

Living with Risk and Danger

STUDIES IN INTERDISCIPLINARY SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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The defense will be followed by a reception

Living with Risk and Danger

STUDIES IN INTERDISCIPLINARY SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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I submit this dissertation to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Copenhagen, as a candidate for the title of PhD in theology, on the following date: August 28th, 2017.

Living with Risk and Danger: Studies in Interdisciplinary Systematic Theology concludes three years of study as part of the University of Copenhagen's Excellence Programme for Interdisciplinary Research (2014-2017), *Changing Disasters*. This program has hosted researchers from all six faculties of the University of Copenhagen. Within this project, my work has contributed to the "imagination" research cluster, which is concerned with exploring the symbol systems through which human beings interpret and cope with disasters.¹ I wish to thank the project leader, Dr. Kristian Lauterbach, and all of my colleagues at the project for sustaining a challenging and supportive atmosphere at our academic events and throughout our informal gatherings. In this regard, special thanks must be extended to my theological office-mate, Dr. Christine Tind Johannesen-Henry, who was a postdoc at the disaster research project.

Above all, I am most grateful to my supervisor, Professor Niels Henrik Gregersen, who was a co-PI at the disaster research program. I owe him thanks for his generous supervision of this dissertation and for his mentoring throughout my entire theological education. He has always encouraged and inspired my efforts to explore new theological ideas with the purpose of expressing a viable theology for our contemporary context.

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¹ The project distinguishes the research cluster "imagination" from "interventions," focusing on disaster response (societies changing disasters), and "transformations," investigating the impact of disasters on society (disasters changing society), see <http://changingdisasters.ku.dk/about/> visited August 14th, 2017.

My wife, Johanne Amalie Lodberg, has been an immense support throughout the process. Not only has she assisted with project planning and shown considerable interest in an academic field foreign to her own, she has also endured and embraced all the vulnerabilities of writing. Thank you!

For this dissertation, I have made some formal choices:

- I provide English translations of quotations from the Scandinavian languages, Old German, and Latin, and place the original quotes in an appendix. Generally, I quote from German sources in the original language. However, in Part II, which consists of slightly revised versions of articles already published in English contexts, I also provide English translations of German quotations, placing the German originals in the appendix. When referring to such original quotations, I write “see appendix.”
- All biblical references are drawn from the *New Revised Standard Version*. In a few cases, I have referred to the original texts of the 1997 *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* from 2012, both taken from *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* (<http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/online-bibeln/ueber-die-online-bibeln/>)
- I refer to David Kelsey’s *Eccentric Existence* as EE and abbreviate any work named *Systematic Theology* as ST, giving the volume in Roman numbers.
- The use of square brackets in quotations indicates that I inserted a clarification into that quotation. Use of three dots in a quotation means that I have skipped parts of the original text.

Three chapters forming Part II of this dissertation constitute slightly revised versions of articles published elsewhere.

Chapter 4 appears as “Risk and Vulnerability: An Overview of the Field” in the interdisciplinary anthology *Exploring Vulnerability* with Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht (October 2017). I thank the editors, Heike Springhart and Günter Thomas, for inviting me to the symposium *Vulnerability—A New Focus for Theological and Interdisciplinary Anthropology*, which took place September 6-9, 2015 in Heidelberg, Germany.

Chapter 5 has been published in the *Journal of Risk Research* (March 2017) under the title “Risk, Danger, and Trust: Refining the Relational Theory of Risk.” I thank the anonymous reviewer for helpful insights and

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Chapter 6 has been accepted for publication in a special issue of *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (Fall 2017) on *Disasters and Tragedy*. It arose as a result of the August 19-20, 2016, Copenhagen conference *Endangered Selves and Societies: Theologies of Tragedies and Disasters*, arranged by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Christine Tind Johannesen-Henry, and myself. I presented an early version of the paper at a research seminar at the Department of Systematic Theology, University of Copenhagen. I thank the key respondent, Professor Bent Flemming Nielsen, for important comments on methodology, the guest respondent, Professor Miroslav Volf, and my colleagues at the department. Thanks are also due the editors of the special issue, Niels Henrik Gregersen and Jan-Olav Henriksen, for including this article, and to the anonymous reviewer for insightful suggestions.

Mikkel Gabriel Christoffersen
August 28th, 2017, Copenhagen

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Part I: Introductions to Risk and Danger

1. Introductory Observations: Risk and Danger

Living with risk and danger means living with the possibility of loss and suffering. Human life is lived in vulnerability to harm that may destroy what one perceives as valuable, but it also entails exposing oneself to harm for the purpose of realizing some good. What one perceives as dangers and risks, as future possibilities of harm for one's life depends on experiences of loss and suffering in the past. This dissertation explores the central themes of risk and danger from the perspective of Christian theology.

Christian theology excels when it addresses typical facets of the general human condition. And, it excels when it addresses contextual aspects that differ from person to person, and from culture to culture. An investigation of risk and danger has to bear in mind that human beings look forward towards a future of possibilities for flourishing and joy. Yet, with respect to our contemporary global context, it appears that continued religious terrorism, climate change, and political instability, has revived a sense of vulnerability in the Western world, unseen since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989—an event that broke the surging wave of fear regarding the prospect of impending atomic war in the 1980s.

1. An Unacknowledged Testimony to the Experience of Risk and Danger

In 1976, during the heydays of the welfare state society, Danish theologian Viggo Mortensen conveyed a sense of personal exposure, even in the midst of the relative security of his homeland. Mortensen professed that he had never experienced profound suffering. At the age of 33, Mortensen had experienced neither physical illness nor social harassment, growing up under safe and loving conditions in the welfare state of Denmark. But Mortensen still lived with a keen sense of risk and danger:

And yet, the secure citizen of the welfare state lives—so he feels—on a volcano that can erupt at any moment. Disease, calamity, death. His orderly world can collapse, or suffering might descend upon him. This possibility is at the back of his mind when he gets into his car, when he senses an inexplicable pain in his chest, when he reads the newspaper or watches television. The thought of a nameless suffering exists behind the feeling of tranquility, happiness, and safety because he knows of all the things that threaten his being.²

² Mortensen, *Lidelsens problem*, 5, my translation, see appendix.

As Mortensen described it, the safety and happiness of modern human beings, even within a stable society, are fragile. One aspect of the welfare state is its identification of threats and its use of resources to employ safety measures to assuage such threats, say, by demanding seatbelts in all cars.³ Yet, Mortensen sensed the limits of such efforts. Despite all the safety measures deployed by the welfare state, a feeling followed him that the security and happiness of his world could collapse.

Since then, a whole body of sociological theory on risk and danger has arisen—theory that in complex ways illuminates Mortensen’s conscious experience of vulnerability, of being exposed to danger, and as exposing oneself to risks.

In his groundbreaking study, *Risikogesellschaft*, published in 1986, German sociologist Ulrich Beck focused on the societal presuppositions of living with a sense of exposure. The “risk society,” Beck argued, addresses a new set of anthropogenic phenomena, like nuclear weapons and power plants, pesticides, pollution, and climate change, that constitute potential hazards for modern society.⁴ In Beck’s analysis, these new “risks” constitute byproducts of the very same industrial society that has produced the high increase in welfare for industrialized nations. That the welfare state may erupt from within itself explains Beck’s title for Part 1 of his book: “living on the volcano of civilization” (notably, using the same geological metaphor as Mortensen did ten years earlier).

While Beck sought solutions in a move towards increased societal “cosmopolitanism” beyond the national boundaries of the welfare state,⁵ Beck’s colleague in German sociology, Niklas Luhmann, argued (in his 1986 book *Ökologische Kommunikation*) that modern society is *unable* to respond properly to environmental threats. Faced with new dangers like climate change, modern society stands powerless. Due to societal differentiation into a series of systems (wherein each takes care of critical functions for society⁶), society as a whole is unable to centralize in order to mitigate a common, overarching threat.

The sociological theories in Beck and Luhmann described ways in which the welfare state may not be able to solve all problems for human beings. And, the sociology of risk, to which they contribute, also offers detailed

³ Hansson, “Risk.”

⁴ In his 2006 *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, which is not the same book as his English work *World Risk Society* from 1999, Beck added risks of terrorism and financial breakdown to the ecological risks that shape politics in the risk society.

⁵ See Beck et al., “Cosmopolitan Communities of Climate Risk.”

⁶ For instance, the system of economy takes care of the flow of money, the system of law determines the legality of actions, and the system of politics resolves the question of governmental power, Luhmann, *Ökologische Kommunikation*, 50.

descriptions of the broader human situation of living exposed and vulnerable.

In light of the *Relational Theory of Risk*,⁷ which I will introduce more in more detail in Part II, Mortensen's statement aptly exemplifies how human beings construct "risk relationships." Driving a car threatens one's life—even in the secure welfare state—because one might crash the car with fatal consequences. Thus, Mortensen constructs a relationship of risk between the threat of driving a car, on the one hand, and his valuable but vulnerable life on the other.

This relational theory of risk acquires another layer of depth if one distinguishes between "risk" and "danger." While risk means *exposing oneself* to a threat, danger means *being exposed* to a threat. Offering this distinction between risk and danger was Luhmann's great contribution in his *Soziologie des Risikos* published in 1991. The distinction between risk and danger hinges on the *attribution* of harm. Attributing harm to one's own decision means considering it a risk. Conversely, attributing harm to external forces means that it is a danger. In his testimony, Mortensen offers examples of both aspects of possible harm.

- Getting into a car is an activity that involves *exposing oneself* to deadly forces. Due to the weight and power of cars, traffic accidents or reckless driving may result in death, and frequently does so. 76 people died in Denmark in 2015 from driving in a car, which in every instance constitutes a tragedy.⁸ Given the option of working from home, entering a car to drive means actively running a "risk" with potentially fatal consequences.
- However, threats derive not only from one's activity but also from an experience of passivity. An inexplicable pain in the chest is emblematic for the types of possible suffering to which one is passively exposed. A sudden pain in the chest may mean nothing. Yet, it may also be a fatal illness that shatters one's being, perhaps even to the point of death. One *is exposed to* diseases, accidents, and disasters. Living with such passive exposure to suffering constitutes a life in "danger."

In this context, living with risk and danger means living with an orderly world in which one thrives, yet realizing that this world is vulnerable to threats that originate either in one's own initiative or in forces outside of

⁷ See Boholm and Corvellec, "A Relational Theory of Risk."

⁸ See Statistics Denmark, "StatBank Denmark Uheldk1: Injured and Killed in Road Traffic Accidents."

one's control.⁹ Put more simply, one perceives the world as contingent, in the sense that things could be different than they are.¹⁰ The sense of contingency inherent in the distinction between risk and danger points towards "actions," where something could be different because *I could* change it (risk); and towards "accidents," where things could be different, yet *I cannot* change it (danger).¹¹

2. Contemporary Christian Systematic Theology

This project analyzes and evaluates the potential of Christianity's symbol system for addressing the human situation of living with risk and danger. As such, this dissertation is a work within the field of *systematic theology*. Like other religions, Christianity consists of a system of symbols that structure the way in which it generally thinks about God and the world.¹² A symbol "throws together" (Greek: *σύν* + *βάλλειν*) meaning so that words or artifacts can come to express a meta-empirical reality.¹³ For a symbol system to be Christian, it will usually draw from such symbols as creation, consummation, sin, reconciliation, incarnation, cross, resurrection, and the triune God. Taken together, these symbols form a system that makes up the cultural heritage of Christianity.¹⁴

⁹ Importantly, the concepts of risk and danger apply to more than the sphere of personal suffering. Currently, some decisive factors in shaping political opinions are risk relationships, for example, regarding climate change or immigration. For a discussion of the cultural embedding of risk selection, see Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*.

¹⁰ Luhmann, *Funktion Der Religion*, 187.

¹¹ For the distinction between *Handlungskontingenz* and *Ereigniskontingenz*, see Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, 269.

¹² Clifford Geertz introduced the idea of religion as a symbol system into the field of anthropology. For him, religion has several facets. It is "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of actuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic," Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 90.

¹³ Berner, "Symbol: I. Religionswissenschaftlich," col. 1921. For a broader view of symbols as "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception" see Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 91.

¹⁴ Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 89. I preference this understanding of "system" rather than using Luhmann's distinction between system and environment. In this dissertation, I do not engage Luhmann's systems theoretical observation of religion, mainly because religion, for him, transfers indefinable contingency into the definable realm, tying contingency to the hidden will of God, Luhmann, *Funktion Der Religion*, 130, 189. The reader can explore Luhmann's systems theoretical observations of religion in the following works: Luhmann, *Funktion Der Religion* and *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, and his articles, Luhmann, "Läßt unsere Gesellschaft Kommunikation mit Gott zu?," "Society, Meaning, Religion: Based on Self-Reference," "Die

Systematic theology constitutes a theoretical practice that seeks to interpret the Christian symbol system with regard to problems that arise in contemporary human experience—both those experiences that are typical of all human existence and those that make up particular human beings’ context. Systematic theology *analyzes* and *evaluates* existing interpretations of Christian symbols with the purpose of offering a coherent and “unified presentation” of the Christian faith,¹⁵ in such a way that it presents itself as a life option for contemporary people. In particular, this dissertation analyzes and evaluates the interpretations of Christian symbols in a relatively recent field of theology, which I will call “risk theology.” This field consists of contemporary theologians who have found the term “risk” particularly significant with respect to their theological proposals—I elaborate upon and discuss this field further in Chapter 2. These “risk theologians” constitute the theological field within which the present exploration of systematic theology takes place.

However, systematic theology not only analyzes and evaluates Christian symbols in the theologies of risk, it also reinterprets them, thus *developing* new ideas.¹⁶ Systematic theological interpretation aims at showing the *orientational* value of Christian symbols, which means: 1) *qualifying* the interdisciplinary analysis of the human situation; 2) providing *answers* to the situation’s implicit questions; and 3) pointing to its *transformative* potential on human lives as they are confronted with risk and danger.¹⁷ In this dissertation, I seek to show that the Christian symbol system entails resources that can enable contemporary human beings to live with risk and danger.

The symbol system of Christianity necessarily finds itself in a cultural exchange with other fields of meaning, as theology also does with other disciplines. Theology has the task of explicating those connections and utilizing any germane insights from neighboring disciplines for mutual benefit. Norwegian theologian Marius Mjaaland puts it this way: “At its best, theology has always been open to insights from other disciplines, be it

Unterscheidung Gottes,” “Die Weisung Gottes als Form der Freiheit,” “Die Ausdifferenzierung der Religion,” and “Brauchen wir einen neuen Mythos?”

¹⁵ Mjaaland, *ST*, 87, my translation, see appendix.

¹⁶ For the PhD-requirement of analyzing, evaluating, and developing new ideas, see University of Copenhagen, General rules and guidelines for the PhD programme, 3.

¹⁷ A narrower understanding of the term “orientation” as merely descriptive has led Jan-Olav Henriksen to differentiate between “orientation” and “transformation,” Henriksen, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation*, 3. However, I take a broader approach to the term “orientation,” seeing the potential of transformation as a subset of the ability of the religious symbol system to orient human lives. I return to these matters in Chapter 3 on methodology.

philosophy or anthropology, law, biology or sociology, without losing its clear awareness of the peculiarity of theology.”¹⁸ Since the systematic theology of this dissertation orients itself towards the problem of living with risk and danger—a problem typical of human existence however contextually varied it may be—this project will be conducted in dialogue with other disciplines. As I have already indicated, the problem of living with risk and danger is illuminated by “risk sociology,” which I will introduce more carefully in Chapter 3.2. To highlight the dialogical quality of this dissertation, in interfacing with risk sociology, I have added the adjective “interdisciplinary” to the term “systematic theology” as it appears in the title of this dissertation. The risk sociology that I engage does two things: 1) it helps in analyzing the situation of living with risk and danger; and 2) it offers patterns of thinking that can inspire the development of new ideas: the re-interpretation of the Christian symbol system in light of the experience of living with risk and danger. The methodological chapter (Chapter 3) elaborates upon and clarifies how I approach such interdisciplinary systematic theology.

3. Risk Calculus

While the symbol system of contemporary Christianity forms the primary hermeneutical horizon of this project, contemporary human beings—those that recognize themselves in Mortensen’s description—often resort to a more mathematical strategy for dealing with the sense of risk and danger. Such a mathematical strategy is found in *risk calculus*. Risk calculus is a highly influential part of the sociology of risk that pervades current thinking about risk and danger. For instance, let us imagine a contemporary Dane bracing herself before entering her car by considering the driving statistics. Compared to the number of times a car is used in Denmark every year, the probability of dying during one’s next trip to work is very small. So small is this probability, that the driver could come to regard it as negligent and proceed to begin her drive free of worry. In other words, risk calculus becomes a way of qualifying one’s understanding of the threatening uncertainty of the future and orienting oneself within it.

Risk calculus is one of the great achievements of modernity for handling the inherent uncertainty of the future. Historically, it has contributed to a secularization of strategies for coping with uncertainty, no longer depending on religious forms of divinization.¹⁹ The story of risk calculus takes us

¹⁸ Mjaaland, *ST*, 18, my translation, see appendix.

¹⁹ Peter Bernstein’s history of risk, *Against the Gods*, shows considerable enthusiasm about the importance of risk calculus as “one of the prime catalysts that drives modern Western society,” Bernstein, *Against the Gods*, 1. Yet, Bernstein also points to “three

back to renaissance Italy, where the term “risk” was first deployed. Maritime traders at that time had a keen sense of life’s fragility, even more so than farmers, for water is more treacherous than farmland.²⁰ Sending a shipment of goods to a foreign land could result in great wealth, but only if the ship returned home safely through all the obstacles posed by the sea. In this context, the Greek word “*ρίζα*” (meaning root or cliff) inspired Italians to form the verb “*risicare*,” denoting the venture of circumnavigating a cliff and the danger of failing. The etymological root of the concept of risk thus has to do with maritime daring to gain a certain income and reward.²¹ With so much at stake in the face of such uncertainty, the term “risk” finds its way into the maritime insurance system, where payments ensue in the event that a ship fails to return home.²² In the centuries to come, the instrument of personal risk calculations and the system of insurance became more common as mathematicians developed the underlying probability theories.²³ While the term “risk” quickly became colloquial in the Latin languages, it remained a technical term in Germanic and Anglo-Saxon areas until the 19th century.²⁴

Current colloquial English uses the term “risk” in a variety of ways. While “risk” can mean (1) a possible unwanted *event*, such as when one refers to lung cancer as a risk of smoking; it can also mean (2) the *cause* of such a possible unwanted event, as in the phrase: “smoking is a health risk.” Since “probability” has become such an integrated part of modern sense-making, the term risk has come to connote (3) the *probability* of an unwanted event, thus excluding both certain and uncertain events from one’s view. And finally, risk means (4) the expectation *value*, where one adds a measure of *severity* of the unwanted event to the measure of probability (wherein “severity” is measured in terms of, say, money or lives). In this sense, risk is the probability of a loss multiplied by the severity of such a loss.²⁵ When considering the risk of dying in a car

dangers” in the trend to risk manage everything: “the exposure to discontinuity, the arrogance of quantifying the unquantifiable, and the threat of increasing risk instead of managing it,” Bernstein, “Thinking About...,” 49.

²⁰ Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, 269.

²¹ Rammstedt, “Risiko,” col. 1045.

²² The insurance system itself can be traced back to Babylonians and Chinese marine traders 3000 BC, Dahlberg, “The Roots of Risk,” 4.

²³ This development takes up most of the space in Bernstein’s history of risk, *Against the Gods*.

²⁴ Rammstedt, “Risiko,” col. 1046.

²⁵ For these four notions of risk, see Hansson, “Risk,” and compare Shrader-Frechette, “Risk,” 331 and Gottschalk-Mazouz, “Risiko,” 502–3. The prevalence of the fourth notion of risk as probability times severity does not compare with its newness. It was

accident, as our contemporary Dane just did, the term “risk” is taken in the third sense, namely as a probability.

One can approach and express probabilities quantitatively or qualitatively. A “Bayesian” method is based on qualitative assessments, which are especially relevant for singular events without history, e.g. considering the probability that one’s proposal in marriage will be accepted.²⁶ In contrast, a “frequentist” approach derives quantitative probability measures from data samples, inferring from the past to the future. This approach is more mathematical, but its truth value depends on abstracting to the aggregate level from the concrete and unique situation of the human being in question, and assumes that the future sufficiently resembles the past. For example, when a person is placing him- or herself in a car, various contextual factors are in play: it may be winter, with icy roads; one may have forgotten to change tires; one may be very tired or distracted. In theory, of course, researchers may be able to investigate many of those risk factors, thus approximating the concrete situation. Yet, outside of the laboratory, decisions have to be made without proper time to make calculations, and laypeople are typically not able to handle such complex calculations. Even experts are unable to grasp a unique situation completely, as it is simply impossible to account for every single possible variable that might affect a given situation.²⁷ As philosopher Sven Ove Hansson puts it, “almost all decisions are made ‘under uncertainty.’”²⁸ Even very complex calculations neglect the possibility of a “black swan,” that is, of an event with low probability and high impact.²⁹ And there is always the possibility of “unknown unknowns” (as Donald Rumsfeld poetically put it)—the things we don’t even know we don’t know about—arising and causing havoc. It is not just the things human beings worry about that can kill them.³⁰

used this way in Norman Rasmussen’s 1978 study of nuclear reactor safety, see Hansson, “Risk” and Rammstedt, “Risiko,” col. 1048. This understanding of risk enables so-called “risk-benefit analyses,” since one can score the probability and severity of different scenarios, multiply them and compare them, Shrader-Frechette, “Risk,” 331, see also Boholm and Corvellec, “The Role of Valuation Practices for Risk Identification.”

²⁶ Dahlberg, “The Roots of Risk,” 5–6 and Gigerenzer, *Reckoning with Risk*, 26–27.

²⁷ Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, 269.

²⁸ Hansson, “Risk.” In decision theory, “under uncertainty” means under conditions where the probabilities affecting the decision are uncertain, in distinction to “under risk” where the probabilities are known.

²⁹ See Taleb, *The Black Swan*, xxii.

³⁰ As Bob Heyman points out, the “unlimited scope of possibility” stands in contrast to the “necessary cultural selection of a small number of contingencies, viewed mostly as

In sum, while risk calculus has proven itself extremely valuable for relating to hurt on the aggregate level, it is finally—and not only empirically but also in principle—unable to exhaust the need for interpretation of the situation of living with risk and danger. Such calculus does not fully explain and address the *sense* of threat which besets even the secure welfare citizen. Although risk calculus is functional, it cannot account for the existential aspects and questions of the experience of living with risk and danger.

This dissertation seeks to argue that Christian systematic theology offers a more comprehensive, and existentially germane, way of addressing this experience. The purpose of this language, however, is not to turn the uncontrollable into something one can control. Rather, as Ingolf Dalferth once phrased it, the purpose is to enable human beings to live with what is uncontrollable in a controllable way.³¹

4. Research Question, Thesis Statement, and Outline

So far, I have attempted to defend the plausibility of this dissertation's underlying assumption: namely, *that the experience of living with risk and danger is broadly recognizable*. I do not claim that this experience is all-encompassing, merely that contemporary people have this experience and sense its problematic character. I have also made the assumption that the Christian symbol system has something to offer in widening and overcoming problems that arise in living with risk and danger.

These assumptions lead to the primary question with which this project is concerned: *what does it mean to live with risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system?*

I investigate the methodological moves required to answer this research question in Chapter 3, but let me briefly clarify some of its terms.

Living with risk and danger is a part of the human condition. While investigations of security measures aim at reducing particular risks and dangers, this theological investigation of risk and danger takes the situation of *living with* risk and danger as constitutive for human life, inquiring about its possible meanings and how human beings may come to live with it. Coming to an understanding of life with risk and danger enables one to take action in a qualified manner.³²

risks in late-modern societies, which become objects of organized concern," Heyman, "Risk and Culture," 602.

³¹ Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen*, 83. Thanks go to Christian Busch for this reference.

³² *Ibid.*, 34–35.

This core question is meant to emphasize that this investigation is undertaken in light of the Christian symbol system. As suggested, every religion constitutes a system of symbols that provides orientation for human beings as they go about living their lives. These symbols order the world in such a way that human beings can experience, understand, and act in it.³³ In contrast to other forms of symbolic orientation, a religious orientation entails a reference to God as the ultimate reality. This reference entails a principled relativization of human life as it is confronted with risks and dangers. Dalferth explains:

In religiöser Lebensorientierung ist so stets eine prinzipielle Relativierung menschlichen Lebens im Blick auf eine ihm gegenüber größere Wirklichkeit mitgesetzt, der es sich verdankt und auf die es sich bezogen weiß, ohne über sie verfügen zu können.³⁴

This dissertation investigates ways in which Christianity's symbol system orients human life, analyzing existing proposals, evaluating them and developing new ideas on their basis. In Chapter 2, I analyze and evaluate the existing proposals in the field, the various "theologies of risk." Chapter 3 presents and discusses the methodology required for performing this investigation of the Christian symbol system with regard to risk and danger.

Before presenting the rest of the structure of the dissertation, I will propose four theses as answers to the research question. Proposing them now will give the reader a sense of the overall trajectory of this dissertation, which constitutes an extended argument for these four theses. Each of them relates to *one aspect* of the situation of living with risk and danger, and addresses this aspect with reference to the Christian symbol system.

- First, living with risk and danger means *having something to lose*. In light of the Christian symbol system, having relationships of value to oneself and other creatures is a result of the surplus of divine creativity, which one experiences in the receiving of oneself and one's world as a gift. *Creating human beings, each with their environments, the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brings human beings into existence and enables ties of value within the world*. Yet, the created world is also vulnerable. The surplus of being created is also the presupposition of potential loss, not only self-induced (risk), but also externally generated (danger).

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 92.

- Second, living with risk and danger means *living vulnerably with fear and anxiety*. The Christian symbol system enables the fearful and anxious person to direct this sense of vulnerability into a community of Father, Son and Spirit. *The triune God lives a vulnerable life of possible—and actual—loss*, living as the endangered and risking incarnate Son and the “relationally vulnerable” Father, with the Spirit groaning on their behalf. Being situated within the life of the Trinity, human beings are empowered to handle their vulnerability with a balanced care for themselves and for others.
- Third, living with risk and danger means living *towards an uncertain future* that can entail loss and suffering. In light of the Christian symbol system, however, any future loss is penultimate. The ultimate future reality of human beings consists of a *promise of the triune God to restore what humans have lost as new life in a new creation*, as already actualized in the Spirit’s resurrection of the Son. This divine promise to overcome evil means that no threat to human life can become absolutized. It should be noted that this does not legitimize an apocalyptic disregard for the conditions of human existence; human beings are responsible for contributing to the wellbeing of this world.
- Fourth, living with risk and danger means *incurring guilt* for one’s involvement with situations of both possible and actualized loss. The Christian symbol system sees this experience in light of *God’s promise to forgive, as God forgave the crucifixion of the Son*. Throughout the incarnation, even at the point of crucifixion, and into his resurrected life, the Son maintained a forgiving stance to human beings. In spite of the crucifixion, the Father forgives rather than punishes creatures, and lets the Spirit create new life specifically at Easter and universally at Pentecost. The divine promise to forgive enables human beings to *assume responsibility* for situations of risk where responsibility can be difficult to place.

Analyzing the *situation* of living with risk and danger is the primary task in Part II, which consists of three interdisciplinary studies. Chapter 4 presents an overview of human vulnerabilities in an age of insurance. This is followed by a critical investigation of the *Relational Theory of Risk* in Chapter 5. These two chapters are interdisciplinary in the way they revise and enrich sociological theories with sociological observations and theological perspectives. In contrast, the final chapter of Part II, Chapter 6, explores the theological idea of faith as “trust in a situation of endangerment,” using sociological and phenomenological material.

Part III offers a more comprehensive theological investigation of the Christian symbol system concerning the human situation of living with risk and danger. Chapter 7 presents the principles of this coherence, beginning with a discussion of David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*. Chapters 8-11 explore the four theses just outlined, each in their turn. As such, the experience of a good and valuable world worth preserving points to the resources of creation theology (Chapter 8). The experience of human vulnerability points to the incarnation as the place where God shares human vulnerability, including the anxiety that arises from this vulnerability (Chapter 9). The idea of *possible* suffering relates one to a threatening future, which is the theological area of eschatology and new creation (Chapter 10). Finally, the responsibility for harm, be it external or internal, raises questions of guilt and forgiveness, which is the locus of divine reconciliation (Chapter 11). Part III concludes with Chapter 12 summing up how this dissertation has argued for a way of living with risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system.

It is my contention that a systematic theological consideration of living with risk and danger requires the activation of a broad range of theological loci. Therefore—drawing on Isaiah Berlin's famous characterization of the hedgehog and the fox—one might say that this dissertation will be a fox covering a lot of territory, rather than a hedgehog staying in just one area of theology.³⁵ Rather than focusing on one aspect of the Christian symbol system that addresses risk and danger, I suggest that a credible answer requires a coherent interpretation of many aspects of the Christian symbol system. Providing an overview of the theologians to whom the concept of risk has been significant will be helpful in this endeavor. To such an overview we now turn.

³⁵ See EE 320 with a reference to Isaiah Berlin.

2. Research Field: Theologies of Risk

This chapter presents the field of contemporary systematic theology that will be referred to throughout as “risk theology.” I define this field as being composed of that theology which consistently employs the term “risk,” be that in colloquial or rigorous conceptual terms, with the purpose of expressing central convictions within one or more of the theological loci, for example, the doctrine of creation, christology, or theological anthropology.

Among the “theologians of risk,” as they will be called, I focus on six figures: William Vanstone, John Sanders, Niels Henrik Gregersen, Günter Thomas, Sharon Welch, and Karen Baker Fletcher. Each theologian offers distinct and varied understandings of risk in theology, and each comes from a different confessional and geographical background: from Lutheran Denmark (Gregersen); Reformed Germany (Thomas); Anglican Britain (Vanstone); and from North America, Methodism (Sanders, Baker-Fletcher) and Unitarianism (Welch).

These theologians of risk represent various systematic theological backgrounds, and are thus witness to that immense plurality making contemporary systematic theology.³⁶ Arguably, what unites these theologians is their confrontation with classical “perfect-being theism.” All six theologians follow the trend of construing the triune God as capable of experiencing suffering, rather than being impassible as the tradition has had it, and as entering into mutual interaction with the finite world.³⁷ The world does not simply run according to some definite plan prescribed by God; it runs as a “free course,”³⁸ with creatures participating in it, and influencing its outcome, at least for a time, also in ways that occasion divine suffering. In other words, the risk theologians see the need for reconstructing the doctrine of God so as to be able to engage with modern experiences of contributing to the world in a more fruitful way.

This dissertation might be seen as a development of their work, building on their insights and assumptions, evaluating them, and correcting some of them along the way. This chapter offers an analysis and evaluation of those authors, and the ways in which they have used the concept of risk for their Christian theology. Placing the analysis and the larger parts of the

³⁶ For a more practical theology of ecclesial and cultural risk-taking, see Bucher, *Theologie im Risiko der Gegenwart*, especially 203-232.

³⁷ Once a heresy, the suffering God has turned into orthodoxy, as argued by Goetz, “The Suffering God.”

³⁸ Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, 215, see appendix.

evaluation in this chapter enables me to focus on and develop a theology of risk in Part III through a more constructive interaction with the extant theologies of risk.

1. Risk and the Kenotic Creation: William Vanstone

The most widespread use of the concept of risk in theology concerns the first article of faith, the doctrine of divine creation. In the judgment of systematic theologian Paul Fiddes, speaking of “creation as a ‘risk’ for God” has become “a constant theme in recent theology.”³⁹ The idea is that *God runs a risk* in creating the world. Specifically, by allowing the world to be free.⁴⁰

An early approach to the topic of risk in theology appeared with William Vanstone’s book, *The Risk of Love* from the late 1970’s, which Sanders, Gregersen, and Thomas all cite.⁴¹ William Vanstone (1923-1999) was an Anglican priest who chose a life of the church over an academic career. When deployed as a minister to a newly developed neighborhood in the socially hopeful 1950s, Vanstone’s experiences motivated him to reformulate his theology. While the ecclesiology of his father’s church had focused on addressing people’s social and spiritual needs, Vanstone found himself “living in a happy and contented district,”⁴² where people lived without any obvious sense of risk and danger. Rather than seeking to invent problems that the Gospel could solve, Vanstone saw a need to formulate and express an ecclesiology, and thereby a Gospel, of thankfulness for the gift of life in its goodness.⁴³

Vanstone’s influential phenomenology of authentic love forms the basis of this theology of thankfulness. Vanstone’s intuition was that if “God is

³⁹ Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 215. See for instance, Tillich, *ST I*, 269; Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 233; Pannenberg, *ST II*, 193–94 and Pannenberg, *ST III*, 689–90; Link, “Die Krise des Vorsehungsglaubens,” 424 and Pool, *God’s Wounds I*, 151. Paul Fiddes himself also speaks of creation as a risk in Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 207.

⁴⁰ It appears to be a presupposition for the internal consistency of this viewpoint that one takes “freedom” to be incompatible with both theological and natural determinism.

⁴¹ This book was published in Britain 1977 under the name *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense*, but acquired the name, *Risk of Love* in the American edition 1978. I examine it as a theology of risk, not because it constitutes a systematic account of risk in theology, but because of its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. John Polkinghorne has edited an anthology dedicated to this book under its British name, see Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*.

⁴² Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s idea of a “post-war world ... come of age” inspired Vanstone to a theology ministering “to man not in his weakness but in his strength,” *ibid.*, 13.

love,”⁴⁴ then human beings must know about the nature of God from love’s most authentic expression, from a description of love as it should be.⁴⁵

- Love is *limitless*, for it gives away the entire self and it seeks to overcome all barriers that the beloved might erect, whilst still restraining itself so as to set the beloved other free.
- Love is *precarious*, for it respects and enables the otherness of the beloved rather than controlling it, even though this includes the risk of being misjudged, misunderstood, and rejected.
- Love is *vulnerable*, for the lover attaches him- or herself to the beloved thus giving the beloved a certain power over the lover.

Such is the love of God in creating the world, argues Vanstone. He sees this confirmed in the divine kenosis, the self-emptying of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The hymn of Philippians famously states that God “emptied” (*εκένωσεν*) Godself in becoming a human being in Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁶ Rather than understanding such self-emptying as a shift in the divine nature, from high divine self-sufficiency to human lowliness, Vanstone wishes to see it as an expression of the very nature of God. For Vanstone, the kenotic love of Jesus Christ reveals who God is, thus expanding the idea of kenosis into the very nature of God, and thereby into the doctrine of creation. As kenotic love, both in creation and incarnation, God is limitless yet respectful, precarious yet resourceful, and vulnerable, yet still able to experience the triumph of love.⁴⁷ God has created the world, pouring the divine heart and soul into it, as all engaged artists would, thus endowing it with an incredible and inherent value.

The idea of *risk* surfaces within this line of thought in Vanstone. In creating such a world, God has surrendered the fate of the created world, love’s triumph or tragedy in the world, into the hands of creatures, thereby running a great risk. He argues that the realm of *nature* responds to this divine love by “coming right,” by being what it was ever meant to be. But, nature can also “come wrong,” by failing in its purpose. Within the realm of nature, human beings respond in *freedom* to the divine love. And, within the realm of freedom, human beings are able to respond to the gifts of divine love by *recognizing* them precisely as the gifts of divine love. Whenever such recognition occurs, then, Church ensues.⁴⁸ God runs a risk in all of these three levels.

⁴⁴ 1 Jn 4:8.

⁴⁵ Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 42–54.

⁴⁶ Php 2:7.

⁴⁷ Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 59–74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

Here, Vanstone draws things full circle. The Church, not neglecting its general responsibility to help love triumph in the world, has a special function in the world, namely to host and form the response of human beings to divine love. And, to do so in a festive recognition of the gift of creation as that which it is, namely an expression of divine love.

Suggesting that God creates human beings with freedom, Vanstone drew upon a long tradition of creation theology. In Western Christianity,⁴⁹ Tertullian (ca. 165-220) had long since argued that human beings possess a freedom to choose in matters of life and death.⁵⁰ This is a freedom which they misuse, such that they—not God—are responsible for certain evils: “the blame for what happened to him [the human being] should be imputed to himself and not to God.”⁵¹ Two centuries later, Augustine (354-430) claimed this freedom should be thought of as limited to Adam and Eve, whom God righteously punished for abusing that freedom. God then excluded them and all their descendants from the Garden of Eden to suffer all sorts of evil, including corporeal death.⁵² Augustine derives the legitimacy of contemporary suffering from his doctrine of original sin: human beings deserve their punishment, because they were in Adam, committing his sin with him.⁵³

In contemporary theology, the view of suffering as a divine punishment of evil has almost entirely receded. Therefore, the “free will defense,”⁵⁴ as it has often been called, also has a stake in suggesting that contemporary human beings are free. This makes them, and not God, morally culpable for the harm that they impute to others.

Yet, moral evil does not exhaust the reality of evil in this world. Vanstone emphasizes that God has given freedom not only to humans but to non-human parts of nature too. This idea has inspired the physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne to develop what he calls “a free-process

⁴⁹ For a brief overview of pre-Augustine notions of free will, also in Eastern Christianity, see Marksches, “Willensfreiheit: III. Kirchengeschichtlich,” 1569.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 99-111/II:5-8. For the argument that this applies also to contemporary human beings, see 109-111/II:8.

⁵¹ Ibid 101/II.6, see appendix.

⁵² Augustinus, *Enchiridon*, 63/VIII.25.

⁵³ Ibid, 63/VIII.26. Augustine bases this idea on Romans 5:12 in the Vulgate translation of the Christian bible. In Latin, the text says that sin and death came into the world through one man “in whom” (*in quo*) all people have sinned, while the Greek text reads that sin comes through Adam and death through sin “because” ($\epsilon\phi' \tilde{\omega}$) all people have sinned.

⁵⁴ For an influential account of this term, see Plantinga, “The Free Will Defence” and Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*.

defense.”⁵⁵ The natural sciences have made the contention that all creaturely suffering could derive from human free will implausible. After all there was a very long period of natural creaturely history when human beings did not exist, but where suffering in the form of evolutionary competition and predation did very much exist. Polkinghorne’s view, then, is that God creates the world with the propensity to develop into more and more complex forms of existence (the “anthropic principle”). This allows creation to develop in a free process, “through the continual interplay between chance and necessity.”⁵⁶ While this propensity has enabled human beings to appear on the planet, it carries a series of harms—diseases and disasters—to which human beings are in constant danger of being exposed to.⁵⁷ The free-process view has found its way into the risk theology of Niels Henrik Gregersen.⁵⁸ As such, in an indirect way, Vanstone has been a source of inspiration for risk theology.

Vanstone has inspired theologians to develop a theology of risk in the context of a creation theology. He has made important contributions in clarifying the nature of divine love and in enabling a discourse that transcends the functionalist orientation of theology wherein the Gospel is only there to fix a problem.

Yet, I wonder whether Vanstone’s theology is not too one-sided. Even if people feel quite well themselves, their dying loved ones, or the victims of history, could still pose an existential problem to them. This critique leads this dissertation to search for a *more robust eschatology*.⁵⁹ Such an eschatology might also accuse Vanstone’s understanding of love as too

⁵⁵ See Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 75–78 and *Science and Providence*, 77, both times with reference to Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense*, 62–63. It should be noted that the “free process” view of creation does not constitute process theology. Process theology works with a dualistic account of the God-world-relation (God vs. evil), wherein God is not perceived as the creating origin of all things. In contrast, the free process view works with God as a creator, which enables a view of God as taking a risk in creation. For an excellent introduction, see Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*.

⁵⁶ Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 66.

⁵⁷ Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 61.

⁵⁸ Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 232.

⁵⁹ Günter Thomas’ critique of the lack of eschatology in theologies like Vanstone is precise: “Die Annahme, daß das Leiden in Schöpfung und Geschichte der notwendige Preis einer eschatologiefreien Selbstzurücknahme Gottes zugunsten des hohen Gutes der Freiheit und Sittlichkeit sei, verfinstert Gottes Liebe. Diese neotheistische Lösung mutet die zynische Einsicht zu, daß den Preis für Freiheit und Sittlichkeit ganz überwiegend diejenigen zu bezahlen haben, die niemals oder kaum in den Genuß einer im Leben entfalteten Form der Freiheit und Sittlichkeit kommen,” Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 341.

narrowly modeled on a relationship between responsible adults. As Günter Thomas has pointed out, another form of authentic love also appears in human lives, as becomes apparent in experiences of being rescued from oneself.⁶⁰ This is the sort of love human beings most often, but not only, experience as children. Parents are, after all, entitled to—and expected to—rescue their children from harm, even if they resist being rescued. Likewise, human beings are the children of God, sharing in the Son’s relations with the Father. *This redemptive character is an important aspect of love*, which appears to contradict the idea of kenosis as the only form of love. And, this dissertation is an attempt to broach both these aspects within a more trinitarian outlook on love.

2. Risk in the Divine Providence: John Sanders

Vanstone’s idea of God as love—a love that risks in creating the world—is one of the inspirations for John Sanders’ *The God who Risks* from 1998.⁶¹ Looking at John Sanders (1956-), one sees that the context has shifted from British Anglicanism to American Evangelical Methodism, and so have the key points of theological concern. In a context where the practical life of the church concentrates on petitionary prayer, evangelization, and making a positive difference in the social world, Sanders finds that the otherwise widespread evangelical-Calvinistic theological determinism lacks coherency. If God decides and controls everything singlehandedly anyway, why should Christians pray, evangelize, and work to change the world? So Sanders seems to ask. As a result, Sanders became the co-founder of the movement “open theism” as an alternative to “classical theism.”⁶² In *The God who Risks*, Sanders’ move is to pit the “risk-view” of open theism

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sanders published a revised edition in 2007, which is the one I cite.

⁶² The five compatriots were Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. Their shared book, *The Openness of God*, also confronted “process theism,” inspired by Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John Cobb. For the discussion between open theists and process theologians, see Griffin, Cobb, and Pinnock, *Searching for an Adequate God*. The proponents of “classical theism” really took the bait and sparked an intense debate over open theism in the evangelical milieu of the United States, see e.g. Spiegel, “Does God Take Risks?” Some of the other open theists also work with the concept of risk, but their approach is pretty much covered by Sanders, see especially Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” 151 and *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God*, 125–35. For a more statically oriented view, see Bartholomew, *God, Chance and Purpose*, 223–42.

against the “no-risk-view” of classical theism, thus placing the concept of risk in the spotlight of theological inquiry.⁶³

The strength of Sanders’ work is the analytic clarity with which he follows through on the distinction between “risk” and “no-risk.” Like Vanstone, Sanders insists that the divine love does not control the beloved; rather, it requires the beloved to return the love in freedom. Therefore, rather than controlling everything in detail (the no-risk view), God sets up the general conditions of creation while allowing for the input of human beings (the risk view). This concerns both the God-human and the human-human relationship. Using the free-will vocabulary from analytic philosophy, Sanders believes that human beings have been created with a freedom that is “libertarian” in the sense of being incompatible with theological determinism. The result of this is that the will of God is not always done on the risk view—sometimes human beings act in ways that are contrary to the will of God. This enables Sanders to emphasize that some events lack a divine purpose: “it allows for pointless evil.”⁶⁴

This view has consequences for what one can say about the classical divine attributes. Sanders qualifies the meaning of the term “omniscience” with reference to the idea of human freedom. Given that humans are free, in such a way that God runs a risk in creating them, God cannot know with absolute certainty what humans will choose to do. The future is open not only for human beings, but also for God, hence the name “open” theism. God knows all things that can be known, which include all past and present events and states of affairs, and all future events that are causally determined by the present ones (which—it appears to Sanders—means all things that are not influenced by human free will).⁶⁵ Similarly, “omnipotence” comes to mean that God has the power to see through his

⁶³ The distinction between the risk-view and the no-risk view actually derives from Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, 39–68. This distinction guided the discussion between Helm and Hasker in their shared article Helm and Hasker, “Does God Take Risks in Governing the World?”

⁶⁴ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 226.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 206. Sanders calls this “dynamic omniscience” because it grows or changes with the events. As history moves along, divine knowledge expands, hence its dynamic character. It appears that Ingolf Dalferth and Philipp Stoellger adopt a similar notion of divine omniscience: “‘Weiß’ Gott um die als freie doch gerade unabweisbare Spontaneität menschlichen Handelns? Er weiß um die Möglichkeitsspielräume, aber nicht um deren faktischen Realisierung. Dann aber widerfährt auch ihm, was er nicht vorherbestimmt und nur prinzipiell, aber nicht konkret vorherweiß,” Dalferth and Stoellger, “Einleitung: Religion als Kontingenzkultur und die Kontingenz Gottes,” 37–38. For a political theological critique of the open theist view of divine omniscience, a critique that proposes an even more fragmented knowledge of God, see Reichel, “Gottes fragliches Wissen,” 183–85.

plans, that is, to create a people that will enter into loving fellowship with God.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, Sanders' understanding of God becomes the mirror image of that which he confronts, namely classical theism. Sanders retains a personalist model of God vis-à-vis the individual human being. Concerning the doctrine of God, this model does not allow much conceptual space for a trinitarian differentiation in the divine economy of love. Could it be that the triune God in the divine economy not only creates a space for human vulnerability freedom and vulnerability (in creation), but also shares it (in incarnation) and finally recreates it (in resurrection and consummation), each corresponding to a different aspect of authentic love?⁶⁷

Similarly, concerning theological anthropology, Sanders' theological personalism becomes too individualistic. This comes to the fore when Sanders brings his understanding of God to bear on biblical texts. On the one hand, Sanders' insistence on the genuine relationality between God and humans is important. God's biblical mercy, anger, or repentance should not be abandoned as forms of anthropomorphism.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Sanders' personalism lacks a concern for the victims of history. In the Exodus-story, God sends the plagues to make Pharaoh repent resisting the release of the Israelites.⁶⁹ As Sanders notes, "God ups the ante in the increasing destruction of the Egyptian economy."⁷⁰ Letting this biblical story stand without theological comment leaves a picture of a God who would throw an entire country, with all the people in it, into economic ruin just to make Pharaoh change his mind. This is equivalent to claiming that God sent Hurricane Katrina to make George Bush repent his immigration policy.⁷¹ Sanders' interpretation completely overlooks the victims of such a catastrophic event. Besides shedding a critical light on Sanders' rather uncritical biblical hermeneutics, this evaluation points to a problem with remaining within a personalist view of divine providence that lacks any sense of the interconnectedness of human lives. God is not only in a relationship with the mighty leader of a country, but also, perhaps even primarily, to the least among human beings too. I suggest that *engaging the sociology of risk enables a view of human beings as more embedded in their sociality.*

⁶⁶ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 191.

⁶⁷ For this critique directed at Vanstone, see Thomas, "Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation," 167, fn. 34 with reference to Welker's more differentiated concept of love, Welker, "Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love."

⁶⁸ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 27–30.

⁶⁹ Ex 6-14.

⁷⁰ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 58.

⁷¹ For a more prophetic approach to Hurricane Katrina, see Ruether, "After Katrina."

It is striking that Sanders does not consider any of the non-theological investigations into the concept of risk when writing his book on risk. Instead, Sanders structures his argument around the Methodist idea of the four sources of theology. That is, a theology is valid if it is in accordance with scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.⁷² It is clearly the evangelical context that influences his choice of topics to consider under the heading of “experience,” including evil and prayer.⁷³ I would argue that Sanders could have strengthened his argument towards a theology of risk if he had engaged with risk sociology in order to broaden his experience base and to harvest other conceptual resources. I hope to show that there is something to gain from such an interdisciplinary engagement, in particular with respect to the development of well-grounded theological proposals.

Inspiration for such an interdisciplinary approach to risk in theology comes from the next two theologians of risk that shall be considered, Niels Henrik Gregersen and Günter Thomas.

3. Between Risk Sociology and Trinitarian Theology: Niels Henrik Gregersen

Lutheran theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen’s (1956-) engagement with the concept of risk in theology can be found in a series of articles from 2002 onwards.⁷⁴ It should be noted that Gregersen’s broader commitment is to developing theology in dialogue with scientific truth claims of various sorts.⁷⁵ His commitment to a coherent theology that incorporates insights from resources beyond theology derives from his engagement with the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Gregersen’s dissertation encouraged the intertwining of theology and culture with respect to life in the

⁷² Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 30–33. This quadrilateral of theological sources is the structuring principle of Sanders’s book.

⁷³ On the risk view, God can change God’s mind when people pray. However, this understanding leads to the anthropologically megalomaniac notion that “God might sometimes refrain from acting beneficially in one person’s life because others have failed to pray,” *ibid.*, 282. Faith becomes objectified as something one can nourish to different degrees: For Clark Pinnock, people experience divine non-involvement in their lives partly because a “lack of faith on the human side. ... Our failure to pray impacts the world negatively,” Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness*, 135. Basinger appears to agree on this point, see Basinger, “Practical Implications,” 158.

⁷⁴ Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” “Risk and Religion,” “Risk and Religious Certainty,” “Beyond Secularist Supersessionism,” and “The Value of Risk-Taking.”

⁷⁵ For his work on evolutionary theory, see Gregersen, “The Idea of Creation and the Theory of Autopoietic Processes” and the debate it sparked in Zygon. Gregersen responded with Gregersen, “Autopoiesis.”

contemporary world.⁷⁶ His methodological approach to theology of risk, therefore, is quite different from that of Sanders. Gregersen develops a critical engagement with the scientific field of risk sociology.

This engagement results in an export of theological patterns of thought to sociology. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens both argue that while pre-modernity was characterized by living with dangerous fate, modernity, from the industrialization onwards, sought to take control over the world through the means of risk-calculus. This carried on until people—and Beck’s *Risk Society* aided with this—finally realized that a series of unintended consequences of modern industrial society now appear to them as dangers beyond their control, thus ushering in *reflexive modernity*.⁷⁷ Reconstructing Gregersen’s approach, I would argue that Gregersen exports the thought structure of Christian trinitarianism in order to see a unity in Beck and Giddens’s tripartite division of history. Through all ages, Gregersen argues, people have not only lived with exposure to uncontrollable fate and attempted to take control of it by means of risk-calculi, they have also lived with experiences of self-imposed uncontrollability,⁷⁸ and they still do.⁷⁹

Gregersen also maintains his trinitarian framework when he changes his direction, importing patterns of thought from risk sociology into a trinitarian theology of risk. He does so as follows:

- Using the distinction between *risk* and *danger*,⁸⁰ Gregersen gives a more precise formulation of the free will/free process defense. God the Father runs a risk in creation, thus bringing creatures into the danger of suffering from both chance events and human aggression.

⁷⁶ Gregersen, *Teologi og kultur*, see especially Chapter IV.

⁷⁷ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 30 and Beck, *World Risk Society*, 50.

⁷⁸ Gregersen goes back to reformation theology, considering how Luther, Wesley and Pascal determined risk and danger concerning the relationship to God, Gregersen, “Risk and Religious Certainty,” 27–31.

⁷⁹ Gregersen writes: “We live simultaneously in a premodern world of fate, in a modernizing attempt to control risk, and in a postmodern awareness of creating risks while trying to prevent them,” Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 222. This observation is undoubtedly correct from a philosophical point of view. Yet, one could also argue for a middle way, exporting an even more complex doctrine of the trinity. All three coexist (*perichoresis*), but some cultures and historical periods call forward some aspects more than others (*appropriation*). I return to this pair of concepts in Chapter 7. This is Tillich’s strategy in *The Courage to Be*, where he argues that anxiety has ontic, moral, and spiritual aspects, each of which was promoted in a specific time period (ancient civilization, middle ages and modernity respectively). Yet, all three coexist at all times, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 57–63.

⁸⁰ Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 30–38.

- With reference to the ethical principle of the *catastrophe threshold* to taking risks,⁸¹ especially on behalf of others, Gregersen argues: “The more risks God is willing to take within the order of creation, the more God must be able to absorb the risks and restore the loss incurred on the creatures in the order of salvation,”⁸² a restoration Gregersen attributes to the divine Spirit.
- Finally, Gregersen argues that the divine Son runs a *second-order risk*⁸³ by assuming the very fragile flesh of material existence as a means to absorb the *first order risks* of creation. However, Gregersen does not explicate very well *how* the divine assumption of the *suffering* Jesus constitutes an absorption of the first order risks of creation. In another essay, Gregersen states that the suffering Son transforms the suffering by spreading his “life-giving power ... into the suffering and dying bodies of humans and animals.”⁸⁴ However, what the idea of the dying Jesus’ spreading power into other suffering creatures really means remains unclear.

This basic trinitarian structuring of theology, including risk-theology, differs from Sanders and Vanstone, who both rely on the personalist model of God vis-à-vis the-human individual. Gregersen appropriates the phenomenology of authentic love from Vanstone, suggesting in line with Vanstone that limitlessness, precariousness, and vulnerability are the true marks of divine love. Gregersen also adopts Sanders’ explication of the consequences of this idea for the understanding of the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience.⁸⁵ Yet, while Sanders thinks primarily within this personalist divine-human structure, Gregersen seeks to work out the consequences of the statement that God is love in trinitarian terms.

While this dissertation critically discusses several aspects of Gregersen’s theology of risk throughout, it follows his insistence on an engagement with the academic field of risk sociology. Rather than exporting theological thought structures, however, two of the following chapters (4 and 5) aim to

⁸¹ Rescher, *Risk*, 67. Rescher calls it an *Unacceptable Risk Principle*.

⁸² Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 232.

⁸³ See Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 38–40. When human beings observe (first-order) risks, they usually take action to prevent the adversity from occurring. Yet, this action, on the other hand, might be risky in itself (second-order risks). There is reason to believe that post 9/11-legislation ruling to fortify the cockpit doors to prevent terrorists from taking control over aircrafts was a necessary cause for the Germanwings plane crash of 2015, where the co-pilot locked out the captain before making the plane descent and crash into a mountain, Kolatsis, “Aviation Security.”

⁸⁴ Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 205.

⁸⁵ See Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 226–29.

export theological commitments to human anthropology. Similarly, Part II will expand the interdisciplinary concepts beyond risk and danger to include “vulnerability” and “trust.” Finally, Part III offers a more *comprehensive* theology of risk and danger than Gregersen’s articles have been able to develop.

4. The Cross as Risk: Günter Thomas

Like Gregersen, German Reformed theologian Günter Thomas (1960-) explicates his theology of risk in close connection with the sociology of risk. Thomas distinguishes himself by means of a stronger Christological focus. His article, *Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation*, 2007, examines the question of whose will it was that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

Thomas’ Christological approach entails structuring his theology of risk around three moments in the incarnation of the Son: the incarnation, which includes the missionary activity of Jesus;⁸⁶ the crucifixion; and the resurrection.⁸⁷ Gregersen, in contrast, structures his theology around the unity of the three persons of the trinity; and Sanders sees divine providence as playing out through salvation history from Adam to present day as a long series of events. Yet, Thomas’ distinction between incarnation and crucifixion enables him to suggest that the incarnation entails an attempt at a divine rapprochement to human beings, to which human beings respond in rejection, crucifying the incarnate Son. In other words, the cross of

⁸⁶ To clarify, “incarnation” does not mean the mere point of contact between divine and human at Jesus’ birth. The “flesh” that the Son assumes entails the entire life-story of Jesus. But, it is clear that Thomas aims at the distinction between the missionary activity of the divine Son as a willed and active enterprise, and the crucifixion as something Jesus suffers more passively. This is similar to theologian Jeff Pool, who also offers a tight conceptual interpretation of the “self-sacrifice” of incarnation, distinguishing between the activity of becoming a human person and the passivity of being overcome by human evil, see Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 217–378.

⁸⁷ Thomas largely follows Bonhoeffer’s distinction between these three moments: “In Jesus Christus glauben wir den menschengewordenen, gekreuzigten und auferstandenen Gott. In der Menschwerdung erkennen wir die Liebe Gottes zu seiner Kreatur, in der Kreuzigung das Gericht Gottes über alles Fleisch, in der Auferstehung den Willen Gottes zu einer neuen Welt,” Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 83, see Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 352. Simultaneously, Thomas rejects Bonhoeffer’s strong notion of providence. In Thomas’ judgment, Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of providence renders all worldly occurrences essentially positive, simply because they derive from the providence of God, *ibid.*, 185. For a discussion emphasizing Bonhoeffer’s strong doctrine of providence, see Burkholder, “Violence, Atonement, and Retributive Justice: Bonhoeffer as a Test Case,” 398, fn. 14.

Christ constitutes *a risk* of the incarnation in the sense of a possible unwanted event for God, and not its purpose.

Thomas suggests that the divine Son becomes a human person in Jesus Christ for a number of different reasons, among which is the divine valuation of creation. The cross of Christ, then, is a risk that God runs by becoming a human person in Jesus Christ. It is partly the risk of becoming fragile flesh, and partly the enhanced risk of preaching the Kingdom of God before powerful people concerned with their own kingdoms. As a contingent consequence of this life, the cross becomes the destiny of Jesus. Thomas' daring thesis is that the crucifixion of the divine Son was the will neither of an abusive Father, nor of the divine Son who became incarnate trusting the Father to hear his prayer "deliver us from evil."⁸⁸ Instead, the crucifixion was the will of sinful and systemic human powers.⁸⁹ As a result, Thomas comes to interpret the cross as the darkest moment of divine-human history, although the cross—secondarily—witnesses the divine willingness to suffer with human beings.⁹⁰ Rather, Thomas highlights the soteriological significance of the incarnate life of the divine Son and his resurrection by the Spirit. Concerning the resurrection, Thomas basically argues that God, rather than withdrawing the commitment to creation because of the human sin in the crucifixion, sends the Spirit to *create anew* on Easter morning.⁹¹

The reader may notice that I adopt and develop a number of Thomas' insights over the course of what follows. Yet, I would argue that Thomas overlooks the necessity of developing a theology of divine reconciliation if the cross is regarded merely as a risk.⁹² While Thomas rightly argues that the new creation promises new life (also) to those who have lost it unjustly and prematurely (an idea that I develop in Chapter 10 on consummation), Thomas does not consider how God deals with the *relational distortion* that has happened in so far as human beings are *guilty* of wrongdoing. In

⁸⁸ No one, to my knowledge, has argued that it could be the sole will of the Spirit.

⁸⁹ Thomas, "Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation," 172.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹² Sanders develops a theology of divine forgiveness that appears to be based on the idea that more routes are open; but this is incoherent. On the one hand, he suggests that the decision of the Son's self-giving on the cross occurs as late as the situation in Gethsemane, for at that point, the divine purpose of salvation could have no other course, Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 102. On the other hand, he speaks of the cross as the price that needs to be paid when one forgives, *ibid.*, 106. If the cross plays a necessary role for divine forgiveness, the implication is that the cross must be a part of the divine purpose with the incarnation.

technical terms, divine grace is not only effective; it is also imputative.⁹³ In the assessment of the Scottish theologian H.R. Mackintosh: “Among the possible brief phrases in which the essence of Christianity might fairly be summed up, one certainly would be: I believe in God who forgives sins through Jesus Christ.”⁹⁴ *There are not only victims, but also sinners in this world. Therefore, a theology of risk should address both aspects of human lives as victims and sinners.* The Christian symbol system should—as Norwegian theologian Paul Leer-Salvesen insists—remember to nourish the “theological language of sin, guilt, atonement, forgiveness, and reconciliation.”⁹⁵ In this dissertation, I wish to emphasize *the role of the incarnation in the divine forgiveness of human sin, on the basis of Thomas’ hypothesis that the cross constitutes a risk.*⁹⁶

5. A Theological Social Justice-Approach to Risk: Sharon Welch

A third theologian who has worked with the concept of risk, insofar as it arises in a dialogue between sociology and theology, is Sharon Welch (1952-). Though Welch’s work *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*⁹⁷ came out in 1990, it does not appear on the list of literature drawn upon by Sanders, Gregersen, and Thomas. As such, Welch is foreigner to this field. Yet, her pivotal work has the potential to contribute immensely to this conversation.

⁹³ See Rieger, “Gnade/Gnade Gottes: IV. Kirchengeschichtlich,” col. 1030.

⁹⁴ Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 1. See also Chapter 2.4 where I go into greater length on this point.

⁹⁵ Leer-Salvesen, “Theology after the Massacre in Norway,” 114. This statement appears in the context of encouraging other academic fields to learn from the forensic theological tradition, but he thereby implicitly insists that theology should uphold its own tradition for this language.

⁹⁶ This is controversial. Many early Christian interpretations of the cross see it as a necessary condition of salvation. Yet, Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that atonement theology must be interpreted with a view to its adequacy for the problems at hand rather than simply as a repetition of early Christianity: “Deren Wahrheit ist ja nicht schon durch die Tatsache ihres Auftretens im Urchristentum verbürgt und ist auch nicht einfach eine Funktion ihres Alters. Die älteste Deutung (vielleicht die des Todes Jesu als Prophetenschicksal) muß nicht die profundeste und Sachgemäßeste sein,” Pannenberg, *ST II*, 469. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza adds to this argument that the early Christian interpretations of the crucifixion constitute “rhetorical accounts” seeking to “make sense” of Jesus’ “brutal death as a condemned criminal,” Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 108. The point for Thomas, it appears, is to let the brutality of Jesus’ death stand out.

⁹⁷ In the second edition, Welch argues that her book would be more properly called an “ethic of risk” rather than a “feminist ethic of risk” for, as she argues, the ethic of risk itself is not feminist since it is based on the writings of both “womanist and African American male ethicists,” Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 15.

Gregersen and Thomas study the sociology of risk, importing and exporting various thought structures into theological discourse. In contrast, Welch addresses a more concretely contextualized example of the experience of risk and danger. Specifically, she addresses the 1980s middle class despair over the apparent inevitability and pervasiveness of injustice, war and violence—a despair that, she argues, leads to a lack of engagement for social justice.⁹⁸ Her analysis is that such middleclass despair has its roots in the cultural construction of the concept of *responsibility*. In her American context, people see responsibility within the confinements of an *ethic of control*. In this context, “responsibility” comes to mean making sure that a specific goal is realized. Under this conception of responsibility, middle class persons, who are unable to bring about the peace and justice they urge for, despair and give up any struggle to realize their goals. This is where the concept of risk becomes relevant for Welch’s thinking.

To destabilize the contemporary ethic of control and its underlying concept of responsibility, Welch studies ethics, theology, and literature in the African-American tradition. Inspired by these sources, Welch proposes an “ethic of risk” that construes responsibility very differently. Rather than ensuring the realization of a certain goal, taking responsibility for resisting injustice means creating a matrix *from which further action can ensue*. I would assume that the ethic of control remains reasonable when the goal is something as simple as making oneself a coffee. However, as soon as realizing one’s goals requires the cooperation of others, as it does if the goal is social justice, an ethic of control entails seeing others as mere instruments rather than subjects in their own right. Therefore, responsibility construed within an ethic of risk aims at empowering others to contribute towards social justice. An ethic of risk begins at the point of despair over not being able to realize one’s goals, urging and hoping that possibilities will arise in spite of what appears to be the case.⁹⁹

Welch then considers the theological underpinning of the ethics of control and its construction of responsibility. She argues that a theology of divine omnipotence, “assumes that absolute power can be a good.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Gregersen also explores the religious basis for an ethic of risk. For Gregersen, the parable of the talents, Mt 25:14-30, and Jesus’ general demand of the disciples leave “the safe ordinaries of work and family life” invite a risk-taking attitude to life, see Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 225.

⁹⁹ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 17, 40, 46.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 111. Welch’s concept of omnipotence is not dialectic; most theologians consider divine omnipotence limited by the rules of logic, and many theologians deem it limited by the divine nature as love, see Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 63–64. However, to avoid her critique, the understanding of God requires also the limitation of love.

History has shown that such ideas too easily become a corruption for those in power who consider themselves legitimate in their absolute rule without consideration for the ruled. Such a theology has different consequences for the powerful and the powerless.

