



BRILL

The Sign of Jonah

Divine Abandonment as Human Freedom in Karl Barth's Mature Trinitarian Ontology

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Received 17 September 2022 | Accepted 16 July 2023 |

Published online 18 October 2023

Abstract

The dialectical-theological origins of the politically- and ethically-charged concept of alterity are well-known within the philosophy of religion. Intellectual histories of this concept tie it too exclusively to the notion of distance or *διάστασις* in Karl Barth's early *Römerbrief*, however, and so miss Barth's Trinitarian reinterpretation of God's otherness in his later work. Taking as my hermeneutical key a cipher, the 'sign of Jonah,' that emerges in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, I show that Barth's mature doctrines of temporality and filiation understand alterity as a moment of divine life. Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane marks the climax of Barth's self-reinterpretation: world history inheres within the Christological situation of paternal abandonment. The political-theological conclusions Barth draws from the 'sign of Jonah' dovetail with alterity discourses' anti-totalitarian aspirations but suggest that these aspirations' structural coherence rest on the magisterial Reformers' Christological and ecclesiological commitments.

Keywords

alterity – Christology – dialectical theology – distance – ecclesiology – Karl Barth – political theology – Trinitarian theology

This study has two aims. First, it engages a longstanding debate about the role of the “infinite qualitative distinction (*unendlich qualitativer Unterschied*),”¹ ‘distance,’ or διάστασις between God and created being in Karl Barth’s theology. Second, it uses this engagement to revisit the doxographic origins, and thus perhaps requirements, of the concept of alterity in the philosophy of religion. While Protestant dialectical theology’s impact on postwar European philosophy’s interest in ‘the Other’ is well-documented,² more fully laying out this history’s conceptual consequences is important for three reasons. First, historians of philosophy are beginning to understand alterity as “a fundamental word and theme in European and European-influenced thought in recent decades,” if not of “the last century”³ as a whole. Second, the ‘Other’ seems poised to continue its illustrious career, even if pseudonymously: its epistemological variant *événementialité*, for instance, remains a leitmotif in recent French philosophy.⁴ Third (and, for my purposes, decisively), the political possibilities the philosophy of religion meant to open up through gestures to alterity and to its sister concepts stands at an impasse. There remain, on the one hand, those for whom a stress on the divine or human ‘Other’ effectively safeguards against ideology. On this view, “it would [be] necessary to admit *the distance of God*,” as (the young) Jean-Luc Marion says, “[t]o pass beyond ... the supremely idolatrous identification of ‘God’ with the absolute knowledge

1 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxon.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968 [1921/22]), 9 v. 20, p. 355 [= Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (1922) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1940), p. 340]. I have modified Hoskyns’ translation where helpful and, when citing the *Römerbrief*, will cite the original text in brackets.

2 See Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007) and Mark Taylor, *Abiding Grace: Time, Modernity, Death* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018), especially pp. 83–84. Moyn and Taylor stress Barth’s impact while acknowledging he was read alongside both his own sources, like Søren Kierkegaard, and fellow-travelers like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Rudolf Bultmann, and Franz Rosenzweig.

3 Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, p. 7.

4 Recent work on *événementialité* includes, for instance, Claude Romano’s *L’Événement et le Monde* (Paris: PUF, 1998) and *L’Événement et le Temps* (Paris: PUF, 1999) or Jean Vioulac’s *Apocalypse de la vérité: Méditations heideggeriennes* (Paris: Ad Solem, 2014). The epistemological description of the encounter with ‘the Other’ as *événement* has become so commonplace, indeed, that Jean-Luc Marion retroactively interprets his own concept of the saturated phenomenon – the phenomenological rubric under which he classes the Levinasian *visage* and Michel Henry’s Life, both themselves ways of thinking alterity using the language of phenomenology – as *événements*. See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2017 [2013]), p. 169.

Hegel had constructed.”⁵ Through such “*apophasis*,” we “affirm particular aims provisionally while simultaneously subjecting them to critique” – the “political askesis” characteristic of “democratic citizen[ship]”⁶ – or, if considering the human ‘Other,’ “respond to the singularity and particularly of those forgotten and suppressed by the universal.”⁷ Arrayed against this, on the other hand, are those for whom this first view logically terminates in ‘particularism,’ in an irreducibly heterogenous polity structurally incapable of the moral consensus needed for meaningful collective action. Often represented by Marxist theorists like Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek (and cresting, perhaps, in Badiou’s *Saint Paul*), this second view sees Christian theology’s political legacy as that of a liberationist, but universalist, appeal. Discourses of alterity lead, on this second view, to relativisms which render competing political claims irresolvable, *de facto* benefiting the *status quo*.⁸

That Barth himself saw his project as inextricable from political theology underscores the need to revisit his work’s significance from this angle. Contemporary scholarship on this topic has mainly focused on Barth’s second *Römerbrief* (1921/22), eschewing his mature and more complex *Church Dogmatics* (1932–1967). This historiographic emphasis is not entirely unjustified. The *Römerbrief* does stress God’s transcendence over against the world to forbid conscripting God into any immanent political project, whether that of Barth’s ‘liberal’ forebears’ German nationalism or of revolutionary socialism. Moreover, because it indeed “state[s] ... something like the ‘eschatological proviso’ which liberation theology has insisted on as a way of saying that human projects are not identical with God’s kingdom,”⁹ the earlier Barth’s political-theological use of διάστασις stands closest to, and is thus most recognizable for, late-20th-century alterity discourses. Interpretations of Barth’s political theology that rest mainly on the *Römerbrief* are incomplete, however, given how he later qualifies his (to use Samuel Moyn’s helpful distinction) “diastatical”¹⁰

5 Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and the Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2001 [1977]), p. 76.

6 David Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology, and the Future of Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2020), p. 151.

7 Erin S. Nelson, *Levinas, Adorno, and the Ethics of the Material Other* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), p. 340.

8 See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l’universalisme*, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 2015 [1997]), and Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2000), especially pp. 132–133.

9 Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxon.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 67.

10 Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, p. 137: “The theory that results has been called ... ‘diastatical’ in content: it involved a connection in which two members of a dyad interrelate without

phase. In his retrospective 1956 lecture “The Humanity of God,” for instance, Barth speaks of the *Römerbrief* as an overcorrection. Though “certainly right,” he says, to have opposed a theology that “had become *religionistic, anthropocentric*, and in this sense *humanistic*,” he laments that he “viewed [the] ‘wholly other’ in isolation, abstracted and absolutized, and set it over against man ... in such fashion that it continually showed a greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”¹¹ The contemporaneous *Dogmatics* are even harsher. “We may believe that God can and must ... be only the ‘Wholly Other.’ But such beliefs are shown to be quite untenable, and corrupt and pagan”¹² when faced with the *factum Christi*. This seeming reversal has led much of the secondary literature to conclude that the later Barth is apolitical.¹³ R.H. Roberts even suggests that the *Dogmatics* “stands before us as a warning as to what may happen if the God of the orthodox Christian Gospel is prized apart from the structures of contemporary human life.”¹⁴

This specific debate over Barth’s apparent move away from political theology is embedded within a larger one about distance’s changing role within his thought. Two major readings have characterized this second debate. The first, Hans Urs von Balthasar’s, is that the *Dogmatics* “gradually and without fanfare, but no less inexorably, replaced the central notion of ‘the Word of God’ with that of ‘Jesus Christ, God and man.’”¹⁵ The 1940 *Doctrine of God* anticipates this “turn from dialectic to analogy,”¹⁶ which the *Doctrine of Creation*

the possibility of resolution or higher synthesis between them. In diastasis, as opposed to dialectic, each is barred from absorption in or mediation by the other.”

- 11 Karl Barth, “The Humanity of God” (1956), in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Know Press, 1960), pp. 39–44.
- 12 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (CD) IV/1, § 59, p. 186 [= *kirchliche Dogmatik* (KD) IV/1, § 59, p. 203]. When citing the *Church Dogmatics*, I will first give the citation from the English-language translation by T&T Clark, which I have occasionally modified, followed by the page number in the equivalent original volume. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 14 vols., ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 1936–1976); and Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, 13 vols. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1932–1967).
- 13 For a review of the history of and justifications for this position within Barth scholarship, see Gorringer, *Against Hegemony*, p. 17.
- 14 R.H. Roberts, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications,” in *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, ed. S.W. Sykes (Oxon.: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 145.
- 15 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, s.j. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992 [1951]), pp. 114–115.
- 16 Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxon.: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 2. This is McCormack’s description of von Balthasar’s hermeneutic, with which he disagrees.

completes five years later. The second interpretation, spearheaded by Ingrid Spieckermann and Eberhard Jüngel in Germanophone and Bruce McCormack in Anglophone scholarship, respectively, disagrees. On this view, Barth's only major 'turn' is his rejection of theological 'liberalism' in the 1920s. A "deepening"¹⁷ of the insight that God's self-revelation must ground all human theological reflection characterizes his project thenceforth. This does not lead Barth to abandon the concept of distance, as McCormack argues, but to interpret this concept theologically as a constitutive element of revelation. Both readings are partially correct: von Balthasar's in that the later Barth does recover a positive valuation of the created order by enfolding Creation into Christology; the second in that this recovery radicalizes, but does not directionally depart from, the *Römerbrief's* use of *διάστασις*. Contrariwise, both interpretations share one weakness: they still read Barth using the traditional theological binary of nature and grace. Von Balthasar explicitly identifies Barth's 'analogical turn' as rehabilitating *φύσις*,¹⁸ while McCormack insists that Barth's idea of "the 'analogy of faith,'" which claims that "human knowledge is made ... to conform to its divine object ... [i]n the event of revelation," bespeaks an act of "grace, not nature."¹⁹ In my view, however, the *Dogmatics* intend to deconstruct this binary altogether by rethinking the concept of being *von Gott aus*.

