

The Humanity of Divinity

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I/ INTRODUCTION

This essay is a modest effort to reflect upon the peculiar way in which the study of divinity makes humanists of us all.¹ In what sense does the proper subject of Christian theology include humanity? How is it that disciplined reasoning concerning God leads us to no less disciplined reasoning concerning human beings? And what, if anything, do the kinds of answers we give to such questions as these mean for what we think about the character of Christian theology as an intellectual discipline? Two theologians in particular will help us in the effort to explore such questions: John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Both Calvin and Bonhoeffer—in their own time and in their own way—saw clearly that students of Christian theology may neither avoid nor begrudge asking and answering the Psalmist’s question, “What are human beings that you, Lord, are mindful of them, mortals that you should care for them?” (Ps 8:4). And both agreed that the subject of divinity itself requires that *this* question, i.e., the question of humanity, be on the docket. Over decades of theological research and committed teaching at Union Theological Seminary, Christopher Morse has invited his students to discern in particular the abiding provocation and salutary instruction to be had from critical and creative engagement with the legacies of both these theologians. I offer these few remarks as but a faint echo and brief footnote to his own gainful service to the churches, from which I myself have received much.

II/ THE HUMANNESSE OF JOHN CALVIN?

“He’s a classic Calvinist, too. Let the punishment fit the crime, and then some’.

*‘That’s not Calvinism,’ Rebus said, ‘It’s Gilbert and Sullivan.’”*²

If we were to take our cues from popular portraits of the French reformer, we would think Calvin unlikely to help us appreciate the humanity of the study of divinity. While undoubtedly a humanist in the quite specific sense of being a prac-

1 In Scotland, where I live and work, the discipline of theology as a whole is commonly referred to as ‘divinity’ and theologians as ‘divines’; the American terminology of the ‘Divinity School’ reflects this heritage. Together with its narrower meaning—i.e., to refer to the reality of God as such—I also exploit the resonances of this wider meaning in what follows.

2 Ian Rankin, *Rebus’s Scotland* (London: Orion, 2005), p. 42.

tioner of the scholarly literary methods of early modern European intellectual culture, for many people Calvin has been a signal representative of the *inhumanity* even *misanthropy* of theology.³ The 18th century historian Edward Gibbon charged that “personal malice” and “envenomed . . . envy” were the sole motivations for the reformer’s life and thought.⁴ William Barry’s informative and scholarly entry on Calvin in the 1911 *Catholic Encyclopaedia* casually refers to its subject throughout simply as “the dictator”. Calvin, we read, embraced a perverse love of austerity amounting to a “Manichean hatred of the body”; his work at its core is shot through with “concentrated pride,” fractiousness, and scorn of others. Barry finishes with antiquarian flourish: “Geneva was the Sparta of Reformed churches; and Calvin [was] its Lyncurgus.”⁵

It is not only such scholars who have considered Calvin a misanthrope. Consider the portraits painted by our poets. Take this short excerpt from “John Calvin” by the Hungarian-Canadian poet Gyorgy Faludy:

“His forehead was unlined but moist, and shone
above his long French nose. He didn’t care
to touch his wife, so he caressed his beard
into smooth waves as he proclaimed the Lord
thrust sin into men’s souls so he could hurl
them latterly into Hell. It was so vile,
so horrible, it had to be believed.
In dreams he loved to hone castrating knives
and in Geneva did away with lust,
jailed loving couples, poets, all who smiled
with happiness, or laughed, or studied books.
and well-dressed men who danced.”

Finally, treating of the case of “poor Servetus” Faludy goes on to imagine how, “Calvin had him burned on slow fire / his followers herding all the people there / to watch the blaze as, at his window, sniffing / that rank smoke, he licked his swollen lips.”⁶ Closer to my home in Scotland, the poet Edwin Muir, has long invited his fellow Scots to contemplate the image of, “King Calvin with his

3 For a recent insightful theological reflection on this charge related in particular to Calvin’s doctrine of human depravity in sin, see Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 202–9.

