory prayer; and, finally, the mutual giving [*Spenden*] of the forgiveness of sins in God’s name.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: Eine Dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche* (vol. 1 of *DBW*), 90–100. Mawson’s exposition of this theme is helpful; *Christ Existing as Community*, 133–138.

<sup>553</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 117.

<sup>554</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 107.

<sup>555</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 121. Bonhoeffer subsequently expounds the meaning of ‘mutual forgiveness’ in terms of bearing the sins of one another in the community, not the mutual declaration of the gospel assurance.

At this point in his thought, being-for-others does not seem to encompass speaking the word to them.

*Fourthly*, the work of Christ in establishing a new form of basic relation between people does establish a real new community in the world. This new community (the church) is established and made a reality by Christ on the cross, and then actualized in concrete human communities by the Holy Spirit. It is in this connection that Bonhoeffer's well-known axiom is coined: 'Christ existing as community' (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*).

There is not room to explore the strengths and weaknesses of this axiom, which (as Mawson notes) is closely tied to Bonhoeffer's complex interaction with and modification of the Hegelian ideas of 'objective spirit' and 'God existing as community'.<sup>556</sup> The important point, however, is that Bonhoeffer regards the various empirical forms of the church's community life—what he calls its 'objective spirit'—as being the means by which Christ is present in the community, and by which the Holy Spirit actualizes the reality of the church as the body of Christ. In particular, Christ is present in and through the traditional Reformation forms of the preached word of Scripture and the embodied word of the sacrament:

The Christ who is the word in person is present in the word of the church [*Kirche*] and as the word of the church. His presence is, in essence, his existence as preaching. His presence is not the power or objective spirit of the church-community [*Gemeinde*] from which it preaches, but his presence is preaching. Were this not so, preaching would not have gained the exclusive place the Reformation has given it ... Preaching is the form of the present Christ, to whom we are bound, and to whom we must hold fast.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Mawson, *Christ Existing as Community*, 121–149. Mawson interacts closely with those who regard the axiom as a collapsing of Christ *into* the church. He argues that Bonhoeffer guards himself against this by maintaining an appropriate asymmetry between the reality of Christ being present in the church, and the impossibility of straightforwardly identifying the church with Christ.

<sup>557</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Vorlesung "Christologie" (Nachschrift)', in *Berlin, 1932–1933* (vol. 12 of *DBW*), 299.

[Regarding the form of Christ ‘as sacrament’], there are two things to be said. First: Christ is wholly word; sacrament is wholly word. Second: Sacrament is different from word, in the sense that it has its own right to exist in the church.<sup>558</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of this Reformation heritage has a characteristically Barthian cast—he considers that the word of the Bible, like the human word of preaching, ‘becomes’ God’s word as the Spirit who is active in the church-community makes it so.<sup>559</sup> All the same, the form in which that word is communicated, in his earlier writings, does not extend beyond preaching and the sacraments. There is no explicit indication in Bonhoeffer’s earlier works that he regarded the mutual ‘service of the word’ by community members to each other as an integral aspect of the community life.

However, the foundations of this idea are certainly there. If the community that is formed by the reconciling work of Christ is one in which believers are *with* and *for* each other in Christ, and in which they relate to each other only *through* Christ; and, further, if the form of Christ’s Spirit-actualized presence in the community is the Scriptural word that is repeated and witnessed to by human speakers; then (the conclusion follows) why might not those human speakers be any and every Christian person who has been called into true personhood by that word? Why might not the regular forms of personal interaction in community life be a means by which Christ is present between believers in the form of his word?

By the time of the Finkenwalde experiment of the mid-1930s, chronicled in *Life*

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<sup>558</sup> Bonhoeffer, ‘Christologie’, 300. See also this from *Akt und Sein*: ‘[Christian revelation] must, in other words, be thought of in the church [*Kirche*], because the church is the present Christ, ‘Christ existing as church-community’ [*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*]. In the proclamation of the church-community for the church-community, Christ is the common ‘subject’ of the proclamation (word and sacrament) and church-community’; *Akt und Sein*, 108.

<sup>559</sup> On the basis of Bonhoeffer’s 1935 lecture on ‘Contemporizing New Testament texts’, Woelfel characterizes Bonhoeffer’s biblical hermeneutic as being very similar to ‘Barth’s understanding of Scripture and dogmatic exegesis’. James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer’s Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 109.

*Together* in 1938, Bonhoeffer seems to have reached this very conclusion. The individual members of the Christian community were to look not just to preachers but to *each other* as ‘a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word’.<sup>560</sup>

It is significant that between this later development in Bonhoeffer’s thinking, and his earlier academic writing, lies a marked change in Bonhoeffer’s personal attitude to the Bible and to Christ.

The debate over the nature of Bonhoeffer’s ‘transformation’ mirrors, in many ways, the various attempts by those holding widely diverging theological views to appropriate Bonhoeffer to their cause. I do not wish to judge the degree to which the events of late 1931 and early 1932 constituted a ‘conversion’ of Bonhoeffer to genuine Christianity, nor to assess whether the prison period constituted a further growth in his theology or a backsliding from it.<sup>561</sup>

However, there is no doubt that a significant change of orientation took place in Bonhoeffer’s life at this time. The evidence is found in several pieces of correspondence, perhaps most clearly in this passage from a letter to Elizabeth Zinn in 1936:

I plunged into my work in a very unchristian and arrogant way. An insane ambition, which some noticed in me, made my life difficult and deprived me of the love and trust of my companions. At that time, I was terribly alone and left to myself. It was very bad. Then something different came, something that has changed and overturned my life to this very day. I came, for the first time, to the Bible. That is also a terrible thing to say. I had preached many times, I had seen much of the church, had spoken and written about it—and I had not yet become a Christian, but was in a very wild and uncontrolled way my own master. I know that at that time I had made the cause of Jesus Christ into an advantage for myself, for my

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<sup>560</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 19–20.

<sup>561</sup> Green notes, for example, that Müller and Phillips see Bonhoeffer’s middle period, and *The Cost of Discipleship* in particular, as a detour or regression in his theological development; *Theology of Sociality*, 5–6.

insane vanity. I pray to God that will never happen again. Not that I ever prayed much at all then. In my total desolation, I was quite happy with myself. The Bible has freed me from all this, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Since then, everything has changed. I have felt this clearly, and so have other people around me. It was a great liberation.<sup>562</sup>

Bonhoeffer's 'great liberation' was precipitated by a personal encounter with the Bible, and it resulted in an increased focus on Scripture in his work and writings. Green chronicles this post-1932 change of focus and activity, including a new concentration on exegetical rather than philosophical writing, on pastoral rather than academic work, and a fresh assertion of the importance of obedience to the word of Christ in Scripture, particularly the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>563</sup> While statistics are a blunt instrument in this context, the change in Bonhoeffer's focus is also indicated by the occurrence of the words 'Bible' and 'Scripture' in his writings: they occur a total of 14 times in the pre-1932 works of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, as opposed to a combined 140 times in *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*.

This new attention to Scripture is also reflected at multiple points in Bonhoeffer's writings post-1932. Writing to supporters of the seminary at Finkenwalde he says:

The Bible stands as the focal point of our work. It has become again for us the starting point [*Ausgangspunkt*] and the centre of our theological work and all our Christian activities. We have learned here again to read the Bible prayerfully. This is the point of our morning and evening devotions, in which we hear the Bible consecutively.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> 'An Elisabeth Zinn', in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Illegale Theologen-Ausbildung: Finkenwalde 1935–1937* (vol. 14 of *DBW*), 112–113.

<sup>563</sup> Green, *Theology of Sociality*, 150–180.

<sup>564</sup> 'Das Bruderhaus an Freunde und Förderer des Seminars' in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Illegale Theologen-Ausbildung*, 91. Note also the opening words of the Preface to *The Cost of Discipleship*: 'In those times when the church seeks to renew itself, Holy Scripture is richer for us. Behind the necessary daily slogans and battle cries of church disputes, there lies a more intense search and questioning for that which it is really all about, namely Jesus himself. What does Jesus have to say to us?' Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge* (vol. 4 of *DBW*), 21.

There is no question that the Scriptures occupied a more central and urgent place in Bonhoeffer's work during this time, and more particularly that his *personal connection* with the Bible markedly changed. Seeking to explain this change to his somewhat more liberal-minded brother-in-law in 1936, Bonhoeffer writes:

It is in this way that I now read the Bible. I ask of every passage: What is God saying to us here? And I implore God to show us what he wishes to say ...

And now I wish also to say to you very personally: since I have learned to read the Bible in this way—and that was not very long ago at all—it becomes daily more miraculous to me. I read it morning and evening, often during the day as well, and every day I take a text that I have chosen for the whole week, and try to immerse myself in it completely, so that I may truly hear it. I know that I could no longer live properly without this. I also could not properly believe ...

Thus all that remains is the decision whether to trust the word of the Bible or not; whether we want to allow it to take hold of us, as no other word can in life and in death. And I believe that we will only become truly joyful and free when we have made this decision.<sup>565</sup>

Two things are noteworthy in this correspondence. The first is that Bonhoeffer's encounter with the personal address of God's word is mediated not through preaching or sacrament but through the text of Scripture itself. He speaks quite candidly of God speaking to him personally through the Scriptural word. The second is that his response to this encounter is *to testify about it* to his brother-in-law. He practises, in other words, precisely what he commends as the normal experience of Christians in community in *Life Together*: 'When someone is struck by the word, he tells it to others'.<sup>566</sup>

My contention is that Bonhoeffer's encounter with the Bible, and his personal response to it, goes some way towards explaining the development in his thought

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<sup>565</sup> 'An Rüdiger Schleicher', in Bonhoeffer, *Illegale Theologen-Ausbildung*, 146–148.

<sup>566</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 19.

that *Life Together* represents. In being encountered by the word personally in a way that was ‘daily more miraculous to me’, and in testifying of this word to others, Bonhoeffer saw that the presence of the mediating Christ existed not only in the forms of preaching and sacrament, but in the testimony of every believer who has been ‘placed in the truth’ by their encounter with Christ’s word.

Thus, while preaching and the sacraments remain very important in Bonhoeffer’s middle-period writings on the nature of church and ministry,<sup>567</sup> he expands the field in which the ‘word of salvation’ is heard in the community to the personal interactions of believers. The implications that were inherent in his earlier theology of christological mediation and vicarious representative action become explicit. If true community is only possible as Jesus Christ stands between us, and sets us free by his vicarious representative action to be (like him) with-others and for-others; and if that life-giving christological work can only come to us from outside, through the ‘alien’ word of God in the Bible; and if that transformative word is encountered personally by every Christian (as Bonhoeffer himself encountered it in Scripture)—then the forms of community life that instantiate Christ’s presence by his word cannot be limited to the preaching and sacramental ministries of church leaders. They must also encompass the joyful testimony of every individual in the community, who relates to every other person in the community only in and through the Christ who is present as word. This is the logic that leads Bonhoeffer to conclude that the ‘single real service to the neighbour is to serve them with the word of God’.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> For example, in his discussion of the relationship between preacher, sermon and congregation in ‘The Concrete Commandment and the Divine Mandates’, Bonhoeffer makes strong statements about the high office of preaching, and about how the congregation should not use ‘the priesthood of all believers’ as an excuse to avoid giving the preaching the humility, respect and service it deserves; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik* (vol. 6 of *DBW*), 400.

<sup>568</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 82.

By 1938, this was Bonhoeffer's view of the place of one-another speech in a Christian community. The events of 1939 and thereafter took his circumstances and the focus of his writing in a different direction—away from the principles and practices of Christian community and towards the realities of being a Christian in the midst of a civil and political crisis. This is not to say that Bonhoeffer was entirely 'discipleship-and-church-focused' in the 1930s and then 'politics-and-society-focused' post-1940; such a division is reflected neither in the integrated nature of his thought, nor in his actual writings in both periods.<sup>569</sup>

All the same, Bonhoeffer viewed the Finkenwalde experiment as a laboratory in which to incubate the kind of reformation and restoration that the church more generally needed to embrace. Unfortunately, the events that overtook him prevented the unfolding of that process, and the further outworking of what it would mean for the church as a whole to be a community which had as its goal to 'encounter each other as bringers of the message of salvation'.

#### *§4 Conclusions*

What light, then, does Bonhoeffer's theology of community cast on the meaning and significance of the OES that is practised within it? Two aspects are worth considering.

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<sup>569</sup> Barker argues persuasively that Bonhoeffer saw the experiment at Finkenwalde as preparation not only for the restoration of true community in the church, but for the church's witness in the world; H. Gaylon Barker, 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition', in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde, 1935–1937* (vol. 14 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*; ed. H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Bocker; trans. Douglas W. Stott; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 34–36.

a. *Word and community*

The first and most significant point is that Bonhoeffer grounds the significance of the brotherly word on the *constitutive place of the word of Jesus Christ in the creation and growth of Christian community*. Bonhoeffer is vehement in his opposition to the idea that Christian communities are a species of religious communities generally, or indeed of any other form of human community; nor are Christian communities formed by the longing of humans for relationship with each other. They are not fleshly, self-serving or emotional communities (*seelisch* or *psychisch*), but spiritual ones (*pneumatisch* or *geistlich*). They are formed and exist and flourish only by the free act of God in Jesus Christ.

In particular, Bonhoeffer sees Christian community as being established by the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross, and brought to actualization by the Holy Spirit, as believers are set free to relate to each other through the mediation of Christ. This actualization happens as the risen Christ is present and addresses people through his word—the alien, *extra nos*, Scriptural word that is preached and spoken and embodied in the community, and which the Spirit enables people to hear and respond to. This word places believers in the truth found in Jesus Christ, and through him gives true and right access to others in community. It re-creates the human person as a ‘being-with-others’ and a ‘being-for-others’.

There are deep resonances here with Paul’s train of thought in Ephesians (analyzed above in chapter 4). The sinful human state of alienation from God and from others is overcome by an act of new creation on the cross, whereby Christ makes one new man out of the two (Eph 2:1–22). The new reconciled humanity is raised up together in Christ, and exists only ‘in Christ’. He is the centre and source of its life as his ‘body’, and through him the body grows in unity and love—that is, in being profoundly with each other and for each other through him (Eph 4:1–16). All of this is mediated through the preaching and teaching of the apostolic gospel

word—by Paul and the evangelists and teachers and pastors, but also by the manifold and diverse members of the community, who speak the truth in love for the growth of the body (Eph 3:1–10; 4:7–16).

The distinctive contribution of *Life Together* is to perceive that the ‘*Menschenmund*’ in which this re-creative word of Christ are found are, in principle, the mouths of every member of the community, since each individual has received this word from outside, and only *through* this word can relate rightly to others in Christian community.

Bonhoeffer explicitly refers this concept to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith—that is, to the prior ‘alien’ work of God that calls forth and creates human response, and that comes to us from outside. He also connects it with the Reformation conception of the means of grace—that is, of the mediating work of the preached-word and the sacraments in bringing this word to human beings in the church. However, at one significant point Bonhoeffer takes the Reformation perspective further.

This can be seen by comparing Bonhoeffer’s view with a much-cited essay by Christoph Schwöbel on Reformation ecclesiology.<sup>570</sup> Like Bonhoeffer, Schwöbel emphasizes that the ‘church’ that is created by God cannot be intrinsically connected to any human impulse, action or institution. The church is *creatura verba divini*—the creature of the divine word.<sup>571</sup> It is created by the work of God through his word and Spirit, by which human response is called forth:

In trying to determine the nature of the Church one has to talk about what makes the

Church possible, i.e., the Word of God, and what is made possible in the Church, i.e., true

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<sup>570</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, ‘The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers’, in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community* (ed. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 110–155.

<sup>571</sup> Schwöbel, ‘Creature of the Word’, 122.

faith. Both aspects together form the *communio sanctorum*, and of this Church the attributes of the Church expressed in the creeds of the ancient church can be predicated.<sup>572</sup>

Schwöbel argues that the human preaching of the word is ‘incorporated’ by God into his action, ‘insofar as he grants us certainty in authenticating the external word of Scripture and human proclamation by the internal testimony of the Spirit’.<sup>573</sup> Thus, the preached word of a perspicuous Scripture (through which the Spirit elicits faith) is the means by which God constitutes the church.

To this point, Schwöbel is arguing largely in parallel with Bonhoeffer. Indeed, Schwöbel proceeds to insist that the *ministerium verbi divini* is not only the fundamental human action by which the Church bears witness to God’s action, but that this ministry is for all Christians:

This ministry of the Church is demanded by the obedience of faith for *all* Christians and therefore all Christians exercise the royal priesthood of the community of witness.<sup>574</sup>

However, in what follows it becomes apparent that the involvement of all Christians in the *ministerium verbi divini* entails nothing beyond living a life of consistent obedient faith (which is a form of ‘witness’), and being part of a community that contains within it the basic forms of ministry, which are preaching and the sacraments.<sup>575</sup> For Schwöbel, Christians demonstrate their involvement in the ‘community of witness’ by observing and receiving the witness contained in preaching and sacrament, but he can find no place in his schema for the *actual verbal witness* of Christians as members of a community of witness.

It is in this aspect that Bonhoeffer’s middle period writings, and in particular *Life Together*, represent an advance not only on his earlier work, but on Reformed

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<sup>572</sup> Schwöbel, ‘Creature of the Word’, 127.