The first two sections of this study are dedicated to showing how this rethinking of being from within revealed theology takes place through the *Dogmatics'* doctrine of time. This doctrine completes the Christological refoundation of ontology Barth announced as early as his 1929 lecture "Fate and Idea in Theology," which served, not coincidentally, as a response to Erich Przywara's *Analogia Entis*.²⁰ Barth starts with the question of being – is "God ... himself being, the origin and perfection of everything that is"?²¹ – and analyzes two theological methods that try to answer this question: "realism" and "idealism." Although this text first claims that realism is that which maps God onto a feature (objective in classical metaphysics, subjective in mysticism) of being, it winds up finding the analogical formula – "similarity to God in the midst of even greater dissimilarity"²² – in idealism, too. Barth critiques his

17 Id., n. 1.

18 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 115.

19 McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, pp. 17–18.

20 Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 93.

21 Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology" (1929), in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 1986), p. 33.

22 Id., p. 46. Barth is paraphrasing the Fourth Lateran Council's formula (1215): "*inter Cre-*

own diastatical framework under this second term. Though “[t]heology needs this antidote and this modesty,”²³ idealism can confuse the self-transcendence internal to thinking’s dialectical structure with God’s transcendence. “Theology must therefore resist the impulse to devise a grand synthesis of opposites,”²⁴ Barth says, but this will only happen if we “begin ... where God’s Word has and does concretely come to us: In truth” – ‘distance’ – “because it is God’s Word. In reality” – ‘being’ – “because it was made flesh.”²⁵ Barth scholarship has recognized this Christocentric reorientation of his theological method while neglecting how the *Dogmatics* ultimately interpret the epistemological tension between realism and idealism ontologically as the self-alienation that interiorly characterizes the Trinitarian life. We can find the hermeneutic cipher for understanding this interpretation of διάστασις as a feature of God’s being in that “mini-dogmatics unto itself,”²⁶ the 1953 *Doctrine of Reconciliation*: ‘the sign of Jonah.’

This cipher comes up in the context of Barth’s meditation on Jesus’ agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Here, “Jesus does not, in fact, receive any sign (*Zeichen*) from God. Or rather, He has ‘the sign of the prophet Jonah’ (*das “Zeichen des Propheten Jona”*) who was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly. For Him, as for all this evil and adulterous generation, the only sign will now be the actual event of His death.”²⁷ In Gethsemane, in other words, the Son experiences his own διάστασις from the Father: a divine abandonment. My central claim is that this experience is not, for Barth, a marginal one in the Son’s earthly sojourn. It forms, rather, the climax of the Trinitarian cosmology von Balthasar rightly saw in the *Doctrine of Creation*. Time itself exists as an externalization of the history God is. Because this history achieves “the ‘eschatological event of salvation’”²⁸ on the cross, however, the destitution Jesus undergoes in Gethsemane is – for the human being – the epistemological flipside of her proper ontological site of participation in the divine life: mortal finitude. This study’s third section concludes by arguing that this kenotic

atorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notanda.” See Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 43rd ed., ed. Peter Hünermann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), p. 269, n. 806.

23 Id., p. 47.

24 Id., p. 48.

25 Id., p. 60.

26 Bruce McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2022), p. 109.

27 *CD IV/1*, § 59, p. 269 [= *KD*, p. 295].

28 *CD IV/1*, § 59, p. 160 [= *KD*, p. 174].

Trinitarian ontology is also a political theology. Humanity's Christological position is defined by the epistemic fallibility and moral urgency that characterizes a deliberative, free, and yet responsible political order. Barth's vision's philosophical significance thus lies in his having thought through the religious presuppositions on which late-modern alterity discourses' attempts to critique ideology must rest. McCormack's claim that "dialectical theology in the form in which it was taught by Barth was a thoroughly *modern* option"²⁹ is thus correct, though not (primarily or only) for its Kantian provenance, as McCormack claims, but for ontologically reinterpreting the Reformation's – and thereby, I venture, modernity's – founding dogmatic claim: justification by faith alone.

1 "God only in this history": Trinity, Temporality, Christology

Although he misinterprets its meaning, Roberts correctly notes that the *Church Dogmatics*' central conceptual problematic is that of temporality. "The so-called 'inner logic' of the *Church Dogmatics* is the axis of eternity and time unfolded through the motif of the 'analogy of faith.'"³⁰ Because, "for Barth, time is a surrogate for substance in general,"³¹ the relationship between eternity and time serves as Barth's alternative to a theological method that would ground God's relationship to creaturely being in a general efficient causality which God, as *prima causa*, initiates and that would know God by way of a univocal *conceptus entis* which bridges God and creaturely being. Barth's name for this other method varies. In the *Doctrine of God*, it is *analogia entis* and "natural theology"³²; in that of *Reconciliation*, it is "supreme attributes" theology.³³ Barth rejects this approach for both a formal and a material reason. Formally, such a method goes astray because its theological epistemology is not based on revelation; for it, "God and man are seen together on a ground common to both and therefore neutral." This is a "partitioning of the Christian concept of God"³⁴ between the 'God' who necessarily grounds being and the one who acts contingently in a distinct ontic context. Materially, this method wrongly divorces God's creative and salvific acts. There can be no explanatory

29 McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 466.

30 Roberts, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time," p. 88.

31 Id., pp. 88–89.

32 CD II/1, § 26, pp. 81–87 [= *KD*, pp. 87–95].

33 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 177 [= *KD*, p. 193].

34 CD II/1, § 26, pp. 81–83 [= *KD*, pp. 88–91].

gap between “that God is” and “what He wants to give and do to deliver us,”³⁵ a harmful gap between God’s immanence and economy that persists, on Barth’s reading, even in Martin Luther’s *Deus absconditus* and John Calvin’s double predestination.³⁶ The *Dogmatics*’ critique of ‘natural theology’s’ many faces thus insists for the unity of God’s being and acting: it is not directed, as Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian theology is, against “mere ‘monotheism.’”³⁷

The *Römerbrief* musters this critique using metaphors of separation. We read, for instance, that “the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it ... [T]he Resurrection is” – therefore – “not an event in history at all.”³⁸ For the later Barth, this strategy is inadequate. Although the world’s being cannot be confused with that of God, the *Dogmatics*’ solution is to think being on the basis of God instead of maximally segregating these two concepts. Barth bases this approach on the idea that God is the “*actus purus ... et singularis*.”³⁹ For Barth, this idea “holds together being and act, instead of tearing them apart like the idea of ‘essence’ ... [W]e are in fact interpreting the being of God when we describe it as God’s reality, as ‘God’s being in act (*Gottes Sein in der Tat*),’ namely, in the act of His revelation, in which the being of God declares His reality: not only His reality for us ... but also His own, inner, proper reality”⁴⁰ for Godself. Only “God is (*GOTT IST*),”⁴¹ but this ‘is’ does not denote a general *conceptus entis*. The act by which God ‘is’ is a particular act: the utterance of *the* (singular) Logos from all eternity. It is thus important to remember that the theologoumenon most often associated with Barth, that God’s revelation is a ‘self-revelation,’ means that revelation is not just epistemologically foundational for theology’s subject, but ontologically constitutive of its object. Jüngel calls this the insepar-

35 Martin Luther, *Annotationes in Epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* (1535), 4, vv. 8–9 (WA 40, p. 608). Luther distinguishes, in this passage, the *generalis* (‘general,’ natural-theological) from the *propria* (proper, ‘evangelical’) knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei*).

36 CD II/2, § 33, pp. 127–145 [= KD, pp. 136–157] discusses Reformed supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism and critiques the understanding of predestination in Luther’s *De servo arbitrio* and Calvin’s *Institutes* for (a) making the individual believer the object of God’s predestination and (b) partitioning God’s *decretum absolutum* from God’s self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. Barth appreciates supralapsarianism’s insight that God’s desire to gloriously manifest mercy and justice should be thought of as logically prior to the creation of the human being. However, for Barth, God’s *obiectum praedestinationis* – as both election and rejection – is Jesus of Nazareth, not each individual human.

37 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997 [1967]), p. 10.

38 Barth, *Romans* 1, v. 4, p. 30 [= p. 6].

39 CD II/1, § 28, p. 264 [= KD, p. 296].

40 Id., p. 262 [= p. 293].

41 Id., p. 257 [= p. 288].

ability of “form and content”⁴² in the *Dogmatics*’ concept of revelation. God reveals *Godself* because revelation is the act or “event (*EREIGNIS*)”⁴³ in which God determines God’s own being in a movement of self-interpretation. God *becomes* God in the eternal, free, and necessary act of the Father generating the Son and establishing fellowship with him in the unifying Spirit. Barth explicitly calls this act a “history”:

He is God only in these relationships (*Beziehungen*) and therefore not in a Godhead which does not take place in this history, in the relationship of its modes of being, which is neutral toward them. This neutral Godhead, this pure and empty Godhead (*neutrale, pure, leere Gottheit*), and its claim to be true divinity, is the illusion (*Blendwerk*) of an abstract ‘monotheism’ which usually fools men most successfully at the high-water mark of the development of heathen religions and mythologies and philosophies. The true and living God is the One whose Godhead consists in this history ... in these two modes of being [Father and Son] which cannot be separated, which cannot be autonomous, but which cannot cease to be different. God is God (*Gott ist GOTT*) in their concrete relationships one to the other, in the history (*Geschichte*) which happens between them.⁴⁴

But because only God ‘is,’ all being, including creaturely and historical being – which Barth calls “world-occurrence (*das WELTGESCHEHEN*)”⁴⁵ – simply is this one, innertrinitarian event of the Son’s generation seen *von außen*. “[W]e stand, no, we move necessarily within the circle of this event (*im Kreise ihres Ereignisses*).”⁴⁶

The term *ad extra* or *nach außen* thus stands at the center of the mature Barth’s doctrine of time. He seems to prefer the contrast between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ this term produces over other spatial metaphors, such as Creation’s existing ‘within’ the Trinitarian life. This contrast avoids two dangers. It avoids, on the one hand, the Scylla of a pantheism that would think of apparently triune phenomena within the world as accurately representing the divine life. These would be, Barth thinks, ‘natural theologies’ cloaked in Trinitarian garb.