Even if one were to insist that omnipotence is something reserved for the divine, the *powerful* among human believers can believe that they surrender themselves to the divine omnipotence, thus considering their own actions in concordance with divine commands. This would convey absolute authority to their actions regardless of their consequences for other human beings.¹⁰¹

Conversely, cultural understandings of God as omnipotent (in the absolute sense) prompt the *powerless* among human believers to live with an ethic of self-sacrifice. The consequence of this understanding is apparent in theologies, where Christ is supposed to have sacrificed himself in response to the divine command.¹⁰² Opposition to this Christian ethic of self-sacrifice, where love is the same as letting go of oneself, is a move that much feminist and womanist theology shares, because of its problematic perpetuation of patriarchal relationships.¹⁰³

In contrast to such an ethic of self-sacrifice, Welch highlights the ethic of risk that takes its starting point in the communal resistance to injustice. While such resistance may very well end in harm, it is not about sacrificing oneself. Rather than losing one's self in risking harm and death, one really gains oneself, Welch argues:

One may be deprived of the accoutrements of a successful self—wealth, prestige, and job security—but another self, one constituted by relationships with others, is found and maintained in acts of resistance. When we begin from a self created by love for nature and for other people, choosing *not* to resist injustice would be the ultimate loss of self.¹⁰⁴

Rather than the willingness to sacrifice oneself, an ethic of risk begins with a loving affirmation of both self and others.¹⁰⁵

While Welch does not offer any alternative Christology, she does hint at her doctrine of God, which, I would argue, is too one-sided. Arguing for a theology of divine immanence, she really reduces the word “God” to an adjective. For Welch, “God” names those things that enables and

¹⁰¹ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 112.

¹⁰² Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 47, 117, 161, 165, see especially 117-20 for a critique of Paul Tillich on this score.

¹⁰³ To back up this statement, Welch refers to Rosemary Ruether, Judith Plaskow and Mary Daly, see *ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 165., emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

encourages resistance. “Divinity then connotes a quality of relationships, lives, events, and natural processes that are worthy of worship, that provide orientation, focus and guidance to our lives.”¹⁰⁶ However, since God for Welch is not even the source of human relations, but merely a name for when they function towards justice, Welch’s doctrine of God constitutes a theological “non-realism, which reduces the reality of God to the good experiences of life.”¹⁰⁷ In this dissertation, I seek to accommodate Welch’s concern—that theology should not legitimize an ethic of control, not even hidden in an ethic of self-sacrifice—into a theological framework that allows God the position of ultimate reality.

While Welch has not herself offered a Christology to replace the Christological motif of self-sacrifice that she denounces, Karen Baker-Fletcher has developed a Christology inspired by Welch.

6. Christology of Risk: Karen Baker-Fletcher

Inspired by Welch’s ethic of risk, Karen Baker-Fletcher proposed a Christology of risk.¹⁰⁸ A womanist theologian,¹⁰⁹ Baker-Fletcher writes within a tradition that remembers the civil rights movement struggle for justice for African-Americans in the United States. Entrenched in the tradition of this struggle, Baker-Fletcher discovers parallels in the life of Jesus, who also struggled against injustice. Yet, Baker-Fletcher rightly emphasizes that Jesus is different from other human beings: Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us in the dust.¹¹⁰ The incarnate God is just as vulnerable to harm from social injustice as other human beings.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 176. See also 179. But is this enough to overcome sin and give new life to the victims of history?

¹⁰⁷ Gregersen, *Den generøse ortodoksi*, 467, my translation, see appendix. Gregersen levels this criticism against the Danish pastor Thorkild Grosbøll. Even though Gregersen is critical of classical theism—especially the notion of God as impassible, *ibid.*, 477—he still argues that the referent of the word “God” remains prior to creation, as firstness to secondness, *ibid.*, 470. Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity suggests that God also turns into secondness by becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ, *ibid.*, 481.

¹⁰⁸ Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, “God with Us in the Dust,” and *Dancing with God*.

¹⁰⁹ Novelist Alice Walker coined the term “womanism” in her novel *The Color Purple*. The term became influential for African-American women, scholars, and activists who could identify neither with the male dominated black social ethics and theology, nor with its middle-class dominated feminist counterparts. See also Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, ix and 7.

¹¹⁰ Baker-Fletcher, “God with Us in the Dust,” 188 where she disagrees with modern “low” Christologies of adoption. Yet, it should be noted that Baker-Fletcher fails to take her high Christology into account when it comes to the crucifixion: “[I]t is not the crucifixion that makes Christ unique. Others were crucified before Jesus, with Jesus,

The combination of vulnerability and laboring for justice leads Baker-Fletcher to suggest that Jesus risks the crucifixion:

Jesus' ministry of resistance against evil and his empowerment of others involved the real risks of political persecution, character assassination, and even death. The cross must not be forgotten because such persecution is a possible consequence of standing up for what is morally right.¹¹²

Pondering the importance of preaching Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23), Baker-Fletcher argues that the crucifixion constitutes an important symbol of human *sin*, not one of salvation, while the symbol of *resurrection* points to the power of the Spirit to create anew.¹¹³ In much the same spirit as Günter Thomas, such an interpretation gives an answer to the theodicy of the crucifixion. It ensures a “non-violent atonement,”¹¹⁴ since *God did not, in any of the three divine persons, bring about or want the violent crucifixion.*¹¹⁵ And it takes those people in Baker-Fletcher's tradition seriously for whom the interpretation of the cross as a divine self-sacrifice on behalf of humans has lost its power as symbol of salvation.¹¹⁶

and after Jesus. What makes the story of Jesus the Christ distinctive is the resurrection,” *ibid.*, 190.

¹¹¹ An eco-theologian, Baker-Fletcher offers something similar to Gregersen's idea of deep incarnation: “if human beings are made from the dust of the earth, then Jesus [as the incarnate God] is not only ‘flesh and spirit’ or ‘human and divine,’ but Jesus is also *earthy* and *divine* ... If Jesus is God with us, then Jesus is God with us in the very elements—dust, water, air, and energy—that make up our bodies,” Baker-Fletcher, “God with Us in the Dust,” 188–189, compare Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation.”

¹¹² Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 80, see also Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 137.

¹¹³ Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 79.

¹¹⁴ For her sympathetic discussion of Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, see Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 136.

¹¹⁵ Baker-Fletcher, “God with Us in the Dust,” 189.

¹¹⁶ Baker-Fletcher refers to the influential work by Delores Williams on the topic of atonement in womanist theology. Williams denounces the black woman's role, coerced or voluntary, as a surrogate for white women, either as worker, house wife, and sexual partner, Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 62–73. Williams is also critical of this role's legitimization in the image of Christ's redemption as the “ultimate surrogate figure,” dying on the cross and taking sin upon himself, be it coerced by the Father or voluntary, *ibid.*, 162. Instead, Williams argues that the salvation of black women concerns Jesus' survival strategies towards an identity shaped by the Gospel, *ibid.*, 164. While Williams sees salvation exclusively in Jesus' ministry and the resurrection purely as immanent before the cross, Baker-Fletcher speaks more highly of the resurrection as the salvation from the death on the cross: “While the historical Jesus was crucified, the resurrected Jesus lives,” Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 77–78. For an overview of feminist and womanist theories of atonement, see also Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 251.

Bringing Welch and Baker-Fletcher's theology of risk and resistance into the discussion about a theology of risk qualifies (or at least nuances) the theology of divine love that Sanders, in particular, promotes. Their commitment points towards finding a way out of the alternative "overwhelming power" or "sacrificial love,"¹¹⁷ a dichotomy that derives from Sanders' contrasting of the "risk" and the "no-risk" views.

7. Completing the Overview: Three Additional Voices

For the sake of mapping the field of theologies of risk, let me briefly mention three other theologies of risk.

In 1990, Richard Holloway (then bishop of Edinburgh) edited a collection of essays titled *The Divine Risk*.¹¹⁸ Perhaps the most important contribution to this text was that of (later) archbishop Rowan Williams. Williams offered a phenomenological description of *speech* as something that leaves the speaker exposed and vulnerable. Since God speaks to the world, paradigmatically in and through the preaching of Jesus, God takes on the risk that human beings might idolatrously domesticate God's message for their own distorted purposes. Yet, a part of what God says ultimately remains beyond human domestication, Williams argues: "To say that [Jesus] is 'risen' is at least to say that he still speaks, is still free of what is said to him and about him."¹¹⁹ God remains in a position of speaking to human beings. This conviction encourages human beings to keep listening to God and run the risk of locating the God of the outcast in the contemporary world.¹²⁰ Much of what follows is in line with William's exposition in this article.

The founder of black theology, James Cone, collected a number of his own essays in a 1999 volume called *Risks of Faith*.¹²¹ In the struggle for black survival and recognition in America, Cone felt the need to construe theology in light of the black experience, contending that "God is found

¹¹⁷ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 110. "We should not look forward to overwhelming power but to the way of sacrificial love. In Jesus we learn that God has chosen this way in the world—the way of cross and resurrection, which is also normative for the Christian life."

¹¹⁸ Holloway, *The Divine Risk*. The six contributors are David Jenkins and Rowan Williams on God and Risk, John Habgood and David L. Edwards on Church and Risk, and A. N. Wilson and Elizabeth Templeton on Individual and Risk.

¹¹⁹ Williams, "God and Risk (2)," 20.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²¹ See also Walker, "Faith as Taking the Risk."

among the poor, the wretched, and the sick,”¹²² acknowledging that such a theological commitment runs the risk of misconstruing who God really is. In “accepting the risk of faith and the ethical burden of making decisions about life and death without an infallible guide,” Cone found himself inspired by Paul Tillich.¹²³ Tillich asserts a “morality of risk,” where human beings take the courageous risk to depend on their own moral judgment in responsibility to divine authority. In contrast, a “moralism of authority” also depends on the divine authority—or some other—for the *content* of one’s ethical decision. “A morality which plays safe, by subjecting itself to an unconditional authority, is suspect. It has not the courage to take guilt and tragedy upon itself. True morality is a morality of risk. . . . Moralisms give safety, morality lives in the unsafety of risk and courage.”¹²⁴ These insights are important for theological methodology: systematic theology has to dare to declare itself when the theological tradition is unclear and when it needs revision.

Finally, it might be observed that, neighboring the theologies of risk, is the theology of vulnerability.¹²⁵ Within this field, Baptist theologian Jeff Pool has authored a two-volume work titled *God’s Wounds*, in which God runs risks both in creation and incarnation.¹²⁶ Due to the technicality of his

¹²² Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 37. The risk of faith, for Cone, is the “existential burden of making decisions about human liberation without being completely sure what Jesus did or would do,” *ibid.*, 36–37.

¹²³ In an earlier book, Cone quoted Tillich’s *Theology of Culture* with the term “risk of faith” understood as an existential risk “in which the meaning and fulfillment of our lives is at stake,” Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 18. In Tillich, the unconditional manifests itself in concrete embodiments, among which he mentions the “prophetic-political demands for social justice, if they are the ultimate concern of religious and secular movements,” Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 10. This is what Cone picks up concerning the risk of focusing on the black experience of oppression in America: “In the black world no one takes life for granted: every moment of being is surrounded with the threat of nonbeing. If black theology is to relate itself to this situation, it too must take the risk of faith and speak with a passion in harmony with the revolutionary spirit of the oppressed,” Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 19.

¹²⁴ Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 141. Also Rudolf Bultmann uses the term “risk” to express the existential responsibility, Bultmann, “Wissenschaft und Existenz,” 119. In an earlier discussion with Martin Rade about the certainty of faith, however, Bultmann had defended his idea of faith as a venture by repudiating the term “risk” for its lack of existential depth, Bultmann, “Der Glaube als Wagnis,” col. 1008.

¹²⁵ In this context, the following works deserve to be mentioned: Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*; Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*; Keul, *Weihnachten - das Wagnis der Verwundbarkeit* and Springhart, *Der verwundbare Mensch*.

¹²⁶ Pool, *God’s Wounds: Hermeneutic of the Christian Symbol of Divine Suffering. Vol. 1. Divine Vulnerability and Creation and Vol. 2. Evil and divine suffering*. Pool plans a third volume which will focus on tragedy and divine suffering.

language, I discuss only small portions and key insights from this work throughout the dissertation rather than giving it a lengthy elaboration.

8. Conclusion: The Need for A Comprehensive Theology

Throughout this presentation of theologians of risk, I have laid out a series of markers indicating how I will proceed throughout the thesis, and what points will be discussed further in Chapters 8-11. I will briefly sum up the insights that have been considered.

- Vanstone emphasizes that the *freedom* of human beings derives from the nature of God as limitless, precarious, and vulnerable love. It is a love that expends itself so that the relations to the beloved become a matter of mutual influence. Sanders continues this tradition, clarifying what it means to say that God loves the world and seeking to win its love in return. Vanstone and Sanders' theses share two weaknesses, however: 1) Their concept of God is too providential, thinking in terms of God vis-à-vis human beings. I develop a more trinitarian theology of risk, with a clearer differentiation of what divine love means. 2) They largely reduce human anthropology to its ability to respond to God. I examine the sociology of risk to gain a broader and more contextual view of theological anthropology.
- Examining the sociology of risk and allowing some of its thought structures to illuminate theological problems, Gregersen and Thomas offer crucial inspiration for grounding the theology of risk in an interdisciplinary discourse. I follow Gregersen's call for a trinitarian outlook, and Thomas has proposed a theological statement, the significance of which this dissertation explores over long stretches: *that the cross of Christ constitutes a divine risk*. Yet, Thomas, in particular, reveals a lack of concern for a forensic theology of reconciliation.¹²⁷ In Chapter 4, I show that living with risk and danger also entails living with a sense of guilt, to which the proper theological response is a theology of divine forgiveness.
- Finally, Welch and Baker-Fletcher add a welcome social justice component to the project. Welch's focus on the experience of despair when confronted with the danger of injustice encourages a more direct engagement with the *experience* of living with risk and danger. I draw greatly on in their criticism of divine omnipotence and the ethics of self-sacrifice, and on their proposals for an ethic of risk, not least in

¹²⁷ In contexts outside risk theology, Gregersen briefly discussed divine forgiveness, Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and the Face of God," 161, but his phenomenological approach requires elaboration.

Christology. However, Welch's doctrine of God becomes too immanent for this project.

This dissertation aims to contribute qualitatively new perspectives on risk in theology. The aim is also to add more quantitative depth to the theologies of risk as an already existing yet underdeveloped framework for a contemporary constructive theology.

More generally, I have shown that theologies of risk seek to communicate traditional and renewed theological insights to both: 1) an audience already familiar with the theories of risk; and, 2) an audience so engaged in the life-world of risk and danger, that the theory of risk would make sense to them. This is also the audience of this dissertation.

Notably, this overview of theologies of risk has shown a high degree of theological diversity. To bring some sense of unity to this field, I go beyond its previous scholarship. In other words, rather than negotiating all aspects of this dissertation's theology on the basis of the diverse field of theologies of risk, I have found it helpful to find a more comprehensive theological proposal as a vantage point. This proposal does not constitute a theology of risk per se, but contains a viable theological outlook on which I can build such a theology of living with risk and danger. This comprehensive theology is David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*.¹²⁸

David Kelsey (1932-) is a theology professor emeritus at Yale Divinity School. Kelsey published his magnum opus, *Eccentric Existence*, in 2009. This is the work that I will engage with primarily. It constitutes the culmination of a long-term project in theological anthropology within the postliberal tradition. While the founding fathers of postliberal theology, George Lindbeck and Hans Frei, focused their attention on methodological problems,¹²⁹ Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* implements key insights from the postliberal tradition into a material study of the dogmatic locus of

¹²⁸ I wrote my master's thesis, awarded a gold medal from the University of Copenhagen, as a comparison of David Kelsey and Wolfhart Pannenberg, in particular their use of the symbol of *imago Dei* in their Christology and theological anthropology. While the engagement with David Kelsey then was more comparative and descriptive, this dissertation approaches Kelsey in a more constructive way, seeking his theological insights and amending them with critical discussions. Counting Pannenberg as one of the risk-theologians, it would have been possible to use his *Systematic Theology* as my key interlocutor. I have chosen Kelsey over Pannenberg for two reasons. First, I find Kelsey's distinction between the three aspects of the divine economy (creation, consummation, and reconciliation) important and fruitful. Second, for all its ingenuity, Kelsey's work deserves to be appropriated and brought into new conversations in contemporary theological discussion.

¹²⁹ Consider Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* and Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. and Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*.

theological anthropology. However, I agree with former Cambridge Professor of Divinity David Ford, when he says of Kelsey's work: "It might be seen as the theological culmination of the Yale School, but its scope is far wider than that."¹³⁰ For instance, *Eccentric Existence* transcends a very strict understanding of postliberal as "self-profiling" and as speaking "ill about the life that we all share."¹³¹ Kelsey not only takes an immense interest in exploring what characterizes human beings in their shared humanity but he also prepares and enters a dialogue with non-theological claims to truth (more on that in Chapter 3.3B).

A theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence* lays out a comprehensive view of the human being in relation to God and the world, a view based on a trifold imagination of how God relates to human beings. According to Kelsey, God relates to human beings in three distinct ways. 1) God *creates* the world and human beings; 2) God *consummates* the world, drawing it towards eschatological consummation; and 3) God *reconciles* human beings to God when they have sinned.¹³² Distinguishing these three aspects of the divine economy ensures the trinitarian scope that I have asked for. Therefore, Part III takes its basic shape from Kelsey. Chapter 7 offers a deeper introduction to the logic of Kelsey's work and the leading distinction between creation, consummation, and reconciliation.¹³³

Besides adopting Kelsey's basic trifold structure, I will follow Kelsey's choice of focusing primarily on the divine economy more than the immanent Trinity. This corresponds to the problem-oriented approach of this dissertation, focusing on the experience of living with risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system. As a result, I will largely put aside discussions, not only of the immanent Trinity, but also of the divine attributes, the divine kenosis, and the technical aspects of theodicy that play such a significant role in the theologies of risk—especially in Sanders' theology of divine providence.¹³⁴ Such a constriction is why this dissertation has been titled "studies" in interdisciplinary systematic theology.

¹³⁰ Ford, "Humanity Before God," 32.

¹³¹ Gregersen, Kristensson Uggla, and Wyller, *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age*, 19 and 20.

¹³² EE 5.

¹³³ Perhaps the reader wonders about the order of sequence: creation, consummation, and reconciliation. Many would assume that the order should be creation (Father), reconciliation (Son), and consummation (Spirit). This point will be picked up again in Chapter 7.

¹³⁴ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 173–220.

The following chapter discusses more thoroughly some of the methodological implications of using David Kelsey as a primary interlocutor in a theological dissertation on risk.

3. Methodology: Interdisciplinary Systematic Theology

In the introductory chapter, I presented this dissertation as a work of interdisciplinary systematic theology, claiming that systematic theology constitutes an investigation of the Christian symbol system in light of certain contemporary experiences.

Talking about “interdisciplinary” theological investigations presupposes that theology is a discipline distinct from other areas of academic scholarship; and the “interdisciplinarity” of such an investigation involves an attempt to bridge those disciplines. Interdisciplinary theology seeks to engage with other disciplines. In the context of this dissertation, it refers to a mutual exchange of concepts and analyses of human existence for mutual enrichment. This particular exchange draws upon material primarily from sociology and theology. The mutual enrichment entails a mutual *qualification* of each discipline’s analyses of the shared world, such that one discipline sheds light on the other discipline’s blind spots, leading to a more complex view of the human being as living with risk and danger. This chapter explores the theological “method of correlation,” that undergirds the interdisciplinary process employed throughout what follows.

1. Method of Correlation

The systematic theologian Paul Tillich was influential in formulating the method of correlation.¹³⁵ Later theologians expanded the method of correlation in other directions. But, since Tillich’s account presupposes the idea of Christianity as a symbol system,¹³⁶ I remain with his formulation of the correlation method:

In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the *human situation* out of which the existential

¹³⁵ The method of correlation dates back to German *Vermittlungstheologie* in the 19th Century, see Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Task and Methods,” 41.

¹³⁶ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza presents the history of the method’s reception by various catholic theologians, *ibid.*, 41–47. Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Joseph Ratzinger, Rosemary Radford Ruether and David Tracy all formulate alternative ways of understanding the Christian pole that are different to Tillich’s interpretation, e.g. as the historical Jesus (Küng), the Christian texts (Tracy), or the prophetic principle (Ruether).

questions arise, and it demonstrates that the *symbols* used in the Christian message are the *answers* to these questions.¹³⁷

Here, the word “correlation” means that theology should clarify the relationship between the Christian message and the situation of human beings. This relationship should be sought by correlating the questions implied in the human situation and the answers of the Christian symbol system.¹³⁸ For instance, the first thesis of this dissertation correlates the symbol of divine creation with the existential question regarding the origin of value inherent in the experience of having something valuable to lose, something vulnerable to being lost.

The method of correlation becomes an *interdisciplinary* method when Tillich suggests that other disciplines can contribute to the analysis of the human situation:

The analysis of the human situation employs materials made available by man’s creative self-interpretation in all realms of culture. Philosophy contributes, but so do poetry, drama, the novel, therapeutic psychology, and sociology.¹³⁹

This dissertation follows Tillich inasmuch as it insists on the possibility of a dialogue between theology and the contemporary situation, specifically, as this situation appears through an interdisciplinary analysis.

Exploring *answers* in the Christian symbol system to existential questions that may arise from this analysis. This means relaying the meta-empirical content of the symbols as a possible address to the reality that is experienced. According to the Christian symbol system, for instance, the value of the world owes to its being created by a valuing divine Creator.

Taking a cue from the philosopher of religion, Jan-Olav Henriksen, I would also claim that the answers provided by religious symbol systems encourage certain ways of relating to and acting in the world, what Henriksen understands as the religion’s potential for “social and personal transformation.”¹⁴⁰ Exploring the *transformative* potential of the Christian symbol system concerning the situation of living with risk and danger are amongst the tasks of this dissertation.

¹³⁷ Tillich, *STI*, 62, emphasis added. Similarly, Kelsey sees it as a “substantive standard of excellence” for theology to evaluate the adequacy of traditional Christian formulations in every new socio-historical context, EE 24, see also 44.

¹³⁸ Tillich, *STI*, 18.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 63. In contrast, Tracy focuses more narrowly on “a phenomenology of the religious dimension present in everyday and scientific experience and language,” Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 47.

¹⁴⁰ Henriksen, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation*, 23.

While Tillich maintains that systematic theology provides *answers*, I find it essential to maintain that systematic theology can only explore *possible* answers. Determining whether the Christian symbol system providing those answers also corresponds to a divine reality goes beyond the limits of this dissertation. Rather, I follow Kelsey in doing theology in a hypothetical mode. *Given* that the Christian symbol system exists and functions in human lives, how might these symbols address the question of risk and danger raised in the contemporary situation?¹⁴¹ Yet, it remains for the Christian symbol system *itself* to claim its own referentiality to the divine revelation and the divine economy. This is a referentiality that the systematic theologian has to presuppose if he or she wants to explore the possibilities of this symbol system.

The method of correlation calls upon this dissertation to analyze, evaluate and develop new ideas concerning the two poles in Tillich's method of correlation, namely the human situation (in this instance, the situation of living with risk and danger) with the purpose of finding implicit existential questions; and the Christian system of symbols with the purpose of finding possible answers to these questions. I explore these two poles in the following sections.

2. Analyses of the Human Situation

Analyses of the human situation of living with risk and danger will be the subject for Part II of this dissertation. There I draw primarily upon the academic field of "risk sociology." I have constrained my engagement with non-theological fields to risk sociology for three reasons. First, accounting for further academic areas, which could have been relevant for analyzing the situation of living with risk and danger, like risk psychology¹⁴² or security studies,¹⁴³ would leave much less space for constructive interdisciplinary work and theology-proper discussion. Second, precedents for theological engagement specifically with risk sociology already exist, meaning that the present study could align itself with and seek to fruitfully advance an extant tradition of theological thought. Third, risk sociology constitutes a well-rounded and complex field of phenomenological and

¹⁴¹ EE 22. Concerning the concept of divine revelation, I follow Gordon Kaufman, who argues that revelation can only be the conclusion, not the premise of one's theological work, Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, 3. I will leave the reader to decide for him or herself regarding this proposition.

¹⁴² For psychometrics studies of risk and religion, see e.g. Liu, "Are Risk-Taking Persons Less Religious?" and Sinha, Cnaan, and Gelles, "Adolescent Risk Behaviors and Religion."

¹⁴³ See e.g. Hughes and Lai, *Security Studies: A Reader* and Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*.

sociological analysis, one which is rich enough to justify an exclusive theological engagement with it. Such a rich field is apt for investigating the experience of living with risk and danger in a theological light. In sum, constraining myself to risk sociology ensures a sharp focus that facilitates a rich and constructive interdisciplinary engagement.

The risk scholar Jens O. Zinn has suggested dividing this field into five different strands:¹⁴⁴

- a “risk society” branch informed primarily by Ulrich Beck, which focuses on the dynamics of risk society, where politics are determined by the anticipation of those primarily environmental hazards that are side-effects of industrialization;¹⁴⁵
- a “systems theoretical” perspective from Niklas Luhmann that investigates risk as self-induced harm through its distinction from danger.¹⁴⁶
- a Michel Foucault-inspired “governmentalist” approach, which investigates the societal effects of calculable risks in areas like medicine and insurance;¹⁴⁷
- an “edgework” perspective, which explores the social dynamics of voluntary high-risk activities like extreme sports;¹⁴⁸ and,
- a “cultural approach” to risk, originating in Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s *Risk and Culture*, which reveals how cultural preferences and convictions determine the selection of risks.¹⁴⁹

While I touch upon all five discourses during the dissertation, the two first have proven particularly influential. Instead of performing deep engagements with a single author, e.g. Luhmann’s systems theory, or Beck’s entire sociological *œuvre*, I have prioritized small-scale problem-oriented studies focused on the situation of living with risk and danger. I have prioritized the immediacy of the situation of living with risk and danger and the sociological material’s ability to gain a deeper understanding of this situation. For instance, as an addition to the five theories of risk sociology just mentioned, I have worked with the

¹⁴⁴ Zinn, “Introduction.” This bullet list derives from my article “Risk and Vulnerability: An Overview of the Field,” which appears as Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁵ See Beck, *Risikogesellschaft* and *Weltrisikogesellschaft*.

¹⁴⁶ In particular, Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos* and “Risiko und Gefahr.”

¹⁴⁷ An English edition of Foucault’s main article on “governmentality” appeared in Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, *The Foucault Effect*.

¹⁴⁸ Lyng, “Edgework” and “Edgework, Risk, and Uncertainty.”

¹⁴⁹ Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*.

Relational Theory of Risk, proposed by the Swedish risk-scholars Åsa Boholm and Hervé Corvellec in 2011, which focuses on some ramifications of living with risk. For a problem-oriented dissertation, the relational theory of risk offers lucidity and broad explanatory power. Yet, it has also become evident that a deeper engagement with interdisciplinary sociological and theological source material could enhance the relational theory of risk significantly. Therefore, in Chapter 5, I refine the relational theory of risk through Luhmann's distinction between risk and danger, his theory of trust, and insights from select theologians.

I have used two general criteria for mining the field of risk sociology. Primarily, I explore whether its insights can contribute to a theological-sociological anthropology, one shedding light on the situation of living with risk and danger. I do this to ensure what science-religion scholar Wenzel van Huyssteen has called the "experiential adequacy" of "theological understanding."¹⁵⁰ Focusing on German risk sociology that has arisen from the 1980s onwards helps ensure that the analysis finds not only aspects and existential questions that are *typical* of human existence, but also aspects and existential questions that depend on a *specific cultural condition* of human existence.¹⁵¹ If the reader recognizes him- or herself in these considerations, it remains an open question whether this owes to existential typicality or from cultural proximity.

The second criterion for mining the field of risk sociology is that the concepts used for engagement here should have a broad and rich ability to aid in offering fresh interpretations of the Christian symbols in view. The non-theological material offers conceptual constellations with which the theologian can discover new aspects of his or her own tradition.¹⁵² I take up this methodological move from Niels Henrik Gregersen and Günter Thomas. In combination with the terms "risk" and "danger," I find that "vulnerability" and "trust" are particularly important concepts for this study. The epistemological problem concerning this method is dealt with in section 3.3 below.

Before that, I wish to respond to catholic theologian David Tracy's critique of Tillich. In Tillich, the questions come from the human situation

¹⁵⁰ Huyssteen, "Pluralism and Interdisciplinarity," 69.

¹⁵¹ This nuances David Tracy's position which focuses theology towards showing the relevance of the "major Christian theological categories for *all* human experience," Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 44, emphasis added. Different sorts of contextual theology have brought attention to the fact that human experiences also depend on one's cultural background.

¹⁵² For this, I add phenomenology to sociology, most clearly expressed in Chapter 6 on trust and endangerment, where I develop a view of trust in a conversation between the sociology of Niklas Luhmann and the phenomenology of K.E. Løgstrup.

and the answers from Christianity. Thereby, Tracy observes, Tillich leaves out the questions Christianity raises and the answers that might come from the situation itself. A full correlation, Tracy argues, fails unless these two aspects also enter the picture.¹⁵³ Concerning the answers from the situation, I mentioned in the introduction that risk calculus, taken together with the insurance system, constitutes a significant way in which human beings deal with their experience of living with risk and danger. Yet, Chapter 4 presents my argument for why modern technologies, in particular the insurance system and risk calculus, provide insufficient answers to the experience of risk and danger. Concerning Christianity posing questions to the situation, I allow a varied, sociologically and phenomenologically oriented theological source material to qualify the sociological discussions of the situation of living with risk and danger. In Chapter 5, I pose several questions to the *Relational Theory of Risk* from a philosophical and theological standpoint.

As such, the analyses of the human situation of living with risk and danger in Part II aim at formulating a series of questions, to which Part III offers the contours of theologically informed answers from within the Christian symbol system. As Tillich emphasizes, these questions require a certain existential character to be of real theological interest. They have to address that which concerns human beings ultimately, meaning that they have to “become a matter of being or not-being for us.”¹⁵⁴ This becomes the main criterion for selecting the decisive questions on the basis of the investigations in Part II.

3. Reconstructive Interpretations of Christian Symbols

As noted in the introduction, this dissertation presupposes that such a thing as the Christian symbol system exists. Addressing the human situation, Christian symbols are not left untouched. *Every situation requires a renewed reflection of the adequacy of Christian symbols, the result of which may be a recoding of key theological symbols, however slight that recoding may be.* Working in the tradition of contextual theology inspired by the method of correlation,¹⁵⁵ Sigurd Bergman argues that Christian theology does not simply answer the question of the situation; the encounter with the situation also transforms the Christian tradition. The

¹⁵³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Tillich, *STI*, 14.

¹⁵⁵ The method of correlation has been an important inspiration for contextual theology that has sought to establish present human experience as a *locus theologicus*, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2. Liberation theology works primarily on the basis of experiences of oppression, see e.g. Ruether, “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation” and Stewart, “The Method of Correlation in the Theology of James H. Cone.”

relationship between Christianity and other areas of analysis constitutes an interplay, where the “keys of normativity” for the Christian tradition lies in its “capacity for being mediated”¹⁵⁶ with the contemporary situation. Only if such mediation is possible does the Christian tradition remain relevant. This means that contemporary theology can also be in discontinuity with traditional ways of interpreting the Christian symbols.¹⁵⁷ However, when the novel theological proposals deviate from traditional formulations, the contemporary theologian must show that they are preferable. The contemporary theologian bears the burden of proof.¹⁵⁸

This dissertation offers interpretations of a series of Christian symbols, recoding them to various degrees. This reconstructive work is done in a critical and constructive conversation with a series of “Christian texts,”¹⁵⁹ among which are 1) contemporary systematic theological expositions, especially the theologians of risk from my research field; and 2) biblical texts.

A. Contemporary Systematic Theological Expositions

Theologians interpret and conceptualize the Christian symbol systems with different aims and through different methods. The main theological interlocutor for this study is Yale theologian David Kelsey and his *Eccentric Existence*. I have given my rationale for this in Chapter 2, and I return to him in Chapter 7.

Besides Kelsey, I draw upon the writings of two groups of theologians—a primary group and a secondary group. The primary group consists of the “theologians of risk,” which I introduced in the previous chapter. These are primarily Vanstone and Sanders, Gregersen and Thomas, Welch and Baker-Fletcher. The aims of my engagement with them are to analyze and evaluate their ways of coding the Christian symbol system, and to develop new ideas where their reflections come short (be that individually, or as a group).

The secondary group does not (necessarily) consist of risk theologians. It contains systematic theologians that I have chosen to incorporate because they offer a variety of admonitory and supportive insights of relevance for this study. These systematic theologians come from various denominations (Lutheran, Catholic, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist), from Nordic, Germanic and Anglo Saxon areas, thus securing a relatively ecumenical basis for

¹⁵⁶ Bergmann, *Gud i funktion*, 64, my translation, see appendix.

¹⁵⁷ For a Christological warrant of remaining true to the analysis of the human situation, see Tillich, *ST I*, 64.

¹⁵⁸ EE 24.

¹⁵⁹ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 45.

this study, at least within contemporary Western Christianity. They are either classics of recent biblically and problem-oriented theology—Jürgen Moltmann (1926-), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014), Raymund Schwager (1935-2004), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-), and Michael Welker (1947-)—or they are systematic theologians that have contributed to developing the theological topics of this dissertation—e.g. Christian philosopher Marilyn McCord Adams on horrendous suffering; biblical theologian Sigrid Brandt on victim and sacrifice; Oxford theologian Paul Fiddes on natural evil; feminist theologian Elisabeth Gandolfo on human vulnerability; Kierkegaard-scholar Arne Grøn on values; legal theologian Paul Leer-Salvesen on guilt; Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup on trust; Barth-scholar Hans Vium Mikkelsen on reconciliation; Baptist theologian Jeff Pool on divine vulnerability; systematic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx on unnecessary suffering; philosopher of religion, Claudia Welz on lamentation; and Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff on forgiveness. Instead of expounding them in great exegetical detail, so as to clarify the entire scope of their theologies, I read them as irritation, provocation, and inspiration for this dissertation's proposals towards a theology of risk.

A reconstructive approach to the Christian symbol system cannot commence without consideration of biblical texts. The biblical texts are the foundational texts of Christianity, serving as a collection of books through which the Christian symbol system acquires its contours.

B. Biblical Texts

The bible constitutes a library of books (the Greek word *βιβλία* means “books”), which the Christian religion has deemed normative for the coding of its symbol system. The main reason for this normativity is that these texts constitute at once durable witnesses to historical experiences with how God relates to the world, and constitute the primary witnesses to the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Christian symbol systems considers to be the revelation of God.¹⁶⁰ However, as Wolfhart Pannenberg has pointed out, a modern engagement with these texts has to deal with a dual distance surrounding these texts. Not only does a distance exist between the biblical texts and the divine revelation in Jesus of Nazareth (let me call this “Distance 1”); but also between the biblical texts and a possible contemporary theology (call this “Distance 2”). With this condition, the precarious question arises regarding how systematic theology

¹⁶⁰ Compare Tillich, *ST I*, 35.

should go about interpreting these texts.¹⁶¹ Without hoping to answer this question in full, let me reflect on some of its aspects, beginning with Distance 1—the distance between Jesus and his witnesses.

Recent exegetical scholarship has emphasized Distance 1, the distance between the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the biblical interpretations of his life and work. In the “rewritten bible” perspective, the biblical texts constitute mature theological statements written in various genres.¹⁶² The biblical authors construed a series of religious symbols with reference to their theological convictions about how God relates to the world—in other words, with reference to their understanding of the Gospel. This reconstructive effort proceeded by drawing upon and adapting—rewriting—other Jewish and ancient texts so as to express the authors’ theological convictions to their readers and listeners in as convincing a way as possible. Systematic theologian Marilyn McCord Adams expresses a similar view of the biblical texts:

The New Testament generally and the Gospels in particular are — among other things — second- and third-generation polemical documents intended to interpret the meaning of Jesus’ career from the (individual or communal) authors’ point of view to particular contexts of controversy.¹⁶³

For the purpose of expressing the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, *New Testament authors arguably rewrote their written and oral sources* into coherent theological wholes, not shying away from offering new accounts of central aspects of their original sources by subtracting, adding or rewriting material.¹⁶⁴

Emphasizing the distance between the historical Jesus and the biblical texts entails a warning both against harmonizing the biblical texts into one

¹⁶¹ Pannenberg, “Die Krise des Schriftprinzips.” A third sense of distance exists between the theology of this dissertation and the contemporary systematic theological expositions that I use (Chapter 3.3A). The wish to reduce this distance might explain why I have found theologians writing after WWII especially inspirational for this study.

¹⁶² The term “rewritten bible” originates from Geza Vermes’ 1961 study *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*. The term allows one to observe how bible texts rewrite other texts, e.g. Chronicles rewriting Samuel and Kings in the Hebrew bible, among other things excluding the unfortunate story of how David assaults the married woman Bathsheba and sends her husband Uriah to the front line of war, 2 Sam 11-12. This perspective has been especially important in Qumran-studies, where the term Rewritten Scripture has gained prominence, see Zahn, *Rewritten Scripture*. Only recently, exegetes have brought this research strategy to bear on the New Testament, showing how later Gospel authors rewrite earlier traditions, see Nielsen, “Introduction” and Petersen, “Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon.”

¹⁶³ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 22, emphasis removed.

¹⁶⁴ Nielsen, “Introduction,” xxiii.

account where, for example, Jesus would then have said exactly seven words on the cross (the *diatessaron*), and against excavating the historical Jesus by way of historical-critical methods.¹⁶⁵

However, these warnings should not be absolutized such that the distance between text and person severs the Christian symbol system from the flesh and blood of the life of the incarnate divine Son. Even though the New Testament descriptions of Jesus presuppose the resurrection and the confession of Jesus as the promised Messiah, systematic theology has to maintain that these writings still constitute perspectives on a person who also lived a human life before the resurrection. That is, Jesus as an “historical and named person who lived from approximately year 0-30.”¹⁶⁶

The rewritten bible-perspective inspires a way of handling the second problem of appropriating biblical texts in systematic theology—Distance 2, the distance between the biblical texts and a possible contemporary theology.¹⁶⁷ One could suggest that, like the biblical authors, *a contemporary systematic theologian also has the task of exploring possibilities for rewriting the story of Jesus with the purpose of exploring its significance for the contemporary world and with some approximative claim of reference to the historical Jesus*. However, one should not stretch the analogy between the biblical authors and contemporary systematic theology too far—essential differences remain. While the biblical texts sought to become authoritative expositions of faith by locating “itself in the same discourse as the scriptural works it rewrites,”¹⁶⁸ contemporary systematic theology explores *possible ways* of rewriting the story, maintaining a reflexive distance to the authoritative discourse. The author of Luke offered a pre-critical rewriting, for example, claiming that he accounts for how things actually transpired. In contrast, contemporary systematic theology has to maintain a critical distance from its own

¹⁶⁵ The “rewritten bible”-perspective is critical of the two-source hypothesis, which gives more historical credibility to Mark and Q than to the rest, partly because Q is a theoretical construct, partly because seeing Luke as rewriting not only Mark, but also Matthew (and John) yields meaningful results, see Müller, *Acts*; for a critical discussion, see Malan, “Is Rewritten Bible/Scripture the Solution to the Synoptic Problem?” While some of the contemporary theological expositions—e.g. Tillich, Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Schwager—make arguments with reference to an historical-critical perspective on the bible, I will consider their results from a theological perspective.

¹⁶⁶ Mikkelsen, “Den trinitariske Gud,” 39, my translation, see appendix.

¹⁶⁷ In a brief discussion of exegete Mogens Müller’s recent work, systematic theologian Bent Flemming Nielsen mentions in passing the idea of dogmatics as a form of biblical rewriting, see Nielsen, “Mogens Müller: Evangeliet og evangelierne.”

¹⁶⁸ Zahn, “Genre and Rewritten Scripture,” 284–86.

suggestions, even as it upholds a reference to the historical person of Jesus.¹⁶⁹ This reflexive distance manifests in differences of genre. The biblical texts are largely polemical texts, addressing contexts of controversy; in contrast, contemporary systematic theological rewriting of the Christian message has the task of expressing its commitments, conceptually weighing arguments from various sources, both from lived Christianity and from other academic disciplines, and according to certain standards of excellence.¹⁷⁰

In that process, the systematic theologian will engage in a critical dialogue with patterns of thought from other disciplines. How the systematic theologian rewrites the biblical texts in dialogue with patterns of thought from disciplines other than theology is a matter of theological contention. Here, I can see two possible paths, which appear in the theological material that I engage with in this dissertation. Path 1 uses other patterns of thought as ways of expressing the convictions of the biblical material; and Path 2 uses other patterns of thought as inspiration for a more thorough rewriting of the Christian symbol systems.

In Path 1, the systematic theologian *seeks to stay as true to the biblical texts as possible*, mainly seeking to explicate the inherent meaning in the biblical world for ever new contexts. As postliberal theologian George Lindbeck famously phrased it, this is a “practice of absorbing the universe into the biblical world.”¹⁷¹ This (Barth-inspired) postliberal approach also inspires Kelsey’s methodological outlook.

For Kelsey, the biblical texts constitute witnesses to the ways in which God relates to human beings.¹⁷² Kelsey argues that in reading these texts, the contemporary systematic theologian contributes with an “imaginative judgment” that structures these witnesses into categories of the divine economy.¹⁷³ Given a classification of the biblical texts into three categories

¹⁶⁹ I thank Jesper Tang Nielsen for an informative, informal discussion of this point.

¹⁷⁰ For a theological discussion of coherency, consistency, and controllability as criteria for systematic theology, see Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, 300–304.

¹⁷¹ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121.

¹⁷² EE 137. Inspired by Hans Frei, Kelsey considers the biblical texts in their narrative form, aware that the bible consists of many other genres, EE 187. I prefer a broader take on the texts, using the word “witness” instead.

¹⁷³ EE 459. Kelsey describes the imaginative judgment as a “rough, slightly artificial ... factoring of biblical accounts of God’s relating to us,” Kelsey, “Biblical Narrative and Theological Anthropology,” 143, fn. 24. Kelsey argues that theology appreciates the “substantive standard of excellence” that accounts of God’s relating must comport with the person of Jesus and biblical accounts of how God relates to all else, see also EE 24. Kelsey does not consider any theological grounding of his concept of imaginative judgment, but he does account for the freedom of imagination in his creation theology

of witnesses, Kelsey proposes that God's economy consists of three distinct works: God relates to human beings by creating them; by drawing them to eschatological consummation; and by reconciling them when they have sinned.¹⁷⁴ On the basis of this three-fold structure of the divine economy, then, the task is to explicate the biblically witnessed views of God and what is not God. It is important to note that the biblical canon in Kelsey is not a homogenized whole; its wholeness has a musical character: "The canon is a chorus that is sometimes dissonant," Kelsey writes.¹⁷⁵

One consequence of Kelsey's approach is that imported patterns of thought can become conceptual vehicles to express the content of the biblical text. Let me offer three examples. First, Kelsey's definition of the term "human being" is naturalistic: it follows human DNA.¹⁷⁶ Second, Kelsey sees a distinction in the Wisdom literature between humans as "being bodies" and as "having bodies," a distinction that is commonplace in body phenomenology.¹⁷⁷ Third, when explicating the nature of a "promise," Kelsey borrows insights from the philosophy of language.¹⁷⁸ These three examples show how Kelsey is engaged in discussions with non-theological anthropology with the purpose of offering a comprehensive picture of theological anthropology.

(see Chapter 8.2A). For a more Spirit-centered approach, see Jacobsen, "Sola Scriptura," 155–56.

¹⁷⁴ Kelsey nowhere offers a full overview of which texts fall into which of these categories. Yet, Kelsey clearly sees canonical Wisdom literature as emblematic for creation, the Gospel narratives of Jesus's life and death as emblematic of the reconciliation, and the resurrection narratives in the Gospels together with Revelations as emblematic for the eschatological consummation. Since Kelsey considers canonical Wisdom literature as the primary witness for his creation theology, it is apparent that Kelsey considers the Old Testament to be a witness to the divine economy in its own right. As such, Kelsey is a (not uncritical) student of Brevard S. Childs, who argued for a biblical theology that takes seriously the integrity of the Old Testament witness to the divine reality, see Poulsen, "Brevard S. Childs," 222.

¹⁷⁵ EE 215.

¹⁷⁶ EE 257–61. The motive for this is negative. Defining the term "human being" according to essential characteristics like religiosity, reason, or self-awareness excludes some humans that do not possess those characteristics. However, Kelsey overlooks the instability of this definition. Human DNA is and has been under constant development throughout the centuries.

¹⁷⁷ See Ringleben, "Leib/Leiblichkeit: II. Dogmatisch," col. 218–19 with reference to Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 89–236. Kelsey nowhere mentions this connection. Generally, Kelsey refrains from discussing his sources because the legitimacy of the *use* of these sources often end up as the object of public discussion rather than the theological subject matter itself, Kelsey, "Response to the Symposium on Eccentric Existence," 81–82.

¹⁷⁸ EE 454 and 496.

Regarding the alternative means for dealing with the relationship between bible and contemporary cultural concepts, Path 2, systematic theologians can *use imported patterns of thought as inspiration for rewriting the Christian symbols in ways that offer new theological perspectives*. This can be done, even proposing perspectives that might diverge from the intentions of the biblical authors themselves. Such an approach could find its basis in the exegetical observation that the Gospel authors also rewrote their predecessors' work due to a discomfort with, or even "dislike" for, other evangelical authors.¹⁷⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2.5-6, feminist and womanist theologians have expressed significant concerns about the biblical language of self-sacrifice. Such a discomfort with aspects of biblical texts can give rise to renewed formulations of the dogmatic content, which non-theological patterns of thought can inspire.

Granting patterns of thought from other academic disciplines an important place in rephrasing theology is characteristic of the theologies of Gregersen and Thomas. While they refrain from expressing any discomfort they might have with the theologies of the biblical authors, they still use risk sociology to express important elements of their interpretations of the Christian symbol system, arriving at interpretations that diverge from the biblical authors, for instance concerning divine providence.¹⁸⁰

The epistemological status of reading Christian symbols through concepts from risk sociology, however, remains unclear.¹⁸¹ One could simply make a pragmatic case for such a reading, arguing that the methodological move of looking to other sciences for "analytical ideas" follows an important tradition of academic progress.¹⁸² Yet, one could also seek to develop a theology of culture, explicating how interdisciplinary insights derive, say, from the order of creation, or from the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or from sinful, yet reconciled human beings. Space restrictions prevent me from developing such a theology.

¹⁷⁹ Müller, "Acts as Biblical Rewriting of the Gospels and Paul's Letters," 97. For instance, exegete Gitte Buch-Hansen insists that the antisemitism of the Gospel of John should be acknowledged, confronted, and criticized rather than simply interpreting the Jews as exemplars of human existence, see Buch-Hansen, "Johannesevangeliet og antijudaismen," 231.

¹⁸⁰ It would go beyond the constraints of this study to offer a comparison between the theology of providence in the biblical authors and in the risk theologians.

¹⁸¹ For some of Gregersen's considerations of this problem, see Gregersen, *Teologi og kultur*, 223–24.

¹⁸² Clifford Geertz complains that the science of anthropology of religion has stopped looking to "philosophy, history, law, literature, or the 'harder sciences'" for "analytical ideas" that could expand the theoretical horizon, since this is what the great founders of the field did, Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 87–88.

The epistemological problem remains unsolved. Earlier, I claimed that the contemporary theologian bears the burden of proof if he or she deviates from traditional formulations of Christian symbols. But this also applies to deviating from traditional meanings imputed to biblical texts, as the biblical texts are normative for the coding of the Christian symbols. Therefore, I begin without such deviation, following Kelsey's interpretations and Path 1 as a starting point (primarily in Chapter 8, but also in parts of Chapter 10), moving closer to Path 2's more critical ways of rewriting the biblical texts as I proceed (Chapters 9, 10, and 11). Because of this epistemological difficulty, the measure against which this dissertation's coding of the Christian symbol system should be evaluated, then, must be its ability to remain clearly *within* the Christian symbol system whilst still addressing the situation of living with risk and danger in viable theological ways.

4. Conclusion on Methodology

This dissertation uses a method of correlation that seeks to correlate the human situation of living with risk and danger and the Christian symbol system, by showing how the questions of the human situation can find possible answers in the Christian symbol system. I use risk sociology and theology to analyze the human situation, and I develop the Christian symbol system through analyses of contemporary systematic theological expositions and biblical texts. In what follows (Part II), I begin the interdisciplinary analysis of the human situation as living with risk and danger.

Part II: Living with Risk and Danger

This part of the dissertation consists of three individual studies of the experience of, and problems arising in relation to, risk, danger, vulnerability, and trust.

The first chapter, Chapter 4, presents an interpretation of the contemporary Western context concerning human vulnerability, taking its cue from German theologian Wilfried Härle who suggests that *insurance* is one of the most important aspects of modern society, besides information processing and the division of labor. In the context of risk and danger, investigations of the technology of insurance are important because insurance constitutes a social way of dealing with human vulnerability. Härle writes:

Eine breite Verteilung und vielfältige Absicherung von Risiken in der Gesellschaft setzt finanzielle Mittel und psychische Kräfte zur Gestaltung der Gegenwart frei, die ansonsten durch die Vorsorge für die Zukunft gebunden wären.¹⁸³

Insurance empowers people. Paying heed to the history of the concept of risk in the insurance world, Chapter 4 distinguishes three domains of vulnerability in contemporary human lives:

- the domain of disastrous vulnerability “above” insurability, where the principle of precaution should play an important role;
- the “middle” domain of insurable vulnerability where solidarity is decisive; and
- the personal domain “below” insurability where vulnerability should be accepted as instrumental to a life of meaning and justice.

While acknowledging the immense importance of the technology of insurance for distributing risks, I use this study to address the limits of this technology. While insurance pays out money for harm, mitigating financial vulnerability, insurance does not render the harm undone or offer new life to those who succumb to the harm.

In Chapter 5, I use an interdisciplinary set of sociological and philosophical-theological source materials to amend what has been called the *Relational Theory of Risk*, published in *Journal of Risk Research* in 2011 by the Swedish scholars of risk Åsa Boholm and Hervé Corvellec. While the sociological inputs here largely derive from Niklas Luhmann’s conside-

¹⁸³ Härle, *Dogmatik*, 186.

rations of risk, danger, and trust, various theologians enable the venture of placing theological anthropology in a dialogue with sociological theorizing. My contribution consists of three arguments concerning the ethical existence of human beings. First, I argue for the importance of the category of “danger,” lest the ethical orientation of human beings becomes distorted into an overly aggrandized sense of human power and responsibility. Second, I appeal to the possibility and importance of trust once one comes to interpret other people as threats. Third, I claim that the resolution of conflicts over mutually exclusive constructions of risk requires information, axiological compromise, and sharing power, whilst recognizing that the conflictual potential of risk remains despite such efforts.¹⁸⁴

The final chapter of Part II, Chapter 6, reverses the interdisciplinary approach. Rather than confronting typical human problems like risk and danger with theological considerations, this chapter investigates a theological problem aided by sociological and philosophical investigations. This chapter picks up on a lead about trust presented in Chapter 5, as the develops a view of trust in conversation with Niklas Luhmann and the Danish philosopher of religion K.E. Løgstrup. These observations about trust contribute to a discussion of faith as trust in God in a situation of vulnerability. While I contend that crucifixions, including the crucifixion of Christ, remain a stumbling block for trusting God, I refigure the incarnation, death and resurrection of the divine Son as a place of inner-trinitarian struggle with faith as trust, a struggle into which God draws human beings.

Together, these three chapters constitute the main interdisciplinary analysis of the situation of living with risk and danger. On the basis of this analysis, I end Part II by raising the four existential questions that will guide the theological investigations of Part III.

¹⁸⁴ I draw upon the feminist ethicist Sharon Welch in both Chapters 5 and 6. While the point of using her in Chapter 5 is to emphasize the importance of *personal* risk-taking, Chapter 6 uses her ethics of risk towards a consideration of *sharing* risks.

4. Limits of Modernity: Risk and Vulnerability

The term “vulnerability” holds great promise as an anthropological bridging concept between theology and other academic disciplines. The term “vulnerability” captures a deep sense of human finitude and fragility that resonates well with many key commitments in Christian theology.

The concept of “vulnerability” is closely related to that of “risk.” Both concepts draw attention to the uncertainty and insecurity of future events.¹⁸⁵ However, while “vulnerability” describes a present condition that allows for future hurt, “risk,” by way of contrast, signifies the anticipation of that hurt. Risk relates to future hazardous events that are uncertain in that they may or may not occur. If the hazardous event does occur, then harm is caused to the vulnerable entities at stake. Vulnerability, then, is the susceptibility to hurt and therefore risk presupposes vulnerability. For, it is only if something is perceived as *vulnerable* to a foreseeable hurt that it makes sense to anticipate that hurt as risk.

The close connection between vulnerability and risk is very germane for the unfolding of a more complex and nuanced concept of vulnerability. This unfolding will be mediated through a reading and discussion of risk sociology. In 1986, Ulrich Beck published the book *Risikogesellschaft* (Risk Society) that turned the term “risk society” into what he considered a “diagnostic term for society.”¹⁸⁶ Capturing the imaginations of scholars and journalists alike, the term “risk society” intensified an already on-going involvement with the concept of risk in different strands of research, not least within sociology. Even though the main strands of risk sociology do not explicitly address the concept of vulnerability, this chapter argues that risk sociology implicitly draws attention to key aspects of vulnerability. I claim that these aspects are central for an interdisciplinary discourse on vulnerability that seeks to include the personal sphere of human life, but which can also reach beyond it, moving into the social and natural spheres.

Specifically, this chapter combines insights from risk sociology to expand upon three domains of vulnerability that I suggest should be kept distinct, revolving around the concept of insurance: 1) the macro-level of “disaster vulnerability,” that is, vulnerability to hazards with very high impact “above” insurance; 2) the meso-level of vulnerability to hazards that are insurable; and, 3) the micro-level of vulnerability involved in personal

¹⁸⁵ It is worth observing that the German term *Unsicherheit* covers both “insecurity” and “uncertainty.”

¹⁸⁶ Sørensen and Christiansen, *Ulrich Beck*, 13.

risk-taking below insurance. Each of these three levels gives rise to theological considerations that follow, limit, or expand the sociological theories of risk. These three domains constitute the three main sections of this chapter.

1. Disaster Vulnerability

An important work in the vulnerability paradigm of disaster research is *At Risk* from 1994 (second edition 2004) written by disaster scholars Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis. The purpose of this book is to correct the “conventional” view of disasters, a view that locates the causes of disasters primarily in overwhelming natural hazards like tsunamis and earthquakes.¹⁸⁷ Reshaping this conventional view, the vulnerability approach locates the condition of possibility for disasters in the social sphere rather than merely in the natural sphere. The central insight is this: only if vulnerable people live where the natural hazard hits does the hazard result in a disaster. Consequently, *At Risk* analyses the social structures that make populations vulnerable to different kinds of natural hazards.

To ensure the normative edge—that disaster research should aim at reducing the loss of human lives—Wisner et al. define “vulnerability” as a trait of human beings and not of things. Vulnerability can then be thought of as follows, “The characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard.”¹⁸⁸ With this definition, the concept of vulnerability encompasses a threatened group of persons’ ability not only to “withstand” the shock and to “bounce back” from the effects of the shock, but also their ability to “bounce forward” towards a new, more positive state.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, “disaster risk” constitutes:

¹⁸⁷ The conventional view of disasters should not be confused with the former paradigm of disaster research, called the “dominant” paradigm, which was influenced by military funding and organizational theory. For an overview of disaster research history, see Quarantelli, “Disaster Studies.”

¹⁸⁸ Wisner et al., *At Risk*, 11, italics omitted.

¹⁸⁹ These three abilities connect to the term “resilience,” see Dahlberg et al., “Resilience in Disaster Research,” 46. Even though the *At Risk* authors include what is meant by “resilience” in their concept of vulnerability, the concept of resilience goes further in highlighting human abilities and actions in the face of disasters, while the term vulnerability focuses on disabilities and passivity. The *At Risk*-authors are aware of this problem, Wisner et al., *At Risk*, 14.

a compound function of the natural hazard and the number of people, characterized by their varying degrees of vulnerability to that specific hazard, who occupy the space and time of exposure to the hazard event.¹⁹⁰

In other words, a “disaster” occurs when a natural hazard hits a group of people vulnerable to that hazard. From this observation, Wisner et al. construct what they call a “pseudo-equation”: disaster risk = hazard x vulnerability.¹⁹¹ As a result, disasters should be viewed as a hybrid of natural substrates and cultural conditions.

The resulting analytical interest of this vulnerability paradigm concerns the social sphere more than the natural—the vulnerability paradigm offers analyses of the causes, both proximate and ultimate, of the vulnerability of populations. Rather than focusing only on the immediate natural cause of a disaster, Wisner et al. investigate what is unsafe in the given social conditions and their social root causes.¹⁹² The purpose of a deep analysis of the causes of disaster is to better understand what needs to be adjusted in the social order so as to reduce the frequency and severity of disasters.

The influential theory of the risk society, launched by Ulrich Beck in 1986, focused on another set of macro-level hazards, which I, for the purposes of this chapter, call “risk society hazards.”¹⁹³ These are man-made hazards, such as nuclear meltdowns, pollution, pesticides, and the forms of extreme weather that derive from anthropogenic climate change. All of these hazards are unintentional by-products of the industrial society that increased material welfare considerably, especially in the Western world.

Vulnerability to risk society hazards compares in size and importance to the vulnerability of natural hazards, yet risk society hazards differ from natural hazards, not only in relation to their anthropogenic origin, but also by virtue of their “limitlessness.” Ulrich Beck argues that, although natural

¹⁹⁰ Wisner et al., *At Risk*, 49.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² The authors call their theoretical model the “pressure and release” model, *ibid.*, 87. This term is not particularly clear. The most obvious interpretation would be to think of vulnerability factors as building up a kind of pressure, which a given hazard then releases violently in causing a disaster. However, the authors meant something else by this term. In short, while “pressure” signifies how both vulnerability and natural hazard build up disaster pressure, *ibid.*, 50. like the two handles of the nutcracker cracking a nut, “release” denotes that disaster pressure can be released through reduction of vulnerability. The advantage of their view is that it focuses on solutions to the disaster pressure, albeit only on the side of the vulnerability.

¹⁹³ Beck simply calls these hazards “risks,” which has resulted in some conceptual confusion, since Beck also suggests that risk is the societal *anticipation* of these hazards. Society is a risk society to the degree that the anticipation of risk society hazards becomes decisive for politics.

hazards can be catastrophic to the population they hit, they are principally limited in time and space. In contrast, risk society hazards create disasters that are continuous and on-going. To illustrate, one might think of how it was the whims of the wind that ultimately decided which areas became contaminated by the radioactive emissions of the Chernobyl power plant.¹⁹⁴ One might think of how climate change created in one part of the world dramatically changes the weather in another.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, one might think of how air and water pollution seeps into even the earthquake-secure homes of wealthy CEOs. No one is completely immune to the larger effects of such hazards. Therefore, risk society disasters transcend the immediacy of the accident, not only in space but also across time. For, often, the injury appears far later than the action, and the causes can often only be understood in hindsight.¹⁹⁶

The limitlessness of risk society hazards renders it impossible to handle such hazards satisfactorily through insurance. Insurance offers financial compensation for a definite hazard that is covered in an insurance policy. However, since risk society hazards are limitless, too often they cannot be clearly defined.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, insurance rests on the willingness of the insurance taker to accept the inherent gap between compensation and hardship.¹⁹⁸ But, as the governmentalist insurance scholar François Ewald argues, risk society hazards are irreparable and severe enough to make compensation unacceptable for insurance takers, even if they could be insured against.¹⁹⁹

A theological consideration of such uninsurable disaster vulnerability should support the ethical principle, “Avoid any (real) risk of catastrophe at any (ordinary) cost.”²⁰⁰ As per theologian Wolfgang Huber, a risk management model that calculates risk simply as a matter of “hazard times probability” fails when it comes to such disaster vulnerability. The probability of natural or risk society hazards may be small, but if they occur, the resulting damage may be unimaginably serious and, indeed,

¹⁹⁴ Beck, *Risikogesellschaft*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Ewald, “The Return of Descartes’s Malicious Demon,” 288. That disaster causes often appear more clearly in hindsight should keep the vulnerability approach to natural disaster from its moralistic tendency of assigning responsibility and blame to those instigating the root causes—at least in such cases where those disasters are not readily foreseeable, caused by corporate incompetence, or financial corner-cutting, and so on.

¹⁹⁷ Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft*, 61, 103-104.

¹⁹⁸ Ewald, “Insurance and Risk,” 204.

¹⁹⁹ Ewald, “The Return of Descartes’s Malicious Demon,” 289.

²⁰⁰ Rescher, *Risk*, 73, italics omitted.

irreversible.²⁰¹ So, even though disaster vulnerability is ambiguous—for, decreasing vulnerability to one hazard may increase vulnerability to another—disaster research does recommend adjustments to the social order that would decrease overall vulnerability.

However, theologian Kristine Culp comes to a very different conclusion regarding such disasters. In Culp’s reading of disaster literature, she states: “Damage and loss have a force of inevitability.”²⁰² Indeed, Culp’s “narrative of the seeming inevitability of risk and damage” leads her to conclude that susceptibility to damaging change must be regarded, simply, as a “basic feature of human existence.”²⁰³

I suggest Culp’s conclusion involves an unwarranted level of resignation in the face of disaster vulnerability. A different approach, also relevant for theological consideration, should be the precautionary principle (for example, after the Fukushima accident of 2011, German theologian Wolfgang Huber argued vocally that the precautionary principle should apply in cases of disaster vulnerability).²⁰⁴ Of course, the precautionary principle cannot become a universally overriding principle; as Douglas and Wildavsky argued, certain irreversible goods may exist that human beings can only reach if they take risks.²⁰⁵ So, not every venture can be, or should be, avoided on the basis of taking precautions. The section on personal risks will return to this question of goods and risk-taking, but, for present purposes, I shall conclude with Huber’s words: “This kind of debate has nothing to do with the principle itself but only with its reasonable application.”²⁰⁶ The *precautionary principle is a crucial guiding idea*, then, and even though it cannot always be taken as the ultimate consideration in determining whether risky actions should be taken, it is nevertheless a principle that should be prioritized when considering risks at the macro-scale.

2. Insurance and Vulnerability

While risk society hazards, as mentioned, are notoriously uninsurable, an increasing number of other hazards have become insurable. François Ewald shows how insurance uses the “technology” of risk to insure for a whole

²⁰¹ Nassim Taleb even argues that negligible risks and the events that human beings do not know about, what he calls, capitalized, “Black Swans,” are those that have the most important impact on human lives. His advice is to increase exposure to the positive Black Swans, while decreasing exposure to the negative, Taleb, *The Black Swan*.

²⁰² Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*, 93.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 94. Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*, 94.

²⁰⁴ Huber, “After Fukushima,” 6. See also Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 232.

²⁰⁵ Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*, 28.

²⁰⁶ Huber, “After Fukushima,” 204.

range of hazards, decreasing vulnerability to the financial consequences of loss. Risk understood as a technology aggregates classes of hazards and calculates their probabilities. On this basis, insurance agents offer contracts with premiums to policyholders.²⁰⁷ As a result, insurance transforms hazards that people previously would have perceived as “blows of fortune,”²⁰⁸ into objects for financial compensation. The result of insurance is a significant decrease in financial vulnerability with respect to the hazards covered.

The class of possible insurance hazards share one characteristic (beyond the acceptability of the compensation and the determinability of the destruction discussed in the last section), namely that insurance hazards must be calculable. It must be possible to calculate the probability and impact of the hazards on an aggregate level. Consequently, insurance performs the technology of risk on populations, not on individuals. To Ewald, this collectivity of risk results in an abstract, but effective form of solidarity. Since all members of a given population are equally victims and agents of risk, insurance institutes solidarity between the members of that population. Ewald even suggests—and this reveals Ewald’s Foucauldian background—that such insurance solidarity refrains from socializing the population into certain behaviors like other communities do. Ewald writes:

The family has its rules, the trade union its internal regulations. These mutualities place one, moralize one, educate one, form one’s conscience. Insurance mutualities are different: they leave the person free.²⁰⁹

That insurance can support solidarity without demanding behavioral restrictions may be true, but such functionality is susceptible to the drive towards personal optimization of finances in at least two ways. First, insurance suppliers, whether private or public, can take measures to reduce spending by creating safer environments and reducing the insurance taker’s risky behavior. Such preventive measures involve interfering with the lives

²⁰⁷ Not all insurance relationships are voluntary and demand wealth to cover the premiums. Some insurance relationships function involuntarily through citizenship. The distribution of voluntary and involuntary insurances varies from state to state, but, in general, Western state development has offered an increase in the level of insurance, regarding not only the percentage of the population and the range of risks, but also the degree of compensation, Baker, “Liability and Insurance after September 11,” 350.