<sup>573</sup> Schwöbel, ‘Creature of the Word’, 125.

<sup>574</sup> Schwöbel, ‘Creature of the Word’, 132 (emphasis original).

<sup>575</sup> Schwöbel, ‘Creature of the Word’, 132–134.

ecclesiology considered more broadly. Like Luther, and Calvin (and Schwöbel), Bonhoeffer grounds his ecclesiology in the justifying *extra nos* work of God through the word of Jesus Christ. And along with the Reformed tradition, Bonhoeffer affirms not only the central place of preaching and the sacraments in proclaiming and mediating this word, but the essential involvement of all Christians (the priesthood of all believers) in receiving and participating in the community-creating work of God and all its benefits.

However, whereas Luther and Schwöbel (and the Reformed tradition generally) struggle to explain how the priesthood of all believers could actually result in mutual priestly ministry, Bonhoeffer finds a way to make concrete the logic of the Reformed position. If the word of Jesus Christ is constitutive of the Christian community—if it creates, forms and sustains it—then the ‘single real service’ that any Christian can offer to another in the community is the service of the word: in testimony, counsel, admonition, exhortation and gospel reassurance.

In the practice of the community at Finkenwalde, and in his theological reflection upon it, Bonhoeffer articulates what the logic of Reformed theology requires: that the mutual edifying speech of the Christian community is a central facet of its life, and the ideal form of its members’ loving service of one another.

#### *b. Community and church*

In his theological reflections in *Life Together* on how Christ himself creates and constitutes genuine Christian community, Bonhoeffer is teasing out the implications of his earlier theological work. Particularly in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer searches for a way to speak about the concrete reality of Christ being ‘really present in’ and even ‘existing as’ the visible, empirical community of Christians, but without

collapsing Christ into the historical reality of the church.<sup>576</sup> In doing so, he asserts two complementary truths.

On the one hand, no human institution, religious community, assembly or corporate body of any kind can be straightforwardly identified with the *sanctorum communio*. The fact that a church or any other form of community calls itself a Christian church does not make it so, even if that community undertakes various activities associated with Christianity. The church does not ‘possess’ Christ, and Christ cannot be read off any particular Christian ‘church’ in its historical contingency. In arguing this way, Bonhoeffer was not only distancing himself from the modern liberal project (as represented by Troeltsch), with its confidence in being able to discern from historical analysis the true nature of Christianity; he was also implicitly undercutting the legitimacy of the Reich Church as a ‘Christian community’, given its support of Hitler. If there was ever a time when it was painfully apparent that not every ‘church’ represented the true community of Christ, it was Germany in the 1930s.

On the other hand, this is not to say that true Christian community is only invisible and spiritual, that it exists on a heavenly plane but has no earthly, concrete visibility, or that the church is accidental to God’s revelatory work in Christ. On the contrary, true Christian community—that is, the kind that happens through the mediation of Jesus Christ between human persons—is always visible and concrete. It happens between real persons at *this* time and in *this* place. In this sense, churches really do make visible the ‘communion of the saints’ (*sanctorum communio*) even if they remain at the same time ‘the communion of sinners’ (*peccatorum communio*). Christ really does exist as community, as a ‘body’ that has an existence in the world.

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<sup>576</sup> I am indebted in this section to Mawson’s discussion both of the accusation that Bonhoeffer identifies Christ too closely with the church, and of how he sees Bonhoeffer avoiding this trap; *Christ Existing as Community*, 138–169.

Thus, genuine Christian community (and the real presence of Christ himself) *is visible* in empirical Christian churches and communities, but cannot be straightforwardly identified with them. The balancing act that Bonhoeffer undertakes here is a delicate one, and it is not surprising that some of his stronger statements have been taken to imply too close an identification of Christ with the church. However, it is difficult to see how the balancing act itself can be avoided. As Webster points out in his subtle discussion of the question, the coming to ‘visibility’ of the redeeming work of God in the church is as much a work of his sovereign grace as the reconciling work of the Son:

This sheer gratuity is fundamental to the church’s being: it is what it is because in the Holy Spirit God has completed the circle of his electing and reconciling work, and consummated his purpose of gathering the church to himself. The church, therefore, is natural history only because it is spiritual history, history by the Spirit’s grace. And so also for the church’s visibility: it is through the Spirit’s work alone that the church becomes visible, and its visibility is therefore a ‘special’ or ‘spiritual visibility’, created by the Spirit and revealed by the Spirit.<sup>577</sup>

In this sense, the physical people, relationships and activities of Christian community life can be viewed as the visible church or community of God, insofar as they are initiated and animated by the perfecting work of the Spirit of God. The visibility of the church is a visibility by faith in the work of God. Apart from the question of starting place (Bonhoeffer uses the church itself as his theological point of departure; Webster begins with the doctrine of God), it is hard to imagine Bonhoeffer disagreeing with this way of putting it.

In fact, this is one of the very significant implications that emerges from *Life*

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<sup>577</sup> J. Webster, ‘The Visible Attests the Invisible’, in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 102.

*Together*: that the existence of the *sanctorum communio* is not *confined to its existence within churches or church gatherings*. If genuine Christian community occurs, and *only* occurs, when Christians encounter one another in and through Jesus Christ, then it is experienced whenever Christians so encounter one another, in all the varied ways in which that might happen:

The extent to which God gives the gift of visible community [*sichtbaren Gemeinschaft*] varies. The isolated Christian is comforted by a brief visit from fellow Christians, some common prayer and a brotherly blessing; yes, he is even fortified by a letter from the hand of a Christian ... Others are given the community of the Sunday church service. Still others are granted to live a Christian life in the community of their family. Young theological students before their ordination receive the gift of life together [*gemeinsamen Lebens*] with their brothers for a certain time. Among serious Christians in church-congregations [*Gemeinde*] today, there is an awakening desire to meet with Christians during their breaks from work for a shared life under the word [*zu gemeinsamem Leben unter dem Wort*]. Life together is again being grasped by today's Christians as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary thing it is, the 'roses and lilies' of the Christian life (Luther).

Christian community [*christliche Gemeinschaft*] means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it is a short, isolated meeting or the daily community of many years, Christian community is only this.<sup>578</sup>

In this sense, another implicit aspect of Bonhoeffer's thought that becomes more explicit in *Life Together* is that 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) is a somewhat broader category than 'church-congregation' (*Gemeinde*).<sup>579</sup> 'Community' doesn't only

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<sup>578</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 18.

<sup>579</sup> The issues relating to Bonhoeffer's vocabulary are complex. While '*Gemeinschaft*' can fairly consistently be translated 'communion' or 'community' or even 'fellowship', the related word '*Gemeinde*' (while also meaning 'community') is more often used by Bonhoeffer to mean 'church-congregation-viewed-as-community'. See Clifford J. Green, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (vol. 1 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works; ed. Clifford J. Green; trans. Reinhard Krass and Nancy Lukes; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 14–18.

occur in ‘church-congregations’. To adapt the words of Matthew 18:20, Bonhoeffer sees ‘Christian community’ existing wherever even two or three are gathered, so long as Christ is there, standing in the middle of them.

This is significant for his exposition of the ‘shared life under the word’ (as he puts it in the section just quoted). The Sunday church service, with its preaching and sacraments, is not the only context in which this shared life exists. In fact, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between the orderly word of the pulpit, that is tied to a particular ‘office, time or place’ and the ‘free word from person to person’—the brotherly word that listens to the other, that prays for the other, and that bears the other’s burden.<sup>580</sup> In the speaking of this word of Jesus Christ, in a multitude of different contexts, Christian community becomes visible and is experienced.

This aligns with what we have observed above in the analysis of the apostolic trains of thought. OES takes place (and is encouraged to take place) both within the regular assemblies of the church (e.g., Heb 10:24-25) and within the everyday life of believers (e.g., Heb 3:13). The body that Christ is ‘building’ and ‘growing’ in the world through the apostolic gospel, and by its individual members ‘speaking the truth in love’, is a larger, more cosmic entity than the local Ephesian congregation (Eph 4:1–16). Likewise, the ‘new humanity’ that was created on the cross, and that is now being embraced and ‘put on’ as a new corporate identity by the Ephesian believers, is a more expansive concept than the local church-congregation.

This is not to diminish the centrality and importance of ‘church’ as a concept, either in the apostolic thought or that of Bonhoeffer—any more than the importance of OES should diminish the importance of CTP in the life of Christian communities. It is merely to recognize that the reality of Christian community through Jesus Christ is *not confined* to the weekly assembly of the gathered

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<sup>580</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 87.

congregation. It is a reality also made visible in the daily life of a seminary or a Christian family, in the occasional meetings of believers in various circumstances, even in the encounter of one believer with another in the course of everyday life. Theologically, it occurs wherever two or more believers encounter one another through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

If all Christian community has Jesus as its ‘centre’, as the one who stands between us and reconciles us to one another in him, then the bringing of his word to one another—in a multiplicity of contexts and forms—must also be central to the meaning and purpose of all Christian community. In Bonhoeffer’s words:

Therefore the goal of all Christian community is clear: to encounter each other as bringers of the message of salvation.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 20.

*PART IV*  
*Conclusions*



## *Chapter 10: The theological nature, purpose and practice of OES in the Christian community*

This thesis began with the proposition that the phenomenon of OES has not received the attention its frequency and theological significance within the NT warrants. In chapter 1, I put forward a basic definition of this form of speech, namely:

- that the speaker is a Christian *qua* Christian (not a recognized or authorized office-holder or leader);
- that the hearer or hearers are fellow-members of the Christian community;
- that its content conveys some aspect of Christian revelation and/or its outworking in life;
- that its illocutionary force is varied (e.g., exhorting, admonishing, encouraging); and
- that the desired perlocutionary outcome of the speech is the spiritual benefit or edification of the hearer.

I also demonstrated in chapter 1 that this form of speech is a meaningful category of speech-action within the NT, one that is not only referenced widely across a range of corpora, but is described in categories with significant theological weight.

I then argued (in chapter 2) that if the lack of attention to OES was to be addressed, the field of thought within which to do that was *theological ethics*—the discipline of seeking to understand, on the basis of Scripturally-informed theological reflection, what constitutes good and right action in the world. I also advanced in chapter 2, and have pursued over the subsequent chapters, a three-part methodology

for examining the theological nature, purpose and practice of OES:

- i. to trace the apostolic ‘trains of thought’ with respect to OES—that is, how the apostolic authors themselves thought their way from theological realities to an understanding of the nature, purposes and practice of the speech-action of OES within particular circumstances. This task was pursued in Part II (chapters 3–5), in relation to the trains of thought contained in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews respectively;
- ii. to synthesize and explore the key theological judgements that emerged from the apostolic trains of thought, a task pursued in Part III (chapters 6–9) with respect to the word of God, the sanctification of speech, and the nature of Christian community;
- iii. to put forward, on the basis of the analysis and synthesis of Parts II and III, a set of theologically-informed reflections on the nature, purposes and practice of OES to guide the deliberative action of Christian communities today.

That third and final task is the burden of this chapter.

Two brief preliminary comments are called for regarding the scope of these reflections, and how they might guide the deliberations of contemporary communities.

*Firstly*, the relevance of the theological understandings I will put forward presupposes not only the validity of the apostolic theological judgements upon which they are based, but their *continuing validity* within a stable field of moral action. By ‘stable field of moral action’ I am referring to what O’Donovan describes as a *created moral order*, in which things and persons and actions exist in the world within a complex order of kinds and ends—an order that in God’s purposes is also *historical*; that is, it has a history that encompasses its fallenness, its inaugurated redemption through the work of Christ, and its eschatological liberation.

Put simply, when the apostles explored the what, why and how of OES they were addressing a particular instantiation of the same morally ordered field of action within which Christian communities today must also consider the nature and purposes of the same form of action. For all the circumstantial differences that exist between, say, the Corinthian church and any contemporary church, an ethic that seeks to be informed by Paul's theological judgements about OES in the Corinthian context must proceed on the assumption that he was speaking about the same morally ordered world we inhabit today—a world in which speech has a certain function, in which the work of Christ is definitive, in which the Spirit is active to perfect God's work, in which Christian community has a certain character and purposes, in which moral learning and growth proceeds in a certain way, and so on.

However, this leads to a *second* point regarding the *scope* of a theological ethic. The moral field may be ordered and stable (though fallen), but it is also immensely complex and variegated, and our action within it will throw up a multitude of different dilemmas, challenges, possibilities and opportunities. This is simply to recognize that the trains of thought in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews (for example) while evincing a palpably shared theological thought-world, and describing the same kind of action, apply those realities to different particular contexts and circumstances—circumstances that in one sense are the same (Christian communities seeking to live out their new life in Christ) but in other ways have obviously unique features (e.g., the factionalism and arrogance of the Corinthians, the prominence of the Jew/Gentile question in Ephesians, the danger that sinful drift and neglect pose to enduring faith in Hebrews).

All of this is simply to say that there is no avoiding *our own train of deliberative thought* in the circumstances of our own particular Christian community—what

O'Donovan calls our own  $X > Y$  in light of a Scriptural or theological  $A > B$ .<sup>582</sup> The task of practical reason is to conduct this train of thought at the particular time and place that is given to us—reflecting on theological reality in order to determine on the good and right action to be pursued in these particular circumstances. Thus, while the conclusions that are presented below seek to be specific enough in scope to address the particular sector of the moral field of action under consideration (i.e. OES in Christian communities) they cannot be so specific as to crowd out the necessary task of deliberative thought that each particular Christian community must undertake.

With those two observations in mind, I will seek to answer the three questions with which I began:

- What sort of action is OES? What is its nature?
- What is the good for which OES aims? What are its purposes?
- How should OES be practised?<sup>583</sup>

## *§1 What sort of action is OES?*

### *a. Human speech*

As a species of human speech-action, OES shares the nature of all human speech. It seeks to represent some aspect of reality in order to perform some action or work

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<sup>582</sup> See chapter 2§4.b.

<sup>583</sup> This corresponds to the 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions around which I have organized my synthesis of the apostolic and theological material above. See chapter 2 for further discussion of this methodology.

within that reality.<sup>584</sup> In the terminology of speech-act theory, human speech has a ‘force’ (*F*) with respect to some representative predication or referral (*p*), and seeking some perlocutionary effect (*PE*).<sup>585</sup> It seeks to comprehend the fallen but good order of created reality, to name it, to order it, to act upon it and within it.<sup>586</sup>

As such, human speech is both a gift of the Creator, and a means by which to fulfil the commission God has given humanity—to bring forth and develop the good order of creation, to seek the good that the created order invites us to enjoy, including the good of loving service towards others. One vital aspect of this created order is the social nature of human being.<sup>587</sup> Humans are created not as atomistic centres of personhood, but as existing with and for others. Human speech functions within this frame, as a means of doing good to others through representational, communicative action.

However, the particular nature of OES can only be understood against the background of the corruption of human speech through sin. As a consequence of humanity’s rebellion against God and his will (the fateful ‘inward curve of the heart’), human speech has been fundamentally compromised, both in its ability to truly comprehend and represent the truth of the world, and in its purposes and direction. Having willed to do evil, humanity finds its reason fractured and its ability to recognize and communicate the good deeply impaired.<sup>588</sup> Having culpably retreated into self-centred isolation, we encounter other people as threats or as objects to be manipulated or used for our benefit.<sup>589</sup> In speech-act terms, the *F* of human speech find itself compromised by manipulation and deceit, its (*p*) is corrupted by falsehood

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<sup>584</sup> See chapter 8§2.

<sup>585</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>586</sup> See chapter 8§2.a–b.

<sup>587</sup> See chapter 9§3.

<sup>588</sup> See chapter 8§2.c–d.

<sup>589</sup> See chapter 9§1, 3.

and error, and the perlocutionary outcome of the speech cannot finally escape the self-enclosed, self-centred purposes of the ego.<sup>590</sup>

*b. A divine action*

Against this backdrop, OES needs to be understood fundamentally as *a divine action*.

*God makes OES possible by the revelatory, redemptive and sanctifying work of God through Jesus Christ and by his Spirit.*

In revealing himself climactically in Jesus Christ, and restoring human reason (by liberating it to see the truth of reality in Christ) and redirecting human will (away from self and towards the love of God and of neighbour), God redeems and restores human speech to represent the world truly and to act within the world lovingly, to ‘speak the truth in love’ (Eph 4:16).<sup>591</sup> Because God has spoken by his Son in these final days (Heb 1:1–4), the otherwise unknowable wisdom of God concerning the world and his purposes is knowable in Christ (1 Cor 1:18–31). And because God has poured out his Spirit on his people, they are now enabled not only to understand and embrace the word of Christ in faith, but to communicate that word to others. In this work of the Son and the Spirit, God fulfils his OT promises—not only of revealing his saving purposes through Christ in the last days, but of endowing his people with true wisdom, and of empowering them with prophetic ‘Spirit-speech’.<sup>592</sup>

To channel Bonhoeffer, the word of OES that the Christian speaks comes as a gracious divine gift from ‘outside’, as does the Spirit-given faith to embrace that word as the truth and wisdom of God, as does the new freedom to comprehend and make true judgements about the variegated reality of the world in Christ, as does the

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<sup>590</sup> See also the picture of false and self-centred speech represented at multiple points in Ephesians, chapter 4§2–4, and in 1 Corinthians, chapter 3§5–6.