42 Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 4th ed., trans. John Webster (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014 [1986]), pp. 27–28.

43 *CD* II/1, § 28, p. 264, p. 262 [= *KD*, p. 294].

44 *CD* IV/1, § 59, p. 203 [= *KD*, p. 222].

45 *CD* IV/3.2, § 72, p. 685 [= *KD*, p. 784].

46 *CD* II/1, § 28, p. 262 [= *KD*, p. 294].

His own examples include medieval *vestigia Trinitatis* and modern dialectical idealism, as the *Doctrine of the Word of God* and that of *Reconciliation* criticize, respectively. On the other hand, though, *ad extra* language also avoid the Charybdis of a ‘panagapics’ (my term) for which the Trinitarian Persons’ perichoretic love – albeit thought apart from the particular relations which, in fact, constitute them – is being’s ultimate meaning. Barth seems to view this second temptation as the stronger one. He thus counters, first, that when theology speaks of God as love, “it is not because we think that somehow we already know generally what love is as the content of an action which is genuinely good, and that on the basis of this knowledge we can equate God with this content.”⁴⁷ Moreover, and second, only one of the Persons – the Son – reveals what God’s innertrinitarian love is. This is why, Barth says, “[t]he tempting definition ‘God is love,’” this “equation of God,” should not be quoted “apart from its context and without the interpretation that is placed on it by this context”⁴⁸ in 1Jn. 4: that of the Son’s mission. The Father’s reconciling the world to himself in Jesus of Nazareth is what reveals the gratuity of the uncreated love that always already characterizes God’s life and to which created love is also called. From Barth’s perspective, then, ‘panagapics’ commits, on a cosmological scale, the same abstraction of Trinitarian relationality Kathryn Tanner has more recently accused social Trinitarianism of. There is no ‘Trinitarian love in general.’ Rather, the Son is the one who is – because he encounters the Father as a Thou does an I – the basis, in eternity, for the covenantal relationality God freely displays in time by creating and redeeming the creature.⁴⁹ Here, Barth’s Trinitarian thought does overlap with Rahner’s. For both, “the concept of ‘relation’ is ... a *logical*, not an ontological explanation ... Father, Son and Spirit are only ‘relatively’ distinct, that is, in their distinction they should not be conceived by something”⁵⁰ – even ‘relationality’ and ‘love’ – since this concocts “a distinction previous to their mutual relations and serving as their foundation.”⁵¹

In other words, because God exteriorizes Godself only in the Second Person, created being’s meaning is but that of filiation. The *Dogmatics* express this in progressively radical terms. For the *Doctrine of God*, for instance, the Creator-creature relation is an “overflowing (*Überströmen*).”⁵² At first, the *Doctrine of*

47 Id., p. 276 [= p. 309].

48 Id., p. 275 [= p. 309].

49 Id., pp. 284–285 [= pp. 319–320].

50 Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), p. 207 ff.

51 Rahner, *The Trinity*, pp. 68–69.

52 CD II/2, § 33, p. 178 [= KD, p. 197].

Creation seems poised to confirm this. “The eternal fellowship between Father and Son, or between God and His Word ... finds a correspondence in the very different but not dissimilar fellowship between God and His creature ... But” – this is Barth’s pivot – “this understanding is inadequate” because, “in respect of His Son who was to become man and the Bearer of the divine image ... we can see how it was not only appropriate and worthy but necessary that God should be the Creator.”⁵³ By conceiving of God’s operation *ad extra* as preparing the consummation of the covenant the Trinity is *ad intra*, Barth retains a distinction between *θεολογία* and *οικονομία* while doing away with the metaphysical and epistemological caesura this distinction classically enforced. The mystery of God’s being-in-Godself for the creature – *θεολογία* – Barth reinterprets *theologically* as God’s eternal mystery to and for Godself that unfurls itself *as time*. McCormack describes this as the mature Barth’s “theologically grounded divine ontology.”⁵⁴ I would go further. The *Dogmatics* offer a Trinitarian cosmology that thinks God-being on the model of a Klein bottle: each point *ad extra* (‘on’ the economic Trinity) finds a corresponding moment *ad intra* (‘on’ the immanent Trinity), but this inside-outside distinction holds true only locally. Globally, there is but one surface. (These are the correspondences that Figure 1, below, tries to map in two dimensions.) Being is the *extroversion*, in this term’s full amphibology (namely, as both a copy and a turning-inside-out), of God’s speaking life.⁵⁵

This study’s second section will revisit this amphibology. Before doing so, however, it is important to show how Barth places a determinate, material

53 *CD III/1*, § 41, p. 50 [= *KD*, p. 63].

54 McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son*, p. 103.

55 In this sense, Barth thinks that being ‘participates’ in God, although his articulation of this participation differs methodologically from that of the tradition of *analogia entis*, which proceeds by first determining the perfections of being-in-general and then predicating God of these perfections. Creatures participate in God’s perfection imperfectly or defectively due to their creaturely limits. *Analogia entis* leads, on Barth’s view, to various theological problems, chief among them its implicit understanding of God as a negation of the creature. “[I]f we view the being of God in its abstractly understood transcendence ... i.e., as negative from the point of the view of the being of the reality distinct from Himself, then we have substituted for the biblical idea of God an idea which is easily recognizable as the highest idea conceivable to man. For what is the idea of the infinite, the unconditioned or the absolute but the idea of our own limits, which suggest to us both our transcendent goal and origin, but which in themselves can be understood only as *our* limits and therefore the negation, the non-being of all that we are?,” *CD II/1*, § 28, pp. 303–304 [= *KD*, p. 341], emphasis mine. The soteriological denouement of *analogia entis* on Barth’s account, then, is that the creature’s redemption comes to require its natural limits’ destruction. Fellowship with God is a threat to the creature’s existence *qua* creature.

content into his Trinitarian ontology's formal structure. This content is the historical human being Jesus of Nazareth. Because time is the event of the Son's eternal generation witnessed *von außen*, it is for the sake of this man that Creation and humanity were made, and the covenant established. "The inner basis of the covenant (*innere Grund des Bundes*) is simply the free love of God, or more precisely the eternal covenant which God has decreed in Himself as the covenant of the Father with His Son as the Lord and Bearer of human nature, and to that extent the Representative of all creation."⁵⁶ Crystallizing time around the incarnation in this way requires the *Dogmatics*, as a major line in Barth scholarship has argued,⁵⁷ to rethink another traditional theological distinction: that between the λόγος ἄσαρκος and ἔνσαρκος. Before his Trinitarian reinterpretation of distance, Barth had evaluated the λόγος ἄσαρκος concept positively as yet again indicating the 'otherness of God.'⁵⁸ The later *Dogmatics*, however, see this concept as only "necessary and important ... when we have to understand the revelation and dealings of God in the light of their free basis in the inner being and essence of God."⁵⁹ That the λόγος is 'also' ἄσαρκος thus just becomes, in my view, another way of saying that the incarnation eternally determines God's life.

Although this act of conceptual ventriloquism opposes the doctrine's traditional meaning, it suggests that by the 1950s Barth overcomes the dichotomy he still posits in the '40s between the Logos's "cosmogenic function" and its serving as "the intrinsically divine basis of God's revelation."⁶⁰ When the *Doctrine of Creation* enfolds cosmos into salvific Logos as the latter's "external basis

56 CD III/1, § 41, p. 97 [= *KD*, pp. 106–107].

57 The view that Barth's understanding of the λόγος ἄσαρκος and ἔνσαρκος develops within the *Dogmatics* is shared by Bruce McCormack in "Grace and being: The role of God's gracious election in Karl Barth's theological ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 92–110 and in "Election and the Trinity: Theses in response to George Hunsinger," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (2010), pp. 203–224; by Darren O. Sumner in "The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth's Critical Reception of the *Extra Calvinisticum*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 1 (2013): pp. 42–57; and by Serge Wüthrich in "Le refus du Logos asarkos chez Karl Barth et Robert W. Jenson dans le contexte du dialogue entre judaïsme et christianisme," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 94, no. 1 (2020): pp. 27–48. George Hunsinger disagrees, however – see his "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 2 (2008): pp. 179–198 – and has carried out an important debate with McCormack within Barth scholarship about this issue.