²⁰⁸ Ewald, “Insurance and Risk,” 200. This statement shows that only Ewald’s *concept* of risk can be characterized as “strong constructivism,” Lupton, *Risk*, 28, not his ontology. Ewald does presuppose a hazardous world that leads people to either resignation or reaction.

²⁰⁹ Ewald, “Insurance and Risk,” 204.

of the clients, demanding or urging certain behaviors.²¹⁰ Second, the use of risk classifications may prompt the population members that fall into low-risk categories to break the solidarity and form smaller populations with lower premiums.²¹¹ For the solidarity to remain intact, such tendencies require regulation.

For those who are insured, insurance changes the perception of the insured hardships. In the words of legal scholars Tom Baker and Jonathan Simon, a “risk beyond insurance is experienced in a very different way than a risk that is insured.”²¹² Insurance reduces anxiety and worry regarding the future, thus increasing risk-willingness for the good of society.²¹³ The Nordic “flexicurity model” is based on that very insight. If a government offers a proper insurance against unemployment, workers accept lower compensation terms for employee termination, thus creating more flexibility for the companies.²¹⁴ Of course, risk-willingness that arises from insurance can also become a detriment to their susceptibility to the dangers that have been insured against—people may commit “moral hazards” by reducing their alertness and responsibility with respect to their own actions and choices.²¹⁵ But insurance also provides a moral opportunity for helping others. Politics scholar Deborah Stone argues:

²¹⁰ Other Foucault-inspired authors use the governmentality approach to clarify the consequences of preventive measures (e.g. in medicine). Robert Castel discusses the consequences of the medical sectors’ increased use of general risk factors to determine dangerousness rather than using individual assessments, Castel, “From Dangerousness to Risk.”

²¹¹ This may occur both in the private sector and in independence movements of rich regions. Indeed, Baker and Simons argue that their culture moves in that direction: “Private pensions, annuities, and life insurance are engaged in an historic shift of investment risk from broad pools (the class structure of risk spreading through insurance) to individual (middle-class) consumers and employees in return for the possibility of greater return,” Baker and Simon, “Embracing Risk,” 4. However, not everyone concurs with this assessment. For example, Michael Powers uses social justice arguments to counter such a cultural development, Powers, *Acts of God and Man*, 146.

²¹² Baker and Simon, “Embracing Risk,” 12.

²¹³ Ewald, “Insurance and Risk,” 208.

²¹⁴ Svendsen, *Trust*, 47–48.

²¹⁵ Baker, “Risk, Insurance, and the Social Construction of Responsibility,” 43. Powers terms such insurance negligence “morale hazard” to distinguish it from the “moral hazard” of setting fire to one’s house if the insurance price is higher than the market price, Powers, *Acts of God and Man*, 137.

To participate in a risk-pooling scheme is to agree to tax yourself not only for your own benefit should you incur a loss, but also for the benefit of others who might suffer from loss when you do not.²¹⁶

Even though one is still vulnerable to hardship, at least one's financial vulnerability is reduced, which increases the ability of the victim to regain his or her foothold in life. This ability transforms one's relationship to hardship, "so that, even in misfortune, one retains responsibility for one's affairs by possessing the means to repair its effects."²¹⁷ In other words, insurance empowers the individual to recover from a hurt.

A theological consideration of insurance can also lend its voice to such an approval of the insurance system, especially if such insurance develops aspects of solidarity rather than dismantling them. In 1875, Charles H. Spurgeon even saw in life insurance a possibility of fulfilling the New Testament demand of not thinking about tomorrow:

Now I know how to practice Christ's command for 'taking no thought for the morrow.' I pay the policy money once a year and take no further thought about it, for I have no occasion to do so now, having obeyed the very spirit and letter of Christ's command.²¹⁸

This connection between insurance and lack of anxiety worked as an argument to sway a Christian community from a view of divine providence that banishes the development of providential social systems. However, suggesting that insurance is incapable of removing all human worries about the future clearly overburdens the system of insurance.

Therefore, one reads with some surprise that Ewald concludes his discussion of insurance on the following high note: Ewald argues that insurance "liberates human beings from fear"²¹⁹ in a way comparable with religion. Insurance liberates human beings to a life of confident and risk-willing action. The liberating force of the insurance system therefore results in a minor revolution in philosophical anthropology. As Ewald puts it:

All man's relations with himself or herself, with others and with the world are overturned. With insurance and its philosophy, one enters a universe where the ills that befall us lose their old providential meaning: a world without God, a laicized

²¹⁶ Stone, "Beyond Moral Hazard," 53.

²¹⁷ Ewald, "Insurance and Risk," 207.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Tracy, "Insurance and Theology," 89 with a reference to *Address of the Presbyterian Annuity and Life Insurance Company*, Philadelphia, 1875, 10; I have found the same statement in the Spurgeon's sermon, 'To-morrow' from August 25, 1856, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0094.php>, accessed Nov 14, 2016.

²¹⁹ Ewald, "Insurance and Risk," 208.

world where ‘society’ becomes the general arbiter answerable for the causes of our destiny.²²⁰

For Ewald, insurance shifts the responsibility for hurt from God to society.

Some theologians might agree with Ewald that religion—some forms of religion—can liberate human beings from fear to act in society. Within Protestant Christianity, Lutheranism has always argued that faith in God results in freedom for the inner person, which liberates persons to act in service for one’s neighbor like a good tree bears good fruits.²²¹

However, a theological consideration must also place a proper limit on similar claims from insurance. It is rather presumptuous to suggest that the system of insurance itself places the human being in a world without God, where society takes over the religious promises of redemption from fear. Suggesting that insurance entirely removes human worries reduces the human being to *homo oeconomicus*. Ewald turns money into the ultimate concern of human beings.²²² But, as the Beatles once sang: “money can’t buy me love”; nor can it buy me final redemption. *Human beings concern themselves with other things—and more ultimate things—than money.* Consider, for example, having one’s house burned to the ground. One receives money from fire insurance to rebuild the house, but all of one’s belongings have been incinerated. So, one is left without the things—the pictures, gifts, heirlooms—that constitute important parts of one’s history. Human identity is historical. Since one of the ways in which human persons remember their history is through memorabilia, they are thereby vulnerable to crises of identity if they lose all the objects that create such powerful links to their history. In the case of fire hazards, this insight becomes a lived reality against which insurance cannot prevent one from being potentially hurt. It merely offers financial compensation for it and nothing more.²²³

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Luther, “Abhandlung über die christliche Freiheit,” 153.

²²² Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 13.

²²³ Moreover, Ewald elsewhere realizes that risk society hazards place an upper limit on insurance. He also promotes the precautionary principle in the realm of risk society hazards, Ewald, “The Return of Descartes’s Malicious Demon,” 282–97. But since this principle cannot—and should not—be applied in all cases, risk society hazards leave human beings with significant anxiety, as Ulrich Beck realized, Beck, *Risikogesellschaft*, 66.

3. Personal Risk and Vulnerability

The sociological theories of risk so far considered have highlighted the macro-domain of disaster vulnerability and the possibility of reducing financial vulnerability to meso-level calculable hazards through insurance. But risk sociology has a harder time grasping the micro-level of personal risk where vulnerability can be tragic rather than disastrous, and wherein insurance meets its lower limit. Insurance does not cover, say, the risk of being refused by one's only love,²²⁴ or the risk of losing oneself to a bourgeois or aesthetic life.²²⁵

However, another sociological theory of risk remains to be reviewed that relates to the logic of personal risk-taking. Stephen Lyng has coined the term "edgework" to classify a set of high-risk voluntary risk-taking activities like extreme sports, high-risk occupations, and perhaps even criminal activities. Characteristic of edgework activities is the voluntary exposure to threats, and even to mortal threats: "The archetypical edgework experience is one in which the individual's failure to meet the challenge at hand will result in death or, at the very least, debilitating injury."²²⁶ A successful edgework activity is one where the "edgeworker" comes as close to the critical edge as possible without falling off it. Importantly, the responsibility for survival lies with no one but the edgeworker him- or herself, and the edgeworker perceives a high degree of self-realization in performing the given activity. Characteristically, edgeworkers "view instances of people dying or being seriously injured in risk-taking endeavors as evidence that these individuals lacked the core survival skill of a genuine edgeworker,"²²⁷ primarily the ability to stay in mental control without being overcome by fear.²²⁸ Edgeworkers place themselves in highly vulnerable positions,²²⁹ but they struggle to avoid realizing their own vulnerability because fearing their vulnerability makes them more vulnerable.

A theological consideration of "edgework" can acknowledge how such activities draw attention to the positive aspects of risk-taking. So far, the concept of risk has been related mostly to those risks that should be avoided. But risk-taking is sometimes necessary, and this is so beyond the notion of edgework, which is a rather extreme case.

²²⁴ Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 51–52.

²²⁵ This is the topic of Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*.

²²⁶ Lyng, "Edgework," 857.

²²⁷ Lyng, "Edgework, Risk, and Uncertainty," 119.

²²⁸ Lyng, "Edgework," 859. Therefore, edgeworkers refrain from gambling because its intrinsic element of luck leaves them without control, *ibid.*, 862.

²²⁹ According to Lyng, edgeworkers rely heavily on chance for their success, even though they do not admit it, Lyng, "Edgework," 872.

First, embracing risk is necessary because ours is a world where all decision-making entails risk. Proposing marriage to one's partner entails the risk of being rejected. Equally, not proposing to one's partner involves the danger of being forsaken for a more plucky individual. In that sense, no possibility of avoiding risk exists. Rephrasing Kierkegaard's famous dictum, one may claim: "Propose, and you will regret it. Do not propose, you will also regret it. Propose or do not propose, you will regret it either way."²³⁰ Risk aversion makes life safer, but also boring. And, if taken to an extreme degree, it makes life impossible since every decision involves risk. In contrast, risk willingness makes life exciting but unsafe and, if taken to an extreme degree, dangerous.

Second, embracing risk is necessary because running a risk often increases the probability of attaining certain benefits that would not have been available to the more risk averse. Being headhunted for one's dream job is possible, but handing in a job application increases the probability significantly! Of course, handing in the job application also increases the risk of being rejected. Gregersen captures this insight well: "There are important goods that can be obtained only by accepting certain risks, but by taking a risk we also run the risk of vulnerability to being harmed."²³¹ Indeed, exposing oneself to harm may be the only way of reaching this or that goal in life. In such instances, vulnerability must be accepted for a higher purpose.

In the context of social change, feminist theologian Sharon Welch²³² expands on this notion that some goods can only be acquired through vulnerable exposure. Unlike edgeworkers, who place themselves in highly uncertain situations, taking exclusive personal responsibility for their survival (and, therefore, having no focus on their vulnerability), and unlike an "ethic of control," in which responsibility equals the ability carry out one's plans, Welch argues for an "ethic of risk" that actively accepts vulnerability in community, and argues for "an engagement with the world that accepts risk, ambiguity, and imperfection."²³³ An ethic of risk involves a change in one's perception of responsibility towards working together

²³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 38, see appendix. Not even insurance is risk free for the insurance taker. When considering taking out insurance, one runs a risk whether one chooses to take out insurance or not. Systems theorist Niklas Luhmann argues: "If one takes out insurance, one is financially secure in a damage event. But then one carries the risk of having taken out insurance for naught if no damage event occurs. Deciding against taking out insurance means running the opposite risk," Luhmann, "Das Risiko der Versicherung gegen Gefahren," 273, my translation, see appendix.

²³¹ Gregersen, "Risk and Religion," 361.

²³² A shorter version of this paper's engagement with Welch appears in Chapter 5.

²³³ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 30.

continuously on a project where one is unable to see the finish line ahead. This entails acting, even if the odds of prevailing are next to nothing. Welch writes: “The fundamental risk constitutive of this ethic is the decision to care and to act although there are no guarantees of success.”²³⁴

From a theological point of view, the personal motivation for endorsing an ethic of risk cannot rest on creation theology alone. Niels Henrik Gregersen bases risk willingness on a creation theology where the very nature of the world itself necessitates a risk-taking attitude. As Gregersen puts it:

The gift of life demands a risk-taking attitude, even to the point of losing one’s life for the benefit of others ... the world is created by the benevolent God in such a manner that it invites a risk-taking attitude, and rewards it in a long-term perspective.²³⁵

That the world rewards risk-taking applies to the aggregate level of human community, which benefits from an overall willingness to explore and develop. But the created world—even with the system of insurance—cannot ensure a reward for every individual risk-taker.²³⁶

Instead, I argue, an *individual ethic of risk rests on the resurrection promise and hope of eschatological new life*. Jesus is the paradigm of the individual who follows an ethic of risk,²³⁷ but finally loses to the world. As Gregersen rightly puts it, Jesus died as “the icon of a loser”²³⁸ in terms of evolution (Jesus had no offspring), of society (Jesus was humiliated as an outlaw), and of religion (Jesus died in the experience of God-abandonment). Had the crucifixion been the last word, the genre, so to speak, of Jesus’ life would have been that of a tragedy (since Jesus’ life claims to represent the deepest level of human reality, I would claim that the tragedy itself could not even serve a cathartic function). Yet, the resurrection means that the Holy Spirit restores the life that Jesus lost prematurely. Jesus loses to the world, but the Holy Spirit of new creation saves Jesus’ life to become a transformed part of the consummated world.²³⁹ The Christian tradition affirms that the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruit of a general resurrection to new life²⁴⁰—and this must be so for successful and failed risk-takers alike.

²³⁴ Ibid., 68.

²³⁵ Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 226.

²³⁶ For a critique of any theodicy that focuses on the aggregate or “global” level, see Adams, “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians,” 305.

²³⁷ Baker-Fletcher, “God with Us in the Dust,” 189.

²³⁸ Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 203.

²³⁹ Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 178.

²⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 15:13-23.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed a range of sociological theories of risk, utilizing them to investigate the concepts of vulnerability and risk in three domains: the macro-level of vulnerability to disastrous hazards, the meso-level of vulnerability to insurable hazards, and the personal level, where vulnerability also arises from life-enhancing risk-taking.

Discussing these three domains has shown the importance of a differentiated sense of vulnerability. Kristine Culp's understanding of vulnerability as "susceptibility to being changed, for good and for ill,"²⁴¹ a condition that should not be overcome,²⁴² applies well to the realm of personal risk, where some goods are only attainable through vulnerable exposure to harm. But this is not sufficient to provide a rich and well-differentiated account of other important kinds of vulnerability and risk.

Risk sociology has revealed two other levels of vulnerability in which theology should endorse the struggle to limit vulnerability. First, insurance in solidarity reduces the financial vulnerability to middle-range calculable hazards, thus empowering people to reorient their lives. Second, the precautionary principle should guide the realm of disaster vulnerability to natural hazards and risk society hazards, thus decreasing vulnerability for those at risk. In sum, this chapter has offered a much more differentiated sense of human vulnerability that might be valuable for creating further interdisciplinary bridges for theologians to pursue.

One interdisciplinary bridge opened in this chapter is the subjective conditions of possibility for coming to consider something as a risk. This is the topic of the next chapter, which explores one approach to this question, namely the *Relational Theory of Risk*

²⁴¹ Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*, 2.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 94.

5. Danger and Trust: Contributing to the Relational Theory of Risk

In the article “A Relational Theory of Risk” from 2011, Åsa Boholm and Hervé Corvellec propose a theoretical framework for understanding how people consider something a risk. The essence of their theory is that risk emerges in the simultaneity of (1) threatening *risk objects*, (2) valuable and vulnerable *objects at risk*, and (3) the *relationship* between (1) and (2) by the assumption of causal relations between them. This relational theory of risk enables Boholm and Corvellec to cast light on the social risk conflict that arises when people construct risk relationships in mutually exclusive ways. Their theory advises risk managers to investigate the values of opposing groups rather than simply trying to inform them about the risk calculations of experts.

However, the risk management application of the relational theory of risk does not exhaust the potential of Boholm and Corvellec’s article; the chapter also entails two important ethical perspectives. The first ethical perspective concerns the struggle to reject and “exclude” the thing or person that one constructs as a threatening risk object. Although Boholm and Corvellec appear mostly descriptive about this dynamic, I will argue that normative questions arise immediately from the struggle to keep others out. The second ethical perspective concerns the ethical consequences of the relational theory’s focus on risk. Focusing entirely on risk, I will argue, the theory consolidates the social attribution of harm to endogenous risk rather than exogenous danger, a priority that overburdens modern society with responsibility.²⁴³ These two crucial ethical features of the relational theory of risk invite further reflection.

Therefore, this chapter investigates the relational theory of risk and seeks ways to refine it, using an interdisciplinary material. Critical insights from the sociology of risk appear, especially the German systems theorist Niklas Luhmann’s considerations of risk, danger, and trust. Ethical and philosophical perspectives will qualify and nuance these sociological insights. As an outcome of these deliberations, the chapter suggests a “Relational Theory of Risk and Danger” that not only speaks to the ethical

²⁴³ Ethicist Wolfgang Huber distinguishes the “retrospective responsibility” of taking responsibility for one’s action in the past from the “prospective responsibility” of taking responsible action for the future, Huber, “After Fukushima,” 1. In this context, the responsibility is retrospective.

implications of the relational theory of risk but also to its ability to explain social risk conflict.

Section 2 offers a brief explanation of the relational theory of risk. Sections 3-5 refine the relational theory of risk. Section 3 argues that a relationship of risk is properly a “relationship of danger” if the person either does not perceive the relationship in advance or does not have any options of mitigating it. This section also discusses the ethical consequences of overlooking the distinction between risk and danger in risk theory. Section 4 discusses the relational theory’s ethical claim that risk relationships imply an “exclusion” of the threatening object. Instead, the section argues that a risk relationship places the observer in a decision between trust and distrust, and only distrust results in a struggle of exclusion. Section 5 suggests that when a person constructs a risk-relationship, the distinction between risk and danger poses the question of the origin of the negative consequences, either in the person suffering the harm or in something external. This question is key to analyzing social risk conflicts. In section 6, I finally present the Relational Theory of Risk and Danger.

1. The Relational Theory of Risk

Let me begin with a hypothetical example that will assist in explaining the relational theory of risk. An Italian tourist guide earns money by informing tourists about the Leaning Tower of Pisa. One day, a tourist asks the tourist guide whether the Leaning Tower of Pisa is earthquake proof. Just short of answering, the tourist guide dwells on the image of an earthquake striking the Tuscan region, powerfully enough to lay the Leaning Tower in ruins. The tourist guide shivers as images of the consequences for her, for Italy, and for the world cultural heritage flash before her eyes.

The relational theory of risk offers a framework within which one can understand the dynamics of such an example. The following statement captures the key aspects of the theory:

[Risk results] from situated cognition that establishes a relationship of risk linking two objects, a risk object and an object at risk in a causal and contingent way so that the risk is considered, in some way and under certain circumstances, to threaten the valued object at risk.²⁴⁴

The concept of “objects” denotes all phenomena that people can identify as one among other objects, like the driver of a Ford Focus, the Leaning

²⁴⁴ Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk,” 176.

Tower of Pisa, classical music, or democracy.²⁴⁵ To identify an object, a person has to make use of distinctions.²⁴⁶ For example, the proper name serves sufficiently to identify the Leaning Tower of Pisa among other towers.

The relational theory places an object in either one of two positions, either as “an object at risk” or as a “risk object” (see figure 1). An object can be “at risk” if it meets two requirements. First, a person must ascribe value to it, as the tourist guide ascribes value to the Leaning Tower of Pisa because she makes her living on it, but also because she values its importance as a symbol of her country and for the cultural heritage of the world. Boholm and Corvellec emphasize how ascription of value varies depending on the cultural context and the personal preferences of the person. Second, an object is “at risk” only if it is vulnerable to a certain threat, say an earthquake. The Leaning Tower, then, meets both the requirements of value and vulnerability and therefore constitutes an object suitable for being an object at risk.

The threatening earthquake occupies the other side of the risk relationship equation. Boholm and Corvellec define the threatening object as the “risk object.” In other words, a risk object is what a person perceives as threatening to the object at risk. The risk object may decrease the value of object at risk or even eliminate the object at risk altogether, like an earthquake may destroy the Leaning Tower. In sum, the definitions of the risk object and the object at risk are interdependent. The construction of a risk relationship between a risk object and an object at risk occurs in a person at a certain time; and when it does, both objects are constituted simultaneously.

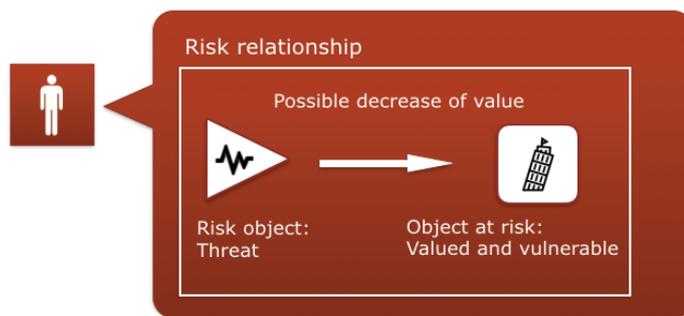
The person constructing the risk relationship, in Boholm and Corvellec’s terminology, constitutes a “situated cognition.”²⁴⁷ The cognitive aspect derives from the way in which the person constructs a risk relationship, namely through a creative imagination. In his or her situated context, the person imagines a certain train of events in which a risk object may causally affect an object at risk so that the value of the object at risk

²⁴⁵ Boholm and Corvellec suggest “physical, cultural, or social artifacts,” but these three categories do not exhaust the relevant realm of objects, *ibid.*, 177.. Consider e.g. the personal zone of intimacy, which could be at risk and therefore expands the list.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Also Heyman clarifies that one needs three processes, namely “the *selection* of an outcome as worthy of attention, the *homogenisation* of cases, and their *differentiation* from non-cases,” Heyman, “Risk and Culture,” 612.

²⁴⁷ Sometimes, the relational theory also uses the term “observer,” which also Luhmann prefers.

decreases. This imagined train of events constitutes a “risk narrative.”²⁴⁸ Occasioned by a tourist’s questions, the Italian tourist guide imagines that an earthquake (the risk object) occurs, strong enough to destabilize the Leaning Tower (the object at risk), whereby the guide has constructed a risk relationship between earthquake and tower.



After this brief summary of the relational theory, which I endorse, the next three sections discuss ways to refine the theory. The first problem concerns those relationships where the valuable and vulnerable object is properly in danger, rather than at risk.

2. Relationships of Danger

Solely focusing on the concept of “risk,” the relational theory of risk overlooks that humans also find themselves exposed to negative events beyond their perception and agency. In “A Relational Theory of Risk,” Boholm and Corvellec suggest—with a reference to Luhmann—that “relationships of risk are bound to action and decisions to act.”²⁴⁹ Luhmann’s notion of risk is characterized by a seminal distinction between risk and danger. While a risk is attributed to an agent, a danger is attributed to the external environment. If the reader takes Boholm and Corvellec’s reference to Luhmann’s theory at face value, their statement implies that when a person has constructed a risk relationship, this person has the agency and responsibility for acting on it, for trying to prevent the risk object. Let me expand this point a bit further by presenting Luhmann’s distinction between risk and danger.

In Luhmann, the distinction between risk and danger presupposes the observation that the future is inherently uncertain and insecure (*unsicher*). The future does not appear to follow from deterministic laws, and even if it

²⁴⁸ Elsewhere Corvellec offers insights into how individual construction of risk narratives can be inspired by signs of risk—say, warning signs in public transportation—that are narrated by administrative entities, Corvellec, “The Narrative Structure of Risk Accounts,” 106–12.

²⁴⁹ Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk,” 181.

did, humans often do not possess enough information about the determinant factors to foresee the future. So, rather than considering risk in distinction to certainty and security, Luhmann seeks to pair the concept of risk with something that also presupposes insecurity. Therefore, Luhmann suggests a distinction between “risk” and “danger.” Both risk and danger denote possible harm.²⁵⁰ But the distinction between them hinges upon their attribution: if the harm derives from an internal decision, the harm is a “risk.” If, in contrast, the harm originates in the external environment, the harm constitutes a “danger.”²⁵¹ A consequence of Luhmann’s distinction is the following: if all relationships between threatening and valuable-vulnerable objects were relationships of *risk*, as the relational theory of risk would have it, then, the harm is assigned always to the injured party—the victim of the harm—and never to the injured party’s external environment.

In light of this observation, section 2 discusses the conditions of possibility for a risk relationship in distinction to a “danger relationship.” In a “danger relationship,” the harm does not derive from the injured party itself, but from something in the external environment. The last section considers the ethical relevance of signifying some relationships as relationships of danger rather than relationships of risk.

Familiarity with the World

Constructing risk relationships is not the primary human mode of being. Prior to that, human beings find themselves in a state of pre-reflexive familiarity with the world. Even while one constructs a risk relationship, one takes the rest of the world for granted. Humans live with “that attitude, which has no particular frame of reference, of unquestioning security in relation to what is not expressly thought and intended.”²⁵² Familiarity with the world means expecting the continuity of the world, expecting that the world stays roughly the same. While showing people around, the tourist guide is concerned with capturing the attention of her audience, thus presupposing the continuity of traffic, the presence of the Leaning Tower, etc.

In this state of familiarity with the world, things may occur to a person that this person was not antecedently aware of. In such a situation—prior to

²⁵⁰ Luhmann, “Risiko und Gefahr,” 138.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 148–49. The general purview of Luhmann’s theory could suggest that such attribution is an exclusively social process. But sometimes Luhmann speaks of the distinction between risk and danger more phenomenologically, in the sense that risk requires the person to have knowledge about certain alternatives to choose between. Since the purpose in this context is the conversation with the cognitivist relational theory of risk, I allow the phenomenological interpretation to dominate this chapter.

²⁵² Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, 92, see appendix.

the construction of a risk relationship—humans live in danger. This phenomenon can be conceptualized with former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s reference to “unknown unknowns”—harms that we don’t even know that we don’t know about.²⁵³ Before the terrorist attack on New York 9/11 2001, US military had spent billions of dollars erecting a missile shield anticipating missile attacks from rogue states but had not imagined that civil airplanes could be used as missiles too.

Unknown unknowns are relative to the person’s knowledge stand. One person’s knowledge is often another person’s ignorance. The 9/11 attackers had worked with the narrative that hijacked planes could become a threat to the World Trade Center—to them, this narrative did not constitute a risk relationship—but even so, this narrative still constituted an unknown unknown to the US military. In the relational theory of risk, the subjectivity of the person features centrally: only if a person has constructed the risk relationship—sometimes aided by other people’s risk narratives—only then does the risk relationship exist for this person. Unknown unknowns, by contrast, constitute dangers *par excellence*.

Vague Risk Objects

In the relational theory of risk, a risk relationship contains definite risk objects: this dog threatens to bite this baby boy. But human beings may also construct—or better still, sense—risk relationships, where the threatening risk object is vague and undefined.²⁵⁴ Søren Kierkegaard’s influential distinction between fear and anxiety can illuminate what such a vague risk relationship may mean. In Kierkegaard, fear has a definite object, so fear is how one often relates to a well-defined risk relationship: the tourist guide may fear a barking, and potentially biting, stray dog passing by her as she shows around the tourists.

²⁵³ Donald Rumsfeld also spoke about “known knows” and “known unknowns” at a US Department of Defense press conference on February 12th, 2002. His statement has been printed in poetic form in Seely, *Pieces of Intelligence*, 2. Slavoj Žižek has complete the epistemological picture with the term “unknown knows,” which denotes “all the unconscious beliefs and prejudices that determine how we perceive reality and intervene in it,” Žižek, “Rumsfeld and the Bees.”

²⁵⁴ Indeed, even with a rather definite risk object, the *relationship* may still be vague. The vagueness can occur if one considers a specific threat, say from the brute forces of driving a car, but is unable to concretise the ways in which driving can cause harm. One might even be unwilling to spell out some of the possible narratives, because concretising the relationship into certain narratives entails narrowing one’s focus. If one keeps looking down for signs of slippery roads, one might overlook the red lights (the fallacy of misplaced concreteness).

In contrast, an object of anxiety escapes definition; its object is nothingness itself.²⁵⁵ The mere possibility that something bad could happen in this or that regard may daunt people without enabling them to define the object of their concerns. Before the tourist guide was asked, the presence of the very leaning tower may have installed an anxious insecurity in her. However, as soon as people define the risk object, anxiety turns into fear.²⁵⁶ Still, constructing a risk relationship with vague objects makes people anxious.

Ulrich Beck's understanding of anxiety in the risk society can illustrate what the consequences of such "relationships of vague risk" might be. In his theory of the risk society, anxiety plays a significant role, even though its role invites further development. As Beck notes:

The driving force in the class society can be summarized in the phrase: *I am hungry!* The movement set in motion by the risk society, on the other hand, is expressed in the statement: *I am anxious!* The *commonality of anxiety* takes the place of the *commonality of need*.²⁵⁷

Ulrich Beck's theory of the risk society points out that society has created a new dangerous materiality. Beck defines this new dangerous materiality—among other things—through its invisibility. While the natural senses of human beings are able to observe hazards like earthquakes, the new dangers are generally imperceptible. The normal human senses can discover neither radioactivity, pesticides, nor greenhouse gasses, they can only discover the negative consequences.²⁵⁸ This trait leaves the public dependent on scientific experts to discover and convey their risk assessments to the exposed people, scientists whose values inform their risk selections and who do not always agree with each other on the assessment of the risk. One needs only to think of the different scientific

²⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, "Begybet Angst," 348. For Kierkegaard, the object of anxiety is oneself, or specifically one's manifold possibilities of relating to future realities. The object is "freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility," Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 313, see appendix. This means first, that not only the possibility of something, but the sheer possibility of possibility is what is anxiety provoking. Second, Kierkegaard insists that a person has to learn to be properly anxious, Kierkegaard, "Begybet Angst," 454, because proper anxiety reveals one's self as freedom and responsibility. Third, Kierkegaard emphasizes that anxiety, properly speaking, comes from within, not from without, although people usually seek the root of anxiety outside themselves, *ibid.* In this context, I extend Kierkegaard's analysis of anxiety (*Angst*) to encompass also a sense of the anxiety that derives from indefiniteness outside of the human subjectivity.

²⁵⁶ Wilkinson, *Anxiety in a Risk Society*, 19–20.

²⁵⁷ Beck, *Risk Society*, 49, emphasis in original, translation altered, see appendix.

²⁵⁸ Beck, *Risikogesellschaft*, 29–30.

interpretations of coffee as health risk or health opportunity.²⁵⁹ This structural feature of the risk society results in the public's construction of "risk" relationships where the risk object is left undefined. People become anxious, not knowing exactly what they are afraid of. Therefore, what brings humans together in the risk society, according to Ulrich Beck, is their anxiety toward "vague risk relationships."²⁶⁰

No Options

Even when a person constructs a definite relationship between a threatening object and a valuable and vulnerable object, this relationship becomes a risk relationship only if the person has actual options of preventing the risk object or securing the object at risk. A possible harm is a risk only if the potentially injured party has a significant degree of knowledge and agency. If the victim has neither knowledge nor agency, Luhmann's distinction between risk and danger implies that the threatening relationship constitutes a relationship of danger.²⁶¹

A genuine risk relationship requires that the observer both constructs the risk relationship and that he or she have available a real set of alternative options to choose from.

When this definition of risk speaks of "options" available to the observer, options should be understood concretely, not necessarily with reference to an abstract free will. Luhmann notes the problem with a society that attributes harm to individuals according to an abstract notion of choice:

²⁵⁹ Sørensen and Christiansen, *Ulrich Beck*, 85.

²⁶⁰ The "object at risk" can also be vague: it can be difficult to determine beforehand, in terms of both space and time. In the case of Chernobyl, the wind decided who were the actual objects at risk; and had the power plant deteriorated in 2030, an entire new generation of citizens would be affected, see Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 120.

²⁶¹ In a later article, Boholm and Corvellec find that risk workers in a railway project have an acute sense not only of what I, with Rumsfeld, call unknown unknowns but also that a whole array of identified risk relationships are beyond their control, Boholm and Corvellec, "The Role of Valuation Practices for Risk Identification," 13–15. However, these risk workers do have one specific sense of control or agency, which means that their threats still constitute risks: these risk workers can recommend that the railway project be brought to a halt. This situation creates a fascinating dialectic. On the one hand, embarking on a grand project, like building a new railway, means that all threats constitute risks. Management of those risks entails decisions that are equivalent to second-order risk-taking. On the other hand, once the project has begun, it constitutes a reality, within which employees find themselves exposed to unforeseen or unmanageable events, say extreme storms, that would threaten life, project or not. These relationships, then, still constitute relationships of danger.

To the extent that society imputes decisions and a corresponding mobility, there are no longer any dangers that are strictly externally attributable. People are affected by natural catastrophes, but they could have moved away from the endangered area or taken out insurance. To be exposed to danger is a risk.²⁶²

Niels Henrik Gregersen rightly draws attention to the “considerable degree of arrogance” in the idea that the victims of natural disasters could just have moved.²⁶³ But I claim that the arrogance lies first of all with the society—or the organization—that places responsibility on the individual rather than on itself or simply puts it upon the uncontrollable nature of things.²⁶⁴

From Danger to Risk, and Back

The last three sections have shown some requirements for a relationship of risk. A relationship between a threatening and a valuable and vulnerable object is a relationship of risk only if the injured party (1) actually constructs the relationship, (2) constructs the relationship in such a definite way that his or her response goes from anxiety to fear, and (3) has substantial options for mitigating the relationship, through precaution, preemption, preparedness or other anticipatory actions.²⁶⁵ If these requirements are not in place, the relationship is rather one of danger.

Without the aspect of danger, the relational theory of risk comes to follow a problematic trend toward attributing negativity to the injured party.²⁶⁶ According to Luhmann, increased knowledge and options for the individual person has turned dangers into risks. For example, more knowledge about risk factors in medicine turns the danger of disease into a risk of one’s own lifestyle.²⁶⁷ Before the extensive research into different carcinogens, cancer was a danger; now, many different warnings are in place, among which the most prominent, arguably, is “Don’t smoke!” So, developing lung cancer now largely constitutes a risk.²⁶⁸ In general, the increase in knowledge and options has resulted in a general attribution of harm to the injured party rather than the external environment. The

²⁶² Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, 71, see appendix.

²⁶³ Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 220.

²⁶⁴ Whether Luhmann defends this view or is being sarcastic is unclear.

²⁶⁵ Anderson, “Preemption, Precaution, Preparedness,” 788.

²⁶⁶ Others argue that the trend goes towards inability to attributive negativity at all, see Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 271.

²⁶⁷ Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 53.

²⁶⁸ Exemplified with public warning signs, Corvellec discusses how public risk accounts applied by the state places responsibility on the individual person: “risk accounts also engage the responsibility of narrates to do what they reasonably can now that they know what may happen,” Corvellec, “The Narrative Structure of Risk Accounts,” 114.

relational theory of risk allows that risk objects and objects at risk change place in a battle of definitions.²⁶⁹ Such definitional contests of “association” and “dissociation” of causal connections between threats and vulnerable valuables also apply to the question of danger or risk, as Boholm and Corvellec’s study of a windmill platform has shown²⁷⁰. However, in this context, the argument is that the overall societal increase in knowledge and options results in a general transfer from danger to risk.

Existing risk literature has pointed out that this transfer from danger to risk is problematic because *reputational* risks, that is, the management of guilt and blame, become more important for the organization than the management of material risks.²⁷¹ But a philosophical perspective also goes into the existential ramifications of this practice. The discrepancy between lifestyle and norms threatens to overburden the human self-relation concerning the key ethical component of guilt.

Overburdening the human individual with responsibility distorts the human sense of guilt, which plays a vital role in the ethical awareness that underlies human co-existence. The human “sense of guilt” should correspond to human actual “relations of guilt” concerning harm done to others. One should *feel* as guilty as one *is* guilty. However, human sense of guilt can deviate from this correspondence in two ways.²⁷² The human sense of guilt can deviate “neurotically” when the overburdening of responsibility results in a too generalized sense of guilt. If an injured party internalizes the all-encompassing societal allocation of responsibility to oneself, the injured party succumbs existentially under the weight of his or her guilt. One feels guiltier than one is. But human sense of guilt can also deviate “psychopathically.” There may be a point where the neurotic sense of guilt becomes so pervasive that it challenges the person to a protest. Rather than striking a proper balance between human relations of guilt and human sense of guilt, the person protests against the idea of guilt altogether, deeming it irrelevant to his or her existential orientation. Such a protest against the idea of guilt allows the person’s healthy sense of guilt to wither away. One feels less guilty than one is. In sum, the societal transfer from danger to risk, which places all responsibility on the injured party, has problematic ethical consequences.

²⁶⁹ On the 1996 controversy about Shell sinking the Brent Spar platform, see Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk: Lessons for Risk Communication,” 14–16.

²⁷⁰ Corvellec and Boholm, “The Risk/No-Risk Rhetoric of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA),” 638.

²⁷¹ Power, *The Risk Management of Everything*, 37–42.

²⁷² This section builds on the insightful observations of the ethicist Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 12–35.

A philosophical approach to this societal situation seeks resources to ease the overburdened human responsibility that results in a distorted sense of guilt.²⁷³ Luhmann's distinction between risk and danger offers such resources by enabling social theorizing to *insist on the aspect of danger*. In the words of theologian Günter Thomas, "the children of non-smoking, non-drinking, vegetarian parents can also become diseased with cancer at an early age."²⁷⁴ Due to the ethical consequences of an exclusive focus on risk, a refined relational theory of risk should be precise about the conditions for considering threatening relationships as relationships of risk. These conditions are knowledge and options. Threatening relationships where the injured party has neither sufficient knowledge nor available options should be constructed as relationships of danger.

3. Risk Relationships and Trust

The last section ended with the observation that a relationship between a threatening and a valuable and vulnerable object should be considered one of risk only if a person can imagine the causal connection between the two objects and has available options for mitigating their relationship. But even though the injured party is capable of mitigating the risk relationship, this does not entail that the person should make use of this option, since mitigating a risk relationship entails rejecting and excluding the risk object from one's space of concern.

This section claims that the rejection and exclusion of the risk object only materialize if the observer chooses to distrust the risk object rather than trusting it. In contrast, Boholm and Corvellec suggest that a risk relationship always motivates the risk manager to "exclude" the risk object:

If designating a risk object is a double act of selection and exclusion, then designating an object at risk is a double act of selection and inclusion. Risk management and governance strive to keep the risk object out and the object at risk in by developing an adequate risk management regime.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ However, "underburdening" the consciousness would also be problematic. If one takes away all responsibility, one also removes the possibility of free consent and gives way to the utilitarian argument that "no instances of consent are perfect," see Shrader-Frechette, "Risk," 333, wherefore they can calculate the risk-distribution without consideration for the right to free consent.

²⁷⁴ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 418, fn. 84, my translation, see appendix.

²⁷⁵ Boholm and Corvellec, "A Relational Theory of Risk," 180. Elsewhere Corvellec states that "Risk accounts evoke threats, threats evoke fear and fear evokes dangerous Others," Corvellec, "The Narrative Structure of Risk Accounts," 116. I claim that trust can break this chain of causality either before threats elicit fear or before fear creates dangerous Others.

However, I claim that when the person constructing a risk relationship chooses to *trust* the risk object, the person maintains the risk object in his or her space of concern. Trust includes a risk object, only distrust excludes it. To justify this claim, I draw upon Luhmann's early book on interpersonal trust (and trust in systems), so the following investigation is restricted to human risk objects.²⁷⁶

Relationships of risk can arise when one realizes that another person is free to do anything imaginable, even harmful things. When considering the damaging options of another person, one can construct him or her as a risk object within a risk relationship. Such a risk relationship places the constructing person in a position where he or she has to consider whether to trust or distrust the other.

Trust, in Luhmann's terminology, is the expectation that the trustee behaves in concordance with his or her personality. Trust is the generalized expectation that the other will handle his or her freedom, his or her disturbing potential for diverse action, in accordance with the personality that he or she has presented and made socially visible.²⁷⁷ Trust assumes that the other will behave in accordance with his or her personality, but trust also anticipates that the actions of the other will contribute to a meaningful life, including also the life of the truster. As Luhmann puts it: "One trusts if one assumes that this behaviour [of the other] will fit in meaningfully with one's own pattern of life; one distrusts if one reckons that this will not be the case."²⁷⁸ While one realizes that the other constitutes a risk object, one can still choose to trust that the other person does not actualize his or her threatening potential but participates in the co-construction of meaningful lives.

Trusting the risk object constitutes a response that includes the risk object rather than excluding it. Only when one chooses to distrust does one exclude the risk object and take action either to pacify the risk object or protecting the object at risk. The risk object is only excluded when the person distrusts the risk object.

The ethical concern with trust and distrust derives from the inherent uncertainty of the choice between them. The choice of trust and distrust

²⁷⁶ I should suspect that the results could be generalized also to non-human risk objects. In a qualified sense, trust can also be given to things, say a tree: If a tree looks sturdy, a person will be more inclined to climb it; however, it makes little sense to speak of the tree breaking the climber's trust. If a branch looks thin and a climber steps onto it anyway, the climber may be humiliated because he or she has trusted too much. Yet, the ethical priority to trust, which I consider at the end of section 4, does not apply to trust in non-human things

²⁷⁷ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 48.

²⁷⁸ Luhmann, *Trust*, 72, see appendix.

cannot be based on any secure foundation; rather, trust and distrust are performative in the sense that they create the reality that they assume. According to Luhmann, any decision about trust depends on an interpretation of the available knowledge and signs. One rarely places trust or distrust in someone without analyzing the context in a search for objective reference points. One bases the trust/distrust-decision on reasons and signs, among other things the personality of the object of trust. But since trust and distrust relate to the infinite potentialities of the future actions of others, one can never completely justify one's decision to trust or not with reference to these signs and reasons. As Luhmann notes: "Trust remains a risky undertaking."²⁷⁹ Since neither trust nor distrust can be fully rationalized, to trust or not to trust is finally a decision that has performative consequences. If one trusts, one settles on the signs in favor of trusting and thus constructs the person as someone who can be trusted. If one distrusts, one focuses on the negative signs and the person becomes someone who cannot be trusted.

Luhmann's distinction between trust and distrust enables the observation that Boholm and Corvellec's relational theory of risk focuses only on what happens when a person *distrusts*. As they argue, constructing a risk relationship—and, I should add, maintaining it into distrust of the risk object—involves "designating" one object as dangerous and another object as valuable and vulnerable. Boholm and Corvellec warn:

designating an object as 'dangerous' does not simply entail affixing a label of dangerousness to something that exists already. Designating something as of one kind rather than another is a constitutive act that outlines the object's contours. The emphasis on characteristic traits provides the object with an identity; correspondingly, this emphasis involves downplaying other traits of the object and considering them less significant.²⁸⁰

The result of reacting to a risk relationship with distrust in the risk object is that the constructing person excludes the risk object from his or her concerned attention. As theologian Miroslav Volf suggests, exclusion of the other destroys the valuable otherness of the other, sometimes by constructing the other as an enemy to be destroyed, sometimes by coercing the other to assimilate to one's own standard.²⁸¹ Both exclusionary options are distrusting attempts to remove the other from its status as a risk object, instead of respecting the freedom of the other.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 27, see appendix.

²⁸⁰ Boholm and Corvellec, "A Relational Theory of Risk," 179.

²⁸¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

So, a refined relational theory should add that trust, while respecting the infinite possibility of the other even to do harmful things, expects that the other does not make use of that possibility in the future. Instead, trust relies on the possibility that the mutual life plans could enhance one another. In the context of railway planning, Boholm and Corvellec find that contracts are necessary but finally incomplete ways of controlling contractors. Ultimately, railway planners need a certain amount of trust in their contractors if the planners are to embark on a grand railway project.²⁸²

This insistence that trust plays a significant role in the construction of risk relationships enables a philosophical perspective relating to the difference between trust and distrust. From a philosophical point of view, I will argue, *trust is better than distrust, generally speaking*. Of course, some situations require a responsible person to distrust, but a philosophy of love would argue that the performative consequences of distrust are ethically problematic. Philosopher of religion Claudia Welz suggests, with reference to Søren Kierkegaard, that love of another seeks to avoid a construction of the other as less trustworthy than the other actually is. Indeed, love would prefer suffering the consequences of a naive trust to overlooking the possibility of good in the other. Welz writes:

Certainly, to be played for a fool hurts the vanity and pride, but it is just as shameful to anticipate evil when good was actually present. The loving person fears to be prejudiced and wrong, so the loving person believes and hopes all [good things from the other].²⁸³

Of course, the result of trust sometimes goes well beyond having one's pride hurt, it may result in true suffering, so—again—some situations necessitate distrust. Even so, distrust is not so significant as trusting is overall.

This ethical perspective of love encourages the person who constructs the risk relationships to challenge the cultural standards of accepted risk relationships. According to Boholm and Corvellec, the cultural situation constrains what can count as a risk relationship and what cannot. They focus mostly on descriptive standards like “acknowledged natural laws” or “established principles of scientific, discovery, rules of media representation, or the game of social forces.”²⁸⁴ However, culture also provides normative standards with which to select risk relationships. So, even if one's culture would easily accept certain risk narratives and jump to

²⁸² Boholm and Corvellec, “The Role of Valuation Practices for Risk Identification,” 121.

²⁸³ Welz, *Vertrauen und Versuchung*, 66, my translation, see appendix.

²⁸⁴ Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk,” 179.

acts of exclusion, the ethical perspective of Welz appeals to the individual that he or she remembers the shame of believing the worst about others and instead considers the trust of love that hopes all good things.

The ethical insights that derive from observing that the constructing person has a choice between trust and distrust make it imperative for a refined relational theory of risk to incorporate Luhmann's distinction between trust and distrust.

4. Risk Objects and Danger Objects

A third and last point concerns the social conflict that can arise around antagonistic constructions of risk relationships when mutual trust has broken down. While the relational theory of risk understands risk conflicts as the result of differing constructions of what counts as risk object and object at risk, this chapter uses Luhmann's distinction between risk and danger to raise question of the origin of the object that threatens the valuable and vulnerable object.

Boholm and Corvellec analyze a case about a ridge in Southern Sweden, where high ground water pressure fertilizes the soil for agriculture. At one point, the walls of the tunnel started leaking water, which incited conflict. On the one hand, local farmers viewed the high ground water as the object at risk and perceived the tunnel as the risk object because the leakage reduced the valuable ground water. On the other hand, the tunnel builders saw the tunnel as a valued item partly because a tunnel at that place would improve public transportation in the whole region of Southern Sweden, partly because a lot of money had already been poured into the project. For them, the high ground water became the risk object threatening to destroy the whole railroad project.²⁸⁵ Thus, the two risk groups constructed their risk relationships in exactly opposite ways. As a result, the two groups wanted opposite policies: lowering the ground water pressure or stopping the tunnel building.

The relational theory offers an analysis of risk constructions, an analysis that aids explaining the logic of antagonistic risk relationships. When people have different constructions of what counts as the risk object and as the object at risk—and when they have chosen to distrust rather than trust—risk conflicts arise. The oppositional risk narratives result in conflicts that can only be solved if both parties are willing to inquire into the values of the other person and find axiological compromises.

But a refined theory of risk can use Niklas Luhmann's distinction between risk and danger to add a significant layer to the explanation of risk conflicts: a refined theory ought to take into account who brought about the

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 184–85.

threatening object. Depending on the point of view of the observer, the same threatening object may be either a risk object or what I would call a “danger object.” While the person who has brought about the threatening object would consider it a risk object (the perspective of the tunnel builders), the person who perceives the threatening object as externally generated would see the threatening object as a “danger object” (the perspective of the local farmers).

This difference of perspective, whether the possible harm is self-induced or imposed by others, whether it is endogenous or exogenous, changes the two parties’ assessment of the harm. Luhmann writes:

People for whom the risk behavior of others becomes a danger will evaluate [the threat from the risk behavior] differently than those who make the decision themselves or participate in it. In other words, there are structural occasions for the ongoing reproduction of consternation conflicts.²⁸⁶

This structural difference between the victim of harm and the decision maker implies that solutions to social risk conflicts cannot merely be concerned with offering full information, as usual risk communication theory suggests.²⁸⁷ Nor can risk managers solve risk conflicts simply by listening to the values of the conflicting parties, as the relational theory of risk suggests—even though clarification of the key values at stake is integral to any effective risk communication.²⁸⁸ Both of these types of risk management overlook the distinction between the decision maker and the victim of risk, between risk and danger.²⁸⁹

A refined relational theory of risk would argue that *risk conflicts are not only about lack of information and axiological differences; they are also about who is responsible for the genesis of the threatening situation*. In another article, Boholm uses Luhmann’s distinction between risk and danger, which enables her to consider the following: “In order for communication about risk to result in mutual understanding [...it requires] a transition of decision of power from regulator to stakeholder.”²⁹⁰ Sharing power, engaging more people in the decision-making process, is certainly a way to resolve some risk conflicts. Not everyone can participate equally in all decisions,²⁹¹ so practices of sharing power cannot ultimately

²⁸⁶ Luhmann, “Risiko und Gefahr,” 163, my translation, see appendix.

²⁸⁷ See Boholm, “The Public Meeting,” 136.

²⁸⁸ Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk: Lessons for Risk Communication,” 13.

²⁸⁹ Luhmann, “Risiko und Gefahr,” 152.

²⁹⁰ Boholm, “The Public Meeting,” 136.

²⁹¹ Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 163–64.

solve risk conflicts. Conflict remains a possibility. But standing with the vulnerability to such conflict may be necessary for proper cooperation. At least, this is the basis for feminist ethicist Sharon Welch, who has argued for what she calls “an ethic of risk.”

Welch opposes an “ethic of control” that construes responsibility²⁹² as the ability to ensure the implementation of one’s goal with certainty.²⁹³ This ethic rules in the idea that a responsible risk manager mitigates and manages one’s own risk relationship. An ethic of control implies that one has the power to enforce a process according to one’s own plans. Welch argues that such an ethic of control is problematic. For, if the implementation process involves other human parties with risk relationships, the concentration of power implied in its concept of responsibility relies on a morally problematic imbalance of power.²⁹⁴

Instead, Welch advances an understanding of responsibility that she calls an “ethic of risk.” According to this ethic, “[r]esponsible action [means] the creation of a matrix of further resistance ... Responsible action provides partial resolutions and the inspiration and conditions for further partial resolutions by others.”²⁹⁵ Instead of requiring a job done by one individual, responsible action encourages the individual to take risks in creating conditions that can further more actions, also by others and in the future. Sharing power with others equals running the risk that others may influence the process, but sharing power also reduces the possibility of conflict that derives from experiencing harm as exogenous.

The insistence on the aspect of danger, then, is not only relevant for a refined relational theory of risk due to the existential relating to human sense of guilt (see section 3.5), but also in connection with the different assessment of possible harm, whether it derives from oneself or from another party.

5. The Relational Theory of Risk and Danger

In this chapter, I have argued for three ways in which one could refine the relational theory of risk. This final section describes the resulting contours of the “relational theory of risk and danger” in three brief points.

First, humans are in danger without prior knowledge or available options. Humans are in danger either if they are unaware of the relationship between a threatening and a valuable and vulnerable object or if they do not have any options of mitigating that relationship. If so, a “relationship of

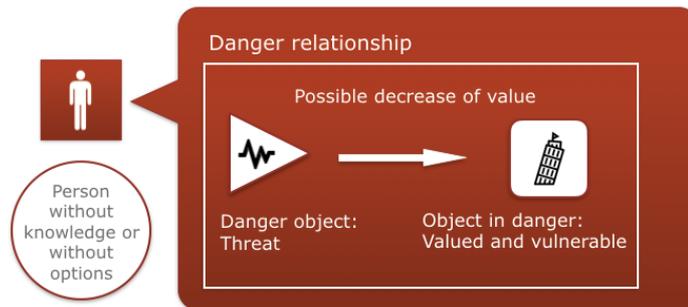
²⁹² Prospective responsibility (see note 1).

²⁹³ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 14.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

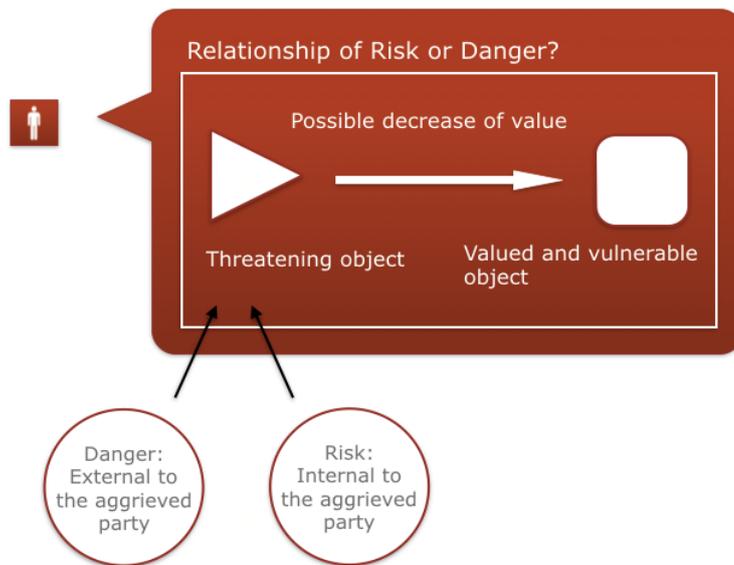
²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75, see also 46.

danger” exists. This relationship consists of 1) threatening “danger objects,” (2) valuable and vulnerable “objects in danger,” and (3) the relationship between (1) and (2) that can be established by the cognition of causal relations between (1) and (2) in a person who is unable to mitigate the relationship between (1) and (2), (see figure 2). If and only if, the person constructs the relationship and has options for excluding the object, a risk relationship emerges.



Second, when a person has constructed a risk relationship, he or she has a choice whether to trust or to distrust the risk object. If the person chooses to distrust the risk object, and that is sometimes necessary, the risk object is excluded and combatted either for destruction or assimilation. Conversely, if the person chooses to trust, the risk object remains included, the otherness of the risk object is respected and the person expects that the risk object acts in ways that result in a meaningful mutual life.

Third, some situations indeed undermine the possibility of trust, sometimes because the other person has constructed a mutually exclusive risk relationship. In such a situation, neither factual nor axiological discrepancies exhaust the possible reasons for conflict. The question of who brought about the threatening object plays an important role (see figure 3). The relationship is one of risk if the person ascribing value to the vulnerable object has brought about the threatening object (e.g. the perspective of the tunnel builders); if the threatening object derives from something external to the injured party, the relationship is one of danger (e.g. the perspective of the local farmers).



If the risky behavior of one person becomes the danger of another, the endangered person has legitimate reason to resist and create a conflict even if the factual and axiological disagreements have been overcome. True involvement in the decision-making process may help preventing some of that legitimate conflictual potential, but that requires an ethic of risk that dares to be vulnerable.

Along the way, I have highlighted three ethical features of the relational theory of risk and danger. First, observing that some relationships are dangerous helps undermine the exaggerated focus on individual responsibility for harming others, an opposition that enables humans to relate properly to a central phenomenon of human conviviality, namely guilt. Second, highlighting that a person constructing a risk relationship has a choice of trusting the risk object, especially if the risk object is human, enables humans to oppose a too distrustful culture and include rather than exclude the usual suspects. Third, insisting that people experience exogenous danger objects differently than endogenous risk objects supports the need for sharing power and the need for an ethic of risk rather than an ethic of control. In sum, the relational theory of risk and danger incorporates significant ethical features that the relational theory of risk overlooks.

Further research into refinements of the relational theory of risk could expand the purview beyond relationships of risk and danger to relationships of “chance” and “hope.” While relationships of risk and danger deal with human anticipation of future possible harm, humans also anticipate positive futures. The refined relational theory of risk has distinguished risk- and danger relationships according to the endogenous or exogenous attribution of the harm, respectively. Similarly, future interdisciplinary research could

investigate relationships of chance and hope according to endogenous and exogenous attribution of good. Developing a theory of relationships of chance and hope would challenge the gloominess of the future that creates and sustains a culture of ambiguous anticipatory action.²⁹⁶

I return briefly to the discussion of chance, hope and grace in Chapter 8. The next chapter goes more into detail with the topic of trust that I touched upon in this chapter, taking a more theological approach to the topic.

²⁹⁶ Anderson, "Preemption, Precaution, Preparedness."

6. Trust, Endangerment and Divine Vulnerability: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue

In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther defines faith as trust in “god,” be it trust in money and property, knowledge and social status, or the true, triune God. Famously, Luther writes: “A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.”²⁹⁷ Trusting in one’s “god” is related to a call for protection in a situation of endangerment.

However, the idea of faith as *trust in a situation of endangerment* needs to be clarified if it is to be viable for contemporary theology. Historical experience of excessive suffering—nooses and gas chambers—has challenged Luther’s idea of the provident God as one who simply offers protection from all harm. In response to this development, the leading hypothesis of this chapter is that an added emphasis on the vulnerable incarnation of the divine Son (in which the triune God experience a *crisis of trust*) can lead to a renewed appreciation of faith as trusting God in a situation of endangerment.

1. Method and Outline

Methodologically, I use interdisciplinary investigations into the phenomenon of trust to clarify the relationship between trust and endangerment. These investigations will offer perspectives on trust through which I will reinterpret the biblical accounts of divine incarnation. The description of trust builds on two sources, namely Danish philosopher of religion K.E. Løgstrup (1905-1981) and German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998).

A phenomenological description of trust has been the claim to fame for one of the founders of *Scandinavian Creation Theology*, K.E. Løgstrup.²⁹⁸ In his seminal work from 1956, *Den Etiske Fordring (The Ethical Demand)*, Løgstrup offered a phenomenology of trust that has been influential, not only in theology, but also in philosophy.

However, trust has not only been of interest in phenomenology. Since trust is an interpersonal phenomenon, the social sciences in particular have gained an interest in trust. A seminal figure in this movement has been

²⁹⁷ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 386, see appendix.

²⁹⁸ See Gregersen, Kristensson Uggla, and Wyller, *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age*.

Niklas Luhmann with his book *Vertrauen (Trust)* from 1968.²⁹⁹ Studying trust from a systems theoretical point of view, Luhmann addresses two aspects of trust that can expand Løgstrup's perspective.

First, Luhmann presents a theory of social trust, of trust in social systems, clarifying how human beings trustingly rely on social systems of arbitration when they consider trusting other people. Investigations into the nature of trust in social systems lead this chapter to a critical theological consideration of the endurance of such trust in social systems, a topic implicit in Luther's definition of faith.

Second, Luhmann offers a distinction between risk and danger, which helps understanding the situation of endangerment that Luther's definition of faith assumes. In Luhmann, both risk and danger are about future possible harm, and therefore establish the human being as vulnerable and exposed—what Luther means when he speaks of human beings “in need.” Human beings are exposed not only to things beyond their control; they also place themselves in threatening situations, exposing themselves to the whims of reality. This is the basis for Luhmann's distinction between danger and risk. While one is subject to “danger” if the harm derives from the external world, one runs a “risks” when the possible harm derives from a decision of one's own.

In what follows, I use Løgstrup and Luhmann constructively—mindful of their differences—to propose a view of trust that can clarify and qualify the theological understanding of faith as trust. I wish to show that trust does not result in security, but entails an endangered vulnerability in itself. I begin with a clarification of trust as a basic human condition of vulnerability, aided mostly by Løgstrup. Then I proceed with more Luhmannian investigations into how trust in social systems might be helpful if one's trust has turned into distrust. I end the clarification of trust with considerations about possible reactions to being trusted, aided by both Løgstrup and Luhmann.

In the final section, I use these insights on the nature of trust to reconfigure the idea of trust as faith in God, exploring the significance of the divine incarnation for *Large Catechism*. This approach will result in ways of bringing the notion of faith as trust into contemporary Christian theology.

²⁹⁹ In the social sciences, numerous other contributions exist. For an overview, see Shapiro, “The Grammar of Trust.” In her analysis, trust is “overextended,” which is why I focus narrowly on two accounts.

2. Trust as a Gift of Spontaneity

Trust is a basic and primary phenomenon in human life; it constitutes a reality that human beings cannot bring about themselves. This is the thesis of this section. Even though Luhmann sees trust as the opposite, namely as the result of a choice, I will argue my thesis drawing on observations from both Løgstrup and Luhmann.³⁰⁰

Trust plays an essential role in interpersonal communication. Løgstrup shows that approaching another person in speech entails a certain “tonality.” Communicating with others entails conveying a certain tone of voice, a note that one expects the other to tune into:

[S]imply in addressing the other, irrespective of the importance of the content of what we say, a certain note is struck through which we, as it were, step out of ourselves in order to exist in the speech relationship. For this reason the point of the demand—though unarticulated—is that the speaker is accepted as the note struck by the speaker’s address is accepted.³⁰¹

Addressing another person entails the trusting expectation that the other person tunes into the tonality that one has proposed. Intending a pun, one hopes that the recipient will smile.

The basic nature of trust manifests itself not only in spoken communication; already the bodily communication that ensues when appearing before others entails trust. In Luhmann’s observation, being in a room with other people entails the trusting expectation that one will be perceived in accordance with one’s self-image. If a person enters a room with other people, “his mere appearance presumes some minimum trust, trust that he will not be misinterpreted but that he will be accepted by and large as what he wishes to appear.”³⁰² Elsewhere in the text, Luhmann constricts trust to be the result of a choice occasioned by a breach of one’s immediate sphere of familiarity with the world. In this passage, however, Luhmann finds that the mere appearance before others entails a communication about one’s personality that one hope others will receive in

³⁰⁰ In this chapter, I read Løgstrup from a systematic point of view that includes his concept of the sovereign expressions of life, such as trust, openness of speech, mercy and hope, from his 1967 work *Opgør med Kierkegaard (Controverting Kierkegaard)*, see translated excerpts of this and other later writings of Løgstrup in this volume: Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*. In this book, Løgstrup followed his student Ole Jensen in saying that human evil does not annihilate all aspects of trust; human beings do not possess a power to destroy the created life in its entirety. What Ole Jensen argues is that trust is a manifestation of a momentary consummation of human life, Jensen, “‘Skabte livsmuligheder’ - ‘Suveræne livsytringer.’”

³⁰¹ Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 15, see appendix.

³⁰² Luhmann, *Trust*, 40, see appendix.

ways similar to one's own expectations—or in ways that are better than one would expect, surely.

Trust as Grace and Danger

Concluding from these observations, I would concur with Løgstrup that trust basically eludes human control. Humans are capable of choosing to adhere to a duty or not. This is not the case with trust. Trust arises with the very interdependent structure of human life.³⁰³ Some people lack a basic trust in life, and are severely disabled by it, but such people are unable to bring about this elementary trust by way of choice. Rather than being the product of human will, trust is an expression of life itself. Trust is a gift.

In line with this observation, Løgstrup suggests that trust is “spontaneous.” Løgstrup defines spontaneity in the following away: “What one does spontaneously, one does unconstrained and free from ulterior motives.”³⁰⁴

As soon as human manipulation meddles with trust, certain conditions and restrictions arise with the result that trust turns into distrust. Løgstrup argues that “the least interruption, the least calculation, the least dilution of it in the service of something else destroys it entirely, indeed turns it into the opposite of what it is.”³⁰⁵ In other words, when one constructs a risk relationship where one perceives another person as a potential threat to something valuable and vulnerable in one's life, one is already in a state of distrust and the bond of trust is broken.³⁰⁶ Concluding from this negative observation, Løgstrup suggests that trust is only trust in an immediate and spontaneous surrender of oneself to others.

In so far as trust constitutes spontaneous utterance of life itself, carrying human conviviality, trust constitutes grace, understood as that which is positive and beyond human merit. However, trust still entails an exposure of one's self, an exposure that renders human beings vulnerable. Løgstrup formulates this exposure as follows: “Regardless of how varied the communication between persons may be, it always involves the risk of one person daring to lay him or herself open to the other in the hope of a response.”³⁰⁷ Not aware of the distinction between risk and danger, Løgstrup uses the word “risk.” Certainly, addressing a stranger in the train where one could simply listen to music constitutes a risk, exposing oneself

³⁰³ Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 28.

³⁰⁴ Løgstrup, *Solidaritet og kærlighed*, 24, my translation, see appendix.