<sup>591</sup> See chapter 8§2.c–d.

<sup>592</sup> See chapter 3§3–4.

new character of love that moves from selfish inwardness to other-focused communication of the truth, as does the ability, on the basis of all this, to impart christocentric words to others for their edification. OES represents the sanctification of sinful human speech through the work of God, as God draws forth or leads out the human agency that he has re-created in Christ into loving communicative participation in the world.<sup>593</sup>

In other words, OES is a human impossibility, made possible only by the work of God, and *in this it is precisely the same as all true preaching*. As Barth memorably puts it:

As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both *our obligation and our inability* and by that very recognition give God the glory.<sup>594</sup>

OES, like preaching and all forms of CTP, is an ‘impossible possibility’, made real by divine initiative, and this is an important foundation for considering its flourishing within Christian communities today. If it is objected, for example, that the widespread practice of OES is beyond the ability of many Christians, then the response must be: no, it is beyond the ability of *all* Christians, but for the work of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God. However, as the apostolic teaching repeatedly makes clear, by the revelation of his word in Jesus Christ, and by the inward working of the Spirit, God *does* give this form of speech to Christian believers generally. In the same way as God enables the otherwise impossible human proclamation of the word by apostles, preachers, and teachers, so he makes possible the otherwise impossible practice of OES within Christian communities. Christian communities today should have no less confidence in God to do one as to do the other.

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<sup>593</sup> See chapter 8§1.

<sup>594</sup> Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (trans. Douglas Horton; Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928), 186 (emphasis original).

On the other hand, while efforts to promote or encourage OES within Christian communities are warranted and desirable, the character of OES as a divine act prevents us from regarding OES purely as a technical or practical achievement. Again, OES shares this characteristic with CPS. Growth in the ability to perform speech-actions like CPS or OES is possible over time, given our created human capacity for accumulating knowledge, experience and competence in action. However, such growth requires and presupposes the ongoing work of God in Jesus Christ through his Spirit, and a corresponding prayerful reliance on God to do his work in and through the human act of speaking. The word that creates, sustains and dwells in the midst of a Christian community continues to be the communicative act of the risen Christ through his Spirit.<sup>595</sup>

OES therefore represents, like other forms of the ministry of the word, the eloquence of the risen Christ in his community. In the faithful ‘re-performance’ of Scripturally-informed speech-acts by his people, whether in proclamatory acts of preaching or teaching, or in the ‘free word’ between Christian believers, the Lord Christ himself is present in his word. In fact, it is by this presence ‘in the midst’ that he creates and sustains genuine community.<sup>596</sup>

*c. A species of sanctified human speech-action*

OES thus proceeds because of divine action, draws its content from divine revelation and (as I will discuss further below) participates in the divine purposes to save and sanctify his people. As a human action that possesses these characteristics, OES is *one species of a genus* that also includes the foundational proclamatory speech of the apostles, and by extension the derivative teaching-preaching speech of congregational

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<sup>595</sup> See chapter 7§3.a.

<sup>596</sup> See chapter 9§4.a.

leaders (what I have labelled as ‘CTP’). As has been demonstrated extensively above, the apostles perceived a fundamental theologically-based *continuity* between their *kerygmatic* proclamatory speech and the OES of the Christian community.<sup>597</sup> In speech-act terms, the common nature of these forms of speech can be represented as an act in which speaker S by the utterance U performs the illocutionary act *F*(p) in order to achieve perlocutionary effect PE in hearer H, where:

- S = a speaker called and empowered by God’s Spirit, and motivated by love for his hearers;
- U = a locution of undetermined length;
- F = a range of illocutionary forces, featuring *assertives* (e.g., tell, proclaim, announce, explain), *directives* (implore, command, exhort, appeal), *commissives* (promise, guarantee, invite), and possibly *expressives* (thank, express, delight);
- p = some facet of the true content of the christological message of the apostolic gospel, including its call upon the individual to ongoing cruciform faith and repentance;
- PE = that hearers would understand and respond to the message in ongoing repentance and faith;
- H = a member or potential member of the Christian community.

This analysis is as descriptive of the apostolic proclamation as it is of OES and CTP. In their trains of thought, the apostles consistently urge the members of Christian communities to exercise a form of edifying speech with one-another that is based upon and extends into regular community life the apostolic proclamatory gospel speech they had heard.<sup>598</sup> It is striking in 1 Corinthians, particularly, how the

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<sup>597</sup> See particularly chapters 3§5; 5§2, 5; 7§2.a.

<sup>598</sup> See chapters 3§5; 4§2; 5§2.

features of OES mirror aspects of Paul's proclamatory ministry at almost every point: both are acts of humble service to the Lord Christ, both have the christocentric *kerygma* as fundamental content and criterion, both are driven by a Christ-like love, both have the character of gift, both only proceed by the work of God's Spirit, and both contribute to the purpose of God to grow his people.<sup>599</sup>

This accords with Peter Adam's observation, noted at the outset of this thesis, that what we now commonly refer to as 'preaching' is only one of a multiplicity of forms of 'word ministry' that the NT sees as available to the Christian community. To effectively limit the ministry of the word to just one of these forms (i.e., CTP), as many Christian communities arguably do today, is to attenuate severely our vision of the biblical word as the constituting centre of Christian community.

The challenge for Christian communities is to resist the tendency of CTP to colonize all the available space in the practice of congregational word ministry. An enlarged vision is needed, in which the central place of CTP is maintained, but in which other species of Spirit-enabled, gospel-centred speech are given their proper emphasis. Both CTP *and* OES are integral to the healthy functioning of Christian communities.<sup>600</sup>

#### *d. Integral to the life of faith*

For all that OES and CTP have in common, one key difference emerges at this point. As the sanctification of human speech, OES is portrayed in the NT as an *integral aspect of the sanctified life of every believer*, in a way that CTP (understandably) is not. To 'speak the truth in love', in a multitude of contexts and forms, is part of what it means to 'put on the new humanity', to 'learn Christ', to 'walk as wise not as

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<sup>599</sup> See chapter 3§5, 7.

<sup>600</sup> See further below on the different but inter-related functions of OES and CTP.

unwise' (Eph 4:20–29; 5:15–21).<sup>601</sup> The active pursuit of this kind of renewed speech is a Spirit-given consequence of the primacy of love as the form of the moral life (1 Cor 14:1).<sup>602</sup>

This point has been confirmed at multiple points, and from multiple angles, in the argument of this thesis. OES is described and encouraged in the NT as a God-given feature of the Christian life lived in the eschatological age of the Spirit,<sup>603</sup> in which the word of Jesus Christ now dwells richly with God's people as the generating and sustaining life of their community,<sup>604</sup> and by which they encourage, admonish and exhort one another daily.<sup>605</sup> Indeed, Hebrews grounds the need and rationale for OES in the sober dangers that God's pilgrim people inevitably face as they journey to his sabbath rest.<sup>606</sup>

This suggests that Christian communities today should teach and inculcate OES as a normal and essential facet of Christian discipleship, in much the same way as they would seek to nurture and encourage prayer, deeds of mercy, joy or any other virtuous Christian practice. To 'encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation' (in Bonhoeffer's words) should be a goal for all Christian communities, and thus an essential aspect of our vision for the discipleship of every Christian.

It means also that if OES is a normative feature of sanctified Christian agency, then the chief *impediment* to its practice is that which inhibits all godly action, namely the ongoing influence of sin and the flesh. This is quite evident in 1 Corinthians, with its constant critique of the selfishness and arrogance that continues to mark the Corinthians' behaviour,<sup>607</sup> and in Ephesians, with its insistence that its

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<sup>601</sup> See chapter 4§3–4.

<sup>602</sup> See chapter 3§6.

<sup>603</sup> See chapter 3§3.

<sup>604</sup> See chapters 4§2; 9§1, 4.a.

<sup>605</sup> See chapter 5§2, 5.

<sup>606</sup> See chapter 5§2, 4.

<sup>607</sup> See chapter 3§2, 5–6.

readers leave behind (or ‘put off’) the ongoing remnants of their former life and walk instead in the new Christ-like life of the Spirit.<sup>608</sup> In both cases, the chief impediments to the practice of OES in the community are the sinful attitudes and spiritual immaturity of its members.

Thus, while there may be many particular contextual or practical reasons why OES is not flourishing within Christian congregations today, underlying all of them is the apostolic diagnosis of the inwardly-curved, sinful human heart. Like all manifestations of love, OES is not natural to the human self. The ongoing negative influence of ‘that which is earthly in you’ (Col 3:5) requires the active ‘putting off’ of selfish and false speech, and the ‘putting on’ of the gracious, loving speech of mutual teaching and admonition (Col 3:12–16). The consistent apostolic teaching and exhortation and encouragement with regard to OES (like other aspects of the sanctified life) shows how aware they were of the problem, and suggests an obvious corrective path of action— that OES as a form of Christian action should be explicitly taught about, modelled and encouraged within Christian communities today.

It might be ventured that where this does not happen, and where OES is consigned to the margins, a church-community culture develops that tends to satisfy the impulses of both pastor and people. When CTP becomes the dominating or only form of the word within a Christian community, the congregation as a whole can absolve itself of the responsibility of OES, and the pastor can enjoy the status benefits of being the sole means by which the word comes to the community. The community becomes afflicted, on the people’s side, by a self-focused inattention to the needs of others, and on the pastor’s side by a somewhat Corinthian pride in the exercise of one particular high-status gift. In the end, this is healthy neither for the

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<sup>608</sup> See chapter 4§3–4.

pastor nor the congregation.

Perhaps ironically, when Christian congregations fail to give OES its rightful place in the communal life, this represents a failure of CTP to perform its proper function. The role of CTP is to authoritatively establish the norms and framework for congregational thinking and practice, in line with biblical teaching, which in this case means to teach and preach against the inwardness and selfishness of the old life which inhibits OES, and to commend, teach and encourage OES as a loving expression of the Christlike life.

*e. Force and content*

As already noted, OES shares with CPS a common set of illocutionary forces (mainly assertives and directives) in relation to a common predicative and referential content (concerning some aspect of the Christ-centred apostolic message and its application to life).

However, within this commonality, there is a distinction in emphasis. With CTP, the emphasis falls upon the assertive, along with accompanying calls for faithful and repentant response (directives). With OES, the emphasis falls more upon the directive (as reflected in the prominent vocabulary of ‘exhorting’ and ‘admonishing’), along with an accompanying basis in the truth claims of the apostolic gospel (assertives).<sup>609</sup>

This dynamic between assertive and directive is critical to maintain, with both CTP and OES. Without its complementary directive component, CTP can easily degenerate into a merely exegetical or intellectual exercise, without responsive purchase in the life of its hearers; likewise, without its complementary assertive

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<sup>609</sup> See chapters 7§4–5; 8§3.a–b.

gospel component, OES can easily degenerate into anodyne sentimentality on the one hand,<sup>610</sup> or legalistic moralism on the other.

In the apostolic trains of thought, the integral connection between the assertive and the directive is constantly maintained. This is seen in the intertwined discourse of doctrinal exposition and exhortation in Hebrews, which the author himself maintains throughout his ‘word of exhortation’, and which he invites his readers to imitate in their exhortation of one another.<sup>611</sup> It is seen too in the ethical logic of Ephesians, with its consistent mode of argument from the state of affairs that has been established in Christ and is proclaimed in the apostolic gospel to the worthy ‘walk’ that actualizes that new state of affairs in the life of its participants.<sup>612</sup>

Ephesians also strongly connects ‘speaking the truth in love’ with the doctrinal truth of Christ, as preached in the apostolic gospel.<sup>613</sup>

Perhaps most strikingly, this connection between (assertive) doctrine and (directive) appeal is reflected in the description of prophecy in 1 Corinthians as the paradigmatic form of OES, to which Paul wants the Corinthian believers to aspire. Paul frames prophecy as a loving act of Spirit-given wisdom speech, anchored in the *kerygmatic* revelation of Christ crucified. On that basis, prophecy supplies an intelligible, contextual articulation of the ‘mind of Christ’ for the edification, exhortation and encouragement of its hearers.<sup>614</sup>

Broadly speaking, then, the Christ-centred truth which CTP teaches and proclaims with an applied call for response, OES affirms, reiterates, testifies to and applies, with an appeal to respond in particular ways amid the contexts of everyday

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<sup>610</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer’s indictment of ‘emotional’ or ‘psychological’ community in *Life Together*; see chapter 9§2.

<sup>611</sup> See chapter 5§2, 4–5.

<sup>612</sup> See chapter 4§3.

<sup>613</sup> See chapter 4§2–3.

<sup>614</sup> See chapter 3§6.

life.

This invites Christian communities today to consider how the force and content of the weekly sermon (the common form of CTP in nearly all churches today) might be effectively integrated with more specific, personal and contextual applications, exhortations and appeals by the members of the community. What contexts exist, or could be created, within which members of the community could exhort, admonish or encourage one another, either with personal testimonies or appeals to heed the lesson of the sermon, or with a particular application of its message to the situation of the hearer/s?

This leads to a consideration of the different forms that OES might take and the various contexts in which it might be practised.

*f. Form and locus*

The characteristics summarized so far in this conclusion are true of OES in whatever form it might take. However, this should not lead us to conclude that OES always takes the same form, or is confined to a particular location (e.g., the gathered congregation or Sunday service). The NT attests to a variety of forms and contexts within which OES is practised.

With respect to *form*, the NT references everyday ‘speaking’ (Eph 4:25), intergenerational teaching and training (Titus 2:3; Eph 6:4), prophecy (1 Cor 14:1), exhortation (Heb 3:13), admonition (Col 3:16), reproof (Matt 18:15), teaching or instruction (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 14:26), a song or hymn (Col 3:16), a psalm (Eph 5:20), interpreted tongues (1 Cor 12:10), bringing various ‘words’ to contribute to a congregational meeting (1 Cor 14:26), encouragement or comfort (1 Thess 5:14), and words of wisdom or knowledge (1 Cor 12:8). It is clear that different circumstances and needs call for different kinds of speech (‘admonish the idle,

comfort the fainthearted', 1 Thess 5:14). OES can be pre-prepared (1 Cor 14:26), or more responsive and immediate (1 Cor 14:30). There is no specification as to the length of its discourse.<sup>615</sup>

With respect to *locus*, the apostolic trains of thought likewise envisage a range of possible locations or contexts within which OES might occur: the congregational gathering itself (1 Cor 14; Heb 10:24–25), the household (Titus 2:3; Eph 6:4), and a variety of occurrences in the midst of unspecified daily circumstances (Eph 4:25; Heb 3:13; 1 Thess 5:14).

This concurs with Bonhoeffer's observation that the encounter of Christian community can occur in a variety of ways and circumstances.<sup>616</sup> The essential nature of OES is that one Christian encounters one or more others, with the word of Christ standing between them, and offers whatever particular word that love requires in that circumstance. The context for this encounter can be a formally organized gathering (such as the weekly congregational assembly or some other church program), or a more informal encounter in the course of daily life (whether at home or work or school or any other communal interaction).

This suggests that OES is less a particular program or event, and more a *common currency* of Christian community life—in its various congregational gatherings and activities, but also in daily and informal interactions between believers. OES could thus be conveyed through forms as varied as congregational singing, communal liturgical responses, a pre-prepared testimony or prophecy, a spontaneous insight, a reminder, an encouragement or admonishment in conversation, a letter, an email or a text message. It could be planned for, such as in a regular meeting between two or more believers, or could emerge spontaneously in a conversation over coffee or

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<sup>615</sup> See the discussion of this issue in relation to prophecy, chapter 3§6.

<sup>616</sup> See chapter 9§1, 4.

around the family dinner table; it could take place between parents and children, or between friends and work colleagues, or between two congregation members talking together after Sunday service, or between a group of believers meeting together specifically for mutual encouragement (such as in a small home group).

Moreover, the form that OES takes will also be varied, according to the gifts and capabilities of the speaker *and* the requirements of the circumstance. OES may contribute a word that informs and clarifies a train of moral thought someone is undertaking; it may share an insight that has been forgotten; it may question assumptions or correct errors or self-deceptions; it may stiffen resolve when it is flagging or exhort and encourage perseverance when strength is failing; it may speak words of peace and assurance in the midst of anxiety, or words of understanding and comfort in the midst of grief; in love, it may speak the one truth that needs to be heard in a situation but which everyone else is ignoring.

In all of these kinds of situations (and the many more that could be imagined), OES brings some facet of the Christ-centred word of God to bear on the particular circumstance that is before it. In doing so, it offers, in Bonhoeffer's words, the 'single real service' one Christian brings to another.<sup>617</sup>

## *§2 What is the good for which OES aims?*

In much the same way as the nature of OES is founded upon its character as a divinely given and enabled action, so the purposes or aims of OES are defined by God's purposes for humanity in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>617</sup> See chapter 9§1.