58 Sumner, "The Twofold Life of the Word," p. 50.

59 CD IV/1, § 57, p. 52 [= *KD*, pp. 54–55].

60 CD II/2, § 33, p. 97 [= *KD*, p. 104].

(*äußere Grund*),⁶¹ however, Jesus of Nazareth becomes the ‘inner logic’ of all reality. In order that he may obediently fulfill the covenant, the covenant with Israel had to be established; in order for there to be a people Israel, humankind had to be created; and, finally, in order for there to be humankind at all, the universe had to be made. These three preparatory ‘layers’ – Creation, covenant, and world history – correspond (on the *Dogmatics*’ less supersessionist reading) to three contemporaneous histories now occurring as eternity’s *alter latus*. Our “time of grace – the time of the old and new covenants ... is the real reverse-image (*Gegenbild*) of the time of creation (*Schöpfungszeit*).”⁶²

This multilayered account of temporality is Barth’s alternative to both a “theological Liberalism ... preoccupied with the thought of a ‘historically’ purified Bible” and the literalism of a “declining theological orthodoxy” that “[takes] it stand on the theory that the Bible contains nothing but ‘history’ and is therefore in its entirety the Word of God.”⁶³ Creation history is “*keine Historie*”; it is an “*unhistorische Geschichte*”⁶⁴ that chronicles, in another key, the simultaneously occurring first-covenantal history of the Jewish people and world history, the second-covenantal one. This contemporaneity is what distinguishes biblical “saga” from “myth,” because while “[m]yth does, of course, take narrative form,” too, “its tales and their events and figures are obviously pictures and embodiments of what happens always and everywhere and to that extent does not happen ‘anywhere at any time.’”⁶⁵ Each event within Creation history, however, has only one correspondence within the two other histories. The creation of man and woman, for instance, ‘is’ the (still valid) covenant of “Husband Yahweh” and Israel on the one hand and the “relationship between Jesus Christ and His church” on the other, even as all three play out, in time, the eternal covenant between Father and Son.⁶⁶

But because the Son with whom the Father makes that innertrinitarian covenant is identical with Jesus of Nazareth, even the eternal covenant includes time. Jesus’ “true humanity ... is not a ‘contingent fact of history;” not even of God’s history. Rather, “[i]t is the historical event in which there took place in time that which was the purpose and resolve and will of God from all eternity and therefore before the being of all creation.”⁶⁷ That is why all three creaturely

61 CD III/1, § 41, p. 97 [= *KD*, p. 107].

62 Id., p. 74 [= *KD*, p. 80]. Emphasis mine.

63 Id., p. 82 [= *KD*, p. 89].

64 Id., p. 78 [= *KD*, p. 84].

65 Id., pp. 84–85 [= *KD*, p. 92].

66 Id., p. 322 [= *KD*, p. 365].

67 CD IV/2, § 64, p. 31 [= *KD*, pp. 32–33].

temporalities point to “the fulfilled time (*die erfüllte Zeit*) of Jesus Christ which has its center in his lifetime (*Lebenszeit*).”⁶⁸ Jesus’ life completes the Triune God’s self-revelation or yes-saying (*Bejahung*) to Godself, and this yes-saying exteriorizes itself in the other creaturely temporalities, too. Barth sees God’s creation of light (Gen. 1:13), for example, as God’s yes-saying on the order of Creation history. A nature-grace paradigm thus misinterprets the *Dogmatics*’ theology of the creature. Because God’s eternal history always already includes time in its movement toward Jesus’ life, even the eternity-time distinction is heuristic.⁶⁹ Indeed, Barth’s account suggests that nature-grace paradigms either presuppose that there are elements of God’s good Creation that are not oriented to redemption or interpret, as neutral, creaturely elements that impede that redemption that should be judged as sin.

A series of correspondences between the one divine and the three creaturely histories could be developed on Barth’s model – some he makes explicit, others he only suggests (again, see Figure 1). Unpacking this model’s implications, however, requires the further step of considering Barth’s Christology. If creaturely being is the one event of the Son’s generation as experienced *von außen*, in what does the Son’s filiation consist? The *Doctrine of Reconciliation* answers this question by tackling the scandal of *κένωσις*. For Barth, theology only finds God’s “taking to himself what He was not,” and thus the “mystery of the ‘deity of Christ’” problematic, if it has already covertly accepted “the deity of a divine essence (*Gottwesen*) furnished with all kinds of supreme attributes (*höchsten Eigenschaften*)”⁷⁰ – the God of ‘natural theology’. If it accepts this God, Christology will end in Docetism (*κένωσις* does not really take place) or the ‘death of God’ (*κένωσις* is the *κένωσις* of divinity as such).⁷¹ Christology can overcome this aporia, Barth says, if it insists that the

68 CD III/1, § 41, p. 75 [= *KD*, p. 81].

69 McCormack thus incorrectly juxtaposes the mature Barth’s Trinitarian ontology with Jüngel’s when he writes that “the act of ‘self-determination’ occurs for Jüngel *not*, as Barth had it, in pretemporal eternity but in history – in God’s act of identification with the crucified Jesus, an act of identification that made Jesus to be the ‘crucified God,’” *The Humility of the Eternal Son*, p. 169. This juxtaposition rests on a traditional distinction between time and timeless eternity that Barth does not endorse. Eternity, for Barth, is set apart from other temporalities not by timelessness or quasi-temporal priority but by the fact that it is the one history that God, being’s sovereign principle, elects as constituting God’s self-expression. Noneternal time does not partake in this sovereignty – which is why, in those times, things ‘can happen to’ or ‘befall’ the creature, whereas nothing befalls God.

70 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 177 [= *KD*, p. 193].

71 On this, see Barth’s excursus on the 19th-century Giessen-Tübingen “Kenosis Controversy”; *id.*, p. 181 ff. [= p. 197 ff.].

... meaning of [Jesus'] deity – the only true deity in the New Testament sense – cannot be gathered from any notion of supreme, absolute, unworldly essence 'on the far side' (*höchsten, absoluten, unweltlichen, jenseitigen Wesens*). It can be learned only from what took place in Christ ... Who the one true God is, and what He is, i.e. what is His essence as God (*sein Wesen als Gott*), and therefore his deity (*Gottheit*), his 'divine nature' ("*Göttliche Natur*"), which is also the divine nature of Jesus Christ if He is very God – all this we have to discover from the fact that as such He is very man and a partaker of the human nature (*MENSCHLICHER Natur*), from His becoming man, from His incarnation and from what He has done and suffered in the flesh. For ... the mirror in which it can be known (and is known) that He is God, and of the divine nature, is His becoming flesh and His existence in the flesh.⁷²

This is why, for Barth, "the *exinanitio*, the abasement, of God, and the *exaltatio*, the exaltation of man ... is not ... a matter of two different and successive actions, but of a single one, in which each of the two elements (*Komponenten*) can be known ... only in this relationship."⁷³ The way in which this historical human person, Jesus Christ, is human, is entirely the way he is God the Son. This is "the entry of the one Son of Man into fellowship with God ... the exaltation in which, without ceasing to be true man, without thus being deified (*vergottet*) (!), but in our nature and flesh, He is at the side of the Father in heaven, partaking as human (*als Mensch*) in His power and glory."⁷⁴ Barth thus argues, controversially, that the resurrection has only an epistemic function for the covenant community. "The being of Jesus Christ was and is perfect and complete in itself in His history (*seine Geschichte*)" – that is, his human life – "as the true Son of God and Son of Man. It does not need a transcendence (*Überbietung*) or augmentation (*Hinzufügung*) by new qualities or further developments."⁷⁵ The resurrection only confirms, *pro nobis* or subjectively, something that was already the case *pro se* or objectively.

The mature Barth thus interprets the fact that "God ... made Himself secular and human"⁷⁶ as qualifying the divine life both immanently and economically. 'Supreme attributes' theology, on the other hand, views the Son's obedience to the Father as only an economic act; the Logos only condes-

72 Id., p. 177 [= p. 193].

73 CD IV/2, § 64, p. 21 [= KD, p. 21].

74 Id., p. 24 [= p. 24].

75 Id., p. 132 [= p. 148].

76 CD III/1, § 41, p. 216 [= KD, p. 244].

cends *pro nobis*. God's economy remains ontologically contingent, a reaction to an unforeseen happenstance, such as sin, that is improper to God's ownmost being. Barth rejects this. "We have not only to deny but actually to affirm and understand as essential to God's being (*dem Sein Gottes wesentlich*) the offensive fact that there is in God Himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination." This "apparently ... most offensive fact of all" means, however, "that it belongs to the inner life of God (*es gehört zum inneren Leben Gottes*) that within Him there is also this event: obedience (*GEHORSAM*)."⁷⁷ Barth's qualms about the term 'Person' in his *Doctrine of God* must not mislead us. He does not there press against the secret ditheism of 'essence' to recover – to use Marion's distinction between unicity and unity – an "empty unicity of enumeration" based on the principle of identity. Rather, God's "[i]dentity comes from unity, and unity comes in turn from the putting into operation of love," this operation itself "brought about through communion."⁷⁸ That Barth's pneumatology uses the ancient *vinculum amoris* trope thus coheres with his framework. The Trinitarian history is one because God, in the third Person, wills its oneness, not because the Godhead is internally undifferentiated. Moreover, the Spirit can be this bond because the obedience of the Son is not, in Barth's view, a "deprivation" or "lack" but "a particular being (*Sein*) in the glory (*Herrlichkeit*) of the one equal Godhead."⁷⁹

Some prominent critiques of Barth's Trinitarian theology here miss, in my view, its main theological-epistemological point. McCormack, for instance, sees Barth as leaving out a "*material explanation*"⁸⁰ for Jesus' obedience within the divine life, while Robert Jenson claims Barth's turn to *vinculum*-language to shore up a dyadic view of relationality is 'natural theology's' remnant within the *Dogmatics*. Both arguments home in on a seemingly limiting feature of creaturely and specifically human existence – historicity in McCormack's case, a "merely two-sided understanding of human community"⁸¹ in Jenson's – to conclude that, because God is this human creature's 'Other,' the Son's obedience needs a distinct, eternal ground or the Trinity a distinct, nonbinary communion. But, for Barth, such *Denkweisen* cannot hold. For him, the proper method is – he adopts Luther's term – *theologia crucis*. Such *theologia* sees

77 CD IV/1, § 59, pp. 200–201 [= *KD*, p. 219].

78 Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxon.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), p. 91.

