ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The first section of this investigation attempts to attain a clear understanding of the doctrines of sin held by Niebuhr and Barth within the wider context of their thought as a whole. Niebuhr's basic theological standpoint can be defined as "between gospel and world". Man is seen as a dualistic being, transcending in his freedom the nexus of forces which constitute him on the natural level. The theological basis of Niebuhr's anthropology is laid in the doctrines of man as the creature of God and man made in the image of God. This anthropology, with the social dimension held constantly in view, is the context of Niebuhr's idea of sin. Sin occurs when man, thus understood, uses his freedom both individually and corporately to transcend his proper creaturely limitations and aspire to finality. Barth's general standpoint for his approach to the idea of sin can be defined as "viewing sin in the light of grace". This approach, which finds its mature expression in the Church Dogmatics, has certain antecedents in Barth's earlier period. The idea of sin played an important part in his development as man came to be seen as existing under the judgment of God, a judgment which finds its supreme and essential manifestation in the action of God's grace for man in Jesus Christ. From the standpoint of grace, which means from the standpoint of the particular and concrete event of Jesus Christ, sin is seen in the volumes of the Church Dogmatics as part of a wider dimension of inimicality, "the Nightingale", a dimension whose "being" has been deprived of all necessity and overcome in this action of God against it in Jesus Christ.

Niebuhr and Barth's approaches are evaluated and explored at greater depth in terms of their respective answers to two questions (i) what "is" sin? (ii) how, if at all, is it overcome? These questions may be taken broadly as directing attention to the two poles of the law/gospel dialectic which is the framework within which theology has traditionally addressed itself to the idea of sin.

Under the heading "The 'being' of sin: its origin and nature" the basic ontological and epistemological questions raised by the idea of sin are first examined. In Barth's case due recognition is given to his concern for the correct order of theological questioning here. . . . There are peculiar difficulties in attempting to understand sin's "being" and "actuality" due to its having been deprived of all necessity for its being by God's gracious assault upon it in Jesus Christ. Barth attempts to face this question and also to overcome the epistemological problems which a claim to know sin implies by appealing to his axiom "in the light of grace". Niebuhr's approach to sin is more straightforward. Sin "is" as it is encountered immediately in universal moral experience. His account of how sin is known appeals to the traditional distinction between general and special revelation. The distinction between the two theologians here can be analysed in terms of divergent understandings of revelation. These understandings when assessed exegetically and theologically point to divergent approaches to anthropology which may be tentatively defined as "essentialist" (Niebuhr) and Christological (Barth). Niebuhr's approach, while not without promise, appears open to certain of Barth's criticisms.

The second aspect requiring attention within the area of the "being" of sin is the ethical. Barth attempts to ground ethics firmly in dogmatics by viewing it as the doctrine of God's command. The man who is utterly called into question by the action of God for him in justification is summoned in his ethical life to conform to the status given him in grace. Niebuhr finds the heart of the ethical in the tension between the claims of the immanent and the transcendent. The transcendental claim is defined in terms of the claim of the law of love which all men experience. These distinctive approaches express themselves concretely in divergent approaches to social ethics. Ultimately the issue reduces to their differing understandings of how Christ is related to human existence. Niebuhr by his approach attains a striking relevance but at the cost of a deceptive subjectivism and the loss of ethical motivation. Barth is able to attain a better theological grounding of ethics.
and, in practice, a greater relevance than his Anglo-Saxon critics have allowed, but this appears to some extent in spite of his theoretical approach.

The ideas of the fall and original sin are examined, particularly the former, in the third extension of the investigation of the "being" of sin. Niebuhr's categorisation of the fall as myth is examined. By viewing the fall in this way Niebuhr attempts to find a middle road between literalism and idealism. Barth prefers the category of occasa. He, however, pays greater attention to the theological questions raised by the idea of a fall of man at the dawn of history and also attempts to give the Biblical material a positive treatment. The Biblical view appears to be more unashamedly historical than either Barth's or Niebuhr's constructions. Niebuhr's loss of the historical perspective at this point is related to a certain monistic tendency in his thought and is reflected in the pessimistic note which appears in his writing. Barth's approach to the fall is symptomatic of a distinct idealistic tendency in his thought whereby the historical framework of the Biblical witness is obscured.

In the second general area of concern, the response to the question of how sin is overcome, the traditional divisions, justification, sanctification, and eschatology are retained as a framework.

Barth's doctrine of justification is rooted in his notion of the covenant of grace, the heart of which lies in the election of man for God and God for man in the eternal election of Jesus Christ, who in His death and resurrection takes the place of a sinful man and justifies him. Niebuhr's doctrine of justification is closely related to the notion of vicarious suffering. Overstrict juridical and legal theories are rejected. The important point is that man is set aside, in his goodness as well as his wickedness, by God's action in Christ through which alone man is put in the right with God. Barth's approach gives scope to many of the basic Biblical categories but leaves a query as to the place of the human subject. Niebuhr's view, while as ever attaining a certain relevance, is lacking in the profound "rational" of the Biblical doctrine.

Under sanctification, Niebuhr's approach is via the dual meaning of grace as mercy and power. He explores the paradoxical situation of the believer as a man made new by grace and yet retaining his old nature with its selfish motivation. Niebuhr's prospect, however, appears unduly pessimistic and lacks an important Biblical dimension. Barth's early polemic against Christian man and his goodness has given place to an attempt to give positive meaning to sanctification as sanctification in Jesus Christ. Like Niebuhr, however, and as against Calvin, he appears to be over-pessimistic. Theologically this is related to his extreme objectivism whereby the being of man is gathered so completely into the being of Jesus Christ.

In the area of the final overcoming of sin, eschatology, Barth's approach is via the idea of paraoxia, the personal coming of Jesus Christ. The full and final overcoming of sin which this implies has the nature of an unveiling of the triumph over sin achieved in His first coming. Certain ontological questions are also raised in the context of eschatology. The idea of future judgment is rendered problematic by Barth's approach and he also moves distinctly closer to universalism than the whole Biblical evidence allows. Niebuhr's approach to eschatology is essentially symbolic. His ability to separate himself finally from an idealistic interpretation of eschatology is questionable and his doctrine lacks the distinctive depths and heights of New Testament eschatology.

In the concluding section the ultimate theological distinction between Niebuhr and Barth, in their theologies in general, and in their approaches to the idea of sin in particular, is seen to lie in the area of Christology. Niebuhr's attempt to structure a Christology which is relevant to modern man while plausible as an attempt fails because it involves the inhibiting of important Christological elements by prior anthropological considerations. Barth's Christology while setting itself against any such alien determinants appears to lack a proper grounding in human existence through a failure to take the implications of the humanity of Christ with sufficient seriousness. A more adequate approach to Christology is outlined and the implications of such for a proper Biblical approach to the idea of sin indicated.

Thus while both theologians have significant contributions to make to the understanding of the idea of sin, neither Niebuhr's law-gospel order from his standpoint "between gospel and world" nor Barth's gospel-law order from his standpoint "viewing sin in the light of grace" are seen to be fully adequate.
THE IDEA OF SIN IN THE THOUGHT OF
REINHOLD NIEBUHR AND KARL BARTH

D. Bruce A. Milne

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Divinity
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 1970

University of Edinburgh
The interest of this thesis is not purely theological. The writer has been concerned, both prior to and during this study, with the question of how best to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in particular with the form and place of the doctrine of sin in such preaching.

The choice of Barth requires little apology. Whatever verdict we eventually pass upon him we are forced in grappling with his theology to take account of all the major theological questions in the context of the history of Christian theology from the Fathers right up to the modern period. Niebuhr was chosen as providing a useful foil to Barth, his more pragmatic approach able to be set in fruitful contrast to Barth's more heavily theological one.

Several comments as to the nature of the investigation are appropriate -
1. There has been a deliberate attempt made in this study to be expository and to allow the theologians concerned to speak for themselves.
2. In particular, in this respect, the opening two chapters are devoted entirely to exposition. Critical comment appears only as a means of allowing a fuller elucidation of both men's views, or else is confined to footnotes. In the remainder of the thesis exposition is in each case followed by discussion. However, the distinction between the two parts of the thesis is a general rather than an absolute one and this has been indicated by the fact that the chapter numbers run consecutively through from start to finish.
3. In order to allow the investigation to be fully impartial the occasions when Niebuhr precedes Barth in the exposition and those occasions when Barth precedes Niebuhr are almost equally balanced. The order which appeared to allow the best discussion of the viewpoints was also taken into account in each case.
4. Both Barth and Niebuhr are systematic theologians in the sense that what they say at any particular point bears an inner relation to what they say at every other point. This being the case it was found impossible to deal with their ideas of sin in rigid separation from their other doctrines. A fair part of this study is accordingly given to investigating the roots
of their doctrines of sin at the level of their primary ideas and convictions.

Thanks are due to the Scottish Education Department and to the Carnegie Trust for the Scholarship which enabled the undertaking of this project; to my former Principal, Dr. G.R. Beasley-Murray, of Spurgeon's College, for his encouragement to pursue a course of theological research prior to taking up the work of the ministry; to my two supervisors, Professor T.F. Torrance and Professor John McIntyre, for all their helpful comment and criticism, and for their encouragement throughout; and to the staff of New College Library for their unfailing attention and helpfulness.
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SUMMARY

The primary requirement of an analysis and assessment of the views of sin held by Niebuhr and Barth is a clear understanding of their respective doctrines of sin within the wider context of their thought as a whole. Accordingly the first section of this investigation attempts to attain such an understanding. Niebuhr's basic theological standpoint, which was largely shaped during his ministry in Detroit, can be defined as "between gospel and world." His anthropology, in keeping with this stance, draws its inspiration from cultural as well as theological springs. Man is seen as a dualistic being, transcending in his freedom the nexus of forces which constitute him on the natural level. This transcendent dimension is confirmed and more fully disclosed by revelation in general and Christology in particular. The theological basis of Niebuhr's anthropology is laid in the doctrine of man as the creature of God and man made in the image of God. This anthropology, with the social dimension held constantly in view, is the context of Niebuhr's idea of sin. Sin occurs when man, thus understood, uses his freedom both individually and corporately to transcend his proper creaturely limitations and aspire to finality. Sin is preceded by temptation and anxiety is its psychological accompaniment. It can be analysed in terms of its two main forms, pride and sensuality. Barth's general standpoint for his approach to the idea of sin can be defined as "viewing sin in the light of grace." This approach, which finds its mature expression in the Church Dogmatics, has certain antecedents in Barth's earlier period as he reacted against the anthropocentricity of the nineteenth century theology which he had inherited and sought a more explicitly theocentric orientation. The idea of sin played an important part in this development whereby man came to be seen as existing under the judgement of God, a judgement which finds its supreme and essential manifestation in the action of God's grace for man in Jesus Christ. From the standpoint of grace, which means from the standpoint of the particular and concrete event of Jesus Christ, sin is seen, in the volumes of the Church Dogmatics as part of a wider dimension of inimicality, das Nichtige, a dimension whose "being" has been deprived of all necessity, denied, and overcome in this action of God against it in Jesus Christ.
Niebuhr and Barth's approaches are compared, evaluated and explored at greater depth in terms of their respective answers to two questions - (i) What "is" sin? (ii) How, if at all, is it overcome? These questions may be taken broadly as directing attention to the two poles of the law/gospel dialectic which is the framework within which theology has traditionally addressed itself to the idea of sin. At this point a certain methodological decision required to be taken since the two theologians under review would diverge as to the order in which these two questions should be approached. Niebuhr's understanding enables him to treat them in the order above (law-gospel) whereas for Barth the second should be regarded as primary since for him sin's "being" is only understood a posteriori of an understanding of its being overcome (gospel-law). For methodological purposes Niebuhr's order is retained but Barth's approach is not thereby invalidated in the treatment.

Under the heading "The 'being' of sin: its origin and nature" the basic ontological and epistemological questions raised by the idea of sin are first examined. In Barth's case due recognition is given to his concern for the correct order of question, i.e. his concern to see questions of possibility in the light of questions of actuality. Relating this to sin there are peculiar difficulties in attempting to understand its "being" and "actuality" due to sin's having been deprived of all necessity for its being by God's gracious assault upon it in Jesus Christ. Barth attempts to face this question and also to overcome the epistemological problems which a claim to know sin implies by appealing to his axiom "in the light of grace". Questions raised by the notion of das Erscheinliche are also discussed. Niebuhr's approach to sin is more straightforward. Sin "is" as it is encountered immediately in universal moral experience. His account of how sin is known appeals to the traditional distinction between general and special revelation. The distinction between the two theologians here can be analysed in terms of divergent understandings of revelation. Barth's celebrated debate with Brunner is helpful in throwing the issues into sharper relief. The notion of "general revelation" and its particular expression in moral experience are examined in the light of Biblical testimony and the theological issues which they raise. Within certain limits there is seen to be some validity in this approach,
but Niebuhr's employment of it is seen to be less than satisfactory and Barth's objections to it fairly applicable in his case. These issues lead in turn to the recognition of divergent approaches to anthropology. These can be tentatively defined as "essentialist" (Niebuhr) and "Christological" (Barth). Niebuhr's attempt to ground anthropology in the doctrines of creation and the *imago Dei* while having some promise is open to criticism in the terms of his statement.

The second aspect requiring attention within the area of the "being" of sin is the ethical. This has peculiar point as it is the area in which Niebuhr and Barth have engaged in direct exchange of views. Barth attempts to ground ethics firmly in dogmatics by viewing it as the doctrine of God's command. The man who is utterly called into question by the action of God for him in justification is summoned in his ethical life to conform to the status given him in grace. Niebuhr finds the heart of the ethical in the tension between the claims of the immanent and those of the transcendent. The transcendent claim is defined in terms of the claim of the law of love which all men experience. It has its ultimate ground in the religious dimension as the claim and demand of the creator whose essence is love. These distinctive approaches express themselves concretely in divergent approaches to social ethics. Ultimately the issue reduces to their differing understandings of how Christ is related to human existence. Niebuhr by his approach attains a striking relevance but at the cost of a deceptive subjectivism and the loss of ethical motivation. Barth is able to attain a better theological grounding of ethics and, in practice, a greater relevance than his Anglo-Saxon critics have allowed, but this appears to some extent in spite of his theoretical approach.

The ideas of the fall and original sin are examined, particularly the former, in the third extension of the investigation of the "being" of sin. Niebuhr's categorisation of the fall as myth is examined against the background of his concepts of symbol and myth. By viewing the fall in this way Niebuhr attempts to find a middle road between literalism and idealism. Barth prefers the category of *saga*, which is also an attempt in its way to avoid these same extremes. He, however, pays greater
attention to the theological questions raised by the idea of a fall of man at the dawn of history and also attempts to give the Biblical material a positive treatment. The Biblical view appears to be more unashamedly historical than either Barth or Niebuhr's constructions. Niebuhr's loss of the historical perspective at this point is related to a certain monistic tendency in his thought and is reflected in the pessimistic note which appears in his writing. This loss also implies that he cannot give his deep sense of the corporate dimension of sin its full theological basis. Barth's approach to the fall is symptomatic of a distinct idealistic tendency in his thought whereby the historical framework of the Biblical witness is obscured.

In the second general area of concern, the response to the question of how sin is overcome, the traditional divisions, justification, sanctification, and eschatology are retained as a framework.

Barth's doctrine of justification is rooted in his notion of the covenant of grace, the heart of which lies in the election of man for God and God for man in the eternal election of Jesus Christ, who in His death and resurrection takes the place of sinful man and justifies him. Subjectively, man is summoned to receive this with the "empty hand" of faith. Niebuhr's doctrine of justification is closely related to the notion of vicarious suffering. Overstrict juridical and legal theories are rejected. The important point is that man is set aside, in his goodness as well as his wickedness, by God's action in Christ through which alone man is put in the right with God. Barth's approach gives scope to many of the basic Biblical categories but leaves a query as to the place of the human subject. Niebuhr's view, while as ever attaining a certain relevance, is lacking in the profound "rationale" of the Biblical doctrine.

Under sanctification, the overcoming of sin within the experience of faith, Niebuhr's approach is via the dual meaning of grace as mercy and power. He explores the paradoxical situation of the believer as a man made new by grace and yet retaining his old nature with its selfish motivation. Niebuhr's prospect, however, appears unduly pessimistic and lacks an important Biblical dimension. Barth's early polemic against Christian man and his goodness has given place to an attempt to give
positive meaning to sanctification as sanctification in Jesus Christ. As with Niebuhr, however, and as against Calvin, he appears to be over pessimistic. Theologically this is related to his extreme objectivism whereby the being of man is gathered so completely into the being of Jesus Christ.

In the area of the final overcoming of sin, eschatology, Barth's approach is via the idea of parousia, the personal coming of Jesus Christ. The full and final overcoming of sin which this implies has the nature of an unveiling of the triumph over sin achieved in His first coming. Certain ontological questions are also raised in the context of eschatology by Barth's account of the relation between sin and the will of God. The idea of future judgement is rendered problematic by this approach and Barth also moves distinctly closer to universalism than the whole Biblical evidence allows. Niebuhr's approach to eschatology is essentially symbolic. As in the case of the fall he attempts to find a middle road between literalism and idealism. His ability to separate himself finally from an idealistic interpretation of eschatology is questionable and his doctrine lacks the distinctive depths and heights of New Testament eschatology. Hence his ability to affirm a full and final overcoming of sin remains uncertain.

In the concluding section the ultimate theological distinction between Niebuhr and Barth, in their theologies in general and in their approaches to the idea of sin in particular, is seen to lie in the area of Christology. Niebuhr's attempt to structure a Christology which is relevant to modern man while plausible as an attempt fails because it involves the inhibiting of important Christological elements by prior anthropological considerations. Barth's Christology while setting itself against any such alien determinants appears to lack a proper grounding in human existence through a failure to take the implications of the humanity of Christ with sufficient seriousness. This is the root of the idealistic "from eternity" perspective of his thought. A more adequate approach to Christology is outlined and the implications of such for a proper Biblical approach to the idea of sin indicated.
Thus while both theologians have significant contributions to make to the understanding of the idea of sin neither Niebuhr's law-gospel order from his standpoint "between gospel and world" nor Barth's gospel-law order from his standpoint "viewing sin in the light of grace" are seen to be fully adequate.
I EXPOSITION
THE IDEA OF SIN IN THE THOUGHT OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR

A. BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

We begin our study of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin with a brief biographical sketch. This is required of us not simply to add human interest to our account but because of the crucial significance of Niebuhr's beginnings for the shape and direction of his subsequent thought. Hofmann can even assert that -

"... for Reinhold Niebuhr more than for any other contemporary theologian it is important to consider what determined the starting point of his theological work in order to understand him."1

Niebuhr was born in 1892, third son of the minister of a Lutheran offshoot church in Missouri. His first formative religious influence came from his father "who combined a vital personal piety with a complete freedom in his theological studies."2 Having expressed a desire to follow his father's footsteps into the ministry Niebuhr attended the denominational college and theological seminary before going on to Yale in 1913 for graduate study. However he did not complete his course there. As he comments significantly - "Epistemology bored me ... and frankly the other side of me came out: I desired relevance rather than scholarship."3 In 1915 he received and accepted the call to the pastorate of a small Evangelical and Reformed church in Detroit.

Niebuhr's theological stance at this time, insofar as it was clearly articulated, was within the popular liberalism of the time. D.R. Davies comments - "For a theological student in the early 1900s to be orthodox was an anachronism. To be in the swim one had to be liberal."4

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Niebuhr himself refers to the "liberal and highly moralistic creed which I had accepted as tantamount to the Christian faith". E.J. Carnell in his book on Niebuhr characterises this theological liberalism in a four-fold manner, in terms of its metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, and philosophy of history. Its metaphysics were essentially immanentist. It taught no sharp ontological otherness in the relation between God and the world, and as a result the place and significance of revelation was severely qualified. In epistemology the course had been set a century before by Schleiermacher with his theology of subjective consciousness and religious feeling. Its anthropology was based upon an optimistic faith in the inherent goodness of man and the powers of human rational attainment. As far as history was concerned it had baptized Darwin into the church and its mood was accordingly one of optimism in the prospect of man's inevitable upward march towards perfection. It would of course be mistaken to suggest that Niebuhr subscribed explicitly and without qualification to all these tenets; but they were the kind of view, implicit in many cases, which characterised the milieu from which he emerged.

His early months in the ministry were not easy ones. He suffered from a basic shyness which inhibited his pastoral work - "Usually I walk past a house two or three times before I summon the courage to go in." He also found the demands of weekly preaching a considerable strain upon his limited theological resources.

5. KB, p.5; Cf. also Beyond Tragedy (London, 1938), p.287 where he refers to the hesitancy he felt (on his ordination) in expressing his faith in terms of the Apostles' Creed.
7. Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (New York, 1938), p. 3.
"Now that I have preached about a dozen sermons I find I am repeating myself ... The few ideas that I had worked into sermons at the seminary have all been used, and now what?" This early discouragement was soon banished however. On the one hand his personal backwardness was overcome by his discovery of people.

"I think I am beginning to like the ministry also because it gives you a splendid opportunity to have all kinds of contacts with people in relationships in which they are at their best ... there is ... something quite glorious about folks."

On the other hand his preaching was reborn. He wrote in 1918 -

"I am really beginning to like the ministry. I think since I have stopped worrying so much about the intellectual problems of religion and have begun to explore some of its ethical problems there is more of a thrill in preaching. The real meaning of the gospel is in conflict with most of the customs and attitudes of our day at so many places that there is adventure in the Christian message, even if you only play around with its ideas in a conventional world. I can't say that I have done anything in my life to dramatise the conflict between the gospel and the world. But I find it increasingly interesting to set the two in juxtaposition, at least in my mind and in the minds of others."

Both these notes, the personal and the ethical, were to be enduring ones for Niebuhr. It is the latter however, his discovery of the ethical dimension, which will claim our attention in what follows. Detroit in the early 1900's was the ideal centre for one seeking "to explore the ethical problems of religion". The Ford Company was just beginning the rapid expansion which was to make it the motor centre of the world, and during his thirteen years' pastorate there Niebuhr was faced at first hand with the realities of the new automatised industrial pattern and forced to think through the whole range of its implications for the Christian ethic. This encounter with Ford in Detroit is of crucial significance for an understanding of Niebuhr's theological outlook - "The resulting facts of Ford's expansion determined my development more than any books which I may have read."

8. LNTC, p.4.
9. Ibid., pp.27-28. On this cf. also, Davies, op. cit., p.19 - "It is in this awareness of the reality of the personal that Niebuhr so finely displays the Christian revolutionary spirit. The defeat and tragedy of the secular revolutionary is that the reality of the individual as a person, an end in himself, is dissipated into mere social forces and institutionalism."
10. Ibid., p.27.
11. KB, p.5.
Or, as he put it more succinctly elsewhere - "I cut my eye-teeth fighting Ford." Externally Ford was identified by the American public in general and the church-going public in particular with liberality and progress. Ford himself claimed that his,

"... the greatest and most successful motor company in the world, was instigating the greatest revolution in the matter of rewards for workers ever known in the industrial world."13

One commentator on the time could write -

"I consider 1914 a momentous year in history ... the year in which Henry Ford by more than doubling wages at one stroke finally freed the worker from 'proletarian' servitude and lifted him above the 'minimum subsistence wage'."14

Niebuhr however was unable to share in the general optimism. He encountered the harsher effects of Ford's new assembly line techniques on the lives of the men to whom he ministered. Writing in his diary he describes a visit to one of Ford's factories -

"So artificial is life that these factories are like a strange world to me though I have lived close to them for many years. The foundry interested me particularly. The heat was terrific. The men seemed weary. The manual labor is a drudgery and toil is slavery. The men cannot possibly find any satisfaction in their work. They simply work to make a living. Their sweat and dull pain are part of the price paid for the fine cars we all run ..."15

He also became aware of the evil of men being dismissed in middle age without any system of pension to support them. Perhaps worst of all were Ford's retooling periods lasting from four months to a year when men would be laid off in large numbers without any possibility in most cases of obtaining alternative employment.

12. Quoted Bingham, p.129, cf. also KB, p.13, "Such theological convictions which I hold today began to dawn upon me during the end of a pastorate in a great industrial city."
13. Ibid., p.130.
14. R. Bruckbecker, in Image of America, 1959
15. LHTC, p.78.
The force of all this was borne in upon Niebuhr during his pastoral contacts -

"Mother and I visited the home of ..., today where the husband is sick and was out of employment before he became sick ... He is about 55 or 57 I should judge, and he is going to have a desperate time securing employment after he gets well ... I promised ..., I would try and find him a job. I did it to relieve the despair of the family, but I will have a hard time making good on my promise. According to the ethics of our modern industrialism men over 50, without special training, are so much junk."16

The immediate effect of his Detroit experience was to force Niebuhr to rethink the easy, optimistic liberalism which he had held as a creed up to this point. He had already noted its distinct limitations on the personal level. "In my pastoral duties I found that the simple idealism into which the classical faith had evaporated was ... irrelevant to the crises of personal life."17 Now he was faced with its limitations before the industrial situation which faced him daily in Detroit. "The social realities of a rapidly expanding industrial community ... forced me to reconsider the liberal and highly moralistic creed which I had accepted as tantamount to the Christian faith."18 For Niebuhr, as for many another before and since it was the demand of the pulpit which brought this uneasiness to a head.19 As a preacher he was required week after week to stand before his people, identified with them in the situation in which they found themselves and to speak a Word of God in and to that situation.

16. LNTC, p.149.
17. KB, p.6. Cf. also, LNTC, pp.24, 189.
18. Ibid., p.5.
19. Cf. Karl Barth Word of God and Word of Man, tr. Horton, (London, 1929) p.100 where, speaking of his own and others' break with 19th century patterns of thought - "It arose simply out of what we felt to be the need and promise of Christian preaching ... "
It was from this stance, and as he wrestled with this demand, that Niebuhr was forced to recognise that -

"... the simple little moral homilies which were preached in that as in other cities by myself and others seemed completely irrelevant to the brutal facts of life in a great industrial centre."\(^{20}\)

Thus he came to a "first disillusionment with 19th century religion".\(^{21}\) The judgement which he was thus forced to pass upon himself he did not fail to spread to the church at large -

"The church is like a Red Cross service in war time. It keeps life from degenerating into a consistent inhumanity, but it does not materially alter the fact of the struggle itself ... It seems pathetic to me that liberalism has too little appreciation of the tragedy of life to understand the cross and orthodoxy insists too much upon the absolute uniqueness of the sacrifice of Christ to make the preaching of the cross effective."\(^{22}\)

Niebuhr's involvement in the social and political issues of his situation and his disillusionment both with the 19th century liberal creed and the church generally led him not surprisingly to a real appreciation of Marx. His first books, *Does Civilisation need Religion* (New York, 1928), and *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1934) reveal a real sympathy for Marx's socio-economic critique of religion.

In 1928 Niebuhr left Detroit to become a member of the faculty of Union Seminary in New York in the chair of Christian Ethics. He remained there till his retiral in 1960. The years there saw a flood of articles, books and papers from his pen - concerned in the main with the social and political issues of the period and their relation to the Christian faith.

\(^{20}\) Art. 'Ten Years that shook my world', *The Christian Century*, April 26, 1939, Vol LVI/1, no 17, p.545.

\(^{21}\) KB, p.4.

\(^{22}\) LNTC, pp.115 and 85.
During these years certain developments can be traced in Niebuhr's thought 23 but none of them represents a really fundamental change of outlook. The basic orientation of his thinking was laid, as he tells us, during these early years in Detroit. We will now attempt to characterise this orientation more precisely.

B. NIEBUHR'S GENERAL STANDPOINT

It needs to be asserted clearly at the outset that we will look in vain for a fully-orbed theological system in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr. There is no Niebuhrian "Summa" or "Dogmatik". Nor is this accidental. In a revealing autobiographical passage he states -

"I cannot and do not claim to be a theologian ... I have never been very competent in the nice points of pure theology; and I must confess that I have not been sufficiently interested heretofore to acquire the competence. De Tocqueville long since observed the strong pragmatic interest of American Christianity in comparison with European Christianity; and that distinction is still valid."24

Throughout his career Niebuhr has manifested a distinct suspicion of such 'full-blown' theological constructions. He has preferred to concentrate on the field of theological ethics and allow his thought to unfold in dynamic relationship with the social and political situation of his time and immediate environment. The primary fact for Niebuhr to which he constantly responds in his writing and thought, and towards which he directs himself, is man-in-community, man in the social and cultural relationships in which he stands. Whether it is the Ford workers in the 1920's or the urban proletariat in the 1930's or the post-war situation of the 1940's and 50's the basic reality is consistently man in his social situation.

23. Certain attempts have been made to trace this development, Cf. e.g. P. Lehmann in an essay in KB, p.252f. who sees it in terms of a movement from Christus in Nobis to Christus Pro Nobis and then back again to Christus in Nobis. West in Communism and the Theologians (London, 1958), p.140f, characterises it in terms of a Marxist phase, then a Socialist phase, and then finally a Pragmatist phase.

Two features of this approach are especially significant. Firstly, it is realist in its outlook. By this we mean that as against the social gospel movement it is concerned to see man as he is rather than as he might conceivably become. It does not wish to mitigate to any extent the realities of human sin and perversity. Secondly it is dynamic in that, as we have sought to indicate above, it is concerned to relate itself to immediate social situations as they are directly encountered in their flux and change. We can therefore broadly characterise Niebuhr's approach as a dynamic realism. In this emphasis Niebuhr carries forward something of his inheritance in the 'Social Gospel' movement of the 19th century; though in his hands it is stripped of all its optimistic illusions as to the perfectibility of human society. Niebuhr's realism is too stark to permit any such idealism. For this whole question as to the relation between the individual and society in his thought one of his earliest works Moral Man and Immoral Society is very important. Here Niebuhr's sense of the significance of the social dimension of life is sharply pronounced. His position at this time is well summed up in the final chapter entitled 'The Conflict between Individual and Social Morality'. From the standpoint of the individual the highest ideal is unselfishness. Society however must strive towards justice and hence at times make use of force and compulsion. Thus a purely individualistic ethic fails, Niebuhr argues, to confront adequately the real problems and dilemmas of ethical life. It can neither define the real problems nor shape adequate answers to them.

25. "Realist" is a notoriously difficult term to finally pin down. Thelen in Man as Sinner in Contemporary American Realistic Theology (New York, 1946) relates the term to "realism with regard to human nature" (p. 7). Niebuhr's own discussion of the term is in these terms (CRPP, pp. 11-23). Thelen refers to an article by E.W. Lyman in Theology and Modern Life (ed. Schlippe, Chicago, 1940) in which he distinguishes four senses in which theology may be said to be "realistic" - i. in its view of history and man's nature; ii. in its view of God and standards of truth and value; iii. in its view of the world as against Kantian phenomenalism; iv. in particular views e.g. Pratt, von Hugel. This book of Thelen's is valuable in setting Niebuhr within a wider perspective of reaction to liberalism in American theology. On this compare also American Christianity, Vol 2 (ed. Smith, Handy, Loetscher, (New York, 1963) Chapters 20 & 21, p 426ff.

He argues, that is, for the recognition of a dimension of evil at the level of the competing forces in society which individualism fails to take account of.  

In this orientation towards man's being-in-society Niebuhr diverges from the 19th century concern with inward religious consciousness as the primary datum for theological investigation. He also at this point stands apart from the dialectical movement on the continent of Europe in that he will not concede that the point at which primary reality is encountered is the Word of God, God Almighty in the transforming act of His free Grace in Jesus Christ. Niebuhr has of course a real concern to point men in his thinking to Jesus Christ as God's gracious answer to the human predicament which his realistic analysis probes so mercilessly, but this never allows him to lose sight even for a moment of concrete man in the precise setting of his human environment. Not surprisingly, Barth complains in his correspondence with Niebuhr, of the lack of a whole dimension, as Barth sees it, in the work of Niebuhr and other Anglo-Saxons.  

West well comments -

"Primary reality lies for him not with the power of social movement towards revolution, nor with the present victory of a risen Christ, but with the immediate struggles of men in their sin with the social powers and responsibilities before them."  

In the light of this it is not surprising that the only area of Christian theology which Niebuhr has explored at depth is anthropology. What may we say of this man-in-society? What is the precise nature of his being? What is the relation of this man to God - in judgement and in mercy? And what does all this mean for man face to face with the demands and responsibilities of his present situation? These are the questions with which Niebuhr is concerned to grapple. Perhaps his position is best

28. Cf. KB, p.11. "The fact is that the human self can only be understood in a dramatic-historical environment."  
30. C. West, Communism and the Theologians, p.117
summed-up by a statement of his own - "I can't say that I have done anything in my life to dramatise the conflict between the gospel and the world."31 "Between the gospel and the world". That is where Niebuhr quite deliberately places himself, never retreating to the one or the other but always standing precisely there in the no-man's land between the two.32

C. NIEBUHR'S ANTHROPOLOGY

We turn now to an examination of Niebuhr's anthropology as the necessary setting for an exploration of his notion of sin. Thus far we have seen that his anthropology falls within the general orientation of a dynamic realism. Niebuhr's fullest and most profound statement of his anthropology is in his Gifford lectures, The Nature and Destiny of Man and this will accordingly form the basis of our exposition.33

31. LDTG, p.27
32. Cf. other attempts to state Niebuhr's position. Hofmann, op.cit., p.14 "The relation of gospel and world to each other is the main theme of Niebuhr's work." P. Ramsey in KB, p.115 speaks thus - "There is in his thought a constant dialogue between man's knowledge of himself and the moral law when he views himself, in the moment of self-transcendence or when studying alternative interpretations of his historical existence on the one hand, and on the other the knowledge that comes from encounter with the revelation in Christ and from viewing himself in the mirror of the Word." G.P. Vingaux in "La Theologie de L'Histoire chez Reinhold Niebuhr" (Paris, 1957) p.15. "C'est donc au double point de vue theologique et social qu'il cherche a élucider les relations de l'Eglise et de notre civilisation."
33. P. Ramsey in KB, p.231. "Later works have more amply illustrated, but not essentially modified his basic (anthropological) contentions in the Gifford lectures. It is primarily on this ground that the critics must fight."

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- 10 -
a) Presuppositions

1. 'Transcendent' nature of man

Niebuhr begins his account of man by posing the basic question, "What is Man?" That is, how are we to think of him? From what standpoint may an account of him be given? What range of reality requires to be posited to account for his being and existence? He argues that the key to understanding man lies in an acknowledgment of man's essential dualism. There are two facts which can and must be consistently affirmed about man -

"The obvious fact is that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic forms. The other less obvious fact is that man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason, and the world."34

Man is to be understood on the one hand in solidarity with the realities disclosed in the natural order. His existence can be indicated within the processes observable by the empirical sciences. Man emerges from this total nexus of natural forces, impulses, reactions and processes. He lives subject to these same realities, constantly qualified and conditioned by them. His life is finally terminated and resolved away into new amalgamations and orderings of these same forces. On the other hand, we require to say something further. Merely to speak in naturalistic categories is to fail to speak of total man, man in his full stature and being. To speak thus is in fact to lose sight of man altogether. Alongside this undoubted naturalism we require to set a further dimension and to speak also of man as a being who in some sense "goes beyond" or "transcends" these natural categories. Man possesses - "... a capacity for self-transcendence, the ability to make himself his own object."35

34. Human Nature (London, 1941), pp. 3-4
35. Ibid., p.4.
Man can only be properly indicated Niebuhr thinks when we are prepared to take both these dimensions seriously and to posit both, and both together.\(^{36}\)

It will be observed that by answering the question "what is man?" in this kind of way Niebuhr has in a sense charted the course of his whole further exposition. He has not sought his answer as to man's nature for example primarily in terms of a scientific investigation of his origins; nor in a sociological exploration of his patterns of behaviour; nor in a study of his capacities as disclosed in his action in history. All these fields are entered at points in his exposition but they do not constitute the real area of his interest. Nor, on the other hand does he seek his answer to the question simply from the statements of the Bible about man; nor, even in the first instance, from the events of Biblical history - Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Redemption, Parousia - though these categories of course exercise a basic influence upon his exposition.

36. Cf. also Human Destiny, (London, 1943) p.1; ICE, p.77; Christian Realism and Political Problems, (London, 1962) p.167; SDH, p.15f; and a more sophisticated account of this dualism in his most recent Man's Nature and His Communities (London, 1966) p.21. In this whole connection it is significant that in the preface to SDH Niebuhr explicitly acknowledges his debt to Martin Buber - "whose book I and Thou first instructed me and many others on the uniqueness of human selfhood." Cf. Buber, in I and Thou, for example - "The unlimited reign of causality in the world of It, of fundamental importance for the scientific ordering of nature, does not weigh heavily on man, who is not limited to the world of It but can continually leave it for the world of relation (Thou) ... Here man is assured of the freedom both of his being and of being." p.51 of ET (Edinburgh, 1937) of Ich und Du (1923). In view of this it is surprising that in his essay on "The historical roots of Niebuhr's thought" in KB, p.178f, Kroner makes no reference to Buber. He does however mention the influence which Kierkegaard has had upon Niebuhr. We will have occasion to say more of this later but for the moment we can note a passage from Kierkegaard's Concept of Dread tr. Lowrie (New Jersey, 1944) p.76, "Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis." Also Sickness unto Death, tr. Lowrie (London, 1941) p.17.
Along with these other elements, and at points providing him with his main category of interpretation is what we may tentatively term an existentialist approach to man. In saying this however we must never lose sight of Niebuhr's robust confidence in the power of human reason. West comments -

"Niebuhr rebelled against the liberal tradition which puts all its confidence in (reason and conscience) but he never fell into that complete relativism which led Marx to economic determinism and moral instrumentalism, and Barth to a totally theological orientation of all thought and morals."

His existentialism is never of an irrational character.

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37. It is possible to make too much of this existentialist element in Niebuhr. This would appear to be Carnell's mistake (op.cit.p.33f; 46; 159); similarly Minnema in art. "Reinhold Niebuhr" in Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology, ed. Hughes, (Grand Rapids, 1966) pp. 377-405. One would require to mention also other substantive influences - (i) Augustine (cf. HH p.165ff; CRPP pp. 114-139 Kroner in KB pp. 187-8, and Niebuhr's comment, KB p.437); (ii) the influence of the Biblical accounts of man's creation and fall in Genesis (Cf. ICE pp. 37f; 82f; HH p.191f). Niebuhr is no fundamentalist in his approach to the Bible (HH pp.185-9; CRPP p. 185ff; Christian Century, Feb. 23rd, 1949; art. by Carnell "Niebuhr's view of Scripture" in Inspiration and Interpretation (Grand Rapids, 1955 p.239f), yet there can be no doubt that it has a certain authority for him (cf. our discussion of 'myth' in chapter 5 below); (iii) Niebuhr at this point is also apparently reflecting the tremendous impact which the psychology of religion made on American theology in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Smith, Handy and Loetscher in American Christianity. Vol. 2, p.429 suggest that Walter Horton's ascription of virtual veto power to psychology over theology (A Psychological Approach to Theology, N.Y., 1931) expressed a "widely held conviction". Cf. too E.D. Starbuck Psychology of Religion (New York, 1899); W. James Varieties of Religious Experience, (New York, 1902); G.A. Coe, Psychology of Religion. (Chicago, 1916).

38. West, op.cit. p.121.

39. In an essay in CRPP p.165f entitled "Coherence, Incoherence, and Christian Faith", Niebuhr criticises the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Barth for their excessive irrationality as he sees it, and their failure to promote a real commerce with the culture of the time. He himself disavows the "existentialist" label and argues for a "Biblical Realism" which he thinks is orientated to the Biblical Heilsgeschichte.

contd./
This dualistic view of man is axiomatic for Niebuhr's whole thought. We will require to explore it more fully in a moment and raise the question as to its relation to his explicitly Christian presuppositions. First however we will follow him as he seeks to illustrate, and to some extent to vindicate, this view by setting it firstly against the panoramic background of the principal views of man which have been held throughout history, and secondly in the light of modern anthropological problems.

ii. Cultural survey and modern anthropological problems.

Niebuhr begins his survey with the Classical view of man. Within its distinctions he sees two basic agreements, - firstly, man was understood primarily from the standpoint of the uniqueness of his rational faculties; secondly, man tended to be seen in terms of a sharp dualism between mind and body. This had a corresponding two-fold effect upon the overall understanding of man - the rational element becomes practically identified with the divine, and the body is identified with evil while the mind or spirit is identified with goodness. While these are primarily elements in Platonic and Aristotelian thought they occur also in Stoicism. Despite its unwillingness to see any defect at the centre of man's being classical thought was nonetheless permeated by a deep gloom and pessimism. It further lacked any sense of a meaning in human history. Greek tragedy also reflected this pessimism though in a different form and one which "most nearly approaches the Christian interpretation of life".\(^40\) The tragedians recognised that evil extended more deeply and widely than the material and that "the tragedy of human history consists precisely in the fact that human life cannot be creative without being destructive; that biological urges are enhanced by and sublimated by daemonic spirit and that this spirit cannot express itself without committing the sin of pride."\(^41\) This feeling for Greek tragedy is significant as we shall see later when discussing his view of sinfulness.\(^42\) One has to query this account as a full exposition of classical thought. In particular Niebuhr fails, it

39. contd. Niebuhr's confidence in reason is surprising in that many of the thinkers to whom he is indebted were sceptical as to the power of reason e.g. Marx and Freud (ICE pp. 106ff, 127ff; HN pp. 36f, 45f, 55f, 129), E. Fromm (PH p. 201; HD P. 115). The influence of Hobhouse is perhaps of some significance here (L.T. Hobhouse, The Rational Good, cited in ICE p. 48.) Hobhouse makes much of the notion of 'harmony' and 'inter-connexion' in ethics. (op.cit. pp. 61f, 78)

40. HN, p. 11. On this whole section, cf. pp. 4-18
41. Ibid, p. 11
42. Cf. also BT, pp. 155-169
appears, to allow for the objectifying of evil in the Greek understanding which is associated with the notion of ἀνάγκη (necessity). This idea, associated with μοῖρα (fate) and νόος (reason) implied that there is a certain rational structure to reality and that evil is in some way bound up with it as a perverse factor within it. It is within this structure that man has freedom. Niebuhr approached this understanding where he speaks of Greek tragedy as mentioned above but in general he is too preoccupied with man to take real account of it and hence he seize upon the Greek dualism and its tendency to see the root of evil in the body, "the prison house of the soul" as being the essence of the classical understanding of the problem. As a result Niebuhr can speak of evil only in terms of ἡμβρίᾳ i.e. pride and does not explore the possibilities which ἀνάγκη and μοῖρα raise of a more objective approach to evil.

Niebuhr next turns to a summary of the Christian view of man which we will examine in his later fuller expansion of it. Coming to the modern view, he argues that it is a compound of the Classical and Christian views with certain more recent ingredients. He examines it in terms of three problems in modern anthropology.

Firstly, there is the confusion arising from the inner contradictions in the views of the rationalists, both idealistic and naturalistic; and vitalists and romanticists.

"Modern man ... cannot determine whether he shall understand himself primarily from the standpoint of the uniqueness of his reason or from the standpoint of his affinity with nature; and if the latter whether it is the harmless order and the peace of nature or her vitality which is the real clue to his essence." 46

Niebuhr examines the endless debate between idealism and naturalism, and the more recent challenge to their combined rationalism from romanticism, and argues that -

43. Plato, Phaedo, pp.63e-68b; 81c-83e
44. HN p.11; BT p.161
46. HN, p.22
"Modern culture ... has not been able to arrive at any satisfactory solution to the problem (of vitality and form) because its interpretations of man were derived from metaphysical theories, idealistic and naturalistic, in which one aspect of reality was made the principal of interpretation of the whole ... the problem of vitality and form is thus a cause of never-ceasing debate in which half-truths are set against half-truths. Modern culture is unable to escape the confusion arising from these misconceptions."47

This same limitation is observable also in Marxist socio-economic theories of man and in Freudian psychological analyses. He concludes -

"The fact is that it is not possible to solve the problem of vitality and form, or fully to understand the paradox of human creativity and destructiveness, within the limits of the dimension in which modern culture, whether rationalistic or romantic, views this problem."48

Secondly Niebuhr examines the problem of individuality. Historically individualism is found in its highest form in Christianity, attaining to a "final heightening" in the Protestant Reformation. The Renaissance seized upon this emancipated individual, but in seeking "to raise the idea of the individual beyond the limits set for it in the Christian faith ... ends by losing the idea and the fact altogether."49 None of the subsequent developments have been able to put Humpty Dumpty together again - whether they be bourgeois culture or naturalism, idealism or romanticism. "A genuine individualism can be maintained only in terms of religious presuppositions which can do justice to the immediate involvement of human individuality in all the organic forms and social tensions of history while appreciating its ultimate transcendence over every social and historical situation in the highest reaches of its self-transcendence."50

47. Ibid., p.28
48. Ibid., p.56
49. Ibid., p.60
50. HN, p.24
Thirdly, Niebuhr points out the mistaken optimism in modern culture's understanding of man. It has attempted to explain historical evil either in terms of social and economic conditioning or as deriving from man's psychological structure. Naturalism and idealism both refuse to see man as inherently evil and even its pessimism has no 'uneasy conscience'. Even where the note of pessimism rises to despair as for example in Freud it does not deflect the 'main stream of optimism.'

It is worth while at this point asking Niebuhr what precisely he is seeking to achieve by this cultural survey. Upon what sort of presuppositions is all this based? The question is made the more urgent by the fact that the generalisations he uses are so sweeping that specialists within these periods would take issue at points and allege over-generalisations and even historical inaccuracies. Niebuhr's own defence of his approach at this point is that he has attempted to establish that modern estimates of man -

"Lack a principle of interpretation which can do justice to both the height of human self-transcendence and the organic unity between the spirit of man and his physical life."53

Man in modern culture -

"... is not measured in a dimension sufficiently high or deep to do full justice to either his stature or his capacity for both good and evil, or to understand the total environment in which such a stature can understand, express and find itself." 54

Niebuhr is fundamentally a realist at this point in that one of his primary convictions is that the Christian faith is confirmed, or at least shown to be highly relevant, when set in the light of the basic problems of human experience. He sees the argumentation which establishes this conclusion as being fundamental to a contemporary apologetic.

51. HN, p.129.
52. This is cited by Wolf in his essay in KB, p.235.
53. HN, p.132.
54. Ibid., p.133.
"Our apologetic task as proponents of the Christian Faith must include the analysis of experience which proves alternative faiths to be mistaken."\(^{55}\)

Or he has it elsewhere -

"There is, in short, no possibility of fully validating the truth in the foolishness of the Gospel if every cultural discipline is not taken seriously up to the point where it becomes conscious of its own limits and the point where the insights of various disciplines stand in contradiction to each other, signifying that the total reality is more complex than any scheme of rational meaning which may be invented to comprehend it."\(^{56}\)

The apologetic task as Niebuhr envisages and seeks to fulfil it has the object of inducing the plea - "To whom can we go?" as the preliminary step towards the full confession "Thou hast the Words of Eternal life." What are the grounds to which he appeals to attain to this object?

There appears to be an appeal in part to the sheer experience of man in the realities of contemporary life -

"(I must insist) that modern man's collective history embodying as it does both the earlier dreams of happiness and harmony through the progressive mastery of both nature and history by the 'methods of science' and the contemporary disillusionment, is pretty conclusive evidence that there was something wrong with the spectacles through which modern man looked at himself and the world."\(^{57}\)

Or again, in his discussion of the contemporary failure to appreciate evil, he speaks of - "... a very stubborn source of resistance in man to the acceptance of most obvious and irrefutable evidence about his moral qualities."\(^{58}\)

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55. KB, p.15f.
56. CRFP, p.184.
57. KB, p.16.
58. HN, p.130; cf. also MHHC, p.16, where, writing in 1966, he can say "I still think the London Times Literary Supplement was substantially correct when it wrote some years ago: 'The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.'"
He can also appeal to the fact that the various modern views of man are inherently self-refuting -

"Modern man, in short, cannot determine whether he shall understand himself primarily from the standpoint of the uniqueness of his reason or from the standpoint of his affinity with nature; and if the latter whether it is the harmless order and peace of nature or her vitality which is the real clue to his essence. Thus some of the certainties of modern man are in contradiction with one another; and it may be questioned whether the conflict can be resolved within the terms of the presuppositions with which modern culture approaches the issues." 59

Much of Niebuhr's critique of modern anthropology however is made from the standpoint of his previously stated dualistic understanding of man. It is because of their failure adequately to account for this, the full dimension of man, that the modern theories are to be criticised and rejected. Thus for example in his discussion of modern views of the individual he criticises naturalism, because "it does not view life in sufficient depth to comprehend the self-transcendent human spirit";60 idealism, because "it loses the (human spirit) again because the uniqueness and arbitrariness of individuality do not conform to its pattern of rationality which is its sole principle for interpreting reality";61 and romanticism, because "its premium upon uniqueness as such ... leads tragically to the complete annihilation of the idea of individuality in personal terms."62 Granted, that is, the validity of Niebuhr's dualism modern analyses are finally untenable - and hence "to whom can we go?"

But we require to press Niebuhr one stage further - Upon what grounds does he substantiate his dualism? The answer, in part at any rate, is revelation. It has to be acknowledged that a casual reading of the opening chapters of Human Nature would not give this impression.63

59. HN, p.22, also p.41.
60. HN, p.86 and 60f.
61. Ibid., p.86.
62. Ibid., p.92.
63. In ICS there is more immediate appeal to revelation but this does not invalidate the point made here as the Gifford Lectures represent Niebuhr's matured moment. Cf. KB., p.231.
The argument begins with a statement of the problem of man's nature and it has already advanced to Niebuhr's dualistic solution before any 'revelational' appeal comes to the surface. The 'Christian View of Man' is unfolded certainly but only it seems in its historical succession and after the Classical view has been set out. It would however be wrong to characterise Niebuhr's whole anthropology from this immediate impression. The final basis of it is revelation, and Christology in particular as we shall see.

iii. Revelation

Niebuhr argues for revelation at two levels. There is individual and general revelation on the one hand, and historical and special revelation on the other. By individual and general revelation Niebuhr means - "The testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands."64 This "general revelation of personal experience" contains three elements -

(i) "The first is the sense of reverence for a majesty and of dependence upon an ultimate source of being."
(ii) "The second is the sense of moral obligation laid upon one from beyond oneself and of moral unworthiness before a judge."
(iii) "The third, most problematic of the elements in religious experience is the longing for forgiveness."65

This revelation is, he believes, what Paul is referring to in Romans 1, 20-21. It is "not so much a separate experience as an overtone implied in all experience."66 Schleiermacher recognised it and termed it a "feeling of dependence". It is to some extent identifiable with conscience "the sense of being commanded, placed underobligation and judged",67 which, if interpreted in terms of Biblical assumptions "proves to be the only basis of a correct analysis of all the factors involved in the experience".68

64. HN, p.136
65. Ibid., p.141; cf. also CP, p.187f; KB, p.224.
67. Ibid., p.138.
68. Ibid., p.138.
This gains the support of another form of this same general revelation the content of which is expressed in the concept of the Creator and the creation. "Faith concludes that the same 'Thou' who confronts us in our personal experience is also the source and creator of the whole world."\(^{69}\) The order here is important, for in arguing that "... world is not self-determined and self-explanatory and self-sufficient but points beyond itself."\(^{70}\) Niebuhr is not simply restating the cosmological argument but rather, as he thinks, with Paul in Romans 1, acknowledging that "... the creation is contemplated as pointing to a Creator already known in man's moral experience."\(^{71}\) Thus general revelation moves out from the contemplation of a dimension of depth in personal human consciousness to a recognition of a similar dimension of depth for any adequate account of nature.

This general revelation however requires a sharpening by which the God thus revealed as "the 'Wholly Other' at the edge of human consciousness"\(^{72}\) is more fully and adequately known. Special revelation now comes into its own. Niebuhr defines it as "the record of these events in history in which faith discerns the self-disclosure of God."\(^{73}\) Concretely this means the history of Israel and the Covenant culminating in the Person of Jesus Christ. In this history we discern the mercy and judgement of God. God's judgement falls upon the Jewish nation for their unwillingness to acknowledge their proper relationship to God in creaturely dependence and instead aspiring to an independence and security outside of this relationship. The judgement which thus falls, not only on Israel but upon the whole race in the light of this disclosure of man's sinful rebellion against God, raises the question as to whether there is a "reserve of mercy" in God which can accept man even in the judgement which falls upon him. To this question the answer is Jesus Christ.

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69. HN, p.141
70. Ibid., p.142
71. Ibid., p.143
72. HN, p.141
73. Ibid., p.146
Christian faith regards the revelation in Christ as final because the ultimate problem is solved by the assurance that God takes man's sin upon Himself and into Himself, and that without this divine initiative and divine sacrifice there could be no reconciliation and no easing of man's uneasy conscience."74

iv. Christology

Jesus Christ is a revealer in a twofold sense. On the one hand he is the revealer of God. Niebuhr confesses with the Church the mystery of the Incarnation, Very God and Very man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Hence any question we may wish to ask concerning God must of necessity begin with Jesus Christ.

"The difficult conception of the 'suffering servant' as the Messiah and messenger of God suffering for the sins of the guilty though himself guiltless and revealing thereby the very character of the divine is rightly regarded by Christian faith as the ultimate revelation of God."

Niebuhr's categories for interpreting the Christ event as here indicated are soteriological and, if the term is not too emotively charged, "anthropocentric". One commentator remarks - "Niebuhr's primary categories for his Christology are obviously Messianic-functional ones rather than logos-incarnational ones."76 It is certainly worth noting that Niebuhr's Christology is not orientated towards metaphysical issues. We receive from him no restatement of the Chalcedonian formula. He exhibits in fact a certain impatience with this whole approach to Christology.77

Niebuhr does not first structure his Christology from revelation and then seek to explore its relation to human existence. Rather, in keeping with his stance "between gospel and world", such Christological views as he holds are unfolded in closest relation to the realities of immediate human existence. This explains partly why we so often encounter the notion of "relevance" and its equivalents.78

74. Ibid., p.153. Also KB, p.254f.
78. e.g. HN, p.175, 132. FH, p.173, 159.
If the generalisation is not too sweeping we could say that Niebuhr approaches the Person of Christ through His work rather than the other way round.79

Christ then is the revealer of God. He is also however the revealer of men. Here the importance of revelation for Niebuhr's anthropology becomes obvious. "The same Christ who is accepted by faith as the revelation of the character of God is also regarded as the revelation of the true character of man."80 Niebuhr finds Biblical rootage for this in the notion of Christ as the Second Adam. While he acknowledges that "the actual phrase is used sparingly in Scripture" nonetheless "... the whole New Testament continually regards Christ as the final norm of human character."81 This has a very particular form and meaning -

"Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history. This perfection is not so much the sum total of various virtues or an absence of transgression of various laws; it is the perfection of sacrificial love."82

This sacrificial love, or agape, is revealed above all at the cross of Christ, and Niebuhr goes on to unfold human existence in the light of the meaning disclosed in the death of Jesus Christ. In his analysis of man Niebuhr has argued for a dimension of spirit whereby man can "stand outside of" and "transcend" himself. The revelation of Christ and the agape of the cross correspond to this "transcendence" of man. -

"The perfection of agape as symbolised in the Cross can neither be simply reduced to the limits of history nor yet dismissed as irrelevant because it transcends history. It transcends history as history transcends itself. It is the final norm of a human nature which has no final norm in history because it is not completely contained in history."83

80. HN, p.157
82. HD, p.71; Vignaux, op.cit. p.89f.
83. HD, p.78; cf. also BT, p.19-20.
Christ then reveals agape to be the meaning and goal of human existence. In thinking of the final attainment of moral life we ought not therefore to think so much in terms of attaining to certain specific standards or certain patterns of conduct. Niebuhr views this as a "legalistic interpretation of life" and hints that judged from this standpoint Christ cannot be thought of as perfect - "It is not possible ... to assert the sinlessness of every individual act of any actually historical character." Christ's sinlessness rather consisted in that - "The animating purpose of his life is to conform to the agape of God." But agape is not merely the meaning and goal of individual moral life. As ever Niebuhr wishes to think in corporate categories and hence he immediately goes on to explore the implications of this revelation of the meaning of life as sacrificial love for human society and history. He does this in three stages. Firstly, Christ as the Second Adam indicates the meaning of the perfection of the First Adam which lies in "the harmonious relation of life to life". As he puts it more fully -

"The 'essential', the normative man, is thus a 'God-man' whose sacrificial love seeks conformity with, and finds justification in, the divine and eternal agape, the ultimate and final harmony of life with life." Secondly, as far as the actual possibilities of human history are concerned, the perfection of Christ as disclosed in the agape "symbolised" in his cross carries to its conclusion man's universal, if dim, apprehension of the ultimate validity of the law of love. The cross also clarifies the possibilities within history refuting on the one hand the denial of an eternal dimension within the historical and on the other the dream of attaining to perfection within history. The cross further reveals the hollowness of all human pretension to goodness in the sheer contrast between it and the agape of God. Thirdly, the cross reveals the mistake of

84. HD, p.77.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., pp.71-101.
87. Ibid., p.84.
88. HD, p.85. Also ICE, p.59 and 116ff. BT, p.16. This whole section is a summary of HD, pp.85-94.
v. Justification

One final presupposition of Niebuhr's anthropology requires to be mentioned - the idea of justification by faith. In a sense this is simply a particular implication of Christology, giving attention to the work of Christ rather than His Person. By the gracious condescension of God to sinners in the incarnation and supremely in the death of Christ, man is put right with God. Niebuhr uses a wide variety of Biblical terms to indicate this and we will explore this area of his thought more closely in a later chapter. One of his principle categories is the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. He discusses this at some length in the latter part of the Gifford lectures and there lays bare the fundamental implications of this notion for anthropology. In particular, as Niebuhr expounds it, justification means the final judgment upon all human pretensions to righteousness before God. The fact that man is put in the right with God by the action of God for him implies the rejection and setting aside of all his own efforts to attain this end -

"... the reformation doctrine of 'justification by faith' ... which appears so irrelevant to modern man ... represents the final renunciation in the heart of Christianity of the human effort to complete life and history, whether with or without divine grace." 91

Justification is thus not simply the judgment of human evil but also of human goodness.

"The Pauline doctrine really contains the whole Christian conception of God's relation to human history. It recognises the sinful corruption in human life on every level of goodness. It knows that the pride of sin is greatest when men claim to have conquered sin completely." 92

89. Ibid., p.95.
90. ED, pp.102-220.
92. Ibid., p.108.
In the light of the work of Christ for him man is disclosed as a creature who is in the wrong with God in such a way that he cannot put himself in the right. He is only put in the right by the action of God for him in Jesus Christ.

In general conclusion as to Niebuhr's anthropological presuppositions we are led to affirm that the appeal is ultimately to revelation, and to Christology in particular. He is not however adverse to the negative sort of apologetic outlined earlier and also to seizing upon factors in experience and history which, seen even in their own terms, appear to substantiate the Christian position.

So much for the presuppositions of Niebuhr's anthropology. We turn now to his positive unfolding of it. He does this under three heads - man as the Image of God; man as the Creature of God; and man as Sinner.

b) Exposition

i. Man the Image of God

Niebuhr begins his account of the Imago Dei with a discussion of the Biblical basis of the doctrine. There is no full Biblical doctrine as such, he argues but there is certainly the basis of one. In particular the Bible does not draw a sharp distinction between soul and body, and soul and spirit. Further, in Scripture spirit is not defined intellectually as in Hellenism. The Hebraic unity of body and soul is preserved and spirit is seen primarily as the capacity for affinity with the divine.

He turns then to the history of the Imago doctrine. The significant aspect here is his appreciation of Augustine. "Augustine is, in this as in other doctrines, the first Christian theologian to comprehend the full implications of the doctrine of man." Augustine located the Imago in the mind, but this meant for him more than its being viewed in terms of rational mental processes. Rather it was related to the capacity of the mind for "transcendence to the point of self-transcendence". The memory is a particularly significant element in this.

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93: HN, p.162f.
94: On this appreciation for Augustine see KB pp.9, 187f and 437.
95: HN, p.165.
Augustine is led to conclude that by this capacity to transcend himself man is an essentially religious creature who can find his home only in God. Niebuhr concludes "No Christian theologian ever arrived at a more convincing statement of the relevance and distance between the human and the divine than he." Calvin built on Augustine and extends the *imago* to cover the whole man, even the body. Luther is too coloured by the desire to stress man's sinfulness and hence the loss of the *imago* to be able to add significantly to an understanding of the notion. In general Niebuhr concludes that theology has tended to see the *imago* "... in terms which include man's rational faculties but which suggest something beyond them." He quotes Heidegger - who has given us the "ablest theological analysis of human nature in modern times" - to the effect that - "man is something which reaches beyond itself; that he is more than a rational creature." Niebuhr amplifies this "something ... more" in terms of man's freedom to determine himself. "He determines himself in such a way that he must choose his total end." The transcendent freedom of man is revealed in Jesus Christ, the norm of humanity, whose life in the transcendence of the possibilities of historical existence demonstrates the supra-historical goal of all human striving. Man is always committed to a form of idolatry

96. HN, p.166. Augustine's notion of the *imago* was somewhat fuller than this might imply. In particular he made the celebrated distinction between the *imago* and the *similitudo*; cf. E. Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (O. Wyon London, 1939), appendix I, p.499f, esp. 506.
97. Cf. Niebuhr's use of memory in PH, pp.20-24 where he argues that it "represents man's capacity to rise above, even while he is within, the temporal flux". For appreciation and also criticism of Niebuhr here, compare J. McIntyre *The Christian Doctrine of History* (Edinburgh 1957) pp. 102-106. HN, p.166-7.
98. HN, p.169.
99. Ibid. p.170; Calvin - *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F.J. Batties (London, 1961) I.XV, 3 pp.186-189. Calvin however was able to include the body because he tended to see the *imago* in terms of man's relationship to God, or put another way, as God's mirroring Himself in man - cf. T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London 1949) pp. 35-82, esp. p.39.
100. HN, p.173.
101. Ibid. p.
102. Ibid. p.174.
when he attempts to identify the final principle of meaning with some principle of coherence within historical existence, whether that principle be rational or historical. When this happens the religious demand becomes intolerable since man already has a god and cannot tolerate another. - "The real situation is that man who is made in the image of God is unable, precisely because of those qualities in him which are designated as "image of God" to be satisfied with a god who is made in man's image."103 We will attempt a full exploration of Niebuhr's view of the imago later. For the moment we can observe that he locates it in man, and man as he now is.103a

ii. Man the Creature of God

By thinking of man under this head Niebuhr wishes to stress the fact of man's finiteness and dependence yet without implying any inherent evil in this finiteness. He wishes the unanimous Biblical testimony to the essential goodness of creation to be heard, even when stressing the brevity and dependence of life. This stress Niebuhr notes in the Christian notion of individuality where, though the individual is a creature who stands within a realm of infinite possibility his salvation does not mean the loss of this creatureliness nor its obscurance.104 There has regrettably been a stream of Christian thought which has failed to attain to this insight and has identified temporality and dependence with evil. Niebuhr does admit that death and evil are linked in Scripture in Pauline teaching, but thinks it can be explained in the main in terms of a symbolic usage by Paul. And even if we grant that Paul is in agreement with the Rabbinic view of death as due to the fall Niebuhr argues that an exegesis of the Genesis account does not require this interpretation. Certainly the causal connection between sin and death has been the orthodox position but he feels that it is not in accord with the total Biblical view of the finiteness of man. He argues rather that the overall Biblical teaching

103. NN, p.177.
regarding death is that it - "Illustrates the difference between the majesty of God and the weakness and dependence of man as creature."\textsuperscript{105}

D. IDEA OF SIN

a. Analysis of Sin

i. Account of its nature

Niebuhr's thought as we have already indicated marks a break from the liberalism of the 19th century. At no point is this break more marked than in his doctrine of sin.\textsuperscript{106} Niebuhr turns full circle from the easy optimism of his inherited creed and confronts us with man the sinner, in profound need of God's grace. H. Hofmann has attempted an exposition of Niebuhr's whole thought from the standpoint of his doctrine of sin\textsuperscript{107} and Emil Brunner informs us that "this presentation has met with complete approval from Niebuhr himself."\textsuperscript{108} We may therefore be assured that in turning to expound his view of sin we are penetrating close to the heart of his theological vision.

The sinner who catches Niebuhr's attention however is, in keeping with his essential outlook, never merely an isolated individual in a fractured relationship with God. He is always also a social being in a fractured relationship with his neighbour. It is this latter dimension which has absorbed the great bulk of Niebuhr's writing in anthropology.\textsuperscript{109}

Here something of his Anglo-Saxon pragmatism manifests itself. His attention is attracted by man in the encounters of his daily existence and although he sees this man as also at the same time man coram Deo there is no vertical movement in his thought which allows us to lose sight of this horizontal dimension. Thus while his analysis of sin is in the first instance in individualistic terms any full account of it must keep the social element clearly in the picture.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{105} HN, p.189.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Cf. e.g. BT, p.105.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} H. Hofmann, op.cit. Though this has been challenged. Cf. G. Harland, \textit{The Thought of R.N.}, (Oxford 1960) pp. IX-X
  \item \textsuperscript{108} In essay by Brunner in KB entitled "Some remarks on Reinhold Niebuhr's work as a Christian thinker", KB, p.31.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} DCRN; MAMIS; CLCD; \textit{The Godly and the Ungodly} (London 1958); \textit{Nations and Empires}, (London 1960), etc.
\end{itemize}
Niebuhr takes his starting point (granted his anthropological premises as above) with Ritschl's reference to "the contradiction in which man finds himself". This "contradiction" has already been expounded as Niebuhr's dualistic view of man. He has several further accounts of it at this point which are more closely related to its being "the occasion for sin". The contradiction he tells us is one of "freedom and finiteness". Man is "in and yet above nature". Man is "a finite spirit lacking identity with the whole, but yet a spirit capable in some sense of envisaging the whole ... He stands at the juncture of nature and spirit and is involved in both freedom and necessity". These definitions of man's contradictory or "paradoxical" situation are on the whole in ontological terms but Niebuhr also wishes to spell this out epistemologically -

"Man's knowledge is limited by time and space. Yet it is not so limited as animal knowledge ... witness the fact that man knows something of these limits which means that in some sense he transcends them." These characterisations of the contradictory situation of man are crucial for Niebuhr's view of sin because it is in terms of this situation so viewed that he defines it.

"Sin lies at the juncture of spirit and nature, in the sense that the peculiar and unique characteristics of human spirituality, in both its good and evil tendencies can be understood only by analysing the paradoxical relation of freedom and necessity, of finiteness and the yearning for the eternal in human life."
Hence if we ask him "what is sin?" he can reply -

"Sin is the unwillingness of man to acknowledge his creatureliness and dependence upon God and his effort to make his own life independent and secure ... It lies in man's unwillingness to recognise and acknowledge the weakness, finiteness and dependence of his position; in his inclination to grasp after a power and security which transcend the possibilities of human existence; in his effort to pretend to a virtue and knowledge beyond the limits of mere creatures." 118

Sin then is to be seen in closest relation to the human situation. Man is a being set in existence at the meeting point of two dimensions of reality. He combines within himself two worlds. By definition as man he is at once both free and bound, both transcendent of, and dependent upon, the natural order, both child of nature and child of supernature. Sin has its being in the response of man to this situation, in what man does as this being set in this precise position. And this response, man's sin, we can most generally define as - a claim to finality. 119

Sin hence is bound up in the closest way with the will of man. "The Christian estimate of human evil is so serious precisely because it places evil at the very centre of human personality - in the will". 120

The nature of the will's evil lies in that it actualises man's sinful claim to finality. "Man is mortal, that is his fate; man pretends not to be mortal, that is his sin." 121

We will require later to explore more fully this dialectic of sin and the situation of man. For the moment we follow Niebuhr as he seeks a fuller exploration of what might be loosely termed the "mechanics" of sin. In particular he seeks to answer two questions; firstly why does man sin? - to which he gives his account of the traditional answer, temptation. Secondly how does sin present itself to man? - to which he gives an answer in terms of anxiety.

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118. HN, pp.147 and 148; Cf. also HD, p.226fn., FH, p.106f; CLOD, p.21; BT, p.11, 28.
120. HN, p.17, also p.281.
121. BT, p.28.
ii. Temptation

The Bible speaks, Niebuhr notes, of the reality of temptation and also of a tempter. This implies that sin in some sense reaches beyond and behind the human will -

"To believe there is a devil is to believe that there is a force or principle of evil antecedent to any evil human action and hence that man's rebellion against God is not an act of sheer perversity nor does it follow inevitably from the situation in which he stands."122

Following the account of the fall in the book of Genesis123 Niebuhr suggests that the devil tempts man by reason of the fact that he misinterprets his situation of finiteness and freedom by suggesting that no ill consequences will result from his defiance of the limitations of his situation. Temptation, by this, lies in that the evil consequences of man's claim to finality are queried, even denied, and man is invited to accept as real the situation which his claim to finality has no ill effects upon his relationship to God, his fellows, creation and himself. In his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics Niebuhr in a lengthy discussion of the fall draws the further conclusion that the fact of the tempter as both a rebel against God and yet under His dominion -

"Expresses the paradoxical fact that on the one hand evil is something more than the absence of order, and on the other hand that it depends upon order ... Thus the devil is possible only in a world controlled by God and can be effective only if some of the potencies of the divine are in him. Evil in other words is not the absence but the corruption of the good; yet it is parasitic on the good."124

The reality of temptation however must never be permitted to obscure the fact of man's perversity - his guilty connivance in the line of action indicated by the tempter. Sin must always be defined in terms of evil rather than error. Even when we give full place to the paradoxical situation

122. HN, p.192.
123. The Genesis account is not of course strictly historical for Niebuhr. Cf. HN, p.191 and 276ff. MNHC, p.15f. ET, p.11f.; CRPP, p.186. For discussion of Niebuhr's notion of symbol cf. e.g. Richardson in KB, p.225-7. Both these issues will be discussed in Chapter 5.
which is the "occasion" of human sin we require to retain this element of conscious perversity.

"The occasion for man's temptation lies in the two facts his greatness and his weakness, his unlimited and his limited knowledge, taken together ... His sin is never the mere ignorance of his ignorance. It is always partly an effort to obscure his blindness by over-estimating the degree of his sight and to obscure his insecurity by stretching his power beyond its limits."125

Thus in answer to the question as to why man sins, why that is he grasps after finality from his position at the juncture of freedom and finiteness, the first and provisional answer is - because of the reality of temptation. And Niebuhr it would appear is even prepared to think of this to some degree in terms of a dimension which man encounters as objective to himself. However this is far from being a full answer and Niebuhr will have more to say at a later stage of his exposition in reply to this question as to why man sins.

iii. Anxiety 126

Niebuhr now goes on to examine the state of mind to which temptation appears as temptation. This he argues is anxiety.

125. HN, p.193.
126. In this whole section Niebuhr leans very heavily indeed upon Kierkegaard's account in The Concept of Dread (tr. Lowrie, Princeton, 1944). Whole sentences of his account could have come straight from there. For example compare "Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved." (HN p.194) with "Dread is the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility" (Concept of Dread, p.38). Compare "Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin" (HN 194-5) with "Dread is the psychological state which precedes sin." (Concept of Dread, p.82). We are not surprised in the light of this to read in a footnote that Niebuhr considers Kierkegaard's analysis of the relation of anxiety to sin as "the profoundest in Christian thought". (HN, p.195) cf. also Kierkegaard, Either/Or. tr. Lowrie, (London, 1944) Vol 1, pp.115; Vol 2, pp.159-60. Niebuhr's debt to Kierkegaard is emphasised by Kroner (KB 182-3) who writes "with respect to the doctrine of sin Niebuhr is more in agreement with Kierkegaard than he is with Calvin". This question in turn leads to the larger one as to the meaning of Kierkegaard himself, and in particular to the question of the relationship in his thought between his stress on subjectivity and the "Absolute Paradox", or putting this more sharply, contd.
"Man being both free and bound, both limited and limitless, is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved. Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness. Anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation."  

Anxiety then is the name which Niebuhr wishes to give to the inner state of consciousness of man in the situation of finiteness and freedom. It is not in itself sin. It is however the psychological state of man immediately prior to sin. Sin however is always something more. The step or "leap" from anxiety to sin is never a necessary one. Man always retains the "ideal possibility" of overcoming the threat inherent in his anxiety by an act of faith. "The ideal possibility is that faith in the ultimate security of God's love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history." In this sense Christian orthodoxy has been perfectly correct in its insistence that unbelief is the root of sin. This finds Biblical confirmation in Jesus's injunction "Be not anxious" summing men to a state of perfect trust in the security of the divine love.  

There is also a second sense in which anxiety must be distinguished from evil - in that it is not merely the precondition of sin but also the ground of all human creativity. Man finds himself in his highest freedom surrounded by a whole universe of possibilities, and while there certainly are real boundaries to this universe of possibility, man finds it difficult to gauge them from his own immediate perspective. He is thus driven on by his very anxiety before the yawning gulf of his possibilities to reach out after his ever-widening horizons and hence becomes caught up in the

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For our purpose it is sufficient to note that Niebuhr leans heavily upon Kierkegaard at this point and on the whole interprets him as giving an account of certain psychological factors which are present in all human sinning, even if they do not in themselves explain it.  

127. Ibid., p.194-5. Also HD, p.76. BT, p.98.  
128. HM, p.195.  
129. Ibid.
whole process of human creativity. The distinction between these two possibilities of anxiety - sin and creativity - is not a simple one Niebuhr argues.  

"Anxiety as a permanent concomitant of freedom is thus both the source of creativity and a temptation to sin. It is the condition of the sailor climbing the mast with the abyss of the waves beneath him and the 'crow's nest' above him. He is anxious both about the end towards which he strives and the abyss of nothingness into which he may fall."  

b. **Forms of Sin**

Sin has two main distinguishable forms - pride and sensuality.

"Man falls into pride when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditional significance; he falls into sensuality when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom ... by losing himself in some natural vitality."

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i. **Pride**

Pride is the more basic of the two according to Scripture. Niebuhr finds Paul's exposition of man's self-glorification in Romans 1 "an admirable summary of the whole Biblical doctrine of sin." In a lengthy footnote he traces this view of sin through the thought of Augustine, Pascal, Luther and Calvin. As against the rationalist-classical standpoint which tends to find the essence of sin in man's ignorance or in the passions of the body the Biblical view is that sin is rooted in man's evil will (cf. above) and arises from man's self-worship. "Man's sin lies in his pretension to be God."

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130. Ibid., p.196.
131. Ibid., p.198. One misses in this whole account in both Niebuhr and Kierkegaard the moral note of an objective judgment brought against man.
132. BN, p.198, also BT, p.28.
133. Ibid., p.199; and also pp. 17, 174f.
134. CE, p.95 also 96-97. BT, p.28. CLCD, p.21.
Niebuhr distinguishes four forms of pride.

1. Pride of Power: This has both a strong and a weak form. In its strong form man "lusts after divinity", to use Luther's phrase. It arises from a feeling of comparative security in which the self is seemingly blinded to the contingent nature of its existence and aspires to actions and aims out of all keeping with its real state. This has social as well as individual instance, - Niebuhr points to the prophetic denunciation of Babylon and the nations (Is. 28, 1f, Ezekiel 30, 8), - but it is seen in any individuals or groups throughout society whose position appears to be secure. The second form of the pride of power arises more from a realisation of insecurity and expresses itself in a grasping after security at the expense of other life. This form is particularly manifested in the advancing forces in society. One can trace a species of this pride of power in man's exploitation of the resources of nature. Instead of a thankful gratitude he expresses a greedy avarice which, with its proclamation of material comfort and security as life's highest goods, is the besetting sin of bourgeois culture. Behind it lurks a deep insecurity before the threat of extinction by these same natural forces. Man's will-to-power in his relations with his fellow-humans which some psychologists have regarded as the dominant human behaviour drive is deeply related to this same sense of insecurity. The whole process however is self-defeating for the more frantic the efforts made to secure oneself the greater becomes the realisation of insecurity. "... there is no level of greatness and power in which the lash of fear is not at least one strand in the whip of ambition."135

2. Pride of intellect:

"All human knowledge is tainted with an 'ideological taint'. It pretends to be more true than it is. It is finite knowledge gained from a particular perspective but it pretends to be final and ultimate knowledge."136

This is well illustrated in the assumptions of finality in all the great philosophical systems. Even Marxism which is so sensitive to the ideological and the historically conditioned in all theoretical thought fails really to understand this because of its over-simplified theory of human consciousness. It hence remains blind to the historically conditioned character of its own system. -

135: HN, p.207.
There is in short no manifestation of intellectual pride in which the temptations of both human freedom and human insecurity are not apparent. Thus all claims to knowledge are to some degree sinful since -

"the ignorance of ignorance which underlies every attempt at knowledge can never be described as a mere ignorance. The ignorance presupposes pride, for there is always an ideal possibility that man should recognise his own limits." Niebuhr here if pressed to the logic of this position comes near to solipsism, or at any rate to a deep scepticism. This has been taken up by Carnell and others.

3. Moral pride:

"Moral pride is the pretension of finite man that his highly conditioned virtue is the final righteousness and that his very relative moral standards are absolute." It is Biblically depicted in the pharisees who opposed Jesus and in the Judaeers who resisted Paul. Historically this may be seen to have been the issue at the Reformation - the truth or otherwise of Luther's view that "the unwillingness of the sinner to be regarded as a sinner was the final form of sin." The historical manifestations of this particular form of pride are legion - "The whole history of racial, national, religious and other social struggles is a commentary on the objective wickedness and social miseries which result from self-righteousness."

4. Spiritual pride: Niebuhr regards this as the "ultimate sin" whereby man forgets the qualified and contingent nature of his position and aspires to arrogate to his own limited understanding and attainment the sanction and status of the divine. Here the self-deception which is implicit in all pride becomes quite explicit. Niebuhr draws an important conclusion from this - "Religion is not simply as is generally supposed, an inherently virtuous human quest for God. It is merely the final battleground between God and man's self-esteem. He aligns himself with Kraemer's view that - "what goes by the name of religion in the modern world is to a great extent unbridled human self-assertion in religious
disguise. Protestantism, as a protest against Catholic attempts to secure this ultimate authority for the visible church by identifying it with the Kingdom of God, is hence correct. Protestantism however needs to be alive to the equal danger of spiritual pride which her stress on individualism can give rise to. Indeed so powerful and subtle is this form of sin that it can insinuate itself even into a man's very confession of it. The virtue of the Christian faith as a religion of revelation lies in the fact that in it - "...God speaks to man from beyond the highest pinnacle of the human spirit; and that this voice of God will discover man's highest, not only to be short of the highest, but involved in the dishonesty of claiming that it is the highest." 146

Niebuhr develops this discussion of pride as the essence of sin in three further ways.

1. The relation of dishonesty to pride. Niebuhr has drawn attention to the deceit which is an element in man's self-love and pride. He sees in this need to deceive oneself an important witness to the "vestige of truth" which is inherent in the self and which the self finds the need to satisfy before it acts. Niebuhr thinks this calls into question the notion of total depravity. The "mechanism of deception" is highly complicated in its function. Ignorance is certainly involved in it. The self is always partly under the illusion that it is the centre of the world in the sense that its self-consciousness is the centre of the world of its experience. The ignorance however is also always to some extent wilful. This view of sin as related to deception is accounted for to some extent by both Marxist and psychological analyses but a proper understanding of it can only be gained on the basis of the Christian understanding of man as determined and yet self-transcendent.

141. Ibid.
142. Ibid., p.213.
143. HN, p.213
144. Ibid.
146. HN, p.216.
147. HN, pp.216-220
2. The social dimension of pride: Here we confront one of Niebuhr's most distinctive and recurrent themes. In his view, which he first elaborated in his early work *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, we require to distinguish between the individual and social levels of sin and pride. He notes two distinctions in particular. (i) Groups make unconditional demands which individuals do not. (ii) Groups aspire to higher pretensions than individuals. "The group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centred, and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual." This collective pride is most clearly reflected in the nation state. There is in fact Niebuhr thinks a 'temptation to idolatry' in the very majesty of the state; a real dimension of religious awe and reverence implicit in all consent on the part of the governed. The pretension to final authority which the state makes is only partly explicable in terms of man's self-defence in face of the threat of nature. A full explanation requires us to speak of moral categories and in terms of spiritual pride. Because of its very power, majesty and seeming durability the state in its claim can attain to a dangerous plausibility as recent German history makes terrifyingly plain. In its final expression the claim of the state can amount to a claim to divinity - "Collective pride is ... man's last, and in some respect most pathetic effort to deny the determinate and contingent character of his existence. The very essence of human sin is in it." Niebuhr is also concerned with the problem of "equality of sin and inequality of guilt"; with the fact that on the one hand there are real and valid distinctions to be made between different forms and expressions of evil, and on the other with the fact that all men are equally guilty in the sight of God. His discussion of this in the Gifford Lectures however has subsequently been repudiated by him for its attempting to do justice to the problem in quantitative terms and he confesses to having no satisfactory answer to this question.

148. HN, p.221ff.
149. Ibid., p.221-222; FH, p.218;
151. HN, pp.233-242.
152. KB, pp.437.
ii. **Sensuality**

The second major form of sin is sensuality. Niebuhr provisionally defines it as "The destruction of the harmony within the self by the self's undue identification with and devotion to particular impulses and desires within the self." Although both Bible and Christian tradition have seen sensuality as subordinate to pride there has been a Hellenistic wing in theology which has tended to see sensuality as the basic form of sin. This has tended to the view that Christianity encourages prurience in its attitude to sex and a lack of sympathy for those who are made prey of socially disreputable evils. Niebuhr, while aligning himself firmly with the main stream of Christian thought in this matter, nonetheless thinks that to regard sensuality as simply a derivative form of self-love is too simple and he discerns a second factor at work.

"Is sensuality ... a form of idolatry which makes the self God, or is it an alternative idolatry in which the self, conscious of the inadequacy of its self-worship, seeks escape by finding some other god?" He argues that both of these elements obtain in sensuality. He illustrates this from drunkenness and sexual passion. In the case of the latter there can at times be a further, third, element when sex becomes the attempt to escape from the sinful situation in which the self finds itself into some form of impersonal subconscious existence.

**c. Further problems**

i. **Freedom and responsibility**

Central to all discussion of the problem of sin down the centuries has been the question of man's freedom in, and responsibility for, his sin. Niebuhr now addresses himself to this problem. His discussion at this point serves to illuminate some of his earlier exposition of the nature of sin.

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154. Ibid., p.248.
155. HN, p.249-50.
156. Ibid., p.251-52.
Niebuhr seeks to defend the Pauline-Augustinian notion of man's being both responsible for his sin and yet sinning inevitably. He rejects both pelagian and semi-pelagian alternatives.

"The truth is that, absurd as the classical Pauline doctrine of original sin may seem at first blush its prestige as a part of the Christian faith is preserved and perennially re-established against the attacks of rationalists and simple moralists by its ability to throw light upon complex factors in human behaviour which constantly escape the moralists." 158

He seeks to prove this "ability to throw light" on the part of the classical doctrine by taking the example of religious nationalism. This phenomenon he urges cannot be accounted for simply in terms of a free and deliberate choice of evil as against good. One requires to note also the sense of inferiority and insecurity which the nationalist is seeking to alleviate by his commitment to his cause. This however, on the other hand, is not an inevitable cause of the evil. A cultural lag is also inadequate to account for it since the action is in defiance of universal standards of behaviour. An adequate account cannot be given until we are prepared to see the action as flowing from previous sin. That is, other factors "do not lead to sin unless it is first presupposed". 159

"Actual sin is the consequence of the temptation of anxiety in which all life stands. But anxiety alone is neither actual nor original sin. Sin does not flow necessarily from it. Consequently the bias towards sin from which actual sin flows is anxiety plus sin, or in the words of Kierkegaard sin presupposes itself. Man could not be tempted if he had not already sinned." 160

He goes on to examine this notion of "inevitability" for which he has argued and notes that it consists in man's constant failure in the face of his anxiety to submit his will to the will of God. Man, using Kierkegaardian language, seeks a quantitative rather than a qualitative development of his life. Hence man's inordinate self-love points behind itself to the prior failure fully to trust himself to God.

158. Ibid., p.264.
159. HN, p.265.
160. Ibid., p.266
"The anxiety of freedom leads to sin only if the prior sin of unbelief is assumed. This is the meaning of Kierkegaard's assertion that "Sin posits itself".161 Biblically this priority of sin is expressed in terms of the devil. Hence sin predates the first sin and thus "the situation of finiteness and freedom would not lead to sin if sin were not already introduced into the situation."162 He then turns to seek a meaning for "responsibility". His appeal is to man's awareness of guilt. "The fact of responsibility is attested by the feeling of remorse or repentance which follows the sinful action."163 Introspection reveals the reality of freedom since it uncovers the uneasy conscience. This universal human experience testifies to man's relatedness to God - even in his guilt. "All experiences of an uneasy conscience, of remorse, and of repentance are therefore religious experiences though they are not always explicitly or consciously religious."164

Here is the explanation of why a sense of guilt attaches to all moral endeavour and rises with increasing moral sensitivity, which in turn, he believes, points to the freedom of the human spirit -

"The ultimate proof of the freedom of the human spirit is its own recognition that its will is not free to choose between good and evil. For in the highest reaches of the freedom of the spirit the self discovers in contemplation and retrospect that previous actions have invariably confused the ultimate reality and value which the self as spirit senses with the immediate necessities of the self... Man is most free in the discovery that he is not free."165

161. Ibid., p.268. In this enigmatic phrase Kierkegaard is seeking to express his view that sin cannot be treated objectively. By this we mean that no account of sin in psychological, sociological, hereditary or philosophical, or even physio-chemical terms can, Kierkegaard believes, really grasp the essence of it or explain its being and origin. It "is" in the qualitative leap which, while not absolutely unrelated to other explanations and accounts of sin (e.g. the psychological) is also, and always, in discontinuity from other such accounts. We know what sin means in sinning. It arises in sinning. Hence "sin posits itself".

162. Ibid., p.270.
163. Ibid.
164. Ibid., p.273.
165. HN, p.274.
Such an existential interpretation of necessity and responsibility is confused by any attempt to give a 'literalist' and hence strictly historical meaning to the doctrine of Original Sin. It leads, Niebuhr thinks, to the Augustinian error of original sin as physically an inherited corruption. This is not to say that the Biblical account of the Fall and the transmission of sin are to be totally rejected however. He argues rather for Adam as representative man standing in "seminal" rather than "historical" relation to the race.

He concludes -

"The Christian doctrine of original sin ... is a dialectical truth which does justice to the fact that man's self-love and self-centeredness are inevitable, but not in such a way as to fit into the category of natural necessity. It is within and by his freedom that man sins. The final paradox is that the discovery of the inevitability of sin is man's highest assertion of freedom."166

In general we notice at this point that Niebuhr in his discussion of freedom and responsibility wishes to remove the model of necessity such as obtains in the natural sciences and replace it by a personalist model; that is he wishes to find meaning for the ideas in terms of inner states of consciousness. Again the dependence on Kierkegaard is apparent.

ii. Justitia originalis

Niebuhr concludes his discussion of the nature of man with an attempted restatement of the old theological notion of justitia originalis.167

He begins by drawing attention to the "universal testimony of human experience" that man is not what he ought to be. This inner tension between man's actual misery and his proper greatness is, Niebuhr thinks, a telling piece of evidence against any extreme notion of total depravity. Certainly man does not attain final goodness at any point. He needs Christ to show him what man truly is. Yet there is a fundamental and prior sense of dis-ease with his present state which is universally felt and which points to some recognition in man of a higher and better existence.

166. Ibid., p.279.
167. HW, pp.281-318.
Man's awareness of moral sickness points to the awareness of a prior state of health. Thus whatever total depravity may mean it is bound to take account of this, viz. - "that human sin cannot destroy the essential character of man to such a degree that it would cease being implied in, and furnishing a contrast to, what he had become."\textsuperscript{168}

If this is the case what kind of relation are we to posit between man's "essential character" and his present state? What model are we to use to signify it? The traditional answer here has been in terms of the story of the fall understood as an historical event at the beginning of history. The effect of this approach has been to give a chronological relation between the two factors referred to. The effect of confining the "essential character" of man to the period before the fall has been to remove it from any immediate relevance. In protestantism this has opened the door to exaggerated notions of human depravity and the identification of the remnant of original perfection with a capacity for "civil justice". In catholic thought it led to the definition of the state of original righteousness as a special gift, a \textit{donum superadditum}, which was lost in the fall but left man's essential nature unaffected. The correct approach to this issue is not a chronological but an existential one in the sense that it should be understood in terms of factors present in all human behaviour -

"The relation of man's essential nature to his sinful state cannot be solved within terms of the chronological version of the perfection before the fall. It is, as it were, a vertical rather than a horizontal relation. When the fall is made an event in history rather than a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man the relation of evil to goodness in that moment is obscured."\textsuperscript{169}

To help his exposition of original righteousness in this "vertical" sense Niebuhr calls upon a distinction between the essential nature of man and the virtue of conformity with that nature. The former of these

\textsuperscript{168} \textsuperscript{169}
has two elements he thinks - man's character as creature in the natural order, and his transcendence over the natural order. We are back with his dualistic view of man at this point. Now the virtue or perfection corresponding to the first of these may be tentatively defined as "natural law".\textsuperscript{170} The perfection corresponding to the second is analogous to the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. These latter are not simply counsels of perfection which tower over man dwarfing his highest moral attainments. On the other hand neither are they virtues by which man can hope simply to complete his otherwise incomplete natural goodness. They are beyond the possibilities of sinful man yet not remote from him in that they are the basic requirements of his freedom.

Niebuhr's conclusion is that radical notions of the destructive effects of sin require to be qualified in two respects. (i) Sin has not destroyed man's fundamental \textit{humanum}, that by which he is man. (ii) Sin has not removed the sense of obligation which man continues to feel towards his essential nature. This sense of obligation, the demand of the essential nature of man upon his present sinful state, makes itself known to man in the form of law.

It is Niebuhr's conviction that this "vertical" understanding of original righteousness corrects both Protestant and Catholic extremes in relation to the effect of sin upon man. Against the Protestant extreme which asserts that man's essential nature has been destroyed it is now possible to argue that this is not the case and that the image of God is preserved in spite of sin. Against the Catholic extreme it can be shown that man's essential nature has been altered by sin and that the distinction between a completely lost original justice and an uncorrupted natural justice is irrelevant. "Both are corrupted by sin; but both are still with man not indeed as realisations but as requirements."\textsuperscript{171}

Niebuhr now has two issues to clarify, granted his rejection of the historical account of the fall and original righteousness. —

1. What is the precise locus of this perfection? 2. What is its character and content?

\textsuperscript{170} HN, p.287.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., p.292.
1. Niebuhr locates the original righteousness in the self's consciousness in the moment of self-transcendence prior to an action. (using 'action' in the widest sense.)

In this moment the 'self' recognises itself for what it is - a finite and radically conditioned creature - and hence recognises that its claims for itself are unwarranted and result in harm to its fellows. In that moment it in a sense 'remembers' its original perfection. Thus to use Niebuhr's own words - "Perfection before the fall is ... perfection before the act." This does not imply a dualistic understanding of the self, i.e. an empirical self as well as a universal self. What it does point to is a tension which is always present in man between looking at the world from the standpoint of his own values and requirements, and looking at both it and himself and being disquieted at the undue claims which he makes for himself in action. This inner tension Niebuhr sees reflected in Paul's autobiographical passage in Romans 7. The virtue or perfection corresponding to the true nature of man therefore encounters him in the form of law. Again this enables Niebuhr, he believes, to correct extremes - the over-simplified approach of the Augustinian tradition which overestimates man's corruption, and the optimistic illusions of 'liberal Christianity' which tends to identify men's moral ideals with their actual moral attainment. Further this account does justice to the Fall symbolically viewed for by it original righteousness, standing "outside of history" does retain a clear relevance for man in history.

172. HN, p.294.
173. HN, pp.295-6. In his discussion of total depravity Niebuhr does not relate his position and criticism to his understanding of justification as the radical calling into question of man's good as well as his evil. Thus the discussion remains at the level of assessing man's relative moral possibilities. There is missing here the more fundamental approach to which he points in his doctrine of justification, of redemption as a whole new moral order. His argument here is in a sense within the framework, though in critical relationship to it, of Luther's Bondage of the Will viz. that since man was a sinner he was not free to do good, a reversal of Kant's celebrated dictum "ought implies can".


2. Niebuhr has argued that the character and content of original righteousness is 'law'. This law he now goes on to argue may be identified with "faith, hope and love". To use this theological terminology however does not mean that it should be too sharply distinguished from natural law, which he has earlier provisionally defined as the requirement of man’s essential nature as contingent creature. Too sharp a distinction here has led to the errors of Catholic natural law theory. The testimony of experience however is that no fulfilment of the 'natural law' brings ease of conscience. The ultimate demand and the ultimate possibility always lie beyond the reach of sinful man. The specific content of this higher law may be defined in terms of the requirement of the great commandment, (a) "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God" - "the perfect relation of the soul to God in which obedience is transcended by love, trust and confidence"; (b) "... with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." - "the perfect harmony of the soul with itself in all its desires and impulses"; (c) "... and thy neighbour as thyself." - "the perfect harmony of life with life."

Under the first of these he makes the important relation of this norm to Jesus Christ -

"Adam's perfection before the Fall is not fully understood until the Second Adam defines it. This thesis is at least partially correct. For the Christian faith is not only the answer to the human situation of self-contradiction, it is fuller and clearer revelation of that contradiction. The revelation of God the Redeemer accentuates a previous knowledge of God as judge, for the simple reason that the revelation of the redemptive love clarifies His character of holiness in terms of which human sin is judged."[175]

This "law of love", the content of the demand of original righteousness is essentially transcendent in character. It is no simple possibility.

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174. HH, p.297.
175. Ibid., p.307.
It might be if man were completely free. But he is not, and such freedom as he possesses is corrupted by sin. This qualification of man's possibilities arises in part from the sheer limitations of man's material capacities. Man's imagination is simply too limited to visualise and appreciate the interests of other parties as clearly and fully as his own. Further even if such an understanding were attained it would necessitate a vast reorganisation of economic and political structures on an unimagined scale and in defiance of geographical and other natural factors to actualise this concretely. Niebuhr's conclusion hence is - "There is therefore no historic structure of justice which can either fulfil the law of love or rest content with its inability to do so."176 - to say nothing of "the stubborn fact of corruption" which sin introduces. In this real situation the Catholic distinction between an absolute and relative moral law has some validity if the two are not sharply distinguished. This avoids an over-optimism regarding historical possibilities such as liberal protestantism manifested, and the over-pessimism of the reformation.177

iii. Grace and sin

One final area remains to be explored - what does Niebuhr hold as to the possibilities of deliverance from sin - (a) within the present experience of faith; (b) in the beyond. That is, theologically put - what do we learn of Niebuhr's view of sin from his doctrines of sanctification and eschatology?

The first of these he deals with in a section of "Human Destiny" entitled 'Wisdom, Grace and Power'. Here he argues that Christ does not simply disclose the meaning of human life but he also makes available resources to fulfil that meaning. This is gathered up in the twofold meaning of grace - it is both God's power over man and God's power in man.178 The degree of human appropriation of this grace is strictly

176. HN, p.314.
177. HN, pp.314-318.
178. HD, pp.102ff. Niebuhr's use of the notion of power to speak of grace raises questions. What is this 'power'? We will raise this issue again later.
circumscribed however -

"Whatever 'newness of life' flows from the experience of repentance and faith is, when governed by true Christian faith conscious of a continued incompleteness and a certain persistence of the strategy of sin."179

This, he argues is the Pauline view of the matter. Faith does bring a new factor into the believer's experience - viz. the exchange of the old principle of self-centredness for the new principle of devotion and obedience to God. But the actual level of attainment must always be radically qualified by a recognition of - "the sinful corruption of human life at every level of goodness" and that "forgiveness is as necessary at the end as at the beginning of the Christian life."180 Niebuhr goes on to expound this more fully in terms of the statement of Paul in Galatians 2:20. During the course of this he reopens the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy on the human will and seeks a position which holds both these positions together by distinguishing two levels within the experience of conversion from which each of the two is in turn valid.

"From the level of sinful self surveying its own situation it is always true that it has the possibility of, and therefore the responsibility for, becoming conscious of the undue character of its self-love. But when the self stands beyond itself 'by faith' it is conscious of the fact that nothing it has done or can do is free of debt to the miracle of grace."181

He repeats his earlier warning of the distinct limitations of the level of attainment in actual Christian life. There is in general a planing down of a sharp distinction between Christian and non-Christian moral attainment. On the part of the non-believer there is - "the infinite possibility of organising life beyond the centre in the self."182 This must be thought of also in terms of grace, though here the grace of a "hidden Christ". On the part of the believer there is always the consciousness of - "the realities of sin which appear on every new level of virtue."183 Niebuhr puts the same qualification in his discussion of the Kingdom of God.184

179. HD, pp.104ff; also MNHC, p.94.
181. Ibid., p.122.
182. Ibid., p.127; also 132.
183. Ibid., p.129.
184. Ibid., p.253ff.
This has come in Christ in the sense that the Christ event is the disclosure of the meaning of human history but it awaits the full realisation of that meaning -

"There is no escape from this paradoxical relation of history to the Kingdom of God. History moves towards the realisation of the Kingdom but yet the judgement of God is upon every new realisation."\(^{185}\)

Niebuhr then is pessimistic as to moral attainment even within Christian faith. Progress in Christian faith is in part simply a progressive uncovering of human sinful pretension.

iv. Eschatology

All this above being the case what then may we hope for? In what sense, if any, is sin to be finally overcome? Niebuhr's eschatology conforms to his familiar dialectical frame of thought. In this case the two dimensions are provided by the notions of the end of history as one the one hand a \textit{finis}, that is, an end point where"that which exists ceases to be"; and on the other as a \textit{telos}, that is, the end as "the purpose and goal of man's life and work".\(^{186}\) He wishes to retain the New Testament terminology in his eschatology. He argues that 'Parousia', resurrection and 'last judgement' are to be seen as "symbols". By this he claims to disavow a literalism by which - "the dialectical relation of time and eternity is falsified and the ultimate vindication of God over history is reduced to a point in history."\(^{187}\) On the other hand the notion of the end must not be simply dismissed. The 'symbols' must be taken seriously - "because they express the self-transcendent character of historical existence and point to its eternal ground."\(^{188}\) Without these symbols indeed the Biblical faith "degenerates into Platonism or utopianism."\(^{189}\) The truth of the matter for Niebuhr is that man's situation is such that notions of the character of "the resurrection" "transcend the limits of the conceivable".\(^{190}\)

\(^{185}\) HD, p.296.
\(^{186}\) Ibid., p.297.
\(^{187}\) Ibid., p.299.
\(^{188}\) Ibid. Niebuhr's use of the term 'symbol' will clearly require a fuller examination in what follows.
\(^{189}\) FH, p.269.
\(^{190}\) HD, p.305.
They are beyond any possibility of a rational grasp for the man who stands within the human situation at the juncture of freedom and finiteness and all of whose concepts share in the limitation imposed by this dependent stance. Niebuhr states quite categorically that - "We know nothing about ... an abrupt ending of the world."¹⁹¹ What then is the 'hope' which the Christian possesses? He defines it in individualistic terms as follows - "The hope of the Resurrection affirms that ultimately finiteness will be emancipated from anxiety and the self will know itself as it is known."¹⁹² Further than this he will not go. He can speak of the "Anti-Christ who appears at the end of history" and who "can be defeated only by the Christ who ends history",¹⁹³ but it is difficult to see what precisely this is to mean. Niebuhr remains so persuaded of the transcendent nature of the eschatological symbols and so conscious of the danger of importing sinful pretensions of finality into any sharper interpretation of the end that we have to rest content at this point, awaiting the "judgement" and casting ourselves utterly upon the grace of God.

¹⁹¹ HD, p.310; also FH, p.269.
¹⁹² HD, p.322.
¹⁹³ Ibid., p.330.
CHAPTER 2
THE IDEA OF SIN IN THE THOUGHT OF KARL BARTH

A. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this introductory section is twofold.
Firstly, we will indicate something of the theological situation of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century protestantism. This will enable us to gain some sense of the climate of ideas within which, and subsequently over against which, Barth's theology was developed. In particular we will notice how the doctrine of sin fared in this period.

Secondly, we will briefly sketch the lines of development of Barth's own thought from his "new beginning" around 1914, through his commentaries on Romans and the Christliche Dogmatik of 1927, up to the publication of the first volume of the Kirchliche Dogmatik in 1932. In this account we will pay particular attention to developments in his epistemology and note how these influenced his view of sin.

This two-fold introduction will bring us to the threshold of our primary objective - the unfolding and discussion of Barth's doctrine of sin in the Kirchliche Dogmatik.

a. "Nineteenth Century Heritage"

"The theology of neo-protestantism was never for Barth, as for some of his critics, an interpretation of Christianity that he had known only in other men. It was the theology by which he himself had once lived and preached and taught." 1

So writes James Smart in a recent study of Barth's early years. In any attempt to expound his thought it is accordingly only proper to begin where he began - with nineteenth century "liberal protestantism".

Whatever its particular emphases may have been, and they varied from theologian to theologian, the essence of this movement as Barth later saw it was its anthropocentricity. In its teaching man occupied the centre

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of the stage and his moral and religious experience, his social and
cultural awareness, became the all-absorbing centre of attention. In an
assessment of this period written in 1957 Barth formulated this fundamental
mistake as residing in its having taken contemporary man too
seriously in his own terms. As a result nineteenth century man's view
of the world and his current self-understanding were uncritically adopted
as the basis upon which, and the framework within which, the theologian
was required to work. General to these nineteenth century presuppositions
was the notion, variously defined, of a religious a priori, a primal
religious potentiality inherent in man as man, which was only too often the
starting point and the controlling "pole" in the theological construction.