4 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, volume 7 (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1840), p. 101, footnote 36.

5 William Barry, s.c. ‘Calvin’, *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1911).

6 George Faludy, ‘John Calvin’ in *George Faludy: Selected Poems 1933–80* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), p. 206.

iron pen, / and God three angry letters in a book / and there the logical hook / on which the mystery is impaled and bent / into an ideological argument.”⁷

The popular image of Calvin as a desiccated ideologue and despiser of all things human is well captured in an anecdote told by one of the leading Calvin scholars of our own day, Randall Zachman. He relates how once, while a student at Yale Divinity School, a friend passed him a satirical pamphlet resembling an evangelistic tract. Its cover claimed to summarise Calvin’s doctrine. Inside it read in solid block letters: “God hates you and has a horrible plan for your life.”⁸

At this point we could begin to play a game of competing portraits, by marshalling all the evidence we could muster in defence of Calvin’s character, starting with his own (perhaps wry) self-description as “timid, soft, and cowardly by nature”⁹ and building upon what Beza in his 1564 biography called the “wealth of material available to us to testify to his good qualities” and “silence those malicious men who speak ill of him and swamp the people who know no better with false rumours and slanders.”¹⁰ But rather than entertain you with this, I want to move from consideration of Calvin’s person to his thought. For in the end, it must be upon Calvin’s *theology* rather than upon his personality *per se* that the question of whether his legacy is humane or misanthropic is decided.

As is well known, Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was a work permanently in progress. Yet from the very first edition of 1536 Calvin’s doctrinal synthesis led with this famous claim: “Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves” (I.1.1).¹¹ With each successive revision and expansion of the work, Calvin was at pains to clarify and amplify this proposition further in both this article and elsewhere. As an initial gloss on the matter of human self-knowledge, he added this to his text in the 1539 printing at the opening of the second book: “With good reason the ancient proverb [‘know thyself’] strongly recommended knowledge of self to man. For if it is considered disgraceful for us not to know all that pertains to the business of human life, even more detestable is our ignorance of ourselves. . . . Yet, there is much disagreement as to how we acquire that knowledge” (II.1.1 and 3 (1539)).¹² This same early revision also brought another admission to the fore, namely, that, as Calvin says, “it is not easy to discern” whether it is the knowledge of God or that of ourselves which “precedes and brings forth the other” (I.i.1 (1539)). Writing twenty years later, in the greatly expanded introduction to the work as a whole, Calvin reflects at length

7 Edwin Muir, ‘The Incarnate One,’ in *One Foot in Eden* (1956), p. 47f.

8 Randall Zachman, ‘Theologian in the Service of Piety: A New Portrait of Calvin’, *The Christian Century*, April 23–30, 1997, p. 413.

9 So writes J. Cottret in *John Calvin: A Biography* (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2003).

10 Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1997), pp 121, 12. For a delightful and persuasive effort of this kind see Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin: The Reformer as a Husband, Father, Pastor and Friend*, trans. G. Shriver (Louisville: Abingdon, 1971).

11 Cited from the revised edition of John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1536 Edition*, trans. F. Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1986).

12 All other references to Calvin’s *Institutes* here are made following this edition—John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559)*, 2 volumes, ed. J.T. McNeil, trans. F. Lewis Battles. *Library of Christian Classics*, volumes 20 and 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

on how the traffic between self-knowledge and knowledge of God runs variously and turbulently in both directions (I.1.1–3 (1559)). While this matter, it seems, draws the theologian into a real thicket, Calvin never falters in his view that this is the *right* thicket in which to be. Indeed, very few of the structuring elements of Calvin's *Institutes* persist across the three decades of its unfolding composition as surely as does his instance upon the importance, propriety, and difficulty of winning true human self-understanding.