³⁰⁵ Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 85, see appendix. In this context, Løgstrup considers mercy/mercilessness, but the same applies to trust/distrust.

³⁰⁶ See Boholm and Corvellec, “A Relational Theory of Risk.” See also Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

³⁰⁷ Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 17, see appendix. See also Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene*, 282.

to the other. Luhmann is right in seeing trust as a risk. However, conversing with others and appearing before others belongs inherently to a sphere of human life so basic that trust not only constitutes a “risk” as Luhmann has it.³⁰⁸ The exposure of trust belongs to the pre-existing structure of human life and is—as such—a “danger”: at this basic level, one is *exposed* to the wheeling and dealing of other people.

The Normativity of Trust

The question arises why one would or should attempt to trust once one has fallen into distrust? Elsewhere I have argued for the ethical priority of trust, pointing out that distrust involves the possible reduction of the other to less than the other is (see Chapter 5.3). Løgstrup offers yet another reason.³⁰⁹ He argues that trust is inherently good. Trust is simply ethically descriptive. When describing the phenomenon of trust, Løgstrup suggests, one cannot avoid adding the ethical goodness of trust to other typical characteristics of trusts. Trust understands itself as good, while distrust understands itself as bad. The ethical understanding of trust belongs to the phenomenon of trust itself.

There is one important caveat here: sometimes one’s context can be so dangerous that one has to evaluate trust in opposition to its inherent goodness, thus encouraging an attitude of distrust.³¹⁰ Even though the trust of children shows life as it should be,³¹¹ the existence of pedophiles makes parents advise their kids to take care whom they trust—in resistance to the goodness inherent in the phenomenon of trust itself. Løgstrup explains:

We can regard an end as so important that in the light of it we must deem negative, qua means, a phenomenon good in itself, but this does not negate the intrinsic goodness of the phenomenon. Our evaluation can thus run counter to the phenomena’s own determinations of themselves as good or bad.³¹²

Løgstrup suggests that even though trust is inherently good, a situation can occur where trust would entail so many negative consequences of trust that withholding trust would be not only legitimate but also proper. It would be inadmissible, for instance, to be truthful with the police representatives of an illegitimate regime.³¹³

³⁰⁸ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 28.

³⁰⁹ A third reason could be extracted from Gambetta who points to the ways in which general societal distrust enables the mafia, which then lives from selling trust that relies on its own sanctioning, see Gambetta, “Mafia: The Price of Distrust.”

³¹⁰ Løgstrup, *Kunst og etik*, 193.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

³¹² Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 116, see appendix.

³¹³ Løgstrup, *System og symbol*, 111.

This reality makes it important to discuss how to evaluate the context so as to assure that one trusts in legitimate ways. This is a problem to which Luhmann speaks eloquently.

3. Distrust and the Social Institutions

So, human beings can find themselves in a situation of such danger that they have to reconsider whether to trust or not. Once the trust has been broken, it is no longer spontaneous and therefore slides into distrust. Following this understanding of trust, the question arises how a person can contribute to his or her regaining trust once trust has been broken?

The conception of trust, which I follow in this chapter, means that the only way from distrust to trust is letting go of oneself and one's reservations. Because trust is only trust if it is spontaneous, one cannot simply decide to trust, as Luhmann thinks. However, what one *can* do is to give up the attitudes that withhold the trust from manifesting itself in one's life. Løgstrup writes:

To decide to show trust or mercifulness is to decide to surrender oneself to trust or mercy. Trust and mercifulness must be there already as life-possibilities. If they are not, no decision can elicit them. So the expression 'to decide to show trust or mercifulness' is somewhat inadequate, but it is not incorrect because the decision consists in the renunciation of attitudes or movements of thought and feeling that are incompatible with trust and mercifulness.³¹⁴

The "attitudes and movements" that one should seek to renounce constitute whatever reasons one might have for not trusting. Finding a nanny, parents may find themselves with a suspicion against male nannies. Simply deciding to hire a male nanny anyhow does not constitute trust; trust might occur only if one works with one's prejudice with the purpose of surrendering oneself to the other.

Løgstrup does not discuss whether the social organization might be of aid in renouncing one's distrustful attitudes.³¹⁵ Yet, this is where Luhmann contributes with precise and penetrating suggestions. For him, the social organization has everything to do with the presuppositions for showing trust.

³¹⁴ Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 79, see appendix.

³¹⁵ Løgstrup is also not blind to the influence of the social organization on the conditions of trust. He finds a negative connection between social organization and trust. Some types of social organization can expel trust from human conviviality. Specifically, the increased rationalization of society can come to destroy the conditions of possibility for "the expressions of life," among which he counts trust, see Løgstrup, *System og symbol*, 119.

I what follows, I will reuse his observations, even as I have to adjust for his diverging understanding of trust. I make the necessary adjustments immediately after offering an overview of Luhmann's view of the connections between trust and social organization.

Luhmann on Interpersonal Trust and System Trust

According to Luhmann, trust means relying on the expectation that the other person will act in ways that are productive for one's own plans. Hiring a nanny, one trusts the nanny to take care of one's baby. The nanny, however, is free to act in counter-productive ways. He or she might prefer watching television rather than looking after the kid. Given that possibility, one might legitimize one's decision to trust by assessing the nanny's personality. In this view, trust involves the expectation that the nanny will act according to his or her personality.

Therefore, the truster needs to put the other person's personality under scrutiny. More broadly, Luhmann argues that when considering whether to trust or not, the potentially trusting person relies on objective clues about the other person's personality. The truster evaluates the personality of the other to find reasons why trusting—or not trusting—the other person is justified. In the context of finding a nanny, characteristics like thoughtfulness, calmness, and baby appeal would count towards trust. Importantly, these clues are mere signs that do not represent complete information, and therefore do not eliminate the risk of trust, even if they diminish it.³¹⁶ These clues form the reference points for the truster, if someone would call the truster into account for trusting this nanny.

Evaluating the personality of the other also includes examining his or her contextual structure of motivation. What would this potential nanny potentially gain and lose if entrusted with our baby? An extreme scenario would be that the nanny could kidnap the baby and demand a ransom. The ransom would be among the possible gains for kidnapping the baby. Among the possible losses, however, would be the sanctions that the truster could inflict on the trustee.³¹⁷ If the nanny kidnaps the baby, the parents would be legitimized in sanctioning the nanny.³¹⁸

How such sanctions occur depends on the constitution of the society, from personal retribution to legal sanctioning in a community governed by law. In modern societies, sanctioning relies on systems of arbitration; sanctioning is seldom the result of sheer power. On a first level, the distribution of sanctions takes place within the system of morality, which,

³¹⁶ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 20.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

³¹⁸ See Wolterstorff, "Does Forgiveness Undermine Justice?," 222.

according to Luhmann, bestows or withdraws esteem.³¹⁹ To be legitimized in withdrawing esteem from a wrongdoer, one usually refers to moral norms. However, if the betrayal of trust entails an infringement on legal norms, sanctions can also be played out in the legal system.³²⁰

Therefore, considering whether to trust the nanny with the baby relies not only on the personal of trust to the nanny, but also on one's trust in these social systems. As Luhmann points out, the moral and legal systems of one's society structure the attribution of guilt and blame: "The possibilities of sanction ... structure the imputation of guilt, and thus the risk of social disgrace and condemnation."³²¹ If the trusted person betrays the trust, the moral and legal systems determine whether he or she is guilty or the trusting person is simply naïve.³²² In that sense, trust in the social systems of arbitration, trusting that social systems of arbitration function fairly in cases of conflicts over trust supports personal trust. Luhmann calls such trust in social systems "system trust."

Back to Spontaneous Trust

Arguing for such a close connection between personal trust and trust in the social systems of arbitration can take one quite far away from the spontaneous trust that I developed with Løgstrup. The problem with Luhmann's view is that the truster only comes to surrender *aspects* of one's plans for the future to the other person; but the truster still keeps him- or herself at a distance from the trustee.³²³ However, focusing on trust as a function turns trust into something else, namely *securitas*; trust becomes a means of handling a critical situation where the trusting familiarity with the world has broken down. Luhmann even advises to avoid talking about one's reliance on the possibility of sanctions for breaking trust, lest the talk of sanctioning kills the atmosphere of trust.³²⁴ For Løgstrup, such a strategic move constitutes an ulterior motive that really turns trust into distrust. Instead, trust constitutes *fiducia*, as something without presuppositions and ulterior motives, beyond the concern for one's own security.

In spite of these differences, some of Luhmann's insights can support the spontaneous trust of Løgstrup. Consider a situation where the system trust

³¹⁹ Luhmann, "Die Moral des Risikos," 333.

³²⁰ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 47.

³²¹ Luhmann, *Trust*, 37, see appendix.

³²² Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 36–37.

³²³ Employing Hardin's distinction between trusting and entrusting, it is clear that Luhmann speaks of entrusting something to someone, Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness*, 65–66.

³²⁴ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 45.

has become a part of one's sphere of familiarity, where one simply assumes the functioning of the systems of arbitration, of law and morality. If one lives in such a society, even considering whether the nanny would kidnap the baby seems far out. With societies that function in this way, surrendering oneself to the trusting impulse comes easier. Certainly, assuming that sort of functioning requires that both the truster and the trustee live in systems that function well. This is the case, according to Luhmann, "when the participants are both living in a system which is familiar to both, and so requires no further information about it but tacitly provides an everyday basis for mutual understanding."³²⁵ The participation of the other in functioning social systems gives a hint of the motivational structure of the other.³²⁶ Therefore, functioning social systems of sanction, both those that provide the basic norms (morality, law, religion) and those that settle these norms through discussion (public opinion, philosophy, politics, theology), enable a culture of trust that has great impact on personal trust.

This culture of trust supports one's struggle to overcome one's attitudes of distrust against the other person. It enables the potential truster to actively look for positive clues of trustworthiness in the other person—rather than being guided by one's prejudice—on the basis of which the person can "decide" to surrender him- or herself.

4. The Demands of Being Trusted

Until now, I have mostly considered the situation of trust from the point of view of the person trusting. Yet, Løgstrup and Luhmann also offer important ethical perspectives about how the person trusted should react to trust. The sometimes overwhelming exposure and vulnerability of the truster could lead the trusted person to conclude that he or she should always meet the expectations of the trusting person. However, this is the conclusion of neither Luhmann nor Løgstrup.

Løgstrup and the Ethical Demand

For Løgstrup, the experience of receiving trust reveals human interdependence. The elementariness of trust reveals that human beings constitute the life-world for one another. Løgstrup expresses this with a powerful metaphor of the interdependence of human lives:

One never has something to do with another person without having a part of the other person's life in one's hand. It may be a very small matter, involving only a

³²⁵ Luhmann, *Trust*, 36, see appendix.

³²⁶ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 61.

passing mood, a dampening or quickening of spirit, a deepening or removal of some dislike. But it may also be a matter of tremendous scope, such as can determine if the life of the other flourishes or not.³²⁷

Humans deliver something of their lives into the hands of others. People are delivered over to each other, people have power over each other, enabling or disabling other people's life and existence. Humans are susceptible to being changed by their proximate context, for better or for worse.

Løgstrup argues that from this ontological interdependency springs an ethical demand to take care of whatever part of the other's world one controls. The situation of self-surrender demands that the trustee takes care of this life over which the truster has been given power.³²⁸

However, the ethical demand is not a demand to simply fulfill the truster's wishes; it is not a demand to comply with the other person's dreams, hopes, and plans.³²⁹ The ethical demand is *silent*, as Løgstrup says; it does not simply receive its content from the expectations of the truster.³³⁰ Had the ethical demand required the trustee to grant the truster his or her own wishes, the relation between truster and trustee would be merely instrumental—the interaction would constitute “reciprocal flattery,”³³¹ as Løgstrup notes. In contrast, the ethical demand is “demand for love, not for indulgence.”³³² In every situation, the trusted person him- or herself has to give voice to the silent ethical demand and figure out how to best take care of the other person's vulnerability.

From this ethical necessity, however, conflict can ensue. What the trusted person thinks is best for the trusting person might not align with the expectation inherent in the trust. The ethical demand does not ensure harmonious communities. Adhering to the ethical demand means that one risks the moral or legal sanctions of the other. Well-intentioned acts can have evil consequences; that is the risk. One can surely diminish that risk by considering the conditions within which one acts.³³³ Still, the ethical demand places the trustee in a tension between submission and arrogance,

³²⁷ Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 15–16, translation altered, see appendix.

³²⁸ One is interdependent not only if one trusts, also if one distrusts. I have argued earlier that trust appears even in distrust. Hereby I complement Niekerk's solution to the problem. Niekerk points out that Løgstrup argues that the *exposure*, not the trust, is the basis of the ethical demand, Niekerk, “Begik K.E. Løgstrup den naturalistiske fejlslutning?,” 31.

³²⁹ See also Nickel, “Trust and Obligation-Ascription,” 312.

³³⁰ The ethical demand applies not only if the other has positive expectations but also if the other expects to trade upon one's goodwill, Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, 107.

³³¹ Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 21, see appendix.

³³² *Ibid*, see appendix.

³³³ Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, 113.

between giving in to the other person's immediate expectations and imposing one's own worldview upon the other.³³⁴

Luhmann and the Transformation of Expectations

In Luhmann, the ethical rationality of trust is more hypothetical than categorical. While Løgstrup argues that one has an absolute responsibility for taking care of the trusting other, Luhmann considers the response to trust in a more functional way. Luhmann suggests that *if* one wishes to use trust as a way of reducing complexity in a certain situation, then one should always attempt to be worthy of receiving trust oneself. Given this hypothetical imperative, which is the very basis for Luhmann's consideration of trust in a functional society, Luhmann investigates the conditions for proving trustworthy.

As it turns out, trustworthiness is not easily displayed. Simply conforming to the role that others expect one to play offers little chance of proving oneself trustworthy. The trusted person disappears when he or she simply does what is the truster expects. Proving trustworthy requires more of the trustee. Luhmann writes: "The path to trust is by way of entering into the expectations of others in a transformative way: one can fulfil them better than expected, or in a different way."³³⁵ Proving trustworthy entails meeting expectations but in a way that exceeds or transforms expectations. A trustworthy personality is capable of incorporating the expectations of the other without falling prey to conformism, argues Luhmann.

Even though Luhmann does not discuss it, the conflict potential remains on this hypothetical model. If one decides to act to transform the truster's expectation, one cannot control the reactions of the truster. His or her response to one's commitment remains open. Perhaps the truster would have preferred the trustee to meet expectations. If so, the trustee has proved untrustworthy instead. As a consequence, attempting to win trust entails the risk of losing trust.

5. Trust and the Incarnation

In the previous sections, I have offered a view of trust based on a combined phenomenological and systems theoretical approach. Let me summarize the results that I will use to reconsider the idea of faith as trust from the perspective of God as triune.

I have argued that trust is given with the very interdependent structure of human lives, where already appearing before others and communicating with others entails vulnerability. Human beings cannot stay at a watchful

³³⁴ Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 33–36.

³³⁵ Luhmann, *Trust*, 62, translation altered, see appendix.

distance from others all the time (trust as *securitas*), they always already surrender (some part of) themselves to the other (trust as *fiducia*). Human beings always have parts of each other's lives in their hands. It belongs to the trusting vulnerability that the trusting person expects the other to take care of this part of one's life.

Once one's trust has turned into distrust, the inherent goodness of trust encourages one to overcome one's attitudes of distrust and surrender oneself to the other. I have argued that functioning systems of arbitration can result in an atmosphere of trust that enables this surrender, at least if the social systems function so well that trust in them—social trust—hardly becomes an issue.

Finally, I have argued that the person receiving trust has an obligation—whether categorical or hypothetical—to take care of the vulnerability inherent in the other person's trust. Regardless of how one reacts to being trusted—whether responding to the ethical demand or responding with the hope of proving trustworthy—conflicts might ensue between the truster and the trustee.

Now, in two steps, I will relate this view of trust to the Lutheran understanding of faith as trust. For these considerations, I assume that the faith is in the triune God that reveals Godself in and through the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity in Jesus Christ. I show how fleshing out trust in this way can develop the critical potential of understanding faith as trust in “god.”

Crisis of Trust between Human Beings and Systems

As we have seen in the previous sections, trust in the functioning of the systems of arbitration is essential for a society of trust. In themselves, these systems impose checks and balances on each other, thus fulfilling—if they also work for the benefit of the citizens—their purpose of solving conflicts of expectation and encouraging trust between people.³³⁶

Yet, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ places a limit to the trust in the social systems of arbitration. The limit appears when one focuses on how the systems of arbitration at Jesus' days allied themselves to ensure the crucifixion of the incarnate Son according to the Gospel witnesses. Such a focus plays a central role in the work of German theologian Michael Welker. In his interpretation, the allied systems consisted of 1) politics, represented by Pilate who washed his hands,³³⁷ 2) the religious establishment that sought to kill Jesus on account of blasphemy,³³⁸ 3) two

³³⁶ Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 30.

³³⁷ Mt 27:24.

³³⁸ E.g. Mk 14:2 pars.

types of judiciary, both the religious³³⁹ and the political,³⁴⁰ and 4) the public opinion that changed from glorification of Jesus to demanding his crucifixion.³⁴¹

Arguably, the conflict between Jesus and the systems of his day concerned the issue of trust. As we have seen, appearing before others and communicating with others inherently entails the vulnerable expectation to be received as one wishes to be received, also for the divine Son of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived and preached the Kingdom of God and expected human beings to orient their lives correspondingly.³⁴² Yet, the crucifixion showed that people and systems handled Jesus' surrender to them in a rejection of him. The systems of arbitration unanimously deemed Jesus' expectations to be illegal and illegitimate, and they did so by punishing Jesus with a violent death sentence. Welker emphasizes that such an outcome constitutes a potential for any society, past, present or future, thus endangering itself and its citizens:

The cross reveals the night of the divine abandonment, not only for Jesus himself, but also for the entire world. The cross reveals this distress and danger in the specificity of Jesus' hour of death, but also as an enduring endangerment for all times.³⁴³

The resurrection, however, constitutes the divine response to this earthly fate of Jesus. Since the social systems failed Jesus, only the divine Father remained as a possible judge and arbiter in the conflict between the claims of Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the claims of humanity that Jesus was a blasphemer and a religious rebel. And the Father assumes that role. The resurrection constitutes a confirmation of Jesus' message. By sending the Spirit to resurrect Jesus, the Father confirms that Jesus was the Son of God, and that Jesus was legitimate in his message of Kingdom and conversion. This confirmation applies even as his message implied a divine authority that no human person would normally be able to assume without being accused of blasphemy.³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Mk 14:53-56 pars.

³⁴⁰ Lk 23:22 and Jn 18:38.

³⁴¹ Mk 11:8-11 and 15:13. See Welker, *Gottes Offenbarung*, 179–84.

³⁴² Mikkelsen, "Den trinitariske Gud," 30. See also Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 114–23.

³⁴³ Welker, "Der erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott," 44, my translation, see appendix.

³⁴⁴ Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 173–74; Pannenberg, *ST II*, 385–86 and Mikkelsen, "Den trinitariske Gud," 32.

The conclusion from this witness is that relying only and completely on the social systems of arbitrations leaves the human self finally endangered. Welker emphasizes that God encourages systems of arbitration, insofar as these systems orient themselves towards justice, mercy and knowledge of God—this is not a theory of anarchism.³⁴⁵ *However, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus shows that these systems offer no final security, no final basis for one's trust. Instead, one can place trust in the divine promise to resurrect the world.* As such, the result of this chapter aligns with Luther's criticism of one particular social system—money—as the object of one's trust.

Yet, even the trust in the divine promise has an odd dynamic, which the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus also plays out. How can a person trust in God when crucifixions and the like occur in the world, thus constituting possible futures for the vulnerable believer, the person “in need”?

Crisis of Trust between the Persons of the Trinity

One need not even go so far as to the possibility of crucifixion. Most believers experience situations that problematize their trust in God. One's trust in God is not simply spontaneous and unconditional. Sometimes the lack of spontaneity derives from expecting a life without struggle or pain. This sort of expectation is illegitimate: Human beings are created to live well, not to live without struggle and pain. At other times, however, suffering seriously inhibits the created integrity of human beings. Such experiences constitute a theological challenge to the immediacy of Luther's trust in God as the preserver of all good things. Contemporary human beings live in a time where not only the cross of Jesus, but also thousands of other crosses, nooses and gas chambers, have made it apparent that human beings endure excessive suffering that infringes on their created integrity. Distrust in God appears to be the result.

Reading the incarnation story in light of this problem, one can discover that God has worked through such distrust towards trust within the life of the triune relations between Father, Son, and Spirit. Arguably, the crucifixion of the incarnate Son problematizes his trust in the one he called Father. If one takes Mark and Matthew as the primary witnesses to the events on the cross,³⁴⁶ the fate of the incarnate Son of God in the created world was one of utter despair, as he died with the words: “My God, my

³⁴⁵ Welker, “Theologie und Recht,” 574–75. For the argument that all institutions are creatures that God calls to contribute to human well-being, see also Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 30.

³⁴⁶ If not for historical reasons, then for theological ones.

God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁴⁷ Günter Thomas rightly sees this utterance as an expression of a “crisis of faith” for the Son in his relationship to the Father.³⁴⁸ The divine Father sent the Son into this world as a trusting human being in all its vulnerability and exposure; but the Son also took the increased risk of bringing the divine forgiveness and the Kingdom of God to human beings, increasing his own vulnerability. Yet, on the cross, the mission appears to fail, and his own life was shortened in a way that appears to falsify the prayer, “rescue us from evil.”³⁴⁹ In so far as the Son takes on this risk trusting in the Father’s aid, the Son would have an expectation that the Father would take care of this life. On the cross, the Son experiences the Father as one who has let down that expectation.

However, the resurrection shows that the Father aims at more than meeting expectations; the Father wishes to be trustworthy. As Luhmann pointed out, one proves trustworthy not by meeting the expectation of the other, but by acting in ways that transforms those expectations. The Father did not abandon the Son.³⁵⁰ Rather, *the Father addresses the expectations of the Son in a transformative manner by resurrecting the Son* rather than, perhaps, rushing to save the Son with a display of heavenly power, which would leave the Kingdom of God, the nonviolent kingdom of love, shattered. By sending the Spirit to resurrect the Son, the Father saves not only the Son, but also the forgiving and creative Kingdom of God, which the Son was sent out to bring to human beings. Much more than display of heavenly power, which the Book of Job sees as the Creator’s answer to excessive human suffering,³⁵¹ the Father reacts transformatively, sending the Spirit to instigate a new creation that absorbs the pain (the resurrected one still bears the wounds of the cross) and works through it towards new and resurrected life. The resurrection shows that however much the social systems may fail and fall into arbitrary violence, the Kingdom of God still prevails.

That God has revealed Godself in this way constitutes a decisive clue of trustworthiness at the occasion of which human beings might be able to surrender themselves in faith. *The result of this trinitarian movement may be said to elicit faith understood as certainty, not security.* While Luther seemed to consider the bible a secure witness of the resurrection, the

³⁴⁷ Mk 15:34 and Mt 27:46, with reference to Ps 22:1.

³⁴⁸ Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 174, my translation, see appendix. Compare Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 152.

³⁴⁹ Mt 6:13. Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 174.

³⁵⁰ Here I go with Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 152, rather than Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 229.

³⁵¹ Job 38-39.

resurrection witnesses in the Gospels themselves did not react to the resurrection with a completely convinced sense of security. Indeed, they reacted with different forms of fear. If one takes the experiences of the resurrection witnesses as paradigmatic, then one can conclude that trusting in this message as the basis of one's life does not constitute a new *securitas*. As Niels Henrik Gregersen notes, "Safety is no longer a live option in religious matters; rather, a risk-taking attitude is the unavoidable pathway to God."³⁵² What Gregersen rightly highlights is that the movement of faith does not occur without one's subjectivity, and therefore faith constitutes a risk. In so far as one commits oneself to this message on the basis of the belief that God has proven trustworthy in and through the resurrection, trust constitutes a risk, namely the risk of basing one's life on wrong clues.

Yet I would complement Gregersen with the observation from Løgstrup that trust does not primarily derive from a decision, and is therefore not simply a risk. Faith understood as trust is something that grasps the believer in the power of the Spirit.³⁵³ Trust constitutes a grace that human beings do not owe themselves. Grace, I would suggest, is the positive counterpart to danger; grace is a life-fulfilling quality to which human beings are undeservedly "exposed" through the same openness that create their vulnerability.

Relying on the message of the crucified resurrected in the midst of the ambiguity between risk and danger, each of with their form of vulnerability, is what constitutes the "certainty" of faith. Thus, Luke's interpretation of Jesus' words on the cross makes sense if one assumes the reality of the resurrection: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."³⁵⁴ Reusing Løgstrup's metaphor of delivering oneself into another person's hand, I suggest that the *human person, as drawn into the divine movement of death and resurrection, can trustingly place his or her life in the hands of the triune God who has worked through a crisis of trust into trust.*

³⁵² Gregersen, "Risk and Religious Certainty," 28.

³⁵³ Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 93–95.

³⁵⁴ Lk 23:46.

Conclusions to Part II

The three chapters making up Part II have painted a complex picture of the human situation concerning risk and danger. Human beings construct risk relationships that occasion their distrust and concern, their action, but also sometimes their trust despite such threats. Yet, human beings also find themselves in situations of danger beyond their knowledge or control. In Western societies, the technology of insurance plays a significant role in structuring some of those relationships of risk and danger, covering the financial costs of some hazards. Insurance, however, does not solve all the problems of human existence. Concerning the experience of living with risk and danger, there is ample room for more existentially-oriented questions to which the symbol system of Christianity can become an answer. As argued, the Christian symbol system does not enable human beings to control that which they cannot control; rather, it serves to enable them to live in anticipation of things that they cannot control.³⁵⁵ To do this, however, discovering the contention between trust and distrust in the very life of the Trinity, establishes the Christian symbol system as one that invites human beings with all their uncertainties into the divine life.

As such, Part II has already begun the theological reflection. The rest of the dissertation will develop what has been presented using the method of correlation as set out in Chapter 3. After a brief proposal of the existential question that arises out of the situation described in Part II, Part III will then present a much more detailed account of the Christian symbol system.

As anticipated by the four theses proposed in the introduction (Chapter 1.4), what follow are the existential questions that I see arising from the analyses of the human situation in Part II. These questions are decisive, and must be addressed in an interdisciplinary theology of risk. Indeed, I argue that these questions are of ultimate concern for human beings and therefore meet Tillich's criterion of questions relevant for theology, as discussed in Chapter 3.

- The analysis of living with risk and danger found its starting point in the observation that human beings live in relationships to realities that are valuable to them. One can relate to this observation in numerous ways, for example, with gratitude. Chapter 8 takes this stance as a presupposition, attending to the existential question that can arise on this basis: where, or at what, should one direct one's gratitude for

³⁵⁵ Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen*, 83.

living in a world of value? Since this question involves the metaphysical scope of being itself as the basis for the goodness of such being, this question is a matter of ultimate concern.

- The analysis of living with risk and danger showed that human beings live a life that is vulnerable to dangers outside of the sphere of human influence and control, and that this can give rise to fear and anxiety. Even though the Christian tradition has emphasized Jesus' commandment of giving no thought for tomorrow,³⁵⁶ Chapter 9 will probe the possibility that Jesus himself finally succumbed to these feelings. The chapter argues that fear and anxiety can lead to self-preservation and protection of one's nearest. This raises the existential and ethical question regarding where one directs these fears and anxieties. Anxieties address the root of one's identity, and therefore become a matter of ultimate concern.
- The analysis of living with risk and danger showed that human beings live with risk and danger as concerned with a future that is inherently uncertain. An existential question in this regard concerns the ultimate future destiny of human life. Chapter 10 addresses relationships of risk and danger where the "object at risk" is the possible future of one's own life, the life of one's beloved, the victims of history, and life itself. These matters involve matters of staggering significance, and are of ultimate concern, for human beings.
- The analysis of living with risk and danger showed that human beings live engaged in situations where they contribute to harming others. From an ethical perspective, this means incurring guilt. Chapter 11 elaborates on the reality of incurring guilt in the context of risky endeavors, raising also the existential question of how one lives with incurring guilt. Since this relates to the question of the justification for one's life conduct, it is a matter of ultimate concern.

Taking these questions as their starting point, each chapter of Part III (Chapters 8-11), explores possible answers to these questions in relation to the Christian symbol system. Part III begins with an introductory chapter (Chapter 7) laying out the basis of this exploration towards a theology of risk.

³⁵⁶ Mt 6:34.

Part III: Towards a Theology of Risk and Danger

Part III consists of five theological chapters that offer a differentiated, yet unified, picture of the Christian symbol system regarding the situation of living with risk and danger. To develop this theology, I have primarily limited my engagement to one conversation partner, David Kelsey. However, discussion of key risk theologians and important reflections drawn from select contemporary systematic theological voices will be made use of along the way. Chapter 7 provides a brief but detailed exposition of Kelsey's theological project. The presentation and discussion of his *Eccentric Existence* therein provides the foundation which guides my own theological reflections on living with risk and danger. These reflections make up the content of Chapters 8 through to 11.

7. A Theological Perspective: David Kelsey's Eccentric Existence

I begin by presenting the structuring principle of Part III, which is the most decisively theological part of this dissertation. As mentioned in Chapter 2.8, David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* guides my theological investigations. I have three reasons for choosing Kelsey for this role.

- First, although David Kelsey is not a risk-theologian in my strict understanding of the term, *Eccentric Existence* offers a systematic theological framework that is more comprehensive and detailed than his risk-theology colleagues.
- Second, what was lacking in some of the risk theologians considered thus far was a thoroughly trinitarian framework for doing theology. *Eccentric Existence* offers such a framework.
- Third, Kelsey's theological anthropology can be made conversant with distinctions made in risk sociology, e.g. between risk and danger in Niklas Luhmann, as I will show in Chapter 8.

Since its publication in 2009, *Eccentric Existence* has received a great deal of academic attention. An issue of *Modern Theology* has been devoted to discussing *Eccentric Existence*.³⁵⁷ Some of those articles have been included in Gene Outka's anthology on the work.³⁵⁸ Most of these articles

³⁵⁷ *Modern Theology* 27:1, 2011.

³⁵⁸ Outka, *The Theological Anthropology of David Kelsey*. Most responders raise very respectful questions, of which I will highlight a few: John E. Thiel ponders whether Kelsey's creation theology is unable to cope with insights from liberation theology, e.g. concerns about social sinfulness, Thiel, "Methodological Choices," 15. Charles M. Wood is puzzled by the speculative character of Kelsey's considerations of the eschatological body, Wood, "A Response," 28–29. David F. Ford investigates EE's selective consideration of texts from the biblical canon, e.g. the synoptics rather than John, Ford, "Humanity Before God," 44–49. And Joy Ann McDougall proposes to see idolatry as the root of sin, where Kelsey has preferred keeping distinct a series of aspects of sin, McDougall, "A Trinitarian Grammar of Sin," 122. Only Catherine Pickstock, whose text was not included in the Outka volume, has been vociferous in her polemic against Kelsey. In particular, Pickstock took issue with Kelsey's insistence that the divine economy consists of three distinct works with three distinct stories. Pickstock emphasizes that God relates to human beings in only one way that can be told in one overarching story, Pickstock, "The One Story." Kelsey responded to Pickstock by suggesting she had completely misrepresented his theses to the point of unrecognizability. It is worth noting that many of these criticisms have been responded to by Kelsey, justifiably enough, by noting that it is impossible for any theology to

invite Kelsey into a dialogue about the commitments and consistencies of *Eccentric Existence*. Other scholars have used concrete insights from *Eccentric Existence* to analyze concrete theological problems.³⁵⁹ Other scholars again have applied the entire work towards some problem or other not covered in *Eccentric Existence*.³⁶⁰

This dissertation seeks yet another way of applying Kelsey's work that opens up and explores new layers of Kelsey's thought. Taking the basic commitments of David Kelsey's work as my point of departure, I aim to develop a more comprehensive Christian theology within which humans can live with risk and danger. Instead of building such a theology "from scratch," I use a set of convictions in Kelsey as my starting point for the following four chapters. These convictions are concerned, in particular, with the structure of the divine economy.

1. Three Divine Works: Creation, Consummation, and Reconciliation

The core idea in *Eccentric Existence* is to distinguish clearly between three ways in which God relates to human beings.

- God "creates" the world, setting it into existence and upholding it;
- God draws the world towards "eschatological consummation," promising the coming of the Kingdom of God, a transformation of God's creation into a new creation;
- and, given that human beings sin, God "reconciles" human beings to God.

Together, "creation," "consummation," and "reconciliation" constitute the divine economy. These are the three ways in which God relates to human beings.³⁶¹ That the divine economy constitutes three distinct relations to human beings is the starting point for Kelsey's theological anthropology.

cover every potential issue; and that his two-volume work, which spans over eleven hundred pages, had no pretensions of being wholly comprehensive, see Kelsey, "Response to the Symposium on Eccentric Existence."

³⁵⁹ For an ingenious constructive development of an "eccentric ecclesiology" on the basis of Kelsey's work, see Pauw, "Eccentric Ecclesiology." For the use of Kelsey's distinction between three logics of Christian discourse, namely the logic of "Christians beliefs," of "coming to believe," and of "living our beliefs," EE 80, see Healy, *Hauerwas*, 52–54.

³⁶⁰ For an ecological theology in light of Kelsey's work, see Marais, "Eccentric Existence?"

³⁶¹ Kelsey consequently writes about God "relating to create" the world, "relating to draw it to eschatological consummation," and "relating to reconcile it." Kelsey uses the word "relate" because divine actions should be understood as events rather than the consequence of a static metaphysics (what Hunsinger has dubbed a "motif of

Kelsey understands human beings as *eccentric* beings. They have their centers outside of themselves, their meaning and their value, their destiny and their identity in God.³⁶² This means that a theological understanding of human existence must see human beings in light of how God relates to them. If the triune God relates to human beings in three distinct ways, then human beings exist in three different perspectives, as created, as reconciled, and as drawn into eschatological consummation. Therefore, Part I of *Eccentric Existence* sees the human being as “created,” Part II considers the human being as “being drawn towards eschatological consummation” and Part III takes the human being into consideration as “reconciled.”³⁶³

Three Divine Works of the Trinity

Kelsey argues that an intimate relationship exists between the three divine ways of relating to the world and the three divine persons of the Trinity. To clarify this relationship, Kelsey draws upon the traditional concepts of *appropriation* and *perichoresis*.

On the one hand, theology ascribes each of the divine relations—creation, reconciliation, and consummation—to one of the divine persons, Father, Son, and Spirit (*appropriation*). On the other hand, all three persons are active in each of the works, working together in a choreographed mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*).³⁶⁴ I would formulate the economic *perichoresis*

actualism,” Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth. The Shape of His Theology*, 30. See also Christoffersen, *Image of God and Christology*, 94. I am skeptical as to whether such a Barthian event-focused view of divine action does not simply move the problem elsewhere. Moreover, because the point it refers to is not especially relevant regarding the present context, I will not follow Kelsey on this point, and use the term “works” for all three.

³⁶² EE 893. By 1962, Wolfhart Pannenberg had already made formative contributions to seeing human beings as eccentric, considering the human openness to the world and the human ability to focus on others than oneself as an openness also to God, see Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?*, 5–12 and Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 57–71. Kelsey does not offer a similar phenomenological basis for his notion of the eccentricity of human beings.

³⁶³ In light of *each* of the three distinct ways of divine relating, Kelsey discusses *what* human beings have in common, *who* human beings are, including human distortions of that identity (sin-in-the-singular), and *how* human beings should orient themselves into their contexts (in faith, hope, and love, respectively), including human distortions of those “hows” (sin-in-the-plural). Finally, he ties it all together with a coda on the image of God. In this dissertation, I place only minimal focus on Kelsey’s important contributions to the who- and the how-question.

³⁶⁴ The brevity of Niels Henrik Gregersen’s articles on risk only allows him to work with the idea of attribution. Curiously, Gregersen ascribes the work of creation to the Father, the work of consummation to the Spirit, and the incarnation to the Son in this rather surprising order, which aligns with Kelsey’s ordering, Gregersen, “Faith in a

thus: while the Father is the source of “creation,” the Spirit participates as life-giver, and the Son as the pattern, the Word, the rationality through which God creates. While the Spirit is the primary agent of consummation, the Spirit is sent by the Father and works in responsibility to the Son. While the Son is the incarnate bringer of “reconciliation,” the Son is sent by the Father and guided and empowered by the Spirit.³⁶⁵

As such, Kelsey’s way of phrasing the divine economy as creation, consummation, and reconciliation is well in line with the Christian tradition.

Three Distinct Works

Where Kelsey’s conceptualization of the divine economy stands out in contrast to much of the Christian tradition is in his insistence that the three works within the divine economy should be kept *distinct*. Since God’s trifold relating originates in one and the same triune God, the divine works are distinct; but they are not separate, for all three divine persons participate in each of them (*perichoresis*). To use Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s phrase: Kelsey distinguishes the three divine persons without dividing them.³⁶⁶ Kelsey insists that each of the three aspects of the divine economy has its own purpose. As Kelsey frames it:

Each [of the ways in which God purposefully relates to all else] has its own goal: a) To relate to realities genuinely other than God that are, in their finite ways, good, true, and beautiful manifestations of God’s glory; b) to reconcile creatures to God when they are estranged; c) to glorify creatures eschatologically.

The purpose of “creating” the world is to establish finite and independent reality, as an object of God’s attentive delight, within which humans can flourish in and with their proximate contexts. The purpose of drawing that same world to “eschatological consummation” is to bring something new to that world, a novelty that is not only largely consistent with creation but still transforms God’s creation into a new creation in

World of Risks,” 232–33. In her critique of Kelsey, Cathrine Pickstock completely overlooks the aspect of *perichoresis*, wrongly criticizing Kelsey for suggesting that if there could be a creation without a consummation, then there could also be a Father without the Spirit, Pickstock, “The One Story,” 28. See also Kelsey, “Response to the Symposium on Eccentric Existence,” 78.

³⁶⁵ Kelsey’s formulations are a bit more technical: “the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Spirit,” EE 122 and “the Spirit, sent by the Father with the Son, draws creatures to eschatological consummation,” EE 716. Lastly, “the Son, sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, reconciles,” EE 716. He elaborates on the relations with much care, see EE 120-131, 166-175, 442-457, 616-623.

³⁶⁶ Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 33.

which humans share the Son's relations with the Father. Finally, the purpose of "reconciliation" is an after-the-fact-of-sin reactive effort to restore humans to their created and consummated relation with God.

In Kelsey's analysis, Christian theology has tended to confuse or conflate these three aspects of the divine economy. Too often, the three distinct works have been reduced to a binary plot, say of creation and reconciliation or even to one overarching plot, say, of eschatological consummation. These are the problems with such confusion:

- Seeing "reconciliation" as the overarching logic turns the divine act of creation into an instrument towards the goal of reconciliation rather than an act done for the sake of creatures themselves. Moreover, consummation becomes a mere "postscript" to reconciliation, leaving little theological hope for liberation from social oppression.³⁶⁷
- Construing "consummation" as the overarching logic postpones the dignity of human beings to the point when they have finally realized their true selves.³⁶⁸ Moreover, it also turns sin into a necessary part of the story.³⁶⁹
- Finally, if "creation" becomes the overarching logic, human beings only have their own powers to mend the brokenness of their existence, which leaves no hope for a future transformation of the horrors of this world.³⁷⁰

For these reasons, Kelsey argues, Christian theology should avoid conflating the three aspects.³⁷¹ No overarching purpose exists of which the

³⁶⁷ Kelsey, "God and teleology," 368–69.

³⁶⁸ Pannenberg slides in this direction. For him, the goodness of the world applies to the created world *as consummated*: "Dabei gilt das Urteil 'sehr gut' von der Welt der Schöpfung nicht einfach in bezug auf ihren zu irgendeiner Zeit fertig gegebenen Bestand, sondern im Blick auf den ganzen Weg ihrer Geschichte, auf welchem Gott seinen Geschöpfen in zuvorkommender Liebe gegenwärtig ist, um sie durch Gefährdung und Leid der Endlichkeit schließlich zur Teilnahme an seiner Herrlichkeit zu führen," Pannenberg, *ST III*, 693. Pannenberg grounds the dignity of human beings in the eschatological human destiny that they already now anticipate, Pannenberg, "Der Mensch als Person," 168. I find this to be too unstable to justify such a stance on human dignity.

³⁶⁹ Kelsey, "God and teleology," 369–71.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 371–72.

³⁷¹ Arguably, John Sanders' theology centers on reconciliation: human beings are created to respond to God, but since they do not, the Son dies so that human beings can be inspired to respond to the divine love. Günter Thomas' theology is adamant about balancing creation and consummation: God creates the world, but God also saves it from itself in a saving transformation. The value of the trifold complexity of Kelsey's approach should be appreciated.

three purposes can become a subset.³⁷² All three works constitute divine gifts of grace. Spending much of his theological energy on the grace of “creation,” Niels Henrik Gregersen expresses what I would call the grace of “consummation” and “reconciliation” respectively:

The Gospel promises that God will devote all divine power to resist the destruction of the natural and social realms (Death), and that God will ceaselessly fight the human tendency, when one feels threatened, to shut oneself out from one’s surroundings (Sin).³⁷³

The point is that the divine possibilities have not been exhausted with God’s “creation”; the divine economy has more to offer than what God has given in creating the world.³⁷⁴

The Internal Logic between the Three Works

Though distinct from each other, Kelsey points out that these three divine works function according to a certain internal logic. The divine work of creation is the basis of it all; only if God creates is there anything to consummate or reconcile. Kelsey points out that nothing inherent in creation obliges God to consummate it. God’s creation is a gift to humans, immensely valuable as it is, even though it is not perfect, even though death is a certainty, even though it entails concrete instances of sin and suffering, even though it is full of dangers and even though some goods only are attainable through risk-taking. The created world is a gift to human beings, and likewise, divine consummation is an *additional* gift to the gift of creation. This added gift will finally transform aspects of the first creation—the inbuilt instances of hardship, suffering, and death—but the divine consummation also maintains important aspects of continuity with the created work.

Creation and consummation have no presuppositions other than the eternal love and freedom of God who wants others than Godself to love.³⁷⁵ That creation and consummation are “equally primordial” helps explain why Kelsey, contrary to usual systematizations within Christian theology, deals with consummation *before* reconciliation, so that the order of

³⁷² Perhaps this is why Kelsey nowhere mentions the term “providence.” This term appears to imply that God has one overarching goal with creatures and therefore the concept is more theistic than trinitarian. However, if providence points more narrowly to the concrete guiding force of God in the world, the provident force in Kelsey’s understanding would be God the Spirit drawing the world to eschatological consummation.

³⁷³ Gregersen, “Skabelse og forsyn,” 69, my translation, see appendix.

³⁷⁴ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 380.

³⁷⁵ EE 77.

sequence is creation (Part I), consummation (Part II), and reconciliation (Part III).

The divine work of reconciliation does have a presupposition, namely human sin. In other words, while creation and consummation are divine actions, reconciliation constitutes a divine *reaction* to something, which should not have been there, namely sin.³⁷⁶ Human beings have a certain self-orienting power that makes them capable of doing and being what is contrary to the purposes of God. Given that they use this power to thwart the divine purposes, divine reconciliation is what brings them back into their created and (because God also consummates them) their consummated fellowship with God.

The fact of sin, however, also influences the divine work of consummation, adding a reactive moment. Sin makes human beings live in bondage to the structures that they have created. As such, human beings are in bondage to sin as a sphere of power. The divine consummation comes to entail a transformation of these structures that enables a sense of freedom from human bondage to them.³⁷⁷ This transformative final consummation happens according to the logic of the “already-not yet.” The reality is already present, having been inaugurated in Christ, but it is not yet brought to its finality. The consummation of God insists that people and the world can change, also for the better, and it constitutes a hope for the victims whose lives ended early, namely, that the Holy Spirit will offer them new life.³⁷⁸

This conception of Kelsey resolves any alternative between “supralapsarianism” and “infralapsarianism.” While supralapsarianism entails that the Son would have been incarnate even if human beings had not sinned, infralapsarianism suggests that the Son becomes incarnate only as a result of sin. Kelsey’s conception enables Christian theology to affirm both: regardless of sin, the incarnation of the Son is a necessary component in the Spirit’s drawing the world to eschatological consummation. The fact of sin,

³⁷⁶ In Chapter 9, I venture the hypothesis that the randomness inherent in Creation also makes nature develop in ways that are not always in line with the divine will.

³⁷⁷ Danish systematic theologian Theodor Jørgensen works with the distinction between God as the subject *of* history, who as *actus purus* upholds the world as the forum for human actions, and God as the subject *in* history, who reacts to human disobedience through the incarnation understood as *actio* and *passio*, Jørgensen, “Historiens teologi - Teologiens historicitet,” 249. To clarify, within the *actus purus* of God, Kelsey distinguishes between creation and consummation.

³⁷⁸ See also Hammerlin and Leer-Salvesen, *Voldens ansikter*, 29.

however, means that the incarnation acquires another purpose: it also becomes the way in which God reconciles humans to God.³⁷⁹

All of Kelsey's three structures are unconditional. Besides reconciliation being logically conditional upon the negativity of human sin, God creates, consummates and reconciles humans unconditionally. These works are not conditional upon anything that human beings have done or will do; they simply apply and gracefully frame human life. Not even Kelsey's idea of human beings enacting "appropriate responses" to the divine economy entails a conditioning of divine love. There is an important difference between a "condition"—if you do not do A, then I will retract B—and a "term"—A is the proper way of owning B.³⁸⁰ Fleshing out ways in which creatures can respond appropriately are the "terms" under which God relates to creatures.

Importantly, all three works are *universal*. Later, I will investigate and expand upon Kelsey's basis for claiming that not only creation, but also consummation and reconciliation apply to all people and the entire cosmos. In my judgment, this conviction entails that the "vertical" difference between God and human beings, and therefore the community among human beings, is more basic than any "horizontal" barrier that human beings might put up between human groups, between oneself and another according to race, class, ethnicity, culture, nationality, status, achievements—or religion.³⁸¹ This seems to be an important theological conviction and contributes to my reasons for choosing Kelsey as the primary interlocutor for this project.

2. For this Project

For the purposes of this project, Kelsey's way of structuring the divine economy into three related aspects will prove fruitful. It offers a deep and profound structure within which to order a series of theological insights. Therefore, I order three of the four chapters of part III in like manner:

³⁷⁹ Charles M. Wood ponders whether sin in Kelsey becomes a sort of *felix culpa* for the divine Son since sin is the requirement for a divine work being attributed to the Son, Wood, *A Response*, 30. However, Wood overlooks the perichoretic aspect of the triune life *ad extra*. The Son does not require that a work be attributed to him, the Son contributes in important ways to both creation and consummation, which I explore in Chapters 9 and 10 of this dissertation.

³⁸⁰ In Danish, the distinction is between *vilkår* and *betingelse*, see Gregersen, *Den generøse ortodoksi*, 226, fn. 114, to whom Theodor Jørgensen suggested the distinction.

³⁸¹ For the distinction between vertical and horizontal difference, see Buch-Hansen, "Johannesevangeliet og antijudaismen," 245. Kelsey does not offer any theology of religion, so that part is on my own expense.

under the rubric of creation (Chapter 8), of consummation (Chapter 10), and of reconciliation (Chapter 11).

However, one chapter (Chapter 9) provides an expansion of Kelsey's outline. While Kelsey's work is thorough, I find that he does not properly struggle with the challenge posed by evil and loss in human lives, a topic emphasized by risk and danger. His creation theology derives—and with good justification—from Wisdom theology. The creation theology of canonical Wisdom takes the occurrence of evil and loss for granted. In Chapter 8, on creation, I follow this lead and explore it beyond Kelsey's reflections. For, the methodological move of focusing on Wisdom theology makes Kelsey overlook that the incarnation of the divine Son also makes a difference for creation theology, as Günter Thomas has highlighted. For Kelsey, the New Testament mainly witnesses the consummation and reconciliation. I will argue that the incarnation of the Son, to which the New Testament witnesses, also contributes to a proper understanding of creation theology. This is the topic that Chapter 9 is concerned with, which I then add to the creation theology of this dissertation.

Moreover, I develop a theology of reconciliation that is rather different to Kelsey's. As suggested in Chapter 2.4, it is essential to uphold a theological language of divine forgiveness to address human guilt. Since Kelsey's theology of reconciliation focuses more on the divine Son being in solidarity with humans *qua* sinners, I seek inspiration for this part elsewhere.

It is a principle of Kelsey's that the divine creation constitutes the presupposition of the other ways in which God relates to human beings; and so I will begin with his creation theology.

8. Creation: Gift and Loss

Living with risk and danger presupposes living in a world that one experiences as *valuable*. In Chapter 5, I developed the *Relational Theory of Risk*, which states that human beings construct “risk relationships” that connect threatening entities (say, an earthquake) with vulnerable entities (say, the Leaning Tower of Pisa). But human beings only construct risk relationships if they also find the vulnerable entity to be *valuable*. An Italian tourist guide might value the Leaning Tower of Pisa for its utility, inasmuch as it provides him or her with a famous monument to show to clients; but it is also valued for its historical uniqueness and its oblique Romanesque beauty.

Christian theology can interpret the reality of value and goodness in human lives through the symbol of divine creation. This chapter develops the *symbol of divine creation* so that it correlates with the reality of value in human lives. The majority of this chapter investigates the symbol of divine creation, whereas the conclusion returns to the correspondence with the world of values. This chapter has two main sections, one that describes the life-world of human beings (Chapter 8.1), and one that investigates what human beings *are*, specifically as beings born into such a world (Chapter 8.2). This approach accommodates the secondary purpose of this chapter, which is to develop a theological anthropology that resonates with the anthropological considerations of Part II concerning risk, danger, vulnerability, and trust.

The creation theology of this chapter will advance in close connection with the creation theology of *Eccentric Existence*. Kelsey’s main inspiration for his creation theology is the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, referred to as Canonical Wisdom. Within Canonical Wisdom, so Kelsey argues, Proverbs generally expresses the conventions of Wisdom creation theology, while Job explores Wisdom’s coherency in light of experiences of suffering; then Ecclesiastes explores Wisdom’s coherency in light of experiences of life without a *telos*.³⁸² If this chapter succeeds in showing that Kelsey’s description of the human being through Canonical Wisdom corresponds well to the description of the human condition as presented in Part II, then I will have made an argument for using this genre as a guide to this dissertation’s creation theology. This can be considered the third purpose of this chapter.

³⁸² EE 188.

The choice of letting Canonical Wisdom guide a Christian creation theology is extremely unusual, and therefore requires theological warrant. The Christian tradition usually develops its creation theology on the basis of Genesis 1-2. Michael Welker speaks of Genesis 1-2 as “die normative Schöpfungüberlieferung” for Judaism, but for Christianity as well.³⁸³ Therefore, prioritizing Wisdom theology over Genesis is one of the more visionary aspects of Kelsey’s *Eccentric Existence*.

To warrant this move, Kelsey notices that the worldview, which Canonical Wisdom conveys, shows no signs of influence from the grand acts of divine deliverance from oppression, devil, sin, or death. Such deliverance is a significant part of the rest of Old and New Testaments. As described in Chapter 7, Kelsey insists on keeping the logics of creation, reconciliation, and consummation as distinct from one another. As devoid of deliverance, Wisdom theology thematizes neither reconciliation nor consummation.³⁸⁴ This stands in contrast to Genesis, which arguably aligns with the narrative logic of the Exodus story, where God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is central.³⁸⁵ According to Wisdom literature, God simply creates the world, with all the ambiguities that I describe in the following. *Based on the Wisdom literature, creation theology can be allowed to speak for itself with its focus on the universal traits of human life.* Wisdom literature has the human being in view precisely as *human* being, not as Jew/Gentile or clean/unclean, as much of the Old Testament

³⁸³ Welker, *Schöpfung und Wirklichkeit*, 15. Welker quotes Jewish Bible scholar Shemaryahu Talmon for this statement.

³⁸⁴ The covenant theology that plays such a significant role in the deuteronomistic theology, Høgenhaven, “Den deuteronomistiske teologi,” 26, is excluded from the Wisdom theology perspective. In Ec 5:4-6, the Teacher even warns against vows that one is unable to keep. It remains an open question whether the Teacher even warns against making covenant promises to God.

³⁸⁵ EE 177 and 188. Kelsey builds his argument on Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann, see EE 176-189. According to Kelsey, Westermann argues that Genesis is a pre-ambule to the deliverance story, EE 177, and therefore is already tainted by the logic of deliverance. However, Kelsey clarifies that Genesis 1-11 according to Westermann is a “mixed-genre narrative”: told as a story of origins, “*Gen* 1 [...is not] the beginning of salvation history or event as its preparation,” EE 934, quoting Westermann, see also EE 180-181. Told as a story of the future, the narrative is “bent” towards a story of deliverance, EE 934. In her critique of Kelsey’s use of Westermann, Pickstock only quotes Westermann’s rejection of von Rad’s thesis of creation as a part of the story of deliverance, Pickstock, “The One Story,” 37, but she misses that Kelsey accounts for this rejection, EE 183.

has. Wisdom literature focuses on what human beings have in common as creatures of God.³⁸⁶

Hermeneutically, Kelsey interprets Wisdom literature from a Christian standpoint. Even though Wisdom literature nowhere speaks of God as triune, Kelsey—without discussing this problem further—appropriates the divine creation to the work of the Father in perichoretic cooperation with the Son and the Spirit. One can warrant this move with reference to several works of the New Testament that envision the world as created through the pre-existent Jesus Christ.³⁸⁷ Arguably, such New Testament authors see the incarnate Son in light of the Woman Wisdom-figure who, albeit a creature, is a mediator of creation.³⁸⁸ In this way, Wisdom theology can be said to have contributed to a Christological creation theology.³⁸⁹

These introductory remarks now having been made, I begin the development of a creation theology of risk and danger.

1. Proximate Contexts

A core distinction in this dissertation is that between risk and danger, which builds on a distinction between exogenous and endogenous harm. If the harm comes from outside the victim, it is a danger. But, if it can be ascribed to the victim him or herself, then it is a risk. Kelsey's interpretation of Wisdom literature offers the language to reconstruct this sociological distinction theologically. Kelsey distinguishes between human beings and their "proximate contexts."

Creation and the Proximate Context

The *proximate context* of human beings consists of their "quotidian." The quotidian is the everyday life of human beings, their relationships with other persons, with social institutions and artifacts, and with natural entities

³⁸⁶ Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig religion*, 85. While this is true for the canonical Wisdom literature, Hans J. Lundager Jensen points out that the Apocrypha of Sirach and Wisdom turn Wisdom into deuteronomism: Wisdom comes to inhabit Zion. Also, the Song of Songs has traits of Zion-theology, see Poulsen, "Zionteologien," 106. This may also be why Kelsey considers Song of Songs Wisdom theology, EE 188, but leaves it out of consideration when developing his creation theology. For this question to Kelsey, see Ford, "Humanity Before God," 48–49.

³⁸⁷ See e.g. Jn 1:1-3, Col 1:15-17, and Hb 1:2.10.

³⁸⁸ Prov 3:19-20 and 8:22-31, see also EE 241 where Kelsey argues that such a Wisdom view of the divine *Logos*, the divine Son through which the Father creates the world, makes it more dynamic than the more static Greek understanding.

³⁸⁹ Historical Christianity has interpreted Psalm 33:5-6 to warrant the *triune* participation in creation: "[The Lord] loves righteousness and justice/the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.// By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,/ and all their host by the breath of his mouth."

(and the natural world at large). The proximate context entails limits and expectations, traditions and possibilities. I would suggest using the following prepositions to systematize Kelsey's interpretation of Wisdom literature: God creates human beings "into" and "with" their "proximate context." Human beings are created *with* their proximate context because the proximate context itself is also created. Upholding the world, God stands in metaphysical relation to God's divine creation.³⁹⁰ Yet, God also creates human beings *into* their proximate context because they are born into, and have their lives within, their proximate context.

In light of Wisdom theology, being created as a human being is a matter of being born into the created world.³⁹¹ Wisdom theology neither has a cosmological nor a phylogenetic focus when speaking of creation. It simply focuses on the world as it is, as upheld by God in an ongoing creative relationship, and as the proximate context into which human beings are born.³⁹² Once born, every single entity has a life span, a birth and a death, development and deterioration. That history at large has a developmental purpose—however rudimentary and difficult to discern—belongs to the logic of divine consummation, to which I return in Chapter 10.4.

Kelsey's theology of birth finds its point of departure in an interpretation of Job 10. The context of Job 10 is really a rather negative one: Job is in uproar over his own creation, regretting the day he was born because of the injustice he has recently experienced at the hands of God.³⁹³ Although not having sinned, Job experiences great suffering: he has lost his herd of animals, his servants, his children, and is afflicted with terrible ill health.

³⁹⁰ EE 456.

³⁹¹ For a similar theology of birth on the basis of Job 10:9, see also Wingren, *Credo*, 35. As I will show later, seeing creation as being born into a proximate context does not mean that the proximate context has not been marred by sin. I agree with the trend expressed by Krötke: "Was die Universalität der S[ünde] betrifft, so ist sie in neuerer Zeit so verstanden worden, daß alle Menschen in einen gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang hinein geboren werden, der vom Sündigen vorhergehender Generationen geprägt ist," Krötke, "Sünde/Schuld und Vergebung: VII. Dogmatisch," col. 1888.

³⁹² Wisdom theology's lack of interest in origins includes unconcern with questions of the origin of mankind and the universe. Kelsey notes this as a fact and takes it as a limitation to his own theology, EE 190. But this is not a mark of distinction on the side of Wisdom theology. Human beings ask those questions and theology should ask them too. This is not the task of this study, however.

³⁹³ Whether the suffering comes from God is unclear in Job. In the prose-introduction, "the antagonist" makes a deal with God that allows him the power to destroy all of Job's good fortune, Job 1:12. Yet, in later parts, both prose and poetry, the deal with the antagonist seems to be forgotten. Job addresses God directly and God takes full responsibility.

Job laments the day he was born.³⁹⁴ In the middle of this, Job offers a creation theology of birth: The day Job was born was the day of his creation. Job explains the belief that God was active in the very processes of procreation:

Your hands fashioned me and made me;
 and now you turn and destroy me.
 Remember that you fashioned me like clay;
 and will you turn me to dust again?
 Did you not pour me out like milk
 and curdle me like cheese?
 You clothed me with skin,
 and knit me together with bones and sinews.
 You have granted me life and steadfast love,
 and your care has preserved my spirit.³⁹⁵

Here, Job employs a rather bucolic, yet fascinating metaphor for procreation. Giving birth is a process that requires semen poured out like milk from an udder and a curdling and maturation period of 9 months, not unlike a good cheese.³⁹⁶ The idea is not that God takes over the male part of the procreation so that Job is born without a human father. Procreation is a matter left to the interplay between human agency and chance.³⁹⁷ Rather, Job confesses that the creator God takes an active part in the entire process towards the point of creation, that is, the time of birth.³⁹⁸ The creation theology of Job highlights that God creates human beings in their individuality into a proximate context that becomes theirs. God bestows being to every little new born child in its actuality, not only qua the general divine upholding of the universe, but also in this child's concrete individuality. The proximate context consists of a specific set of parents,

³⁹⁴ Job 3:1 and 10:18-19.

³⁹⁵ Job 10:8-12. See also Job 31:15.

³⁹⁶ EE 246. Kelsey makes this analysis with reference to biblical scholar Hans Walter Wolff.

³⁹⁷ In modern society, science has advanced the understanding of how human beings are conceived and how they develop. It appears that natural reasons suffice. How is it possible to claim that God creates human beings? To answer this question, systematic theology can also learn from Job. Kelsey argues that Job relies on the science of his day that probably knew about the necessity of semen and saturation, and still Job believed that God had created him through being born. As Kelsey phrases it: "Whatever the processes are, God is immediately, intimately, and inextricably involved in the processes that result in Job's having been born, processes in which Job has no say," EE 247.

³⁹⁸ See also Ps 139:13.

present or absent, a certain political state of affairs, a certain religious climate, and so on.

A person's proximate context appears to be contingent. While Kelsey does not consider this explicitly, it is clear that *being born into a specific context entails a sense of contingency in human life*. The metaphysical contingency, that the world exists at all, that the world might not have been, finds its answer in the Christian idea of the creator God as the power of being in all that is.³⁹⁹ As Gregersen puts it, God is "the ceaseless source of all that exists."⁴⁰⁰ Yet, the creation theology of Wisdom literature also provides an answer to the personal contingency of one's own proximate context. God gives each creature his or her context as his or her own. While I will return to other contingencies that remain outside the scope of divine meaning, I would argue that the Christian symbol of divine creation reasonably imbues with meaning both the metaphysical contingency of being itself, and the contingency of one's proximate context.

Importantly, Kelsey defines the term "proximate context" of human beings in distinction to God as the "ultimate context." The term "proximate context" does not necessarily imply an overtly local or narrowly parochial outlook to the exclusion of a global outlook. In Kelsey's view, remote solar systems are included in a person's proximate context, in so far as they affect life on earth directly through causation or indirectly through cosmology. Images of galaxies, and institutions like NASA, influence how humans see themselves in relation to creation as a whole. As such, Kelsey expands the rather intimate and local outlook of Wisdom theology, emerging as it did from a largely agrarian society.⁴⁰¹ Yet, considering the more philosophical claim that God must be the creator of all things to be properly considered as God, Kelsey has good reasons for doing so.⁴⁰² As such, the ways in which God relates to human beings—creating them, consummating them, and reconciling them when they have sinned—constitute the "ultimate context" of human beings. Specifically, Wisdom

³⁹⁹ Kelsey does not use this term. See Tillich, *ST I*, 236. That God creates out of nothing means that creation depends absolutely upon God's continuing will and act to uphold the world in existence. The world is created neither out of an eternal matter aside from God, which would constitute a dualism, nor out of Godself, which would make the world co-eternal with God, EE 201.

⁴⁰⁰ Gregersen, "The Twofold Assumption," 464.

⁴⁰¹ As Lundager Jensen argues, "both the positive and the skeptical wisdom unfold ... not in an open international world, but rather in the local and intimate: in the family, in the city, on the market," Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig religion*, 85, my translation, see appendix.

⁴⁰² Gregersen, "Skabelse og forsyn," 121.

theology sees the creator God as the ultimate context for all creatures.⁴⁰³ In sum, God's ways of relating to the world constitute its ultimate context, while the proximate context of every human person is the entire world as it appears from his or her perspective.⁴⁰⁴ The proximate context is the world seen from the possibilities of interaction with every individual; the world as the individual can influence it, and the world as it can influence the individual.

Loss and Ending

Even though the central proposition of this chapter is that the created world is a gift, the proximate context of human beings cannot be adequately captured if it is looked at only in rosy terms. While the proximate context is the condition of possibility for human wellbeing, it is also the condition of possibility for human loss. If risk and danger concern possible loss, a creation theology of risk and danger should deal with this experience.

Again, Kelsey will assist in doing this constructive piece of theology. Kelsey distinguishes between the intrinsic and the extrinsic limits of creatures, to which I add—inspired by Kelsey—the social limits too.⁴⁰⁵

A. Loss from Intrinsic Limits: The proximate context has intrinsic limits. The proximate context consists of all creatures, and over the course of time, every creature deteriorates.

Deterioration is the destiny even for the greatest parts of creation, such as mountains that, worn by weather, turn into dust; or stars that, slowly burning out, turn into white dwarfs, black holes, or supernovas. Deterioration is also the destiny of the very small, such as atoms that decay in radioactive processes with different half-lives. So it is, of course, with complex creatures like plants, animals, and human beings, which also disintegrate over time. Likewise, all ephemeral things, like a good wine or an embrace, have an ending too.⁴⁰⁶ In that sense, death, understood as disintegration and deterioration, is a fact of life.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ EE 162. See e.g. Ec 12:1, Prov 3:19, and Job 38-41.

⁴⁰⁴ The idea that God creates human beings with a perspective of their own stands in contrast to Pannenberg, for whom this “egocentric” way of seeing life through one’s own perspective already constitutes sin, Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*, 104.

⁴⁰⁵ EE 201-202. Kelsey subsumes these traits and limitations under the headline of human “finitude.” I purposefully avoid this. Christians hope that these limits will be broken in the new creation, even the limit of death. Since human beings, even in the new creation, will be finite, these created traits cannot belong to human finitude, see Pannenberg, “Tod und Auferstehung in der Sicht christlicher Dogmatik,” 153.