"The theology of the nineteenth century in working at its own
theme was more interested in Christian faith than in the Christian
message ... It was in the direction thus given that they looked
when they expounded the Bible, when they defined their attitude
positively or critically, to the dogma of the early church and to
the confessions of the Reformation, when they investigated and
set forth church history, when finally they formulated the state¬
ment of Christian truth that they could champion in the present.
They looked upon the believing Christian man, 'in history and in
the present' as the man confronted with Jesus Christ and united
with Him, but on this man and on his existence as this man."3

This preoccupation with man had one quite disastrous consequence - God,
as the God of the Scriptures, the High and Exalted One, towering infinitely
over man, commanding, judging, redeeming him - this God became eclipsed
and fell away out of sight. As another commentator has put it -

"All the great distinctive differences between God and man had
been so planed down that the line ran from one to the other in
a gentle declivity or a gentle slope depending on the direction
one travelled."4

3. GGG, p.66.
cf. also Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, (London,
he characterises "Modernism" as a "bastard phenomenon" from its
attempt to "explain the absolute of religious and ethical values in
terms of the categories appropriate to the essentially relative and
non-absolute vital zone".
Also Barth's comment on Schleiermacher that he failed to see "that one
cannot speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice".
WGWM, p.196.
In this process what of the notion of sin? What understanding was arrived at of the idea of man as a sinner before God?

Certainly from the point of view of a positive statement of this doctrine the immediate picture seems promising enough. Clearly in the theology of neo-protestantism the Christian faith is conceived in strongly moral and ethical terms. There is here a profound concern with good action and behaviour. As against periods in the church's history when the problem of sin has been obscured by a remote self-sufficient intellectualism or dismissed by a careless, self-indulgent antinomianism the nineteenth century believer with his high moral seriousness presents a much more promising appearance. Further the writing of the time is not without reference to sin. Was it not Kant who raised the problem of man's radically evil nature? In his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* with commendable realism he faces us with the evil will of man. Schleiermacher also gives serious attention to the doctrine. In *The Christian Faith* he devotes a major section to sin. He declares that the theologian is bound to say the worst he can about sin. And he called attention in a new way to the significance of sin in its horizontal, social dimension. Ritschl certainly cannot be accused of ignoring sin either; nor can Herrmann to read whom, H.R. Mackintosh avers, is to be reminded of the Psalmist who wrote of how the Lord - "... brought me up out of a horrible pit and out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock..."

Such impressions are misleading however and do not characterise the overall position of these writers. Kant never allows the notion of radical evil to exercise any deep effect upon his epistemology and hence it remains something of an appendage to his thinking - indicating a certain possibility but silenced by the strident anti-metaphysical tone of his thought.

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As a whole. Schleiermacher's notion never escapes the terms of his basic stance in the "feeling of dependence". Sin is defined as "everything ... that has arrested the free development of the God-consciousness". His stress on the all-embracing divine causality leaves little room for a sense of sin's grim reality. Ritschl's thought lacks any deep awareness of sin. It is not accidental that he can assert that "sin is judged by God as ignorance". Flew can say of him - "He continually leaves the impression that he does not enter into those searching analyses of man's misery when sold under sin which are in all ages the foundation of the Christian message." Herrmann in this respect is much more promising. As one commentator has it - "The gospel for Herrmann means a great deliverance from a great distress." It is hence not insignificant that Barth has always regarded Herrmann as to a degree seeing beyond the nineteenth century theology and pointing the way forward from it even if he did not take it himself.

In general we can affirm that the doctrine of sin as understood in a sense of a radical sinfulness was almost wholly lost in the theology of neo-protestantism. One looks almost in vain for a sympathetic understanding of Jesus - "...you who are evil", or Paul's "Oh, wretched man!" or the Augustine of the 'Confessions', or the Luther of the 'Bondage of the Will'.

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10. Quoted Mackintosh, op.cit. p.160 also p.84. (cited by Dickie).
13. Theology and Church, p.238-271. Reference too would require to be made to J. Müller whose work Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde, (E.T. The Christian Doctrine of Sin, 2 volumes, 1885), was first published in 1838-44. Muller like Herrmann manifests a deeper understanding of the problem of sin and stands out against the general trends of the period. Barth pays tribute to Muller in Church Dogmatics, ed. Bromiley and Torrance, (Edinburgh, 1936-1969), volume III, part-volume 3, p.312ff speaking of his work as "a partial yet very definite movement in opposition to the general trend" (p.312). Torrance,"K.B.Intro....", p.63 refers to him as one of the significant influences on Barth in his early period.

(In all future references to the Church Dogmatics in its authorised English translation we will use the following notation - III/3, p.312ff.)
We are concerned with morality, with right and wrong, with good and evil, but we are up above the valleys of misery and despair. The blazing light of God's holiness does not appear to disturb the efforts of ethical man in his earnest pursuit of goodness; no trembling note of anxiety breaks across his action. There is rather a supreme self-confidence and assurance, the sun shines, the birds sing, all seems bright and fair.

Paradoxically, it is just this very preoccupation with man that prevents nineteenth century man from seeing himself as he really is. Within the folds of its anthropocentric preoccupation it cannot conceive either of the exceeding sinfulness of sin or of the exceeding graciousness of God. Beginning with man, and man so conceived, they found it impossible to rise to God, and hence, due to the eclipse of God by the sun of their own self-righteousness they had insufficient light by which properly to see man the sinner before Him.

b. Barth's Theological Pilgrimage

Karl Barth was born in Basel in Switzerland in 1886, the son of a minister and theological professor of the Swiss Reformed Church. Reared in an atmosphere which combined high scholastic attainment with true spiritual devotion Barth's interests were turned not surprisingly towards Christian theology. On the eve of his confirmation he boldly resolved to become a theologian. His studies, in accordance with the continental pattern were pursued in a variety of centres. Kant and Schleiermacher were his earliest loves but among his teachers none so attracted him as William Herrmann whom he "absorbed into his pores". In 1914 Barth was appointed pastor in the agricultural and industrial parish of Safenwil in the Aargau region of eastern Switzerland. He entered his ministry as a seemingly typical product of liberal protestantism. During the following years however Barth came to a fundamental change of mind which came to involve a decisive break from the prevailing theology. Through his influence this change came to affect the whole course of Christian theology for the next generation. It is outwith the scope of this study to trace the fascinating story of this "change of mind" since we are concerned with the views of the mature Barth of the post-1932 Church Dogmatics. However we will spend a little time noting the course of his development from 1914 to 1932.
Despite the timing of Barth's "wind of change" the outbreak of the First World War was not the cause of Barth's disenchantment with his theological heritage. He had already sensed some die-ease when Troeltsch moved in 1914 from the theological to the philosophical faculty, and this feeling was heightened in the same year when a public manifesto appeared in support of the Kaiser's War and among the signatories Barth found to his surprise and horror the names of nearly all the theological teachers whom up till then he had religiously revered. The implication was clear -

"Disillusioned by their conduct, I perceived that I should not be able any longer to accept their ethics and dogmatics, their biblical exegesis, their interpretation of history, that for me at least the theology of the nineteenth century had no future." The real key to Barth's change of course however lay in this above all - that Barth rediscovered the Bible. As a preacher who had to stand before his people week by week he was forced to ask himself - what had he to say in this situation? What was the Word of the Lord for this people in this situation at this hour of crisis? As he put it in 1922 - "It arose simply out of what we felt to be the 'need and promise of Christian preaching'." This in turn gave rise to a wholly new way of thinking about the relationship between man and God. Instead of beginning with man and man's experience, he began with God. His companion in this pilgrimage was Eduard Thurneysen, a former student friend who ministered in a neighbouring parish. In keeping with this 'new direction' their early sermons deal with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There were other lesser factors too. There was the new understanding of the place of eschatology for Christian faith which they learned from Blumhardt.

14. This despite S. Neill Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961 (London, 1964), pp.205-6. Cf. Barth Kirchenblatt fur die ref. Schweiz, 1940, p.100. "Does the theological renascence of today take its rise from the great disillusionment of the recent World War and its consequences? Answer: During this period it had in any case its inception. During that time we were not asleep but were taught somethings by the events that took place. I neither can nor want to prove that without the First World War we would be standing where we are today. But who can prove that we have brought to our present positions by the World War?" Tr. as in G.C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, tr. Boer, (Grand Rapids, 1956), p.25 footnote.
There was the inescapable and acute problem of achieving social justice which they were taught by Ragaz and Kutter. There was the superficiality of the nineteenth century view of man against which they now saw Dostoevsky as a disturbing question mark.

The outcome of all this was the publication in 1919 of a commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans, which he rewrote in 1922. These commentaries were no systematic and disciplined expositions of the text. Rather one catches here something of the tension and ferment of the whole movement. One senses that here a prophet is being born. The whole tone is dynamic, urgent, 'heavy with eternity'. We meet sweeping generalisations, baffling paradoxes, unashamed contradictions - but through it all the sense that here is a man who has seen something which he believes to be of ultimate significance not just for himself but for his whole generation and world - and is struggling through the brokenness of his speaking to convey this thing in all its dimensions. In general one can understand the commentaries on Romans as an assault upon nineteenth century religiosity. In the first edition it is human culture which receives the weight of the blow, for Barth remains here within a Heilsgeschichte framework and maintains a distinction between church and world. Smart can even speak of the "note of jubilation" of the first edition.

In the second religion too falls under the axe. Here Barth uses Overbeck's notion of Urgeschichte and argues for a form of timeless crisis between the old and the new which is rooted in the Christian gospel.

15. GGG, p.58.
Thurneysen describes it thus, "Karl Barth stands before us already in this early period as a reader and expositor of scripture ... Both then and now this has been the source from which his whole theology has come."
Also Torrance in TC p.11f and Thurneysen art. "Zum rel. sozialen Problem" in Zwischen den Zeiten, 1927, p.515. "We read the Bible anew with far fewer presuppositions than before." tr. as in Berkouwer, TGThKB, p.45, footnote. Cf. too Berkouwer TGThKB p.45 - "It was the Bible which saved them from utter despair."
17. WGWM, p.100.
18. Komm. Schöpfer Geist (Sermons with E. Thurneysen (München, 1924))
Cf. also Revolutionary Theology in the Making, p.217-8, and Smart op.cit. p.60. "The point at which they began to rethink their theology was with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."
19. James Smart, op.cit., p.82.
20. James Smart, pp.100-112 for a documentation of the influences which were brought to bear between the two editions.
He maintains an existentialist stress and there are clear indications of Kierkegaard's influence.21 Theology is conceived of as a theology of the Word and theological thinking is to be dialectical due to the transcendent nature of the object about which it seeks to speak. Above all the Romans is an attempt to recover the Godliness of God. We are confronted with the Other at infinite qualitative distance from man who cannot focus Him in either his thinking or experience. His knowledge of God is always fractured knowledge. Theological thinking and statement is the attempt to do the impossible - to "paint a flying bird".22 With this note on the transcendence of God there is also a stress on the fact of God's gracious act in Jesus Christ. Although as yet Barth was far from the full Christological orientation of his later work this note is clearly heard. In it all the No sounds louder than the Yes as Barth turned his guns upon the anthropocentricity of the nineteenth century.

The implications of all this for the doctrine of sin were profound. Here was a tearing apart of God and man and the opening up of a great gulf between the two. The gently sloping incline between them was suddenly cleaved as by an earthquake and an ugly and seemingly bottomless and unbridgeable gulf opened up. Man found himself no longer nodding religiously across at a God beside him. He now strained upwards from the depth of his need towards a God who towered threateningly over him. In a word - sin was rediscovered. To a degree this was due to man's existential predicament.

21. Barth's relationship to Kierkegaard remains a very thorny question. Explicitly, Barth attempted to erase his influence after the first edition of the *Dogmatik* in 1927 (cf. below and I/1, foreword pp. IX-X) References to Kierkegaard in the volume cited are signally sparse (only pp. 21 and 126 and in I/2 only pp. 385f and 496.) Cf. also III/4, foreword p. IXf; Torrance, op. cit. pp. 139-147; Smart, op. cit. p. 194 who criticises Torrance for any suggestion of there being an *analogia entis* of an existential nature even in 1927. "Existentialism had never entered far into the substance of Barth's thinking." (p. 194). Smart thinks however that the notions of dialectic and paradox have remained significant, if less obvious elements in Barth's thinking throughout. (op. cit. p. 224) cf. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Cologne, 1961), pp. 93-123; Bouillard, *Karl Barth* (Paris, 1957), pp. 107-113.

22. WGWM, p. 282.
Man exists under the judgement of God. Sin is revealed as an alien power and is so revealed by grace.23

In the next years especially after his move to Göttingen in 1924 to become Professor of Reformed Theology, Barth turned his attention to giving a more positive statement of his view. The result was the Christliche Dogmatik of 1927.24 In this work Barth tries to grapple with the basic problem which his theology now faced. Granted that the nineteenth century had committed the error of identifying revelation with man's being and capacities as man, granted that Barth had exposed this error and confronted man again with the God who was the Other, the Unknown and the Enemy of man, granted the essential discontinuity which this laid bare in the relationship between man and God - granted all this, how could one from this manward side of the relationship speak at all about God? Barth admits "the almost insuperable difficulty of this problem."25 He takes his starting point in the fact of Christian speech concerning God and in particular of Christian preaching.26 He argues for a possibility of hearing God's Word as a possibility given by God (it can) Himself. But revelation is always God in revelation and hence only be received by man as a gift. It is never a possession. Urgeschichte is a key category in showing how this revelation is made real in Jesus Christ in history yet is not equatable with history. It is not susceptible to examination by scientific historical methods but is given to faith and obedience.28 There is always a hiddenness and a revealedness and the same is true of Scripture.29 Barth was not at this point aware of the extent to which he was still operating within the grasp of the very categories he was seeking to repudiate. In particular an alien existentialist anthropology was still an influential element.30

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25. Ibid., p.92.
26. Ibid., p. 18ff.
29. Ibid., p.341.
In the next years (1927-32) Barth wrestled further with these basic issues returning more and more to the Bible and to the writing of the Protestant Reformers and the Fathers of the early centuries. It was one of the fathers, Anselm of Canterbury, who gave Barth the key he was seeking at this vital stage in his thinking and it was through his wrestling with Anselm in 1930 that Barth finally broke through into a theology in its own right. Torrance can even describe this encounter with Anselm as "the decisive turning point in his thinking." 31 Barth himself in the foreword to the second edition of his book on Anselm 32 speaks of "how much my interest in Anselm has influenced me, or been absorbed into my own line of thinking ... in the book on Anselm I am working with a vital key if not the key to an understanding of that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my Kirchliche Dogmatik as the only one proper to theology." This influence of Anselm has been fully documented by Torrance in his Karl Barth: An introduction to His Early Theology (pp. 182-193). In particular we notice that Anselm helped develop Barth's epistemology in that -

a. He set theological understanding firmly within the reality of faith. Faith is always fides quaerens intellectum, faith in search of understanding, credo ut intelligam. Barth comments "It is my very faith which summons me to knowledge ... just because we possess the certainty of faith we must hunger after the fidei ratio." 33 There is then a certain dynamic 'intellectualism' inherent in faith in which the believer is moved to inquire into, and to seek to apprehend, faith's Object. Theology finds its existence and task in this movement. Its starting point hence does not

33. Anselm, Proslogion, 1: 1/100: 18; Barth, FQI, p.18. Barth translates intelligere by Nachdenken, literally "thinking afterwards" or reflection. Cf. J. McIntyre St. Anselm and His Critics, (Edinburgh, 1954), p.32, who also raises the question as to whether Barth is being consistent in arguing that advance in intellectus does not effect the fides itself.
require to be established prior to its task from some point outside of faith and then move to faith from this point. Rather it begins where faith begins and has its existence and task by the very compulsion of faith in its active movement towards understanding. In other words, it does not move from the unknown to the known but from the known into a deeper and fuller apprehension of this known.

b. Anselm's notion of God as the One quo maius cognitari nequit means that theological statement can never be thought of as adequate to its object. Theological statement must seek accordingly to be transparent to its Object and to indicate through its straining and fragmented language the transcendent Object to which it seeks to point. This implies an utter and unrelievable dependence in theological work upon the God to whom it seeks to bear witness. Theology itself becomes possible only by grace. Anselm indicates just this attitude of dependence by his habit of prayer in the midst of his theological writing.

c. The deepest problem however still stands - how is theology possible, even within faith and in dependence upon God? Barth finds Anselm's answer to lie in the first instance in fact that God has given Himself in revelation to be known in creaturely categories. In particular He gives Himself in His Word as preached and believed, - in the Credo which the church confesses. Faith is the awareness of a vox significens rem, and further, an awareness of the rem thus signified by an assent to it which itself is given. Faith arises then by the fact and action of this objective Word of God in His revelation (Credo). In other words credere is related to intelligere in that (1) Credere basically is a credere in i.e. it has an object, it purports to grasp and acknowledge a creditum which is rationally apprehensible. (2) Credere is also an assent to this, i.e. to the Truth itself and hence credere in essence means to have heard the final word of understanding and to have now as a task the exploration and ordering of its thinking in accordance with this objective Credo.

34. FQI, p.130f.
thus apprehended. Further in this movement the control is exercised totally by the Object. True knowledge here is a movement towards the inner rationality of the Object itself. Behind all this lies the sheer fact of the Credo - the action of God in His grace in Jesus Christ and hence a certain ontic analogy set up by God in His grace. It is to this that theology seeks to respond by a pursuing after a noetic analogy in its thinking. In this process theology attempts simply to penetrate into the rationality inherent in the Object as given to man in His Revelation in Holy Scripture and Jesus Christ, and to order its thinking in accordance with that order and reality thereby revealed.

Barth's work on Anselm marked the completion of his development from the first edition of Romans and he now felt himself ready to embark upon a re-editing of the Christian Dogmatics of 1927 and the elaboration of a full dogmatic investigation. 1932 accordingly saw the completion of the first half-volume of the Church Dogmatics.

36. In this exposition we have been concerned to reflect Barth's own understanding of Anselm in Fides Quaerens Intellectum. There remains of course the further question as to how correct Barth's interpretation is. In particular there is the matter of apologetic concern in his writing. Barth sees the essence of Anselm's method as residing in an attempt to show his opponents that although they explicitly reject a particular proposition the logic of their mutually agreed premises ought to lead them to it. This process however in Barth's view is always operative within faith, i.e. the premises are given by revelation. McIntyre argues against Barth here and thinks that the Anselmic methodology has a wider range of application, as in the Monologion and Proslogion. Barth does not take the apologetic concern of Anselm sufficiently seriously. (McIntyre, op. cit., pp.34-38.)

37. Barth chose Church Dogmatics as against Christian Dogmatics for his title because he wishes to indicate that dogmatics was not "a free science but one bound to the sphere of the Church." (L,/1, foreword p. IX) and also to indicate his concern in these volumes to articulate his theology in continual dialogue with the great theologians of the church's history.
B. THE DOCTRINE OF SIN IN THE CHURCH DOGMATICS

a. General comment

Barth's Church Dogmatics, begun in 1932 and left uncompleted at his death in December 1968, is a massive attempt to structure a theology within the terms indicated by the above epistemology. Barth denies any systematisation in the Church Dogmatics, but that does not mean a lack of care for coherence and order. Rather there is a seeking after an order and coherence which is in keeping with the revelation it seeks to bear witness to, that is, with the being and act of God in His revelation. Revelation is revelation of the Triune God and in accord with this the Dogmatics falls into five divisions of which the first two are of a general prolegomenal nature, the first especially so viz. the Doctrine of the Word of God. Here Barth seeks to expound his whole understanding of revelation. Then follows the volume on the Doctrine of God. Once these are completed he turns to unfold the Being and Act of the Triune God in the Volumes on God the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, corresponding to the work of the Father, Son and Spirit. Unfortunately Barth died before volume five became a reality so that his eschatology is fully realised rather than fully articulated. Within this overall scheme Barth elaborates all his themes including an extensive study of Christian ethics. We turn our attention to the idea of sin within this total framework.

The first general comment that requires to be made is that Barth has no separate chapter in the Church Dogmatics entitled "sin". Whereas earlier dogmaticians customarily treated of "sin" or "man and sin" in a distinct section - usually following the sections on revelation and God, Barth rejects this approach. This fact in itself is of quite fundamental

38. I/2, pp. 853-884.
39. Ibid.
40. I/1, p. 339ff.
41. The material on ethics throughout the Church Dogmatics if bound together would require two large part-volumes.
importance for his view of sin. For Barth sin has no autonomy such that it can be treated in distinction from the whole corpus of Christian doctrine and in particular from the doctrines of the Being and Act of God in His Grace. It is at this point and at no other, at the point of God's dealing with sin in His grace in Jesus Christ, that it is disclosed in all its hideous dimension. Hence it is from this standpoint alone that it can be understood. We will of course return to this point at much greater length but we require to notice it at the outset since all that Barth has to say on sin emanates from this central conviction, and further this approach must also govern any attempt to expound his view from the volumes of the Dogmatics. In accordance with this basic conviction the main expositions of the idea of sin occur in volume four - the Doctrine of Reconciliation. Here Barth sets out the saving work of Christ under the traditional headings of Prophet, Priest, and King. In the light of this man's being in sin is disclosed - by Christ's priestly work, as pride leading to man's fall; by Christ's kingly work as sloth leading to misery; by Christ's prophetic work as falsehood leading to condemnation.

Before we can examine these sections however we are required to consider some earlier sections where Barth either establishes presuppositions for the treatment in volume four (e.g. his attempt to base anthropology on Christology in III/2), or actually foreshadows his treatment in volume four (e.g. his very important section Gott und das Nichte in III/3). The best procedure hence would appear to be to go more or less consecutively through the volume of the Church Dogmatics and examine at each point what is said about sin and how it relates to the doctrine under discussion. Only then will we be in a position to attempt an overall statement of Barth's view.

b. Sin and the Doctrine of the Word of God

There are comparatively few explicit references to sin in this first volume. We should not be misled by this however. In fact the notion of sin is a highly significant presupposition to Barth's whole doctrine of revelation. We have already seen how Barth came to break with the nineteenth century in his coming to understand the relationship between man and God as being of one dis-continuity and otherness. He clears the decks as it were of all human a prioria in terms of capacities inherent in man which will
serve as foundation stones for a relationship with God. Man in and of himself has no capacity for God, that is for God in His Word of Revelation. It is sin which is the decisive determination of this situation. It is not simply a case that finitum non capax infiniti, but that homo peccator non capax verbi divini. There is no bridge from man in his sin to God. Thus if man is to be reached by God in His Word of Revelation it can only be by a movement from God to man. That means it can only be by Grace. God's Word is only heard and apprehended by man as a sheer miracle of God's Grace. That this is man's situation however is properly only disclosed to man by this very word of grace. We are first and only aware of being God's enemies because God has actually established intercourse with us. That is, God's Word always comes to man as a Word of judgement in that it discloses anew the fact of man's sinfulness before Him. God's Word reveals man not as God's friend but as God's enemy. When the word of God comes to a man -

"It thus strangely tells him that he cannot hear it at all, this Word which tells him it; and he cannot hear it because he does not want to, because the fact of his life is disobedience, and thereby in practice, so far as concerns the use he makes of his life, is a refusal to listen to what God says to him. Nay more; this content of the Word of God spoken to man also makes it quite inconceivable, that man should succeed even only in hearing the Word of God, that God should turn to him and address him at all. His being closed to what God can say to him is merely an expression of the wrath of God which lies upon him. Must not this wrath of God if it is serious - and the Word of God tells us nothing else than it is serious - consist above all and decisively in the fact that God has turned away His countenance from us and therefore does not converse with us, that for fallen man in the objective sense there is not a Word of God at all? If we hear it notwithstanding ... then we can only regard this possibility of our hearing as a possibility gifted to us, subjectively and objectively, in an utterly miraculous way, as the "notwithstanding of grace", which on our side has nothing to correspond to it or to precondition it."

Homo peccator non capax verbi divini, herein lies the significance of the idea of sin for the doctrine of revelation. Here the tearing apart of man and God is carried to its limit and the reversal of the direction of the

42. I/1, p.217.
43. I/1, p.466.
44. I/1, p.252.
45. I/2, pp.466-7.
46. I/1, pp.467-8.
nineteenth century completed in what could be termed the epistemological implication of the sin of man.

We can summarise this section in four statements -

(i) God in His sheer grace has condescended to reveal Himself to man.

(ii) Man is disclosed by God's grace towards him as a sinner before God and hence as one who has denied to him any inherent capacity for the Word of God; and all of whose attempts to erect criteria for its evaluation are ruled out of court.

(iii) Man is disclosed by God's grace towards him as a sinner before God and hence if man is to hear this Word and embrace it truly as God's Word of revelation to him it can only happen as a miracle of the grace of God towards him.

(iv) Man is disclosed by God's grace towards him as a sinner before God and hence when the Word of God comes to Him it comes as a judgement which confirms/man's sinnerhood/ to be the case.

c. Sin and the doctrine of God
i. The grace of God

Barth devotes a large section of II/1 to an exposition of his view of God under the title The Perfections of God. This is an extremely important section since in it are laid some of the most decisive foundations of his theology, and hence also of his view of sin.

He is unhappy with speaking of "attributes" in relation to God as has been traditionally done. Barth thinks this has led in the past to a fundamental cleavage between God's Being and His Acts. He is also sensitive to the dangers of nominalism which are also present in speaking of divine "attributes". Barth rather wishes to think out his doctrine of God from the Being of God in His Act - that is to take as the sheer essence of the divine the One who discloses Him in Jesus Christ as the fulfiller of the Covenant of Grace. He finds the heart of the matter in the assertion

47. II/1, p.322ff; also II/1
48. II/1, p.327ff. Cf. Calvin, Institutes, Bk. 1, 10,2 tr. Battles, (London, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 96-97. Calvin wished to speak of the attributes as virtues of God's "eternity and self-existence". He drew the distinction however between God's being in Himself and His Being towards us. Barth thought to detect a "nominalist background and tendency" in this and other 'orthodox' views (II/1, p.328). contd./
that God is the Gracious God. He puts it thus -

"Grace is the distinctive mode of God's Being in so far as it seeks and creates fellowship by its own free inclination and favour unconditioned by any merit or claim in the beloved, but also unhindered by any unworthiness or opposition in the latter - able, on the contrary, to overcome all unworthiness and opposition."49

We can perhaps put this more sharply by stating that Barth is not asserting that grace is simply one attribute of God among others such that we can, as it were, reach past it to something more fundamental in God to which it yields allegiance and of which it is but one particular expression alongside others which may seriously qualify it. Barth will allow no such reaching behind the back of grace to some standpoint from which grace is no longer the central word which can be spoken concerning God. Barth is impatient of any suggestion of a division in the Divine Being such that a "second factor" makes its appearance alongside the first of grace. It is on this ground that, in his discussion of the relation between God's grace and holiness he criticises the constructions of Polanus and van Mastricht.50

In a daring passage he even goes as far as to assert that - "Any other idea of God in which He is not yet gracious ... is really, whether it is affirmed or denied, a theology of the gods and idols of this world, not of the living and true God."51 and the test as to whether we are worshipping the true God or an idol lies in this - "whether it is grace which we have learned to


49. II/1, p.353.
50. II/1, pp.359-360.
51. II/1, p.357.
venerate and worship as God." This is an extremely serious challenge since Barth well knows that under this charge of idolatry thus defined falls great areas of Christendom as well as long periods of the Church's history. That he is prepared to level so fundamental a charge underlines how important the fact that God is essentially gracious is for Barth. In one place he even speaks of grace as the mode of being within the Trinity. The relationship within the Godhead of the Father and the Son through the Spirit may also be described as gracious - "grace which binds the Father with the Son, and the Son with the Father by the Spirit." It is as though as Barth listened and waited for the Divine Word to disclose itself the message which broke the silence and cleft the darkness was this - "God is the gracious God". It is to this Word that he seeks to bear witness through all the winding ways of the Church Dogmatics.

"In grace we have characterised God Himself, the One God in all His fulness. We are not wrong, we do not overlook or neglect anything, if we affirm that His love and therefore His whole Being in all the height and depths of the Godhead, is simply grace." From this standpoint he expounds the "Perfections of God" under two general categories, the divine loving and the divine freedom.

ii. Sin and the Divine Loving

Because God's essential being is His being as the gracious God, i.e. He is as the gracious God - this is the standpoint of all revelation. The light of God's Word which falls upon man's darkened eyes bringing the knowledge and understanding to which man left to his own devices could never hope to attain, is the light of grace. Hence every area of Christian truth becomes visible at this point and at this point alone. Sin is no exception to this. It too is to be viewed "in the light of grace". Commenting on Peter's cry "Depart from me ..." Barth says this - "From grace and only from grace does the judgement proceed which compels a man to speak in this way ... the man without grace and without faith will not speak in this way."

52. II/1, p.357; also III/2, p.609.
53. II/1, p.358.
54. II/1, p.358.
55. II/1, p.362.
That God is gracious means that God exists in opposition to that which opposes Him, i.e. in opposition to sin. Accordingly when we encounter Him we encounter Him in opposition to us. But it is not a sheer opposition but rather one which also saves and heals us because it is the opposition of His grace. From this Barth draws the implication that it is again in this light that sin is to be seen and understood -

"There is no such thing as a created nature which has its purpose being or continuance apart from grace, or which may be known in this purpose, being or continuance except through grace. Even sin, death, the devil and hell - works of God's permissive will which are negative in their effects - even these works do not constitute any exception to the general rule ... Thus God and the enemies of God cannot be known at all unless both they and their negative character and whole work of negation are known in the service which they render as instruments of the eternal, free and immutable grace of God ... To know Him always means to know the gracious God, even in sin and death, even under the dominion of the devil, even in the abyss of hell. And conversely, where can there be any true or serious knowledge of sin and the devil, of death and hell, if there is not also a knowledge of the gracious God?"56

Grace however has a quite specific meaning for Barth. He very often connects it with the notion of a covenant of grace by which God binds man to Himself and Himself to man to be his God.57 As the gracious God, in the freedom and sovereignty of His self-giving, He gives of Himself to man. In a section dealing with the method to be followed in dogmatics he speaks of the 'four great circles' of which "the first is the covenant between God and man which God ratifies and confirms; it is only at this point, and therefore at the very outset in the light of the doctrine of grace that we shall have to think of its corresponding shadow and therefore develop the doctrine of sin".58

Barth's deepest word concerning grace however is only reached when we begin to speak of the fulfilling of the covenant of grace in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God for Barth is quite specifically and concretely "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ". Explicit statements to this effect abound through the Dogmatics. For example -

56. II/2, p.92.
57. e.g. II/2, p.94ff; III/1, p.94f.
58. I/2, p.882.
"... all that makes the Church the Church and Christians Christians, does not come from any place but only from Christ. And that means that grace - it may be pardoning grace, or sanctifying and enabling grace - is always His grace."59

or again -

"Grace is not a general possibility, to which we can systematically recur and from which we can withdraw, no matter whether we have in mind restraint or assurance with regard to our action. Grace is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 13, 14.)"60

In his critique of the Roman Catholic view this is the question he puts again and again - how can one make distinctions in grace if it is the one grace of the one God in the Son of God? - "If the grace of God is grace of the one God and the one Christ what place is there for these (Catholic) distinctions? How dare we split up the grace of Christ and the grace of God?"61 Perhaps the clearest statements of the equation of grace with Jesus Christ occur in Barth's essay Gospel and Law where he says -

"God's grace in Jesus Christ. He himself and He absolutely alone ... God's grace means and is Jesus Christ."62

This then is the deepest word which can be spoken concerning grace.

Grace is God in action in the Person of Jesus Christ from all eternity. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's eternally gracious purpose for man. Here is grace - that God moves towards his creature in utter condescension binding it to Himself and effecting its healing and renewal. And all this is another way of saying Jesus Christ. It is not an accident that in his basic statement in II/1 Barth should argue that - "The archetypal form of God's gift of grace lies in the incarnation of His Word, the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ."63
Barth is concerned in all his thinking to take utterly seriously, in the full range of its implication, God's having entered human existence in the miracle of the incarnation. This is the summit and crown of grace, God's giving Himself in space and time. This means that Barth always thinks of grace in a thoroughly concrete manner. Grace is brought near and made real in the sheer hard historicality of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a grace which has assumed real flesh and blood, and which lived out a genuinely human life amid all the qualifications and tensions of existence in space and time. It is a grace which at the last was subjected to that final contradiction which conditions all human existence—death, and that in all the stark reality of a cross of wood and nails. In effect Barth here is simply in this stress upon the concreteness of grace in the Person of Jesus Christ, trying to apply the homoousion of Nicea to the understanding of grace. That is, the truth that what God is in His self-giving to us in Jesus Christ is antecedently and eternally in Himself. Jesus Christ is fully homoousios with the Father. Thus the grace made manifest and commended to us in Him is none other than the very grace of the eternal being of God, and equally the grace of the eternal being of God is none other than the grace made manifest and commended to us in Him.

Accordingly, since this is so, it is just at this point where grace is supremely manifest and active that sin is most clearly and fully disclosed. "In respect of the irruption of the new aeon, over against Jesus Christ, the old aeon, Adam's sin, comes to its true proportions." In speaking of Jesus Christ as the place where sin is disclosed Barth lights upon the Cross as the place where this disclosure is supremely evident.

"The fact that it was God's Son, that it was God Himself, who took our place on Golgotha ... shows us what a consuming fire burns against sin. It thus discloses too the full implication of sin, what it means (to resist God,) to be God's enemy, which is the guilty determination of our human existence." It is in God's taking account of sin, in His movement against it, in His taking up arms for its destruction, that sin stands forth in its foul reality and makes malignant contradiction of God and His good creation. The Cross is the

64. 1/2, p.61.
65. II/1, p.398.
critical point in this divine campaign. At Golgatha the assailants are locked in the crucial conflict. Hence here above all sin is seen.

But in this conflict God conquered. His grace is not simply manifested but triumphant. Barth has not forgotten the battlecry of the elder Blumhardt, "Jesus is Victor!" Grace always means the triumph of God in the Person of His Son. Barth wishes to draw an important implication from this for his notion of sin. To see sin in the light of grace means to see it as overcome, annulled, and vanquished. It means to see it as taken account of, and atoned for, and robbed of all further ground to level an accusation against man. Hence -

"It is only of forgiven sin that we know that it is recognised as sin, that it is sin. What we may know more or less apart from forgiveness is perhaps defect, error or vice. But to know sin as sin, as our rebellion against God, as our transgression of His command, we must know its forgiveness."67

iii. Sin and the Divine Freedom

God is further revealed as sovereign and free in the work of His grace, the One who is exalted over His creature in His love toward it. When we turn our attention to the Perfections of God under this head there is raised immediately the question as to the place and being of sin within this divine Lordship. Barth's treatment of this question here is only an outline of a fuller exposition under the doctrine of creation. He disavows any suggestion of a dualism by which sin is ascribed an autonomous realm alongside of, and counter-balancing, the realm of the sovereign free God. -

"... a right understanding of the freedom of God's will makes all dualistic ways of thought impossible ... We deceive ourselves if we think we should take sin, death and the devil seriously in the sense of ascribing to them a divine or semi-divine potentiality, or the role of a real antagonist to the Living God."68

He rejects the suggestion that sin can present a real and effective challenge to God. On such a view -

66. Cf. the definition of grace, (II/1, p.353). It not only "seeks" but also "creates" fellowship with the creature. This is brought out further in Barth's discussion of Berkouwer (IV/3, p.175f); cf. Berkouwer, TOThKB passim, tr. Boer, (Grand Rapids, 1956).
67. II/2, p.768.
68. II/1, p.563.
"Sin ... acquires the character of an unforeseen incident which suddenly transforms the good creation of God into something problematical ... On this view God Himself appears in a sense to be halted and baffled by sin being pressed back into a special 'world of God.'" 69 Rather "in the whole of the divine work it is really a question of only a single divine rule." 70

Thus sin must be understood from within this "single act of divine rule" also. It too, though in a special sense, is dependent upon, and hence subject to, the divine Lordship. - "Whatever exists belongs either (as it is affirmed by Him) to being, or (as it is disavowed by Him) to non-being. In either case it is subject to His Will." 71 In what sense then can sin be ascribed to the divine will? Does Barth in the face of the dangers of dualism find himself driven to the opposite extreme of an all-embracing monism? Certainly Barth wishes to avoid this by arguing that sin must be seen as that which is excluded by the divine will, and only in this very special sense dependent upon God. "If He is creator and Lord of the world, this settles the fact that even in creation sin can only be the impossible possibility - the possibility rejected by His sustaining grace." 72

God thus knows sin as -

"that which He has rejected, excluded and denied.... And He also wills it to be this, to be what it is in virtue of His rejection of it, in the way which belongs to it as the impossible. Even His non-willing is really a powerful willing which fixes limits and therefore directs and governs." 73

iv. Sin and the Divine Election

Nothing is more distinctive of Barth's doctrine of God than his treatment of election. Hartwell can even assert that Barth has inaugurated "a new epoch in the history of the doctrine". 74 Barth certainly gives great prominence to it. In distinction even from Calvin who in the Institutes postponed his exposition of predestination and election to almost the end of his teaching on grace Barth puts it at the very forefront of his teaching. Barth's newness however lies not in the heavy stress he gives the doctrine, there were theologies in the post-Reformation period which shared this, but in his thinking it through in such thoroughly

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69. II/2, p.90. 72. II/1, pp.505-506.
70. Ibid. 73. II/1, p.552.
71. II/1, p.557. 74. Chambers Encyclopedia, 1967 ed. art "Karl Barth" 75. II/2, p.3 also Theologische Fragen und. contd./
Christological terms. For Barth election means 'election in Christ' in the fullest possible sense. On the one hand this means that Jesus Christ is the electing God. There is no place for a hiddenness in election whereby man is faced with an inscrutable decision of God behind and prior to His decision for man in Jesus Christ. Rather Jesus Christ is God at work in election. On the other hand Jesus Christ is the elect man, the object as well as the subject of election. On this basis Barth goes on to erect a doctrine of predestination whereby Christ is both the elect and the rejected. What of sin in this light? How does it relate to this eternal decree of God in Jesus Christ? Following a line of argument which we encountered under the above section he argues that in His action of election God also is rejected, and it is by this very fact that sin and evil have their existence. - "Satan (and the whole kingdom of evil) - i.e. the demonic which has its basis in him is the shadow which accompanies the light of the election of Jesus Christ." Sin exists as that which has been rejected in God's eternal decree of election in Jesus Christ.

Such is the relationship between election and the being of sin. There remains the question as to the relationship between sin and the history of man the covenant-partner of God. i.e. did God elect man's sin and fall? This is an issue which traditionally has received lengthy discussion in terms of the controversy between the Supralapsarians and the Infracalpsarians. Barth devotes a lengthy footnote to a discussion of the relative merits of the two viewpoints. He comes down on the Supralapsarian side but thinks the position is only properly stated when we think of God's election concretely - in the action of God's grace in Jesus Christ. In these terms sin was willed by God in the sense that He willed man as His covenant partner who in confrontation with sin would freely affirm God's "No" to it.

76. II/2, p.115.
77. II/2, p.118.
78. II/2, p.340f.
79. II/2, p.122.
80. II/2, p.127-145.
81. II/2, p.141f.
However in the nature of the case man being man and not God, this confrontation meant the overthrow of man. In recognition of this fall of man God wills Himself as the One who overthrows man's assailant and in the power of Whose grace man must live. Thus while not directly willed by God, man's fall and sin are thought of as taken into account by God's eternal decree in Jesus Christ. 82 Barth amplifies this in succeeding discussion 83 where he argues that God elects man's sin, fall and rejection by making them His own in Jesus Christ. In Him God declared Himself guilty of, hence assumed direct responsibility for, the movement of man against Himself. "He elected our rejection. He made it His own." 84

d. Sin and the Doctrine of Creation

This third main section of the Dogmatics is extremely important for Barth's view of sin. It is here, as he unfolds his view of God's work as Creator and His relationship to His creature, that he is forced to grapple with the whole question of the existence of sin and evil.

i. The Idea of Creation

He begins his account by arguing that creation is an article of faith and hence the relevant data for any study of it must be drawn, not from science such as astronomy or palaeontology, but from the Word of God. 85 Concretely that means the narratives of the creation of the universe and man in the opening chapters of Genesis. To argue in this way of course immediately begs the further question as to how we are to evaluate the Biblical stories. Before discussing this however Barth turns aside to indicate the approach which he wishes to take to the doctrine as a whole.

82. Barth is here able to give unqualified praise to the framers of the Scots Confession (1560) where in articles 2 and 3, instead of working out in the usual way an independent doctrine of sin, the Confession introduces the problem of the fall only as a postscript to the doctrine of the original foreordination of man; the problem of original sin only arises as a preface to the doctrine of faith in Jesus Christ as effected by the Holy Ghost. II/2, p.154.
83. II/2, p.164ff; also discussion of Judas, pp.461-501.
84. II/2, p.164.
85. III/1, pp.3-41; Cf. p.22 "The doctrine of creation is a doctrine of faith ... it is knowledge and confession in the reception of the divine self-witness and response to it."
by speaking of the relation between creation and covenant. This third volume of the Dogmatics is not to be isolated from the first two or from the fourth on Reconciliation and the fifth on Redemption. There must be no separation in the works of God. Creation may be thought of as the first of God's works but it is always in the whole series of His works and stands in vital dependence upon the further works. In particular it stands in vital dependence upon the work of God's grace in entering into covenant with man. Hence we have in fact to reverse the historical order and see creation as following the covenant of grace and not the other way round. The implications of this position will become clear as we proceed - not least as regards the doctrine of sin.

Taking up the question of the interpretation of the Genesis accounts two possible approaches present themselves. One is to take the accounts as traditional orthodoxy has done, in a straightforwardly factual and historical sense. Beth rejects this, not so much on the grounds that he finds it scientifically untenable as for theological reasons. It implies a division in the work of God and the Being of God. It suggests a sphere prior to, and hence apart from, the sphere of God's gracious action where God is no longer known as the gracious God and hence no longer in a relationship of faith.

The second possibility is to view the Genesis accounts as simply illustrating, in the form of popular imagery, certain universal and timeless truths concerning the being of the universe and the life of man within it. Barth designates this the

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86. III/1, p.42ff; cf. p.44. "Creation follows the covenant of grace ... as God's first work it is in the nature of a pattern or veil of the second and therefore in outline already the form of the second."

87. This sentence is replete with ambiguities but it is difficult to see how to avoid this in a general statement of this kind. It is admitted that there has been no strictly accepted position as such on all points of the Genesis narratives but there has been sufficient agreement to allow one to speak of an 'orthodox approach' as above.

88. III/1, p.62.
mythological approach. With a "myth" one is required to press through the outward form of the story to the kernel in the timeless, eternal and abstract truth which it illustrates. Hence in turning away from the "historical" approach "we must be careful not to fall into the equally impossible exegetical and dogmatic proposition that it is not history but the disguise of an unhistorical and timeless reality." In distinction from both these extremes Barth argues for the category of saga. He defines it thus "a saga is an intuitive and poetic picture of a prehistorical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space." There are two elements in a saga. First there is the fact that in a saga we are dealing with a real event delimited in time and space (zeitlich-raumlich beschränkt). "The Bible always means a unique event one occurring in that place and at that time." Second, and as a balance to the first element, the events indicated in Scripture are not always fully expressible in human words. There is what we can term a two-fold history in the Bible - the acts of men and the acts of God. This latter class of events are truly historical (geschichtliche reality) belonging to the series of events in space and time. However they are not "historical history" (historische Geschichte) i.e. they are beyond the reach of historical research and recording. They are only indicated by saga. Hence the Bible inevitably has much saga intertwined with history throughout its pages. Occasionally we have to do with purely divine events, and here we have "pure saga". Such a case is that of the creation accounts in Genesis.

Barth now turns to expound the narratives in their character as saga and from the standpoint of the covenant. He attempts it in two stages.

89. III/1, p.80.
90. III/1, p.81.
91. I/1, p.374.
92. III/1, p.82 and cf. I/1, p.375.
93. III/1, p.90.
In the first he looks at "Creation as the External basis of the Covenant". It is that which "makes it technically possible ... that which genuinely points to grace as its necessary presupposition, it is itself already grace." The narrative begins with God calling the world into being over against the chaos (אֹרֶץ). Barth rejects any notion of the chaos as being the "raw material" from which God created. Rather it is what God refused and rejected by His act of creation. It is - "the world fashioned otherwise than according to the divine purpose, and therefore formless and intrinsically impossible". It is "the possibility which God in His creative decision has ignored and despised, like a human builder when he chooses one specific work and rejects and ignores another". At this point we confront a fundamental conception of Barth and one which exercises considerable influence on his whole conception of sin and evil. Here he takes it as the key with which to interpret the rest of the narrative. Before coming to this we need to underline that although chaos is in the deepest sense something confined to the past by the act of God's negating and refusing of it we must not imagine that it has no significance. Barth here is not simply indulging in a piece of obscure exegesis relating to a some primal state of matter. "Chaos" here is something essentially dynamic, in terms of its own "impossible" dynamism and according to its own "absurd" reality. And it will and does attain to this "reality" whenever God's Word and Work are disregarded and forgotten. This "impossibility" is possible! "This can of course happen. The creature can be so foolish. It can become guilty of the inconceivable rebellion of looking past the Word of God ... and therefore to this state of chaos." Barth turns to the narratives and takes up the notion of "separation". The successive "days" speak of successive "separations". The first is of light

94. III/1, p.94ff
95. III/1, p.97.
96. III/1, p.100.
97. III/1, p.102.
98. III/1, p.108.
99. III/1, p.108. Very large questions are of course being raised here. What is this being? What are we to understand by phrases like "impossible dynamism" and "absurd reality"? We will require to explore this whole attempt to speak in these terms of sin and evil in the immediately following chapter, and to relate Barth to the meonitic contd/
from darkness. The darkness here referred to is the "predicate of chaos" and hence separation of light from it is the separation of "that which God did not will from that which He did. As the sphere of non-grace from that of His grace." Further this act of separation indicates the proper relationship of God to chaos in that God shows Himself here to be Lord of darkness, Lord of chaos who assigns to chaos its own proper sphere.

"He reckons with darkness in this particular way, not permitting to chaos more than the nature of a threat at edge of the cosmos, giving darkness a name which describes it as such - i.e. its nature which is wholly different from that of light and by which it is always to be distinguished from the other according to His act as Creator." The next separation is that of the "waters above" from the "waters below". This speaks, Barth thinks, of God's affirming of a world in which man is safe from the threat to his existence. Thus a boundary has been set to the possible incursion of chaos. Man is freed from anxiety and assured of the good and sovereign purpose of God towards him. The sea, existing within its bounds and limits becomes for man -

"a creaturely sign of the existent but averted threat of the reality, which by the wrath of God might reign yet by His goodness cannot reign but only threaten, being forced in its own way to praise God and work for the good of those that love Him." The third and fourth days carry this note of the triumphant goodness of God into the furnishing of the creation and bring us to the final act of creation - the creation of man "in the image of God".

The meaning placed upon the "image of God" is clearly crucial for a doctrine of sin since it is to this text that appeal has constantly been made to support a variety of understandings of man as a sinner before God.

99. contd. tradition in theology as well as to current discussion of these issues. (Cf. J. Hick, Evil and the God of Love.

100. III/1, p.108.
101. III/1, p. 117.
102. III/1, p. 123.
103. III/1, p. 123.
104. III/1, p. 127.
105. III/1, p. 142.
106. III/1, pp. 156-176.
What does Barth make of this crux interpretum? In fact he wishes here to
diverge from the main stream of interpretation as to the meaning of the
imago Dei. He notes that there is no explicit reference in the text in
Genesis to any inherent qualities of man - whether intellectual, moral, or
aesthetic.107 Turning from such notions Barth argues that the phrase must
be in its strict context in Genesis 1, 27 "God created man in His own image,
in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them."
The "image of God" is explained by the last phrase - "(He created) male
and female" - that is it lies in man's existence-in-relatedness, in his
being as a being-in-confrontation and fellowship. "The image and likeness
of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation."108
Concretely this means existence as male and female - "Man can and will
always be man before God and among His fellows only as he is man in relation
to woman and woman in relation to man."109 Further, however, this
relatedness of man to woman is the antitype of which the prototype lies
in the being of God Himself who prefaces His creative fiat with a "Let Us" -
Thus the I and the Thou in the divine being is an analogy (no more) of
the I and Thou of human relatedness.110

The image of God comes to have the meaning that man is the being
created by God who can be a Thou to his fellow and to God. This second
aspect brings us to the history of the covenant, first with Israel, and
then in the New Testament with the Church. Barth notes the New Testament's
habit of speaking of Jesus Christ as the Imago Dei and argues that here we
have the true prototype of the idea. He is the Second Adam - "for whose
sake, with whom in view, towards whom, and therefore in and after whom,
God created the first man".111 Hence man's being in the image of God,
as witnessed to in his relation to His fellows, to woman, points beyond

107. III/1, pp. 192-3.
108. III/1, p. 195.
109. III/1, p. 186. This raises obvious questions which we will return
to. If the imago means this then is marriage necessary to achieve
true humanity? And more important, if Christ is the imago then how
real is his being as a man by this?
110. III/1, p. 196.
111. III/1, p. 203.
itself to man as the covenant partner of God - man claimed and loved by Jesus Christ and called to live in and for Him.

This brings Barth to the second creation narrative, which is developed under the title "the Covenant as the Internal basis of Creation". He is concerned now with the way in which creation is a "sign" and "sacrament" of the covenant of grace.\(^{112}\) We are presented here with man on the earth as the "farmer" of its produce. In particular we meet man in the Garden of Eden. Barth will not allow us to dismiss this as simply a mythical fairy-tale place, the geographical localisation of the account in Genesis rules this out. But neither will he allow it a definite location. In keeping with the \textit{saga} form and the pre-historical character of the subject matter Barth speaks of it thus -

"We have to accept both the fact that Paradise was planted and existed somewhere and not just everywhere or nowhere - but also that there can be no actual investigation of this 'somewhere'. It is palpable that in these passages we have to do with a genuine consideration of real events, persons, and things but only with a consideration and therefore not with a historical review but with considerations which do not have their origin in observation but in imagination."\(^{113}\)

We have noted that Barth uses the term "sacrament" to denote the relation of creation and covenant in this second narrative and he now moves to expound it in these terms. He interprets the two trees in the garden in terms of gospel and law\(^{114}\) - the tree of life bore witness to the fact that man is given life by God's grace and that he lives by virtue of the goodwill of God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil speaks of a possibility given man by God -

"To know good and evil, to be able to distinguish and therefore judge between what ought to be and what ought not to be, between Yes and No, between salvation and perdition, between life and death, is to be like God, to be oneself the Creator. The one who can do this bears the supreme attribute and function of deity."\(^{115}\)

\(^{112}.\) III/1, p. 232.

\(^{113}.\) III/1, pp. 252-253.

\(^{114}.\) III/1, p. 256f.

\(^{115}.\) III/1, pp. 257-258.
Hence the possibility is the possibility of aspiring to this status. Man is summoned however, in the face of this possibility to allow God to be his God, that is to live in the confession and confirmation of the fact that his life is to be lived in and by what God has chosen and willed for him. This is not to imply that man's position is at the crossroads between obedience and disobedience. Man has a freedom but it is a freedom to affirm the decision already taken for him - to say a glad "Amen" to the Word and Work of God on his behalf - that is, he has freedom to obey. In this way the Garden of Eden prefigures the entire situation and history of man as this creature of God, created and sustained by God and called to live by His grace, yet always in danger of trying to live apart from grace. This process is seen in the history of Israel but finds its fullest and truest meaning in the Incarnate grace of God, Jesus Christ.\footnote{116}

Barth has now reached the threshold of the Biblical account of the fall of man in Genesis chapter three, but he breaks off at this point and his full treatment of the fall is held over until volume four and his consideration of reconciliation. There are however certain pointers towards that later treatment which can be made explicit here. In general, any view of the fall requires to face the question as to how it relates to history - what sort of 'eventness' is claimed for it? For Barth the fall has "saga historicity".\footnote{117} Eden is no mythical garden of paradise - it is a "definite earthly place". Yet not such as we can locate it. The other general observation is that Barth's account effects a planing down of any over-sharp distinction between the pre- and post-fall situations. It is at this point perhaps that his departure from earlier discussions is most marked. The earlier view of a state of original righteousness, the celebrated justitia originalis, which Adam forfeited in the initial act of disobedience, finds no clear place in Barth's construction. To foreshadow the later exposition - "The biblical saga knows nothing of an original ideal man either in Genesis 1, or Genesis 2 or elsewhere."\footnote{118} Even Eden is not as idyllic as has been thought - "From the very first it is not without serious problems."\footnote{119} We will return to these issues later.

\footnote{117. We will examine Barth's position in detail in a subsequent chapter.}
\footnote{118. III/1, p. 200: also IV/1, p. 508.}
\footnote{119. III/1, p. 250.}
The Goodness of Creation

In a later section "Creation as Justification" Barth gives expression to his overall view of creation as something "Good" -

"The reality which it has and is not just any reality. Its being is not neutral; it is not bad but good. Because it is, and is thus distinct from nothingness it is distinct from the bad and evil. In the words of the Genesis saga it is separated from the darkness of chaos. Because it is affirmed and not denied, elected and not rejected it is the object of God's good pleasure. Because it may be by God, it may also be good ... what is elected and accepted and thus well pleasing to God is for this reason not only good but very good, perfect." 120

The ground of this joyful affirmation of the created order lies however not in the possibility of discovering a "brighter side" in creation. Rather it lies in the fact that creation exists for the sake of, and in the fulfilling of, the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. The created order considered in itself can give only an equivocal reply to our question as to its goodness. It speaks with a Yes and a No - a brightness and a darkness. When we take our stand within the covenant however this dialectic ceases and there sounds the unequivocal Yes of God's good pleasure in the work of His hands. This is not to say that no negative note can be heard from the standpoint of the covenant. On the contrary it is only from this standpoint that a truly serious No can be heard. And it is heard. Here we really do see the threat to the good creation of God because the creation stands - "on the edge of nothing, bordering it and menaced by it, and having no power in itself to overcome the danger". 121 But the Yes overcomes and drowns out the No when we stand in the light of the actualisation of the covenant in Jesus Christ. In Him God "pronounced the Yes and the No with differing emphases". 122

He took the No utterly seriously by taking it to Himself in the Cross but - "His participation in this negative aspect of existence became only a transient episode. It was the affair of a moment. The moment has passed. Christ dieth no more." 123

120. III/1, p. 366.
121. III/1, p. 376.
122. III/1, p. 383.
123. III/1, p. 383.
Thus any notion of ultimate dualism is apparently excluded and we are able to affirm the goodness of creation as the order of existence called into being for and by the grace of God within and for which God's grace has triumphed over every threat. 124 Barth discusses Leibniz in this light and the optimism of the eighteenth century 125 which for all its notable attainments failed to attain to the real ground of optimism in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, and hence its optimism could not ultimately be sustained. Behind this failure Barth sees again the spectre of a dual system of book-keeping whereby we have a God in Christ and a God behind Christ, a realm of nature and a realm of grace, a creation and a covenant. 126

Having thought in this way about the created order in general we move next to an examination of man as a creature within that order. Predictably his presupposition is the grace of God. - "The knowledge communicated by the Word of God is the knowledge of creation in its indissoluble connexion with the covenant and therefore the knowledge of heaven and earth as the cosmos of man in covenant with God." 127 Hence we find no dependence upon current scientific views of man. Revelation, the covenant, Jesus Christ, are the keys to anthropology also. -

"As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God. He is the source of our knowledge of man as created by God ... the nature of this man Jesus is alone the key to the problem of human nature. This man is man." 127

It is from this Christological standpoint, that is, from the incarnate grace of God that Barth wishes to speak of man the sinner.

124. III/1, p. 386ff. It remains of course an open question as to whether dualism can ever be absolutely excluded if evil and sin are to be taken with a proper seriousness. We will require to examine Barth more fully on this point later.
125. III/1, p. 414.
126. III/2, p. 11.
127. III/2, pp. 41 and 43; cf. also discussion of Brunner p. 128f.
"The real man is the sinner who participates in the grace of God. Thus the knowledge of the real man depends on the recognition that he shares in the divine grace. Even the fact that he is a sinner is true only when seen in connexion with the truth that he is the object of the grace of God. For he sins against the grace of God ... The grace of God, the covenant of God with man is primary. The sin of man is secondary."128

Barth draws out the implications of this "priority of grace" for a doctrine of sin in two ways -

1. In the first place this affects the way in which sin is to be viewed. There is no possibility of seeing man the sinner in isolation from his being as the object of God's grace and God's covenant partner. Thus there can be no independent doctrine of sin apart from the doctrine of God's grace in Jesus Christ. That is the doctrine of sin requires to be treated from a point within the doctrine of reconciliation. Man the sinner becomes visible only in the light which blazes out from the cross and empty tomb. And this in turn means that sin is known only at the point at which it is forgiven - "Known sin is always forgiven sin, known in the light of forgiveness and the triumphant grace of God. Unforgiven sin, sin not yet known to be forgiven, is always unrecognised sin."129

2. The priority of grace means that the true nature of sin is here disclosed - viz as a movement against grace. All other accounts of sin, no matter how thorough their examination of man's predicament, no matter how serious the verdict they bring against him - unless they find the essence of it all here will miss the true nature of sin.

"Sin is man's self-alienation from the grace of God ... sin consists in the fact that he rejects the grace of God ... sin resists grace ... its inconceivable reality can be grasped only when we see it as rebellion against grace."130

It is in this light Barth argues that we need to set the notion of the radical corruption of man the sinner. He admits the force of the Biblical witness at this point. We need to allow the serious view of man which it presents.131 Man's corruption is "radical and total". However this must not

128. III/2, p.32; also p.203.
129. III/2, p.36.
130. III/2, p.35.
131. III/2, p. 28.
be permitted to obscure the primary truth that man is still the creature of God and as such the object of His grace. Hence we require to affirm in the face of the radical corruption of man the fact that sin cannot alter the essential being of man.

"The power of sin is great but not illimitable. It can efface and devastate many things, but not the being of man as such. It cannot reverse the divine operation and therefore the divine work which is effected by God. Sin is not creative. It cannot therefore annul the covenant."132

Man remains man even in his radical sinfulness. Even the deepest awareness of the corruption of man; even in the face of the long history of man's inhumanity to man; even the great accumulated evidence of every generation, every society, and every individual to the sheer reality of human evil; even in the face of the revelation of the possibilities of human perversion disclosed in nailing God incarnate to a Cross - even in the face of all this, Barth will not allow us to alter the assertion that man is good.

"The affirmation that man is good is correct if applied to real man as God created him and as he exists in the history of his responsibility before Him. In the free fulfillment of this responsibility he is indeed good and not evil."133

Such an account immediately requires us to put the question as to the meaning which sin can have in this view. If man is good despite all his sin are we not back with the optimism of the nineteenth century? Can it be that Barth's great No to man as it sounded out in his earlier writings and even in Volume one has now to be seen as but the prelude to an even louder Yes such that the No becomes muffled and drowned out?124 It has to be noted however

13. III/2, p. 197; also pp. 32, 33, 227, 319, 403.
14. There are not lacking commentators who believe that something akin to this has in fact taken place. G. Wingren Theology in Conflict, tr. Wahlström, (Edinburgh, 1958) speaks of finding in Barth's theology "no active power of sin, no tyrannical, demonic power that subjects man to slavery and which God destroys in His work of redemption. There is no devil in Barth's theology." (op. cit. p. 25) This is putting the issue rather baldly. Barth obviously speaks of all these items listed by Wingren. His point however is that Barth remains contd/
that Barth's Yes is not a Yes to man as such and in general, but to man-in-the-covenant, man as laid hold of, restored, and healed by the God-man, and hence of man in and with God.  

What then of sin? What account can be given of its existence and being? The full treatment of this is held over till Volume four. However there is a brief foreshadowing of it here. If man is predetermined as the covenant partner of God - if man is always this man, man in Jesus Christ, man grasped and upheld by the victorious grace of God in Him, what place can sin have? One possibility is that it in some sense inheres in the created order but we have already seen that Barth will not allow this. Hence one is left to say that sin is inexplicable, that we cannot account for its existence. Granted the covenant of grace and the goodness of creation sin has no basis for its existence. It is an "ontological impossibility" for man.  

"Man is not without God but with God. This is not to say of course that godless men do not exist. Sin is undoubtedly committed and exists. Yet sin itself is not a possibility but an ontological impossibility for man."

134. contd. within the nineteenth century Schleiermchian framework (pp. 25-26) and in terms of this framework he is unable to give these elements a proper Biblical reality. Compare, too, Chas. West in the work cited who writes that "the problems of Barth's point of view" in his later theology lie, not in an over-consciousness of sin, but in his "banishment of sin to the realm of an ontological impossibility" ... so utterly cancelled out and *nichtig* that one becomes concerned for Barth's realism about human limitations". p.222 of *Communion and the Theologians*, cf. also p.238. Von Balthasar also finds a continuity between Schleiermacher and Barth cf., op. cit, pp. 210-238, and S.J.TH., vol. 7, p. 59f. We will look at this more thoroughly later.  

136. III/2, p. 136; also 146, 197, 203, 273. All manner of questions are raised here. In particular there is the ontological question as to the "being" of sin - What is this entity? What kind of reality can we assign it? Secondly there are important epistemological questions raised - How are we to know this reality? How do we apprehend it? We will raise these issues in the following chapter.
Clearly all manner of questions present themselves at this point and Barth turns to a fuller account in his celebrated section Gott und das Nichtige.iii. das Nichtige

The actual setting of this discussion needs to be noted. In his account of the various aspects of the created order Barth turns from the physical universe and man to the dimension of invisible spiritual realities - the angels, and in their own special form of reality, the demons. The discussion of das Nichtige, as Barth points out in his foreword, is intended as "basic material essential to an understanding of brief and summary remarks about demons at the end of the treatise on angels." Barth notes the earlier discussion of providence when note was taken of an "opposition and resistance", a "stubborn element and alien factor". He turns now to a re-examination of this element, taking it with proper seriousness. No examination in this area can be contemplated which denies the full implications of Romans 11, 36, "Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things." This must be allowed to stand. We must recognise this as applying in the sphere of das Nichtige as much as anywhere else. Barth clears the ground for his exposition by indicating certain mistakes regarding das Nichtige.

137. Translators have encountered no little difficulty in rendering das Nichtige in English. Dr. R. Ehrlich in the authorised English translation favours "Nothingness". Hartwell thinks this is much to be regretted Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth, (London, 1964) p. 149n. as it obscures the grim reality and temporary power of evil. He prefers "the Nihil" as does Cochrane in the ET of Weber's Introductory Report on K.B.'s Church Dogmatics, (London, 1953) Cf. also G.V. Jones "The inimical principle of negation" SJT, Vol VII, September 1954. Barth's intention is indicated in a letter - "Nichtige contains not only a negative but a distinctly disqualifying note. That which is nichtig is not only ineffectual, insignificant and trifling but is downright abominable - yes, accursed. Strictly speaking the word may only be used in the way I have done, to denote the chaos, sin, the devil and the demons. Used in any other way it is too strong, too sharp." (quoted Weber, op. cit. ET, p.187) The meaning Barth intends will become clearer as we unfold his teaching. For our purposes we will retain the German das Nichtige.

138. III/3, foreword XII.

139. III/3, p. 291.
It has the form of a third factor over against Creator and the creature. There is a perennial temptation to locate it in one or other of these; on the one hand of locating it in God and speaking of a causalitas mali in Deo and hence violating the Holiness of God; and on the other of laying the whole responsibility for evil at the door of the creature and - "thus putting evil more or less outside the providence and Lordship of God".  

Another mistake is to take das Nichtige so seriously that it towers menacingly over us chasing away all confidence and Easter joy in God's triumph over it. Again we can err if we imagine that there is any other victory in the face of it than this one. There has to be here an explicit recognition of the "necessary brokenness" of all theological thought and utterance. There can be no systematization such that das Nichtige is assumed into a system and assigned a role within it and hence 'explained' and in that sense controlled and ordered. One final misconception is the identifying of das Nichtige with the "shadow side of creation". Barth has had earlier reference to the goodness of creation. He is here concerned to demonstrate that the No which sounds from das Nichtige is not the No which sounds from the "darker side of the created order". To misinterpret das Nichtige in this way is to lay a grave slur upon the goodness of God and is a failure really to see creation affirmed by God in the covenant of grace in all its creaturely Yes and No. Barth here directs attention to Mozart in whose music a unique witness is borne to the essential harmony and beauty of creation. We must even say that Mozart has a place in theology and this because - "he knew something about creation in its total goodness that neither the real fathers of our church nor our reformers, neither the orthodox nor liberals, neither the exponents of natural theology nor those heavily armed with the Word of God, and certainly

140. III/3, p. 292.
141. Cf. above p. 33f.
142. III/3, p. 297f.
not the existentialists, nor indeed any of the great musicians before and after him either know or can express and maintain as he did.\textsuperscript{143} Nor in this matter can we forget that Jesus Christ became flesh for us - that is identified Himself with the creaturely and thus affirmed it. Hence we cannot seek das Nichtige here.

Where then are we to look for our knowledge of das Nichtige? As ever: Barth's answer is Jesus Christ. He reveals both the goodness of God in the light and dark of creation and the true Nichtige -

"which is both utterly distinct from both Creator and creation, the adversary with whom no compromise is possible, ... the antithesis which is not merely within creation and therefore dialectical but which is primarily and supremely to God Himself and therefore to the totality of the created world."\textsuperscript{144}

What do we learn of das Nichtige from this standpoint? We see here for one thing that it is a force which is directed against God Himself -

"That God's Word, God's Son, God Himself became flesh means no other than that God saw a challenge to Himself in this assault upon His creature ... It means that God took to heart the attack on the creature because He saw in it an attack on His own cause and therefore on Himself."\textsuperscript{145}

Das Nichtige exists as a threat to God Himself - it aspires to challenge and overthrow the Divine. In this sense the contention with it is God's affair. And God Himself took up cudgels against it. God Himself moved to destroy and annihilate it in His action in Jesus Christ. It is as this opponent of God, that which God has to destroy in Jesus Christ that das Nichtige is unmasked. Hence we may define it as - "the reality (Wirklichkeit) on whose account (i.e. against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it."\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{143.} III/3, p.298.
\textsuperscript{144.} III/3, p.302.
\textsuperscript{145.} III/3, p.304.
\textsuperscript{146.} III/3, p.305. The German word translated 'reality' here and throughout this section with reference to das Nichtige, is Wirklichkeit. Barth prefers this and the related \textit{Aktualität} to \textit{Realität} because of the dynamic overtones to these terms (cf. the relation between \textit{Wirklichkeit} and \textit{Werk}; and between \textit{Aktualität} and \textit{Akt.}) It is a dynamic, active reality which Barth is concerned to speak of here. (cf. Torrance, op.cit., p.151 footnote.)
Thus we are enabled to distinguish between das Nichtige and the shadow side of creation and we are further able to see the real meaning of the confession of the Providence of God in this area.

Barth now moves to apply this fact and in so doing brings us to a fundamental point in his idea of sin. The fact that das Nichtige in all the breadth of its meaning—death, sin, hell, devil and demons, is truly disclosed and known only in God's victorious action against it means that each of these particular manifestations is known only here, and hence sin is known only here—"In the light of Jesus Christ the concrete form in which das Nichtige is active and revealed is the sin of man." Further, in relation to man the creature, just as we have distinguished between das Nichtige and the No of the created order so we have to distinguish between das Nichtige and the No of human creatureliness and frailty. This is important for our understanding of sin in that it means that we need to be on our guard against identifying it with this creaturely frailty. Das Nichtige in its form as human sin is uncovered only in its opposition to God, and only in its being overcome by God, only finally that is, in the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is possible, Barth admits, to arrive at something very like a knowledge of sin from the limited No of creatureliness. We can be brought to real self-despair and self-loathing. We can judge ourselves by all manner of internal and external laws and standards. This, however, is at best only a fragmented knowledge. Only in Christ do we see the true "reality" of sin and its effect upon being. But we will not see ourselves as sinners in the final sense, until we see ourselves as implicated in the action of God against das Nichtige.

147. III/3, p. 305.
"I can and will be told that I am a real sinner, responsible for the reality of das Nichtige because I am its bearer and doer, only when I am told so by God Himself. And it can be told me by God Himself only as He reveals Himself to me in His opposition to real Nichtige ... It can be revealed to me only by Jesus Christ because in Him alone and in His light real Nichtige, the real sin which wages war with God, is assailed and overcome by Him, stands revealed as the sin of man ... as the alien and adversary to whom I myself have given place. This is the final reason that to understand the nature of Nichtige we must not turn elsewhere than to the heart of the gospel." 148

Barth advances two further reasons why we must turn "to the heart of the gospel" to see our sin. (1) Only this view really leaves man without excuse for his sin. If we define it in terms of a falling short of some abstract law of God man can still plead his creaturehood. Why should the creature be expected to conform to the standard of the Creator? But if the Creator has come to him in His grace and dealt with his real adversary at infinite cost, and bound him to Himself in His grace then a total obligation is laid upon man to live in thankfulness for, and dependence upon, this grace of God. Then his failure to do so is truly damnable. In relation to this gracious creator man could and should live in righteousness - "His sin consists in the fact - and this is why it is so real and inexusable - that he repudiates this possibility and imperative and therefore the grace of God and its command." 149 It is in this sense as the law of the covenant, the total obligation laid upon man in the light of God's prodigal grace in Jesus Christ that the law accuses and slays the sinner and banishes him from the divine presence. (2) Only if we take Jesus Christ as the point of departure for our knowledge of das Nichtige can we see its full dimensions - that is, its involving evil, death and hell as well as sin. In Jesus Christ the cosmic dimensions of the adversary are revealed in the total sweep of the victorious grace of God in Him are set forth.

148. III/3, p. 307; "real" here and throughout this quotation translates "Wirklich", cf. footnote supra.
149. III/3, p. 308.
Barth pauses before his final section on the Reality of das Nichtige for a long excursus on the contribution to the notion made by theology and modern existentialist philosophy. He looks in turn at the views of Müller, Leibniz, Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Sartre, and evaluates each in the light of his own position above. Müller though a welcome relief from the easy optimism of the nineteenth century fails to give a proper noetic basis to das Nichtige and hence cannot properly understand it. Leibniz has value in relating sin to the wider cosmic dimension of evil but confuses it with the negative side of creation and ends up by domesticating das Nichtige. Schleiermacher has made a great contribution in his seeing sin as that which exists only in God’s negating it in His Omnipotent grace, but he fails ultimately to draw a sufficient distinction between sin and grace. Barth’s inclusion of Heidegger and Sartre in this summary indicates his concern to speak relevantly concerning sin, and to relate his doctrine to the cultural situation of present-day Europe. He notes the unique opportunity at the present moment, to which Heidegger and Sartre bear witness, of confronting das Nichtige. However despite the fact that these writers raise the proper and urgent question they fail to give the correct answer. This is not to say that there are not real and valuable echoes of a true understanding of das Nichtige in their work - Barth instances for example Sartre’s optimism. But starting as they do from a human standpoint and working within the circumscription of human categories they are not able to really see das Nichtige as opposition to God and as overcome only in God’s action against it in Jesus Christ.

In this final section Barth attempts to gather up his discussion and to move to a positive statement of the nature of das Nichtige. He attempts this in seven statements.151

150. III/3, pp. 312-349.
151. III/3, pp. 349-364.
1. The fact that das Nichtige is taken into account by God in His action against it implies that it does exist in its own way - it "is" in a special third sense as against the existence of the creature and the Creator.

2. It "is" more than the mere negation of the other two categories of existence (God and the creature). Das Nichtige borders on the shadow side of creation and when the creature turns away from the will of God it crosses the frontier and achieves actualisation in the creaturely sphere. The distinction between it and the creaturely sphere must however be retained.

3. Because it "is" in this third and special sense das Nichtige is revealed and known in its distinction from the Creator and the creature only in its confrontation with God and in His action against it.

4. The "ontic context" of this revelation of das Nichtige is the covenant of God with man. God elects man as His covenant partner. He elects and therefore rejects. He says Yes and therefore also No. There is a left as well as a right hand of God. It is because He is Lord on both the left and the right that das Nichtige "is", in its peculiar sense. It can therefore have no independent reality. It is utterly dependent upon God. It "is" because even God's rejection and denial are fruitful and effective. Barth here refers to Genesis 1, 2 and the rejection of the chaos at creation.

5. The evil character of das Nichtige derives from this. God's will and act, His opus proprium is His Grace. Hence what He rejects and refuses as the object of His opus alienum is essentially that which is opposed to and resists grace. In this movement and being it is totally without a norm or standard. It conforms to no law. Hence it is inexplicable. It "is" only in and by this action of God in His opus alienum and can be seen only in the light of His opus proprium, as resistance to the order of grace set up by God in His relation to His creature.

6. The primary antithesis in which das Nichtige has its being - and Barth speaks of this as the one point upon which everything here depends - is its confrontation with God. The primary mistake to be made in this whole area is to imagine either that God is not profoundly affected by this contrary element, or the corollary to that, that man must battle alone against it. This implies a graceless God and a self-sufficient
creature — for Barth the ultimate nightmare.

7. Finally and decisively, das Nichtige has no perpetuity. Its dependence upon the election and will of God does not require the dialectic of an eternal perpetuity. Its real end was brought about in the death of Jesus Christ. It is strictly a thing of the past, finally and decisively banished in the victory of Jesus Christ over it.

As we noted above this whole section on das Nichtige is intended as a preliminary to the section on the demons. In length however it greatly exceeds the latter — nor is this accidental. All that we should give to demons Barth argues is a "quick, sharp glance". 152 If we treat them at too great a length we are succumbing to their threat. Granted that our look at them is to be a brief one, what sort of look is it to be? What sort of reality are we dealing with here? Borrowing from his discussion of das Nichtige Barth disavows any thought of a dialectic of good and evil, of good angels and bad angels, of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness. There can be no equipoise, no reciprocity. The reality of the demonic is a reality of the "third order", real only in its own peculiar and secondary sense. The faith by which we believe in the demons is also of a different order. They have their being within the dimension of das Nichtige and hence within the limits and according to the terms of that shadow reality. They can be thought of as a kingdom "always on the march". 153 Any claim to be the counterpart of God arises from the falsehood which is of their essential being. They claim to require to be taken as seriously as God, to have a power over against Him, to be an order of dominion in dialectical opposition to the dominion of God — but "it is all a mimicry". 154 In the light of God's truth their falsehood is revealed. In this light they are seen to be already overthrown and driven from the field in the fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ. In a final footnote Barth considers the apparent Biblical testimony to the demons as being fallen angels but argues that such a view is incompatible with a proper understanding of das Nichtige of which

152. III/3, p.519.
153. III/3, p.523.
154. III/3, p.527.
155. III/3, p.531.
the demons constitute a particular expression - "a true and orderly angel does not do what is ascribed to some angels in this doctrine!" 155

e. Sin and the Doctrine of Reconciliation  i. Presuppositions

In this final Volume of the Dogmatics we arrive at Barth's main treatment of the doctrine of sin. It will be observed in what follows however that Barth does not have a great deal fresh to say as far as the being and nature of sin is concerned. All his main emphases have already been foreshadowed or even expounded.

His point of departure in reconciliation is the phrase "God with us" which he sees as the heart of the Christian message and faith. This means Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ as the fullfiller of the eternal covenant of grace. Hence, the covenant is the "presupposition of reconciliation". 156

The covenant Barth argues must be seen as prior to man and hence to the fall -

"The fall and its consequences is a happening which, for all its fearfulness ... does not take place outside but within a special relationship of the affirmation of man by God, of God's faithfulness to man which is self-evidently supposed to be unshakeable." 157

Barth examines the covenant idea at length and we are reminded of how profound an influence it has on him. It is the decisive presupposition for his doctrine of sin, as we will see more fully in a moment. The priority of the covenant means two things for sin - (1) It implies that the nature of sin is ingratitude. (2) It implies that the being of sin is always relative - only an "episode", active only under God's control at His left hand. From this standpoint we are able to see that man's being consisted from the very first in rebellion against God's grace, in a rejection of the covenant. In the face of this Grace remained faithful. Barth here poses the question as to whether we need to say that "the enormous incident of sin" 158 meant an even more glorious demonstration of grace and hence "O felix culpa!" but he rejects this as failing to consider seriously enough what it means to be at fault before God. In this whole area we are required to begin with the atonement and to take it as it is and then to think

156. IV/1, p.22.
157. IV/1, p.27.
158. IV/1, p.68.
outwards from it, and this in relation to sin as well. "this is the only place from which we can see and judge from the Christian standpoint what sin is."\(^{159}\)

Following this approach Barth first unfolds the being of Jesus Christ who is the atonement as the One who is true God and true Man, the God-Man. Having once done this he feels in a position to deal with sin in extenso. No true dogmatics can fail to take it very seriously - "there is in fact no page in the Bible in which it does not figure and many pages in which it seems to be almost alone."\(^{160}\) But, and here Barth parts company with earlier dogmaticians, it can only be treated in relation to the doctrine of reconciliation. It must not be viewed as an independent autonomous area existing from a centre in itself and requiring a detached and independent theological treatment. What then is the being of sin? It has its being and action only in dependence upon the Yes of God's gracious purpose and hence as the No of that which God has rejected and refused. But the Yes of God is a very concrete and precise Word and Work. It is the Yes of the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Sin has its being therefore in contradiction and antithesis to this work of God - "Sin is therefore not merely an evil but a breach of the covenant ..."\(^{161}\)

This has an important corollary which Barth develops at length in the succeeding discussion and which is very important in determining the whole approach to the doctrine, viz. that we cannot talk of sin as being the breach of any "law of nature" or any other command or set of commands inherent in man as man, or derivable from the created order. It is even sin to imagine this to be the case;\(^{162}\) Real sin is not active there because the real grace of God is not active there. It is in the covenant that God's Yes sounds in all its concreteness and it is in opposition to this that the No of sin is properly and uniquely heard. To speak of "laws of nature" and to attempt to erect a doctrine of sin upon some such independent basis is to be guilty of by-passing the grace of God and is "to sin again theologically".\(^{163}\)

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159. IV/1, p.81.
160. IV/1, p.139.
161. IV/1, p.140; also the Essay "Gospel and Law" in GGC, p.1ff.
162. IV/1, p.141.
163. IV/1, p.141.
Nor can the Old Testament law be used in this way. To use it as such is in effect to require men to become unconverted Jews before they become Christians, which, whatever it may effect, fails to bring about a real recognition of sin. The proper method is clear—we can consider it only in the light of Christology—

"It is in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the grace of God that we shall necessarily perceive step by step both the fact that man is a transgressor and the nature of the transgression in which he contradicts the grace of God."164

What does sin mean as the predicate of Christology? In fact Barth's full answer lies in his three long sections in the three volumes on reconciliation corresponding to the three aspects of his unfolding of the work of Christ. His massive exposition of Christ's work treats of it under the classification of Calvin—Prophet, Priest and King. The sections on sin follow each in turn.

ii. The Priestly work of Jesus Christ: sin as pride leading to the fall

Barth's first section deals with Christ as Priest. Under the headings "The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country,"165 "The Judge Judged in our Place"166 "The Verdict of the Father"167 he sets out the way of the justification of the sinner in the Christ who took to Himself creaturely existence in the form of a servant, humbling Himself to become man's brother; who accepted the place of man as a sinner and judged man by judging Himself at the cross in man's place; and who by His resurrection was vindicated and confirmed by the Father as the ground of man's acceptance and the way of man's redemption. Against this background Barth considers human sin.

He prefaces the more particular implications of it however with some very important general considerations, by which he seeks to give a fuller apology for his method in its divergence from the dogmatics of "all other ages, churches and movements."168 Fundamental to their constructions has been the basing of a doctrine of sin on a knowledge of sin which is prior to, and hence distinct from, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. This may indeed give an analogy of evil but in

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164. IV/1, p.142.
166. IV/1, pp. 211-283.
167. IV/1, pp. 283-357.
168. IV/1, p.359.
fact it derives from an inner dialogue within the man who has been created good and not from the real evil which makes a man God's enemy. In this area, too, man needs the scales to be removed from his sin-blinded eyes and Jesus Christ here again is the way to sight and understanding—"Access to the knowledge that he is a sinner is lacking to man because he is a sinner... All serious theology has tried to win its knowledge of sin from the Word of God and to base it on that Word." Here Barth turns to deal with a view which up till now he has only mentioned in passing. This position would agree that the knowledge of sin can come only from revelation but it would wish to confront man not merely with Jesus Christ and His claim upon him but also, and first of all, with God in all the sublime majesty of His Glory and the fiery purity of His Holiness. This God confronts man generally in the sphere of nature and his inner moral consciousness. He is also known in history, especially the Biblical history. He meets man as one to whom man owes allegiance and before whom he is guilty. So confronted man is brought to repentance and then to release from his guilt in the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. This position, or variations upon it, has been the standard orthodox teaching in the whole church for centuries. Barth however launches himself against it. He finds it inadequate on five counts—

1. It requires a division in the knowledge of God and the Word of God. Here Barth refers to his earlier discussion under the Doctrine of Creation where he rejected every suggestion of a division between creation and covenant and argued instead for a single and whole work of God which finds its heart in the covenant of grace. God is one both in His inner essence and in His action towards His creature. There is a general truth in the fact that man's awareness of sin arises from his confrontation with the majesty and holiness of God—but the mistake which has been made is a failure to fill out this notion and to see it in terms of the concrete movement and expression of the majesty and holiness of God in Jesus Christ.

169. IV/1, p.361.
170. IV/1, p.362. ff.
2. The law which confronts and judges man by this view is the law of an 
abstract God behind, and prior to, Jesus Christ. This can only mean that 
the law so derived has the same abstract quality. But the abstract God 
of this abstract law cannot really justify man - and hence how can He really 
accuse and condemn him?
3. This law, even if it is allowed and even if it is effective in bringing 
a certain sense of unsettlement and guilt to man cannot ultimately bring a 
binding condemnation upon him. He can evade this total judgement because 
he can always appeal, even implicitly and covertly, to his status as a 
creature and ask why he should be required to keep this standard.
4. In this process a certain dishonour is done to the True God since in 
this process the True God and His true Law are replaced or ignored.
5. This position can be shown to be inconsistent in another way - in that 
in order to bring about an awareness of sin there requires to be some stand-
dard of good in the light of which evil is manifested. But, Barth asks, 
what standard of good can we have other than that given us in the God who 
is the gracious God and revealed to be such in His covenant of grace set up 
and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Barth is well aware that the view he here criticises has served the 
church well for generations and that mighty triumphs in its history are 
associated with it. Hence he acknowledges that from this position, for all 
its weaknesses - "there can arise a fairly, and in some respects a supremely 
relevant knowledge of sin." This happens when the Biblical material is 
allowed to control the view. The texts of the Bible are all in some way 
pointers towards its heart and centre in the covenant of grace, and hence 
even in their own terms, will convey to a marked degree the burden and guilt 
under which man stands in the light of the gospel. The Reformation is an 
outstanding example of this "in spite of" and "notwithstanding". Of the 
sense of guilt brought about by the preaching of the Reformers and the 
message they proclaimed Barth writes - "Although from a distance and with a 
certain indistinctness, it was the true and living God and His law."
The danger in all this, however, as Barth sees it, is that once we start looking past Jesus Christ for our knowledge of sin and look at the Bible otherwise than from its centre the door is opened to all kinds of non-Biblical elements to make their appearance as sub-centres alongside the Biblical categories. He traces what he sees as this very process in the protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth century and in developments leading up to liberal protestantism in the nineteenth century which reached its climax in Ritschl and Troeltsch. Here an alien element in the particular guise of a "natural law" successively eroded the Biblical judgements brought upon man until the opposite pole was reached and man found himself no longer judged at all. Thus the lex Biblica is challenged, and then replaced, by the lex aeterna in man's heart and conscience. The answer to all this for Barth lies in taking revelation in its concrete expression. Only then can a true knowledge of sin be gained. Here alone we hear an inescapable judgement brought upon us. We have no place left us for discussion and parleying for terms. We are summarily "arrested, marched away, and locked up." Barth seeks exegetical support for his view in the stories of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, 11f); Peter's "Depart from me ..." (Luke 5, 8f); John 15, 22 and 24; 16, 8; and Ephesians 5, 12f. He here also tackles the crucial passage in Romans 1, 18 - 3, 20 and argues that 1, vs. 16 and 17 stand as the proper preface to all that follows and that the verdict of "guilty" which Paul brings against Jew and Gentile in this section derives ultimately from seeing them in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His atonement.

Turning to a positive statement of his position Barth suggests four propositions as to the being of sin when viewed in the light of Jesus Christ. i. Here sin in its pure, unequivocal form is disclosed. It is seen to be trespass against God, and patricide. Here all its ambiguity is torn aside and it stands forth in its naked antagonism to God.

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173. IV/1, pp. 369f and 374f.
174. IV/1, p. 390.
175. IV/1, p. 397ff.
ii. Jesus Christ is seen to be the judge who discloses the reality and sinfulness of human sin. Here in this One we are really able to bring a judgement against sin - to see man as damned by God. Just because it is here in this one that the judgement of God is brought against man He alone is competent to be the judge of man and to reveal the true nature of his sinfulness.

iii. In Jesus Christ sin is revealed as the truth of all human being and action. The coming and death of Jesus Christ renders impossible any separation between ourselves and the sins of others or any gradations in sinfulness. Jesus by dying for all men revealed the total life of all men to be guilty before God.

iv. Jesus Christ reveals the truth of Anselm's *quanti ponderis sit peccatum*. He delivers us on the one hand from over-stressing its seriousness since in Him it is seen to be subject to the Lordship of God. This Lordship as exercised at Golgotha is of such a nature as to show that sin can never exist in any kind of harmony with God but only as the "absolutely impossible" existing at the left hand of God, rejected and broken by Him. But on the other hand, and this is the main point here - Golgotha reveals just how great and serious an interruption of the good purpose of God sin is.

"The truth is that Anselm's *quanti ponderis sit peccatum* is given an answer in the Cross of Christ or not at all. It is given an answer from the Cross of Christ. The serious and terrible nature of human corruption, the depth of the abyss into which man is about to fall as the author of it, can be measured by this fact, that the love of God could react and reply to this event only by His giving, His giving up of Jesus Christ Himself."

Man here simply stands as man the sinner under God's total judgement - "The man who is saved in the person of another and can be saved only in this way is obviously in himself a lost man." These preliminary considerations dealt with, Barth turns in earnest to his positive exposition of sin. In the light of Jesus Christ's Priestly work man is seen to be proud and fallen. Sin is other things.
beside but this is the heart of it - "Sin in its unity and totality is always pride." Barth notes the long-held view that unbelief leading to disobedience is the root of all sin. He accepts this, but argues that when we think of unbelief concretely it is really the proud refusal by man of the grace of God extended to him.

Barth explores the pride of man in four paragraphs in which he sees it as the antithesis of the being of man revealed in Jesus Christ. 1. The Word became flesh. This means that God is God in the action of His grace in becoming man - in becoming as we are. In this light we men are exposed as those who seek to become as he is, that is, to become God. Man can never attain this - he attempts the impossible and makes himself impossible in the process. But the attempt is made.

2. Jesus is the Lord become a servant and His Lordly rule consists in His becoming subject. In this light we men are exposed as those who are servants who seek to be lord. Again man here seeks the impossible and only succeeds in deluding himself. Here the rebellious nature of man's sin is uncovered. Pride is almost too weak to describe this - megalomania is nearer it.

3. Jesus Christ the Lord became servant took to Himself the accusation brought against all men. In this light we men are exposed as those who are properly accused by God but who resist this judgement and seek to be our own judge. Again here man attempts the impossible and only succeeds in hiding the truth from himself and in misunderstanding the true God who is the true judge and alone able to distinguish between good and evil.

4. Jesus Christ at the cross in our place accepted the position of utter helplessness apart from the help of God the Father. In this light we men are exposed as those who imagine that they can help themselves and by that very action of self-help lay claim to the help of God. Again man only deludes himself and misunderstands both his own situation and the being of the One who is to be trusted to help the helpless man. Sin from this

179. Ibid.
180. IV/1, p. 418ff.
standpoint is also seen to involve the fall of man. He does not wish to understand the fall as a "revealed theory of supernatural origin and content about man."\textsuperscript{181} It is rather something which is true of man as man addressed by the Word of God. It is wrong to make too much of the fall of man. Man, though fallen, is not fallen right away from God into a gulf of Godlessness. "His godlessness may be very strong but it cannot make God a 'man-less' God ... Man in his fall cannot cease to be the creature and covenant-partner of God."\textsuperscript{182}

In the light of Jesus Christ the Saviour three further propositions concerning man’s fall are forwarded - \textsuperscript{183}

1. Man’s corruption is revealed as a debt which he owes to God. "He is a debtor who cannot pay."\textsuperscript{184} Here Barth draws upon Anselm’s discussion and tries to go beyond it by arguing that the full weight of man’s sin and the full extent of man’s guilt and debt are disclosed in the action of God’s in forgiving it, in sheer mercy. Man reacts to the grace of God, which is the predetermination of his being, by a proud refusal of it. By this refusal to be the being loved by God man places himself under the left hand of God, under His No and His wrath.

2. Man’s corruption is revealed as both total and radical. This follows from the fact that it is the whole man who is atoned for in this Jesus Christ. One cannot talk here of a "relic" of goodness remaining in man despite his sin. "Relic" says both too much and too little. Man has more than a relic of goodness - as the covenant partner of God he is good. But as the sinner fallen into corruption and requiring the whole self-giving of the fallen man Jesus Christ for his redemption there is no remaining core of goodness inherent to him. He is seen to be evil at heart.

\textsuperscript{181} IV/1, p. 479.
\textsuperscript{182} IV/1, p. 480.
\textsuperscript{183} IV/1, p. 484ff.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
There is no "nature reserve". In a footnote Barth argues that it was a mistake of exegesis which gave *peccatum originale* the meaning of *peccatum hereditarium*. It is not intended either in Isaiah 51, 3 or Romans 5, 12 - which latter, though admittedly referring to a relation between Adam and the race "is not referring to an actualisation of that connexion within the world, the propagating and inheriting of the sin of Adam." Barth here is really taking exception to the German Erbsunde and suggests instead the stricter rendering of *peccatum originale*, viz. Ursunde.

3. Man's corruption is revealed as the corruption of all men in that Christ died for all men. They are "all concluded in disobedience". (Romans 11, 32) The Bible views all men as those for whom Christ has died and risen and hence the man of sin, who is every man, has died in Jesus Christ and is no more. This solidarity of the race is expressed by the Bible in the person of Adam - and here Barth concludes his discussion by giving a fuller account of his understanding of Adam, the fall of man, and the origin of sin. "The meaning of Adam is simply man." This is *saga* and not history hence we must not expect historical interpretation. Rather Adam the sinner is the meaning of human history as a whole. All history is *Adamic* history. "It constantly repeats the little scene in the Garden of Eden. There never was a golden age. There is no point in looking back to one. The first man was immediately the first sinner." Who then is Adam? Barth acknowledges that the Biblical tradition intends that he should be understood as "the great unknown who is the parent of the race." However set beside other Old Testament men his sin is hardly the supremely fearful one. It is a mistake to think that we are preconditioned by his disobedience. - "No one has to be Adam ... Although the guilt of Adam is like ours it is just as little our excuse as our guilt is his. We and he are reached by the same Word and judgement of God in the same direct way." 190

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185. IV/1, p. 496.
186. IV/1, p. 500f. This was Kierkegaard's problem. Cf. Concept of Dread, p. 23ff. where he refers to the Articles of Smalkald where originale had explicitly become haereditarium. (p. 24)
187. IV/1, p. 507.
188. IV/1, p. 508.
189. IV/1, p. 509.
190. IV/1, p. 509.
Barth prefers the term "representative" to speak of Adam in relation to the race. But he is a representative only in the sense of being a disclosure of what is true of all men. "Adam is not a fate which God has suspended over us. Adam is the truth concerning us as it is known to God and told to us." And this is not a relationship which can be pragmatically established and determined. It is established and determined by the love of God. Paul's teaching in Romans 5 accords with this, Barth argues. Paul sees in Adam not so much a primal figure at the threshold of history as a parallel to Jesus Christ. Yet it is not a strict parallel since Jesus Christ is the primary figure in the relationship. Adam is not independent of Jesus Christ but rather points to and reflects Him. Jesus Christ is the Last Adam which means not the second, but the first, the true Adam.

iii. The Kingly work of Jesus Christ: sin as sloth leading to misery

Barth now takes up the idea of the Kingship of Jesus Christ. Here he directs attention within the one work of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to the man who is covenant partner of God - that is, to the work of Jesus Christ in exalting this fallen man in His own exaltation. Barth expounds this exaltation of Christ the King in three sections, "The Homecoming of the Son of Man", "The Royal Man", and "The Direction of the Son". In the light of this he asks for a second time - who is the sinner? Who is the man of sin? He answers this in terms of man's sloth and misery.

Again however the development of his answer is preceded by a more general discussion concerning Barth's method of treatment of the doctrine of sin. It might be felt that Barth had said his piece with sufficient

191. IV/1, p. 511.
192. IV/1, p. 518 also Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5
    SJT Occasional Papers No 5. And Resurrection of the Dead, tr.
193. IV/2, pp. 20-154.
194. IV/2, pp. 154-264.
195. IV/2, pp. 264-377.
clarity already but possibly the sheer newness of his approach in basing the knowledge of sin on Jesus Christ requires him to return to some of his affirmations and criticisms. He repeats his criticism of any kind of "Law" which is drawn from a source other than the gospel itself. He warmly commends the work of F. Flückiger\textsuperscript{196} which had appeared since his earlier discussion and which traces the history of the notion of natural law. Flückiger examines its beginnings in the classical period and its penetration of Christian thought in the post-apostolic period up to the middle ages and Aquinas. The early church and the New Testament writers however did not recognise the notion - "Der Begriff des Naturrechts war der Christlichen Kirche von ihrem Ursprung her unbekannt."\textsuperscript{197} If sin is approached in any other way than directly from Jesus Christ it can never be seen in its proper threat. Man is shamed only by the presence of a God who is not just God in His infinite distinction from man but "God with us", God in Jesus Christ.

Barth now sets himself to answer the question as to the precise form of sin revealed in the Kingly office of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{198} The essence of it is sloth. In the light of the upward movement in Jesus Christ sin is a downward counter-movement - an inertia, a refusal, a failure, a slothfulness. Barth is here able to highlight an aspect of sin which is often overlooked in the concentration on its more positive Promethean forms. In its own perverse way sloth too aims at the denial and refusal of God. It "crystallises in the rejection of the man Jesus",\textsuperscript{199} that is, in the rejection of the grace of God which is present and active in Him. Ultimately this means for man the rejection of his true being and hence man becomes "man in contradiction",\textsuperscript{200} with himself.

This works itself out in four directions -

1. In man's relation to God. We begin as ever with a Christological statement. God became flesh and as such established for man the knowledge of God's Being and His presence and action. In this light man's sin is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{196} Geschicht[e] des Naturrechts (Zürich, 1954)
  \item \textsuperscript{197} op. cit. p. 284.
  \item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{IV}/2, p. 403ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{199} \textit{IV}/2, p. 406.
  \item \textsuperscript{200} \textit{IV}/2, p. 409.
  \item \textsuperscript{201} \textit{IV}/2, p. 409ff.
\end{itemize}
stupidity. It is the folly of refusing this knowledge and of attempting the impossible - to be without this God. This stupidity expresses itself in a pseudo-knowledge - a "world of wisdom" which is impressive enough in its own terms and may even encompass a supposed knowledge of God but the stupidity of man's slothful ignorance of the living God is manifest nonetheless in the other dimensions of his life. It renders him unable to be a real neighbour to his fellow man. It brings a dualism into his view of his physical nature. It means he cannot really understand his existence in time or the significance of human history.

2. The Word became flesh and remains in indivisible union with it in Him. Jesus Christ reveals human life as essentially life with the brother. In this light man's sin is seen as inhumanity, the rejection of the brother. This expresses itself again in a pseudo-form, philanthropy. The inhumanity of man's slothful rejection of his true humanity in Jesus Christ is unmasked in the other dimensions of his life. It means a loss of relationship with God - the God who is always "our" God and hence only known as He is known with the fellow man. It means a confusion as to man's own nature since there is no "I" without a "Thou". It means the loss of our true life since our life and history consist in being with the other.

3. The Word became flesh means the disclosure of essentially human life as life in the unity of soul and body. In this light man's sin is dissipation - man's slothful hesitancy to use the freedom of the Spirit in the flesh which is given in Him. It can express itself in a specious form - as an appeal to an inward "spiritual" existence or to a "healthy" outward self-expression. This concealment is stripped aside when we see the effects of man's slothful dissipation in terms of the other dimensions of his life. Here it is seen that man is cut off from God, whether his dissipation leads him upwards or downwards it prevents his seeing the true God and living by His grace. It brings inhumanity in its train since man out of step with himself cannot keep step with his neighbour. It means that man cannot endure the brevity of his life in history.

4. Jesus, the Word become flesh, exercised his freedom in giving up his life to God and men. In this light sin is disclosed as our snatching at life. Sloth here appears as human care. It assumes a pseudo-form in the
legitimate carefulness of a man in the face of the demands of life. Again it is disclosed when we see man's slothful carefulness in face of the other dimensions of his life. Man in his carefulness finds God afar off because he resists Him at the point where He draws sovereignly near - at the point of death. It also destroys human fellowship. The anxious man isolates himself from his fellows. It finally destroys the unity of body and soul. In the face of death man cannot be whole but falls into self-assertion or renunciation.

Barth goes on to ask what is the nature and being of this slothful man. He defines it as misery.202 Faced with the work of Jesus Christ in seeking him in the far country and restoring him to sonship in the Father's house man seeks to live a false existence in exile, and hence in misery. This, from another standpoint, is what we have already encountered as the status corruptionis of the man of sin. Even here however we cannot think of man as being able to "give God the slip".203 Even in his misery he belongs to God. It is this very belonging which makes the misery so severe. Just because God holds him in the covenant man cannot find rest elsewhere. In his unfolding of the implications of this Barth faces the question of the bondage of the will. An aspect of man's misery is the determination of his will as servum arbitrium. We learn this from a consideration of man's liberation in Jesus Christ. This whole matter however requires to be understood Christologically. When so regarded we can assert that man has a genuine freedom - viz. to obey and be with God. It is not a case of man being placed between a posse peccare and a non posse peccare. As the man made free by God and for God he has only the non posse peccare. He "cannot" sin. He can only believe and obey. Only as he renounces this capacity can he sin - can he be guilty of sloth. His sloth is his failure to make use of this freedom. Only in Jesus Christ is this possibility made known to us and it remains valid even although the old man continues to exert his baleful influence against the life of the new man in Jesus Christ. There can be no synthesis or co-operation between these two.

202. IV/2, p. 483ff.
203. IV/2, p. 483.
204. IV/2, p. 495.
The Prophetic work of Jesus Christ: sin as falsehood leading to condemnation

Barth's third and final section of his Doctrine of Reconciliation is a consideration of the Prophetic office of Jesus Christ. Here he turns from the what of reconciliation, i.e. from the two-fold movement of God in His grace, downward to man and then upward for and with man - Jesus Christ as Priest and King. From this he turns to the how of reconciliation and to the claim that this twofold movement is the truth and declares itself as such. This is again unfolded under three heads, "the Light of Life", 205 "Jesus is Victor", 206 and "The Promise of the Spirit". 207 Against the background of this Prophetic work of Christ Barth puts the question for the third and last time - what is sin in this light? Who is the man of sin? He answers in terms of falsehood and condemnation. 208

Once again he prefaces his exposition with a restatement of his method (the knowledge of sin as attainable only at the point where man is contradicted and judged, viz. in Jesus Christ) in its divergence from earlier approaches. In a footnote he turns in particular to the Lutheran view of Law as preceding the Gospel, and poses certain questions to those of this view. 209 Does such not imply inevitably a division in the one Word of God? Does this not involve the impoverishing of the gospel on the one hand and the placing of the Law in an ambivalent position on the other since it then is both an external ordinance and the accuser of man? Can this view be attributed to Paul or to the Old Testament law? Does this view not require a return to general revelation or an untenable view of the Bible? How can this Law really bring a judgement upon man?

Jesus Christ is the truth. Against this truth the man of sin stands before us as a man of falsehood. Man here is the one who moves to evade the truth of Jesus Christ which encounters him. It is hence the specifically "Christian form of sin", 210 the form in which it appears post-Christum. Man here does not so much set himself against the truth or to

205. IV/3, pp. 38-165.
206. IV/3, pp. 165-274.
207. IV/3, pp. 274-367.
208. IV/3, p. 368ff.
209. IV/3, p. 374.
ignore it, rather he advocates and supports it, but always in such a way that it becomes his truth, thus enabling him to evade the judgement of his own falsehood in the light of it. It can appear even in very Christian clothing. Only the truth in Jesus Christ is powerful enough to lift this illusion and expose the falsehood. The nature of this falsehood becomes clear here in four respects.

1. In Jesus Christ we are confronted with the truth itself, the truth of His Person and hence allowing us no distance from him. As the incarnate Truth he exercises authority over the sinner binding him to Him. In his falsehood man resists this.

2. The truth of Jesus Christ is the truth of his death and passion. Here man sees the truth about himself and the death that he deserves, and here he recognises the call to go himself by the way of the cross, the call to conversion and a new beginning. Man in his falsehood refuses this and tries to avoid this challenge.

3. In our encounter with the truth of God in Jesus Christ we have to with God's Word in the power of His Spirit. We are here summoned to obedience, brought the gift of the Spirit and called to accept it as lost sons requiring conversion to the father's house. Man resists this summons, gift and call in his falsehood. He does not wish to be this son. He tries to plane down the sharpness of this encounter.