*a. The eschatological purposes of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ*

A consistent feature of the apostolic trains of thought regarding OES is that the goods it aims at (or purposes it serves) are grounded in the larger picture of God's revealed purposes in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, that larger purpose is the revelation of God's wisdom in Christ crucified, by which God is building a congregation of people who live the cruciform life as they await the final resurrection and the kingdom of God in Christ.<sup>618</sup> In Ephesians, the conceptual frame for OES is the once-secret but now-revealed purpose of God to create and build a new unified humanity in Christ through the worldwide work of the apostolic mission.<sup>619</sup> In Hebrews, similarly, the purpose of God, revealed climactically in these final days in his Son, is to purify his people from sin and bring them safely to his eternal sabbath rest.<sup>620</sup>

In each of these trains of thought, the preached apostolic *word* that communicates God's purposes is integral to their actualization in history, whether as the proclaimed word of the cross in 1 Corinthians, or the revealed gospel secret of Ephesians, or the climactic word of the Son in Hebrews that is announced by the apostles. This word, whether preached by the apostles or by those who follow them, *is* the word of God, in the sense that it is a divinely commissioned and enabled re-performance of God's own communicative action.<sup>621</sup> By the work of the Spirit in enabling such speech, and in rendering it effective in the hearts and minds of its hearers, God's eschatological purposes in Christ are achieved in the world.

Another common feature of the apostolic thought is that the good to which God's purposes in Christ are oriented is a *lived good* in this world. Whether framed

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<sup>618</sup> See chapter 3§1, 3, 7.

<sup>619</sup> See chapter 4§1, 2, 5.

<sup>620</sup> See chapter 5§1.c, 2.

<sup>621</sup> See chapter 7§3.

as the crucified life of love in 1 Corinthians, or the ‘worthy walk’ of Ephesians, or the life of love and good deeds in Hebrews, the purposes of God for his people are not merely eschatological—that is, not only related to their participation in the life to come. God’s intent, as conveyed in the apostolic teaching, is to liberate his people to live rightly *now* within his good-though-fallen created order. There is a good to be grasped and participated in and lived out within this age, through the redeemed and sanctified agency that God restores within his people by his Spirit. The essential shape of that new lived reality is ‘faith expressing itself through love’.<sup>622</sup>

It is within these historic divine purposes, and their extension in the world through the apostolic gospel, that the NT frames the purposes of OES. The good that the speech-action of OES is ordered towards is the good of God’s cosmic purposes for humanity in Christ Jesus, and their actualization in the daily life of believers. That good can be further unpacked by exploring the metaphor of the body (and its edification), and the moral transformation of believers.

#### *b. OES and the edification of the body*

God’s purposes for his people are both individual and corporate in nature. Bonhoeffer’s insistence that the individual cannot be understood except with reference to the social and the communal—and *vice versa*—is important to note at this point.<sup>623</sup> The purposes of OES are oriented to the building or growth of a corporate entity (the community, the church, the people of God), but the growth of such an entity also involves the sanctification and contribution of each individual member.

The body image that is prominent in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians holds these

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<sup>622</sup> Gal 5:6; see chapter 8§1.c., 3.

<sup>623</sup> See chapter 9.

two aspects together: the growth of the whole, unified body of Christ is the goal, but each individual part is to be honoured in its difference, and is meant to contribute in its difference, according to God's apportioning. The diversity-within-unity that characterizes the triune God characterizes also the 'body' of Christ. The same Spirit is manifest in every gift, the same Son is the object of every service, the same God wills and works through all.<sup>624</sup>

Importantly, the diversity of gifts and service is dominated within the portrayal of the NT by a *diversity of speech-actions* that the congregation members contribute to the body. In their diversity, these various forms of speech are all founded on the truth of Jesus as Lord, all seek the same purpose (the common good, the growth of the body), and all are motivated by the one impulse—to seek the good of the other members of the body in love. 1 Cor 12–14 makes this argument at length; Eph 4 does so just as strikingly in the compact statement of 4:14–16, culminating in what could stand as a purpose statement for all forms of OES: to speak the truth in love.<sup>625</sup>

The diverse forms of OES that have been observed above correspond to the way this common purpose is pursued within a diversity of contexts by a range of different individuals. To take one example, some people are more gifted at singing than others, and songs also have a particular way of communicating that is different from (say) brief conversations or emails or extended expositions. Likewise, the more urgent appeal of an 'exhortation' communicates and functions differently from an 'admonition', an 'encouragement' or a 'reminder', and some people are more adept at these different forms of speech than others.

In other words, the various forms of OES correspond not only to the different God-given capacities of individuals but to the variegated nature of the moral field of

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<sup>624</sup> See chapters 3§5; 4§2.

<sup>625</sup> See chapter 3§5–6.

action. The reality of the created order confronts us constantly with various challenges of deliberative thought and action. We are required to recognize the nature of the particular facet or aspect of the order of the world as we encounter it, and to deliberate as to what good and right action might be called for in this particular context.

Thus, within the unity of the body, the necessity and purpose of OES is framed by three continua—a range of life-situations requiring different kinds of speech or input; a range of speakers with different capacities and opportunities; a range of different kinds of OES that are each suitable for particular ends.

Given this persistent and multifactorial diversity, any tendency to constrain the loving communication of gospel truth to one context only (the church service), by one person only (the pastor) in one form of speech only (the sermon) seems hard to defend. To do so not only fails to utilize the diverse God-given gifts of his people, but places upon the sermon an unrealistic load that it was never intended to bear, ‘the burden of doing all that the Bible expects of every form of ministry of the Word’.<sup>626</sup> In particular, the key functions that the Bible expects the various forms of OES to perform within the body are left undone. The body is inevitably less healthy as a result.

What ought to be pursued is love, Paul says, and the widespread practice of intelligible Christ-exalting edifying speech that springs from such love.<sup>627</sup> That such speech is to be ‘eagerly desired’ in love leads to a final point to be made under this heading; namely, that the capacity to participate in particular forms of OES is not a static possession. It is possible to acquire and improve in the ability to perform different kinds of OES. The frequent apostolic injunctions to do so assume as much.

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<sup>626</sup> Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 59.

<sup>627</sup> See chapter 3§6.

This means that the flourishing of OES within Christian communities is not so much a matter of taking an inventory of the various word-gifts of each member, and seeking to deploy them, but teaching, training and urging believers to take whatever opportunities present themselves to bring a contextually fitting word to others within the community, and to grow in their ability to do so.

*c. OES and moral transformation*

The other significant way that this thesis has framed the purpose of OES is in relation to the moral transformation of believers. Put simply, OES is not only an aspect of the sanctified life; it is *a means by which* that sanctification unfolds and grows within the lives of believers.

The NT portrays the Christian life as one in which the sanctification which God has definitively achieved for his people through the blood of Christ is led out or actualized in a daily life of faith, love and hope.<sup>628</sup> That new identity and character that has been received as an act of divine grace is to be ‘put on’ or ‘walked in’, more and more.<sup>629</sup> This involves a constant deliberative encounter with the complex and variegated realities of life, seeking to discern the good and the right within each fresh situation, and grappling with the ongoing presence of sin in our rationality, desires and will. It is in this ongoing, daily, complex and spiritually hazardous ‘walk’ of discipleship that OES performs one of its vital functions. The one-another speech of the Christian community protects, encourages and stimulates the love and good deeds for which God has redeemed his people.<sup>630</sup>

I have argued that O’Donovan’s categories of ‘moral teaching’ and ‘moral advice’

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<sup>628</sup> See chapter 8§1.

<sup>629</sup> See chapter 4§3.

<sup>630</sup> See chapter 5§3–4.

are helpful at this point to delineate the field of moral communication in which OES tends to do its work. Deliberative thought requires both a unified framework of the moral universe (of the good and the right), as well as a more granular situational discernment as to how any particular context for action is to be understood, and any particular action resolved upon. Broadly speaking, the role of the moral teacher is to inculcate the former—that is, a comprehensive, foundational framework of theological knowledge that informs all aspects of the sanctified life. The role of the moral adviser is in connection with the latter—that is, to help another moral agent in the deliberative process within particular contexts.

As already noted above, the form that this ‘advisory’ speech might take is multifaceted, called forth by what would best serve the moral faithfulness or growth of different people in different daily situations. It may be responsive to various circumstances that arise, such as moral weakness or failure (‘admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted’, 1 Thess 5:14), or it may address the ongoing daily realities of sin (Heb 3:13). It may affirm or testify to the truth in a way that further teaches it or clarifies it for the hearer (Col 3:16; Rom 15:14; Eph 6:4), perhaps in the context of doctrinal error (Eph 4:15). It may serve as an ongoing reminder, stimulus and encouragement to live out the sanctified life in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24–25), or in some other way bring an aspect of the wisdom of Christ to bear on a life challenge or circumstance faced by the hearer/s (cf. the function of prophecy in 1 Cor).

In all these different possible scenarios, OES operates under the recognition that the unfolding moral transformation of believers over time requires the ongoing presence and action of the Spirit-enacted word of Christ both as CTP *and* as OES. Each performs a function that the other cannot adequately supply. Just as OES cannot adequately teach, explain and guard a comprehensive framework of theological truth that shapes the Christian mind, so CTP cannot adequately bring

the word of Christ to bear on the numerous, multifaceted daily challenges of each member of the community. To affirm the vital role of OES is not to denigrate or compromise CTP, any more than affirming the foundational importance of CTP implies the minimization or exclusion of OES. It is simply to recognize what the apostolic authors repeatedly recognize: that the presence of Christ within the Christian community to sanctify his people by his word and Spirit occurs both through the teaching-preaching ministry of pastors, elders and overseers *and* through the variegated one-another speech of the members of the community.

### *§3 How should OES be practised?*

Numerous aspects of the manner in which OES should be practised have already emerged implicitly in our examination of its nature and purposes. Within the scope of this project, the ‘how’ question also needs to be approached with some care, lest it be answered too concretely or specifically, and so colonize the deliberative space that particular Christian communities need to occupy in discerning precisely how OES should be practised in their circumstances. All the same, to supplement what has already been said, and as a guide for Christian communities to undertake the contextual deliberation that is necessary, the following adverbially expressed conclusions can be advanced.

OES should be practised *truthfully*—that is, based upon and springing from the doctrinal truth of the apostolic proclamation, as summarized by Paul’s phrase ‘Christ crucified’. OES is an attempt to speak the truth about moral reality, and this is only possible on the basis of the truth that is ‘in Jesus’ (Eph 4:21). At all levels of its practice, OES should constantly seek its bearings from this lodestar, even as it delves into the proximate challenges of sanctified living.

OES should be practised *carefully*, with thoughtful attention to the particular circumstances of an individual or group, and to an application of the truth of Christ that ‘fits the occasion’ (Eph 4:29). Bonhoeffer’s sober recognition comes to mind, both of the unavoidable responsibility to speak, and the care that is required in doing so. OES routinely looks and listens before it speaks.

Related to this, OES will strive to express itself *graciously*. OES brings the *von außen* word, the christocentric word of grace ‘from outside’ that simultaneously exposes sin and promises forgiveness in Christ. The gospel foundation and purpose of the one-another word profoundly shapes its practice. It will speak from a position of shared weakness with the hearer/s, and always seek the good of the hearer/s, not the rhetorical victory of the speaker. Whether in warm encouragement, urgent exhortation or sober admonition, OES should always be spoken with the patient, kind, other-person-oriented love that 1 Cor 13 describes so powerfully (and which drives the OES of 1 Cor 14).

As already noted above, OES should be practised *congregationally*, and play its unique and important part in the life of the gathered church. The apostolic expectation was that OES would play a regular and orderly role in congregational life: for example, that members of the church would bring words to share for the edification of all when they gathered (1 Cor 14:26); that corporate singing was to be conceived of (to a significant degree) as one-another directed (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); and that the contextually applied gospel word of ‘prophecy’ should be aspired to by all and practised normatively. There are multiple and various ways in which these different modes of OES might be practised congregationally, depending on the size and context of the gathering. But in whatever way it might happen, if OES is to flourish within a Christian community, it needs to occupy a visible place within the main congregational gathering.

However, the practice of OES cannot be limited to the church gathering. It

should also occur as *a normal daily practice*, in the midst of lived experience—in the home, the neighbourhood, the informal gathering, the workplace, and so on. The nature of OES as a form of practically immediate moral speech requires this (cf. Heb 3:13). As with its congregational expression, no single particular form or mode of daily OES needs to be specified. It can occur in personal conversation or in written form; it can arise spontaneously in response to circumstances, or be more planned or proactive; it can begin with the biblical word and explore its implications for our lives, or start with the need of the moment and draw on biblical, christocentric truth to address it; it can be a single encounter or an ongoing pattern of speech over time; it can occur between two individuals or within a small informal gathering. As already noted, the NT frames OES as a normal facet of the redeemed life of the believer—in a sense, like prayer or thankfulness or love or joy or any other Spirit-given consequence or implication of repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>631</sup> This is a useful way for individual believers to consider their own practice of OES; that is, as an everyday facet of Christian discipleship, in which they struggle and fail, and yet never cease starting afresh; in which they learn and grow over time, and yet never cease to give thanks for the work of God in enabling them to do so.

Finally, and somewhat paradoxically, the nature of OES as we have explored it indicates that it should happen *both spontaneously and deliberately*—that is, as a form of speech that arises freely and contextually by the power of the Spirit within the various moral challenges of daily Christian discipleship, and yet also as a practice to be intentionally considered, planned for and encouraged. The apostolic authors consistently taught their readers about OES, provided them with profound

theological reasons and motivations for practising it, urged and encouraged them to persevere in it, and gave them practical teaching and guidelines for doing so. If the silence and relative neglect with which OES has been greeted in both scholarly and popular Christian thought is not to be reflected in the practice of Christian communities today, then a concerted and deliberate effort to apprentice ourselves to the apostolic example in this area would seem a high priority.



## *Chapter 11: Further prospects*

This thesis has sought to construct a coherent theological understanding of OES by means of a detailed exegetical examination of key NT trains of thought, and a synthesis of the major theological themes those trains of thought revealed. In doing so, I have enjoyed the invigorating but uncomfortable experience not so much of taking part in an existing scholarly conversation as seeking to open up a fresh one—a conversation that nevertheless connects at multiple points with deep and long-running discussions in exegetical, theological and ethical scholarship. Given the space available, I am very conscious of having interacted only briefly with texts, themes, connections and debates that deserve far more attention than I have been able to give them. I am also aware of having posed questions (explicitly or implicitly) that require considerable further investigation.

The most compelling prospects for further research seem to me to be as follows.

At an exegetical level, I have dealt at some length with 12 of the 25 passages that reference OES within the NT. Further exploration of other trains of biblical thought would be welcome, particularly in the epistles of 1 Thessalonians (where Paul connects his own gospel ‘exhortation’ with that of the Thessalonian believers and their leaders) and 1 Peter (where Luther’s view of the ‘priestly’ speech of believers is anchored).

More work could also be done on the continuities and discontinuities between the OES of the NT church-community and the ‘wisdom-speech’ traditions of the OT; I touched on this in chapter 3§3 but very briefly.

The question of authority is a complex one, about which further thought is

required. What does it mean to say that a speech-act like OES or CTP has ‘authority’, or that the person uttering it has ‘authority’? How does the nature of ‘authority’ as an ‘event’ (which calls forth action from someone) relate to the ‘authority’ of a text or message (like the Scriptures or the gospel), or the authority of an office or position (such as a leader or elder)? In what sense are various kinds of ‘teaching’ thus exercises of authority? What different sort of authority does the exercise of more practically immediate speech like OES have? These are questions worthy of further investigation in light of the findings of this thesis.

A related subject for further study concerns the implications of this thesis for the much-debated question of how men and women should exercise various kinds of word ministry within Christian communities. The fact that OES is practised broadly by both men and women in the NT offers a fresh angle from which to consider this question, an opportunity I was able to take up in only the lightest manner in chapter 3§4 and 3§7.a.

My discussion (in chapter 8) of the nature of speech and language was necessarily short. Further thought as to how God’s action in Christ redeems and sanctifies the created powers of human speech and language would be very welcome, particularly by those more expert than me in the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language.

Methodologically, this thesis has sought to bring together biblical exegesis, theological synthesis and ethical reasoning to consider the moral nature of an ecclesial form of action. If this approach is seen to be fruitful, it opens up possibilities for thinking theologically about other issues and forms of actions in church life and ministry: such as the nature and purposes of the church gathering itself, of pastoral care and pastoral counselling, of the practice of the Lord’s Supper and baptism, and so on.

In this connection, two significant prospects for further research suggest

themselves. The first is to consider how a theological understanding of ‘one-another edifying speech’ might contribute to a fresh theological consideration of ‘outsider-focused evangelistic speech’—that is, the question of whether or how Christian believers should engage in mission activities or evangelistic speech with non-believers. The methodological approach and findings of this thesis could provide fresh possibilities for resolving a question that has become somewhat bogged down in historical and exegetical debates.

The other form of Christian action that this thesis also obviously connects with is that which I have labelled CTP: the congregational teaching-preaching speech of pastors, elders and overseers. I have discussed CTP mainly in terms of its similarities and differences from OES, but in doing so have hopefully opened up lines of enquiry for thinking further about the nature of CTP as ‘moral teaching’, as overlapping with ‘prophetic speech’, as deriving its nature from the apostolic proclamation, and as occupying a central and foundational place within the thought and life of the Christian community.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this thesis seeks to construct a theological framework within which more specific practical deliberation about OES in Christian communities could proceed. Research projects would be very welcome which sought to do just this—to investigate the current state and practice of OES in particular Christian communities, to engage with the theological conclusions reached by this thesis, and to deliberate about what changes and developments those congregations could make in response.