It will already have become clear that human self-understanding is no independent theme in Calvin's thought, being thoroughly entangled with the question of God from the outset. But we need to say more than just 'entangled' here—for Calvin is clearly of the mind that as far as Christian theology goes, the knowledge of God and of ourselves are not just interrelated, but are also irreversibly ordered. This ordering comes to negative expression when he remarks that "it is certain than man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face" (I.1.2 (1539)), and when he observes how a human being "is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness" of her true state until she "has compared [herself] with God's majesty" (I.1.3 (1559)). The same ordering of knowledge finds direct and positive expression in the final French version of the *Institutes* from 1560, where Calvin states plainly that it is only "in knowing God" that "each of us also knows himself".¹³ True human self-understanding arises out of knowledge of God. Thus there is ultimately, in Calvin, a necessary *indirection* to theology's interest in and view of humanity. The path to such knowing within Christian thought must be *specifically circuitous*, if it is to lead us to genuine human self-knowledge at all.¹⁴

For our purposes, it is crucial to note well a further feature of Calvin's thinking here: namely, that the knowledge of ourselves we win by way of the knowledge of God is *humanizing* in its character and effects. In part, this is because it is in and through a right knowledge of God that we discern the purpose, prospects and limits of human existence in the midst of the "the melancholy desolation of these days" (IV.1.2) as Calvin has it. This is why Calvin's programme of more narrowly theological inquiry and reform is always closely allied with a parallel programme of ethical, social, and even political inquiry and reform. This is something one finds nicely displayed in his 1539 treatise on *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*.¹⁵ Calvin's immediate concern in this work is with the proper shape of the life and faith of the Christian community in relation to what he calls God's "certain economy" of salvation, i.e., in relation to the formative particu-

13 See Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), p. 36, footnote 3.

14 Cf. John W. de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), p. 42 where he rehearses the claim of Andre Bieler—made in *The Social Humanism of Calvin* (Louisville: John Knox, 1964)—that Calvin turned renaissance humanism "on its head" by "making it a consequence of God's grace".

15 John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church", in *Theological Treatises. Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), pp.183ff.

larity of what God has done and is doing in the world to remake and to sustain properly *human* life.¹⁶

Tellingly, he argues throughout this tract that the "apostasies and heresies" of his day are at one and the same time "blasphemous" and "presumptive" as regards God, *as well as* "cruel," "burdensome," and "tyrannical" as regards women and men. It is important to observe how, seen in this way, reform of the church has a dual purpose—both a better honouring of God *and* the provision of a greater humanness. Theological heresy and ecclesiastical apostasy, on Calvin's view, are always simultaneously blasphemous *and* misanthropic; or better, they are misanthropic *because* they are blasphemous. In short, to get God wrong is bad for you, humanly speaking. This is why time and time again, Calvin counts amongst the foremost goals of church reform the unburdening of consciences, the dispelling of delusions, and the rescue of human freedom from illegitimate constraints both spiritual, ecclesiastical and political, without thereby having 'changed the subject' at all.

Theology done in this mode wagers that human interests—interests in truth, in justice, in wisdom etc.—are best served when and where our efforts at self-understanding are detoured through careful reflection upon divinity. Theology done well is always and inevitably a *philanthropic* endeavour only because and in so far as it goes about its proper business of pursuing true knowledge of deity. For in concentrating upon God, theology comes to reflect in thought the essential philanthropy of the deity itself. Christians can and must ask God "to lead us, unfeignedly repentant, to the knowledge of ourselves" since by way of knowledge of the gospel we know that "gentleness and sweetness which [God] shows forth in his Christ"¹⁷ as so also all the humane "benefits" which flow from embracing "what is to our advantage to know" of God (I.2.2. (1559)). It is the philanthropy of the God of the gospel that underwrites, demands and empowers the humanity of Christian theology and the humanism of the Christian theologian.