4. The God who encounters man in His Truth in Jesus Christ is the One who is absolutely free in Himself and who is absolutely sovereign over man. Beside this man is robbed of all his normative concepts and summoned to confess that God alone is normative for man. He is called to cleave freely to this God - that is to become the covenant-partner of God. In his falsehood man starts back from this. He attempts to change the confrontation with God into a co-operation and to talk of God as the Supreme Being, the norm of all human goodness, etc. Falsehood is certainly seen in all human unbelief, superstition, and error, but this is only a secondary form. The full maturity of man's falsehood is reached only in the man who has

211. IV/3, p. 434ff.
encountered Jesus Christ - that is, in the Christian. Barth points to what he thinks is a higher incidence of lying and misrepresentation in Western Christendom as evidence of this principle. 212

Barth finally turns to the effect of man's falsehood on his own life and sees it as 213 condemnation. The man of sin as a man of falsehood moves to the judgement and condemnation of God. Jesus Christ has accomplished a reconciliation for us and he delivers us from guilt and restores us to fellowship with God. But man refuses this. This refusal is "incomprehensible". It is an "impossible possibility" which cannot be rationally represented. Man tries to evade the Truth, he has recourse to falsehood before the inescapable encounter with it - and hence comes under threat of condemnation. Jesus Christ comes to this man assuring him of the passing of this condemnation, that is of the passing of the man of sin which he tries to make himself. But man lies in the face of this truth - lies against the truth of the divine grace - and hence stands under the threat and danger of damnation. This is still only a threat but it is one which is to be taken seriously. In this same situation of threat and danger are those who have not yet been reached by the Word of divine pardon, i.e. those who have not yet been encountered by Jesus Christ. In the same situation too is the Christian who lives in denial of his life in Jesus Christ.

The real misery for man in this situation is that it distorts and corrupts his true being. His true being is not set aside by this mad falsehood - but it brings him to misery. He lives in a distorted world, a world without a true centre however restlessly he may seek one, a world without a periphery however he may blunder aimlessly towards one. There is no co-existence, no real unity with his fellows. There is no steadfastness and hence no advance or progress. Here we confront the "mystery of iniquity", in its reality and existence post Christum, in our own time. Yet however seriously all this is it must never be allowed to overbalance the fact of the victory of the truth over it. Hence Barth's deliberate imbalance in the size of the sections on Christ and sin in this final volume.

212. IV/3, pp. 452-453.
213. IV/3, p. 461ff.
Man cannot ultimately make the truth of Christ into an untruth. It can never be overcome, or reversed, or undone, or rendered false. The falsehood may be strong, it may even surprise us at times by its influence even among Christians. But the Truth is not passive before it. Truth moves triumphantly against falsehood and overcoming it sets a final limit to its advance. Does this mean then that we can cheerfully anticipate an apokatastasis? Barth has two final comments on that issue -

1. We dare not count upon God's grace indefinitely - even in the light of the Cross and Resurrection. The man who consistently resists God's grace remains in a situation of real danger. We cannot even in the interests of theological consistency lay claim to what can always only be given by God and received as a gift by man.

2. Nevertheless, we make bold to hope for it and pray for it. There may well be much more in God's grace, in the Cross and Resurrection, than we can now anticipate.

f. Ethical Teaching
i. The nature of Christian Ethics

Thus far we have made no reference to the considerable sections which Barth devotes to Ethical teaching during the course of the Church Dogmatics. Any full account of his doctrine of sin would require to take some account of this, and particularly would this be the case when we are thinking of his doctrine in relation to that of Reinhold Niebuhr.

Barth's intention is that ethics should be seen as belonging properly within the dogmatic scheme and he accordingly has a section on ethics at the conclusion of each of his main divisions. The one at the close of the volume on reconciliation was never completed but there is ample material from the others - enough to fill two part-volumes.

The first section which occurs during his discussion of the Doctrine of God. This is highly significant because it implies that Barth wishes ethics to be viewed as part of the doctrine of God. It is, he says, the

215. IV/2, pp. 782-796.
doctrine of "God Commanding":216 As God is the gracious God and acts for
man in Jesus Christ man is placed under obligation, he is commanded.
Ethics for Barth requires to be rooted in the Being of God as such, the God
who loves in freedom and who is in His action towards and for man in His
action towards and for man in His grace. In this first section Barth
raises the fundamental question as to how we are to think of the relation¬
ship between dogmatics and ethics. He raises the possibility which has
been tacitly assumed so often in Christian thought - that ethics has a
distinct sphere alongside of dogmatics, that is, that there is a sphere
of man's "ethical behaviour" and "practical action" which requires to be
recognised and admitted in its own right. This sphere, though related to
dogmatics to a degree, nonetheless demands attention on its own terms.
Put another way we are, by this view summoned to consider the Christian
man in his action in the world and in his moral behaviour, as in some
sense distinct from the Christian man in his theological reflection, wor¬
ship and testimony. Although explicitly this "independent ethics" has
normally paid tribute to dogmatics and made no claim to rivalry or priority,
nonetheless this has been the effect, Barth argues. The roles become
reversed and dogmatics made to bow the knee before ethics and hence before
the non-Biblical anthropology which an independent ethics invariably
employs. Further, dogmatics in this process finds itself constricted
and relegated to the position of an "intellectual pursuit" unrelated to
"real life". Thus the "holy man" comes to replace the "holy God" as
the centre of attention.217 The great mistake here is a failure to under¬
stand the nature of the dogmatic task. Dogmatics is concerned with the
purity of doctrine, with the Word of God in Church Proclamation. The
Word of God is the beginning and goal of this concern. But the Word of
God is addressed to man - that is, to real man, to this man amid the
totality of his existence, in the midst of the work and action of his life.

216. II/2, pp. 509ff.
The Word meets man that is, in his ethical situation and as he is confronted by his ethical questions. Thus, the dogmatic sphere is in this sense also the existential sphere, and hence also the ethical sphere. It is to dogmatics that we must look for our ethical answers because it is dogmatics which puts the ethical questions. In other words, dogmatics includes ethics and ethics derives from dogmatics. Separation is both unnecessary and mutually destructive. It can only occur when the real nature of dogmatics is forgotten or obscured. Dogmatics properly understood is ethics, and ethics properly understood is dogmatics.

Barth gives this position fuller and more concrete expression in his discussion of ethics under the Doctrine of God. 218 The link between Dogmatics and ethics above was formulated in terms of the Word of God. Here Barth fills out "Word of God" to its real expression in the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ whereby man is bound to God from all eternity. Man hence is posited with God and this forms the decisive determination of his being. He is in every department of his life this first and foremost, man with, and by, and for God. There is no other man than this man nor any other God than this God. This is the primary thing and hence the ethical question arises subsequently to it. It is the question concerning the being and action of the man who is antecedently the covenant partner of God. Put another way the question "What wouldst Thou have me to do?" is only asked after the question "Who art Thou Lord?" It is in this succession and in this order that the ethical question is put - the indicative of grace proceeds and conditions the imperative of morality. The gospel is prior to, and encompasses the law. 219

Here another of the presuppositions of Barth's approach to ethics manifests itself. Barth, had, as we have seen above, 'inherited' a theological tradition which made much of the ethical. It viewed it however in terms of man's moral achievement rather than his moral inadequacy. Barth's concern to recover a true theocentric approach led him to a rediscovery of the centrality of Christology. In particular he came to see

218. II/2, p. 509ff.
219. II/2, p. 511ff.
the Cross, God's free justification of sinful man, as the radical judgment of man and all his ethical attainment. This relation of ethics to justification and sin is an abiding element in his ethical theory which we will examine in greater depth in a later chapter. It is this fact, God's grace in Jesus Christ, which is the basis for the whole ethical sphere since it implies the total claim of God on the life of man. Hence we require to begin as it were not with man's question but with God's answer in Jesus Christ. Only when this answer is given as the first word can the ethical question be properly put.

In spite of all this man does attempt to put the question as to his life and action independently of God's grace and to give his own answer to it. Seen from the standpoint of grace this is man's sin. It arose with the fall and man's foul craving to be as God knowing good and evil - that is, to put and to answer the ethical question. There is in the light of this no possibility of wedding a general and a theological ethics. If we hear the command of God; if we understand the grace of God as the basis of our life and hence the claim upon our total being; if we hear the command of God, the God of the covenant, then we are delivered from the requirement of any further sanction. Apologetical ethics is seen from this standpoint to be a mistaken path also in its attempt to establish and justify theological ethics within the framework of the presuppositions of non-theological moral understanding. This attempt must fail because on the one hand it attempts an impossible isolation of theology, and on the other it assumes an autonomous area outside of revelation. The Roman Catholic attempt to preserve a unity, though an improvement on Protestant ones still falls short. It requires a co-ordination of nature and grace, man and God, reason and revelation such as to allow no radical judgement to be brought by the latter upon the former. Hence grace cannot fully be grace, sin cannot fully be sin.

220. Romans, p. 68, 120-124, 107-114, 149f et. al.
221. II/2, p. 516f.
222. II/2, pp. 518-9.
223. II/2, p. 520.
224. II/2, p. 528f.
and there is no full divine obligation laid upon man.

In distinction from this the starting point must always be God who in His grace is established as Lord of all men and hence every man is confronted with God's command. Thus the ethical problem is the problem of man's obedience to God, and in this form it is the general problem of man's life in the world. In this enquiry however we have to be controlled by this starting point - God's Word in Jesus Christ, and no other law or gospel than this.

ii. The form of Christian Ethics

Granted this general approach, how is this to be worked out? What does ethics mean within the compass of dogmatics? What is the law within the gospel? Barth considers this under the general notion of "The Command of God".225

He first gives a general definition of what "good" means from this point of view.226 The primary action is always God's, i.e. the event of His grace. Man's action is therefore "good" as it is taken up into, and conformed to, that event. Its goodness derives from, and reposes upon, the goodness of that action of God for man, that is upon the very goodness of God Himself. This is to leave the matter at a very general level and Barth seeks to fill this out more particularly by arguing that the content of the command of God, the actual goal to which man is summoned, is disclosed in Jesus Christ and hence we can summarise the command of God as "to love Jesus and keep His commandments".227 It is important to realise in this whole matter that God's command meets man, not in the form of specific commands, but as the general command of God's grace - the command to live in freedom before Him. Because God's command is such man is convicted not so much of specific disobediences but of living without grace. This command is also a promise which is made concrete in Jesus Christ and hence the challenge of the command of God is a challenge to decide constantly for Jesus Christ.228

225. II/2, p.552ff.
226. II/2, pp. 552-565.
227. II/2, p. 569.
228. II/2, p. 609.
Barth however is still not content with this way of putting the nature of God's command and points us to Scripture. Here the command of God is concreted. We need to recognize that the Biblical commands are specific commands and we need to take them to ourselves in this way. In doing so however we must see beyond the specific commands in themselves to the God who commands us - that is we need to see the command in the context of a personal encounter with the Living God whose will is always historical. Barth wishes to avoid the notion that we are simply given general ethical principles to apply as we best can in concrete situations. He admits the existence of these in Scripture but will not allow this to invalidate what he has said concerning specific commands. In the Bible the divine command is always concrete. It can become concrete for us on two accounts. (i) In our attempts to give a specific command relevance in the present. (ii) By the fact of our standing in the same historical sequence as the men and women of Scripture, that is, in the sequence of the covenant of grace.

Barth returns to the question of ethics at the close of his study of the doctrine of creation and his treatment is extended to say the least: a volume in English translation running to nigh seven hundred pages! In the preliminary discussion Barth repeats his view that ethics can only be treated within dogmatics. The earlier discussions above dealt with what he terms - "general ethics" that is, ethics considered from the point of view of the divine action - the upward look as it were. Here we move to special ethics - i.e. to look downwards at the man who is commanded by God, i.e. at the man who is God's covenant partner as he acts in specific ethical situations.

He clears the ground for this study by reaffirming that the raw material for it is not an amalgam of Scripture texts considered in isolation from the gospel, or a "natural law" discernible to reason.

229. Ibid., p.647.
230. Ibid., p.672ff.
231. II/2, p.700ff.
or certain moral norms derivable from a cultural tradition. This he terms the "casuistic approach" which while it is valuable in certain situations is not gospel ethics in the proper sense.\(^{234}\) He has three criticisms of this position - (1) It puts the moralist on God's throne judging good and evil. (2) It assumes that the command of God is a universal rule requiring to become concrete in specific situations. (3) It destroys human freedom as man's freedom for God.

Turning to "special ethics" Barth seeks to explain what this consists in. He rejects the view that it is a matter of a moment by moment guidance immediately granted in each new situation. There is some merit in this position however in that it points to the dynamic character of ethical decision and is a reminder of the place of the Holy Spirit and of the event of revelation. God is the living God and hence His will must be constantly renewed to man.\(^{236}\) Barth next points out that it is not a question of arbitrary 'occasional' commands but of the commands of the one Lord repeated and renewed. And further each specific command is not distinct from the earlier ones. The man who obeys or disobeys is this man in covenant relationship to God. In other words there is here a certain "horizontal" dimension which gives a "form of reference" for an ethical decision.\(^{237}\) Knowledge concerning this horizontal dimension can come only as men are instructed by God's Word. There is no full disclosure of this "formed reference" in the Word of God but in Jesus Christ a "concrete outline" can be discerned. Special ethics has the task of accompanying the history of the covenant and of being a "commentary upon this history to be drawn up with particular regard to this encounter."\(^{238}\) There is no field of reality outwith this encounter. We deal here with the sphere where man obeys or disobeys rather than a law in relation to which he is right or wrong. It is asking too much to expect a full answer from this "formed reference".

\(^{233}\) III/4, p. 5.
\(^{234}\) III/4, pp. 6-15. We will require to investigate this at greater depth.
\(^{235}\) III/4, p. 15-16.
\(^{236}\) III/4, pp. 15-16.
\(^{237}\) III/4, pp. 17-18.
\(^{238}\) III/4, p. 19.
reference". We are given "guidance" only. Where is the command of God the creator? One answer (E. Brunner) is that it is a knowledge of God as creator and of human creatureliness. Barth argues against this -

(i) No reliable knowledge of God can be gained from Brunner's obscure magnitude 'reality'. (ii) This view tends to a split in the command of God and ultimately in God Himself. (iii) It is not clear that what is being spoken of in this view is not simply the truth of certain generally discernible laws of life. Rather the command of God is the command of the God met in Jesus Christ and not some hidden obscurity. This God so known is also the Creator and hence the Command of God which we hear in His work of grace in Christ is the Command of the Creator. In this man appears as the one of whom we may say the following things - he is a being with a history; a being in an I-Thou encounter; a being who is subject to a material organism; a being allotted a fixed span. This is the basis of special ethics. We go forward, by asking concerning the command of God - to what extent the command in this creaturely sphere has in view man's sanctification, and by following the four lines indicated in the characterisation of man above. This path is always a theologica viatorum but it can nonetheless offer us a genuine knowledge.

This concludes Barth's general discussion. The remainder is given to working this out in relation to particular spheres and questions.

239. III/4, p. 31.
240. III/4, p. 19ff and pp. 36-38.
241. III/4, p. 39f.
242. III/4, pp. 43-44.
243. Ibid., p. 46.
We have attempted to summarise Barth's teaching on sin as it appears in the overall sweep of the Church Dogmatics. We will now attempt to draw the various strands together in a concluding statement of his view.

The key to Barth's whole doctrine as we have indicated above is the doctrine of grace. It is here that every account of his thought must begin. For Barth God is the gracious God. Grace is His very Being and Essence. Nothing which we may posit or imply concerning Him has any value or truth except as it is an amplification or reformulation of this fact. All our Christian doctrines and theological statements are valid and meaningful only as they indicate and relate to the situation in which God is the One who is gracious - for this and only this is the situation. There is no other God than the gracious God. There is no other created order than that formed and upheld by and for this gracious God. There is no other creature than the one called into being, redeemed and sustained by and for this same gracious God. To depart from this is to depart from reality and to enter the world of myth and illusion.

Further, grace, as we have seen, has a quite specific meaning as the covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Grace means this concrete act and event. The gospel by and for which the Church exists is none other than the good news that God is none other than this God who has acted for man in the covenant set up and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is to this gospel that we are called to bear witness in all articulations of Christian truth in our theology and dogmatics.

All our Christian understanding derives from the revelation of the God who gives Himself to be known in His Word. But the God who is thus made known to the creature in His Being and action is the gracious God. This means that grace is the standpoint from which we arrive at an understanding of every area of Christian knowledge. Barth will allow no exception to this principle. Sin too must be approached from the side of grace. Sin has to be seen as it were a posteriori at the point of God's taking account of it in His grace. It is retrospectively, in the light of God's movement against it, i.e. in the light of Jesus Christ and His cross that sin is disclosed and the particular nature and form of its reality
uncovered. The priority of grace is hence the decisive presupposition of Barth's doctrine of sin. In this fundamental grounding of his thought Barth shows how clearly he is seeking to break from the nineteenth century tendency and its anthropocentricity. Over against all such thinking Barth seeks a starting point in God and the movement of his thought tries to be consistently downwards from God to man. He will suffer no exception to this and even the doctrine of sin must conform to this pattern. There can be no starting point in any human experience of guilt or shame. What is sin in the light of revelation, i.e. ultimately, in the light of Jesus Christ? It is as an answer to this question that Barth's doctrine is structured.

The movement in the other direction, from man to God, which Barth saw as the great error of the nineteenth century has been kept before Barth during the decades since in his encounter with the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. In the latter's dependence upon the existential philosophy of Heidegger Barth believes he sees a repetition of this same mistake. His own theology has been expounded over the years in conscious antithesis to Bultmann and in faithfulness, as he sees it, to the reformation principle of the priority of God. Events in Germany in the Twenties and Thirties and the struggle of the German church against National Socialism also helped to confirm his antagonism to a theology which allowed any concession to an autonomous understanding of man. Barth attempts a radical clearing of the decks as far as all such ideologies and anthropologies are concerned. God must be allowed to be God, and that means for theology the radical submission of all its categories and connections to the judgement of God in His Word, that is, the God who is the gracious God. In the earlier part of the Dogmatics Barth's concern is more with the revealing Word, in his later volumes he turns his attention more to the Incarnate Word, but there is no deviation in the fundamental direction of his thinking. Because this is the case, Barth, in his doctrine of sin, will allow no place for approaches which deny or qualify this principle. All appeals to a general revelation, a natural law, or an imago Dei conceived of in terms of "divine remnants" in man are seen by this, Barth believes, to be mistaken roads. All our knowledge of sin is to be derived from revelation, that is, the revelation
of the gracious God, the God of the covenant, the God known and active in Jesus Christ.

What can we say of sin from this stand-point? What is disclosed concerning sin "in the light of grace"?

1. Sin is seen to be a movement in the first instance directed against God. It is in the encounter with God that sin is disclosed and hence its being is a being in antithesis to Him.

2. Sin is seen further to be a movement against grace. God is a gracious God and all that resists Him resists His grace. Sin is always a denial and refusal of grace.

3. Sin is seen as that which really does threaten the creature of God. That God must take action against it in becoming flesh and dying on Golgatha reveals the seriousness of its assault upon the creature. Man really is a sinner. In the light of the cross he is seen to be a radical sinner.

4. Sin is seen as the concrete expression of a wider dimension of evil. It is a particularisation of a whole inimical cosmic principle which threatens the entire creation of God.

5. Sin is seen in the light of the triumphant fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ as that which is vanquished and overcome in its threat to the creature. To know sin means always to know it in this relationship and hence as forgiven.

6. Sin and evil are seen in this light as distinguishable from both the creation and the creature. Both creation and creature are willed by God in His work of grace and hence are good. This goodness extends to their "shadow" or "creaturely" aspects. We are thus able to affirm of the creature man that he is both radically evil (cf. under 3. above) and that he is good because he is always man held in being by God's grace, the grace which is particularised in the covenant.

7. Sin is seen to be of a third order of being over against the Creator and the creature.

8. Sin is seen to have its being only in antithesis to, and hence in dependence upon, the grace of the God who is Lord over all in His grace. It "is" only as that which is denied by God's affirmation, as that which is rejected by God's election, as active only under His left hand, and
because of the action of His right hand.

9. Sin is seen to be "ontologically impossible" in the light of the victory of Jesus Christ. This is the mystery of iniquity.

10. Sin is seen over against the work of God's grace in Jesus Christ in its particular forms — as pride leading to fallenness, as sloth leading to misery, as falsehood leading to condemnation.
II. DISCUSSION

A. THE "BEING" OF SIN: ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE
CHAPTER 3
ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

It is the purpose of this chapter to lay bare the fundamental pre-suppositions which govern the accounts of sin given by the two theologians under discussion. We will give our attention here, that is, to the basic ontological and epistemological problems to which any account of sin must address itself. The issues here are very involved, and hence it is crucial that we proceed with great care putting our questions as sharply as possible and asking them in the proper order. We will indicate firstly the kind of question which we require to discuss here, then investigate in turn Barth and Niebuhr's approaches to them before finally seeking to evaluate their accounts.

On the ontological level we require to raise the question as to what sin "is". What is it that man does when he sins? What have we to do with when we speak of sin? What is its essential character and nature? What is the shape and form of this "entity"? Here the special nature of the subject matter gives for special problems; What if we conclude that sin is non-being in some sense? In what way can we talk of an ontology of non-being, or even engage in meaningful discussion of it? This series of questions as to the being of sin however immediately points us to another set of questions - as to the locus of sin. Where does it give itself to be known? At what point can we encounter sin such that its "being" is disclosed to us? i.e. where are we to look for our answer to the question as to what it is? These latter questions are, in their deepest intention, ontological ones; they direct our attention to the object, in this case sin, and seek to assist our uncovering of its "being". However they have obvious epistemological overtones since they are questions which tend towards the clarifying

1. Since the nature of sin is the question to be discussed and since one of the approaches to it under review takes the position that sin "is" only in a secondary and problematic sense we cannot prejudge the enquiry by speaking from the outset as if sin had being in the same sense as other realities referred to. We will normally indicate our recognition of this by placing quotation marks round words referring to its "being".
of our knowledge of sin.

Moving to the explicitly epistemological area there are questions as to how we know sin - how can we grasp and cognise it? How is our mind able to wrap its fingers round it? This area is again complicated by the subject matter under discussion. What if sin be defined as the irrational, as lie, falsehood, etc? How can we "know" the untrue? How can we apprehend a dimension which by reason of its very nature will inevitably misrepresent itself to us?

The lapsing over of ontological into epistemological questions which we have noted above need not surprise us. The relation of thought to being, or subject to object, is never one in which the two poles can be held rigidly apart. As James Brown has reminded us -

"It is part of our situation that we are inevitably and inescapably inside the knowledge relation, from the start to the end, and so we cannot step outside of ourselves to an indifferent standpoint from which to review and adjust the relations of thought and being. Thought and being are together from the beginning."

This is as relevant to our discussion of sin as elsewhere even if there are special problems here as we have already hinted. The implication of this fact for our present discussion is that it is impossible finally to isolate any of these sets of questions and deal with them in vacuo as it were. Granted that however, it is crucial that we tackle these issues in their proper order as we shall shortly. We will look in turn at Barth and Niebuhr's thought and to the answers they give to these questions as well as the sort of problems which are raised for them by the nature of their answers. We will treat them separately first of all and deal with the problems which are peculiar to their accounts before setting them together and attempting a fuller evaluation of their answers.

A. BARTH

a. Ontological questions

i. General movement of Barth's thought

It is at this point, in his method of framing the fundamental theological questions, and the order in which he treats them, that the distinctiveness and thrust of Barth's whole theology lies. As far as the order of his treating of theological problems is concerned we can put his position most concisely by saying that for him questions of actuality precede questions of possibility.

The starting point for him is the fact of God's self-revelation in His Word; that is, God as He gives Himself to be known through the Holy Spirit in the church. Barth's starting point, in other words, is the reality of the God who is, God Himself in the truth of His Being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence it is with an exposition of the Word of God in its threefold form and nature and with the Triune Being of God that Barth is concerned in the opening Volume of his Church Dogmatics, i.e. the primary question is as to the actuality of God. Further, since this God gives Himself to be known above all in the Person of the Son of God, theology as Barth views it is called to a continual concentration upon Jesus Christ in His Incarnation, life, death and resurrection - that is to a concentration on the action of God's grace in Him in all its particularity and concreteness. Putting this another way, we can say that for Barth the primary theological question is the Who question; Who is the God who gives Himself to be known in His Word?

3. I/1, pp. 51-184.
5. I/2, p. 5f, 672, 883: II/2, p. 4f.
6. I/1, p. 339f. Cf. also Calvin, "What is God? Men who put this question are merely toying with idle speculations. It is far better for us to enquire 'What is His nature? And to this end what is consistent with His nature?" Institutes Bk. I, 1, 2, tr. Battles, (London, 1961) Vol. 1, p. 41. Also essay by T.F. Torrance "The Eclipse of God" in Baptist Quarterly Vol. XXII, Oct. 1967, no. 4, where he argues that Calvin reversed the medieval order of questioning by beginning with quale (quis) sit, rather than quod sit, and an sit.
The fact that this is the primary question for Barth and that he answers it in this way in terms of Jesus Christ, has an important implication for his thought, viz. that he attempts to think out his theology in concreto rather than in abstracto since he seeks to be consistently controlled by the particular form and direction of God's Being manifest in Jesus Christ, and to refuse all kinds of general religious or theological categories which might present themselves as alternative ways. This can be illustrated from the Church Dogmatics. In his discussion of omnipotence Barth argues that the meaning we give to it must be derived from the particular manifestation of it in Jesus Christ rather than a general notion of infinite possibility because -

"It is not the general which comes first but the particular. The general does not exist without this particular and cannot therefore be prior to this particular, but only in the opposite direction - from this particular to the general. It is from this particular that we come to this general." 7

Later, in his discussion of the revelation of Godhead disclosed in the humiliation and suffering of Jesus Christ, Barth moves in the same direction - "The meaning of His Deity ... cannot be gathered from any notion of supreme, absolute, non-worldly being. It can be learned only from what took place in Jesus Christ." 8 Hartwell speaks of Barth's movement of thought as being the reverse of the normal logical one - i.e. from general to particular; Barth moves from particular to general. 9 This is however rather unhelpful as it seems to imply that Barth is contravening logical procedure. We are on safer ground if we simply state that in his theological thought the starting point is always the particular and concrete event of God's gracious coming to His creature in Jesus Christ. von Balthasar refers to these features in a section of his exposition of Barth where he is attempting to uncover Barth's Denkform. He writes of Barth's -

7. II/1, p. 602.
8. IV/l, p. 177, Cf. the similar movement of thought in III/1, p. 60 with regard to creation as a 'timeless truth'.
"Pathos der 'Wirklichkeit', der 'Eigentlichkeit', der 'Verwirklichung'... Wirklichkeit und Eigentlichkeit aber ist dort, wo die höchste Dichte, die höchste Konkretheit, die vollste Entfaltung alles nur Möglichem erreicht ist: im Concretissimum." 10

West, in his study of Barth, to which we will have cause to refer again, sums up this fundamental principle of his thought in this way -

"The starting point for Barth is not the general category of understanding, but the concrete God Who manifests Himself in Christ, not a God and men with Being and attributes, but an act, an event, which when we see the actor so acting we presume to presuppose certain things about his being... God's being in event, the event of the birth, death resurrection and coming again of Jesus Christ." 11

Thus for Barth, it is only when this question as to the actuality of God, the 'Who' question is allowed to be the primary one and the quest for the answer to it the primary matter that the other important theological issues can be raised, and in particular the question as to the possibility of theological knowledge. This principle is evident in the Dogmatics. For example Barth expounds the Word of God in its three-fold form before going on to discuss its knowability. 12 Again the question as to the knowability of God follows rather than precedes the exposition of the fulfillment of the knowledge of God. 13 In his study of revelation its objective and subjective reality in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit comes before the examination of their possibility, 14 and the reality of faith is expounded before the possibility of faith is investigated. 15

Barth's comment on his method during his discussion of the knowledge and knowability of God can stand as applicable to all the other areas mentioned, and as a general indication of the movement of his whole theology -

13. II/1, cf. p. 3f with p. 63f.
15. IV/1, p. 740f.
"We start out from the fact that through His Word God is actually known and will be known again. On principle we have to reject any anxiety about this occurrence as not only superfluous but forbidden ... But this also means that the question cannot be whether God is knowable. Where God is known He is also in some way or other knowable. Where the actuality exists there is also the corresponding possibility. The question cannot then be posed in abstracto but only in concreto; not a priori but only a posteriori."16

Compare also -

"The type of thinking which wants to begin with the question of the knowability and then pass from that point to the question of the fulfilment of the knowledge of God is not grateful but grasping, not obedient but self-autonomous. It is not theological thinking. It does not arise from the church, or rather from the church's basis, and it does not serve the church. What it affirms to be knowable and then actually known - whatever else it may be - is certainly not God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit whose revelation and work is attested by the Holy Scriptures and proclaimed by the church. If this is God - and there is no other God - there is no other way from the question of the knowability of God to that of the actual knowledge of Him. There is only the descending way in the opposite direction."17

In this volume just cited Barth goes on to expound the Being of God. He sharply criticises Roman Catholic dogmatics for attempting to arrive at a knowledge of God explicitly prior to God's revelation.18 God is as He is disclosed in His self-revelation. "God is who He is in the act of His revelation."19 In other words the noetic, our knowledge and understanding of God, takes place only with and under the ontic - God in His Being in the act of His revelation. God creates being, and therefore the actuality and possibility of our knowing, in his work (operare) of grace.

16. II/1, pp. 4-5. Note also Barth's acknowledgement here of his debt to Anselm (p. 4) at whose feet "I believe I learned the fundamental attitude to the problem of the knowledge and existence of God which is adopted in this section."
17. II/1, p. 63.
18. II/1, pp. 79-84.
19. II/1, p. 257 and following.
We can gather up this account of Barth's fundamental principle in its relation to the order of our theological questioning by saying that for him the ontological is always prior to the epistemological, provided that by ontological we do not understand an abstract investigation of a general class of possibilities of being but the obedient exploration of the Being of God in particular, in its concrete manifestation in Jesus Christ. Epistemological questions in theology can only properly be put in this context, i.e. in the light of God's action in Christ, and hence only a posteriori of that event. This does not mean of course that we can dispense with epistemology. Clearly some kind of theory of knowing must be present from the first. But this must be held to some degree tentatively and open to being redirected in accordance with Reality to which attention is directed in the primary movement of theological questioning. T.F. Torrance in a recent study argues for just this position in this way -

"... in theology the canons of enquiry that are discerned in the process of knowing are not separable from the body of actual knowledge that it attains. In the nature of the case a true and adequate account of theological epistemology cannot be gained apart from substantial exposition of the content of the knowledge of God, and of the knowledge of man and the world as creatures of God. It is scientifically false to begin with epistemology."20

ii. Relation of this movement to the "being" of sin

It is time now to relate this discussion of Barth's fundamental approach to ontological and epistemological issues to his treatment of the doctrine of sin in particular. His general method as we have seen requires that we begin by opening ourselves to the reality of the object under discussion and allowing it to disclose its being to us through the medium of the questions we put to it. In the case of the knowledge of the being of

God this process is comparatively comprehensible as a method of enquiry, though of course we make no pre-judgement thereby of problems as to its workability in practice. We can, that is, fairly readily envisage the situation in which as we put our questions to Him, enquiring into His reality, so He graciously assumes the role of subject, revealing Himself to us through the medium of our questioning and making us the objects of His Revelation through His Word. There is however a distinct problem in envisaging this kind of model as far as our knowledge of sin is concerned. How can we think of sin in this kind of a way? How can we adopt this method of approach in the case of an "entity" by definition the antithesis of the Divine Being?

There would seem to be two simple means of avoiding this problem and of retaining Barth's method of approach. One would be to posit an essential relatedness of sin to God - such that sin is seen as a mode, a highly specialised one admittedly, of God's direct action. Sin could thus be thought of as being disclosed within the range of the disclosure of the Divine Being, i.e. a monistic solution. Barth however would not countenance this. In III/3, p. 304 he speaks of an opposition and resistance to God's world - dominion - which "neither can nor may be understood as something which He Himself willed or posited or decreed, and that ... cannot be subsumed under any synthesis."21 The other possibility would be to posit a distinct "world of sin" such that it attains autonomy over against God and can be thought of as disclosing its nature to us from its own self-generating base in a sense similar to God, assuming in a parallel manner its own initiative in response to our questioning and in this way apprehensible by us. That is, this would afford a dualistic solution to our problem. Barth however would not allow this either -

"a right understanding of the freedom of God’s will makes all dualistic ways of thought impossible. We deceive ourselves if we think we should take sin, death, and the devil seriously in the sense of ascribing to them a divine or even semi-divine potentiality, or the role of a real antagonist to the Living God."22

Despite his rejection of these two possible ways out of the problem Barth wishes to retain, in the face of the problem of the being and knowledge of sin the "methodological principle"23 which is so dear to him.

Barth’s solution to this problem has already been hinted at in our earlier exposition of his view of sin which we formulated as ‘sin in the light of grace’. Putting this in terms of the problem of the being and knowledge of sin Barth believes it possible to enquire into the actuality and activity of sin in a way similar to our enquiry into any other area of Christian knowledge – because sin discloses itself, in its reality and being at the point of God’s gracious action against it.

"There is no such thing as a created nature which has its purpose, being or continuance apart from grace; or which may be known in this purpose, being or continuance except through grace. Even sin, death and the devil and hell ... do not constitute any exception to this rule ... Thus God and the enemies of God cannot be known at all unless both they and their negative character and whole work of negation are known in the service they render as instruments of the free, eternal, immutable grace of God ... conversely, where can there be any serious knowledge of sin and the devil, of death and hell ... if there is not also a knowledge of the gracious God."24

Barth discusses our knowledge of sin here, as we see, within a wider dimension of antithesis which he later defines as das Nichtige. He speaks of this as "an opposition and resistance to God’s world-dominion",

22. II/1, p. 563. Cf. also II/2, p. 90 and II/1, p. 557.
23. In speaking of a "methodological principle" in this way we are not forgetting Barth’s disavowal of all such "systematic principles" either in his own or in any "good" theology (I/2, p. 861f; also Karl Barth’s Table Talk, pp. 23-25 S.J. Th., Occ. Papers, No 10, ed. Godsey. Granted this however the phrase would seem to be not without value. Alternatively one might speak of a certain 'direction' or 'order' in his theology. Cf. I/2, p. 5 – where Barth speaks of "the very definite order of being which Holy Scripture makes manifest, when in its witness to God’s revelation it confronts and relates God to man, divine facts and human attitudes, enforces an order of knowing corresponding to it."
24. II/2, p. 92. Cf. also I/2, p. 882; I/2, p. 61; II/1, p. 398; II/2, pp. 768-9; III/2, p. 203; III/2, p. 35; IV/1, p. 307.
which requires to be distinguished from the "shadow-side" (Schattenseite) of the created order. Das Nichtige does not include this though it borders upon it and menaces it. It is a more strictly inimical dimension including evil, the devil, the demons, sin and hell. It is within this larger notion of das Nichtige that sin and the knowledge of it is discussed.

"How do we know that das Nichtige really exists? ... We know all this clearly, directly and certainly from the source of all Christian knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ." It is at this point that we can properly put the question Barth argues, and here alone the solution as to the "being" and nature of das Nichtige, and of sin, lies. Our investigation therefore advances as we put our questions here i.e. as we open ourselves in our questioning to the reality of God's work and Word in Jesus Christ and enquire at this precise point as to what this work and Word of God implies as to the nature of that against which it is directed. There must be no appeal that is, to any general human experience of law. Once again we begin with the particular; the event of God's gracious condescension in Jesus Christ.

As we adopt this procedure and begin to direct our questions as sharply and rigorously as we can to this precise point so step by step the reality of das Nichtige and of sin is disclosed to us.

In the first place the being and life of Jesus Christ as man discloses the true nature of the situation in which man finds himself as a creature under the threat of das Nichtige. Here we require to direct our questions and our attention to the kind of life he lived; the form of existence he assumed. "That the Word became flesh means that the Word became a creature of this kind, a lost creature." Here, das Nichtige is disclosed in its

27. III/3, p. 304.
effect on the creature. In the second place the fact that God was in Christ, that this event was an event of God’s grace, a movement of God’s being in opposition to das Nichtige implies that God saw in this "Thing" a threat, not just to His creature, but to Himself. Thus our questions are directed here to this whole movement of grace as a movement of God for man which uncovers das Nichtige as the enemy and opponent of God Himself - "That God’s Word, God’s Son, God Himself became flesh means no other than that God saw a challenge to Himself in this assault upon His creature."28

In the light of this we need to banish from our minds any notions of an ultimate harmony between das Nichtige and God. There is no possibility of an ultimate reconciliation. The fact that God moved against das Nichtige in the concrete and particular manner in which He did so in Christ means that we have to think out our view of this "reality" as a movement essentially and irrevocably antithetical to God. It has not been "chosen, willed, or done"29 by Him. It is not part of the good creation over which He could pronounce His affirming benediction.30 There is no ground whatever for any kind of synthesis with it.31 Thirdly, when we direct our questioning as to the nature of this dimension to this precise point we are taught its defeat and vanquishing at the hand of God.32

Gathering all these points together Barth moves to this kind of account of Nichtige -

"(It) is the 'reality' on whose account (i.e. against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it. Das Nichtige is thus the 'reality,' which opposes and resists God, which is itself subjected and overcome by His opposition and resistance, and which in this two-fold determination as the 'reality' that negates and is negated by Him, is totally distinct from Him. The true das Nichtige is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross and that which He defeated there."33

28. Ibid.
29. III/3, p. 304.
31. III/3, p. 305.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid. The German for 'reality' here is Wirklichkeit. Cf. note in chapter above where we pointed out that Barth's deliberate preference for Wirklichkeit and Aktualität arise from his conviction that 'reality' is bound up with dynamic activity; cf. T.F. Torrance, op.cit., p. 131 footnote, also pp.151-180. He suggests that Barth owes a debt here to Husserl, cf. Ideas ET (London, 1931).
From this general view of the 'contradictory dimension' we require to ask more precisely what all this means for Barth's view of sin - "the concrete form in which Nichtige is active and revealed". The full implications of this general approach are only fully uncovered by Barth in his final volume of the Dogmatics on Reconciliation but the outlines have already been traced and we will not go over that ground again now. We will however observe certain broad implications which Barth draws here in the third volume.

When we direct our questions as to the nature of sin to the point of God's dealing with it in His grace it is disclosed as our sin; it is the eruption of this antithetical dimension (das Nichtige) within our creaturely existence and as such it is manifested in human words and works. It is that for which we are culpable and for which we must shoulder responsibility. - "In the light of Jesus Christ it is impossible to escape the truth that we ourselves as sinners have become the victims and servants of das Nichtige, sharing its nature and producing and extending it." Once again this is not a knowledge which derives from any human experience of guilt in the light of some abstract law. Only here at this point is human sin and guilt properly disclosed. True consciousness of guilt and sin does not derive from any self-awareness even of the most serious and self-contradicting kind. A real conviction of our sin before God occurs only when God Himself tells us of it.

The procedure by which we turn "to the heart of the gospel" in order to truly see human sin is vindicated, Barth argues, in two further ways. First, in that it is only when sin is seen as resistance to God's grace in Jesus Christ that the truly damnable dimensions of sin are uncovered. It is only when man sees himself as the one who refuses God's gracious provision for him in the infinite depth of it which the cross uncovers that a true verdict of guilt can be brought against him. No abstract law of God can ever bring this charge so fully since man can always plead in the face of it his being as a fallible creature. Second, seeing sin at this point means seeing it as in its proper context, that is within a whole nexus of cosmic contradiction i.e. within the whole dimension of das Nichtige.

It is now time to review the argument to see how far we have come. We have indicated that within the terms of Barth's essential approach the primary question for him was as to the actuality of the theological object and that his thought always moves from the particularity and concreteness of the object to the more general epistemological and other questions which arise. We have sought to show that his treatment of sin is no exception and that the primary question here also is the question as to the actuality of his "order of antithesis". We observed that the procedure here is not quite so straightforward as in other areas of Christian knowledge but that his conviction that sin is known truly only at the point of God's dealing with it means that he is able to preserve his normal order of questioning and direct attention to the actuality of sin as it emerges in conflict with God's gracious offensive against it. We are now in a position to explore more fully Barth's answer to the fundamental ontological issue - what is sin? Thus far we have uncovered the following -

1. Sin is a particular manifestation of the order of das Nichtige.
2. The essential nature of this order, and hence of sin within it, is an opposition to God's grace.
3. As such it is to be distinguished from God's good creation.
4. As such it is reckoned with and overcome by God's dealing with it in Jesus Christ.

A fuller account of the being of das Nichtige and sin emerges as Barth turns to expound the "reality" of das Nichtige -

"The ontic context in which das Nichtige is real is that of God's activity grounded in His election ... (which activity is) invariably one of jealousy, wrath and judgement. God is also holy and this means that His being and activity take place in a definite opposition, in a real negation both defensive and aggressive. Das Nichtige is that from which God separates Himself and in face of which He asserts Himself and His positive will ... Das Nichtige has no existence and cannot be known except as the object of God's activity as always a holy activity. The biblical conception as we recall it is as follows, God elects and therefore rejects what He does not elect; God wills and therefore opposes what He does not will; He says Yes and therefore says No to that to which He has not said Yes; He works according to His purpose and in so doing rejects and dismisses all that gainsays it. Both of these activities grounded in His election and decision are necessary elements in His sovereign action. He is Lord both on the right hand and the left. It is only on this basis that
**das Nichtige 'is'. As God is Lord on the left hand, as well, He is the basis and Lord of das Nichtige too .... It 'is' not as God and His creatures are but only in its own improper way, as inherent contradiction, as impossible possibility ... Even on His left hand the activity of God is not in vain. He does not act for nothing. His rejection, opposition, negation and dismissal are powerful and effective like all His works because they too are grounded in Himself, in the freedom and wisdom of His election. That which God renounces and abandons in virtue of His decision is not merely nothing (Nichts). It is das Nichtige and has its own being, albeit malignant and perverse ...**

We have taken the trouble to quote this section in extenso because of its great importance in laying bare Barth's view of the "being" of sin. What are we to make of all this?

**iii. The Leontic Tradition**

Both the concept das Nichtige and the account of its origin and being which Barth gives in this passage imply that we require to relate Barth to a certain tradition in the history of thought regarding the question of evil and sin. It can be loosely termed the "leontic" tradition. In its philosophical expression this tradition has its roots back in pre-Socratic Greek thought in the Pythagoreans, Heraclitus, Parmenides and others. 41

Following Paul Tillich's account of the tradition we can begin by recalling that the literal meaning of "to exist" is "to stand out" (ex-sistere). When we enquire as to what existence "stands out" of we can reply on two levels. On the one hand existence can be thought of as standing out of non-existence in the sense of standing out of sheer non-existence, absolute non-being. To exist at this level simply means not to non-exist, which we can express in the symbols of formal logic as follows —

\[ \neg \alpha \sim \neg \neg \alpha \].

Non-existence in this sense was indicated by the Greeks as absolute non-being. (\(\tau\eta \: \omicron \omicron \kappa \: \omicron \: \omicron \)) The Greeks however also spoke of non-existence as \(\tau\eta \: \mu\upsilon \: \omicron \: \omicron \) . Here actual being is thought of as related to potential being. There is in all being, by this view, the yet-to-be-realised, the latent. All being is potential before it is actual and as

42. Tillich, op. cit., p. 22ff.
actual is set in relation to some further potential. In this sense we can again speak of existence as a "standing out" - this time from relative non-being. The Greeks signified this category of non-being as ὁ ἄ γ ϊ ς ὄ ν and thought of it as in some sense actually resisting the actualisation of being so that actualisation could only be attained by an effort which overcame the resistance of ἄ γ ϊ ς ὄ ν. This whole way of thinking implies a basic ontological dichotomy between potentiality and actuality. We can term it the distinction between the existential - i.e. that which actually exists, and the essential - i.e. that which is ultimately real, the full potentiality of being. This classical notion and distinction laid the basis for a particular approach to evil which sees it as inhering in some dimension of non-being. (méon) μιζ ὄ ν

In Platonian thought this dualism attained classical expression in his theory of ideas. For this view actual existence was unreal and evil. True reality and goodness lay beyond in the world of the eternal forms or ideas. There is a concern to oppose the notion that evil as well as good can be ascribed to God, and some other realm of being is therefore posited to account for evil. In the Timaeus Plato gives some hint of this dimension in a discussion of the creation of the world. In mythical terms he speaks of Reason (Vο较少us) overcoming Necessity (ανεγρυς). Necessity here is not so much a principle of determinism as an "errant cause".

43. A.E. Taylor also has an account of this classical notion, Plato, the Man and His Work, (London, 1926), pp.85-86. He points out, as Tillich does not, that to some extent the whole distinction between being and non-being was related to the semantic problem which the Greeks encountered of distinguishing between true and false statements. Eἰκὼν in Ionic Greek carried the notions of to be, to exist, and also to be true. By this what was false (not in fact the case) could not be properly distinguished from blank nothing.


45. Plato, Timaeus, 47e-48a, cf. too 68e-69a.
Grote defines it as "a coeternal, chaotic matter, an indeterminate something, the inconsistent, the autonomous, that which can neither be understood nor predicted". Reference too must be made to Plotinus who reflects this increasingly objective understanding of evil. He speaks of an evil world-soul, a demonic dimension which he thinks he finds in Plato's Timaeus.

In the thought of Plotinus this Platonic notion is given a more explicit expression. Concerning the place of evil he writes -

"Evil cannot have any place among Beings or in the Beyond-Being; these are good. There remains only, if evil exists at all, that it be situated in the realm of Non-Being ... By this non-Being of course, we are not to understand something which simply does not exist, but something on an utterly different order from Authentic-Being ..."

The importance of Plotinus' thought for the Christian tradition lies in his influence on Augustine during his neo-Platonic, dualistic period. This can be overstressed. Plotinus' thought receives radical modification at the hands of Augustine. For example as against the whole Platonic tradition he argues for the essential goodness of the created order and hence of matter. Augustine's use of the meonic motif is in a modified form. It appears in his view of evil as prativio boni - that is, as the absence of goodness which prevails when anything has defected from the

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46. Grote, Plato (London, 1865) Vol 3; though cf. A.E. Taylor, Plato, the man and his Work (London, 1926), pp. 443 and 455; also Commentary on Timaeus (Oxford, 1928) p. 300. He argues that we must not take πλατωμεστή κατά to represent anything inherently lawless and irrational - it is rather "brute fact" or "given fact" which has no apparent justification. This whole area in its relation to the idea of creation has been thoroughly investigated by Arnold Ehrhardt (The Beginning, Manchester, 1968). He notes Plato's problem of how to make some ontological predication from the empirical world while it was involved in continual motion and change, and hence seemingly offering no basis for notions of existence which require of necessity some element of immutability. In Timaeus he strives for a static element under the concept of τύχε (order). However this is threatened by his ethical dualism. He also has here the hint, as we have noted above, of a connexion between a chaos in the supernatural world and the random, errant motion in the empirical world which is the source of evil. (Ehrhardt, op. cit., pp. 147-8; cf. also p. 103ff.)


49. Augustine, On Free Will, 3, IX, 24 (tr. Burleigh) and Enchiridion, IV, 13-14, "omnia natura bonum est".

50. The Nature of the Good, XXV commenting on John 1, 3, "nihil" - "not anything".
mode of being which is proper to it in God's creative intention. That is, evil is inherently negative in character tending towards nullity and non-existence. Human life being evil is fallen away from its destiny in the intention of God.

This whole view of reality as essentially cleft between existence and essence was all but lost in the ascendency of the Hegelian system whereby even non-being was gathered up into the final synthesis. Existence by this became simply the actualisation of essence and the gap was overcome. In their very differing ways nineteenth century thinkers like Kierkegaard, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Marx reacted against 'the System' and advocated a view of man in which the estrangement of his present existence from his essential nature is taken with a greater seriousness. Thus a view emerges of man's life as characterised by anxiety and threatened by meaninglessness. He is oppressed by meonic non-being which is variously termed by its advocates das Nichts (Heidegger), le Néant (Satre), Non-Being (Millich).

By his notion of das Nichtige Barth would appear to stand within this whole meonic tradition. As we shall see in important respects he is distinct from this tradition but certain elements of affinity are unquestionable -

1. In his view of evil, sin etc. as essentially negative; i.e. it is on a secondary level of being such that it can only be properly indicated by a denial of the affirmation which we make to indicate true being.

2. In his close binding up of evil with the good. It is never autonomous and independent but in some sense parasitic upon the actuality of the good.

3. In his tendency to see sin as lacking in any proper basis for its "being" and therefore arbitrary, and, in this sense, absurd.

52. Cf. too Bultmann's notion of man as subject to the sense that life is "all slipping away from him" Kerygma & Myth, tr. Fuller, 2 vols. (London, 1953), Vol I, p. 19.
53. Barth here has undoubtedly been influenced by the view of J. Müller, The Christian Doctrine of Sin, NT. (Edinburgh, 1885) Vol 2, p. 173.

"We must acknowledge that evil is in its nature inconceivable, i.e. incomprehensible, seeing that it is realised by arbitrariness and arbitrariness is a violation of rational reason and true sequence." cf. too Barth's acknowledgement of Müller in III/3, p. 312ff.
54. Kahler was probably also an influence. cf. von C. Seiler, Die Theologische Entwicklung Martin Kählers bis 1869 (Gütersloher, 1966), pp. 28-36.
Barth diverges from this tradition at one obvious point. He is against any notion of a potentiality in human being and existence. This is the issue which led him to break with Schleiermacher and the nineteenth century tradition as we have already seen. Further distinctions will become apparent as we go on to relate Barth to current discussion of the problem of evil.

iv. Criticism of Barth

Barth's account of evil has recently come under heavy criticism from J. Hick in his work *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966) and his critique will serve as a useful basis for a fuller discussion of Barth's view and our arriving at some assessment as to the extent to which he properly belongs within the meontic tradition. Hick has three lines of criticism though in essence as we shall see they really reduce to one broad one. Firstly, he finds Barth and the meontic tradition as a whole guilty of combining a valid theological insight with an unwarranted philosophical theory. The valid theological insight is in the understanding of evil as 'the going wrong of something good'. Hick thinks this to be the proper view in the light of the Christian understanding of God and creation. It is in fact he thinks - "the only possible account of the ontological status of evil in a universe that is the creation of an omnipotent and good God." It does not imply the unreality of evil but it does rule out an untenable dualist solution to the problem of the existence of evil. An invalid philosophical extension of this view occurs however when it is combined with a notion of non-being whereby, granted the reality of existence, non-being (meon) is regarded as having a rationally necessary reality. This Hick finds quite unjustifiable. Non-being is real enough as an existential experience but it cannot be defended philosophically as existing by an inherent necessity. Barth is accused by Hick of this very error in his account of das Nichtige which we quoted earlier where Barth appears to argue that the notion of the divine choosing in election requires some corresponding notion of refusal and

rejection,\textsuperscript{55} and on this basis, the reality of \textit{das Nichtig}.

"Barth's argument - that in creating God chooses good and rejects evil, which henceforth has the character of being denied and opposed by God - would be in order if this were a human choice. But when applied to the Godhead the argument becomes highly questionable. It requires the premise that in creating God must choose between realities which already stand in some way before Him (or within Him) seeking His election. But such a premise ignores, and by implication denies, the distinctively Christian doctrine of the creation \textit{ex nihilo}. By postulating a previously existing situation within which God acts, and of whose character He must in acting take account, Barth is halfway towards a Manichaean dualism."\textsuperscript{56}

It would appear however in this criticism that Hick has failed to grasp the basic terms of Barth's approach to the problem of evil. His criticism might have validity if addressed to some of the other writers within the meiotic tradition. It is open to question however whether Barth can be classed with them as far as his essential method is concerned. He explicitly repudiates any attempt to move from a general notion of necessity, such as implied in human acts of choice, to the understanding of what is involved in the Divine choosing. Rather he wishes quite deliberately to move in the other direction, from the particular fact of the Divine election in Jesus Christ. That is, he wishes to speak of the Divine election in this dialectical manner ("election therefore rejection," etc ...) because he thinks this is required by the particular event of God's election as it is witnessed to in the Scripture. Hence for criticism to register properly it requires to ask - does the notion of \textit{das Nichtig}, and Barth's account of its basis in the Divine non-willing, accord with the Word of God? That is, if we restrict ourselves in our account of evil to what is disclosed in God's dealing with it - is the account which we are required to give in that situation, in accordance with Barth? Certainly if we take seriously the Biblical view of the Sovereign freedom of God we cannot think of evil as having an autonomous centre over against the will of God; that is, evil must \textit{in some sense} be related to the willing of God. Further, God's action against it in Christ makes it clear that it is wholly inimicable to Him and hence not attributable

\textsuperscript{55} III/3, p. 351; also III/3, p. 96 etc.

\textsuperscript{56} Hick op. cit. p. 193
to His direct willing in the sense that the creation and being of the creature is attributable to Him. Thus if we keep within the limits of revelation we are required to posit a relation of evil to the will of God in a unique and special sense. If we add to this the Augustinian notion of evil as the degeneration of the good and as always parasitic upon it, which Hick allows, it would seem that Barth's account becomes more credible. It certainly cannot be lightly dismissed as deriving from either a questionable philosophical concept of non-being or a blatant piece of anthropomorphism as Hick suggests. All this being said in Barth's defence we nonetheless are bound to affirm that Hick is on to something here. He has failed to see Barth's concern in his doctrine of das Nichtig simply to reflect the witness of revelation. Barth's account being "more credible" when seen as the attempt to reflect the witness of revelation however does not mean that it is wholly so. Though Hick's main thrust would appear misdirected he has not missed his target altogether. When we examine the Biblical witness we cannot but wonder if Barth's account of the origin of evil does not go further, and say more, than the Scriptural witness allows. In particular the analogy of a human builder electing and therefore rejecting from among possible pieces of work which is implicit in Barth's account is unfortunate. 57 Thus our question here leads us on to Hick's second criticism of Barth.

This second criticism is that Barth in his notion of das Nichtig is infringing his own principle that there is no place in theology for speculative theorising. This very criticism is more fully and more adequately levelled by G.C. Berkouwer in his book The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth 58 and we will follow Berkouwer on that account. He finds the root of Barth's distinction between God's willing and His non-willing,

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57. It is explicit in III/1, p. 108. In addition to this 'going beyond' the Biblical material Barth also appears open to the charge that he leaves certain elements of the Biblical material out of account. cf. Lühi, Gott und das Böse, (Zurich, 1961), p. 261.

which is the basis of sin and evil, in Barth's earlier discussion of election where he speaks of an eternal self-distinction in God whereby He separates Himself from that which is not God, and hence Berkouwer argues: "In the thinking which draws a line from a self-distinction in God to man's confrontation with evil, the problem of the origin of sin soon finds itself coming under the control of speculative ideas." The mistake Barth makes here according to Berkouwer is not that he does not say enough about the being and status of evil but that he says too much. He goes beyond the limits indicated by revelation and attempts to move from these limits to an account in which evil is given some kind of "explanation". Certainly Berkouwer has raised an important question here. There appears little trace in Holy Scripture of material which would afford an unequivocal basis for some of Barth's formulae. In his reply to Berkouwer however Barth admits this. "Nowhere does Scripture itself speak of das Nichtige or 'impossible possibility' or especially of 'ontological impossibility'". Barth defends the notion of das Nichtige however as belonging to the same class of concept as Athanasius' homoousios, viz. as required to express certain Biblical insights even if not directly cited in any one Biblical passage. In principle such a category of concept is admissible enough, - the criterion in each case being the extent to which they are justified by the explicit Biblical materials as they stand. It is here however that Berkouwer's question becomes insistent for it must certainly be asked how valid a parallel with Athanasius Barth's case is at this point. Athanasius was able to cite very fully from Scripture to sustain his notion. Barth's Biblical references are both fewer and less obvious. Athanasius' formula has stood the test of time in that the church through its history has accepted it as the most valid one in the conceptual circumstances. Barth's notion has not met with a similar universal acceptance; though of course

59. II/2, p. 141. "... so assuredly as God is God and not not God; so assuredly does He live in eternal self-differentiation from all that is not God and is not willed by God."

60. op. cit. p. 222.

61. e.g. "impossible possibility", "ontological impossibility".

62. IV/3, p. 178.
one cannot prejudge future developments. Berkouwer finds the heart of the issue to lie in the question of the nature of the "Mystery of Iniquity". For earlier writers reference to the mystery of evil and sin implied reference to the imponderable question as to why it made its appearance, and continues to exist in a world created and ruled by a sovereign, loving God. Bavinck speaks of the origin of evil as "the greatest riddle of life and the heaviest cross that the understanding of man must bear." For Barth however the mystery in its essence lies in the sphere of the "being" of sin — i.e. the mystery of its "existence" in a world created and redeemed by God, especially redeemed. Berkouwer writes of Barth's view — "This mystery, this enigma, has nothing to do with the limits of our understanding in the sense of the noetic incomprehensibility of sin. The mystery consists in the fact that sin is something which in the nature of the case cannot be." Berkouwer refers us to III/2, p. 146 where this incomprehensibility is Christologically grounded in the doctrine of election in Jesus Christ — "Here in this understanding of man's being as resting in God's election lies the basis and sense of our thesis of the ontological impossibility of sin as descriptive of man." The mystery of iniquity then is the mystery of its continuance post-Christum, in face of God's all-conquering grace. This shift of meaning regarding the mystery of evil from regarding it in terms of the inadequacy of our cognitive grasp of its origin and existence to the utter impossibility of its "existence" Berkouwer regards as belonging "to the most decisive and determinative aspects of Barth's theology." The Bible and the reformers speak otherwise he alleges. In replying to Berkouwer however Barth makes it clear that this tidy distinction between these two meanings of the mystery of sin and evil does not correctly represent his position, in intention at any rate. It becomes apparent here that Barth certainly would wish to speak of a mystery for the understanding —

64. Berkouwer, op. cit. p. 225.
65. Translation as in ET of Berkouwer, p. 226 footnote.
66. Ibid., p. 231.
67. Ibid., p. 232.
68. IV/3, p. 178. cf. here the quotation from Müller in footnote supra.
"Evil exists only per nefas, in the fact of a revolt which has
no positive basis which can't its ratio only in the abyss, which as
such can be the product only of unreason. It lacks any justifying
raison d'être. This is why we cannot explain either the fact that
it exists or the way that it does so. That is why it is so
baffling to our understanding."69

It would be truer to Barth to say that the heart of the mystery lies
on the ontological level. Evil has been deprived of any basis for its
existence by God's good will in creation and redemption. But this
carries with it implications for our understanding. How can we think of
this order of being? - i.e. we are involved also in a mystery for our
understanding. Barth's order in the raising of these questions is in
keeping with the movement of thought which we uncovered earlier. The true
thrust of Berkouwer's critique then comes to lie in his raising the question
as to whether Barth's emphasis on the ontological level of the mystery is
in keeping with the Biblical witness. When we pose this question it
appears that Barth is not so open to criticism - and indeed that he is not
in the end so far from Berkouwer's own position. Barth as we saw is con¬
cerned to refer the "mystery of iniquity" in the first instance to the
ontological sphere, the mystery is that of its "being" at all in face of
the cross and resurrection. Barth is not denying that sin and evil are real,
that they "are" factors, terrible factors, in human existence. What he is
concerned to point out is that they have no right to "be". Berkouwer
at first sight would appear to have failed to see that this is all that
Barth is saying here. In fact this is not so far from Bavinck and
Berkouwer's own position. Whereas they were content to view the mystery
of evil in relation to the facts of God's sovereignty and love Barth is
concerned to think of this sovereignty and love of God concretely in terms
of Jesus Christ. Accordingly he then draws ontological implications - how
can sin "be" since Christ is Risen? etc. Berkouwer himself might say, how
can sin "be" since God is sovereign love? The fundamental criticism of
Barth which we are examining here however is whether he is guilty of

69. Ibid.
speculation. We have seen that what he is attempting to indicate in terms of the mystery of iniquity is not so far as at first sight might appear from more traditional approaches. At one or two points however he does appear to be more open to the charge. We have referred to his use of an unfortunate metaphor, that of a human builder, in relating das Nichtige to the will of God. The terms he employs, "impossible possibility" and "ontological impossibility" are also misleading. He admits their limitations himself. One wonders if he might not have been better to give fuller, more extended accounts of the "being" of sin and evil and thus avoid the speculative overtones which these terms carry. Berkouwer has a further fear in this respect, viz. that Barth's references to election and the primal decision of God, His negation of the negation, take God's real encounter with sin out of the historical dimension. This is a serious charge. Barth attempts to counter it. Election and the decision of God are always, he claims, to be linked to the name of Jesus Christ, and "to say 'Jesus' is to say 'history'". This is a very large issue which we will examine more extensively in a later chapter. We can foreshadow our subsequent discussion by stating that in our view Berkouwer, within certain limits is making a valid point here, i.e. that we recognise in this sense a certain speculative tendency in Barth's thinking. However this criticism is not to be couched in the bald form in which Hick presents it.

Hick's third and final criticism is within the framework of the theodicy problem. He finds Barth quite unacceptable here. Faced with the alternatives as the problem traditionally puts them, - of evil as existing on the one hand by necessity or on the other by divine decree Barth opts for neither; in fact - "... he positively rules out each of these two possible ways of relating his account of evil to the doctrine of God." Here in effect the whole of Hick's critique reduces to one point - viz. that Barth does not

70. III/1, p. 108.
71. IV/3, p. 178f.
73. IV/3, p. 179.
74. Hick op. cit., p. 147; cf. III/3, p. 351 which rules out the first "way out"; and III/3, pp. 304-5 which rules out the second. Barth attempts to reflect the Biblical approach which is neither straightforwardly monistic nor straightforwardly dulaistic. Its position might contd./
give a rationally defensible account of evil. It is difficult however to see how Barth is to be criticised at this level in the fashion Hick wishes him to be. Barth's whole approach to theology is determined by a refusal to submit theological investigation to any general notion of rationality. He is concerned to think out his view only in accordance with the rationality which is required by reason of the nature of the object which he is investigating, the Truth in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Barth's thought of necessity is irrational, i.e. that he pays no attention to fundamental principles of logical consistency or to the inner relationships of the ideas with which he operates. Barth wishes to operate rather with what one might define as the trans-rational - where even the criteria of rationality are required to submit to cleansing and re-alignment in accordance with the Reality disclosed to the theologian's questioning. As far as the being and nature of evil is concerned we need to query whether Hick has grasped the full implication of the mystery of evil; i.e. of its absurdity and irrationality. If it "is" only in its own absurd way - i.e. as having no basis for its existence in the will of God, and as overcome in His action against it, then it can never be slotted into any finally satisfactory theodicy. For it to be amenable to this approach would mean its domestication and the abdication of its proper reality.

b. Epistemological questions

1. What it means to "know" sin

If however we do follow Barth in his account of sin and evil this now raises for us acutely the deep epistemological problem which we have already touched upon at points in our argument thus far, viz. if sin and evil are of this essentially irrational and absurd character how can we speak of knowing them at all? In what sense, if any, are they capable of cognitive apprehension?

74. contd. be usefully termed interactionist. God's sovereignty and love are both asserted and evil is a very definite factor to be reckoned with. God and evil appear in a certain inter-actionary relationship in terms of a history of salvation. The real question to Barth, and to Niebuhr also for that matter, is whether they reflect this approach.

75. II/1, pp. 63-128.
Are we not here faced with an insuperable difficulty, with an "ugly ditch" of unbridgeable proportions? This problem requires to be carefully distinguished from the one we discussed above as to the locus of sin, though obviously our answer here will be closely related to that discussion.

In turning to this problem we begin best by reminding ourselves as to what precisely Barth means by the "irrationality" and "absurdity" of evil. The real heart of it is uncovered during his discussion of man (III/2). He acknowledges the reality of the Biblical testimony to the sinfulness of man, but argues that this cannot finally alter the essential being of man. Real man is man as the covenant partner of God and hence the object of the eternal grace of His creator and Lord. This, not his sin, is the primary truth about man. "The grace of God, the covenant with man is primary. The sin of man is secondary." It is in this light that Barth goes on to speak of sin as "meaninglessness", and as an "inconceivable reality". Barth's argument here is given a Christological basis as it unfolds. Man is man with Jesus Christ. He, Jesus Christ, is man's "ontological determination". Sin in this light can only be something which a priori is excluded. It is hence seen to be an "ontological impossibility". Noetically sin can be described from this standpoint as - "only man's irrational and inexplicable affirmation of the Nichtige (des Nichtigen) which God as creator has negated, and as a "mad and incomprehensible possibility." The "irrationality" of sin then for Barth derives from its ontological impossibility. Sin, by the nature of the case (God as the gracious God) is that which cannot be. It has been deprived of any proper ground for its existence. Rationality requires that the object which is to be apprehended stand in some kind of ontic relationship to the realities indicated in the familiar world of ideas and concepts. But sin, as a form of das Nichtige does not possess this relatedness. It hence has to be thought of as lying beyond the world of the rationally apprehensible. It is rationally absurd in the

76. III/2, p. 27. 79. III/2, p. 35. 80. III/2, p. 136. 81. III/2, pp. 136, 141, 146, etc. 82. III/2, p. 143. 83. III/2, p. 205.
light of God and His grace. Since sin "is" thus, by the nature of the case we are required to say that it can never become "rational". There is no possibility of rationally apprehending it since to do so would imply that sin had ceased to be sin within the dimension of das Nichtige. On Barth's terms this impossibility would apply equally to God. Sin can never by his terms be brought within the world of the rational since it can never become ontologically possible. We have therefore to conclude that in this primary sense of 'knowing' sin must remain forever the unknown; and no form of epistemology is capable of crossing this gulf. Even when we try to indicate it in terms of falsehood, lie, etc., we do not evade this.

However this does not mean that we are reduced to speechlessness before it. There is another sense in which it is possible to speak of 'knowing' sin. For this we require to recall Barth's definition of sin as the denial of grace —

"Sin is man's self-alienation from the grace of God for which and in which he has his being. Sin consists in the fact that he negates the grace of God and therefore his own true interests... Thus the grace of God is the presupposition of man's sin, not that it is grace which leads or compels him to sin. Sin resists grace, it affronts it and betrays it. It has no basis in grace. It is in fact so terrible and infamous because it can have no basis in the grace in which God acts as Creator and in which man has his being as His creature. But its inconceivable reality can be grasped only when it is seen as rebellion against grace."84

In terms of Barth's discussion of Nichtige — "Das Nichtige is that which God does not will. It lives only by this fact that it is that which God does not will. But it does live by this fact."85 Because this is so, sin and evil are disclosed in opposition to the grace of God. In Jesus Christ there takes place the drawing into the open of sin and evil as a movement of contradiction in antithesis to the grace of God. It is possible hence at this point and in this manner to speak of a "knowledge" of sin, i.e. it is that which is disclosed in the movement of God against it.

84. III/2, p. 35.
85. III/3, p. 352. Cf. Ibid p. 351 where God is described as the "basis" (Grund) and "Lord" (Herr) of das Nichtige.
This "knowledge" of it is not of a general nature. We cannot derive it from any universal ethical principle or personal inner experience. It is a knowledge which derives from this concrete point alone, and which ultimately is disclosed there because of the nature of sin - viz. as the antithesis of grace.

Hence Barth is able to grapple at this level/the epistemological problem. We can know sin, not as it is in itself, but as it is in its effects - as an antithetical and reactionary dynamic in face of the will and action of God. We can, that is in this sense, know that which is essentially 'lie' and 'falsehood', 'absurdity' and 'irrationality'.

Having thus given some account of Barth's approach to the fundamental ontological and epistemological problems of the doctrine of sin and indicated some of the questions which his account raises we turn now to examine Niebuhr's approach.

B NIEBUHR
a. Ontological questions
i. General approach to sin

In our general account of Niebuhr's view of sin we began by attempting to characterise his general theological viewpoint which we finally defined as "between gospel and world". As we seek now to probe more deeply into his thought we are made the more aware of how profound an influence that basic stance exercises upon his whole theology. Niebuhr has an unflagging concern for "realism", that is, he deliberately refuses to think out any theological problem in isolation from the immediate political, social, material and economic realities of his own and his neighbour's situation. Hence when we wish to uncover his approach to the fundamental ontological and epistemological questions which any view of sin must confront we find very little explicit discussion of them. Niebuhr's anti-metaphysical bias prevents him from giving these issues the depth of treatment which other writers, Barth for example, have deemed essential. Whereas, as we saw above Barth is not only concerned to expose himself to these problems but is also deeply concerned as to the methodological question - i.e. the order in which
the problems require to be examined, Niebuhr moves almost immediately into his exposition of the doctrine of sin and its expression in the contemporary setting, leaving us only the scantiest of prolegomena as to the method of approach to be adopted, and comparatively slender discussions of the "theoretical" issues involved here.

As far as Niebuhr's theory of knowledge is concerned his comment at Yale - "Epistemology bored me ... and frankly the other side of me came out. I desired relevance rather than scholarship."86 sets the scene for his later development. Paul Tillich in an essay on "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge" begins it with the startling complaint - "The difficulty of writing about Niebuhr's epistemology lies in the fact that there is no such epistemology."87 He amplifies this by saying - "Niebuhr does not ask 'How can I know?' He starts knowing. And he does not ask afterwards, 'How could I know?' but leaves the convincing power of his thought without epistemological support."88

This 'starting knowing' is well illustrated in his two major statements of the doctrine of sin. In his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, Niebuhr begins with a summary and discussion of American Protestantism and its reaction to cultural developments. Within this chapter Niebuhr moves from the statement "The distinctive contribution of religion to morality lies in its comprehension of the dimension of depth in life,"89 to the statement that "the dimension of depth in the consciousness of religion creates the tension between what is and what ought to be",90 and thus to reference to "the demonic force in human life ...",91 and discussion of the Biblical ("mythical") view of man. There follows a chapter on the ethics of Jesus as in essence the ethic of "love absolutism"92 and then without

86. Bingham Courage to change, p. 83.
88. KB, op. cit. p. 36.
89. ICE, p. 15.
90. Ibid, p. 18.
more ado we are involved in the "Christian Concept of Sin". 93 The same immediacy is illustrated in the Gifford lectures. 94 We begin with the fact of the contradictions which all accounts of man are inevitably involved in, pointing to the fact that - "man is a spirit who stands outside of himself, life, his reason, and the world." 95 Then follows an illuminating historical survey of man's attempts at self-understanding, 96 an analysis of contemporary anthropological problems - and we are once again face to face with "man the sinner". Admittedly in this second case there is some attention given to the basis of the doctrines in Niebuhr's discussion of revelation, 97 and we will highlight the significance of this shortly, but this does not confute the general point we are making here that Niebuhr apparently regards the 'theoretical problems' as of distinctly secondary importance.

Niebuhr's deliberate refusal to discuss these issues at length has another spring besides his concern for "realism". It lies in his deep-seated suspicion of all high-blown theological constructions. In his exposition of the sin of pride he gives considerable attention to the "pride of intellect". He argues that - "all human knowledge is tainted with an ideological taint. It pretends to be more than it is." 98 His sharp realism and his wide acquaintance with the history of thought will not allow him to absolve theology from this charge. 99 The truth of the matter is - "that it is neither possible for man to know the truth fully nor to avoid the error of pretending that he does." 100 All theology, like all thought is tainted by, and continually threatened by, the ideological pretensions of the theologian. Niebuhr however, on this account, does not withdraw from the theological task in despair of ever arriving at any significant conclusions; he has his own antidote to ideology in his robust

94. The Nature and Destiny of Man
95. Ibid, pp. 3-4, Vol I.
96. Ibid, pp. 4-26.
100. HD, p. 225.
faith in human reason in its encounter with the realities of human experience and illuminated by revelation. West defines his method as "... empirical reason encountering revelation, both deepened by dialectical tension, to express the truth which is beyond ideology." Whenever theology neglects this empirical reference point however the dangers of ideology and the sinful pretensions of intellect will protrude. The effect of this conviction in circumscribing Niebuhr's interest in "theoretical" theological questions is clear enough.

All this does not mean however that Niebuhr has no answer to give to these questions. As Tillich argues in the essay already cited - "the omitted element reappears under a disguise in another place". Hence we can put the fundamental questions to Niebuhr as we did to Barth though we will require to draw the material for his answers from explicit comments in various corners of his writings and from implicit ideas in his thought as a whole.

ii. Relation of this approach to the "being" of sin

There is one passage in his Interpretation of Christian Ethics, where he indicates a stance within the privatio boni tradition. -

"The idea in Hebrew mythology that Satan is both a rebel against God and yet ultimately under His dominion, expresses the paradoxical fact that on the one hand evil is something more than the absence of order, and on the other that it depends on order. There can be disorder only in an integrated world... Thus the devil is possible only in a world controlled by God and can be effective only if some of the potentialities of the divine are present in him. Evil in other words is not the absence but the corruption of the good; yet it is parasitic on the good." He does not however develop this truth or let it lead him to deeper questions as to the status and origin of this parasitic dimension, and as to what its relationship is to "the good" when the good is viewed concretely as the good will of God in creation and redemption.

101. West, op. cit. p. 143; (Communism and the Theologians).
102. K & B, p. 36.
103. ICE, pp. 83-84. Also Europe's Catastrophe and the Christian Faith, (London, 1940), p. 17. "Man cannot be totally depraved for the simple reason that even the most terrible evil in human life and history cannot enter the world without riding on the back of something virtuous and good."
Again there is the suggestion of a more radical understanding in Niebuhr's references to the demonic.¹⁰⁴ There may be something approaching this same 'objectivity' of evil in his stress on sin as pride, man's folly in centring existence upon himself.¹⁰⁵ This sense of the sheer stupidity of sin points in the direction of man's having been beguiled by some power outside of himself. Niebuhr hints at this thing in his discussion of the devil.¹⁰⁶ In this tendency towards a certain degree of objectivity in his view of sin Niebuhr can be contrasted with Paul Tillich who in some respects echoes many of Niebuhr's own views. In Tillich however sin is always related to finitude, to man's predicament.¹⁰⁷ In his discussion of the fall Niebuhr can speak of a - "force of evil antecedent to any evil human action".¹⁰⁸ But the impact of this is lessened in that it is difficult to see what kind of historical reality the fall story has for him¹⁰⁹ and he does not carry his analysis any further.

Another pointer is found in a passage in Beyond Tragedy. In a discussion of the "falsehood of moralism" he points to its failure - "to understand what Christian theology has meant by original sin. It does not see that man is not free to extricate himself from the vicious circle. This is true if for no other reason than that because even though he can see others are involved in it, he never believes himself to be involved. In himself the will-to-power always seems to be perfectly justified by impulses of survival and self-defence. It is this very blindness and self-deception which constitutes the mystery of sin. For it really is a mystery."¹¹⁰

Again however, having opened the door to a deeper confrontation with the "mystery of iniquity", Niebuhr refrains from stepping through it. And so he goes on to speak of the mystery in terms of its elements - "No one, even the most astute psychologist, has ever made a perfectly convincing analysis of the comparative degrees of ignorance and dishonesty which enter into it."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ ICE, p. 97.
¹⁰⁵ ICE, pp. 95, 97.
¹⁰⁶ Cf. ref. to Isaiah 14, 12f, the fall of Lucifer, HN 192.
¹⁰⁸ HN, p. 192.
¹⁰⁹ HN, pp. 191, 276: also BT, p. 10, 11, 12 and MNHC, pp. 15-16.
¹¹⁰ BT, p. 105.
¹¹¹ Ibid.
We have further to note that Niebuhr does not discuss in extenso the profound metaphysical problem posed by the fact of sin in a universe created and upheld by a Sovereign, Loving Deity. Such an omission is to a great extent surprising in a man who is as concerned as Niebuhr unquestionably is for an apologetic for the Christian faith which is adequate and relevant. He is roundly critical of Barth and others for their failure to provide such. Such being the case one would have anticipated from him a considerable discussion of the problem. It is unthinkable that in his contacts with secular man Niebuhr should not have been forced again and again to face what Hick describes as - "the most serious objection that there is to the Christian belief in a God of Love", and another has described as "the great practical argument for atheism". However, whatever conclusions his own thought has brought him to he does not share these at length in any of his major works.

One of the results of Niebuhr's failure to pursue these issues or to allow his thought to be influenced by their implications is that one misses in his account a sense of the sheer evil of this whole dimension - the dark, demonic, foulness and horror of the thing; nor is there a sense of its sheer irrationality and absurdity. There is of course much stress upon sin but it appears in apparently more domestic guise in terms of its expression within individual and social actions, and structures. We suggest hence that there is lacking that radical inimicality in his view of sin and evil which makes itself felt in Barth's account of das Nichtige. West puts his finger on at least one of the reasons for this - "Niebuhr has never been placed in the position where the whole meaning and direction of his life and society were called in question by a great new ideological power because of their lack of inner coherence and outer order. Shrewdly pessimistic about human nature as Niebuhr is one looks in vain through his writings for that understanding of existential despair which is the logical consequence of much of his analysis."

\begin{itemize}
  \item [111a] CRPF, p.182 - "(Barth) will explore neither the inner contradictions of life nor the coherences and congruities of which philosophy speaks for apologetic purposes. Ethically Barth is as relativist as Westermark and epistemologically as much a positivist as Carnap."
  \item [112] Hick, op.cit., p.XI.
\end{itemize}
When Niebuhr does address himself to the question of the nature of sin he frames his answer as we have seen in terms of what sin means for human behaviour rather than attempts a radical exploration of the "being" of sin as such. Thus one encounters definitions of sin in terms of the will, of rebellion against God, of pride, man's refusal to acknowledge his creatureliness and finitude, his attempt to secure his existence, as self-contradiction, as injustice, as sensuality, as man's pretension to be God. Niebuhr's interest in sin is always as interest in man the sinner; his investigation of sin is never allowed to escape from its position as a sub-section of his investigation of man - sin is for Niebuhr always an aspect of anthropology. It has a relatedness to man (and "man" here is man in Niebuhr's usual sense of man-in-society, man in the midst of his concrete relationships) which consistently circumscribes any fuller explanation of its "being". The heart of his view is given in a sermon in Beyond Tragedy:

"The essential point in the nature of human evil ... is, that it arises from the very freedom of reason with which man is endowed. Sin is not so much a consequence of natural impulses, which in animal life do not lead to sin, as of the freedom by which man is able to throw the harmonies of nature out of joint ... It is not a defect of creation but a defect which becomes possible because man are endowed with a freedom not known in the rest of creation." 124

Sin then for Niebuhr requires to be thought of in relation to the situation of man "at the juncture of spirit and nature." 125 It is uncovered only by "analysing the paradoxical relation of freedom and necessity", which is the essence of this situation. Man is always man in this tension

115. HN, pp. 17, 281, 200; ICE, p. 27.
116. HN, p. 17.
117. HN, pp. 198-216, 221-233.
118. HN, pp. 147, 148, 17; HD, p. 226 (fn); F & H, p. 106f; CLCD, p. 21: BT, pp. 11, 28; ICE, p. 95.
119. HN, pp. 149, 147, 190, 194.
120. HN, p. 17.
121. HN, p. 191.
122. HN, pp. 191, 242-255.
123. ICE, p. 95.
124. BT, p. 11: cf. ICE, p. 87; FH, p. 106; SDH, p. 18f, 53f; HD, p. 139; HN, p. 190.
125. ICE, p. 87.
and therein lies both the possibility of sin and, as he resolves the tension by a movement towards himself, its actuality. Sin is, by definition, man seeking to resolve the tension of his situation in terms of his self-love.

iii. Sin and the theodicy question

We can gather up these various strands and put more sharply the question as to the being of sin if we set it in the light of the theodicy problem and ask what relation obtains for Niebuhr between sin and the will of God. As we have indicated Niebuhr does not explicitly address himself to this issue at depth so we will require to follow the logic of his position for ourselves. What is the relation of evil to the will of God? In general we can classify views of this problem as they incline either towards a monistic or a dualistic approach to this relationship i.e. as they tend to see the ontic basis of evil in the will of God and hence its being as within the province of the sovereign purpose and intention of God - or as they see the ontic basis of evil as in some sense to be viewed over against the will of God and hence as requiring the positing of some autonomous ontic basis. Few views incline to either extreme. It is nonetheless useful at this point to investigate Niebuhr in relation to these alternative tendencies.

We have noted above how closely bound up sin is for him with the situation of man. Man, to be man, is man in the tension of freedom and necessity; but this freedom requires a freedom to transgress the proper bounds of his situation, i.e. to sin. Niebuhr carefully guards against any suggestion that evil and sin are created by God. He argues strenuously against any equation of sin with finiteness - even physical death is not to be seen as the "wages of sin". Sin was - "not ordained in the counsels of God nor the inevitable consequence of temporal existence."126

126. HN, pp. 176-189.
127. ICE, p. 83; cf. BT, p. 11 "Sin is not a defect of creation."
Nonetheless certain monistic tendencies do appear in his thought. He disavows any strict historical view of an original state of perfection, which, though admittedly only pushing the problem one stage further back, is the traditional answer to the challenge and implications of monism. More important, Niebuhr's thought is characterised by a certain tragic note. We will have cause to explore this more fully later. For the moment we can note that despite his claim to the reality of an ideal possibility of escaping from sin there is a strong note of inevitability in his discussion of it -

"If finiteness cannot be without guilt because it is mixed with freedom and stands under ideal possibilities it cannot be without sin (in the more exact sense of the term) because man makes pretensions of being absolute in his finiteness." 129

That is, sin is so closely bound up with the human situation that if we wish to hold a doctrine of creation, as Niebuhr does, then we are inclined in the monistic direction inevitably.

On the other hand however there are certain dualistic tendencies also present. Niebuhr does speak of a devil and has some sense of the objectivity of evil. 130 Certainly as we have seen this does not attain to the proportions of an inimical dimension such as Barth argues for under his notion of das Nichtige. Niebuhr is content simply to state that the devil is a fallen angel and that his evil arises from his - "effort to transgress the bounds set for his life, an effort which places him in rebellion against God" 131. Another pointer in this direction can be adduced in his treatment of the historical event of the coming of Jesus Christ. Niebuhr has a profound awareness of the cruciality of the incarnation. However to a large degree it is a cruciality for revelation; that is to say in his terms, it is crucial as a disclosure of the true meaning of human existence and as the true norm of human life, and as the unveiling of the merciful heart of God.

128. HN, pp. 281-296.
129. ICE, p. 95; also BT, p. 155f; West op. cit., p. 174. This is well illustrated in the chapter"Man's Selfhood," p. 81f of the recent MNHC. This view of Niebuhr is well parodied in a limerick of Archbishop Temple after Niebuhr had spoken at a conference at Swanwick - contd.
There is not however the deep feeling of the cruciality of the Christ-event for the overcoming of sin and evil which one senses in the New Testament itself. Hence we miss the triumphant assurance of the ultimate destruction of sin and evil which rings out from the apostolic message. Niebuhr's eschatological prospect is strictly circumscribed. He will only allow that - "The hope of the Resurrection affirms that ultimately finiteness will be emancipated from anxiety and the self will know itself as it is known. Thus in his thought the permanence of sin becomes a real question. The final destruction of all dualisms - viz. the coming termination of the whole dimension of evil, - remains as a rather indistinct terminal possibility at the boundary of his thought. We are bound to say therefore that Niebuhr is finally neither clearly monistic nor dualistic though he does incline in a monistic direction on the whole. This rather equivocal note is in harmony with the nature of sin and evil if they are indeed finally incoherent and absurd. Niebuhr however does not explore these possibilities sufficiently to give him a proper basis for this equivocality and hence his thought must be deemed unsatisfactory at this level. In this last section of our discussion we have posed the alternatives as dualism and monism. This has been valuable in clarifying Niebuhr's approach to the "being" of sin and evil. As we mentioned earlier however the position against which Niebuhr requires ultimately to be measured is the Biblical approach which we termed an interactionist one. Niebuhr's adequacy measured by this approach will be assessed in the chapters which follow.

129. contd. At Swanwick when Niebuhr had quit it, a young man "At last I have hit it, Since I cannot do right, I must find out tonight The best sin to commit and commit it!"

130. ICE, p. 83f; HN, pp. 192-3.
131. HN, p. 192.
132. Cf. Lu. 11, 20; Jn 12, 31; Acts 2, 32ff; 10, 43; 13, 38; Rom 5, 15ff; 7, 25; 8, 35f; 1 Cor 15, 20ff; 2 Cor 5, 17, 19; Eph 1, 20ff; Col 2, 14; Heb. 7, 28, 9, 12; 1 Jn 3, 8; Rev 5, 5.
133. HD, p. 322: also p. 300 where he repudiates dualism.
b. **Epistemological questions**

i. "General" and "special" revelation

Turning from this to epistemological questions and the problem as to how we know sin, his answer is given on two levels in accordance with his two-fold view of revelation. On the one hand Niebuhr believes that there is what we may define as a "general revelation" to all men - i.e. God discloses Himself to every man in a manner distinguishable from his revelation of Himself in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. The elements of Niebuhr's position are as follows - God is the sovereign Lord of all life and being, He is its sustainer, i.e. all life and being is utterly dependent upon Him for its continued existence. Man is a particular being in this totality and is dependent in this absolute sense upon God. This dependence is borne witness to in all man's experience. All human experience in some sense "points beyond itself". Niebuhr argues at many points for a dualistic understanding of man, i.e. man as inhabiting two levels of reality. Man, that is, in some sense transcends the merely physical. He is a part of nature yet more than nature. He is subject to physical laws yet the possessor of a unique freedom in the face of them. This transcendence is borne witness to in the history of man's self-understanding by the inherent contradictions in the various views which have been held and by their passing from favour. This in itself indicates that -

"Man is not (by these views) measured in a dimension sufficiently high or deep to do full justice to either his stature or his capacity for both good or evil or to understand the total environment in which such a stature can understand, express and find itself." 

In his doctrine of general revelation Niebuhr is arguing that this sense which man has of being "more than" the natural is a witness to his dependence upon, and relation to, the divine. The transcendent dimension which any adequate account of man is required to posit is here focused as an impinging of the human upon the divine. That is, man's experience of the beyond, which forms the framework and background to all his experience is an essentially

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134. HN, p. 142.
135. Cf. earlier discussion, HN, pp. 1-4 etc.
136. HN, p. 133.
religious encounter. Niebuhr highlights man's contemplation of the created order as being a particular point at which this encounter with God discloses itself; but it is in fact as wide as man's experience. Man is by definition man-in-conscious-dependence-upon-God.

There is a second element in this universal experience of God which is more closely related to the notion of sin - viz. the sense that the Other lays a claim upon man. Man is conscious of being - "commanded, placed under obligation and judged." This is "in some sense identical or associated with what is usually called conscience." Man, further, is conscious of his failure to fulfill the demands of the 'Other' and hence there arises the third element in this universal experience of God - viz. "the longing for forgiveness". Thus we can say that the sinner for Niebuhr is every man in the midst of his moral experience - man in "the tension between what is and what ought to be", man in inescapable encounter with God. What Niebuhr has to say as to the role of special revelation in the matter of uncovering sin is important as we shall see, but its function is never such as to displace or render superfluous this prior universal revelation and its effect in rendering men guilty and longing for forgiveness. Man the sinner is for him man amidst the tensions and contradictions, the struggles and turbulences of concrete daily moral experience. It is this conviction which pervades Niebuhr's whole writing on the theme of sin and which is the explanation of his essentially realist form of the doctrine. On the second level there is "special revelation", i.e. "public and historical" revelation, the revelation borne witness to in the Bible, the revelation in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. In the first place it means the history of Israel as the history of the covenant between God and His people. Israel's unfaithfulness to God as seen in the prophetic denunciations is a disclosure of "the real evil in the human situation" which lies in man's "unwillingness to recognise and acknowledge the weakness, finiteness, and dependence of his position."
This uncovering of the real nature of human evil is carried to its full conclusion when man is seen in the light of Jesus Christ. He reveals the true norm of human life as agape - sacrificial love. The movement of his life was a movement consistently directed towards God and his neighbour. Against the utter self-giving of the love of Christ which finds its climax at the cross, man's existence stands under total judgment. It is seen as a movement whose essential direction is towards the self rather than towards God and the neighbour. Man seeks to substitute his own self-hood for the divine. "The root of man's sin lies in his pretension to be God."144

There is a further dimension in Niebuhr's account of the function of special revelation in the disclosure of human sin and we turn to examine it here. This dimension is Niebuhr's desire to set sin in the light of justification. In the central section of Human Destiny (pp. 102-220) Niebuhr conducts a lengthy discussion of the Christian doctrine of salvation as "grace". He is particularly concerned in this with the relation between God's forgiveness and human moral attainment. Theologically he is concerned, that is, with the relation between justification and sanctification. Justification may be defined as the idea that apart from any merit or attainment on the part of man God freely imputes to him the obedience and righteousness of Jesus Christ, thus pardoning all his sin, and establishing him as a son of God in Jesus Christ. Niebuhr's accounts of it are less sharply defined but carry these implications. It is - "the assurance of divine forgiveness".145 It is the action in which - "the divine mercy imputes the righteousness of Christ".146 Sanctification may be defined as the actual attainment in human experience of the goodness and righteousness of Jesus Christ i.e. "that not only has the true meaning of life been disclosed in Jesus Christ but also that resources have been made available to fulfil that meaning."147 Niebuhr discusses the relation between the two

144. ICE, p. 97.
146. Ibid. p. 119.
147. Ibid. p. 102.
first of all in terms of Jesus Christ as the "Wisdom" and "Power" of God. He is the "wisdom" in that He is the disclosure of the truth about God as the truth of His mercy towards sinful man, i.e. of man's justification. He is the disclosure of the "power" of God in that he brings a new moral dynamic to the lives of those who trust in God's mercy through Him, i.e. of man's sanctification. Niebuhr attempts to set out the relation obtaining between these two in an examination of the "Biblical Doctrine of Grace". Here he wrestles with the seemingly paradoxical truths that on the one hand salvation implies the breaking in principle of the power of sin in a believer's life, yet on the other hand the believer remains subject to sin and continually requiring forgiveness. He seeks to expound these truths and their relation in terms of the Pauline statement in Galatians 2, v.20. He argues that we require to affirm both sides of the paradox. On the one hand the self is "broken", "shattered", "crucified" and so we can describe the Christian experience of the new life as the "experience of a new selfhood" i.e. the old principle of self-centredness is overcome. But it is also the case that "there are realities of sin which appear on every new level of virtue," i.e. justification will always lead to sanctification but the extent of the latter is always circumscribed. Niebuhr then launches upon a historical survey of these doctrines and their relation. He finds the Reformers closest to the Biblical viewpoint despite certain deviations (Luther, whose mistaken view of grace and law which led to quietism and irresponsibility; Calvin, whose defective view of sin led to a subtle resurrection of self-righteousness).

For our purposes we particularly note the implication of the doctrine of justification for a view of sin which Niebuhr draws out - viz. that justification by faith implies that every pretension of human goodness

148. HD, pp. 103-130.
149. Ibid., pp. 113-114.
150. HD, pp. 131-220.
requires the forgiveness of God just as much as every act of human evil. In other words, before the fact of God’s free grace in Jesus Christ all human distinctions between good and evil are finally relativised. Justification means the radical and total judgement of all human life and being. We are totally called in question and totally reinstated by the gracious action of God in Jesus Christ. In particular this applies to the life of faith as well as to the life of unbelief. The Christian man and all of his Christian attainment are also here called into question; i.e. the believer in the midst of his Christian works no less than the unbeliever in the midst of his godless works is required to live in the attitude of the publican "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." Niebuhr’s stress on justification as the disclosure of human sin throws into sharp relief his view of sin as man’s pretension to be God. Over against man’s utter moral bankruptcy and desperate need for God’s grace which justification through Jesus Christ alone uncovers, man aspires to divinity. The penniless, indebted beggar lays claim to the throne and the crown! Man who has nothing lays claim to everything. Man who stands under crushing judgement aspires to set himself up as a final judge. Man who is laden with guilt and shame pretends to the holiness and innocence of deity. This is the measure of human sin in the light of justification.

Niebuhr’s road to this position is not simply a theological one. As ever his thought also has a realist dimension. He reaches this view partly from his shrewd observation of the facts of experience. Hence he argues in this fashion -

"The sad experiences of Christian history show how human pride and spiritual arrogance rise to new heights precisely at the point where the claims of sanctity are made without due qualification."

151. HD, p. 153 writing on "justification by faith"—"this doctrine which appears so irrelevant to modern man ... represents the final renunciation at the heart of Christianity of the human effort to complete life with or without the help of divine grace."


153. ICE, p. 95.

154. HD, p. 126.
or again -

"The actual situation is that a man may be redeemed from self-love in the sense that he acknowledges the evil of it and recognises the love of God as the only adequate motive of conduct, and may yet be selfish in more than an incidental sense. The pride of a bishop, the pretensions of a theologian, the will to power of a pious businessman, and the spiritual arrogance of the church itself are not merely incidental defects, not merely 'venial' sins. They represent the basic drive of self-love, operating upon whatever new level grace has pitched the new life."\textsuperscript{155}

Here Niebuhr's realism leads him to a truth which is theologically implied in the fact of justification. This means that for Niebuhr's view of sin, the claims of sanctification are always to be severely qualified and that such moral attainment as is arrived at is to be seen as "by grace alone".

Such then is Niebuhr's answer to the question as to our knowledge of sin, and in particular as to where the man of sin is uncovered. He is man in the daily encounter with moral issues; he is this man set in the light of the prophetic witness, the Person of Jesus Christ as agape, and the fact of his justification in Christ.

The immediate problem which is raised for us by Niebuhr's answer to the epistemological problem here is as to the relation between these various elements, and in particular the relation between the sinner disclosed by general revelation and the sinner disclosed by special revelation. The problem here for Niebuhr is as to the relative place and value of these two forms of revelation. We will investigate this issue more fully later when we attempt to relate his thought to Barth; however it is proper at this point at least to indicate a certain ambiguity in his position which requires clarification.

Niebuhr uses a variety of phrases to describe the relation of revelation given by God's "special" action to that given in universal experience. Were there to be no "special" revelation this general one would "remain poorly defined and subject to caprice ..."\textsuperscript{156} it would be "not fully known ... become falsified"\textsuperscript{157} and "explained merely as man facing the court of social approval or disapproval of facing his own 'best self'"\textsuperscript{158} it is "defined only through"\textsuperscript{159} special revelation which serves to "clarify the confrontation, of man by God in the realm of the personal and individual moral life."\textsuperscript{160}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
156. & HN, p. 136. & 158. & Ibid., p. 139. & 160. & Ibid., p. 154. \\
157. & Ibid., p. 140. & 159. & Ibid., p. 147. &
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At one important point however it adds a new dimension altogether - viz. that it alone gives -

"the assurance of faith that the nature and character of God are such that He has resources of love and redemption transcending His judgment (which) is not something which may be known in terms of general revelation. It is the most distinctive content of special revelation."161

Cf. also -

"the vague sense of the divine which human life never loses is crystallised into a revelation of a divine mercy and judgement."162

The phrases which we have noted above as being Niebuhr's account of the relation between the two forms of revelation strike one immediately as being rather imprecise, even ambiguous. Special revelation is said on the one hand simply to "clarify" general revelation, but it is also admitted that apart from special revelation general revelation would be "subject to caprice" to the extent of not being viewed as an encounter with an Other at all, i.e. as not being revelation. If this latter is the case then the role of special revelation is clearly a far more significant one than "clarification". In point of fact Niebuhr's statements can be arranged in an ascending scale of importance as far as the role of special revelation is concerned - it clarifies general revelation, it crystallises it, it improves the definition of it, it prevents it being falsified, it prevents its being explained away, it makes it fully known, it alone defines it. The range of meaning covered here is a wide one.

How do we resolve this? Niebuhr himself points us to a possible solution in the very important distinction that only in special revelation is God known as a redeemer. If this is so then one is bound to ask whether the role of special revelation can be properly indicated by the notion of "clarification". Is this addition (God as a Redeemer) not a highly significant, even crucial one as far as our view of God is concerned?

161. Ibid., p. 154.
162. HD, p. 113.
In other words, does the full logic of Niebuhr's position not require that the relation of special to general revelation be spoken of in terms of "only defined through" rather than "clarified by"; i.e. we can resolve the ambiguity by neglecting the 'weaker' statements of the relationship. However even if this is a correct interpretation of Niebuhr's thought at this point the question needs to be raised whether we can in fact leave it at that, and whether the full logic of Niebuhr's position does not require a restructuring of his whole view of revelation. Of this more in a moment.

Before leaving this discussion of the relationship between general and special revelation we need to note that Niebuhr does speak of the relationship in the other order - i.e. of the role of general revelation in relation to special. It is required to "gain credence" for special revelation; without the presuppositions of (general revelation) there could be no special revelation. It is the "ground upon which the Biblical-historical revelation is built". General revelation then plays a crucial role in relation to special revelation. In fact it makes it possible. Niebuhr does not elaborate this function but the implication appears to be that in general revelation man encounters God in such a way that he gains the fundamental categories of experience and understanding which are required to apprehend the God disclosed to him in special revelation.

General revelation gives man a certain 'outline' or 'mould' within his total experience and understanding which special revelation can then 'fill in' or 'fill out' depending on the conceptual model one wishes to use.

If we allow this however there is the same problem which we noted a moment ago - of fitting God as Redeemer into this picture. Is it simply a matter of the extension of the 'outline', or the stretching of the 'mould'? Niebuhr speaks in terms of an answer to a question put (i.e. does the God confronted in general moral experience as Judge have resources of love and

163. HN, p. 136.
164. Ibid.
165. HN, p. 146.
redemption transcending his judgement?) Will this do? Can the old wineskins of general revelation hold the new wine of a redeeming God? Niebuhr attempts another account of the relation during his discussion, of the Messiahship of Jesus.\(^\text{166}\) Here he uses the analogy of our knowledge of other selves. Our knowledge of other selves is derived from two sources, our observation of their behaviour, and our apprehension of their speech. If we only observe their behaviour our knowledge of them is limited, Niebuhr argues. We cannot thus penetrate to the depths of their unique self-hood. Further we will in this situation inevitably misunderstand the other to some extent since we will inevitably interpret their hidden self-hood in terms of our own selfhood. When however the other self "speaks", utters the "word" of self-disclosure, then we are able to attain to a true knowledge of them. In this event the other self becomes a subject rather than an object. By this word we attain to a true knowledge of the other. The relation of this knowledge-by-word to the previous knowledge-by-observation is as follows -

"partly a completion of incomplete knowledge, partly a clarification of obscurities and contradictions and partly a correction of falsifications."\(^\text{167}\)

There would seem however to be questions which can be raised here. First, as far as the analogy itself is concerned, we require to ask whether this sharp distinction between speech and action is tenable. Is speaking not a form of action and vice-versa? Do we not in fact as readily correct impressions gained by something someone has said in the light of their subsequent action as the other way round? (Cf. 'actions speak louder than words'). Further in terms of the uniqueness of the other self - is speech necessarily a better disclosure of individuality than action? Admittedly as a vehicle of communication it can admit of a degree of precision and sophistication which action cannot attain to, but actions can be equally the expression of uniqueness. Does the experience of bereavement not teach

\(^{166}\) HD, p. 66f; cf. also similar analogy in NN, pp. 139-140.
\(^{167}\) HD, p. 68.
that the uniqueness which one has lost is a uniqueness recalled in terms of actions once performed as much as, if not more than, in terms of words once spoken? The more important issue here however is not the analogy itself but the implications which it carries as to the relation of general to special revelation. Two comments are in place -

1. This is a wider and more accommodating statement of the relationship between the two forms of revelation and hence better able to account for the objections which might be raised by some of the statements noted earlier. E.g. Special revelation is said both to correct general revelation and to add to it.

2. The objection noted above still remains to be met. Is this revelation of God as a God with "resources of love and redemption transcending His judgements" simply an extension of our knowledge of God? It may be that Niebuhr's two-level view of revelation is correct, however it would require to be more carefully formulated and also to give explicit recognition of the objection indicated here that in the end on the day when we take the second form of revelation seriously we require to reformulate our whole view in terms of the second form.

Such is the nature of Niebuhr's answer to the question as to how we know sin. As with our discussion of Barth we notice that the answer above is in terms of the locus and so belongs strictly almost as much to the area of ontological as to epistemological questions since it is concerned with the object, sin, in its "being", as well as with the question of our apprehension of it. Niebuhr in fact does not have to face the kind of epistemological question which Barth faced when defining sin as irrational and absurd. His failure to probe the ontological question as deeply as Barth means that this sort of issue is not raised for him in this fashion.

It will be useful at this point to review our argument thus far. Within our overall concern with the fundamental epistemological and ontological questions we have attempted to expound in turn the sort of answers which Barth and Niebuhr give us in the face of these issues. We have also entered into discussion of certain peculiar problems which their accounts raise. We now turn to a fuller evaluation as we set the thought of the two men in relation to each other.
a. The distinction in general terms

The first thing we require to observe as we proceed is that both men are consistent thinkers. That is, they are consistent in the sense that they are not merely concerned that their writing at every point should be a valid reflection of the truth as they see it, but they are also concerned to achieve an inner consistency of thought such that what they say in any particular area accords, in their intention at least, with what they affirm in every other.

This consistency further appears as a consistency to a particular standpoint or outlook which lies behind and is expressed through all that they write; and this applies to what they write about sin as much as to any other subject. Properly to relate their thought it is therefore incumbent upon us to seek to characterise these viewpoints as sharply as possible and to conduct our discussion of the relative merits of their respective doctrines of sin in the first instance in terms of these fundamental standpoints. To this task we therefore turn first of all.