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## *Appendix 1: A survey of OES in the NT*

This appendix contains a survey of every certain NT reference to the phenomenon of OES. By ‘reference’, I mean a text in which a form of speech-act that meets the speech-act criteria outlined in chapter 2 (above) is described, exemplified, commanded or in some way encouraged. Briefly, those criteria are:

1. That the *speaker* is acting in his or her capacity as a believer, not in relation to a recognized or commissioned role within the Christian community (such as apostles, pastors or elders).
2. That the actual or implied *hearer/s* of the speech are (or are regarded as) Christian believers.
3. That an *illocutionary act* takes place or is envisaged as taking place.
4. That the *propositional* elements of the speech-act (the things referred to or predicated of), whether specified in the reference or supplied by its context or the nature of the action itself, relates truthfully to some aspect of Christian revelation.
5. That the *perlocutionary act* (the expected or actual effects of the speech-act) is a positive one, imparting some benefit or good to the hearer.

The combined effect of criteria 1 to 3 is to characterize the speech-act as ‘one-another speech’ in the Christian community. The combined effect of criteria 4 and 5 is to characterize the speech-act as ‘edifying’; that is, of being aimed at a positive perlocutionary effect that ‘builds’ the hearer in some way in relation to the understanding and practice of Christian faith.

Only references that satisfy all five criteria are included. Some borderline cases (such as Phil 2:1 and Jas 5:16) have been excluded.

The survey will articulate how each reference meets the criteria under the following headings:

- the type of reference (e.g., whether it refers to the speech-act by means of a *description* of it taking place or being expected to take place, or an *imperative* or exhortation for it to take place);
- the speaker/s;
- the hearer/s;
- the propositional act;
- the illocutionary act;
- the perlocutionary act;

- any significant theological judgements or themes that explain, motivate or undergird the speech-act.

## *Matt 18:15*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The second person singular imperative, which is dependent on the condition ‘if your brother sins against you’, indicates a course of action that should be taken.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Given the escalation from 18:15 (speak personally) to 18:17 (take it to the whole congregation), the speaker of 18:15 could be any member of the Christian ἐκκλησία.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The reproof is directed to another member of the Christian community (a ‘brother’), who has committed some sin or fault against another individual.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The content of the speech is some description or detailing of how the brother’s behaviour has fallen short of the standards of Christian morality and caused a breach of relationship between the speaker and the hearer. In terms of our criteria, the speech refers to the conduct of the Christian life and its effects on interpersonal relationships.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The word translated ‘reprove’ (ἐλέγχω) is difficult to render in English. It may refer to the act of pointing out the sin that has been committed, or focus more on the result of such a communication (to ‘convict’). <sup>632</sup> In either case, the illocutionary act involves some description of the sin with an intention of bringing the brother to acknowledge and repent of his fault.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The desired outcome is the gaining or winning (κερδαίνω) of the brother, connoting both the resumption of interpersonal relationship and the restoration of the offender into the fellowship of God’s people.
<i>Theological themes:</i>	This section follows on directly from Jesus’ teaching about the ‘little ones’ and the Father’s concern for them (which should

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<sup>632</sup> Carson notes the background of Lev 19:17: ‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him’; D. A Carson, ‘Matthew’ in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library, 1984), 595–6.

shape the disciples' concern not to despise them or cause them to sin). The diligence of the shepherd to find and save one lost sheep (18:12-13) is reflected in going to the brother who has sinned in order to win him back.

### *Matt 28:20*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The present active participle διδάσκοντες gains its imperatival force from μαθητεύσατε in 28:19.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	In the first place, the group receiving this command from the risen Christ are either the eleven disciples mentioned in 28:16 or possibly a larger group present on the mountain. <sup>633</sup> Either way, those commissioned to make disciples by baptizing and teaching are paradigmatic disciples of Christ. <sup>634</sup> The command envisages the involvement of Christian disciples (considered generally) in the act of teaching.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The recipients of this teaching will be other disciples—that is, those in verse 19 who have been baptized into the triune name.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The content of the teaching is all that Christ had already commanded them (πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν).
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The speech-act of 'teaching' (διδάσκοντες) here involves not simply informing other disciples of all that Christ has commanded but teaching them to keep or observe (τηρεῖν) those commands.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	In the immediate context, the effect of the act is 'to disciple' (μαθητεύσατε 28:19) those who are thus taught. In the broader context of Matthew's Gospel, to be 'discipled' is to submit to the yoke of Christ's authoritative teaching (11:29), or to do 'the will of my Father in heaven' as reflected in his words (12:49-50).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	The teaching that the disciples are to engage in gains its scope

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<sup>633</sup> The puzzling phenomenon of the disciples simultaneously worshipping and doubting in verse 17 has led some to suggest that a broader group of disciples beyond the eleven were present on the mountain; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 745.

<sup>634</sup> As argued by D. A. Carson, 'Matthew' in *Matthew, Mark, Luke* (EBC 8; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library, 1984), 595-6.

and authority from the universal authority that has been given to the risen Jesus Christ (20:18). This authority of Christ is trinitarian, in that it is ‘given’ to Christ (presumably by the Father), and is enacted in the world as disciples are baptized into the triune name. It is also eschatological, in that it extends from the historical moment in which the disciples are being addressed through until the ‘end of the age’ (in v. 20).

### *Rom 12:6–8*

- Type of reference:* Most commentators and translations supply the missing verb as an imperative either at the beginning of the list (‘let us use’, ESV) or as part of the list (‘If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy’, NIV). Either way, the list is construed as an exhortation or instruction from the apostle to his readers to engage in this activity.<sup>635</sup>
- Speaker/s:* Different members of the body are to exercise the different gifts they have received by grace. That the text does not map the various forms of speech to particular offices or roles is suggested not only by the context (which emphasizes gift rather than office or appointment), but also by the words used (προφητεῖαν rather than προφήτης, and ὁ διδάσκων rather than ὁ διδάσκαλος).
- Hearer/s:* In context, the hearer/s of the speech are other members of the ‘one body’ of which all are members.
- Propositional:* No propositional content is specified except that implied in the acts themselves; that is, it is reasonable to assume in the context that ‘prophecy’ and ‘teaching’ and ‘exhortation’ have propositional content related to some aspect of Christian revelation and faith.
- Illocutionary:* We meet here three of the four most common forms of OES speech-action in the NT (νουθετέω, ‘to warn or admonish’

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<sup>635</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 763–4. Cranfield agrees with Schlatter that while the construction starts with an indicative (‘having these gifts’) the imperatival force of the list arises from each one being given a mode or manner of implementation. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol. 2: Commentary on Romans IX–XVI and Essays* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 618.

being the other). ‘Prophesying’ (προφητεῖαν) refers to a voluntary, intelligible form of speech bearing some form of revelation from God (see further below on 1 Cor 14).<sup>636</sup> ‘Teaching’ (διδάσκω) is a broad term referring to various kinds of educational activities, whether formal or informal.<sup>637</sup> The verb translated ‘exhorting’ (παρακαλῶν) has a semantic range ranging from ‘exhorting’ through ‘imploring’ and ‘urging’ to ‘encouraging’ and ‘comforting’.<sup>638</sup>

- Perlocutionary:* The outcome is not specified, except for the effects inherent in each kind of activity (e.g., teaching having the effect of someone being taught; exhorting have the effect of someone being exhorted).
- Train of thought:* This section follows directly from Paul’s appeal to the Romans, in response to the mercies of God, to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, and to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. The speech-acts are framed by the prior gracious acts of God in the gospel, and the ongoing gift and transformation that is the life of faith within the body of Christ. Part of this noetic transformation is to think rightly and soberly about themselves—to understand their unity and diversity as ‘one body’ in Christ, and also to understand the various gifts they have and employ, according to the standard of faith (μέτρον πίστεως v. 3).

### *Rom 15:14–15*

- Type of reference:* The apostle states his confidence in the ability of the Roman Christians to engage in speech-acts of warning or admonition.
- Speaker/s:* The Roman Christians considered generally (‘you yourselves’).
- Hearer/s:* The speech-act is directed to ‘one another’ (ἀλλήλους 15:14).
- Propositional:* The propositional content of mutual admonition relates to the knowledge with which they have been filled—knowledge which is essentially the same as that which Paul has been writing to

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<sup>636</sup> See chapter 3§7 for an assessment of the considerable debate surrounding the nature of ‘prophecy’ in the NT.

<sup>637</sup> ‘διδάσκω’, *BDAG*, 241.

<sup>638</sup> ‘παρακαλέω’, *BDAG*, 764–765.

	them about ‘as a reminder’ (15:15).
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The verb <i>νουθετέω</i> could be translated ‘warn’, ‘admonish’ or ‘instruct’. It connotes ‘counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct’. <sup>639</sup>
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	In context, the desired outcome of the mutual admonition practised by the Romans would be the same as Paul’s goal in writing to them by way of reminder, as expressed both in the verse immediately prior (that they might be filled with ‘all joy and peace in believing’ and ‘abound in hope’ by the power of the Spirit, 15:13), and in the general statement of Paul’s goal in his apostolic ministry, ‘the obedience of faith’ among all nations (1:5).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	Apart from the theological underpinnings of the goal of their knowledge-based mutual admonition (as expressed above), no other explicit theological argument is presented.

### *1 Cor 1:4–7*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	Paul describes both a past and present reality in the Corinthian congregation: that they were enriched (aorist indicative, <i>ἐπλουτίσθητε</i> , 1:5) with all speech and all knowledge, and that they continue not to be lacking in any gift (present infinitive, <i>ὕστερεῖσθαι</i> , 1:7).
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Those enriched with this speech are the recipients of the letter, the <i>ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ</i> , referred to five times in 1:4–8 with the second person plural pronoun.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The hearers of the speech are not specified, but can be assumed to include (at the very least) the fellow members of the Corinthian church who are the addressees of the epistle.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The conjunction <i>καθὼς</i> that opens 1:5 links the speech and knowledge with the ‘testimony of Christ’ that was confirmed or established ( <i>ἐβεβαιώθη</i> ) among them, strongly suggesting that the content of their speech is related to the Christocentric <i>kerygma</i> that Paul had proclaimed among them. Paul describes this foundational message or proclamation in the paragraphs

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<sup>639</sup> ‘*νουθετέω*’, *BDAG*, 679.

	following as ‘the gospel’ (1:17), ‘the word of the cross’ (1:18), ‘Christ crucified’ (1:23), and ‘the testimony of God’ (2:1).
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	‘All kinds (or every kind) of speaking’ best translates the range of illocutionary acts denoted by παντὶ λόγῳ (1:5). <sup>640</sup> The diversity of the word-gifts with which the Corinthian church was endowed is discussed in more detail in chapters 12-14. <sup>641</sup>
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The logical and syntactical connection between the testimony of Christ that was at first confirmed among them (ἐβεβαιώθη, aorist passive, 1:6), and the ongoing exercise of these gifts of speech and knowledge as the believers are sustained until the end (βεβαιώσει, future active, 1:8) has led Chrysostom (and others) to conclude that the means by which God-in-Christ sustains or confirms believers to the end is by the ‘constant repetition of his name and work’ in the knowledgeable speech of believers. <sup>642</sup> The desired outcome, then, of the ‘all kinds of speaking’ is that the Corinthian believers would remain firmly in the fellowship of Jesus Christ until the day of Christ (1:8-9).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	These verses introduce in very brief compass some of the key concepts that Paul will proceed to expand as the argument of 1 Corinthians unfolds—that the rich speech and knowledge the Corinthians possess are a <i>gift</i> of God’s grace, and not something to be boasted in; that the purpose of these gifts is related to the perseverance and growth in Christ; and that the content and rationale for their exercise can never stray far from the testimony of Christ.

### 1 Cor 2:6–16

<i>Type of reference:</i>	Paul describes the christological ‘wisdom’ (σοφία, 2:6, 7) that is revealed only by the Spirit (2:10-12) and imparted to others by the Spirit (2:13).
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Several factors indicate that the ‘we’ who understand this wisdom (2:10-12, 15-16) and speak or impart it to others (2:6,

<sup>640</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 91-92.

<sup>641</sup> The generalized reference to the speaking of God’s wisdom in 2:6-16 also uses λόγος (2:13) to describe the speech of the community (see discussion below).

<sup>642</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 101.

7, 13) are spiritually mature Corinthian believers generally, not just Paul the apostle or his apostolic colleagues. Most notably there is a shift from the emphatic 'I' (ἐγώ) in 2:1 and 2:3 to the first person plural in 2:6, followed by the return of ἐγώ in 3:1, and a corresponding shift from language of proclamation (κήρυγμα, 1:21; κηρύσσω, 1:23; καταγγέλλω, 2:1) to the more general language of speaking or imparting (λαλέω, 2:6, 7, 13).<sup>643</sup>

*Hearer/s:* The recipients of the spiritual wisdom are those who are able to accept and understand it—that is, other Spirit-enabled believers (2:13). The natural person (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, 2:14) is not equipped to understand.

*Propositional:* The 'wisdom' that is known and imparted is materially equivalent to the wisdom of 'Christ crucified' that Paul has been discussing in 1:18-25.<sup>644</sup> However, as this wisdom is grasped or understood (ἐγνώκεν, 2:11) it contains implications for every facet of life, for 'judging all things' (ἀνακρίνει πάντα, 2:15). Possessing this christocentric wisdom by the Spirit is described as having the 'mind of Christ' (νοῦν Χριστοῦ, 2:16).

*Illocutionary:* The speaking or imparting of the wisdom is described using the plain verb λαλέω (2:6, 7, 13). What is understood is then spoken, imparted, or passed on to others.

*Perlocutionary:* No direct outcome is specified. The implied outcome is the ability to do that which all true wisdom imparts; that is, to understand and make correct judgements about the real nature of things, and to live accordingly.

*Train of thought:* This passage plays an important part in the unfolding theological argument of 1 Corinthians. By linking the spiritual wisdom that is spoken in the community with the apostolic proclamation of 'Christ crucified', Paul lays the groundwork for his more specific discussion of 'spirit-speech' and prophecy in chapters 12-14. In many ways, what 1 Cor 2:6-16 mentions in outline and overview, 1 Cor 12-14 discusses and applies in detail to the Corinthian congregation.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Collins, *Corinthians*, 122. See chapter 3§3 for a more detailed discussion of this point.

<sup>644</sup> Again, see chapter 3§3 for an exegetical demonstration of this connection.

<sup>645</sup> Gillespie, *First Theologians*, 165.

### 1 Cor 11:4-5

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The participles of προφητεύω describe an activity that takes place in some context (not specified) in the Christian community.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	‘Every man’ (πᾶς ἄνθρωπος, 11:4) and ‘every woman’ (πᾶσα [...]) γυνή, 11:5) suggests that the practice of prophecy was common.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The context is the Christian community (cf. Paul’s insistence in 11:16 that his instructions on these matters are the invariable practice of ‘the churches of God’). However, it is not made clear whether the prophecy is taking place within the church-gathering of the whole community (i.e., ‘when you come together as a church’ in 11:18) or in other contexts in which Christians meet or encounter one another, such as the household.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The content of the prophecy is not specified.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The speech-act is to prophesy (προφητεύω). (See comments on Rom 12:6-8, above.)
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The perlocutionary effects are not specified.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	The theological material that introduces the section relates to the main issue under consideration (the authority relationship between men and women) rather than to the nature or purposes of prophecy.

### 1 Cor 12:4-11

<i>Type of reference:</i>	A description is provided of the variety of speech-acts given and distributed by God within the body of Christ.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	A range of speakers are identified within the church. As with the gift list in Romans 12, the different gifts of speech are not mapped to offices or recognized roles.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	Contextually, the hearer/s are others within the Christian gathering, this passage being part of the section beginning in 11:17 where Paul deals with questions and issues related to the congregational gatherings of the Corinthian church.
<i>Propositional:</i>	Given the explicit source of the ability to perform the various

speech-acts ('the one and same Spirit'), and the context of that same Spirit empowering the confession that 'Jesus is Lord' (12:3), it is reasonable to conclude that the propositional acts entailed with the various speech-acts in the list relate to aspects of Christian revelation. It is likely that the 'wisdom' referred to in 12:8 is connected with Paul's extensive discussion of the christologically-shaped wisdom that comes from God in chapters 1 and 2, and that the 'knowledge' of 12:8 is closely related to the 'knowledge' in Christ that they received by the grace of God in 1:4-7.

*Illocutionary:* Five kinds of speech-act are mentioned: the utterances (λόγος) of wisdom and of knowledge (12:8), prophecy (προφητεία, v. 10), and the pairing of 'kinds of tongues' (γέννη γλωσσῶν, v. 10) and 'interpretation of tongues' (ἐρμηνεία γλωσσῶν, v. 10).

*Perlocutionary:* The outcome or intended effect of the various verbal manifestations of the Spirit is the common advantage or benefit (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, 12:7). From Paul's subsequent teaching in chapter 14, 'kinds of tongues' only counts as beneficial or edificatory speech in the congregation if it is paired with an interpretative act that makes it intelligible to the hearers (14:2-5).