III/ REFERRING TO GOD—BONHOEFFER AND THE QUESTION OF HUMANITY

Calvin's view of this matter is distinctive but not idiosyncratic. Let us come forward to the first half of the twentieth century, and north from the French Cantons of Switzerland to the plains of North-Eastern Germany, more specifically to the lecture halls of the University of Berlin, where between 1930 and 1933 we could have taken in the lectures of a young theological teacher named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Unlike with Calvin, few, if any, have cast Bonhoeffer as a misanthrope, though his unwillingness to play tennis with American amateurs during his year at Union Seminary in New York has occasionally drawn accusations of 'elitism'.¹⁸ But just like Calvin—and in spite of the tennis—the Lutheran Bon-

16 Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church", p. 192.

17 Calvin, *Institutes 1536*, I.6, p.18.

18 See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Revised edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 155 citing Paul Lehmann's own account of Bonhoeffer's 'irresistible and unflinching sense of humour.'

hoeffer was centrally preoccupied with theme of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity. And like Calvin he too contended that they are thoroughly entangled in a very particular way.

At the end of July 1930 Bonhoeffer delivered his inaugural lecture within the Faculty of Theology, taking as his topic the question of humanity in recent philosophical and theological reflection.¹⁹ It is a detailed piece of work, which scrutinizes a range of important contemporary philosophical accounts of humanity including those offered by Greisbach, Scheler, and Heidegger. For present purposes, what counts are the results of all this philosophical heavy lifting. We human beings, Bonhoeffer argues, seek to understand ourselves either from our possibilities and achievements or from our limitations. In the former case, the question of transcendence is never really broached as the human person is approached as “a self-subsisting world, needing no others (only itself) in order to come into his own essence”; in the latter case, by contrast, it would appear that the question of transcendence is central, because thought from its limitations, human nature rests not “in immanent, quiescent possibilities but in ever-active relating to its own boundaries.”²⁰ But Bonhoeffer objects that this second case is in fact reducible to the first. This is because “the boundary by which the human being limits himself remains a self-drawn boundary, that is, a boundary the human person essentially has already crossed, a boundary that person much already have stood beyond in the first place in order to draw it.” In this way, “by limiting my own possibilities in thought . . . I demonstrate through the very possibility of limitation the infinity of my possibilities.”²¹

It is Bonhoeffer’s contention that question of humanity can never be posed with full seriousness if it is put as question both asked and answered within the scope of human being. While this problem was patent in the philosophy of Bonhoeffer’s day, he charged that a good many attempts to pose the question of humanity on theological soil—including those made by some of his teachers and contemporaries—also succumb to this same lack of seriousness. What is Bonhoeffer’s concern here? What worries him most is the collapse of transcendence into mere human possibility. For if the answer to the question we are to ourselves is always and inevitably “comprised in the question” itself, then, he argues, the whole effort proves viciously solipsistic. Any knowledge of ourselves won along this path will be rooted not in reality, but merely in the reflex of the anxious will, and so will skate dangerously back and forth between the poles of false self-aggrandizement and equally false self-denigration. In either case, such knowledge will prove to be false and misleading, and as such dehumanizing.

19 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’ in *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931*, Volume 10, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* ed. C.J. Green, trans. D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 389–408.

20 Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, p. 391.

21 Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, p. 399.

Theology has a diagnosis for this loss of genuine transcendence and the concomitant exchange of a world of what is real for a world merely of what is willed or wished, the forfeit of the world genuinely beyond me merely for the world that I myself am. That diagnosis is ‘sin.’ In thinking through the nature of sin, Bonhoeffer enthusiastically adopts Luther’s image of humanity *incurvatus in se*—of human beings turned in upon themselves, like an arrangement of frightened armadillos.²² Bonhoeffer, with Luther, could think of no better image with which to capture the situation of humanity in sin than this one of alienated self-imprisonment.