We have already attempted to characterise in different ways these very viewpoints. As far as Barth was concerned we have spoken of his 'theocentric' approach. We have indicated the movement of his thought by speaking of his consistent attempt to see questions of possibility only in the light of, and subsequent to, questions of actuality. In this connection we referred to the particularity and concreteness of his thought; and this as the particularity and concreteness of God's gracious coming to man in the Person of Jesus Christ. We were able thus to speak of Barth's concept of Grace as lying near to the heart of his whole dogmatics. Barth's work may then be characterised as an attempt to articulate a theology which accords with God's gracious self-revelation and self-giving in Jesus Christ. It is with God's grace, understood in the particularity and concreteness of its expression in Jesus Christ that Barth is supremely concerned. It is this concern which lies behind and controls his whole development.168

Turning to Niebuhr, we have spoken of his standpoint as being "between gospel and world". We have noted the essentially Anglo-Saxon, pragmatic tone of his thought. We have spoken of him as a "dynamic realist". As we saw, Niebuhr has never lost the orientation which his first pastorate in Detroit gave to his outlook. His thought hence always evolves in a certain dialectical tension, turning now to the social and political issues of the time, analysing them relentlessly on their own terms or from the deeper insights into human behaviour which the Christian faith has brought him; now turning back to the gospel seeking light from it on the problems he is wrestling with and indicating its answer to them. We can characterise his work then as an attempt to articulate a theology which accords with the gospel of God's love in dynamic relation to the situation of contemporary urban man at every level of his existence. In particular Niebuhr is concerned with the social dimension of his existence. He is haunted by the fact which he sought to draw attention to in his early work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* that the sin of a community is more than the sum total of the sins of the individual members of the community. An individualistic ethic is accordingly inadequate to deal with this issue and traditional Christian ethics have been individualistic. Niebuhr is dedicated to finding a Christian ethic which will be adequate to this corporate dimension of the human problem.

Bringing the two viewpoints together we can indicate Barth's as lying in God's being and action in Jesus Christ and Niebuhr's as lying in the relation between the gospel and contemporary human realities. Perhaps we can focus the two positions in this way - Barth in his thought seeks to join himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and hear the Risen Christ "interpreting in the Scriptures the things concerning Himself". Niebuhr seeks to position himself by the Ford assembly line, with a Bible in his hand and engage in dialogue with the workers concerning their situation, turning to the Bible for light and help in the discussion.
These distinct standpoints are crucial for their whole thought. As far as the doctrine of sin is concerned they mean this - For Barth the being of sin is disclosed here in the presence of the Risen Christ and the Cross which lies immediately behind Him. Here is uncovered a God whose very being is grace. Sin then is a resistance of grace. It is a movement against God, yet it also threatens man. It does not belong to God's good creation; it has no position or rationale within it; it is overcome by the Christ; it is hence das Nichtig - absurd and irrational. We can know it only properly at this point, in opposition to the concrete grace of God in Jesus Christ. For Niebuhr the being of sin is uncovered here (at the assembly line). It is bound up with man's essential predicament, at the juncture of freedom and finitude. It is man's pride and sensuality. It is inherent in his good as well as his evil. It is even more deadly on the social than on the individual level. One is not required to theorise about it (non-being, etc.) It can be known directly in man's moral experience, but it is fully known only in the biblical (prophetic) witness and in Jesus Christ.

To a large degree these standpoints derive from the nature of the problems to which the two men address themselves. Barth, the European is imbued with that sense of crisis which has so characterised continental thinking in this century. The impact of Nietzsche and to some extent, Kierkegaard, meant the annihilation of autonomous reason as a bastion of the human spirit. In its place loomed the dark threat of existential despair. This is the problem which to some extent faces Barth and it is with this that to an important extent he wrestles. One of the men of Macedonia to whom he responds in his theology could be not unfairly depicted as the thinking continental man of the twentieth century struggling with the threat of utter meaninglessness and despair. To Niebuhr the American, this sense of utter crisis is not so acutely felt. He too, of course, is driven by a sense of the critical nature of the times, but the problem which more often catches his attention is the problem of man in the face of the tensions and challenges raised at both individual and community level by urban technological society. His man of Macedonia is the Ford worker who has been
laid off and has no immediate prospect of employment. The distinction between the two men might be drawn in another manner. Both were reared in an inheritance of nineteenth century "liberalism". Both came to reject their inherited creed. Barth however sought to reject it in a more radical and thorough going sense than Niebuhr. Barth came to the conclusion that the whole direction and movement of nineteenth century theology had been mistaken; it was in essence anthropocentric, moving from man to God. Hence he sought to reconstruct theology from the very foundation as a movement from God (conceived in terms of the particularity of His self-giving in Christ) to man. As a result he reformulated theology as a theology of revelation, a theology of the Word of God. Niebuhr's rejection of the nineteenth century was less thorough. Its error, as he saw it, lay in its optimism. It did not adequately confront the real dimension of the human predicament. Hence he structured a theology which centred in a new seriousness with respect to man's sinful estrangement, a theology of dynamic realism, a theology with a heavy accent on anthropology.

Behind the differing standpoints as we have indicated them above there lie differing estimates as to the nature of ultimate reality. For Barth, ultimate reality lies in God Himself as known in His self-revelation in the Word of God. Here then is where he takes his starting point and where he continually returns. Not in man and his experience, not even in his religious and Christian experience, but in God, God known and active in Jesus Christ lies the first and elemental datum of his theology. This does not mean that Barth is unconcerned about human issues or with human experience in its religious and other aspects, but it does mean that this second dimension is never for him to be viewed in isolation on its own terms as in itself a constituent of primary reality. Only as it is seen in the light of the first dimension, God and His Word, is it capable of

169 cf. LGTC, pp. 87-88, 149-150. Also West, op. cit. p. 190 and 117, 140, 212; cf. "Niebuhr takes as his primary datum neither a theological conviction about grace ... nor a vision of what society might be, but the social relations in which he stands.", p. 117. Cf. also the Barth-Niebuhr letters after Amsterdam in 1948.
170 Cf. his resistance to National Socialism in Germany.
being truly seen and considered because only then is its real being uncovered as a being in, and with, and under God Himself. Only then does it find its true place in the hierarchy of reality. For Niebuhr ultimate reality lies in sheer human experience. As West puts it - "Primary reality lies for him not with the power of social movements towards revolution nor with the present victory of a Risen Christ, but with the immediate struggles of man in their sin, with the social powers and responsibilities before them."  

Man as he is encountered amid the realities and tensions of concrete existence is Niebuhr's starting point and the place to which he returns again and again in his theology. This does not mean that revelation is discounted (Niebuhr is not a naturalist!) but its function is essentially illuminative with respect to man's concrete social existence.

Having attempted an exposition of the two men's approaches to ontological and epistemological questions with respect to the doctrine of sin, and also a broad characterisation of the distinctions in the two approaches, we require now to grapple at closer quarters with the issues which divide Barth and Niebuhr. As far as the "being" of sin and the knowledge of sin are concerned the divergence in their views is related clearly to a divergence in their understanding of revelation. What constitutes sin? At what point does it arise? We have noted the two theologians' answers to these questions. It is time now to assess their validity, and hence to explore the area of the doctrine of revelation. In particular we will require to examine the claim, affirmed by Niebuhr, and denied by Barth, that there is a revelation of God afforded, and hence that sin is uncovered, in man's universal moral experience. We will require to approach that more particular issue by way of an examination of their respective ideas of revelation in general. The more particular examination of moral experience which we will then turn to will in its turn lead us on finally to a discussion of Barth and Niebuhr's relative views of man, and of the Imago Dei in particular. Only when we have come to some assessment of the relative merits of the two men in respect of these problems will we have explored adequately this area of ontological and epistemological problems raised in

171. West, op. cit., p. 117.
association with their doctrines of sin.

b. Focussing the divergence

1. The idea of Revelation

1. Barth and Niebuhr's positions

In the theology of the nineteenth century within which Barth first took his stance there had been a reaction to the old mediaeval and reformed distinction between a knowledge of God arrived at by way of rational reflection and a knowledge derived from revelation. i.e. between a theologia naturae and a theologia fidei. Kant's critique of natural theology paved the way for a more unified approach in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher sought his single approach by way of the religious self-consciousness, Hitzig based theological knowledge on the value judgements of faith. The general effect was the emergence of a theological climate within which there was almost no place for revelation at all, or at least as it had been traditionally conceived. When Barth came to his disillusionment with this tradition and its pervasive anthropocentricity and sought to recover a properly theocentric approach it was to the notion of revelation that he appealed. His whole theology as a theology of the Word of God is an attempt to take the revelation of God as the fundamental axiom and controlling norm of thought. Revelation for Barth however has a particular meaning. Here too his thought evidences a refusal to begin with general concepts. Barth's concern in revelation is with -

"the concrete concept of revelation which the Bible attests as having taken place and which proclamation promises as about to come, with the very concrete bracket which encloses ... a definite past, to wit, the epiphany of Jesus Christ, and with equal regularity a definite future, to wit the recurring moment in which men shall hear the Word of God." 176

172. Cf. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Q.1 etc; Calvin, Institutes, 1, 3-7, though note his greater pessimism as to the sufficiency of reason and hence his greater stress on revelation in the Word of God as the only true way to a knowledge of God.


175. I/1, p.124ff; p.333ff cf. "the first and decisive place of revelation". 176. I/1, pp. 333-4.
Bartb expresses this particularity of revelation more sharply in an earlier passage -

"Revelation in fact does not differ from the Person of Jesus Christ and again does not differ from the reconciliation which took place in Him. To say revelation is to say 'the Word became flesh'." 177

Knowledge of God occurs only by revelation, i.e. only where God takes the initiative to disclose Himself to man. This has happened finally and normatively in Jesus Christ. 178 This revelation in Christ is both unique and exclusive. It is a question of something absolutely new, once for all, einmalig, (�അാ) . It is not the particular occurrence of something previously encountered and apprehended in some general way.

Speaking of the way this revelation comes to us Barth distinguishes between revelation itself and the "tokens of revelation". The one revelation expresses itself "upon the nature and history of this world in quite definite forms, and this it does ever and anew" but these forms are not revelation "itself" - they are useful as "tokens of revelation". 179

The words and deeds of Christ, the Virgin Birth and the empty Tomb, the prophetic apostolic testimony, and the Holy Scriptures belong to the tokens of revelation. Preaching, sacraments, and church are also in this category. All are important as pointers to Jesus Christ but are not themselves revelation. He, Jesus Christ, is revelation uniquely and exclusively. 182 If Barth is prepared to withhold the title of revelation in a strict sense even to these elements, we are not surprised when he withholds it from other creaturely realities such as the natural order or human experiences. Barth in his theology speaks a fundamental "No" over all alternative or supplementary paths to a knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is only attained where God reveals Himself. He has revealed Himself properly only in Christ.

The reason for this exclusive note in revelation does not lie in a narrow-minded rejection of the non-Christian world and its experience -

177. Ibid., p. 134, also 1/2, p. 1f.
180. Ibid., p. 64.
181. Ibid.
182. Ibid., p. 81 cf. too 1/2, pp. 12/13.
"The reason however why it is undiscerning to dub religious and moral achievements, because they impress us as sublime and lofty, revelations of the same quality as the revelation in Christ is that - it may be said in all reverence - it has pleased God in His plan of world redemption to exercise self-limitation by becoming flesh in this special, historic man, Jesus Christ, and so to express clearly and exclusively in Christ's life and work His judgement on, and purpose for, man and the world." 183

In fact Barth attains to this exclusiveness by a more precise route, he sees this exclusiveness as a direct implication of the nature of the revelation in Christ as a revelation to sinners.

"We cannot be too definite when we go on to say that we are thinking of the grace of God when we say that God is knowable ... For it is by the grace of God and only by the grace of God that it comes about that God is knowable to us." 184

All other routes to a knowledge of God, all other claims to revelation, fail in their claim and intention precisely at this point - that they do not confront us with the God of the gospel - i.e. the God of grace who slays and makes alive. They are attempts to "by-pass the grace of God". 185

All such approaches Barth argues require as an axiom some notion of an analogous relationship between God and man by which we are able to "know God in advance" of the revelation in Christ. But this is not possible. It implies a division in the being and knowledge of God and the positing of a God other than the known and active in the covenant set up and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Barth attacks on this ground the Roman Catholic notion of an *analogia entis* which idea he regards as the main reason for not becoming a Roman Catholic. 186

The heart of Barth's rejection of a natural knowledge of God is his view of justification by grace. Just as in the moral sphere the fact of justification by Christ alone calls utterly into question all human pretensions to self-justification so in the epistemological sphere it calls

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183. H. Kraemer, op. cit., p. 122
184. II/1, p. 69.
185. II/1, pp. 75-79.
186. I/1, foreword, p. X.
into question every movement of thought which aspires to attain knowledge of God apart from the knowledge given in His gracious work of justification in Jesus Christ. Before God, which means before the cross man's thoughts as well as his works are judged and set aside. Here Barth's debt to Kohlbrugge is apparent in the latter's stress upon the radical nature of grace as sovereign grace, i.e. as God's grace from first to last which man never owns or possesses. Within this No to natural theology which sounds out from the fact of justification in Jesus Christ Barth is able to speak a Yes to it. To the man whose eyes are opened upon the truth of God in Jesus Christ there is opened a new understanding of the natural order as the work of the same eternal Word.

Barth is thus committed to a wholesale rejection of what has been commonly termed 'natural theology' - i.e. the view that God can be known by us otherwise than in His special revelation in Christ and Scripture and in a manner other than faith. He examines the various grounds which have urged in its favour. There is on the one hand a pedagogic interest in natural theology. The argument here is that it is necessary in the interests of Christian evangelism to posit some general knowledge of God attainable on premises other than those confessed from within Christian faith, i.e. some "point of contact" at which conversation between the church and the world may commence. Barth however suggests that the usefulness of this is greatly over-rated. The non-Christian in this conversation conducted on agreed rational premises is not thereby brought to the self-despair and sense of total need which the revelation in Christ can produce in him, nor is his enmity against God truly exposed. On the other hand natural theology

187. Romans, p. 82, 88, 98ff, etc; II/1, pp. 74-75 and passim pp. 63-178.
188. Theology and Church, pp. 74-75, 215-6; also Christliche Dogmatik pp. IV, 41, 110. T.F. Torrance argues in a number of places that this approach of Barth has its parallel in the natural sciences. Theological Science, (London, 1969) passim, and especially, pp. 99-105; Space, Time, and Incarnation, (London, 1969) passim and pp. 64-74. Barth's setting aside of natural theology may be viewed as an attempt to attain a properly scientific theology in the same manner as in the natural sciences there has been a movement from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics and hence to an approach more adequate to the scientific realities themselves.


190. II/1, pp. 85-128.
is defended on Biblical grounds. Barth admits that there are -
"... not, only individual passages but a whole strand running through Scripture in face of which we can certainly raise the question whether we are not invited and summoned to natural theology by the Scripture itself."191

But after examining these passages and the strand alluded to, he concludes -
"Holy Scripture neither imposes the necessity nor even offers the possibility of reckoning with a knowledge of the God of the prophets and apostles which is not given in and with His revelation or bound to it; and therefore to that extent with a Christian natural theology."192

Barth's exegesis of the significant Biblical passages is crucial for our discussion and we will be returning to this in a moment. For the present we note Barth's conclusion regarding natural theology - that it is the theology of the natural man - that is, it is the "right theology"193 for the man who has not yet come to know God in Christ. It has its real function in the "arrogation, preservation and affirmation of the self-sufficiency of man and therefore his likeness with God."194 The whole matter is gathered up thus - "The fact of the matter is that God is knowable to us in His grace, and because in His grace only in His grace.195

This whole question of natural theology is obviously bound up in the closest possible manner with the question of general revelation, and the debate concerning the former in the history of the church has always been in practice the debate concerning the latter. Berkouwer in discussing Barth's "Offensive against natural theology" states that -
"the offensive is closely related to the subject of general revelation because the central question in the conflict directly concerns the reality and nature of God's revelation."196

In discussing general revelation we are turning attention to the basis on which natural theology claims to stand, the basis of its claimed knowledge of God. Formally there is a certain distinction in that the notion 'natural theology' carries a certain implication of the objectivity of God as an

191. II/1, p.99.
192. II/1, p.125.
193. II/1, pp. 143-4.
194. II/1, p. 135.
195. II/1, p. 172.
object of human knowledge. 'General revelation' on the other hand points rather to the subjectivity of God as the personally acting Subject in the knowledge relationship. In practice however the problems concerning the one are the problems which are associated with the other. Barth's rejection of natural theology is of a piece with his rejection of general revelation.

Niebuhr however as we have seen wishes to retain the notion of general revelation. He believes that there is a knowledge of God attainable by man within the being and limits of his natural experience. This question is obviously another formulation of the issue already raised in our discussion of the epistemological problems of the doctrine of sin. If we allow a relation to God in general human experience ("conscience") then there is implied a knowledge of sin outside of, and prior to, Jesus Christ. We can put the two positions sharply in two references -

Barth - "He (Jesus Christ) and He alone is to be called revelation in the original, true and strict meaning of the concept." 200

Niebuhr - "The revelation of God to man is always a twofold one, a personal-individual revelation and a revelation in the context of social-historical experience." 201

The issues which confront us here are these - granted the being and existence of the Living God confessed in the Church as the Triune God, incarnate in the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth - where does this God give Himself to be known by his creature? In particular -

i. Can one speak of a knowledge derived from man's universal experience, either of the natural order, or of his moral and religious awareness?

ii. If one may speak of such a knowledge, how does it relate to the knowledge of God derived from His self-disclosure in Jesus Christ?

197. Berkouwer, op. cit. p.87ff; cf. Calvin, Institutes, 1, 4, 1-4
198. That this distinction is not without meaning is witnessed to in the fact that it is possible to hold to general revelation yet reject natural theology as do Berkouwer, and Brunner.
199. HN, pp. 135-146.
201. HN, p. 132.
2. Relation to Brunner

To aid our analysis of Barth and Niebuhr's positions we refer at this point to the thought of Emil Brunner and discuss the relation of the two to him. This as we will see affords a useful background to the discussion which will throw the issues into sharper relief.

First we indicate the close relation between Brunner and Niebuhr. Niebuhr is often related to the theological movement known as dialectical theology and associated with the names of Barth and Brunner. Of the two leaders of the movement it is from Brunner rather than from Barth that Niebuhr has drawn his inspiration -

"Niebuhr recognised that Barth's concepts and the whole direction of his thinking had inspired an epochal renewal in theology. But he himself was influenced far more in his thinking by the writings of Emil Brunner who came much closer to his own problems."

The closeness of this relationship is perhaps best put by Niebuhr himself -

"I may say that Brunner's whole theological position is close to mine and that it is the one to which I am more indebted than any other."

There are significant differences at the level of their ethical theories and in particular in that Brunner wishes to retain a notion of natural law which Niebuhr has increasingly come to reject, however at the level of their basic approach to epistemological issues and their concern for a valid meaning for general revelation they stand shoulder to shoulder. In the celebrated 1934 debate between Brunner and Barth Niebuhr aligns himself on Brunner's side -

"In this debate Brunner seems to me to be right and Barth wrong; but Barth seems to win the debate because Brunner accepts too many of Barth's presuppositions in his fundamental premises to be able to present his own position with plausibility and consistency. Barth is able to prove Brunner inconsistent but that does not necessarily prove him to be wrong."

202. To what extent this relationship is a valid one in Barth's case will be clearer by the end of this discussion.


204. Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 431.

205. HD, p. 66 footnote.
The real question in this debate was as to the possibility of a natural theology. We will direct our attention to its implications for the notion of general revelation. The debate took the form of certain theses set forth by Brunner as being in his view representative of Barth's position, to which he gave his own counter-theses. Barth replied by refuting Brunner's corrective. The second thesis in the debate is the one which explicitly raises the question of general revelation. Brunner interprets Barth as teaching that - "every attempt to assert a 'general revelation' of God in nature, in the conscience, and in history is to be rejected outright." In reply Brunner seeks to give a meaning to the notion. He argues that the world as the creation of God inevitably to some extent discloses the Creator; i.e. it is a "revelation" which statement Brunner regards as "not pagan but fundamentally Christian". We require however, he thinks, to distinguish between an objective and a subjective factor in this revelation of God. Objectively the being and reality of God shine out from the creation, subjectively fallen man can only dimly perceive it. Sin "dulls man's sight", and in his sin he "wilfully misrepresents the revelation of God in creation and turns it into idols". This duality of revelation of which we are required to speak is overcome once more when a man is restored to fellowship with God in Christ. Only the Christian is able to attain to a true "natural knowledge of God".

Replying to this Barth attempts to do two things - i. to show Brunner to have been inconsistent; ii. to show him to have been mistaken. On the first count he points out the variety of the terminology which Brunner

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208. Ibid, p. 25.
210. Ibid, p. 27.
211. The virulence of Barth's attack upon Brunner was no doubt influenced by the political situation in Europe at that time. The rise of National Socialism in Germany with its idolatrous pretensions set Barth against any concessions to a natural theology.
employs to describe the subjective effect of sin on man's apprehension of the revelation in nature. Brunner asserts on the one hand that it is "recognisable" by fallen man, yet on the other he affirms that sin "makes man blind for what is visibly set before his eyes". As for showing Brunner to have been mistaken Barth's general argument is that in his account, despite his stress on the effects of sin, Brunner is once again raising a foundation for a natural theology and knowledge of God. Brunner appeals to a distinction between a material and formal image of God. The material image has been lost and only the formal remains which Brunner broadly defines as man's humanum. In fact however this formal image turns out, Barth argues, to have a distinctly material content - man is no longer the helpless sinner delivered into the hands of God. He is once again capable, even required, to co-operate in his own salvation. Subsequent discussions by both parties tended to illuminate the issues but despite certain signs of drawing together they remained divided to the last.

As the volumes of the Church Dogmatics appeared Barth did turn to give a fuller exegetical basis to his view. In I/2 and II/1, and in his shorter commentary on Romans he seeks to expound the crucial Scriptural passages in Romans and Acts. He here acknowledges that God is indeed known in His works, i.e. in the created order. There is, he admits, a genuine knowledge of God "objectively speaking" - "It is unquestionable that knowledge of God is here ascribed to man in the cosmos and knowability ascribed to God." Thus -

"Objectively the Gentiles have always had the opportunity of knowing God, His invisible being, His eternal power and Godhead. And again, objectively speaking, they have also always known Him. In all that they have known otherwise God as the creator of all things has always been, objectively speaking, the proper and real object of their knowledge." All this however needs to be viewed in the light of the preaching of the Cross. Man is there seen to be the sinner who has closed his mind upon this 'revelation' of God and turned it into an idolatry. Only in the light

212. Ibid, p. 80, quoting p. 25.
213. A Shorter Commentary on Romans, tr. van Daalen (London, 1953)
214. II/1, p. 119.
215. A Shorter Commentary on Romans, p. 28.
of the Cross is this primal truth, viz. man's rejection of the testimony of God, uncovered to us. Apart from, and prior to this proclamation it has no value for him.

In Revelation and Reason Brunner reiterates his view of a genuine general revelation in nature. He throws further light on his understanding of the effects of sin by disclaiming a quantitative approach -

"the relation between man's origin and his perversion is not quantitative but dialectical, because the point at issue is a spiritual relation not a natural one; it is not a question of an 'almost complete elimination' but of 'contradiction'." 217

The notion that man is 'man-in-contradiction' is basic to Brunner's anthropology. There is again in this account in Revelation and Reason great stress on the role of general revelation in relation to human responsibility before God. In relating the two forms of revelation, in creation and in Christ, Brunner argues that their unity lies in the fact that the God known in both is one and the same God - the eternal Logos (the Incarnate Son), the Creator is the Redeemer. The distinction however resides in the fact that though -

"the Revealer does not vary, the form in which He reveals Himself does certainly vary. The reason why this general revelation does not have any saving significance for the sinner is that in it God, as Person does not meet man personally, but impersonally." 218

Turning to Barth's further statements Brunner complains that Barth seems to be prepared to grant all Brunner's premises in his exegesis of the New Testament passages but then proceeds to wipe the slate clean again by arguing that in the real situation, man under wrath, this revelation in nature has no significance. Brunner sees in this a failure to distinguish between the principium cognoscendi and the principium essendi which prevents

218. Ibid, pp. 75-76.
Barth from being able to conceive of a revelation in nature without it implying the possibility of a natural theology. Thus, Brunner argues, Barth can make the true statement "only through the historical revelation in Christ can man perceive his sin"; but follows it by the false statement "only in the light of the revelation in Christ - namely in the rejection of the same - does man become a sinner."²¹⁹

Gathering up this discussion, the essence of the two views appears to be as follows - Brunner wishes to give a meaning to general revelation. He believes that the Bible teaches, and the reformers also upheld, the reality of a revelation of the Living God in the natural order such that man is made inexusable for his refusal to acknowledge God. Man in his sin wilfully suppresses this 'witness' and due to the blinding effects of his sin it can never be the basis of a genuine knowledge of God independent of his final self-revelation in Christ. From the standpoint of that revelation however the other primary revelation in nature is once again uncovered as pointing to the One known fully in Jesus Christ. Barth will not allow any such notion as a 'general revelation'. He admits that 'objectively' God is known by man in His work, but sin has so effected the situation that man can no longer see this. Rather he turns aside from the Living God to idols. Only in the light of the revelation in Christ is this uncovered to man - that he is a culpable sinner guilty of turning away from the true God who is now, and only now, known to Him in Jesus Christ; that is, in His essential Being as the God of grace and salvation. There is hence only one revelation - the revelation in Jesus Christ.

It is now time to attempt to evaluate the two positions. In the first instance we are concerned here with a straightforward exegetical question as to the meaning of Romans 1, 18f. In the second place we have a theological issue here as to the meaning and scope of revelation. We consider these in turn.

²²⁰. Ibid, p. 79.
3. **Exegetical evaluation**

Barth, though admitting that Romans 1 teaches that God both can be known and is known by the heathen prior to his revelation in Jesus Christ argues that sin has so effected the situation that this knowledge is effectively suppressed. Man's state is one of "utter ignorance", \(^{221}\) men "do not achieve in the slightest 'the knowledge of God in the natural order'". \(^{222}\) Man has turned aside to that which is no God. There is no "remnant" of a natural knowledge of God. Brunner wishes to maintain a knowledge of God in this fallen man such that he is rendered responsible and guilty before God. The knowledge of God in creation is hence "the indispensable presupposition of the Christian message." \(^{223}\) Sin has greatly reduced the clarity of this knowledge but Scripture still speaks of it nonetheless as a reality for fallen man. Three comments are in order here at the exegetical level.

i. Taken as it stands, (i.e. not in isolation from its context in the argument of Romans but from prior theological considerations), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Paul in Romans 1, 18-23 teaches that the Gentiles have already a knowledge of God prior to the coming of the gospel to them - cf. διότο γνωστών του Θεοῦ φυσικον εστιν εν αὐτοῖς (19); διότο γνωτες του Θεον (21); το δικαιώμα του Θεου ἐπηγνώτες (32); albeit this knowledge has not come to maturity but rather has led to a turning away into darkness (v. 21). It is the gospel which brings this situation into focus certainly (vs. 16-17) but the text does seem to imply that the responsibility which Paul here is concerned to stress has a retrospective reference - i.e. it is a responsibility in relation to a witness borne by the natural order. Man's ignorance of God is hence at every moment a wilful ignorance. Man is in darkness only because he is holding his foot against the door through which he knows light could shine. i.e. at this level Brunner's exegesis in its underlining a "responsibility before God" appears to be correct. Calvin exeges it in this way -

\(^{221}\) II/1, p. 305.
\(^{222}\) II/1, p. 307.
\(^{223}\) Revelation and Reason, p. 66.
"God is invisible in Himself, but since His majesty shines forth in all His works and in all His creatures men ought to have acknowledged Him in these, for they clearly demonstrate their creator... the manifestation of God by which he makes His glory known among His creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is however inadequate on account of our blindness. But we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity..."

ii. There is no question that the consistent Biblical view tends towards Barth's more pessimistic view of man. Romans 1, though speaking of this revelation to the Gentiles in creation goes on to speak of man's effective suppression of it and of his being 'given up' by God (vs. 18-24, 26, 28). We can compare here for example, 1 Thess. 4, 5; 2 Thess. 1, 8 - the heathen "know not God"; (also Gal. 4, 8); Eph. 4, 18 "darkened understanding"; Col 1, 21 "estranged and hostile in mind"; 1 Peter 1, 18 "ignorance" (Acts 17, 30); 1 Cor. 1, 20, heathen wisdom is made "foolish" by God, the gospel is "folly" to such; cf. 1 Cor. 1, 19-20; Jn. 1, 20 they "knew not" God's Word; Eph. 2, 1-2 they are "dead". All this testimony is in harmony with the Old Testament view of the heathen nations that they "knew Thee not" (Jer. 10, 55; cf. Job 18, 21).

iii. There is however a further strand in Scripture which may help resolve this seeming contradiction. It is not at first blush connected with the question of general revelation at all. i.e. it is not the "side line" so often referred to as giving a basis for a natural theology (Jn. 1; Acts 14, 17; Romans 1; Psalm 19 etc.) Rather it is a line which speaks of man in rebellion against the truth of God. One thinks here for example of the case of Pharaoh who resisted the Word of God and hardened his heart against it, (Exodus 5, 2, 5, 17; 7, 14; 8, 15 - 9, 12; 10, 1 etc.) so that Scripture can go on to speak of God's having hardened his heart against it; i.e. he was confirmed in his resistance of the Word of God. Jesus' parable of the Sower (Mk. 4, 3f) and the explanatory saying - "Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get and still more will be given you. For to him who has will more be given and from him who has not will be taken away even what he has." (Mk 4, 25-26)

also point in this direction. This whole theme is suggestively illustrated in the case of Herod - who heard the Word of God at the lips of the Baptist (Mk 6, 17) but who in his folly silenced this witness (Mk 6, 21f) and when the Son of God confronts him He has nothing to say; no further word to bring (Luke 23, 6-9). This same dynamic picture of the relation between men and the revelation of God is implied in the "holding down" of the truth in Romans 1, 18. We can note too Paul's reference in I Timothy 4, 2 to people who had "their conscience seared with a hot iron", which implied that in the course of their continuance in the way of unbelief and apostacy they reached the point from which there is no return because their conscience was no longer sensitive to their danger and need. From the standpoint of this witness we suggest that Brunner's picture of man-in-contradiction wrestling with God's truth as it really and concretely impinges upon him is in harmony with the Biblical picture of what it means to be a sinner before God. Barth admits this picture too - "In the light of the self-revelation of the truth our human being and activity is seen to be in its ultimate and profoundest reality a fight against the truth." The general trend of Barth's exegesis however is towards an understanding in which the struggle is concluded and unbelieving man lives on in virtual ignorance of God. Thus although not explicitly addressing itself to the question of general revelation this strand in Scripture points in the direction of an understanding of man as man in a struggle against the truth of God, i.e. an essentially dynamic understanding of the relation between God's revelation and the sinner. Thus the Bible speaks of fallen man both as involved in a struggle with God and yet it admits of the terrifying possibility of this man as also having been "given up". Relating this to Romans 1 and Barth and Brunner we can put the matter thus - Romans 1 appears to teach a twofold relationship between sin and natural revelation (i.e. revelation in nature). On the one hand man as sinner rejects this revelation (v. 18 ... "hold down the truth"). On the other hand man as sinner is blinded for this revelation

225. Berkouwer General Revelation, pp. 204-5.
226. II/1, p. 305; also IV/3, p. 434f.
Brunner has seized upon the first of these - man’s wilful rejection of the revelation of God. This is in keeping with both his dynamic dialectical understanding of man and his stress upon responsibility. Barth on the other hand has given fullest place to the effect of sin in rendering man "ignorant" and "blinded" in relation to the revelation in nature. This is in keeping with his sola gratia motif in salvation and with his view of revelation as essentially de novo in Jesus Christ. It also accords, and here is Barth’s main question to Brunner, with the stress upon God as the essentially gracious one and hence to know Him at all is to know Him in His grace and salvation.

iv. There is another exegetical element here. There is a strand in John’s gospel which relates sin specifically to the coming of Christ (15, 22-24; 9, 39-41; 12, 31; 16, 9) It is the presence and work of the Christ which is the context in which sin arises as man is confronted by the claim of God upon him and resists that claim. The reference 15, 22 and 24 even asserts that had Jesus not come "they" (i.e. the world which resists the witnesses of the Christ) would have no sin. Barth exegetes Romans 1, 18 in this sense. The wrath revealed from heaven he takes to be the wrath revealed in the cross. 227 If we heed this line of witness we require to say that while the revelation in the natural order may constitute a sufficient witness to render man culpable for his ignorance and blindness with respect to it, it is only a prelude to the knowledge and reality of sin which springs forth when this same man is confronted by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Gathering up this discussion we suggest the following resolution to the problem of the seemingly equivocal note in the Biblical testimony - man as sinner being both active and passive in relation to God’s revelation in nature. Brunner’s stress on the active struggle of man is the prelude to Barth’s stress on man’s passive ignorance of God. Romans 1 is, in other words, the story of all men. 228 God does not leave Himself without a witness to them.

227 A Shorter Commentary on Romans, p. 26; II/1, p. 119f.
228 This view is not identical with the idea that Romans 1 is Paul’s rewriting of the story of the fall. There are certain affinities with it however. We will be examining the question of the fall later and our major objection to this interpretation will become apparent.
The creation points beyond itself to One who claims man's obedience and worship. Man as sinner resists this and is hence "given up" to ignorance of God. The mistake of both Barth and Brunner is to view the situation of man in isolation either from its beginning or its end. Barth tends to isolate the end result "ignorance" from man's previous struggle with knowledge. Brunner tends to isolate the struggle from the end result "ignorance". Thus the situation is considerably more pessimistic than Brunner allows, i.e. man has less knowledge of God than he assumes (though the quantitative standard has limitations here). It is not however as pessimistic as Barth teaches, in the sense that there is a point for every man where God's reality impinges upon him in such a way that his subsequent ignorance of God is responsible and wilful. Barth would appear to be correct however in his pointing to the work of Christ and His work of atonement as the point in relation to which man's sinful ignorance of God is more truly drawn into the open and made manifest.

Exegetically it would appear that Barth and Brunner, and Calvin and Nygren can be drawn closer than at first might have appeared possible. Their divergence would seem to be mainly a question of the element in the Biblical witness which they are concerned to stress. The notion of general revelation does seem capable of defence but only in a very qualified sense. It is certainly never a basis for a natural theology (Brunner of course would not consider such a possibility either); nor is it a revelation which is ever followed by man but one which man always turns away from into darkness. Its significance is that man is rendered culpable by it. Even this culpability however is secondary to the culpability which he attains when confronted by the cross of Jesus Christ. In as much as some meaning can be given to general revelation it could be argued that Brunner's main point has been conceded, however the qualifications which Barth urges have been seen to be also largely valid.

4. Theological evaluation

Barth's case against the idea of general revelation is not at heart so much exegetical as theological. This is not to say that he is intentionally disrespectful of the Biblical text. The real basis of his
objection however lies in his understanding of revelation and the knowledge of God. God, for Barth is known only where He gives Himself to be known, and He has done this properly and fully only in Jesus Christ. Hence the claim to any kind of a knowledge of God, even of the sort Brunner argues for here, has to run the gamut of Barth's question - How can there be a knowledge of the true God other than in His grace in Jesus Christ? If Brunner's position is to be upheld and a valid meaning of general revelation retained it will do so only by a view of revelation which can withstand this query.

Barth's question here is really a two-fold one.229

i. **Who is this God known in nature?** i.e. Barth requires an account of the Object encountered in general revelation and an indication as to how this Being relates to Jesus Christ.

ii. **How is this Being known?** i.e. he requires an account of the means of knowing this God and an indication as to how this relates to God's grace.

The two issues obviously belong together but we will attempt to take them in this order.

Barth's view is that the notion of a knowledge of God in the natural order implies a division in the Being of God - a God in Jesus Christ and a God outside of Jesus Christ.230 It has to be asserted unequivocally that if this is in fact the implication of the notion of general revelation then the idea must be rejected categorically. The essential unity and consistency of the Being of God is an axiom which no proper Christian should require to argue for. Hence we must assert the ontological identity of the God known in Jesus Christ with the God claimed to be known in the natural order. This identity is borne witness to in Scripture itself, where it speaks of Jesus Christ as the agent of creation and the upholder of all things. (cf. John 1, 1-3; Colossians 1, 15-17; Hebrews 1, 2-3) The God who reveals Himself in His handiwork in creation is thus identical with the God

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229. Cf. Natural Theology, p. 82. This is his two-fold question to Brunner during the course of the debate.

230. II/1, p. 79ff.
who comes to men as Redeemer in Jesus Christ. Brunner of course fully acknowledges this with Barth.\(^{231}\) In Romans 1, 20 Paul refers to the content of the witness borne in the natural order as to God's "eternal power and deity". Thus when Barth argues that this "eternal power and deity are none other than Jesus Christ" he is certainly correct.\(^{232}\) Nonetheless there is here the implication that for fallen man there is a circumscribing of the full reality of God. He is made aware only of His "eternal power and deity", (δύναμις καὶ θεότης). Thus Brunner's distinction between the objective and subjective factor in this knowledge appears useful.\(^{233}\) Objectively the creation is a true and convincing disclosure of the Triune God, and hence of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son and the Lord of creation. Subjectively however due to man's sin it is a witness only to God's "eternal power and deity". The problem thus is as to how we relate these two "views" of God. Barth thinks they cannot be related, i.e. only the former is a view of "God", properly speaking, at all. To wish to hold to these two views as being both valid views of the Living God implies inevitably, Barth believes, a dualistic understanding of Him. The correct procedure is to give up all notions of a prior revelation and to seek for a unity in the unity of the being of the Son of God who is at once both the Creator Word and the Redeeming Word and thus the one with whom all men are bound up in their being. This unity Barth expresses by speaking of the election of grace as the basis of both creation and redemption. Brunner however thinks we can retain these two views of God and speaks of the distinction as between knowing God personally (in Christ) and impersonally (in the natural order).\(^{234}\) Brunner's notion here however appears to have difficulties and fails to give that sense of the identity of the two views in the one being of God which is crucial to his concern to find in general revelation the root of his concept of man's responsibility.\(^{235}\) It would seem to require more than a merely 'impersonal' encounter with God to render man properly guilty before Him. The real difficulty with the personal/impersonal model is that it appears to imply that the distinction resides too

\(^{231}\) Revelation and Reason, pp. 75-77; Barth in III/1, pp. 94-97.  
\(^{232}\) I/2, p. 306.  
\(^{233}\) Natural Theology, p. 26.  
\(^{234}\) Revelation and Reason, p. 76.  
\(^{235}\) Grant, op. cit. J. Baillie, Our Knowledge of God, p. 82ff. (London, 1939)
objectively in the sheer form of the revelation in question. It would be truer to Brunner's own premises, and arguably closer to Romans 1, if he set the distinction between the two forms of revelation more strictly in relation to the fallen state of man. The revelation in the created order is described as of God's "eternal power and deity" but need this necessarily imply, even for the sinner, an essentially impersonal disclosure of God, and hence of a God essentially different from the God disclosed in Jesus Christ? Is the really significant distinction not that whereas the revelation in nature in its summons to man to reverence and worship God only leads in practice to man's guilt and wilful flight from Him, the revelation in Christ, while if rejected, effecting a sharp increase in man's culpability, if received in repentence and faith means forgiveness and salvation, the arresting of his flight and his return to the Father's house. The crucial difference in other words is that the revelation in Christ is for the believer a healing revelation.

This approach to the distinction would allow a distinction between two stages in the knowledge of God, the first a purely negative one which is not fruitful and leads only to a wilful ignorance, without implying inevitably a dualistic understanding of the Godhead.

Barth's further question however puts the issue more sharply - how can we know God except in His grace? - i.e. using the notion above, is there any other knowledge of God possible for sinners than a 'healing' revelation? This Barth believes is the deepest problem with general revelation -

"The conception of an indirect revelation in nature, in history and in our self-consciousness is destroyed by the recognition of grace, by the recognition of Jesus Christ as the eternal Word who was made flesh, but nothing else destroys it." Barth's argument for this conclusion appears to be as follows. He wishes to begin from the concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ (II/1, p.63f; Revelation, p.42f). He will not allow us to take a starting point in any general notion of revelation. The ultimate starting point is the Being of God -

236. Romans 1, 20, is closely related to Θεότητας which is used in Col. 2, 9 of Christ. One thinks here too of Acts 14, 17 where there is a witness (ἀμαρτυρίαν) borne in rain and fruitful seasons "satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" which can only be regarded as a pointer to God as good and gracious towards man.

"we must go back to the decision which is prior to all our questions about the knowledge of and knowability of God ... the decision that was made from eternity by the fact that God is who He is..."

Knowledge of God takes place not as a human possibility but as an "encroachment of God upon man". Revelation that is only takes place because God wills to disclose Himself and hence only as grace. Revelation means Jesus Christ and hence takes the form of "grace for sinners". Revelation in the concrete form of the Word become flesh is a revelation which judges man and discloses him as the one who has no capacity for it at all. Only by grace and as grace is revelation actual for man. Hence as Barth would argue any general revelation is ruled out a priori since it is not by definition identical with the one revelation, i.e. with grace.

Barth's criticism here is really in two parts - that true revelation is only by grace and of grace. As far as the first of these is concerned it would seem possible to argue that a revelation in nature could fulfill the necessary condition. Barth argues that, because of the relation which obtains between God and man, man can have no knowledge of God apart from the good pleasure of God, a good pleasure which resides in His essential being, and which moves Him to give Himself to man as an object of his knowledge. Left to himself man's thinking about God is only an empty movement of thought. All this in itself however would not seem to rule out a revelation in nature a priori. God, as "Lord of the event which we call the knowledge of God," can will to disclose Himself to man in any way and through any medium He may choose. Hence it seems possible to argue that God has so chosen to form the natural order that man at some point (it is never a state) learns of his "eternal power and deity" and his "goodness" in the seasons, etc ... i.e. man can never be Lord of this event either, and here too knowledge comes to man only because of the good pleasure of God.

239. II/1, p. 76; cf. p. 69 "it is by the grace of God and only by the grace of God that God is knowable to us."
240. Revelation, p. 49.
241. II/1, p. 75.
Barth as we have seen, however, also wishes to argue that revelation must be gracious, and here general revelation is certainly less satisfactory. This however depends to a degree on how one defines grace. Barth is concerned to define it as God has defined it for us in His action in Jesus Christ. The Bible certainly supports this (1 John 3, 16; John 3, 16; 2 Tim. 1, 15; Eph. 2, 8-9; Rom. 5, 8; etc.) On Brunner's side it could be pointed out that a revelation in nature does not contradict this. Indeed the terms in which it is spoken of can be interpreted as pointing in the same direction. Acts 14, 17 speaks of God's good work for man in the natural sphere and Romans 1 suggests that the revelation of God ought to have produced in man "honour and thanksgiving" (verse 21) (οὐκ... ἔδωκαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῶν). Man dimly perceives that there is One upon whom he depends and whose will towards him is good. There is admittedly no knowledge here of a Saviour in the full and proper meaning of the term but it could be argued that there is at least a faint foreshadowing of it, in the sense that the natural order can be viewed as pointing to a Creator whose will for man is good and positive. This is all the more likely in that the God who is encountered in the natural order is none other than the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Thus to use a phrase of Barth's from another context242 there would seem to be the possibility of arguing that "from a distance and with a certain indistinctness" there is here a genuine revelation of the God of the gospel; though it would be necessary to immediately add - a disclosure from which man sinfully turns and flees, and which is hence before long lost to him, but for whose rejection he retains a responsibility.

Barth's question however remains a disturbing one, for such a 'knowledge of God' is certainly very far from the knowledge of God given in the gospel where knowledge implies a relationship to God, a conversion, a reconciliation. There is no question but that the God known in Christ has a reality and clarity, and a dimension of sheer grace, which is a tremendous "advance" on anything which can be learned of Him otherwise. Thus while Brunner's notion of a revelation of God in nature does not necessitate a division in either the being or knowledge of God it cannot be denied that it

242. IV/1, p. 366.
has certain tendencies in that direction.

Summarising this discussion we can state that while Brunner's position does not inevitably involve the serious dualistic implications that Barth thinks it does, it has certain dangerous tendencies towards such a view. While it bears a valuable witness to the fact of man's guilt prior to his hearing the gospel, it also tends towards an over-concern with man's guilt as it derives from his confrontation with God's revelation in the natural order to the neglect of the Biblical stress upon the relationship between the guilt of man and the coming of Christ.

Relating all this to Niebuhr we require to notice in the first place that Niebuhr's view of general revelation cannot be straightforwardly identified with Brunner's. Brunner in his view of general revelation keeps within the classical Biblical passages on the theme making most of Romans chapter 1. He structures the notion of general revelation in these terms - God is disclosed to man in the work of nature "His invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." (Romans 1, 20) Niebuhr also wishes to find the vindication of his view in Scripture but though he refers to Romans 1, 20-21 he gives equal weight to Psalm 139 and Job 7, and speaks of "the sense of being seen, commanded and judged and known from beyond ourselves," and interprets man in terms of the "conscience". That this inward personal experience is the heart of Niebuhr's understanding is implied in his speaking of a movement from the inward to the outward - "the creation is contemplated as pointing to a creator already known in man's moral experience." The movement for Brunner is in the other direction. The outward, revelation in nature, implies the inward - man's responsibility before God. This distinction is in keeping with the two men's anthropologies. Real man for Niebuhr is man-inself-transcendence. Revelation accordingly is that which throws light upon this situation, i.e. which uncovers the fact of man's essentially dualistic form of being. General revelation does this in its setting of man before

243. HN, p. 137.
244. Ibid., p. 138.
245. Ibid, p. 143; cf. p. 141 "faith concludes that the same Thou who confronts us in our personal experience is also the source and creator of the world." Also p. 142 where he speaks of a transfer "from the inner to the outer world."
God and the claim of the transnatural. Real man for Brunner is man-in-contradiction. Revelation hence discloses this fact. Man is uncovered in his flight from God and yet is responsible before Him, i.e. as the one who refuses to heed God's revelation in the natural order. Both men have a dialectical understanding of man but the terms of the dialectic differ and this affects their precise understanding of general revelation. Further in Brunner's case the revelation itself is to some extent a determination of man's situation. His contradiction arises in part from the impinging of God's revelation upon him. For Niebuhr however revelation is rather the uncovering of an already existent dialectical situation which arises by reason of the situation of man at the juncture of freedom and finitude.

Despite this difference the two men are agreed at the following points:

1. There is a valid general revelation, i.e. God is actually disclosed to man in the natural order in a manner distinct from his self-revelation in Christ.

2. The effect of this revelation is that man is rendered guilty before God.  

For Brunner this is the primary implication, for Niebuhr it is one element.

In as far as we have seen that exegetically and theologically some kind of meaning can be given to "general revelation", Niebuhr's view requires to be upheld as against Barth's in principle. However we noticed concerning Brunner that he was mistakenly optimistic as to the extent of this revelation and that he failed to give due place to the relation between sin and the coming of Christ. These qualifications require to be made with even greater force in Niebuhr's case. His notion appears to be that this revelation extends to all experience -

"there is in all human consciousness at least a dim recognition of the insufficient and dependant character of all finite life, a recognition which implies the consciousness of the reality upon which dependent existence depends." 247


247. HN, p. 137.
This is certainly to say too much. This is much more than Scripture allows. Niebuhr places little stress on the deadly effects of sin in turning man away from the light of God. The revelation which God gives of Himself in nature is always in process of being extinguished in the sinner's heart and understanding. The man which this revelation encounters is always a man whose being is set against it, i.e. as a being in antagonism to the revelation of God. Only if the gospel of Christ shines into the darkness and brings the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is that flickering knowledge of God from the natural order preserved from extinction. Thus Niebuhr's view of God's revelation in the natural order is much too optimistic and much too static. He tends to think of revelation as a state of affairs rather than an ever-renewed encounter of God with man which has its origin always and only in God's gracious self-giving. He thinks in terms of a road which is always laid, of a door which stands constantly open. Hence we can defend Niebuhr only in a very limited sense in his notion of a revelation in the natural order, and hence of his ability to speak of a guilt of man prior to his hearing of the gospel.

We have now assessed the two men's views of revelation in its broader sense. This basis being laid, we can now move on to examine the more particular issue of the attempt to locate general revelation in universal moral experience. This is obviously the crucial issue as far as our knowledge of sin is concerned.

ii. Moral experience and natural law
1. Niebuhr and Barth's positions

The issue which confronts us here is the question as to the being and status of man's universal moral experience and how this relates, if at all, to God in His revelation. We will look at Niebuhr's position first of all. He believes that there is a definite relationship between the two elements. He speaks of a knowledge of God which is given in, with, and under man's encounter with the moral demand. He even considers this as in some sense prior to, and more fundamental than, the witness borne to man.
in the natural order — "The creation is contemplated as pointing to a Creator already known in man's moral experience." In his account of general revelation this moral encounter with God is the "second element" and he defines it in this way — "The sense of moral obligation laid upon one from beyond oneself and a moral unworthiness before a judge." The man who thus encounters God meets Him, Niebuhr argues, in His capacity as a Judge prior to His self-disclosure as a gracious Redeemer in Jesus Christ. In practice, this encounter with the Transcendent impinges upon man in terms of a moral demand, i.e. it is — "in some sense identical or associated with what is called 'conscience'". To put the matter thus, however, leaves it at a very general level and we will require to examine this relationship between divine demand and ethical experience much more closely. For the moment we will follow Niebuhr as he seeks to spell out the terms of this encounter.

He seeks to do this in association with the notion of justitía originalis. This is not to be thought of in terms of a primeval state of innocence which man has now forfeited on account of a 'fall' in the person of Adam. That would be to falsify the myth of Genesis. Niebuhr, however, believes an important meaning can be given to the notion of an original righteousness.

It is the claim made by man's "essential nature" upon his current state and behaviour. Niebuhr holds that man's true essence has been corrupted but not destroyed and that this "true essence" remains with man in the shape of this "claim" or moral demand. Here is where man's uneasy conscience has its rise. It is — "a phenomenon which can be understood only as the protest of man's essential nature against his present state." More precisely this tension can be analysed in terms of —

248. HN, p. 143.
249. Ibid., p. 141.
250. HN, p. 142, 153 cf. also p. 307.
251. Ibid., p. 138.
252. Ibid., p. 281ff.
253. Ibid., p. 296; ICE, pp. 82-87; BT, pp. 10-13.
255. We will be raising the question of the "essential nature" of man later.
256. HN, p. 215.
257. Ibid., p. 283.
"the tension between the self as it looks out upon the world from the perspective of its values and necessities and the self as it looks at both the world and itself and is disgusted by the undue claim of the self in action."258

Concretely this claim of the essential self upon the self in action, or, put more generally, the challenge of man's essential nature to his present state, expresses itself as the demand of law259 - the law of love.260 It can be summarised in the love commandment of Matt. 22: 37-39.261 Leaving aside for the moment the question as to the adequacy of Niebuhr's reinterpretation of justitia originalis, we return to the problem as to the exact relation which Niebuhr believes obtains between the moral "ought" and man's knowledge of God.

First we require to observe that man from sheer experience and unrelated to any divine revelation can arrive at the conclusion that love is the norm of his existence. -

"Man knows both by experience and by the demand for coherence that life ought not to be lived at cross purposes, that conflict within the self and between the self and others is an evil. In that sense love is the law of life according to the insights of natural religion and morality."262

or, as he put it earlier - "All human life is informed with an incoherent sense of responsibility towards the ultimate law of life 'the law of love'.263 Now Niebuhr believes that the meaning of love is properly known only in Jesus Christ. Christ is for him the normative man - the embodiment of the law of love.264 The question hence of the relation between moral experience in general and the revelation of God in particular reduces at this level to the question as to the relation between human history and the perfection of Christ. Niebuhr addresses himself to this precise issue in his latter half of the Gifford lectures. He argues that the relation is a three-fold one (1) the perfection of Christ (agape) completes the incompleteness of mutual love (eros). Here he argues for an essential continuity between the ethical

258. Ibid., p. 295.
259. HN, p. 295.
260. Ibid., p. 306.
261. Ibid., p. 297f.
262. HD, p. 85.
263. ICE, p. 123; also pp. 114-115.
264. HN, p. 157; HD, pp. 71, 80 (footnote) BT, pp. 167, 182
Vignaux, op. cit., p. 89f.
encounter of man with the law of love at the level of his immediate personal relationships and face to face with the problems of organising himself socially and politically - and the law of love embodied in Jesus Christ. Thus he criticises Nygren for setting too sharp a contrast between the two, for -

"the freedom of man is such that he is not without some idea of the virtue of love which does not justify itself in terms of its own happiness. It is significant that Jesus does not regard the contrast between natural human love and the divine agape as absolute ... (Matt.7:11)"

Bultmann is also censured for denying that "the vigorous demands of the Sermon on the Mount have any relation to 'the highest good' in the ethical sense". 266 By this position morality can be thought of as pointing towards revelation.

At the second level of the relation "the Cross represents a transcendent perfection which clarifies obscurities of history and defines the limits of what is possible in historic development." 267 Here a certain discontinuity is observable. The law of love in Jesus Christ is the declaration of the inherently relative possibilities of man's moral striving and in this sense goes beyond moral experience.

Finally, "the Cross represents a perfection which contradicts the false pretensions of virtue in history and which reveals the contrast between man's sinful self-assertion and the divine agape." 268 Here the discontinuity is sharply focussed. Christ here "stands in contradiction to all forms of human goodness in which self-assertion and love are compounded." 269 Here Christ appears as the Judge of every human striving who stands over against man's ethical experience. Niebuhr, however, even at this point, is not as radical as his premises might have allowed him to be, i.e. Christ does not stand in such radical discontinuity that He denies and overturns man's ethical experience. Niebuhr, that is, does not apply at this point the full range of implication of the idea of justification by grace which he does elsewhere. Christ here remains as the standard of the good, and as such, a

265. HD, p. 88.
266. Ibid.
267. Ibid., p. 90.
268. HD, p. 93.
269. Ibid.
standard in the light of which man stands judged - but he is not the essence of the good such that man can only learn what the good is from Him. Barth as we shall see takes that more radical step and hence he is able from the vantage point of justification to call into question all human moral experience and to argue that only in Christ, which means for him only in the gospel, is man able to learn what right and wrong means. Niebuhr's view is perhaps best summarised thus -

"The love of Christ thus always stands in a double relation to the strivings and achievements, the virtues and the wisdoms of history. In so far as they represent developments of the goodness of creation, it is their fulfilment. In so far as they represent false completions which embody the pride and power of individuals and nations, of civilisations and cultures, it is their contradiction."270

This "double relation" of revelation to moral experience is further illustrated when we explore Niebuhr's attitude to the notion of natural law.

In his unfolding of his anthropology in the Gifford lectures he appears to have a real place for the idea - It is, "the virtue and perfection which corresponds to the first element of (man's) nature."271 Due to man's being the bearer of a transcendent freedom there is always an element of confusion in defining a law of nature.272 Niebuhr nonetheless thinks that it has "a tentative validity for it distinguishes the obvious requirements of his nature as a creature in the natural order from the special requirements of his nature as free spirit."273 He also in one or two places indicates the sort of form which this natural law takes. In his discussion of laws and principles of justice in the Gifford lectures he notes the - "practical universality of the prohibition of murder"274 and argues that -

271. HN, p. 287.
272. Ibid.
273. Ibid.
274. HD, p. 263.
"There are essentially universal 'principles' of justice moreover by which the formulations of specific rules and systems of justice is orientated. Both 'equality' and 'liberty' are recognised in Stoic, mediaeval and modern theories of natural law as transcendent principles of justice."275

Objecting to Bertrand Russell's view of sexual morality Niebuhr writes that he - "disregards one important, immutable aspect of the human situation, namely, the organic unity between physical impulses and the spiritual dimension of human personality."276 On the other hand, however, Niebuhr seems dissatisfied with the idea of natural law. The references just noted almost exhaust his attempts to fill out the idea concretely and his keen sense of the extent of human sinfulness makes him sensitive to all attempts to erect a final norm in history. He notes the -

"involvement of all 'natural' or 'rational' standards and norms in sin. There is therefore no uncorrupted natural law just as there is no completely lost original justice. The freedom of man sets every standard of justice under higher possibilities and the sin of man perennially insinuates contingent and relative elements into the supposedly absolute standards of human reason."277

He speaks of his "increasing rejection of the concept of natural law".278

He has two main lines of criticism.

1. Natural law theories fail to allow for the historical character of man's existence. That is, they fail to admit the uniqueness which is the essence of historical occurrence, and they also fail to realise the degree to which those who frame the theories are themselves reflecting the values and outlook of their particular historical period. That is they "are too inflexible on the one hand and their definition is too historically conditioned on the other".279

275. Ibid. and also ICE, pp. 116-117.
277. HN, pp. 297-298.
2. They tend to make the law of love an addendum to the natural law\textsuperscript{280} i.e. they wish to maintain too rigid a distinction between the determinate and indeterminate possibilities of the human situation. Behind this is the notion of an essential social structure which finds reflection in the idea of justice. Niebuhr, however, thinks such rigid division impossible and hence natural law conceived in this model is inevitably restrictive and unwarrantedly secure.

If Niebuhr is implicitly, if not altogether explicitly, the opponent of traditional natural law theories,\textsuperscript{281} there is another sense in which it can be argued that he conforms to that viewpoint - viz. in his notion of the law of love. There can be no question that for him the law of love attains to something approaching the absoluteness which natural law theorists tend to claim for their systems - cf. e.g.

"Community is an individual as well as a social necessity, for the individual can realise himself only in intimate and organic relation with his fellow men. Love is therefore the primary law of his nature."\textsuperscript{282}

It is "the final law of human existence".\textsuperscript{283} Paul Ramsey, in a lengthy discussion of the role of the law of love in Niebuhr's moral theory, concludes - "love with its indeterminate possibilities is Niebuhr's radical revision of the conception of the natural law for human personality with its indeterminate freedom".\textsuperscript{284}

West also notes certain affinities in Niebuhr's law of love with more theoretically absolute expositions of natural law - "Something of the burden of the law remains (in Niebuhr's thought) in the way the law of love ... interacts with the power facts of society."\textsuperscript{285}

One requires, however, to keep before one Niebuhr's strong sense of the sinful pretensions inherent in every human attempt to exact a final or ultimate principle of understanding.\textsuperscript{286} He is accordingly critical both of Luther's notion of an ecstatic state of transcendence, in which the soul rises above the demands of the moral "ought", and of Brunner's doctrine of

\textsuperscript{281} F & H pp. 204-207. ICE, pp. 154-8 CR, p. 140f.
\textsuperscript{282} HD, p. 253 and in his most recent MN & HC he writes "I have not revised my criticism that natural law theories, drawn from a metaphysical basis, are too inflexible."
\textsuperscript{283} F & H, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{284} K & B, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{285} West, op. cit., p. 154.
\textsuperscript{286} cf. HN, p. 207ff; BT, pp. 27-46; MWHC, pp. 81-96.
Schöpfungsordnungen. They both fail here to see the radical implication of the doctrine of justification by faith which we noted above, viz. that—"according to the doctrine of justification the inner contradiction of the soul is never completely healed." Hence the degree to which the law of love is recognised as a final principle is always relative to this qualification. Despite this, however, we can state that the law of love appears to serve Niebuhr rather as concepts of natural law served earlier ethical theorists. Man here encounters something which partakes of the very essence of things— an immutable determination of the human situation. Since God is love it is a short step from this position to the view that in his concrete encounter with this law of love, man is in encounter with the will and demand of God. He approaches this identification in a passage in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*—

"The unity of God is not static but potent and creative. God is, therefore, love. The conscious impulse of unity between will and life is the most adequate symbol of His nature. All life stands under responsibility to this loving will."  

The problem which is raised here is really the one we have been discussing from various approaches in this whole section—viz. the relation of faith and reason in Niebuhr's ethical theory. Paul Ramsey in the article already cited, investigates this relation at some depth and suggests three possible positions as to this relation—

1. Reason and faith operate in separate spheres though both arrive at the same conclusion—viz. love is the law of life. They then engage in "ceaseless dialogue".

2. (Taking more seriously Niebuhr's notion of man's sharing an "incoherent" sense of the law of love.) This approach would give more place to continuity between reason and faith. The unique contribution of faith would be its revelation of sacrificial love (the Cross) whereas reason could only attain to a notion of mutual love.  

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287. HD, p. 196.
288. ICE, p. 48.
289. Ramsey: art. cit. Section V "Faith and Reason in Love".
290. This would be the sort of relationship implied in HD, p. 84.
Niebuhr's critique of Fromm. Thus while reason can give us the basic notion of responsibility towards the other, only revelation can properly unveil the true heart of this, or its proper goal. Thus reason will require faith from the beginning if it is to attain to the notion of sacrificial love, but from the standpoint of faith, reason (i.e. a rational analysis of ethical responsibility) is seen to tend in the same direction. However, if we allow reason a fuller place we can interpret "incoherent" to imply a dim perception of sacrificial love (agape) and hence revelation by this would serve to confirm and fill out that "rational" outline.292

3. Or as a refinement of the second view - if we take love as simply "the good of the neighbour" then revelation in Christ shows us not so much a new kind of love, or the pinnacle of love, but simply love itself. This avoids the ambiguities of 2. The distinction between Christ and ourselves by this would not be that He loves with a different kind of love from ours, but simply that He loves and we do not. By this view reason can attain to the essence of the meaning of love but revelation serves to disclose how far short we fall of loving.

The first alternative seems wrong in that it is out of harmony with Niebuhr's constant attempt to set faith and reason in relation. The second, though nearer Niebuhr's intention, is clearly ambiguous and Niebuhr can be cited in support of both the interpretations as to the meaning of "incoherent" given there. The third is attractive in that it avoids this ambiguity and preserves a real 'continuity', yet retaining a distinctively 'new' element in the contribution of revelation viz. the awakening of guilt. If we tentatively accept the third as expressing Niebuhr's deepest intention, if not showing his explicit reasoning, we can relate this conclusion to our overall question as to the relation of moral experience and revelation in this way. Man in his moral experience meets the demand of the law of love, and is consciously put "in the wrong" with regard to it. Christ is the incarnation of God who is love and is hence the proper meaning of this law.

292. This is implied in HD, p. 81.
Our encounter with Him discloses the meaning and seriousness of our previous moral strife. Thus conscience is in this sense a revelation of God in that, from the standpoint of the revelation in Christ, we can see that our encounter with the law of love in our 'normal' moral relationships was an encounter with the will and demand of God, and hence an encounter with the Divine Judge, i.e. with God in His revelation. It is because he approaches the question of sin from this standpoint that Niebuhr can speak of knowledge of sin in terms of immediate moral experience.

Over against this position stands Barth's total rejection of a revelation of God in man's moral experience such that he is rendered a sinner before Him. He will not allow any such notion. His discussion and rejection of the notion has already been summarised above. We sketch the weaknesses of this view as he sees it.

1. It requires a division in the knowledge and Word of God.
2. The law which judges is an abstract one of an abstract God.
3. This law cannot really condemn man.
4. The true God and His true law is dishonoured in this process.
5. It requires a standard of good other than that disclosed in the gracious God of the gospel. To these theological criticisms Barth appends as we saw an historical criticism - viz. that when such a notion as Niebuhr's has been allowed in the Church it has only been a matter of time before the knowledge of God obtained from this source came to challenge and finally usurp the knowledge of God obtained from His Word and work in the gospel - i.e. general revelation came to overthrow special revelation, and in the nineteenth century, finally to destroy the very notion of revelation itself. The path of truth and safety lies, Barth argues, in a total No! being spoken over all these attempts to allow for a knowledge of God, - prior to and alongside of, the knowledge of God given at the heart of the gospel - and this includes a knowledge of God as a Judge towering infinitely over us in our sin.

293. Under Chapter 2; IV/1, pp. 358-397.
Barth's objections to Niebuhr's position finally reduce to one. If we take as our starting point, as Barth does, the concrete particularity of God's gracious self-giving in Jesus Christ then we have our immediate problem with a claim to a knowledge of God from some source other than this centre - even as a negative determination in a "knowledge of sin". In particular, how can there be a genuine meeting with God such that man is put in the wrong before Him, or become the bearer of a truly guilty conscience, other than in Jesus Christ? This position requires a law or standard of God or right against which the sinner is uncovered in his sinfulness. But what standard of good is there other than Jesus Christ? That is, how can there be a law, even a law of love, which is a final criterion of good and evil if it is not a law disclosed in, and attaining its sanction from, God's grace in Jesus Christ. The heart of Barth's objection to the law so conceived is that it fails to take seriously the concrete reality of justification by grace. When this is done all man's ethical life, the good as well as the evil, is called into question and set aside. Ethics as the relative Yes and No, better and worse, are set aside and the categories of sin, and its opposite faith, make their appearance.294

Barth elaborates his critique in his paper Gospel and Law.295 Arguing from the premises of the unity of the being and Word of God and its form and content being always Grace, Barth argues for the order Gospel/law. The "gospel" means God's gracious self-giving in Christ - the Word become flesh.296 The law requires to be approached from this standpoint. We recall that Christ fulfilled the law - and this is crucial for any understanding of it.297 If we think of law as the "manifest will of God" then we must think supremely of Jesus Christ in whom the will of God is properly uncovered to us. Further, the gospel by its very nature as the action of God for man lays upon man certain fundamental obligations. This is the law,298 and here

294. Barth's debt here to Luther and Kierkegaard will be fully documented in the following chapter when we will expound his ethical theory in full. At this point we are concerned with the more particular question of his rejection of the law conceived in terms of general ethical experience.
296. Ibid., pp. 4-7.
298. Ibid., pp. 8-10.
it can be defined as "the necessary form of the gospel whose content is grace". Its very terms indeed, as expressed in the fundamental commandment to love and fear God, simply direct us to the heart of the gospel - in Jesus Christ. Here the law can only be properly viewed as a law disclosed with, and subsequent to, the gospel. Sin, therefore, is uncovered, and conviction truly registered in the conscience, only in the light of God's grace in the gospel.

The deepest issue here is again that of revelation. At the more immediate level it is the question as to the theological evaluation of human experience of guilt prior to the hearing of the gospel of Grace, i.e. is sin disclosed, as Niebuhr would affirm and Barth deny, in universal moral experience? In the first instance we will attempt a Biblical evaluation. Does the Bible recognise man's encounter with the moral demand as an encounter with God? Are there universal moral norms which may be properly designated as "law of God"? Does Scripture give any support for a natural law?

2. Exegetical evaluation

The exegetical problem which confronts us is the question of the interpretation of Romans 2: 14-16. This is not the only passage where the question of natural law is raised of course. The bridgehead of the debate, however, has always been Romans 2. There have not been lacking interpreters

299. Ibid., p. 10.
301. Ibid., p. 14f.
who have seen in Paul's teaching that "the Gentiles do by nature what the law requires" 

who have seen in Paul's teaching that "the Gentiles do by nature what the law requires" ἡ γῆ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ ἔκρου τὰ ἔργα τοῦ νομοῦ πιλάνσιν (14) and that they show what the law requires "written on their hearts", τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νομοῦ γραμμένον ἐν τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν a clear warrant for a natural law known by all men irrespective of their religious faith.

Althaus⁴ for example can write - "There is a natural inclination towards the good which refers to a law of nature. God has written in the hearts of the gentiles that which the law of man demands."³⁰⁵ Thus, by this view, Paul teaches there that the will of God is known in its general terms by all men and the wrestling of their consciences is a wrestling with the will of God revealed to them "in their hearts".

Niebuhr's position is not far from this as we have seen. He does not refer to this Romans passage in his section on general revelation. His explicit statements on it indicate that he sees the passage as referring to non-Christian gentiles and as a reference to the moral struggle in which "the requirements of action dictated by man's essential nature" assert themselves in face of man's immediate situation. Unlike Althaus, and Dodd, and Emil Brunner, however, Niebuhr as we have seen, due in part to his more radical understanding of justification, stops short of an explicit view of natural law.

Barth's exegesis of the passage departs from the mainstream of the history of exegesis. He argues that Paul is not thinking of the non-Christian gentile at this point at all. He has been dealt with in 1: 16f. -

"The gentiles whom in 2: 14 Paul mentions in contrast to the Jews are simply the gentile Christians ... to whom, through God's wonderful deed in Jesus Christ, the very thing has happened which those prophetic words (Jer. 31: 33) pronounced to the people of Israel"⁴³⁰⁷

This certainly has the value of avoiding what might otherwise appear as a volte-face on Paul's part after the pessimistic picture of the Gentiles drawn in chapter 1: 16f, and would also accord with the claim that they fulfil Jer. 31: 33 (Heb. 8: 10). The main difficulties with this view lie in the

304. P. Althaus, Römerbrief; cf. too C.H. Dodd, Romans, pp. 35-36.
305. Althaus op. cit., p. 21.
306. NN, p. 291 and ND, p. 110.
307. A Shorter Commentary on Romans, p. 36.
fact that those referred to are not said to have the law but simply to perform the deeds of the law, and the meaning of φύσις. The exact denotation of φύσις remains a matter of controversy. The Platonic meaning relates the term to the notion of purpose; to give an idea of "in accordance with the nature of". It is not some metaphysical principle nor is it a mere convention. Taken in this sense Barth's interpretation becomes more plausible. It also opens up the possibility of a positive understanding of natural law viz. a law which is in accordance with the nature of things. The law of God can in this sense be termed a natural law.

Nygren, in his commentary on Romans, points out the importance of the context of 2: 14f. Paul is here concerned with demonstrating the inexcusability of the Jews just as in chapter 1 he has argued for the inexcusability of the Gentiles. The Jew, although admitting his imperfection, nonetheless views himself as fundamentally in the right with God on account of his having the law. He thus contrasts himself favourably with the Gentile who is a stranger to it. Paul, however, points out that it is the performance of the law which really matters and judged by this the Jew is in no better position than the Gentile. Both will be judged on the same basis - their accordance or otherwise in actual practice, with the Will of God. In the case of the Jews this has been the law of the Covenant. The Gentiles also have a 'law' however. It is not equivalent to the Old Testament law in value - Paul does not deny a distinction - but they are capable of being equated at this vital point that both convey a knowledge of God's will such that both Jew and Gentile are morally responsible beings and hence beings whose judgement is just.

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310. Nygren, Commentary on Romans (Philadelphia, 1944), pp. 119-120.
Nygren argues further that Paul is not here in verse 14 arguing for a lex naturalis after Stoic fashion - "the emphasis is not on having the law but on keeping it, on fulfilling the law"\(^{313}\) nor does Paul say that the law is written on the 'good Gentile's heart (cf. v. 15 ἐπὶ ἑαυτοῦ τὸν νόμον, not ὅ νόμος) even though Jer. 31: 33 no doubt influenced the apostle here. Paul is merely alluding to the fact that a Gentile on occasion will fulfill the work of the law in contrast to the Jew who despite having the law in fact fails to fulfill it. (The Gentile will equally also fail to fulfill it - cf. chapter 7; but that is not Paul's point here - his overall intention is simply to make good his charge of guilty on the Jews.) Nonetheless, he does admit here that the Gentile is responsible for his action. His conscience bears a witness to him (15). Nygren interprets this to imply that -

"Paul believes in God as living and ever active with man, even with the heathen, in life's concrete situations, showing him what is good and what is required of him ... (God) has written the "words of the law" in their hearts so that, if they do otherwise in their concrete situation, they are aware that they have done evil. "Their conscience also bears witness". Paul does not think that the heathen live in utter darkness, unable to tell right from wrong, white from black. Just because what the law requires is written on their hearts, they have a sense of how they ought to act in the specific situation ... the heathen's conscience stands as an objective witness beside him, showing that he actually knew that he did wrong." \(^{314}\)

Calvin exeges the passage in a similar manner -

"Therefore they have a law, without the law: for although they do not have the written law of Moses, they are by no means completely lacking in the knowledge of right and justice ... Paul contrasts nature with the written law meaning that the Gentiles had the natural light of righteousness which supplied the place of the law by which the Jews are taught, so that they are a law unto themselves ... The testimony of their

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own conscience, which is equivalent to a thousand witnesses, was the strongest pressure which (God) could bring to bear on them. There is, therefore, a certain natural knowledge of the law, which states that one action is good and worthy of being followed, while another is to be shunned with horror.\footnote{315}

He goes on to emphasise that -

"we cannot conclude from the passage that there is in man a full knowledge of the law, but only that there are some seeds of justice implanted in their nature.\footnote{316}

The context is a crucial factor in this approach - viz. guilt and condemnation on both Jew and Gentile, but also a guilt and condemnation in which the Judge executing sentence acts with utter justice. Jew and Gentile are both inexcusable - their guilt and blindness are both wilful and culpable. It is not a question of man's attaining a knowledge of God in some area of his being which is in some sense preserved from the effects of the fall. Rather the stress in Paul, and which Calvin and Nygren bring out, is upon the action of God who brings His will to bear upon fallen man and unsettles him in his sinful estrangement. The crucial point, however, by this line of exegesis is that man in his sin is brought to a consciousness of his guilt.

The difficulty for this view which Barth is concerned to avoid is the one he has raised again and again - who is this God? What is this "law"? What are the grounds of this guilt and condemnation? At the exegetical level, although the context gives certain support to the more traditional line of exegesis and hence to Niebuhr's conviction, Barth's interpretation is certainly not impossible. The issue hence requires to be carried over into theological considerations.

\footnote{315}{Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, tr. Mackenzie, (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 48-49.}
\footnote{316}{Ibid., p. 48.}
3. Theological evaluation

Barth's objections at this level have already been fully set out.317 They reduce to the question as to what meaning one can give to the law in the light of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. The debate here is really between Barth and Luther on the meaning of the law. All the major adherents of the law/gospel order, with the exception of Emil Brunner, are Lutherans,318 as was Niebuhr's earliest affiliation.319

A fruitful way of probing these issues and one which enables a close relation of the discussion to Niebuhr's thought, is to approach by way of the respective anthropologies.

iii. Anthropology

1. General divergence

By this approach, the divergence between Luther and Niebuhr on the one hand and Barth on the other, can be put as a divergent assessment of the being of man prior to his renewal in Jesus Christ. Luther and Niebuhr's law/gospel dialectic derives from an anthropological dialectic in terms of man before and after this renewal. Barth's gospel/law, or more correctly 'law within gospel', approach derives from his concern to see anthropology within Christology and his unhappiness with this independent man prior to renewal in Christ.

It is because Niebuhr stands with the Lutheran tradition at this point that he can go on to speak at all of a knowledge of sin prior to a knowledge of Christ. It is because Barth breaks with this tradition that he will not allow a knowledge of sin which is not (i.e. directly) related to the knowledge

317. cf. earlier chapter and above p. 80. IV/1, p. 358ff.
319. cf. earlier biographical account.
of Christ. We, therefore, require to examine the anthropologies which underlie the relative assessments of the theological significance of general moral experience.

The question which we are facing here is - can we give an account of man apart from his relation to God becoming man in Jesus Christ? Is there a manhood, a humanum, to be described and accounted for independent of the event of God taking up human flesh in the Incarnation? It is because Niebuhr believes in such that he can hold to his notion of law, and think of a real encounter with God prior to "special revelation" in Christ. Niebuhr, that is, embraces an essentialist anthropology. There are points at which it appears that Niebuhr rejects all attempts to speak of an essential form of man. He sets himself directly against any attempt to define man in terms of fixed and stable structures in his reason, nature or history. The thread which runs through his critique of rationalism, idealism and romanticism in the opening sections of the Gifford Lectures is his charge that they all fail to allow for man's self-transcending freedom and hence inevitably present inadequate, even misleading, pictures of his being. All definitions of man's essence in terms of fixed patterns and structures discernible by rational observation are by definition side-tracks for any approach to man. They lack -

"a principle of interpretation which can do justice to both the height of human self-transcendence and the organic unity between the spirit of man and his physical life." 321

It might be thought that this position would imply a break with the 'essentialist' tradition, i.e. the view that man has a certain fixed form or essence and an embracing of a radical existentialist anthropology. 322 Niebuhr, however, is at this level merely clearing the ground. In its own way, his notion of man as requiring a dimension of transcendent freedom to account for him is still within the essentialist frame (perhaps 'dynamic' essentialist). Niebuhr himself acknowledges this - cf. "I believe in an 'essential' nature of man" 323 (he normally defines this in terms of freedom).

320. HN, p. 19ff.
321. HN, p. 132.
322. Cf. J.P. Sartre L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme, p. 15: "Man is nothing else but what he makes himself ... there is no explaining things away ... by reference to a fixed and given human nature." tr. as Ramsey, K & B, p. 81.
What then is essential man for him? As far as the "filling out" of this notion is concerned Niebuhr is rather equivocal. The root of this equivocality lies in his attempt to speak of man both as within limits a determinate creature subject to the laws and conditions of natural life within the total causal nexus and as a creature transcending this determination. The problem is - how are we to relate these two elements and hence in what terms is the "essential nature" of man to be spoken of? Sometimes Niebuhr allows that in so far as man has a determinate structure, it is possible to uncover the "essential nature" in these terms -

"In so far as man has a determinate structure, it is possible to state the essential nature of human existence to which his actions ought to conform and to which they should fulfil. But in so far as he has the freedom to transcend structure, standing beyond himself and beyond every particular social situation, every law is subject to indeterminate possibilities which finally extend the limits of any specific definition of what he 'ought' to do. Yet they do not stand completely outside of law, if law is defined in terms of man's essential nature. For this indeterminate freedom is a part of his essential nature."324

Having asserted this, however, he seems to take it away again when in the same essay he can write - "fixed historical structures and norms ... do not in fact exist."325 As we saw in our discussion of Niebuhr's view of the natural law although he appears to concede considerable ground to a rational definition of man and his norms, in practice he concedes rather less. His position with respect to defining essential man within the terms of his determinate structure is accurately put in a comment in Faith and History -

"There is not much that is absolutely immutable in the structure of human nature except its animal basis."326 Niebuhr's conviction as to the essential freedom of the human spirit and his strong sense of history with its record of the sheer flux and change of life under the impact of this free human spirit, means that his concessions to an "essential nature" as expressed in immutable laws for human conduct are strictly limited. Man's "essential" structure then for Niebuhr is properly man's transcendent freedom327 which on the one hand is the denial of structure yet on the other hand requires a certain form of "essential" nature. This form expresses

324. CRPP, pp. 146-147.
325. Ibid., pp. 162-163.
326. F & H, p. 207.
327. HN, pp. 3-4; HD, p.1; ICE, p.77; CRPP, p. 167; SDE, p.15ff; MNHC, p.21.
itself in the demand of love. Man accordingly may be defined for Niebuhr as 'the creature whose being finds its meaning and fulfilment in love'. "The law of life is love." 328

Over against this essentialist notion stands Barth's doctrine of man, which we can most simply indicate as Christological. Barth commences his anthropology 329 with an explicit rejection of all attempts to approach man as an object in and of himself. 330 Man can only be viewed and understood in his relation to God. 'God', however, must be understood in a very precise sense - God is, as ever for Barth, the God of the covenant, the God revealed and active in Jesus Christ. Hence to require that anthropology be understood in relation to God means that it be understood in relation to Christology. Thus far Barth remains within more or less close touch with the traditional theological approach to man but in his understanding of the precise relation between the two elements Christ and man his anthropology strikes out in comparatively new directions - viz. in his attempt to base and found anthropology on Christology. 331 Thus - "As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our knowledge of the nature of man created by God." 332 This means for theology that - "... in its investigation of the nature of man in general, it must first look away from man in general and concentrate on the one man Jesus, and only then look back from Him to man in general." 333 This does not imply a direct and simplistic parallel between the human nature of Jesus and human nature in general, nor that we can simply "read off" our anthropology from our Christology. 334 We sinful men are different from Jesus. His human nature is - "... without the self-contradiction which afflicts us and without the self-deception by which we seek to escape from this our shame." 335 Since Jesus alone is true man we conclude that - "We are partakers of human nature as and because Jesus is first partaker of it." 336

328. ICE, p. 117; cf. also p. 123 "all human life is informed with an incoherent sense of responsibility towards the ultimate law of life - the law of love."

329. III/2, passim.

330. III/2, p. 19f.

331. Ibid., p. 44.

332. Ibid., p. 41.

333. Ibid., p. 53.

334. Ibid., p. 47.

335. Ibid., p. 48.

336. Ibid., p. 50.
In this last quotation we are made aware of the range of implication which Barth wishes to predicate on the basis of "Jesus as true man". He is concerned to assert, not simply the noetic implication as to our knowledge of man, but the ontic implication as to the being of man. Here in Jesus is constituted the ontological basis of human being - as being by and with God. "Basically and comprehensively therefore, to be a man is to be with God." Barth here is unfolding the implications of his understanding of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh..." Jesus Christ in His action of becoming flesh laid hold of human existence "in the flesh", and healed and bound it to God in His very being. It is the implication of das Wunder der Weihnacht.

The mistake of the essentialist approach then, as Barth sees it, lies in its indicating an unreal object. It sets out to define the essence of man as though man were not, or not yet, the man with God in Jesus Christ. But such a man does not properly exist, there is no such "God-less" man; he is an ontological impossibility. The correct method is to unfold step by step the meaning of human nature and being as being "with God", and as the human being disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth. Barth undertakes such an unfolding in the remainder of the volume cited.

Coming to the question of the evaluation of human moral experience Barth evaluates this from within these presuppositions. Thus while Barth does not deny the reality and sharpness of moral obligation and the genuine even crushing sense of guilt which can derive from it - even a sense of guilt in relation to God - the proper meaning of this is uncovered with reference to the actual situation of man as man-with-God in the covenant of grace. Here, at this point, it is disclosed that the real guilt which hangs over man is his resistance of this covenant bond, i.e. his resistance of God's grace. It is this fundamental disorder which lies behind and

337. III/2, p. 135.
338. I/2, p. 132ff esp. 147f.
339. III/2, p. 75 and ff.
340. III/2, pp. 55-640.
341. IV/1, p. 362; also I/2, p. 360.
342. II/2, p. 92; also cf. I/2, p. 746; III/2, p. 32f; IV/1, pp. 80-81; Credo 37, 44, 56; GGG, p. 14f.
gives a proper meaning to these secondary disorders expressed as guilt feelings in the face of concrete ethical demands. - "Even when we have verified the ethical characteristics of man we still do not have an unambiguous index of real man." This moral tension which he encounters in the face of the demand of the moral 'ought' -

"... may well be the inner tension between the relative Yes and a relative No, between becoming and perishing, between strength and weakness, between the great and the small, between achievement and will; the dialectic in which human existence has a part in the antithesis or dualism of light and darkness which runs through the whole of creation. But this tension has nothing whatever to do with man's being in sin as such."^44

West's criticism of Niebuhr is relevant at this point - viz. that he is guilty of obtruding ideological elements drawn from his American environment into his social and theological analysis of man. His ignoring of the Christological factors in man's situation means that he has to fill the lacuna in his thought with elements drawn from some other source. In his case they are drawn, as indicated, from the social and political norms of twentieth century American society. It is this element in his thought which Barth would claim prevents Niebuhr from distinguishing the ethical from the religious, and from breaking, by way of justification in Christ, through categories of good and evil to the categories of sin and faith, and to man before God.

The division between Barth and Niebuhr is a division thus between what we may term an 'essentialist' and a 'Christological' understanding of man by which we imply the distinction between a view of man which sees his essence as disclosed in the realities encountered straightforwardly in empirical experience (though these realities to be properly understood require a relation to a transcendent dimension), and a view which finds man's true being in the one who became incarnate, Jesus Christ. It is this division

344. IV/1, p. 360.
which lies behind Niebuhr's adherence to the Lutheran law/gospel dialectic and his placing moral experience within the range of God's self-revelation, as against Barth's gospel-law order and his narrower view of revelation.

Barth's approach has certain undoubted strengths. He is able to give a central place to the significance of Jesus Christ for human existence and hence overcomes the problem of having to relegate His significance to only a proportion of the human race. Again he is by his Christological approach able to avoid the incorporation of an alien anthropology with all its dangerous presuppositions which so afflicted the church in the nineteenth century, and as many would argue, continues to do so in current existentialist theologies.

On the other hand there are questions to be raised. Scripture certainly appears to refer to the Incarnation in terms of Jesus being made like us rather than the other way round, and hence the impression is given that He participated in our nature rather than we in His. Such a view of course requires a prior situation of man as lost and fallen. Others have noted a certain tension in Barth's anthropology whereby the Christological motif is in places replaced by the motif of man's total dependence upon God such that Barth is not thoroughly consistent to his Christological presupposition and this in itself would indicate a certain inadequacy if it is in fact the case.

Niebuhr attempts to support his essentialist notion by the traditional appeal to two other doctrines - the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of man in the image of God. We will require therefore to assess the adequacy of this 'basis'.

2. Man and the doctrine of Creation

It is important to keep in view in any consideration of Niebuhr's doctrine of creation that for him the idea is, by his terms "mythical"
in nature - "Creation is a mythical idea which cannot be rationalised ... the truth of creation can only be expressed in terms which outrage reason." He does not think of man's essential being as having come from God at some moment at the boundary of history. The significance of creation is rather its value as a key to interpret human existence here and now. In this form it implies man's finiteness, dependence, and insufficiency, as realities within God's purpose, and hence as 'good'. More importantly -

"... the whole import of the Christian doctrine of creation for the Christian view of man is really comprehended in the Christian concept of individuality. The individual is conceived of as a creature of infinite possibilities which cannot be fulfilled within the terms of this temporal existence." Such an implication Niebuhr argues brings us to Kierkegaard's notion of selfhood as lying in the summons to self-realisation in relation to God. The more straightforward implication of the doctrine of creation viz. that man in his present being derived directly from God's creative will Niebuhr draws implicitly rather than explicitly. It is the underlying assumption of his idea of the image of God to which we now turn.

349. BT, pp. 7 and 8: also ICE, p. 32f.
350. HN, p. 179.
351. Ibid., p. 181.
352. Ibid., pp. 182-3.
353. Cf. for example G. Wingren Creation and law, tr. Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1961) Wingren seeks to derive an anthropology from the creative will of God (op. cit. pp. 18-31 and passim). It is not insignificant that he also wishes to preserve the idea of natural law (p. 124). Barth argues against this kind of approach in IV/1, p. 368f. He thinks that it requires a division between God the Creator and God the Redeemer. He refers to his own attempt in III/1 to harmonise the two in the notion of the covenant of grace.
Man and the doctrine of the Image of God

a. Niebuhr’s and Barth’s positions

The understanding of the image of God in Barth and Niebuhr’s thought has already been touched upon.

Niebuhr as we saw finds the *imago* in *man*, in his constituent being. His account of it requires to be approached from the standpoint of his dualistic anthropology. Man is the participant in a transcendant realm of being. He has a capacity for self-transcendence.\(^{354}\) The image of God in his thought corresponds to this capacity. His account of the *imago* in the Gifford Lectures makes this tie-up explicit. He seeks help from Augustine, Heidegger, Schiller, and Kierkegaard in his attempt to characterise it.\(^{355}\) This transcendent element is always clearly associated for Niebuhr with man’s freedom and hence the *imago* is bound up with man’s need to choose and thus determine his being and destiny. Very important for our purposes is the relation which Niebuhr indicates between the *imago* and Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is for Niebuhr the ultimate court of appeal in his anthropological discussion. Christ is the Second Adam, the norm of humanity. The real vindication of man’s dualistic nature, his capacity for transcending his natural being and environment, is found in the being of Christ. He is the final revelation at this point since he discloses the "trans-historical norm of historical life".\(^{356}\) It is significant, however, that Niebuhr does not refer in his discussion to the N.T. texts which explicitly relate the *imago* to Jesus Christ. The *imago* thus can be understood only in the light of Jesus Christ, not in the sense that He is its essential form but in the sense that he, as the norm of humanity, points to and establishes the reality of the transcendent as a genuine dimension of human life. The *imago* is related to Jesus Christ noetically but not ontically. This distinction is important in relating him to Barth.

\(^{354}\) HN, pp. 3-4; HD I: ICE, p. 77; CRPP, p. 163: SDH, p. 15f; MNHC, p. 21. 
\(^{355}\) HN, p. 173.
\(^{356}\) HN, p. 175.
Barth's view of the image of God derives from his attempt to set anthropology consistently in the light of Christology. He finds the clue to the meaning of the *imago* in the work of Vischer and Bonhoeffer.\(^{357}\) Man, by God's creative decree is man in confrontation with his fellow man. This being-in-relation is expressed concretely in the sexual differentiation and in the relation of man and woman. This is the prototype of which the antitype is the being of God Himself in the self-differentiation of the Holy Trinity. This leads us, Barth argues, to God's relationship in the covenant of grace with Israel and the Church. The final meaning of the *imago* hence lies in the Person of Jesus Christ, in whom the covenant is set up and fulfilled. Man's being in the image of God is hence by this, man's being as the covenant partner of God, cleansed and healed in Christ. Put another way, the *imago* for Barth is God's reflecting and imaging Himself in man. Again we need to indicate the role of Christ in the understanding of the image. Christ for Barth is the image, not merely a vindication of its reality but its very expression and content. Thus Barth is delivered from the problem of the Reformers who spoke of a "relic" of original righteousness still possessed by fallen man. By Barth's interpretation we are free to talk of man as totally corrupted, no talk of "relics" is relevant. But, and here is the all-important 'other factor', man is also God's covenant partner, redeemed and restored in Jesus Christ. The *imago* lies here in Christ and man's being as a participation in Him. Thus for Barth the *imago* is related to Christ both noetically and ontically.

Bringing the two positions together we can put the distinction between them as follows - for Niebuhr Christ is the *norm* of humanity; for Barth Christ is the *reality* of humanity. Niebuhr hence requires to posit an independent human nature on the basis of creation and the image of God while Barth denies such. For Niebuhr hence, believing as he does in this independent humanity fallen into sin, the situation of man as a creature of God but estranged from Him is in itself a determination of man's existence and provides an essential precondition of the Incarnation as a movement of God's

\(^{357}\) III/1, p. 194.
grace to effect man's salvation and healing. Barth, however, denies this independence. He wishes to assert only a single basis for man's being - in God, i.e. in His grace in Christ. Thus creation becomes a function of redemption and anthropology is gathered into Christology. Put another way, and here we face the fundamental issue between the two men, for Niebuhr revelation is illumination and to a lesser degree determination; whereas for Barth revelation is determination and hence illumination. Returning to the more particular issue of the meaning of the image of God we can evaluate exegetically as follows -

b. Exegetical evaluation

When we investigate the whole range of the Biblical references to the "image of God" it becomes apparent that we are here dealing with two distinguishable classes of text.

i. In the first place there are the passages, Genesis 1:26f; Genesis 5:3; James 3:9; 1 Cor. 11:7; 1 Cor. 15:49a which teach a certain relatedness of God and man. Man is here asserted to be made in God's image. In this connection Genesis 5 appears to be important since the notion is there applied to a human progenitor. 1 Cor. 15, 49a also speaks of the image in terms of a direct human linear relation. Thus whatever meaning we attach to the notion requires to be relevant in this setting. On the face of it these references would appear to support the finding of the meaning in terms of the physical being of man (Noth; von Rad, etc.) but the difficulty here is that it requires too sharply physical a notion of the deity of which there are certain traces in Scripture but which does not accord with the bulk of the evidence. The meaning is perhaps better seen if we think in terms of a human offspring as being in a sense the expression of the creative will of the progenitor, an extension of his life and being. Man in the image of God is by this man as the creature of God, the one in whom God's creative purpose finds expression. As has been pointed out, there is significantly no reference in the Bible to a 'loss' of the image, nor of a prior 'possession' of it. By this view of the image the reason is obvious -

358. Cf. TWNT, art. \(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\nu\nu\), Vol 2, pp. 381-383: 390-392.
man can only cease to be in the image of God when he ceases to be the
creature of God, that is, when he ceases to exist. The image is not a
faculty or property of man as such but his relation to God his creator and
upholder. 359

ii. In the second place there are the passages, Colossians 1, 2 Cor. 4
where Jesus Christ is spoken of as the image of God. Here we encounter
a new dimension of meaning for the notion. Porteous can even speak of an
"obliteration" of the O.T. meaning. 360 In other passages - Romans 8, 29;
Colossians 3, 10; and 1 Cor. 15, 49b the Christian believer is referred
to as being destined to share this image of God in his union with the Christ
who is the essence of the image. Here the meaning the "image" bears has
altered from the O.T. one of "likeness" to something approaching "the
perfect reflection of the essence." 361

Focussing this investigation we observe that the Bible uses the notion
of the image of God to cover two kinds of relationship. First there is
a relationship which derives from man's being created by God. Man is
God's creature and remains such, even in his sin. Second there is a
relationship which the believer knows through Jesus Christ. A relationship
of redemption which will attain to its fulness only at the Return of Christ.
The question as to the meaning we are to attach to the imago lies to a
great extent in the relationship which we adduce between these two senses
of the term.

Relating this to Barth and Niebuhr - we can observe that, as far as
Niebuhr is concerned, his proposed solution is clearly less than adequate
in that he fails to take any account at all of the second series of
passages above. This may derive from a conviction that this second group
of texts is so distinct as not to fall within the scope of his view as
derived from the first group, but this would require to be argued for.
As it stands his failure to refer to this strand of the Biblical witness

p. 682.
means his abdication of the right to properly claim a "Biblical Doctrine" of the *imago*. To some extent Niebuhr's omission here is surprising. As we have argued there would have been room for a relation of the *imago* to Jesus Christ within the terms of his anthropology. Indeed we have had reason to actually make the identification ourselves in seeking to draw out his meaning, i.e. Jesus Christ as the image of God in the sense that He vindicates the reality of the transcendent. Admittedly such a meaning is less than the New Testament appears to affirm when it directly identifies Christ as the εἰκὼν Θεοῦ but Niebuhr could at least have allowed for the weaker secondary meaning noted above. Niebuhr's exposition also appears unable to cope with the passages where the image is referred horizontally, i.e. Adam/Seth, Adam/race (Genesis 5, 1 Corinthians 15, 49a). His whole presentation in the Gifford Lectures in his identification of the *imago* with the transcendent, while defensible to some extent, leaves a certain impression of his having found Biblical support for an already formed idea rather than the Biblical material's having driven him to his anthropological conclusion.

Barth's interpretation avoids the problem of having to find the image of God in man, and he is also able to give a meaning to the whole of the Biblical material. Certainly his attempt to think of the *imago* in terms of relationship can hardly be classified as incorrect, nonetheless it is dependent upon his rather individual interpretation of the Genesis creation stories, and his simple identification of the two meanings of the image in a universalistic sense leaves certain questions. 1 Corinthians 15, 49 certainly implies a very close relation between the two meanings since here both are brought together within a single text, however one presupposition of Paul's teaching here is chapter 1, verse 18 (of 1 Corinthians) which indicates a fundamental division between ἀπολύεινεις and σωζομένεις and verse 21 which relates salvation to faith in the closest way.

362. In particular one thinks of his relating the *imago* to the man/woman relation which would appear to lead to real problems in associating the *imago* with Jesus Christ.
Bringing this discussion of the relative anthropologies to a conclusion - does Niebuhr succeed in establishing an independent anthropology and hence in opening the way towards the law-gospel order? His construction certainly leaves a number of questions unanswered. He might have been able to attain a more adequate position had he made more of the doctrine of creation but his rather mythical understanding of it made this difficult. As a result the *imago Dei* has to carry the full weight of his case and its ability to do so is undermined by exegetical inadequacies as we have noted.

Barth is certainly more satisfying at the exegetical level, as far as the passages we have looked at are concerned, but there are real difficulties in his constantly thinking in universal categories. One is left with the question as to how he can reflect the clear Biblical witness to the cruciﬁality of faith for salvation and the radical distinction which it draws between believer and non-believer. One is bound to ask at times whether the objectivism of his thought which is such a salutary corrective to nineteenth century tendencies (and certain current positions, for example Bultmann’s existentialist anthropology) is not to some extent an over-corrective?363

iv. Conclusion

To conclude finally, this rather wide-ranging discussion has served at least to open up the basic approaches to the idea of sin taken by the two theologians and to indicate the problems which arise in that context. At the ontological level Niebuhr has less to offer as compared with Barth’s profound, if at times rather speculative, exposition. Niebuhr is more adequate in the face of epistemological questions. His notion of a general

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revelation has a certain validity even if he attempts to make more of it than is warranted. His attempt to make good the implications of this position, however, suffers from his commitment to existentialist as against Biblical categories. Barth as ever is penetrating and rigorously consistent with his primary convictions.

Relating these conclusions to the question of their fundamental positions we can suggest that Niebuhr's concern to allow man a proper "pole" (between gospel and world) has a certain correctness but that he fails to justify it adequately theologically. Barth's position ("in the light of the Word of God") though more satisfying theologically nevertheless leaves certain questions unanswered.

We propose proceeding by way of a fuller examination of the ethical field. This has significance as being the area where the divergence between the two men has expressed itself explicitly and where Niebuhr thinks he has real questions to put to Barth. It will also enable a deeper examination of the divergence.
We turn our attention in this section to a deeper exploration of one of the areas already discussed above — viz. the area of ethics. In this chapter we will attempt to expound the two men's approaches to the ethical question and seek to illustrate their relative positions with respect to the area of Christian social ethics. We will take note of the divergencies between them, which emerge at that level, and seek to relate them to the conclusions reached above as to the heart of their divergence. Finally we will aim to draw out the implications of this investigation for the doctrine of sin. We begin with Barth.

A. BARTH'S ETHICAL THEORY

a. Presuppositions

No-one reared, as Barth was, in the theological concerns of nineteenth century liberal protestantism could fail to give serious attention to the ethical question — the question of the good. We have already indicated the essentially anthropocentric character of this theology — its stress on the human religious and aesthetic consciousness as the controlling pole of its theological construction. Within this tradition the ethical question was obviously a central concern. In keeping with the tone of this outlook, however, it was approached in a particular manner — viz. in terms of man's ethical achievement rather than his ethical limitation. Man's ethical sensitivity was hailed as the testimony to his peculiar dignity and status within the created order. It was the great dividing line, (and here the evolution controversy lent its influence) between man and the brute creation. The question of the good in other words was more properly the question of the goodness of man. By a remarkable transformation the area in which the deepest question mark is placed over man, such that Kant found it necessary to speak of man's "radical evil"¹, became for these men of the nineteenth century a pulpit from which man's greatness could be heralded.

1. Emmanuel Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, tr. Greene and Hudson (Chicago, 1934), pp. 15-49.
T.F. Torrance comments -

"... the question of ethics, even the problem of radical evil, was the question in which the nineteenth century saw expressed the peculiar greatness and dignity of man, but on the other hand, the problem it involved required an explanation, and, inevitably within the context of romantic idealism, aided and abetted by evolutionism, it was explained naturally."²

Barth in an essay in 1922 speaks of it in these terms -

"The naive belief in those better days essentially simplified the question about the good, or at least made its difficulties less insistent. It was then a pleasure to study ethics. Fundamentally, it was a matter, not of asking what to do, as if that were not known, but rather of finding out whether philosophy or theology, Kant or Schleiermacher, provided the more illuminating formula for the obvious - for it was obvious that what to do was to further this infinitely imperfect but infinitely perfectible culture."³

Interestingly and significantly, it was this question of ethics which finally projected Barth into his orbit of reaction to this whole trend. In his essay 'The Humanity of God' he raises the various reasons for the failure of this theology, and comments significantly -

"Was it - and for me personally this played a decisive role - the failure of the ethics of modern theology at the outbreak of the First World War which led to our discontent with its exegesis, its conception of history and its dogmatics?"⁴

Barth here is probably referring in particular to the manifesto signed in 1914 by ninety-three German intellectuals, including most of Barth's theological teachers, supporting the Kaiser's war. As Barth tells us, the day when the manifesto appeared was for him a 'Dies ater'.⁵ Writing in an essay in 1922 in the new theological situation which was then emerging, it is this very question of ethics which he believes has to be recovered in all its seriousness - "The ethical problem dominates:

3. WGWM p. 145; cf. too Barth "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century", GGG, p. 66 et al.
5. GGG, p. 58.
it is fundamental, first, a priori, in the situation; it takes us up. We live within this crisis and relationship."  

This approach to the ethical question for which he appeals in 1922 is not that of his predecessors. Already in the essay cited we find Barth striking the deeper notes which his Romans also sounds. For Barth the ethical question is seen as a question put against man pointing him towards the utter hopelessness of his situation - "... the problem of ethics is a responsibility that cannot be borne: a deadly aggression against man."  

Barth, that is, is struggling here to break through ethics to the notion of sin and to man before God. In this movement Barth's radical understanding of justification played its part. In the light of the justification of man by God in Jesus Christ all human efforts to attain the good are set aside. Here alone true goodness is manifested - the goodness of God for man in His grace.

The influence of Kierkegaard is apparent. Kierkegaard had also made this breakthrough from the ethical into the religious. In Fear and Trembling (in a discussion of Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac) he argues for a "telelogical suspension of ethics" - i.e. for the recognition of a transcending of the notion of ethical duty, the doing of the morally "good", in the face of a demand of faith -

"In the fight to realise the task of ethics sin shows itself not as something which only casually belongs to a casual individual, but sin withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and deeper presupposition ... Now all is lost for ethics, and it has contributed to the loss of all. There has come to the fore a category which lies entirely outside its province."  

Man, that is, is related to God, he is placed before God. This orientation

7. Epistle to the Romans, tr. Hoskyns (London, 1933) e.g. p. 167f.  
9. WGWM, p. 152.  
10. Ibid. p. 168  "It is through the inescapable severity of this doom that we come upon the reality of God. It is this that proves that the problem of ethics, when it becomes our own, is the bond that relates us to God.