⁴⁰⁶ In a May 6th 2016 lecture “Time, Eternity, and the Prospects for Care” at the University of Copenhagen, Miroslav Volf distinguished the “positive loss” that belongs

Since all things deteriorate eventually, the risk and danger in this category is a matter of *timing*; events can occur that make creatures deteriorate before they should—prematurely. This brings us to the category of extrinsic limits.

B. Loss from Extrinsic Limits: A second category of loss derives from the “extrinsic” ontological limits of creatures.⁴⁰⁸ Proximate contexts place extrinsic limits on human life. This means that creatures risk damaging each other, and inevitably do so over the course of a lifetime. The clearest example of inevitable loss, which obtains to living creatures, is the food chain.⁴⁰⁹ In a world with finite resources, creatures live at the expense of other life; not only in that earlier creatures die off to create space and reserve food for new creatures, but also by the way in which creatures uphold themselves. Human beings slaughter and eat not only animals but also plants that have a created integrity of their own. Karen Baker-Fletcher calls this a “necessary violence.”⁴¹⁰ This is a brutal reality of the created world that theology should not overlook. It is not just the natural world, but also the cultural world that has zero-sum elements: getting a job means that another person did not get it. As Alfred North Whitehead famously put it: “Life is robbery.”⁴¹¹ Living at the expense of other creatures is the only way that one can sustain life. This sort of loss is—therefore—inevitable.

One can also look to the accidents that derive from the complexity of creaturely interaction. Accidents constitute unavoidable harm to human

inherently to the good from the “tragic loss” of unnecessary suffering, see also Gregersen, “Positive Loss and Tragic Memory.”

⁴⁰⁷ Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 198. Kelsey remains ambiguous concerning the necessity of death. On the one hand, Kelsey argues that human beings live on borrowed breath: “it is intrinsic to [human creatures] that in the normal course of creaturely events they must sooner or later surrender what was borrowed,” EE 210. On the other hand, Kelsey affirms that “death is neither physiologically nor evolutionarily necessary,” EE 249, that only “the *possibility* of death is necessary,” EE 250, both times quoting the evolutionary biologist Jeffrey Schloss. As such, rather than death, “mortality” in the strictly logical and ontological sense of the *possibility* of death, of being “capable of non-existence” is what characterizes the finitude of human creatures, EE 561 and 1022.

⁴⁰⁸ EE 201-202.

⁴⁰⁹ EE 209.

⁴¹⁰ Seeing necessary violence in the cycle of life, Baker-Fletcher emphasizes the contrasting term “unnecessary violence” which “takes life from another individual or group of individuals out of sheer hatred, morbid or sociopathic curiosity, or because either individuals or governing authorities can see no other way out of threatening situations, real or imagined,” Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 37. Later, she names acts of lynching and crucifixion as examples of unnecessary violence, *ibid.*, 131–32. I return to this in Chapter 9.2.

⁴¹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 105.

creatures. The relationship between all the elements of the proximate context is utterly complex, and since most of the world is coupled loosely whilst showing high complexity, most elements of the proximate context interact without much predictability.⁴¹² Proximate contexts are not structured mechanically like combustion engines. As Kelsey puts it:

The innumerable networks of creatures of various kinds that make up the quotidian interact in infinitely complex fashion. ... The realm of physical creatures, which is the context into which we are born, is inherently accident-prone, as creatures inescapably damage one another.⁴¹³

This is a limitation that proximate contexts place on creatures. While the food chain is inevitable, severe accidents are contingent; one can live a full life without ever being involved in a serious accident. Yet, within such complex systems, hurt happens that no creature could foresee or prevent. Coincidences that derive from often good-willed, intentional and non-intentional actions sometimes come together as a stroke of misfortune to create harm. Creatures experience damage that is outside the scope of human power.

After an event, one can learn from accidents and take precautions; yet, the precautions place a new set of structures that give rise to new complexities with new potential for damage and loss.⁴¹⁴ As the Teacher of Ecclesiastes notes:

Time and chance happen to them all [both wise and unwise]. For no one can anticipate the time of disasters. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.⁴¹⁵

I would press the point that the distribution of this sort of loss follows no account of justice. Regardless of their actions and personalities, circumstances can strike human beings in uncontrollable ways. Conversely, against the purely negative focus of the Teacher, chance events also happen to result in desirable states of affairs, on the aggregate level and for the single person. Someone does win the lottery, and, for this person, the game of chance has turned out well.

C. Loss from Social Limits: A third category of loss derives from the social realm of moral evil. For Kelsey, moral evil is the deformation of

⁴¹² For a distinction between four types of coupling and their various types of impact, see Bonß, *Vom Risiko*, 68–76.

⁴¹³ EE 202.

⁴¹⁴ Gregersen, “Risk and Religion,” 357.

⁴¹⁵ Ec 9:11b-12.

human practices resulting in avoidable, unnecessary, and abiding violations of creaturely integrity; moral evil is the consequence of sin.⁴¹⁶ While Kelsey's creation theology primarily focuses on individual moral action,⁴¹⁷ I would argue, guided by Wisdom theology, that the proximate context is scarred by evil systemically. This should also belong to creation theology.

The Teacher of Ecclesiastes has a keen sense of the injustice of the world: "I saw the oppressions that are practiced under the sun."⁴¹⁸ When human beings commit evil, they often participate in broader structures of meaning that justify their actions. These broader structures constitute social limits. Social limits constitute all the structures of social life that human beings have built up, in various different ways. While these forms of power may be of overall benefit for society, they may also take forms that are unjust and oppressive, causing more suffering and hurt than they do good. As the Teacher notes, some rulers rule not to the advantage, but to the disadvantage, of the ruled.⁴¹⁹

I develop these thoughts in Chapter 10.3 from the wrongdoer's point of view, but let me emphasize that the situation of oppression does not create an absolute divide between victims and wrongdoers. The Teacher argues that while the victims are alone in their victimization, also the oppressors lack comfort. "Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them."⁴²⁰ Taking the last "them" as referring to the oppressors, the point might be that oppressors, just like the oppressed, long for someone to recognize their inherent value as human beings—despite their oppressive actions. This is a thought to which I return in Chapter 11.3. In any case, the situation is hopeless for both; neither the oppressor, nor the oppressed are able to fix the situation of oppression.

In sum, *intrinsic, extrinsic and social limits are a part of human creatures' proximate context*. These are the limits within which human beings enjoy their wellbeing and suffer their loss. While this chapter seeks to clarify what creation is, Chapter 9.2 takes a clearer stance on how this creation should be evaluated. It is time to investigate more carefully what *human beings* are as created into such proximate contexts.

⁴¹⁶ EE 209.

⁴¹⁷ Kelsey returns to speak forcefully about the systematic effects of sin in the parts about consummation.

⁴¹⁸ Ec 4:1a.

⁴¹⁹ Ec 8:9.

⁴²⁰ Ec 4:1b.

2. Being and Having Bodies

While human beings experience harm from their proximate contexts, they can also experience their own bodies as the origin of harm. That is the topic of this section.

Kelsey describes the human being with two equally important propositions: human beings *are* bodies, and human beings *have* bodies.⁴²¹ As mentioned in Chapter 3.3B, this distinction has a history in body phenomenology, yet Kelsey derives the distinction between having and being a body from Job 10, from the same verses stated above:

Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.
You clothed me with skin,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.⁴²²

In the first part, God pours out and curdles the body that *is* Job. In the last part, God gives Job a body, clothing him and knitting him together with skin and bones, so that now Job *has* a body.⁴²³ I will go with this interpretation, fully aware that one can also interpret this as a standard Hebrew parallelism, a “hendiadys,” where two words carry the same meaning.

A. Being a Body

Being a body entails that human beings are *actual* bodies, that they are *changing and developing* in their interactions with the proximate context, and that they have certain *powers and energies*.⁴²⁴

I Actuality: Since being created by God is a matter of being born, created human beings are *actual* human beings. God does not just create the conditions of possibility for birth. God does more than create the world and the laws of nature that enable human beings to procreate. Rather, God is

⁴²¹ The purpose of this distinction is to avoid both a monist and a dualist view of the human being. In his somewhat technical language, Kelsey uses the expression “actual human living personal bodies” for human beings, see EE 308 and the discussion in Wood, “A Response,” 28.

⁴²² Job 10:10-12.

⁴²³ See footnote 177.

⁴²⁴ Concerning “being a body,” Kelsey discusses nine “core themes,” among which I draw out three that are relevant for this study (2, 5, and 6). Beyond these three, Kelsey argues that human bodies are 1) a divine gift, 3) distinct, yet related to other creatures, 4) human qua DNA-structure, 7) finite, 8) inherently mysterious, and 9) good, EE 250.

involved in the very process of being born.⁴²⁵ Emphasizing that the *actuality* of the human body is what God creates avoids both the error of seeing a zygote as an actual human life—it is an actual zygote and a *potential* human life⁴²⁶—and the error of postponing the actuality of human life to the eschatological point when a human person has actualized him- or herself or has come to accept the self that God has given.⁴²⁷ Emphasizing that human beings are at home in the world in this way is a commitment that Kelsey shares with the *Scandinavian Creation theology*.⁴²⁸

2 Changing and Developing: Being a body means that human beings change and develop throughout their lives in an interaction with their proximate contexts.⁴²⁹ They depend on their proximate contexts for their functioning and wellbeing. Human beings have needs that can only be fulfilled with resources from their proximate contexts. In this context, a statement from Gustaf Wingren can be taken as paradigmatic of Kelsey’s intention:

Breathing, searching for food, protection from danger, and receiving warmth—these are conditions of the life that is being born (= being created), conditions that are afforded by the contact which human life has with other created things. This contact keeps life in being and sustains human weakness against death.⁴³⁰

That human beings depend on the world for their continued existence is the most basic trait of *being* a human body. Human beings need energy inputs to ward off sinking into chaos. Human beings flourish in the recognition of others; they thrive in the embrace of others; they experience all the goods that others give them through their bodies. Simultaneously, human beings are vulnerable to harm, which they experience through deprivation of the goods that are necessary for their survival and wellbeing. Yet they are also restorable to previous states, and capable of learning new things. They are resilient and open for transformation towards the good.

⁴²⁵ EE 252.

⁴²⁶ EE 254-55. For the implications of this for the heated theological “pro-life”/“pro-choice”-debate in America, see 262-64.

⁴²⁷ In contrast to the account in Genesis where Adam and Eve are created as fully adult, Job’s creation theology of birth entails that human beings are actual even as they develop ontogenetically, EE 262 and 299-300.

⁴²⁸ Gregersen, Kristensson Ugglå, and Wyller, *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age*, 14. Kelsey has read Wingren, but drawing the connections between them goes beyond the scope of this study.

⁴²⁹ EE 261.

⁴³⁰ Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 19, translation altered, see appendix.

3 *Center of Finite Powers and Energies*: Being a body means that human beings are centers of various powers or energies that they can employ to influence their proximate contexts. While being the center of various finite powers is something that human beings share with other creatures, human beings also have a distinct set of powers. As Kelsey phrases it:

human living bodies generally have a distinctive array of capacities for specific types of self-regulated behavior that involve more complex, more long-range, and more flexibly modulated planning than that of which any other kind of living body is capable.⁴³¹

Humans are not only able to plan much more complex things than non-humans, they also perceive things in a qualitatively different way. As Gregersen notes: “What happens *with* the animals, happens *for* the human being.”⁴³² Typically, human beings are aware, not only of themselves, but also of their own finitude, of their own morality, and of their susceptibility to being changed, both for good and for bad.

Kelsey discusses how human beings, through their power and energies, can be said to be *free*. Kelsey discusses this in ways that make his work conversant with many aspects discussed in Part II, and seeing human beings as free is a crucial part of risk theology.⁴³³ Therefore, I shall give this aspect of Kelsey’s theological anthropology more attention. Kelsey distinguishes four senses in which a human being can be free. For present purposes, I discuss three of them.⁴³⁴

In the first sense, human beings are free in so far as they can *transcend their present reality and imagine alternative contexts*, for example future contexts that they might inhabit. This ability is the condition of possibility for the construction of risk relationships. Much like the *Relational Theory of Risk*, Kelsey sees this freedom as finite in the sense that it is always a transcendence of one’s specific proximate context, and therefore also bound to the flows and oppositions that one’s proximate context offers.⁴³⁵ Human beings construct risk relationships from their biological,

⁴³¹ EE 265.

⁴³² Gregersen, “Skabelse og forsyn,” 81, my translation, see appendix.

⁴³³ In reference to the results of part II, I expand on Kelsey’s notion of human powers and energies, particularly with respect to Kelsey’s affirmation that an ad hoc appropriation of “particular insights yielded by technical philosophical phenomenology about particular structures, capacities, and dynamics of human consciousness” can be fruitful for theological anthropology, EE 832.

⁴³⁴ The fourth sense of freedom that Kelsey discusses depends on Kelsey’s understanding of “existential hows,” EE 835, a proper discussion of which would go beyond the scope of this study.

⁴³⁵ I return to the topic of human bondage to their proximate contexts in Chapter 10.2.

psychological, social, and cultural vantage points. Among the infinite range of potential risk relationships, human beings can only be aware of so many risk relationships at a time and the rest is left to one's familiarity with the world. This means that threats exist that escape human awareness: this is where relationships of danger arise. Freedom of self-transcendence generally belongs to being a human body.

Kelsey sees a second form of freedom in that human beings are free *to choose between alternative ways of realizing certain goals*.⁴³⁶ This freedom depends on the first freedom of self-transcendence. For, only if one can imagine alternatives in the proximate context can one choose between them.⁴³⁷ However, the freedom to choose between alternatives depends also on the alternatives that the proximate context presents, as Kelsey points out.⁴³⁸ If one is hungry, and only one source of food is available—because one's proximate context consists of a desert island—one can only eat from that source. Moreover, some of the possibilities may be “nearly impossible to resist,” as Stephen Evans phrases it.⁴³⁹ This aligns with Marilyn McCord Adams, who offers this thoughtful example to highlight the limits to human responsibility under extreme pressure:

Suppose a terrorist threatened to torture and behead ten people unless we always put our pencil down exactly one inch from our desk's edge - something it is, strictly speaking, within our power to do. Imposing such disproportionate consequences on our actions puts us under too much pressure and so does not exalt but crushes human agency.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ It would seem, then, that Kelsey disagrees with Pannenberg's assessment that a freedom-to-do-otherwise is already sinful because it is no longer tied to the good. Pannenberg argues that “ein Wille, der der Norm des Guten gegenüber auch anders kann, faktisch schon kein guter Wille mehr ist. Er ist auch nicht nur schwach, weil noch ungefestigt im Guten. Insofern er der ihm gegebenen Norm des Guten gegenüber auch anders kann, ist er immer schon sündhaft, weil von der Bindung an das Gute emanzipiert,” Pannenberg, *ST II*, 296. For this project, I side with Kelsey; it is not simply that freedom to do otherwise is the problem, but how human beings make use of this freedom.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁴³⁸ That the freedom to do otherwise depends on the proximate context in this way leads Kelsey to argue that this sort of freedom does *not* belong to what human beings are as created by God, EE 842. I would argue, however, that the freedom to do otherwise is formally there, but only possible to use when the proximate context offers options. Constraints on options is another way in which human beings live in bondage to their proximate contexts (see Chapter 10.2).

⁴³⁹ Evans, “Salvation, Sin and Human Freedom in Kierkegaard,” 185.

⁴⁴⁰ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 37.

The sort of freedom described here depends on the alternatives that the proximate context presents. Sometimes it only presents *one* option, beyond the option of doing nothing. If and only if the proximate context presents more than one proper option is the human being free in this sense of the term.⁴⁴¹ While such a proximate context enables a “richness” of possibilities, the structure of many people’s proximate contexts does not grant them such richness.⁴⁴² In relation to the *Relational Theory of Risk*, experiencing a lack of possibility means that threats become dangers. If one has constructed a risk relationship but is unable to mitigate it, the source of threat remains a danger to which one is passively exposed.

A third form of freedom comes under scrutiny when Kelsey considers the freedom of “wholehearted, non-self-divided action in response to God relating to one.”⁴⁴³ Kelsey argues that sin distorts this possibility, so that it no longer belongs to the created person. Human beings—as they are in bondage to themselves and their contexts—are unable to act wholeheartedly, he argues.⁴⁴⁴

From a more phenomenological point of view, however, I follow K.E. Løgstrup’s view that human beings, in their social interactions, can be carried by sovereign utterances of life that enable them to act wholeheartedly—in spite of themselves (see Chapter 6.2). Not just trust, but also mercy and hope are life possibilities that present themselves to creatures, drawing human beings to a momentary fulfillment of life. Human beings can be wholeheartedly present for others, even for the briefest moment, when they are full of trust, hopeful for the future, or completely engaged in merciful action for the sake of the other person. When they are wholeheartedly present, this owes to the sovereign manifestations of life that carry them. The freedom of wholehearted action

⁴⁴¹ EE 841. By considering the freedom-to-do-otherwise in light of the proximate context’s display of possibilities, Kelsey avoids taking a stand in the principled discussion of whether human free will is compatible with determinism or not. This discussion has been important in risk theology, see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 241 and Gregersen, “Divine Action, Compatibilism, and Coherence Theory,” 216, where Gregersen introduces the term “ontological compatibilism” emphasizing that *all human acts depend on divine powers*. Gregersen endorses this creational theological realism in contrast to what he calls a “nomological compatibilism” of being free in spite of being completely predetermined, either by the laws of nature or by God’s monocausal sovereignty.

⁴⁴² EE 841-42.

⁴⁴³ EE 836.

⁴⁴⁴ This is the locus of Kelsey’s doctrine of sin-in-the-singular, which I exclude from discussion for present purposes.

only belongs momentarily to being a human body as a gift, but it is nonetheless a sense of freedom.

In sum, human beings are *actual*, they are *changing and developing* with their proximate and ultimate contexts, and they possess various finite *powers and energies*, including powers of freedom that are deeply entangled in the conditions of the proximate context and finitude of their constitution.

B. Having a Body

That human beings also “have” bodies broadens the perspective on what human beings are. “Having a body” in the context of Christian creation theology, means that God has *given* each human being a body. Having a body equals having been given a body, a life, a breath to live on for a time.⁴⁴⁵ This means, according to Kelsey, that human *responsibility*, *dignity*, and *respect* follow from having been a given body by God.

1 Responsibility: Human beings are responsible to God for the ways in which they orient their bodies within their contexts, both proximate and ultimate.⁴⁴⁶ While Kelsey justifies this claim with reference with Job, I will add a justification by reference to the Teacher of Ecclesiastes who believes that God will hold people accountable for their orientation within their proximate contexts: “Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”⁴⁴⁷ Human beings owe God responsible action, so that they orient themselves in ways that are “appropriate responses” to the ways in which God relates to them.⁴⁴⁸ I return to the topic of responsibility in Chapter 11.1.

⁴⁴⁵ For David Ford, the idea of living on borrowed breath is not “theologically felicitous” as it compromises the language of creation as a gift, Ford, “Humanity Before God,” 43. Kelsey himself oscillates between considering created life a gift or a loan. On the one hand, the body is a gift and only the eschatological time is borrowed, EE 480. On the other hand, created life is a loan, as human beings live on “borrowed breath,” EE 309. Seemingly, these two terms result in very different senses of responsibility. While one is responsible for maintaining what one has borrowed, a gift becomes one’s property with which the owner can do what he or she wants. However, Løgstrup makes the observation that while one does not owe a return for a gift, one does owe the giver the responsible use of the gift according to its function, Løgstrup, *Kunst og etik*, 231, see also Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 46. I might add that the boundary of the metaphor of human lives as a loan comes when one asks about the conditions for terminating that loan. Certainly, God does not terminate the loan if people neglect it. There is no divine correlation between sin and death.

⁴⁴⁶ EE 272-75.

⁴⁴⁷ Ec 11:9.

⁴⁴⁸ Chapter 11.1 returns to this discussion of responsibility.

2 *Dignity*: Human dignity arises from the proposition of this responsibility. That human beings are accountable for the ways in which they orient their bodies is the basis of their dignity. This is a theocentric claim, and it has to be. Human dignity does not rely on capacities that some have and others do not, e.g. capacities for thinking, for self-regulating behavior, or for religious communication.⁴⁴⁹ While the responsibility of human beings is relative to their capacities for being responsible, responsibility does not depend on capacities. Nor does the human dignity rely on a specific human agency, a certain way of employing one's capacity, or upon certain dignified behavior.⁴⁵⁰ Human beings have dignity because God holds them accountable.⁴⁵¹ Concerning the *Relational Theory of Risk*, I would argue that grounding dignity in the divine call to accountability means that *value* is not only something human beings bestow upon things; *value is inherent, or even conferred upon creatures by God*. Value is first of all something human beings should seek to respond to in their evaluation. I make the case for this view in section 8.3.

3 *Respect*: Third, human beings are owed respect from other human beings because of their dignity. Respect is the proper response to dignity. Since respect is a response to the dignity based in human accountability, respect means not interfering with the unsubstitutability of human accountability. Respect includes not forcing other human beings into certain courses, because force takes away human accountability.⁴⁵² While children can be forced to go to kindergarten, they are also not accountable for their not wanting to go to kindergarten.

As such, *responsibility, dignity, and respect* are the three things that Kelsey derives from the idea of human beings *having* a body.

Even though Kelsey's exposition of human beings as personal bodies is illuminating, the distinction between risk and danger invites one to observe an aspect of human embodiment that Kelsey overlooks. Herein, one experiences oneself neither as *being* only a vulnerable body that others can violate, nor as *having* bodies for which one alone is responsible. One also experiences one's body as something foreign to oneself, as something for

⁴⁴⁹ In contrast to Wilfried Härle, who argues that the capacity and destiny (*Bestimmung*) of human beings to communicate religiously is what grounds human dignity, Härle, "Menschenwürde," 155.

⁴⁵⁰ For this argument, see Meyer, "Dignity, Rights, and Self-Control," 532–34. The problem for Meyers is his inability to distinguish between inherent human dignity (Danish: *menneskeværd*) and dignified behavior of self-control (Danish: *værdighed*). Dignity does not depend on dignified behavior, but has an intrinsic sense too.

⁴⁵¹ EE 275-78.

⁴⁵² EE 278-280.

which one is *not* responsible, something to which one is in *danger*.⁴⁵³ If one experiences an inexplicable pain in the chest, which turns out to be cancer, one can come to perceive one's own body as something to be combatted and preserved at the same time. In constructing a risk relationship, one can distinguish the cancer cells as a threatening object apart from the healthy cells as the vulnerable valuable object. Yet, both things are parts of one's body: the two objects are one. Therefore, one can come to experience the body as a danger to itself.

Kelsey's conceptual framework can accommodate this insight, however, if one expands upon the experience of having a body. I suggest that cancer is an experience of *having a body where the order of influence is turned around*. Rather than oneself being responsible for how one orients one's body into the world, one is the victim of the body's threat to oneself.⁴⁵⁴

3. Conclusion: Risk and Value

I return now to the concept of value, with which I began this chapter. So far, this chapter has developed a theological anthropology in line with many of the anthropological insights presented in Part II, and it has shown that Wisdom theology in Kelsey's constructive reading is helpful in developing such a theology.

Yet, the very fact that there are things of value sets the stage for this chapter's theological interpretation of the world as a divine gift of creation. In Chapter 5.4 on the *Relational Theory of Risk*, I presented an example of a mutually exclusive value-conflict: the Swedish builders saw the potential tunnel through the ridge as an immensely valuable product, whilst the farmers saw the tunnel as a threat to what they valued, namely their farmland. The authors of the relational theory of risk explain valuation as a matter of cultural situatedness.⁴⁵⁵ Such an approach is methodologically helpful in studying axiological conflicts, and also helps explain why different people nourish different values. Yet, if it turns into an overarching

⁴⁵³ The conceptual framework for understanding human beings should allow for such an experience, lest a hermeneutics of positive wisdom, where one's destiny follows one's acts, turns the experience entirely into something that one has brought upon oneself.

⁴⁵⁴ This is an instance where Kelsey could have profited from engaging more closely with body phenomenology, where the distinction between having a body and being a body is standard. The experience of the body as something alien to oneself appears in double sensing: touching one's own finger, one experiences the body both as oneself and as something alien to oneself, see Kristensen, "Krop og håb," 247 with reference to Bernhard Waldenfels. Unfortunately, that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and is an area for further research.

⁴⁵⁵ Boholm and Corvellec, "A Relational Theory of Risk," 178.

interpretation of life, such social constructivism neglects important aspects of how human valuation functions.

As Danish philosopher of subjectivity Arne Grøn has pointed out, human valuation is always of something that one *perceives as* valuable. “We attribute value to something because it is valuable, but that it is valuable finally means that it—for us—possesses value *in itself*.”⁴⁵⁶ If one perceives life, health and relations as valuable, as most human beings do, then one perceives them as valuable *before* valuing them. The value comes before the valuation, and the valuation is a response to the value that one perceives. Grøn also points out that the most important things to human beings are those things which are *invaluable*. If things are invaluable, they cannot be reduced to human valuation of them.⁴⁵⁷ Human dignity, for example, is more than a convention; it is something that human beings experience as an invaluable value. It points to how things might be valuable in spite of human evaluation: a life that does not succeed according to contemporary human values is still valuable in itself.⁴⁵⁸ I would suggest that Christian creation theology should interpret the inherent and sometimes invaluable value of creation—and the ability to appreciate these values—as gifts from the divine Creator.

To elaborate the correlation between creation and value, I will reference Luther’s explanation of the first article of faith in his *Small Catechism*. In this context, Luther conveys very concretely that all the valuable things in human life owe their existence to the divine creator:

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul; eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all my property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or

⁴⁵⁶ Grøn, “Det uhandterligt gode,” 60, emphasis in original, my translation, see appendix.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 64. In Kelsey, the dignity of human lives depends on human flourishing in the sense of “blossoming,” which is a result of God’s relation to human beings, and therefore independent on the character of human life as well or ill, good or bad. Kelsey distinguishes this sense of flourishing from “thriving,” which means flourishing in the sense of “having oneself in hand.” This sense of flourishing depends on one’s activity in the proximate context and whether one contributes to the wellbeing of the proximate context, EE 315, see also Kelsey, “On Human Flourishing,” 26.

worthiness of mine at all! For all this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.⁴⁵⁹

Even though such words do not reflect the wide range of different proximate contexts into which human beings are born—a variety that Luther must have been acutely aware of—the text still speaks to the importance of a sense of gratitude for whatever one has received. It encourages finding those things in life that are valuable. Without merit, human beings exist, being a body and having a body with—typically—functioning senses, enough to eat, clothes to wear, and social relations—all of which are necessary for a good life for the receiver of these goods.

Yet, the experience of living with risk and danger in light of creation theology does not just correlate with the human experience of value—vulnerability must be considered too. Luther writes in the first person mode of confession, inviting his readers to confess with him. Yet, some readers of Luther's words will find it difficult to join in with his confession of thanks. While gratitude for whatever one has received is important as an appropriate response to being created, the circumstances of some persons (like those of Job, in his affliction), might be so terrible that they result in a righteous lamentation—why was I created with such horrible, abusive parents in a time of war? The theological anthropology developed in this chapter also incorporates human vulnerability. The relation of such anthropology to human vulnerability is the topic of the following chapter.

⁴⁵⁹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 354–55, see appendix.

9. Incarnation: Vulnerability and Anxiety

Living with risk and danger means living a life of vulnerability. While the previous chapter focused on how one's proximate contexts constitute the presupposition of one's wellbeing, this chapter grapples more directly with the observation that one's proximate contexts also entail dangers to which one is exposed and vulnerable.⁴⁶⁰ This experience constitutes an existential problem for human beings. This chapter discusses three aspects of that problem.

First, human beings may relate to their vulnerability with fear and anxiety. In the first section, I investigate how the Christian symbol of divine incarnation can provide orientation with respect to the fear and anxiety that arises on account of human vulnerability. The incarnation means that the second person of the trinity, the divine Son comes to live a *human* life, with all its joys and woes, with all its potential dangers, risks, chances, and graces. The result of this investment of the divine life into creation, with all its vulnerabilities, is that human beings share their experience of vulnerability with the triune God.

In the second section, I use the investigation of this divine vulnerability in the incarnation to reconsider the topic of creation and value, now on new terms. The vulnerability of the world of value destabilizes that value. I explore two possible answers. First, I discuss the degree to which the triune God is responsible for the threats that exist to the vulnerable valuables of creation. Second, I use the symbol of divine incarnation to show that the God who shared in creaturely vulnerability, through the incarnation, demonstrates a movement of love that values creaturely life in the midst of vulnerability.

In the third section, I investigate the sense of human vulnerability that arises in the experience of actual loss. I use a discussion of the cross of Christ to warrant the legitimacy of lamentation when actualized loss reveals human vulnerability. Rather than curving one's fear and anxiety inward so they turn outwards in aggression, the destinies of Job and Jesus justify human beings directing their lamentation outward in the direction of God.

I begin with a clarification of the task and problem concerning human vulnerability.

⁴⁶⁰ One could defend this ordering of topics with reference to Jürgen Moltmann: "Primär erfahren wir das Leben und die Liebe zum Leben und erst danach den Verlust des Lebens und der Menschen, die wir lieben," Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 96.

1. Relating to Vulnerability through Divine Sharing of Vulnerability

In the previous chapter, I expounded a series of ways in which human beings are vulnerable, to intrinsic limits, to extrinsic limits, and to social limits. This section investigates some of the modes and pitfalls of human relating to their own vulnerability. For this, I use a theory of vulnerability found in contemporary theologian Elisabeth Gandolfo.

Pitfalls in Relating to Vulnerability

As argued in Chapter 5.2, human beings can experience fear and anxiety when they realize and relate to all the possible risk relationships that can occur on the basis of creaturely vulnerability. While *fear* is the response to risk relationships where both the threatening object (risk object) and the valuable, vulnerable object (object at risk) take definite forms, the object of *anxiety* is nothingness itself. Therein, I was in agreement with Kierkegaard: anxiety can occur as a response to the construction of a risk relationship where the risk object—or the object at risk—is vague and undefined.

What also needs to be considered in this context is Paul Tillich's observation that anxiety does not disappear when the risk object becomes more definite. Since anxiety is about nothingness itself, it remains, lurking behind every definite form of fear. Concerning dying, for instance, the object of fear is "the anticipated event of being killed by sickness or an accident," whereas anxiety relates to the sheer nothingness in and after death.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, since human beings are unable to endure anxiety for very long, Tillich argues that they will seek a definite object that they can fear, as a way of escaping their anxiety.

Human beings do not experience fear and anxiety concerning all types of vulnerability. Tillich argues that only the risk-relationships where the object of risk is of ultimate concern can instigate fear or anxiety, exemplified with dying, seriously missing the mark in life, or meaninglessness.⁴⁶² On this point, Elisabeth Gandolfo rightly criticizes Tillich for suggesting that the death of others raise anxiety only in so far as their death makes one feel the threat to one's own death.⁴⁶³ Tillich remains individualistic in his existentialism. Based on narratives of mothers' experience with children in danger, Gandolfo argues that human beings can also become anxious if non-being threatens a person who is significant and valuable to them.⁴⁶⁴ This observation leads Gandolfo to insist that vulnerability is *relational*. It is not just oneself that can be an anxiety-

⁴⁶¹ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 37–38.

⁴⁶² For his influential typology of non-being, see *ibid.*, 40–63.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁶⁴ Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*, 117.

inducing “object at risk”—significant others can also appear as “objects at risk” in their own right. Such “relational vulnerability” plays an important role when Gandolfo investigates the pitfalls of human vulnerability.

Responding to Tillich’s statement that “all human life can be interpreted as a continuous attempt to avoid despair,”⁴⁶⁵ Gandolfo observes that human beings protect themselves from anxiety by seeking to lower their (relational) vulnerability. One way of creating security from threats to one’s vulnerability is by accumulating assets of different sorts—physical, human, social, environmental, and existential assets. Gandolfo presupposes that these assets are competitive, meaning that if one has more access to them, another has less. She overlooks that noncompetitive assets also exist. Theologian of economy Kathryn Tanner points out that public goods like lighthouses or pieces of knowledge, for instance, have the outstanding feature “that everyone can enjoy the whole of them at the same time with the complete absence of rivalry.”⁴⁶⁶ However, it is true that some assets *are* competitive, and concerning these assets, accumulating assets results in privilege for the group included in the sphere of vulnerability. According to Gandolfo, “Privilege is the product of human anxiety over vulnerability; it is a collective attempt to alleviate anxiety through control of vulnerability. It is an attempt to control assets for protection from and resilience to vulnerability.”⁴⁶⁷ To defend privilege, human beings employ strategies to prevent others from gaining access to the assets, sometimes even violent strategies. “Unfortunately,” Gandolfo warns, “the pain relief offered by these strategies comes at a steep price—namely, the violation of human dignity in ourselves and others.”⁴⁶⁸ In their search for invulnerability, human beings collect assets for themselves, employing violent defenses of these assets, defenses that increase overall vulnerability. In Gandolfo’s analysis, then, much of human violence arises from anxiety and human vulnerability.

The existential question arising from this analysis concerns *how human beings should relate to their vulnerability*. In the next section, I investigate how the Christian symbol of divine incarnation addresses this experience, arguing that God shares in human (relational) vulnerability, dealing with vulnerability in ways, in which human beings can participate.

⁴⁶⁵ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 56.

⁴⁶⁶ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 135. Tanner notes, that claiming copyright removes this possibility from knowledge.

⁴⁶⁷ Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*, 141.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

Incarnation as Sharing Human Vulnerability

I would argue that the decisive motif for describing the God of Christianity in ways that enable a trusting faith is the incarnation of the divine Son. Incarnation means that Godself becomes a creature. Incarnation means going into the “flesh” (σάρξ). The idea is grounded on an influential verse in the prologue of the Gospel of John, which reads: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”⁴⁶⁹ In the original Greek context, “flesh” denotes first and foremost the vulnerable and mortal life of living creatures.⁴⁷⁰

In light of this idea, I would argue that the divine Son, the divine Word, lived a human life, which he experienced as ambiguous in much the same way as any other human life, with the hopes and chances, but also with the risks and danger that such a human life includes. The Gospel of Luke writes the divine Son into the story of human beings all the way back to Adam.⁴⁷¹ This suggests to us that Jesus Christ was a human person like all others, a finite human being “in all the ways in which human creatures are finite,”⁴⁷² as Kelsey notes. Jesus is born into a proximate context, which is the condition of possibility for his wellbeing but also for his loss, from intrinsic, extrinsic and social limits.

The various Gospel accounts of the beginning of Jesus’ life describe several aspects of Jesus’ vulnerability. As German theologian Hildegund Keul puts it, “Die Weihnachtsgeschichten der Bibel führen die Verwundbarkeit Jesu anschaulich vor Augen.”⁴⁷³ For the following interpretation, I draw on the distinction made by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds between inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerability.⁴⁷⁴ As a finite and embodied creature, Jesus was “inherently” vulnerable, sharing in universal human vulnerability. This means that he was utterly dependent on his proximate context for survival. However, his vulnerability was also “situational,” depending on certain societal conditions as it did: Jesus was born during a census so there was no room for him at any of the inns in Bethlehem.⁴⁷⁵ Finally, the vulnerability of Jesus’ kingship enabled

⁴⁶⁹ Jn 1:14.

⁴⁷⁰ Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation,” 176–77.

⁴⁷¹ Lk 3:23–38.

⁴⁷² EE 627, see also Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 66. What emphasizing Jesus’ finitude means for the accounts of healing and resuscitation, e.g. Lk 4:38 and 7:14–15, I leave open.

⁴⁷³ Keul, “Inkarnation,” 218.

⁴⁷⁴ For the distinction between inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerability, see Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, “Introduction: What Is Vulnerability,” 7–8.

⁴⁷⁵ Lk 2:2–7. While “situational circumstances” for Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds primarily denote societal exacerbation of vulnerability, one should add a constitutional

Herod to seek his life, thus establishing a “pathogenic” vulnerability, a vulnerability that is made possible because one is already vulnerable.⁴⁷⁶ In Chapters 10 and 11, I return to other ways in which Jesus increased his own vulnerability, what I would call “teleological vulnerability,” which derives from running a risk with the purpose of achieving a certain good.

Arguably, God was vulnerable even “prior” to the incarnation of the Son through the divine indwelling in “Boten/Engel, Schekinah, Visionen, Tempel, Torah,” as Günter Thomas points out.⁴⁷⁷ Still, the vulnerability in these appearances remains distanced, a sense of relative security remains. In contrast, the incarnation means that God’s vulnerability changes qualitatively and increases quantitatively. In the words of Thomas, “Es ist eine Präsenz *ohne Rückholbarkeit*, eine Präsenz, die durch eine Dahingabe der Selbstbestimmung und Freiheit empfindlicher und zugleich manipulierbarer ist.”⁴⁷⁸ The incarnation increases divine vulnerability in a significant way, irreversibly *crossing* the distinction between Creator and created and submitting the divine Son to ambiguous human life (the qualitative difference), whilst also making God more exposed to human aggression and manipulation (the quantitative difference).

The incarnation does not increase vulnerability just for the divine Son but also for the divine Father. The Father experiences relational vulnerability through seeing the Son vulnerable. While the Father has been relationally vulnerable to being wounded in grief since the very act of creation—grieved over human infidelity, tragedy and victimization,⁴⁷⁹ the relational vulnerability of the Father takes on a new quality with the incarnation of the divine Son.

So, the kenotic act of becoming a human being constitutes a divine sacrifice of God’s own relative invulnerability. The Philippian hymn, which states that God “emptied” (*εκένωσεν*) Godself in Jesus Christ, expresses this new divine vulnerability when referring to Jesus’ eventual destiny in the crucifixion.⁴⁸⁰ Yet, becoming a human being already constitutes a divine self-emptying. God gives God’s life over to the joys and woes of existence in this world. This kenotic act turns the very incarnation of God into a final sacrifice of the remaining divine security. According to biblical theologian Sigrid Brandt, a sacrifice consists in goods

dimension: unbearable suffering for one person may not be unbearable for another person.

⁴⁷⁶ Mt 2:1-18. The result is that the family flees to Egypt and Jesus becomes a young boy with “Migrationshintergrund,” Keul, “Inkarnation,” 221.

⁴⁷⁷ Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 168.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Pool, *God’s Wounds II*.

⁴⁸⁰ Phil 2:6-8.

that, while necessary for one's own protection, are given away without any expectation of seeing them return. In this light, the very incarnation of Jesus constitutes a sacrifice, Brandt argues:

Jesu Einsatz seines leiblichen Lebens zur Verkündigung des Namens Gottes um des Glaubens seines irdischen 'Geschwister' willen durchbrach das Gabenkalkül. Er 'setzte alles aufs Spiel'. Seine *Verkündigungsexistenz* war ein *Opfer*.⁴⁸¹

Coming to earth with the purpose of revealing the divine nature and will (Chapters 10 and 11), the divine Son sacrificed a position of relative divine security.

Brandt defends her claim with an interpretation of the letter to the Hebrews, according to which the sacrifice is to be found in the very incarnation, and not only in the cross. "Deutlich wird [dass der Hebräerbrief] mit dem 'Opfer' Jesu Christi nicht in erster Linie dessen Kreuzestod (!), sondern dessen Existenz im Leibe, sein leibliches Leben also zur Erfüllung von Gottes Willen meint."⁴⁸² Such a reading of Hebrews proffers a great insight, although it competes with other New Testament interpretations both inside⁴⁸³ and outside Hebrews.⁴⁸⁴ Brandt's argument centers on Hebrews 10:5-10, where the author of Hebrews explains the sacrifice of the Son in the body—not in the death—as that which *abolishes* the cultic offering of death:

Consequently, when Christ *came into the world*, he said,
 "Sacrifices and offerings you [the Father] have *not desired*,
 but a body you have prepared for me;
 in burnt offerings and sin offerings
 you have taken no pleasure.

Then I [Christ] said, 'See, God, I have come to *do your will*, O God'
 (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."

When he [Christ] said above, "You [the Father] have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are

⁴⁸¹ Brandt, "War Jesu Tod ein 'Opfer'?" 73.

⁴⁸² Brandt, "Hat es sachlich," 270.

⁴⁸³ The insight appears to be original when compared with standard exegesis, e.g. Koester, *Hebrews*, 429–34.38-40. See also Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis*, 182–86. Brandt acknowledges that a tension exists between this theology of the cross in Hebrews on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the "law-of-will-and-successions" argument of Hebrews 9:16 where God has to die for human beings to inherit; as well as the "cultic-legal" argument of 9:22, where forgiveness depends on the shedding of blood, *ibid.*, 195–96. For a disruption of the connection between forgiveness and the cross, see Chapter 11.

⁴⁸⁴ For a discussion of sacrificial imagery in the New Testament and its analogical accuracy, see Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 262–69. For a discussion of the exegetical variety of interpretations of the sacrificial imagery, see Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis*, 205–82.

offered according to the law), then he [Christ] added, “See, I have come to *do your will*.” He abolishes the *first* [the cultic offering] in order to establish the *second* [doing the will of God]. And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the *offering of the body* of Jesus Christ once for all.⁴⁸⁵

The point of the Son’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is to do God’s will, which does not consist in him becoming any kind of offering on the cross; rather, God’s will is for Jesus to be bodily present with human beings. Christ “abolishes” (*ἀναιρεῖ*) the cultic offering in accordance with the will of God.⁴⁸⁶ Jesus achieves this, not through the cross, but through his doing God’s will as a bodily person. In other words, the incarnate Son does *not* perform a cultic offering. Instead, the Son steps into the bodily community of humans, which constitutes the real sacrifice of Jesus (*τῆς προσφορᾶς τοῦ σώματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*). And, as Hebrews expresses, this is done with the purpose of sanctifying humans.⁴⁸⁷ The core point is this: the incarnation already constitutes a sacrifice, namely a sacrifice of relative divine security, of that which is necessary for the Son to uphold his own life in eternity; the Son gives up those things to become a mortal human being.

The finitude of the divine Son includes an inherent openness towards the future, including an openness to other possible futures than the cross. Systematic theologian Hans Vium Mikkelsen puts it in the following way:

It belongs to the humanity of Jesus that he did not know how his life would end. Being subjected to the contingency of history belongs to a life as a true human being in history.⁴⁸⁸

As such, Jesus Christ lived a particular life with an open future. The course of Jesus’ life was open to a series of potential directions and possibilities, of which he only realized some.⁴⁸⁹ The future could have gone

⁴⁸⁵ Heb 10:5-10.

⁴⁸⁶ By way of contrast, exegete Craig Koester has Christ abolish the first covenant to establish the second, Koester, *Hebrews*, 434.

⁴⁸⁷ Brandt, “Hat es sachlich,” 270.

⁴⁸⁸ Mikkelsen, “Den trinitariske Gud,” 23, my translation, see appendix. This includes seeing Jesus’ predictions of his death either as risk calculi or as theological claims from the Gospel authors, e.g. Mk 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34. As Mikkelsen notes, Jesus was “Fully human, as he does not know the final result of what will happen after death. If this was not the case, the cry ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) would have been fake,” Mikkelsen, *Reconciled Humanity*, 229.

⁴⁸⁹ Palestinian theologian Mitri Raheb rightly emphasizes that God identifies with all those who die after having been tortured under the rule of an empire, Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 103–5. However, I would argue that God also identifies with those who die in disasters, because the incarnate Son *could have* been killed in a landslide. God also identifies with those who suffer from sickness, because he

in many directions, but like any other life, it took one particular path, as *it developed in an interplay between Jesus' character and choices, his relations to the other two persons of the trinity, and his relations to other human beings in their roles and individual lives*. Jesus was born into a specific proximate context with its network of memories and expectations. Jesus' final destiny was contingent—it did not follow a divine “master plan,” as it were. Nor was it simply arbitrary. It was the result of free human reactions to Jesus being the divine Son seeking to be in community with them. Being the divine Son and being born to save the world, not all the ways of engaging his proximate context could be revelations of the divine nature. He could not have remained a carpenter; that would not have revealed anything to anyone. Revelation requires some sort of public work, a form of public work that could qualify as living a divine life, in Jesus' case, the realization of the divine Kingdom (see Chapter 10), and the forgiveness of sins (see Chapter 11).

One thing that was certain in becoming a human being, however, was that the divine Son would eventually die. The intrinsic loss constituted in biological deterioration is essential to the divine incarnation, to his becoming a human being. Jesus lived with the intrinsic limits of creatures (see Chapter 8.1). Jesus' death is to be interpreted in line with the death of all living things. As Jürgen Moltmann states: “Endlich starb Jesus *den Tod alles Lebendigen*, denn er war sterblich und wäre auch ohne Hinrichtung eines Tages gestorben.”⁴⁹⁰ Therefore, the solidarity in death must have been a part of the purpose with incarnation. This is one viable way of interpreting Jesus' words on the cross expressed in John: “It is finished.”⁴⁹¹ Jesus was meant to die so as to create a community of human fellowship “with God, who in his Son moves into the texture of life and death. God

could have died from sickness. Consider the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, which Matthias Grünewald painted for the Antonine Hospital in Isenheim, Germany, depicting the crucified Christ sick with buboes. While the depiction may be a result of the “when-did-we-see-you”-structure of Matthew 25:44, it also lends itself to the idea of perceiving Christ as having an open future with several possible outcomes, among which a death of illness. Claiming this, I disagree with Athanasius who argues that it would have been *a priori* unfitting for Jesus to die of illness, see Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 91–105/XIX-XXV. Surely, some ways of dying are more potent than others. Jesus happened to die a rather forceful death, and the powerful symbol of the cross has captured the minds of many human beings. Had Jesus died a much more mundane death, the message of Jesus Christ may not have been as potent and inspiring, even if followed by the resurrection. In that sense, God not only risks the cross, God also risks something less fascinating than the cross. God risks having no impact in the world. God risks triviality.

⁴⁹⁰ Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 190.

⁴⁹¹ Jn 19:30. See also Heb 2:14.

can be found fully as much in the low grass as in the highest of the stars,” as Gregersen puts it, in his interpretation of this statement from John.⁴⁹² That God becomes inherently mortal is a key kenotic element of the incarnation.

Sharing Vulnerability with God

Moltmann, whose theology of God sharing in human suffering has proven itself vital for expressing the Christian message in a century of victimization, is a clear source of inspiration for this theology of vulnerability. In *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, Moltmann proposes that God suffers with human beings whenever they suffer. God is a suffering God: this is obvious in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, where the incarnate Son suffered death and the divine Father suffered the loss of his only Son. Moltmann references the Jewish scholar Elie Wiesel who, at the sight of a young boy being hanged in a concentration camp, answered the legitimate question, “where is God?” with the confession, “This is where—hanging here from this gallows.”⁴⁹³ Moltmann consents to this confession from his Christian theological point of view.⁴⁹⁴ The Christological subtext in Moltmann’s consent derives from the structural similarities between the young boy and Christ. Both are hanging from a piece of wood, struggling for what would have seemed like an age before they eventually died, and both were killed by a destructive regime.

However, a final—and crucial—structural similarity is left open. The youngster *never sought out his particular destiny of suffering*. Did the incarnate Son of God seek out such a destiny? Moltmann believes so. Moltmann suggests that Jesus gave himself to suffer on the cross with a purpose, namely the purpose of being in a community with other sufferers.⁴⁹⁵ This is a decisive structural *dissimilarity* in the two experiences, which, I would suggest, alienates the young victim from the message. The boy did not pursue suffering; the young boy wanted to live.

To continue Moltmann’s theology of solidarity with suffering, it is important to argue that the cross was the incarnational purpose of neither the Father nor the Son. Most of the Christian tradition has suggested either that the Father inflicts the crucifixion on the Son (e.g., as a punishment), or

⁴⁹² Gregersen, “Fra skabelsesteologi til dybdeinkarnation,” 35, my translation, see appendix, see also Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 191.

⁴⁹³ Wiesel, *Night*, 65.

⁴⁹⁴ Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 262.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265, emphasis added: “[Christus] erniedrigt sich und nimmt den ewigen Tod des Gottlosen und Gottverlassenen auf sich, so daß jeder Gottlose und Gottverlassene seine Gemeinschaft mit ihm erfahren kann.” The criticism of Moltmann on this account also applies if God intended the suffering of Jesus Christ for any other purposes.

that the Son seeks out the cross in voluntary obedience to the Father (e.g., as a satisfaction). In contrast, I explore another theological possibility: *the incarnation means that the divine Son proved willing to live a vulnerable, open life, preaching the Kingdom of God and hoping for the conversion of people, but being ready to take whatever destiny would become his.* As Hildegund Keul suggests, “Diesem Leben in Verwundbarkeit spricht das Christentum Heilsbedeutung zu.”⁴⁹⁶ This builds on the proposition of those risk theologians whose suggestion it is that the cross of Christ is a *risk* of the incarnation (see Chapter 2.4,6). Chapters 10 and 11 explore the meaning of the incarnation in light of consummation and reconciliation, which include a higher emphasis on the teleological vulnerability of entering Jerusalem to preach. But as a part of the divine work of creation, the decisive incarnational movement is that the divine Son lives a life of human vulnerability, and that the divine Father comes to experience a new quality of relational vulnerability.

Sacrificing relative divine security to become a human being constitutes the way of God in the world. Thus, becoming a true human being, *Jesus shows an alternative way of living that contrasts with the parochial search for invulnerable security.* In Gandolfo’s assessment, “That alternative is to renounce the egocentric and violent pursuit of unilateral power and invulnerability in favor of remaining in compassionate solidarity with the rest of vulnerable and suffering humanity.”⁴⁹⁷ Since even God was vulnerable, both individually and relationally, when the divine Son became flesh, human beings should realize that their strategies for obtaining invulnerability could never succeed. For Gandolfo, this realization empowers human beings to “make peace” with their vulnerable human condition.

The sacrifice of relative divine security, however, also sheds new light on the value of the created world itself.

2. Valuation of Creational Value and the Divine Incarnation

In Chapter 8, I explored the relationship between creation and value. The vulnerability of human value, however, challenges its value. If all value is perishable, why bother caring about it, one might ask? Why would God even create such a world, in which there is vulnerability? From the perspective of eschatology, of course, things look different. But this theology is committed to Kelsey’s argument that God’s creation, consummation, and reconciliation constitute distinct works of divine

⁴⁹⁶ Keul, “Inkarnation,” 216.

⁴⁹⁷ Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*, 217.

economy in their own right. For now, I will continue with the exploration of creation theology.

The Goodness of Creation in Itself

Risk theologians evaluate the vulnerability of valuable relations and actualized pain and loss, in diverse ways. One perspective, posed by Gregersen, is the view that the natural world constitutes a pre-moral package deal of creation, where pains have gains.⁴⁹⁸ And, though I will nuance this view considerably, it contains important insights to bear in mind.

The “package deal” perspective highlights the spheres where an essential connection exists between goodness and suffering. As Gregersen points out, death enables new life in a world of limited resources and generational relations of power.⁴⁹⁹ Likewise, human beings experience physical pain through the same nervous system that allows experience of the loving caress. “The good lover and the torture specialist uses—for good and evil—the same hypersensitive zones of the human body.”⁵⁰⁰ Pain functions as a warning system against “getting ourselves burned, drowned, or damaged by using our bodies (or minds) in a way which they are not in a fit condition to bear.”⁵⁰¹ Finally, Gregersen points out that mental suffering, like anxiety, constitutes a side effect of the mental capacities that enable humans to imagine unseen future possibilities and cooperate with other people in very complex ways. The possibility of anxiety and mental suffering is the price for human freedom.⁵⁰² These elements of creation contain a considerable degree of hardship. In Chapter 8.1, I discussed the inevitability of suffering in the food chain, which, K.E. Løgstrup argues,

⁴⁹⁸ Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 201.

⁴⁹⁹ See also Ps 104:29b-30.

⁵⁰⁰ Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 198.

⁵⁰¹ Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 224. Hick points out that the correlation between pain and danger is not proportional. A toothache is more painful than it is dangerous; conversely, cancer can be less painful initially, but is much more dangerous than a toothache, Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 299.

⁵⁰² Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ,” 199. Gregersen appears to combine this view with the evaluation that the goodness of the world applies not to the present creation, which is unfinished, but to creation in its coming, consummated form. “The goodness of creation does not apply on every occurrence in the world but only with respect to the creation as a whole, as constituted with reference to its future consummation,” Gregersen, “Three Types of Indeterminacy,” 178. I agree with Kelsey who insists that the present creation is the actual creation, and that consummation does not finish an unfinished creation, but adds a gift to the already fine, however ambiguous, creation.

entails a sense of cruelty, which is not evil but a condition for life.⁵⁰³ At their deepest creational level, human beings live at the cost of other life.

There is a hardship and toughness about this package-deal, but it is also beneficial, even as one enters the sphere of actualized, experienced pain and suffering. Realizing that life necessarily entails some amount of pain and suffering is important to counter the spread of tranquilizers and other narcotic drugs as a coping mechanism for life—the idea that all hardship should be avoided so that even guilt, grief, and anxiety might be doped away. Some amount of pain and suffering enables human beings to learn empathy for the troubles of other people, creating what Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx calls “wise personalities.” It is crucial to maintain that some aspects of pain and suffering belong to the conditions of life. Paul Leer-Salvesen points to three other such aspects.⁵⁰⁴

- The pain associated with the human sense of guilt can be devastating, but it insists on the ethical character of one’s actions.⁵⁰⁵
- The pain of grief can be horrible, but says something true about human life, namely that one has loved.
- The pain of delivery is painful, but it brings forth new life.⁵⁰⁶

All of these instances of pain can become distorted when they are exaggerated into a neurotic sense of guilt, into sickening grief, or into life-endangering birth pangs. But, in and of themselves, they reveal something true about human lives, and they are necessary steps towards consequences that might redeem the pain. For example, the redemption in forgiveness, the redemption of enabling a new orientation in love after the death of the beloved, and the redemption in the reception of a new born baby.

However, the idea of redeemable suffering is highly problematic when taken as a general theory, as it has been, for example, by William Vanstone. Vanstone considers the ability of creation to participate in the triumph of love in the world. He proposes that, if creation tragically “comes wrong,” inner-worldly positive consequence can “redeem” them. For instance, a chance event causing a forest fire could result in more fertile land or be the habitat of a new species;⁵⁰⁷ a stunted tree could form a strangely beautiful

⁵⁰³ Løgstrup, *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*, 278.

⁵⁰⁴ Leer-Salvesen, “Skyldfølelsen,” 328–29.

⁵⁰⁵ While guilt derives from human sin, I would maintain that feeling the sting of conscience over sin is a part of the goodness of the created order.

⁵⁰⁶ I present Leer-Salvesen’s point with a humble attitude of being ready to be rebuked by those who are confronted with this sort of pain.

⁵⁰⁷ Vanstone, *The Risk of Love*, 83.

shape against the winter sky;⁵⁰⁸ or the mutation causing a human person to become an “imbecile” could be redeemed because “the imbecile may be loved as few are loved.”⁵⁰⁹ Vanstone suggests that such good consequences of tragedy can turn the tragedy into a triumph. Yet, Vanstone fails to discuss the individuals or organisms that are the subject to the suffering itself. Was Martin Luther King’s assassination “redeemed” by the Fair Housing Act, which was an immediate result of his death? Or, could the death of seven-year old be redeemed if the parents experience a much closer relationship afterwards? I tend towards answering “no” in those cases. This approach shows no concern for the victims who have suffered and died (see Chapter 10.1).

Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a distinction between *necessary or redeemable suffering*, on the one hand, and *unnecessary or excessive suffering* on the other. There is an extremity to some pain and suffering that makes it difficult to say that the exploratory freedom of nature simply constitutes a necessary hardship in life. Some pain is so extreme that one cannot say all instances of suffering can be redeemed through their positive consequences, including those that make humans wiser and more mature. Schillebeeckx argues that “there is an excess of suffering and evil in our history,”⁵¹⁰ of a sort that cannot be redeemed through its positive consequences. Sometimes human beings do not get stronger when they experience suffering.⁵¹¹ These are things that simply should not be, states of affairs, even in nature, that God opposes as the loving Father God is.

Concerning suffering brought about in part by the natural world, I follow Paul Fiddes in suggesting that the excessive display of suffering in the natural world is the result of the natural world “slipping away” from the divine purpose, “due to the autonomy [God] has given it.”⁵¹² While much

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 718.

⁵¹¹ For a lucid and empirical grounding of this statement, see Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption*, 50–54, but also Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 329–31.

⁵¹² Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 227. Thereby I reject theologies that see human sin as responsible for natural evil, whether the mechanism of such a theological proposal is 1) human sin leading to natural evil understood as divine punishment; 2) sin leading to the lordship of the devil who brings natural evil; or 3) sin leading to a nothingness in turning away from God, in which human beings also experience natural sorts of evil. This understanding also transcends Thomas’ alternative: “Je nachdem, ob die Theologie diese Aspekte naturalen Lebens der ‘guten Schöpfung’, der Sünde oder der ‘unfertigen Schöpfung’ zurechnen werden ... bilden sich deutlich unterschiedlich akzentuierte Theologien heraus,” Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 170–71, fn. 45, unless of course one also understands nature’s random slipping away from the divine purposes as sin, a commitment I am not ready to make.

of the suffering that human beings inflict on each other alienates God, also the natural world occasionally develops—and has developed—in ways that give rise to divine grief over the way things are in this world.⁵¹³ It is a great good that the randomness of exploratory freedom in the natural world helps actualize some of the possibilities of creation. However, some of those possibilities bring such excessive destruction that they had better not be explored. The excessiveness of destruction in creation, the inescapability with which people die in disasters and diseases, is “offensive to life and love,” as Fiddes expresses it.⁵¹⁴ This aspect of the problem of suffering prompts the claim that even nature occasionally slips away from the divine purposes of the world, exploring possibilities that nature would have better not explored. The randomness present in this world sometimes results in excessive suffering that constitutes “natural evil.” Fiddes suggests:

We might then speak of God’s experience of that excessiveness as hostile non-being, a slipping of nature away from his [God’s] purpose, due to the autonomy [of randomness] he has given it.⁵¹⁵

Since some random events result in excessive suffering, God does not simply appreciate all random events as futhering the creative purpose of overall wellbeing for creation. Karen Baker-Fletcher proposes something along these lines. “It is necessary ... to make a distinction between nature living the life of God’s aim, which leads to the well-being of all, and occasions when nature is clearly overstepping its bounds.”⁵¹⁶ I would argue that this interpretation should be applicable at least to the occurrence of disasters, and chronic or mortal diseases.

Admittedly, the distinction between necessary and unnecessary suffering is not clear cut. As Gregersen observes, “we would not have an atmosphere around our globe without life-damaging volcanoes.” This places volcanic

⁵¹³ Fiddes considers whether one needs to think of nature’s freedom in terms of the panpsychism of Alfred North Whitehead, but Fiddes distances himself from that thought. “Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between randomness and universal responsiveness, but somehow we must think of nature as generating something strange to God if we are to say that he suffers within it,” Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 228–29. I am inclined to remain on the side of randomness, using a sort of consequential ethics to maintain that some natural possibilities are better left unexplored.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵¹⁶ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 84. Even though the distinction is vital, it is not easy to draw. Concerning hurricanes, Baker-Fletcher argues both that hurricanes prevent the waters of the sea from becoming stagnant, *ibid.*, and that “Earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, disease, are all examples of what human beings and other creatures threatened by such phenomena experience as ‘evil’,” *ibid.*, 94.

eruptions within a logic of necessity.⁵¹⁷ The point is, however, that such eruptions can have such devastating consequences that Christian theology should avoid attempting to redeem their violence by reference to its positive consequences, particularly when such interpretations turn victims into unwilling sacrifices for the lives of others.⁵¹⁸

Whether death belongs to the created natural order or to nature slipping away from its purpose is unclear. On the one hand, I would maintain that death is simply natural, belonging to the created realm of being that one should accept as one's destiny. A timely death belongs to the created will of God. On the other hand, Fiddes rightly stresses the human experience of even the most "timely" death of their loved ones as an "offence against love; far from allowing us the opportunity to meet pain with love, it takes away from us the opportunity of spending love on another."⁵¹⁹ This experience of offense in the face of timely death is also legitimate. As a consequence, theology has to live with the paradox of saying that death essentially belongs to life, and that it essentially does not. Death remains ambiguous.⁵²⁰

Claiming that nature can slip away from the divine purposes does not change the Wisdom theological insistence, as Kelsey understands it, that one's proximate context is the actual, God-willed creation, into which God creates every single human being. While any given proximate context still constitutes God's creation, Kelsey realizes that this creation is also impaired by moral evils. I argue, then, that much like human proximate contexts are marred with oppressive and unjust human structures, they are also—occasionally—marred with diseases and disasters that are contrary to God's will. I simply add that God's creation is also vulnerable to natural

⁵¹⁷ Gregersen, "Theology and Disaster Studies," 45.

⁵¹⁸ Insisting on this point does not constitute "religious narcissism," as Gregersen appears to have it, *ibid.*, 35. Gregersen's legitimate concern is to warn against unbearable self-victimization; but mitigating this threat through a universal call that merely asks those who are suffering to "look at the bigger picture" tends to add insult to injury for those whose encounters with sickness and disaster resulted in their terrible suffering.

⁵¹⁹ Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 222. See also Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, 110.

⁵²⁰ Kelsey's treatment of the topic is lacking something here. Going for the option that death is a part of created life, Kelsey argues against two ways of allowing death a dominant role in one's life, either by longing for suicide because of despair, or avoiding death in "self-assertion against all proximate contexts," EE 438. Kelsey overlooks Fiddes' point that the bereaved relatives experience death as an offense to their ties of love.

occurrences exploring and actualizing potentialities that had better not be explored.⁵²¹

Yet, I also argue, beyond Kelsey, that a Christian theological valuation of this creation would benefit from bearing in mind that it is the triune God who creates, which enables including the divine incarnation within the discourse on creation. When creating, the second person of the trinity is not simply the preexistent Logos, the *Logos asarkos*; the incarnation of the divine Son belongs to the divine work of creation.

The Goodness of Creation in Light of the Incarnation

Drawing a closer connection between the creating and the incarnate Son leads to the argument that God has created the world on the premise that the Son will enter into creation and share the conditions of life that I laid out in Chapter 8.⁵²² God creates human beings into a world of risk and danger, but being born into the world, God also places Godself under these conditions.

That God ventures into this fragile and mortal life constitutes a profound valuation of human life. The incarnation definitely and permanently pronounces the divine “evaluative appreciation of finite-creational life,”⁵²³ as Günter Thomas puts it. This valuation of creation through the incarnation of the divine Son also finds expression in a statement in Karl Barth’s creation theology:

Indem in Jesus Christus Gott selbst Geschöpf wurde, hat er bestätigt, daß seine Schöpfung in ihrer Totalität ein Akt seiner Weisheit und Barmherzigkeit war: ohne Fehler, ohne berechnete Anklage, seine gute Schöpfung. Aber hier stand zugleich mehr auf dem Spiel. ‘Das Wort ward Fleisch’ heißt es ja. Es ward also nicht nur Geschöpf, sondern tödlich gefährdetes, bedrohtes, ja tatsächlich dem Verderben verfallenes Geschöpf.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ I do not reintroduce “a traditional theological distinction between what God creates, which was unambiguously good for us, and what we experience now, which even in its physical particulars is a fallen and unqualifiedly degraded version of what God originally created,” EE 203. The present creation is God’s good creation, even as it is vulnerable to spewing volcanoes and harmful mutating cells.

⁵²² This surely goes beyond the creation theology of Wisdom literature, but so does the idea of a Trinitarian God as the creator, which Kelsey maintains anyhow.

⁵²³ Thomas, “Krankheit als Manifestation menschlicher Endlichkeit,” 187, my translation, see appendix. See also Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 169 and Thomas, “Krankheit im Horizont des lebendigen Gottes,” 512–14.

⁵²⁴ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/3*, 344–45.

Barth argues that when God becomes a human being, a mortal and dangerously exposed human being,⁵²⁵ God shows that the created world is good enough also for God. Thus, creation acquires not just an oral, but an experienced and embodied divine stamp of approval.

Expressed as a conflict between the Father's creational appreciation of the world as good and the existence of evil, the problem of evil remains abstract. By way of contrast, when the Word becomes flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, the conflict between creation-as-good and the occurrence of evil becomes tangibly concrete. God is willing to endure the dangers in which God has placed human beings. The incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth shows the divine valuation of the world of creation.