79 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 202 [= *KD*, p. 221].

80 McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son*, p. 113.

81 Robert W. Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 3 (1993): p. 302.

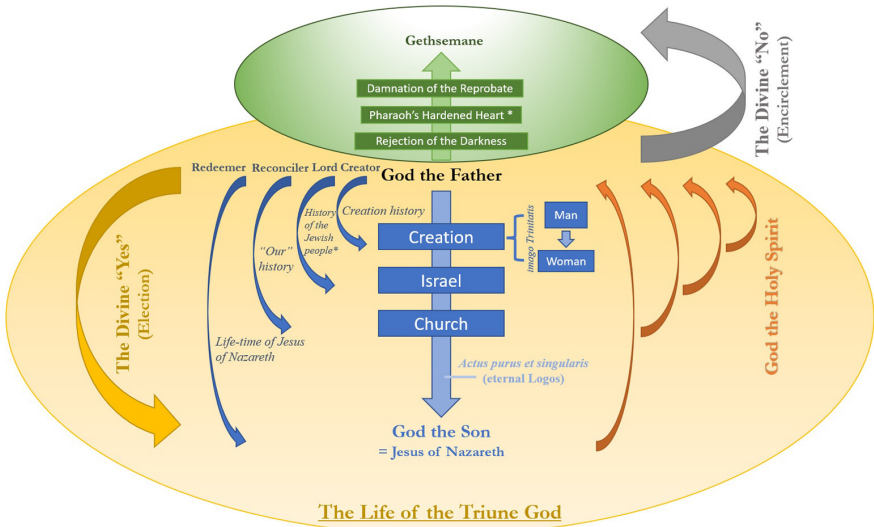


FIGURE 1 A (tentative) visualization of the *Church Dogmatics*' model of temporality. Each historical "layer" occurs simultaneously to the others and corresponds to one of God's salvation-historical titles, one of God's covenant-partners, and one of God's encirclements and rejections of evil. So, for example, on the "layer" of world history, God the Reconciler elects the church and damns the reprobate. The *Dogmatics* do not explicitly mention the elements marked with an asterisk (*). I offer them here to show Barth's model's exegetical and constructive fecundity.

Jesus' passion and death on the cross, not as a reflection or representation of some 'higher' truth, but as really and completely constituting "the logical final continuation (*Fortsetzung*) of the history in which [God] is God (*der Geschichte in der er Gott ist*)."⁸² "The atonement is history (*Die Versöhnung ist Geschichte*)"⁸³ because "all theology lives by the fact that the cross of Jesus Christ is itself the work and therefore the wholly sufficient Word of God."⁸⁴ Who God is for and in Godself, and not just for us, *theologia crucis* 'reads back' from the cross. The cross reveals it was the Father's free decision, from eternity, to be God in the generation of this obedient, human Son and in no other act. The history of the unfolding of this decision is the only meaning of the word 'God.' 'God' is not an antonym of 'human.' God un- and enfolds (as) the human being, the Creator (as) the creature.

82 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 203 [= *KD*, p. 223].

83 Id., p. 157 [= p. 171].

84 Id., p. 250 [= p. 275].

2 “A trembling in the bosom of God”: Paternal Abandonment as Filial Freedom

The Son's obedience, however, has a subjective as well as an objective component. Though Jesus' "free self-offering" on the cross is God's ultimate "act,"⁸⁵ this act is in continuity with Jesus' personal comportment and spiritual life. Unless this was the case, the passion would be merely that: a *πάθος* God unwillingly undergoes. The *Doctrine of Reconciliation* intensively explores this comportment, which it calls *iustitia Dei*, in a small-text excursus devoted to Jesus' desert temptations and Gethsemane agony. Paul Dafydd Jones notes that, although this "excursus ... is neither the most conspicuous nor the longest in the *Dogmatics*," it "constitutes one tremendously important source for understanding Barth's view of Jesus' humanity."⁸⁶ Considering the history of interpretation of the agony in the garden in particular, that Barth would attach such importance to it is unsurprising. Patristic and medieval exegetes under the sway of the Stoic ideal of *ἀπάθεια*, after all, traditionally used philosophical acrobatics to evade what this pericope *prima facie* suggests: that Jesus, faced with his execution as a social outcast, is terrified.⁸⁷ But because Barth's Christology configures, as I showed above, the Son's *exinanitio* as constituting his deity, Barth frames what traditional exegesis saw as scandalous in positive terms. Unlike 'Adamic' humanity, who is "unable to want God to be God" – "indeed, he himself wants to be God"⁸⁸ – Jesus utterly accepts the Father's sovereignty. It is thus not so much Jesus' acts of ministry (his healings, exorcisms, etc.) that define *iustitia Dei*, but his refusal of several decisively theological temptations. This refusal is what plays out in the temptation in the desert: there, Jesus rejects (1) valuing life above God's will, (2) theocracy, and (3) "the 'leap' of faith."⁸⁹ These three tests are prodromes of Jesus' final and radical decision of faith in Gethsemane.

An interpretation of Matt. 26:39 and its two petitions – "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*" –

85 Id., p. 245 [= p. 269].

86 Paul Dafydd Jones, "Karl Barth on Gethsemane," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (2007), p. 157.

87 For a broad survey of the Gethsemane agony's history of interpretation, see Kevin Madigan, "Ancient and High Medieval Interpretations of Jesus in Gethsemane: Some Reflections on Tradition and Continuity in Christian Thought," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 157–173.

88 Martin Luther, *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam*, N° 17 (LW 31, p. 10 = WA 1, p. 225): "Non potest homo naturaliter velle deum esse deum, [i]mmo vellet se esse deum et deum non esse deum."

89 *CD* IV/1, § 59, pp. 260–264 [= *KD*, pp. 286–291].

crowns Barth's take on this pericope. During this, Jesus' lonely "high-priestly prayer (*hohepriesterliche Gebet*),"⁹⁰ "the apostolate, the community, Christendom, the church sleep"⁹¹ in the figures of the sleeping disciples. Though the Gospels present the two requests as continuous, Barth thinks Jesus' radical decision takes place in the beat between them. This, he writes, is the "striking difference between the story of Gethsemane and that of the temptation in the wilderness. In the latter there is not even the remotest glimpse of any hesitation ... on the part of Jesus Himself."⁹² In Gethsemane, however, "there is a stumbling (*Stutzen*), although only for a – repeated – moment: a moment in which there is a pause and hesitation (*Aufhalten und Zögern*), not only on earth and in time, not only in the soul of Jesus which is 'sorrowful even unto death,' but in a sense in heaven, in the bosom of God Himself (*im Schoße Gottes*), in the relationship (*im Verhältnis*) between the Father and the Son."⁹³ The Son now faces the ultimate temptation because, in this moment, he finds himself deprived of the meaning of his impending suffering. The "resurrection" – which will be the "disclosure (*Enthüllung*)" of the "meaning (*Sinn*)" of the passion – "lies on the other side (*jenseits*) of the answer"⁹⁴ the Father gives to Jesus' prayer. In this moment, all Jesus can predict is his mission's seeming failure. "What shook him," Barth concludes, "was the coming concealment of the lordship of God under the lordship of evil and evil men. This was the terrible thing which He saw breaking on Himself and His disciples and all men, on His work as reconciler between God and man, and therefore on God's own work, destroying everything, mortally imperiling the fulfillment of His just work and redemptive judgment."⁹⁵

What tempts Jesus in this 'pause' is the theological temptation Barth sees as underlying 'natural theology': that of theodicy. For "the affirmation by the natural and primordial knowledge of God (*natürlichen und ursprünglichen Gotteserkenntnis*) and solidarity with God (*Gottesverbundenheit*) is quite plainly its self-interpretation and self-justification (*Selbstausslegung und Selbstsertigung*)." For 'natural theology,' "man is not really needy ... [H]e is already rich and self-secure and therefore ... not dependent on God's grace."⁹⁶ When it procures theodicies, such theology just extends its own self-justifying logic,

90 Id., p. 271 [= p. 299].

91 Id., p. 267 [= p. 294].

92 Id., p. 265 [= p. 292].

93 Id., p. 265 [= p. 291].

94 Id., p. 268 [= p. 295].

95 Id., p. 269 [= p. 296].

96 *CD* II/1, § 26, p. 136 [= *KD*, p. 151].

for theodicy bespeaks God's inability to justify Godself and God's reliance on human 'proofs' for this purpose. The "supreme ecstasy and satisfaction of religion," Barth claims, is thus "the supreme form of sin"⁹⁷ because it is the subjectivistic, pietistic flipside of the demand for theodicy that 'natural theology' seeks in its objectivistic, rationalistic 'proofs.' Asking for such a sign, for an explanation or mystical experience to justify his suffering, is precisely what, for Barth, Jesus considers in Gethsemane.

The Father, however, gives no such sign. "Jesus does not, in fact, receive any answer, any sign from God. Or rather, He has 'the sign of the prophet Jonah.'"⁹⁸ The only response the Father gives to the Son, in other words, is in the historical events' outplaying themselves: "the language of the facts (*die Sprache der Tatsachen*)."⁹⁹ "God will give His answer to the prayer only in this inconceivable, frightful event, and not otherwise."¹⁰⁰ Faced with nothing less than the problem of evil and suffering itself, in other words, the Son finds himself abandoned by the Father, an abandonment he will soon give voice to on the cross (Mk. 15:34, Matt. 27:46). For Barth, what *iustitia Dei* consists in here is that, in the face of this experience, Jesus does not conclude, as does 'Adamic' humanity, that "there is no God or that God is unjust."¹⁰¹ Rather, in the second part of his prayer – "not as I will, but as thou *wilt*" – Jesus refuses to justify the Father. He affirms the Father's sovereignty over history. He not only trusts that the Father's providential design will play out in history, but that it play out *as that history* – and nothing more. "He only prays. He does not demand. He does not advance any claims ... He does not cease to allow that God is in the right, even against Himself."¹⁰² As a *reditus* to the Father's *exitus* of his yes-saying Word, Jesus speaks this "radiant Yes (*strahlendes Ja*) to the actual will of God. It is radiant because the decision which it expresses and fulfils ceases to regard any other divine possibilities which there might be and fixes itself on the actual will of God ... and unreservedly accepts it."¹⁰³ To be even more precise: the decision of faith Jesus takes, "an expression of the supreme and sole praise (*das höchsten, des einen Lobes*) God expects of man," is to interpret the Father's abject absence from

97 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 264 [= *KD*, p. 290].