*Train of thought:* Paul is setting out on a train of thought in this chapter that will conclude in chapter 14 (see further comments, below). The starting point (here in chapter 12) is to emphasize that although various gifts are given, they are all manifestations, gifts, ministries and operations of the one triune God, distributed by him for the common good. There is no place, therefore, for seeing the exercise of such gifts in terms of status-seeking, rivalry or factionalism (a besetting Corinthian problem). The speech that they variously undertake together is to be understood as the diverse and yet unified activity of the members of the body of Christ (12:12-27).

### *1 Cor 14:1-40*

*Type of reference:* The whole section functions as an imperative from the apostle

	to the Corinthian church that they be zealous (ζηλώω in 14:1 and 39) for that which is truly spiritual, as manifested in intelligible forms of mutually beneficial speech, notably prophecy. Paul's concern is to urge the proliferation of intelligible (rather than unintelligible) speech within the congregational gathering in a regulated and orderly way.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Paul's is calling on all the Corinthian believers to 'pursue love and be zealous for what is truly spiritual', and thus to seek to prophesy. It is clear that this does not necessarily mean that the entire congregation will speak in this way (since limits are placed on how many are to prophesy, for example, in 14:29), but the direct imperatives of 14:1 and 39, and the expected manifold variety of contributions in 14:26, express the apostle's desire and expectation for widespread congregational participation in these forms of edifying speech.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The context for the speech is the Corinthian church gathering; the hearers are those present, comprising mainly believers but also the 'unbeliever or outsider' who may enter (14:24).
<i>Propositional:</i>	In the context of these forms of speech having already been mentioned in chapter 12 (see the discussion above), and in view of the nature of biblical prophecy in its various forms as representing some form of verbal revelation from God, it can reasonably be concluded that the propositional content of the intelligible forms of speech that Paul commends relate to the Christian faith and to the conduct of the Christian life.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The three main speech-acts discussed here are prophecy (προφητεύω/προφητεία), speaking in tongues (γλῶσσα) and tongues-put-into-intelligible-words (διερμηνεύω, which depending on exactly what 'tongues' denotes may be the interpretation or translation of a language, or the articulation of pre-verbal ecstatic sounds). <sup>646</sup> The first and third are desirable and fitting speech-acts for the congregational gathering, and fit our criteria of 'one another edifying speech'; the second does not, because what it achieves is personal not corporate. The considerable exegetical issues surrounding the exact nature of

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<sup>646</sup> The considerable exegetical issues surrounding the precise nature of 'prophecy', 'tongues' and 'tongues-put-into-intelligible-words' are discussed in the body of the thesis in chapter 3§7.

the illocutionary acts of ‘prophecy’, ‘tongues’ and ‘tongues put into words’ cannot be canvassed here. What we can briefly note here is that prophecy as practised in Corinth (unlike tongues) was voluntary, intelligible speech directed to the encouragement and edification of the hearers.

Other corporate speech-acts mentioned briefly in the passage are the blessing of God in thanksgiving (14:16-17) and the various forms of speech that the Christians ‘bring’ with them to edify the gathering—“a psalm or a teaching or a revelation or a tongue or an intelligible articulation of a tongue” (14:26).

*Perlocutionary:*

The effect Paul wishes to see result from the various intelligible speech-acts is captured in the repeated use of οἰκοδομή or its verbal equivalent (14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). The desired outcome of the speech is the ‘building’ of the church, a theme with resonances to chapter 3 (where the church is a temple whose builder is God acting through his apostolic fellow-workers) and chapter 8:1, where knowledge arrogantly used can result in mere ‘puffing up’ rather than ‘building up’. Other desired or expected perlocutionary effects are encouragement (παράκλησις) and consolation (παραμυθία), which are bracketed with οἰκοδομη in 14:3; the conversion of the unbeliever or outsider (14:24-25); and learning (μανθάνω, 14:31).

*Train of thought:*

Chapter 14 not only reaches back into a number of the themes introduced in chapters 1-3 (and particularly 2:6-16), but represents the conclusion of the argument that began in chapter 12. Its main points are as follows: there are indeed multiple gifts within the Christian congregation by the Lord’s working, but the mere possession of them (or not) should not threaten the unity of the body or be seen as a status marker of spiritual maturity (chapter 12); the better framework for thinking about these gifts is love, that consistent focus on the benefit of others rather than ourselves that is the mark of Christian maturity (chapter 13); love, therefore, will drive us to be zealous for those gifts within the congregational gathering that bring benefit to others, of which prophecy is the prime example because of its ability to offer intelligible words to others for their building up and encouragement.

## 2 Cor 2:6–8

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The infinitives express what the apostle would now rather have his readers do (μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς ... παρακαλέσαι, 2:7), and what he appeals for them to do (παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς κυρῶσαι, 2:8) in restoring the repentant offender, and reaffirming their love for him.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	It is addressed to the majority of the Corinthian congregation.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The recipient of their speech will be the offender, who had suffered some form of censure or punishment from the congregation.
<i>Propositional:</i>	In context, the content of the encouragement concerns reassuring or consoling the offender that he is now forgiven and welcomed back into fellowship, and that their love for him remains strong.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	Here, encouragement (παρακαλέω) is the illocutionary form the speech-action takes rather than its outcome or perlocutionary effect (as in 1 Cor 14:3). <sup>647</sup> The reaffirming or ratifying (κυρόω) of their love for the offender may also be regarded as an illocutionary act, although what form it took in the context is difficult to determine (especially since it is a term often used in legal contexts).
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The desired outcome is that the hearer be welcomed back, and reassured of his legitimate place in the community.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	Paul's concern is multifaceted. He is concerned for the forgiveness, repentance and restoration of the offender, but also for the obedience of the Corinthians to Paul's instructions in the matter. His logic is that since the appropriate extent of the punishment has been reached, now is the time for love to take the form of forgiveness and comfort.

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<sup>647</sup> As noted by Thiselton (commenting on 1 Cor 1:10), there is considerable debate as to how παρακαλέω can be employed in illocutionary or perlocutionary terms, and whether one or the other is dominant in Paul. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 111–114.

## *Eph 4:15–16*

- Type of reference:* The verses describe an expected or desired state of affairs flowing from the ‘work of ministry’ conducted by the saints in 4:12, in contrast to the undesirable state of 4:14 (not being children, not being tossed around by every wind of doctrine).<sup>648</sup>
- Speaker/s:* The first person plural of 4:15 (αὐξήσωμεν) carries on the plurals of 4:13 and 4:14, suggesting that the speech-act is expected to be undertaken by a wide variety of speakers within the Christian community. The body imagery of 4:16 confirms this, with a multitude of parts involved in the upbuilding of the body. The phrase ‘according to the proportional working of each individual part’ in 4:16 (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους) suggests that the mode or practice of the ‘speaking in love’ may be variegated.
- Hearer/s:* In context, the recipients of the speech are the other members of the ‘body’.
- Propositional:* The ‘truth’ that is to be spoken, in the context of Ephesians, is most likely ‘the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’ in 1:13, which is described again in 4:21 as ‘the truth that is in Jesus’. In the immediate context of 4:16–17, the truth they are to express to one another stands in contrast to the false doctrine of 4:15.
- Illocutionary:* The illocutionary speech-act in 4:15 is a participial form of ἀληθεύω; literally ‘truthing in love’. The weight of evidence (adduced by Thielman and others) indicates that the term refers to *speaking* the truth.<sup>649</sup>
- Perlocutionary:* The expected outcome is the growth of the body of Christ. In the context of the passage, this may well refer to the community

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<sup>648</sup> Following the increasingly accepted work of J. Collins on the meaning of διακονία, the debate surrounding what the ‘work of ministry’ is and who conducts it (4:12) has recently shifted towards seeing this ‘ministry’ as the work of a restricted group of people—either the officials (14:11) or the Jewish Christians (‘the saints’) who bring the gospel to the Gentiles as a phase in salvation history; see L. Windsor, ‘The Work of Ministry in Ephesians 4:12’ *Tend My Sheep: The Word of God and Pastoral Ministry* (Keith G. Condie, ed.; London: Latimer Publications, 2016), 1–25. Wherever one lands on this question, the envisaged result of this ‘ministry’ is the same, namely the ongoing, multifaceted growth of the body through its various parts ‘speaking the truth in love’.

<sup>649</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 285.

of Christ considered broadly—that is, the one household of God referred to in 2:19, comprising both Jew and Gentile, united together and growing in Christ.

*Train of thought:*

If Windsor is right in his analysis, 4:15-16 represents the climax of a temporal progression starting in 4:11.<sup>650</sup> Christ gave the foundational gifts of people to preach and teach the gospel (the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers), who in turn equipped and prepared the saints (the first Jewish Christians) to bring the gospel to the nations so that the whole united body may speak the truth in love to one another for the upbuilding of Christ's body. The interplay between this cosmic 'body of Christ' metaphor, describing the whole new Jew-Gentile united humanity in Christ, and the reality of the local Christian community as a 'body' who are 'members of one another' (4:25) is worthy of further exploration.

### *Eph 4:25-29*

*Type of reference:*

In 4:25, there is a plural second person imperative (λαλεῖτε), and in 4:29 a third person middle imperative ('let not this ... but that').

*Speaker/s:*

The section of which these verses are part (beginning at 4:17) addresses the entire Ephesian congregation with a second person plural (μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν). Eph 4:25 also employs a second personal plural imperative (λαλεῖτε), along with the adjective ἕκαστος, indicating that this form of speech is the responsibility of 'each person' in the congregation.<sup>651</sup> The general expectation of mutual speech in 4:15-16 (as a consequence of salvation-historical gifts of the ascended Christ) is made explicit here in terms of the involvement of each member of his body.

*Hearer/s:*

The 'neighbour' who is the hearer of the speech is a fellow member of the body (of Christ), with the emphasis on the interdependence and mutuality of the body's members (echoing

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<sup>650</sup> Windsor, 'The Work of Ministry'.

<sup>651</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 610.

4:16).

*Propositional:*

In both verses, a contrast is drawn between the content of two kinds of speech; that is, between falsehood (4:16) and corrupt talk (4:29), and truth (4:16) and ‘that which builds up’ (4:29). The two verses, taken together, express as an imperative the desired state of affairs envisaged in 4:15-16—that given the reality of falsehood, corruption and error, the various members of the body of Christ are to speak the gospel-grounded truth to one another for the purpose of building up the body of Christ to maturity. The addition of τῆς χρείας in 4:29 could either be an objective genitive (for the building up of ‘what is needed’ or lacking) or a genitive of quality (describing the kind of building up that focuses particularly on what is needed).<sup>652</sup> Either way, the effect is to contextualize the content of the edifying talk. What is described generally in 4:16 is now more individual and specific, a form of truthful mutual edifying talk that will have reference to the need of the moment. This is reinforced by the final clause of 4:29 that describes the individualized benefit that accrues from the speech (ἵνα δῶ χάριν τοῖς ἀκούουσιν).

*Illocutionary:*

The illocutionary vocabulary is unremarkable: the everyday verb λαλέω (4:25) and the equally common noun λόγος (in 4:25).

*Perlocutionary:*

The effect of the speech in 4:29 takes up the οἰκοδομή vocabulary from 4:16; what comes out of their mouths should only be that which is ‘good for building up’ (ἀγαθὸς πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν).<sup>653</sup> The final clause of 4:29 reinforces the gracious benefit of the speech for the hearer.

*Train of thought:*

The exhortation at the beginning of chapter 4 to ‘walk’ in a worthy manner of the calling is taken up again in 4:17 at the beginning of the section of which 4:25-29 is part. The focus of the ‘walk’ in this pericope is particularly on the contrast between the false and futile ‘walk’ of their former lives that they are now to ‘put off’, and the renewed life they are to ‘walk in’ as a consequence of having learned the truth of Christ (4:20-21). The contrasts of speech in 4:25-29 are part of this old self/new

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<sup>652</sup> See Lincoln’s discussion of these issues; *Ephesians*, 306.

<sup>653</sup> Thielman points out that ἀγαθός is also used in 4:28 to describe the ‘good’ work that is now to be done by the former thief. In both cases, the word means something like ‘beneficial’; *Ephesians*, 316.

self dichotomy. The truth-telling, edifying speech of 4:25, 29 is as much an aspect of renewed Christian living as the other ethical demands this section contains.

### *Eph 5:3-4*

<i>Type:</i>	The negated imperative (μηδὲ ὀνομαζέσθω, 5:3) proscribes certain kinds of speech, in favour of (ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον, 5:4) ‘thanksgiving’.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Those who are thus to speak are the members of the Ephesian congregation considered generally (see comments on 4:25-29 above).
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The speech to be avoided and performed is ‘among you’ (ἐν ὑμῖν), indicating that the hearers of the speech are other members of the Ephesian congregation.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The content of the thankful speech is (in context) a grateful appreciation of the good gifts of God, in direct contrast to treating them as opportunities for immoral and lustful gratification (5:3). What the community talks about, and how it talks about it—like all the pairs of contrasts in this section—must no longer spring from the sinful ‘old self’ but from the Spirit-filled ‘new self’ (4:22-24).
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The speech-act being encouraged is thanksgiving, which is directed to God, but in the presence and hearing of others (or else the contrast with vulgar and foolish talk does not hold).
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The locus of thanksgiving is not only personal (between the one giving thanks and God), but corporate; hence, Paul’s insistence that their mutual talk be characterized by thanksgiving rather than foolishness or vulgarity. This is similar to the thought of 1 Cor 14:16-17 in which thanksgiving in the congregation must be intelligible, so that it can be the subject of someone else’s ‘Amen’, and thus of their being ‘built up’.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	The logic of this instruction derives from the contrast (throughout this section) between their former, darkened, futile life, and the new life that they must now continually ‘put on’ as those who have learned Christ (4:19), been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (4:30) and are being renewed in

the likeness of God (4:24). This is the second of three mentions in this section of mutual speech as a component of the renewed life (the others being 4:25-29 and 5:19-20).

### *Eph 5:18-21*

- Type of reference:* The content of the (passive) imperative ‘be filled by the Spirit’ is unfolded in the prepositions ‘speaking’, ‘singing’, ‘making melody’, and ‘giving thanks’. These participles are not so much imperatival as indicating what will happen when one is filled by the Spirit.<sup>654</sup>
- Speaker/s:* The speakers are the members of the Ephesian congregation (see on Eph 4:25-29 above).
- Hearer/s:* The speech of 5:19a is directed to ‘one another’ (ἑαυτοῖς); the speech of 5:19b is directed ‘to the Lord’ (τῷ κυρίῳ). Given the way 19b picks up in verbal form the nouns from 19a, it is likely that 19b is not describing a second or different speech-act, but providing more detail or a different perspective on the one speech-act of speaking-by-singing;<sup>655</sup> namely, that their Spirit-filled singing is addressed to one another, but at the same time takes place before the Lord and is directed to the Lord with the heart. This ethos is reflected in many of the canonical Psalms (which at least in part were to be the content of their speaking to one another) where the declaration of God’s great character and deeds (i.e., the ‘praise’ of God) is simultaneously addressed to the congregation and to God (e.g., Ps 22:22-26; 35:18; 40:10; 68:26; 107:31-32).
- Propositional:* The content of the speech has several aspects: it includes the message of the canonical Psalms, with their variegated presentation of the praises of God (that is, the speaking out loud of God’s great character and deeds, in every circumstance of life); ‘hymns and spiritual songs’ that most likely contained lyrical presentations of Christian teaching;<sup>656</sup> and the

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<sup>654</sup> Hoehner labels them as participles of result, the present tense indicating a ‘repetition or progression of the characteristics described’; *Ephesians*, 706.

<sup>655</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 362.

<sup>656</sup> Lincoln offers the NT hymns of Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; Eph 5:14 and 1 Tim 3:16 as examples.

	thanksgiving of 5:20. In its intelligibility and focus on God, the Spirit-filled speech stands in sharp contrast to the kind of speech that would ensue from being drunk with wine (5:18a).
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	There are most likely two illocutionary acts described in these verses. The first is conveyed by the participle of λαλέω, to ‘speak’ or ‘address’ one another, along with the co-ordinate participles of ᾄδω and ψάλλω. This emphasizes that the act of speaking-by-singing is genuinely corporate; it is speech directed to one another, and (together) to God. The second is the thanksgiving of 5:20. As in 5:3-4, there is a strong contrast between the self-indulgent misuse of God’s gifts (in drunkenness) and the thankfulness that rightly acknowledges the giver.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	In context, the Spirit-filled mutual speech of 5:19 is an instance of walking wisely and making good use of the time (5:15-16), rather than taking part in the ‘unfruitful works of darkness’ (5:11). On the benefit of corporate thanksgiving, see on 5:3-4 above.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	This is the third instance in this section (beginning from 4:17) where Paul urges his readers to speak in a way that reflects the new Spirit-renewed life they are now living in Christ, rather than their former darkened and futile existence, which still beckons to them in the lives of their contemporaries (cf. ‘do not be partners with them’ in 5:7; ‘take no part’ in 5:11). The repetition of περιπατέω in 5:15 picks up the ‘walk’ metaphor from 4:17 (and 4:1), with 5:18-21 functioning as something of a climax, as well as a transition (via 5:21) to the ‘household code’ of 5:22f.

### *Eph 6:4*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The nouns παιδεία and νοουθεσία describe the context in which fathers are to ‘raise’ (ἐκτρέφετε) their children.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The speech is to be undertaken by the fathers of the household, which typically included an extended biological family and its

servants and slaves.