This Christological creation theology captures an additional purpose in the incarnation, beyond the two that Kelsey has already pointed out. In Kelsey, the incarnation has a *proactive*, supralapsarian purpose in drawing the world towards eschatological consummation and a *reactive*, infralapsarian purpose in reconciling the world to God. Yet, I propose that the incarnation had another *proactive* purpose in connection with creation as the first of three works of the divine economy, namely the purpose of valuing God's creation by living within it.

While Barth is right in emphasizing the goodness of creation, the incarnation does not leave out all the possible legitimate indictments (*berechtigte Anklage*) against God.⁵²⁶ Indeed, it appears that the very incarnate Son comes close to bringing such an indictment himself.

3. The Cross as Lamentation

Human beings experience anxiety at the prospect of their vulnerability when they are in concrete situations of danger. The experience of vertigo, say, the experience of looking down at the streets from a tower, wondering how only a proper construction of the railing prevents falling with fatal repercussions—such an experience can bring one anxiety. Yet, one can also experience the anxiety of non-being when threats to one's vulnerable existence materialize into actual harm. The earthly destiny of the Son incarnate is a testimony to such an experience.

⁵²⁵ I hesitate in deeming creation fallen and corrupted like Barth (*dem Verderben verfallenes Geschöpf*), but a proper evaluation would depend on what these terms mean for Barth. Investigating this goes beyond the scope of the present study. See my own position earlier in this section 9.2.

⁵²⁶ In this criticism of Barth, I agree with Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 224.

The Crucifixion and the Space for Lamentation

By sending the Son into the world, the Father placed the Son in a position of vulnerability, and the Son trusted in the Father that the mission would be possible by the power of the Spirit.⁵²⁷ The earthly destiny of Jesus, according to both Mark and Matthew, was his hanging on the cross screaming: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁵²⁸ This outburst refers to Psalm 22, which ends with a praise to God for rescuing the lamenter. This intertextuality has left theological commentators with an exegetical problem. Do Mark and Matthew purposefully leave out the ending because Jesus died despairing in God-abandonment? Or, is the ending implied to signify that Jesus trusted God in spite of the peril of the cross?

In *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, Moltmann promotes the first option, that the Father ontologically abandoned the Son. To Moltmann, the dying cry of Jesus signifies that Jesus died, neither only as a blasphemer at the hands of the religious law, nor only as a rebel at the hands of the political powers, but also as a godforsaken, at the very hands of God. While Moltmann maintains that the Father suffers the death of his Son,⁵²⁹ he also insists that the Father rejected, condemned, even cursed the Son⁵³⁰ with the result that real enmity arose between them: “Das Kreuz des Sohnes trennt Gott von Gott bis zur völligen Feindschaft.”⁵³¹ To Moltmann, this genuine godfor-

⁵²⁷ Heb 2:13. Inter-trinitarian trust was a theme in Chapter 6.5.

⁵²⁸ Mk 15:34, see also Mt 27:46. Ever since Moltmann accentuated this verse, it has gained prominence in Protestant theology, at the cost of the calmer and more dignified expressions found in John and Luke. Moltmann prioritized this verse on historical-critical grounds. Even though a discomfort against historical-critical arguments has come to the fore in recent exegetical endeavors (see Chapter 3.3B), Moltmann’s theological discoveries were so important that they legitimize a continued prioritization of these verses. This verse’s proclamation of the Son experiencing the woes of human life as other humans is crucial for a contemporary theology of risk and danger. For a view that draws attention to the Gethsemane struggle in Luke, see Springhart, *Der verwundbare Mensch*, 190–93.

⁵²⁹ Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 230.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 229, see also Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 92–99.

⁵³¹ Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 145. Schillebeeckx summarizes Moltmann’s conception in this way—“God himself has cast him out as a sacrifice for our sins”—and rightly criticizes it with the following statement: “The difficulty in this conception is that it ascribes to God what has in fact been done to Jesus by the history of human injustice,” Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 721. Later, Moltmann subtly dissociates himself from his prior position. He denies that God hides his face in silence so that Jesus dies to a silent God and insists that the resurrection entails a divine protest against crucifixion, Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 198–99. Instead, Moltmann focuses on the divide between Jesus’ belief that he is a child of God and his experience of divine abandonment, *ibid.*, 187.

sakenness is what differentiates Jesus' cross from all the other crosses in world history. Since Godself in the triune differentiation of the divine has been godforsaken, God is present in the godforsakenness. As a result, no other crucified person will be godforsaken again.⁵³² For him, the rest of Psalm 22 is left out of the account.

In contrast, Innsbruck theologian Raymund Schwager interprets the dying cry of Jesus as a sign of trust in the Father. Surely, Schwager suggests, the dying cry of Jesus reveals the deep irony that the one who was sent to bring the Kingdom of God to human beings comes to experience the hell that humans can make for each other. But for Schwager, the interpretation that the Father should have abandoned the Son presupposes an arbitrariness in the Father that does not correspond to the idea that the Son reveals who God is:

Gewiß war die tiefe Nacht nur möglich, weil der Vater es zuließ, dennoch darf man daraus nicht folgern, er sei direkt von seinem Gott geschlagen worden, der sich plötzlich vom gütigen Vater in einen despotischen Herrn verwandelt hätte ... dennoch blieb er der Abba, dem sich Jesus restlos anvertraute.⁵³³

While the experience of being crucified touched upon the Son's most inner space for trust in the Father; the trust remains intact throughout (*restlos*). For Schwager, the ending of Psalm 22 is intertextually implied in the Son's dying appeal, an ending where God comes to rescue the praying person.

One way out of the impasse that Moltmann and Schwager's contrary interpretations present is simply to refrain from choosing either. As Marilyn McCord Adams rightly notes, "the passion narratives underdetermine how we are to take these verses."⁵³⁴ With this in mind, I call for another approach, in this case an integration of these two opposing interpretations.

From Schwager, I take the emphasis that the loving Father does not suddenly turn "despotic," whereby I take leave of Moltmann's idea that the Father abandoned, condemned, and cursed the Son. This also fits better with Moltmann's insightful claim that the Father suffers the death of his only Son in the "infinite pain of love."⁵³⁵ Yet, Schwager overstates Jesus' trust. Adams rightfully emphasizes that the mutual indwelling between the

⁵³² Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 233.

⁵³³ Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 152. Schwager was a catholic theologian who was in close correspondence with the influential social philosopher René Girard, on whose basis he developed a fascinating view of a dramatic theology of the atonement. As their correspondence shows, however, the influence was mutual, see Girard and Schwager, *Correspondence 1974-1991*, 52 and xii.

⁵³⁴ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 75.

⁵³⁵ Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 230.

Father and the Son comes to entail “loud cries and tears and real struggle, a loss of confidence in one’s grip on Divine purpose, and even a lack of any vivid sense of the presence of God.”⁵³⁶ In other words, I would argue that Jesus Christ comes to *experience* the abandonment of God. As Mikkelsen puts it: “The feeling of the absence of God was real, but this does not make the absence of God real.”⁵³⁷ Although the loving Father remains passionately present with the Son, suffering the loss of the Son,⁵³⁸ circumstances and expectations made Jesus Christ incapable of sensing this presence. The divine Father respects the “creaturely alterity” enough to refrain from preventing acts as evil as a crucifixion, even for his own Son. Yet, for the creature undergoing the suffering, such a “relative distanciation” can easily be experienced as an abandonment from the suffering of humans.⁵³⁹

The Son had expected to bring about the Kingdom of God (see Chapter 10.1). So, his outcry, “Why have you forsaken me?” not only constitutes a personal plea for life; the Kingdom of God is so closely related to the person of Jesus, the imminent death of Jesus brought the very Kingdom of God into doubt (compare Chapter 6.5).⁵⁴⁰ I follow Günter Thomas, who construes the basis of such doubt in the following way:

Der Sohn übernahm das Risiko der Inkarnation im Vertrauen auf den Vater ... Während der Sohn seiner Sendung in die Praxis der Selbsterniedrigung in Gestalt affizierbarer Liebe true bleibt (‘gehorsam bis zum Tod am Kreuz’, Phil. 2,8), bleibt die Bitte ‘und erlöse uns von dem Bösen’ unbeantwortet.⁵⁴¹

Jesus prays with all other humans, “deliver us from [evil],”⁵⁴² and when Jesus experiences the evil of human sin,⁵⁴³ the cross expresses a “crisis of trust” between the Father and the Son. In the words of Karen Baker-Fletcher, Jesus’ words on the cross, according to Mark and Matthew, constitute a “prayer of doubt and seeming abandonment.”⁵⁴⁴ That Jesus

⁵³⁶ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 76.

⁵³⁷ Mikkelsen, *Reconciled Humanity*, 229. See also Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 319.

⁵³⁸ According to Jeff Pool, the Father “agonizes over Jesus’ victimization by estranged humanity, a victimization that both initiates the extremity of Jesus’ struggle with ultimate despair over God’s possible absence and causes Jesus’ untimely and unjust death,” Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 318.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁵⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 142.

⁵⁴¹ Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 174.

⁵⁴² Mt 6:13. NRSV chooses “the evil one.”

⁵⁴³ For the connection between sin and evil, see EE 410.

⁵⁴⁴ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 113.

addresses God, no longer with the intimate Abba,⁵⁴⁵ but simply as God, shows the distance and crisis of trust that Jesus feels just before he dies.

A crisis of trust is a situation of utter ambiguity. On the one hand, the Son experiences his death as a failure⁵⁴⁶ of his mission to realize the Kingdom of God; on the other, the Son has nowhere to turn but to his Father, now that the world has turned against him. Such ambiguity places Jesus on the cross squarely in the tradition of biblical lamentation.

As philosopher of religion Claudia Welz has argued, lamentation involves neither restful trust nor silent despair. While complete trust finds meaning in the sort of evil that holds no meaning, lament insists on the responsibility of God for the world. And while complete despair bends a person inwards, towards oneself in silence, lament uncoils the troubled person towards God, and thus maintains the—however distorted—relation.⁵⁴⁷ Thus, lament maintains the ambiguity between trust and distrust, between accusation and appeal. I would argue that Jesus' final outcry according to Mark and Matthew voices this troublesome ambiguity.

At this stage, Jesus becomes the new Job. Job is righteous in his lamentation, his accusations are legitimate. It has been suggested that such an interpretation of the book of Job hinges on the translation of a single decisive verse, namely 42:6. The NRSV version translates it thus: "therefore I despise *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes."⁵⁴⁸ This translation inserts the reflexive object "me," which is not there in the Hebrew text, which reads:

וְאָפַר עַל-עֶפְרָר וְנִחַמְתִּי אֲמָאִם עַל-בְּנִי

Taking into account that God unmistakably tells Job that he—in contrast to his friends—has spoken rightly and therefore should not repent,⁵⁴⁹ one wonders whether this translation is correct. Another translation, one which does not insert the reflexive object, could see the dust and ashes as the object of Job's emotional turmoil, and as expressing the following:

⁵⁴⁵ For this exegetical datum, see Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 95.

⁵⁴⁶ Moltmann's critique of the idea of seeing the cross as a failure is too superficial. Brushing this idea aside as a promotion of heroic failure, Moltmann quickly places quotation marks around the word "failure," Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 141. However, the idea that the cross reflects a failure for—or at least an endangerment of—the dawn of the Kingdom of God is far from heroic. Compare this with the criticism of Moltmann in Chapter 9.1.

⁵⁴⁷ Welz, *Vertrauen und Versuchung*, 26. Welz does not consider the Christological possibilities of this observation.

⁵⁴⁸ Emphasis added.

⁵⁴⁹ Job 42:7.

“therefore I repudiate and repent of dust and ashes.”⁵⁵⁰ Bearing in mind that Job has been sitting in dust and ashes during the whole poetic discussion with God,⁵⁵¹ the interpretation presents itself that Job, after having experienced a new relationship to God, is now ready to move on, that the time for lamentation is over.⁵⁵² Yet, considering that Job was the victim of human aggression,⁵⁵³ disaster,⁵⁵⁴ and disease,⁵⁵⁵ perhaps *Job was repenting—and rightly repenting—the conditions of being a vulnerable, mortal human being.*⁵⁵⁶ Repenting this condition in the conversation with God was exactly what Job did right. If so, Job’s repudiation of the flesh points forward to the cross of Christ, who also laments over living with such danger.

However, according to Mark and Matthew, Jesus dies not uttering the ambiguous words of abandonment and lamentation, but giving “a loud cry.”⁵⁵⁷ Perhaps this wordless outcry suggests that Jesus dies, not in complete silence, but sliding towards the end of despair. Words have stopped, and only the sheer emotion of hopelessness is left over.⁵⁵⁸ When Jesus “gave up his Spirit,”⁵⁵⁹ perhaps that was the Spirit interceding with “sighs too deep for words,”⁵⁶⁰ groaning not only for creation in general, but also for this particular horror that left even the divine Son speechless. At least, the loud cry of Jesus points to the deep meaninglessness of that Friday which the English language strangely calls “Good,” or “Holy”;

⁵⁵⁰ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 83.

⁵⁵¹ Job 2:8, see also 2:12.

⁵⁵² Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 86.

⁵⁵³ Job 1:15.

⁵⁵⁴ Job 1:16 (fire from heaven) and 1:19 (a wind storm).

⁵⁵⁵ Job 2:7.

⁵⁵⁶ Holst, “Wisdomsteologien,” 96.

⁵⁵⁷ Mk 15:37. While Moltmann appears to equate the two expressions, Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 140, I would argue that the lament and the outcry are clearly separate in Mark.

⁵⁵⁸ Does this mean that Jesus actually commits a sin? The argument could be made, at least, that if sin is lack of faith as trust in God, as tradition has it, the conclusion to Jesus’ life according to Mark and Matthew suggests that even Jesus sinned. The tradition has conceived the sinlessness of Jesus as basic for his divinity. The divinity of Jesus shows in his lack of sinning. The basis for this claim has been—among other things—Heb 4:15, “tempted as we are, yet without sin.” In response to this, Marilyn McCord Adams argues: “the focus of the epistle is not on sin in general, but apostasy in particular ... thus, the thrust of the passage might be the more limited one: ‘Christ was tempted, had to struggle to maintain His loyalty in the face of death, but He didn’t betray His calling. You shouldn’t either!’,” Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 75.

⁵⁵⁹ Jn 19:30 with parallels, translation altered. NRSV writes “spirit,” I would interpret it as the divine Spirit.

⁵⁶⁰ Rom 8:27.

while Danes speak of Long Friday (*Langfredag*); and Germans of Lamentations Friday (*Karfreitag*).

Lamentation and Human Vulnerability

Legitimizing lamentation as I have done throughout this section makes a decisive difference to the orientation of Christian symbols into a life of vulnerability. Rather than lashing out against the world in a parochial act of self-defense, the divine Son addresses his indictment and anxiety towards the divine Father in the power of the Spirit. This attitude invites human beings to participate in the same movement of divine relations that embrace even the bitterest accusations resulting from the human situation of vulnerability. As Gandolfo suggests, the divine Spirit working in and with human beings as they direct their lamentation to God enables human beings to meet the vulnerabilities of others with “compassion” rather than violence, to resist when the vulnerabilities of others are threatened, and to weep with others when their vulnerabilities are violated.⁵⁶¹

4. Conclusion: Risk and Vulnerability

This chapter has developed the symbol of divine incarnation in relation to the human experience of vulnerability. Chapter 8, on creation, left the reader with the question of whether valuables are really valuable given how vulnerable they are. In the middle section of this chapter (9.2), I have argued that divine incarnation, where the divine Son showed that the vulnerable world of value was valuable enough for God, constituted a positive valuation of human valuables despite their vulnerability.

The first and last sections answered the question of how human beings relate (and should relate) to their vulnerability more directly. While human beings sometimes relate to their vulnerability with an anxious and aggressive urge for self-protection, the divine kenosis means that human beings may come to accept their own vulnerability, thus seeking more appropriate ways to be loyal to their proximate contexts (Chapter 9.1). As was discussed in the last section, actualized and excessive loss unearths human vulnerability in a highly pronounced way, wherefore it is crucial to be able to direct one’s grief and anxiety outward towards God in lamentation (Chapter 9.3). Exploring Job and the crucifixion shows that such lamentation is not only entirely legitimate, but also divinely vindicated as a response to such suffering.

Taken together, this chapter and the last have presented a creation theology. While the first chapter focused on the immediate *value* of the divine creation, this chapter has attended to the *vulnerability* of creaturely

⁵⁶¹ Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*, 225–59.

value. Both aspects belong to the divine creation. Now I turn to the symbol of divine consummation, which promises a restoration of the creaturely loss of life and a renegotiation of creaturely vulnerability.

10. Consummation: Risk and the Future

In Chapter 8.2, I explored the claim that human beings have the freedom to transcend their own perspectives and imagine alternative realities which might be brought about in the future. This is the condition of possibility for the human construction of risk relationships, wherein one imagines future possible threats (*risk objects*) to something vulnerable that one cares about (*the object at risk*). This chapter inquires about the future in light of the divine promise to consummate the world.

According to the Christian symbol system, as I have ordered it (in line with David Kelsey), God not only creates the world; God also promises to consummate the world. This is a consummation that God inaugurates with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The present chapter develops this statement and considers what the divine promise of consummation means for human constructions of risk relationships. Doing so, it draws upon the Christian symbols of divine consummation (new creation, the Kingdom of God), divine judgment, and sin. In this context, the symbol of sin is understood for the most part as being expressed in a social sphere of power—one that makes it difficult for human beings to orient their lives in this world in ways that are appropriate responses to God.

In line with much of the Christian tradition, Kelsey appropriates the divine work of consummation to the Spirit in perichoretic cooperation with the Father and the Son. Even though the resurrection of the Son constitutes the inauguration of the consummation, the role of the incarnate Son is first of all a passive one. When the incarnate Son is crucified, he dies. The death of Jesus Christ means that he is unable to resurrect himself. The German language offers a distinction between *Auferstehung* (standing up) and *Auferweckung* (being awoken). If Jesus died, then the Spirit must wake him up, before he would be able to stand up for himself.⁵⁶² The Son's participation in the divine act of consummation follows upon the work of the Spirit.⁵⁶³ Therefore, the act of new creation is appropriated to the Spirit.

⁵⁶² Moltmann, *Wer ist Christus für uns heute?*, 74. The Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig has claimed that when the Son dies, he goes to preach for those who have already died and bring them with him into the light of the resurrection, superbly expressed in Grundtvig's hymn, "This night came a knock at the portals of Hell," see Grundtvig, *Living Wellsprings*, 94–96. The biblical basis of such theology maintains that Christ died and was then made alive to travel to the realms of hell, see 1 Pet 3:18b-19 and 1 Pet 4:6.

⁵⁶³ See also Thomas, "Resurrection to New Life," 262–63 with reference to Tim 3:16 and Rom 1:3-4, and Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ," 203.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ by the Spirit, the Christian tradition has seen the *promise* that God will consummate the world. As Paul writes:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.⁵⁶⁴

The resurrection of Christ constitutes the first fruits of the divine consummation. Therefore, the resurrection entails a promise that God will also finish the divine consummation of the world, albeit at a time when all authorities and powers, even death, have been overcome.

As Kelsey observes, a promise is a speech act that has several characteristics.⁵⁶⁵

- First, a promise has *commissive force*. God commits Godself to a certain course of action. That God has promised to finish what God has begun means that God has committed Godself to keeping the promise.
- This binding of Godself, second, *creates a new reality* within which humans live in and with their proximate contexts, awaiting the fulfillment of the promise. A bond exists between God as the promisor and human beings as those who have been promised. Believers now see the world in that light: with the past showing possible signs of that final consummation; the future seen as hopeful; and the present as an opportunity to enact proper responses to that reality.
- Third, the promise that God has made *does not entail specifics* concerning the deadline of the promise or the content of the promised future. The Spirit shares the same Greek word, *πνεῦμα*, with the term “wind,” that blows in unforeseeable ways. The open-endedness of the promise requires trust in God’s passion for doing it; and humans suffer from the patience of God with the world.⁵⁶⁶ God has already inaugurated the final consummation, but it has not set in quite yet.⁵⁶⁷

For Kelsey, the Christian eschatological promise upholds a sense, both of *already*, and of *not-yet*. The divine consummation is *not-yet* fulfilled since God has not yet finished the divine Kingdom in the world, and death itself is not yet annihilated. But the divine consummation has *already*

⁵⁶⁴ Rom 8:11, see also 1 Cor 6:14 and 15:22-26.

⁵⁶⁵ See EE 454-55.

⁵⁶⁶ As Günter Thomas once put it in a Q&A at the September 2016 Heidelberg conference on *Vulnerability—A New Focus for Theological and Interdisciplinary Anthropology*.

⁵⁶⁷ EE 500.

begun, and the Spirit is at work in the present. This already-not-yet-structure means (now borrowing terms from systematic theologian Kirsten Busch Nielsen) that even if the dreariness and the hopelessness of the world is not *abolished*, at least it has been *pierced through*.⁵⁶⁸

This chapter discusses the meaning and the content of the divine consummation. The first section 10.1 discusses the *scope* and the *content* of the promise of divine consummation. While the divine consummation is an added gift to creation, the contingent fact of sin means that human beings are in bondage to sin, which is the topic of section 10.2. This adjusts the meaning of the divine consummation to entail a liberation from the bondage to sin in which human beings find themselves, as I discuss in section 10.3. Finally, section 10.4 returns to what the promise of divine consummation means for how human beings relate to the future.

1. The Scope and Content of the Promise to Consummate

Clarification of the Christian symbol of divine consummation—used to address the experience of living with risk and danger—depends on the scope of the consummation and upon its content too. This section will explore the scope and content of the consummation.

The Universality of the Consummation and the Outpouring of the Spirit

Much theology has seen God's consummating activity as being limited to a set group of people—the elect, as it were.⁵⁶⁹ By way of contrast, Kelsey assumes that all people are the recipients of this promise of divine consummation, going so far as to posit that the entire created world is what the Spirit is working to consummate. Besides having decided to create the world, God decides to draw the created world to eschatological consummation. Yet, Kelsey does not explain what warrants this universal approach. While he focuses on the resurrection as the basis of the divine consummation, I would argue that the consummation applies to the entire creation with reference to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2.

Pentecost is the event at which the disciples become empowered to return to the public and preach the Gospel of the resurrected Christ.⁵⁷⁰ As Raymund Schwager has pointed out, the events surrounding the

⁵⁶⁸ Busch Nielsen, "Synd," 123, my translation, emphasis in original, see appendix.

⁵⁶⁹ Augustine, for instance, argues that human beings will be consummated to replace the fallen angels, Augustinus, *Enchiridon*, 67/IX.29 leaving behind a *massa perditionis*, *ibid.*, 155/XXIII.92. Anselm promotes a similar idea, Anselm von Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, 51–67/II:16–18.

⁵⁷⁰ Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 183.

resurrection remained ambiguous to the disciples at their encounters with Jesus: the first women witnesses to the resurrection fled from the grave,⁵⁷¹ and when Jesus appeared before others, some reacted with alarm and doubt,⁵⁷² and feared for the Jews before closed doors.⁵⁷³ At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made these matters clear. As such, the Holy Spirit fills the role of the promised Advocate, guiding human beings to an understanding of the divine consummation.⁵⁷⁴

According to Schwager, this change owes to the transition from the sheer externality of the resurrection visions to an approach that changes the inner life of the witness too. While both the incarnate and resurrected Christ encountered the disciples externally, always causing doubt and distress, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit transforms the interior reality of the disciples so as to enable them to receive the Kingdom of God. “Die Zeit des Geistes als Zeit des Freimuts dank der das eigene Innere verwandelnden pneumatischen Erfahrung unterscheidet sich so deutlich von der Zeit Jesu.”⁵⁷⁵ The experience of the Spirit changes the inner reality of the disciples, grounding a certitude that was crucial for the mission of the disciples. Yet, I would argue that the Holy Spirit at Pentecost not only begins the renewal of the interior life of the human believer, for the outpouring of the Spirit also addresses the social dimension of human beings.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out over “all flesh.” Experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter interprets the event by quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel. Joel states that the outpouring transpires not merely upon all believers but “upon all flesh” (*ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα*). According to Acts, it is not merely the disciples (and, in time, all the Church), but all humans are included in the realm of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷⁶ The Holy Spirit pours out over men and women, young and old, and upon people from other cultures and languages, creating a new and universal community. Given that “flesh” also connotes the sheer materiality of the world (see Chapter 9.1), the outpouring of the Spirit encompasses even the non-human parts of reality—for it is not just humans that have bodies made from flesh. Michael Welker concludes his exegesis of Acts:

⁵⁷¹ Mk 16:8.

⁵⁷² Lk 24:37-41.

⁵⁷³ Jn 20:19.

⁵⁷⁴ Jn 15:26.

⁵⁷⁵ Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 183.

⁵⁷⁶ For Schwager, this community consists only of believers, Schwager, “Christology,” 352 and Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 182–202. An exegetical perspective that reduces this “all flesh” to mean “all Jews,” Munck, *Acts*, 19, is not theologically viable.

Inmitten aller Differenzen von Menschen, Nationen und Kulturen wird eine universale Gemeinschaft des Geistes gestiftet. Der christliche Glaube sieht diese differenzierte Gemeinschaft des Geistes durch den auferstandenen und erhöhten Jesus Christus, seinen Geist und sein Reich vermittelt.⁵⁷⁷

Consequently, the Church does not constitute the Kingdom of God; the Church exists as a witness to the Kingdom of God, which in itself is an all-embracing reality. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit enables the disciples to enter a community by sharing the charismatic gifts required for building such a community.⁵⁷⁸ But, this community directs the disciples outwards in a missionary stance towards the world, trusting that the triune God is always already at work, and drawing the world towards eschatological consummation.⁵⁷⁹ Thus, the eschatological *missio Dei* takes place in the public realm, which includes the life of the Church.

In sum, when God draws human beings in and with their proximate contexts to eschatological consummation, it involves all of God's creation.

The Content of the Divine Promise

The content of the divine promise to consummate creation, then, is the promise of a new creation. Upon describing what he envisions about the eschatological consummation, Kelsey warns that the systematic theologian “walks a knife edge between vacuity and self-indulgent fantasy.”⁵⁸⁰ On the one hand, descriptions of this Christian symbol have to be thick and conceptual enough to discover reasons for joy concerning what the Spirit has already done, and ground hope for what is to come. On the other hand, many metaphors of the biblical texts are not apt for conceptual analysis about things to come.⁵⁸¹ Taking this warning into account, I will proceed with a mixture of phenomenological, biblical, and theological references.

As argued in Chapter 9.2, creation theology entails an incarnation theology that emphasizes the divine risk in becoming a human being. Jesus was present with human beings in their created state, valuing it, seeing it through until death, so that humans would not die alone. It is not just the very act of creating the world that belongs to the divine work of creation, but also God's sharing of the vulnerability, risks, and dangers that God has created for human beings. That God shares the human condition means that God's creation becomes valuable in and of itself. Yet, death remains

⁵⁷⁷ Welker, *Gottes Offenbarung*, 206.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Kelsey highlights the universality of the work of the Spirit in spite of his exegetical suggestion that Acts 2:1-36 is about the “Spirit's bestowal on the church,” EE 482.

⁵⁸⁰ EE 552.

⁵⁸¹ EE 552-53.

ambiguous. In the face of actual loss, the hurting human being shares with the divine Son a legitimate complaint towards God in lamentation.

The ambiguity of death is the context of the divine consummation. As Wolfhart Pannenberg notes, dying does not lose its sting until the resurrection has occurred. “In Gemeinschaft mit Jesus verliert [unser Sterben] seine Hoffnungslosigkeit und ist schon überwunden durch das Leben, das in Jesu Auferstehung erschienen ist.”⁵⁸² The new creation constitutes a new proximate context, one that has been so transformed that humans are no longer susceptible to dangers like accidents, diseases, and disasters. As Marilyn McCord Adams envisions it, “the relation of embodied persons to our material environment is renegotiated, so that we are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors.”⁵⁸³ Death has been overcome, not in the sense that human beings avoid experiencing it, but in the sense that the divine Son has gone through it, and experienced a resurrection as the first fruit of the whole creation.

In that sense, the divine consummation takes away the sting of death. This changes the circumstances of human anxiety, for *human beings do not confront a void, a nothingness; God promises that the nothingness has been filled with divine grace.* Falling into the hands of the loving God is the content of a hope for life beyond death. The eschatological fulfillment of creation means that victims are offered new life in return for the life that they lost too soon.⁵⁸⁴ Living with what Hannah Arendt terms “the predicament of irreversibility,”⁵⁸⁵ human beings can only direct their care for the victims of history towards a new creation in which God creates new life. Creating new life, however, does not entail imbuing all earthly occurrences with divine meaning.

The New Creation and Unnecessary Suffering

That God promises to consummate the world does not necessarily mean that God reveals how everything contributes to “the divine plan,” as John Hick has argued. For Hick, God will turn all instances of evil into steps towards bringing about the Kingdom of God. Instances of evil that, in themselves, appear to be thwarting God’s purpose “will, in the retrospect of God’s completed work, be seen to have been used as stages in the triumphant fulfillment of the divine purpose of good.”⁵⁸⁶ In this view, God

⁵⁸² Pannenberg, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis*, 97.

⁵⁸³ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 48.

⁵⁸⁴ See Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 483.

⁵⁸⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.

⁵⁸⁶ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 364. Marilyn McCord Adams seems to follow Hick in this regard: the new creation will make humans realize that they were close to Jesus

uses all instances of evil towards fulfilling God's own divine purposes, thus giving a retrospective meaning to everything.

One can find a similar theology in Miroslav Volf. Volf maintains that such a meaning can also be given within human life, focusing on the "already" aspect of the divine consummation, as it were. In a profoundly personal segment of one of his books, Volf sees his nine years of struggling with the curse of infertility as "having to drink bitter waters from a poisoned well month after month."⁵⁸⁷ Yet, receiving his two adopted children, "the poison was transmuted into a gift, God's strange gift."⁵⁸⁸ This means that the family's barrenness turned into a suffering similar to that of giving birth, redemptive because of the positive consequences: the two adopted kids have become unsubstitutable for him.

The problem with this theology, I would argue, is the implication that the divine consummation abolishes the category of unnecessary suffering.⁵⁸⁹ From this eschatological view point, all items of suffering will turn out to be redemptive, serving a divine purpose that is now hidden.

Instead of implying such a providential triumphalism, I would argue with Günter Thomas that the Spirit creates anew whenever human beings experience evil, even death.⁵⁹⁰ Volf has every right to his own theological interpretation of his life, but I would point to the possibility of perceiving the loving unsubstitutability of these adopted children as an example of God creating new life *in the midst of* unnecessary suffering, rather than as an instance of bringing good *out of* evil. Theologian Christian Link formulates the point well: "Man sagt sicher zu viel, wenn man dekretieren wollte, dass Gott in jedem Falle aus Bösem *Gutes* schafft; aber dass er aus Altem *Neues* schafft; an dieser biblischen Erfahrung dürfen wir festhalten."⁵⁹¹ The new creation reacts to a life gone awry, heals the brokenness, but does not take away the scars or wipe the suffering away. Not all evil occurrences can be redeemed through their positive consequences; but God promises to create anew and open new possibilities no matter how evil

Christ, even in their horrendous suffering, and that this proximity to Christ is so valuable that they will not wish any of their horror-participation away, Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 40. While Adams has been one of the most important contributors to a theology of terrible suffering, eschatological meaning making is not the right way to proceed. Only the new creation of new life for victims and perpetrators alike can make up for human horror-participation.

⁵⁸⁷ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 31.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁸⁹ Neither Volf nor Hick argues that God brought about these events on purpose. Actual suffering does not derive from God in any causal, intentional sense.

⁵⁹⁰ Thomas, "Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation," 179.

⁵⁹¹ Link, "Die Krise des Vorsehungsglaubens," 427, emphasis in original.

things have become, and no matter how long it takes to fulfill this promise. This applies not only to present experiences of divine consummation, but also to the final fulfillment of the eschatological consummation.

Seeing the divine consummation as a new creation brings up the question of continuity and discontinuity between God's works of creation and consummation.

Creation and Consummation

This theology of divine consummation means that such consummation stands in both continuity and discontinuity to the divine creation.⁵⁹² Some elements that belong to the creational will of God will be overcome in the future: prominent among them is death.

At stake here is the "faithfulness to the earth"⁵⁹³ that I believe Christian theology should maintain so that human beings can find joy in celebrating their created life. As Kelsey rightly insists, the present creation entails that "finite personal bodies in community are exactly what God creates and declares 'good.'"⁵⁹⁴ The eschatological consummation is a "fresh blessing" added to the blessing of creation.⁵⁹⁵ However, Kelsey stretches things too far when he argues that the divine consummation does not also constitute a "divine correction of a faulty or inadequate creation."⁵⁹⁶ Correcting a faulty creation is not the primary purpose of the divine consummation, but even Kelsey also proposes that, when finalized, the new creation will overcome a series of aspects of the old creation. For example, the predation, death, disease, and disaster that characterize this created world will no longer obtain in the divine consummation.⁵⁹⁷ For Kelsey, then, death and disease are not defects in the original creation, but they are horrific enough for God to want to get rid of them in the consummation.

⁵⁹² Welker, "The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God," 139.

⁵⁹³ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 380 with reference to Bonhoeffer and Nietzsche.

⁵⁹⁴ EE 480.

⁵⁹⁵ EE 480.

⁵⁹⁶ EE 480.

⁵⁹⁷ For a list of Kelsey's number of continuity and discontinuity between creation and new creation, see EE 554-557. As points of continuity, Kelsey maintains that human beings will be bodies in a community and remain radically dependent on the divine will to uphold their existence. This means, in a strictly logical sense, that human beings will remain logically mortal, in the sense that any immortality remains dependent on God continuously creating them. Given that God has committed to this in faithfulness, they will be practically immortal.

In any case, the divine consummation consists of a transformation of human material existence into a different sort of existence.⁵⁹⁸ K.E. Løgstrup states the content of this hope when he suggests that the final consummation overcomes biological and cruel death:

The Kingdom of God is not only a suspension of the law and its death. It is also a suspension of the biological, cruel death. The Christian message assumes that not only ethically but cosmically God acts against Himself.⁵⁹⁹

While I agree with Løgstrup's vision of the content of the Kingdom of God, I would wish to avoid the apparently absolute confrontation in God, implied in Løgstrup's suggestion that God acts *against* Godself.

Instead, I would emphasize that it is the *triune* God at work both in creation and consummation. The work of creation is merely attributed to the Father and the work of consummation to the Spirit (see Chapter 7). Therefore, the cosmic turn is not a creation *ex nihilo*: it is a new creation *ex vetere*, out of the old, a transformation of the world, entailing an element of salvation.⁶⁰⁰

2. Life in Bondage

The purpose of God's eschatological consummation is first and foremost to bless humans with a new gift; a gift of newness in the final consummation. Since the consummation of God is as original as creation itself, it must be abstracted from the sin and evil committed in this world.

⁵⁹⁸ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 48. Kelsey says the same later: the eschatological consummation of the proximate contexts involves "some kind of largely unimaginable transformation of their quotidian creatureliness," EE 484.

⁵⁹⁹ Løgstrup, *Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, 334, see appendix.

⁶⁰⁰ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 402. There are important and subtle differences between Kelsey and Thomas at this point. For Thomas, "new creation" constitutes a "redemptive transformation" (*rettende Transformation*), where God reacts and responds to a world gone awry. He understands this in contrast to three other models, namely: 1) "substitution," where God annihilates the old creation to create a new one; 2) "restitution," where the new creation does not change anything, but simply constitutes a new perspective on the self-same world; and 3) "consummating transformation" (*vollendende Transformation*), where nothing can really go wrong since everything will simply be subsumed into the new fulfilled consummation. While I believe Kelsey would agree with Thomas' critique of the first two, I would argue that Kelsey's own model overcomes the divide between the redemptive and the consummating transformation. For Kelsey, divine consummation constitutes an added gift, and is therefore not simply seamless fulfillment of the old creation. Yet *given* the contingent reality of sin and the consequent evil distortion of the created proximate contexts, the divine consummation acquires a new redemptive purpose, namely to transform the world so that it no longer exists in a bondage to sin.

Yet, it is a fact—however contingent—that humans distort their created proximate contexts. According to the vulnerability-analysis of Chapter 9.1, human beings relate to their own vulnerability by gathering resources at the expense of others, serving themselves rather than each other. Humans let this self-absorption condense and harden into structures of human organization. Institutions sustain the unjust differences regarding access to important assets and goods. While Elisabeth Gandolfo maintains (as does legal scholar Martha Fineman), that human beings form societal institutions as a reasonable response to vulnerability, she also claims that such institutions have often come to preserve parochial privilege. “Unfortunately, these social structures and the institutions built to uphold them are themselves vulnerable to anxiety-induced corruption of egocentrism and parochialism.”⁶⁰¹ This understanding can give rise to an interpretation of the idea of sin as a social sphere of power, a sphere of power in the proximate contexts, to which human beings are in bondage. While I remain open to other interpretations of the symbol of sin, I am focusing upon a social interpretation of the “sphere of power” aspect of sin in this chapter.
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Given that proximate contexts become evil in this way, Kelsey argues that “God’s actually keeping God’s absolute promise also contingently implies the promise of transformation of that distortion and its consequences.”⁶⁰³

The Bondage of Human Beings to Sinful Proximate Contexts

In Chapter 9.1, I interpreted the Greek term “flesh” (σάρξ) in terms of vulnerable, bodied materiality. According to the Gospel of John, the divine Son became such fleshly, vulnerable material. This section explores a different connotation of the word: “flesh”—understood as being in opposition to the life in the Spirit. In Kelsey’s synthesizing interpretation of Galatians, flesh and spirit (πνεῦμα) become two overlapping realities, resulting in a connotation of “flesh” as “sinful flesh.”⁶⁰⁴ Beyond the sense of fragile materiality, then, “flesh” also comes to connote the human being as it is in bondage to the “elements of the cosmos” (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ

⁶⁰¹ Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*, 136.

⁶⁰² For instance, Kelsey argues that sin-in-the-singular is something else, namely a distortion of the identity of human beings when they live at cross grain to their basic identity, which God gives to them through the ways in which God relates to them in creating, consummating, and reconciling them.

⁶⁰³ EE 484.

⁶⁰⁴ Gal 5:13-6:10.

κόσμου),⁶⁰⁵ which Kelsey understands as the structures of the world on which human beings rely when they orient themselves in the world. Paul offers exemplars of these structures when he considers the distinctions Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female, as structures from which the divine consummation into the life of Christ liberates human beings.⁶⁰⁶ Life lived according to such pairs is a life lived in bondage. In Kelsey's words:

To structure one's lived world on the bases of these contrasts is to trust one's life to realities that are not God but creatures. Such trust constitutes worship, and to worship creatures is to live in bondage.⁶⁰⁷

In the "already" aspect of the divine consummation, human beings live in a conflict with these structures, from which they cannot escape. But, the divine consummation relativizes them. I return to the topic of liberation from these structures in the next section, but I now turn to a more Christological grounding of the claim that human beings live in bondage to social structures.

With Michael Welker, I would argue that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the basic prophetic revelation of this bondage: it reveals the nature of sin in an interplay between bondage to systems and individual responsibility.⁶⁰⁸ It requires returning to the development of an incarnation Christology of risk.

Christology and the Kingdom of God

While Kelsey focuses on the resurrection for his theology of consummation, it is vital to include the Spirit-led life and mission of the incarnate Son as the way in which God consummates the world.

Driven by the divine Spirit, the divine Son already manifests the Kingdom of God in and through his actions as a human person. As Jürgen Moltmann indicates, the synoptic Gospels remember Jesus Christ as someone who expects the Kingdom of God as a festive meal. When Jesus invites sinners and tax collectors to dine with him, he not only brings about

⁶⁰⁵ Gal 4:3,9. The meaning of this phrase is vigorously disputed, but exegete J. Louis Martyn supports a reading like Kelsey's, see Martyn, *Galatians*, 389, 404-406.

⁶⁰⁶ Gal 3:28, see also EE 492.

⁶⁰⁷ EE 492.

⁶⁰⁸ Similar interpretations exist among convert refugees in Denmark. In her innovative ethnographic exegesis, Gitte Buch-Hansen has shown that converting refugees in the mainline Danish church, Apostles' Church (*Apostelkirken*), tend to interpret Christ's suffering as a witness to the sufferings they have experienced in their lives, focusing on "Christ's suffering - not on behalf of sinful humanity - but as a witness of humanity's suffering *because* of sin," Buch-Hansen, "How to Do Things with Rituals."

a human community but also an in-breaking of the very Kingdom of God.⁶⁰⁹

Such a manifestation of the divine Kingdom could have been an address to the created world even if sin had never been a reality. But given the existence of sin, and of nature slipping away from God's purposes, the divine consummation manifest in Jesus' life can be seen in his other actions too. Jesus preaches the Gospel for the poor and oppressed to encourage a dignified life in the consciousness of their status as children of God. The result should be that outsiders can accept themselves, and find resources to change their societal situation.⁶¹⁰ Jesus heals the sick in ways that point towards the final consummation. He includes those that the guardians of the social moral code have excluded and condemned, without even inquiring into the reasons for their failure to meet those moral standards.⁶¹¹ Moreover, he resists the devil's offer of divine and earthly security, refusing both to throw himself from the temple in the hope of a divine intervention and to take over all earthly kingdoms.⁶¹² In all of these acts, Jesus not only preaches the Kingdom of God, Jesus is "the very personification of the coming of the Kingdom of God to this world."⁶¹³ All of this happens in the power of the Spirit who guides Jesus Christ throughout his life, until the end at the cross.⁶¹⁴

This specificity of Jesus' mission is important. As Jan-Olav Henriksen puts it: "It is a specific mission that Jesus' life is dedicated to. Not everything is worth dying for, and not every kind of dedication may appear as commendable."⁶¹⁵ Emphasizing that Jesus' mission gives a broad ethical direction for risk-taking helps nuance Niels Henrik Gregersen's affirmation of an ethos of risk-taking on the basis of the biblical texts.

Gregersen rightly describes how the teachings of Jesus invite a risk-taking attitude to life. This is clear in the parable of the talents, where the

⁶⁰⁹ Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 135 with reference to Lk 13:29 and Isa 25:6-8, but also to the parable of the wedding party in Mt 22:2-10 and Lk 14:21. For a discussion of the future and presence of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' life, see also Pannenberg, *ST II*, 368.

⁶¹⁰ Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, 121. Moltmann does not use the term "resilience," but he could very well have done so.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶¹² Mt 4:1-11. Both Günter Thomas, with reference to Anselm, and Jeff Pool argue that the Father entrusts the Son with the Kingdom of God, thereby risking it all, see Thomas, "Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation," 161-62 and Pool, *God's Wounds II*, 246.

⁶¹³ Mikkelsen, "Den trinitariske Gud," 30, my translation, see appendix.

⁶¹⁴ See Gregersen, "Trial and Temptation," 340.

⁶¹⁵ Henriksen, *Desire, Gift, and Recognition*, 280.

lord praises the servants who achieved certain goods through their investing the talents.⁶¹⁶ It is clear too in the incident where Jesus invites Peter to walk onto the water,⁶¹⁷ which confirms the claim that Jesus encourages an ethics of risk. Gregersen concludes approvingly: “The recurrent idea in these biblical traditions is that only the one who is willing to risk a loss will prevail, and only the one who is willing to face uncertainty on the streets of life will find God.”⁶¹⁸ Rather than shunning all risks so as to live in security, humans should be ready to run risks, under certain restrictions, as some great goods are only achievable through risk-taking (though of course, no guarantees are provided that such risks will prove fruitful – else, they would not be risks).

While Gregersen’s insight is true, other biblical traditions seem to imply that the risk-taking ethos of Jesus is not indifferent towards the specific goods one attempts to achieve through risk-taking. That is, only certain goods are worth taking the risk. The announcement of the Kingdom of God offers an ethical orientation for the question regarding which particular risks are worthwhile: the struggle for justice, the inclusion of outsiders, and raising up the downtrodden, for example. Karen Baker-Fletcher formulates it this way: “To overcome the cross with Christ ... includes being willing to risk your own life in the process *in the call for justice*.”⁶¹⁹ Arguably, there is a *specificity to Jesus’ teaching concerning the ethics of risk and the mission for which one should risk one’s life in the imitation of Christ*.

When the Son came and proclaimed the imminence of the Kingdom of God to all people, the mission entailed a risk, namely *the risk that human beings would oust him rather than open themselves to him*. Running this risk means incurring a “teleological vulnerability,” a vulnerability that serves the purpose of achieving some good (see Chapter 9.1). In this case, the good would be that people would receive the Kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit.

Yet, people did not receive the Kingdom of God. Their reaction was perhaps unforeseeable. Since sin constitutes a mysterious nothingness, even God could not know with certainty the reactions that human beings would have. There had been martyrs of God and prophets before, but none who was the very Son of God. Such an interpretation, which implies a view of divine omniscience similar to that of John Sanders (see Chapter 2.2), can

⁶¹⁶ Mt 25:14-30.

⁶¹⁷ Mt 14:22-33.

⁶¹⁸ Gregersen, “Faith in a World of Risks,” 225. However, the most basic reality of Christianity is that God finds human beings, not that human beings find God.

⁶¹⁹ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 150, emphasis added.

find warrant in an interpretation of the parable of the wicked tenants.⁶²⁰ Matthew has Jesus compare the divine Creator with a landowner. The parable suggests that after having sent prophets of different sorts, the Father sends his only Son, expecting that they would receive and respect his authority, though they had respected none of the earlier messengers. Matthew puts it thus:

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.⁶²¹

The Father did have some unfortunate history with the people, and yet nourished the hope that people would receive the divine Son. Given the inherent uncertainty of the future, the life and crucifixion of Jesus constitutes an ethic of risk. The incarnate Son brings the Kingdom of God to human beings, empowering them to struggle for justice and peace, at the risk of being persecuted.⁶²² Baker-Fletcher rightly considers Jesus ministry as one of “healing, salvation, and liberation. Viewing Jesus’ life as an ethic of risk helps clarify that God does not crucify his son; rather it is human beings that commit the violent act of crucifixion.⁶²³ In light of such potential future persecution, Sigrid Brandt suggests that one should read Philippians 2:17 as saying that Paul sees the very preaching of the Gospel as a sacrificial service to the Philippians. Perhaps, the text could be translated as follows:

But even if I am being victimized [*σπένδομαι*] in connection with the sacrifice and priestly service [*ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ*] to your faith [*τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν*], I am glad and rejoice with all of you.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ As mentioned earlier, there is not sufficient space in this dissertation for a thorough discussion of the divine attributes, but see Mavrodes, “Omniscience” and Reichel, “Gottes fragliches Wissen.”

⁶²¹ Mt 21:37-39.

⁶²² Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 80.

⁶²³ Baker-Fletcher, “God with Us in the Dust,” 189.

⁶²⁴ Translation altered, taking inspiration from Brandt, “War Jesu Tod ein ‘Opfer’?,” 74. The NRSV-translation reads: “But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.” Exegete Gordon Fee interprets it differently, suggesting that Paul’s *current imprisonment* is the “pouring out” that corresponds to the congregation’s faithful sacrifice, understood as their ministry, Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 240, 252-55.

From this perspective, the sacrifice inherent in Christian existence entails a service of preaching the Gospel, which generally presupposes a functioning body with which to preach.⁶²⁵

Only in extreme cases, where powers inimical to God are strong enough, Brandt argues, would this sacrifice subject the preacher to such victimization. If the threat of victimization becomes tangible, however, Christian existence should not shy away from the path of justice for the sake of self-preservation. One could argue that the crucifixion of Christ constitutes an extreme case of such victimization. “Gerade das Opfer Jesu Christi erfüllt sich nicht im Kreuz, es weicht dem Geopfertwerden um Gottes und der Menschen willen aber auch nicht aus.”⁶²⁶ In this light, one can interpret the cross of Christ as an experience of excessive suffering, irredeemable through its positive consequences (see Chapter 9.2-3). What are the mechanisms of this excessive suffering?

The Crucifixion

As was mentioned in Chapter 6.5 with respect to trust, Welker has drawn attention to the multitude of systems that conspired to crucify Jesus:

Jesus Christus wird im Namen der Politik und im Namen der Religion verurteilt. Er wird im Namen von zweierlei Recht, dem jüdischen und dem römischen Recht, hingerichtet. Auch die öffentliche Meinung ist gegen ihn ... Alle weltlichen Immunsysteme versagen. Die wechselseitigen Kontrollen von Religion, Politik, Recht und Moral fallen im Kreuzesgeschehen aus.⁶²⁷

An alliance was created consisting of politics, religion, law, public opinion—foundational systems in the contemporary Western world too—and Jesus’ loyal disciples who left him. In his political system, Pilate represented an absolute rule and an imperial cult which Jesus’ preaching of the Kingdom of God undermined,⁶²⁸ leading to an execution of Jesus as a political subversive. Religious groups conspired against Jesus on account of blasphemy, perhaps because they wanted to retain their position of power.⁶²⁹ The political and religious systems relied on legal norms for

⁶²⁵ Brandt, “War Jesu Tod ein ‘Opfer’?,” 75. Again, I acknowledge that other New Testament accounts interpret the very crucifixion as a sacrifice.

⁶²⁶ Brandt, “Hat es sachlich,” 276.

⁶²⁷ Welker, “Der erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott,” 44. Welker is inspired by Moltmann’s description of the systematic complexity of Jesus’ death as blasphemer, rebel, and godforsaken. See also Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 119.

⁶²⁸ Pannenberg, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis*, 93, 96.

⁶²⁹ Jh 11:48. When Jesus forgave sins without expiation but on direct divine authority, see Mk 2:6 with parallels and Lk 7:48, he undermined the authority of the temple and the law, see Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama*, 56.

executing Jesus. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza comments on the political aspect: “in the eyes of the Roman judicial system Jesus might have been guilty of subverting the kyriarchal order.”⁶³⁰ Finally, the public that had cheered Jesus on his arrival in Jerusalem, quickly came to demand his crucifixion.⁶³¹

The background for this alliance of rejection was the incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth. His Spirit-led mission to bring about the Kingdom of God, and to convey the divine forgiveness of sins to human beings on the basis of divine authority alone, challenged the usual ways in which the powerful had protected their own vulnerability. As expressed by Jan-Olav Henriksen, Jesus has a desire for the Kingdom of God that opens people’s lives towards a communal and inclusive future. However, Jesus’s desire to perform such an opening of lives, meets with resistance from a closing desire that wishes to control the religious and social communities in their present form.⁶³²

Universal Human Responsibility

In sum, it was human beings that killed Jesus, through an alliance of human systems. That humans are responsible for executing Jesus is vivid in Acts, which depicts Peter speaking about human beings as guilty of his execution. The speech at Pentecost is paradigmatic:

[T]his man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.⁶³³

In all of these sermons, the same pattern exists: Jesus preached, humans killed Jesus, but God raised him.⁶³⁴ One could call this the Lukan pattern of cross and resurrection.⁶³⁵ Systematic theologian Robert Jenson comments:

⁶³⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 102.

⁶³¹ Mk 11:9-10 and 15:6-15 with parallels.

⁶³² Henriksen, “Begjærets kristologi, begjærets frigjøring,” 8–9.

⁶³³ Acts 2:23-24. In this verse, I suggest reading “handing over” (ἐκδοτον) simply as the move of incarnation. Jesus exposes himself by placing his life in their hands, trusting that human beings will heed the ethical demand and take care of his life. Compare Acts 3:14-15, 4:10, 5:30, 10:39b-40a, and 13:29-30. While the “human beings crucified/God resurrected” pattern is clear, Luke still presupposes that the sins of human beings are a part of God’s plans. In Chapter 10.1, I argue otherwise.

⁶³⁴ Weaver, “The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship and God,” 343.

⁶³⁵ Other New Testament accounts, however, appear to interpret Jesus’ crucifixion as an act of his own, or of the divine will. For example, 1 Pet 3:18 suggests that the crucifixion had a purpose of bringing people to God.

The pattern of the primal kerygma of atonement is displayed in Luke's presentation of the first Christian sermon. Jesus was put to death by the hands of sinful men, but God raised him up; *therefore* a return to God and life in his Spirit is open to you.⁶³⁶

Jenson implicitly pushes against the literal reading of Acts. The "you" that Peter in Acts addresses throughout is too narrow. He addresses the Israelites who lived at the time of Jesus.⁶³⁷ There are two systematic reasons why a broader perspective is apt. I have already highlighted how multiple systems, not only the religious, were active in the causing the crucifixion. As such, the judicial process against Jesus manifests an entire world that has succumbed to the power of sin.⁶³⁸ This was a reality at the time of Jesus and a threat that all human systems live under. As Welker notes:

[Das Kreuz] offenbart die 'Nacht der Gottverlassenheit', nicht nur für Jesus selbst – sondern auch für die ganze Welt. Das Kreuz offenbart diese Not und Gefahr in der Todesstunde Jesu, aber auch als eine beständige Bedrohung für alle Zeit.⁶³⁹

Complementing this, Wolfhart Pannenberg offers another important reason for universalizing the responsibility for the crucifixion of the incarnate Son. Pannenberg argues that all people participate in the movement of opposition against God, a movement spearheaded in the historical condemnation of Jesus.⁶⁴⁰ This is also Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach, he argues that whomever lays hands on the least among humans, thus lays hands on Christ: "Wer sich jetzt am geringsten Menschen vergreift, vergreift sich an Christus, der Menschengestalt angenommen hat und in sich das Ebenbild Gottes für alles, was Menschenantlitz trägt,

⁶³⁶ Jenson, "On the Doctrine of Atonement," 102, emphasis in original. Jenson discusses how contemporary theology should understand the cross neither apart from its future (resurrection), nor apart from its past (the divine interaction with Israel), *ibid.*, 103–4. I follow Hans Vium Mikkelsen who also claims that the crucifixion should be understood from the past, albeit from Jesus' own life and works, seeing the cross as a human reaction to Jesus' mission, Mikkelsen, "Den trinitariske Gud," 27.

⁶³⁷ As mentioned in footnote 179, Gitte Buch-Hansen addresses the problem of overlooking the anti-Semitic structures of John, Buch-Hansen, "Johannesevangeliet og antijudaismen," 231. Arguably, the same applies to Acts. According to Acts 4:27, however, not only the "peoples of Israel," but also the "Gentiles," and thus the entire world, "gather together against" Jesus. For Schwager, this text "demonstrates that the alliance against Jesus has a truly universal character," Girard and Schwager, *Correspondence 1974-1991*, 52.

⁶³⁸ See Weaver, "The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship and God," 335.

⁶³⁹ Welker, "Der erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott," 44.

⁶⁴⁰ Pannenberg, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis*, 96.

wiederhergestellt hat.”⁶⁴¹ Through the incarnation, Jesus Christ has become a human being, and through the resurrection, Jesus Christ is presently present in the “least of these.”⁶⁴² Surely, Christ is present in the proclamation of the Word, and in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, which is where God primarily wants to be sought out. Yet, Christ’s omnipresence also entails a judgment over human beings who exacerbate the vulnerability of others.⁶⁴³ As such, a universal solidarity exists between sinners who—all in different ways—participate in the movement of expelling the incarnate Son of God from this world.

In sum, the crucifixion event manifests a contingent fact: the world wants to be without God.⁶⁴⁴ Human beings have produced a host of powers, “networks of objective evil powers, realities, and structures,” and they serve those powers that now hold them captive.⁶⁴⁵ The structures that humans create are good in so far as they serve a God-willed purpose of erecting order and managing complexity; but when they turn bad, they place human beings in bondage to them. Considering human bondage to such sinful proximate contexts in this way is in line with John Sanders’s comment on a social interpretation of “hereditary” sin. Once sin has been posited in human life, Sanders argues, it permeates human social life. “Each of us grows up in relation to other sinners and sinful institutions and

⁶⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, 279 with implicit reference to Mt 25, 31-46. Thus, Bonhoeffer interprets “the least of my brothers” universally, including all people, compare Luz, *Mt 26-28*, 521-44, who argues *against* this interpretation’s exegetical power, but *for* its theological legitimacy.

⁶⁴² Mt 25:45.

⁶⁴³ The legitimate worry about anti-Semitism brings K.E. Løgstrup to argue that executing Jesus is no worse than executing any other person fighting for the cause of the oppressed, Løgstrup, *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*, 240. In contrast, I would argue that executing the Son of God is the worst thing, but that any time human beings violate the created integrity of others, directly or indirectly, they also violate the created integrity of Christ.

⁶⁴⁴ The conviction that all human beings participate in the resistance against God does not stumble before the observation that women remained in the vicinity of Jesus throughout his crucifixion. Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel points out that according to Mark, Jesus’ female disciples stayed close to Jesus during his death and burial rather than fleeing. However, she also points out that the women flee when they hear about Jesus’ resurrection, Mk 16:8. Given the cultural construction of diverging gender roles at the time, her interpretation is this: while the male disciples run because of their broken dreams, the women run because Jesus is no longer available for their concerned care—apparently both men and women want Jesus on their own terms. While the male disciples lose transcendence, the female disciples lose immanence, Moltmann-Wendel, “Zur Kreuzestheologie heute: Gibt es eine feministische Kreuzestheologie?,” 556. Yet, the entire world still wants to be without God.

⁶⁴⁵ Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 231.

organizations. Socially, we are born into sin. Individually, we follow our forbears in sin.”⁶⁴⁶ This means that humans are connected to each other in such a way that evil actions cannot be viewed as completely individualistic. Human beings are in bondage to proximate contexts that are permeated by sin.

Besides promising new life to the victims of evil in the world, the divine consummation, then, promises liberation from the bondage to sinful proximate contexts.

3. Consummation as Liberation from Bondage

The resurrection of Jesus Christ expresses how God goes about dealing with human negations of the divine call to fellowship. This is Günter Thomas’s insight in his theology of new creation. By resurrecting Jesus Christ, God maintains the divine faithfulness and the divine *Gnadenwahl* for humans whilst also refusing to tolerate the finality of the death that became the consequence of Jesus’ life. Rather than damning human beings for their sinfulness, God creates something new. “[N]icht der die Schöpfung potenziell auch zurücknehmende Zorn Gottes wird entfacht, sondern seine Schöpferkraft für eine neuschöpferische Initiative.”⁶⁴⁷ The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the inauguration of a new creation, a divine consummation. This divine consummation becomes the liberation from the bondage that humans find themselves in. As the means to overcome this bondage, the Spirit institutes a new creation, a final consummation. This is a central feature of Kelsey’s understanding of the eschatological consummation:

The new creation is a world freed from bondage to these forces [the elements of the cosmos, Gal 4:3-9]. In one way, the battle has already been won by God through the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. In another way, the struggle continues.⁶⁴⁸

After the event of the resurrection, the battle has been won, but the struggle still continues. A struggle still exists between living the life of the Spirit and life according to the flesh. Kelsey writes:

⁶⁴⁶ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 255. This is the only time in his work where John Sanders breaks away from his I-Thou framework for understanding divine providence. Yet, Sanders insists that human beings are *always* capable of freeing themselves from these structures, capable of changing their desires, so sin does not really overpower human beings, and he finally remains with the personalist relation of God vis-à-vis the individual human being. I argue that the divine consummation enables such freedom.

⁶⁴⁷ Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,” 178–79.

⁶⁴⁸ EE 488.

This new creation is a lived world constituted by living in the time of and by the power of the eschatological Spirit. It is in conflict with the old, but still obtaining, world constituted by living in the time of socially construed worlds grounded in faith in the power of finite creatures—that is, according to the ‘flesh.’⁶⁴⁹

Flesh and Spirit are not options that humans can choose between from some point of disengagement. They are forces that affect human beings and challenge them. But how does the divine consummation begin to liberate the human person from this bondage? Consummation for Kelsey does not only mean a consummation beyond the death of each and every human being: it also means an historical *telos* of justice and a liberation of human beings that begins now. Let me point to two aspects of that consummation, concerning both individual and social liberation.

A. Individual Liberation

The hope for resurrection is closely tied to securing the dignity of the individual person over and against society. This is Pannenberg’s insight. As created, the individual has an infinite worth, a dignity that society cannot deny. Too often, society can and does deny this dignity, but the dignity does not disappear as a result. The fact that individuals will eventually die brings into question the extent of their dignity.⁶⁵⁰ This challenge to human dignity is one that the proximate context can use to legitimize violations of the integrity of the human person, for instance by keeping resources to itself rather than sharing them (see Chapter 9.1).

To be connected to the one who died and was resurrected again through the Spirit’s outpouring over all things results in individual freedom from society. On the basis of the ontological resurrection, people acquire a new freedom from the powers of this world. As Pannenberg puts it:

Die Verbundenheit mit dem Tode Christi begründet im Lichte der Auferstehungshoffnung ein Bewußtsein der Freiheit von allen Mächten dieser Welt, von allen Normen und Sanktionen der Gesellschaft, weil sogar durch die Drohung des Todes keine Macht dieser Welt den mit Christus Verbundenen trennen kann von Gott und seinem Heil.⁶⁵¹

Therefore, the resurrection hope creates the basis of courage in the face of coercion and negative influences from larger social powers. Freedom from the finality of death through the promise of eschatological consummation can also enable human beings to accept their vulnerabilities and accept death as their destiny in ways that counter the urge towards the

⁶⁴⁹ EE 493.

⁶⁵⁰ Pannenberg, “Tod und Auferstehung in der Sicht christlicher Dogmatik,” 147.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

self-protective accumulation of limited resources for the self. Moltmann writes:

Es ist die Hoffnung auf Vernichtung des Todes und auf die Auferstehung zu einem ewigen Leben, die uns bereit macht, das Leben hier so zu lieben, daß wir verletzlich, sterblich und traurig werden. Wir erfahren die Kraft der Auferstehung schon hier in der Liebe.⁶⁵²

As mentioned in Chapter 9.1, death and vulnerability appear to be among the root circumstances of sin. Unable to deal with their vulnerability, human beings aggressively draw resources to themselves, exacerbating the vulnerability of others. Yet, the promise of the resurrection enables humans to accept themselves as mortal and vulnerable, which is the first condition for creating a more just society.

B. Societal Liberation

The final consummation, however, not only places the individual into a new reality, it also changes the reality in which humans participate on the social scale. As was discussed in Chapter 6.5, the crucifixion showed that the systems and institutions (supposedly the arbiters of trusting relations), failed in their task. In that situation of resurrection, the Father becomes the arbiter between the victims of society and those systems. The resurrection sends the clear message from the Father supporting the claims of Jesus Christ to act on divine authority. The Kingdom of God is a more encompassing reality than any human system can be. As biblical theologian Walter Wink notes, the redemption of the systemic realm is the work of God who “*presses for [a given system’s] transformation into a more humane order.*”⁶⁵³

Consummation is something that happens now—according to the already-not-yet-structure—and human beings are allowed to rejoice in the results that they see. They can rejoice when the divine consummation loosens structures that are too tight and tightens structures that are too loose; where justice is done and where rights are improved. Yet, Kelsey insists that even though specific historical changes may be deemed good, any change for the better remains overall ambiguous:

‘Good’ and ‘evil’ are properly used to express moral judgment on these changes. However they cannot be added up and subtracted to arrive at a bottom-line calculation of overall increase or decrease in social, cultural, or personal goodness.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵² Moltmann, *Wer ist Christus für uns heute?*, 76.

⁶⁵³ Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 32, emphasis in original.

⁶⁵⁴ EE 485.

In light of this, it is meaningful to hope for something better and to rejoice over positive change; but this hope and this joy has to be qualified. The world aims at the Kingdom of God, but the movement towards it is “conflict-ridden and anything but linear.”⁶⁵⁵ Therefore, any discernment of the progress towards the realization of the Kingdom of God should be done with utmost care and remain tentative. Moreover, the goal is not “a goal to be actualized by us but rather [by] God drawing us to that goal.”⁶⁵⁶

4 Transformation, Judgment, and Final Freedom

Even as humans are in bondage to all sorts of powers, they still carry the responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus. This means that the crucifixion in light of the eschatological consummation becomes a judgment upon human lives. However, “judgment” does not mean metering out a punishment; it means clarifying what is the case, and what is right and wrong. That is the core meaning of the Greek term for judgment, *κρίνειν*, in the Apostles Creed. The judgment reveals that humans live according to the flesh. As Kelsey notes:

[The judgment] discloses how radically inadequate our social and cultural contexts in fact are for the full well-being of personal bodies in community, given their distortion by humankind’s inappropriate responses to God’s ways of relating to them.⁶⁵⁷

Yet, the purpose of judgment is not to denounce anyone. The purpose is to heal and purify.⁶⁵⁸ The pain of judgment is one of shame and remorse for the person one has become; but it is pain that has an ending and points towards the consummation of relationships.