98 Id., p. 269 [= p. 295].

99 Id., p. 271 [= p. 298].

100 Id., p. 268 [= p. 295].

101 Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (1525), § 6 (LW 33, p. 291 = WA 18, p. 784): "[S]i rationis humanae iudicium spectes et sequareis, cogaris dicere, aut nullum esse Deum, aut iniquum esse Deum."

102 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 270 [= *KD*, p. 297].

103 Id., p. 270 [= *KD*, p. 298].

experience, not as a sign of unfaithfulness (or worse), but as the Father's mysterious presence *sub contrario* in world history. "Thy will be done' means that Jesus, like all this 'evil and adulterous generation'" – i.e., humanity *tout court* – "is to receive only the sign of the prophet Jonah, but that as the one man, the only One ... He willed on behalf of this generation to see in it the true sign of God (*das wahre Gotteszeichen*)."¹⁰⁴

What I am proposing is that Barth completes, in this exegesis of the agony in the garden, a Trinitarian reinterpretation of his earlier diastatical thought. The 'sign of Jonah' shows that the *Dogmatics* retain the unbridgeable distance between human experience and divine sovereignty that characterized the *Römerbrief's* theology. This is no longer a "negative natural theology,"¹⁰⁵ however, because the *Dogmatics* here reintegrate this distance as taking place within the divine life itself. What Barth earlier understood as the 'otherness' of a transcendent 'God'-in-general over against 'the world,' he now rearticulates as the transcendent Father's 'otherness' for the Son. But because the Son's humanity is his way of being God – for "the man Jesus ... is just what we are and how we are"¹⁰⁶ – this distance is no 'dark night of the soul' overcome by some future inpouring of grace. Rather, what Barth suggests is that the Son's distance from the Father, but his steadfast obedience in faith even in this distance, simply is the Son's place, and thus humans' own, within the Trinity. If "we are to be 'sons' alongside the one divine Son of the Father,"¹⁰⁷ then, we also must accept the Christological site of paternal abandonment as our exaltation. For this reason, Jones' claim that what occurs in Gethsemane is, for Barth, "a moment that is *overcome*" because "God is always moving past this event and ... towards the triumph of the cross and resurrection"¹⁰⁸ must be qualified. The cross (martyrological witness to the God of Israel) objectively fulfills faith's subjective dimension (paternal abandonment), which the resurrection then confirms as having been divine. There is, however, no *Dieu phénomène*: there is no such thing as 'religious experience' and perhaps not even, most radically, a 'life after death' in any traditional sense. The believer does not (now, and maybe not ever) access some privileged phenomenal datum from which the atheist is barred. Rather, all genuine faith performs the same hermeneutic shift in perspective Jesus does in Gethsemane: choosing to see history's ('world-occurrence's') unfolding, just as it is, as the Father's providence. The believer

104 Id., p. 271 [= *KD*, p. 298].

105 McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 259.

106 *CD* IV/2, § 64, p. 93 [= *KD*, p. 102].

107 Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 141.

108 Jones, "Karl Barth on Gethsemane," p. 165.

affirms the world and its history, just as they are, because she has faith that “God has loved the world,” as it is, “from eternity”¹⁰⁹ in Jesus Christ. That is ‘justification by faith alone.’

Barth thus suggests that faith affirms the world in its finitude, which includes suffering and death. My reading of the *Dogmatics* thus opposes Roberts', who claims the text evinces a “profound ontological exclusiveness” and that “[t]he triumphalist aggrandizement of [its] theology was made at the risk of a total disjunction and alienation of his theology from natural reality.”¹¹⁰ In fact, I think Barth's vision incorporates Roberts' ‘natural reality’ whole and entire as one element of a self-historicizing God. Jesus Christ “reveals that God says yes to [God]self (*Gottes Selbstbejahung*) as His saying yes to the world (*Bejahung der Welt*)”¹¹¹ because finitude's obediential movement, culminating in the cross, finds its own place as finite within the Godhead. This means no future cosmic transformation will retroactively justify finitude. Finitude is already justified as the Son's obedient being. That is why Barth often frames the eschaton as having already taken place in Christ. “[T]he full and genuine and individual humanity of the man Jesus of Nazareth ... is the ‘act of God’ (*die “Tat Gottes”*), the ‘eschatological event of salvation’ (*das “eschatologische Heilsereignis”*).”¹¹² Such statements back up Ingolf Dalferth's view that “the eschatological assumption of the world into God” is “Barth's answer”¹¹³ to the question of the God-world relationship. Dalferth's view has to be nuanced too, though: if Jesus' life constitutes the eschaton, then the latter has, if we are thinking of time linearly, already come to pass. Jesus' lifetime is the cosmos's ‘high water mark,’ its Christological perigee from which history now recedes but whose teleological fulfillment it remembers in faith (*memoria passionis*).¹¹⁴

On Barth's account, then, the “great and true history of conflict” that characterizes world history must continue. Faith cannot escape history, even theoretically. History “runs its course,” “cannot be terminated,” and “must be experi-

109 *CD IV/3.2*, § 72, p. 785 [= *KD*, p. 898].

110 Roberts, “Barth's Doctrine of Time,” p. 145.

111 *CD IV/3.1*, § 69, p. 236 [= *KD*, p. 271].

112 *CD IV/1*, § 59, p. 160 [= *KD*, p. 174]. Emphasis mine.

113 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* (Oxon.: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 119.

114 McCormack's critique of such interpretations of Barth as foreclosing “the confidence of the Christian ... in God's capacity to achieve a complete victory over evils (both natural and of human origin) and the suffering they bring in an eschatological future that is free of both” (*The Humility of the Eternal Son*, p. 194) is far more salient than Roberts'. Where I disagree with McCormack is in his negative evaluation of this foreclosure and his assigning it to a “post-Barthian” position. I think it is Barth's view too and that it has positive political-theological ramifications, as I outline below.

enced in all its bitterness,¹¹⁵ but it can be endured because its problems and contradictions, down to the problem of theodicy itself, are not alien to, but happen as extroversions of, the eternal history between Father and Son. “[I]n the face of any human suffering,” then, “we ... have to think ultimately of the obscure but gracious control of divine providence and therefore of the goodwill of God which becomes act and event in it.”¹¹⁶ We have to think this, though, not just because “His ... thoughts are higher than our thoughts”:¹¹⁷ not just, in other words, because of God’s generic distance from human experience. This disjuncture, rather, this seemingly insurmountable logical contradiction between a good Father and an evil history, is one perceived and endured within the Godhead. “But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no ... neither the Son” (Mk. 13:32). The question *unde malum?* echoes, in eternity, between Father and Son.

Accepting the ‘sign of Jonah’ allows Jesus to steadfastly complete his historical mission. Far from engendering quietism, then, faith’s decision to interpret the Father’s empirical absence from history as his providential presence is what opens up that history as that of human freedom. “It is not a resignation before (*Entsagung ... gegenüber*) God.” Rather, “in the power of this prayer” at Gethsemane, “Jesus received, i.e. He renewed, confirmed, and put into effect, His freedom to finish his work.”¹¹⁸ Since the Father ‘gives’ only his absence, even Jesus grips no certain point of contact between providence and history. He too proceeds, obediently and confidently but with no subjective guarantee, to carry out what he believes to be the Father’s will. But since Jesus’ life is the human way of partaking in deity, the community that affirms Jesus as Lord, the church, accepts the provisionality of human knowledge as the premier epistemological consequence of the Christological dogmas by which it expresses its faith. Various “attempted Christian philosophies of history and the related practical experiments” are thus, for Barth, “radical defection[s]”¹¹⁹ from the church’s vocation. Through the mediation of their Trinitarian and Christological visions, then, the *Dogmatics* lead a theological epistemology grounded on revelation to become a theology of human freedom.

115 CD IV/3.1, § 69, p. 237 [= *KD*, p. 272].

116 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 246 [= *KD*, p. 270].

117 Id., p. 271 [= p. 298].

118 Id., p. 271 [= pp. 298–299].

119 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 715 [= *KD*, p. 818].