11. S. Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p.17.  
12. Cf. S.K., Sickness unto Death, tr. Lowrie (London, 1941), p. 130 "Sin is this: before God in despair not to will to be oneself; or before God in despair to will to be oneself." (S.K. here = S. Kierkegaard).
"before God", as a decisive qualification of man's ethical situation, Barth draws both from Kierkegaard and from his reading of Ficker's edition of Luther's Römerbriefvorlesung.

"We can understand the statement that God and His words are justified when in faith we believe them to be true and righteous, though they are so in themselves also without our believing we must take the sentence that we must become sinners and liars and fools and that all our righteousness, truth, wisdom and virtue must perish. But this becomes a fact when we believe that we are liars, sinners and fools and that our virtue and righteousness are absolutely nothing before God (coram Deo). And thus we become inwardly, inside ourselves, what we are outside ourselves, namely, before God (coram Deo), although inside ourselves we are not so i.e. we do not believe that we are so."

It was only when this situation of man was taken seriously that his predicament could be properly indicated. Man's problem was not simply a sickness but a sickness unto death. Man's case is hopeless - he is cast utterly beyond the boundary of his own capacity for self-justification into the realm of God's grace. To that alone he can cling.

A further implication which (following Luther and Kierkegaard) Barth drew from this understanding of the ethical question and its relation to sin was that the opposite of sin was not goodness but faith. Within the realm of the ethical there was good and evil; the more and the less; the better and the worse. In faith, however, one was placed before God where the ethical "more" or "less" became quite irrelevant. Before God's grace in faith man was utterly judged and utterly justified.


Compare Kierkegaard again -
"... too often it has been overlooked that the opposite of sin is not virtue, not by any manner of means. This is in part a pagan view which is content with a merely human measure and properly does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as is affirmed in Romans 14: 23 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin'. And for the whole of Christianity it is one of the most decisive definitions that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith."16

Barth's ethical theory is based upon these presuppositions, though at the time of the 1922 essay he still had some way to go towards his mature and disciplined unfolding of the doctrine in the Church Dogmatics. In particular, we require to note the shift of emphasis (which is alleged even in the Church Dogmatics) from a concentration upon the revealing Word to the Word made flesh in the Person of the God-Man Jesus Christ.17 As the terms of this movement indicate, Barth's concern with the question of the how of revelation and within this his concern to speak a 'No' over all other ways to God than that of grace, which means Jesus Christ, to some extent gives way to a concern with the what of revelation and hence with the God/manhood of Jesus Christ and its implications for the man who is affirmed as God's covenant partner in Jesus Christ. It is in terms of this second area of concern (or perhaps more correctly this extension of the first area of concern) that Barth's essentially positive ethical approach is enunciated as we shall see.18

16. Kierkegaard, Sickness unto Death, p. 132, cf. too Luther's Lectures on Romans, passage cited above p. 61 "through faith ... sin is alive in us." also pp. 400-402; Barth 'Romans' pp. 122-123.
17. On this development cf. West, pp. 193-4; von Balthasar, op. cit., who speaks of "die Ersetzung des Centralbegriffs 'Wortes Gottes' durch den Centralbegriff 'Jesus Christus, Gott und Mensch'", p. 124. also Barth's autobiographical report for the years 1928-38 (Christian Century, 1939, p. 272) and III/4, preface XIII.
b. The Ethical theory of the Church Dogmatics

Moving on to the Church Dogmatics we refer to the summary of the section dealing with ethics in an earlier chapter. There are two sections in which his approach is indicated: during his discussion of proclamation in I/2\(^{19}\) during his treatment of the doctrine of God in II/2.\(^{20}\) In the former discussion he argues against any isolation of the ethical sphere from the dogmatic - the unity of the two lies in the being of the man who is addressed by the Word of God. In the latter he fills out "Word of God" to its proper dimensions and seeks to think of the ethical question as the question of the man who is God's covenant partner in Jesus Christ. Here Barth argues that ethics is "the doctrine of God's command".\(^{21}\) Ethics that is, belongs within the doctrine of God. God is the God who in the election of Grace has chosen man as his covenant partner -

"In the true Christian concept of the covenant of God with man the doctrine of the divine election of Grace is the first element, and the doctrine of the divine command is the second. It is only in this concept of the covenant that the concept of God can itself find completion. For God is not known and is not knowable except in Jesus Christ. He does not exist in His divine Being and perfections without Jesus Christ, in whom He is both very God and very man. He does not exist therefore without the covenant with man which was made and executed in this name."\(^{22}\)

Thus God's relation with man belongs to His essential being in the eternal manhood of Jesus Christ, and hence God's direction of man in Him belongs equally to His essential being. Ethics, as the Command of God must hence be approached and understood from this standpoint. Thus the man who is faced with the ethical question is the man who is antecedently the covenant-partner of God. The imperative of the ethical demand is heard subsequent to the indicative of the divine grace. Hence the real ethical question is the question - "What would'st Thou have me to do?" where the Thou signifies the Living God who has justified man in grace and who claims man's whole life and being as the area of His Lordship. There is, in Barth's thought here a certain dialectical movement which requires to be

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19. I/2, pp. 782-796.
20. II/2, pp. 509-781.
22. Ibid.
clarified and which we have already touched upon. When the question of the good is really asked i.e. when man is placed in relation to real goodness - the goodness of God, the goodness of His self-giving in Jesus Christ, the goodness of His grace - man’s relative Yes and No, more and less, better and worse, even his highest good and deepest evil - are all finally irrelevant. Before the goodness of God which is the goodness of His grace, man is found to be utterly in the wrong, totally called into question, the believing with the unbelieving. This is the radical implication of justification by grace. We pass in this movement, that is, through the ethical to the religious - from the dialectic good/evil to the dialectic sin/faith where man stands by faith as a sinner before God; i.e. before the God who condemns him and justifies him in Jesus Christ. This is the first movement of the dialectic of Barth’s ethical theory. It means a radical clearing of the decks, the sweeping away of the goodness of moral man, the silencing of all talk of man’s ethical attainment, of his peculiar dignity, considered in and of himself. Here a total No sounds over man. The sickness lays hold of him at his heart, it permeates his being, he is delivered up to death.

Then, however, there comes, by grace alone, a second movement whereby the man who is denied in the first movement is now affirmed in his creaturely being. This second movement is rooted in the action of grace whereby there takes place in Jesus Christ both the judgement and the justification of man. Thus within the No there sounds a Yes which establishes man as the creature of God and which is the sanctification of his creaturely existence and all its levels.

Thus having set ethics aside in favour of the category of sin coram Deo, sub specie aeternitatis in the first movement of the dialectic, Barth here seeks to restore it in the second. Ethics now finds a valid place as the doctrine of the command of God; as the response of the creature to his judgement and justification in Christ. Understood in this way, ethics,

23. This temporal sequence does not of course obtain in the being and action of God. Justification is simultaneously both the denial and affirmation of man.

24. II/2, p.509.
with its good and evil, more and less, better and worse, has a proper place and role in the whole theological scheme. The ground and justification of ethics is the person of Jesus Christ. Here Barth breaks with all the attempts to ground it in a natural knowledge of God, a natural law, or an analogy entis. God's affirmation of man is the affirmation of Jesus -

"The attitude of God, in which the faithfulness of the Creator and therefore also the enduring relations of the human being which he has created are revealed and recognisable is quite simply his conduct toward the Man Jesus; his election of this man, his becoming and remaining one with Him, his revelation, his action, his endurance in him and through him, his love, which is turned towards him, through him to those who believe in him, and finally to the whole creation, his freedom and Lordship which finds in this man their created bearer and representative. He is God, in that He, in his eternal Godhead, Himself became this man in his human creatureliness. This, precisely, is God's conduct towards sinful man." 25

This is the basis for the ethical and the way in which Barth approaches it. The question of the good then for Barth reduces to the question of the degree of man's conformity to the will of God his Creator and Redeemer. In Christ the whole of his being is affirmed and sanctified and hence the question of the ethical is the question of man's conduct in the whole range of his being.

In Christ man is elected and affirmed in his life before God. Our part is to confirm what God has already affirmed. Our obedience is in confirmation of Christ's obedience for us. We are called to take responsibility for our lives because God has already taken responsibility for us.

We could gather up this ethic by saying that it is an ethic of indicative-imperative. We are summoned in the imperative of the command of God to be and to do because of what we have been made and had done for us in the great indicatives of God's grace. Become what you are! The essential character of Barth's ethic in this second positive element is freedom. Oden defines

25. III/2, p.41.
it thus -

"Man is called to be free, to be himself before God in response to the freedom of God for Him. There is no claim of God except the claim implicit in the good news that God is for us. There is no requirement of God apart from the liberating claim that addresses us in the Christ event." 26

West speaks of Barth in his approach - "... giving not only a caution, but also a charter, to free responsible, and (in a general sense unbound to any philosophical system) empirical ethical thinking in the whole field of ethics." 27

It is essential that both of these movements of the dialectic should be noticed. Barth has been seriously misrepresented due to a failure to take seriously the second term of this movement and hence he has been seen, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, as the enemy of true ethical concern. As we shall see Niebuhr has been a major spokesman for this misinterpretation of Barth.

c. The shape of this ethic

What of the actual content of the ethical demand? What is the form of the Christian ethic?

Barth points here 28 to Jesus Christ in whom true manhood is disclosed and man's fallen humanity is sanctified. Put at its simplest, then, the ethical goal is to - "be like Jesus" or as Barth puts it "to love Jesus and keep his commandments". Put another way it is to live by grace alone - i.e. in the acknowledgement of, and in dependence upon, the grace of God, our justification in this One. It is a deciding for Christ. More particularly the command of God is given in the Word of God (Scripture) - and here as specific commands which we require to apply in our specific contexts, under the guidance of the gospel of Grace. Such an application though not always immediately apparent is nonetheless possible due to

26. T.C. Oden, The Promise of Barth, (New York, 1969), pp. 59-56. On freedom in Barth, cf. Evangelical Theology, tr. Foley, (London, 1963) pp. 9, 12. An illustration of this indicative-imperative approach, and one which Barth regards as explaining in principle all the others, is found in his exposition of the Sabbath commandment. (II/4, p.53ff) Its heart is not an 'ought' but a 'may'. It merely asks man to be free from work.

27. West op. cit., p.207.

(1) the consistency of the God of the Bible with the one with whom we have to do. (2) Our solidarity with the biblical people of God in the one covenant of grace. (3) The consistency of God's command in any specific situation with his previous commands to us. (4) God is the Living God and He can guide us through His Word in personal encounter. All this does not guarantee clarity in every situation. Theological ethics, like all theology, is a theologia viatorum. However, we can derive a "formed reference" from the interaction of the horizontal dimension which is here uncovered with the vertical dimension of God's gracious action in Christ.

We will require to raise questions of Barth as to how this works out in practice and whether his position is really in keeping in practice with the terms of this theory. We will attempt this in the first instance in the field of social ethics, but before doing so, we will turn attention to Niebuhr's ethical theory.

B. NIEBUHR'S ETHICAL THEORY

a. The terms of his approach

For Niebuhr perhaps even more than for Barth, ethics formed the dominant concern of the theology within which he was reared. As we have pointed out above, he did not have a clearly articulated theology at the outset. Nonetheless, it was the age of the "social gospel" in American liberal theology and Walter Rauchenbusch had widespread acclaim.29 Niebuhr himself refers to the "liberal and highly moralistic creed" which he had accepted as tantamount to the Christian faith.30

His first pastorate in Detroit as we have argued earlier was the real anvil on which his theological and ethical convictions were hammered out. He indicates in his diary an early appreciation for the ethical as against the narrowly theological as far as his preaching was concerned — "... since I stopped worrying so much about the intellectual problems of religion and have begun to explore some of its ethical problems there is more of a thrill in preaching."31

29. Cf. Hoffmann op. cit. p. 11 "As the leaders of dialectical theology in Europe had been aroused by the social-religious movement which preceded them, so was the young Niebuhr influenced by Walter Rauchenbusch."
31. LDTC, p. 27.
The great ethical question in Detroit, however, was the question of the Ford Motor Company and it was as he sought to grapple with the problems which Ford's new industrial pattern raised for the Christian ethic that his interest in this area deepened until it became arguably his dominant concern. Detroit and Ford as he says - "determined my development more than any books which I may have read." In his early years, Niebuhr's concern was mainly towards a critique of the Church's role in the face of the emerging industrial situation. He showed a real appreciation for Marx's analysis of society and his critique of religion and Niebuhr turns some of his criticism on the Church in Does Civilisation need Religion? and Moral Man and Immoral Society. Niebuhr came to see through Marx's own idealisms and turned to a more widely Socialist stance in the thirties, which in turn has given place to a pragmatist orientation in the last decade or two. It is not until his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics in 1935 that Niebuhr attempts a theoretical justification for his approach to Christian ethics and it is to this work that we turn now.

We have already had occasion to note Niebuhr's tendency to appeal to both revelation and human experience. We saw this in his anthropology and his doctrine of sin. His ethical theory as we might expect manifests this same two-fronted advance. He begins by referring to general ethical experience and speaks of it in terms of "the tension between what is and what ought to be". This implies a "dimension of depth in life". It is this which "bends the bow from which every arrow of moral action flies". This dimension of depth is the religious dimension of existence.

33. Ibid., p. 5.
34. ICE, p. 18.
35. Ibid., p. 15 also p. 18.
36. Ibid., p. 18.
37. Ibid., p. 79 "The eternal is involved in every moral judgement".
man as the creature and servant of God, and hence as the inhabitant of a transcendent as well as an immanent sphere of reality is the object of transcendent as well as immanent claims. Niebuhr refers to Kant's attempt to derive religion from morality and argues that he in fact moved in the wrong direction -

"The sense of obligation in morals from which Kant tried to derive the whole structure of religion is really derived from the religion itself. The guilt or "drive" of moral life is a part of the religious tension of life."38

This analysis in turn affords a standard by which to measure differing religious approaches, viz. the degree to which they can maintain a fruitful tension between the two levels - the historical and the transcendent. The extremes to be avoided here are on the one hand an over-stressing of the transcendent which leads to loss of the significance of the historical; and on the other hand a concentration upon relative historical achievements which result in moral complacency.39 Judged by this criterion the prophetic Hebrew-Christian tradition, properly understood, comes nearest to the requirement. Here the doctrine of creation is seen as of particular import -

"To say that God is the creator is to use an image which transcends the canons of rationality, but which expresses both his organic relation to the world and his distinction from the world. To believe that God created the world is to feel that the world is a realm of meaning and coherence without insisting that the world is totally good or that the totality of things must be identified with the sacred."40

The "myth" of the Creator God in turn points towards the possibility of the transcendent God becoming both the judge and redeemer of the world.41 The perfect fruit of this prophetic religion is the ethic of Jesus.42 Jesus' ideal of love carries forward the same dialectical relation between the historical and the transcendent. It is relevant to every historical

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38. Ibid., p. 19.
39. Ibid., p. 19.
40. ICE, p. 37.
41. Ibid., p. 39.
42. Ibid., p. 47.
situation and yet it defies realisation on the historical plane. At its heart lies an understanding of God as love, and hence he summons men to renounce self-love and to love as God loves. This analysis of the situation of man leads to a disclosure of his moral ineptitude - the ideal forever recedes from him. It is a disclosure, that is, of his sin which, in essence, is his "pretension of being God". The ethical ideal of the Christian religion, though an ethical impossibility due to human sin, still retains a real relevance for historical situations - "... the prophetic tradition in Christianity must insist on the relevance of the ideal of love to the moral experience of mankind on every conceivable level. It is not an ideal magically superimposed upon life by a revelation which has no relation to total human experience. The whole conception of life revealed in the Cross of Christian faith is not a pure negation of, or irrelevance toward, the moral ideals of 'natural man'. While the final heights of the love ideal condemn as well as fulfil the moral canons of common sense, the ideal is involved in every moral aspiration and achievement." It also in its promise of forgiveness for the penitent offers hope to man in face of the despair which this rigorous realism with regard to his moral attainment must otherwise produce.

b. The Sanction of Ethics

Such are the broad terms of Niebuhr's ethical theory as he here unfolds it. Pressing to a deeper level - what is the real basis of his approach? What is the nature of the ethical sanction? From whence does it derive?

In the first instance we require to observe Niebuhr's uncrirical acceptance of man's universal ethical consciousness; the "moral ideals of 'natural man'"; the "moral canons of common sense". Niebuhr, that is, is prepared to allow a properly ethical sphere within the scope and reality of the encounter of secular man with the demand of the moral "ought".

43. Ibid., p. 48-71, esp. 47, 48, 59, 66 and 71.
44. Ibid., pp. 75-109.
45. Ibid., p. 97.
46. Ibid., pp. 114-115.
47. Ibid., p. 131.
48. ICE, p. 115.
49. Ibid.
Pressed to give a theological account of the ontological basis of this sphere, Niebuhr would no doubt direct us to the terms of his anthropology and here in particular to his view of man as creature of God made in His image - i.e. to the doctrines of Creation and the imago. To speak of a "theological account" of secular ethical experience is in full accord with Niebuhr's whole approach since his overall argument is that secular ethical experience when properly analysed "requires" some such account being given of it, i.e. morality points towards (because it is based upon) the dimension of the religious. Properly understood the encounter with the moral 'ought' is an encounter with the transcendent, i.e. with the dimension of the spiritual and divine. Concretely man is encountered by the claim of the law of love and it is this summons, the summons to love, which lies at the heart of the moral 'ought'. The full meaning of this transcendent claim is given in the prophetic Christian tradition, taking its roots from its Hebrew background with its doctrine of God as Creator and Judge and finding its maturest expression in the ethic of Jesus. Here we are confronted with the being of one who lays an obligation upon man. He is love, and hence the summons to obey Him and become as He is, is a summons to love. Hence, by implication, and as explicitly expressed in Jesus' ethic - He opposes man's self-love. Thus revelation uncovers the full and proper nature of the ethical demand. Niebuhr's ethical theory, that is, has final recourse to Jesus Christ and to a sanction in terms of the explicitly religious.

Niebuhr's view then is that the ethical pole, even if considered in and of itself, leads us inevitably to the religious pole. The two belong together and are the inside and outside of the same dimension of reality.

50. cf. earlier chapter.
51. ICE, pp. 18, 19, 79. This is the essence of Niebuhr's argument in the Gifford Lectures and the ground both of his critique of secular views of man because they fail really to account for man, and his advocacy of general revelation which is the recognition of this dimension.
52. ICE, pp. 56 "The justification of these demands is put in purely religious and not in socio-moral terms." also 59, 62-65.
53. ICE, p. 77 "when life is seen in its total dimension, the sense of God and the sense of sin are involved in the same act of self-consciousness."
It is this conviction as to the essential relatedness of morality and religion, that explains Niebuhr's seemingly equivocal approach to ethics. He is thus able to argue in both directions. From morality to religion when arguing that a full account of the former requires the positing of the latter. From religion to morality when arguing that the real meaning of the ethical demand is conformity to the nature of God, who is love. This dialectical method is well illustrated when Niebuhr attempts to argue for the superiority of the Prophetic-Christian tradition in that it avoids irrelevance on the one hand and complacency on the other. We can ask here, - 'but why are irrelevance and complacency "wrong"?'. Why is an ethical approach which avoids them "good"? Here Niebuhr would appear to be appealing to some communis sensus. He does not feel he requires to demonstrate this or indicate his grounds for preferring moral relevance to irrelevance or moral seriousness to complacency. If ultimately pressed Niebuhr would no doubt argue that since love is the law of life and the "natural man" has an "inchoate" sense of the demands of love, he will recognise the "good" of relevance and seriousness.

c. The shape of this ethic

So much for the sanction of morality - what is the nature of the moral claim - i.e. what is its concrete form? Here Niebuhr's answer is simple enough - it is the law of love. The norm thus is essentially dynamic. He will not allow for its being sharply formulated and captured in any set of commandments or historical structures. It is also dynamic in the sense that it can never be finally realised even at the pinnacle of moral attainment both because human nature with its proneness to self-love constantly falls short of its demand, and because it is a creative norm which will continually uncover new possibilities beyond the horizons of immediate attainment. It is always an impossible possibility.

54. ICE, pp. 19f and 47f.
55. Cf. his whole campaign against rigid natural law theories.
56. ICE, p. 158.
Its terms are indicated in the ethic of Jesus and incarnated in his Person.

d. Ethical Evil and Sin

Before leaving this account of Niebuhr's theoretical ethics we will seek to clarify, as we did in the case of Barth, the precise relation between ethical evil and sin. The relation is generally indicated by the chapter titles in the An Interpretation of Christian Ethics. Niebuhr begins by arguing for an "Independent Christian Ethic"; sharpens this in terms of "The Ethic of Jesus"; and thence arrives at the requirement for a discussion of the "Christian conception of sin". Sin is then a dimension which is uncovered by the ethical experience and in encounter with the Christian ethic in particular. Man faced by the demands of the law of love is aware of his failure to meet these demands. He is thence made aware of his sin - "The love commandment stands in juxtaposition to the fact of sin. It helps in fact, to create the consciousness of sin."57 Man of course commonly does not make this movement from moral ineptitude to sin. "The consciousness of sin has no meaning to the mind of modernity because in modern secularism reality is merely a flux of temporal events."58 When, however, life is measured "in its total dimension" man discovers "the self both related to and separated from life in its essence".59 Man's sense of moral failure then is rather like a pain in the chest. It can be accepted simply for what it is and put up with. On the other hand, it can lead a man to his doctor, to a deeper and fuller examination and the diagnosing of a serious internal condition. Niebuhr later gives another account of the relation between ethics and sin as lying in the range of responsibility which is felt -

"... in the Christian interpretation of moral evil guilt is attached not only to actions in which the individual is free to choose a higher possibility and fails to do so, but in which higher possibilities which the individual is not free to choose, reveal the

57. Ibid., p. 75
58. Ibid., p. 76.
59. Ibid., pp. 75-76.
imperfections of the action which he is forced to take. Thus the simple moral guilt of conscious evil is transmuted into a sense of religious guilt which feels a general responsibility for that for which the individual agent cannot be immediately responsible.  

Niebuhr here seems to be groping towards Kierkegaard's distinction between qualitative and quantitative guilt. However, the essential discontinuity between the two which Kierkegaard's vocabulary requires would be more than Niebuhr wishes to maintain.

Sin, however, for him is certainly more than an accumulation of moral lapses. He analyses it in terms of its residing in an evil will, and in essence man's "rebellious pretension to be God". Sin for Niebuhr is a very positive notion and he depicts it in dynamic terms. Nonetheless there is not the essential disengagement from the ethical such as Barth posits in the first movement of his dialectic. Sin is uncovered in the first instance by a fundamentally inward movement - "... when life is seen in its total dimension, the sense of God and the sense of sin are involved in the same act of self-consciousness." See also "The full dimension of depth in which all human action transpires is disclosed only in introspection." We should note in this connection also Niebuhr's speaking of a "consciousness of sin", or of a "sense of sin".

60. ICE, p. 88.
62. ICE, p. 87.
63. Ibid., pp. 97 and 83.
64. Ibid., p. 77.
65. ICE, p. 91. Cf. Art. "Christian Faith in the Modern World" in Ventures in Belief, (New York, 1930), p. 8 "The religious meditation ends in God but it begins with the discovery of self. The great mystics have all borne testimony to the fact that the way to discovery of God is through sounding the depths of selfhood".
66. ICE, pp. 75-76.
67. ICE, pp. 75-77.
Ethics then relates to sin in that it is the area where man first learns of his moral weakness, and thus can be pointed towards the fuller dimension of his predicament when he comes to see that his moral lapses have their root in an evil disposition whose evil derives from its antithesis to the divine. The fact that the ethical sphere is also in deepest reality the religious sphere - i.e. the demand of the law of love is the demand to conform to the will and being of God, would imply that for the religious man the two realms overlap each other in the sense that the religious encloses the ethical. Niebuhr does not thus require to posit an ontological basis for the ethical as Barth does in terms of the humanity of God in Jesus Christ. The ethical sphere is grounded for the religious as for the secular man in the being and will of the Creator who has made man in His image.

Having undertaken this brief summary of the two ethical theories we move to a closer examination as we see them working out in a particular ethical sphere - viz. the area of social ethics.

SOCIAL ETHICS

a. Barth's Social Ethics

We have already noted the place ethics held in Barth's beginnings both in the milieu from which he emerged and as the point at which the limitations of this theology were finally brought home to him. Social ethics in particular played a role at this point. Barth in his agricultural and industrial parish at Safenwil, was an early devotee of the Christian Socialism connected with the names of the younger Blumhardt, Kutter and Ragaz, though Barth had reservations as to their too easy identification of the Kingdom of God with the socialist order. 68

68. I/1, pp. 82-83; II/1, pp. 633-4; WGM, p.159; Torrance op.cit. pp. 36-37 see also the Barth/Thurneysen correspondence.
Their contribution to Barth's thinking at this point he indicates in a question -

"Was it the encounter with socialism as interpreted by Kutter and Ragaz that opened our eyes to the fact that God might want to be God and to speak quite otherwise than in the dusty shrine of the Christian self-consciousness?" 69

Barth's rediscovery of the "God of the Gospel" opened his eyes fully to the dangers inherent in the Christian socialist movement and indeed to the danger of the whole ethical realm as a false way of self-justification. In the following years, though he never lost his concern for the socio-ethical field it retired into the background as he engrossed himself in more strictly theological concerns. The rise of National Socialism in Germany in the thirties, however, brought this whole area vividly into focus once again, and Barth's leadership of the church in the face of the Nazi totalitarianism is well enough known. In the post-war period, though taking a lively interest in socio-political developments he 70 remained dedicated to his vocation as a theologian. 71 He has, however, addressed himself to this area in several publications 72 and we can attempt now a characterisation of his theory of social ethics.

1. Theoretical basis

As we indicated in our exposition of his ethical theory, Barth's is an essentially "theological" approach. That is, he will brook no possibility of considering man in his own terms in isolation from the action of God with respect to him. The heart of his ethics lies in the gracious election of man in Jesus Christ. The man who we are to consider with respect to his socio-political existence is this man and no other, man with God and therefore commanded by Him. The full unfolding of the implications of this approach for social ethics required Barth's shift of concentration to the God/man 73 and his exposition of the being and sanctification of man in Jesus Christ. 74 Social ethics is thus the

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69. GGG, p.33.
73. West op.cit., pp. 194-5.
74. III/3 passim.
realm in which, at the social level, in the field of his relationships with his fellow-man, man is made responsible for the actualising of the humanity given him in his relationship with God in Christ. Barth seeks, that is, to move consistently from the being of man in Christ to his social responsibilities. The true form of humanity as disclosed in the being of Jesus Christ is disclosed as a being-in-encounter. Hence -

"In its basic form, humanity is fellow-humanity. Everything else which is to be described as human nature and essence stands under this sign to the extent that it is human. If it is not fellow-human, if it is not in some way an approximation to being in the encounter of I and Thou, it is not human."75

Barth draws implications in two directions - (a) human life is essentially social life. "Every supposed humanity which is not radically and from the first fellow-humanity is inhumanity ... We have to rule out the possibility of a humanity without the fellow-man."76 Thus the social question is not simply the question of some neutral area of man's responsibility to which he may or may not give heed. The social question is the question of his being as human being, as a being with God.

(b) The original and proper form of this fellow-humanity is the co-existence of man and woman -

"... this basic distinction, the differentiation and connection of I and Thou, must be explained as coincident with that of male and female. All other relationships are involved in this as the original relationship. All other humanity is included in this centre."77

This means that social as distinct from personal relationships can never be of final significance.78 Social groups, nation, race (Volk) are all "secondary" relationships. In an analysis of the terms of these structures under the heading "Near and Distant Neighbours" Barth argues that these relationships are qualified in a three-fold manner. They are

75. III/2, p.285.
76. III/2, pp. 223 and 229.
77. III/2, pp. 292-3.
78. III/2, p. 286.
reversible, fluid, and removable and hence -

"... This means that they are not original or final. It is a fact... But it is no more. It is not the case that his being in this sphere belongs to his essence as a human creature, as may be said of his being in the sphere of man and woman or parents and children. He is actually led into this sphere. But he belongs to it only provisionally and temporally. He is originally and finally free in relation to it." 79

Barth's argument here has no doubt more than a side glance at the tendency of post-war German theologians to raise Volk to the status of a theological concept. 80 It is in this light that Barth warns against over-generalised sociological theorising and the dangers of bureaucracy. 81

This approach allows for a social ethic which combines both a deep sense of responsibility for social issues and a freedom and objectivity with regard to particular social structures. Some indication of what Barth's fully-developed theory of social ethics might have come to had he completed his Church Dogmatics can be guessed from an early article where he addresses himself to the question of Church and Culture 82 and approaches it from the three theological perspectives creation, revelation and redemption. From the standpoint of creation culture is to be seen as a promise of what man is to be. 83 From reconciliation it can be seen as the sphere within which the reconciled man is summoned to obey God's command - the command to become human. 84 Viewed from redemption (Erlosung) culture is the limit (Grenze) beyond which stands the redeemer who makes all things new at His coming. Under this last point Barth speaks of the cultural task in these terms -

79. III/4, p. 302.
80. West op. cit., p. 207fn.
81. III/2, p. 252.
82. TC, p. 334f.
83. TC, p. 343.
84. Ibid., p. 346.
"With this eschatological anticipation, the Church confronts society. Not with an undervaluation of cultural achievement, but with the highest possible evaluation of the goal for which it sees all cultural activity striving. Not in pessimism, but in boundless hope. Not as a spoilsport, but in the knowledge that art and science, business and politics, techniques and education are really a game, a serious game, but a game, and game means an imitative and ultimately ineffective activity - the significance of which lies not in its attainable goals but in what it signifies. And the game might actually be played better and more successfully, the more it was recognised as a game. Our earnestness could not be impaired by making clear to ourselves that the game can never be ultimately serious, and never is; that the right and the possibility of being wholly in earnest is God's alone."

In all this there is the same dialectical No and Yes which we noted above. On the one hand, the profound pessimism as to the purely human considered in itself as either a source of ultimate meaning or truth or as a route to God. In terms of the social dimension this means an appreciation of the sinful element in all human life; that man in his social and political organisation seeks to assert himself over against God and dreams of his tower of Babel; that in all his relationship with his neighbour man reflects the fissure which runs through his relationship with God. But in the light of God's grace and His pardon and restoration of man in Christ there arises an appreciation too of the value and possibilities of human society considered no longer in itself - but in the light of creation, reconciliation and redemption.

ii. Application

Barth works out the terms of this approach more specifically in two writings Church and State, and The Christian Community and the Civil Community. As the titles suggest, he distinguishes the Christian from the civil order. He characterises the latter in terms of Romans 13 and sees its place and function as two-fold (a) to restrain evil (b) to allow the preaching of Christ -

85. TC, p.349.
"The meaning and purpose of this mutual association (that is of the polis) is the safeguarding of both the external, relative and provisional freedom of the individuals and the external and relative peace of their community and to that extent the safeguarding of the external, relative and provisional humanity of their life both as individuals and as a community." 88

The further purpose of this he indicates as follows - "It serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time; time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith." 89

The state in this sense must be thought of as a mode of redemption, as one of the orders of God's providential reign. Its meaning and function is that - "In its comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, in its function and its purpose, it should serve the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner." 90

The state can, of course, break free from this purpose. It can become demonic - and here Barth's experience of National Socialism in Germany is clearly in mind. 91 Revelation 13 as well as Romans 13 is in Scripture! 92 But it never ceases to be in the hand of God and as such a "sign" 93 of Redemption. It can be thought of as the outer circle of the world's existence in God's grace of which the Church is an inner circle but sharing the same centre. The State is - "capable of reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community." 94 It is the Church alone which can recognise this

88. AS, p.16 cf. also CS, p.23f.
89. Ibid., p.21 cf. also CS, p.31.
90. CS, p.29.
91. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
92. AS, pp. 96 and 97.
93. The German here is Gleichnis. Gregor Smith suggests "allegory" as a translation but West thinks this a mistake and prefers "parable" (West op.cit. p.293 and 283 fn.3). Gollwitzer prefers Zeichen (Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde, Section 14) which would give a meaning nearer the English "sign". "Parable" certainly has the value of being an immediately recognisable notion and hence what Barth might have expected to be immediately implied.
94. AS, p.33.
function and hence which carries the responsibility for the State's fulfilment of this role. In practice, this does not imply a Christian political party or Christian state. It means that -

"Among the political possibilities open at any particular moment, it will choose those which most suggest a correspondence to, an analogy and a reflection of, the content of its own faith and gospel. In the decisions of the state, the Church will always support the side which clarifies rather than obscures the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole, which includes the political sphere outside the Church. The Church desires that the shape and reality of the state in this fleeting world should point towards the Kingdom of God ... that human policies (and) the policies of God ... should proceed, however distantly, on parallel lines."95

We have here the charter for a real Christian involvement in and concern for the proper form and functioning of the social order. There remains, however, the question as to what this responsibility means in the event of the State's becoming subject to the powers of chaos - i.e. when the possibility of demonisation becomes a reality. Here Barth's example in the face of Nazi totalitarianism indicates that there is a real boundary point in his thinking beyond which Christian action must withhold support from the State - though even then this is only for the sake of the State itself - a seeking to return it to its God-given function within the order of redemption. However, Barth is in fact fairly reticent as to this possibility in the two major writings we referred to. West, although on the whole fairly commendatory of Barth's point of view, complains at this point that -

"... nowhere do we see that call to total opposition, that confession in crisis which characterised his polemical writings against Nazism ... when we turn to Barth's positive suggestions for political ethics, this lack of crisis is all the more apparent."96

There appears here a certain dichotomy in Barth's thinking as to the possibility of opposition to the State and this has carried over into his attitudes towards particular political regimes - the Nazi and the Communist.

95. AS, p.34.
96. West, op.cit., p. 298.
iii. Communism and Naziism

In contrast with his energetic arousing of the Churches to the dangers of Naziism and the need to take a clear and unambiguous stand over against it Barth manifests towards Communism a comparatively calm, neutralist attitude. The struggle with communism is a struggle between "East and West" and the Christian's counsel in the face of it is - "... not to take part in the conflict. As Christians it is not our concern at all. It is not a genuine, not a necessary, not an interesting conflict. It is a mere power conflict." Barth admits that there are ideological issues at stake here. The essence of the conflict is - "between two different conceptions of man, and especially of the social and politico-economic ordering of his life, between two powerful intellectual principles and systems, two 'ideologies'." But at this level "Western Man'' appears to be as great a caricature as Eastern man and the Christian must stand apart from both. "That is the first element in our Christian political attitude - our refusal to fight one way or the other in this conflict." German National Socialism was a different matter. It was a "single and absolutely clear-cut political and spiritual menace" and in the face of its threat "with a good conscience and clear understanding" one could only say "no". Barth finds the reason for this clear opposition in the nature of Naziism as "a mixture of madness and crime in which there was no trace of reason", and further in its attempting to represent itself "in the guise of a falsified Christianity". It presented itself as a real and desperate threat - "It was not a matter of declining against some mischief, distant and easily seen through. It was a matter of life and death, of resistance against a godlessness which was in fact attacking body and soul."  

97. AS, p. 131.
98. Ibid., p. 132.
99. Ibid., p. 136.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., p. 115.
By contrast, Barth's position of neutrality before the Communist threat and his advice in these terms to Christians living in Iron Curtain states has evoked considerable criticism. Emil Brunner spoke for many when in an open letter to Barth following the latter's visit to Hungary in 1948 he sought to point out Barth's inconsistency. The essence of the Nazi threat lay in its totalitarianism and the same threat presents itself in Communism.

"The totalitarian state is based on, is in fact identical with, the denial of those rights of the person viz-a-viz the state which are usually called human rights. That was the situation in Hitler's state and it is the same now in the Communist totalitarian state."104

Further, Brunner accuses Barth of oversimplifying the issues. What of the Russian states which have been annexed by Communism? Can they really be fundamentally distinguished from territories annexed by Hitler? And hence can the proper course for Christians in these areas be fundamentally different? Barth's counsel to the Church in communist lands - viz. go on proclaiming the Word of God and stand apart from taking sides either for or against the state - is precisely the attitude which Barth condemned in Germany in face of National Socialism.106

Barth attempted to defend himself against Brunner's charge. He begins by repudiating the notion of certain principles by which the Church must always act; ethical decisions are for him always concrete decisions to be taken anew in each new situation. "The Church never thinks, speaks or acts 'on principle'."107 This applies even to an anti-totalitarian principle. Barth thus attempts a restatement of the distinction between Communism and Naziism. Marxism is not what Naziism was so dangerously - a deep and genuine temptation. Marxism is not a finally serious alternative to the great mass of West Europeans. Its ideological limitations are widely known.

104. AS, p. 110.
106. Ibid., p.113.
107. Ibid., p.114.
If there is a danger in the face of it, it is a danger of taking it too seriously. The Church's role is to stand on the side-lines in this conflict.

Possibly a large element in Barth's refusal to directly oppose Communism lies in his fear of the identification of Western Society with the Christian faith. Barth's struggle with nineteenth century thought makes his sensitiveness to this cultural identification understandable. In fact Barth's position is probably best defined as indirect opposition rather than neutrality. He is not unaware of the elements of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in Marxism and of the fact that total opposition means the impossibility of giving support to Christians who live in the Marxist lands and for whom these elements enable a certain positive relationship to be attained with Marxism. In practice Barth's theology has been proved of help to Christians in Eastern Europe. The difficulty about evaluating Barth in these terms is twofold. One problem is that Barth does make explicitly neutralist statements in places, which appear certainly to imply a denial of any form of opposition. Even if we agree that Brunner is mistaken in identifying communism with the Anti-Christ, the final historical embodiment of evil we certainly cannot adopt a simple neutralism with respect to it. In these statements we hear more of the Swiss burger speaking than the properly responsible theologian. The second problem is that Barth's practice appears to lag behind his theory. West spells out the terms of this disease. He points out Barth's oversimplification of the factors which lie behind and express themselves in political policies and reactions to them. The fear of Communism which Barth speaks of as lying behind the West's aggression towards it is also expressed by some as a helpless resignation towards it - or even by others in an advocacy of the very neutrality which Barth champions. Again Barth has no real positive

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108. Cf. Gollwitzer's sensitive attempt to attain a positive evaluation of Marxism from within the terms of a Barthian theological outlook. ... und fahren, wohin du nicht willst (Munich, 1951), tr. Delacour and Fenn Unwilling Journey (London, 1953)
111. West, op.cit., p. 312f.
112. Ibid., p. 315.
alternative to the Communist and Capitalist structures. He has no guidance to give as to how an economy "between East and West" might organise itself. That is, he shows an inadequate appreciation of the problems which emerge immediately we try to relate 'spiritual' or 'ideological' theories to the concrete problems of social and economic organisation, even when the 'spiritual' or 'ideological' theory is one of 'neutrality'. West further points to Barth's failure really to understand the social and political situation in which the Church has to act.¹¹³ This is not a failure in his theoretical approach to these issues. It is rather an inconsistency in practice.¹¹⁴ Barth shows an insensitivity to the kind of pressure that the Communist system brings to bear upon its citizens¹¹⁵ and of problems such as espionage which his own visit to Hungary must have raised.¹¹⁶ West's view is that all these deficiencies are not so much theoretical ones, but rather inadequacies in his application of his theory due to the limited nature of his contact with concrete social and political problems —

"Again and again one sees the narrow base of Barth's experience in this realm - the Christian socialism of his youth, with its lashing anti-bourgeois prejudice, the overwhelming impact which the Nazi revolution made on him, and the life of a thoughtful citizen of the Swiss Comradeship of the Oath - being made the basis of political and economic judgements much too broad for such a base to carry, because Barth has not felt compelled by his theory to participate more widely in the political experience of mankind."¹¹⁷

We will require to ask whether this is a deep enough analysis - i.e. whether, in fact, these inadequacies do not point to a theoretical flaw as well, but first we will sketch Niebuhr's approach in this field.

¹¹³. Ibid.
¹¹⁴. Ibid., p. 317.
¹¹⁵. Ibid., p. 312.
¹¹⁶. Ibid., p. 312fn.
b. Niebuhr's Social Ethics

We have already referred to the role ethics played in Reinhold Niebuhr's development and within this it has been social rather than personal ethics which has been the area of his special interest. Hence all that we wrote earlier concerning the place of the ethical in Niebuhr's development applies mutatis mutandis to social ethics. At this point we will merely underline certain principles which were evident in his early social analysis and which have remained fairly constant factors despite change and development in other ways.

i. Underlying Principles

(1) The law of love is the ultimate norm of social relations.118 We have already indicated the significance of the law of love for man's individual awareness of sin, and here we set it in its social context - which is its properly significant dimension for Niebuhr's thought as a whole. Man is set in a social context and has fundamental responsibilities for his social relationships. He is to "love his neighbour as himself". This gives Niebuhr a standard for the whole social and political field.

The relation of life to life in the terms of the law of love is the "final good" by which all social and political action is to be evaluated. "Community is an individual as well as a social necessity; for the individual can realise himself only in intimate and organic relation with his fellow men. Love is therefore the primary law of his nature and brotherhood the fundamental requirement of his social existence."119 Niebuhr carries this norm over from his social gospel inheritance though in his hands it is shorn of easy optimism and sentimentality which that movement had often encased it in. We need to observe that this standard is never reducible to a fixed and static form. Beyond the recognition of "equality" and "liberty" and a prohibition of theft and murder there is no "natural law" in this area either. Indeed this very norm of love implies that no immediate structures will ever finally embody and circumscribe its demands but that each new structure will merely open the road towards

118. DCNR, pp. 35-62; MMIS, pp. 71-74; ICE, pp. 47-71; 113 to end; SDH, p. 172f; FH, pp. 171-222; BT, pp. 16-17; HD, pp. 233-296; CR, pp. 114-139; 140-164; MNHC, p. 29f.
120. HD, pp. 262-263.
deeper and more embracing ones. It is worth noticing here that Niebuhr's appeal to the law of love as the ultimate norm means that he does not draw Barth and Brunner's distinction between the "personal" and the "political". There can be no such division for Niebuhr and he labels this a "sentimental" version of the love commandment.

(2) Reason and conscience have a role to play in the quest for the social and political ideal. Unlike Barth, Niebuhr does not work from a complete relativism with respect to the contribution of reason and conscience in the realm of social ethics. He does not of course follow liberalism in placing his complete faith in them, but he is alive to their contribution.

He criticizes Barth and Brunner for their failure to accord reason its proper place - "Karl Barth's belief that the moral life of man would possess no valid principles of guidance if the Ten Commandments had not introduced such principles by revelation is absurd as it is unscriptural." And later in a footnote - "Brunner ... erroneously follows the Reformation disparagement of the function of reason in the realm of social ethics." Reason and conscience do not have all the answers - but they do point the way and go a part of the distance, and this Niebuhr is not slow to acknowledge. There is indeed an implicit appeal to these faculties in all Niebuhr's social and political writing (which means in the great bulk of his writing!) Again and again we find him involved in discussion of current issues in these fields and subjecting them much of the time to just the kind of analysis they would obtain from someone basing their approach on these two as the ultimate sanctions.

(3) Human sin is a primary datum in all social analysis and construction. We do not require to expand on this element here. We have already seen how fundamental an influence his "rediscovery" of the Christian Doctrine of sin has been for Niebuhr's whole thought. We simply underline

121. HD, pp. 253-254.
125. HD, 263. He finds the biblical warrant in Rom. 2:14 and describes Barth's exegetical effort to eliminate the force of this Pauline doctrine as "tortuous".
126. HD, p. 265 cf. also pp. 269-70.
its significance for his social ethics. In the section of the Gifford lectures which we have alluded to above, he speaks of "the sinful element in all social reality" and "the sin of idolatry and pretension in which all government is involved." In a discussion of the significance of power in social organising he speaks in this fashion -

"The perennial importance of power in social organisation is based upon two characteristics of human nature. The one is the unity of vitality and reason, of body and soul. The other is the force of human sin, the persistent tendency to regard ourselves as more important than anyone else and to view a common problem from the standpoint of our own interest."

No social programme, no matter the depth of rational analysis and width of moral sensitivity can ever hope to succeed even relatively if it fails to take account of this stubborn reality - the sinfulness of the human heart. Niebuhr is a realist as to the possibilities of any given social or political situation.

(4) Arising from the earlier points - society is to be thought of as analysable in terms of a conflict and balance of powers. This arises from Niebuhr's pessimism in face of the promises of liberalism. The social realities are essentially the realities of powers pursuing ends and inevitably to some degree in collision. The social and political task in this situation is not so much evolving elaborate blueprints for world government or dreaming of Utopia - whether of a Marxist or a Capitalist brand - but of achieving, in the face of pressing concrete problems, an adequate degree of justice and peace by the balancing out of these powers, whereby despotism on the one hand and anarchy on the other can be avoided and a relative approximation to the norm of love attained. "The domination of one life by another is avoided most successfully by an equilibrium of powers and vitalities, so that weakness does not invite enslavement by the strong."
Also earlier -

"The power which determines the quality of the order and harmony (in a community) is not merely the coercive and organising power of government. That is only one of the two aspects of social power. The other is the balance of vitalities and forces in any given social situation."133

Two further factors may be mentioned. One has already been alluded to but merits special reference - viz. the dynamic nature of Niebuhr's social ethics. He does actually refer to it134 but it is more an element which is reflected in the whole tone and movement of his writing. There is about it all a vitality which arrests and compels. Niebuhr is miles from the dry social theorist writing in the isolation of his study. Social ethics is the study of man - the being possessed of a transcendent freedom - in his relation to his fellow amid all the seething possibilities of social existence and with the indeterminate horizons of the law of love as the beckoning goal. Finally, one would mention Niebuhr's conviction that religion, and Christian faith in its "prophetic" form in particular, have the resources which offer man the truest and most enduring social and political solutions. In his early period Niebuhr appears almost sceptical as to this factor,135 but as time passed so did his conviction deepen in this matter.

In this analysis we have drawn heavily, though not of course solely, upon the chapter on Social Ethics in the Gifford Lectures. This is in deference to, and in agreement with, the view of Bennet that -

"...the essential structure of his social ethics took permanent shape during the late thirties and early forties, the period of his most intensive theological activity when he wrote The Nature and Destiny of Man. His chapter "The Kingdom of God and the Struggle for Justice" in the second volume of that book represents the continuing structure of his social ethics as well as anything that he has written."136

133. HD, p. 267.
134. Cf. HD, p. 257 where he speaks of "the dynamic interpretation of the social process."
ii. Communism

We conclude this summary of Niebuhr's social ethics by noting his attitude to Communism. We have already observed Niebuhr's appreciation of Marx during the early period of his writing. This was never a fundamental agreement with the Marxist ideology, but rather an honest acknowledgement of the validity of much of Marx's analysis of the pretensions of a social class and of the way in which religious ideals and values were bound up with, and contributed towards, these pretensions.137 He used, that is, Marx's social analysis without being captivated by it.138 His emergence into a more pragmatic understanding of social and political realities meant his adopting a more critical stance with respect to Marxism. He came to view it as misleadingly simplified in its analysis139 and idealistically Utopian in its hope.140 Niebuhr sees Communism as a debased form of religion.141 Unlike Barth he is sensitive to its power and attractiveness; it is indeed more dangerous at this level than Naziism.142 He is unable like Barth to take up a neutral stance with respect to it.143 Communism requires to be opposed and Niebuhr has no qualms about siding with the Capitalist West against it.

C. Comparison and Assessment

i. History of the Debate

We will introduce this section by referring to the debate between Barth and Niebuhr which has been carried on spasmodically over the years, and noting in particular the way in which social ethics appears as the recurring point of disagreement.

138. FH, p.241f; ICE, p.28, 133-134; REE, p.271.
139. FH, p.182f; ICE, pp. 28, 92, 211-2; REE, pp. 244, 270, 197f; HN, pp. 46-51; CRPP, pp. 39-47; MNHC, pp. 26-7.
140. FH, p.258; ICE, p.29; HN, pp. 46-51; MNHC, p.27.
141. FH, p.240; REE, p.193f.
143. CRPP, "What makes Communism so Evil?", p.39f.
The "debate" is in fact more correctly a monologue in the early stages. Niebuhr has recurrent criticism of Barth but the latter is too immersed in the European situation to take much account of it, and it was not until the general assembly of the W.C.C. at Amsterdam in 1948 that he was provoked to pick up the gauntlet.

1. **Background to Amsterdam** Niebuhr's criticism is foreshadowed in his very first work *Does Civilisation need Religion* where he identifies the fundamental reason for the failure of religion in the modern period as residing in its failure -

"... to make civilisation ethical (rather) than because it has failed to maintain its intellectual responsibility. For every person who disavows religion because some ancient and unreviewed dogma outrages his intelligence several become irreligious because the social impotence of religion outrages their conscience... The metaphysical problem of religion cannot be depreciated. In the long run, religion must be able to impress the mind of modern man with the essential plausibility and scientific respectability of its fundamental affirmations. But the scientific respectability of religious affirmations will not avail if the life which issues from them will not help to solve man's urgent social problems. If modern churches continue to prefer their intellectual to their ethical problems, they will merely succeed in maintaining a vestige of religion in those classes which are not sensitive enough to feel, and not unfortunate enough to suffer from, the moral limitations of modern society." 144

Here Niebuhr expresses both his supreme concern for the ethical relevance of religion and also, and as a result, his unhappiness with "intellectual" approaches. Barth is not in sight here - and indeed he would share Niebuhr's rejection of a merely "intellectual" concern - however, one cannot but feel that in his ethical/intellectual dialectic the mould is here being prepared which is subsequently to be "filled out" with Niebuhr's anti-Barthian polemic.

His *Leaves ....* evidence the same social passion and criticism of approaches which neglect this dimension. 145 Barth's name appears for the first time in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and here he strikes a recurring note - "The modern Barthian revival of Lutheran orthodoxy with its stress...

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144. DCNR, pp. 14 and 16.
145. LNTC, pp. 128, 130-131, 145, 177, 191.
146. MEIS, p. 68.
on the absolute distinction between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man means that "the nicely calculated less and more of social morality lose all significance". Barth falls into the same trap as his bete noir Schleiermacher - a "Separation of religion and Morality".

In Reflections at the End of an Era he takes up the same point, though without specifying Barth.

"The knowledge of the equal sinfulness of all human nature is not completely compatible with a social purpose which sets the relatively good ideal against the relative injustices of society." This is not to imply that the orthodox doctrine must be given up. We need to recognise that "in certain areas the conflict is permanent" but, and here is his thrust, "its permanency does not justify the suppression of one in favour of the other".

A few years before this he had reviewed Barth's Word of God and Word of Man. This work was the first contact the Anglo-Saxon world had with Barth. Its publication preceded Hoskyns' translation of the Romerbrief by five years. Niebuhr criticised Barth on three accounts - for setting the ethical demand of Jesus beyond human possibilities; for leaving theology no way of authenticating itself except as meeting human need; for suggesting a road to certainty which avoided the need to qualify individual experience in the "experience of the race". As Meyer points out, however, "his criticisms were all to be found empty within a few years" as Niebuhr himself came to adopt positions which, to some extent, incorporated these standpoints.

Niebuhr's position is more adequately articulated in his Interpretation of Christian Ethics. Here he finds one of the criteria of the truth and validity of a religious approach to lie in -

"the degree to which the transcendent remains in organic contact with the historical so that no degree of tension may rob the historical of its significance."  

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147. EMIS, p.69.
148. RPE, p.284.
149. RPE, p. 284.
150. Ibid., p. 284.
152. Epistle to the Romans, tr. Hoskyns, 1933.
154. ICE, p. 19.
In a chapter entitled "the law of love in Politics and Economics" he attacks "Christian Orthodoxy" for its failure to see the ethical relevance of the gospel. The arguments here, however, apply mutatis mutandis to Barth as Niebuhr understood him. For example -

"Men whose very existence is imperilled and whose universe of meaning is reduced to chaos by the social maladjustments of a technical society, may be pardoned if they dismiss as a luxury which they cannot afford, any 'profound' religion which does not concern itself with these problems."155

The fact of the matter is that the very terms of approach which a 'profound' religion employs to some degree inevitably imply an inability really to speak to these more relative situations -

"... a religious interpretation of life which does justice to the ultimate problems of human existence and is able to apprehend the final possibilities of good and evil does not find it easy to deal with the questions of relative good and evil which are the very stuff of the political order... Accustomed to a telescopic view of life and history it does not adjust itself as readily as it ought to the microscopic calculations and adjustments which constitute the stuff of moral life."156

In the Gifford Lectures, Niebuhr continues his attack. We have already noted his criticism of Barth's sharp disjunction of culture and religion157 and his refusal to allow for any rationally deducible moral norms.158 As far as social ethics are concerned, Niebuhr reiterates his charge of moral irresponsibility -

"Theologies such as that of Barth which threaten to destroy all relative moral judgements by their exclusive emphasis upon the ultimate religious fact of the sinfulness of all men are rightly suspected of imperilling relative moral achievements of history."159

In his discussion of social ethics he accuses Barth of falling into Luther's error of separating Church and State, religion and life, theology and ethics.160 He admits that Barth's reaction to Naziism was not characteristic

155. ICE, p. 150.
156. ICE, pp. 153 and 176.
158. HN, p. 296: HD, p. 263.
159. HN, p.234 cf. also HD, p. 120.
160. CRPP, p.182.
of a quietist attitude but he thinks that this was to a fair extent an emotional thing and not strictly required by, or fully explained by his theological presuppositions. He thinks Barth's notion of the function of the just State as defined in *Church and State* in terms of its guaranteeing freedom for hearing the Word of God - "very minimal contribution to the problem of justice in the State", and he laments that - "none of the intermediate problems of justice are illuminated by this." 162

Such is the background to the World Council of Churches Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 when the divergence between the two men was brought right into the open and Barth was provoked to reply to Niebuhr's criticism.

2. Face to face - Amsterdam and after. Niebuhr had been responsible for some of the study material issued to delegates prior to the Assembly 163 and Barth in his address at Amsterdam set out to reply to what he regarded as a wholly mistaken emphasis in this material. Entitling it rather cheekily "No Christian Marshall Plan" Barth called attention to what he felt to be an unfortunate anthropocentricity - a pre-occupation with "the world's disorder" in isolation from, and in neglect of, "God's design" - the design of His Kingdom revealed and set up in Jesus Christ. The proper order, however, was from God to man and not as in the material, the other way round. The Church's role in this situation was not to try Atlas-like to carry the world on its shoulders, but "to give...the world a proof of the freedom which is bestowed upon us a congregation of Jesus Christ". 164 At the level of social ethics this "giving a proof" or "sign" means "pointing to God's Kingdom" which means not taking a stance "upon anything but obedience to the concrete commands of the living, present Lord Jesus Christ". This means that we have to refuse any human commitment as a basis, and Barth here refers to the absence in the preparatory material of any implied critique of Capitalism.

161. op.cit. p. 23f.
This further implies that the Church can do no more than "point" to the Kingdom. It is not a Christian state which we can envisage becoming concrete at any particular historical point. The Kingdom is God's and it has already come. We can but bear our witness to this as true.

Niebuhr's reply to this broadside appeared in an article in *Christian Century* shortly after the Assembly. Entitling his article provocatively "We are men and not God" he began by drawing a distinction which the Amsterdam Assembly had served to uncover between "Anglo-Saxon" and "Continental" theology. The "Continental" variety is characterised best by its stress on eschatology, and realised eschatology in particular. In Niebuhr's view there is agreement as to the realities to which "realised eschatology" bears witness but not as to the implications which are drawn from it. In Barth's eyes this truth in the first place becomes the road to an irresponsible attitude towards the world - i.e. it becomes the charter for a faith in which "all is of God" to the extent that the summons to man to a costly dying to self can be ignored and the Church's prophetic function of interpreting to the nations the judgements of God revealed in its history can be forgotten. In the second place, Barth can give no guidance and inspiration to Christians "in the day to day decisions which are the very woof and warp of our existence." It seems further to imply that "We can, as Christians, dispense with the principles of justice, which, however faulty, represent the cumulative experience of the race in dealing with the vexing problems of man's relations to his fellows." The Christian must not leave it to the "pagans of our day" to attain a tolerable degree of justice in the face of the pressing problems immediately facing the race. At the end of the day Barth's theology is properly characterised as "crisis theology" - it is useful in the hour of crisis, as was Noah's ark in the flood but -

165. *Christian Century* Oct. 27, 1948 "We are men and not God".
167. Ibid.
"It seems to have no guidance for a Christian Statesman for our day. It can fight the devil if he shows both horns and both cloven feet. But it refuses to make discriminating judgements about good and evil if the evil shows only one horn or a half of a cloven foot."168

It outlines "the final pinnacle of the Christian faith and hope with fidelity to the Scriptures" - but it requires correction because "it has obscured the foothills where human life must be lived." It is ethically irrelevant and morally irresponsible.

Barth replied in turn reiterating his criticism of the Amsterdam material with its "overburdenedness" and "inner uncertainty" deriving, as he still held, from its attempt to move from the human situation, assessed largely in its own terms, to the Kingdom and resources of God rather than in the other (correct) order. Barth raises here the question as to whether the division between himself and Niebuhr (and "Anglo-Saxon" as against "Continental" theology) does not lie in distinctive attitudes to the Bible. Niebuhr and the Anglo-Saxon tradition claim a loyalty to the Bible as their final authority but in practice there appears a lack of willingness to be bound by the Bible. Instead there is manifested a tendency towards speculative or empirical theologising with the support of, rather than under the disciplined control of, Biblical texts. As a result, Barth argues, there occurs the loss of a whole dimension -

"The Word of God, the Holy Spirit, God's free choice, God's Grace and judgement, the creation, the reconciliation, the Kingdom, the sanctification, the congregation, and all these not as principles to be interpreted in the same sense as the first two dimensions ('God' and the 'World') but as the indication of events, of concrete once-for-all, unique divine actions, of the majestic mysteries of God that cannot be resolved into any pragmatism".170

The loss of this dimension has meant the loss of a centre from which differing Christian emphases can be assessed and allowed their proper place. It has also meant the loss of mystery, and - Barth admits - a loss of real interest as far as he is concerned.

168. Ibid., p. 1139.
In the final 'round,' Niebuhr is in the first place, content simply to repeat his charge of "irresponsibility" in the immediate and pressing decisions which Christians must take every day -

"It could be proved ... that a theology which illumines the pinnacles of the Christian faith and nerves men to heroic action in a day of obvious crisis may yet be less than adequate in guiding their conscience in the prosaic task of every day."172

Secondly, Niebuhr attempts to point out Barth's inconsistency in that his own Biblical exegesis betrays a commerce with and dependence upon, cultural norms which he elsewhere explicitly disallows. This means that in the end of the day Barth's ultimate criteria are more subjective and arbitrary than he imagines.

Niebuhr continued the attack in his essay on "Coherence, Incoherence and Christian Faith,"173 which clearly has in view Barth's Amsterdam address -

"In this world Barth bids the Christian Church to witness to the resurrection; that is to set up signs and symbols of redemption in the confusion of sin. His signs are all explicitly eschatological. They must have something of the aura of martyrdom upon them. He bids the Church to wait until the issues are clear before it bears this historic witness, just as he himself waited in witnessing against Hitlerism until the manifest injustices of a tyrannical state revealed their clearly idolatrous religious character. This is a religion, as a Catholic critic rightly observes, which is fashioned for the catacombs and has little relation to the task of transfiguring the natural stuff of politics by the grace and wisdom of the Gospel."174

He makes this point again in the more recent article in the Ecumenical Review175 where he criticises "one type of Christian politics" which "merely asserts the moral ambiguity of all political positions and exhibits its Christian transcendence by refusing to make a choice". 176

176. Ibid.
Thus although the actual expression varies from time to time Niebuhr's criticism of Barth has been a consistent one - viz. that his theology, whatever its merits may be on other levels, is quite inadequate at the level of man's every day ethical experience. It fails here in two ways; first in that it requires too sharp a division between faith and culture and hence makes it difficult for the Christian to bring the insights of his faith to bear upon cultural problems. As a result the non-Christian does not learn of the essential relevance of Christian faith to his problems nor does he hear the prophetic Word applied to his situation. Barth's theology is inadequate at the ethical level secondly, in that he gives the Christian himself no real guidance in the midst of the decisions which daily ethical issues require of him. How for example does the city finance committee decide what are adequate housing conditions for its citizens? How precisely does the Christian business man fill in his expense account? Barth can help nerve men for a situation of absolute black and white witness certainly, but can really say nothing to them in all the grey and polka-dot situations of their concrete existence as employees and as citizens. These lacunae in Barth's theology are no light matter in the light of the importance of this area as he sees it, and Niebuhr raises a further charge - irresponsibility, and this in two ways.

(i) Barth's view is irresponsible in relation to the Church's evangelistic task because the area of the ethical is the area with which non-Christian man is supremely concerned. He is therefore unimpressed by a faith which appears to have no relation to his real life.

(ii) Barth's view is irresponsible in relation to the Church's pedagogic task since, as we have noted, it sends the Christian out into the world with no guidance as to the relation and significance of his faith for his immediate social and ethical situation.

Barth for his part criticises Niebuhr for his dangerous anthropocentric tendencies - i.e. with a failure really to take the great indicatives of the faith with that utter seriousness which implies that all other voices can only be heard subsequent to, and consequent upon the voice and Word of God. Seen from this standpoint, Niebuhr's own approach has its own lacunae - a whole dimension in fact. For all its pragmatic "realism" it does not finally grasp reality but is all the time in danger of reflecting
merely the relative and fragmented viewpoints of the theologian himself. Because it will not see realities consistently in the light of God's action with respect to them, but attempts to seize them as they are immediately encountered, he is in constant danger of failing to really see them at all, and instead of having apprehended the reality which he seeks to grasp he is left often with the husk of his own conceptual and experimental categories.

ii. Evaluation:

The ethical question is the question of the good and hence the divergence of ethical approaches will be uncovered at the point of their respective accounts of the nature and form of the good towards which man feels obligated. We begin our evaluation of Barth and Niebuhr's ethical theories at this point.

1. The Nature of the Good. For Barth the moral demand, the demand of the good, is not to be viewed in itself. Its real significance, that is, can only be understood when it is set in the light of the whole range of reality. This means that there can be no isolating of the ethical; no autonomous area in which the question of the good is raised and answered in isolation from other questions. We are never to forget that the man to whom the question of the good is addressed and who seeks in differing ways to answer that question, both theoretically in his ethical theorising, and practically in his ethical behaviour, is always a man who inhabits a world in which Christ died and rose and who was apprehended and bound to God by that event. The man who hears and responds to the demand of the good is thus man with and before God, and whose whole life including his ethical experience is set in this light - that he is the man for whom God became man and died at Golgotha. Man is thus man under the radical judgement which this event implies. He is also the man who by that same event is affirmed as a man with God to whom true being and humanity are restored in Jesus Christ. His ethical behaviour is thus his response to the fact of his new existence in Jesus Christ - the question of the degree of his conformity to, and apprehension of,

the humanity given him in Jesus Christ. The proper evaluation of the ethical that is lies in the dogmatic. The question of the good can only be properly understood in this total context; i.e. in the setting of Barth's dialectical No and Yes to man in Jesus Christ. We require, that is, to refuse to listen to the ethical question in itself - as if it confronted us with the Goodness of God in itself. Rather we require to set aside the ethical for the religious - to move to the category of sin and grace and in this light re-assess the ethical. The good of the ethical question must thus be set in the light of the Good, of the Goodness of God. It is thus only in a secondary, derived and special sense that the ethical demand can be properly thought of as reflecting the demand of God upon man.

For Niebuhr on the other hand the position is much more straightforward. The question of the good is quite directly the question of the Good, the Goodness of God. Man in encounter with the claim of the law of love is in encounter with the claim and demand of God. This is not to suggest that man does not require the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the Cross which is the final vindication of the law of love and the place at which its meaning is finally clarified. Further man can obviously fail to make this equation of the demand of the law of love with the claim of a transcendent Being. Nonetheless, the fact remains, that his ethical experience is in the final analysis a religious experience - the good of the ethical demand can be related directly to the will of the Good, the will of God.

2. The heart of the division This distinction in the understanding of the ethical demand in Niebuhr and Barth arises from a divergence in the ontological basis of the ethical sphere. Niebuhr, as we have already expounded his view, believes in a human being derived from God's creative action - man made in the Image of God. This man is totally dependent upon God and responsible to him in his whole existence. God presses upon this man in the demand of the law of love and supremely in the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which man is summoned to repent of his self-centredness and to centre his life upon God and his neighbour. The ethical, by this, is ontologically grounded in the life and being of man the creature of God made in His image. Barth denies this "independent" man derived from creation. Man is man with God, man in and with Jesus Christ. His whole being is properly a being in and with Him.
The ontological basis of the ethical hence must be sought in Jesus Christ. The demand of the ethical is ultimately the demand to be conformed to Him, to realise the humanity given in Him. The man who struggles with the ethical demand is always this man - man in Jesus Christ. Hence we are back with the alternatives which we posed in the previous chapter in terms of anthropology - viz. an essentialist or a christological anthropology?

We can put this divergence between the two in another way - viz. in a divergence in Christology. We can put this most sharply if we ask the question - how does the work of Christ affect human existence? Niebuhr's reply must be that it affects it only relatively. It is a disclosure to all men of the ultimate nature of reality. It is for those who trust in Christ by faith the means of forgiveness and pardon, and through repentance the resource of Grace whereby man can begin to realise life as it should be - i.e. a deliverance from self-centredness into life centred upon God and the neighbour. Beyond this, however, Niebuhr hesitates to go. The result of this stance is his essentially 'realist-pragmatist' ethical approach. Ethical realities are to be encountered just as they present themselves. Revelation can illumine but it has not radically affected the situation. We is accordingly critical of Barth's "realised eschatology", and his irresponsible refusal to take ethical realities seriously in their own terms. West comments -

"(Niebuhr) is ... more acutely aware than Barth of the ways of God with human structures of power, order and justice, precisely because, or so it seems, of his refusal to place the whole political process from the beginning under the order of redemption." 179

Barth's answer to our question is that the work of Christ affects human existence absolutely. That is, in the being of the Son of God in his work of atonement the whole of man's existence is grasped and healed and bound to God. That which was foreshadowed in Creation is here actualised - viz. man's being as a being-in-relation with God; man as God's covenant partner. All this has happened. Christus Victor! Barth's seeming unconcern for, or at least his relative disinterest in, the immediate ethical

178. "We are men and not God", Art.cit. p.1135.
realities arise from this perspective. It also is the source of his criticism of Niebuhr for his unwarranted "anxiety" and "carefulness" as to the state of the world. We evaluate the two positions in turn.

3. Niebuhr - strengths and weaknesses There is no doubt that his position has certain strengths over against Barth. He is unquestionably able to attain a striking relevance for the Christian ethic in the face of contemporary issues as the titles of his occasional writings demonstrate. He is also able to grapple at close quarters with the ethical dilemmas of Christians in a secular mechanised society. There can be no question that in this respect he has rendered yeoman service to the Christian cause. The testimony of D.R. Davies is one which could be repeated again and again - "I first came across his work during a deep crisis in my own inner life which Doctor Niebuhr more than any contemporary thinker helped me to resolve." Again, in an assessment of Niebuhr's role in American political thought and life, Schlesinger writes -

181. The following are examples of titles of articles submitted by Niebuhr to various Journals during this period -
   1925, "Germany and modern civilisation", Atlantic Monthly, June.
   1931, "Crisis in British Socialism", Ibid., Sept. 30th.
   1937, "America and the war in China", Ibid., Sept. 29th.
   1942, "The Anglo-Russian pact", Christianity and Crisis, June 29th.
   1945, "The conference of the big three", Ibid., March 5th.
   1953, "Sex and religion in the Kinesey report", Christianity and Crisis, November 2nd.

to give but the briefest and randomest of selections.
182. 1930, "Is stewardship ethical?" The Christian Century, April 30th.
   1938, "Christian faith and the common life" Oxford Con. Series Vol 4 (Lon.'38)
   1940, "Politics and the Christian Ethic", Christianity and Society, Spring.

- again a brief and random selection.
Niebuhr showed that the refutation by history of democratic illusions need not turn into a refutation of democracy...
His penetrating reconstruction of the democratic faith... absorbed and mastered the forces of disillusion and pressed the nerve of action.\textsuperscript{184}

Niebuhr explicitly chose as his theological stance the border area "between gospel and world" and there is no doubt that his theology manifests a striking commerce between the two. To read Niebuhr is to be forced to the conclusion that, granted the truth of Christianity, there can be no dubiety as to its relevance to human life. To have attained such a goal is commendation indeed when one reflects on the depth of the problems which Western society faced during the period of Niebuhr's influence. The tribute of the \textit{New York Times} is a fitting one -

"His great distinction is no doubt that of having almost single-handed recovered for the secular intellectual community a sense of the formidable majesty and toughness that can belong to the Christian understanding of man and history when it is powerfully and cogently interpreted."\textsuperscript{185}

His ethical theory, however, is not without its real weaknesses and we require to note them. In the first place he is not sufficiently aware of the deceptive subjectivity of realist ethics. Niebuhr is the champion of an ethical approach which takes things "as they are" and which dispenses with theoretical speculation. He is the product of that Anglo-Saxon pragmatism which generations before produced a Pelagius. Over against Barth's "dangerous" theorising Niebuhr's thought would seem to reflect a commendable straight-forwardness and objectivity, allowing ethical realities to stand in their own terms and not to be theologised out of recognition. His own deep awareness of the ideological pretensions of all high-blown theological constructions, and his constant self-criticism might, one feels, amply guarantee the objectivity of his ethical views. Such, however, is not the case. As so many have found before him the subjective elements which are swept out of the front door can re-enter through the back in the form of implicit assumptions. The refusal to

\textsuperscript{184} K and B, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{New York Times} - quoted on jacket of his latest book \textit{Man's Nature and His Communities}. 
follow any explicit theological evaluation of ethical facts does not mean that we can escape all evaluation. "Common sense realism" is one position among others, one possibility among others, carrying as many presuppositions and implicit axioms as any other theological standpoint. West, after a searching analysis of Niebuhr's social ethics finds him guilty on this precise charge -

"(pragmatism) pretends to be free of all presuppositions except real social situations. But does it in fact depend on unexamined values and structures organic to American traditions which are themselves hiding special interests?... Is not Niebuhr thrown back into dependence on the truth and goodness in his own cultural background - which appears so vividly as ideological to those who have not shared this background - because he cannot share Barth's unqualified conviction about the victory of Christ and the all-creating grace of God?"186

Secondly, Niebuhr's failure to view the ethical in its full theological christological setting implies that he inevitably misrepresents it. He is concerned with the empirically real - i.e. with the ethical question considered in and of itself in the concrete terms of its particular setting, though of course the full terms of this setting transcend materialistic ones.187 But the question needs to be asked as to whether this approach is an adequate one. Is the ethical a watertight compartment in this sense? Can ethical realities be considered in themselves and not related to a quite definite theological situation? In particular two limitations manifest themselves -

(i) Niebuhr's approach appears open to one of the dangers which Barth mentions in his critique of so-called "Casuistical ethics".

"(The moralist) makes himself Lord, King and Judge at the place where only God can be this... he can know the command of God, see through it and past it, and thus master and handle it."188

188. III/4, p.10.
If man has the will of God even as the law of love in all its limitless demands, there is the immediate danger of his fashioning from that very will of God an instrument of his own  

hubris. This can happen in the sense that Barth refers to above in the case of the moralist. Niebuhr, one has to add, is aware of this danger and is heartily critical of all attempts to erect a final norm in history with its accompanying threat of self-justification, but we need to ask whether his approach is not in constant danger of just this. This danger can also arise in the sense that man can pride himself upon his own relative attainment with respect to this command. He may very well ignore the absolute nature of the demand of love and feel rather that within the terms of his inevitable human limitations he does rather well, as well as most at any rate. Thus although it is true that men can be led from a realisation of ethical inadequacy to the sheer fact of human sinfulness there is no inevitability in this movement. Ethics, when approached pragmatically can thus become a subtle but deadly side-track whereby man is confirmed in his sin rather than disturbed in it. One has to ask whether Barth in the end of the day has not a more satisfactory answer to the anthropocentricity of the liberal protestantism from which both sought to free themselves, because of his attempt to transcend the ethical altogether and set man sub specie aeternitatis. Niebuhr's failure to approach ethics Christologically implies an inability to bring that radical and total judgement upon man which is the real answer to anthropocentricity. It is here not surprising that Barth should have levelled this as his charge against Niebuhr at Amsterdam. In other words might we not fairly raise the question whether it is Niebuhr rather than Barth, or at least as much as Barth, who is open to the charge of "standing in the place of God"?

(ii) Niebuhr's failure to set ethics in its full theological context implies a loss at the level of ethical incentive and motivation. Certainly a theology such as Barth's which makes much of God's grace is always in this kind of danger as well. Paul faced this very problem as Romans 6:1 makes clear. Hence it is no necessarily damning indictment of a theology to charge it with the danger of antinomianism. (Indeed it is when this danger is not present that one has to begin asking whether one really has the apostolic gospel.) What, however, is significant is that Paul gives a thoroughly Christological answer to this problem. The ethical motivation derives from a recognition of the position of the Christian believer in relation to Jesus Christ. In baptism he was baptized into the very death of Christ (Roms. 6:3-4, 6). He now shares the risen life of Christ as one who is now made over to Christ as a member of His Body (Roms. 6:4-5, 11). Hence sin is unthinkable. It is a denial of a spiritual reality. The ethical motivation in other words derives from the theological reality. Factors such as Niebuhr appeals to as the demands of love are not without a place in New Testament ethics but the real heart of ethical motivation lies in the recognition of the believer's situation with respect to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and the shining moral attainment, generally speaking, which the early Church reflected derived in the first instance from its understanding of the gospel. Again the pragmatic approach, because of the limited range of reality with which it concerns itself, fails to give that ethical motivation which a Christological approach would have given.

Finally, in criticism of Niebuhr we would mention the law of love and here ask how adequate a standard it is, even when filled out in the ethic of Jesus and in the light of the Cross. In Niebuhr's hands it becomes the instrument for a far-reaching and penetrating critique of individual and social moral issues, but one has to ask whether in fact Niebuhr's practice is in advance of the theory. Niebuhr's suspicion of law in ethics and his stress upon the dangers inherent in any attempt to state final norms means that his ethical standard is dangerously flexible. In practice it is often not at all easy to see what the demand of love implies in a situation. Love in other words has to be given a fuller context, i.e. it requires a kind of "law". Niebuhr attempts to do this
through the ethics of Christ and by defining love concretely in terms of the cross, but one wonders if this is enough. Does the Bible not claim a higher sanction for its explicit commands than Niebuhr allows them? Is there not in Scripture material for the "filling out" of the law of love to give it a greater range of application without unduly hampering its flexibility?\footnote{191}

In fact, Niebuhr has the raw materials for a more thorough-going theological evaluation of the ethical in his basing of the being of man upon the fact of the creation of man in God’s image. However, due to other weaknesses which we will discuss later, Niebuhr fails to carry this through and hence is left with his pragmatic and therefore circumscribed approach.

4. **Barth - strengths and weaknesses.** The strengths of Barth’s approach to ethics are real ones. As we have just indicated his following of Luther and Kierkegaard in the breaking through ethics into the categories of sin and grace gives a more adequate answer to the road taken by Schleiermacher and the nineteenth century than Niebuhr’s realistic ethic. By his approach the ethical can no longer offer man a ground for his self-exaltation and justification. He is placed under a radical judgement which logically can leave him nothing but a cry for mercy. All his action, whether relatively good or relatively evil, and his very being itself are called into question and man is delivered up \textit{in toto} into the hands of God.

The danger of such an approach, viz. the rendering irrelevant of the ethical distinction and the sharp divorce of creed from conduct, Barth attempts to face positively in the second movement of his dialectic - the affirmation of man in Jesus Christ. It seems to be correct to say as West does\footnote{192} that Niebuhr and many of Barth’s Anglo-Saxon critics have failed really to grasp the significance of this second movement and hence that their criticisms of Barth’s ethical ineptitude are to some degree beside the point.\footnote{193} Niebuhr has not, that is, grasped the full development of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{192} Op.cit. 241-2, "Niebuhr completely fails to grasp the inclusive, affirming nature of Barth’s Christological Doctrine of Grace; that in Christ created humanity is fulfilled not arbitrarily limited and refined."
\item \textit{193} Cf. T.C. Oden, \textit{The Promise of Barth} passim (New York, 1969) who speaks of a "hunger for caricature" in many of these critics. (op.cit. p.43).
\end{itemize}
Barth's theology in its movement from a concentration upon the revealing Word to a concentration on the Word which is revealed, the God/man Jesus Christ. Hence there does appear to be within Barth's approach room for a positive and wide ranging ethical theory. Further, his radical criticism of the ethics of his generation enables him to attain an objectivity in his ethical theory which is not bound to any particular tradition. Barth's attitude and approach to Communism is witness to this, though in practice as we saw he has lacked a full appreciation of the problems of Christian witness in a Communist State. Nonetheless his theology provides the terms for an objective approach freed from ideological commitments. Nor has Barth left it all to others to spell out the terms of his ethic in detailed instances. The Church Dogmatics has large areas given to Christian Ethics - enough in fact to fill two whole volumes. In these sections, and in volume III/4 in particular Barth gets down to some very thorough and detailed ethical thinking. Themes such as sexual morality, abortion, and euthanasia are treated to a mature and sensitive discussion. In his latest and final fragment in IV/4 Barth has gone so far as to construe baptism in terms of man's ethical response to the initiative of God's grace to him which implies an ethical seriousness ill-fitting the picture which his critics have at times presented of him. One could point also here to Barth's role in the resistance of the German confessing church to Nazism as evidence of the ethical power and relevance of his theology. Even if it is true that he has not involved himself consistently in immediate political and social issues to the extent that Niebuhr has, this is partly due to sheer physical limitation. The detachment which the Church Dogmatics project required of him made this kind of continuous involvement impossible. Barth has sensed a theological vocation, and, while not neglecting his social responsibilities, this for him meant the closing off of other fields.

195. We could give a list of articles by Barth which would parallel that of Niebuhr given above.
196. IV/4, pp.100ff, 153ff.
as areas for his labours. Further the New Testament is in some respects open to the same charge as Niebuhr has brought against Barth. It is not entirely accidental that those who have taken the Biblical text with the greatest sense of its authority per se have often been open to a charge of world-flight. This has not always been the case of course - witness the Clapham Sect in nineteenth century England; however it has been sufficiently recurrent to be noteworthy. Having made all these points are we to conclude that Niebuhr's criticism is entirely unfounded and that Barth is to be defended on every score in his ethics? Several further comments are in order -

(1) There would appear to be grounds for saying that Barth's ethical theory is not so much irrelevant as over-generalised. To take some concrete examples - what of the decision to be taken by a local authority with respect to the problem of providing adequate housing for its citizens. Obviously all agree in principle that the best possible should be provided. But what does that mean? Does an extra bedroom attain that ideal rather than a more elaborate heating system? And where is the money to come from for this? From the education programme? From other welfare services? From the transport department? etc. etc. Or, again, how does a man decide between the competing loyalties of his home and his career? Does he deny his wife and family the value of his presence in order to attain a higher status in his job and hence be able to provide for them on a more adequate scale? Or, to think of a larger instance how does a government decide the proportion of its national income to devote to the needs of under-developed nations in face of clamant home demands? It is not that in these instances one of the alternatives proposed conflicts with the fact of God's being for man in Jesus Christ. It is rather that the theological truth referred to does not appear to affect the decision in any important regard - it remains at too great a distance from the alternatives. In the first example, for instance, it may confirm the correctness of the general aim - the best possible housing - but it has little contact with the practical means of attaining this aim which is precisely where the problems and questions arise.
Yet it is decisions like this which form the great bulk of practical ethical decision making. Barth's ethic appears too general really to make contact with these particular questions.

(ii) Barth as we have already pointed out does in places engage in highly relevant ethical discussion. It is in the course of these discussions that it becomes apparent how in fact he really does ethics. Discussing abortion for instance \(^{197}\) he notes the Biblical commandment forbidding murder. He underlines medical evidence concerning the autonomous life of the embryo. \(^{198}\) He regards the Roman Catholic absolute denial of all termination of pregnancy to be mistaken. \(^{199}\) He speaks of the need for a renewed sense of awe before the wonder of life and the consequent respect for it in all its forms. \(^{200}\) He appeals to the gospel as condemning all deliberate abortion, but as also extending forgiveness to such as may have been guilty of such. \(^{201}\) He discusses the "exceptional case" where the mother's life and health are seriously endangered unless the pregnancy is terminated, and lays down four principles as guides to decision in such a case. \(^{202}\) What strikes one in this discussion is the sensitivity which Barth manifests and the openness with which he approaches the problems. He has no predetermined attitude and seeks light from wherever he can obtain it. One cannot help reflecting that the way Barth in fact does ethics is really not so far removed from the approach which he had earlier excluded in theory under the heading "casuistical ethics" \(^{203}\). That approach sought to arrive at God's law and command in general by reference to the Bible, natural law and cultural norms, and then to apply this to particular cases. Barth criticised it on three grounds - i. it placed the moralist in God's place knowing good and evil; ii. it made the command of God a universal rule simply requiring concrete application in specific instances;

197. III/4, pp. 415-423.
198. III/4, p. 416.
199. Ibid., p. 417.
200. Ibid., p. 418.
201. Ibid., p. 419.
203. III/4, p. 6.
iii. it encroached upon man's true freedom before God, his freedom to obey God Himself. Barth's real objection to this approach would appear to be the first one - viz. that the "casuistic" approach implies man's knowing beforehand what the will of God is in any situation and hence becoming Lord of it. When we remove that element, Barth's own ethical practice appears in certain respects strikingly similar to this approach. There is, as we have seen, a similar attempt to bring certain principles, Scriptural and otherwise, to bear upon the particular instance and arrive at a view which accords with the divine will. In other words, in practice Barth appears to go beyond the strict terms of his theoretical dogmatic approach to ethics and to indulge in a wider-based assessment of the issues.

(iii) This inconsistency inevitably raises the question as to whether there is also a theoretical flaw in Barth's approach such that his admirable ethical attainments in some areas are to some extent in spite of himself. In particular we would raise the matter of Barth's attempt to base anthropology so uncompromisingly upon Christology - with the danger which we have encountered that man can no longer be taken with the seriousness which he requires; i.e. despite his heavy stress on the historical dimension of God's revelation in space and time in the reality of Jesus Christ one has to ask whether in fact the idealism which he reacted against has been totally eradicated. Barth does attempt to take Christ seriously, and there is in places a great stress on the human in Barth - witness his emphasis on man's fellow-humanity (Mitmenschlichkeit) - but this is not a fully obvious derivative from his theoretical position which requires us to say that ultimately the only true humanity is the humanity of Jesus Christ. That is, Jesus Christ in his humanity is the ontological basis for all other humanity. Man exists only by the Word of God, and this means only in and by Jesus Christ. Individual humans are such by virtue of the fact that they participate in the eternal humanity of the Son of God. Barth will allow no qualification of this. He criticises Brunner for his attempt to marry the (correct) notion of man as constituted by the Word of God with a neutral humanity which may or may not affirm God's claim. 204

204. III/2, pp. 128-130.
What Barth will not countenance is that man is granted by his creation a genuine freedom before God which is not simply a freedom to affirm God's good-pleasure towards him. Brunner by his categories of responsibility and the capacity for decision is reaching towards such a view - viz. that while agreeing with Barth that man never ceases for a moment to be in the hand of God held in being by this Word of God who was manifested in Jesus Christ, it is unjustified to move from that position to one in which man's human being arises directly from the humanity of Jesus Christ. Barth's position in other words appears to require a conflation of the two works of God, creation and redemption. One has to ask whether the Bible, while never for a moment suggesting anything other than that these two are works of the One God - the Bible is the best of all anti-Marcionite tracts! - nonetheless does preserve a distinction between the two works, and places between the two the fall of man. This, further, is the setting in which the Bible speaks of the incarnation - man's fall and guilt. "The Word became flesh" means the assumption by God of this situation, "He Himself partook of the same nature ... made like His brethren in every respect." (Hebrews 2, vs. 14 and 17; cf. also Philippians 2, v. 7f). The incarnation means Christ's consanguinity with us, not the other way round. 205

We will be examining Barth's Christology more fully later and there attempt to give these criticisms a fuller documentation.

As we noted earlier with respect to Niebuhr we are back with the issue which confronted us in the previous chapter viz. an "essentialist" as against a Christological anthropology. Our consideration of the ethical question in other words has simply served to uncover this basic divergence between Barth and Niebuhr from another point of view. We will turn next to view this issue in the light of the problems connected with the 'history of salvation' and the fall of man. Before moving to that issue, however, we would comment on the terms in which the Barth/Niebuhr debate arose at, and subsequent to Amsterdam, and in particular to the distinction which was drawn between "Anglo-Saxon" and "Continental" approaches to theology.

Although Barth challenged the over-generalisation which this distinction endangered he did agree with Niebuhr's categories in principle. One does gain the strong impression in studying Barth and Niebuhr that one is dealing with two such distinguishable approaches to theology and that for all their overlapping and agreements at points there lies at the heart of their respective theologies a fairly radical divergence. To some extent it appears to be a reflection of the age-old human conflict between the man of action and the man of thought. For a man of Niebuhr's approach and outlook Barth must represent a dangerous 'detachment' and 'irrelevance' in the face of reality. For Barth Niebuhr is the representative of a dangerous 'activism' and 'superficiality'.

d. The relation to the idea of Sin

Finally, to relate all this to the question of sin, it would appear that Barth is correct in his attempt to transcend the ethical in the terms of the first movement of his dialectic and set it under the judgement of the cross and resurrection, however this need not mean that the ethical sphere in its relative Yes and No contains no genuine encounters with the Living God. Referring to our exegesis of Romans 2, 14 earlier we saw the possibility of an activity of God within the ethical - disturbing man in his sinful estrangement from God and in his terrible self-sufficiency. Thus the uneasy conscience which burdens man as he lives within the approval and blame of daily ethical existence, though not equatable with man's having infringed a series of concrete commands of God, is nonetheless a witness to man's estrangement from God. The true meaning of this estrangement, i.e. man as a sinner, is only given when man is set before God, i.e. in the light of God's revelation.
CHAPTER 5

THE FALL AND ORIGINAL SIN

One of the supremely determinative factors in any view of sin is the value which the theologian concerned affords to the account of the fall of man in Genesis, chapter 3. Here we are confronted with the fundamental questions of the origin and nature of sin and its relation to the whole human race. The theologian's stance at this point is hence deeply revealing as to his whole view of sin. We commence our discussion of these issues with an exposition of the doctrines of the fall and original sin in Niebuhr and Barth.

A. NIEBUHR'S VIEW OF THE FALL
a. Concept of 'Myth'

The fall for Niebuhr belongs to the category of myth. Our primary task accordingly will be to indicate what 'myth' means for him. In his two accounts of 'myth' Niebuhr refers to the 'Christian world view' which holds that the ground and meaning of existence lie "outside of existence" in God. The relation between temporal, immanent existence and the eternal, divine ground of existence is one neither of identity nor radical discontinuity. Rather it is dialectical whereby "the eternal is revealed and expressed in the temporal but not exhausted in it." When man attempts to signify this relationship and speak of this 'beyond' upon which he recognises all temporal existence as depending, he encounters a critical problem. The language which he employs in his immanent setting with reference to rational or logical relations is not applicable to this relationship. If he attempts to use language borrowed from rational relations man will end up with a pantheism whereby God and the world are identified, or a dualism whereby God and the world are separated, and he is left with a spiritual world devoid of content and a material world.

2. ICE, p.36: BT, p.3ff.
3. BT, p.4.
4. BT, p.4.
devoid of meaning. The answer to this dilemma is "symbol" or "myth". Niebuhr's account is rather loosely formulated at this point and he shows little explicit recognition that he is moving in an area which bristles with problems and which has evoked a vast wealth of comment. Thus, for example, he shows no recognition of the complexity of the term symbol or of the fact that it can be distinguished from myth. It is difficult to find a distinction between myth and symbol in Niebuhr's thought. Symbol is perhaps used more commonly when he is referring to the general category of signification which he is seeking here, and myth is used when he refers to the Biblical material; however in practice he can use the two interchangeably. What exactly is Niebuhr trying to say in his concept of myth? He attempts to clarify his meaning by reference to artistic symbolism.

The artist attempts by means of a two-dimensional drawing to represent a three-dimensional object; or, to use a rather more sophisticated example, the portrait artist attempts to depict the essential character of his subject although what he actually paints may not reflect any single expression of his subject. Thus -

"A moment of time in a personality can be made to express what transcends the moment of time only if the moment is not recorded accurately. It must be made into a symbol of something beyond itself."

The common element in the two examples lies in the point that what is recorded by the artists, if judged by the canons of a strict one-to-one relation, is not a faithful reproduction of the object under scrutiny. Thus an element of deceit in the sense of an infringement of the strictly logical is necessary to record what, in another sense, is the truth.

5. BT, p.4.
6. BT, pp.4-6: ICE, p.36.
7. Cf. E. Bevan, Symbolism and Belief (London, 1938), p.11ff who distinguishes two classes of religious symbols. There are those behind which we see and hence attain a non-symbolic conceptual understanding of the reality symbolised, and there are the symbols behind which we cannot see and hence can have no access in conceptual terms to the realities behind the symbols. Cf. also J. Baillie, The Sense of the Presence of God (Oxford, 1962) pp.115-129. Barth, Credo, p.23f: I/1, p.413f.
This same need to be a "deceiver, yet true" lies upon the man of faith. Every attempt to signify the eternal using language drawn from the temporal must be a form of deceit. Nonetheless, it may be true. Such is the case in the statements that God created the world, that man fell into sin, that God became man to redeem the world from sin, that Christ will come again at the last judgement. They are examples of what Niebuhr understands by myth. Myth becomes falsified, however, whenever either of the two poles of the relation are allowed to overcome the dialectical tension and control the myth. Thus on the one side the immediate reference of the language employed can be overstressed. Here the rational, immanent value of the term predominates. On the philosophical level this is the error of an over-strict empiricism. Theologically it appears as a mistaken literalism with respect to the Biblical symbols. On the other side the immanent pole of the dialectic can become submerged. Philosophically this is the mistake of idealism, and it has its theological counterpart whenever theology succumbs to idealistic, Platonic influences whereby Christianity loses its character as an historical religion and becomes simply another philosophy; the Bible ceases to be interpreted as a record of Heilsgeschichte, but is seen rather as an account of religious experience in general.

It is necessary at this point to attempt to sharpen the discussion. What precisely is Niebuhr reaching for in his notion of myth? Is he simply attempting to draw attention to the general fact that when we engage in religious discourse we are required to stretch language beyond its ordinary usage and to employ it in a manner distinct from that usage? Or, putting this another way, is he pointing us to the fact that religious discourse is a very special form of discourse requiring to be distinguished from all other forms of discourse, a distinct "language game" with its

10. The parallel between the two examples has its limitations: "true" cannot obviously be used in the same sense of the reproduction of a three dimensional figure on a two dimensional canvas as of a portrait in respect of a person.
11. CRP, pp. 165-6: HH, p. 41f.
13. HH, p. 51ff.
own peculiar conventions, norms, and standards of verification? Niebuhr certainly is concerned to draw attention to the fact that the religious man wishes to point beyond immediate empirical and rational factors to a more ultimate dimension of meaning which he claims to discern, and what this "pointing beyond" gives rise to linguistic forms of a very special kind. This, however, would not appear to be Niebuhr's primary concern in his concept of myth, though obviously the questions of the nature and status of religious language which recent philosophy of religion has been concerned with are not irrelevant to Niebuhr's category. 15

Again is Niebuhr simply drawing attention to the Ineffability of God, that is, to the fact that no matter what we say of Him all our language is inevitably inadequate to the Object they attempt to indicate? Is myth in other words a witness to the God of Isaiah chapter 40 and Psalm 139, Who, in Anselm's terms, is the God quo maius cogitari nequit? 16 Such an understanding of God is certainly not irrelevant to Niebuhr's apology for "myth" however Niebuhr's problem arises apparently in the first instance from the conceptual limitations of mundane language rather than from the more distinctly religious sense of awe and inadequacy before the Ineffable Being of God which was the context of the Old Testament and Anselm's problem.

Finally we can ask - is Niebuhr by this category of myth reaching for some notion of analogy? This solution would appear to have a fair credibility though it is remarkable that Niebuhr does not relate himself to the history of discussion of this problem. From its very beginnings, and from the time of Aquinas in particular, theology has struggled with the notion of analogy, i.e. with the question as to how language taken from our every-day world can be applied to the divine Being. Had Niebuhr referred to this tradition he would have been able to draw upon a rich field of theological reflection and to clarify and deepen his exposition of the category of myth.


16. Anselm, Proslogium, Chapter XV.
It is useful here to relate Niebuhr to Paul Tillich who also uses the notions of myth and symbol, particularly the latter. Indeed Tillich is on record as stating that "the centre of my theological doctrine of knowledge is the concept of symbol". 17 Tillich, like Niebuhr, believes that symbol is essential if we are to speak about God. "Man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate." Symbol then operates in the gap between the Infinite and Unconditioned and the finite and conditioned. Thus far Tillich's account has similarities to Niebuhr's account of myth. Tillich has, however, a further element. Symbol for him is more than a mere sign. It actually participates in the being of the thing which is symbolised. It has "secondary revelatory power". 19 It is, by this, distinct from a "sign" which merely points to and indicates something. The symbol shares in the reality which it signifies. 20 When a number of symbols are combined they form a "myth". "Myths are symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters." 21 It would seem from this that Tillich and Niebuhr cannot be exactly equated in their understandings of the term "myth". At least two distinctions have come to light - (i) Tillich is more careful than Niebuhr to distinguish between the two terms myth and symbol. Tillich restricts myth to the "stories about divine-human encounters". Niebuhr, however, is prepared to use the term even for theological assertions like "God is creator". 22 (ii) Tillich wishes to view a symbol as itself, in a sense, revelatory. It cannot by definition apprehend what it attempts to indicate but it shares nonetheless in its reality. It ought to be said, however, that while Niebuhr certainly does not speak of myth in such terms he clearly does wish to view them as more

22. BT, p. 129; ICE, p. 32f.
than mere conceptual bridges. The point of the myth is that it "speaks" to us. Thus, for example, the myth of the fall is only understood "in introspection". That is, it requires to be apprehended personally and to lead to the confession 'I am Adam'. This is certainly part of what Niebuhr implies when he speaks of the "relevance" of myth. This more dynamic aspect of myth is also borne witness to by the fact that he restricts himself to the traditional Christian 'myths' though theoretically he is under no requirement to do so. We will have further comment to make on this in a moment, but for the present we can view it as additional evidence that for Niebuhr 'myth' has a wider and fuller function than merely that of its ability to allow some kind of linguistic and conceptual reference between the temporal and the eternal.

In the light of all this we can assert that there is a wide area of common ground in the two men's thinking. Weigel in the article cited is even prepared to identify their approaches in this area. This being the case it is significant for our interpretation of Niebuhr that Tillich sees the symbol in his thought performing the function which the analogy entia performed for Aquinas. This identification strengthens our view that part at least of what Niebuhr is concerned with in his notion of myth is what has traditionally been approached in terms of analogy.

Before attempting to gather these strands together there is one further very important area which requires to be entered - viz. the relation of Niebuhr's concept of 'myth' to the whole problem of historicity, and to the thought of Rudolph Bultmann in particular. Bultmann defines myth as "... the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world, and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side." At first sight this does not appear to be so far

from Niebuhr's position though the latter would not have chosen "imagery" as his material category, and would perhaps have been suspicious of an overtone of antithesis and dualism in the way in which the two orders of being are said to be related. A distinction between the two men becomes clearer, however, when we examine further statements of Bultmann. Niebuhr wishes to hold that myth expresses a supra-rational, supra-historical truth concerning man. Bultmann however writes -

"The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically but anthropologically, or better still, existentially."27

"Myth contains elements which demand its own criticism - viz. its imagery with its apparent claim to objective validity. The real purpose of myth is so to speak of a transcendent power which controls the world and man, but that purpose is impeded and obscured by the terms in which it is expressed."28

It is clear from this that Bultmann would contest Niebuhr's view that the myth conveys a truth as to man's life and relation to God. For Bultmann myth is rather the wrapping of ideas in which the truth of the kerygma is encountered in the New Testament and the task of theology with respect to it is that of "stripping the kerygma from its mythical framework, of 'demythologising' it."29 The myth is not a revealed picture whereby the transcendent is disclosed in its relation to the world; rather it is a time-conditioned category of understanding which as such is a hindrance to our apprehension of the truth. It is not so much a truth concerning man in his relation to God or God in His relation to man. It is rather a mode of man's self-understanding. It is not as for Niebuhr a supra-rational category but is rather a sub-rational form of expression. For Niebuhr, however, myth is of crucial importance.

28. Ibid., p.11.
29. Ibid., p.3.
He accordingly criticises Bultmann. "Bultmann does not distinguish rigorously between pre-scientific myths and permanently valid symbols."30 This does not imply that there are no pre-scientific elements in myths. He is quite explicit on this - "... in a sense mythical thinking is simply pre-scientific thinking which has not learned to analyse the relation of things to each other before fitting them into its picture of the whole."31 However, and this is the crucial point - "Mythical thought is not only pre-scientific; it is also supra-scientific. It deals with vertical aspects of reality which transcend the horizontal relationships which science analyses, charts and records."32 In fairness to Bultmann's full position it must be said that he does to some extent think of myth in terms of its soteriological value rather than its cognitive aspect, however at the level of his concern to de-mythologise the Christian message his distinction from Niebuhr is clear.33 Weigel puts it thus - "The difference between the two men, and Tillich would go along with Niebuhr, is that Bultmann thinks there is too much myth in the Scriptures while Niebuhr, admitting the presence of myth, would consider that much of the so-called myth is really valid symbol."34 This reference to Bultmann brings us into touch with what unquestionably is one of the most influential factors leading to the adoption of concepts like myth and symbol - the rise of the historical criticism of the Bible, and in particular the development of the positivist approach to history and its application to theology in the nineteenth century.35 Under the pressures of this approach

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30. KB, p. 446.
31. ICE, p. 36.
32. Ibid.
33. Kerygma and Myth, Vol I, p. 11. Bultmann is in fact far from clear as to the precise meaning of myth. Cf. the title of the first section of his essay "The Mythical View of the World and the Mythical Event of Redemption". Myth is already being used of two distinct magnitudes.
it seemed, and for many it still seems, difficult to salvage much properly reliable history from the evangelical records of the life and ministry of Jesus. Although Niebuhr does not refer explicitly to this in his apology for the category of myth it is certainly a contributory factor.

One final point before we summarise. It is worth underlining that the myths with which Niebuhr is concerned are the Biblical ones. From the definition of myth which he uses one theoretically might have expected to find him exploring the religious and imaginative history of the world for the myths which most fully satisfy his requirements. In practice, though showing a certain appreciation of other religious traditions he restricts himself to the traditional symbols. He constantly defends his appeal to the Scriptural material in terms of its "ability to throw light upon", "do justice to", etc., the complex facts of human experience, but this does not fully account for his Biblical orientation. Ultimately it appears that Niebuhr restricts himself to the Biblical material in this manner because he regards it as in some sense inspired and hence a vehicle of divine revelation. There is thus a covert appeal to faith implicit in his notion of myth.

What then does myth imply for Niebuhr? As we have seen it is the category he uses to deal with the problem of how to refer to the transcendent using immanent categories, and in its way is his particular form of analogy. There is evidence that he thinks of the myth as having revelatory value. In general, however, the idea is rather imprecisely formulated.

The final point we will concern ourselves with in this discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of myth will enable us to understand this imprecision, not to say equivocacy and also to register our major criticism of his position. We can approach it by raising the question of the miraculous. As we have seen Niebuhr is alive to the danger of myth losing its historical anchorage such that faith degenerates into a kind of gnostic idealism.