Given such a theology of purifying consummation, the conception of divine love and human freedom needs to be revisited. Human beings are to be respected not only in their freedom to love God, as William Vanstone and John Sanders have argued. Human beings also need salvation. Here, I follow Günter Thomas, who states:

dass es sich in Verhältnissen der Liebe unter anderem auch um Verhältnisse der Rettung handelt. Faßt man nicht die entspannte Situation der Liebe zweier ‘autonomer Personen’ ins Auge, sondern Situationen der Not, so äußert sich die

⁶⁵⁵ EE 479.

⁶⁵⁶ EE 479.

⁶⁵⁷ EE 498.

⁶⁵⁸ Volf, “The Final Reconciliation,” 94; Gregersen, “Den sidste dom” and “Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation”; Pannenberg, *ST III*, 656–67; Gregory of Nyssa, *Soul and the Resurrection*, 84–85/LXXXII, cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15.

Liebe, nicht, aber ganz wesentlich in der Abwendung oder Linderung der not. Wer liebt, versucht den geliebten Menschen zu retten.⁶⁵⁹

This does not entail omnipotence in the problematic sense of determining all things in detail; it only needs omnipotence in the sense of being able to rescue and redeem. The power of God must be powerful enough to save.⁶⁶⁰

What such transformative divine consummation means for human freedom, however, is a trickier question. Kelsey simply leaves the question open. He remains undecided concerning whether human beings in the eschaton are also able to maintain a life at cross-grain with their nature as eccentric, as related to by God, and as having their meaning and value located in God.⁶⁶¹ Kelsey's argument is that it requires no other power than the created power of freedom to maintain a life in opposition to God.⁶⁶² Therefore, the question becomes whether: 1) this created power of freedom is essential to maintain the human being precisely as human; or, 2) human freedom is one of those created aspects of humanity that the new creation overcomes.⁶⁶³ Kelsey refrains from answering this question.

Sanders, in contrast, ventures an answer. He appears to opt for the former solution. Out of love, God respects the created freedom of humans to reject God's invitation to the Kingdom of God, a freedom which gains eternal significance. "Only those who decline God's grace are rejected,"⁶⁶⁴ Sanders argues. In Thomas' evaluation, such a theology entails that "es am alten Menschen noch etwas gibt, das nicht der neuschöpferischen Verwandlung bedarf: den freien Willen."⁶⁶⁵ For Thomas, the divine consummation entails a transformation of the entire human creature, including the human will. However, Thomas goes to the other extreme, understanding the final consummation as an instance of disrespect (*Respektlosigkeit*) over against the human being.⁶⁶⁶ Importantly, Thomas argues that the divine lack of respect for human free will does not entail

⁶⁵⁹ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 341.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ EE 509 and 02.

⁶⁶² EE 509.

⁶⁶³ EE 558-560.

⁶⁶⁴ Sanders, "Inclusivism," 33. Pool shares this understanding with Sanders. By respecting human freedom, God risks hell, Pool, *God's Wounds II*, 181. However, Pool makes the statement that God thereby risks eternal grief over human misery: "As long as hell remains a reality, so too that long does God grieve over an estranged though beloved creation," *ibid.*, 183. If people turn away from God, grief becomes an eternal reality in the life of God, *ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁶⁵ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 404, fn. 35.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

that God breaks some human will, something conceived as being intact and full of integrity in comparison with God's. Rather, the divine lack of respect mends a human will that is always already distorted and brings the human person into the divine community.

Gregersen seeks a middle way between these positions. Like Thomas, Gregersen suggests that God transforms human freedom, purifying it into a position of full clarity in the presence of divine glory. Paul writes: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."⁶⁶⁷ The new creation entails a saving transformation of the entire human person. Under these new circumstances, however, Gregersen maintains that God respects human freedom.⁶⁶⁸ If in this situation, a human being remains resolute in refusing the love of God, then this person would face annihilation as an internal consequence of this rigid refusal.⁶⁶⁹ Hopefully, this would be a borderline situation. Given the transformed state of full clarity, there is reason to hope that no one would deny the divine love at this point. But insisting on the possibility of the negative outcome is crucial, for love and grace can only be accepted in freedom.⁶⁷⁰ Since Gregersen convincingly balances redemptive love with the concern that love can only be accepted in freedom, I follow him here. The condition of truth means, however, that the choice of remaining away from God does not include any eternal risk-taking: it will be a choice under neither risk nor uncertainty, but in full clarity.

Summing up the results of this chapter, I claim that the promise of the final consummation constitutes a transformation of creation, not a restitution from a fallen position. It constitutes a transformation from all the three forms of human suffering that I discussed in Chapter 8.1: 1) intrinsic loss and death; 2) the extrinsic ontological limits exemplified by the food chain that will transform into the lamb and lion eating side by side;⁶⁷¹ and, 3) social bondage to evil. This is the content of the promise of divine consummation.

5. Conclusion: Risk and the Future

Living with a risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system means living into a future that is ultimately promissory. In the preaching

⁶⁶⁷ 1 Cor 13:12.

⁶⁶⁸ This is in line with Pannenberg, *ST III*, 690.

⁶⁶⁹ Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation," 118.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 115 and fn. 16.

⁶⁷¹ Thomas, "Krankheit im Horizont des lebendigen Gottes," 508. Thomas, *Krankheit im Horizont*, 508 with reference to Isaiah 11:6-7.

and presence of Jesus Christ and in his resurrection, God has promised to consummate the world. In light of this symbol of divine consummation, no matter how bad things might become, God promises to create anew. The point is not that God turns bad things into good things, but that no matter how bad things are, God will—sooner or later—draw humans to new possibilities.

The symbol of divine judgment inherent in the idea of divine consummation means that the worst thing—the judgment of God upon all creatures—is a live reality for human beings. As a result, there is a limit to the dangers that human beings can expect to face. To explain this point, David Kelsey refers to the photographer Diane Arbus' explanation for the unguarded presence of the unusual people in one of her photograph series:

'Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've passed their test in life. They're aristocrats.'⁶⁷²

Anxiety concerning the future is one thing, but once the danger has become concrete, it is much easier for human beings to deal with it and relate to it. In light of the Christian symbol system, the judgment of God is the worst that could happen. Kelsey comments:

So, too, for those who are being judged by God; the worst has happened. There is nothing more terrible left to fear in their lived worlds, nothing worse to protect themselves against, to disguise, or to deny.⁶⁷³

The presence of the divine Son between human beings is not simply an acquittal; the divine presence also constitutes a judgment upon human lives that do not live up to that which God intended, measured in terms of the divine consummation. As such, human beings are experiencing the worst that they can come to experience as the Spirit draws humans towards eschatological consummation: divine judgment. As was mentioned earlier, however, the judgment is promissory, constituting a transformation of the world towards the good. The impending judgment and the promise of transformation takes the top off the danger that humans can perceive themselves as being in.

The idea of the divine promise of a new and consummated reality can seem very abstract when confronted with everyday constructions of risk and danger. Theologian Esther D. Reed brings that point home clearly:

⁶⁷² EE 535.

⁶⁷³ EE 535. In this context, Kelsey appears to place the judgment strictly in the "already" part of the divine consummation. It should really be placed within the logic of already-not-yet, just like the divine consummation.

The hope of a redemption yet to come, in which the whole earth will be healed, restored, and transfigured, sounds faintly absurd to the average person struggling to make a living and reading in a newspaper about the latest natural disaster.⁶⁷⁴

Reading about the latest natural disaster places the reader in a world of threats. Nonetheless, divine consummation is what God promises: a new life to those who have succumbed to threats, whether other- or self-imposed. While God does not change the loss that one might experience, God promises new life. This promise takes the edge off of the fearful experience of living into an uncertain future.

Importantly, the promise of the divine consummation does not entail focusing people so much towards the ultimate reality of consummation that they overlook contemporary concerns. Concerning the victims of injustice, catholic theologian Johann-Baptist Metz objects to a too superficial notion of divine consummation that becomes triumphalist:

Whoever, for example, hears the theological language about the resurrection of Christ in such a way that in it the cry of the crucified one becomes inaudible is not hearing theology but mythology, not the Gospel, rather a myth of the victor. Here lies the distance between theology and mythology. In myth the question is forgotten; thus it is more fit for therapy, for easing our anxiety, perhaps also more conducive for managing contingencies, than is Christian faith.⁶⁷⁵

While the aim of this dissertation's theological reflection is, indeed, to address human anxiety regarding the future, I believe I have developed a reading of the symbol of divine consummation that takes Metz' objection into account. The tension between creation and consummation is crucial. The creation theology of the vulnerable incarnation (as developed in Chapter 9) can take very seriously that even the Son of God can be said to have lived a life of suffering. The consummation theology of this chapter does not leave the Son's cry of abandonment aside—but it promises that the Father and the Spirit listen to his cry, and to all other cries of suffering, and promises to bring about a new creation with new life: God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”⁶⁷⁶

In the meantime, suffering human beings live in the tension between creation and consummation. Theologian of ethics William Schweiker issues a warning about bringing the idea of divine consummation into conversation with present day concerns about the future, specifically human destruction of the planet. If the future is safe with God, why bother?

⁶⁷⁴ Reed, “Redemption,” 228.

⁶⁷⁵ Metz, “Suffering unto God,” 613–14.

⁶⁷⁶ Rev 21:4.

The ‘new creation’ is not about renewable resources: we cannot imagine that it can be used to endorse the ecological naivety and thirst for unending consumption that blatantly disregards the real and present limits on human activity. Rather, new creation is about a renewed ‘mind,’ a new conscience, empowered to seek the integration, establish just relations, between domains of reality so that life, with its specific finite limits, might flourish.⁶⁷⁷

Schweiker is right that human beings cannot simply shrug at their destruction of the planet through over-consumption—nor at any way of life that endangers the balance of nature and of human life. The devil tempted Jesus, telling him to throw himself from a cliff because angels would come to catch him. Jesus responded: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”⁶⁷⁸ Nor should human beings take God’s promise for granted, or neglect the roles they have to play in bringing it about. Since the whole world, not only believers, will be transformed into the divine glory, all human beings stand responsible for the way in which they have treated their proximate contexts—not only how they have treated each other, but how they have treated the integrity of their non-human environment too.⁶⁷⁹

However, I believe Schweiker goes a little too far in his revision of the Christian symbol of new creation, reducing it simply to a matter of renewed conscience. The idea of a divine consummation with new life to the entire world, including the world that human beings destroy, enables the victims of oppression to protest against present day social structures, regardless of how society might respond to their protest. Concerning the African American struggle for justice in America, systematic theologian James Cone argues that the African-American spirituals sung in Ante-bellum slavery confirmed hope in justice when they thematized the eschatological consummation. Spirituals affirm hope, “hope that enables black slaves to risk their lives for earthly freedom because they knew they had a home ‘over yonder.’”⁶⁸⁰ In other words, the renewal of human conscience occurs through the promise of divine consummation of the whole world, not in spite of it.

Part of what makes it difficult for human beings to take care of the earth, is that it constitutes a realm of resources that can be used to protect themselves in the face of their vulnerability, and that this insight has hardened into structures and institutions constituting powers to which

⁶⁷⁷ Schweiker, “Time as a Moral Space,” 137.

⁶⁷⁸ Mt 4:7.

⁶⁷⁹ In line with Gregersen’s notion of deep incarnation, where God goes into the very tissue of biological existence, Elisabeth Johnson has argued for a “deep resurrection” emphasizing that the entire creation goes into the eschatological consummation, see Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 148–50.

⁶⁸⁰ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 27.

human beings live in bondage. This is why the liberation inherent in the divine consummation is so crucial. While social bonds are the condition of possibility for human wellbeing, human beings also have to correct them when they develop in destructive and distorted ways. As mentioned in the previous section, this is a perspective that gives human beings a sense of freedom over and against their cultural prejudices and norms, and enables them to protest against ecological injustice.

In the process of finding out how to relate to the often conflicting vulnerabilities of the world, incurring guilt in one way or another appears to be inevitable. The experience of incurring guilt in one's engagement in situations of risk is the topic of the following chapter.

11. Reconciliation: Risk, Guilt, and Divine Forgiveness

In the Apostles' Creed, the divine forgiveness of sins is presented as being essential to Christianity. This chapter correlates the theological symbols of "sin" and "reconciliation" with the experience of living with risk and danger.

This endeavor presupposes that the Christian symbol "sin" can still be made sense of by contemporary human beings. In many ways, the symbol of sin is in crisis. On the one hand, an overly moralistic understanding of sin used for purposes of social control have made it odious to the public; on the other hand, the colloquial and ironic use of the word "sin," used as an adjective to tempt persons towards harmless pleasures, has diluted the seriousness of the term. For example, we see tasty desserts being called "Chocolate Sin Cake" ice-creams and perfumes alike drawing on the terminology of the seven deadly sins. However, the solution to this problem should not be to discard the symbol entirely, for it speaks to and embraces the darker aspects of human existence. In the context of living with risk and danger, I argue that it makes sense to concretize the symbol of sin in relation to *the experience of guilt*.

The question of guilt and responsibility plays an important role in risk literature. As has been seen, the distinction between "risk" and "danger" centers on the attribution of harm either to the victim him- or herself, or to something external, respectively. The origin of harm is either internal to the victim or external. Clarifying the conditions under which such an attribution can legitimately take place has already been discussed (see Chapter 5.2).

How guilt comes to be attributed is significant because of the modern tendency to overburden human responsibility. This is done to such a degree that human beings give up on finding some proper and appropriate relation to guilt. This tendency has roots in Western Christianity. Johann Baptist Metz makes the argument that Augustinian Christianity has ascribed all sorts of harm to human beings. This exaggerated sense of guilt has resulted in an "extreme hamartiological overburdening of men and women."⁶⁸¹ As a counter-reaction, modern anthropologies have gone towards the other extreme, dismissing the theological anthropology of guilt altogether: "freedom withdrew itself ever more from any suspicion of guilt ... and the capacity for guilt counted less and less as the mark of freedom, as the

⁶⁸¹ Metz, "Suffering unto God," 618.

dignity of freedom itself.”⁶⁸² As a result, a proper language of guilt appears to be less relevant and has slowly deteriorated.

Unfortunately, this development in modernity goes hand in hand with an “all-risk” individualism (see Chapter 5.2) that places all guilt and responsibility on the individual person. Increased knowledge and more options for mitigating threats mean that dangers turn to into risks, and the responsibility for harm falls upon the person who suffers it. Frankfurt school sociologist Hartmut Rosa argues that modern society produces “people of guilt,” who are unable to relate to others in meaningful ways—what Rosa calls “resonance.” He writes:

Wir sind selbst ‘schuld’ daran, wenn wir zu dick werden, aufgrund mangelnder Schuldbildung keine Stelle kriegen, infolge ungenügender Vorsorge in Altersarmut geraten, unspornlich sind etc. Produziert eine Gesellschaft aber auf solche Weise systematisch ‘schuldige Subjekte’, ohne einen Ort oder eine Instanz oder eine Praxis des Verzeihen zu installieren, untergräbt sie damit ... möglicherweise systematisch ihre Resonanzfähigkeit. Vielleicht bedarf sie dann des individuellen und kollektiven *Burnouts*, um einen Neuanfang zu ermöglichen.⁶⁸³

Without a functioning language of guilt, the individual person gets overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. This situation is problematic because guilt, as Paul Leer-Salvesen has argued, is a basic constituent of ethical life. Such a collective burnout must be avoided. An exploration of the Christian symbol system can yield possible ways of addressing this sense of guilt.

The foundations of how the Christian symbol system might address this experience have been laid through Part III. To counter the general inability to deal appropriately with guilt, I argued in Chapter 5.2 that human beings not only construct risk relationships, for which they themselves are responsible; they also live with “relationships of danger,” to which they experience themselves as powerless. *Only* if the victim has knowledge about the harm and *substantive* options to avoid it does the harm constitute a risk, I argued. The creation theology considered in Chapters 8-9 followed through on that insight by painting a picture of the world of creation in which human beings are vulnerable and exposed to accidents: human beings experience harms that are *undeserved*. The consummation theology highlighted how human beings live in bondage to their proximate contexts (Chapter 10.3), and how the promise of consummation entails a transformation of those structures (Chapter 10.4).

This chapter examines more closely the phenomenology of guilt and its relation to the Christian symbol of sin (Chapter 11.1). It also considers the

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Rosa, *Resonanz*, 361–62.

Christian-theological response to sin: divine reconciliation understood as divine forgiveness (Chapter 11.2-3). The purpose is to regain a sense of the *Christian symbol system as pointing to God as an authority for forgiveness (Instanz des Verzeihens)*. This helps respond to Rosa's implicit call for a revival of, what might be called, the language of forgiveness.

1. Guilt and Sin

Guilt is a multifaceted phenomenon. In Chapter 5.2, I noted Leer-Salvesen's distinction between *guilt* as a state of affairs, and the *sense of guilt* that ideally should correspond to one's actual guilt. In other words, there is a difference between the act (or omission) that imputes one with guilt, on the one hand, and the actual sense of guilt a person feels after having committed a misdeed on the other hand. Unfortunately, these two do not always match. A person can feel guilty for something that he or she is not responsible for (the "neurotic" deviation). Likewise, a person can feel no guilt though having committed awful crimes (the "psychopathic" deviation).⁶⁸⁴ Taking risk into consideration, however, makes the attribution of guilt more intricate. Before discussing those intricacies, I explore aspects of the phenomenon of guilt. It is not possible here to venture to far into adjacent phenomena, like shame and envy, even though these phenomena are also connected to the concept of sin.⁶⁸⁵

Guilt and Responsibility

Guilt as a state of affairs is closely connected to *responsibility*.⁶⁸⁶ A good starting point for understanding responsibility is Niels Henrik Gregersen's

⁶⁸⁴ See Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 12–32. See also Løgstrup, *Norm og spontaneitet*, 81–91.

⁶⁸⁵ See Gregersen, "Skyldens og skammens triader." Recently, theologians have gained an interest in the phenomenon of shame, which addresses the person's *identity* where guilt addresses human *actions*. Stephen Pattison has argued that the Christian tradition has focused on guilt/forgiveness for too long, overlooking the ontological distortion of the human self, Pattison, *Shame*, 229–74. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the confines of this dissertation to delve too far into this problem. I refer to Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation" and to my own work on shame, Christoffersen, "Forsoning i fængsel."

⁶⁸⁶ To nuance this close connection, Arendt argues that one can be held responsible for things—and one can assume responsibility for things—that one has not done simply because one is a member of a given wrongdoing group (like a nationality or a family). Such responsibility does not incur guilt, she argues, for guilt is always personal: "In this sense, we are always held responsible for the sins of our fathers as we reap the rewards of their merits; but we are of course not guilty of their misdeeds, either morally or legally, nor can we ascribe their deeds to our own merits," Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 147–48.

description of responsibility as a triadic phenomenon. Responsibility involves a *person* who is responsible *to* someone *for* someone or something. In other words, an *agent* is responsible *to* a judicial authority *for* a certain area of concern, whether that area of concern is a person or a cause.⁶⁸⁷ A simple example could be where *one* is responsible *to* society *for* paying taxes.

The *connection* between the judicial authority and the area of concern is crucial. In parenting, one is responsible *for* a child in its concreteness, seeking to do what is right for the child for its own sake, not for the sake of the judicial authority. While the norms and laws of society serve as important guidelines for the responsibility of parenting, society is not primarily what one is responsible *to*.⁶⁸⁸ But the judicial authority, *to* which one is responsible, is not unrelated to the child itself. Hearing a child crying, Gregersen argues, one can apprehend the judicial authority at play. Using a metaphor from the Lutheran understanding of a sacrament, Gregersen argues:

[T]he field of our responsibility and the authority of justice to which those responsible are answerable are not unconnected. For the authority makes itself felt precisely *in, with and under* our encounter with whomever or whatever we have responsibility for.⁶⁸⁹

Such a connection between the judicial authority and the area of concern does not turn the other person into a sacramental medium of salvation, but it does warrant the connection between the area of concern and the judicial authority.

Conversely, the judicial authority and the particular area of concern to which one is responsible should be kept distinct. Parenting means being responsible for the wellbeing of the child. But the parent must sometimes do more than the child is capable of demanding (the defenseless child), and sometimes do less (the unreasonable child).⁶⁹⁰ Upholding a regime of domestic psychological terror where one subdues the child into silence does not exempt one from being responsible for it. Similarly, one has to handle a spoiled child with reference to a higher authority than the child itself. The difference between the area of concern and the judicial authority applies not only to children, but also to all the silenced victims of history

⁶⁸⁷ Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation," 107. Gregersen's observation derives from Løgstrup, "Verantwortung," col. 1255.

⁶⁸⁸ Løgstrup, *Etiske begreber og problemer*, 44.

⁶⁸⁹ Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation," 108, emphasis in original.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107–8.

and to all human systems of judgment that fail due to their limitations and sin (Chapters 10.2 and 6.5).

The connection between responsibility and guilt is this: if one has failed one's responsibility in the eyes of the authority, one has incurred guilt and is now "in guilt" as a state of affairs. Therefore, one might specify that guilt arises with what Wolfgang Huber has called "retrospective responsibility"⁶⁹¹. Retrospective responsibility is at stake when a violation of creaturely integrity *has* occurred and the question about who was culpable for that harm arises.

The Christian symbol system posits the triune God as being the final judicial authority. This also establishes a connection between guilt and sin. That sin and guilt are not simply the same is important. On the one hand, all human beings are sinners, and as such, a basic human solidarity in sin exists that should avoid a moralizing notion of sin (as if to say "You are a sinner, and I am not!"). On the other hand, as Gregersen observes, when one's discussion of sin becomes too general, this leads either "to an amorphous feeling of guilt, or to an intellectualization of guilt."⁶⁹² The phenomenology of guilt can help concretize what sin means.⁶⁹³

Short of the Kingdom wherein all will be made clear, human beings see their guilt and responsibility only dimly.⁶⁹⁴ It is phenomenologically sound to suggest, as Leer-Salvesen has done, that people can come to sense their guilt in both neurotic and psychopathic ways (Chapter 5.2). While the social space is often responsible for such distortions, one can use the help of others to clarify one's status of guilt and for correcting one's sense of guilt. Leer-Salvesen highlights the importance of having ethical conversations where a conversation partner can help another discern what he or she is guilty of.⁶⁹⁵ However, the risk society indicative of reflexive modernity makes the task of clarifying one's relationships of guilt much more intricate. Leer-Salvesen's empirical material consists of male murderers, men with violent fathers, and female sex abuse victims. All these types of harm are very direct. There is a clear causal connection between wrong and wrongdoer and little dispute about the ethical judgment

⁶⁹¹ Huber, "After Fukushima," 1 in distinction from prospective responsibility. This distinction meets some of Leer-Salvesen's critique of excessively close connection between guilt and responsibility, Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 38–39.

⁶⁹² Gregersen, "Guilt, Shame, and the Face of God," 148.

⁶⁹³ Similarly, the bondage to social structures constitutes sin, see Chapter 10.2.

⁶⁹⁴ 1 Cor 13:12.

⁶⁹⁵ See the end of every chapter in Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*.

about such acts.⁶⁹⁶ Risk, in contrast, is about *possible* harm to other persons. Therefore, risk makes it more difficult to attribute guilt.

Legitimate Attribution of Responsibility

The connection between guilt and responsibility, and the idea that people are responsible to an authority, should be borne in mind as I venture into a discussion of the idea of risk. The difficult part lies in establishing the criteria for legitimate attribution of responsibility, and therefore of risk. As a starting point, I suggest that legitimate attribution of responsibility includes the following aspects:⁶⁹⁷

- that a *wrong* has occurred (wrongdoing),
- that the agent, to which the responsibility should be attributed, *caused* that wrong, or, as a bystander failed to prevent the wrong (causality),
- that the attribution of responsibility corresponds to the agent's degree of *capacity* for moral action. The latter arguably includes the three following aspects at least:
 - The agent has *knowledge* about the outcome and its potential negative impacts.
 - The agent has other *options* to choose from - or at least is not compelled to take the action.
 - The agent meets the basic *conditions for accountability*, that is, is grown up, mentally healthy, and in full consciousness at the moment of his or her action.

However, the concern with risk muddles the clarity of these conditions. Let me discuss the implications of risk for this description of responsibility.⁶⁹⁸

Concerning the requirement that the guilty agent has *done wrong*, it should be noted that a materialized *risk* is harder to evaluate than more direct harm. If a person recklessly exposes others to possible harm, and the harm then materializes, then the case is almost as clear as a case of direct harm (this is termed “negligence”).⁶⁹⁹ But such a clear correlation between risky action and effect is not always possible. People typically run risks not because they want to harm others but because they want to pursue a certain

⁶⁹⁶ In the terms of the relational theory of risk, the *narrative* bringing together the risk object and the object at risk is often clear, and the judgment of what is the object at risk—the *value* at stake—is more often beyond dispute.

⁶⁹⁷ These aspects are inspired by Van de Poel and Nihlén Fahlquist, “Risk and Responsibility,” 884.

⁶⁹⁸ Concerning c2 and c3, I have nothing to add with respect to risk.

⁶⁹⁹ Van de Poel and Nihlén Fahlquist, “Risk and Responsibility,” 885.

goal. Taking actions that are risky for others points to the problem of “moral luck.”⁷⁰⁰ If circumstances make up the difference between doing wrong and avoiding it, what is the relationship to guilt? If one is inattentive while driving of car but manages to hit the brakes just before one runs down a biker, one can experience a sense of vertigo, as if to say: “That was close!” This experience reveals the spatial quality of guilt: guilt constitutes a chasm that one can fall into, a chasm so deep that one cannot climb up by one’s own powers. The vertigo-experience is one of standing so close to the border of the chasm of guilt that only a strong headwind has kept one from falling in.

Concerning the demand that the guilty party be understood as the one who has *caused* the harm, it should be noted that situations of risk, understood as possible harm, can make it difficult to establish what causal networks were in play. Since running a risk means placing control over the outcome into a network to which different actors contribute, negotiating responsibility becomes an issue.⁷⁰¹ This is called “the problem of many hands.”⁷⁰² Complex structures with far-reaching consequences, like climate change, are phenomena where many actors contribute, but no single actor appears to be particularly responsible. This phenomenon—being more than a bystander, but less than a perpetrator—has prompted Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg to coin the term “implicated subjects,” defining such subjects as “beneficiaries of a system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of trauma and wellbeing simultaneously.”⁷⁰³ Not only are Westerners implicated subjects in climate change, in the sense of being beneficiaries from the industrialization that has caused it, they are also implicated subjects in the sense of sharing in the responsibility for generating the climate changes.

Concerning the requirement that the guilty should have *knowledge* of the potential danger, one should note (as argued in Chapter 5.2) that knowledge of a certain threat is intrinsic to having constructed a risk-relationship. In other words, when taking a risk, with eyes open, one is of course aware that there is some level of threat. Else one would not call it a risk after all. Moreover, I have argued that all the risk relationships a person has *not* constructed constitute relationships of *danger*, and one is no longer responsible in these instances. These statements require some qualification.

⁷⁰⁰ For a discussion of this concept, see Williams, “Moral Luck.”

⁷⁰¹ Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 128. Luhmann argues that the realm of causality increases towards infinity with the increase of distance in time.

⁷⁰² See Van de Poel and Nihlén Fahlquist, “Risk and Responsibility,” 897–900.

⁷⁰³ Rothberg, “Preface: Beyond Tancred and Clorinda,” xv. See also Welz, “Post-traumatic growth?,” 88.

First, there are some risk relationships that one arguably *should* construct, even if one fails to. Driving a car, one might be concerned with a risk relationship, say, on the back seat—that the older child (risk object) could be bullying the younger (object at risk)—with the result that one is unaware of the risk relationship between the force of the car (risk object) and a passing biker (object at risk). In that sense, human beings are, to a degree, responsible for the risk relationships they construct and act to mitigate; and one is responsible for one's neglect.⁷⁰⁴

Second, people may get wiser as they go along life, and may revise their previous assessments of taking risks in their life, coming to new conclusions about the assessment of different risks. A risk that seemed worthwhile when younger (riding a motorcycle), might come to be seen as dangerous and foolish as one grows up—especially if one has lost some friends to awful crashes. Risk assessments, therefore, change as one goes through life. Or, take a case of moral luck. Though a drunk driver has never caused a car-accident, he or she comes to learn about the risks of driving drunk. This may lead him or her to judge his or her earlier lack of knowledge and its consequent actions as blameworthy. Such a case would give an agent the possibility of taking renewed responsibility for the situation, and altering his or her behavior accordingly (say, taking a taxi from then on).⁷⁰⁵ Conversely, in cases of “moral bad luck,” where harm has indeed occurred, hindsight may result in a reevaluation of one's actions. Even though one has lived in an environment that has treated drunk driving lightly (and therefore neglected that risk relationship), the drunk driver responsible for a traffic accident might come to blame him- or herself for not taking the risk more seriously.

Third, the construction of risk relationships, which I placed as a requirement for being guilty, not only depends on one's level of information but also on one's value system. One's values motivate one to sustain certain risk relationships and ignore others. Human beings form their values in an intense relationship with the culture and institutions in which they participate. The traditional example of this is Hannah Arendt's notion of the “banality of evil,” which she develops as a reporter to the 1961 Jerusalem trial of Nazi logistics manager Adolf Eichmann. While Eichmann arranged the murders of countless Jews, his primary concern was only with the right scheduling of trains, being promoted, and being a law-abiding citizen. He actually showed very little interest in the dignity of his fellow human beings that he so radically violated. Unlike Hitler, Eichmann did not set out to destroy Jews because he hated them; rather, their

⁷⁰⁴ For a similar point, see Luhmann, *Soziologie des Risikos*, 36.

⁷⁰⁵ Van de Poel and Nihlén Fahlquist, “Risk and Responsibility,” 901.

destruction was simply a by-product of his own attempts to ascend through the Nazi ranks. Though Eichmann arranged the trains going to and from the death camps, he did not seem to give the victims of those camps any thought at all; he displayed neither malice nor any kind of regard for them. Arendt writes:

He merely, to put it colloquially, never realized what he was doing ... It was sheer thoughtlessness—something by no means identical with stupidity—that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.⁷⁰⁶

While not establishing the right risk relationships is the explanation for his actions, Arendt also emphasizes that such a lack of knowledge does not remove Eichmann's responsibility. Indeed, Arendt argues that holding him responsible is what turns Eichmann into a human being, rather than simply a "cog in the machinery."⁷⁰⁷

These qualifications of the ascription of responsibility and guilt nuance the connection between risk and responsibility. Knowing whether one is responsible for, and therefore guilty of, harm that constitutes a manifested risk is complicated. Therefore, I would argue, the criteria in the bullet list above be understood more like *guidelines* for reasonable ethical conversations with oneself and with others rather than strict rules for establishing guilt.

Nonetheless, I still maintain that human beings incur guilt through their actions because human beings are responsible *to* the authority of God *for* the ways in which they orient themselves in the world. Guilt binds human beings to each other and to their pasts. In response, forgiveness loosens that binding to one's past, leading to a new life of reconciliation.

2. Divine Forgiveness

In light of the Christian symbol system, guilt and forgiveness belong together.⁷⁰⁸ Christianity insists on human guilt just as it speaks of the forgiveness of that guilt. Philosopher of religion Nicholas Wolterstorff has offered important contributions to clarifying the nature of forgiveness, what it entails, and what the Christian symbol system might mean by it.

A Phenomenology and Social Theory of Forgiveness

Forgiveness means relinquishing the right to resentment and retributive punishment, a right that the victim of a wrongdoing has acquired through

⁷⁰⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 287–88, emphasis in original.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁷⁰⁸ Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 60.

being wronged. This is Wolterstorff's main hypothesis and its significance here should be explored.

Forgiveness logically presupposes that a person has been wronged. If a husband were to say "I forgive you" to his spouse, and the spouse did not remember doing anything wrong, then the statement of forgiveness would probably be perceived as being highly misplaced—or as some sort of joke. The spouse might well ask what the husband thought her guilty of. Also, forgiveness is only pertinent to the wrongful act itself, and to the people involved in that act: "I can forgive you only if you have wronged me, and only for the wrong you have done me."⁷⁰⁹

Declaring forgiveness does not mean declaring that one has forgotten about the wrong that was done. Therefore, the amnesia of post WWII-Germany in the 1960s made it perfectly reasonable to insist on the resentment as Holocaust survivor Jean Améry did. As Arne Grøn expresses it, "Facing the will to be ignorant, to carry on living as if nothing had happened, the will to remember what has happened must, it seems, take the form of resentment."⁷¹⁰ Amnesty is not amnesia, as Desmond Tutu points out.⁷¹¹

Nor is amnesty an apology. Forgiveness implies a condemnation of a specific wrongful act. It entails a judgment, one that does not acquit, but which convicts the wrongdoer for the wrongful act. Forgiveness neither forgets nor condones the wrong done.

After this clarification of the concept of forgiveness, I turn to explore Wolterstorff's suggestions of its performativity. To explain this, Wolterstorff draws upon what he calls "victim rights." As a victim of wrongdoing, one acquires the right to an appropriate retributive punishment and the right to anger, or, more accurately, to resentment.⁷¹² The right to some form of retributive punishment is the right to have things made even. "Someone has imposed an evil on me; this calls for things to be evened up between us by the imposition of a comparable evil on him."⁷¹³ It is not a right to vengeance, which can easily result in a circle of violence, but merely to retribution. In a community founded on the rule of law, of course, enacting this retributive justice is a matter for the state, who has a monopoly on enacting legitimate violence.

⁷⁰⁹ Wolterstorff, "Does Forgiveness Undermine Justice?," 221.

⁷¹⁰ Grøn, "The Limit of Ethics," 50.

⁷¹¹ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 28.

⁷¹² Wolterstorff, "Does Forgiveness Undermine Justice?," 222. While Wolterstorff does not consider the grounding particularly of victim rights, I would argue that they belong to the dignity of the human person, see Chapter 8.2B.

⁷¹³ Wolterstorff, "Jesus and Forgiveness," 204.

The right to resentment is also a right to be emotionally engaged in one's moral judgment. Just like a true sense of guilt constitutes the appropriate response to guilt, resentment constitutes an appropriate response to having been wronged.⁷¹⁴ Resentment condemns the act as wrong and therefore plays a significant role in ethical orientation, for it maintains that human beings live in a moral universe. Resentment is the emotional correlative to negative moral judgment. In his empirical studies of victims of parental violence and sexual abuse, Leer-Salvesen found that resentment allows the victim to regain a sense of subjectivity after having been made into a passive object of wrongdoing:

Violence and abuse humiliate and belittle. Afterwards the victims fight to get back on their feet again, they struggle to stand upright and regain their dignity. Moral anger, the victim's own anger and that of those who support and comfort them, is of great importance in this process.⁷¹⁵

An ability to feel anger is a part of the victim's resilience that allows him or her to regain a foothold in life.⁷¹⁶

Forgiveness, then, Wolterstorff argues, is a way of handling one's victim rights. Forgiveness means forgoing these rights, declaring oneself ready to stop being resentful at the person, and it involves abnegating one's right to punishment.⁷¹⁷ It is important to bear in mind that the rights to resentment and retribution are rights that the victim acquires; *they are not duties*.⁷¹⁸ Victims are also in their right to forgo those acquired rights. If the victim chooses to do so, society—through the courts—may still want to punish the wrongdoer, for the sake of deterring other potential wrongdoers, reforming the wrongdoer, or protecting society from the wrongdoer in the hope that the wrongdoer reforms.⁷¹⁹ Yet, forgiveness involves forgoing one's personal right to retribution and resentment directed at the wrongdoer.

While Wolterstorff suggests that forgiveness entails forgoing resentment altogether, I argue that the victim only forgoes resentment at the *person*, thus seeing forgiveness as an act of separating the person from the deed. In Wolterstorff, forgiveness means forgoing resentment while maintaining the

⁷¹⁴ In a similar way as guilt can be distorted into neurotic or psychotic forms, I would argue that resentment can also be distorted into hatred or complacency.

⁷¹⁵ Leer-Salvesen, "Reconciliation without Violence," 167.

⁷¹⁶ For the view that self-respect does not require resentment, see Fiddes, "Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness," 63 with reference to Martha Nussbaum.

⁷¹⁷ Wolterstorff, "Jesus and Forgiveness," 203.

⁷¹⁸ Anselm thought that resentment and punishment are duties, Wolterstorff, "Does Forgiveness Undermine Justice?," 224.

⁷¹⁹ Wolterstorff, "Jesus and Forgiveness," 206–7.

moral judgment that the person had done wrong: “Forgiveness is the relinquishing of that feeling—not the relinquishing of the moral judgment that he has wronged one, but the relinquishing of one’s anger at him for having done so.”⁷²⁰ I see a much closer connection between the emotional engagement in resentment and the moral judgment.⁷²¹ Indeed, I would argue that forgiveness requires relinquishing one’s resentment and moral judgment of the *person*, while maintaining resentment and moral judgment of the *deed*, no longer then counting this deed against the wrongdoer’s moral history. Wolterstorff has argued similarly elsewhere.⁷²² Forgiveness consists in distinguishing between person and deed, then no longer attributing the deed to the person. In this way, forgiveness and resentment are not alternatives in the same way as forgiveness and retributive punishment are.

Since anger and retribution are rights of the victim, forgoing forgiveness relies on the victim only. A wrongdoer cannot do anything to earn the right to receive forgiveness. Forgiveness remains an act of grace.⁷²³

Guilt and Forgiveness in Christian Doctrines of Atonement

None of the traditional theories of atonement—the moral influence model, the *Christus Victor*-model, nor the more forensic models of vicarious satisfaction or penal substitution—address the problem of guilt in light of these reflections on forgiveness.⁷²⁴ They all deal with the *consequences* of wrongdoing, with the place people allegedly end up if they sin, namely in some sort of misery or hell. This is the argument of exegete Gerd Theissen:

Die drei klassischen Versöhnungslehren haben eine Grenze: Christus übernimmt in ihnen weniger die Schuld des Menschen, sondern überwindet das Unheil, das er durch seine Schuld verursacht hat, die Abhängigkeit vom Teufel, die Beschädigung der Ehre Gottes oder die subjektive Angst vor Gottes Zorn.⁷²⁵

Consider briefly the two most forensically-oriented theories, the vicarious satisfaction and the penal substitution models. Anselm of

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 203.

⁷²¹ E.g. Murphy, *Getting Even*, 19 and Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue*, 4 with reference to the work of Jean Améry.

⁷²² Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 171. See also Kelsey’s consideration of righteous anger, EE 521-22

⁷²³ Wolterstorff, “Jesus and Forgiveness,” 207.

⁷²⁴ For the seminal typology of models of atonement, Aulén, *Den kristna försoningstanken*. For a refreshing take on the traditional models in light of feminist and womanist worries, Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 248–49, and for a Nordic reception of Tanner, see Henriksen, *Desire, Gift, and Recognition*, 278–88.

⁷²⁵ Theissen, “Gestorben für uns,” 94. I consider most of these aspects in Chapter 10.

Canterbury presents the bifurcation elegantly: on account of sin, God has to have human beings endure either passive punishment or active satisfaction to uphold an orderly universe.⁷²⁶ Anselm sees the incarnate Son as doing the satisfaction, repaying with the crucifixion the divine loss of honor that God has suffered on account of human sin.⁷²⁷ With Miroslav Volf, we find the “penal substitution” view, in which God chose that Christ should take away human sin and guilt by suffering the “just retribution” that human beings should have suffered.⁷²⁸

However, neither of these two options really amount to divine forgiveness. God does not forgive humans in either. Jesus makes amends or takes their punishment. Rather than conveying forgiveness, the divine Son worked the satisfaction or suffered the retributive punishment.

For Karen Baker-Fletcher, this stands in contrast with the biblical witness: “The problem with the Anselmian doctrine is that biblically, it seems that God in Christ forgives sin rather than pays the debt of sin.”⁷²⁹ To defend this statement, Baker-Fletcher references Jesus’ words on the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”⁷³⁰ She also references the fifth prayer of the Lord’s prayer, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” which she interprets as claiming that the incarnate divine Son “forgives our great debt, just as Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for this same forgiveness.”⁷³¹ I would admit the New Testament a larger range of interpretability on this issue than Baker-Fletcher seems to acknowledge.⁷³² However, I will follow her lead and develop these and other biblical resources that warrant taking the Christian symbol of divine forgiveness as the decisive forensic metaphor. I return to the relationship between the forgiveness of the victim and divine forgiveness in the next section.

Incarnation as Divine Forgiveness

The incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ enacts the divine forgiveness of sins towards human beings. As Leer-Salvesen puts it: “The

⁷²⁶ Anselm von Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, 43/I:12.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 97/II:6.

⁷²⁸ Volf, *The End of Memory*, 117. See also Volf, *Free of Charge*, 114.

⁷²⁹ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 139.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 188, fn. 50. At other places, however, Baker-Fletcher appears to opt for an entirely transformational understanding of the term “forgiveness” leaving behind the forensic aspects: “forgiveness is a desire for healing and justice in a broken world. Forgiveness does not accept evil but demands transformation,” *ibid.*, 113. I wish to maintain the forensic understanding, contrasting it with retribution.

⁷³¹ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 139.

⁷³² See e.g. Rom 3:21-26, Mk 10:45, Mt 26:28.

divine forgiveness is a sovereign act of love, which does not put up any conditions beforehand.”⁷³³ Divine forgiveness is an unconditional and sovereign act of divine love. While human beings as perpetrators are still hostile towards God, the divine Son ventures into the world to enact forgiveness.⁷³⁴ The purpose of this divine initiative of forgiveness, then, is to spark a response in the wrongdoer, to instigate the human self-realization that they may have wronged God.⁷³⁵

When Jesus begins his missionary activities, he forgives sinners simply on his own authority. The synoptic Gospels give an account of how Jesus healed and forgave a paralyzed person in Capernaum whom his friends had brought to Jesus through the roof:

When Jesus saw their [the friends’] faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ ... Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’⁷³⁶

Jesus forgave the paralytic on his own authority. Besides Jesus’ own authority, some theologians have claimed that the faith or repentance of the sinner is a requirement for divine forgiveness. Yet, when this description speaks of the faith—or faithfulness, as *πίστις*—this might also refer to the faith of the *friends* as the occasion of Jesus’ forgiveness. This would undermine that assumption that personal faith is requisite for having one’s sins forgiven. Jesus then has authority all of his own to forgive sins with no other condition being required. In another account, Luke conveys how Jesus forgives a woman who is a sinner—probably a prostitute—after she has anointed him with oil:

‘Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ Then he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’⁷³⁷

To Raymund Schwager, such accounts suggest that the incarnate Son, Jesus of Nazareth, offers forgiveness to sinners simply out of mercy. He writes:

⁷³³ Leer-Salvesen, *Tilgivelse*, 171, my translation, see appendix.

⁷³⁴ Fiddes, “Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness,” 57.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷³⁶ Mk 2:5.9-11, with parallels. With reference to this and other biblical texts, Gerd Theissen concludes: “Hier predigt Jesus Sündenvergebung durch Gott unabhängig vom Kreuz,” Theissen, “Gestorben für uns,” 88. See also Wolterstorff, “Does Forgiveness Undermine Justice?,” 219.

⁷³⁷ Lk 7:47-48. See also Jn 8:11 and Lk 19:9-10.

This divine action, which began in the ministry of Jesus, is meant to reveal who Israel's God really is: namely, a God who does not require human sacrifice or an antecedent act of reconciliation in order to be merciful. This God, whom Jesus addresses in most personal fashion as "Abba," turns to sinners out of his own initiative, graciously offering them his forgiveness (the divine love of enemies).⁷³⁸

Exegete Klaus Berger also claims that the only condition of divine forgiveness is Jesus' authority.⁷³⁹ Jesus has this authority from God.⁷⁴⁰ That Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins is what brings him into trouble with the religious elites.⁷⁴¹ Berger observes that Jesus even delegates this authority to the disciples—according to John—as they go out and preach the forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit. Berger writes: "Ohne Zweifel bedeutet das: Sündenvergebung gehört zur Botschaft und zum Auftreten Jesu."⁷⁴² In sum, divine forgiveness depends on the divine authority to forgive.

As argued in Chapter 10.3, the cross is primarily a prophetic revelation of human sin and bondage to the powers in their distorted forms. This theology of the cross needs to be redescribed in light of the forensic language of reconciliation. The cross constitutes a risk of the incarnation, not only for the divine Son suffering death and the Father suffering the divine Son's death, but, in light of this social phenomenology of forgiveness, it presents a risk for the world of creatures too. When the world fatally rejected the incarnate Son, God earned the right to resentment and retribution. On account of such a betrayal of trust, a just and destructive punishment would be within God's rights. The synoptic parable of the wicked tenants indicates this right. After the tenants have killed the vineyard owner's son, Mark has Jesus say: "He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others."⁷⁴³

⁷³⁸ Schwager, "Christology," 349.

⁷³⁹ Berger, "Das Kreuz," 89. For a similar view, see Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 237..

⁷⁴⁰ Jn 5:19-30. That John the Baptist also preaches the forgiveness of sins, Mk 1:4, does not change the radical newness of the very incarnate Son preaching it. John the Baptist was beheaded, Mk 6:17-29, so perhaps he was one of the messengers that the evil tenants rejected, Mk 12:2-5?

⁷⁴¹ Mk 2:7.

⁷⁴² Berger, "Das Kreuz," 89.

⁷⁴³ Mk 12:9, see also Mt 21:41 and Lk 20:16. If these passages have specific reference to God's history with the Jewish people, such an interpretation has to be avoided; it functions only if one can read them with a sense of universal responsibility in mind, see Chapter 10.2.

However, hanging on the cross, Jesus prays according to Luke: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”⁷⁴⁴ Knowing that he will die, the Son prays that the Father would remain in concordance with the divine nature as love,⁷⁴⁵ which the Son was sent to reveal and enact in the creaturely world, that the Father would continue on the reconciliatory path of forgiveness and refrain from whatever retribution would have been legitimate due to human sin.

In the Lukan and Johannine descriptions, the resurrected Christ himself greets the disciples with the words: “Peace be with you.”⁷⁴⁶ Similarly, the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew have a person—Trinitarian theology could interpret this person as the divine Spirit—proclaim to the first women witnesses at the grave: “Do not be afraid!”⁷⁴⁷ From this resurrection message of peace, the conclusion suggests itself that the Father hears the Son’s prayer of forgiveness on the cross, thus remaining faithful to the divine character as forgiving love, even when human beings have crucified the divine Son.

According to Schwager, the resurrection message of peace and forgiveness stands higher than the pre-Easter message of gracious forgiveness. Such forgiveness encompasses the world that rejected it in the first place:

Das richterliche Urteil von Ostern war folglich nicht bloß eine nachträgliche Bestätigung der Botschaft Jesu, es enthielt auch ein ganz neues Element, nämlich die Verzeihung für jene, die selbst das Angebot des reinen Verzeihens abgelehnt und den Sohn verworfen haben. Durch die Friedensbotschaft von Ostern erfolgte eine Verdoppelung jener Verzeihensbereitschaft, wie sie in der Basileia-Botschaft zur Sprache gekommen war, ein Vergeben für die erste Nichtannahme des Vergebens.⁷⁴⁸

The resurrection does not merely confirm that Jesus was right in his claim to divine authority as the divine Son, and that human beings should have received this forgiveness in conversion and penitence. For, had the

⁷⁴⁴ Lk 23:34. Schwager, *Jesus im Heildrama*, 137 points out that this prayer could be a reference to the Targum Isaiah 53:4, which has the “suffering servant” perform an intercessory prayer concerning human sins, Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 104. In contrast, the Old Testament Isaiah sees the suffering servant bring away human misery by somehow “carrying” it. In Isa 53:12, the Hebrew bible entails the direct idea that the suffering servant “bears the sins of many, because he poured out himself to death. Also here, the Targum stays with the topic of intercession for sin, *ibid.*, 105. In sum, Luke may be drawing upon a different tradition than Matthew concerning the theology of the cross.

⁷⁴⁵ 1 Jn 4:8b.

⁷⁴⁶ Lk 24:36 and Jn 20:19.

⁷⁴⁷ Mt 28:5. Mk 16:6 reads “Do not be afraid” In Mark, the person is a young man, in Matthew an angel.

⁷⁴⁸ Schwager, *Jesus im Heildrama*, 174. See also Welker, *Gottes Geist*, 240.

resurrection only verified this claim, the conflict between the Son and human beings would have been eternalized. No, in resurrecting the Son, the Father and the Spirit react in continued faithfulness to their yearning for community with humans in the Kingdom of God. The resurrection means that the triune God, now in a pattern centering on the Spirit, creates anew. The events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ confirm what was apparent from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, namely that divine forgiveness is unconditional.

3. Discussing Objections and Providing Nuances

In the previous section, I presented a reading of the incarnation as an enactment of divine forgiveness. This section discusses a series of objections to the theology of divine forgiveness there presented.

A. Repentance as Reception rather than Condition of Forgiveness

Some theologians argue that repentance is a condition for divine forgiveness.⁷⁴⁹ God can only forgive if human beings repent. Jeff Pool sees repentance as a condition—indeed the only condition—upon which divine forgiveness depends. For him, Jesus' ministry was “a ministry that declared in word and deed divine forgiveness for human sin on the condition of human repentance alone, a ministry operating with a logic of surplus, excess, or super-abundance.”⁷⁵⁰ Pool highlights that divine forgiveness already occurs in the life and ministry of Jesus before the crucifixion. Yet, for him, human repentance is still a condition for divine forgiveness.

Such an interpretation is grounded in a different interpretation of the Lukan parable of the prodigal son and his brother. What motivated the son to return to his father, I would suggest, was above all his dire material needs—he is hungry. His feelings of repentance are secondary, if they are sincere at all.⁷⁵¹ Yet, the father, knowing nothing of the son's feelings,

⁷⁴⁹ See e.g. Brümmer, “Atonement and Reconciliation,” 448–49. In Chapter 5.2, I used Leer-Salvesen's phrase, “a true sense of guilt” (*sann skyldfølelse*), to describe the emotional quality of repentance, see Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 35. His argument for preferring this concept over “repentance” is that, while a true sense of guilt clearly directs the wrongdoer towards the harm done to the other person, repentance can also point the human person back to oneself. He refers to a drug smuggler claiming: “First of all, I repent being so stupid that I was caught,” *ibid.*, 76. I find that most authors use repentance as entailing a direction towards to other person.

⁷⁵⁰ Pool, *God's Wounds II*, 323.

⁷⁵¹ It is not even clear whether the prodigal son's repentance is heartfelt or merely instrumental to his degraded ordeal. Placing an emphasis on the word “say” in the following sentence clearly changes its meaning from the traditional understanding that the prodigal son repents: “I will get up and go to my father, and I will *say* to him,

discovers him in the distance and runs to him, embracing him and kissing him before the son has any chance of revealing his mind.⁷⁵² This shows that human repentance is not a condition. The father had already forgiven the son. Another parable from Luke brings the point home. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd, leaving his place of safety, travels into the wilderness to search for the one sheep that has been lost. Rather than the shepherd waiting to see the sheep return, the shepherd goes out to find the sheep and carries it home, rejoicing with his friends and neighbors.⁷⁵³ Finally, Kathryn Tanner has pointed out that Jesus on the cross—again according to Luke—does not wait for human beings to become penitent before asking his Father to forgive them: “From the cross, without waiting for their repentance, Jesus asks the Father to forgive his tormentors and executioners.”⁷⁵⁴

So, I would argue that repentance is not a condition of divine forgiveness; but repentance might still be required for the proper *reception* of forgiveness.⁷⁵⁵ A proper sense of guilt is the right way of owning divine forgiveness. Paul encourages the Corinthian community to reconcile themselves to God: “We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”⁷⁵⁶

‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’” Similarly most of the people that Jesus forgives are sick and believe that Jesus can heal them; they are not necessarily repentant of their sins.

⁷⁵² Lk 15:11-32. Arne Grøn and Thomas Brudholm warn against the use of this parable for forgiveness after mass atrocities, see Brudholm and Grøn, “Picturing Forgiveness after Atrocity,” 162. They point to significant *dissimilarities* between that parable and the interactions of blacks and whites in South Africa: 1) The mere loss of money and honor at the son’s moving away does not compare to the dehumanization of torture and massacre; 2) While the older brother jealously resented the celebration, black survivors legitimately resented the restoration of atrocious perpetrators into the top tiers of society; 3) The son is a son, so there is a positive relationship to restore, which is not often the case between perpetrators and victims of mass atrocity. Even though Brudholm and Grøn are right in making those distinctions concerning interhuman forgiveness, the death and resurrection of Jesus shows that the divine Father forgives human beings regardless of human torture, regardless of differences in wrongdoing between human beings, and regardless of how far away human beings have moved from their created relationship to God.

⁷⁵³ Lk 15:4-6. Luke’s own conclusion to this parable—that there will be rejoicing for “one sinner who repents,” 15:7—looks odd: the parable relays nothing about the lost sheep being repentant—carrying a sheepish grin, if you will—because it got lost.

⁷⁵⁴ Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 270.

⁷⁵⁵ So I have argued in the article, Christoffersen, “Forsoning i fængsel.”

⁷⁵⁶ 2 Cor 5:20. As Pannenberg notes, the human being has to enter into divine reconciliation, Pannenberg, *ST II*, 460.

Wolterstorff contemplates what it might mean to receive divine forgiveness. Recall that forgiveness means distinguishing the wrongdoer (whom one accepts), from the deed (which one still condemns). If so, forgiveness is properly received, when the wrongdoer him- or herself shows signs of having made that distinction. Repentance functions as such a sign. Wolterstorff writes:

This is the significance of Jesus's references to repentance. The person who repents of what he did has dissociated himself from the one who performed that misdeed, put a space between them. Hence it is possible for me not to hold it against him even though I do not dismiss bygones as bygones.⁷⁵⁷

However, even when human beings resist the divine offer of forgiveness, God does not take it back. God patiently awaits their reception of forgiveness, until finally, at some point, at the last judgment, God makes them see with clarity and thereby transforms them towards repentance. Moreover, I would argue that the appropriate reception of divine forgiveness does *not* warrant any sort of demarcation between Christians who receive it properly and non-Christians who do not. Repentance is the proper way of *receiving* forgiveness, but the divine forgiveness is given even if sinners do not repent.

B. The Cross as Sermon rather than Condition of Forgiveness

Divine forgiveness is not even conditional upon the suffering of Jesus on the cross, as argued in Chapter 11.2. This idea is in line with the thinking of Pool, who argues that “the divine goal of reconciliation did not require a death by victimization for its attainment.”⁷⁵⁸ Rather, the message of Jesus relied on his divine authority. Considering the emphasis I have made on the human contribution to the cross of Christ, I would agree with Edward Schillebeeckx, who claims: “we have to say that we are not redeemed *thanks to* the death of Jesus but *despite* it.”⁷⁵⁹

However, the resurrection casts a new light on the crucifixion. Recall that I rejected the idea of new creation as consisting in merely understanding the existence of suffering as a vehicle for good (redeemable evil), in favor of creating anew from an experience of irredeemable evil (see Chapter 10.1). In light of this understanding of the divine consummation, I would argue that the crucifixion of the Son becomes an occasion for God to

⁷⁵⁷ Wolterstorff, “Jesus and Forgiveness,” 205. See also Goffman, *Relations in Public*, 113.

⁷⁵⁸ Pool, *God's Wounds II*, 290.

⁷⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 722, emphasis in original.

declare the divine willingness to forgive. Klaus Berger suggests that the cross becomes a “sermon” about the divine forgiveness of sins:

Also: Gott hatte den Tod Jesu am Kreuz nicht wirklich nötig. Und: Zur Vergebung unserer Sünden mußte Jesus nicht am Kreuz sterben, ‘mußte’ aufgefaßt im Sinne sachlicher oder heilsgeschichtlicher Notwendigkeit. Aber: Gott läßt den Gekreuzigten Christus zu einer Predigt werden darüber, daß er, Gott, nun (seit er Jesus in die Welt gesandt hat) wirklich bereit ist, die Sünden aller zu vergeben.⁷⁶⁰

In that sense, the cross comes to entail something entirely different to what humanity thought it would.⁷⁶¹ Aside from the resurrection, the humanity that brought Jesus to the cross considered it another successful execution of an instigator of various riots that threatened social institutions that they wanted to protect. Yet, in light of the resurrection, the cross comes to mean so much more.

The cross becomes the prophetic revelation of human sin. Humans refuse the forgiveness that God offers to them on the basis of God’s divine yearning for continued fellowship with humans. That refusal constitutes sin. As Pool notes, “those for whom God-become-human has created a new possibility have refused it, have actually perceived it as threat rather than as promise and, hence, have killed Jesus of Nazareth in order to eliminate this threat.”⁷⁶² Jesus’ crucifixion is a meaningless victimization of Jesus, a genuine evil that cannot be redeemed through its consequences.

The English language points to an important distinction in the Germanic word *Opfer*, which means both victim and sacrifice, as Brandt has

⁷⁶⁰ Berger, “Das Kreuz,” 88. I find this idea of harm as a potential sermon fascinating, yet also potentially problematic. On the one hand, hearing other harms as sermons, e.g. an earthquake as a sermon of human finitude, would not assume that God were the cause. If an earthquake can remind people of their fragility, such an effect derives not from causation, but from God creating new possibilities in the midst of harm. On the other hand, the problem with the idea of a morally silent earthquake as a sermon is that the earthquake might preach—and has often preached—the exact opposite, namely the exacerbation of human protection of oneself on behalf of others, see Chapter 9.1. Many differing “sermons” are possible from each event therefore.

⁷⁶¹ According to Theodor Jørgensen, the cross was not necessary for God to forgive human beings; but it was necessary for human beings. “The crucified Christ is the divine token of the credibility of the forgiveness of sins,” Jørgensen, “Dom og forsoning i nutidigt perspektiv,” 147, my translation, see appendix. However, said in isolation, such a requirement means that the crucifixion regains a divine necessity; it becomes something that the Son or the Father seeks out, which is problematic for reasons that I have already accounted for in Chapter 9.1. Instead, I would say that the resurrection could turn the crucifixion into a divine token of the credibility.

⁷⁶² Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 320.

noticed.⁷⁶³ Inspired by this ambiguous meaning, Welker explains that the cross expresses primarily the victimization of Jesus, secondarily his sacrifice:

Gott intendiert damit aber nicht die Viktimisierung Jesu durch die Menschen am Kreuz, doch er riskiert sie. Selbst angesichts der Viktimisierung Christi durch die Menschen am Kreuz bleibt Gott seinem in der Menschwerdung (und in der damit verbundenen Hingabe seines Lebens = *sacrifice*) bekundeten Willen zur Gemeinschaft mit den Menschen treu.⁷⁶⁴

As such, the cross becomes a powerful symbol of the essential Christian belief that the forgiveness of humans applies even to a humanity that refuses the divine offer of forgiveness. As previously discussed, this is the reality that the resurrection of Jesus established when Jesus said: “Peace be with you.” In other words, humans were “deceived” on the cross. Pool suggests as much, playing along with the “fish hook interpretation” of the salvation story in Gregory of Nyssa, replacing demons with humans themselves as the object of deception.⁷⁶⁵ By crucifying Jesus, humans thought they could eliminate God’s radical address to their sin. Yet the crucifixion only made the divine forgiveness clearer than ever. This human murder of God disclosed to the unfaithful yet beloved human, ever more deeply, powerfully, and permanently, the fullest and most authentic actualization of both divine and human life as love in Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁶⁶ On the cross, God maintains exactly the character that God had disclosed in Jesus’ life and ministries: unfailing, authentic, and forgiving love.⁷⁶⁷

C. Forgiveness entails Vulnerability rather than Suffering

This understanding of divine forgiveness does not neglect the intricate connection between forgiveness and suffering, it only avoids suggesting that the connection between forgiveness and suffering is a necessary one. On the one hand, giving up one’s legitimate right to punishment can certainly entail an experience of sacrifice.⁷⁶⁸ On the other hand, the

⁷⁶³ Brandt, “Hat es sachlich,” 247.

⁷⁶⁴ Welker, *Gottes Offenbarung*, 191-2.

⁷⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 40/XXIV.

⁷⁶⁶ Pool, *God’s Wounds II*, 229.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁷⁶⁸ For Sanders, forgiveness requires paying a price: “forgiveness comes with a price: the suffering of the one who has been sinned against. The injured party must suffer the pain, forgoing revenge, in order to pursue reconciliation of the broken relationship,” a suffering that Sanders then connects to the crucifixion, Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 106. While I agree with Sanders’ phenomenological approach, I would argue that forgiveness usually does not require the forgiver to be crucified. It appears that Sanders

prospect of righting a distorted relationship, under which one suffers, can also weigh much heavier than any thirst for revenge, making forgiveness appear as a gift also for the victim.

A different point is, however, that forgiving another person entails a heightened vulnerability to suffering. Volf offers the metaphor of forgiveness as an embrace: opening his or her arms as invitation to an embrace, the forgiver leaves his or her body vulnerable, risking repeated or renewed assaults. Volf argues that:

there is the *risk of embrace*. The risk follows both from nonsymmetry and systematic underdetermination. I open my arms, make a movement of the self towards the other, the enemy, and do not know whether I will be misunderstood, despised, even violated or whether my action will be appreciated, supported, and reciprocated.⁷⁶⁹

Sometimes the goal of this risk is vindicated. Sometimes, opening the arms really can touch the wrongdoer so that the wrongdoer actually repents and converts.⁷⁷⁰ Yet, in the decisive case of the incarnate Son, the offer of forgiveness had the most crucial cost, namely the Son's own life. As we saw in the previous chapter, humanity decides against his message, failing to repent, which would have been the appropriate way of receiving the message. Yet even on the cross, Jesus insists that forgiveness was his chosen way of dealing with matters of guilt, even with things as horrific as killing God the Son. On the cross, even as the world struggles to resist the dawn of the kingdom of God (*victimization*), Jesus Christ maintains the incarnational willingness to fellowship with humans (*sacrifice*).

D. Divine Legitimacy in Forgiving Sinners

An important objection to the idea of unconditional divine forgiveness is that it trivializes the suffering of the victims of history. Political theologian Dorothee Sölle is highly critical of the idea that God would forgive perpetrators behind the backs of victims:

Die Schwierigkeit ... ist ... die geschichtliche, nämlich die der sublimen Verachtung von Menschen, denen auch noch das minimal Recht, selber zu vergeben, was ihnen

has allowed the symbolic layer of the crucifixion event to overshadow the tragedy of the actual of the crucifixion. For a critique of such theology, see Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, 161.

⁷⁶⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 147, emphasis in original.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 142–43. Therefore forgiveness does not logically entail suffering, it merely entails vulnerability to suffering.

angetan wurde, genommen wird, wenn man sich auf die Vergebung 'von oben' beruft.⁷⁷¹

According to Wolterstorff, victims of wrongdoing earn the right to resentment and retribution, and forgiveness means waiving those rights. If God forgives human beings on behalf of victims, then God robs the victims of their rights. So, by what right can God forgive on behalf of victims?

Certainly, God can forgive human beings for the direct wrong they have committed towards God, "failing to live in tune with the loving purposes of God for life, and a rejection of the good that God offers."⁷⁷² And, God is capable of forgiving the indirect wrong of humans violating Christ (Chapter 10.3). However, this does not answer the question whether divine forgiveness nullifies the forgiveness of human victims. To address that question, I would suggest two answers to the question of the divine right to forgive, two answers that both involve the relationship between divine reconciliation and divine consummation.