- Hearer/s:* The recipients are the children (τέκνον) of the household, a noun that refers to the relationship (of child to parent) rather than to any particular age group. That the children concerned were still living in the house and being ‘raised’, and were capable of being trained and admonished in the Lord, suggests children and younger teenagers rather than adult children.
- Propositional:* The training and instruction is ‘of the Lord’, which could be a genitive of quality (in the sphere of, or in light of, the Lord),<sup>657</sup> or a subjective genitive (where the fathers are acting as an agent of the Lord’s instruction).<sup>658</sup> Either way, the propositional content of the training and admonishing almost certainly relates to the ‘true’ doctrine of Christ that Paul has been urging his readers to embrace and speak throughout the letter (1:13, 4:15, 21, 25; 5:9; cf. the reference to not being like children tossed to and fro by falsehood in 4:14).
- Illocutionary:* The παιδεία and νοουθεσία in which the fathers are to raise their children indicate a broad range of educational activities, including verbal content, warning and admonition, and physical discipline and training.<sup>659</sup> The thing-being-done by the speech (to raise a child to embrace the truth and character of Christ) is contrasted with infuriating or exasperating the child (παροργίζω).
- Perlocutionary:* The expected outcome is a microcosm of the redemptive-historical growth of the church from childish instability to the mature manhood of the body of Christ in 4:14-16, which happens through the truth being spoken in love. Fathers, likewise, are to raise their children to maturity in the sphere of the Lord by patient (rather than infuriating) instruction and discipline.
- Train of thought:* The household code (5:22-6:9), of which this instruction is part, takes the main theme of the preceding section (of ‘walking’ in a radically new and righteous way in Christ, 4:17-5:21) and applies it to the different relationships of the household. Again

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<sup>657</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 408.

<sup>658</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798-799.

<sup>659</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 402.

there is a contrast (sometimes implied, sometimes stated) between how these relationships should not be conducted and how they should now proceed ‘in the Lord’. The strong place given to Spirit-enabled beneficial speech in 4:17-5:21 is picked up in 6:4 with the instruction to fathers to educate their children in the faith.

### *Col 3:16*

- Type of reference:* In a manner similar to Eph 5:18-21 (with which this passage is often regarded as parallel), an imperative (ἐννοικείτω) is followed by three present active participles that function to explain the means by which or circumstances in which the imperative is to be enacted.
- Speaker/s:* Those required to implement this imperative are the Colossian Christians considered generally, the ‘saints and faithful brothers’ to whom the letter is written (Col 1:2), and who are addressed in the second person plural throughout (including in 3:16).
- Hearer/s:* The reflexive pronoun (ἑαυτούς) describes a reciprocal action, having much the same sense as ἀλλήλων.<sup>660</sup> The speech is directed to ‘one another’.
- Propositional:* The ‘word of Christ’ which was to dwell richly among them refers back to the ‘word of truth, the gospel’ (1:5) and to the ‘word of God’ (1:25) of which Paul was a minister and steward. Given the close parallels between the Colossian speech in 3:16 and Paul’s description of his own proclamation of this word of God (‘warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom’, 1:28) it is reasonable to conclude that the essential content of the ‘word of Christ’ in 3:16 is the apostolic proclamation of the gospel of Christ, in all its rich facets (πλουσίως). On the content of ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’, see above on Eph 5:18-21.
- Illocutionary:* The interpretative issue in this verse concerns whether there are two kinds of speech-acts on view or one. Should teaching and

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<sup>660</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 169; cf. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 145.

admonishing take place *as well as or alongside* the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? Or does the teaching and admonishing take place *by means of* the various kinds of songs, which are gratefully sung with the heart to God. Grammatical considerations favour the latter;<sup>661</sup> some syntactical and contextual factors suggest the former.<sup>662</sup> Overall, given the warnings in Colossians against ecstatic forms of devotion that have lost touch with Christ (2:18-19), it is likely that in 3:16 Paul is recommending that their forms of corporate speech (of which singing is an obvious but not the only example) should be preoccupied with the word of Christ, and be directed not just to God but to one another.

*Perlocutionary:* In the context of the chapter, the effect that Paul is seeking is spiritual mortification and vivification: to dispense with the attitudes and behaviours of their former life, and to clothe themselves continually with the ‘new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator’ (3:10). The purpose of the mutual teaching and admonishing in 3:16 is analogous to that of Paul’s own teaching and admonishing in 1:28, namely, maturity in Christ. This is captured in the summary statement of 3:17 (that every word or deed should be done ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’).

*Train of thought:* The larger train of thought in Colossians hinges around 2:6-7, with its call to the Colossians to continue and grow under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the apostolic word about him that they had already received and embraced. Paul emphasizes the utter fullness and sufficiency of the crucified and risen Christ, particularly in light of the alternative spiritualities that were captivating some of the Colossians (2:16-23). Spirituality and growth only come via union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and this in turn is mediated only by the

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<sup>661</sup> The symmetry of the verse suggests that the datives ψαλμοῖς κτλ are connected with διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες rather than with ᾗδοντες. Further, ᾗδω normally takes the accusative of the thing being sung, not the dative.

<sup>662</sup> The speech-acts of ‘teaching’ and ‘admonishing’ are no more associated with singing in the NT than they are today (there are no other NT instances of διδάσκω or νοουθετέω taking place by means of singing). Paul’s use of the same vocabulary to describe his own ministry in 1:28 might be taken to mean that he has a similar kind of speech-act in mind in 3:16, but this is not certain.

gospel word, not by ascetic or ecstatic spiritual practices. Setting their minds on this truth (their union with Christ, 3:1-4) is the basis for ethical renewal. The moral imperative (to kill off the old, and to put on the new) is based on their existing status in Christ.<sup>663</sup> That this renewal is a corporate, not just individual, activity is made clear by the section beginning at 3:12, of which the call to mutual teaching and admonishing in 3:16 is part.

### *1 Thess 4:18*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	A second person plural imperative is addressed to the epistle's readers.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Those to be doing the encouraging are the congregation of the Thessalonian Christians to whom the letter is written (1:1), and who are addressed as 'you' (pl.) and 'brothers' repeatedly through the letter.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The speech is addressed to one another (ἀλλήλους).
<i>Propositional:</i>	The content of the encouragement ('these words', τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις) refers to the immediately preceding declaration from Paul ('this we declare to you by a word from the Lord', 4:15-17) concerning the parousia, and particularly the participation in it of those believers who have died before the Lord's coming.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	'Encouraging' is perhaps the best English translation of παρακαλεῖτε, given the context of the believers grieving and being concerned about brothers who have died.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	No expected result is specified, beyond that implicit in any instance of encouragement, namely that the hearer is strengthened in some way relative to his or her situation. In this case, the mutual speaking of 'these words' is expected to encourage the Thessalonians in their grief.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	As with Col 3:16 (above), the activity that the Thessalonians are being instructed to engage in is similar to Paul's own ministry, which he describes in 1 Thess 2:11-12 as a paternal brand of encouraging/exhorting (παρακαλοῦντες),

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<sup>663</sup> This expresses, using different concepts, the same ethical logic of Ephesians, where Paul urges his hearers to 'walk in a manner worthy' of their calling (see on Eph 4:25-29; 5:3-4; 5:18-21 above).

encouraging/comforting (παραμυθούμενοι) and testifying/charging (μαρτυρόμενοι). It is reasonable to see both Paul's and the Thessalonians' speech as varieties of the same activity—namely, to provide strength, comfort and encouragement by means of true words about Christ.

### 1 Thess 5:11

- Type of reference:* Two second person plural imperatives are addressed to the epistle's readers.
- Speaker/s:* The subject of the imperatives are members of the Thessalonian congregation (see above on 4:18). The use of εἰς τὸν ἕνα as the object of the second of the imperatives emphasizes that Paul has interpersonal interactions in mind, not just general mutual exhortation that might happen corporately.<sup>664</sup>
- Hearer/s:* The speech is addressed by the Thessalonians to one another.
- Propositional:* The instruction in 5:11 echoes the very similar imperative at 4:18, which (like 5:11) comes at the end of a passage in which an aspect of the parousia is discussed (4:13; 5:1), in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus (4:14; 5:10). This leads to the conclusion that 4:13-5:11 is one unit of thought in two halves,<sup>665</sup> the first half conveying information about the parousia that the Thessalonians may not have been aware of ('we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers', 4:13), and the second half expounding truths they already knew ('you have no need to have anything written to you', 5:1). This leads to the further conclusion that just as the content of the encouragement in 4:18 was 'these words' (i.e., the words of 4:13-17), so the content of the exhortation and edification in 5:11 relates to the material of 5:1-10. This is confirmed by Paul's indicating that they have already been engaging in this mutual encouragement (καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε, 5:11), presumably on the basis that they were already familiar with these ideas (5:1).

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<sup>664</sup> Contra Fee who sees εἰς τὸν ἕνα merely as elegant variation, with no distinction in meaning from ἀλλήλους. Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 199, n. 58.

<sup>665</sup> G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, (IVPNTC 13; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), 155-156.

<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The verb παρακαλέω probably carries a slightly stronger connotation in this verse (reflected in the English ‘exhort’ rather than ‘encourage’), given the sober warnings of 5:4-8. The second verb (‘to build up’, οἰκοδομέω) is used metaphorically here (as elsewhere in the NT) to mean ‘improve ability or function in living responsibly and effectively’. <sup>666</sup> In context, Paul is using οἰκοδομέω here to indicate the ongoing practice of a speech-act (related to the propositional content mentioned above) that achieves this metaphorical building up.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The desired outcome is the ‘building up’ which the speech achieves.
<i>Train of thought:</i>	We have already noted the unity and structure of this section from 4:13-5:11, in which Paul twice urges his readers to use the apostolic word to encourage, exhort and edify one another (4:18; 5:11). The power of the apostolically mediated ‘word’ to bring growth or change in the lives of its hearers has been a theme of the letter to this point, particularly as Paul has recounted his bringing of the gospel to the Thessalonians, their reception of his word and the effect it had wrought in their lives. Paul’s description in 2:11-13 is particularly significant for understanding the ongoing activity of 5:11 (and 5:12-14, analyzed below), in which the Thessalonian believers are continuing to do with one another (cf. 5:11, ‘just as you are doing’), what Paul had originally done with them.

### *1 Thess 5:12-14*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	Two second person plural imperatives are addressed to the epistle’s readers to urge them to engage in this form of speech.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The speakers are the ‘brothers’ of the Thessalonian congregation.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The recipients of the speech are various sub-groups within the community, labelled as the ἀτάκτοι (‘disruptive’ rather than the traditional ‘idlers’) <sup>667</sup> and the ὀλιγόψυχοι.

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<sup>666</sup> ‘οἰκοδομέω’, *BDAG*, 696.

<sup>667</sup> Fee points out that while it is quite possible that the ἀτάκτοι (literally, the ‘out of line’, ‘the unruly’, ‘the disruptive’) may have been characterized as such because of their unwillingness to work

- Propositional:* The content of the speech may well have been shaped by the various possible causes of ‘disruption’ and ‘faintheartedness’ hinted at in the letter (e.g., the persecution alluded to in 2:14 and 3:2-4; or concerns about the parousia in 4:13-18 and 5:1-11). Whether or not this is the case, the content of the speech is directed towards warning the disruptive to cease their unruly talk or behaviour, and strengthening and encouraging the fainthearted to put their trust in the Lord Christ.
- Illocutionary:* As noted above (on Rom 15:14-15), ‘admonition’ (or ‘warning’ or ‘instruction’) usually connotes ‘counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct’. Here it is a speech-act that the leaders (5:12) and members of the congregation (5:14) both engage in. Are the Thessalonians being urged here implicitly to imitate or reinforce or in some way participate in the admonition that their leaders provide? Interestingly, in being urged to engage in *παραμυθέομαι*, (‘encouragement, comfort, consolation’),<sup>668</sup> they are also provided with an example to follow in Paul’s own fatherly encouragement of them (*παραμυθούμενοι*, 2:12).
- Perlocutionary:* The desired effect is implicit in each speech-act, namely that the disruptive cease from their unruliness, and that the faint-hearted be fortified.
- Train of thought:* For the larger train of thought throughout the letter, regarding the ongoing presence and activity of the word of God among the Thessalonian believers (as initiated by Paul himself and carried on by the Thessalonians), see on 5:11 (above). 5:12-14 fleshes out this picture by showing that a subset of the Thessalonian believers lead and oversee this work (‘those who labour among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you’, 5:12). While there are identifiable distinctions in role and function between the work undertaken by the apostle, the congregational leaders and the Thessalonian ‘brothers’, there are also striking continuities in propositional content, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary result.

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(cf. the subsequent discussion of idleness in Thessalonica in 2 Thess 3:6-12), there is no linguistic evidence at all that ἄτακτοι means ‘idlers’ or ‘the lazy’. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 209-10.

<sup>668</sup> *παραμυθέομαι*, *BDAG*, 769.

## *1 Thess 5:19-21*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The imperatives not to despise prophecies but to test them indicates that prophecies were a common practice of the Thessalonian congregation.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The speakers of the prophecy are not specified. It is reasonable to assume that they were members of the Thessalonian community.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The hearers are the recipients of Paul's instruction (the Thessalonian believers).
<i>Propositional:</i>	No content is specified apart from that inherent in the noun 'prophecies', a form of communication that purports to be of a spiritual or divine nature (see on 1 Cor 14:1-40 above). Since the prophecies that they are to 'hold fast' to are those that can be characterized as 'good', it follows that the prophecies consisted of intelligible speech that could be weighed and evaluated for its integrity and value.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	As in 1 Cor 12 and 14 (above), no detail is supplied here as to the exact nature of the illocutionary act described as 'prophecy', apart from confirming what 1 Cor 14 also makes clear, namely, that the speech was produced under the influence or gifting of the Spirit, and that it was sufficiently intelligible and rational as to be capable of being evaluated for its quality or goodness.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	Within the context of 1 Thess 5, with its call for mutual encouragement and exhortation amid the eschatological tension of persevering in Christ until the last day (cf. 5:6-9, 23), prophecy, like the other forms of speech mentioned (in 5:11 and 5:12-14), functions to equip believers for the struggle they are engaged in. Believers are to embrace the prophetic 'good' (5:21), in contrast to the multi-faceted evil that they encounter (5:22), as they trust in God to keep them for the day of Christ's coming (5:23).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	It is striking that in these few short verses in 1 Thessalonians, which is considered to be the earliest of Paul's letters, there is a similar train of thought as in the extended discussion about

prophecy in 1 Cor 12-14, written some five years later.<sup>669</sup> In both cases, Paul urges his readers to allow the full manifestation of the Spirit's work, to resist the impulse to rate prophecy lower than it should be, and to test or weigh prophecy in order to embrace its good effects.

## *2 Thess 3:14-15*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The second personal plural imperative <i>νουθετεῖτε</i> instructs the Thessalonians how to speak to a recalcitrant brother.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	Those who are to speak in this way are the 'brothers' of 3:13, the Thessalonian believers.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The addressee is a fellow believer (not an enemy but a brother) who refuses to obey the message ( <i>λόγος</i> ) of Paul's epistle.
<i>Propositional:</i>	It is reasonable to conclude that the content of the admonition or warning related to the content of Paul's letter along with a challenge to the disobedient brother not to ignore it.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	As noted in several passages above (Rom 15:14; Eph 6:4; Col 3:16; 1 Thes 5:14), the act of admonishing or warning seeks to move someone away from an inappropriate or immoral behaviour and towards obedience to the truth.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The desired effect is to restore the brother concerned to an obedience to the apostolic faith ('our message in this letter', 3:14).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	Paul repeatedly urges the Thessalonian church in this letter to hold fast to the true apostolic message he has communicated to them, either by spoken word or letter (1:10-11; 2:2-3, 5, 14-15; 3:4). He praises them for having done so (1:3-4; 2:13-14; 3:4-5, 13), particularly in light of the affliction or persecution they are suffering (1:4-7) and the challenge of deceptive alternative teachings (2:2-12). The instruction in 3:14-15 comes in this context. Paul wants the congregation itself to do what he has done for them in this letter; that is, to warn or admonish those who do not receive and embrace the apostolic traditions.

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<sup>669</sup> Most scholars date 1 Thess at or slightly before AD50, and 1 Cor in the period AD54-55. See Fee, *1 Thessalonians*, 4-5; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 31-32.