36. ICE, p.82; HD, p.293; BT, p.4, etc.
37. HN, p.146.
He wishes to identify himself therefore with a Heilsgeschichte approach to the Biblical history. The difficulty however is that the Biblical history involves the category of the miraculous. Nor is this element peripheral to the Biblical testimony. At one quite fundamental point - the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead - it holds the very centre of the stage, and is indeed bound up with the whole story. Niebuhr allows this and yet admits to a real difficulty in accepting the miraculous. -

"The healing miracles of Jesus, for instance, are credible because we recognise the height and depth of spirit in the dimension of each individual personality and the consequent spiritual dimension of bodily ill. Psychosomatic medicine corroborates such a conception. But we do not believe in the Virgin Birth and we have difficulty with the physical resurrection of Christ."39

It would appear at this point that Niebuhr is still a child of the 'liberal', 'anti-supernatural' spirit of the nineteenth century with its dogma of a closed cause-effect universe. One wonders if Richardson is not correct in seeing the essence of Niebuhr's position in a passage in Beyond Tragedy where Niebuhr writes -

"The message of the Son of God who dies upon a cross, of a God who transcends history and is yet in history, who condemns and judges sin and yet suffers with and for the sinner, this message is the truth about life. It cannot be stated without deceptions, but the truths which seek to avoid the deceptions are immeasurably less profound. Compared to the Christ who died for men's sin upon the Cross, Jesus the good man who tells all men to be good is more solidly historical. But he is the bearer of no more than a pale truism."4D

Niebuhr adheres therefore to the nineteenth century view of Jesus and hence rejects it would appear subsequent scholarship which has sought to demonstrate that far from being "more solidly historical" the "good man Jesus telling everybody to be good" is a projection of the nineteenth century man's self-understanding.41 Because of this approach to the Biblical accounts of Jesus Christ Niebuhr is unable to open himself to the Fact which is supremely calculated to break open the naturalistic

38. We use miracle here in its most general sense of an event, not directly accountable in terms of the processes of natural law, and attributed to the direct action of the Deity.
39. CPR, pp. 165-6.
categories with which he operates. In turn the nineteenth century framework means that we are left with a real question mark over his ability to escape the dangers of idealism in his theology. He is not unaware of this threat -

"... there is peril in this way of interpreting the gospel truth. The peril lies in the tendency to reduce Christianity to yet another philosophy, profounder than other philosophies because it embodies heights and depths which are not comprehended in the others. We say we take historical facts seriously but not literally; but we may be on the way of not taking them as historical facts at all." 42

In other words at this point Niebuhr in fact seems nearer to Bultmann than it had earlier appeared. He certainly shares Bultmann's view that there is a gain in the rejection of the notion of miraculous intervention as the object of faith. 43 Niebuhr it appears wishes both to have his cake and eat it. He wishes to retain the Biblical-historical perspective but only up to the point where it maintains contact with history as recounted from within the canons of rational demonstrability. Whatever goes beyond that is myth. Yet myth is not to be radically severed from history. The historical is to be taken "seriously" if not literally. 44 But what exactly does this mean? Can this category be maintained and still retain a distance from idealism? We will be able to explore these questions more fully as we examine the myth in particular which is the focus of our attention in this section - the fall of man.

b. The Fall as Myth

Niebuhr has numerous references to the mythical nature of the story in Genesis chapter 3. 45 For example he writes -

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42. CRPP, p.186.
44. CRPP, p.186.
"The story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden is a primitive myth which modern theology has been glad to disavow for fear that modern culture might regard belief in it as a proof of the obscurantism of religion... the idea of the fall (is) a symbol of the origin and the nature of evil in human life."46

Niebuhr is clear that whatever we do with this account we must not regard it as history in any normal sense.47 There was no such man as Adam; there is no such place as Eden; there was no such event as an original time-space act of disobedience which prejudicially affected the total subsequent history of the human race. The meaning and value of the fall story lie elsewhere. It has first of all a significant contribution to make on the metaphysical level in the area of questions as to the origin and nature of human evil. Of these two it is the nature of evil rather than its origin which particularly interests Niebuhr. This balance of interest probably derives from Niebuhr's fear of systematic, doctrinaire approaches to theological questions. As ever he wishes to approach the issues existentially in the sense that he wants to view them in the light of total reality. Thus his use of the story of the serpent is mainly to make the point that all evil is not due to man. This does not mean that he has no interest in the question of the origin of evil. He notes that in the Genesis account sin is closely related to human responsibility. In other words it cannot be accounted for as to its origin, either in terms of the counsels of God, or in terms of the inevitable consequences of temporal existence.48

Niebuhr has another version of this paradox which relates it more closely to man's sin. There he argues that the fall story with its reference to the temptation of Adam and Eve by the devil implies that evil is neither an act of absolute Promethean rebellion, nor the inevitable result of man's finite situation.49 Niebuhr recognises that the position argued for here cannot be philosophically systematised. It is compatible neither with a tidy monism

46. BT, pp. 10 and 13.
48. ICE, pp. 82-83: also 37-8.
49. HN, pp. 192-3.
nor with a tidy dualism. To some extent, that is, evil is a mystery beyond rational apprehension.\textsuperscript{50} Niebuhr is on Biblical ground here.\textsuperscript{51}

The really significant implication of the fall story however lies in the psychological and moral fields.

"It is in its interpretation of the facts of human nature rather than its objective insights into the relation of order and chaos as such that the myth of the fall makes its profoundest contribution to moral and religious theory."\textsuperscript{52}

The point here is that the story of the fall, in its account of Adam's situation, temptation and disobedience, reveals the truth that sin arises in relation to the paradoxical situation of man as the creature set at the juncture of freedom and necessity - at one moment the child of nature, and the child of spirit.\textsuperscript{53}

"...the essential point in the nature of human evil (is) that it arises from the very freedom of reason with which man is endowed. Sin is not so much the consequence of natural impulses, which in animal life do not lead to sin, as of the freedom by which man is able to throw the harmonies of nature out of joint."\textsuperscript{54}

Again -

"Sin can be understood neither in terms of the freedom of human reason alone, nor yet in terms of the circumscribed harmonies in which the human body is bound. Sin lies at the juncture of spirit and nature in the sense that the peculiar and unique characteristics of human spirituality, in both its good and evil tendencies can be understood only by analysing the paradoxical relation of freedom and necessity, of finiteness and the yearning for the eternal in human life."\textsuperscript{55}

At this level the story of the fall, mythically understood, is superior to all naturalistic, evolutionary, or sociological explanations of human evil. It is "true" in a manner profounder than any rigidly historical approach to the story could ever be.

\textsuperscript{50} ICE, p.38.
\textsuperscript{51} II Thessalonians 2, 7.
\textsuperscript{52} ICE, p.38.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{HN}, p.19ff: ICE, pp. 86-7.
\textsuperscript{54} BT, p.11.
\textsuperscript{55} ICE, pp. 86-7. Also \textit{HN}, pp. 192-3: FH, p. 37.
In the Gifford Lectures Niebuhr attempts to take this interpretation one step further by seeking to show the value of the myth in pointing to the true state of mind of the individual prior to actual sin. He defines this as anxiety. In this account he is heavily dependent, as has already been observed, on Kierkegaard's *Concept of Dread* in which the latter uses the fall story to give a psychological account of sin using the category of "dread". 56

Later in the same writing the Genesis story appears once more as Niebuhr attempts to show how its account of original righteousness - i.e. of a period of human perfection prior to the fall - while an historical impossibility, enshrines nonetheless an important insight which goes a long way to explaining the tension in which all moral decision takes place. He views this as a struggle between man's actual state and his 'essential being' which latter category he thinks mythically indicated in the notion of an original righteousness. 57

Such then are the terms of Niebuhr's mythical understanding of the fall of man.

B. BARTH'S VIEW OF THE FALL

As always when expounding an element of Barth's thought we require to begin with the concrete event of God's grace to man in Jesus Christ. It is at this point that Barth believes the vantage point is afforded from which the whole sweep of revelation, of God's Being and His acts, can be viewed and understood. Thus, in this area of his doctrine of the fall of man, it is not surprising to discover that the axioms for his doctrine lie in his christology. Barth's approach to the fall is by way of a recognition of the eternal covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ. 56

57. HN, p. 285ff.
"... as God's first work, again according to the witness of Scripture and the confession, creation stands in a series in an indissolubly real connection with God's further works. And these works, excluding for the moment the work of redemption and consummation, have in view the institution and preservation and execution of the covenant of grace, for partnership in which He has destined and called man .... It follows creation but does not derive from it. It is even true to say that creation follows the covenant of grace since it is its indispensable basis and presupposition."58

Creation and all the subsequent developments are to be thought of as subsequent to, and hence in the context of, the eternal covenant of grace. Already Barth's position is present in germ and our succeeding discussion will simply serve to unpack the stages of the argument.

On the face of it, as it stands the Genesis story of the fall appears to challenge Barth's approach. There is apparently here a history of man prior to the advent of sin. In this 'period' man is apparently directly related to God conditional upon his obedience in respect of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then the fall occurs terminating that relationship and man is forced to leave the presence of God. God, however, in compassion, goes after His errant creature and inaugurates a covenant of grace with him which culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ by whose death and resurrection man is restored to fellowship with God. The orthodox approach to these issues has generally followed the lines of this face-value approach. In the reformed theology of the seventeenth century it was crystallized in the doctrine of the two-fold covenant - a covenant of works in respect of Adam's relationship with God prior to the fall, and then a covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.59

Barth, however, refuses to reconstruct his programme in terms of this exegetical and theological approach. Instead he re-interprets the Biblical story of the fall in terms of his basic theological orientation. He accomplishes this in three stages.

58. III/1, pp. 43-44.
59. Cf. J.H. Heidegger, Corpus Theologiae, 1700, IX, XV: Witsius, De Oeconomia Foederum Dei, ... 1693, I, ii, 1; Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647, section VII.
a. The Literary Question - saga

Barth raises the whole question of the kind of literature we are dealing with in the account of the fall of man. In the first instance this is an exegetical issue. The Genesis record carries, on the surface at any rate, historical and geographical pointers, and there can be no question that real human activities are described. What are we to make of it? Is this history of the kind we encounter for example in 2 Kings in the account in chapter 18 of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah; or in the record on Paul’s imprisonment in Rome in Acts chapter 28? Or, on the other extreme is there no ‘historical’ content here at all? Is this literature simply on a par with timeless folk tales? Barth gives his answer to these questions in two stages. First, there is a general line of argument in terms of the nature of history. Second, there is a more particular line of argument in terms of the actual relation of the fall to the whole work of God. We will examine these in turn.

i. The nature of history

Barth’s starting point in his understanding of history lies in his notion of eternity. He sees it as one of the perfections of God. He accordingly defines it in terms of the being of God -

"God's eternity, like His unity and constancy, is a quality of His freedom. It is the sovereignty and majesty of His love in so far as this has, and is itself, pure duration ...... Eternity is the simultaneity of beginning, middle, and end, and to that extent it is pure duration. Eternity is God in the sense in which in Himself and in all things God is simultaneous i.e. beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction."61

He puts it similarly in a later volume -

"... eternity is not merely the negation of time. It is not in any way timeless. On the contrary as the source of time it is supreme and absolute time i.e. the immediate unity of past, present and future; of once, now and then; of the centre, beginning, and end; of movement, origin, and goal. In this way it is the essence of God Himself; in this way God is Himself eternity."62

61. II/1, p.608.
Once again we see Barth's unwillingness to understand the notions which form the basic ingredients of theology otherwise than as they are given meaning by God's being and action. Eternity is therefore related in the first instance to God Himself, i.e. to the God of the covenant, known in Jesus Christ. Barth sees eternity as the mode of His existence in His sovereign freedom and grace. At the same time eternity, as the eternity of God's Being in freedom and love, has a very special relation to time. It is an eternity which involves and encompasses time. God's eternity is thus the simultaneity in Him of past, present and future. Time reposes upon and derives from Him. The ontological basis of time is firmly rooted in the being of God Himself.

By framing his notion of eternity in these terms Barth separates himself from all philosophical and metaphysical notions of the relation of eternity and time. Barth's God has no commerce with Aristotle's "Unmoved mover". Eternity is no infinite extension of time.

"To identify eternity with time without beginning and end would be to attribute to it an idealised form of creaturely existence. This would be wrong for to say eternity is to say God. And God does not live in an idealised form of creaturely existence. God Himself is not only the ground and content but also the form of His existence. To the extent that He is His own form of existence. He is eternal, and He is in eternity as He is in His time. When we say this we only say that He is in Himself." 63

There is here no hint of the rather formal and lifeless eternal God of the via negativa of scholasticism. The eternal one is the gracious one, the living God of the scriptures. Barth also here guards against any sense of disjunction between God and time such that time comes to assume the proportions of another god, self-grounded and autonomous - "There is no time in itself, rivalling God and imposing conditions on Him. There is no god called Chronos." 64 In his discussion of the eternity

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63. III/2, p.558.
64. III/2, p.456.
of God under the title of *The Perfections of God* Barth goes to great lengths to underline this

"Eternity does not lack absolutely what we know as present as before and after, and therefore as time. Rather this has its ultimate and real being in the *simul* of eternity. Eternity simply lacks the fleeting nature of the present, the separation between before and after... Eternity is the negation of time only because, and to the extent that, it is first and foremost God's time and therefore real time." 65

This relationship between time and eternity Barth sees finally indicated in the incarnation -

"The fact that the Word became flesh undoubtedly means that without ceasing to be eternity, in its very power as eternity, eternity became time... In Jesus Christ it comes about that God takes time to Himself, that He Himself the eternal One becomes temporal, that He is present for us in the form of our own existence and our own world, not simply embracing our time and ruling it but submitting Himself to it and permitting created time to become and be the form of His eternity." 66

From this account of eternity Barth moves to examine the notions of time and history and does so within the framework of the history of salvation and the covenant of grace. Man as we encounter him is fallen man; man who has sought to break free from the covenant and affirm his own being independently of God; he is the rebel against grace.

Corresponding to this being of fallen man there is time - his fallen time -

"The first counterpart of the time of the history of creation in the subsequent history of the covenant is 'our' time in the strictest sense of the concept, i.e. the time of man as isolated from God and fallen into sin. It is the time whose flux has become a flight. It is the time in which there is no real present and therefore no real past or future." 67

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65. II/1, p.613.
66. II/1, p.616.
67. III/1, p.72. cf. also I/2, p.66 and III/2, pp. 511-527:
One cannot but ask whether Barth's enthusiasm for a novel expression is not running away with his better judgement here. What kind of *time* could it conceivably be which has no past, present or future? One appreciates what Barth is trying to say but one queries the possibility of using the concept of time in this way. It is difficult to suppress the simple question - "What time is it?"
In His grace God has not left man in his lost time but has come to him in the history of the covenant. Here we are confronted by real time, the time in which God in His grace has time for man -

"... the second counterpart of the time of creation in the sphere of the covenant of grace is far more important. This is the time of grace itself and as such; i.e. it is the time in which the covenant takes place. Within 'our' time, i.e. the time of the man who has fallen into sin and is isolated from God, there is initiated with God's acceptance of man in grace the new time which God has for us and which now that we have lost the time loaned to us He wills to give us again the time of grace." 68

This time is centred in the coming of Jesus Christ in whom God has time for man. Here our fallen time is taken up into the time of God's eternity. It is healed and fulfilled. 69

"He (Jesus Christ) normalises time. He heals its wounds. He fulfils it and makes it real. And so He returns it to us in order that we might have it again as 'our' time, the time of the grace addressed to us, even when we had lost it as 'our' time, the time of the sin committed by us. He thus invites us in faith in Him to become contemporaries of genuine time, so that in Him and by Him we too have real time." 70

Barth then presents us with a three-fold view of time. There is first the time of God, time as within the eternity of the divine Being. Second there is the time of sinful, fallen man, lost time. Third there is the time of God's covenant with man, the new time given to man by God in His grace. It is against this background that Barth thinks of human history.

Turning to the notion of history - we have seen that fundamental to his notion of time is the concept of created time, the time of God's revelation, the time in which God has fellowship with man. History is simply this time viewed as a related sequence of events. Barth defines history in this way -

68. III/1, p.73; also I/2, pp. 49-56; III/2, pp.527-553.
69. II/1, pp. 19-97; III/2, pp.437-511; III/1, pp.73-75.
70. III/1, p.74.
"The sequence of events in which God concludes and executes this covenant with man, carrying it to its goal, and thus validating in the sphere of the creature that which from all eternity he has determined in Himself; the sequence of the events for the sake of which God has patience with the creature and with its creation and gives it time - time which acquires content through these events and which is finally to be fulfilled and made ripe for its end by their conclusion."  

There is no other history. History is the record of God’s activity with respect to the creature. All history properly is Heilsgeschichte. There is, however, also 'lost time', the time of man in rebellion against grace, time from the perspective of human sinful thinking without reference to God. From this viewpoint man also constructs a history. This Barth characterises as Historie. He alludes to it as -  

"...a history of the world (Weltgeschichte) which is grounded on the ignoring and rejection of the will and Word and work of God and determined throughout by this ignoring and rejection."  

This Barth argues is the real content of the problem of "revelation and history". The great mistake here as far as much modern thinking is concerned is the failure to see this radical distinction between Geschichte and Historie. Thus it is imagined that beginning with a general notion of history, framed from within the circle of our experience, i.e. in terms of our situation in lost time, we can go on to enquire as to the possibility and reality of the impinging of revelation upon it. Not surprisingly problems are encountered. If, however, this distinction is recognised it becomes immediately clear that we must begin with revelation - i.e. deliberately take as our frame of reference the whole situation, the true dimension of historical reality, Heilsgeschichte, the history of the covenant. A problem, however, emerges at this point, and here we come to the relevance of all this discussion as background to the question of the meaning of the fall of man, - how are we to be able, from within our fallen history, in our fallen time, and circumscribed by our fallen experience, to indicate the realities /

71. III/1, p.59.  
72. IV/1, p.505.  
73. II/1, pp.56-58.
of God's action? How are we to move from fallen time to real time? How are we to pass from Historie to Geschichtte when our normal concepts of history are incapable of expounding or explaining these events? Barth's solution is the notion of *saga*. It is that literary form which enables us to break through our fallen conceptual scheme and indicate the realities disclosed in God's revelation. We will pause before attempting a sharper definition of *saga* and seeing how it affects Barth's view of the fall in order to spell out the second more particular line of argument which Barth uses to arrive at this concept.

**ii. The uniqueness of creation**

In this supplementary argument Barth draws attention to the uniqueness of creation among the works of God and in relation to the whole sweep of history. He puts this in several ways. He mentions the fact that in distinction from the subsequent works of God the work of creation does not have to reckon with an opponent:

"In the lost time of sinful man the time of grace has an opponent which the time of creation did not encounter; and the time of creation as such is commencing time which is not the case with the time of grace."74

Barth takes up this latter point again - the uniqueness of the time of creation as commencing time. He refers to its "supremely distinctive and exceptional character" which -

"... consists objectively in the fact that it has no pre-history with which to stand in a retrospective connection or relationship, but that it consists in an absolutely new event which, seen from the standpoint of the creature, commences with itself."75

Since it has such a character and stands thus without relation to any pre-history, the position of man in his attempt to give some account of it is also unique. From what source and in what way can man know this history

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74. III/1, p.75.
75. III/1, p.76.
and be able to recount it? The problems encountered here are obviously profound. We clearly cannot approach these events as we might others within the historical continuum, i.e. from the standpoint of a human observer. Palpably there was none, nor by definition can there have been. The solution to this problem is the category of saga.

Saga then is the form of the account which can be given, of the works of God in general and of the work of creation in particular, by which we can on the general level break through the limitations imposed upon our concepts from their setting within fallen (Historische) time; and on the other hand, on the particular level of creation, surmount the problems posed by its uniqueness. Barth's definition of saga is as follows -

"... an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of space and time."76

Barth is concerned to avoid two errors here. On the one hand we are not here dealing with normal 'history' i.e. with happenings within the sphere of space and time - i.e. history from the standpoint of the non-Christian man, Historie. At the level of creation that is self-evident, as we have just observed. With the latter works of God this mistake is not so clear. On the other hand we are not dealing with "unhistorical and timeless reality and Barth's definition makes clear how real a danger he thinks this to be - of "reality of history", "enacted once for all within the confines of space and time". For this second alternative Barth reserves the title myth. He finds its essence to lie in the kind of material with which it is concerned -

"... the real object and content of myth are the essential principles of the general realities and relationships of the natural and spiritual cosmos which, in distinction from concrete history, are not confined to definite times and places."78

Myth is the embodiment - "... of what happens always and everywhere and to that extent does not happen 'anywhere at any time'."79

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76. III/1, p.81.
77. III/1, p.80.
78. III/1, p.81.
79. III/1, p.58.
The Bible on the contrary is concerned with real saga - events and even in the case of creation we must speak of "creation history" not creation myth. At the exegetical level this means that there is a sharp disjunction between the Biblical account of creation and the Babylonian creation story to which in other respects it manifests a striking similarity. It follows from all this that saga is the essential province of the Biblical witness as the special locus of the account of God's action in the world. But inasmuch as God is proclaimed as the Lord of all history there is properly a saga dimension in all truly historical description since all history finally is Geschicht. Within the Biblical narratives there is a 'mixture' of saga and what has the 'appearance' of history. The saga element, however, is never entirely absent as we have seen and at points, cf. the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, it is almost the only element. The 'history of creation' is the extreme instance of the explicit predominance of saga - it may be described as "pure saga". Barth is quite clear that the saga element is predominant right into Genesis 3 although he does not discuss it at length in the section where the concept of saga is introduced. Under the doctrine of reconciliation, however, he makes his position quite explicit -

"Who could see and attest the coming into being of heaven and earth and especially the coming into being of Adam and his corresponding individual existence? It is not history but saga which can tell us that he came into being in this way and existed as the one who came into being in this way - the first man. We miss the unprecedented and incomparable thing which the Genesis passages tell us of the coming into being and existence of Adam if we try to read and understand it as history, relating it either favourably or unfavourably to scientific palaeontology, or with what we know with some historical certainty concerning the oldest and most primitive forms of human life. The saga as a form of historical narration is a genre apart ... It was in the sphere of Biblical saga that Adam came into being and existed. And it was in this sphere - again by virtue of the prophetically attested Word and judgement of God - that there took place the fall, the fall of the first man. The biblical saga tells us that world-history began with the pride and fall of man."

80. III/1, pp.87-90.
81. III/1, p.82.
82. III/1, p.200.
83. IV/1, p.508.
In the argumentation thus far expounded Barth has drawn attention to two factors in relation to the Genesis account -

i. It, with the rest of these chapters, is dealing (as in a final sense is all the Bible) with the action of God. It is not then self-evident that we can read it as we read accounts of everyday encounters of men and women. Indeed, on the contrary, we need to recognise a definite inappropriateness in so reading it, and a definite inadequacy in the terminology borrowed from such encounters for an application mutatis mutandis to an account of the direct action of God.

ii. It, with the rest of these chapters, is dealing with events which are in some respects unique among the actions of God. The inappropriateness and inadequacy noted under (i) are therefore the more deeply underlined.

That we can refer to the fall at all and give some account of it is due totally to the gracious condescension of God who in the Word of His revelation has given us in the Scripture a description, as we are able to hear it, of what would otherwise be beyond our capacity to uncover or apprehend. The material form of this revelation is the saga-account of the creation and fall of man in Genesis 2 and 3. We can, however, indicate the implication of Barth's view of history for his understanding of the fall in another, more general way. This issue is not exhausted when we have discussed it at the level of the literary form of the narratives. There is here also raised for us the question of the being of such an event. Barth holds that history as we have it is fallen history - i.e. it is a history to which the fall acts as a definite circumference. We are accordingly faced with problems if we try to place the 'event' by which the circle of human experience is bounded, within the circle itself. To make this point more explicit with reference to the analogy of a circle - it is clearly inappropriate to attempt to locate the circumference of a circle at some point within the circle itself. "The Biblical saga tells us that world-history began with the pride and fall of man ... The first man was immediately the first sinner."84 The fall would thus appear for Barth to belong to that category of primary components from which any system of ideas

84. IV/1, p.510.
is constructed and which cannot be accounted for, 'placed' if you like, within the system itself. For Barth accordingly the fall cannot be an event within the plane of historical being as we know and experience it. It is rather the "event" which constitutes the plane of historical being as we know and experience it, the presupposition of all other events, to some degree standing behind them and conditioning them, but never capable of being placed in a series with them.

In these ways we have attempted to show how Barth by his category of saga attempts to overcome the implications which the more traditional 'historical' account of the fall of man would have for his approach. He is well aware, however, that the 'historical' view has been upheld to a great extent because this appears to be the view of the fall taken in the rest of Scripture, and by Paul in Romans 5 in particular. Not surprisingly therefore we note that Barth has given detailed attention to this section of Scripture and his exegesis here forms the second stage of his reinterpretation of the fall story. Before we turn to this we require to relate this account of saga to Niebuhr's notion of myth.

iii. Saga and myth

Barth as we have seen distinguishes his category of saga from myth. Does this simply then mean that he is to be distinguished quite clearly from Niebuhr? Or, on the contrary, is Barth's saga in fact doing for him very much the same job as myth does for Niebuhr? We can best arrive at a solution to these questions by making several comments -

1. It is possible to approach this whole area in terms of the problems raised by the development of the positivist approach to the study of history. The effect of this movement was to leave theology in the position of having either to deny the historical element in the Biblical witness and with it the basis of the gospel, or of affirming the historical by some other means than scientific historical methods. All the dualistic distinctions between different kinds of history are related to this dilemma. In this broad setting it would appear valid to see Niebuhr's myth as serving him in a manner rather similar to Barth's saga.
2. Within this broad similarity two apparent distinctions manifest themselves.

a. The first arises in the light of Barth's myth/saga distinction. The essence of myth, as Barth understands it, lies in its range of reference. It is a story whose primary reference is to a universal series of instances rather than to a single, unique instance. It is concerned with "what happens always and everywhere, and to that extent does not happen 'anywhere at any time'". Does Niebuhr's myth fit this picture? In fact it is possible to relate him both positively and negatively to this definition. There is in Niebuhr's myth a generalised dimension. He is concerned to refer to human existence in general in the notion of myth. However, he is nonetheless also concerned in some of the myths with an historical once-for-all element. Thus although what he says about the cross often appears to fall within Barth's definition (its ability to shed light on human history, etc.) he would also be concerned to maintain that the death of Jesus Christ was an event in space and time. Part of the difficulty here is, as we have already observed, that Niebuhr does not use myth very precisely and hence some of his examples of myth are nearer to Barth's category than others. The crucial issues would appear to be whether the historical space/time element is decisive. When put in this way Niebuhr's ability to distinguish himself sharply from Barth's notion of myth appears less certain. He certainly wishes to stand apart from an idealism whereby the myth simply serves to illustrate general instances, but his ability to do so is not so clear. Thus while Niebuhr cannot be straightforwardly identified with Barth's category he certainly has tendencies in this direction. The distinction between Barth's saga and Niebuhr's myth which has been thus indicated will only be properly established when we have confirmed a distinction between Barth's saga and Barth's concept of myth i.e. when we have exonerated Barth from any suspicion of holding a similar idealistic-generalised tendency under the guise of saga. This latter question we will

85. III/1, p.85.
86. BT, p.11: ICE, p.86f.
raise more fully towards the end of this chapter but we can foreshadow the discussion there to some extent by stating that in our view Barth is not as able to escape from this tendency as he imagines, and that his distinction from Niebuhr at this point is one of quantity rather than quality.

b. The second apparent distinction is a distinction in terms of the accounts given for requiring these categories. Niebuhr's account appears related to the metaphysical problem of the temporal and finite's being capable of relating itself conceptually to the eternal and infinite. Myth, that is, appears in the context of the age-old problem of finitum non capax infiniti. Barth's apology for saga while related to this problem also quite explicitly introduces the moral element - man's sinfulness. A sinner lives in "fallen time" and has by the fact of his sin no capacity to relate himself to God morally or conceptually. Barth's problem is "the far more incisive statement"\(^8^7\) homo peccator non capax verbi divini. Again, however, the distinction though a valid one is not absolute. Niebuhr also recognises the reality of sin as a factor in man's need for myth\(^8^8\) though this element does not receive great emphasis in explicit statement. Nevertheless there is a moral tone to all Niebuhr's writing and a sense of God's judgement on man's sinful intellectual pretensions which strongly implies this dimension. Barth, for his part, has not lost the sense of the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man". While no longer explicitly recognised as an axiom of his thought, and while the philosophy of existence which accompanied it in the early stages has been denied, the phrase is still relevant to his theology. One is never able to forget that God is God, even in His grace in Christ.

Hence we conclude that while certain distinctions can be drawn between Barth and Niebuhr's concepts of saga and myth respectively they are of degree rather than kind and that through them and beyond them there lies a common element.

\(^{87}\) I/1, p.466.
\(^{88}\) BT, p. 168.
b. Christ and Adam: Romans 5

Barth's most comprehensive examination of this passage occurs, not in the Church Dogmatics but in a contribution to a series Theologische Studien, entitled Christus und Adam nach Römer 5. We will indicate his position as here expounded and then draw out its relevance for his view of the fall.

Barth sees the passage in question (Romans 5, vs. 12-21) as amplifying the overall theme of Romans - the gospel as "the revelation of the final righteous decision of God".89 This becomes effective for us as it is acknowledged in faith. The first part of Romans 5 deals with the effects of this (peace, reconciliation, etc.) and points to the ground of it in the decision of God with respect to man made in Jesus Christ. The theme of the remainder of the chapter is a deeper exploration of the relationship of Jesus Christ and humanity, and in particular with the unfolding of "the special anthropology of Jesus Christ ... the norm of all anthropology".90 Paul here gathers humanity under the person of Adam and Barth finds the key to the Christ/Adam relationship in v.14 where Adam is referred to as the τούτος τού πέλαγος. This means that -

"... man's essential and original nature is to be found therefore, not in Adam but in Christ. Adam can be therefore interpreted only in the light of Christ and not the other way round."91

Hence -

"Human existence as constituted by our relationship with Adam in our unhappy past as weak, sinners, godless, enemies, has no independent reality, status, or importance of its own. It is only an indirect witness to the reality of Jesus Christ and to the original and essential human existence that He inaugurated and reveals. The righteous decision of God has fallen upon men not in Adam but in Christ. But in Christ it has also fallen upon Adam, upon our relationship to him and so upon our unhappy past. When we know Christ we also know Adam as the one who belongs to Him. The relationship that existed between Adam and us is, according to verse 12, the relationship that exists originally and essentially between Christ and us."92

89. Christ and Adam: Man and humanity in Romans 5, tr. Smail (S.J.Thr. Occ. Papers No 5.), p.1.
90. Ibid., p.5.
91. Ibid., p.6.
92. Christ and Adam, p.7.
Barth then explores the parallel between Christ and Adam as Paul indicates it in vs. 18-19 and 21. There is a certain formal similarity. The scope of both is universal. We have to do in both cases - man in Adam, man in Christ - with the one human nature. This, however, must not be allowed to obscure the fundamental disparity between them. Indeed any formal similarity is in fact dependent on the "greatest possible material disparity".

"Our relationship to Adam is a subordinate relationship because the guilt and punishment we incur in Adam have no independent reality of their own but are only the dark shadows of the grace and life we find in Christ."

Barth explores this imbalance further as Paul expands it in vs. 15-17. In terms of the work of Adam and the work of Christ, the difference is "the radical, final, and irremovable difference between God and man." In terms of the effect of the two works, inasmuch as grace restores the human nature which sin has destroyed, sin is clearly subordinate to grace which alone can speak the final work as to man's true nature. The phrase ἡμᾶς ἄνθρωπον is another statement of the relationship. Again a certain connexion is implied, and again a clear disjunction is at the same time indicated. The true heart of the connection between Christ and Adam is here uncovered - viz. that Adam shared in the atonement of Jesus Christ - "The only connexion between Christ and Adam is that for Adam Christ died and rose again. From the sin of Adam as such no road leads to the grace of Christ." That this is the only connexion means that we must not attempt a connexion which would allow Adam an independent being in sin and condemnation. Christ has cancelled that possibility by entering the world and dying for Adam and all men. Thus the relationship between the two,

93. Ibid., p.8.
94. Ibid., pp.7-8.
95. Ibid., p.9.
96. Ibid., p.9.
97. Ibid., p.11.
98. Ibid., p.12.
99. Ibid., p.15.
100. Ibid., pp.15-16.
101. Christ and Adam, p.17.
102. Ibid., p.17.
the parallel which is drawn, is constituted by Christ. —

"The close relationship between the two sides is established not by trying to find a way from Adam to Christ but by seeing that Christ has found the only way to Adam by His Cross."103

But πολλοὶ μὴ λέγουσι also implies a subordination. Here Paul echoes his usage of the same phrase in vs. 9-10 where he has argued that if God has reconciled men amid the darkness of our sin through the hiddenness of the cross how much more are we sure of that reconciliation now that we are brought out of the darkness of sin through the hiddenness of the cross into union with the risen Lord.104 Thus, if the truth of Christ can retain its validity as the truth of Adam (i.e. in the darkness of sin) "how much more" will it stand as truth for those who are delivered from Adamic darkness into the glorious light of Christ.105 Hence, gathering up the implications of this subordination —

"Christ who seems to come second really comes first, and Adam who seems to come first really comes second. In Christ the relationship between the one and the many is original, in Adam it is only a copy of that original. Our relationship to Adam depends for its validity on our relationship to Christ. And that means in practice that to find the true and essential nature of man we have to look, not at Adam, the fallen man, but to Christ in whom what is fallen has been cancelled and what was original has been restored. We have to correct and interpret what we know of Adam by what we know of Christ because Adam is only true man in so far as he reflects and points to the original humanity of Christ."106

Barth further notes the references to Moses in vs. 13-14 and 20107 as a further illustration of this whole theme and relationship. The story of Israel is the story of Adam,108 in which the presence of grace in the election and the covenant and the gift of the law meant the real breaking out of sin, its ἐλλογεῖσθαι.109 The history of the Jews is then a representative history of all men whereby the sin of Adam, of all men, is

103. Ibid., p.18.
104. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
108. Ibid., p.25.
truly seen in all its stark rebellion against the grace of God. But here, where Adam's sin abounded God's grace abounded the more in the coming of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. His rejection by the Jews was the rejection made on behalf of all men. But here precisely the overcoming of that rebellion and rejection took place for all men, Gentiles also. Thus again Adam is superceded by, and subordinated to, Jesus Christ.

In his briefer exposition of the passage in the Church Dogmatics, Barth uses the analogy of a rainbow in its relation to the sun to indicate the essential dependence of Adam upon Christ.

As far as the fall is concerned there are two main implications of this exegesis.

i. Adam cannot be considered as a figure in isolation from Jesus Christ. Adam and Christ belong inseparably together. Further, the relation between them is such that Adam requires to be thought of as essentially dependent upon Jesus Christ. There is no independent "Being of Adam" - an anthropology which is derived from some primal ontological reality distinct from the humanity constituted and ontologically grounded in Jesus Christ. Adam has reality and significance only as a reflection of, and derivative from, that elemental creaturely humanity - the humanity of Jesus Christ. It will be clear that we are here confronted once again with Barth's prime theological conviction - that all God's dealings with men are effected in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Here his axiom with respect to the doctrine of creation - viz. its indissoluble connexion with the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ becomes explicit.

ii. The significance of Adam is bound up with the question of his relationship to the entire race; the seriousness of his fall reposes upon the fact of his being in some sense a corporate, public person in whose rebellion and plight all men are in some way involved. Such at any rate was the older orthodox view. At times Barth uses language which seems to imply some such view. He can speak of Adam's sin having "brought about the death of the many ... there and then"; and of "our sinning in Adam". The real

110. Ibid., pp. 30-32.
111. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
112. Ibid., pp. 33-34.
113. Ibid., pp. 34-39.
114. Ibid., pp. 37-40.
key to his view, however, lies in the notion of **representation**.  

"That is, Adam as seen and understood in the Biblical tradition, the man who sinned at once, the man who was at once proud man, the man who stands at that gateway as representative of all who follow, the one whom all his successors do in fact resemble (in the fact that they all sinned at once as well.)"  

Barth spells out the meaning he attaches to representation here in a passage in *Christ and Adam* -  

"We are all what Adam was and so are all our fellow-men. And the one Adam is what we and all men are. Adam is at once an individual, and only an individual, and at the same time, without in any way losing his individuality, he is the responsible representative of all men."  

Adam is "not a fate which God has suspended over us. Adam is the truth concerning us as it is known to God." In this connection we find him using the notion of "repetition". Barth does not admit any idea of sin's being "inherited". He criticises the German term *Erbsünde* which conveys this notion of sin as a hereditary factor. Barth is here following the lead of Kierkegaard who also criticised the term. Their point would appear to be that the notion of *Erbe* (lit.-heir) is a natural category whereas the Biblical notion of *original sin* is a spiritual category. Barth thinks *Ursünde* a better term. It avoids this confusion of categories and is a more literal rendering of the Latin - *necatum originale*, by which is meant merely -  

"... the voluntary and responsible life of every man ... which by virtue of the judicial sentence passed on it in and with his reconciliation with God is the sin of every man, the corruption he brings on himself so that as the one who does so ... he is necessarily and inevitably corrupt."  

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117. III/1, pp.43-44 cf. above.
118. *Christ and Adam*, p.11.
120. Ibid., pp.26, 43, 45: cf. IV/1, pp.510-513.
121. IV/1, p.510.
122. *Christ and Adam*, pp.43-44.
123. IV/1, p.511.
126. IV/1, p.501.
In actual point of fact the sin of Adam was a comparatively trivial offence -

"He was in a trivial form what we all are, a man of sin. But he was so as the beginner and therefore as the primus inter pares. This does not mean that he has bequeathed it to us as his heirs so that we have to be as he was. He has not poisoned us or passed on a disease. What we do after him is not done according to an example which irresistibly overthrows us, or in an imitation of his act which is ordained for all his successors. No one has to be Adam. We are so freely and on our own responsibility. Although the guilt of Adam is like ours it is just as little our excuse as our guilt is his...
The only difference is that what we all are and do he was and did at the very gateway of history."127

This way of regarding the relation of Christ and the race obviously qualifies the cruciality of the fall.

C. The Genesis passages

The third stage of Barth's re-interpretation of the fall lies in his positive exposition of the Genesis accounts. That is, Me not only raises questions as to the literary character of the account of the fall (and hence questions as to its historicity in that respect); and gives an account of the person of Adam in terms of his dependence upon Christ (and hence qualifies any notion of an independent humanity or racial solidarity); he also offers a viable alternative to earlier expositions of the Genesis passages. To this third element we turn briefly now.

There are two relevant passages; firstly, the description of man in the Garden of Eden in his state of so-called justitia originalis, Genesis 2, 8 to 2, 25 (also 1, 29-30); secondly, the description of the temptation by the serpent and Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit, Genesis 3, 1 to 3, 7.

i. Genesis 2, 8-25 (1, 27-30). Barth notes Gunkel's view that 1, 29-30 implies the doctrine of a 'Golden Age' of universal peace among the creatures. "It is quite true that some such conception can be found between the lines, but it is to be noted that it can be found only between the lines."128

127. IV/1, p. 510.
The true goal to which such references point lies not behind us but before us in the future kingdom of grace. Barth interprets the "It was very good" spoken over the creature and the creation (1, 31) as meaning merely that - "... concretely it was adapted to the purpose which God had in view, adapted to be the external basis of the covenant of grace." Coming more directly to 2, 8f, he discusses the garden of Eden. As far as its actual being is concerned, in keeping with his premises he thinks of it as having "saga" reality. He notes thus both the pointers to a definite geographical location - "the biblical witness is speaking of a definite place on earth ... he localises the garden terrestrially"; and also the pointers in another direction - "a geographical localisation of this region with the help of the indications of the passage is quite impossible and obviously not intended by the saga". He concludes that we have here to do with "a genuine consideration of real events, persons and things, but only with a consideration and therefore not with a historical review but with constructions which do not have their origin in observation but in imagination." As against the idea of this being a perfect state and situation Barth notes certain qualifications of this -

"The place is not described as an Elysium, an island of the blessed, a garden of Hesperides, or even a Lubberland. There are no particular attractions to entice us to it. In it man has to work, to serve the earth as such as he was ordained to do at the beginning of the saga. And somewhere in this garden, also planted by God there is to be found the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with whose existence the divine permission and prohibition is linked. Thus from the very first this place is not without serious problems." The real meaning of man's situation here is indicated by the trees of the garden. The tree of life is a witness to man that he lives by the will and good pleasure of God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil reminds man of the unique work of God - to distinguish between good

129. III/1, pp. 211-212.
130. III/1, p. 213.
131. III/1, p. 252.
132. III/1, p. 252.
133. III/1, p. 253.
134. III/1, p. 250.
and evil. Man is summoned thereby to let the decision of God respecting
good and evil be his decision -

"Man is to know that his life originates and consists in the
cert that God has affirmed and therefore denied, that He has
chosen and therefore rejected, that He has willed one thing
and therefore not willed another. Human life is to be lived in
such a way that face to face with the second tree man takes his
stand consciously and not unconsciously on the ground of this
divine decision, that he accepts it as such, that he acknow-
ledges and praises God as the One who in His sovereignty has
willed and done this and not something else."137

This is the nature of Adam's situation in Eden. He is under the summons to
acknowledge God as his Lord. This is the nature of Adam's freedom - he is
free to obey God.138 Barth suggests a parallel to Adam in Eden in the
history of Israel in Canaan139 and finally to the covenant fulfilled in
Jesus Christ to which the two trees point as symbols of Gospel and Law.140
He then goes on to expound the creation of woman141(2,18-25) and sees in
this event and her relatedness to man the prefiguring of God's relatedness
to man in the covenant of grace -

"The completion of all creation described here, i.e. the completion
of man by the creation of woman, is not only one secret but the
secret, the heart of all the secrets of God the Creator. The whole
inner basis of creation, God's whole covenant with man, which will
later be established, realised and fulfilled historically, is
prefigured in this event in the completing of man's emergence in
the coming of woman to man."142

This leads on to the end of the section, 2, 25 where a primal innocence of
man has been thought to be implied - "...they were not ashamed". Barth
admits the contrast between the picture here and the one which will
subsequently emerge of man the sinner, however he avoids the allegation of
an original perfection here by arguing that this verse belongs properly

137. III/1, p.360.
138. III/1, pp. 264-5.
139. III/1, pp. 267-273.
140. III/1, pp. 273-276.
142. III/1, p. 295.
to the history of creation — "The fact that man was good and innocent is not a part of his own history but the consummation and climax of the history of creation." Adam and Eve are not to be seen as having attained any genuine independence of God in respect of which they could be pronounced "good". Rather their being reposed entirely upon God. Man only "stood" for the first time, i.e. began his history as man, in the moment of his fall.  

ii. Genesis 3. 1-7 Barth's exposition here is held over to the volume on reconciliation. This is in keeping with his view that it belongs to the history of man rather than the history of creation. Here in a series of passages under the overall theme of the "Pride of Man" Barth discusses the nature of the temptation of man by the serpent and sees it as exemplifying, in a remarkable way, the essence of all known sin in man's proud refusal to be the creature of God living by His grace alone; his foul rebellion against the gracious limits set by God for his life. By this exposition the Genesis account of the fall is shown to have a profound and abiding relevance to every man in every generation.

Such then are the terms of Barth's doctrine of the fall of man.

(1) It does not belong to history in the sense that it is, or was, an event within the boundary of our historical perspective, capable of apprehension by means of our normal historical categories. It belongs to pre-history, the history of creation, which as such is the presupposition of our history but not "within" our history. It can hence be recounted only in saga. Adam has saga reality.  

(2) Any notion of an involvement of the race in his sin and fall is mistaken. Adam's true meaning and reality derives from his being as a reflection of, and pointer to, Jesus Christ.  

(3) The Genesis narratives yield to an interpretation along these lines.

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143. III/1, p.308.  
144. III/1, p.307.  
d. The fall and sin

What finally does this position imply as to Barth's overall view of sin? Certain important implications will appear as we go on to relate him to Niebuhr but at this point we can make one observation. By his view of the fall Barth sets his seal to his refusal to allow sin any autonomy with respect to God and His gracious being and action in Jesus Christ. All its appearance in this guise is an illusion. There is no radical overthrowing of God's good design and purpose for man. The fall is not a fundamental undoing of a prior 'good' work of God which requires the Incarnation as a reaction to redeem an otherwise desperate situation. The words "desperate situation" and "redeem" are not irrelevant terms with respect to the plight of man and the work of Christ respectively but they are appropriate, Barth argues, only within a scheme of reality in which evil, sin and fall are not autonomous, self-grounded factors but rather factors whose "being" and "reality" can only and always be absurd and mysterious. One would refer here to Barth's important discussion of infra- and supra-lapsarianism.

He gives credit to infra-lapsarianism for its avoiding the logical and moral problems which the supra-position can raise when the notion of the divine decrees is spelled out too rigidly, and the fall comes to repose directly upon the divine good-pleasure. The supra-lasparians for their part retained a better sense of the free grace of God as the head of all Christian knowledge, and hence as the proper standpoint for viewing the fall of man. They also were able to avoid a separation and division in God's works and an autonomy of evil which the infra-view implied and eventually led to. The correct position Barth believes, is a broadly supralapsarian one, but a supralapsarianism in which God's grace and His decree are viewed in terms of their concrete expression in the covenant with man in Jesus Christ. From this standpoint the fall of man can be seen as the eventuality of God's exposing man to the situation in which man was

146. II/2, pp.127-145.
147. II/2, pp. 131 and 136-9.
148. II/2, p.135.
149. II/2, p.136.
set free to affirm God's 'No' to that which is 'not-God'. Put another way, man was given the freedom, in dependence upon grace to affirm grace as the basis of his existence by allowing and confessing God's separation and distinction between Himself and what He does not will to be his separation and distinction.

"It is not God's will that elected man should fall into sin. But it is His will that sin, that which God does not will, should be repudiated and rejected and excluded by Him ... God does not will and affirm evil and the fall and an act of sin on the part of this man ... but for the sake of the fulness of His glory, for the sake of the completeness of His covenant with man, for the sake of the perfection of His love, He wills and affirms this man as sinful man, i.e. as man laden with sins and afflicted by their curse and misery, and He wills and affirms this man as one who stands like Himself in opposition to sin as His companion in the necessity of repudiating it, as the one fore-ordained to utter the same No and thus to corroborate the divine Yes ... In his case ... the defeat of this evil power cannot be so self-evident as it was in God's case. In his case it must take on the character of an event. It must become the content of a history; the history of an obstacle and its removing; the history of a death and a resurrection .... God wills homo labilis, not in order that he may fall, but in order that when he has fallen he may testify to the fulness of God's glory." 150

By his view of the fall as here expounded there is inevitably raised the question as to its reality on the one hand, and as to its relation to God on the other; i.e. we confront the problem of the relation of sin to history. We will probe this issue as we set Barth's position in relation to that of Niebuhr and examine the contrasts and comparisons which are disclosed.

C. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

a. The fall and basic standpoints

It will have been observed how in their respective accounts of the fall and original sin Barth and Niebuhr remain consistent to their fundamental orientations. Niebuhr's "mythical" view of Genesis 3 and his

150. II/2, pp.141-2.
"representative" understanding of Adam reflect his realist stance. What really matters in the question of the fall of man is his existential situation here and now. This contemporary man confronted by temptation and constantly falling into sin and misery. The garden of Eden which is really significant is not Adam's but mine, where I walk every day of my life and view the forbidden fruit and hear the tempter speak. Niebuhr's apologetic concern is also manifested in his seeking to disengage the enduring truth of the Christian message, and of its doctrine of sin in particular, from an obsolete, and hence unacceptable account of human origins. Barth's category of saga reflects his concern to protect revelation from subjection to general (here scientific) categories drawn from human (fallen) experience. In his refusal to allow Adam and the fall more than saga reality we hear the strident tones of the triumphant grace of God annulling the foolish attempt of Nichtige to assert itself over against Him. We are here again at the Empty Tomb of Jesus Christ. His interpretation of Adam in his essential dependence upon Jesus Christ similarly reflects his unwearying concentration on Jesus Christ as the key to all Christian knowledge as well as the ground of all reality. His refusal to follow Niebuhr's mythical approach and his attempt to speak of a 'history of creation' are indications of his greater exegetical seriousness.

b. The Biblical perspective

Moving on to attempt an assessment, we have inevitably at the outset to confront the exegetical question which the Genesis narratives force upon us. Here while freely admitting the problems which any approach will encounter, one would wish to raise the question as to whether, at the exegetical level, the fall does not have a larger historical content than Niebuhr, or even Barth, accord it. Certainly a wooden literalism is not in accord with the text. The material here is certainly distinctive in character.

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151. It would appear that Niebuhr is seeking to avoid two errors here - (i) a view of human origins which would fly in the face of all the findings of geology and palaeontology; (ii) the notion that the fall of Adam implied a physically inherited corruption for his successors. cf. CRPP, p.186; HN, p.276.
texts, in particular the Babylonian epic Enmea elish, require to be
admitted, even if the relationship is not one of direct dependence.\textsuperscript{154}
Weight too has to be given to the fact that the rest of the Bible makes
surprisingly (from this point of view) little use of the fall story.\textsuperscript{155}
Further, Niebuhr's category of myth, and Barth's category of saga are
realistic attempts to place a positive evaluation upon the material and
if these are not to be thought adequate something not dissimilar has to be
put in their place, as Runia discovered.\textsuperscript{156}
There certainly can be no
question either that the Genesis story is capable of profound application
to the situation of man in general, as both theologians have signally
demonstrated - i.e. it is a remarkable revelation of the factors at work
in all human sin.\textsuperscript{157}
Barth and Niebuhr's generalised use of it is hence
certainly valid as far as it goes. On the other side, however, we require
to weigh certain factors. Supreme among them is the fact that the Genesis
account appears in a fairly historical form - there is a geographical
location for Eden,\textsuperscript{158} and Adam stands in definite historical continuity
with Abraham (cf. Genesis 4, 1: 5, 4 .... 11, 27), and that the rest of
the Bible when it does refer to it appears to accord it a generally
historical value. (cf. Deut 32, 8: Job 31, 33: 1 Chr. 1, 1: Luke 3, 38:
1 Cor 15, 22f: 2 Cor 11, 3: Rom. 5, 12f: 1 Tim 2, 13-14: Jude, 14:
cf. also Ecc. 7, 39: Is. 43, 27: and poss. Hos. 6, 7).\textsuperscript{159}
Particularly significant here of course is Romans 5, 12f. If, as seems
likely, Paul follows the approach and understanding of first century
Judaism then we have to reckon with a distinctly historical evaluation.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{154} Cf. Delitzsch, Genesis, (1887), p.151 (Vol 1): Gunkel, Genesis, (1910),
\textsuperscript{155} Cf. von Rad, op.cit., p.98 "No prophet, psalm or narrator makes any
recognisable reference to the story of the fall.": Barth, IV/1, p.507 ...
though Barth's list is not exhaustive - cf. Deut. 32, 8: 1 Chr. 1, 1:
1 Thes. 2, 13-14: Jude 14.
\textsuperscript{156} K.Runia, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture, pp. 91-103.
Runia's suggestion that "prophecy" is a better term\textsuperscript{g97} while it has
undeniable merit as being itself a Biblical notion and has reference
to other situations where one is dealing with 'history plus', it seems
on the whole rather inappropriate here since the Genesis story has no
futurist reference point. It would appear to be equally inappropriate
contd./
On the surface at any rate, there would appear to be pointers to that in the text. In particular there is the problem of the reality of a parallel between Christ and Adam when the event-ness of his "one transgression" as a space-time occurrence is questioned. We have used "historical" rather loosely in this last paragraph and we require now to sharpen the outlines of the notion. What is to be intended by "historical" in terms of the fall? We can clear the ground somewhat by asserting what we do not mean by it - and here we recall Barth's main criticism of the traditional approach, namely, that the fall cannot be conceived as an event in the series of fallen time, and therefore our construction of fallen time in Historie. Granted for the moment Barth's distinction between Historie and Geschichte his point is well taken. Whatever we wish to imply by "historical" in regard to the fall we do not wish to imply its susceptibility to being conceived and described in terms of Historie.

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156. contd. to talk of the 'prophecy of the Resurrection' when indicating the evangelical records of the resurrection of Christ. The truth of the matter seems to be that no single term can convey the meaning required without a certain unclarity. The real question is as to the content one wishes to give to the terms selected. Cf. Cullmann Christ and Time, p.100ff who also argues for the notion of prophecy with respect to the creation narratives. (p.101)

157. Some would even argue that Paul is using the Genesis story in precisely this manner in Romans 1. Niebuhr approaches this equation in Faith and History, pp.137-8.


159. Cf. G. Wingren: Creation and Law, p.7. In a footnote he refers to the "suggestion of Hugo Odeberg, Skriftens Studium, inspiration och auktoritet, Stockholm, 1954, p.26 that every verse in the N.T. has as its background the chapters in Genesis on creation and the fall." Also H. Bavinck, art. "The Fall", ISBE, II, 1933. "The fall is the silent hypothesis of the whole Biblical doctrine of sin and redemption."


161. Cf. e.g. v.12 "sin came into the world through one man('s sin?)" sim. vs. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and the implied continuity bet. Adam and his unquestionably historical successors: vs. 12, 14, 17, 18.
Our question thus becomes the following - can we give a meaning to "historical" which would apply to Geschichte, i.e. to the action of God outwith and above fallen time? The answer here is surely an affirmative one if we accept the possibility of revelation. Granted our situation in fallen time, operating with our fallen concepts and our fallen understanding there would be no possibility, if left to ourselves, of our pressing through the fall to uncover the situation which pertained beyond it. However we have not been left to the fruits of our fallen theorising. God has graciously come to us and given us in the Scriptural record a witness to that primal situation. Up to a point this record shares inevitably in the fallen situation. Its categories are 'borrowed' from this side of the boundary point and this of necessity if there is to be a genuine communication with us. Angelic language would not serve. Granted this, however, it certainly does not appear inevitable that such a revelation cannot communicate a certain understanding of the extra-boundary situation. This account will inevitably obscure as well as clarify. The communication will be fractured and circumscribed. Nonetheless it can convey certain broad impressions as to that situation. Thus if God did create man perfect in the beginning in relationship with Himself, and man rebelliously turned from Him, there is no reason why we should not be given a certain understanding of this. When we speak of the "historical" in relation to the fall story we imply that the account in Genesis 1-3 constrains us to speak of an original being of man in perfection and of his fall from that being at a point in space and time. Such a view is in accord with the rest of the Biblical testimony on this point as we have indicated earlier. Our criticism of Barth and Niebuhr, as we will show more fully below, is that this "historical" element is not clearly reflected in their thought. Barth certainly attempts to assert something approaching a space/time fall in his category of saga (cf. his definition "enacted once for all in space and time") but our complaint against him and to a greater extent with Niebuhr is that the "historical" aspect of the fall is not given its proper place in their theologies.

162. III/1, p.81.
So far we have discussed only one aspect of the 'Adam problem' - viz. the relation of the Genesis story to the beginnings of the race. There is, however, another whole area of problem. Even if we grant that there was such a man, Adam, at the beginning of human history - what is his relation to the race? Here we confront the whole problem of giving a meaning to original sin. Certainly the cruder forms of the doctrine, whereby sin is propagated in the act of procreation, and our relationship with Adam established in terms of physical heredity, need not detain us. The background of ideas here is semitic not western. M.E. Dahl in his study The Resurrection of the Body, \(^{163}\) speaks of the "Semitic totality concept" by which the Hebrew mind customarily subsumed a host of particulars under one general. It is this kind of concrete "totality" thinking which perhaps points us to the way in which the Hebrew thought of all men as residing in Adam and involved in his guilt, and now living individually and corporately under the dominion of sin. One of the main problems here is that of working out the relation of the Genesis account to the account of the beginnings of human history given by palaeontology. The danger of category mistakes here is very real.\(^{164}\) As we have seen we cannot relate these two accounts directly in a one-to-one manner since they are obviously approaching man at very different levels and since between them lies the fall of man. The fact that this direct relation of the two accounts is not possible does not mean, however, that no relation is possible. Indeed it is clearly required by the view of the fall argued for above. This relating of the two accounts would, however, have to be undertaken with great care so that the crucial points of contact between the two levels could be established.\(^{165}\)

163. (London, 1962) passim, but esp. pp. 59-84; also Pedersen Israël, pp. 1-11 and 99f. W.H. Robinson, art. 'The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality' WJAT 1936, pp.49-62. J. Murray in The Imputation of Adam's Sin (Grand Rapids, 1959) argues for an imputation of Adam's sin to the race. He would have benefited from a greater attention to the background of ideas which Dahl and the others indicate. Some of the problems of the orthodox view are indicated in Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, pp.23-37; cf. Brunner Man in Revolt p.118f and 142f.  
We have deliberately chosen to discuss the question of the historical content of the fall prior to our more detailed examination of Niebuhr and Barth's constructions as it seemed to give a necessary background to the ensuing discussions. We turn directly to them now. There are strengths and weaknesses in both positions.

C. Niebuhr: strengths and weaknesses

Niebuhr's strengths have already been touched upon. There can be no questioning the service he has rendered in recovering the story of the fall from the refuse heap of primitive and outmoded folk-lore and giving it a fresh and powerful application to the situation of modern man. It can even be argued, and with some plausibility, that his mythical approach, via the fall story to the profound problem of the origin of evil, is in some ways more satisfying than other more elaborate discussions in that it avoids the dangers of more precisely formulated positions and retains a due sense of the mystery which lies at the heart of evil and hence which must attach to any view of its origin. Further by his mythical-existential approach he avoids the problems which any attempt to retain an historical element must encounter. Again his existential-psychological use of the story certainly throws light on the 'mechanics' of human sinning and relates the whole area to the findings of contemporary psychological medicine.

Despite these 'gains' Niebuhr's doctrine leaves certain problems. If, as we have attempted to show, the Bible requires a real historical strand in the story of the fall, i.e. that it was an event in space and time at the dawn of history and involved in some sense a loss for the whole race, Niebuhr's rejection of this raises three questions as to the adequacy of his account.

1. The 'eventness' of the fall is related to the 'eventness' of the saving action of God in Jesus Christ; or, putting this more generally, the fall occurs within a whole framework of events - a history of salvation. Niebuhr's complete rejection of the historical at the level of the fall - it is in no sense for him an event in space and time - inevitably raises the question as to the place the historical holds in his thought as a whole. Is he able to escape the charge that the views salvation in terms of ideas rather than events? The fact that he views the fall in a purely mythical non-historical manner does not of course establish this in itself. The relationship between this kind of approach to the fall and a thoroughly idealist theology is not self-evident. We have to hold in view the fact that an important determinative of a movement away from history in Christian theology is often a concern for the living Christ as against the historic Christ. The Jesus of history does not exclude the confession of the Christ of faith. Granted this qualification, however, we argue that Niebuhr's theology does show a preoccupation with ideas to the neglect of the historic events which the Bible directs attention to, and hence that his rejection of the category of history in his interpretation of the fall is symptomatic of an idealistic element in his doctrine of salvation. The root of this tendency would appear to lie in his understanding of the relation of man to God. This relation is dialectical, which for Niebuhr means that God's transcendence over man appears to rule out any direct identification of God in history in conceptual categories. His revelation can come to man only in the form of "symbol" i.e. Niebuhr wishes to distinguish between the historical form of God's revelation and the meaning which this revelation has for man. It has been argued that this same lack of a due sense of the historical dimension of revelation is indicated in his affinity for Kierkegaard, as he understands him. Niebuhr is sensitive to the dangers of idealism.

167. BT, p.4.
169. Carnell, op.cit., pp. 33f, 46, 49; Minnema, art.cit. p.400.
"We say that we take historic facts seriously but not literally; but that may be on the way of not taking them as historical facts at all. Thus we reject the myth of the fall of man as historical fact.... But we also easily interpret human evil as an inevitable condition of human finiteness and stand on the edge of Platonism, or by rejecting the end of the world as a literal event, we can easily obscure the eternity at the end of time and have only an eternity over time left, again a movement towards Platonism. There is no simple solution to this problem."170

Niebuhr seeks strenuously to avoid this danger. He is certainly concerned to underline the "eventness" of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men. As far as the dependence of his thought on Kierkegaard at this point is concerned we need to notice171 his own criticism of Kierkegaard for failing to take "the coherences and causalities of life and history" with sufficient seriousness.172 Niebuhr has too sure a sense of the significance of man's social situation and his history to be in danger of a radical individualism and subjectivism such as Kierkegaard appears at times to advocate. The apparent loss of a fully historical dimension in his view of revelation is to some extent compensated for by his strong sense, reflected again and again in his writings, of the cruciality of the immediate historical situation of man - i.e. Niebuhr's realism. If, as we are arguing, he cannot be seen simply as a pure theological idealist, or existentialist either for that matter, there is a closely related problem for him which he arguably does not escape so readily.

2. This problem arises in the area of ontological questions and the doctrine of the fall. The traditional interpretation of the fall story has, theoretically at any rate, allowed the driving of a wedge between the creative will of God and the total human dilemma. The fall does not solve all the problems here of course,173 but it does enable us to speak of the goodness of God's creative work and to answer at least initially the charge of sin's being the result of His direct willing. Niebuhr's rejection of the fall as traditionally viewed together with his faith in the goodness of God and his recognition of the reality of sin and evil means that he

170. CRFP., pp.186-7.
171. As Carnell appears to fail to do in the work cited.
requires to hold some notion of a pre-mundane or supra-mundane fall. In other words the question is a real one for him - is evil "an inevitable condition of human finiteness" and thus ultimately the responsibility of the creator? Niebuhr argues for the "goodness" of the created order. 174 The question has to be asked, however, whether he can really maintain this in a system where sin stands in such close relation to the created order in general and to the situation of man in particular. Niebuhr implicitly recognises the cruciality of the fall story if the goodness of creation is to be upheld. In his An Introduction to Christian Ethics he in fact uses the fall "myth" to make just this point - "According to the myth of the fall, evil came into the world through human responsibility. It was neither ordained in the counsels of God nor the inevitable consequence of temporal existence." 175 Here Niebuhr appears to be using the fall story simply to make the general point - viz., that evil is not to be directly attributable to God. As far as it goes this is fully in accord with the Biblical testimony. However it remains to be asked whether we can leave it there. Do answers we give to questions as to the being of sin not inevitably imply answers to questions as to its origin? In the Gifford Lectures he does appear to wish to go beyond this general point and to argue that the fall has actual historical location in every moment of existence when man is tempted and "falls" into sin. 176 Such an application whereby the Genesis situation is constantly re-enacted requires that man constantly be related to a state of "original righteousness" from which he constantly "falls".

174. HN, p.178ff. Cf. too Niebuhr's criticism of Tillich for setting the fact of sin so close to creation, The Theology of Paul Tillich, Kegley and Brettal eds., (New York, 1952). Weigel in the essay in Religion and Culture already cited argues that the difference between the two should not be exaggerated at this level since Niebuhr's man will sin inevitably as soon as he is created. (op.cit. p.124)
175. ICE, p.83.
Niebuhr here argues for just this. Man has in his "essential nature" an inherent sense of the demands of this original righteousness. It is the "law written on the heart", the law of love. He "falls" when he rejects this demand and chooses instead the dictates of his own personal will. There is of course a significant qualification of the situation of man within the human series lying between A. and A plus ∞ (where A. = Adam), as against the situation of Adam himself. This qualification is the "increment of sin". Kierkegaard upon whom Niebuhr again leans here spoke of this as the "quantitative" increase of sin. All this, however, does not mean that we can no longer apply the fall account to man's present situation of man. This 'increment' does not mean that man is no longer responsible for his sin. Man still hears the demand of original righteousness, he still recognises the summons of the law of love. This paradox of responsibility despite the qualification of man's sinful inheritance and situation Kierkegaard sought to overcome by speaking of a quantitative increment and a "qualitative leap" with respect to sin.

Niebuhr speaks of the "inevitability and responsibility" of man's position with respect to sin. Putting it more succinctly in a Kierkegaardian formula - "sin posits itself". Again the link with Adam is maintained since this was true of Adam also -

"The sin of each individual is preceded by Adam's sin, but even this first sin of history is not the first sin. One may in other words, go further back than human history and still not escape the paradoxical conclusion that the situation of freedom and finiteness would not lead to sin if sin were not already introduced into the situation."  

In all this one cannot but pay tribute to the effort Niebuhr makes to give the fall a new relevance to contemporary man. Bearing in mind the situation against which he is directing his writing with its widespread denial of the category of revelation, even these qualified attempts to

177. HN, pp.281-318. This approach is in keeping with the aspect of myth which we noted in our discussion earlier of the meaning of myth in Niebuhr's thought - i.e. the element of 'revelation' whereby the myth 'becomes true' in the experience of the reader or hearer.
178. Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p.29, 31f.
179. HN, p.268.
180. HN, p.270.
reinstate the fall are noteworthy - it is not insignificant that even
they were received with little enough sympathy. Niebuhr had later to
admit -

"... these labours of modern interpretation of religious
symbols proved vain. The reaction to my 'realism' taught me
much about the use of traditional symbols. The remnants of
social optimism pictured me as a regressive religious
authoritarian caught in the toils of an ancient legend."181

Exegetically, however, there are difficulties in this view of the fall
story requiring as it does the planing down of any essential difference
between Adam and every man. The Bible raises two problems for such an
equation -

i. the view of man in Genesis - cf. 1, 13: 2, 19: 2, 25: 3, 1f is
difficult to equate with the view taken of him in the rest of Scripture
Mark 7, 21-23: Romans 1, 18-3, 20: Eph. 2, 1-3: 4, 17-19: 1 John 1,
8-10. Even if we allow that man retains a genuine responsibility for
his sin it is still difficult to see subsequent man in terms of the pre-
fall description of Adam.

ii. Adam's sin had a racial consequence which later sins did not have -
Romans 3, 12f.

Thus there does seem to be difficulty for Niebuhr in attempting to dis-
engage the fall from its locus at the beginning of human history and thus,
by implication, a difficulty in maintaining a real disengagement between
the creative will of God and the human sinful situation. Putting this
another way - is Niebuhr able within the strict terms of his position to
escape the charge, of which he is certainly conscious, of attributing evil
to God's will - i.e. the charge of monism?

There is another indication in his writing which makes this question
the more acute - viz. the note of pessimism to which attention has often
been drawn.182 There can certainly be no question that in his analysis

181. MNHC, p.16.
182. West, op.cit., p.174; Hofmann, op.cit., p.247; W.J. Oates,
Basic writings of Saint Augustine, intro. p.XII of Vol 1 (New York,
1948). H.P. Odegard, Sin and Science: Reinhold Niebuhr as a
political theologian, (Ohio, 1956), p.12. In defence of Niebuhr -
Bennet, in K. and B., p.66; Harland, op.cit. intro. IX.
of the human situation Niebuhr brings sin into closest relation to man's being as creature of God. For example, when discussing the role of anxiety in relation to temptation and sin he argues that anxiety is - "...the inevitable spiritual state of man in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness." 183 He goes on to argue -

"... it is not possible to make a simple separation between the creative and destructive elements in anxiety; and for that reason it is not possible to purge moral achievement of sin as easily as moralists imagine ... Anxiety as a permanent concomitant of freedom is thus both the source of creativity and a temptation to sin." 184

Niebuhr reaches a similarly pessimistic conclusion as to the capacity of man for avoiding sin in his social life -

"... there is no simple possibility of relating these (social) interests to each other in terms of a perfect coherence of love so that the man in China or America would affirm the interests of the man in America or China as much as he affirms his own. The human imagination is too limited to see and understand the interests of the other as vividly as those of the self. Furthermore the realisation of any such system of harmony would require more than individual action. It would require the organisation of vast political and economic structures in defiance of, and transcendence over, the contingencies of geography, the fortuitous differences of natural resources, etc. There is therefore no historic structure of justice which can either fulfil the law of love or rest content in its inability to do so." 185

One is reminded of Archbishop Temple's limerick. Such a view of Niebuhr as the unrelieved pessimist is to some extent an unfair one. We need to recall that the enemy that he set himself against, in much of his early writing particularly, was the easy optimism of his inherited nineteenth century creed. In the eyes of such Niebuhr is certainly a pessimist

183. HN, p.195.
184. Ibid., p.196 and 197-8; also BT, p.162, 165; HD, p.132.
185. HN, p.314; cf. MNIS, eg. p. 257 "A realistic analysis of the problems of human society reveals a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperatives of a sensitive conscience". Also HD, p.112 - "In practice (the self) is always betrayed into self-love .... this weakness is partly due to finiteness. The propulsive powers of the self, with its natural survival impulse do not suffice to fulfil the obligations which the self as free spirit discerns. cf. MNHC, Chap. 4; REE, p.279ff.
in the extreme, but as against that extreme he is in fact a thoroughly salutary corrective. Granted this point, however, we still retain the impression of a pessimism in his writings and here the lack of a fully Biblical view of the fall appears to be a factor as we have sought to show above. The other and most obvious 'way out' both of a theological pessimism and of a charge of monism in the face of the problem of evil lies in a reaffirmation of the gospel of grace whereby sin can be seen to be overcome and a real distinction between it and God demonstrated in His judgement of it in Jesus Christ. Such is Barth's path. Niebuhr, however, does not fully embrace this alternative and hence our question here remains.

3. One final question raised by Niebuhr's loss of a historical fall relates to the notion of the race being in some sense involved in Adam's sin; and hence the fact that man is born into a situation which is already weighed against him. Again there are profound problems here for any view of this relation. Niebuhr is sensitive to the harm which has been done by the "horrendous conception that sin was transmitted from generation to generation through lust in the act of procreation". However the fact of a misuse and misunderstanding does not rule out the possibility of a correct interpretation which will retain the basic idea here of a racial implication in Adam's sin. Niebuhr's rejection of an historical Adam means that he is not able to give a full theological basis to this idea. Despite this Niebuhr is in many ways supremely aware of this 'solidarity of sin'. In fact at this point his pessimism which we have just touched upon can be thought of as thoroughly correct. Niebuhr's realism has taught him something of the manner in which sin insinuates itself into the whole situation of man. The entire argument of Moral Man and Immoral Society reflects this insight. In Discerning the Signs of the Times he puts it thus -

186. MNHC also HN, pp.242-248 and 276-280.
"... there is no human society, and there can be none, the moral mediocrity of which must not be shocking to the individual's highest moral scruples."\textsuperscript{188} In his more systematic exposition in \textit{Human Nature} Niebuhr speaks of this in terms of the "inevitability" of sin and pays tribute to the correctness of the traditional doctrine at this level. In other words, at the realistic level of observed human behaviour Niebuhr is forced to take seriously the problem which theologically in terms of a racial 'fall' in Adam he cannot accept - viz. the solidarity of the human race in sin.

Gathering this discussion of Niebuhr together we can say that had Niebuhr been able to see his way towards some notion of a fall of a first man prior to history as we know and experience it which in some sense 'set the course' for its subsequent unfolding, he would have been better able to avoid the suggestions of idealism, and more particularly of monism which arise for him, and he would also have been in a position to give a better theological basis to his deep and challenging analysis of the corporate dimension of human sin.

d. \textbf{Barth: strengths and weaknesses}

Turning to Barth, the strengths of his approach are unquestionable. He approaches the doctrine of the fall with a greater sense of exegetical responsibility than Niebuhr and thus, not surprisingly, makes an effort to take more seriously the apparently historical element in the account. In his \textit{sage} approach he attempts to distinguish himself from the mythical.\textsuperscript{189}

We are concerned with a "history of creation", with "concrete events",\textsuperscript{190} "enacted once for all within the confines of space and time."\textsuperscript{191} Because of this Barth faces up, in a way which Niebuhr does not, to the problems of giving an account of the creation and fall of man at the gateway of history,

\textsuperscript{188} DST, p.145.
\textsuperscript{189} III/1, p.84.
\textsuperscript{190} III/1, p.84.
\textsuperscript{191} III/1, p.81.
such occurrence to the essential goodness of the created order and to the whole work of God's grace. 192 Again Barth has by his approach closed the door to any notion of a dualism in respect of the "being" of sin and evil. His embracing of the revised supra-lapsarian position means that sin and the fall are set firmly within the overarching purpose of God and are made to serve, in their own peculiar way, the fullness of that purpose of God to the glory of the God of grace - "God wills homo labilis ... in order that when he has fallen he may testify to the fullness of God's glory." 103 God remains God in the sovereign freedom of His Godhead. Sin, evil, fall, all stand under His judgement, denied an eternal existence paralleling that of God Himself. Finally on the positive side we note Barth's concern to relate the problem of the fall of man to the whole question of time and history. It is impossible, as he shows, to discuss the fall without relating it to these wider issues. Barth here raises a real question for any attempt to speak of a historical fall. He demonstrates the absolute uniqueness of this event and hence our complete dependence upon revelation for any knowledge of it. Further he demonstrates how it in its way constitutes 'our' time and forms in this sense a boundary point for thinking and experience. Thus if it is to be placed within the series of historical events it requires a recasting of this situation such that one can envisage a prior history which stands in such continuity with the post-fall history that it can form a real past in counter-part to the post-fall 'future' and thus allow the 'fall' the 'eventness' of a location in a time-series. It is possible to find a way through these questions as we have sought to indicate above, and to affirm an historical basis for the fall of man as an event in space and time at the beginning of human history, but there can be doubt as to the significance of these issues.

192. Cf. the whole discussion of creation and covenant in III/1, pp. 94-329.
193. II/2, pp. 141-2.
There are in addition certain problems which Barth's account of the fall leaves for us. First we have to raise exegetical issues. As we have seen the Bible as a whole appears to attribute a larger degree of historicity to the fall than Barth allows. This issue is focussed in his view of Adam as it appears in his exposition of Romans 5. Adam has for him a *saga* reality. Can this be harmonised with the text of Romans 5? Certainly Barth's exegesis has come in for a fair degree of criticism. R. Bultmann, for instance, in an article in *Z.N.W.* (1959), entitled "Adam and Christ according to Romans 5" sets out to reply to Barth's Christ and Adam in Romans 5. Bultmann thinks that Barth misunderstands Paul's theme in this section of Romans. For him (Bultmann), it is "the certainty of the future (eschatological) of the justified" Paul here (Romans 5, 12-21) contrasts two modes of human existence. Barth, however, sees it as a discussion of human nature as such. The Christology of this section is gnostic in Bultmann's opinion and the source of Paul's use of Adam here derives from a combining of the Genesis story with the gnostic myth of the primeval man. This desire for a generalised synthetic understanding means that Barth fails to stress the contrast between Christ and Adam and reverses Paul's Adam/Christ order. This Bultmann thinks is simply foreign to Paul here - "Paul knows nothing of that." Similarly with Barth's view of the law as he expounds it here. The general effect of this is a loss of salvation history.

"The myth according to which Adam is the determining original man is 'demythologised' although in a questionable manner. That Paul endeavours to change the mythological cosmology into salvation history is not made apparent."

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194. IV/1, p.508.
198. Bultmann, op.cit., p.163.
199. Ibid., p.150.
200. Ibid., pp.152 and 160.
201. Ibid., p.164.
202. Ibid., p.163.
203. Ibid., p.165.
Thus - "As the figure of Adam is changed into an idea, so Christ also seems to become an idea." 204 A similar kind of criticism is brought by P. Lengsfeld. 205 He also finds in Barth's exegesis of Romans 5 a dogmatic framework which does not allow a proper exegetical freedom. Thus Barth too simply identifies Paul's use of Adam in Romans 5 with his use of Adam in 1 Corinthians 15. 206 Further Christ's position and role with respect to Adam becomes that of a fullfiller of prophecy (Weisagsung) rather than, as the passage has it, the deliverer from the tyranny of sin and death - i.e. from what Adam's disobedience has engendered. 207 Again, this approach means that the fundamental solidarity between Adam and the race is lost and sin ceases to be a power achieving a determination of man's existence. 208 The real loss, however, is of the Biblical-historical perspective. Barth's position finally reduces, Lengsfeld believes, to a timeless fall.

"Hier hat sich die supralapsarische Prädestinationslehre mit philosophischen Anschauungen von einem überzeitlichen Abfall von Gott verbunden, was beides mit der paulinischen Adam-Christus Typologie nicht das geringste zu tun hat." 210

He thinks that there is in Barth a certain affinity with gnosticism at this point and quotes E. Brandenburger to the effect -

"Die Terminologie Barths stimmt bis in Einzelheiten mit der spekulativen Terminologie des gnostischen Hintergrundes überein." 211

J. Murray in his commentary on Romans 212 joins voice with this line of criticism. He too finds Barth guilty of imposing a theological viewpoint on the text to which it is in fact a stranger. He concludes in very strong terms -

"It cannot be too plainly said that if we adopt this construction of Romans 5, 12-19 we must abandon exegesis." 213

204. Ibid.
207. Ibid., pp. 214-5.
208. Ibid., pp. 215-6.
209. Ibid., p. 186.
210. Ibid., p. 186.
211. E. Brandenburger, WEANT (Neurirchen, 1962), cited Lengsfeld, op.cit., p. 189: also p. 166 where he speaks of Barth's relation to German idealism in its view of the fall of man. Also cf. H. Bouillard, op.cit., pp. 51-52.
213. Ibid., p. 389.
This exegetical criticism raises a fundamental theological question which has been put to Barth in various forms by a number of writers and which we have raised above - viz. can Barth really retain the Biblical-historical perspective in his theology? Is there not an affinity, despite all his efforts to erase such, with idealistic approaches which see history only as illustrative of eternal principles rather than the sphere in which ultimately realities are shaped and determined?

R. Prenter in a review article, discussing the relation between creation and redemption in Barth's thought criticises him in these terms. Although he does not relate the discussion to the fall of man Prenter's article raises the relevant questions. Creation for Barth is an analogy of redemption and hence has a strictly signitive meaning with respect to it. Faith here comes to mean an insight into the inner unity of creation and redemption. Barth's view then approaches a sort of 'creation docetism' -

"Wenn man .... festzuhalterend Einheit reden, dann wird die Folge sein, dass die Realität der geschaffenen Welt verflüchtigt und damit die Betrachtung des geschaffenen Menschengeschlechts doketisch wird." and hence -

"... die eigentliche Funktion der geschüpflichen Existenz wird diese; ein Abbild der Erlösung zu sein, eine Art Zeichensprache der Erlösung abzugeben. Deshalb liegt über dem in einer solchen Exegese dargestellten Schöpfungswelt ein eigentümlicher platonischer Schimmer." Barth in other words, according to Prenter, attempts to stand in the heights above history, but such a position means a threat being posed to the significance of history, and to the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as events in this fallen history. Barth is seeking in other words for a

216. Ibid., p.170.
218. Ibid., p.175.
219. Ibid., p.175.
220. Ibid. p.180. It is interesting at this point to notice that Prenter expresses the same unhappiness with Barth which Niebuhr reflects in his reply to the Amsterdam address of Barth - "We are men and not God", Christian Century, October 27, 1948.
221. Ibid., pp.177-80.
unity in the acts of God which is, properly hidden in God Himself. 222

G.C. Berkouwer also believes Barth open to criticism as to his loss of the historical. 223 He notes Barth's unwillingness to allow creation an independence 224 but thinks that Scripture requires a real, if not absolute distinction between creation and redemption 225.

"The remarkable thing about the Bible is precisely this that while it speaks clearly about the dimension of 'from eternity' and in terms of this dimension speaks of the unity and omnipotence of God's works - also with respect to sin - it never devalues the decisive significance of the historical and the 'step-wise' character of creation and redemption but honours them and fully takes them into account. We are aware that the element of 'reaction' (against the invasion of evil) in the work of God is never His final word and that it may never be allowed to overshadow the a priori initiative of His works preceding to the entrance of sin. But this does not mean that God's a priori action may be so viewed that shadows are cast over the reality and decisive significance of the fall and of God's reaction to it in history." 226

Berkouwer thinks he finds the heart of Barth's view in the statement - "... that which is self-evident to God because of the divine self-distinction between what God is and what He is not - must in history be revealed to us." 227 and comments - "Within this framework of thinking the decisiveness of history can no longer be fully honoured." 228 Like Prenter he thinks the 'step-wise' approach which Barth rejects, to be, within proper limits, a correct one and argues for an adherence to the Reformed view "which desired to speak about reconciliation only in correlation with a breach that took place in history"; 229 i.e. a real fall of man in history.

G. Wingren has formulated 230 a similar question for Barth. He thinks Barth's theology is unfolded within a framework of which the terms are God,
as unknown but known in His revelation; man as lacking a knowledge of God; revelation whereby this need of man is met by God. The Biblical framework, however, Wingren argues, contains three other elements—"the works of God, the works of man, and justification". By his transformation of the Biblical framework Barth is able he alleges, to retain the Biblical categories but only at the price of losing sight of the real Biblical problem—viz. the problem of man's justification. This means that Barth loses the Biblical sense of a real struggle in history, against evil.

Two other critics may be mentioned. Cullmann speaks of a 'Platonic' element in Barth in relation to his view of time. He finds Barth guilty of drawing a qualitative distinction between time and eternity which he sees as foreign to the Bible. For the Biblical authors eternity is "the endless succession of the ages (dunamis)". Despite his concern to avoid the Greek time/eternity distinction by stressing the fact that eternity embraces and involves time, Barth fails fully to free himself from its influence, Cullmann believes.

"The time-marked character of eternity which Karl Barth strives so urgently to bring out ... is understood in the Biblical sense only when the symbol of the straight line is applied to both, to time and eternity, so that this very time during which creation exists appears as a limited portion of the same line, and not as something essentially different. Of this fact Karl Barth's figurative manner of expression fails to take account when he says that eternity 'surrounds' time on all sides (KD 2, 1, 698) or

231 Wingren, op.cit., p.28.
232 Ibid., p.29.
233 Ibid., pp.28-30. The framework Barth uses he believes to be still Schleiermacher's framework (pp.25-26). Hans von Balthasar agrees with this Schleiermacherian inheritance in Barth (cf. Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie, pp.210-259, esp. pp.229-259). However he reaches this conclusion with a far greater depth of argument and with important qualifications. Cf. also S.J.Th. 1954, pp.59-72 art. by G. Miegge "An interpretation of Karl Barth". C. van Til formulated a similar charge (cf. The New Modernism). His argument is however so forced at points that it is difficult to recognise Barth in it. This not surprisingly was Barth's own reaction. Cf. Berkouwer op.cit. p.384ff.
236 op.cit., p.62; cf. Chapter 3.
237 Cf. II/1, p.608; III/1, p.67; III/2, p.558.
'accompanies' it (C.D. 2, 1, 702). Here emerges the danger that, after all, eternity may again be conceived as qualitatively different from time, and so as a result there may again intrude that Platonic conception of timeless eternity which Karl Barth in the Dogmatik is nevertheless plainly striving to discard."238

Mention too must be made here to Jurgen Moltmann.239 Within his particular area of concern, eschatology, he accuses Barth of holding a 'transcendental eschatology' which derives from Kant's influence upon him.240 Barth's fundamental orientation as Moltmann sees it, is indicated by his characterisation of Barth's theology as "the theology of the transcendental subjectivity of God".241 It is conditioned that is, by its attempting to answer the question as to how God can be proved. Over against the traditional "five ways" Barth argues, via his understanding of Anselm and as conditioned by Herrmann, for a proof of God from God's self-revelation.242 Such an approach, however, is "difficult to apply", Moltmann argues, "to that bundle of reports about Jesus of Nazareth, for these statements and communications did not arise in the realm of the Greek metaphysics of the proofs of God, but in a wholly different context."243 Barth attempts to get beyond this "transcendental" framework after 1932 by exploring the immanent content and form of this self-revelation, i.e. in terms of God's Lordship as disclosed in His Son. Moltmann's complaint, however, is that this revision has not been thoroughly carried through at the point of Barth's view of revelation.244 In particular Barth's retention of the "self-revelation of God" as the content of revelation means that the Biblical goal of revelation in the future is lost. -

240. Ibid., pp.45-51.
241. Ibid., p.50.
242. Ibid., pp.53-55.
243. Ibid., p.55.
244. Moltmann, op.cit., p.57.
"With this reflection it becomes almost impossible to speak of an outstanding future of Jesus Christ. If the idea of self-revelation is not to change tacitly into an expression for the God of Parmenides, then it must have an open eye for the statements of promise in the third article of the creed."245

Moltmann is concerned with the other "end" of the history of salvation. His critique is, however, relevant at this point as indicating a similar kind of question to Barth as arises in the area of his treatment of the fall, viz. the question of the reality of the historical in his theology.

The question then has to be faced - is there in Barth's treatment of the fall of man an indication of a foreign idealistic element in his thought? Can it be that Barth is not able to distance himself from Niebuhr quite as readily at this point as we might have anticipated? It is our judgement that these critics have put their fingers on a genuine weakness in Barth's approach. Barth has an idealist tendency as a result of which the historical dimension of salvation loses the place it holds in the Scriptures. Several further comments are in order here.

i. Like Niebuhr Barth is sensitive to the danger we accuse him of. His reaction to the nineteenth century,246 his attempt to deliberately distance himself from myth,247 and the terms of his criticism of the older brand of supra-lapsarianism 248 are evidence enough of this. Our point, however, is that he does not succeed in this attempt as far as the fall is concerned and that his inadequacy here is indicative of a similar tendency in his whole theology.

ii. We are not suggesting that the critics cited here are the only ones who have written on this theme. Patently there are many who believe Barth's approach here to be correct. Nor are we naively suggesting that the critics cited represent a uniform position, or that their criticisms are made from a generally agreed set of premises. There are wide divergencies

245. Ibid., p.58: cf. too Cullmann, op.cit. XXVII-XXVIII (1962 ed.) "... Barth's failure to maintain sufficiently the futurist character of N.T. eschatology."
247. III/1, p.80f.
248. II/2, p.138.
amongst them and several of them in other very important respects are demonstrably further from the Biblical norm than Barth is. That this diversity exists, however, in one sense adds weight to our criticism at this point, since it underlines our claim that Barth has here a tendency which runs through his thought and hence which makes possible the fact that writers approaching him from such a diversity of positions are united in their claim to find a non-historical tendency in him. Further, while many of these critics do not address themselves to Barth's major objection to a "historical" approach to the fall - viz. its using categories 'borrowed' from the post-fall situation - this does not necessarily invalidate their conclusions since as we have seen above Barth's objection is not as telling as he supposes.

iii. We are not accusing Barth of a full-blown idealism whereby history is completely relativised and merely serves to illustrate eternal ideas. Barth does give, as we have duly noted, a tremendous stress to the incarnation, the Word made flesh.249 Our criticism is rather that when one attempts to view his theology as a whole one misses an appreciation for the cruciality of history which the Biblical writers reflect. Indeed when we examine Barth's Christology we will be able to see how this loss of the historical can be uncovered at that central point in Barth's thought. Putting this entire issue in another way, in our judgement there is a correct sense in which one can and should speak of a "step-wise" development in Scripture. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this question in its ultimate ramifications, but we certainly require to raise the issue as to whether the relativising of the historicity of the fall of man such as Barth undertakes, does not inevitably imply a relativising of the significance of the historical in the whole redemptive process and cast an alien idealistic shadow across the Biblical testimony. To the extent that this has been found to be true of Barth his thought must be accounted less than satisfactory.

Summarising the ground covered in this chapter - we have sought to expound Niebuhr and Barth's respective views of the fall of man and to indicate the consistency of their positions at this point with the major emphases of their thought as a whole. We have attempted to assess the adequacy of their constructions by indicating both their strengths and weaknesses. In this latter section we attempted to explore some of the more fundamental issues which their views of the fall raise for their understanding of sin.
B. THE OVERCOMING OF SIN
A. BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Within our overall theme of this section, "the overcoming of sin", which would approximate to all that Barth means by reconciliation, we focus first upon the area of justification. What is Barth's doctrine of justification?

a. The foundation of justification

Our starting point will require to be - the election of grace made in Jesus Christ, i.e. we begin with the eternal foundation of justification. Barth describes the doctrine of election as "the sum of the gospel ... the gospel in nuce ... the content of the good news which is Jesus Christ". His great concern in this whole area is to see election consistently as election in Christ, hence he stresses the need to begin with Jesus Christ. Accordingly -

"If we would know what election is, what it is to be elected by God, then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side glances or secondary thoughts we must look only upon the name of Jesus Christ and upon the actual existence and history of the people whose beginning and end are enclosed in the mystery of His Name."4

The full significance of this can only be grasped, however, when we assert that for Barth election belongs to the doctrine of God. It is not a question of some activity of God, subsequent to, and to that extent arbitrary to, His essential Being. Barth will allow us no division here. God is as the God who elects in His Grace from all eternity.

"...We can never speak of (divine election) too soon. We cannot be too insistent in the recognition and introduction of it as the pre-supposition of all God's perfect work (as that which is truly and properly perfect in its perfection). It is because of this
that we put the doctrine of election - meaning, of course, this
decisive word, this mystery of the doctrine of reconciliation,
the doctrine of the election which took place in Jesus Christ -
at the very beginning, and indeed before the beginning, of what
we have to say concerning God's dealings with his creation. It is
for this reason that we understand the election as ordination, as
God's self-ordaining of Himself. And it is for this reason, then,
that we regard the doctrine of election as a constituent part of
the doctrine of God."5

This means that we need to think of it before and prior to all the other
areas of God's work i.e. the God who acts in creation, reconciliation and
redemption is the God who in His eternal freedom has determined Himself in
Jesus Christ as the God of sinful man - and hence, man is determined as the
man of the gracious God committed to Him from all eternity.6 Concretely,
this self-determination of God means Jesus Christ, and Barth develops this
in a two-fold manner - Jesus Christ as both subject and object of election.
Jesus Christ is the electing God - God at work in the fulfilment of His
sovereign electing purpose.7 This means that there is no decreetum
abscconditum, no hidden depths, no inscrutable decree of God.
All is disclosed and open. "There is no such thing as a will of God apart
from the will of Jesus Christ."8 Jesus Christ is also the object of
election, the elected man.

"In the predestination of the Man Jesus we see what predestination
is always and everywhere - the acceptance and reception of man only
by the free grace of God. Even in the man Jesus there is indeed
no merit, no prior self-sufficient goodness, which can precede His
election to divine sonship. Neither prayer nor the life of faith
can command or compel His election. It is by the work of the Word
of God, by the Holy Spirit, that He is conceived and born without
sin, that He is what He is, the Son of God, by grace alone. And
as He became the Christ, so we become Christians. As He became our
Head, so we became His body and members. As He became the object
of our faith, so we become believers in Him. What we have to con-
sider in the elected man Jesus is, then, the destiny of human nature,

5. II/2, p.89 also 76f.
6. II/2, p.101, also pp. 121, 126 and 142 in the context of Barth's
championing of supralapsarianism.
7. II/2, p.115.
8. II/2, p.115 cf. Calvin, commenting on John 6: 37, 39 - "The elect are
said to have been with the Father before He gave them to his only
begotten Son." (Inst. 3, 12, 7)
its exaltation to fellowship with God, and the manner of its participation in this exaltation by the free grace of God. But more, it is in this man that the exaltation is revealed and proclaimed. For with His decree concerning this man, God decreed too that this man should be the cause and instrument of our exaltation.¹⁹

The man thus elected in and with Jesus Christ is, however, the man who is a sinner before God, fallen away from Him. The election of this man is inevitably a two-fold one. God must say both yes and no to him. Divine predestination is hence a praedestinatio gemina.¹⁰ Jesus Christ as the object of election is hence both elect and reprobate. "... in the election of Jesus Christ which is the eternal will of God, God has ascribed to man the former, election, salvation and life; and to Himself He has ascribed the latter, reprobation, perdition and death."¹¹ There is no balance between these two aspects of election. God's will certainly has a dual form, a Yes and a No but the act of election is in fact a single act in which the rejection is in every respect subordinate to the election. The No is swallowed up in the Yes.¹²

Barth goes on to work this doctrine out both ecclesiologically¹³ and individually.¹⁴ It hardly needs underlining that this centrality of election means the centrality of grace. Indeed Barth states that the doctrine of election is the "basic witness" to the fact that - "the gracious God is the beginning of all the ways and works of God." The significance of all this for an exposition of justification is that it is here, in the eternal election of grace, that the foundation of that doctrine is laid - "God's eternal decree in the beginning was the decree of the just and merciful God, of the God who was merciful in His justice and just in His mercy. He was just in that He willed to treat evil seriously, to judge it and to sentence it, to reject and condemn its author, delivering him over to death. But He was merciful

9. II/2, p.118.
11. II/2, p.162.
12. II/2, p.169f.
13. II/2, pp.195-305.
14. II/2, pp.306-506.
in that He took the author of evil to His bosom, and willed that the rejection and condemnation and death should be His own. In this decree of the just and merciful God is grounded the justification of the sinner in Christ and the forgiveness of sins."15

b. The presupposition of justification.

Moving on from the foundation of justification we require to mention what might be termed its presupposition 16 the covenant of grace. God's eternal election in Jesus Christ takes the form of an activity and a history. 17 His eternal election is concretely His will to fulfil the eternal covenant. "Reconciliation is the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man". 18 It is in this way that we are given the assurance that justification is not a merely relative matter involving only a certain group of people. The covenant makes it an unqualified act which is valid for all time and for all men. Further the setting of justification within the wider concept of the covenant prevents it (justification) from occupying too central a place. Justification belongs to the area of God's reaction to human sin. The covenant points us beyond that - to the faithfulness of God in the event of justification i.e. to his prior and original determination of man as His covenant-partner - "The atonement in Jesus Christ takes place as a wrestling with, and an overcoming of human sin. But at the same time and primarily it is the great act of God's faithfulness to Himself and therefore to us."19 For Barth none of God's works can be isolated from this covenant of grace. Thus creation, the first of God's works has to be seen from this perspective. We have earlier indicated the way in which Barth expounds the relationship between creation and covenant and will not go over the ground again. In a section entitled "creation as justification" 20 Barth seeks to unfold the implication for the created order of the fact that God said an affirming 'Yes' to it in Jesus Christ - and hence in this sense "justified" it.

15. II/2, p.167.
16. IV/1, p.22f.
17. II/2, pp.175, 184.
18. IV/1, p.22 also 35f.
19. IV/1, p.47.
c. The actuality of justification

With this foundation and presupposition Barth moves to expound the actuality of justification. Not surprisingly he approaches it first of all in terms of "the fulfilment of the Broken Covenant". This fulfilment "consists in the fact that God realises His eternal will with man, that He makes the covenant true and actual within human history." As such, however, this fulfilment has the character of an atonement i.e. an obstruction to the eternal covenant, the enormous incident of sin, has arisen which requires to be overcome and is overcome - "The grace of God triumphs over man and his sin - that is the fulfilment of the covenant which takes place in Jesus Christ." Within this wider category of the fulfilling of the covenant, i.e. reconciliation, Barth moves to the particular aspect of it which we understand by justification. Here Barth unfolds the concrete achievement of justification in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The all-important point which Barth makes here is that in dealing with Jesus Christ we are dealing with God. The whole fact and process of justification hangs upon the fact that it is God Himself who acts in Jesus Christ and in Him fulfils His covenant and delivers His creature from the threat of sin. This Godhood is disclosed in His being as a servant, obedient to the Father's will.

"It is His whole being to be this obedient one. This is what distinguishes Him from all creatures either in heaven or earth. This is what proves Him to be the Mediator between God and man. This is what proves Him to be the Son of God." This "way of the Son of God into the Far Country" is not simply a demonstration and proof of His being as the Son of God. It has a definite meaning. Barth now takes up the question of this meaning under the title "The Judge judged in our place" i.e. he moves to the work of Christ in the justification of the ungodly. As a provisional answer one could say - for the sake of His own glory, but that would be to forget

21. IV/1, pp.67-78. 22. IV/1, p.67. 23. IV/1, p.68. 24. IV/1, p.68. 25. IV/1, p.157f. 26. IV/1, p.208. 27. IV/1, p.157f. 28. IV/1, p.211. 29. IV/1, p.211f. 30. IV/1, p.212.
the radical need of the creature which His work of atonement meets and satisfies. Thus a fuller answer would be - "... because what He does for Himself takes place with the intention, that in its purpose and result we will not perish but have everlasting life."31 How is this end accomplished? It is accomplished by His being for us - Deus pro nobis. -

"Deus pro nobis means simply that God has not abandoned the world and man in the unlimited need of his situation but that He willed to bear this need as His own, that He took it upon Himself, and that He cries with man in this need.... (it) means that God in Jesus Christ has taken our place when we become sinners, when we become His enemies, when we stand as such under His accusation and curse, and bring upon ourselves our own destruction."32 Why did He do this? Part of the answer to this is - He came to judge.33 His coming is the uncovering of man's sin -

"The whole world finds its supreme unity and determination against God in looking for justification from itself and not from God. And as a world hostile to God it is distinguished by the fact that in this way it repeats the very sin of which it acquits itself. In this way that which is flesh is flesh. And for this reason the incarnation of the Word means the judgement, the judgement of rejection and condemnation, which is passed on all flesh. Not all men commit all sins, but all men commit this sin which is the essence and root of all other sins. There is not one who can boast that he does not commit it."34

d. The heart of justification - Christ in our place

The basic idea here is that Jesus Christ stands "for us". This means not merely that he is "with us" - it means he is "in our place". The notion of substitution is central to Barth's exposition of the work of Christ at this point.

"Jesus Christ for us' means that as this one true man Jesus Christ has taken the place of us men ... in order to act in our name and therefore validly and effectively for us in all matters of reconciliation with God and therefore of our redemption and salvation, representing us without any co-operation on our part."35

31. IV/1, p.214.
32. IV/1, pp.215 and 216.
33. IV/1, p.217.
34. IV/1, p.220.
35. IV/1, p.230.
Barth goes on to spell out the implications of this "in our place". We have spoken of the judgement which Christ's coming placed man under. Here we can go on to speak of His having accepted our judgement for us.

"What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgement on us men by Himself taking our place as man and in our place undergoing the judgement under which we had passed."^36

And further -

"... at one stroke the whole of the evil responsibility which man has arrogantly taken to himself is taken from him ... It is no longer necessary that I should pronounce myself free and righteous ... I am not the Judge. Jesus Christ is the Judge."^37

Again, Jesus Christ "in our place" means that he took our place as sinners -

"Our sin is no longer our own. It is His sin, the sin of Jesus Christ. God - He Himself as the obedient Son of the Father - has made it His own. And in that way He has judged it and judged us as those who committed it."^38

Jesus Christ as our Representative "in our place" means moreover that he was crucified and died. Here we come to the very heart of Barth's notion of justification in Christ. It is at this point that attention has traditionally always been focussed in the discussions of justification - viz. how are we to view the death of Christ in this respect? We will take care to unfold Barth's position as faithfully as possible.

How are we to understand the passion of Jesus Christ under this head - "in our place"? Where does its distinction lie as against the self-giving of, say, a martyr? It lies in the Person and Mission of the one who suffers and dies. It is the eternal God who suffers: it is the Judge who in this dying takes the place of those who ought to be judged.

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36. IV/1, p.222.
37. IV/1, p.234.
38. IV/1, p.238.
"... there is fulfilled in (the passion of Jesus Christ) the mission, the task and the work of the Son of God: the reconciliation of the world with God. There takes place here the redemptive judgement of God on all men. To fulfil this judgement he took the place of all men, He took their place as sinners. In this passion there is legally established the covenant between God and man, broken by man but kept by God."\textsuperscript{40}

Because this is so the passion of Christ is a unique event. We have here to do "not merely with something but with everything".\textsuperscript{41} What is the meaning of this unique event? What actually happened when Jesus suffered and died? Provisionally, we can say that God acted for man: or thinking of the effect of this action we can say that there took place "the reconciliation to God, the conversion to Him of the world which is out of harmony with Him".\textsuperscript{42} The real heart of what we have to say here, however, lies in this - that here, in this judgement which He bore and fulfilled, "God Himself is for us".\textsuperscript{43} If we ask further as to the \textit{saison d'être} of this action in which God Himself is for us we require to speak of \textit{sin}, "the obstacle which has to be removed and overcome in the reconciliation of the world with God and its conversion to Him". How then is \textit{sin} overcome?

"The very heart of the atonement is the overcoming of \textit{sin}: \textit{sin} in its character as the rebellion of man against God, and in its character as the ground of man's hopeless destiny in death. It was to fulfil this judgement on \textit{sin} that the son of God as man took our place as sinners. He fulfils it - as man in our place - by completing our work in the omnipotence of the divine Son, by treading the way of sinners to its bitter end in death, in destruction, in the limitless anguish of separation from God, by delivering up sinful man and sin in His own person to the non-being which is properly theirs, the non-being, the nothingness to which man has fallen victim as a sinner and towards which he relentlessly hastens. We can say indeed that He fulfils this judgement by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves."\textsuperscript{44}

This last sentence brings Barth very close to some kind of penal understanding of the atonement. He immediately clarifies this in a footnote.

\textsuperscript{40} IV/1, p.247.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} IV/1, pp.250-251.
\textsuperscript{43} IV/1, p.251.
\textsuperscript{44} IV/1, p.253.
The penal notion he thinks occurs in Isaiah 53 but "in the New Testament it does not occur in this connection". It is always in danger of over-statement as when we speak of Christ's suffering our punishment, implying that we are spared from suffering it ourselves, or when we think of Christ "satisfying" the wrath of God. If kept from these excesses and not given the central position it has a certain validity. However -

"The decisive thing is not that He has suffered what we ought to have suffered so that we do not have to suffer it, the destruction to which we have fallen victim by our guilt, and therefore the punishment which we deserve. This is true, of course, but it is true only as it derives from the decisive thing that in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ it has come to pass that in His own person He has made an end of us as sinners and therefore of sin itself by going to death as the One who took our place as sinners. In His Person He has delivered up us sinners and sin itself to destruction. He has removed us sinners and sin, negated us, cancelled us out: ourselves, our sin, and the accusation, condemnation and condemnation which had overtaken us ... not by suffering our punishment as such, but in the deliverance of sinful man and sin itself to destruction, which He accomplished when He suffered our punishment...."47

The essence of the work of Christ in the actualisation of justification then lies in an act of power whereby sin and its power was decisively overcome, human existence was reconstituted, and a new aeon inaugurated. The deep reason why Barth can attain to this position is because he is so concerned to ask who is this who suffers and dies? i.e. because of the way in which he maintains a strict unity between the Person and work of Christ. In a final implication of Jesus Christ "in our place" Barth argues that in so acting for us before God he has acted justly, he has "done right".48

The work of God in Him is a righteous work. It is "the omnipotence of God creating order". It is God taking up again the cause of man and pronouncing His Yes to man which he pronounced in all eternity.49 The justice of Jesus action for man was the justice of his taking man's place, becoming a sinner in penitence and taking the judgement of man to Himself.50

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45. Cf. Berkouwer TGThKB, p.257 (footnote)
46. IV/l, p.253.
47. IV/l, pp.253-4.
48. IV/l, p.256.
49. IV/l, p.257.
50. IV/l, p.259.
The actualisation of justification then is the work of Jesus Christ in His fulfilment of the eternal covenant of Grace. It is his work whereby as man and for man he took personal responsibility for the sin of man and hence made his own the judgement man had brought upon himself. In this work Jesus Christ has done away with sinful man and all his works and restored him to God as a new man in Him. The heart of this whole work is in the "for us", "in our place", Jesus Christ as substitute.\(^{51}\)

All this, exhaustive enough as it might seem still leaves the question as to our relationship to this action of God "for us". By what right can we apply what He has done to our lives now? How can we go on to speak of our justification in Him? In particular this is not simply the problem of faith and history, (Lessing, Hermann and Bultmann, etc.)\(^{52}\) it is, in its acutest form, the problem of the question mark which stands against us as those deserving of eternal death and who in Jesus Christ have actually died and been brought to a final end.\(^{53}\) What we require is another act of God whereby our existence as an existence given and made new in Jesus Christ is confirmed. There is such an act and event - the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day!