One answer to the question of whether God can forgive legitimately would suggest that God earns the right to forgive, for God promises new life to those who have died. The consummation promises new life to those whose lives have been robbed. Løgstrup argues:

Only *God's* forgiveness of those who live at the expense of others avoids belittling the distress he has brought to others— because God raises up the distressed. The life of which the perpetrator cheated him God returns to him in eternity and, therefore, God and He alone can forgive the perpetrator.⁷⁷³

When the incarnate and resurrected Son forgives people, he does so expecting the imminence of the Kingdom of God. Jesus forgives on divine authority, namely the authority of the Father, to whom human beings stand responsible, and the Spirit who stands for consummating the world, transforming and recreating it so that the victims of history acquire new life in compensation for the life they have lost.⁷⁷⁴ The promise of new life to the victims of history does not entail making the misdeed undone. Even the Son was raised with the wounds of the crucifixion still present.⁷⁷⁵

Placing the divine right to forgive in the promise of a new creation, and therefore in the resurrection of Jesus, differs from the theology of Paul Fiddes, who argues that God has earned the right to forgive because Godself has been victimized:

⁷⁷¹ Sölle, *Politische Theologie*, 126.

⁷⁷² Fiddes, "Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness," 57.

⁷⁷³ Løgstrup, *Metaphysics, Vol. 1*, 288, emphasis added, see appendix.

⁷⁷⁴ See also Leer-Salvesen, *Reconciliation without violence*, 175.

⁷⁷⁵ Lk 20:24-29 and Jn 20:20.

Through empathetic entrance into human life in creation, incarnation and the death of Jesus we may say that God has won the right to forgive on behalf of the victim, and we can share in that forgiveness in the sense that we can declare [forgiveness to the offender].⁷⁷⁶

In embarking on a journey into the experience of victimized suffering through the incarnation, Fiddes argues, God earns the right to forgive human beings. However, I do not see why a victimized God earns the right to forgive human beings for other offenses than the ones committed against God.

Another approach to the question of the legitimacy of divine forgiveness could lie in exploring the social aspect of the symbol of final judgment, as Volf has done. Given that the divine consummation is universal, and given that human beings are what they are in relation to other people, all people will meet in the process of judgment, in the “eschatological transition” as Volf puts it, only, now on the conditions of truth and transformation.⁷⁷⁷ While human judgment short of the Kingdom functions under the predicament of diverging perspectives on matters of wrongdoing, the new creation will reveal the full truth about these diverging perspectives, thus providing other circumstances for evaluation.⁷⁷⁸ Similarly, the final transformation of the world entails that all people have been purified into their proper selves. They are identical with themselves and therefore still responsible for their actions, but the purification has created a discontinuity between perpetrators and their actions, a discontinuity necessary for receiving forgiveness.

On these terms, human beings will have to reconcile themselves to both friends and foes, to themselves as well, in the power of the Spirit, giving and receiving forgiveness for their deeds. As Volf writes, “Reconciliation will not have taken place until one has *moved toward one’s former enemies* and *embraced them* as belonging to the same communion of love.”⁷⁷⁹ Such reconciliation will liberate both victim and perpetrator from their being bound to the past atrocity. As Günter Thomas puts it: “Nicht nur der Täter muß von allem Unangemessenen befreit werden. Auch das Opfer muß von dem Lebensraub, von den Verwundungen, Kränkungen und Traumata

⁷⁷⁶ Fiddes, “Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness,” 65. See also Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 184–86.

⁷⁷⁷ Volf, “The Final Reconciliation,” 93. The problem with the phrase “meeting the loved ones” is not so much that human beings will only meet Christ in heaven, as P.G. Lindhardt had it in his infamous lecture on eternal life, Lindhardt, “Det evige liv,” 19–20. Rather, the problem is that human beings also meet their enemies!

⁷⁷⁸ Volf, “The Final Reconciliation,” 102. See also Pannenberg, *ST III*, 663.

⁷⁷⁹ Volf, “The Final Reconciliation,” 104, emphasis in original.

befreit werden.”⁷⁸⁰ That the promise of eschatological consummation entails this aspect means that human beings, for whom forgiveness may be impossible in the present (either because the perpetrator is absent or unrepentant), can still embark on a journey of forgiveness. The victim can imagine conditions where forgiveness will become possible, hoping that a “movement of love and justice is actually there,” a movement in which both victims and perpetrators participate.⁷⁸¹

4. Conclusion: Risk and Guilt

In this chapter, I have developed a view of the Christian symbol of divine reconciliation through forgiveness that is coherent with the idea that God runs a risk in the incarnation. This symbol of divine forgiveness can relieve human beings from the experience of guilt, or enable human beings to live with it. I have argued that such experience can arise also in situations of risk.

Concerning situations of risk, the Christian message of forgiveness can enable human beings to dare to take prospective responsibility for the benefit of overall society. Acts of taking responsibility in situations of risk appear to be in short supply. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Michael Powers points out that the management of “reputational risks” has gained immense importance alongside the management of material risks. The term “reputational risk” points out that company directors letting the company pay their personal parking fines endanger the company’s reputation more than its immediate finance. Therefore, organization theory has established the management of responsibility and guilt, the management of reputation, as a business affair to be kept at the level of strategic concern.⁷⁸² As a result, responsibility becomes something to be managed rather than something to be admitted or taken: managers become averse to responsibility.⁷⁸³ If the idea of reputation management spills over into the existential realm, the idea of an ethical stance to life disappears.

This is where the message of divine forgiveness comes into play. If the ultimate reality of human beings consists of divine forgiveness, then human beings may be able to take responsibility for risks, at the risk of incurring guilt, rather than avoiding them, if not organizationally, then at least existentially.

⁷⁸⁰ Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 474. Günter Thomas rightly criticizes Volf for placing his bets on amnesia, rather than the new creation, *ibid.*, 476–78.

⁷⁸¹ Fiddes, “Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness,” 65.

⁷⁸² Power, *The Risk Management of Everything*, 37–42.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

12. Concluding Perspectives: A Theology of Risk and Danger

This dissertation set out to investigate *what it means to live with risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system*. Risk and danger are about two different forms of exposure to harm. While “danger” is a harm to which human beings find themselves exposed, “risk” is a harm to which they expose themselves. If the harm is attributed externally, then it is a “danger,” if the harm is attributed internally, then it is a “risk.”

This distinction between risk and danger has been applied and developed in modern risk sociology from the 1980s onwards, especially in the work done by Niklas Luhmann. However, the core life experiences that this distinction deals with are universal, and can be found within the deepest roots of Christian tradition too. This tradition conveys accounts of taking risks and being exposed to danger. Matthew, for instance, conveys a picture of Jesus and the disciples in a way that contains aspects of both risk and danger.⁷⁸⁴ Crossing a lake to reach Gennesaret, the disciples suddenly find themselves dangerously exposed to threatening winds and waves.⁷⁸⁵ When Jesus arrives early in the morning, walking on the water towards them, Peter faithfully responds to this manifestation of Jesus’s divinity by walking towards him. He runs a risk, and makes himself vulnerable by moving beyond the relative safety of his boat. However, Peter discovers his own vulnerability—fear of the waters overpowers him, and he begins to sink. He reaches out to Jesus who rescues him, chastising him for his lack of faith.

This account not only conveys a life with risk and danger, it also highlights how vulnerability, fear, and trust are deeply intertwined with such a life. While the particular weight of the threats of risk and danger one faces depend on the nature of one’s proximate contexts, this account demonstrates that living with risk and danger belongs to the typical aspects of human existence, aspects that the Christian symbol system thrives in addressing, just as it also explores ways of understanding wherein the divine rescue in and from this situation consists.

Taking interpretive recourse to such accounts, this dissertation has worked on a second-order level of theological reflection, exploring what it might mean to live with risk and danger from the perspective of the

⁷⁸⁴ Mt 14:22-33.

⁷⁸⁵ Ulrich Luz highlights that the disciples in the boat were “tortured” (*βασανιζόμενον*) by waves and water, which emphasizes the passive and dangerous aspect of their situation, Luz, *Mt 8-17*, 406.

Christian symbol system.⁷⁸⁶ I have followed David Kelsey in construing the Christian symbol system such that it proposes three distinct works of God: God *creates* the world—as a world of opportunity, flourishing, and value—but also a world of vulnerability to risk and to dangers. God draws this world to final eschatological *consummation*, transforming the world so that the endangering and overwhelming powers of the world are finally overcome. Finally, God also *reconciles* the world to God when it has sinned, through manifestations of divine forgiveness.

Assuming this trifold perspective on the economic trinity, this dissertation has argued that the Christian symbol system can address the situation of living with risk and danger in a varied and systematic way. As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose has been to explore the *orientation* value of some of the core Christian symbols for situations of risk and danger. I sum up those results next (Chapter 12.1). Afterwards, I describe the results of this dissertation in comparison with its research field, theology of risk, offering some concluding perspectives on living with risk and danger in light of the *tensions between* the three divine works of creation, consummation, and reconciliation (Chapter 12.2).

1. The Orientation Value of the Christian Symbol System

This section conveys the main results of this dissertation's investigation of the Christian symbol system's orientation value. In the introduction, I suggested that Christianity, like other religious symbol systems, should be able to *qualify* an analysis of the human situation, to provide *answers* to the situation's implicit questions, and to entail a *transformative* potential with respect to human lives. I elaborate on those terms in the following three sections, and therein describe how this dissertation's reflections on the Christian symbol system can develop its orienting potential.

A. Qualifications

Given that Christian symbols convey a “large-scale view of reality,”⁷⁸⁷ Christian theology has an obligation to enter into interdisciplinary dialogue with other fields of meaning for mutual enrichment. When absorbed in their own traditions and disciplines, scholars can lose sight of the larger picture. An interdisciplinary dialogue can point to blind spots and broaden the horizon. This is what I have meant by “qualification.” The way of approaching such an interdisciplinary dialogue taken in this dissertation is through a problem-oriented investigation of real life situations of living

⁷⁸⁶ For the distinction between first-order and second-order theology applied here, see Gregersen, “Dogmatik som samtidsteologi,” 307–10.

⁷⁸⁷ Gregersen, “Theology and Disaster Studies,” 40.

with risk and danger. The purpose, then, is to show that the disciplines of theology and risk sociology can *qualify* other disciplines' analysis of the situation of living with risk and danger. Let me offer three results of this dialogue:

First, as per theologian Paul Leer-Salvesen, I have stressed the importance of enabling human beings to find a true sense of guilt that corresponds with their actual state of guilt. Seeing the world through the lens of risk can easily come to distort the human sense of guilt, for risk assumes that human beings themselves hold responsibility for the harm that they experience. This insistence has led me to a qualification of the *Relational Theory of Risk*, emphasizing that human beings not only expose themselves to risk, but also find themselves exposed to dangers for which they are not guilty.

Second, I have developed a view of trust that draws upon both theology and sociology. As per philosopher of religion K.E. Løgstrup, I have emphasized that trust is not only a risk that human beings run, it is also something given to human beings as a grace. One can only bring oneself into trust if it is in some sense already there, or the basic grounding for it is already given. If one has come to distrust another person, one can then contribute to the re-establishment of trust by giving up one's self-protective stance. Such a return to trust can find support in one's social circumstances, in ways that the sociologist Luhmann has been helpful in analyzing.

Third, involvement with sociological thinkers has prompted a view of human beings as intertwined with their proximate contexts, rather than using a more constrictive view of a providential Godhead in a personalist relation to each individual human person. This was the backdrop of using the "technology of insurance" to explore two levels of vulnerability beyond the personal realm, namely the disaster vulnerability "above" insurance and insurable vulnerabilities. Focusing on human social intertwinement has also led to investigating the social circumstances of trust. As per theologian David Kelsey, I have highlighted that while one's proximate context is the presupposition for human wellbeing, human beings can also find themselves in bondage to their social systems. From a theological perspective, inspired by theologians Michael Welker and Günter Thomas, I have added that social systems can be seen as participating in, and encouraging human beings to participate in, the movement against God that led to the crucifixion of the divine Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

These three points of contact do not exhaust the interdisciplinary potential to be found in the engagement between theology and risk sociology. Let me offer two points of potential development that go beyond the limits of this dissertation. The Christian symbol of the *outpouring of the*

Spirit over all flesh could have been developed further with regard to a theological description of social systems.⁷⁸⁸ Also, an increased focus on the phenomenon of *shame* could have aided in exploring human-social intertwinement, since shame reveals the inevitable risks and dangers of exposure in the social field.⁷⁸⁹

B. Answers

The Christian symbol system offers orientation not only by entering into an interdisciplinary qualification of the analysis of living with risk and danger, but also by offering possible *answers* to the questions implicit in such a life. In this context, “answering” means seeing the meta-empirical reality, which the Christian symbols convey, as an address to the situation. The purpose of such an address would be an orientation in the situation that would enable the person to live with the situation. Granted, receiving Christian symbols as a motivational impetus in a situation of risk and danger depends on seeing the Christian symbol system as formative for one’s life in general. But addressing Christian symbols might also occasion the discovery of the relevance of such symbols. At the end of Part II, I raised four questions about value, anxiety, the future, and guilt, to which Part III has explored possible answers.

First, the Christian symbol of divine *creation* might address the two questions of value and anxiety. The first of the four theses proposed in the introduction stated that *the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brings human beings into existence and enables ties of value within the world*. Nature is not only nature; it is creation, which adds a significant depth to one’s estimation of the world.⁷⁹⁰ The divine work of creation entails that the triune God gives a world of intrinsic values as gifts to human creatures, but it also entails that God places human beings in danger as vulnerable creatures. Therefore the second thesis claimed that *the triune God lives a vulnerable life of possible—and actual—loss*. To address the vulnerability of the valuable creation, the creation theology proposed here follows Günter Thomas in connecting creation and incarnation: the divine Son becomes a human being and shares the gifts of creation—in its basic goodness, but also in its tragedy and distortion. While the Son is vulnerable, the Father is vulnerable on behalf of the Son (relational

⁷⁸⁸ Inspiration for such a theology can be found in Welker, *Gottes Geist*, in Wink, *The Powers That Be*, and in Gregersen, “The Idea of Creation and the Theory of Autopoietic Processes.”

⁷⁸⁹ See Lindhardt, “Hvad med syndernes forladelse - fra skyld til skam?,” 567. See also footnote 685.

⁷⁹⁰ See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*.

vulnerability). To enable a proper sense of divine sharing of this vulnerability, I have found it helpful to emphasize that neither the divine Father nor the divine Son sought out the crucifixion, an emphasis that makes understandable the Son's lament over his creaturely destiny, as he directed his anxieties towards his Father.

Second, the Christian symbol of divine *consummation* might address the question of the uncertainty over one's future by pointing to the divine promise to consummate the world as the world's ultimate future reality. This refers to the theological virtue of *hope*. The third thesis suggested that the ultimate future reality of human beings consists of a *promise of the triune God to restore what humans have lost as new life in a new creation*. While the human situation could see death as the most certain, and perhaps the only future, the symbol of divine consummation conveys the meta-empirical claim that God has promised new life in a new creation. Divine consummation concerns the hope that wronged relationships will one day be rectified and that victims will one day receive new life in return for the life that has been taken from them. Given that human beings are in bondage to sinful social structures, the divine promise of consummation also entails a transformation of these binding structures and of the persons in bondage. This interpretation of the divine consummation claims that seeing the ultimate future reality as promissory relativizes human threats of destruction, as Ingolf Dalferth has argued.

Third, the divine consummation does not address the experience of individual guilt—a guilt that human beings can incur when they run risks, even as they are in bondage to social systems.⁷⁹¹ Therefore, I have developed a view of the Christian symbol of divine *reconciliation* understood in terms of divine forgiveness of human sins. The fourth thesis claims that *God promises to forgive human beings, as God forgave the crucifixion of the Son*. Reconciliation concerns the forgiveness that sets humans free in the present from the things that bind them to their pasts. The view of divine forgiveness developed here worked from the assumption shared by the risk theologians Günter Thomas and Karen Baker-Fletcher, that the cross is a risk rather than the purpose of the incarnation. Thus, this view of forgiveness has focused on the life and mission of Jesus and his resurrection as the decisive symbolic reference points, seeing a reconcilia-

⁷⁹¹ As Elisabeth Gräb-Schmidt argues, the sin of human beings cannot be reduced to its structural components: "Ein christl[iches] Verständnis von Sch[uld] hält an der menschlichen Freiheit gegen alle gesellschaftlichen, gesch[ichtlichen] und kulturellen Wirklichkeiten fest, die diese zu verdecken, zu entkräften und als Illusion zu entlarven sich anschicken," Gräb-Schmidt, "Schuld," col. 1020. See also Sölle, *Politische Theologie*, 111.

tory meaning in the crucifixion only secondarily and in light of the resurrection.

These proposals for understanding the Christian symbol system have reflexive consequences for one's relations to oneself. In Chapter 4, on insurance, I argued against seeing insurance as an entire worldview, since that would reduce the human being to a *homo economicus*. The argument was that in a case of a major fire in their home, human beings might experience a serious crisis of relations and identity, depending on the personal items that were lost to the flames, and seeing whether such items really were invaluable. The Christian symbol system does not put out the fire. It does not control what cannot be controlled, as Ingolf Dalferth has put it. Rather, it places loss suffered within the proximate context into the ultimate context that consists of the ways in which God relates to human beings. In this I follow Kelsey. God shares human vulnerability, and God promises the restoration of the lost relations. To continue this example, if one had left the kids alone in a house with matches while running an errand, and was therefore guilty of their loss, the Christian symbol system also entails the difficult message of divine forgiveness.

In this section, I have summarized the correlation between the situation of living with risk and danger and the Christian symbol system proposed in this dissertation. Such a correlation is necessarily contingent, meaning that it is not necessary, but not arbitrary either. This particular correlation is not necessary for three reasons. The situation of living with risk and danger could raise other questions, e.g., questions of power distributions concerning who gets to define and run risks, or questions of ethics in situations of risk, seeing that risk situations sometimes involve tragic dilemmas. Other symbol systems would answer the questions raised in markedly different ways, for instance by denying an ultimate context beyond the proximate context and the possibility of addressing one's gratitude and lamentation to such an ultimate context. And, other possible answers to the same questions exist within the Christian symbol system, answers that could highlight the sovereign power of God or other aspects of the New Testament soteriologies. However, this correlation is not arbitrary. As summarized in the last few pages, I have proposed four theses for a correlation between the situation of living with risk and danger and the Christian symbol system.⁷⁹² I have argued for these theses in dialogue with existing systematic theological expositions and biblical resources, aided by interdisciplinary patterns of thought. The claim is that these theses express fruitful and viable ways of formulating a contemporary Christianity in a situation where people live a vulnerable life, dangerously exposed to threats, and

⁷⁹² For the full formulations of the four theses, see Chapter 1.4.

running risks that expose them to harm for the purpose realizing some good.

C. Transformations

These possible answers that the Christian symbol system might provide also have orientation value in the sense that they point to the symbols' transformative potential. They show how human beings relate to life with risk and danger both personally and socially. The Christian symbol system is not a value-free zone. As per K.E. Løgstrup, I have argued for the existence of an ethical demand, which requires that human beings take care of their proximate contexts, in so far as they can influence it. I would maintain Løgstrup's insight that the ethical demand is "silent," leaving what needs to be done in every new situation up to the single human being.⁷⁹³ In relating what to do with what one is responsible *for*, one stands in a relation to the judicial authority that one is responsible *to*. Even so, the Christian symbol system offers a set of broad points of orientation, an *ethos* as it were, that constitutes guiding points for the ethical demand.

Beginning with vulnerability to large-scale disaster, I found that the creation theology drawn upon here endorses a precautionary principle, which advises one to take precautions when it comes to creating risk objects with potentially disastrous consequences for human beings and for society. On the middle-level of "insurable vulnerability," the Christian symbol system supports the insurance effort, emphasizing solitary efforts to universalize insurance whenever that is possible, as a response to the created dignity of human beings.

Concerning the sphere of vulnerabilities below the insurance threshold, I have argued that the Christian symbol system endorses efforts of risk-taking for the purpose of realizing goods, especially if this risk-taking aims at furthering justice, including outsiders, and raising up the downtrodden as a response to God bringing about the Kingdom of God, as Karen Baker-Fletcher emphasized. Such risk-taking implies, following Gandolfo's suggestion, that humans have an obligation to share their resources for the benefit of their entire proximate context, in spite of their tendency to reserve it for themselves and their dearest. This would leave the people who share more vulnerable than they would have been, but also with a life that prospers the dignity of others and themselves. The dignity of other people also means that the struggle for justice should work according to an *ethic of risk* that enables others to participate in the struggle, rather than an ethic of control seeking to bring about one's goals singlehandedly. This was Sharon Welch's insight. Counting on the participation of others to realize

⁷⁹³ This corresponds to Tillich, see Chapter 2.7.

the goods of justice also highlights the need for trusting other people. If one constructs a risk relationship where another person appears as a threatening risk object, distrust reduces that other person to such a threat, and it places the other person in a position where exclusionary aggression against this person would be legitimate. By way of contrast, trust includes the other person into one's own sphere of concern, assuming that the other person will also contribute.

Finally, the divine message of forgiveness sets human beings free to run these risks, to not shy away from the threat of incurring guilt whilst acting in the world. In this context, the Christian symbol system may help transform people, helping them manifest a humble stance of readiness to repent as the proper way of receiving divine forgiveness. Using Theodor Jørgensen's distinction between "conditions" and "terms," the Christian symbol system clarifies that receiving forgiveness is not a "condition" for the divine offer of forgiveness; rather, receiving forgiveness is one of the "terms" that specifies the proper way of owning divine forgiveness.

The possibilities for transformation of the personal and social realm proposed here do not constitute a comprehensive Christian ethos in and of themselves. More principled discussions about the possibilities and limits of a Christian ethos as a guide to the ethical demand that makes every person responsible for his or her orientation in this world would be required. But these possibilities for transformation do constitute points of guidance for theological reflection upon a Christian ethos concerning the situation of living with risk and danger.

2. Risk Theology and Eccentric Existence

The correlation of the Christian symbol system and the situation of living with risk and danger, thus described, has not come about in a vacuum. Every situation requires a renewed reflection of the adequate use of the Christian symbols, the result of which may be a recoding of key theological symbols. The theological reflection of this dissertation took place in a dialogue with the research field of risk theology, which I mapped out in Chapter 2. The main contribution of this dissertation to this field is to have developed a series of its existing proposals, adding proposals from other theologians and some of my own, and placing them into a more comprehensive trinitarian context. I drew the trinitarian perspective from Kelsey's distinction between the three divine works—creation, consummation, and reconciliation—each *appropriated* to one of the three persons of the trinity, and each realized in *perichoretic* cooperation. Taking Günter Thomas and Karen Baker-Fletcher's suggestion that the cross of Christ

constitutes a risk as a basic presupposition here led this dissertation to develop a *trifold* view of the divine incarnation.

- The divine incarnation constitutes an affirmation of the value of the created world of woes and joys through the divine surrender of heavenly security. This involves a divine co-vulnerability within which vulnerable human beings can live, even as their lives border on suffering and lamentation.
- Second, the divine incarnation manifests—in the midst of creation—the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ message and activity, and his resurrection entails the final promise that the triune God will accomplish the divine consummation that God has already begun, transforming creation into a place of safety.
- Third, given that human beings sin, they incur guilt. And so, the divine incarnation acquires a third purpose, namely the purpose of enacting divine forgiveness, which the triune God maintains through (and in spite of) the crucifixion, all the way into the resurrected and consummated life.

Holding together these three views of the divine incarnation, especially concerning divine forgiveness, is unique to this dissertation. It constitutes the main contribution of this dissertation to the field of risk theology.

In contrast to Kelsey’s account, I have followed Thomas in emphasizing the importance of the vulnerable incarnation for creation theology. Given this addition, the argument has been that Kelsey’s distinction between creation, consummation, and reconciliation situates human beings in a complex and fruitful tension between gratitude and lamentation, hope, and the freedom to take responsibility. While I have been occupied with exploring the significance of each of these distinct modes in relation to questions raised by the situation of living with risk and danger, let me offer some concluding remarks on the remaining tensions *between* the three divine works.

Tensions in the Divine Economy

The tension between *creation and consummation* finds expression in Welch’s consideration of the limits to human wellbeing, some of which derive from human finitude, and others deriving from injustice.⁷⁹⁴ Being created, that is, being born into a proximate context, amounts to being placed within a particular set of limits. While these limits are the condition of possibility for human life, they are also occasions for suffering.

⁷⁹⁴ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 159.

According to Welch, such limits are genuine and must be accepted in “worshipful contemplation.”⁷⁹⁵ In this context, “worship” not only involves praise but also communication with God in the form of despairing lamentation, urging God to take responsibility for the way in which God divinely creates.⁷⁹⁶ No matter how awful is one’s situation, however, its character as created ensures one’s created dignity in the midst of loss and mourning.

However, in contrast to the limits of creation, to which a *surrendering acceptance* is the proper response, another category of limits exists that human beings should *resist*.⁷⁹⁷ These are the limits that are socially imposed, those limits that foster distortion and degradation. These limits and failings are amongst that which God actively draws towards eschatological consummation. Human beings can respond to this divine activity through resisting these limits and through seeking to build better, however finite, alternatives. Indeed, Kelsey insists that resistance is secondary to establishing communities that can function as “parables” of the Kingdom of God.⁷⁹⁸ With this expression, Kelsey may be referring to the New Testament parables of the divine Kingdom, e.g. the parable of those laborers in the vineyard who got the same wage even though they worked different hours.⁷⁹⁹ Kelsey warrants this constructive commitment with reference to the theological logic of divine consummation. God’s promise to draw the world to eschatological consummation is not dependent upon human beings being in bondage to their proximate

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 110. For this expression, Welch quotes Dennis McCann.

⁷⁹⁶ Suggesting that the proximate contexts pose limits that humans should contemplate in worship does not entail absolutizing the proximate context. As Gustaf Wingren points out, the connection between birth and creation means that God’s creation is ongoing: “Every birth is a creation. God creates now,” Wingren, *Credo*, 60, my translation, see appendix. Every new person is created into a new context, different from that of his or her parents. This shows in the simple fact that the newborn has other parents than his or her parents did. Therefore, the proximate context and its limits are not an eternal order that cannot be broken. Yet, for every newborn human being, the proximate context constitutes an order that should be contemplated and confronted.

⁷⁹⁷ I contribute to this analysis by drawing out the distinction between “surrendering acceptance” (*Ergebung*) and “resistance” (*Widerstand*) from Bonhoeffer, who, in his prison letters, writes: “Ich habe mir hier oft Gedanken darüber gemacht, wo die Grenzen zwischen dem notwendigen Widerstand gegen das ‘Schicksal’ und der ebenso notwendige *Ergebung* liegen ... Die Grenzen zwischen Widerstand und *Ergebung* sind also prinzipiell nicht zu bestimmen; aber es muß beides da sein und beides mit Entschlossenheit ergriffen werden,” Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und *Ergebung**, 244, 21/2-44.

⁷⁹⁸ EE 520.

⁷⁹⁹ Mt 20:1-16.

contexts; rather, divine consummation is a goal in itself, and only secondarily entails liberation from that bondage. Therefore, human action, as shaped by the promise of divine consummation, should primarily be focusing on building communities that are parables of the Kingdom of God, and only secondarily be focusing on resisting a life gone awry.⁸⁰⁰

The tension between these limits and their resulting human attitudes is worth sustaining. Yet, in any given situation, the decision to accept a limit or resist it remains a risk. A deep and passionate involvement with different limits can make the judgment about specific limits more difficult, but also more qualified, as Welch notes: “From such involvement some limits formerly seen as genuine are criticized as socially imposed, and some described as removable are reinstated.”⁸⁰¹ However, taking this decision is the “risk of faith,” that James Cone spoke about, a situation in which human beings also can come to incur guilt.

The complementing qualities of *consummation and reconciliation*, therefore, correspond to an influential passage in Hannah Arendt:

The possible redemption from the *predicament of irreversibility*—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of *forgiving*. The remedy for *unpredictability*, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep *promises*. The two faculties belong together in so far as one of them, *forgiving*, serves to undo the *deeds of the past*, whose ‘sins’ hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation; and the other, binding oneself through *promises*, serves to set up in the ocean of *uncertainty*, which the future is by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationship between men.⁸⁰²

With special attention to risk and danger, this dissertation has shown how human beings live with both the “predicament of unpredictability” and the “predicament of irreversibility.” The future is inherently uncertain, and the past binds human beings to what they have done. In the Christian symbol system, the answer to these experiences is, respectively, the divine promise of consummation that binds the future and the divine reconciliatory forgiveness that loosens the past.

The connection between *creation and reconciliation* is crucial for addressing contemporary Western culture that problematically turns dangers into risks. The increase of “knowledge” and “options” in modernity *turns dangers into risks*, as Luhmann puts it. Consider the example of lung cancer, where modern knowledge of carcinogens, e.g.

⁸⁰⁰ EE 519.

⁸⁰¹ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 110.

⁸⁰² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237, emphasis added.

from smoking, and modern options for avoiding carcinogens, e.g., stop-smoking programs, turns lung cancer into a risk that one runs personally. Another example is pregnancy, where knowledge and options concerning the common causes of miscarriage help turn them into risks, to a much greater extent. According to Serene Jones, miscarrying women experience:

a sense of enormous guilt and responsibility for [their] miscarriage ... ‘What did I do to make this happen?’ they ask. ‘Was it that cigarette I smoked last Sunday? The glass of wine I had three weeks ago? Did I not take the right vitamins?’⁸⁰³

The experience of responsibility derives, not least, from a “medical rhetoric that holds women singularly responsible for the success or failure of their pregnancies.”⁸⁰⁴ The experience of unjustifiably excessive guilt makes human beings unable to stand in relationships of resonance with other people, as Hartmut Rosa has emphasized.

The Christian symbol system can address this experience both in terms of creation and in terms of reconciliation. Christian creation theology can insist that human beings are not responsible for all things in their lives; God has created human beings into a world of joy, but also a world of vulnerability to dangers beyond their control. Yet, even while the aspect of danger is emphasized, the mother may still experience a sense of guilt for the miscarriage. In this case, a constructive use of the Christian symbol system may respond with the symbol of divine reconciliation. In situations of risk, human beings incur guilt that God promises to forgive. This tension between the insistence on danger in Christian creation theology and the enactment of forgiveness in Christian reconciliation theology is crucial for addressing the modern conversion of dangers into risks.

A Trifold View of Divine Love

In sum, these tensions between the three divine works enable human beings to experience a differentiated sense of *divine love* that goes beyond the alternative of “overwhelming power” or “sacrificial love.”⁸⁰⁵

Creation theology can follow William Vanstone in seeing the divine love that artistically endows the world with value, allowing itself to be influenced by its creation and sharing the conditions of vulnerability in which it has placed its creation. A theology of consummation can convey a divine love that promises to rescue the world if and when tragedy occurs.

⁸⁰³ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 135. The quote continues with religious considerations that also turn miscarriage into something for which the women is responsible: “Is God punishing me? Is this fate’s revenge for sins I have committed in the past?”

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁰⁵ For this alternative, see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 110.

Finally, the theology of reconciliation insists on the divine love that restores the divine-human relationship whenever human beings incur guilt.

This trifold way of structuring the divine economy of love, which this dissertation has contributed to developing, gives the field of risk theology a sense of differentiated unity that establishes it as a new and promising field of theological inquiry.

English Summary

This dissertation explores what it means to live with risk and danger in light of the Christian symbol system. Being exposed to harm (defined here as “danger”), and exposing oneself to potential harms (defined here as “risk”), are essential aspects of living, and of being human. The dissertation investigates aspects of living with risk and danger through an interdisciplinary exchange between the fields of risk sociology and theological anthropology. It correlates these findings with the Christian symbol system, and thereby develops a Christian systematic theology of risk and danger.

Part I of the dissertation introduces and sets the groundwork for the discussion to come. Chapter 1 proposes four theses for a theology of risk and danger (see page 12). The remaining chapters can be seen as constituting an extended exploration and defense of these theses.

Chapter 2 presents the research field, which consists of theologians that have used the concept of “risk” in their reflections (some have used that term more rigorously than others). This chapter analyzes and evaluates their “theologies of risk.” From this analysis, three theological perspectives prove formative for this dissertation, namely: 1) the commitment to a theological anthropology that includes the human-social intertwinement; 2) the proposition of the incarnation as involving a risk for God; and, 3) the construal of the divine economy according to a trinitarian pattern.

Chapter 3 describes and discusses the “method of correlation,” which is crucial for the dissertation’s problem-oriented approach. The chapter highlights the difficulty with systematic theological uses of biblical material on the one hand, and of non-theological patterns of thought on the other hand. It reflects on the relevance of the exegetical discussions of “biblical rewriting” for this systematic theological difficulty.

Part II offers three studies of living with risk and danger, which have been published elsewhere (see *Acknowledgements*). Chapter 4 takes the technology of insurance as its vantage point, discussing the prominence and periphery of this category for addressing contemporary life with risk and danger. It distinguishes “insurable vulnerability” from both “disaster vulnerability” (which is above insurance), and “personal vulnerability” (which is below insurance). As a result, the chapter indicates the need for further interpretation of human life with risk and danger beyond the nexus of insurance.

Chapter 5 analyzes, evaluates, and develops what has been called the *Relational Theory of Risk*, which points out that human beings construct

narrative risk relationships imagining threatening entities (risk objects) that can harm valuable and vulnerable entities (objects at risk). Aided by the concepts of danger and trust, the chapter highlights the reality of “relationships of danger” beyond human influence and control. It also points to the possibility of trusting threatening entities, thus including the risk object into the truster’s sphere of concern.

Using risk sociology and philosophy of religion, Chapter 6 provides an interdisciplinary investigation of the phenomenon of “trust” with the purpose of exploring the topic of faith in God. Considering the crucifixion as a “crisis of trust” (Günter Thomas) within the life of the Trinity, the chapter analyzes what highlighting the incarnation means for the traditional understanding of faith as trusting God to give refuge in all need.

From this interdisciplinary analysis of the human situation concerning risk and danger, the conclusion to Part II extracts four existential questions, concerning *value*; *vulnerability and anxiety*; *futurity*; and *guilt*. Possible answers in the Christian symbol system make up the bulk of Part III.

First, Chapter 7 uses David Kelsey’s *Eccentric Existence* to develop the trinitarian framework that undergirds Part III’s theological reflections, suggesting that the triune God relates to the world in three distinct ways: *creating* the world, drawing the world to eschatological *consummation*, and *reconciling* the world when it has sinned.

Chapter 8 provides a *creation* theology that understands the reality of *value* in life as a result of the divine surplus of creativity. Chapter 9 continues the creation theology of Chapter 8, now emphasizing that valuable goods are also vulnerable. Expanding the incarnation theology of Chapter 6, this chapter finds that Christ’s lamentation on the cross legitimizes directing one’s anxiety against God rather than aggressively against other human beings. Chapter 10 explores the divine promise to *consummate* the world as the ultimate context for one’s relation to the future, which relativizes threats from one’s proximate context. Finally, Chapter 11 investigates the experience of incurring guilt in situations of risk. It correlates this experience with the divine enactment of *reconciliation* by divine forgiveness of sinners.

The concluding perspectives of Chapter 12 show how the dissertation has argued for the orientation value of the Christian symbol concerning living with risk and danger. By pointing to blind spots in the various discourses referred to, and by contributing with perspectives from theological anthropology, the Christian symbol system *qualifies* the interdisciplinary analysis of the human situation of living with risk and danger; it provides possible *answers* to the questions arising from this situation; and it points towards ways of *transforming* self and society in

relation to this situation. As such, the dissertation has laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive theology of risk and danger.

Dansk sammenfatning

Det er denne afhandlings sigte at undersøge, hvad det vil sige *at leve med risiko og fare i lyset af det kristne symbolsystem*. Begreberne risiko og fare har været dominerende i risikosociologien, der for alvor vandt indpas i samfundstænkningen, efter at Ulrich Becks (1944-2015) bog *Risikosamfundet* faldt sammen med Tjernobylulykken i 1986. Murens fald i 1989 gjorde mange optimistiske på verdens fremtids vegne, men de senere års politiske og miljømæssige udviklinger har igen øget sansen for samfundets og menneskenes sårbarhed. I denne situation er det værd at overveje, hvordan kristendommens symboler (såsom skabelse, fuldendelse, forsoning, inkarnation, død, opstandelse, synd) kan bidrage til at belyse erfaringen af 1) at leve udsat for trusler, vi ikke kan kontrollere (fare), og 2) at måtte udsætte sig selv for skade for at opnå et bestemt mål (risiko). Inden for risikosociologien har særligt Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) udfoldet denne distinktion mellem risiko og fare.

Udover en introducerende Del I består afhandlingen af to dele. Del II tegner konturerne af et liv med risiko og fare og formulerer fire eksistentielle spørgsmål, der rejser sig fra analysen af sådan et liv. Del III undersøger kristendommens potentiale for at kunne besvare disse spørgsmål. Denne spørgsmål-svar struktur har sit metodiske udgangspunkt i den såkaldte "korrelationsmetode", som Paul Tillich (1886-1965) har præget, og som andre siden har videreført.

I afhandlingens Del I, kapitel 1, præsenterer jeg temaet og fire overordnede teser for en teologi om risiko og fare (se side 12 og i gennemgangen af kapitel 8-11 nedenfor). Afhandlingen kan i det hele taget ansues som et samlet argument for disse teser.

Dernæst analyserer og evaluerer jeg det forskningsfelt, afhandlingen bygger på. Det sker i kapitel 2, hvor jeg diskuterer den gruppe af danske og internationale teologer, der har allerede brugt begrebet "risiko". Størstedelen af disse teologer benytter ordet "risiko" skabelsesteologisk, således at Gud løber en risiko ved at skabe mennesket med frihed til at forme verden på både konstruktive og destruktive måder. Enkelte teologer ser selve Sønnens inkarnation i Jesus af Nazareth som udtryk for, at Gud løber en risiko: korsfæstelsen af Sønnen kommer således til syne som en risiko snarere end som selve formålet med inkarnationen. Endelig undersøger andre teologer risikobegrebets relevans for en teologisk legitimering af menneskelig risikoadfærd generelt, men også specifikt i forhold til kampen for social retfærdighed. Jeg tager udgangspunkt i disse

resultater, men spredningen i disse teologers overbevisninger og forudsætninger medfører, at jeg benytter mig af den amerikanske teolog David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* som primær samtalepartner.

Den introducerende del afslutter jeg i kapitel 3 med en undersøgelse af afhandlingens metodiske udgangspunkt, som jeg finder i korrelationsmetoden. Her peger jeg på den systematisk-teologiske vanskelighed ved at benytte både bibelske tekster og indsigter fra andre akademiske forskningsfelter end teologien. Mens afhandlingen ikke hævder at komme med nogen principiel løsning på dette problem, reflekterer den over de systematisk-teologiske implikationer af det eksegetiske program "genskrevet bibel".

Afhandlingens Del II består af tre udgivne artikler (se *Acknowledgements*), der på forskellig måde anlægger et interdisciplinært syn på det menneskelige liv med risiko og fare. En vigtig kontekstuel faktor for et sådant livet er udbredelsen af forsikringssystemet, både privat og offentligt. Ud fra denne bestemmelse skelner jeg i kapitel 4 mellem menneskelig sårbarhed (der kan forsikres), katastrofesårbarheden ("over" muligheden for forsikring) og den personlige sårbarhed ("under" muligheden for forsikring). Hermed aftegner jeg behovet for, at andre fortolkningsrammer supplerer forsikringsteknologiens bidrag til det moderne liv med risiko og fare.

Dernæst undersøger jeg i kapitel 5, hvad det vil sige at konstruere "risiko-forhold", hvilket de to svenske risiko-forskere, Åsa Boholm og Hervé Corvellec, har givet et bud på i artiklen *A Relational Theory of Risk* (2011). Når man tænker på fremtiden, kan man forestille sig et handlingsforløb, hvor noget truende (*risk object*) ødelægger noget værdifuldt og sårbart (*object at risk*). Herved danner man et risikoforhold mellem det truende og det sårbare. Jeg bidrager særligt til denne teori ved at fremhæve to problemstillinger. 1) Hvis begrebet "risiko" indebærer, at skaden tilskrives én selv (Niklas Luhmann), så vil et eksklusivt fokus på "risiko"-forhold medføre, at den enkelte bliver tilskrevet al mulig skade. For ikke at overbebyrde den menneskelige ansvars- og skyldfølelse (Paul Leer-Salvesen) peger jeg derfor på eksistensen af, hvad jeg kalder "fare"-forhold (*relationships of danger*), der undslipper ens kontrol og dermed også ens ansvar. 2) Derudover hævder teorien, at den, der konstruerer et risiko-forhold, vil komme til at ekskludere den truende faktor. Hvis denne faktor er et andet menneske, peger jeg på muligheden (og vigtigheden) af at vise dette menneske tillid, hvorved man inkluderer den anden i en accept af den sårbarhed, der måtte følge af dette risikoforhold.

Hvor Del IIs første to kapitler benytter et kombineret sociologisk og teologisk materiale til at undersøge den menneskelige situation, har kapitel

6 et mere eksplicit teologisk ærinde. Gennem en interdisciplinær undersøgelse af begrebet "tillid" hos Luhmann og K.E. Løgstrup overvejer jeg, hvordan tro stadig kan forstås som tillidsfuld tilflugt til Gud "i al fare" (Luthers *Store katekismus*), når den traditionelle forsynslære har mistet sin teologiske selvfølgelighed. Hvis man kan forstå korset som udtryk for en "tillidskrise" mellem Gud Fader og Gud Søn (Günter Thomas), så muliggør en mere inkarnatorisk orienteret teologi, at mennesket kan ses som draget ind i Sønnens trosmæssige forhold til Faderen gennem død og til opstandelse ved Helligånden. I dette kapitel kan man allerede se konturerne af den teologi, jeg udfolder i afhandlingens tredje del.

Del II afslutter med en konklusion, der uddrager fire eksistentielle spørgsmål fra analysen af livet med risiko og fare; spørgsmål om *værdi*, *sårbarhed* og *angst*, *fremtiden* og *skyld*. Afhandlingens Del III søger at finde mulige svar på disse spørgsmål i det kristne symbolsystem.

I kapitel 7 afklarer jeg den teologiske ramme, inden for hvilken jeg undersøger kristendommens mulige svar. Førnævnte David Kelsey ser tre måder, hvorpå Gud forholder sig til verden: Gud skaber verden, Gud fuldender verden og Gud forsoner verden med sig selv som en reaktion på menneskets synd. Ifølge Kelsey skal disse tre aspekter af Guds værk holdes distinkte og henføres til hver af de tre guddommelige personer, Fader, Søn og Helligånd ("appropriation"), i en gensidig gennemtrængning ("perikorese"), så ingen af de tre aspekter bliver underlagt de andre. Jeg benytter disse tre aspekter som struktur for afhandlingens Del III.

Kapitel 8 tager udgangspunkt i den observation, at et liv med risiko og fare forudsætter, at man har noget af *værdi*, man kan miste. Denne erfaring af værdi, ja uvurderlig værdi, tyder det kristne symbolsystem som et resultat af kreativiteten i Guds *skabelse*. Gud skaber verden, men Gud skaber også det enkelte menneske ved at lade det føde ind i en kontekst, der er forudsætningen for dette menneskes liv og lykke. I lyset af denne tydning kan mennesket rette sin taknemmelighed for et værdifuldt liv mod Gud som Skaber.

Erfaringen af, at menneskets værdi også er *sårbar*, kræver en ekstra tolkningsmæssig indsats. Derfor føjer kapitel 9 et inkarnatorisk aspekt til afhandlingens skabelsesteologi, idet Sønnens inkarnation anskues som udtryk for en opvurdering af skaberværket. Når man erfarer ens egen sårbarhed og sårbarheden hos de ting, der har (uvurderlig) værdi for én, kan man blive angst. Denne angst kan resultere i et defensivt ønske om at beskytte sine egne og et aggressivt ønske om at udvise potentielle trusler fra ens beskyttelsessfære. Jeg ser derimod inkarnationen som udtryk for, at Guds egen Søn opgiver sin guddommelige sikkerhed og begiver sig ud på sårbarhedens vej. På korset anråber Sønnen Faderen i en følelse af

gudsforladthed – som en ny Job. Selv når Sønnen mister ord træder Helligånden ind, “i forbøn for os med udsigelige sukke” (Rom 8:26). Dette legitimerer, at man vender sin angst og klage mod Gud i stedet for at rette den aggressivt mod andre mennesker.

Når man forestiller sig *fremtiden*, kan den være lovende, men den kan også synes fuld af trusler. Det er emnet for kapitel 10. Inden for det kristne symbolsystem er det imidlertid Guds løfte om, at Helligånden vil *fuldende* verden, der udgør den ultimative horisont, fra hvilken fremtiden får sit skær og bliver løfterig. Basis for dette løfte om fuldendelse er Helligåndens oprejsning af Sønnen fra døden, men også Sønnens eget jordiske virke – i kraft af Helligånden – blandt og for mennesker. Hans jordiske måltidsfællesskab er en manifestation af Gudsrigets måltidsfællesskab, og de risici, han løber for at inkludere de ekskluderede, er markører for Gudsrigets nærvær. Korsfæstelsen afslører, at de menneskelige systemer, der skulle underbygge den mellemmenneskelige tillid, er underlagt syndens truende magt. I denne situation medfører Helligåndens løfte om fuldendelse dog ikke, at fremtidens trusler forsvinder, men de relativiseres, så man får mulighed for at leve tillidsfuldt i flere tilfælde end ellers.

Endelig indgår mennesket i risiko-situationer, hvor man pådrager sig *skyld*. I kapitel 11 undersøger jeg mulighedsbetingelserne for at pådrage sig skyld i risiko-situationer. I modsætning til at gøre et andet menneske direkte fortræd indbefatter risiko-situationer ofte, at andre faktorer indvirker på resultatet, hvilket vanskeliggør tildelingen af skyld. Ikke desto mindre kan man erfare sig som skyldig efter at have løbet en risiko på andres vegne. Til dette kan det kristne symbolsystem svare *forsonende* med sit budskab om Guds tilgivelse. Men hvor traditionen har knyttet Guds tilgivelse til korsfæstelsen af Jesus Kristus, bygger jeg på risikoteologiens tanke om korset som en risiko og hæfter mig ved, at Kristus ifølge nogle dele af evangelietraditionen allerede som et led i sit jordiske virke meddelte mennesket Guds tilgivelse uden henvisning til lidelsen på korset som forudsætning.

I indledningen til afhandlingen overvejer jeg, generelt hvordan et religiøst symbolsystem kan hjælpe mennesker med at orientere sig i verden. I det konkluderende kapitel 12 gengiver jeg derfor, hvordan denne afhandlings udkast til en forståelse af det specifikt kristne symbolsystem skaber orientering på tre parametre. For det første er det kristne symbolsystem med til at *kvalificere* forståelsen af den menneskelige situation. Her har jeg særligt fremdraget Paul Leer-Salvesens fastholdelse af et etisk syn på mennesket, hvis fornemmelse for skyld skal holdes fast men ikke overbebyrdes. For det andet giver det kristne symbolsystem mulige *svær* på eksistentielle spørgsmål. Resultaterne på dette parameter

fremgår af kapitel 8-11. For det tredje indebærer det kristne symbolsystem en mulig *transformation* af menneskers forhold til Gud, til sig selv og til hinanden. Her har jeg særligt fokuseret på, hvordan det kristnes symbolsystem fortolker og påvirker menneskets forhold til sin egen sårbarhed og tillid.

Med denne afhandling har jeg således bidraget til at etablere feltet risikoteologi som et forskningsfelt, og jeg har udformet et udkast til en teologi for risiko og fare som en platform for nye undersøgelser.

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Appendix: Original Quotes

The following numbers refer to footnotes.

Chapter 1

2. Mortensen, *Lidelsens problem*, 5, my translation of: “Og dog lever den således betryggede velfærdsborger — føler han — på en vulkan, der hvert øjeblik kan bryde ud. Sygdom, ulykke og død. Hans ordnede verden kan bryde sammen, og lidelse vil strømme ind over ham. Det ligger i baghovedet, når han sætter sig i sin bil, når han mærker en uforklarlig smerte i brystet, når han læser sin avis eller ser TV. Tanken på navnløs lidelse ligger hele tiden bag følelsen af ro, lykke og sikkerhed, fordi han ved om alle de ting, der truer hans tilværelse.”

15. See Mjaaland, *ST*, 87, my translation of: “en helhetlig fremstilling av den kristne tro slik denne kan forstås i samtiden.”

18. Mjaaland, *ST*, 18, my translation of: “På sitt beste har teologien alltid vært åpen for innsikt fra andre disipliner, enten det er filosofi eller antropologi, juss, biologi eller sosiologi, uten å miste den klare bevisstheten om teologiens egenart.”

Chapter 2

38. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, 215, translation of: “Det frie Verdensløb.”⁸⁰⁶

51. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 101/II.6, translation of: “quod ei evenit non deo sed ipso debeat exprobrari.”

107. Gregersen, *Den generøse ortodoksi*, 467, my translation of: “non-realisme, der reducerer Guds virkelighed til de gode oplevelser i tilværelsen.”

Chapter 3

156. Bergman, *Gud i funktion*, 64, my translation of: “Inte traditions-tolkningen utan växelspelet mellan traditions- och situationstolkningen genererar de normativa nycklarna. Först när traditionen visat sig vara i stånd att bli förmedlad vinner den normativ karaktär.”

⁸⁰⁶ Martensen, *Den christelige Dogmatik*, 219.

166. Mikkelsen, “Den trinitariske Gud,” 39, my translation of: “historisk navngiven person, der har levet fra ca. år 0 - 30.”

Chapter 4

230. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 38, translation of: “Gift Dig, Du vil fortryde det; gift Dig ikke, Du vil ogsaa fortryde det; gift Dig eller gift Dig ikke, Du vil fortryde begge Dele.”⁸⁰⁷ Not even insurance is risk free for the insurance taker. When considering taking out insurance, one runs a risk whether one chooses to take out insurance or not. Systems theorist Niklas Luhmann argues: “If one takes out insurance, one is financially secure in a damage event. But then one carries the risk of having taken out insurance for naught if no damage event occurs. Deciding against taking out insurance means running the opposite risk,” Niklas Luhmann, “Das Risiko der Versicherung gegen Gefahren,” 273, my translation of: “Wenn man sich versichert, ist man im Falle eines Schadens finanziell abgesichert. Man trägt dann aber das Risiko, sich umsonst versichert zu haben, wenn kein Schadensfall eintritt. Entscheidet man sich gegen eine Versicherung, läßt man sich auf das umgekehrte Risiko ein.”

Chapter 5

252. Luhmann, *Trust*, 92, translation of: “[Menschen leben in jener] unthematische[n] Einstellung fragloser Sicherheit in Bezug auf das nicht eigens Bedachte und Gemeinte.”⁸⁰⁸

255. Kierkegaard, “Begybet Angest,” 348. For Kierkegaard, the object of anxiety is oneself, or specifically one’s manifold possibilities of relating to future realities. The object is “freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility,” Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 313, translation of: “Frihedens Virkelighed som Mulighed for Muligheden.”⁸⁰⁹

257. Beck, *Risk Society*, 49, emphasis in original, translation altered, compare: “Die treibende Kraft in der Klassengesellschaft läßt sich in dem Satz fassen: *Ich habe Hunger!* Die Bewegung, die mit der Risikogesellschaft in Gang gesetzt wird, kommt demgegenüber in der Aussage zum Ausdruck: *Ich habe Angst!* An die Stelle der *Gemeinsamkeit der Not* tritt die *Gemeinsamkeit der Angst.*”⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, “Enten - Eller,” 47.

⁸⁰⁸ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 94.

⁸⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, “Begybet Angest,” 348.

⁸¹⁰ Beck, *Risikogesellschaft*, 66.

262. Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, 71, translation of: “In dem Maße, als die Gesellschaft Entscheidungen und entsprechende Beweglichkeit zumutet, gibt es auch keine Gefahren mehr, die nur extern zugerechnet werden. Man ist durch Naturkatastrophen betroffen – aber man hätte ja aus dem gefährdeten Gebiet wegziehen oder seine Besitz versichern können. Sich einer Gefahr auszusetzen ist wiederum eine Risiko.”⁸¹¹

274. Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 418, fn. 84, my translation of: “Auch Kinder von nicht-rauchenden, alkoholabstinenten, vegetarisch lebenden Eltern können früh an Krebs erkranken.”

278. Luhmann, *Trust*, 72, translation of: “Man vertraut, wenn man davon ausgeht, daß dieses Verhalten sich in den eigenen Lebensführungsplan sinnvoll einfügen wird; man mißtraut, wenn man damit rechnet, daß dies nicht der Fall sein wird.”⁸¹²

279. Luhmann, *Trust*, 27, translation of: “Vertrauen bleibt ein Wagnis.”⁸¹³

283. Welz, *Vertrauen und Versuchung*, 66, my translation of: “Zwar verletzt es die Eitelkeit und den Stolz, zum Narren geworden zu sein, aber es ist ebenso blamabel, das Schlechte geglaubt zu haben, wo das Gute gegenwärtig war. Der Liebende fürchtet, in einem Irrtum befangen zu sein, und deshalb glaubt und hofft er alles [Gute vom Anderen].”

286. Luhmann, “Risiko und Gefahr,” 163, my translation of: “Diejenigen, für die das Risikoverhalten anderer zur Gefahr wird, werden anders darüber urteilen als die, die die Entscheidung selber treffen oder an ihr beteiligt sind. Es gibt, mit anderen Worten, strukturelle Anlässe für die laufende Reproduktion von Betroffenenkonflikten.”

Chapter 6

297. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 386, translation of: “Ein Gott heisset das, dazu man sich versehen sol alles guten und zuflucht haben ynn allen noeten. Also das ein Gott haben nicht anders ist denn yhm von herzen trauen und gleuben.”⁸¹⁴

⁸¹¹ Luhmann, *Beobachtungen der Moderne*, 143.

⁸¹² Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 95.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸¹⁴ Luther, *WA 30*, 1:133.

301. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 15, translation of: “i tiltalen som sådan – uanset indholdets vægt – anslås [der] en bestemt tone, i hvilken den, der taler, så at sige går ud af sig selv for nu at eksistere i talens forhold til den anden. Hvorfor fordringen – uudtalt - går ud på, at der tages imod een selv ved at ens tone tages op.”⁸¹⁵

302. Luhmann, *Trust*, 40, translation of: “Schon das Erscheinen überhaupt setzt ... ein Mindestmaß an Vertrauen voraus, nämlich das Vertrauen, nicht fehlgedeutet zu werden, sondern im großen und ganzen so angenommen zu werden, wie man sich zu zeigen wünscht.”⁸¹⁶

304. Løgstrup, *Solidaritet og kærlighed*, 24, my translation of: “Hvad et menneske gør spontant, gør det utvungent og uden bagtanker.”

305. Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 85, translation of: “det mindste afbræk, den mindste beregning, den mindste reduktion af den til middel for andet, ødelægger den totalt, ja gør den til det modsatte af hvad den er.”⁸¹⁷

307. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 17, translation of: “På hvor mangfoldig vis kommunikationen mellem os end kan arte sig, den består altid i at vove sig frem for at blive imødekommet.”⁸¹⁸

312. Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 116, translation of: “Vi kan anse et formål for så vigtigt, at vi i lyset af det må vurdere et i sig selv godt fænomen negativt som middel, men det ophæver ikke at fænomenet i sig selv er godt. Vor vurdering kan altså gå på tværs af fænomenernes egen bestemmelse af dem selv som gode og onde.”⁸¹⁹

314. Løgstrup, *Beyond the Ethical Demand*, 79, translation of: “Beslutte sig til at nære tillid eller være barmhjertig er at beslutte sig til at give sig tilliden eller barmhjertigheden i vold. Tilliden og barmhjertigheden må altså være der i forvejen som livsmuligheder. Er de ikke det, kan beslutningen ikke tilvejebringe dem. En smule inadækvat er derfor vendingen ‘at beslutte sig til at vise tillid eller være barmhjertig’, men forkert er den ikke, thi beslutningen består i at opgive holdninger eller tanke- og følelses-

⁸¹⁵ Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 24.

⁸¹⁶ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 49.

⁸¹⁷ Løgstrup, *Norm og spontaneitet*, 19.

⁸¹⁸ Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 27.

⁸¹⁹ Løgstrup, *Norm og spontaneitet*, 48.

bevægelser, der er uforenelige med tillid og barmhjertighed.”⁸²⁰

321. Luhmann, *Trust*, 37, translation of: “[Die Sanktionsmöglichkeiten] strukturieren zugleich die Zurechnung der Schuld and damit das Risiko sozialer Blamage und Verurteilung.”⁸²¹

325. Luhmann, *Trust*, 36, translation of: “[W]enn die Beteiligten zusammen in einem ihnen vertrauten System leben, über das nicht weiter geredet zu werden braucht, das vielmehr stillschweigend als alltägliche Verständnisgrundlage alle Kommunikation trägt.”⁸²²

327. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 15–16, translation altered, compare: “Den enkelte har aldrig med et andet menneske at gøre uden at han holder noget af dets liv i sin hånd. Det kan være meget lidt, en forbigående stemning, en oplagthed, man får til at visne, eller som man vækker, en lede man uddyber eller hæver. Men det kan også være forfærdende meget, så det simpelthen står til den enkelte, om den andens liv lykkes eller ej.”⁸²³

331. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 21, translation of: “Ilefler for hinanden.”⁸²⁴

332. Ibid, translation of: “en fordring om kærlighed, og ikke ... en fordring om eftergivenhed.”

335. Luhmann, *Trust*, 62, translation altered, compare: “Der Weg zum Vertrauen führt über ein umformendes Eingehen auf fremde Erwartungen.”⁸²⁵

343. Welker, “Der erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott,” 44, my translation of: “[Das Kreuz] offenbart die ‘Nacht der Gottverlassenheit’, nicht nur für Jesus selbst – sondern auch für die ganze Welt. Das Kreuz offenbart diese Not und Gefahr in der Todesstunde Jesu, aber auch als eine beständige Bedrohung für alle Zeit.”

348. Günter Thomas, “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Risiko der Inkarnation,”

⁸²⁰ Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, 134.

⁸²¹ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 46.

⁸²² Ibid., 45–46.

⁸²³ Løgstrup, *Den etiske fordring*, 25.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁸²⁵ Luhmann, *Vertrauen*, 81.

174, my translation of: “Vertrauenskrise.”

Chapter 7

373. Gregersen, “Skabelse og forsyn,” 69, my translation of: “Evangeliet tilsiger, at Gud vil sætte sin magt ind på at modarbejde tilintetgørelsen af det sanseligt-naturlige og sociale liv (Døden), og at Gud uafsladeligt vil bekæmpe menneskets tendens til, når det føler sig truet, at lukke sig ude fra omgivelserne (Synden).”

Chapter 8

401. As Lundager Jensen argues, “both the positive and the skeptical wisdom unfold ... not in an open international world, but rather in the local and intimate: in the family, in the city, on the market,” Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig religion*, 85, my translation of: “både den positive og den skeptiske visdom udfolder sig ... ikke i en åben, international verden, men tværtimod i det lokale og nære: i familien, i byen, på markedet.”

430. Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 19, translation altered, compare: “Att andas, att upphämta föda, att söka skydd mot faror, att få värme utifrån – allt detta är livsbetingelser för det liv, som fötts (=skapats), och det är livsbetingelser som erbjudas tack vare det födda livets kontakt utåt med annat skapat, en kontakt som ånyo ger liv och håller det svaga uppe, contra döden.”⁸²⁶

432. Gregersen, “Skabelse og forsyn,” 81, my translation of: “hvad der sker med dyrene, sker *for* mennesket.”

456. Grøn, “Det uåndterligt gode,” 60, emphasis in original, my translation of: “Vi tillægger noget værdi, fordi det er værdifuldt, men at det er værdifuldt må i sidste ende betyde, at det for os har værdi *i sig selv*.”

459. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 354–55, translation of: “Ich gleube, das mich Gott geschaffen hat sampt allen creaturn, mir leib und seel, augen, orn und alle gelieder, vernunft und alle synne gegeben hat, und noch erhelt, dazu kleider und schuch, essen und trincken, haus und hofe, weib und kind, acker, vihe und alle gueter, mit aller notturfft und narung dis leibs und lebens reichlich und teglich versorget, widder alle ferligkeit beschirmit und fuer allem ubel behuet und bewaret, und das alles aus lauter Veterlicher, Goettlicher guete und barmherzigkeit on alle mein verdienst und wirdigkeit, des alles ich yhm zu dancken und zu loben und dafuer zu

⁸²⁶ Wingren, *Skapelsen och lagen*, 28.

dienen und gehorsam zu sein schueldig bin; Das ist gewislich wahr.”⁸²⁷

Chapter 9

488. Mikkelsen, “Den trinitariske Gud,” 23, my translation of: “Til Jesu menneskelighed hører, at Jesus ikke vidste, hvordan hans liv ville ende. Til det at leve som et sandt menneske i historien hører at være underlagt historiens kontingens.”

492. Gregersen, “Fra skabelsesteologi til dybdeinkarnation,” 35, my translation of: “‘Det er fuldbragt’, lyder det sidste korsord af Kristus ifølge Johannesevangeliet ... Ja, for her går Guds Søn selv til bunds med sin skabning, følger mennesket og spurven og græsset helt ind i døden, for derigennem aldrig at lade nogen skabning være alene. Mennesket og andre skabninger bliver skabt som individer, men altid til fællesskab. Selv i døden er der fællesskab, ikke længere med ægtefæller og børn og forældre og venner, men med Gud, der i sin Søn har bevæget sig ind i skabelsens vævning af liv og død. Gud er derfor fuldt ligeså meget at finde i det lave græs som i stjernernes højder.”

523. Thomas, “Krankheit als Manifestation menschlicher Endlichkeit,” 187, my translation of: “Würdigung endlich-geschöpflichen Lebens.”

Chapter 10

568. Busch Nielsen, “Synd,” 123, emphasis in original, my translation of: “Ikke sådan at det trøstesløse er *ophævet* ... Men sådan at det trøstesløse ikke desto mindre er *gennembrudt*.”

599. Løgstrup, *Metaphysics, Vol. 1*, 334, translation of: “Gudsriget er ikke kun en ophævelse af loven og dens død, det er også en ophævelse af den biologiske og grusomme død. Ikke alene etisk, også kosmisk handler Gud imod sig selv, går det kristne budskab ud på.”⁸²⁸

613. Mikkelsen, “Den trinitariske Gud,” 30, my translation of: “selve personifikationen af Gudsrigets komme til verden.”

Chapter 11

733. Leer-Salvesen, *Tilgivelse*, 171, my translation of: “Guds tilgivelse er en suveren kjærlighetshandling, som ikke setter opp noen betingelser på forhånd.”

⁸²⁷ Luther, WA 30, 293-295.

⁸²⁸ Løgstrup, *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*, 277.

749. See e.g. Brümmer, “Atonement and Reconciliation,” 448–49. In Chapter 5.2, I used Leer-Salvesen’s phrase, “a true sense of guilt” (*sann skyldfølelse*), to describe the emotional quality of repentance, see Leer-Salvesen, *Min skyld*, 35. His argument for preferring this concept over “repentance” is that, while a true sense of guilt clearly directs the wrongdoer towards the harm done to the other person, repentance can also point the human person back to oneself. He refers to a drug smuggler claiming: “First of all, I repent being so stupid that I was caught,” *ibid.*, 76, my translation of: “Jeg angrer først og fremst på at jeg var så dum at jeg ble tatt.”

761. According to Theodor Jørgensen, the cross was not necessary for God to forgive human beings; but it was necessary for human beings. “The crucified Christ is the divine token of the credibility of the forgiveness of sins,” Jørgensen, “Dom og forsoning i nutidigt perspektiv,” 147, my translation of: “Den korsfæstede Kristus er Guds pant på troværdigheden i syndernes forladelse.”

773. Løgstrup, *Metaphysics, Vol. 1*, 288, emphasis added, translation of: “Alene Guds tilgivelse af den, der lever på bekostning af andre, undgår at bagatellisere den nød han bragte over andre – fordi Gud oprejser den nødstedte. Det liv, som ugerningsmanden bedrog ham for, giver Gud ham evigt igen, og derfor kan Gud og han alene tilgive ugerningsmanden.”⁸²⁹

Chapter 12

796. Suggesting that the proximate contexts pose limits that humans should worship does not entail absolutizing the proximate context. As Wingren points out, the connection between birth and creation means that God’s creation is ongoing: “Every birth is a creation. God creates now,” Wingren, *Credo*, 60, my translation of: “Varje födelse är en skapelse. Gud skapar nu.”

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.