## *Titus 2:3-5*

- Type of reference:* The description of what older women are ‘to be’ continues the construction from 2:1-2, in which Titus is instructed to speak or teach that which accords with sound doctrine. The first example of this speech by Titus is for the older men ‘to be sober-minded’ (πρεσβύτεας νηφαλίους εἶναι, 2:2), where the infinitive εἶναι extends the imperative of 2:1.<sup>670</sup> The ὡσαύτως of 2:3 further extends the imperatival force of what Titus is to say to the older women.
- Speaker/s:* The word for ‘older women’ (πρεσβύτιδας) is a hapax; outside the NT it refers to women over the age of sixty.<sup>671</sup>
- Hearer/s:* The recipients of the speech are the younger women of the Cretan Christian community. Unlike the similar material in 1 Timothy 3:11-12 on deacon’s wives or deaconesses (γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως σεμνάς, μὴ διαβόλους ...), the focus here is on inter-generational modelling and instruction within the household.
- Propositional:* The content of the older women’s teaching can be inferred from its doctrinal foundation (it accords with τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ of 2:1), and from the list of behaviours and virtues that are its intended outcome (ἵνα σωφρονίζωσιν τὰς νέας φιλάνδρους εἶναι ... , 2:4-5). Given the constant and strong links Paul forges between doctrine and behaviour throughout the Pastoral Epistles and especially in Titus, it is very likely that the καλοδιδάσκαλος the older women were to practise contained both elements—that is, both moral teaching regarding certain godly behaviours (loving husbands and children, being self-controlled, and so on) and the significance of that behaviour in relation to the apostolic gospel that was the foundation of those behaviours (cf. 1:3, 9; 2:1, 10-14).
- Illocutionary:* The speech-acts of the older women are described by two terms. The first (καλοδιδασκάλους, 2:3) characterizes who they are

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<sup>670</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 126.

<sup>671</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 2009), 409.

to be, namely, ‘good teachers’ or ‘teachers of the good’.<sup>672</sup> Given that there are other ways Paul could have characterized the activity of the older women as purely verbal<sup>673</sup> or exemplary,<sup>674</sup> it seems likely that Paul chose (or even coined) *καλοδιδάσκαλος* to emphasize both aspects. They are to express with their lips *and* embody in their lives ‘that which accords with sound doctrine’. In 2:4, being this sort of *καλοδιδάσκαλος* will result (*ἵνα*) in them being able to advise or encourage or instruct (*σωφρονίζουσιν*) the younger women in godly behaviour. The longer-term ongoing nature of this instruction is indicated in part by the present tense of the verb, but more significantly by the nature of the instruction. It is not the work of a single lesson or conversation to teach someone to be self-controlled or kind or loving.

*Perlocutionary:* Two outcomes are expected: the godly behaviour of the younger women, and the resulting preservation of the public reputation of the word of God (2:5).

*Train of thought:* This passage reflects a key emphasis of the pastoral epistles in general, and of Titus in particular, that right behaviour is inextricably linked with right doctrine.<sup>675</sup> Moreover, right doctrine and behaviour will only be preserved and extended by those who understand this nexus; that is, those who properly grasp that the true knowledge of God must issue in a changed life. This thread runs through the letter. Paul asserts it in his opening greeting (‘the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness’, 1:1); he commands Titus to appoint elders of impeccable character who will also be able to teach and rebuke (1:5-9); he warns of the disastrous impact of false teachers and their immoral works (1:10-16); he urges Titus himself to teach sound doctrine and to be a model of good works (2:1, 7-8); he describes the purpose for which God’s grace in Christ appeared

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<sup>672</sup> Quinn suggests that either is possible; Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary and an Introduction to Titus, I and II Timothy, the Pastoral Epistles*, (AB 35; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 120.

<sup>673</sup> Such as his instruction to Titus in 2:1 to speak (*λάλει*) that which accords with sound doctrine.

<sup>674</sup> Such as his instruction in 2:7 for Titus to present himself as a model for good works (*παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων*).

<sup>675</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 408.

as being to ‘purify a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works’ (2:11-14). The ‘good-teaching’ of the older women fits within this train of thought. In the context of what Titus is to do for all of Crete, and what the elders are to do for each congregation, the older women are to teach and model godly doctrine and behaviour in their relationships with younger women.

### *Heb 3:12-13*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The author instructs his readers to engage in this speech with the second person plural imperative παρακαλεῖτε.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The ‘brothers’ (3:12) who are to engage in this speech are the members of the Christian community being addressed in the epistle. <sup>676</sup> That they were the members of such a community considered generally, rather than leaders or other office-holders, is confirmed by 13:7, 17 and 24.
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The exhortation is to be addressed to ‘one another’ (ἑαυτοὺς, 3:13). Given the individual nature of the spiritual threat in 3:12 (‘in any one of you’, ἐν τινι ὑμῶν), the emphasis of the mutual exhortation is likely also to have an individualized focus; that is, not just a general exhortation of the whole group corporately to one another, but a personal exhortation of one to another.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The author’s immediately preceding quotation of Ps 95:7-11 provides the basis for his own exhortation (‘Watch out, brothers ..., 3:12), which leads to a call for his readers to exhort one another to the same end (in 3:13). The content of their mutual exhortation must therefore be closely related to that of the psalmist and of the author of Hebrews; namely, that God’s word presents a challenge to the hearer not to harden the heart and rebel against him, but to hear and receive the word in faith (cf. the heart of ἀπιστίας in 3:12), lest they fail to enter God’s rest.
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	As noted above (on Rom 12:6-8), παρακαλέω can describe a

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<sup>676</sup> In surveying the extensive debate about whether Hebrews was written to a Jewish or Gentile audience, Ellingworth judiciously argues that the first readers were very probably a mixed Christian community, compromising both Jews and Gentiles (with Jewish-Christians predominant), and containing both new and more experienced believers; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 21-27.

range of speech-acts. Here the emphasis falls on exhortation, given the perilous situation of the hearers.<sup>677</sup>

*Perlocutionary:* The desired effect of the mutual exhortation is expressed in negative terms in 3:13 (not to be hardened by sin's deceit), and in positive terms in the following verse (to 'hold our original confidence until the end', 3:14).

*Train of thought:* The letter of Hebrews as a whole is characterized by its author as a 'word of exhortation' (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, 13:22), and scholars have observed that this description serves as a summary of the epistle's intent.<sup>678</sup> Peterson suggests that 3:13 is an instance of a broader pattern within Hebrews, whereby the author's hortatory method serves as an implicit example for his readers to follow.<sup>679</sup> His urging of them to take heed of the Spirit-spoken Scriptural warning ( 'watch out', 3:12) provides the basis for them to do likewise day by day with one another (3:13). The theological basis for the necessity of such mutual exhortation is the eschatological situation of the readers; that is, the supreme person and finished high priestly work of Christ that promises them entry to the future Sabbath rest of God, the present reality of sin and disobedience that threatens their faith or confidence in this hope, and thus the urgent need for perseverance and 'persistence in faith, hope and love'.<sup>680</sup>

### *Heb 5:12-13*

*Type of reference:* The author expects that the speech-act should be taking place, but it is not.

*Speaker/s:* As noted above (on 3:13-14), those being addressed in Hebrews are the members of an unidentified Christian community considered generally. These are the 'brothers' who have failed to

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<sup>677</sup> 'The urgency for encouragement and reproof is that the community of faith experiences an unresolved tension between peril and promise'; Lane, *Hebrews*, 87.

<sup>678</sup> Ellingworth notes that something of a consensus has emerged about the relation of the doctrinal and hortatory elements in Hebrews, namely that the former is the means to the end of the latter. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 58. Cf. Peterson: 'Theology is in service of exhortation in the argument and structure of Hebrews'; 'Ministry of Encouragement', 248.

<sup>679</sup> Peterson, *God Who Is Rich in Mercy*, 244, 247-248.

<sup>680</sup> Peterson, *God Who Is Rich in Mercy*, 249.

live up to their potential to become ‘teachers’, with διδάσκαλοι being used here in ‘an informal sense’ to indicate a widespread phenomenon of mutual instruction rather than the office or role occupied by only a few (cf. Col 3:16 above).<sup>681</sup> As several commentators note, it was a widespread conviction in the Hellenistic world that ‘any mature person should be able to teach others’.<sup>682</sup>

- Hearer/s:* The recipients of this unrealized teaching are not specified. In context, they are likely to be other members of the Christian community to whom the letter is addressed.
- Propositional:* The inability of the addressees to be teachers is not simply intellectual. It consists partly in a lamentable shortfall in understanding; they have become ‘dull of hearing’ in 5:12, and need to be taught the elementary truths all over again in 5:13 (such truths as are described in 6:1-2). But their childishness is also a lack of mature experience or skill in what the ‘word of righteousness’ means in practice. The contrast is with the mature in 5:14, whose spiritual faculties have been trained by constant use to discern the good and the evil. This suggests that the *content* of the teaching that the immature were ill-equipped to practice was also multi-faceted, involving not only a sound knowledge of the first principles of the word (ἀρχή in 5:12 and 6:1), but the mature discernment to understand how those principles applied to daily experience.
- Illocutionary:* As noted above, ‘teachers’ is being used here in a general sense to mean someone engaged in an act of instructing or informing another (cf. the similar connection in Rom 2:17-21 between being instructed in the law and being a teacher of others).
- Perlocutionary:* The expected outcome of their ‘teaching’ speech is not specified, perhaps unsurprisingly since they are not ready to practise it.
- Train of thought:* The writer does not say much about the what, why and how of the expected-but-unfulfilled possibility of them becoming ‘teachers’ of others. All the same, his expectation that as believers grow in knowledge and discernment they should be able to teach others does fit with the thought of 3:13-14, 6:15

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<sup>681</sup> Bruce, *Hebrews*, 107, n.80.

<sup>682</sup> For example, Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 302.

and 10:24-25, that within the Christian community, believers take responsibility for each other's spiritual welfare and exhort and encourage one another to this end.

### *Heb 10:24-25*

- Type of reference:* The participle παρακαλοῦντες in 10:25 is dependent on the hortatory subjunctive κατανοῶμεν in 10:24. The author is urging his readers to engage in mutual exhortation as a means of rousing or provoking each other to love and good works.
- Speaker/s:* The author moves from a first person plural (κατανοῶμεν, 10:24) to the second person plural (βλέπετε, 10:25). He wants the members of the Christian community to whom the letter is addressed to engage in mutual exhortation (see on 3:12-13 above).
- Hearer/s:* Their exhortation is to be addressed to each other, picking up the ἑαυτῶν from the previous clause (10:25), and the ἀλλήλους from 10:24. The context of the speech and its reception is the congregational gathering (that they are not to neglect).
- Propositional:* The content of the mutual exhortation is connected with the mutual incitement to love and good works, and this in turn is connected to two previous hortatory subjunctives, in 10:22 ('let us draw near ... in faith') and 10:23 ('let us hold fast ... our hope').<sup>683</sup> This presentation of faith, hope and love as the characteristic response to the work of Christ (described in 10:19-21) is a common NT pattern, and provides the propositional framework within which the mutual exhortation of 10:25 takes place. The exhortation to love and good works looks *back* in faith to the finished work of Christ that provides cleansing from sin, and *forward* in hope to the imminent Day of consummation.
- Illocutionary:* Given the strong language of παροξυσμός in 10:24 ('rousing', 'stirring up', 'provoking'),<sup>684</sup> the rendering of παρακαλοῦντες

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<sup>683</sup> James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 146.

<sup>684</sup> 'παροξυσμός', *BDAG*, 780.

	as ‘exhorting’ seems appropriate.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	The author has already commended his readers for their ‘work’ and ‘love’ that issued in service to the saints (6:10). The expected outcome of the mutual exhortation in 10:24-25 is that ‘love and good works’ might continue and increase (cf. ‘let brotherly love continue’, 13:1).
<i>Train of thought:</i>	In many respects, the argument of 10:19-25 is a rendering, with the unique style and emphasis of the author, of a common NT train of thought; namely, that the preaching of the gospel of Christ gives rise to a redeemed community characterized by ongoing faith, hope and love (e.g., 1 Thess 1:2-5). In the scheme of Hebrews as a whole, 10:24-25 functions as a positive counterpart to the more sober warning of 3:12-13. In both cases the mutual exhortation of the community is important—in 3:13 for preventing hardening by sin, and in 10:24-25 for stimulating growth in love and good works.

### *1 Pet 2:9-10*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The verse frames the speech-act of declaring God’s mighty deeds as being one of the purposes (ὅπως) of God’s calling and election of the readers.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The speakers are the second person plural ‘you’ (ὁμεῖς) of 2:9, those called or elected to be the people, priesthood and nation of God. The text leaves open whether this speech is only practised corporately or whether members engage in it individually. The context of 2:5 (where individual stones being built into a spiritual house and priesthood) suggests that there is no need to choose. <sup>685</sup>
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The hearers of the declaration are not specified, but given the nature of the ‘praises’ they are to declare, <sup>686</sup> the imagery of being

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<sup>685</sup> Contra Elliott, who argues that a corporate ‘priestly community’ is on view in 2:9, and not an individual ‘priesthood of all believers’. While the corporate dimension is undeniable, there seems no need to discount the individual implications, which emerge in 3:15-16 (in testimony before the world) and in 4:10-11 (in individual speech in the congregation); John Hall Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 437-438, 443-449.

<sup>686</sup> Michaels points out that the ‘line of distinction in Jewish worship between praise and testimony is

a spiritual house (in 2:5), and the context of the rest of the letter,<sup>687</sup> it is difficult to limit the scope of whom the praises are addressed to. These are ‘praises’ that are proclaimed in the Christian community, but also declared to the world in which that community is placed.

- Propositional:* The ‘praises’ that they are to declare are the mighty saving acts of God, achieved through the ‘stone’ of God’s choosing (2:4-8), Jesus Christ. The nature of those saving acts is elaborated upon in the rest of 2:9 and 2:10 (being called out of darkness to light, becoming God’s people, receiving mercy).<sup>688</sup>
- Illocutionary:* The speech-act is a declaration (ἐξαγγέλλω) that recounts or reports something that has happened, in this case the saving acts of God.
- Perlocutionary:* In the immediate context, no expected outcome is specified. In the context of the letter, the consequences of declaring or speaking out what God has done in Christ include spiritual rebirth (1:23), and mutual service to the glory of God (4:10-11).
- Train of thought:* The four metaphors that Peter employs to describe the new corporate reality his readers are part of (race, priesthood, nation, people) are rich in OT background (see particularly Exod 19:6 and Isa 43:21). Peter’s argument is that God has fulfilled these types and promises in the stumbling stone of Christ, and in the incorporation of new covenant believers into his ‘house’. God’s purpose in this is that his mighty deeds of salvation might be proclaimed, within the church and in the world. In this sense, the verbal testimony (corporate and individual) of Peter’s readers is a fulfilment of the historic purposes of God for his people.

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often difficult to draw’; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 2004), 110. This is certainly true in the Psalms, where the declaration of God’s great deeds often takes place before or to the nations (e.g., Ps 18:49; 57:9; 96:3; 108:3).

<sup>687</sup> The behaviour and speech of Peter’s readers within the prevailing Gentile culture is a major theme of the letter.

<sup>688</sup> Michaels is among a number of commentators who argue that the ‘praises’ (τὰς ἀρετὰς, 2:9) refers primarily to the mighty acts and deeds of God that express his excellent qualities or character, not to his moral excellence as such; *1 Peter*, 110–111. Kelly notes the context of Isa 43:1f. which seems to lie behind this phrase, with its imagery of God saving his people mightily in the Exodus as ‘the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise’; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: A & C Black, 1969), 99–100.

## *1 Pet 4:10–11*

<i>Type of reference:</i>	The imperatival force of διακονοῦντες in 4:10 applies to the variegated gifts that Peter's readers have received, of which he gives two broad examples: speaking and serving.
<i>Speaker/s:</i>	The emphasis on each one (ἕκαστος) receiving a gift, and using it for mutual benefit (εἰς ἑαυτοὺς) makes it very likely that εἴ τις λαλεῖ in 4:11 refers to a range of possible speech within the congregation, not only speech associated with recognized preaching and teaching. <sup>689</sup>
<i>Hearer/s:</i>	The speaking is an example of the gifts that are to be employed εἰς ἑαυτοὺς (lit. 'unto yourselves', 4:10). The hearers are the members of the Christian community.
<i>Propositional:</i>	The logic of the two verses locates the content of the speech in the word of God. In 4:10, the various gifts of God are to be stewarded well for the sake of others. In 4:11, this God-givenness is exemplified in the source of the speech (as speaking the very words of God) and in the source of the ability to serve (with the strength God provides), resulting in glory going to God through Jesus Christ in everything. If the gifts of 4:10 are explained or exemplified in 4:11, then what is 'given' is not so much the ability or capacity to speak well, but the words to say. God gives words to some; God gives strength to others. Each should pass on that gift to others. This would agree with Michaels's suggestion that λόγια θεοῦ refers to an expanded category of Christian prophecy. <sup>690</sup>
<i>Illocutionary:</i>	The gravity of Peter's exhortation makes it likely that he is not referring to casual conversation among believers but to speech similar to the prophecy that Paul wanted to see flourish within the Corinthian congregation; that is, speech delivered in an orderly and intelligible way that is listened to with care because of the divine word it conveys.
<i>Perlocutionary:</i>	Two outcomes are envisaged: God's grace being passed on and experienced by others, as his gifts are faithfully stewarded (4:10); and God being glorified as the giver and supplier of all (4:11).

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<sup>689</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 249–250; contra Kelly, *1 Peter*, 180.

<sup>690</sup> As Michaels argues; *1 Peter*, 250.

*Train of thought:* Peter's exhortation to mutually beneficial speech is framed by themes that have appeared before in our survey: firstly, the suffering, temptation and opposition his readers experience as they await the imminent eschatological judgement day (4:1-7); secondly, the imperative to love one another selflessly (4:8-9); and thirdly, the vital, sustaining power of the living and abiding word of God (1:22-25).