3 “In Him and through Him to be free”: Election, Liberty, Modernity

One of the main strategies 20th-century European philosophy, including the philosophy of religion, used to protect intellectual and consequently political freedom was to juxtapose the individual *datum*, often the human individual herself, against the universal philosophies of history believed to ground all totalitarian logics. This *datum* often bore the name ‘the Other,’ the face-to-face encounter with whom in daily life would deactivate ideology’s seeming omniscience. Emmanuel Levinas’ epistemological interpretation of alterity in *Otherwise than Being* is an explicit example of this strategy. “It is not without importance to know if the egalitarian and just State in which man is fulfilled ... proceeds from a war of all against all or from the irreducible responsibility of the one for all, and if it can do without friendships and faces.”¹²⁰ In this context, “the permanent return of skepticism,” the epistemological analogue of the neighbor’s face, “reminds us of the ... political character of all logical rationalism, the alliance of logic and politics”¹²¹ that sublates such encounters’ significance. Hannah Arendt is more implicit: for her, the political “common sense” learned in a face-to-face community “regulates and controls all other senses.”¹²² Without it, “the only capacity of the human mind” that remains is “logical reasoning whose premise is the self-evident”¹²³ and on the “compulsion” of which “[t]otalitarian rulers rely.”¹²⁴ An ‘Other’ – the neighbor, “God,”¹²⁵ or “revelation”¹²⁶ – is thus the empirical condition of possibility for a deliberative rationality that, to cite a third midcentury thinker along these lines, “opposes the superior strength of the course of the world” with “the fact that in every situation there is a concrete possibility of doing things differently.”¹²⁷

As my introduction outlined, the contemporary philosophy of religion continues to prefer this framework despite its shortcomings and so sees revelation’s political-theological meaning as exhausted by its capacity to disrupt and reconstitute a deliberative political order. Barth’s *Römerbrief* interprets alterity’s function similarly. For it, revelation achieves “the all-embracing relativiz-

120 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being; or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2016 [1974]), pp. 159–160.

121 Id., p. 171.

122 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Mariner, 1976 [1950]), p. 475.

123 Id., p. 477.

124 Id., p. 473.

125 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 158.

126 Arendt, *Origins*, p. 477.

127 Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964–1965*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2006), p. 68.

ation (*Relativierung*) of all human distinctions and human dignities.”¹²⁸ Thus, “a political career ... becomes possible only when it is seen to be essentially a game, that is to say ... when the note of ‘absoluteness’ has vanished from both thesis and antithesis, and when room has ... been made for that relative moderateness or for that relative radicalism in which human possibilities have been renounced.”¹²⁹ Initially, it appears the mature Barth will also take this tack when he turns to discussing the philosophy of history in the *Doctrine of Reconciliation’s* ecclesiology. The community does not, after all, possess “certain higher or deeper insights than others which it can weave into a Christian theory of the meaning and course of world history.”¹³⁰ That would be a “transition from faith to sight ... not permitted”¹³¹ by Paul’s distinction (2 Cor. 5:7). The community accepts that history “[h]ominum confusione et Dei providentia regitur”¹³² without “regard[ing]” this Augustinian binary “in the tracks of the great philosopher [Hegel] as thesis and antithesis,” to which a “third and superior view and decisive word ... might then be envisaged or understood as the synthesis.”¹³³ This is because “Jesus Christ is not a concept which man can think out of himself” and “with the help of which he can then display his mastery over all kinds of greater or lesser problems and therefore over the problem of this antithesis too.”¹³⁴ The *Römerbrief’s* language of ‘relativization’ finds echoes here: Barth writes the community “follows” the Word in “several small and relative steps (*in vielen kleinen, relativen Schritten*),” for instance, because it “knows the inauthenticity and provisionality (*Uneigentlichkeit und Vorläufigkeit*) of all the construction and destruction of man.”¹³⁵

In contrast to the *Römerbrief’s*, however, the *Dogmatics’* theology of freedom no longer views affirming human knowledge’s provisionality in this way as sufficiently characterizing the perspective of faith. For “the twofold concept” of human confusion and divine providence “might then in fact be described as the view which with more or less confidence or despair almost all men of all ages have had and will have, namely, that man exists and world history takes place under the sign of the contradiction between a higher, primary, and therefore predominant principle and a lower principle which persistently

128 Barth, *Romans* 3, vv. 1–2, p. 78 [= p. 52].

129 Id., 13, vv. 3–4, p. 489 [= p. 472].

130 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 716 [= KD, p. 819].

131 Id., p. 715 [= p. 818].

132 “It [the world] is ruled by human confusion and God’s providence”; id., p. 693 [= p. 793].

133 Id., p. 703 [= p. 805].

134 Id., p. 706 [= p. 808].

135 Id., pp. 717–718 [= pp. 821–822].

maintains itself¹³⁶ too. This Platonic interpretation of Augustine's maxim also authorizes an epistemologically chastened and thus compromising attitude.¹³⁷ Indeed, "it is not the glorious or shameful acts, *but their compromises* which give to their history its distinctive aspect."¹³⁸ Where the earlier Barth viewed "the insolence of warfare between good and evil" and its accompanying "convulsions of revolution" as the crowning political-theological temptation, then, the *Dogmatics* claim this title for "calm reflection,"¹³⁹ for the *Römerbrief's* diastatical antidote. What underlies this shift is that, for the mature Barth, *hominum confusio* is defined not just by the antichristian ideologies that attempt to usurp God's imprimatur, but by humans' very attempt to negotiate with these ideologies as if they fulfilled any positive cosmic function. But when "[n]othingness is not thought to be nor treated as excluded," "it is ... given the primacy over the good creation of God. The good creation of God is not thought to be treated as excluding, and it is thus merely coordinated with and therefore subordinated with nothingness."¹⁴⁰ Just like how 'natural theology's' category of nature constructs an aspect of Creation disordered from redemption, mere epistemic humility dishonors God by equating good and evil. But if the human being "lived at peace with God, his brother, and himself," he "could and would only negate, exclude, and reject" any "negation of the good Creation."¹⁴¹

136 Id., p. 702 [= p. 803].

137 Barth here engages Augustine's theology of history from *De civitate Dei* and its political-theological legacy as endorsing each human individual's soul, and not the political *longue durée*, as the innerworldly site of the struggle between good and evil. Arendt sums up this legacy well when she writes that while "Christian philosophy, it is true, broke with the time concept of antiquity because the birth of Christ, occurring in human history, constituted a new beginning as well as a unique, unrepeatable event," "the Christian concept of history, as it was formulated by Augustine, could conceive of a new beginning only in terms of a transmundane event breaking into and interrupting the normal course of secular history. Such an event, Augustine emphasized, had occurred once but would never occur again until the end of time. Secular history in the Christian view remained bound with the cycles of antiquity – empires would rise and fall as in the past – except that Christians, in the possession of everlasting life, could break through this cycle of everlasting change and must look with indifference upon the spectacles it offered," *On Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 20. Although detailing Barth's relation to Augustine on this point lies beyond this study's scope, it seems the *Dogmatics* approve Augustine's refusal to map God's providential plan onto any political process but are concerned that this refusal can generate a Stoicism in conflict with the community's prophetic vocation.

138 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 696 [= KD, p. 797]. Emphasis mine.

139 Barth, *Romans* 13, vv. 3–4, p. 489 [= KD, p. 472].

140 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 697 [= KD, p. 797].

141 Id., p. 696 [= p. 796].

The community's subjectivity thus differs from that of humanity in general in that, though the community also lives in the midst of the contradiction between God and *hominum confusio*, its faith that it acts in obedience to the divine command gives it a 'resoluteness' (*Entschlossenheit*) those outside its circle lack. "As obedience, [faith] is a resolute being and attitude and action (*ein ENTSCLOSSENES Sein, Sichverhalten und Tun*). It is in this resoluteness that its view of world history will display the distinctiveness which makes it so different, so unique, as the Christian view."¹⁴² The community is aware of its judgments' fallibility. Its "resolute decisions (*entschlossenen Entscheidungen*) for and against" are, like all human truth-claims, "provisional clarifications (*vorläufigen Klärungen*) anticipating the great and conclusive clarity towards which it and the whole cosmos are moving."¹⁴³ What Barth views as setting the community apart, then, is that it can simultaneously acknowledge its truth-claims as relative while committing to them as if they were absolute. The 'sign of Jonah's' structural equivalent within ecclesiology makes this simultaneity possible. For the community "sees the contradiction, the conflict, the *diastasis* (*den Widerspruch, den Konflikt, die Diastase*) (!), the riddle of [world-]occurrence. And accordingly, to be sure, it sees no real synthesis resolving the riddle" of history. Thus, "[i]t accepts the twofold view." However, Barth continues, this "is not its final thought or word ... Originally and primarily it has to think on the basis of ... a new thing in relation to that antithesis and contradiction."¹⁴⁴ What is this new thing? Answer:

[T]his new thing which is manifest to the community in the world around it is the grace of God addressed to it. It sees the world in a new light to the extent that it knows that, while the contradiction or antithesis is not removed and does not lose its seriousness, it is relativized, loosened, and in a definite sense broken through by the fact that God not only confronts the world as its Creator, Lord, and Governor, but in this great superiority of His has turned to it as a gracious Father, that apart from and even in spite of its deserts He is kind towards it in the free omnipotence of His mercy, which necessarily means for the world that it is not just obscured by the confusion of men who have fallen away from God and fallen out with their neighbors and themselves, but that in spite of this confusion

¹⁴² Id., p. 716, [= p. 819].

¹⁴³ Id., p. 719 [= p. 822].

¹⁴⁴ Id., p. 708 [= p. 811].

of theirs the world is not bereft of grace but exists under this gracious address of God.¹⁴⁵

As the body of Christ, the community makes visible humanity's, and indeed the universe's, invisible filial site of participation in the Trinity. It assumes the perspective Jesus does in Gethsemane, viewing the *διάστασις* between God's reign and history's vicissitudes, not as that reign's absence, but as paternal sovereignty's ever-mysterious manifestation. For "in willing this [world] and not something supposedly better," Barth writes, "Jesus Christ confirms Himself and His whole being and action. From all eternity He is not alone, but He is the Elect of God in whom and with whom creation is also elect, not in order that it should vanish and dissolve in Him, nor to be merely the object of His work, but in Him and through Him to be free."¹⁴⁶ The *Dogmatics* thus interpret the *Römerbrief's* negative method for critiquing ideology – revelation's excess over human thought needs suspend the latter's claim to absoluteness – as constituting the positive epistemological consequence of their cosmic Christology 'thought from the cross.' All of humanity objectively participates in the free filial fabric in which time itself is uttered, but the community's peculiar 'resoluteness' stems from the fact that it subjectively does so, too.