"...if it is true that this Jesus Christ who was crucified and delivered up to death for us is risen and alive, then it is also true that we who are crucified and dead in Him have a future and hope in the light of the judgement and end which has come upon us in Him ... Because Jesus Christ the Crucified is risen again and lives there is room for us and therefore - this is what we wanted to know - for the problem of the doctrine of reconciliation in our own anthropological sphere."\(^{54}\)

This leads us to our final area of concern in this exposition of justification - viz. the realisation of justification in the being of man. Barth considers this in a chapter entitled, predictably enough, "The Justification of Man".\(^{55}\)

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51. IV/1, p.273. Barth admits that there are other terminologies in the N.T. which equally with the forensic indicate the *pro nobis* expounded above. There is the financial (*payment of a ransom*), the military (*overcoming the strong man* etc.) and in particular the cultic - which Barth unfolds in an extended footnote (IV/1, pp.274-283.)

52. IV/1, pp.287-292.

53. IV/1, pp.291-295.

54. IV/1, pp.350 and 351.

55. IV/1, pp.514-642.
e. The realisation of justification

In a preliminary section he mentions the problem of the 'justice' or 'right' of the action of God in justification. According to this doctrine God, in the same action in which he judges man as sinners and gives them up to death, pardons them and gives them a new life with Him. How are we to avoid the suspicion of a pure object — a legal fiction, a nominalistic "as if"? In what sense is this work of justification right? Clearly "right" here does not mean that God has to act in accordance with some "law". "Right" here can only mean that God acts in a fashion which is true to Himself — "This is the right of God which is maintained in the justification of sinful man ... that in the first instance God affirms Himself in this action, that in it He lives His own divine life in His unity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit." In relation to man God's self-affirmation means His faithfulness to His covenant with man. He maintains Himself, that is, "the God of man, as the One who has bound Himself to man from all eternity, as the One who has elected Himself for man and man for Himself." Man's sin, his injustice, is a resistance of this fact, but strong as it is, it cannot undo or overthrow the right of God. "It does not found any new being or new man or new world." God retains His claim to man and He exercises His claim in His overthrowing of sin. His claim and right over man is the claim and right of His grace. In this way Barth is able to speak of both the righteousness and the grace of God. The grace is "hidden deep under the righteousness of God". God is angry with man. He condemns him. He appears as the wrathful God. But this movement against man is also the work of God's grace. In the midst of his judgement He remains the same God who holds man to Him. This two-fold work of God Barth describes in terms of Luther's distinction between the work of God's right and left hands. At both points it is a work of God and therefore a perfect work — man is really denied and put to death. Man is really affirmed and held in life. This, however, does not mean a state of dualism both for the nature of man and the being of God. We must not think here in terms of states of being but dynamically — in terms of a history —
"This state of dualism, this static co-existence of two quite different men, can only be the result of a misunderstanding, a caricature, of what we really have to see at this point. But if this is the case, then the only alternative is to understand the work of the dividing of man on the left hand and the right as the putting into effect of a history in which the man on the left hand is the whence and the man on the right the whither of the one man, the former being this man as he was and still is, the latter being this man as he will be, and to that extent already is."61

This history is the history of the justification of man. Here we encounter the "real puzzle"62 of justification - that we cannot represent to ourselves, within the perimeter of our own experience, what these two termini are. We can have no "experience" of this history and this movement. Yet it is no myth or fairy tale. It is valid and true - but we can learn that only as we are taught by God's revelation - i.e. by Jesus Christ.

"It is all true and actual in Him and therefore in us. It cannot, therefore, be known to be valid and effective in us first, but in Him first, and because in Him, in us ... that is why our justification is not a matter of subjective experience and understanding."63

This righteousness of Jesus Christ is on the one hand a strange righteousness and yet on the other it is ours. Our understanding of this truth must once again be led by the concrete event of the justification of man in Jesus Christ. What has occurred in Him? Barth answers - "the effective self - substitution of God for us sinful men".64 This implies that he took our wrong and destroyed it, made it a thing of the past. But this did not occur in us - that is, we certainly have not ceased to be sinful men i.e. we are neither the subjects nor objects of this event. Turning to the positive side he has restored us to God and given us life from the dead - men justified before God. But this too is not to be found in any event in our lives.

"Negatively, the justification of sinful man before God means a basic turning away from his wrong and from himself as the door of it. Positively it means his basic turning to God. Neither as the one nor as the other can it be his own affair - neither as our work nor as our experience."65

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61. IV/1, p.543.
62. IV/1, p.544.
63. IV/1, p.549.
64. IV/1, p.550.
65. IV/1, p.556.
Thus our righteousness in Jesus Christ is a strange righteousness. On the other hand, however, it is ours because of our indissoluble unity with Him. "Our real today ... is the today of Jesus Christ ... His history is as such our history. It is our true history (incomparably more direct and intimate than anything we think we know as our history)."

But what does this mean for God? In what sense does this relate to the "right" of God? Barth argues here that this same action is the justification of God.

"It means for Him that He Himself is just (in this work) that in it He affirms His right and therefore Himself. We do not take too great a liberty if we paraphrase: in this work of the justification of unrighteous man, God also and in the first instance justifies Himself." 

God affirmed, in face of the threat and pseudo-claim of sin, his right to man - a right rooted in his election of man in the eternal covenant of Grace. The effect of this is "the Pardon of man". What does this mean? We require to look both backwards and forwards - it is a pardon, a justification of the guilty, of the ungodly. It is a justificatio impii. Barth will allow no diminution of this.

"There is no man justified by God who does not have to recognise and confess that he is still unrighteous, still the proud rebel before Him, who does not have to grant that God is always in the right against him and that therefore he is always in the wrong against God ... The divine pardon does not burst into man's willingness but into his unwillingness." 

66. IV/1, p.548 cf. here Barth's whole anthropology whereby man is to be understood only in this fundamental relation to Jesus Christ. III/2, pp.123-324.
67. IV/1, p.561.
68. IV/1, p.568ff.
69. IV/1, pp.575-6.
However, we also require to look forwards. Man is set in motion even in the midst of his injustice and guilt. He has a goal. He has received a pardon which is a promise.

"In virtue of this affirmation and promise he is already made free for life. The sentence which justifies him is pardon, divine pardon, and as such valid and effective, as such God's mighty disposing concerning him, in virtue of which even as the man he was and is, he is set on the way and in the movement from there to here, he already is the man he will be."70

This means three things. (i) It means forgiveness. God sees man's sin, it cannot be undone. But God overlooks it, He covers it, He obliterates it. This is not a merely verbal pardoning nor a matter of God acting "as if" man were not a sinner. It is rather His act of power towards man.

(ii) It means re-instatement into the rights of God's children. This is something given to man now "The divine sonship of man comes right into his present".71 (iii) It means the placing of man in a state of hope - the hope of glorification.

f. The subjective content of justification

The final aspect of justification which Barth deals with is the human counterpart of the fact of man's justification by God - faith, i.e. the subjective content of the doctrine of justification.72 The situation of man is that he must, in the light of Jesus Christ, discover himself as totally denied and removed. Thus he cannot be sure of himself or lay claim to himself. All that he can do, with respect to his justification in Jesus Christ is to believe it - "the justification of sinful man

70. IV/1, p.592.
71. IV/1, p.600.
72. IV/1, p.608ff.
is his justification by faith alone." 73 This does not mean, however, that faith of itself, considered as a human movement, can justify him. As such it is as powerless as all his works. "He needs justification just as much in faith as anywhere else, as in the totality of his being." 74

What is faith? Barth concludes - it is "wholly and utterly humility"; 75 not an enforced or self-chosen humility. The humility of faith is known in that it is an obeying. 76 Barth here echoes Luther "Where there is faith, there are also love and works." 77 "It is a living, active, busy thing." The supremely important thing with regard to faith is the object towards which it is directed - Jesus Christ. Faith "clings to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ", 78 in His total existence as the sole ground and basis of our justification and hope. 79 On the human side faith is "an empty hand, an empty vessel, a vacuum". 80 And in this it imitates the Jesus Christ in whom it believes. 81

73. IV/1, p.614.
74. IV/1, p.616.
75. IV/1, p.618.
76. IV/1, p.620.
77. IV/1, p.627.
78. IV/1, p.629.
79. IV/1, p.630.
80. IV/1, p.631.
81. IV/1, p.635.
B. NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Justification might generally be characterised as the putting of man "in the right" with God. Our understanding of this event will accordingly be closely related to the way we understand man's being "in the wrong" with God. Our account of Niebuhr's doctrine of justification will accordingly begin at this point, with the "setting" or "framework" of the doctrine in his understanding of sin.

a. What it means to be 'in the wrong'

In a wide sense this is the theme of this whole investigation and we have already attempted to expound it at some length. At this point we will confine ourselves to indicating the terms in which sin is understood. The starting point for Niebuhr is a "realistic" one. Man is conscious of being "in the wrong" - he is aware of moral guilt and an estrangement from reality. The origin of this is man's situation - as a finite and conditioned being possessed of an infinite freedom. In this situation man does not accept the utter dependence of his position and live in humble trust in God. Rather he asserts himself, rebels against God, and attempts to attain, from within himself, the finality towards which his transcendent freedom beckons him. In defiance of God he aspires to be God. Concretely this is a defiance of the summons of the law of love. Man chooses the way of self-love and self-affirmation instead of, and at the expense of, the love of God and neighbour which the law demands. This is the meaning of being "in the wrong" before God. It means having asserted oneself in such a way as to claim finality for the self in the face of God who alone is properly final. It means to have acted in such a way that one's situation of primary obligation towards God and one's fellow man is qualified and self aspires to be the object of primary obligation. In a sense being "in the wrong" with God has the form of a resistance of

82. HN, p.138f; ICE, p.18f etc.
83. HN, p.190f; ICE, p.87 etc.
84. HN, p.149; HD, p.226; FH, p.106f. BD, pp.11, 28 etc.
85. ICE, p.75f; HN, p.297ff etc.
reality. 86 i.e. man set in this world, and surrounded by the obligations towards God and his fellow man which press upon him, attempts to deny this situation and to live instead in an illusory world in which these obligations are secondary to his obligation towards himself. In the sections which lead in to his exposition of justification in Human Destiny, Niebuhr refers to sin as a "proud and rebellious contradiction to the divine and eternal purpose." 87 Niebuhr speaks here of the "wrath of God" and defines it rather impersonally thus -

"The wrath of God is the world in its essential structure reacting against the sinful corruptions of that structure: it is the law of life as love, which the egotism of man defies, a defiance which leads to the destruction of life." 88

Such then is the situation of man "in the wrong" with God. How is he to be put "in the right"?

b. Being put 'in the right' - symbolic truth

Niebuhr is in no doubt as to the cruciality of this issue. As against all 'Hellenised' brands of Christianity for whom the prime issue is man's finiteness and how he can attain a knowledge of God, Niebuhr asserts - "The issue of Biblical religion is not primarily the problem of how finite man can know God, but how sinful man is to be reconciled to God." 89

Niebuhr employs a variety of categories to indicate how man is put "in the right" with God - reconciliation, 90 propitiation, 91 sacrifice, 92 ransom, 93 vicarious suffering, 94 justification, 95 recapitulation, 96 imputed righteousness, 97 victory, 98 redemption. 99

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86. Cf. the terms of his definition of "wrath of God" below.
87. HD, p.37; cf. also p.44 and FH, p.142.
88. HN, p.158; cf. also 152, 190; HD, pp.62, 136; CHPP, p.186.
89. HD, p.58; cf. pp. 57, 108, 219; cf. his definition of judgement "The judgement of God is always partly the effect of the structure of reality upon the realities of history which defy that structure." HN, p.153.
90. HN, p.159.
91. HD, p.58.
92. HD, pp.54, 71f.
93. HD, p.54.
94. HD, p.46ff; FH, p.154ff; BD, p.18
95. HD, p.107.
96. HD, p.80.
97. HD, p.119.
98. FH, p.156f.
99. BD, p.69.
153ff: REB, p.291.
Before we come to a detailed account and assessment of them, however, we need to underline the essentially 'symbolic' nature of these terms for Niebuhr. He is in no doubt that the experience of forgiveness and union with God to which all the theories point in their different ways is a valid one. He is, however, prepared to remain agnostic as to the precise terms of this experience and how it is related to the death of Jesus Christ. The traditional terms are valid as far as they go (though all are not equally so as we shall see in a moment) but no single one nor all together can really grasp and give final expression to the mystery which lies at the heart of the atonement. This is a conviction which has been with Niebuhr from the beginning. In Moral Man and Immoral Society he speaks of the "note of rational absurdity in all religion"100 and when in 1934 he first turned explicitly to the doctrine of the atonement he wrote -

"Every effort to state the idea of the grace and forgiveness of God in purely rational terms suffers from the same difficulties encountered in stating the conception of the relation of God to the world. The idea of grace can be stated adequately only in mythical terms."101

The atonement is one of those areas in which the theologian has to act as a "deceiver, yet true" and hence speak in symbolic rather than strictly logical terms.102 We have to acknowledge that in the relationships between the members of the trinity which the doctrine of the atonement requires we are face to face with mystery, though "a mystery rich in meaning".103 In the Gifford Lectures there is further stress on the supra-rational character of the realities which the doctrine of the atonement attempts to indicate - "All the difficult Christian theological dogmas of atonement and justification are efforts to explicate the ultimate mystery of divine wrath and mercy in its relation to man."104 We have already had occasion to discuss

100. MMIS, p.53.
101. REE, p.290, chs. 287, 296.
102. BT, pp. 8, 17-19.
103. PH, pp.190-191.
Niebuhr's notion of "symbol", or its equivalent "myth". His view that the relation between God and man is dialectical leads him to the opinion that "(man) contemplates the eternal but he cannot name it. When he names it he gives it a name which introduces again his own finite perspectives." The "way out" for man is "symbol" or "myth". Though the product of the finite mind and hence, necessarily, obscuring even as they disclose, these symbols enable the finite to attain to a meaningful apprehension of the eternal.

Such are the theories of the atonement. Although there is no fully and finally true theory Niebuhr feels able to discard certain theories without much ceremony and specifies - "... theories of substitutionary atonement which outrage the moral sense ... theories of a sacrifice which ransomed man from the devil's clutches or of a sacrifice which appeased the anger of a vindictive divine Father." to which he allows the description, "theological absurdities". It is Niebuhr's anti-scholasticism and his concern for relevance and realism which is at work here as much as any strictly theological standpoint. We even find him complaining - "There is in fact no theory of the atonement which is quite as satisfying as the simple statements of the vicarious death of Christ in the gospels." Were the writer of these lines not a theologian of Niebuhr's status one might be inclined to dismiss them as incredibly naïve - since this begs the whole question. Surely "the simple statements of the vicarious death of Christ" are as definite a theory of atonement as any other, giving an answer to all the questions which can be raised, and in turn raising questions for other theories to answer. Further, no one who has done any depth of work on the "simple statements" of the death of Jesus in the gospels will be concerned to defend the use of the adjective here. One suspects that Niebuhr's nineteenth century liberal heritage with its distinction between the "simple gospel of Jesus" and the "complicated theologising of Paul" is obtruding somewhat here. It is significant that Niebuhr refrains from this opinion in the Gifford Lectures.

106. BT, p.61.
108. Ibid.
1. Vicarious suffering

In fact, despite these statements, Niebuhr does have, if not a distinctive theory of atonement, at least a preferred approach to it. In his major discussions of the doctrine he finds his starting point in the Old Testament messianic hope. At the time of Jesus this hope was expressed in two forms - a nationalistic particularism which saw the Jews as special recipients of the messianic kingdom; and an apocalyptic messianism which saw the coming Kingdom in strictly eschatological terms. Jesus rejected both these and also the Hebrew legalism which in his time presented itself as an alternative to both. He took seriously the problem which the prophetic heritage of Israel had so sharply raised - viz. the problem of sin.

"This ultimate problem is given by the fact that human history stands in contradiction to the divine will on any level of its moral and religious achievements, in such a way that in any 'final' judgement the righteous are proved not to be righteous. The final enigma of history is therefore not how the righteous will gain victory over the unrighteous, but how the evil in every good and the unrighteousness of the righteous is to be overcome."

Of supreme importance for Jesus understanding is the picture given in Isaiah 53 of a "suffering servant" of God. Jesus view of the messiahship - "The Son of Man must suffer" combines this idea of vicarious suffering with the apocalyptic strand in Daniel and Enoch. This "incomparably original conception" represents a profound reinterpretation of the meaning of history which can imply one of two things. Either vicarious love is the supreme force in history and will one day attain to supremacy, or it may mean that this love will always appear as a tragic and seemingly weak factor in history being triumphant only in the sense of its being true.

However - "The synthesis of Jesus, according to which the suffering servant is not merely a character of history, but is the representative of the divine, transcends both the simple optimism of the first interpretation and the purely tragic implication of the second conception. It is God who suffers for man's iniquity. He takes the sins of the world upon and into Himself."

110. HD, p.54 cf. BD p.176.
111. HD, pp.40-42.
112. HD, p.44.
113. Mark 8, 31 cf. BD, p.177.
115. HD, p.47.
116. HD, p.47.
Niebuhr gives a further account of this as he explores the full New Testament witness to the Atonement. He indicates the focus of attention as lying "supremely (in) the sacrificial death upon the Cross, understood by Christ as a necessary 'ransom for many'."\(^{117}\) Christ crucified is seen by the apostles as the 'Wisdom and Power of God'. It is wisdom in that it is a disclosure and clarification of the meaning of life and history - "In the New Testament the Atonement is the significant content of the Incarnation. To say that Christ is the "express image of His person" is to assert that in the epic of this life and death the final mystery of the divine power which bears history is clarified; and, with that clarification, life and history are given their true meaning.\(^{118}\)

We are shown here in this disclosure of the character of God that He has a "reserve of mercy beyond His law and judgement" but that "He can make it effective only as He takes the consequences of his wrath and judgement upon and into Himself."\(^{119}\) This, Niebuhr is willing to agree, may be formulated in terms of the classical idea of the Atonement whereby "God is both propitiator and propitiated."\(^{120}\) He is careful, however, to distance himself from a close identification with the classical theory. God's wrath is as we have already observed an impersonal notion of "the world in its essential structure reacting against the sinful corruptions of that structure".\(^{121}\)

All rational theories, whether commercial, judicial or the partistic ransom theory are "efforts to state the paradox of the divine mercy in relation to the divine wrath".\(^{122}\) In their different ways, however, they bear witness to the "central truth embodied in the doctrine of the Atonement". Niebuhr does not at this point give us a statement of what that "central truth" is. He does, however, make the important point that - "The justice and forgiveness of God are one, just as Father and Son are equally God. For the highest justice of God is the holiness of His love. It is law as love which man affronts and defies."\(^{123}\) That, is, whatever we may wish to affirm concerning the atonement we must not allow any suggestion of a division in the Godhead. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The "central truth" for Niebuhr would appear to be to the effect that in this act of God in Christ, and in particular in

\(^{117}\) HD, p.54. \(^{118}\) Ibid. \(^{119}\) HD, p.57. \(^{120}\) Ibid. \(^{121}\) Ibid. \(^{122}\) Ibid. \(^{123}\) HD, p.58.
His death, man's sin and its consequences (wrath and judgement) were taken by God into and upon Himself. As a result of this, man is forgiven his sin. His favourite notion is "vicarious suffering". Earlier Niebuhr rejected theories of substitutionary atonement which outrage the moral sense. However, it seems impossible to completely eradicate the idea of substitution from the notion of a "vicarious suffering". The Oxford English Dictionary defines vicarious as "that which takes or supplies the place of another thing or person substituted instead of the proper thing or person". When used of punishment it signifies "Endured or suffered by one person in place of another; accomplished or attained by the substitution of some other person, etc. for the actual offender." Presumably the notion which Niebuhr is concerned to reject is not so much substitution as such but a debased form of it whereby God is thought of as one party, man as a second, and Christ as a third. By this view man as sinner deserves punishment. God the Judge arbitrarily substitutes the innocent Christ, and lets the sinner go free. However, if we maintain the essential unity of Father and Son, as Niebuhr does, then substitution is both a tenable concept, and indeed, if the Biblical witness is to be heeded, a necessary one. As we have seen, Niebuhr's position ultimately requires something akin to it.

ii. Justification

The other major motif of Niebuhr's view of atonement is the notion of justification. Thus far we have tended to use the term rather loosely to refer to his whole doctrine of atonement. We require now to examine his usage of the term more precisely. The context of his use of the idea is important. It is not introduced in the sections expounded above where the "central truth of the atonement" is set forth. It appears when Niebuhr moves on to explore the historical outworking in Christian experience of the redemptive event. His main category here is "grace" and he argues that

124. HD p.46; BD, p.18; FH p.161f.
125. BD, p.18.
128. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, who speaks of "no external treatment of sin, but a radical, a drastic, a passionate and absolutely final acceptance of the terrible situation, and an absorption by the very God Himself of the fatal disease so as to neutralise it effectively." The Sacrifice of Christ, (London, 1956), p.28.
it has two facets - it is both the power of God over man, and the power of God in man, or as he puts it later, grace is both power in, and mercy towards man. Niebuhr here wrestles with the seeming paradox of man redeemed 'in principle' but not 'in fact' i.e. that man is both the object of God's mercy raised from death to life, and the rebel continuing to resist His will. Justification by faith is the category which "explains" this situation.

"The insistence upon the radical difference between the old and the new life is not in conflict with what must be regarded as the primary Pauline emphasis, his idea of grace as 'justification', as the assurance of divine forgiveness. On this side of Pauline thought the disavowal of perfection is explicit and precise. The very burden of the Pauline message is that there is no peace in our own righteousness. The final peace of the soul is gained on the one hand by the assurance of the divine forgiveness: and on the other hand by "faith". The Christ who is apprehended by faith, i.e. to whom the soul is obedient in principle 'imputes' his righteousness to it. It is not an actual possession except 'by faith'." 131

Justification explains the paradox of the believer. He is righteous by the imputation to him of Christ's own righteousness. He is still a sinner and the righteousness is only his by faith. Justification then is an equivalent for forgiveness of sin, though, by the allied notion of imputed righteousness it draws attention to the positive ground of the believer's forgiveness. Niebuhr goes on to draw out the implications of justification more fully and in particular the fact that the righteousness attained is only 'by faith'. He does this by in effect drawing out the implication of justification being by grace. The fact that man is justified by another who stands wholly for him implies a radical judgement upon man - upon his 'goodness' as well as his 'evil'.

129. HD, p.102.
130. HD, p.111.
"The Pauline doctrine (of the 'imputation of righteousness') really contains the whole Christian conception of God's relation to human history. It recognises the sinful corruption in human life on every level of goodness."

It is this radical judgement and exposure of man's 'goodness' which gives justification by faith its perennial authority. The danger of over-rationalised "judicial and legalistic" theories is that they "never convey the religious truth which strikes man in the very centre of his spiritual being." Justification is then the category Niebuhr finds most adequate to describe the realities of Christian experience.

Vicarious suffering and justification then form the twin foundations of Niebuhr's understanding of the atonement. The latter Niebuhr wishes to divert from the strict juridical terminology which has often surrounded it. The framework of relationships is personal rather than legal. All the other views of the atonement which he refers to in passing are secondary to this. In all this, however, we require to keep in sight the fact that even this "theory" remains a symbolic representative of a mystery which transcends rational apprehension.

We have indicated something of the need and achievement of "justification" in Niebuhr's thought. A final comment is required on the appropriation of justification.

iii. The appropriation of justification

It is in keeping with Niebuhr's interest in the experimental dimension of justification which we have already observed that he should wish to underline the need for this appropriation. We have already noted Niebuhr's stress on justification as implying a righteousness which is "by faith alone", where his stress fell upon the alone, i.e. it is not an achieved righteousness, it is only by faith. The corollary, however, is implicit viz. that the imputed righteousness is attained by faith alone i.e. it is only relevant where there is faith. Niebuhr makes more explicit this necessity for existential appropriation of forgiveness and new life.

132. HD, p.108.
133. HD, p.153 etc.
134. HD, p.108.
135. Cf. the recapitulation theory in HD, p.80.
"The self... must be 'broken' and 'shattered'. It cannot be saved merely by being enlightened ... The necessity of its being shattered at the very centre of its being gives validity to the strategy of evangelistic sects which seek to induce the crisis of conversion."137

Discussing the respective 'role' of divine and human action in this renewal of man he writes -

"The real situation is that both affirmations - that only God in Christ can break and reconstruct the sinful self, and that the self must 'open the door' and is capable of doing so - are equally true, and they are both unqualifiedly true, each on their own level."138

In Faith and History he speaks of the revelation of the true Christian meaning of history - "... the acceptance of which is possible only through a contrite recognition of the human situation of sinfulness."139

Despite these references to the "necessity" of this existential appropriation of grace by faith, or its equivalent, we ought not to draw the implication that Niebuhr regards this as finally crucial. He can speak of a "hidden Christ" operative in unbelievers and his notion of "wrath" does not appear to imply a judgement to come. However, we will examine this aspect more fully later. Niebuhr's stress upon "appropriation" derives rather from his "realism" i.e. from his prime interest in the effect of Christian truth in concrete, human existence, rather than from any sense of a grave peril, hanging over man in respect of which personal faith in Jesus Christ is all-important.

C. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

a. Relation to basic standpoints

Our first comment must be to the effect that in their understanding of justification both Niebuhr and Barth manifest a marked consistency with their primary theological standpoints and emphases.

Barth's prime concern with revelation,140 and that as the revelation of God's grace in Jesus Christ, is reflected in his grounding of

137. HD, p.113.
139. FH, p.158.
140. This preoccupation with revelation has been criticised by F.G. Downing Has Christianity a Revelation? (London, 1964) on the grounds of the imprecision of the term. He argues that it should be seen as a derived rather than as a primary term.
justification in the eternal decree in Jesus Christ actualised in the covenant of grace by which man is determined for God beyond and prior to any secondary determination by the fall into sin. Barth's concern for God as against a concentration upon man is reflected both in the grounding of justification already indicated and in the radical character of his doctrine of substitution - carrying over even into his understanding of faith.

Niebuhr's anchorage in the realistic situation of man is reflected in his being prepared to begin his doctrine of justification with the being and works of man rather than the being and works of God. This is not to say that special revelation in the Cross of Christ does not give an understanding of man's situation which he could not hope to derive from within his own self-understanding, but the basic problem has already been raised prior to it. Further, while the Cross is approached as an answer to the problem of sin, Niebuhr is constantly alive to the way in which the Cross attains a 'relevance' by its ability as 'Wisdom' to shed light on the meaning of human history. His anti-theoretical concern manifests itself, as we have observed above, in his unhappiness with over-strict theories of atonement.

b. Barth

There are strengths and weaknesses which appear in both constructions. Barth shows an impressive ability to integrate the doctrine of atonement into the whole range of God's works so that he attains to a quite remarkable harmony, and even, at the heart of his doctrine, a persuasive simplicity. Thus justification is related to the eternal purpose of God and yet Barth also gives great emphasis to the achievement of justification in time in Jesus Christ. Again, by his consistent refusal to approach the work of Christ directly in itself, but only in closest relationship with the Person of Christ, he is able to guard against all kinds of extreme notions of atonement and give the work of Christ a deep ontological basis in His person as the Son of God and Man, fulfilmer of the eternal covenant of grace. In this connection one would be bound to mention Barth's close relation of the eternal and historical in his doctrine of election in Christ which has certainly inaugurated "a new epoch in the history of the doctrine". 141

Even if there are questions which can still be asked, there can be no doubting the positive significance of Barth's view. Further, one is bound to commend his penetration to the essence of the Biblical understanding of the Atonement by his unapologetic stress on substitution.

One area requires to be mentioned as leaving questions. It is indicated in Barth's deep revulsion at any notion of satisfaction in his view of the atonement. He does attempt to re-instate the doctrine as the term which might be used of the outworking of the divine love which could only find its fulfilment (i.e. "satisfaction") in its judgement and annihilation of the sinner. In addressing ourselves to this issue, it is important to observe what the traditional doctrine of satisfaction was attempting to bear witness to. In its more carefully stated forms it sought to draw attention to the fact that there is that in the Godhead which so resists human sin that it 'required' the Cross to meet and deal with it. In so doing this view believed itself to be bearing witness to a strand in the Scriptural witness which speaks of a transition from wrath to grace in history i.e. in and by the Cross. Barth is unhappy with such notions and once again one hears his polemic against division in the being and work of God and of "step-wise" unfolding of God's works. One does wonder, however, if he is not exposed to the alternative danger of a justification "from eternity" which does not really take the historical sufficiently seriously, a question which we saw reason to formulate in the last chapter. A closely allied issue is the question of the relation between faith and justification. One can see clearly enough the deep concern in Barth to avoid any notion of a justification by works, such that even faith itself must not be allowed such a Promethean role. There is a sense in which Barth's view at this point is simply an outworking of his radical doctrine of substitution and an exploring of the full implications of the *pro nobis* in the atonement. Certainly Scripture would give no encouragement for regarding faith as other than


144. IV/I, p.253 where he states that it is "quite foreign to the New Testament."
"an empty hand"; Scripture invests faith with a cruciality which Barth does not always appear to reflect. It seems to speak of the necessity of an encounter in history between man and the Mighty Object of all his faith, Jesus Christ the Lord. Barth does deal with faith, indeed he has a great deal to say about it, but one requires to ask whether his commendable concern to escape the dangers of concentrating attention on the response of man to the gospel of justification, and his radical understanding of the completeness of the work of Christ for the sinner, do not appear to leave him open to the danger that the encounter of the individual with Christ in history is removed from real history to a realm of super-history where it is objectivised into an "acknowledgement" of what has been already done and is hence already true for the individual viz. his pardon and incorporation into Christ.

Putting this point quite generally, are we not here simply indicating what we have noted earlier with respect to Barth's view of revelation, that in his proper reaction to the immanentism of liberal Protestantism Barth has not been able completely to avoid falling into the opposite danger of an objectivism which does not allow a proper place for the human subject?

c. Niebuhr

As ever Niebuhr wins our admiration in his attempt to give a contemporary relevance to the doctrine in question - in this case 'justification'. There can be no question that he succeeds in this to a marked degree. In his writing modern civilisation is forced to face the fact that the only final hope for man lies in a reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ,

145. IV/1, p.631.
147. Cf. J. Murray, Romans, p.1. (London, 1961) "(The) act of faith is not directed to the fact that we have been justified, but is directed to Christ in order that we may be justified."
even if this leaves many immediate problems still to be resolved. In particular, one is forced to admire the way he uses the notion of justification by faith to bring a radical judgement upon the pretensions of 'good' men and nations and a sharp reminder of the distinct limitations of all human achievements. Again, viewed against the social gospel of his inherited creed, his doctrine contains a depth and general 'adequacy' in the light of contemporary realities which the former certainly lacked. There is too a commendable attempt to recover the great Biblical categories of the atonement.

Niebuhr's thought, however, cannot be regarded as a fully adequate view of the atonement. His doctrine lacks that profound 'rationale' which the New Testament attains. Niebuhr does speak of the "necessity" of the atonement, but one is left uncertain as to precisely wherein this necessity lies. Why does man require pardon and reconciliation with God, and, more particularly, why did Christ have to die? Is it simply a "subjective" necessity? i.e. something which man requires to attain a "full" life, etc., and to overcome the pressing problems of his individual and social existence? Or is there also an "objective" necessity? Is there also an "againstness" in God which places man as sinner in a situation of real peril the overcoming of which forms an important factor in the atonement? Niebuhr does not appear to be able to give much account of the latter dimension. He does use the terms "wrath" and "judgement", but, as we saw, they are interpreted as immanent and broadly impersonal processes within the historical continuum rather than pointers towards a Personal Divine No of rejection and opposition. Barth is able to find a place for these notions because of his relating sin to the wider category of Nichtige. He can thus speak of God's denial and rejection as unleashed against this whole dimension of contradiction and hence upon man in so far as he gives himself up to the influence of this chaotic "order".

d. The cruciality of the starting-points

Setting Barth and Niebuhr together we observe the cruciality of their starting points for the unfolding of their views of justification. Barth begins with God, with the eternal election of Jesus Christ and the covenant

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148. HD, p.54.
of Grace in which God determines Himself, in His Very Being as the God of man, the God who will set up, maintain and affirm in face of every threat to it, a covenant of grace with his creature. The justification of man, his being set "in the right" with God, which is the first aspect of the overcoming of sin is assigned its reality, and finds its meaning (as does sin itself) within this divine work and Word.

Niebuhr is prepared to begin with man's problematic existential situation, which when fully analysed points to a broken relationship with God and the need for pardon and reconciliation as the fundamental requirement for the resolution of the problematic character of his situation. Justification, the "overcoming of sin" in this "first" aspect, finds its being and meaning here, in face of this situation of man. For Barth, as we have noted before, revelation is hence the determination of man's situation - for Niebuhr the illumination of his situation. Because this is so, Barth is able to ground the very being of man in Jesus Christ. Thus the justification of man is closely related to his being as covenant-partner of God. Niebuhr cannot assert this. Man's being is grounded in the work of the Creator God who made man in His image. Justification effects a relative but not a radical change in man's being.
CHAPTER 7
SANCTIFICATION AND SIN

In this chapter we will raise the question as to how Barth and Niebuhr view the relation between sin and the Christian experience of faith. What difference does it make with respect to sin that a man is a Christian? And what does this mean for the being of sin itself? We will examine the two men's replies to these questions. As before we will commence by simply attempting a faithful exposition of their views, indicating the form of the doctrine, and noticing how it relates to their overall positions. We will subsequently proceed to a relation and evaluation of their doctrine.

A. NIEBUHR'S VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION

a. Two meanings of grace

The major discussion of the idea of sanctification occurs in Human Destiny in a section entitled "Wisdom, Grace and Power".\(^1\)

"The Christian gospel enters the world with the proclamation that in Christ both 'wisdom' and 'power' are available to man; which is to say that not only has the true meaning of life been disclosed but also that resources have been made available to fulfil that meaning. In him the faithful find not only 'truth' but 'grace'."\(^2\)

Niebuhr defines this 'Grace' - the "resources made available to fulfil" life's meaning - in the following manner - "Grace is ... the power of God in man; it represents an accession of resources, which man does not have of himself, enabling him to become what he truly ought to be. It is synonymous with the gift of the 'Holy Spirit'."\(^3\) Niebuhr's view of grace, however, has another element. It is also God's merciful pardon of man's sin, and Niebuhr's elaboration of the idea of grace always holds these two notions together. He defines it most simply as "power in, and mercy towards man".\(^4\) Thus on the one hand the Christian receives a new "power" from God which allows him new levels of moral attainment, but on the

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1. HD, pp.102-130.
2. Ibid., p.102.
3. HD, p.102.
4. HD, p.111f.
other hand he remains in need of pardon and forgiveness. Niebuhr attempts several accounts of the relation between these two elements of Christian experience. For example he speaks of salvation as a deliverance "in principle" from the power of sin though not in universal practice. Speaking of Paul's teaching on sanctification he writes - "... the difference (between the Christian and the non-Christian) might be defined as the contrast between the life which is governed by the principle of self-centredness and one which is governed by the principle of devotion and obedience to God. But his injunction to the sinless, not to sin any more, implies that he understands the possibility of sinning for those who have broken with sin in principle ... The Pauline doctrine ... recognises the sinful corruption in human life on every level of goodness."5

b. Galatians 2:20
Niebuhr's fullest analysis, however, is in terms of an exposition of Galatians 2:20.6 He takes the phrases of Paul's statement in turn. (i) "I am crucified with Christ" - Niebuhr thinks Paul is speaking "symbolically" here by likening the change from pre to post-conversion experience to a death (crucifixion) and a resurrection.7 It is symbolic of the change whereby the believer moves from an existence which is imprisoned within sinful self-centredness to an existence in which he is set free from this sinful self-preoccupation to really love.8 This process can be effected only by a "shattering" of the self and this is achieved by a confrontation of the self by God.9 In Christian faith this is mediated by Christ, but Niebuhr hints in a significant footnote that such a conversion is possible outside the historical revelation in Christ - "A 'hidden Christ' operates in history. And there is always the possibility that those who do not know the historical revelation may achieve a more genuine repentance and humility than those who do."10

5. HD, pp.106 and 108.
6. Ibid., pp.112-124.
7. HD, p.112.
8. HD, p.112.
9. HD, p.113.
10. HD, pp.113-114 (fn.)
(ii) "Nevertheless I live" - This means that "the Christian experience of the new life is an experience of a new self-hood." Christian experience that is, does not mean a loss or destruction of self-hood. That means that the "power" of grace i.e. the "Holy Spirit", does not destroy or blot out the individual. Such an effect, as illustrated in religious nationalism is demonic rather than divine. "Nevertheless I live" also distinguishes true salvation from mystical paths to fulfilment which again means the destruction of the self - in this case by its absorption into the divine. True salvation always retains an "existential" character. Indeed, it is only in this salvation that the self truly becomes itself for self-centred existence is finally self-destructive. Its salvation lies in its being "possessed from beyond itself" and thus set free to orientate itself towards, and to begin in measure to actualise, the infinite possibilities of its transcendent freedom.

(iii) "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." - Here Niebuhr indicates two possible meanings - either, the "yet not I" means the assertion of the "priority of grace" i.e. the new life is the product not of the self but of a power from beyond the self; or it implies the confession that the new self is never an accomplished fact -

"that in every historic concretion there is an element of sinful self-realisation, or premature completion of the self with itself at the centre: that, therefore, the new self is the Christ of intention rather than an actual achievement. It is the self only by faith, in the sense that its dominant purpose and intention are set in the direction of Christ as the norm. It is the self only by grace, in the sense that the divine mercy 'imputes' the perfection of Christ and accepts the self's intentions for achievements."

Niebuhr thinks this is not a question of 'either/or' but of 'both/and' and is another indication of the two-fold nature of grace which he has

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13. HD, p.117.
17. HD, pp.118-119.
earlier alluded to. On the one hand, grace is experienced as a 'power from beyond'. This, however, does not imply a deterministic understanding of it. Niebuhr here accuses Barth of such a notion. As against Reformed determinisms, Catholic "synergism" is preferable, though the latter spoil their case by attempting to define the relative contribution of grace and free will too precisely - "The real situation is that both affirmations - that only God in Christ can break and reconstruct the sinful self, and that the self must "open the door" and is capable of doing so - are equally true, and they are both unqualifiedly true, each on their own level." On the other hand, grace is required as forgiveness. Christ's perfection needs to be imputed constantly to the believer. Niebuhr goes on to assess the truth of this interpretation of grace in the light of experience. He argues that Christian history and experience bear clear witness to the fact that - "... human pride and spiritual arrogance rise to new heights precisely at the point where the claims of sanctity are made without due qualification .... It happens to be true to the facts of experience that in one sense the converted man is righteous and that in another sense he is not ... the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope ... perfection is not a reality but an intention." 

c. The dialectic of grace

Our whole interpretation of Niebuhr's doctrine of sanctification and hence of his understanding of the relation between sin and Christian faith depends on the relative weight we place on these two elements of grace.

18. HD, p.119.
22. HD, pp.126 and 129 and 130.
On the one hand there is optimism - Niebuhr does speak of a power from beyond the self i.e. of a real effect on behaviour;\(^{23}\) he talks in terms of a "shattering" of the sinful self and thinks Paul's language of death and resurrection not inappropriate;\(^{24}\) he refers to the Holy Spirit "dwelling in man".\(^{25}\) On the other hand, Niebuhr is pessimistic. He speaks in very disparaging terms of this new life. Each level of attainment opens up new vistas of sin;\(^{26}\) it is only a new life "in principle" - never in fact;\(^{27}\) Christ is never "possessed" by the believer, He is only hoped for.\(^{28}\)

This same dialectic runs through his writings from the beginning. In his early works his inherited optimistic, liberal creed is balanced by the pessimism to which Marx and Ford had contributed in different ways. Thus both Does Christianity Need Religion and Moral Man and Immoral Society, while acknowledging "Religious resources of the individual for social living" are sharply critical of its tendency towards "moral, social and political indifferentism".\(^{29}\) Writing in 1934, Niebuhr speaks of the sinner who is 'justified' even though his sin is not overcome'.\(^{31}\) An Interpretation of Christian Ethics speaks both of an "Impossible ethical ideal"\(^{32}\) and of love as "a possibility for the individual".\(^{33}\) Again there is pessimism as to Christian attainment in the political and social spheres\(^{34}\) and yet - "awed by the majesty and goodness of God, something of the pretence of our pretentious self is destroyed and the natural cruelty of our self-righteousness is mitigated by emotions of pity and forgiveness."\(^{35}\)

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23. HD, p.102 Niebuhr tends to think of sanctification in rather scientific terms - Grace operates as a "power" rather like a force introduced in an experiment producing certain measurable effects.
24. HD, p.113.
25. HD, p.108.
26. HD, p.103.
27. HD, p.130.
29. Ibid., p.70.
30. REE, p.281.
31. ICE, p.133f.
32. ICE, p.211f.
33. Ibid., p.70.
34. ICE, p.149f.
35. ICE, p.230.
In Faith and History Niebuhr speaks of the need for a "view of life which makes all human virtue problematic and sees all historic achievements as ambiguous", but which recognition can be the means by which "the power of self-love may be broken".

In his most recent work, Man's Nature and Its Communities, the tension of the dialectic is to some extent overcome and the overall note is distinctly pessimistic. Having argued for a meaning of "common grace" in terms of the "gift of security", he goes on to discuss the notion of "saving grace" and argues that historically evidences of this latter are sparse enough -

"Ideally the church is a community of 'saved' individuals, who know themselves to be 'forgiven sinners'. This ideal should make for humility; but the long history of religious self-righteousness reveals that religious experience is more effective in inducing repentance for deviation from common standards than in inducing repentance for the hatred, bigotry, and prejudice involved in the common standards of race and nation, or Church."

He instances the failure of evangelical Protestantism in the U.S.A. to seriously challenge the institution of slavery as an example of this severe historical qualification of religious claims for deliverance from sin.

Further indication of the terms of Niebuhr's doctrine can be derived from his historical survey of the doctrine of grace in the Gifford Lectures. He notes Augustine's view that the destruction of sin "in principle" means that its power is broken "in fact" but thinks this is an oversimplification of the situation which fails to recognise "the basic drive of self-love, operating upon whatever new level grace has pitched the new life", and speaks of "the tragic quality of the spiritual life". It was only with the Reformation and its doctrine of justification by faith that a proper view of this matter was attained. Here Niebuhr thinks

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36. FH, p.225.
37. Ibid., p.225 of also BT, pp.224, 258, 252f.
38. MNHC, p.82.
39. Ibid., pp.84-85.
40. MNHC, pp.93-94.
41. HD, p.141.
42. Ibid., p.141.
43. Ibid., p.142.
44. Ibid., pp.142, 153, 196.
Luther attained the correct balance—"A Christian, being consecrated by his faith, does good works, but he is not by these works made a more sacred person or more a Christian. This is the effect of faith alone." Calvin, though submitting the whole question to perhaps its most careful examination, tends to claim too much for the Christian believer and to feel "too secure in the sanctification of the Christian." Turning to the modern period, he finds Barth guilty of so under-valuing human moral effort that he suppresses "the emphasis upon sanctification and the fulfilment of life which the Reformation had retained."

Two final comments are in order.

(i) We need to notice the place the doctrine of justification plays in Niebuhr's pessimism. It had little influence in his earlier analysis which derives its elements from realist sources, and it may well be that his later pessimism as indicated in Man's Nature and His Communities derives from experiential realities in American social and religious life. Between these two, however, and certainly as far as the Gifford Lectures are concerned, his pessimism appears to be theologically rooted—in the doctrine of justification by grace alone which implies a radical judgment upon all moral attainment; Christian as well as non-Christian; post as well as pre-conversion.

(ii) Traditionally, the question as to the sanctification of man has been posed in terms of the individual and his attaining of a state of holiness. Even if the Biblical-corporate note has also been heard, the individual dimension has normally been strongly stressed. This implied that sanctification be understood as an increasing obedience to God's will as revealed, normally in Scripture, and an increasing likeness of character to Jesus Christ. The debates which surrounded the doctrine did not question this as the final meaning of sanctification. The issue was as to how far this was attainable on the one hand and to what extent this attainment was a

47. HD, p.165.
human as against a divine activity on the other. It is important to notice that Niebuhr to some extent stands apart from this debate because he defines sin in rather a different manner and hence this view as to what the goal to be attained is - i.e. the meaning of sanctification - is also somewhat distinct. Niebuhr from the beginning has been fascinated by the social dimension of human existence. Accordingly his norm is a social one - the law of love, and sin is defined generally in terms of a self-love as against a love for God and the neighbour 48. "As the essential sin of the first Adam was pride and self-love, so the essential goodness of the 'Second Adam' is sacrificial, suffering and self-giving love." 49 This means that Niebuhr is not content with a sanctification which merely produces a holy man, he wishes also to produce the holy society. Or putting this another way, his holy man will battle against the social dimension of sin every bit as seriously, if not more seriously, than its personal manifestations. This social orientation of the doctrine of sin in fact greatly extends the range of the moral demand and hence places "holiness", at first sight, at a much greater remove. This social orientation is the second and perhaps the principle root of the pessimism in his doctrine of sanctification, of which justification by grace alone is the first. We have described Niebuhr as a pessimist and the term is a proper one as we have attempted to demonstrate. His pessimism however is not unqualified. He does speak of "resources made available" and a "hope" of deliverance from sin, and of the breaking with sin "in principle". The fact that his pessimism at some stage gives way to a more optimistic note implies that these two terms are not diametrical opposites in his thinking. The ultimate frame of reference here would appear to be one in which the two poles are perfection, defined in terms of Jesus Christ the incarnation of agape, self-giving love; and a radical evil which at every point denies this principle - that is the ultimate evil of an unmitigated self-love. Niebuhr would place both Christian and non-Christian at points within these termini. Thus pessimism is in this sense to be understood as a relative pessimism. The Christian does have moral attainments but they

48. Hence his ability to allow for "conversion" outwith the historical Christian revelation (HD, pp.113-4fn).
are always strictly conditioned. The real question thus is whether this relative pessimism, in the terms in which Niebuhr describes it, is all that can be said in the realm of sanctification.

Gathering up his exposition we can attempt to give Niebuhr's answer to the question with which we began this chapter — "What difference does it make with respect to sin that a man is a Christian?" Niebuhr's reply, as we understand it, would be that both theoretically and potentially it means the overcoming of the power of sin, which is the power of self-love, but concretely all such deliverance is strictly limited, and on the social level often conspicuous by its absence.

d. Consistency with basic stance

Again we can underline the consistency of Niebuhr's doctrine of sanctification with his fundamental stance — "between gospel and world". As we have seen, he appeals again and again to concrete history to refute over-optimistic claims in respect of Christians' deliverance from sin. In his latest writing, in fact, a sharp distinction between gospel and world appears to have fallen away and Niebuhr sees the distinction between "common" and "saving" grace as of no final significance. The latter's validity extends only to the extent that it liberates the self from self-love to love of God and the neighbour. There is in his doctrine here the tragic note which we have earlier pointed out, and that same concern for social as against individual issues and an impatience with over-theoretical approaches to the questions.

e. Evaluation

i. Merits of Niebuhr's account

Niebuhr's account has several undoubted qualities. His realistic pessimism is far nearer both the Biblical doctrine of sin, and sheer experience, than the easy optimisms of the last century liberal tradition. It is hence relevant to an age of crisis in which the foundations of moral and spiritual life are being shaken, to an extent that his inherited creed could never be. He shows a profound insight into the hypocrisy of much Christian "holiness" and as always many illuminating criticisms of the motives and policies of social and religious movements. His profound sensitivity to the social dimensions of existence enables him to spell out

50. MNHC, pp.81-96.
the full terms of Christian obedience in prophetic terms. He has barred forever the road to a self-satisfied individualistic "holiness", as love of God which is not also and always a love for the neighbour.

**ii. Problems left by Niebuhr's account**

However, there do appear to be questions which require to be raised in his doctrine of sanctification. The most fundamental is simply this - can Niebuhr finally escape from subjectivism in his view of the Christian life? At the end of the day, can he really offer any solution to the problem of the power of sin? In the terms of his dialectical view of grace, in the last resort does the deliverance "in principle" not fall out of sight behind the "non-deliverance in fact"? Does the pessimism not overcome the optimism? Putting this in Biblical terms, does Scripture not hold out a more encouraging prospect than Niebuhr's theology? We have already paid tribute to the value of the pessimistic note and noted its theological root in justification by grace alone. However, in the New Testament his doctrine stands alongside the doctrine of the new man. It is in his failure to really attain the depths of the Biblical doctrine here that Niebuhr's weakness has its root. In his exegesis of Galatians 2:20 he takes Paul's phrase "I am crucified with Christ" simply as an instance of the apostle - "interpreting the destruction of the old life and the birth of the new in the symbolism of the death and resurrection of Christ." Exegetically this just will not do. Paul in fact uses the aorist here ("I have been crucified with Christ) and is expressing the truth which appears elsewhere in his writing, that when Christ died and rose he did so as a public and representative Being such that the man of faith can affirm that he died and rose with Christ. The Christian shared the death and resurrection of his Lord. That is an objective and accomplished reality in Paul's view. Subjectively i.e. in terms

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51. *HD*, p.112.
of historical experience, this encountered the believer at his baptism (Romans 6:3-6, Col. 2:12 etc.). Thus, in the most radical sense, the Christian is a new man (II Cor. 5:17 "a new creation"; Eph. 4:24). To talk as Niebuhr does simply in terms of "symbol" is to miss Paul's whole point. Minnema thinks that this exegetical inadequacy is not all that vital, but this can hardly be so. In his doctrine Paul gives the basis for speaking of an ontological distinction between Christian and non-Christian, and hence of a vibrant optimism even in the face of the undeniable fact of the continuing presence of sin in the believer's life. It is the lack of this optimism which most signally distinguishes Niebuhr's account of the Christian and sin from the Biblical one.

This exegetical weakness is related to a theological one. A number of writers have identified it as a deficient doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly a real lacuna in Niebuhr and particularly relevant to the question of sanctification. Niebuhr's difficulty with the doctrine of the Spirit at the level of a real renewal of the believer is related, as King has argued, to his commitment to a scientific world-view in which causality operating by a strict 1:1 relation between cause and effect excludes any notion of "intervention" by supernatural factors. Niebuhr argues for a transcendence of this system at the point of the being of man, but the frame is still a basically anthropological one. The way out of this dilemma would appear to be in a reassessment of Christology whereby Niebuhr's closed categories might be prized open and more adequate models obtained to account for Christian experience, which would be arguably more scientific in that they would be more strictly suited to the material under discussion. As we have noted above, however, Niebuhr's Christology remains to a great extent within the terms of the nineteenth century understanding and so he is unable to avail himself of the resources required here.

54. Minnema: Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology, art. "Niebuhr"
57. We have already observed Niebuhr's speaking of grace in terms of "power".
58. This whole question of the effect of grace on man is similar to that raised in the Jesuit/Jansenist debate in 17th century France. Cf. Pascal, Provincial Letters (Edinburgh, 1847), pp. 1-14; 15-29; 289; 312ff.
Niebuhr's nineteenth century legacy may also explain the problems which he creates for himself by thinking of grace as a power. From this term it would appear that the model he is using is drawn from the natural sciences where one can in a certain situation measure the forces, or "power", operating and reacting within it. If this model is applied to grace, and the relation between the believer and God, grace tends to be understood as an external force over and above the human, 'natural' powers operative in the character of the believer. Working with this model and the closed cause-effect nexus which it implies it is inevitably difficult to give a very meaningful account of sanctification for one who has difficulty with the idea of the miraculous. Barth traces Niebuhr's weakness here to still another source - his failure to really listen to the Scriptures and thus his "loss of a whole dimension", "... the Holy Spirit ... the sanctification, the Kingdom, the congregation".

Looking at this from another point of view, Niebuhr's inadequacy derives from an inadequate view of sin. We have noted his valuable emphasis on the social dimension of sin but, however, this element appears to control his view to the extent that sin is finally simply a question of selfishness and salvation is simply a question of deliverance from selfishness. To argue thus, however, is to miss the whole transcendent pole in the question of sin. The real problem of sin is that it is before and against God. Man is not merely in need of a new selflessness, he is above and beyond all in desperate need of pardon and reconciliation. Man's problem is the Reformation problem, Luther's problem - how can I, a sinner, be reconciled to a holy God? Salvation thus means first of all, pardon and reconciliation with God. Niebuhr of course does not lose sight of this element but it does not have the central place which Scripture accords it. Further, man's plight is that he is "under the law of sin", he lives within an alien lordship and he requires liberation and deliverance.

60. Ibid.
This is attained in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit's uniting a man to Christ. While Niebuhr pays lip service to these elements, the truth appears to be that they cannot be taken with their proper seriousness in a theology which is so controlled by anthropological and sociological categories. Thus in the end Niebuhr cannot really reflect a satisfactory doctrine of sanctification. He fails both to plumb the full depths of man's problem, and to indicate the full terms of his deliverance. The Cross stands, in Niebuhr's phrase, -

"on the edge of history, showing its true meaning, establishing a new hope by faith, and setting up a new tension between imaginative love and the world. It shows the judgement over all history to be one of grace. But the cross leaves man where he was before in the complex of historical forces. It lifts no burden from him. It clarifies, but does not essentially change his responsible action towards the powers of this world."61

B. BARTH'S VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION

a. Barth's early polemic

Our earlier exposition of Barth should be sufficient to warn us against expecting a high doctrine of the Christian man and his attainment. It is against this very man that Barth's whole theology in its polemical aspect is directed and we have already traced the story of his revulsion from a theology which gave a central place to this man. Theologically the account of Barth's position at this point in his view of 'Christian' moral attainment is not fundamentally different from the account which we gave in the chapter on ethics when we spoke of Barth's dialectic - a No against all claims to human attainment and a Yea to human being in Jesus Christ. In that earlier chapter we were discussing ethical experience in general and did not, as here, have the more specialised question - the question of the Christian man - in view. However, the fact that the account here would be simply an echo of the earlier one is due to the fact that Barth did not distinguish in his early critical phase between Christian and Non-Christian moral attainment: "Is there any visible iniquity which it is quite impossible to interpret as sanctification? Or is there any

61. West, p.151.
visible sanctification which may not be called iniquity?"62

"Consider Luther or Ignatius Loyola or Kierkegaard or any other religious genius: does the religious man as such, with his eccentricity, his fanaticism, his conceit, his almost unavoidable tendency toward refined Pharisaism, his high, audacious Titanism - for religion viewed as human desire and conduct is nothing else - does he lend himself to being understood as a guide to the kingdom of love? May not the very tragedy of the situation lie in the fact that he is the greatest hindrance to its coming, and the religious goal the most distant of all from the final goal?"63

There can be no return to - "the toils of the immanentist theology of the pious man which dominated the last two centuries."64 Even in the early period, however, there is the qualified recognition of the need to say something as to Christian life de facto - Barth's grappling with the text of Paul forces this upon him. Expounding Romans 6:22 he writes -

"Those who possess this criterion (of good and evil given in Jesus Christ) are again and again compelled to draw up a list of sinners and righteous men and to make a catalogue of what is permitted and what is forbidden. They are bound to attempt a system of ethics. But, when this is said, it must be borne in mind that the criterion by which they are compelled to understand this systematization also renders it no more than an attempt. The knowledge of God which is the condition of our survey compels us to distinguish clearly between sinners and righteous men; but the human knowledge which emerges is at once dissolved by the very criterion by which it was created."65

b. Sanctification and Justification

Barth's mature exposition of the life and being of the Christian man occurs in his exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation. It is entitled "The Sanctification of Man".66 The context of the discussion is important. The real root of this section lies in the exposition of the person and work of Christ in the office of King, "the exaltation of the Son of Man".67 The fact that sanctification derives from this base implies that we are not here concerned with a second work of man alongside of, and complementary to, God's work of Grace in the justification of man.

62. cf. Romans, 225-6 cf. also pp. 150ff, 275 and Barth's attack on experiences of God, pp. 49ff, 59ff, 77ff, 175ff, 730ff, 360ff.
63. WCWM, p.165; cf. also 86ff, and Chapter V passim.
64. IV/2, p.5.
65. Romans, p.228; cf. also 149ff, 188ff.
66. IV/2, pp.499-612.
67. IV/2, p.3-377.
"There can be no question ... of leaving one sphere of the one whole grace of God and turning to another. It is a matter of doing justice to this grace, and therefore to the truth of the atonement as it claims us, in all its fulness."

The man we are to consider here is therefore the man whose humanity has been exalted in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. We require to notice further that Barth's treatment of sanctification is immediately followed by a chapter entitled "The Holy Spirit and the upbuilding of the Christian Community". This implies that Barth is concerned to guard against individualism. He is concerned to give sanctification an ecclesiological orientation.

Barth begins with a clarification of the relationship between sanctification and justification. They belong together as different aspects of the one work of God :

"Whether we look at it from the one standpoint or the other, our knowledge can and may and must be a knowledge of the one totality of the reconciling action of God, of the one whole and undivided Jesus Christ, and of His one grace."

Nevertheless, within this unity we can distinguish "two genuinely different moments ... It is one thing that God turns in free grace to sinful man, and quite another that in the same free grace he converts man to Himself." This distinction must be maintained against tendencies to allow either one to dominate the other. Turning to expound sanctification under the heading "The Holy One and the Saints", Barth uses the distinction between de jure and de facto to indicate the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian at this level. All men have been sanctified de jure in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. De facto all men do not know and confess it. "De facto ... it is not known by all men, just as justification has not de facto been grasped and acknowledged and known and confessed by all men, but only by those who are awakened to faith." The distinction thus

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69. IV/2, p.499.
70. IV/2, pp.614-726.
72. Ibid.
73. IV/2, p.504.
74. IV/2, p.511.
75. IV/2, p.511. This de facto/de jure distinction appears rather questionable. What are we to understand by a de jure work of sanctification? At the level of justification sense can be given contd./
is primarily a noetic one. We will explore the significance of this later. The Biblical term for these men who belong to the community of the sanctified de facto is saints.

0. The ground of sanctification - participation in Christ

The vast gulf between the claim of this Biblical term, and the actual experience of the men so called points to the ground of their sanctification. It is a sanctification in Christ alone. Every time attention is moved from Him to the 'Holy man' trouble is in store.

"How much false teaching, and how many practical mistakes, would have been avoided in this matter of sanctification if in direct analogy to the doctrine of justification by faith alone we had been bold or modest enough basically and totally and definitively to give precedence and all the glory to the Holy One and not to the Saints: to the only One who is God, but God in Jesus Christ; and therefore to the Royal Man Jesus, as the only one who is holy, but in whom the sanctification of all the Saints is a reality .... There is no prior or subsequent contribution that we can make to its accomplishment. As we are not asked to justify ourselves, we are not asked to sanctify ourselves. Our sanctification consists in our participation in His sanctification as grounded in the efficacy and revelation of the grace of Jesus Christ."76

This participation in Christ, the essence of sanctification is a participation in the humanity of Christ which He exalted for us in his work of atonement. But it is hence a sanctification for, and of, all men.77 The failure to give the work of Christ this universal dimension is the chief weakness of Calvin's treatment of the doctrine. For him only the

75 contd. to this distinction. A man can be legally justified before the law even if he has not personally realised this fact and appropriated its benefits. There is at this level an objectivity in the distinction which can accord with an objectivity in the theological idea of justification by Jesus Christ. Now a man can be sanctified de jure is much more difficult, if by sanctification we are concerned, as the Bible certainly is, with the notion of an ethical renewal. At this point, in other words, a subjective reference is demanded which the de facto/de jure distinction cannot carry.

76. IV/2, pp.515 and 517.
77. IV/2, pp.518-520.
elect have a part in the participatio Christi. This participatio Christi is the meaning of sanctification de jure in which all men share. Barth turns next to give some meaning to sanctification de facto - the sanctification in which only the Christian believer participates. The basic factor here is the union between the believers and Christ. They are sanctified de facto -

"only on the basis of the fact that there is no separation between Him and them, but only a companionship in which He Himself has set them as the One who has been raised again from the dead and lives, who was and is, and will be in the power of the eternal will of God, triumphing over His death, the crucified Lord of all men and therefore their Lord, and now their Lord in particular because it is not hidden from them, but revealed to them, that He is the Lord of all men, and therefore their Lord."79

Barth does not go on to develop this notion of union with Christ, for which he might have drawn upon considerable Biblical material. Barth however is certainly following the direction indicated by Scripture when he goes on to speak of this reality in relation to the Holy Spirit as the One in whom Christ "reaches and touches" the believers -

"The Holy Spirit is He Himself in the action in which He reveals and makes Himself known to other men as the One He is, placing them under His direction, claiming them as His own, as the witness of His holiness. The Holy Spirit is the living Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the work of the sanctification of His particular people in the world, of His community and all its members."80

d. The implications of participation in Christ

He goes on to spell out some of the implications of this. It may be generally characterised as the giving of a new direction.81 It is the power of God. It is illuminating to compare Barth's use of the notion of power with that of Niebuhr's noted earlier -

78. Ibid., p.520.
79. IV/2, p.521.
81. IV/2, p.523.
"The power or sowing which proceeds from the existence of the royal Man Jesus, the critical and constructive force with which He invades the being of men and makes them His saints, is not a mechanical or organic or any other physical operation, nor is it in any sense a magical. It is the power of His Work spoken with divine authority and therefore in illuminating fruitfulness and power."82

In this whole exposition Barth is seeking to attain to that balance which we saw Niebuhr also struggling for - between the one extreme which would imply that the Christian was morally perfect, and the other which would imply that he was morally indistinguishable from the non-Christian and from his own pre-Christian state. Thus for example he speaks of a "definite limit" having been set to their sin which is their sanctification, but qualifies it by arguing that "within" this limit -

"their being is still that of sinners. They still live in the flesh. In relation to this 'within' everything that has to be said about the misery of man, and especially about his lack of freedom to do the will of God, applies to them too."83

But, on the other hand, since this "within" implies some limitation and this limitation is a divine limitation - God's act - it is an "overwhelming limitation" and hence "their being as sinners however seriously it may still assert itself, is pushed into a corner. It may still intrude into the present, but it belongs to the past."84

Putting this seeming paradox another way, in terms of sanctification de facto as a "lifting up" of man, Barth thinks of the initiative of any such as lying in God alone to which the Christian responds in obedience. But this obedient "lifting up" is always a sinful movement - "Their sanctification takes place here below where there is no action that does not have the marks of sloth or can be anything but displeasing to God."85 Nonetheless there is something visible86 - but it is visible only "to those who have eyes to see".87

82. Ibid.
83. IV/2, p.525.
84. IV/2, p.526.
85. IV/2, p.528.
86. IV/2, p.529.
87. IV/2, p.530.
Barth finally puts the situation in perhaps the most graphic of his analogies - the Christian exists at once *servo arbitrio*, "he is a prisoner of sin who continually commits new sins" and in a radical freedom with respect to sin, "he is given a total freedom in the face of this total bondage ... (he is) free in the only worthwhile sense, free to lift himself up in the sense described." Thus we have to say that for the Christian, sin is never an inevitability. He can always refrain from it - indeed, in this freedom given him he "cannot do anything else"; And yet, he is still "very obviously and palpably" a sinner. His being as sinner is "radically assailed, but not destroyed". The Christian is thus always able to lift himself up and look to Christ and really be a Saint. That they fail to be such is due to their failure to avail themselves of the freedom which they are given in their union with Christ. Only such a truth can make sense of the apostolic admonition and give a basis for Christian ethics.

Barth expounds the Christian life in two further sections under the themes of discipleship and conversion. Under the second he criticises any idea of a partial conversion whereby only one aspect of a man/ e.g. his individual personal life as against his corporate social one. Conversion is a matter of the whole man. Thus we have by this to think of the Christian man as one who lives under a dual determination - "we have to do with two total men who cannot be united but are necessarily in extreme contradiction. We are confronted with two mutually exclusive determinations." Hence we can apply Luther's *simul justus simul peccator* it seems, to sanctification.

88. IV/2, p.530.
89. IV/2, p.531.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. IV/2, p.532.
94. IV/2, pp.533-553.
95. IV/2, pp.553-584.
96. IV/2, p.565.
97. IV/2, p.571.
"It is certainly hard to grasp that the same man stands under two
total determinations which are not merely opposed but mutually
exclusive: that the same man, in the simul of today, is both
the old man of yesterday and the new man of tomorrow, the captive
of yesterday and the free man of tomorrow, the slothful recumbent
of yesterday and the erect man of tomorrow. But there is no
easier way of seeing and understanding the matter. Static and
quantitative terms may seem to help, but they are not adequate
to describe the true situation."98

Thus the Christian is simultaneously both the old and the new man. Lack
of clarity here - exaggeration, even seeming illusion - are inevitable.
We can only attain clarity if we refer the statements made of the
Christian to the Christ and only indirectly and secondarily to the Christian.
Our conversion and renewal is only real as it is a participatio Christi -
a real sharing in his conversion and renewal.99 He is the new man.
The discussions concerning sanctification have often centred round the
evaluation of the Biblical witness concerning "good works" and Barth
turns to this. He affirms the necessity of such in the lives of Christians.100
They cannot belong to Jesus Christ to no effect.101 Barth is careful to
qualify this however. The real goodness of the works derives from God,
not the saint. Of the Christian it has to be affirmed that - "each of
his works, as well as he himself, stands in need, as the work of a sinner,
of justification, and therefore of forgiveness, and therefore of the
unmerited recognition of God."102 Nonetheless even as sinners amid our
sinful works we can bring glory to God. Barth defines the works which
attain this in these terms - "What these men do as those who are in Jesus
Christ, and in love to Him, and correspondence with the work of God,
is well done."103 Again, however, he adds a rider - we can never assume
of any particular human work that it has attained this goal. In fact, the
most promising sign with respect to the possible goodness of any work is a
conviction as to the impossibility of such a work ever being good i.e.
"a radical clairainess".104 In a final section Barth expounds the
Christian life as a taking up of the Cross.105

98. IV/2, p.572. 
99. IV/2, p.583. 
100. IV/2, p.585. 
101. Ibid. 
102. IV/2, p.587. 
103. IV/2, p.593. 
104. IV/2, p.594. 
105. IV/2, pp.598-613.
Barth then proceeds immediately to discuss sanctification corporately in terms of the Church, and as we have noted this is no accident. In the section here entitled "The Growth of the Community" Barth strives again for a balanced account of sanctification. Thus the community is on the one hand ever and always a communio peccatorum whose growth is always limited by creaturliness and sinfulness, yet on the other hand, astonishingly, it can actually grow spiritually, and possibly also extensively. The meaning of this growth, however, is never something intrinsic to the community per se but rather a growth in the power of Jesus who indwells the community by His Spirit. i.e. We may also speak of a communio sanctorum.

e. Sanctification and Christian love

Barth concludes this whole consideration with an exposition of Christian love as the concrete de facto form of the individual Christian's response to Jesus Christ. Love and faith belong inseparably together - "Paul (and the rest of the New Testament ...) knows nothing of a faith abstractly taken and considered, but only the faith which has love as a complement within the one vital act of the Christian." Barth subjects the concept of love to a profound discussion. His main initial concerns are with the distinction between agape and eros: With God's love, the love of the Trinity within itself and its love of the world, as the basis of our loving. Under the title of "The Act of Love" he examines the content of this love. This is always a limitation - the Christian remains a sinner - indeed "he is a sinner more intensively than all others because he knows that he is." We cannot say that he loves "wholly and utterly and therefore exclusively" Nonetheless it remains true that as a Christian he will love -
"... that which, surrounded and covered and compromised by a very different activity, takes place in the life of a man as the act of love, does so on the basis of the divine creation and is therefore a reality which counts in the sight of God not to the praise or defence or justification of this man, but in the context of what he wills for him, of the service for which He has determined and uses him." 117

This love, because it is a response to, and reflection of, God's love, is expressed in concrete acts and these as real acts of men set free for them by the Holy Spirit. 118 This love expresses itself more particularly as an "interest" in God, as obedience to God, and as love for the neighbour. Barth recognises at this point a reality of reconciliation - the work of love as a work done by the Christian and by him alone, which is to God's praise.

Here also one would require to refer to the final fragment of the Church Dogmatics 119 where Barth discusses Baptism with water. He here maintains his previous rejection of infant baptism 120 and argues for the ethical significance of Baptism as a human answer to the Word of God addressed to man. 121 As a human work it can have no such ethical value - "Constantly the baptised will be shockingly unfaithful to the community, and the community to the baptised, and hence both to their Lord." 122 Barth retains the qualifying note over all human (Christian) attainment. Nonetheless baptism is a prayer in hope of the presence of Jesus Christ in the life of the baptised and hence an act done in confidence - "Because, and to the degree that baptism is prayer, it is at once a very humble and a very bold action, free from all illusions and profoundly sober, yet bold and heaven-storming. As prayer to God which raises no claim, as pure seeking knocking, asking: Come, Lord Jesus! Veni Creator Spiritus! it is unequivocal obedience to God, an unequivocal answer to His justifying and sanctifying work and word. It justifies Him unequivocally. In spite of all the threats in respect of its future, in spite of all the doubts which throng upon it as a fallible work of man, it is well done and without reproach, a saving action (because it actively recognises and honours the Saviour in His grace and freedom alike). As and because it is prayer, it can and should be ventured with childlikeness, without hesitation, confidently, as a genuine act of hope in Jesus Christ." 123

117. IV/2, p.784.
118. IV/2, pp.795-6.
121. op.cit., p.204.
f. Evaluation

i. The merits of Barth's account

The strength and merit of Barth's view of sanctification can best be assessed if one recalls the theological situation at the close of the last century. At that point Schleiermacher's theology of religious self-awareness and Ritschl's neo-Kantian theology of moral values had attained such a dominance that in a sense sanctification had become the central question. Barth altered this whole tendency and restored the doctrine of sanctification to its proper, secondary place in the scale of theological values. Whatever questions his account might seem to leave unanswered, nothing can be allowed to detract from this achievement. He attained this relativising of the place of sanctification in the first instance by his recovery of the transcendence of God during his early dialectical phase (Rombrief). This in turn attained a more explicitly Christological form as he developed his theology of the Word of God. In particular, here his recovery of the doctrine of justification by grace alone meant a great question mark being placed over Christian man and his good works. Hand in hand with this went a sense of the cruciality of the event of Jesus Christ for the overcoming of sin and hence the qualified significance of the Christian's personal overcoming of sin. Thus in his No to the centrality of sanctification as the nineteenth century had developed it we cannot but see Barth as the champion of the truth. In his positive unfolding of the doctrine, in its proper place and order, Barth's refusal to allow any radical separation from justification would again seem thoroughly correct. Both justification and sanctification are within the one sphere of grace and faith i.e. they are different sides of the one gift of God in Jesus Christ. Finally one would commend Barth's concern to give his position a wide and deep exegetical basis, and in particular his use of the synoptic material which can all too readily be ignored in favour of a sole dependence on Pauline texts.

Barth's consistency in his view of sanctification with his basic theological stance has been well enough indicated in these commendatory remarks. Here again one sees the theocentric concern and the rooting of Christian understanding in the event of grace in Jesus Christ.

ii. Problems left by Barth's account

All this being said, however, we again require to raise certain problems. We saw with Niebuhr that it was possible to speak of a defective doctrine of the Holy Spirit with respect to sanctification, indeed of an almost total lack of the doctrine. Barth certainly cannot be accused in these terms - witness his extensive discussions of the Spirit's role in sanctification - (IV/2, pp. 360-377; 614-840 and 522). However, it is important to notice the precise "function" which the Spirit plays. It could be summed up in a sentence "His work consists in the fact that He enlightens us." 125 Certainly Barth in places speaks of a fuller work of the Spirit - "He makes the power and Lordship of the Man Jesus .... the presupposition which obtains here and now for us," 126 and he seeks to bind the "fruit" of Christian love to the work of the Spirit. 127 Nonetheless the real nature of the work of the Spirit to the work of sanctification is in his enlightening the believing mind to the fact of his sanctification already achieved and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. 128 One has to raise the query as to whether this is his only function? Does the new Testament not also think of a work of the Spirit whereby the sanctification obtained in Christ is actually progressively imparted to the believer in his concrete character as well as his understanding? 129

125. IV/2, p. 522.
126. IV/2, p. 363.
127. IV/2, p. 727.
128. IV/2, pp. 363-5, 367, 369-70, 552.
129. Rom. 6; 2, 4, 11, 13; I Cor. 6; 11, II Cor. 3; 6, 6; 6; Eph. 3; 16, 6; 18; Gal. 5; 16f, 6; 8; Tit. 3; 5; I Thes. 4; 7-8; II Thes. 2; 13; Heb. 10; 29; I Pet. 1; 2; Calvin Comm. on Jn. 19; 19; cf. too F. Gaechter in Z.K. Th. LIII (1929).
Another related question is as to Barth's failure to really exploit the New Testament notion of union with Christ. He does make some reference to it certainly but it does not receive attention from him proportionate to its importance in the Scripture. Some words of Adolf Koberle are to the point here. They were first penned before Barth's later volumes of the Dogmatics had appeared and with them his attempt to give a more positive meaning and content to the life of faith. They are nonetheless still to the point -

"It is true Karl Barth in his vigorous apology for the dialectic theology has explained that to take God seriously to speak correctly as a man of grace means to speak of 'justification and sanctification, of faith and obedience.' But practically these statements are not carried out." Barth has since gone some way to meet this objection e.g. his defence of the notion of "loving God" (IV/2, pp.795-9) and his qualified defence of "I-hymns" (IV/1, pp.755-7). Nonetheless his treatment of this area is not as full as the Biblical testimony would appear to warrant.

These points are really preliminary to the major question which we need to put here - does Barth's position allow for an ontological change in the believing man? Does the event of justification imply, on the subjective level, a new being? We have already seen reason to criticise Niebuhr in the face of this question - we need now to ask how Barth appears in its light. Certainly Barth is much more promising at this level than is Niebuhr. We have already noted some of the terms he employs to describe the Christian man. He has been "given a direction" by God and his being is "overwhelmingly limited" by this direction. Again he is one whose existence can be described as a participatio Christi and is hence "placed under a new determination". He is one who has been "awakened to conversion" and who hence - "is under the determination and in the process of becoming a totally new man."

130. IV/2, pp.517-520, 533.
131. Jn. 14: 20, 23; 15: 4, 5; Acts 9: 5; Rom. 6: 1f; 8: 10; 1 Cor. 1: 9; 1: 30; 6: 15.
133. H. Küng also puts this question to Barth "...does something concrete and ontological actually happen in the 'subjective' appropriation of 'objective justification'?" Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection, p.248.
134. IV/2, p.526.
135. IV/2, p.526.
136. IV/2, p.571.
Speaking of good works he argues that they are necessary for Christians - "it is obligatory that Christians should do good works ... They cannot be Christians, and belong to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Head, to no purpose." In particular, the Christian will manifest the "good work" of love. In answer to God's word and work in the gospel he will submit himself to baptism with water as a genuine act of response and obedience. However, does all this imply a new ontological reality? It certainly appears to. One of Barth's Catholic commentators, Hans Küng, thinks it does. Having asked this question he goes on -

"According to Barth this question would have to be answered with an unconditional affirmation - despite and precisely because of the fact that faith is a purely cognitive process. He has expressed himself very clearly at this point and in two regards. First, believers and only they are moved by the Holy Spirit; non-believers are devoid of the Holy Spirit ... Second, it is precisely in faith that a new and special existence becomes something real - a new, special, objective, real living kind of being. In faith man is in fact reborn and newly created in the root of his being."

That might seem to close the question, however, with respect to Küng, one wonders if that really reflects Barth's ultimate position. His fellow Catholic O'Grady questions Küng's understanding of Barth and asks for his evidence for implying that Barth would teach that "grace becomes man's possession". Certainly when we probe beneath the surface of Barth's statements it seems less certain that he can really allow for a deep ontological distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian. This is indicated by Barth's account of the sanctification of all men in Jesus Christ. All men, believers and unbelievers are sanctified in Jesus Christ - de jure. Only the believer, however, is sanctified de facto - but this means according to Barth that they know something which the

137. IV/2, p.585.
138. IV/2, pp.783-4 (73, 86, 101, 131ff).
139. IV/4 fragment p.203ff.
140. H. Küng, op.cit., p.248.
non-believers do not know, viz. the fact of the sanctification of the world in Jesus Christ, i.e. at root, and in the final analysis, the distinction is epistemological rather than ontological. This interpretation of Barth is also consistent with his criticism of Calvin for his restricting the work of the Holy Spirit - i.e. the sanctification of man in Jesus Christ to which the Holy Spirit in his work opens men's sin-blinded eyes to "the circle of the elect". In Calvin's conception of the participatio Christi -

"There is lacking that which we have described as the objective presupposition of the participation of the saints in the sanctity of Jesus Christ - the sanctification which has come to man a priori in Him." He also speaks of Calvin's "serious distortion of the Biblical message" and his "inhumanity".

Certainly, there are problems in Calvin's view and the questions Barth is putting to him here are real ones. Nonetheless, by his approach Calvin is able to allow a deep significance to sanctification as an intrinsic overcoming of sin in the life and characters of Christian men, i.e. he can allow a real ontological "newness of life" in the believer flowing from his justification in Christ. Thus Calvin can speak of an "actual purity" (pureté actuelle) in believers. cf. too -

"By partaking of him (Christ) we principally receive a double grace; namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness we may have in heaven, instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life." The point is that the Christian attains a genuine holiness and this can be indicated by the fact that Calvin speaks in progressive terms of this fact. Sanctification is something which takes place "little by little".

143. See under exposition of Barth above cf. IV/2, p.511.
144. IV/2, p.520.
145. Ibid.
147. Calvin, Institutes, 3, 11, 1.
148. Comm. on Rom. 8: 11.
"Sanctification is not instantly completed in us on the first day, but ... we make progress in it through the whole course of our life."\textsuperscript{149} Wallace defines his view of sanctification as "the gradual process of man's becoming more and more in the course of time conformed to Christ in heart and outward life and devoted to God."\textsuperscript{150}

Calvin thus is able to speak of a "state of achieved victory over sin"\textsuperscript{151} in which "the power of the Spirit is so effectual that it necessarily retains us in continual obedience to righteousness".\textsuperscript{152}

Now lest there be misunderstanding of Calvin here we require to immediately add two further points. First, the sanctification which Calvin speaks of is always and in every respect a sanctification in Christ. The holiness which the believer attains is never self-generated or self-effected. It derives wholly from the believer's participation in Christ, from his union with Christ by faith.\textsuperscript{153} Second, sanctification is never a completed fact in this life, even our highest attainment in sanctification. Calvin can speak of the sin which "dwells within us always"\textsuperscript{154} and his view of Paul's experience in Romans 7 is that Paul is writing of the Christian life.

Setting Calvin's view in relation to Barth there are certainly many points of accord. Both men stress that sanctification is only in Christ and through faith. Both wish to speak of some actual concrete effects of this in the lives of believers. Both stress the continuing reality of sin within the experience of faith. However, Calvin does seem, in a way which Barth does not, to think of an actual attainment (in Christ and through faith) by which sin is overcome. Putting this another way - can Barth employ the language of progress which Calvin does? i.e. is there in man's sanctification a real movement from a less to a more?

\textsuperscript{149} Coram, on John 17: 17.
\textsuperscript{150} Wallace, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{151} Wallace, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{152} Comm. on I John 3: 9.
\textsuperscript{153} cf. Wallace, Chapters 2 and 3; Calvin e.g. Comm. on Jn 17: 19; Jn. 6: 51; II Tim. 1: 9. \textit{Institutes} 3: 11: 1lf.
It is possible that to some extent the distinction here derives from the polemical settings of the two theologians. Barth, as against the nineteenth century is concerned to block all approaches to a theology of the Christian man. Calvin is similarly concerned but is also under pressure to refute the Roman accusation that his theology led to antinomianism. The distinction here can be focussed if we examine Barth's commentary on a Calvinist Confession - the Scots Confession of 1560. Knox's article on sanctification asserts - "... blasphemy it is to say, that Christ abides in the hearts of all, as in whose there is no spirite of sanctification," and goes on to give a list of sinners ending with "all workers of iniquity" who - "have neither trew faith, nether any portion of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, so long as obstinatlie they continew in their wickedness." The confession goes on to define the newness of life of a Christian in terms of his beginning to hate what was previously loved and vice versa, and speaks too of "that continuale bateell" between flesh and spirit which is the lot of the Christian. Thus the Confession is sober enough in its view of Christian attainment. Nonetheless one wonders if it does not hold out more than Barth's comment implies -

"(The Christian) is no better than the others who do not believe. Like them he is a sinner and is distinguished from them only by the fact that he is beginning to love what he previously hated and to hate what he previously loved." The Christian can only "give a sign" of the divine crisis which had come upon us. Again the distinctions here may appear very small, mere matters of emphasis, however, they arguably point to a genuine theological divergence. If Barth is distinct from Calvin at this point, and the evidence as we have seen is not all in this direction, we are still left with the problem, even granted the distinction, of which is correct.

157. Scots Confession, 1560 Article XIII on "The Cause of 'Guede Workis'."
158. Ibid.
159. Barth, op.cit., p.117.
160. Op.cit., p.120.
The New Testament certainly does speak in quite radical terms of the newness of the Christian's existence, and this does seem to carry the implication of a newness which is visible (I Jn. 5: 18) even under the continuing fact of the believer's sinning. The Bible is also able to speak of a progress in sanctification. (I Jn. 1: 8-10) Berkouwer points out here that "The Scriptures are very emphatic about the connection between good works and the scrutiny of the world. (Phil. 2: 15, Matt. 5: 14-16, Mark 4: 21-23). Others have expressed an unhappiness with Barth in this respect. Emil Brunner writing in 1935 complains that there is nothing to what one hears so often these days - even from those who wish to be Reformation theologians - that while faith brings new life, the new life remains wholly hidden. This teaching is neither reformed nor biblical.164

It could be argued that Barth has since then developed a more adequate view of the Christian life so that it is no longer "wholly hidden". However, our question must still be as to whether such a development is consistent with his theology, i.e. can he really allow in this sense for the grace of God as an intrinsic reality in the life of the believer? i.e. as we put the issue earlier - can he allow, as Calvin by his notion of a discriminating election can - for an ontological distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian?

O'Grady in a recent study of Barth's view of the Church finds him guilty of this charge. Arguing for the view that "God's grace effects in man a new reality, a new being" he criticises Barth in these terms -


162. II Cor. 7: 1; Heb. 12: 14; I Thes. 5: 15; I Cor. 14: 1; I Tim. 6: 11; II Pet. 3: 18; II Thes. 1: 3; Jude 20; 21; I Pet. 2: 3. cf. Berkouwer Faith and Sanctification, Chapter V, p.101ff.


"To say that the Church's sanctity is an ontological reality in Christ alone, and that the subjective action of the Spirit does not intrinsically sanctify Christians; or to say that the holy activities are not the holy activities of the Christian but always Christ's own direct act: I cannot see how these assertions agree with Holy Scripture."166

Now O'Grady is in the main thinking corporately (i.e. ecclesiologically) here and his own position i.e. that of the Second Vatican Council, has problems of its own to cope with, but he does appear to voice, from his own position in the theological spectrum, an unhappiness not unrelated to that expressed by protestant scholars.167

If we argue in this fashion, however, even under the constraint of Scripture, we need to be constantly sensitive to the threat of self-justification which lurks in every notion of an "attained" sanctification. We cannot forget Romans 7. This passage, of course, has not lacked interpreters who would view it as a piece of retrospective thinking on Paul's part referring to his pre-Damascus road experience. A more sophisticated recent version of this would argue that it is Paul's early experience not as he then saw it but as he now sees it, from within faith. (so Bultmann, Kummel and Althaus). Nygren in his Commentary on Romans has in our judgement raised serious problems for both these positions and we follow him in advocating a post-conversion Sitz-im-leben for the passage. By this view the cry of the apostle "O wretched man ..." has a relevance for Christian existence - "As long as this life lasts, there continues the tension between the old aeon and the new, between the heart and the members in the life of the Christian."169 We can never afford to forget this. We are never able to shake off the old man and his works, even our highest spiritual attainments are always a better, never a best. The following testimony is eloquent of all our sanctity -

"Every moment I am faced with the pitfalls of my own being. I pray, and in my prayer my heart is really filled with a genuine surrender to God. I feel that my prayer is a matter of the heart. The words of my prayer come spontaneously from the heart and with strong urgency. No sooner do I rise from my prayer than, for a split moment, like lightning, the thought flashes through my mind, 'I did that very nicely.'"

Keeping this in view we require nonetheless to leave a question mark here over Barth's position rather as we did over Niebuhr's i.e. as to whether he can allow a real 'overcoming' of sin with the experience of faith. However, in one basic and very important respect he is distinct from Niebuhr viz. that he is in no sense a pessimist. It is at this point that we are able to probe more deeply into the reasons for his inability to allow a radically 'new' man in Christian faith. It is not because there is no such man (which is ultimately Niebuhr's position and hence his pessimism), but that he is Jesus Christ alone. Further, Jesus Christ is the One in whom all things were made. The being of man as creature derives from this same Jesus Christ. Thus all men by virtue of their creation in the covenant of grace are ontologically grounded in the being of Jesus Christ in Whom creation and redemption are united in one work of the gracious God. That is, the reason why Barth has to qualify somewhat the notion of a new ontological being given in Christian experience is that the Christian in one sense already possessed this new being prior to his faith, i.e. by virtue of his creation by and in the one Word of God, Jesus Christ, by whose work of atonement the promise contained in creation, man as covenant-partner of God, became a reality. He is the ground of Barth's unquenchable optimism - God triumphant in His grace in Jesus Christ, man reconciled and sanctified in Him. However, and this is the whole question here, it is an optimism with respect to Jesus Christ and the being of man in Him. Thus we are left with the problem we have noted as to what this means for the Christian.

One final question requires to be put as far as Barth is concerned. Does he account sufficiently for the character of the Christian life as a struggle and against demonic powers in particular? This question may seem surprising since we have seen some occasion to query whether he has a sufficient base theologically for the life of sanctification i.e. whether he is sufficiently optimistic in his view of Christian achievement. In fact, however, this query arises from the same Barthian emphasis -the sanctification of man, and the overcoming of sin in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the Christian life has the character of a struggle with evil powers. The testimony of the Scripture is that the struggle with the demonic which characterised the ministry of Jesus was not concluded by his death and resurrection, but that the new people of God as those sent forth in the apostolic succession of Jesus Christ are involved in a similar conflict with a similar foe. Thus while the Scripture rejoices in the victory of God over evil and the devil in Jesus Christ (Jn. 12: 31, 16: 11, Col. 2: 15, Heb. 2: 14, I John 3: 8) it nowhere gives the impression of a fait accompli in the sense that we can think of Satan as a 'non-power' during the period between resurrection and the parousia. The note of joy which rings out from the New Testament Church is the joy of victory - not simply a retrospective rejoicing in the victory of the Christ, but a rejoicing at the implementation and outworking of that once-for-all victory in the ever-new history of the Church. The devil has been fatally wounded but he is not dead. To say this is not to assume that he has a raison d'être in the present, any more than in the past. He is always an enigma, a 'nonsense-factor' in God's world. Yet for all the enigmatic character of his being he is a reality to be reckoned with for the New Testament writers. Barth is less than satisfactory here.

His treatment of the demons has already been touched upon. His "brief look" is commendable from some points of view but as Berkouwer argues - "The manner in which we give this brief look ... must be determined by Scripture." When we view Barth's discussion of sanctification in this light although he can speak of the struggle of Romans 7 as being a reality for Christian experience, he does not find room for the full dimension of the believer's warfare. Putting this issue in another way, we are back with Niebuhr's criticism of Barth at Amsterdam - a realised eschatology which means a loss of a due sense of responsibility as to immediate realities - an issue which leads us on to our next area of consideration - eschatology.

These questions we have put against Barth's construction, however, must not blind us to his immense contribution to the understanding of sanctification i.e. his radical exposure of anthropocentric, self-justifying tendencies in theology, and his pointing the Church back to its heart and centre in a sanctification in Jesus Christ. We must not lose sight of this even if it seems that his intention here is over-theroughly carried through.

C. RELATING THE TWO APPROACHES

In conclusion - and relating Barth to Niebuhr - the basic question in this area is as we saw - "what difference does it make with respect to sin that a man is a Christian?" The crucial issue here as we saw is the being of the Christian man. Can one speak of a new being? i.e. a new ontological determination which arises in conjunction with Christian faith? Neither of our theologians appear able to fully allow this,

174. III/3, pp.519-531.
175. Berkouwer, TGThKB, p.239.
176. IV/1, p.581f, IV/2, pp.583-91.
177. Cf. Wingren Theology in Conflict, p.25 Wingren states baldly "there is no devil in Barth's theology," which appears much too sweeping a statement.
though Barth appears more able to do so than Niebuhr. Their relative views
of sanctification are, however, very illuminating.

Niebuhr is unable to speak of a new being because, quite simply,
there is none such. Revelation even at its highest point in Jesus Christ
on the cross does not radically alter the human situation. It illumines
but does not change. Faith does not alter this situation. Niebuhr hence
is a pessimist in view of the Christian life.

Barth is unable to speak in unqualified terms of a new being, not
because there is none such, but because properly and finally it exists
only in Jesus Christ. In Him it is de jure, a reality for all men, and
de facto, for Christians. Barth's refusal to allow an ontological cleavage
between God's works of creation and redemption is an influential factor here.
Thus although he does not allow a new being within faith in an explicit
sense he can still allow for a new being for all men in Jesus Christ.
That is, revelation is the determination of man, not merely an illumination.
Thus Barth can speak of an overcoming of sin - in Jesus Christ. There is
a new being for all men in Jesus Christ. Barth is an optimist!
Pursuing our second general theme of "the overcoming of sin" we come to the final aspect of our consideration - the eschatological. We are concerned in this chapter with the question of the possibility and nature of a full and final overcoming of sin. Eschatology, by definition, deals with the boundary point in our reflection and this in itself implies that our conclusions here will have large implications for the "being" of sin as well. It is clearly enough at the point of its final overcoming, as we define its proper limit and indicate its boundary possibility, that we learn important truths concerning the nature and status of sin. Barth's conviction that we require to view "being" in closest conjunction with "overcoming" has already been seen to have a measure of truth in it and at this point this view attains a real plausibility. Thus, while we will continue to ask concerning the "overcoming of sin" we will require in this chapter to give attention to the implications of the positions adopted for the "being" of sin as well. It is in view of this width of concern that we have entitled the chapter "Eschatological questions". We will be concerned to ask two questions - what may we hope for in terms of a final overcoming of sin? And further, what does this imply as to the nature of sin itself? In the first instance, this will involve questions as to the Parousia and in turn will raise the issues of judgement and apokatástasis.

A. BARTH'S ESCHATOLOGY

In moving into the area of Barth's eschatology we are, in one respect at least, treading upon dangerous ground since as we have already observed Barth's eschatology is "realised" rather than articulated - he died before he had written it! Our task, however, is not as problematic as this might suggest. Barth's voluminous output and the essential consistency of his thought enable us to indicate the shape of his eschatology with a fair measure of confidence. Even if his profound examination of this theme,
which the production of volume 5 of the Church Dogmatics would have entailed, might have at points, as in his doctrine of election in volume 2, required a "reconstruction" to a greater extent than he had previously imagined necessary, we need not find this lacuna a serious hindrance for our immediate, fairly modest, requirements.

a. Early approach

Eschatology was one of the primary interests of Barth's early writings. Here he shared to some extent in a wider movement associated in particular with the names of Albert Schweitzer\(^2\) and Johannes Weiss\(^3\) which sought to draw attention to the eschatological character of the message of Jesus. Barth's great concern in this early period was to break through the anthropocentricity of the current theology and to point it back to its proper centre in the Living God of the Scriptures, Lord of heaven and earth. Eschatology was the area in which Barth saw the limitations of that theology most sharply exposed and hence where he aimed his blows.\(^4\)

At this stage Barth was deeply influenced by Overbeck\(^5\) and Blumhardt.\(^6\) The latter believed that the supernatural kingdom of God was continually breaking into history in the reality of faith. From Overbeck Barth learned the essentially eschatological character of Christian existence as a radical discontinuity with life in this world. The eschatology which emerged in Romans and Resurrection of the Dead has not unfairly been termed 'timeless eschatology'.\(^7\) The end of history was not envisaged as an end point at the future limit of human history, and hence in a sense within human history. Rather it was a 'beyond in the present', a constant transcendent relation between time and eternity. For example -

1. II/2, preface p.x.
2. A. Schweitzer, Quest of the Historical Jesus (1906).
3. J. Weiss, The preaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God. (1892)
5. Romans, pp.39, 100, 118, 137, 162, 204, 252, 268. Theology and Church, pp.55-73. Torrance Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth, p.71f. Smart, The Divided Mind of Modern Theology, pp.100-104.
6. Romans, 29, 252, 312, 396; Theology and Church, p.55f. II/1, p.634f. Smart, op.cit., p.61.
7. Torrance, op.cit., p.78.
"Last things, as such, are not last things, however great and significant they may be. He only speaks of last things who would speak of the end of all things, of their end understood plainly and fundamentally, of a reality so radically superior to all things that the existence of all things would be utterly and entirely based upon it alone, and thus in speaking of the end he would in truth be speaking of nothing else than their beginning."

In his exegesis - to use the example Barth himself later alluded to as representative of his thought at this point - he takes Romans 13, 11f thus - "Being the transcendent meaning of all moments, the eternal 'moment' can be compared with no moment in time." It was statements such as this which earned his theology the title 'theology of crisis' and 'dialectical theology'. In retrospect, while defending the general intention of this viewpoint in the light of the then current situation, Barth admits its weakness. In essence this lay in his failure at that stage to take really seriously the 'post-temporality of God' i.e. the 'end' as a real end towards which history is moving. In fact it was only as Barth carried his thought forward to this new appreciation of the futurist dimension of eschatology that he really escaped the mistaken one-sided stress on the supra-temporality of God which characterised the theology he was attempting to criticise. This change of direction is crucial for a relation of Barth to Niebuhr as we shall discover in a moment.

b. Maturer position

In the Church Dogmatics Barth has remained consistent to this new appreciation of the futurist reference point in the Biblical eschatological teaching -

"Man here and now reconciled to God will be redeemed. Eternity is also this 'then', just as it is the 'once' before all time and the 'now' over all time. Eternity is also the goal and the end beyond which and over which another goal and end cannot exist. All roads necessarily lead to it ... It is the perfection which remains, so that over and beyond it there is no new horizon. This perfection is God Himself in His post-temporality."

9. II/1, p.635.
11. II/1, p.635.
13. II/1, p.629.
Just how fully Barth has come to incorporate the futurist standpoint into his eschatology is indicated in his last volume, on the doctrine of reconciliation. Speaking of the work of Christ he writes -

"As the revealer of His work He has not yet reached His goal. He is still moving towards it. He is marching from its beginning in the revelation of His life to the end of His not yet accomplished revelation of the life of all men and all creation as enclosed in His life, of their life as the new creation on a new earth and under a new heaven. In his prophetic work He moves from the one Easter Day to the day of all days, to the last day, to the day of His final and conclusive return."  

Thus far we have indicated the significant role of eschatology in Barth's development and seen how he has moved from a 'timeless eschatology' to an appreciation of the futurist reference of the New Testament's eschatological perspective. We will now attempt to fill in other elements of his eschatology.

i. **Eschatology as Parousia**

First we would stress that for Barth eschatology is at its heart essentially **Parousia**; i.e. it is the personal coming of Jesus Christ at the end of human history. The Christian hope is not a hoping in general that somehow "everything will turn out alright in the end", and we will "all live happily ever after"; nor is it simply one form of a diffuse apocalypticism wherein some ultimate and undefined crisis lies at the limit of man's history; nor for that matter is it simply an extension of Old Testament eschatological perspectives wherein the chief actor in the final drama is some fiery divine potentate pouring out wrath and judgements.

The Christian hope as Barth understands it, is quite particular and unique, and the God who acts at this terminal point in human history is a quite particular and unique God. He is the God known and active in Jesus Christ as the framer and fuller of the eternal covenant of grace. The Christian hopes for **this Lord**. Barth makes this point in particular in relation to any kind of human hopefulness which inevitably as such must be equivocal and contradictory, a hoping against hope. Because it is the Parousia that the Christian anticipates, the personal coming of Jesus Christ,

14. In I, p.327; cf. also other passages where this futurist note is struck - I/1, p.530f; I/2, p.116ff; 875ff; 882f; II/1, p.626ff; IV/1, p.112f; 323ff; 603ff; IV/2, p.288f. Also Barth's criticism in IV/5, p.912 of the "pan-eschatological dream" of recent theology whereby eschatology is seen as the pervasive perspective and meaning of the whole gamut of Christian truth. Barth is not arguing of course for purely futurist eschatology as we shall shortly see.
his hope is unqualified and assured -

"What the man who hopes as a Christian expects is not twilight. It is not light and also shadow, good and also evil, salvation and also destruction. It is unequivocally and uninterruptedly light and good and salvation. For the One whom he sees before Him is unequivocally and uninterruptedly God, the living God in His grace and righteousness and mercy and glory, the God towards whom he can go, not with a mixture of confidence and suspicion but only with confidence...Grounded in God, namely in the God who acts in Jesus Christ, and orientated on Him, Christian hope is an uninterrupted and unequivocally positive expectation of the future, and it is only on this basis that we may legitimately and meaningfully raise the question of the future possibility and reality of Christian existence."15

Barth at this point is prepared to put a question mark even against Calvin's construction as bearing signs of appealing to some extent to this general human hopefulness in the guise of a Christian hopefulness. Our attention must be directed not to "the Christian awaiting his future, but God in Jesus Christ who is his future."17 At this point no less than with respect to the Christian's faith and justification and the Christian's love and sanctification we need to hear the words Christus pro nobis.

"As the subject of the faith and love of the Christian Jesus Christ is also the subject of his hope. As He came for the justification and sanctification of the Christian so, according to the equation of 1 Timothy 1, 1, He is objectively already his hope; i.e. the theme and goal and basis of his subjective hope.18

By his concentration on the person of Christ in His coming as the heart of his eschatology Barth is able to relate the futurist dimension to the other terms of his doctrine. Thus the One who will come is the One who has come, and the One who still comes. The futurist hope is not an appendage to God's redemptive work. It is not a more or less arbitrary act of power to put right once for all what man so consistently puts wrong. Rather it is the inevitable and consistent culmination of the work of God in the past and present, the 'logically' necessary "final step" in the argument of grace -

15. IV/3, pp.907-8 and 909-10.
16. IV/3, p.914.
17. IV/3
18. IV/3, p.915.
"As the One He was and is, He will also come and be for ever and therefore in all future time. Even in its commencement and continuation His prophecy is secretly but very really full of completion. It is already the presence and pronouncement of His last Word. The one parousia of the one Jesus Christ in its first and second forms is like an arrow pointing to the third. It moves irresistibly in the direction of His final coming. Its word is in every respect a promise of His not yet manifested universal, exclusive and ultimate glory, of His appearing as Judge of the quick and the dead." 19

In particular Barth links the return of Christ in glory with his Resurrection from the dead. Speaking of the situation of the Christian community he thinks of it as lying between the two parousiae of Christ, i.e. His visible presence and action in the forty days after the first Easter, and His visible presence and action at His return -

"The (Christian community) has the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its ears. It lives with it and by it. It reproduces it. But this message as such is only of a First, a beginning. Of course it is a beginning - this is what makes it so powerful - which includes in itself and indicates the end and the whole. The First is the first fruits, who, risen again from the dead, is the judge of the quick and the dead ... and yet as the message of the revelation of the One He is, it is only a beginning - the message of His first parousia which, as such, is aimed and pointed at His second ... "20

The relationship between these two parousiae indeed is such that the first could conceivably have led directly to, and become, the second. All that will happen at the second is already in essence accomplished in the first. To proclaim Jesus Christ risen from the dead is to proclaim the One who returns in glory. To proclaim the returning Lord is to proclaim the One who rose from the dead in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. 21

It is important here to make quite explicit what has been implicit in the last few paragraphs - viz. that the parousia of Jesus Christ has to a great extent the function of an unveiling or disclosing. It is not so much for Barth the launching of a final and decisive conquest as the uncovering and proclaiming of a conquest already decisively ended in the first parousia of Jesus Christ. Thus while the futurist dimension of Barth's eschatology must not be minimised his eschatology as a whole falls more under the title of "realised" than "futurist". It was in the death and resurrection of Christ that sin, death, hell and all the totality of

19. Ibid.
20. IV/1, p.726.
21. IV/1, p.734.
das Nichtige were properly and irreparably routed. -

"(Nichtige) has already been judged, refuted and done away
by the mercy of God revealed and active in Jesus Christ, or,
in other words ... basically it can be reviewed and inter¬
preted only in prospect of the fact that this refutation
and termination will be generally revealed in the return of
Jesus Christ."22

In relation to our primary concern, the idea of sin, there are two
aspects of eschatology which are especially of significance - the
question of the implications of eschatology for the being of sin; and the
related question of the idea of judgement.

ii. Eschatology and the overcoming of sin

Taking up the first of these, the theme we have pursued in these last
three chapters has been the "Overcoming of Sin". We have observed how
within their respective positions Barth and Niebuhr think of this over¬
coming in the areas of justification and sanctification. The full and
final overcoming of sin, however, belongs to the area of eschatology.
Hence we formulate the question here - in what sense does Barth see
eschatology, the parousia of Christ, as a final overcoming of sin, and what
implications does this hold for his view of sin's "being"?
As to the first
part of this question Barth certainly looks for the return of Christ to
accomplish the full, visible triumph of God over every threat to His Lord¬
ship -

"...the last parousia of Jesus Christ, when His consummating
revelation takes place, when the fulfilment of what God has
done in Him is redemptively revealed, when the rising sun chases
the shadows, and irradicates and removes and dispels all dubiety
and frailty. In hoping in Jesus Christ, the Christian hopes for
the glory of God investing the whole creation of God of every
time and place with unspotted and imperishable glory."23

This doxological vision of a renewed creation at the return of Jesus Christ
Barth sees already in promise in the Resurrection of Christ from the dead -

22. III/3, p.366.
23. IV/3, p.915.
"The verdict of God pronounced in His Resurrection tells us that He not only was and is, but also will be, not only at the end of time but as Himself the end of time......
The verdict of God forbids the men of the N.T. to be satisfied with Jesus Christ as the one who was, as the one who is in the time of the community in the world which follows, as the One who will continue to be that time .... The verdict of God commands that they should look afresh to Himself beyond the whole present manifestation of the alteration of the human situation as accomplished in and by Him, beyond all the deduction which they themselves can now draw from it. It commands that they should look afresh to Himself as the final future of the world and man, their own ultimate and definitive future."24

Hence -

"Already, in celebrating Easter, the Christian may celebrate the dawn of the Last Day on which the veil will be taken away and everything that ever was and is and will be will be set in the light of God, divested of its dubiety and frailty and therefore redeemed."25

Thus eschatology, the hope of the parousia of Jesus Christ, means for Barth the hope which Easter affirms to be a sure and concrete hope, of the final overcoming of sin. It will be destroyed, removed, annihilated and banished to the nothingness from which it emerged. Barth's confidence here, as the allusions to the Resurrection indicate, lies in the victory over evil attained in the first parousia of Christ. In his discussion of das Nichtige Barth refers to this victory -

"What is das Nichtige? In the knowledge and confession of the Christian faith i.e. looking retrospectively to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and prospectively to His coming again there is only one answer possible. Das Nichtige is the past, the ancient menace, danger and destruction, the ancient non-being which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God but which is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ in whose death it has received its deserts being destroyed with this consummation of the positive will of God which is as such the end of His non-willing. Because Jesus is Victor das Nichtige is routed and extirpated."26

24. IV/1, p.334. cf. pp.309-332 and 725-739; also III/4, p.35 in relation to the Sabbath.
25. IV/3, p.916. cf. III/2, p.490 "For us ... the resurrection and the parousia are not two separate events. But for Him they are a single event. The resurrection is the anticipation of His parousia and His parousia is the fulfillment of the resurrection."
This qualification of sin Barth is particularly concerned to stress in relation to the question of sin's perpetuity - and here the implications for the being of sin become apparent.

iii. Eschatology and the "being" of sin

Barth argues that when God's work with respect to das Nichtige, His opus alienum, reaches its culmination, which it attains at the future parousia of Jesus Christ, das Nichtige will cease its absurd existence. - "God is indeed eternally holy, pure, distinct, and separated from the evil which is das Nichtige. But this does not mean that He must always strive with this adversary, enduring its opposition and resistance, and Himself exercising His jealousy, wrath and judgement upon it. Surely He will also be holy, and all the more so, when judgement is executed, when the triumph of His love is unchallenged and boundless, and therefore when He is the God who no longer has to do with an enemy but only with His creature. If He now has to do with das Nichtige it is only that He may have to do with it no more, but only with His creature in eternally triumphant love. No eternal enemy is needed for this. And because das Nichtige is His enemy, because it is He who allows it to be this, because He has made the controversy with it His affair, it cannot be an eternal enemy or have perpetuity."27

The eschatological perspective then as the culmination of the work of God in overcoming sin is the promise and proclamation of the essential qualification of the "being" of sin. Barth by this appears to exclude all dualistic solutions to the problem of sin and evil. Sin is denied any possibility of paralleling and balancing the being of God. It is hence denied any final autonomy. Its existence is not self-generated or self-sustaining. It is qualified, limited, conditioned. In the work of Christ in His first parousia it has been mortally wounded. At His second parousia it will be finally annihilated and excluded.