But how is the question of humanity to be asked and answered with requisite seriousness under the conditions of the fall? As Bonhoeffer states this case:

If the question about the human being is to be posed seriously, it can be so only where the human being is before God That is, the human being is torn completely out of himself, drawn as a whole person before God, and here the question about the human being becomes serious precisely because it no longer includes its own answer. Instead, God gives the human being the answer completely freely and completely anew, since it is now God who has placed the human before God himself and instructs the human being to question in this way. That is, the human being experiences his foundation not through himself, but through God. Whoever God summons is in essence a human being.²³

We human beings certainly come to understand ourselves by reflection, Bonhoeffer concedes, but only in the act of being referred to God, i.e., only at the point where we in fact stand before God and are made what we are by virtue of the salutary effects of God’s own dynamic reality. As with Calvin, Bonhoeffer contends that the knowledge of humanity to which we rightly and necessarily aspire is, theologically speaking, only had indirectly, because *en route* to it human self-reflection is and must be interrupted by God, or else the “human spirit circles perpetually around itself” in sin’s solipsistic spiral.²⁴ Bonhoeffer has a classical theological vocabulary with which to describe this divine interruption and its effects, deploying terms like ‘judgment,’ ‘forgiveness of sins,’ ‘sanctification,’ and ‘revelation.’ What this idiom makes clear is that when Bonhoeffer talks of our coming to understand ourselves “in the act of being related ourselves to God” he is not talking about something we accomplish, but rather about an act of God, something God and God alone does to forge this determinative relation; an act, in sum, of “judgment and grace.”²⁵

22 The image of the armadillo is mine, not Luther’s own!

23 Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, p. 400.

24 Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, p. 406.

25 See Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, pp. 405–7.

Now Bonhoeffer—again like Calvin—considers this rather good news for humanity. For that “act of relating to God” [*Aktbezug*] through whose fire knowledge of ourselves must pass, is the self-same act in which we are graciously given back to the real world, an act in which the world beyond what I would will and wish comes into view once again. Where once there was only an isolated individual—a “master of the world, but only of the world its ego interprets and thinks up, master in its own, self-restricted, violated world”—now there are *others*, there is the *community*.²⁶ For Bonhoeffer, it is only on the other side of being related to God *by God* that we discover that a genuine human existence is a life lived for others, whose fruit is the kind of human society that can only be had amongst the ‘children of mercy,’ as Luther styled it. The world shattering brush with divinity in Jesus Christ brings in its train decisively humanizing effects because and insofar as it affords a genuine transcendence *in the midst of life and for life’s sake*.

Bonhoeffer, as a thinker, was at once restless and unrelenting. In the summer of 1933 he delivered what would be his final course at the University of Berlin, and chose Christology for his theme. In these lectures he revisits and presses further the line of thinking we have been tracing. In terms redolent of all we have just been considering he ventured this claim:

Christology is doctrine, speaking, the word about the Word of God . . . it is knowledge *par excellence*. From outside, Christology becomes the center of knowledge . . . Only scholarship that knows itself to be within the realm of the Christian church could agree here that Christology is the center of the realm of scholarship itself. That means that Christology is the invisible, unrecognized, hidden center of scholarship, of the *universitas litterarum*.²⁷

This is an extraordinary set of remarks, yet entirely in keeping with what has already been advanced with respect to theological anthropology. Now, the peculiar reality of God is understood to be the source not only of true *humanity*, but also of the ultimate truth of the *humanities*—theology’s object stands as the condition of possibility for the whole endeavour of humane learning—*Geistwissenschaft*—in the ‘republic of letters.’ The decisive issue once again is the question of the reality of transcendence: Bonhoeffer considers it to be axiomatic that “the transcendent”—here concretely the Word become flesh—“is always only the prerequisite for our thinking, never the proof.”²⁸ At issue is the effect of *this* transcendent reality upon human self-understanding as worked out in humane scholarship, i.e., what happens when the closed circle of human rationation and discourse is invaded and so transcended by *another* ‘reason’ by *another* ‘discourse,’ *another* ‘logos,’ around

26 Bonhoeffer, ‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’, p. 406.

27 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology” in *Berlin: 1932–1933*. Volume 12, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* ed. L.L. Rasmussen, trans. I. Best and D. Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 301.