The community's freedom, like its Head's, thus takes the form of obedience to the Father's will. The *Dogmatics'* discussion of sanctification hesitates to identify that will with any determinate content for fear of "conceal[ing] the living Jesus behind ... schemata." For "discipleship is not the recognition and adoption of a program, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfill it."¹⁴⁷ Again: "[i]t is not the case," Barth writes, "that [one] is loosed from one general form of action, from the legalism of the world as determined by the dominion of [false] gods, only to be bound to the legalism of another generality." This is because the "binding to Jesus must be thought of as a very particular matter – something which comes to each individual in a highly particular way in his own particular time and situation."¹⁴⁸ Barth applies this 'situational' principle collectively to the community, too. In its choice of ecclesiastical polity, for instance, the community has the "freedom ... to select its form, preferring and grasping some possibilities and rejecting others. It may follow as its principle of order a monarchical, aristocratic or liberal and democratic constitution, or the model of a free association," since they "all are intrinsically

145 Id., p. 709 [= p. 812].

146 CD IV/3.1, § 69, p. 332 [= KD, p. 383].

147 CD IV/2, § 66, p. 536 [= KD, pp. 606–607].

148 Id., p. 547 [= p. 619].

profane (*profan*).¹⁴⁹ In an earlier excursus on the idea that Christian life should be modeled on an *imitatio Christi*, the *Doctrine of Reconciliation* is nonetheless more specific. Since “the freedom of the kingdom of God” must be “attested to the imprisoned world in a visible concretion,” both the individual Christian’s and the community’s obedience will occur “along one or more of the great lines”¹⁵⁰ the New Testament describes: (1) simplicity, (2) humility, (3) nonviolence, (4) chastity, (5) a refusal of self-righteous piety, and (6) martyrdom.¹⁵¹ This rubric has clear political – if not indeed sociopolitical and political-economic – meanings. The community refuses to idolize the market (1), the social order (2), the state and its monopoly on violence (3), the family or *ἔθνος* (4), or even the institutional church (5). Its prophetic and suffering witness (6) is thus all but assured.

Whether or not this ‘situational’ framework grants sufficient depth to the *second-order* content of the paternal command the community obeys is a relevant moral-theological question, one inextricable from the *Dogmatics’* view of the Decalogue’s theological status.¹⁵² Its answer does not affect the divine command’s structural role in Barth’s theology of freedom, however, nor the *first-order* Christological content that catalyzes the command’s liberatory potential. For Barth, this liberation occurs when the community, experiencing the command as both distinct from world history and as containing a definite (albeit, again, second-order) content, is freed for an equally “definite decision.” For the temptation here would be “the supposed freedom of the Yes and No, of the As-well-as, of the neutrality which is fatally active in the combination of the good creation of God with nothingness and then again in the combination of this confusion with the world government of God.” Faced with the command, “[a]ll mere mediation or discussion for discussion’s sake is ... ruled out.”¹⁵³ The confident response the command demands thus lends the community’s historical comportment a distinct moral zeal or even apparent arrogance, the “supreme pride” with which Jesus, too, “stands upright”¹⁵⁴ after his Gethsemane prayer.

149 CD IV/3.2, § 72, pp. 740–741 [= *KD*, pp. 847–848].

150 CD IV/2, § 66, p. 547 [= *KD*, p. 620].

151 Id., pp. 546–543 [= pp. 620–626].

152 For a good overview of this issue, see Philip G. Zeigler, “Graciously commanded: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth on the Decalogue,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71, no. 2 (2018): 127–141.

153 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 718 [= *KD*, p. 822].

154 CD IV/1, § 59, p. 270 [= *KD*, p. 297].

Barth's adding this step is his political theology's major development from the *Römerbrief* to the *Dogmatics*. The *Dogmatics* keep the sovereignty of the content theology reflects upon, redoubling it in the form of the divine command the community hears in each ethical case. The *Römerbrief*, however, thinks this sovereign content as only irrupting into the community in one moment. Theology must thus only posit revelation as an as-yet empty category or placeholder whereto God may or may not arrive. This theological epistemology retains God's freedom, and its political-theological upside is that all ideologies are relativized. A revelation to come holds thinking's system-building in suspense. The *Dogmatics*, in contrast, reinterpret – through the radical rethinking of Christology and fundamental theology I have traced – the subjective experience of this relativization as itself divine. The revealed, sovereign content theology reflects upon thus has, in the mature Barth, two moments, not one. The Christian tradition's Trinitarian and Christological dogmas (or Barth's articulation of them) make up the first moment; this content is stable. The Father's command, the content of which is humanly unpredictable and historically variable, makes up the second moment. The political-theological upside of the *Dogmatics'* framework is that faith is defined, not only by a skepticism toward ideology as in the *Römerbrief*, but also by a conviction that faith steadfastly, though temporarily, should stake out a position within the extant political situation's ideological matrix “for the sake of creation and man.”¹⁵⁵ The community's independence from the dynamics of the broader sociopolitical context in which it finds itself derives from its belief that it is beholden to an external call which can always sound anew. Barth admits this relationship between Christian freedom and obedience is unintelligible to those outside of the community. Its life as the “*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*”¹⁵⁶ appears, to non-theological reflection, as general human fallibility or caprice. In their being so misunderstood, however, the Members echo, in world history, the hypostatic union of their Head: “[a]s surely as its Lord Jesus Christ was elected from eternity, not as the λόγος ἄσαρκος, but as the *Verbum incarnandum*, in His concrete humanity ... so surely in the same Jesus Christ God has also elected His community in its very being *ad extra*, in its visibility and worldliness, in its likeness with other peoples.”¹⁵⁷ From within, however, the community knows it but witnesses to a freedom that is all of humanity's Christological birthright.

155 CD IV/3.2, § 72, p. 743 [= *KD*, p. 850].

156 Id., p. 748 [= p. 857].

157 Id., p. 724 [= p. 829].

Barth's vision in the *Dogmatics*' does not abandon his earlier work's conviction that theology authorizes epistemological and ultimately political freedom. What Barth does claim against his younger self is that such freedom finds a necessary, but not sufficient, basis in the non- or anti-concept of the 'otherness of God.' The *Dogmatics* can thus be read as a response to Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism, "[t]he essence of [which] is negotiation, a cautious half-measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision (*Entscheidung*) to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion."¹⁵⁸ Barth's response to this challenge is subtler than Schmitt's, for whom only an "infallible"¹⁵⁹ but arbitrary sovereign modeled on an equally arbitrary God can cut deliberative politics' Gordian knot. On Barth's account, however, God's sovereignty is not arbitrary. Rather, God sovereignly decides *pro nobis*, from eternity, in Jesus Christ. "[G]odly power and godly love are related to one another neither through subordination nor dialectically. Rather, God's mightiness is understood as the power of his love."¹⁶⁰ Theological reflection lives, on the *Dogmatics*' account, within this synonymy's dynamic. Its choices are definitive because it knows God's love but revisable because it feels God's might. Through such a Christological regulation of God's sovereignty by the other divine attributes, Barth defends the legitimacy of a Christian metaphysics while avoiding the 'natural-theological' impulse that, in his view, misconstrues divine sovereignty. On a broader level, Barth's achievement suggests that the philosophy of religion and the theologies it inflects may wish to rethink their suspicion of ontology. Must they "write a theology without the word being,"¹⁶¹ as Jacques Derrida quipped, or just one where being's ground is not a bearer of 'supreme attributes'?

As my introduction delineated, the philosophy of religion's embrace of alterity discourses and of those discourses' supposed democratic ramifications counts among its post-ontological fever's foremost symptoms. On a narrower level, the *Dogmatics* also implicate this transition from the epistemic to the

158 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]), p. 63.

159 Id., p. 55.

160 Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014 [1983]), p. 22.

161 Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" (1989), trans. Ken Frieden, in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 128. Emphases removed.

political through the dynamic between fallibility and conviction they attribute to ecclesial reasoning. Evaluating the extent to which this dynamic characterizes the deliberative nature of democratic politics from the perspective of social and political philosophy is beyond this study's scope. Nonetheless, if Barth's description of this dynamic is credible, his mature thought offers political *theology* two questions through which it might fruitfully engage such philosophy. First, if theological discourse is the paradigm of deliberative rationality but intelligible only to the faith community, does that rationality's extra-ecclesial prevalence depend – sociologically, at least – on that community's existence within the body politic? Could protecting this community through, say, the right to religious freedom, be the democratic order's first task? Second, if Barth is correct, as he says in the *Doctrine of God*, that humanity's universal election in Jesus Christ is the magisterial Reformation's decisive discovery, does the Christological authorization of human freedom the *Dogmatics* develop speak not just to this text's inner logic, but to an inner logic – a 'theologic' – of modernity as such? The right to differ – "hie stehe ich"¹⁶² – might not, then, mean mainly the rationalistic, 'transcendental' subject's rebellion against the biblical worldview's strictures. The former (critique) would, rather, be the 'outside' of the latter (dogma): the historically and conceptually dependent extroversion of a biblical insight.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this study to the memory of my dear friend and mentor Thomas B. Levergood (1962–2021), who confirmed me in *quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus creditum est*. Thomas, you did "rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace" (Neh. 2:17).

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162 Martin Luther, "Verhandlungen mit D. Martin Luther auf dem Reichstage zu Worms 1521" (LW 32, p. 132 = WA 7, p. 838).

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