28 Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology”, p. 301.

which everything now truly orbits even when this remains ‘unknown’ and ‘hidden.’ The God on whom Bonhoeffer thinks, is a deity whose philanthropic acts are nothing less than world making, and so inescapably pertinent for any and all attempts to investigate the whole human world as it really is.

Bonhoeffer left the University after the summer of 1933, drawn away to a London pastorate for a time, but more comprehensively, entering into an all-consuming involvement with the German Church Struggle. When, years later and courtesy of a Gestapo gag-order, Bonhoeffer found time to write again he set to work upon large scale study of Christian moral theology. His *Ethics* was to be his most important work, the culmination of all his theological endeavours to date. At its heart stands a claim whose audacity is not lessened by its being well-known: ‘*In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world . . . All concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions.*’²⁹ The upshot of this for human self-knowledge is that, “to be taken up by God, to be judged and reconciled by God on the cross—that is the reality of humanity.”³⁰ In this late idiom, Bonhoeffer describes the effect of God’s judgment and reconciliation as the salutary provision of a much needed ‘genuine worldliness’ to women and men who, in sin, have been in flight from themselves, from each other and from the real world. To be taken *up* by God is to be taken *out* of solipsistic captivity and to be put back firmly *on* the earth, set into lives now liveable for others. For Bonhoeffer finally, it is the peculiar philanthropy of deity that underwrites, demands and empowers the peculiar humanity of divinity. Humane existence is the gift and task of the Gospel of the God of Jesus Christ.

IV/ CONCLUDING REMARKS

Walt Whitman, the incomparable American humanist and poet once wrote, “I say to mankind, be not curious about God. For I, who am curious about each, am not curious about God.”³¹ By contrast, when the Psalmist asks “what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals, that you care for them?” we overhear the voice of one whose passionate curiosity about humanity is inescapably bound up with an equally curious passion for God. Indeed, it is because the Psalmist is curious about God that he is curious about and deeply interested in ‘each.’ In this essay I have ventured to reflect a little upon something of what theologians of the calibre of Calvin and Bonhoeffer have made of this dual curiosity, and upon particular ways in which they understood the *questions* of God and humanity, the *knowledge* of God and humanity, and indeed finally the *reality* of God and humanity, to be peculiarly entangled with one another by virtue of the Christian gospel. For both, theology is inevitably led to humanity as a theme precisely as it labours to track the course and discern the contours of God’s mindfulness of and

29 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Volume 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* ed. C.J. Green, trans. R. Krauss, C.C. West and D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 54.

30 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 88.

31 Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, §48.

care for human beings. Both Calvin and Bonhoeffer see humanity and the struggle for humane self-understanding to be profoundly implicated in “the total relevance of the person, Jesus” as the Canadian poet, Margaret Avison has characterised it.³² To think upon the God of our salvation is to be led to contemplate the reality and lives of those women and men whom God saves.

Questions of course, remain—what are we to understand by ‘act of God’? Just what kind of knowledge is the knowledge of God? When and where does such knowledge arise, from what sources, and how is its legitimacy and truth discerned? And what happens to human language when it traffics in talk of God? What does this kind of theological description have to do with all manner of other sorts of descriptions we humans offer of ourselves and our world? And just how might the kinds of claims Calvin or Bonhoeffer make be driven effectively into concrete life and their significance drawn out for *this* or for *that* particular circumstance? In his calling as a Christian theologian, Christopher Morse has for many years devoted his considerable energies to stirring up and reflecting theologically upon just such questions, always refusing to believe that “human identity is self-referential” or that “who we are consists ultimately in our own decisions.”³³ In no small measure thanks to the gift of Morse’s own theological existence many of us still—Whitman notwithstanding—remain desperately and faithfully curious to discern afresh how it is that “God and the dawning of our own reality belong together” for the sake of our common benediction.³⁴

32 Margaret Avison, *A Kind of Perseverance* (Hansport: Lancelot Press, 1994), p. 21.

33 Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit. A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. 283.

34 Wolf Krötke, “Gottes Klarheit”, in *Kirche in Umbruch der Gesellschaft*. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), p. 32.