It is just here however that a certain question requires to be put - is Barth able to exclude the perpetuity of sin and to excise all dualistic shadows as easily as has thus far appeared?28 Barth has found the origin

27. III/3, pp.360-2.
28 The fact that the eschatological area raises the question of the "being" of sin implies that we require at this point to return to certain issues which we discussed in our chapter on ontological questions. In particular there is the question of the category of das Nichtige. We are not here attempting to break new ground as far as that discussion went but simply raising the question of das Nichtige once more in the special light of eschatology. This explains why we have held back this further consideration of das Nichtige to this point.
of evil and sin in the decision and action of God in the creation.

Expounding Genesis 1, 2 he speaks of -

"... that which denied by God's will and act, belongs only to the non-recurring past of commencing time. It is that which is excluded from all present and future existence, i.e. chaos, the world fashioned otherwise than according to the divine purpose, and therefore formless and intrinsically impossible."29

He elsewhere speaks of Genesis 1, 2 as "...the most impressive mention of das Nichtige in the Bible."30 This same relation of the origin of das Nichtige to God's action in creation occurs in another place in this way -

"God created light, approved it, divided it from darkness, and called it day, but the darkness He called night (Genesis, 1, 3-5). In the power - that is, in the negative power - of the divine creating approving, dividing and calling there enters in with the creature that which in all these things is marked off from it, and it enters in with menacing power, the power of the denial of that which God has affirmed, as the non-being which does not exist, as that which is so absolutely opposed and hostile to the creature, as that which is not, chaos. It is not an adversary to God, but only the shadow of His work which both arises and is at once dispelled by His wrath."31

It is at this point, in his relation of the "being" and origin of das Nichtige so closely and directly to the non-willing of God - ("It lives only by the fact that it is what God does not will. But it does live by this fact."32) - that the question of the perpetuity of das Nichtige arises and the eschatological perspective immediately rears up. If God's willing is "powerful and effective"33 in this negative sense then will it not always be so? If God's creative and affirming Yes implies a deep destructive and denying No which is also strangely creative - why will this cease to be the case in the eschaton? Will preservation there cease to have the meaning of a redemption?34 If so, why? In other words, by binding das Nichtige so closely to the divine willing and hence apparently removing any possibility of dualism is Barth not exposed to a subtle reappearance of dualism as the inevitable implication of the future willing of God? Van Oyen has raised this problem for Barth.35 He accuses him of a repetition of the oriental mythology of the promordial struggle between light and darkness. In face of this we require to ask again whether Barth's argument for the final overcoming of sin is really consistent.

30. II/3, p. 352.
31. II/3, p. 77 cf. also II/2, p. 141; II/3, pp. 351-2; III/2, p. 143.
32. III/3, p. 352.
to express unhappiness with Barth's exposition of the origin of das Nichtige and to acknowledge a degree of truth in critics who have detected a foreign, speculative element in his account in contradiction of his own principle which would deny the place of such speculative ideas in theology.\footnote{36} We need, however, in weighing this criticism to keep before us Barth's central concern - to view das Nichtige in the light of God's gracious action against it - and to see in the triumph of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the promise and proclamation of His total victory over das Nichtige. At this point, and in this concern Barth would appear to be faithfully reflecting the Biblical testimony and his conclusion as to the non-perpetuity of das Nichtige in the eschaton would accord with this viewpoint. At the secondary level, however, when we consider the way in which Barth has drawn lines from the creating will of God to the origin of das Nichtige Barth's account would appear to raise problems. If we accept that das Nichtige is due to the "powerful and effective" character of the positive willing of God in its negative effect and yet wish at the same time to affirm that this "dialectic" is not a "necessary" one but that we can anticipate a future situation in which God's Yes will no longer imply a No then we have the problem of giving an adequate justification of this new state of affairs. If we point to the work of Christ as the ground of this new situation we seem to have a real problem in that the work of Christ now appears to have primary reference to God rather than to das Nichtige itself, i.e. it achieves the elimination of the negative overtones of the positive will of God rather than the direct overcoming of das Nichtige itself. The real root of Barth's difficulties here is that while the Cross and Empty Tomb imply the end and overcoming of das Nichtige they do not imply so clearly the Yes/No dialectic which Barth wishes to maintain\footnote{33. III/3, p.352. 34. The passage above occurs under the head of "The Diving Preserving within Barth's treatment of providence. It is here made clear that for him preservation always has the character of redemption. 35. H. van Oyen, De Categorie der 'reconitio' en de theoloische anthropologie, in Pro Regno Pro Sanctuario, 1950, p.346. cited Berkouwer, op.cit., p.247. 36. J. Hick, op.cit., p.186f. Berkouwer op.cit., p.221f: cf. discussion in chapter three on ontological and epistemological questions.}
in His doctrine of creation. It is significant that Genesis 1, 2 should be thought the "most impressive" reference to das Nichtige in Scripture. Barth's exposition at that point is singularly barren of exegetical support, and of Christological testimony in particular. He would appear to have been better to restrict himself to speaking of the "mystery" of the "being" and "origin" of this dimension, and to an affirmation of God's Lordship over it as proclaimed in the gospel and refrained from attempting to indicate so precisely the relation between this mysterious origin and the Lordship of God in His work of creation.

iv Eschatology and Judgement

Turning to the second important eschatological question with reference to the doctrine of sin we look at Barth's doctrine of judgement. The basis of Barth's view of judgement is laid in his exposition of the doctrine of God. Here in his discussion of the attributes, or, as he prefers to call them, the perfections of God, he takes up the meaning of holiness and righteousness when applied to God and their relation to His grace and mercy. We have already seen cause to note the central place that the idea of grace holds in Barth's thought and for his understanding of God in particular.39

"In grace we have characterised God Himself, the One God in all His fulness. We are not wrong, we do not overlook or neglect anything, if we affirm that His love, and therefore His whole being in all the heights and depths of the Godhead, is simply grace."38

The very being and essence of God is grace.39 God's holiness is to be thought of as a 'filling out' and clarification of what we understand by grace -

"God's loving is a divine being and action distinct from every other loving in that it is holy. As holy it is characterised by the fact that God, as He seeks and creates fellowship is always the Lord. He therefore distinguishes and maintains His own will as against every other will."38

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38. II/1, p.358.
39. III/1, p.359; II/2, p.95 "... the God whose essence is grace"; cf. also II/1, p.393; 554; II/2, p.91; III/2, p.164; IV/1, p.42; IV/3, p.81; God in Action, p.83; Dogmatics in Outline, p.44.
40. II/1, p.359.
There must be no shadow of opposition of dialectic as far as the grace of God and the holiness of God are concerned -

"When we speak of grace we think of the freedom in which God turns His inclination, good will and favour towards another. When we speak of holiness, we think of this same freedom which God proves by the fact that in His turning towards the other He remains true to Himself and makes His own will prevail. How can we properly separate these two aspects?"41

Similarly with the notions of God's mercy and His righteousness42 the latter has to be understood within the former and not in antithesis to it.43

It is in this context that Barth goes on to speak of the judgement of God -

"It is ... only as God affirms His victorious goodwill, as the concept of His grace implies, that what holiness especially denotes is true and actual - the aloofness with which God stands over against the resistance He encounters, His judgement upon sin. He exercises this judgement in such a way that it can be manifest and truly appreciated and experienced as divine judgement only in this way, the way of grace."44

The idea of judgement then is bound to the ideas of grace and mercy. Barth will allow it no autonomy. There must be no suggestion of a breach in the unity of the divine Being. God is, in every respect the God revealed and active in Jesus Christ and hence the gracious one. The judgement of God is therefore the judgement of this gracious God. His judgement is the judgement of His grace, i.e. "an expansion of His grace."45 "To grasp this it must be realised that the communication of His grace is an expression of His judgement. It is as God forgives sins in His mercy that He judges."46

41. II/1, p.360.  
42. II/1, p.368ff.  
43. Cf. II/1, p.375 "We are not concerned with a second thing side by side with a first but ... in both cases we have to do with one and the same thing."  
44. II/1, p.361.  
45. II/1, p.382; cf. also IV/3, pp.922, 928.  
46. II/1, p.382.
Barth is aware that the eschatological perspective has more commonly been seen in terms of a great and everlasting either/or. This "symmetrical approach" he thinks to be that of "heathen eschatology". "Scripture never puts these two ways before our eyes. We are not called by its summons to stand at this critical point." 47 The judgement of God as the judgement of His grace has to be thought of in a quite specific manner, and here we encounter the implicit axiom of his whole approach -

"...the real judgement of God is alone the crucifixion of Christ, and the terror of this event is that it is the reality which all other judgements upon Israel, the world and mankind can only foreshadow or reflect. The awfulness of the crucifixion of Christ is that in it the real essence of all the Old Testament threats and executions of judgement, i.e. the revelation of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1, 18) without which the revelation is not divine revelation - was embodied in a unique event." 48

"The divine judgement itself in its reality is only what happened at Golgotha." 49

It is hence "As God is gracious to us in Jesus Christ He judges us." 50 Barth gives a fuller account of this "judgement of God" as the judgement of His grace executed in Jesus Christ in his treatment of reconciliation under the title "The Judge judged in our Place". 51 Here Barth spells out the full story of this mighty action of God's grace whereby He took the place of sinful man and died in our place (Jesus pro nobis). The important point, however, is the nature of this event, viz. that it was a bearing of our judgement - "What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgement of us men by Himself taking our place as man and in our place undergoing the judgement under which we had passed." 52 This judgement has been executed on Jesus Christ, and on all men in Him. Barth is here drawing implicitly on his earlier exposition of the doctrine of election and of double predestination in particular whereby Jesus Christ is both elected man and rejected man. 53 Jesus Christ is the object of the eternal rejection of God -

47. II/1, p. 393.
48. II/1, p. 396.
49. II/1, p. 406.
50. II/2, p. 733; cf. this whole section pp. 733-781; also I/2, p. 36; I/2, p. 97.
51. IV/1, pp. 211-283.
52. IV/1, p. 222.
"The man rejected by God is the man who because of his sin and guilt is denied and repudiated by the righteous judgement and sentence of God, and transferred to the utterly untenable condition of Satan and his kingdom. He is the man abandoned to eternal perdition. He is the man whom this befits, and who had to suffer that which befits him, because he has challenged and drawn upon himself the destructive hostility of God. To be the rejected of God is the threat whose fulfilment would be the inevitable lot of every single human life. And it is this threat which in the election of Jesus Christ is diverted to Him, the one, and in that way from all others ... There is only One rejected, the bearer of all man's sin and guilt and their enduring punishment, and this one is Jesus Christ."54

Because the judgement and holy wrath of God and His rejection of man is in the fact gathered up and borne in and by Jesus Christ Barth rejects every notion of judgement as an eternal rejection by God of sinners. -

"No eternal covenant of wrath corresponds on the one side to the eternal covenant of grace on the other ... The rejection of mankind is the rejection borne eternally and therefore for all time by Jesus Christ in the power of divine self-giving."55

Jesus Christ bore this eternal judgement in His death at Golgotha. It is in the light of these realities that Barth comes to speak of future judgement. As we have seen this has a meaning for him. There is a real terminal point to human history and the Biblical eschatological terms are relevant to it, including judgement.56 Judgement in its future reference, as we would expect from his doctrine as already expounded, has the basic character of a disclosure and unveiling of the one judgement already executed in the Cross of Christ -

"The community knows that it is the world which God has already reconciled to Himself in Jesus Christ. It knows that the judgement upon it has already been executed. It knows its justification accomplished on the cross of Golgotha. By and in this faith in it it lives. In the oneness of this faith it is gathered as the Christian community. In this faith it is in the world, itself worldly. In this faith it is carried as on eagled wings to the glory of the second and final parousia of Jesus Christ; that is to the universal, direct and definitive revelation and vision of the Judge who justifies sinful humanity and of the sinful humanity justified by Him."57

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54. II/2, p.346.
55. II/2, p.450.
56. II/2, p.625; II/2, p.133; III/2, pp.115, 511; III/4, 5,8; IV/1, p.31; IV/1, p.17f, 206, 376; IV/2, pp.142, 548, 615, 634, 658; IV/3, p.293, 319, 675; IV/4, pp.7, 122.
57. IV/1, p.727. cf. Ibid., p.662; IV/2, p.111; IV/2, p.142; IV/3, p.293f.
As he puts it more succinctly in his *Dogmatics in Outline*:

"Jesus Christ comes to meet the church and the world, as the goal of the time that is coming to an end, in order to make visible, finally and for all people the decision taken in Him - God's grace and kingdom as the measure by which the whole of humanity and every single existence is measured."\(^{58}\)

There is, however, no last judgement in general:

"For Jesus Christ really comes from heaven as he who sits at the right hand of God, therefore as the Risen One, therefore as the Revealer of the reconciliation accomplished in Him, therefore in fact as the Judge who anticipated the judgement for us and through whose punishment we are righteous. Dare we forget that and cancel it out in favour of an abstract divine, or rather all too human picture of a judge?"\(^{59}\)

The question remains, however, as to whether such a position can be squared with the Scriptural witness. The New Testament certainly speaks of the cross as a judgement\(^{60}\) but the cross clearly does not exhaust the scope of reference of the idea. There is clearly a futurist reference to judgement and this is spoken of in more critical terms than a disclosure of the cross.\(^{61}\) The Biblical writers speak in the most solemn terms of a judgement which awaits all men at the end of time as we know it.\(^{62}\) Only those who believe have any cause for rejoicing in anticipation, and even the believers have cause for seriousness.\(^{63}\)

Barth is unable to properly reflect this Biblical testimony. In particular one misses in his discussion a fuller attention to the parables of judgement.

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\(^{58}\) *Dogmatics in Outline*: p.129; cf. too p.133f.

\(^{59}\) *Credo*, pp.123-4.

\(^{60}\) John 12: 31.


\(^{63}\) II Cor. 5: 10, I Pet. 1: 17, I Cor. 3: 13.
v. The Question of Universalism

If, as Barth insists, the judgement of God has been passed once for all on the whole race in Jesus Christ, and if, as he insists, this excludes the possibility of a future eternal judgement of sinners\(^{64}\) then we have sharply raised the question of universal salvation, apokatastasis, and in and with it the character of human sinning since if we cannot bring ourselves under judgement how significant is our sin? From what we have indicated thus far it should be clear that Barth has most of the ingredients for a doctrine of apokatastasis. All men are elect in Christ who for all men executes the eternal covenant; or putting this in terms of judgement, Christ as the one who was reprobate from eternity in His death bears in Himself for all men and bears away for all men the judgement which sin brings upon all men. It remains simply to note a final area where Barth carries these presuppositions into his discussion of faith,\(^{65}\) i.e. where he relates the objective prop or nobis to the subjective situation of the individual.

"Faith does not stand or hover somewhere in face of the possibility of unbelief (which is not a possibility but the solid actuality of sinful man). It is not itself a mere possibility grand and attractive but impotent and useless like all mere possibilities. It has itself the character of an actuality - an actuality which is absolutely superior to that other actuality. In this superiority it is not a mere alternative to unbelief. It is not a mere chance of proposition. It is not for man to choose first whether he himself will decide (what an illusion!) for faith or for unbelief. Faith makes the solid actuality of unbelief an impossibility. It sweeps it away ... with the divine No and Yes spoken in Jesus Christ the root of human unbelief, the man of sin, is pulled out. In its place there is put the root of faith, the new man of obedience. For this reason unbelief has become an objective, real and ontological impossibility and faith an objective real and ontological necessity for all men and for every man. In the justification of the sinner which has taken place in Jesus Christ these have both become an event which comprehends all men."

If unbelief is an "ontological impossibility" then the final knot would appear to be tied binding Barth to universalism. Barth, however, refuses to see himself as a universalist. Indeed he explicitly repudiates this view.

\(^{64}\) II/2, p.733ff; II/1, p.397; IV/2, p.568; IV/4, p.80.
\(^{65}\) IV/1, pp.740-779.
\(^{66}\) IV/1, pp.746-7.
"If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it (the circle of the redeemed) must and finally will be coincident with the world of man as such (as in the doctrine of the so called apokatastasis). No such right or necessity can legitimately be deduced. Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so He does not need to elect or call all mankind. His election and calling do not give rise to any historical metaphysics, but only to the necessity of attesting them on the ground that they have taken place in Jesus Christ and His community. But, again, in grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the opposite statement — that there cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling."  67

Apokatastasis can never be finally affirmed. To do so would be to inhibit the freedom of God in the sense that it would imply that God was determined in His action by a particular human situation. The truth, however, is that the only God who is the God known and active in Jesus Christ, i.e. the God who is love in Himself and who freely ad extra chooses to love man and to die for him. Thus apokatastasis can never be affirmed. On the other side it can equally never be finally denied. Barth takes this more positive approach to it in His essay "The Humanity of God". Although claiming that he cannot be interpreted "for or against" universalism 68 he makes three positive points with respect to it — we ought not to react with panic when it is mentioned; passages such as Colossians 1: 19 give us reason to hope for it; those who reject it out of hand may well be in danger of the greater error, namely a "sullen and dismal" legalism. He concludes —

"One thing is sure, that there is no theological justification for setting any limits on our side to the friendliness of God towards man which appeared in Jesus Christ — it is our theological duty to see and to understand that as even greater than we had done before." 70

67. II/2, pp.417-8. cf. also II/2, p.422.
68. GGG, p.49.
69. Ibid., p.50.
70. Ibid., p.50. cf. IV/3, p.478 where Barth counsels us to "hope and pray cautiously and yet distinctly, for it."
Barth's hesitation here is in keeping with the profound sense of the Lordship of God which has been characteristic of his theology from its earliest beginnings. 'God is in heaven and thou upon earth.' Hence there can be no confident expectation of universal salvation—just because this confidence would be only too readily a false confidence, a self-confidence, rather than one born only of the utter mercifulness of the divine love, which comes to man ad extra in the overflowing of divine compassion. Salvation is of God—and it will be of God alone in the end as in the beginning. They cannot count upon it. We can only receive it ever and anew as a gift—as grace.  

Despite Barth's refusal to espouse apokatastasis there have not been lacking critics who have wished to carry him to what they see as the logic of his presuppositions. Brunner charges him with going "much further than the previous upholders of universalism. His basic charge against Barth is that his position cannot be squared with the N.T. witness. Theologically, the error as Brunner sees it, lies in what in other respects is Barth's strength, viz. his objectivism, by which revelation and faith are placed at radically different levels. Brunner thinks that Christ and faith in the N.T. are "on exactly the same level." As a result of this objectivism and the relativising of the place of faith in salvation Barth planes down and finally denies any radical difference between the believer and the unbeliever. Because of the objective decision of God in Jesus Christ taken for all men all are saved whether they believe it or not. In respect of the judgement they are like sailors in a storm who appear to be perishing but who are in actual fact in shallow water where they cannot drown. Their only trouble is that they do not know it. Berkouwer has also voiced disquiet at this level. He notes Barth's concern to speak of unbelief as "highly dangerous" but comments — "It is impossible, however, to see why unbelief should be so dangerous if the divine decision cannot be undone nor the sword of wrath strike twice." Hence "no serious kerygmatic significance" can be ascribed to unbelief. Where can the danger of the final judgement lie? Exegetically, he draws attention to

71. III/2, p.101; IV/3, p.81f.
73. Ibid., p.350.
74. II/2, p.496.
75. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, p.198.
76. Berkouwer, TGThKB, p.267.
"These words do not leave room for the view that the human decision has already been taken, is given and is involved in the encounter with revelation. We see rather the components that are involved in the full flight of concrete reality. We hear about the proclaimed Word which was heard but which was not profitable because it was not accompanied by faith. The word did indeed sovereignly reach the hearers in accordance with the divine mandate to preach the gospel. But there was no profit, no benefit. In unbelief, in the dark recesses of the unbelieving heart it broke off. The fact is taken with full apostolic seriousness. The N.T. speaks of belief and unbelief as a choice, a serious, if you will, a decisive choice."77

J.D. Bettis has challenged Brunner and Berkouwer at this point and argued in Barth's defence. 78 He sees Brunner and Berkouwer as representatives respectively of the armninian and double decree solutions to the question of apokakastasis. Barth holds neither of these but this does not imply, as the others imagine, that he hence espouses of necessity the third possibility - universalism. 79 The heart of Barth's view is his concern to preserve the freedom of God's love. This means that God's love is not merely of His love for sinners disclosed in the incarnation and atonement. God is love in Himself independently of His love for an relationship to man. The mistake of Berkouwer and others lies in their failure to see this and hence for them, God's being love implies that He must save all men. He does not do so (as they hold). Thus He is not simply love but also wrath, i.e. a false and unnecessary dualism in the being of God makes its appearance. 80 It is, however, Bettis argues, precisely this refusal to ground God's being as love upon a relationship of blessing to the creature which enables Barth to reject universalism because it is no longer possible to draw logical lines from a notion of what God is (in a sentimental analogy of human love) to what God will inevitably do (save all men). 81 Divine retribution is hence both a possibility and a reality. It is "the attitude of the God of love toward disobedience ... nullifying its creativity, effectiveness and vitality." 82 Disobedience is the

77. Berkouwer, TGTKB, p.220 cf. also 1 Cor. 15, 1-2 which speaks of a possibility of believing in vain.
80. Ibid., pp.427-8.
81. Ibid., pp.428-430.
82. Ibid., p.430.
attempt to give significance to action independent of God. God's love (retribution) renders this attempt vacuous. The life of disobedience is thus a life of futility; a life denied autonomy and hence devoid of ontological basis, an impossible possibility. It is nonetheless a terrible possibility in the sense that God does not destroy the disobedient man but in the faithfulness of His love holds him in being even as he dashes himself against God's love in hell. The threat of eternal rejection "remains a real threat." Betts argues and quotes Barth -

"To the man who persistently tries to change the truth into untruth, God does not owe eternal patience and therefore deliverance any more than He owes those provisional manifestations. We should be denying and disarming that evil attempt and our own participation in it, if, in relation to ourselves or others or all men, we were to permit ourselves to postulate a withdrawal of that threat and in this sense to expect or maintain an apokatastasis or universal reconciliation as the goal and end of all things."

This essential freedom of God's love implies that man can never secure himself against the threat of reprobation. What security can then be offered? It lies in the subjective aspect of the work of Christ whereby He enables individual men and women to participate by faith in His own divine life and being. This, however, does not mean the removal of all threat but the threat for the man of faith "does not terrify and debilitates."

Betts concludes -

"...the real basis for the rejection of universalism is not divine freedom but is rather the grace of God revealed in Christ. Barth rejects universalism because the premise of its argument is that God's love is good because it saves men. But even more to the point, Barth rejects universalism because it does not adequately indicate the wonderful way in which God really saves men, by enabling them to participate as men in His divine life of love."

Betts certainly presents an attractive case for Barth both in distinguishing him from universalism and in advocating his position as the correct approach to the question. Certain questions remain however.

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83. Ibid., p.433.
85. art.cit., p.435.
86. art.cit., p.436.
Fundamental to Barth's view as Bettis expounds it is his notion that the love of God for man is merely His love ad extra. This enables Barth to hold God's being as love at arm's length, as it were, from its being governed and controlled by human analogies of love, and also from logicalising tendencies. This "holding at arm's length" however raises certain problems. In Barth's approach it is rooted in the freedom of God in His love. When we set him beside Berkouwer, as Bettis does, there would seem to be a certain broad similarity of approach. In Berkouwer's case universalism is avoided by an appeal to God's holiness (wrath) as alongside His love. In Barth's case it is avoided by an appeal to God's freedom. Barth would of course wish to speak of the freedom of God's love whereas Berkouwer would speak of His holiness and His love. Berkouwer by this can anchor reprobation in the being of God as His holy wrath against sin. Barth cannot anchor reprobation so directly in the being of God. It "is" only as a mode of the divine love and one which in the light of God's triumphant love in Jesus Christ can only be as an "impossible possibility". Thus far Barth's construction commends itself as avoiding a dualistic view of God and His works and as reflecting the victory of Jesus Christ over all His enemies. However if the distinction between salvation and reprobation is more than a nominalistic one it must have some co-relate in being. Barth sees this, according to Bettis, in the reaction of the free divine love to human obedience on the one hand and human disobedience on the other. God has "quite different attitudes" to these two human reactions to His grace. If we ask what these different reactions imply concretely, i.e. as to the destiny of the obedient as against the destiny of the disobedient man, we are required it appears, to point to heaven and hell. Thus there is something in God which resists man's sinful disobedience to such a degree that it can imply the retribution of man. But is this so different from what Berkouwer would describe as the holiness of God? There is a general difference in the effect of the two approaches in that Barth's, because of his refusal to root the distinction in the being of God (love and holiness) tends to a relativising of the distinction between salvation and reprobation.

87. art.cit., p.433.
Not surprisingly this causes problems at the point of the assurance of salvation. Bettis admits this. He even poses the question as to whether Barth attributes enough to the work of Christ. His solution here is as we have seen to point to Barth's stress on justification by faith. The subjective application of the work of Christ brings deliverance from fear though the threat of eternal rejection is not removed by Christ. Thus Bettis believes Barth is able to give a crucial place to faith and the kerygmatic situation. The question arises however as to the relation of this situation and that indicated in the N.T., and behind this issue a query to Barth's approach in general. It is difficult to see in the New Testament a view of faith whereby every threat of eternal rejection is not removed. Indeed it is in face of this precise threat that faith is said at times to operate (John 3, 16 and 36) and to triumph. There is a note of utter confidence and certainly in the faith of the New Testament which is much more than an equivalent to the situation in which the threat of eternal rejection, though still real, no longer "terrifies or debilitates". As far as it goes it is true but it does not go far enough. In the Scriptures we encounter men who are experiencing a salvation which means the deliverance from every kind of ultimate threat or fear. It would seem that the "holding at arm's length" which we alluded to in connection with Barth's view of the freedom of God is at this point casting an alien shadow over the reality and finality of salvation in Jesus Christ. In fact Barth himself is not lacking in places in this joyful optimism and the doubt arises as to how faithfully Bettis is reflecting him at this point. Nonetheless Barth himself certainly appeals to the freedom of God's love as the ground of his rejection of apokatastasis and so the danger of this shadow lurks for him. The other important point made by Bettis is that Barth can attain to a real sense of the cruciality of faith. Can this be upheld however? We cannot forget that Barth speaks of unbelief as an "objective, real and ontological impossibility". He also speaks of the sword of God's wrath having fallen on Jesus Christ at Golgotha and hence men - "even if they have deserved it a thousand times, have no power to bring down on themselves a second time the sword of God's wrath now that it has fallen."

88. Ibid., p.433.
89. Ibid., p.435.
90. Cf. Romans 8, p.31ff; 1 Peter 1, 3-9 etc.
He speaks of the "relative" distinction between believer and unbeliever and of their "solidarity". Further he holds universal salvation to be a definite possibility for which we can hope and pray. Naturally no one had any business in defending the reality of reprobation who does not long fervently that none might be lost. There is something fundamentally correct in the desire for universal salvation. But that is a different issue from that of the correct doctrine at this point. If we are really to be controlled by the Biblical witness then it is impossible to believe in *apokatastasis* as a possibility. This does not mean that we are ever final judges of who is lost, or what in a particular instance may or may not be saving faith. But we cannot forget the terms of the Biblical judgements nor the terrible saying of Jesus concerning Judas. There is a way of destruction and many there be who go in at it. Barth, however, will not accept this testimony as referring to the necessity of perdition. In the light of these factors we cannot but echo Brunner and Berkouwer's questions as to whether the cruciality of faith in the theology of Barth is the same cruciality which the New Testament speaks of. Barth appears to leave one at the crossroads with respect to universalism - on the one hand there is the road to *apokatastasis*, and in terms of the journey taken up this point it would appear attractive enough. On the other hand there lies the way of a new seriousness with respect to faith and the real possibility, already for some an actuality, of a rejection of salvation and a consequent pursuance of a course which leads in the end to eternal damnation. Understandably enough this second road does not readily appeal to Barth since it would require among other things the apparent reappraisal of his whole journey up to this point and a return to the nineteenth century and the allowance of a definite autonomy to the human pole in the divine-human relationship. Can we remain at the crossroads? What makes the question the more urgent is that the Scripture does not appear to do so. It speaks in the most solemn terms of the two possibilities which confront men at the judgement

92. IV/1, p.747; cf. III/2, p.136.
93. II/2, p.349.
94. II/2, p.350.
95. II/2, p.348.
96. IV/3, p.478; also GGG, pp.49-50.
97. Matthew 26, 24; cf. also Matthew 18, 6.
to come and implies that already in this life, by their rejection of God's light of revelation, men have set their path towards a final darkness which the judgement to come will but confirm and deepen. Theologically this position, though as we have argued the Biblical and therefore the correct one, does have to take account in its turn of certain questions. It would require making the wrath of God one of the perfections of God. It would, putting this another way, have to maintain the unity of the being of God behind a seeming two-foldness and to accommodate the shadow of dualism which the notion of eternal damnation raises - i.e. sin by this view attains a certain perpetuity and finality with respect to the divine purposes. Again it would need to clarify its understanding of faith and revelation in relation to a synergist view. Can Brunner's position that the two terms are on exactly the same level be maintained? If not, then what relation obtains? Discussion of these issues leads eventually to the area of Christology to which we will turn in our next and final chapter.

Returning to Barth however, if his position is implicitly a universalist one there is then the question, as there was when we examined his doctrine of the fall - what does this imply for the historical character of human sin? If all will be saved in the end how real is the story of man's fall and his being in sin? How real is man's act of disobedience? How seriously is the kerygmatic situation to be taken where man is summoned to acknowledge and confess God's grace to him in the gospel?98

98. It is worth at this point comparing II/2, p.738 where Barth speaks of "something worse than God's wrath" - His indifference. There is here a hint of this same relativising of sin. The main thing apparently which we have to fear is something related to the being of God rather than to our personal and corporate rebellion against Him.
B. NIEBUHR'S ESCHATOLOGY

a. General approach

Niebuhr's fullest discussion of eschatology occurs in the closing section of his Gifford Lectures. He introduces it with the statement - "Everything in human life and history moves towards an end." There is an "end" in two senses. First, there is a point at which that which 'is' ceases to be. It has an end - i.e. a terminal point at which, seen from the perspective of the historical process viewed as a meaningful continuum, it ceases to impinge directly upon the process. In the case of man this "end" is his death, the point at which he ceases to play an 'initiating' role in history. For the end in this sense Niebuhr uses the Latin term finis. Second, all historical reality has an end in the sense that it has a goal towards which it moves, a purpose which it strives to fulfil and in pursuance of which its existence is given a direction and a meaning. The consciousness of this 'goal' is bound up in man with his rational freedom. Even if he does not at any point consciously set himself towards one supreme and overriding goal he is nonetheless in his whole existence a purposive being. For the end in this sense Niebuhr uses the Greek term τέλος.100 These two senses of 'end' are related antithetically in that the end as finis constantly challenges and threatens the end as τέλος. This is the tragic situation of man - a tragedy which is deepened by man's self-dependent attempts to solve this problem. Thus man's need becomes not simply to evade the threat of finis, it is more profoundly to be purged from his sin and guilt. Niebuhr here moves to speak of the "revelation of God in Christ" which while indicating the meaning of history had not brought a "full realisation" of it.101 History thus stands between the disclosure of its meaning and the fulfilment of the meaning, between the τέλος as disclosed and the τέλος as attained. This further prospect, the "end in which history's incompleteness and corruption is finally overcome",102 is expressed

100. Ibid., cf. also F and H, pp.267-8.
101. HD, p.298.
102. HD, p.298.
symbolically" in the N.T. eschatological language in terms of the return of Christ. Everything that is distinctive in Niebuhr's eschatology hangs upon the meaning of 'symbol' here. He is attempting, he claims, to avoid two extremes. On the one hand he stands over against those who dismiss this eschatological dimension as a "hangover" from Jewish apocalyptic, "required" to account for the elements of that tradition which the first coming of Jesus did not fulfil. On the other hand he also opposes a false literalism which imagines that the language used in the apocalyptic setting is in a one to one relation with its usage in these worldly settings. If this is done -

"the dialectical conception of time and eternity is falsified and the ultimate vindication of God over history is reduced to a point in history ... On the other hand if the symbol is dismissed as unimportant as merely a picturesque or primitive way of apprehending the relation of the historical to the eternal, the Biblical dialectic is obscured in another direction. All theologies which do not take these symbols seriously will be discovered upon close analysis not to take history seriously either." 103

What then is the category which Niebuhr is after? In our earlier discussion of myth we saw that Niebuhr appears in this category to be groping towards some account of analogy. The danger, however, as we saw when the fall is made a symbol is that Niebuhr then has difficulty holding on to the historical element. Before we re-examine this question in the eschatological setting we will observe how Niebuhr expounds the "symbols" of the end. There are three main ones of which the first is the most important.

(1) Parousia. This symbol Niebuhr interprets thus - "To believe that the suffering Messiah will return at the end of history as a triumphant judge and redeemer is to express the faith that existence cannot ultimately defy its own norm." 104 The return of Christ implies the Lordship of God over both the historical process and the threat to it from evil. As far as the 'eventness' of the Parousia is concerned Niebuhr insists that it lies 'beyond' history. As such it stands as a judgement on attempts to find the fulfilment of history within history. However, and paradoxically, it is also the fulfilment, and not simply the negation of history.

103. HD, p.299.
104. HD, p.300.
(ii) Last Judgement. This Niebuhr takes to imply three things. The first of these is expressed in the idea -

"that it is Christ who will be the judge of history. Christ as judge means that when the historical confronts the eternal it is judged by its own ideal possibility and not by the contrast between the finite and the eternal character of God. The judgement is upon sin and not finiteness."105

Here Niebuhr gives expression to his strong sense of the moral character of human history. Man stands not so much over against a towering omnipotence but rather under the summons of a moral will. This note is echoed in the second implication - The last judgement emphasises "the distinction between good and evil in history". This is not to say that we can readily draw a precise line between them. Indeed the very notion of a "last" judgement implies the inadequacy of all historical assessments, though it affirms the correctness of their general intention. Third, the "last judgement" implies the final inadequacy of all man's striving in history to escape from his sin and guilt. Again he warns against any literalism here. "It is unwise for the Christian to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell."106

We remain agnostic therefore as to the precise nature of this judgement but Niebuhr urges us to respect the "testimony of the heart" which "affirms the fear of judgement"108 which in turn arises from an "awareness of the mixture of sin and creativity which is the very substance of history".109

(iii) The Resurrection. Niebuhr is not insensitive to the offence which the notion of the Resurrection of the body affords to the modern mind. Indeed he recalls in one place that prior to his ordination he himself had "long and serious discussions" as to whether he could conscientiously confess his faith in the "Resurrection of the Body".110 However he points out that such a faith is no less congruous than that of belief in the immortality of the soul. The symbol implies on the one hand -

105. Ibid., p.302.
106. Ibid., p.304.
107. HD, p.304.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. BT, p.289.
111. HD, p.305.
"that eternity will fulfil and not annul the richness and variety which the temporal process has elaborated. On the other it implies that the condition of freedom and finiteness which lies at the basis of historical existence is a problem for which there is no solution by any human power."112

As the resurrection of the body the symbol also implies the recognition of the part played by the natural order in human life and also the unity of soul and body as attaining a single eternal significance. The difficulties which this notion gives rise to and which are implicit in all the eschatological symbols are not erased simply by rejecting literalism. To some extent they exist by the nature of the case. The whole idea of the end as both beyond history and yet as fulfilling history means that ambiguity, if not downright paradox is inevitable. Niebuhr here refers to two strains within Jewish apocalyptic thought.113 The former saw the consummation as actually within history and hence anticipated a millenial age - the latter saw the consummation as identical with the end of history and transcending space-time realities. Any attempt to wed these two insights Niebuhr regards as facing an "insoluble problem" since -

"It is not possible to give a fuller or more plausible account of what is implied in the Christian hope of the fulfilment of life; and it is well to remember that the conditions of finiteness make a more explicit definition of the consummation impossible."114

Niebuhr goes on to explore the perspective which his view of eschatology throws upon an understanding of history.115 Such are the terms of Niebuhr's eschatology. Our immediate concern is with the question of the 'overcoming of sin'. We wish to ask how, and in what sense Niebuhr anticipates a full and final resolution of the problem of sin. We also wish to see what his answer to this question implies for his understanding of the nature of sin. In what sense then is sin finally overcome?

112. HD, p.305.
114. HD, p.309.
b. Eschatology and the overcoming of sin

Since sin is the real problem of man the consummation of human history must represent a resolution of this problem. Hence Niebuhr speaks of the end as involving a purging of human guilt and sin by divine judgement and mercy.116 This means that the fact that love in history must live as suffering love is not the "ultimate situation". Niebuhr looks for a "final supremacy of love over all the forces of self-love which defy for the moment the inclusive harmony of all things under the will of God."117 Niebuhr will allow sin and evil no final autonomy. They do not constitute a "kind of second God" - to be worshipped as the final power in the world, or at least as strong enough to avoid final defeat at the hands of God. He quite deliberately distinguishes himself from Zoroastrian dualism in his view of the relationship between evil and the Lordship of God.118 Niebuhr is clear then that sin is a qualified and conditioned reality existing only under and within the sovereign will of God. When we attempt to spell out the relation of this to Niebuhr's eschatology the situation is less clear. There would appear to be several reasons for this indistinctness.

i. Niebuhr's eschatology is centred in the reinterpretation of the Biblical categories viewed as symbols. Behind this symbolic approach there lies the whole framework of relationship between the immanent and the transcendent, time and eternity, God and man. This, as we have already seen, is for Niebuhr an essentially dialectical one. It is as they illumine and reflect this dialectical relationship that the eschatological symbols attain their "serious" character. Thus, the symbols are removed from any straightforwardly historical setting - i.e. as indications of certain once-for-all events at the close of history - and related instead to certain structures running through the whole course of history. Now it is obviously a valid enough procedure to use the eschatological elements in this manner at a secondary level. Every work of God has a certain light to shed on every other work. God's action at the "end" of history certainly throws light on His work in history and vice versa. The trouble is that Niebuhr wishes to make the dialectical relation now obtaining in the structures of history the primary element in his understanding of eschatology. This is one reason for his unclarity. It should be clear

117. HD, p.300.
118. Ibid.
that Niebuhr is concerned to give some meaning to the 'symbols'. (They are not simply 'tinkling symbols'!) Our point is that in practice it is difficult to see what degree of reality he can attain for them.

ii. Secondly, and related to the first point, in marked contrast to Barth Niebuhr's rejection of dualism does not appeal to the work of Jesus Christ in overcoming sin. He appeals rather to the sovereignty and Lordship of God. While Niebuhr is not wrong to appeal in this direction - Barth too has to profound sense of the Lordship of God - he fails to relate this exclusion of dualism to the victory of God in history in the work of Christ, and in this respect he is failing to follow the Biblical witness. We have seen reason to ask whether in fact Barth is not guilty of going beyond this witness so that the future eschatological triumph which it speaks of does not get sufficient stress. The question to Niebuhr, however, is a different one ... why does he not relate the argument to Jesus Christ at all? Part of the answer would appear to be that his "symbolic" understanding of justification means that he is not able really to grasp the victory wrought in the atonement as a real victory over the real dimension of evil. One could also here refer to his lack of emphasis on the resurrection of Christ, which is where the N.T., and Barth, draw the inspiration for their exultant confidence in the face of evil and for their exclusion of dualism in the context of eschatology.

iii. Sin for Niebuhr arises from the paradoxical situation of man at the juncture of freedom and finiteness, i.e. although Niebuhr takes pains to distinguish his view from a determinism whereby man sins by the very nature of his being as man, there can be no question that sin and the creaturely situation of man are viewed as standing in a very close relationship. This being the case it becomes difficult to envisage the situation in which man, while remaining creature of God possessed of the distinctive creative freedom which constitutes his humanity, is nonetheless delivered from the possibility of sinning in the eschaton. Niebuhr admits the sharpness of the problem. -

119. CRPF, p.186, cf. Romans .8, 31f; 1 Corinthians 15, 20f; Ephesians, 1, 20f.
"It is true of course that the idea of the resurrection transcends the limits of the conceivable ... the condition of finiteness and freedom which lies at the basis of historical existence is a problem for which there is no solution by any human power."120

The problem can only be solved by God - and on the human side this means only by faith -

"The Christian answer is faith in the God who is revealed in Christ and from whose love neither life nor death can separate us."121

"Christian faith can only trust His mercy to deal with the recalcitrance of sin, even as it trusts His power to overcome the ambiguity of man's finiteness and freedom."122

The words 'even as' in the above citation should be interpreted as implying not 'in the same way as' but, more definitely 'at the same time as' - since in effect these two issues are inseparably bound up and the answer to one is inevitably the answer to the other. It is this that explains the inevitable restraint even unclarity, in Niebuhr's language concerning the eschatological prospect. He resorts at one point to the words of Scripture and speaks of - "the validity of the hope that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."123 The nearest he comes, however, to explicating this doxological prospect is the statement that - "... ultimately finiteness will be emancipated from anxiety and the self will know itself as it is known."124 Sin is to be overcome, but precisely how and when this will happen and what this will mean for human existence Niebuhr does not attempt to indicate. By his terms there is nothing one can say beyond repeating in faith the 'revealed symbols' of the Scriptures and affirming the general implications he draws from them.

c. Eschatology and the "being" of sin

As far as the nature of sin is concerned Niebuhr's view implies two things -

i. Sin is qualified, it is not eternal like God.

ii. Sin is so bound up with the human situation that the precise terms of this qualification are unclear.

120. HD, p.305.
121. HD, p.305.
123. HD, p.309.
124. HD, p.322.
One could attempt now to discuss Niebuhr's position, as we did with Barth, as to the nature of judgement to come and **apokatastasis**. Niebuhr's real problem, however, lies deeper than the meaning he may or may not give to these doctrines. We require to ask more fundamentally - is his whole approach to eschatology an adequate one?

d. **Niebuhr's central problem**

We have seen that he attempts to drive a middle course between idealism and materialism (Biblical literalism). His revulsion from the latter is no doubt related to his American situation where the most exotic brands of millenialism sprout and flourish to an extent quite unknown in Western Europe. He is no doubt also reacting at this point to the brand of "post-millenialism" which he inherited and came to discard - viz. the Utopian hope of the social gospell movement, the dream of building the kingdom of God on earth. He rejects therefore any **historical** realisation of the end. Yet, and here is his dilemma, the symbols cannot be altogether rejected since "without them Biblical faith degenerates into either Platonism or Utopiahism." Here Niebuhr attempts to distance himself from a merely philosophical understanding of human destiny. Where then **is** the end? What can an end **beyond** history mean? The whole problem here is how we are to think of **time** in relation to eternity. Is the time scale a linear continuum such that it can be conceived of as having a beginning and an ending? If so, how are we to relate these points to the series of events between the two termini? Geometrically the end of a line is to some extent a theoretical point since it is governed by the limitations of our capacity for measurement and hence always relative to the degree of accuracy we require or can attain. Nonetheless it is a conceivable point and can be held in fruitful relation to other points on a scale. The 'time line' however appears to pose a further problem. Here we have to think not simply of a theoretical limitation but also of a conceptual one - i.e. how can moments which **begin** and **end** time, and thus to some extent **constitute** it, be themselves conceived in relation to any particular point within the time scale? Putting this theologically, how can we, in terms of **Historie**, indicate either the **creation** or the **parousia**? We have already discussed an aspect of this issue in the chapter above on the fall of man. Although the fundamental problem here is identical

125. F and H, p.269.
at both ends of the time-scale there would appear to be one significant difference. Scripture does not attempt to break through the category barrier at the beginning of time in the way it appears to at the end. Thus although it speaks of the church as chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world" and "predestinated" according to the purpose of God it does not wish to break through the limiting moment of creation ex nihilo to some pre-existent state of man. At the other terminus however the situation is somewhat different. Here the Bible is quite naively uninhibited in its terminology. It speaks of a parousia of Christ at the end of time and is prepared to advance some detail as to its nature.

It speaks of a judgement seat. Most important, it speaks of an existence of man which is new but which is nonetheless in some meaningful continuity with his present form of existence - a new heaven and a new earth. The Biblical perspective then requires us to think of the time scale as transmuted by the parousia but not transcended. Thus there is a 'future' beyond the return of Christ in relation to which it can be placed and related as a 'present' and a 'past'. Niebuhr does not appreciate this Biblical dimension. As a result, despite his attempts to distinguish his position from it, he does leave the impression of a 'timeless end' as his final eschatological perspective. In this respect he is not unlike the early Barth of the Römerbrief and to some extent The Resurrection of the Dead with his Kierkegaardian category of the "infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity." For Barth this meant an eschatology of timeless crisis, and the loss of the historical perspective in the loss of teleology. Barth wrestled with this and the N.T. understanding of time as related to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. For him this meant a concern to distinguish between an old time and a new time rather than between time and eternity - i.e. he sought to give a place to the N.T. eschatological perspective and its concern to speak of a new advent of Christ in more than symbolical terms. If we are to relate this to Niebuhr we must ask

126. Mark 13, 24ff; 2 Thess. 1, 7ff.
127. Matthew 25, 31ff; 2 Cor. 5, 10; Rev. 20, 11ff.
128. 2 Pet. 3, 13; Rev. 21, 1ff.
whether in his rejection of literalism he did not go too far. He failed to see that the alternatives were not exhausted by a total literalism and a symbolic understanding. There is another possibility - that while figurative and metaphorical language is undoubtedly being employed there is a solid factual core to the Biblical testimony concerning the end; i.e. we can employ concepts used within the time sequence to indicate the eschatological realities. They lie in the future and will at a later point lie in the past. The effect of this lacuna in Niebuhr is that human history is denied a proper end and hence an alien idealistic shadow is cast on his thought since the loss of an end implies the loss of a whole dimension of significance for every moment prior to the end. Here we would refer to our earlier discussion of the fall of man where we found occasion to accuse Niebuhr of idealistic, non-historical elements in his approach to the history of redemption. This tendency towards "timeless end" in eschatology is one of a piece with his tendency towards "timeless events". 130 Putting this another way, in terms of Niebuhr's own categories he speaks of a τέλος in history in terms of "the moral and spiritual culmination of the meaning of history (which) is not within history itself." The finis, on the other hand as "the point at which that which exists ceases to be" is historical in that it is the negation of history. For the N.T. writers, however, while they can use τέλος in Niebuhr's sense also speak of a τέλος within history, which really encounters and overcomes the effects of finis 132 and hence which gives a significance to human history and to the events which constitute it, and also enables the exalting in a real triumph and overcoming on the plain of history when the Risen Lord returns in glory. It is because they see history in this way that the N.T. writers can convey in their eschatology both that profound solemnity and that ecstatic joy which characterises their thought. Niebuhr by contrast is unable to truly reflect either of them. His solemnity is in fact only based on the "testimony of the heart" which "affirms the fear of judgement". The trouble with the testimony of the heart, however, is that it all depends on whose heart we are thinking of. What of the many in our own day who appear ready to pass into eternity with little or no sense of fear of judgement? Barth in a rather light-hearted passage addressed primarily to Karl Jaspers, can be quoted as illustrating this point -

130. One could refer here to his constant appeal to terms such as - "significance", "meaning", "implication", "relevance".
131. 1 Tim. 1, 5.
132. 1 Cor. 10, 11; 1 Pet. 4, 7.
"According to our present trend, we may suppose that even on the morning after the day of judgement - if such were possible - every cabaret, every night club, every newspaper firm eager for advertisements and subscribers, every nest of political fanatics, every pagan discussion group, indeed, every Christian tea party and church synod would resume business to the beat of its ability, and with a new sense of opportunity, completely unmoved, quite uninstructed, and in no serious sense different from what it was before ..."133

Barth of course is writing with his tongue in his cheek here but it points to the limitations of appeals to human experience at this level. The real solemnity in the N.T. is the solemnity awakened at the prospect of falling into the hands of the Living God, whose will we have spurned, whose claims we have denied, and whose dear Son we have despised. It is the solemnity of meeting the Holy One Himself. It is the solemnity of encountering a personal Judge. Accordingly there is in the N.T. a true and terrible solemnity. On the other hand there is an estatic joy "unspeakable and full of glory" in the presence of Jesus Christ and in the prospect of future salvation. We just do not find in Niebuhr this throbbing, trembling expectancy, the exultant praises of the redeemed for whom there is now no condemnation and who are marching on towards their "blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Such eschatological anticipation would no doubt be regarded with distinct suspicion by Niebuhr for whom, as West reminds us, -

"Nothing arouses (his) opposition more quickly than the attempt... to escape from the burdens, tensions, anxieties, and relative decisions of this world in some theological or churchly way, leaving the less pious people to bear them....In Barth's emphasis on the datum of the resurrection victory he senses a certain irresponsible lightness toward real human beings and their problems."134

Whatever the merit of Niebuhr’s concern for real human problems one has nonetheless to state that his eschatology lacks both the height and depth of the New Testament, and for reasons we have attempted to indicate.

133. III/2, p.115.
C. COMPARISON

a. Consistency with basic standpoints

Setting the two men together in conclusion, the consistency of their understandings of eschatology with their primary orientations are obvious enough. Barth's strong Christocentric emphasis is indicated in his concern to see eschatology as a parousia, the personal action of Jesus Christ. Again his great stress upon the triumph effected and the judgement passed in the first coming of Christ is in keeping with the same concern for the Word become flesh. Niebuhr's symbolic approach is consistent with his view of revelation as we have seen. The idealistic non-historical note which we mentioned in an earlier chapter is to a large extent muffled in his writings by his strong realism by which we are constantly being faced in his writing with concrete historical and social situations. In the eschatological area however this concrete orientation is inevitably less possible and the "timeless" element is more clearly visible.

b. The overcoming of sin

Under our general theme of the 'Overcoming of Sin' Barth certainly offers a more hopeful prospect. He really can give a meaning to this in its ultimate perspective. Eschatology is for him the prospect of an existence beyond sin. The work of overcoming begun in justification and continued in sanctification attains its culmination in the eschaton. For Barth of course the relation between these three 'moments' is quite crucial. The second and third are generally seen as the outworking in human existence of the overcoming of sin which was fully and finally attained in the first, in the saving work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. As we have seen Barth's tremendous concentration on the completeness of this triumph raises questions for him at the other end of the scale - i.e. the shadow of universalism appears distinctly on the horizon. Niebuhr is in fact better able to cope with this threat since by his approach to the works of God he is able to allow a greater significance to the decision of faith and theoretically at least could cope better than Barth with the Bible's witness to a future judgement. In the event however Niebuhr is unsatisfactory. He cannot speak in a full sense of an 'overcoming of sin'. He admittedly quotes the Biblical witness regarding such but his close binding up of sin and man and his idealistic tendency combine to empty
the Biblical statements of much of their force. He is in fact unable to indicate any real futurist dimension to eschatology which as we have seen is certainly required by Scripture - as Barth came to acknowledge.

c. **The fundamental division**

We are back again at this final stage, with the fundamental division between the two men which we have commonly characterised as a division between viewing revelation as a *determination* of human existence and as an *illumination* of human existence. It is around this fundamental orientation that the two men appear to part company and the distinctions we have noted in their respective doctrines of sin have their root here.

In our final chapter we will seek to focus this division and attempt to evaluate this whole discussion.
C. CHRISTOLOGY AND THE IDEA OF SIN
In the previous chapters we have attempted to expound Niebuhr and Barth's respective theories of sin and to relate and discuss them under the two general headings of the 'Being' of sin, and the 'Overcoming' of sin. In this final chapter we will attempt to draw together the threads of the discussion thus far and focus as sharply as we can the fundamental area of contention.

A. THE ARGUMENT THUS FAR

a. The argument in outline

We will first of all survey the ground already covered and observe the terms in which the division between the two men has come to light already. In the first section we expounded Barth and Niebuhr's doctrines of sin. We saw that in both cases their doctrines of sin require to be related to their fundamental theological standpoints. When so understood Niebuhr's view of sin was seen to be a realist one—i.e. he spoke of sin as he encountered it at his standpoint "between gospel and world". Sin was understood in terms of man's immediate ethical situation. Barth's view of sin, when understood in relation to his fundamental theological standpoint was seen to be "sin in the light of grace". Barth's primary concern to approach all reality from the vantage point of revelation in Jesus Christ meant that sin was understood a posteriori in the light of God's action against it. In the second section we explored Barth and Niebuhr's doctrines of sin, first of all under the heading "the Being and Nature of sin" and second under the heading "the Overcoming of sin". In the first of these we discussed ontological and epistemological questions. We observed the consistency of their positions with regard to their primary axioms and made the point that any proper evaluation of their views of sin would require to assess the merits of these axioms. We attempted to do this by discussing their doctrines of revelation, moral evil and anthropology. In terms of revelation the distinction was seen to lie between a positive (Niebuhr) and a negative (Barth) evaluation of an alleged revelation prior to and distinct from the revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. In terms of moral evil the distinction was seen to lie between a positive (Niebuhr) and a negative (Barth) evaluation of the role of moral evil as a direct mediator of an
encounter with God in His will for man. In terms of anthropology the
distinction was seen to lie between a positive (Niebuhr) and a negative
(Barth) evaluation of the possibility of laying the basis for a doctrine
of man from the doctrines of creation and the Imago Dei. This latter
distinction we attempted to represent as lying between an 'essentialist'
(Niebuhr) and a Christological (Barth) view of man. We attempted to
gather all these threads together as to the distinction between Niebuhr
and Barth's axioms by speaking of it as residing in a distinction between
viewing revelation as illumination (Niebuhr) and viewing it as determination
(Barth). We then attempted to examine one of these areas in greater
depth - viz. their respective evaluations of moral experience. Here the
distinction appeared as between Niebuhr's seeing ethical experience, under¬
stood as an encounter with the law of love, as a direct encounter with God's
will - i.e. the unity of ethics and dogmatics in the ethical; and Barth's
seeing ethical experience, understood as within the doctrine of God as the
Command of God, as only an indirect encounter with God's will - i.e. the
unity of ethics and dogmatics in the dogmatic. Applying these theoretical
distinctions to the concrete area of social ethics we saw the distinction
to lie in that while Barth is prepared to bring the whole realm of man's
social and political relationships into the sphere of redemption and to work
out a social ethic based upon dogmatic (Christological) presuppositions.
Niebuhr is not prepared to do so. For him Christ affects human existence
only relatively. Pursuing this distinction we arrived again at an
essentialist (Niebuhr) as against a Christological (Barth) anthropology.
Finally in this discussion of the "Being and Nature of sin" we looked at
the question of the origin of sin and the problem of history in an examina¬
tion of the idea of the fall of man. Here in fact we uncovered broad
similarities in the two men's approaches to these issues though Barth's
concern to ground anthropology upon Christology ("Jesus Christ is Adam")
and his denial of any proper autonomy to sin were seen to reflect his
concern to see sin in the light of triumphant grace in Christ. Over
against this Niebuhr's realism was seen to be reflected in his concern to
give the whole idea of the fall a primary reference in a setting between
gospel and world. Coming to the second general area of discussion
entitled "The Overcoming of Sin", we first compared the respective ideas
of justification. The distinction here was seen to lie between Barth's view which saw revelation as the radical determination of man such that justification in Christ was its outworking in time and resulted in man's having his being as the justified; and Niebuhr's view which saw justification much more in the 'step-wise' framework as the divine answer, actualised for man by faith, to the problem of sin. Under sanctification Barth seemed unable to allow for a real ontological renewal by the Spirit of the being of the believing man, but was nonetheless generally able to be optimistic due to his subsuming the 'new man' under Jesus Christ as the determination of man's being for God. Niebuhr, although more able to allow for an ontological change in the being of man, due to a weak doctrine of the Spirit, could not properly develop this and ended a pessimist in this area. Here again the distinction appeared related to the 'revelation as illumination v. revelation as determination' motif. In the final chapter under the heading of eschatological questions, the same distinction manifested itself. Barth because of his view of revelation was able to speak of the full and final overcoming of sin in such terms as to sharply raise the question of universalism. Niebuhr because of his view of revelation was less able to affirm this overcoming though able to give more scope to the cruciality of faith.

b. The terms of the division

Gathering these threads together we can observe that the terms in which the divergence has most generally been framed is between the position which sees revelation as having an essentially illuminative role with respect to creaturely reality and hence which sees sin as one of the given factors in the situation prior to, and alongside of, revelation; and the position which sees revelation as having an essentially determinative role with respect to creaturely reality and hence sees sin as within its orbit, so to speak, viewed and 'understood' only from its overcoming by revelation.
c. Sharpening the issue

We require now to carry this whole analysis one stage further and attempt to focus the divergence more sharply. To help us do this we refer again to the terms in which the divergence was framed by the two men when they actually exchanged shots after the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Barth in the first instance protested about an undue 'carefulness' in the attitudes expressed in the preparatory material. He identified this more precisely as a mistaken attempt to discuss the world and its problems alongside of, and even prior to, a consideration of God's design and action with respect to the world. In other words the mistake being made was to fail to begin with revelation, the redemption accomplished for the world in Jesus Christ, and to view the world and its problems a posteriori to, and in the light of, this finished work and design of God.

"God's design' really means His plan; that is, His already come, already victorious, already founded kingdom in all its majesty - our Lord Jesus Christ, who has already robbed sin and death, the devil and hell of their power and already vindicated divine and human justice in His own person."2

Niebuhr, in reply, as representing Anglo-Saxon theology as against Barth's Continental brand characterised Barth's view as a "realised" eschatology by which all is already accomplished and nothing important or finally serious remains to be done. Niebuhr, however, seemed at the same time to believe that the distinction between himself and Barth resided simply in the difference between the implications which each drew from the mutually agreed datum of the revelation in Jesus Christ -

"No Christian would quarrel with the affirmation that the church finds the true and new beginning of life and history in the revelatory and redemptive power of our Lord's life, death and resurrection. The questions at Amsterdam were about the conclusions which were drawn from this article of faith."3

Niebuhr, however, would appear here to be over-simplifying the issue.

The division between himself and Barth did not fall into the class of different conclusions drawn from agreed premises. Rather it was precisely in their different understanding of their premises that the two men's different conclusions were determined. It is small wonder that Barth complained in return that he did not recognise himself in Niebuhr's account of him and that Niebuhr had been demolishing a man of straw in his critique. Barth pointed in another direction in his attempt to plot the point of divergence - to the realm of revelation, and to the Bible in particular. It was a failure to take Scripture with sufficient exegetical seriousness which led to "the absence of a whole dimension" in the thinking of Anglo-Saxons. Barth expounded this dimension more fully as -

"... the word of God, the Holy Spirit, God's free choice, God's grace and judgement, the Creation, the Reconciliation, the Kingdom, the Sanctification, the congregation; and all these not as principles to be interpreted in the same sense as the first two dimensions but as the indication of events, of concrete, once-for-all, unique divine actions, of the majestic mysteries of God that cannot be resolved into any pragmatism."5

It is at this point that the division between Niebuhr and Barth comes into sharper focus. What Barth misses in Niebuhr and what he equally strives to bear witness to in his own theology, is indicated here - the real impinging of revelation upon human existence, the 'other dimension'. One further avenue for further discussion of Barth and Niebuhr leading on from this would be to examine their understandings of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Others have pointed out this road, notably Hoffman.6

There would appear, however, another possibility, which raises the primary issues and also relates the discussion more immediately to the problems connected with their views of sin - viz. the area of Christology.7

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4. Ibid., February 16th, 1949, pp.102ff.
5. Ibid., p.203. Cf. also I/1, p.XI where he complains of a similar loss of a "third dimension" in "modern protestantism".
7. Cf. Lochman, SJT, Vol II 1958, p.254 "... it is always and above all Christology which provides the decisive criterion of Christian thinking. cf. Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p.66. "Tell me how it stands with your Christology and I shall tell you who you are."
It is to this area we now turn in conclusion. We will outline the terms of the two men's Christologies and show how their differences here are the ones which really determine their different approaches to sin. We will finally assess their positions and indicate why neither appears fully adequate. We begin with Niebuhr.

B. NIEBUHR'S CHRISTOLOGY
a. The terms of his doctrine

Paul Lehmann in his essay on this theme begins it with the significant remarks -

"Reinhold Niebuhr is not a systematic theologian as he himself has often said. At no point is this more apparent than at the point of his Christology. One looks in vain for a systematic consideration and elaboration of the Christological questions and answers."¹⁸

The material for any structuring of his Christology must hence be gleaned from various corners of his writing rather than from a consideration of any explicit exposition of the theme.

Niebuhr was reared in a liberalism in which Jesus had taken on the guise of the ideal man, "the good man who tells all men to be good",⁹ as he himself summarises it at one point. He was not fully at home in this situation even from the beginning. He writes in the Leaves... "for the life of me I can no more reduce Jesus to the status of a mere Galilean dreamer and teacher than I can accept the orthodox Christologies."¹⁰ His earliest publications do not reflect a notable advance upon the nineteenth century Christologies. Phrases like "the religion of Jesus"¹¹ "the absolute moral values incarnated in the person of Jesus"¹² occur. More to the point the Christ of these early works appears very much as the fulfilment of Niebuhr's own concerns. One commentator makes the point -

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10. LDTC, p.120.
11. DCNR, p.54.
"The Christ of Niebuhr's early work looks ... surprisingly like the realisation of Niebuhr's own programme, that is, a Radical in ethics, who by his very being puts a question mark to the whole conventional morality of bourgeois civilisation, and as a liberal in religious philosophy who is free from dogmatic claims and is not bound by the discredited absurdities of an outworn creed."13

As his thought developed Niebuhr moves towards a more objective understanding of Christology.14

In his development, however, Niebuhr does not regard orthodoxy as a viable alternative to his inherited creed. For one thing Niebuhr writes from the American scene where orthodoxy is bound up in a way quite foreign to the European setting with an American fundamentalism. This movement with its extreme anti-scientific literalism and its suspicion of social and political involvement could not be other than anathema to the young Niebuhr. Further, and this is Niebuhr's more explicit reason for rejecting the orthodox alternative, its Christologies appeared to him to be unduly speculative and hence irrelevant to current requirements. They also failed to appreciate the inevitable role of symbolism in religious statements.15

The fullest reach of this movement towards a more objective Christology occurs in the Gifford Lectures. Lehmann characterises this development as a movement from a Christus in nobis to a Christus pro nobis; a movement that is from a concentration on the human situation and the relevance of Christ for and in that situation to a concentration upon the truth of Christ Himself who uncovers the real nature of that situation and offers a solution to it.17 His initial statements in the Gifford Lectures are in the context of Christ's being the centre of special revelation and as such the answer to the question as to whether God can forgive sin.

14. ICE, pp.130-131; REE, p.279ff.
15. LDTC, p.120f and 85; REE pp.287-292; BT, pp.13-24.
17. Cf. Niebuhr's own testimony to this effect in K and B, p.439 "... I have come gradually to realise that it is possible to look at the human situation without illusion and without despair only from the standpoint of the Christ-revelation."
He is the "final" revelation - "... not only as a category for interpreting the total meaning of history but also as a solution for the problem of the uneasy conscience in each individual."\(^{18}\) Christ is the revelation not just of God but also of **man** -

"Man is a creature who cannot find a true norm short of the nature of ultimate reality. This is the significance of the historic doctrine of the 'second Adam'. The same Christ who is accepted by faith as the revelation of the character of God is also regarded as the revelation of the true character of man."\(^{19}\)

In this setting \(\text{Niebuhr}\) makes an explicit rejection of speculative Christologies for which Christ is the answer to the time-eternity, finite-infinite tension rather than the bearer of the divine mercy,\(^{20}\) and of liberal Christologies which so accommodate the faith to contemporary culture that Christ becomes merely the reflection of their own ethical optimism in its ideal form.\(^{21}\) \(\text{Niebuhr}\) expounds the terms of this Christology more fully under the theme "Christ crucified as the Wisdom and Power of God."\(^{22}\)

"The wisdom and the truth in Christ is the purpose and the will of the divine sovereign of life and history. The Christian affirmation is that it is now fully disclosed. The power and grace in Christ is the dynamic authority of the divine sovereign of life and history which has been partly revealed by the defiance of sin ... To say that Christ is the 'express image of His person' is to assert that in the epic of this life and death the final mystery of the divine power which bears history is clarified; and with that clarification life and history are given their true meaning."\(^{23}\)

\(\text{Niebuhr}\) uses this key idea of wisdom and power to criticise other Christologies\(^{24}\) - for example the mistake of rationalistic theologies to concentrate on wisdom to the neglect of power. \(\text{Niebuhr}\) takes up again the notion of Christ as the second Adam, the disclosure of the true being of man and his history. He finds the heart of this meaning in **agape**, sacrificial love, which found its supreme manifestation at the cross.

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20. HN, pp.155-156.
22. HD, p.56f.
23. HD, pp.56-57.
24. HD, p.60ff.
"Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history. This perfection is not so much a sum total of various virtues or an absence of transgression of various laws, it is the perfection of sacrificial love. The same cross which symbolises the love of God and reveals the divine perfection to be not incompatible with a suffering involvement in historical tragedy also indicates that the perfection of man is not attainable in history."25

It is statements like this which move Lehmann to speak of Niebuhr's Christology as "the presupposition of his anthropology".26 We are certainly here at the core of Niebuhr's Christology. Christ's being as agape confirms and answers to the fundamental character of human existence which is also agape. The paradoxical relation of mutual love and sacrificial love in human history whereby the highest good is not attainable within historical categories but transcends them is disclosed and reflected in the paradoxical relation of Christ to human history. Christ's perfection while not compatible with a sacrificial involvement in human history leads to the cross - i.e. it transcends human history. This basic thought structure, this two-fold dialectic whereby the dialectic of human existence is revealed and reflected in the dialectical relation of Christ to history, is the core of Niebuhr's Christology and the key to his alternative to both liberalism and orthodoxy.

"Sacrificial love represents a tangent towards 'eternity' in the field of historical ethics. It is nevertheless the support of all historical ethics; for the self cannot achieve relations of mutual and reciprocal affection with others if its actions are dominated by the fear that they may not be reciprocated. Mutuality is not a possible achievement if it is made the intention and goal of any action. Sacrificial love is thus paradoxically related to mutual love; and this relation is an ethical counterpart of the general relation of super-history to history.... The paradoxical relation of sacrificial to mutual love .... makes the doctrine that Jesus was both human and divine religiously and morally meaningful and dispenses with the necessity of making the doctrine metaphysically plausible."27

By this model Niebuhr is able to reinterpret Christology in a way which is fresh and relevant. As against liberalism he is able to take utterly

27. HD, pp. 72-73.
seriously the tragic element in human existence. As against orthodoxy he is, he feels, able to dispense with the rational and metaphysical absurdities which statements of the divine and human natures of Jesus are always prone to. As against both he is able to give Christology a striking relevance to contemporary man and his ethical dilemmas. It is, however, precisely this model which raises questions. Niebuhr holds that *agape* is the final meaning of human existence - i.e. it has an ontological value for him as the reality underlying the natural structures of existence and dialectically transcending them as the highest good towards which they tend but can never attain. Love is the law of life.

The problem arises, however, in relating of this basic anthropological theory to the person of Christ. Niebuhr, as we have seen, discerns a similar 'dialectic' in Christ who is in history, made man in his incarnation, living a life whose "animating purpose" was "to conform to the *agape* of God"; but who is also beyond history in that this purpose pursued to its limit led inevitably to the cross and a reaching beyond human history.

"The perfection of *agape* as symbolised in the cross can neither be simply reduced to the limits of history nor yet dismissed as irrelevant because it transcends history. It transcends history as history transcends itself. It is the final norm of a human nature which has no final norm in history because it is not completely contained in history."  

We could sum up Niebuhr's Christology in another of his sentences - "The *agape* of Christ is the disclosure of both the divine love which bears history and the human love which is history's impossible possibility." Two questions arise here, the first a matter of elucidation, the second a matter of evaluation - Firstly, what is the relationship of anthropology to Christology in this structure of ideas? Secondly, is the Christology which this model attains an adequate one?

b. Christology and anthropology

The relationship would appear to be a dynamic, and if the idea has not been overworked, a dialectical one. On the one hand the Christological appears to be primary - Niebuhr is clear that the relationship of Christ to human existence which he argues for is possible only within faith.

29. HD, p.77.
30. HD, p.78.
31. HD, p.79.
i.e. within the acknowledgment of revelation -

"All this has been understood by the wisdom of faith though it has been withheld from the wise... Christian faith has always understood, beyond all canons of common sense and all metaphysical speculations, that the perfection of the Cross represents the fulfilment - and the end - of historical ethics... The ethical implications of the cross illumine the actual character of human history. This insight is possible only after the religious implications of the cross have given the answer to the problem which is presented by the character of history."32

Thus the starting point would appear to be at the cross and human existence is to be understood a posteriori, in the light of the reality disclosed there. As Niebuhr goes on to state - "There are ultimate problems of life which cannot be fully stated until the answer to them is known."33 As the answer to man's ultimate problem the cross also serves to clarify and disclose the full dimensions of the problem. Anthropology stands in the light of Christology. However, Niebuhr also moves in the other direction - from anthropology to Christology -

"...the Christian doctrine of creation does not set the eternal and the divine in absolute contradiction to the temporal and the historical. There are, therefore, validations of agape in actual history..." 34

He puts these two directions together in this way -

"The Christian doctrine of Christ as the 'second Adam', as normative man, is thus a doctrine which hovers between natural and revealed religion. It belongs to natural religion in the sense that any rigorous analysis of the moral life of man will partially disclose the tangents towards the eternal in all morality. It belongs to revealed religion because it is not possible without faith to follow these implications through to their logical conclusion."35

He goes on to discuss this relationship more fully in terms of 'The perfection of Christ and the possibilities of History'.36 Again there is this dialectical, dynamic, interplay of Christology and anthropology, the revelation of Christ and ethical experience. Christ "completes what is incomplete in the apprehension of meaning attained by historic cultures;" "clarifies obscurities" in their apprehension; and "corrects falsifications which threaten the sense of meaning."

32. HD, pp.78-79.
34. HD, p.79.
35. HD, pp.85-94.
36. HD, p.79.
c. The adequacy of this approach

This brings us to our second question as to the adequacy of the scheme. Our view is that it is inadequate. Niebuhr's attempt to preserve a dynamic 'rapprochement' between the Christological and ethical poles implies a loss for both. It implies a loss for Christology in that it is never able to break free from the anthropological categories in terms of which Niebuhr interprets it to exercise a properly objective and determining influence on his thought. He certainly is concerned to allow the revelation in Christ the role of the fullest disclosure of the terms of the human situation but it is difficult to accept that these terms themselves are Christologically derived. As Lochman comments -

"The dialectical idea of love is the key idea both in his ontology and in his Christology. For Niebuhr Christology is relevant so far as it expresses this view of the world and of man. In so far as it contradicts this it is rejected."37

One could refer here to the way in which Niebuhr draws a line from the transcendent in his anthropology, man's "capacity for self-transcendence",38 to Christology, "agape as symbolised in the cross ... transcends history as history transcends itself".39 In Niebuhr's anthropology the transcendent dimension does not really escape the control of the self. The fact that a relation is made between the transcendent at this level and Christology raises the question as to how far the transcendent in this latter area can escape the orbit of the self. Working with this model what scope is there for asserting a genuinely objective Other pole? Is there not a real danger that everything then becomes interpreted as a function of human existence? Are we not then back with Schleiermacher's problem?40 This procedure whereby Christology is inhibited by a prior anthropological understanding is illustrated in Niebuhr's rejection of the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ. He is unhappy with it on two grounds -

37. Lochman, art. cit., p.262.
38. HN, p.4
39. HD, p.78
40. H.R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, pp.62f, 96f.
(i) It is metaphysically absurd -
"Since the essence of the divine consists in its unconditional character, and since the essence of the human lies in its conditioned and contingent nature it is not logically possible to assert both qualities of the same person. It is even more impossible to affirm the divine nature does not qualify the human qualities or that the conditioned character of human existence is not in contradiction to the unconditioned character of the divine."41

He goes on to point out how if we view agape as the final reality the incarnation can be given a meaning as the 'paradoxical' relation of a "divine agape which stoops to conquer"42 and the "human agape which rises above history in a sacrificial act."43 It is this central truth which Niebuhr thinks faith has always apprehended beyond the metaphysical contradictions of the orthodox formulation.

(ii) It is ethically irrelevant. The orthodox position can preserve the divine and human only by placing the human at such a distance from contingent experience as to render the Christ so described irrelevant to human life. This is the result in both metaphysical Catholic theories and in moralistic Protestant ones. If, however, the ultimate norm is the divine agape then Jesus can be thought of as perfect. This does not mean that he was sinless at every point from a legalistic understanding of perfection. What we can assert is that - "...in Jesus there is a remarkable coincidence and consistency of doctrine, purpose and of act."44 Again from the standpoint of agape as the final reality Jesus' perfection can be given a valid meaning and one which is immediately relevant to human ethical existence. Niebuhr's argument is certainly neat but he makes it rather easy for himself. He interprets Jesus Christ in association with his ethical understanding of reality and then argues, as against other approaches, that his approach is alone adequate and relevant to the same ethical understanding of reality. He bolsters his position further by indicating the logical problems of the alternatives. His whole case, however, hangs on whether his anthropology is a valid one. He appears to be able to appeal to revelation to support it, but in fact his argument

41. HD, p. 75.
42. HD, pp. 74.
43. HD, p. 74.
44. HD, pp. 76-77.
is really mainly the other way round since it is not at all self-evident that the Christ of the New Testament demands to be essentially and normatively understood in terms of the dialectical analogy of love. There is present in Niebuhr here a distinctly idealistic-docetic tendency whereby the concrete and unique particularity of the event of Christ is lost and the cross becomes more the supreme instance and embodiment of the principle of agape. For example -

"The significance of the affirmation that God is revealed in Christ and more particularly in His cross, is that the love (agape) of God is conceived in terms which make the divine involvement in history a consequence of precisely the divine transcendence over the structures of history."45

Or again -

"To say that the innocency of Adam before the fall can be restored only in terms of the perfection of Christ is to assert that life can approach its original innocence only by aspiring to its unlimited end."46

The orthodox view is logically contradictory certainly, but the generations of scholars, saints and martyrs who have confessed it have not had to wait for Niebuhr to inform them of this fact. They did not find this contradiction the embarrassment Niebuhr indicates because their thought tended to move in a significantly different direction from his. They began at the concrete point of Jesus Christ, God and man, a divine miracle and mystery, and yet a profound reality. From this point they moved outward to man and his situation seeing both in the light of the Biblical witness. Such a direction would also seem to offer a more promising approach to the problem of Jesus being tempted and yet sinless. There are difficulties for any account but the orthodox view need not be so irrelevant as Niebuhr imagines. Such a direction can also allow for elements in Christology which Niebuhr had in effect to lop off because they do not fit his anthropological axioms. In particular one thinks of the place given in the N.T. to the resurrection of Christ. Niebuhr's failure to allow the resurrection its proper role is a serious weakness in his whole theology and is a major contributory factor to the pessimism with which he has been often charged. Niebuhr is unable to really view Christ in His full Biblical dimensions, Risen from the Dead, Lord over all, mighty to save. We find ourselves rather, as West puts it -

45. HD, p.74.
46. HD, p.81.
"... standing under the cross looking forward toward the resurrection. The decisive event, without which faith is in vain, hangs over the historical process in tension with every part of it, offering a symbolical interpretation of the whole."\(^{47}\)

Our conclusion hence must be that for all his commendable efforts to reinterpret the Christological dogma in a fresh and ethically relevant manner Niebuhr's construction is inadequate in that his Christ is not recognisably the full Christ of the New Testament witness. Perhaps the most telling commentary on his view is an autobiographical one -

"I have never pretended to be a theologian and so I have elaborated the Christological theme only in the context of enquiries about human nature and human history."\(^{48}\)

In this statement lies the heart of all Niebuhr's theological inadequacies. It is here, in his loss of a full Biblical Christology, that the weaknesses of his doctrine of sin have their theoretical root. We can gather these under the headings of our earlier discussion.

d. Christology and the "Being" of sin

Niebuhr's inadequate Christology means that he cannot see sin in its proper "being". His approach is a straightforward, common-sense one - sin "is" as it is revealed to be in concrete ethical experience. The problem is, and this would be Barth's point, Niebuhr has ignored a whole aspect of man's situation by this approach. He can only treat sin in this straightforward manner by isolating the sinner from Jesus Christ and by tacitly overlooking the fact that the world in which he commits his sin is a world in which Jesus Christ has died and risen again for him. In other words he can only attain this straightforward approach to sin by means of an anthropology which is structured in isolation, in this sense, from Jesus Christ; or, putting it the other way round he can attain this approach only by holding to a Christology which is inhibited by prior anthropological convictions. Niebuhr does attempt to ground his anthropology theologically by referring as we have seen, to the doctrine of man made in the image of God. There is a certain validity in this approach as we will have occasion to point out later, but this failure to allow Christology anything more than an illuminative role in his anthropology

\(^{47}\) West, op. cit., p.151.
\(^{48}\) K and B, p.439.
is less defensible. As a result of his approach sin becomes domesticated. It loses its full terror which we uncover only when we see it as continuing its monstrous activity in spite of God's action against it in Jesus Christ. Niebuhr cannot confront us with the appalling truth that men can and do go to hell in spite of the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose for them. Further, and related to this, Niebuhr cannot really bring out the absurd and irrational character of sin. It goes on in spite of the fact that its "being" has been denied and emptied of all necessity in the Lordship of the Creator and in the atoning work of the Son of God. There are hints of this deeper understanding in Niebuhr's use of the fall story but it is never fully developed and again his inadequate Christology is the real cause. It also means that he cannot set sin in the wider dimension of malignancy which Barth attains to under his notion of das Nichtige. On the reverse side of this Niebuhr is always in danger of viewing sin in terms of his own subjective assessment of the situation. The anthropological categories which inhibit his Christology are also a danger here - i.e. the possibility emerges of seeing not only God (in Christ) but also man in our own image. In our discussion of Niebuhr's social ethics we saw reason to think that just such a subjectivist element was manifested in his political attitudes.49 Again his approach to Christology is related to his mythical approach to the fall with its close binding up of sin and the human situation, as well as the tendency towards idealism which we noted in his thought in general.

e. Christology and the overcoming of sin

Niebuhr's Christology is also the determinative aspect of his approach to the overcoming of sin. It leads to the lack of an inherent necessity for the work of Christ in justification. It leads to the pessimism which is evident in his view of sanctification and Christian moral attainment where the loss of the resurrection in his Christology is crucial. The fact of the believer's dying and rising in and with Christ is also obscured.

49. cf. chapter 5, above.
The other lacuna which we noted here - viz. his weak doctrine of the Spirit, is not unrelated to this since a full Christology goes hand in hand, via the *filioque*, with a full pneumatology. Finally there is at this point the deepest source of the loss of the futurist dimension from his eschatology, and with that the triumphant N.T. perspective in the prospect of a full and final overcoming of sin. Putting all this more generally, because of his Christology Niebuhr thinks of Christ as fulfilling a fundamentally illuminative role with respect to human existence rather than a determinative one. Thus revelation does not really impinge upon human existence and hence there is the loss of the "third dimension". This is the point of Niebuhr's real divergence from Barth.

f. Concluding comment

It might be argued that we have been guilty of two errors in this summary. First, we have made Niebuhr much too systematic. Certainly it is often not easy to determine which came first in his thought, the ethical chicken or the theological egg? However we submit that the broad terms of Niebuhr's theology are of this shape and open to this criticism. Second, even granted this critique, Niebuhr would not be unduly perturbed since he would still have attained what for him is crucial, viz. an ethical relevance for the basic Christian message. It is this which he prizes above all else and which determines his deliberately chosen standpoint, between gospel and world. Our complaint, however, which we have attempted in this discussion to register and document in terms of his idea of sin, is that in this process the 'basic Christian message' undergoes a revision which involves both the loss of crucial elements and the imposition of alien elements so that at the end of the day while applauding his realism and the depth of his concern for his neighbour in all his concrete need, one has to question the wisdom of his stance and the idea of sin which emerges at it. Such a conclusion might seem too damning. At the theoretical level, as an assessment of the theology Niebuhr finally attains, it is we would argue a valid conclusion. It is possible, however, to evaluate a thinker in terms of the direction in which he seeks to travel as well as in terms of the destination he eventually reaches, and at this second level, we will seek to point out later, Niebuhr is capable of more positive assessment.
C. BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGY

a. The centrality of Christology

In coming to Barth's Christology we require to underline at the outset what we have frequently alluded to in the course of our exposition thus far, - the cruciacy of Jesus Christ for Barth's whole thought.

One writer assesses it this way -

"Nicht die Philosophie, die Religionsgeschichte oder die historische Methode, sondern allein das hier und jetzt auf uns zutretende Offenbarungswort ist die Grundlage des Glaubens. Dieses Offenbarungswort ist nichts Abstraktes, sondern es ist die lebende Gestalt Jesu Christi selber. Die ganze Dogmatik, die ganze Theologie muss darum fortwährend christologisch orientiert sein, und selbst über alle irdischen Wirklichkeiten kann schließlich kein bindender Auspruch getan werden als aus dem Glauben in Christus. Person und Werk Christi bilden das einzige kriterium der Theologie."50

Barth's own statement of the matter is as follows -

"A church dogmatics must of course be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts, as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested in Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church as its one and only criterion, and as surely as this is identical with Jesus Christ. If dogmatics cannot regard itself, and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christology, it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as Church dogmatics ... As a whole, i.e. in the basic statements of a Church dogmatics Christology must be either dominant and perceptible, or else it is not Christology."51

This might well be described as the dominant principle of Barth's entire theology. Hartwell believes that Barth follows it "with a consistency and thoroughness unsurpassed in the history of Christian dogmatics."52

This being the case it is clearly beyond our scope to embark upon a full exposition or discussion of the Barthian Christology. We will have to content ourselves with indicating the way in which Barth approaches Jesus Christ, the categories he used to interpret Him, and observe how this as with Niebuhr is determinative of his idea of sin. We will then offer a brief critique of his position and suggest a more adequate approach to the problems in question and hence to the idea of sin.


51. I/2, p.123; cf. p. 883; II/1, p.607; II/2, p.4; IV/1, p.16ff, 45, 81, 546; IV/2, p.500; IV/3, p.58ff, 90ff. The Knowledge of God and the Service of God, 43, 47; Dogmatics in Outline, p.65f. WMWG, pp.179-180.

52. Hartwell op.cit., p.96; cf. Torrance, op.cit., p.204f.
b. "The Word became flesh"

In his understanding of the Being of Jesus Christ Barth aligns himself explicitly with the orthodox symbols. In volume I under the heading "God the Son" he expounds the so-called Symb. Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum in its second article Credo ... in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, filium Dei unigenitum.... etc.53 He has a more detailed account in the following half volume where he sets forth the mystery of the incarnation under the heading "Very God and Very Man" which he expounds in terms of John 1, 14 - ὁ λόγος υἱός θεοῦ ἐγένετο. By λόγος Barth understands "the divine, creative, reconciling, redeeming Word which participates without restriction in the divine nature and existence, the eternal Son of God."54 The incarnation was hence the becoming flesh of God Himself "in the entire fullness of deity, which is also that of the Father and the Holy Spirit." As such the incarnation is a movement which finds its sole and unqualified Subjectivity in the Being of God. As such it is a movement of the divine freedom, an action of God ad extra. As such the incarnation is a movement in which God retains the sole Subjectivity and never ceases to be the divine Word. As such it is not irreconcilable with the ascription to Mary of the title "mother of God" - not as in Roman Catholic dogma where it acts as a qualification of God's sole Subjectivity, but precisely as a confession of the Lordship of the divine Word who rules sovereignly within the created order, just as He does from all eternity with the Father.

By the use of ὁ λόγος Barth believes there is implied that the Word "became man, true and real man participating in the same human essence and existence, the same human nature and form, the same historicity that we have."55 Barth here refers to Luther's statement - "The deeper we can fetch Christ into the flesh, the better it is." More precisely this means that the divine Word became a man, not man in general but a precise individual; and a precise individual in such a way that the manhood he assumed had no being prior to and apart from its being

53. I/1, pp.484-512.
54. I/2, pp.132-171 cf. Christological sections in IV/1; IV/2 and IV/3; I/2, p.123.
55. I/2, p.147.
56. I/2, p.149.
in union with the Word (en-hypostasis) but had its being concretely in this union (en-hypostasis). Further in this union the manhood did not attain a separate being alongside the being of the Word -

"...the reality of Jesus Christ is that God Himself in person is actively present in the flesh. God Himself in person is the subject of a real human being and acting. And just because God is the Subject of it, this being and acting are real. They are a genuinely and truly human being and acting." 57

Coming more directly to the word flesh, Barth takes this to mean fallen flesh - "He was not a sinful man. But inwardly and outwardly his situation was that of sinful man. He did nothing that Adam did. But he lived life in the form it must take on the basis and assumption of Adam's act." 58 He is what we are, but he is such, in a manner quite different from us - he was without sin. "Our unholy human existence, assumed and adopted by the Word of God is a hallowed and therefore sinless human existence." 59 Jesus' sinlessness and perfection was not that of a moral ideal but of a perfect obedience - "Jesus Christ's obedience consists in the fact that he willed to be and was only this one thing with all its consequences, God in the flesh, the divine bearer of the burden which man as a sinner must bear." 60 This implies the possibility of real temptation, of a "growth" in wisdom and stature, and of a genuine struggle to obey the Father's will.

By the verb ἐγένετο in relation to this action of God Barth thinks that "assumed" is preferable as a translation to "became". This guards against any suggestion that the word was qualitatively affected by the hypostatic union. It also removes any hint of the ἐγένετο being viewed as a third being between God and man. Barth refers to the ideas of anhypostasia and enhypostasia by which some theologians sought to guard their understanding of the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ from error. On the one hand and negatively, the human being of the God-man has no existence beyond and apart from the hypostatic union (anhypostasia); on the other hand and positively, it has its being concretely in the acting Lord (enhypostasia). Barth notes the divergent

57. I/2, p.151.
58. I/2, p.152.
59. I/2, p.156.
60. I/2, p.156.
Lutheran and Reformed emphases which arose in the post-Reformation period. The Lutheran tended to stress the unity of the two natures and criticised the Reformed for a nestorian tendency in their Christology. They made much of the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum in the relationship of the two natures. The Reformed tended to stress the real distinction between the two natures and criticised the Lutherans for a eutychian tendency in their Christology, leading to a view of the hypostatic union as a state instead of an event.

c. The two-fold approach to Christology

Barth sets out these distinctions more fully in what he sees as a twofold approach to Christology. There is first what he calls the static-ontic approach. This was the Lutheran one. By it the *Eνεργησις* is thought of as a completed event, an objective accomplished fact – the Word became flesh (assumptio). This gives Christology its "ontological reference". This implies that the God who is to be sought and found by us is the God who has assumed flesh –

"There is no other form or manifestation in heaven or on earth save the one child in the stable, the one Man on the cross. This is the Word to whom we must hearken, render faith and obedience, cling ever so closely. Every question concerning the Word which is directed away from Jesus of Nazareth, the human being of Christ, is necessarily and wholly directed away from Himself, the Word, and therefore from God Himself, because the Word, and therefore God Himself, does not exist for us apart from the human being of Christ."61

There are problems, however, in this approach. Can it really retain the utter Otherness of the Word, His glory and majesty? If so, can it do so without losing the true humanity of the Word in the process? And, if both these errors are avoided is it not at the cost of a mutual conditioning so that John 1, 14 no longer really applies?

On the other hand there is the dynamic-noetic approach. This is the reformed one. By it the *Eνεργησις* is thought of as a completed event, an accomplished act, the Word once in the history of man became flesh. The dynamic of that once-for-all act is renewed for us in the ever-repeated miracle of revelation whereby this same Jesus becomes for faith no longer merely man but God-man, the Saviour and Redeemer. Christology from this

61. I/2, p.165.
62. I/2, pp.165-166.
standpoint attains noetic significance as faith understands and acknowledges the miracle of the incarnation. In this context and over against the Lutherans the Reformed school appealed to the doctrine of the so-called *extra-Calvinisticum*. This was the view that although hypostatically united to the humanity he assumed in the incarnation the divine Word did not cease to fulfil all the functions of the divine Word. The Reformed wished by this doctrine to overcome the seeming loss of the humanity and divinity of the Lord in the Lutheran approach. Once again there are problems to face here. Generally, can this view retain the static element in the *ενθυτησαμένο*? More particularly, can it bear a proper and full witness to the union of the natures in the hypostatic union?

Barth thinks that both these approaches are necessary and that they are possibly not capable of a full synthesis. The best hope of such he thinks lies in taking the latter Reformed approach as the basic one and seeking to attain the Lutheran from it. From this basic approach to Jesus Christ Barth draws implications for the whole of theology. We have already had occasion to underline how thoroughgoing is Barth's attempt to give Christology the central place in theology, and how he attains this in a manner unrivalled in the history of dogma. He is remarkably faithful to his explicit axiom - that dogmatics be "Christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts." We cannot at this stage do more than outline the way in which Barth has worked out this Christological approach to dogmatics.

d. The outworking of this doctrine in the Church Dogmatics

In his doctrine of God Barth's Christ-centred approach means that God is known only here - in His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Accordingly this knowledge is a knowledge given by God in His revelation and hence not based on some more ultimate principle. Its actuality is prior to, and determinative of its possibility. It is a knowledge of faith,

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63. I/2, pp.170-71.
64. I/2, p.123.
65. II/1, p.3f.
66. II/1, pp.4-5.
67. II/1, p.12f.
It is further a concrete knowledge - a knowledge of the living God who is known in His act of revelation, and God who loves in freedom. Barth prefers to speak of the Reality of God as against speaking of His being. Barth goes on to expound this Reality of God in terms of His perfections, which term he prefers to attribute, under the general division of His love and His freedom. In each of the perfections of God Barth attempts to view it concretely in the light of His work and Word in Jesus Christ. This standpoint leads Barth to speak also of the Humanity of God. It is the heart too of his doctrine of the election of God. We have already indicated something of the way in which he expounds election as "election in Jesus Christ". This same Christ-centred approach manifests itself in his treatment of the doctrine of creation. He finds the heart of it in the idea of the covenant of grace set up and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Again turning to the creature Barth attempts to approach anthropology from this same Christological base seeing man "in his determination as the covenant partner of God" - that is, in the light of the truth concerning him which is disclosed and actualised in Jesus Christ. Providence and the inimical dimension of das Nichtige are approached in a similar manner from the point of God's Lordship revealed and affirmed in the person and work of Christ. Turning finally to reconciliation Barth continues the Christological motif. In addition to the predictable discussion of soteriology as salvation in and by Jesus Christ there also occurs here, and in the light of this grace of God, the discussion of sin; of the Christian life as "the being of man in Jesus Christ"; of the church as the community of Jesus Christ; and of the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the salvation wrought in Christ.

68. II/1, p.25ff.
69. II/1, p.257ff.
70. II/1, pp.272-321.
71. II/1, p.257f.
72. II/1, pp.322-350.
73. II/1, pp.351-439.
74. II/1, pp.440-677.
76. see above chapter 2 and 6.
77. II/2, pp.3-507.
78. III/1, p.94ff.
79. III/2 passim, p.203ff.
80. III/3, p.3f and 289f.
81. IV/1 157ff; IV/2 3ff; IV/3, 3ff.
82. IV/1, p.358ff; IV/2, p.78ff; IV/3, p.368ff.
83. IV/1, pp.92-122; 514ff; IV/2, p.499ff; IV/3, p.481ff.
84. IV/1, p.645ff; IV/2, p.614ff; IV/3, p.681ff.
85. IV/1, p.740ff; IV/2, p.727ff; IV/3, p.902ff.
From this standpoint Barth also sets out the various stages of his theological ethics as the doctrine of the command of God—man's summons to obedience in the light of his determination in Jesus Christ. Such is the scope of Christology in Barth's theology. One cannot but admit that he has been remarkably faithful to his declared intention of setting forth a Christologically determined dogmatics. Any criticism of Barth which is to really register will in the light of this inevitably require to criticise his Christology. We have seen occasion during the course of this discussion to criticise Barth's doctrine of sin at a number of points. Until now we have viewed these inadequacies in terms of their failure to reflect the Biblical witness. Such a level of criticism is valid in itself. We require to ask now whether in addition these inadequacies in his doctrine of sin have their source in an inadequacy in his Christology. This is clearly a very large issue in its ultimate scope requiring treatment far beyond what is possible in these final pages. We believe, however, that there is a weakness here and will seek at least to point to it now and indicate how it has affected his view of sin. We will then finally relate him to Niebuhr.

e. A question which remains

i. The question formulated

The criticism which we wish to register has relation to the humanity of Christ, as to its reality for Barth and the role it plays in his theology. We can approach it by referring to his exposition of Christology which we set out above. Barth argues as we saw for a two-fold approach to the completed event of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh. The first is the Lutheran one—stressing the completed nature of the hypostatic union. Barth correctly points out the limitations of this approach—viz., its tendency to blunt the force of both the divinity and the humanity of Christ and the accompanying eutychian threat to a proper distinction between them. He correctly sees such a weakness in seventeenth century Lutheranism which inferred more than was warranted from the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum. As the balancing corrective to this approach Barth proposes the "dynamic-noetic" one which comes to the incarnation as

86. II/2, p. 509ff; III/4 passim; IV/4 fragment.
something discovered ever and again in the act of revelation given to faith. In this sense it is and remains an event. It is here, however, in Barth's framing of the alternative to the Lutheran position, that our query to him arises. The weakness of the Lutheran approach lies in fact in its divinising of the humanity of Christ by the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum. The Reformed theologians attained their corrective of this position by their use of the doctrine of the so-called extra-Calvinisticum. Barth in fact refers to this but a careful reading of the passage raises the question of how closely it relates to his argument at this point. Barth points out the problem of this second approach in terms of its inability to affirm a true ontic base for Christology or the unity of the two persons, and, as against Barth's form of the Reformed alternative, these questions can certainly be put. However the primary issue is whether Barth has really represented the Reformed alternative. It is our submission that he has not done so, and indeed that he cannot fully do so, within the terms of his Christology since it would involve a reappraisal of the human pole in the whole theological situation and the modification of a number of his viewpoints, not least in the area of his view of sin, as we shall seek to point out.

ii. Light from Calvin

At this point we can most usefully refer to the place of the so-called extra-Calvinisticum in the thought of Calvin himself. His understanding of it may be assessed from the concluding sentence of a section of the Institutes entitled "Christ assumed the true substance of human flesh" -

"Here is something marvellous; the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be born in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross yet He continuously filled the world as he had done from the beginning." 89

Calvin that is understands the anhypostasia and the enhypostasia of the union of the two persons to imply that while the Eternal Son of God is concretely the Word become flesh His being and activity are not restricted

87. 1/2, pp.168-9.
88. The term of course post-dates Calvin. For an admirable discussion of this term and its role in Calvin's thought cf. Calvin's Catholic Christology, E. D. Willis, (Leiden, 1966).
to this flesh. For example, he remained head of the angels.\(^{90}\) We cannot here explore the full terms of this idea in Calvin's thought but we can state its implication most succinctly in this way - it enabled Calvin to unfold a fully Trinitarian theology. We can illustrate this from two areas. First, the area of the knowledge of God: Calvin's doctrine at this point has evoked an immense literature to which we have already had cause to refer. When approached from the direction of Calvin's Christology and his view of the extra in particular we are able most satisfactorily to resolve the question of Calvin's alleged teaching concerning a knowledge of God from the created order. All knowledge of God is a knowledge of the Eternal Son of God but all knowledge of God is not necessarily of His being in the flesh. Thus we can speak of a knowledge of God which while not extra Christum is nonetheless extra hanc carnem.\(^{91}\) Any knowledge of God which is alleged as attained directly from the created order is ungrateful and superfluous. It is profitable and true knowledge only as it is illumined by the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.\(^{92}\) Calvin thus can speak of an unprofitable knowledge of God which while not a true and saving knowledge is such as to render man inexcusable before God. Second, in the area of ethics, the extra means that while all of man's life is under the Lordship of God and responsible to Him, only the church is directly and willingly under His Lordship. Christ reigns over all men but savingly and redemptively only over those who are united to Him in the church.\(^{93}\)

The full implications, however, of this extra-Calvinisticum become clear when we remind ourselves that a primary concern of Calvin in the doctrine, which as Willis has shown is certainly no innovation of Calvin's, was to preserve the humanity of Christ over against the tendency of Lutheran Christologies to lose it. By his use of this doctrine Calvin was able to speak of the divine work and attributes of the Mediator without a loss of His humanity in the process. We will note in a moment Calvin's

\(^{90}\) Calvin, commentary on Luke 1, 19 and Matthew 13, 39.
\(^{91}\) Willis, op.cit., p.109ff.
\(^{93}\) Willis, op.cit., p.136ff.
defence against a charge of dividing the One Person in the process. The extra-Calvinisticum was, in its intention, an attempt to preserve the true humanity of the Mediator - to assert in its fullest terms that in the hypostatic union God took into union with Himself human flesh and was subject to the course of a fully human existence, apart from sin. It is when we recall this and seek to explore the ontological implications of this fact that the full significance of the extra-Calvinisticum and the relevance of all this to Barth becomes apparent. The Reformers, although not carrying these implications to their full conclusion, bore witness to them in their speaking of the active as distinct from the passive obedience of Christ. By this they referred to the whole course of his life as man, fulfilling at every point and stage the will of the Father. When this is taken seriously such that the being of the Son in the flesh is seen as identical with the being of the Eternal Word large ontological implications become apparent. Supremely significant is the fact that when we take the course of Jesus life of obedience as being a genuine movement within the Being of God Himself then we are required to speak in terms of a new element in the Being of God after the ascension - that is, there takes place, through the incarnation if not an absolute certainly a relative development or expansion in the being of God. While it is true that Calvin did not himself carry the implications of his Christology and the extra in particular through to their full theoretical implication in these terms, it is this basic concern for the true humanity of the Mediator allied to his undeviating concern to submit all his thought to the magisterial voice of Holy Scripture which enabled him to attain the full dimensions of his Christology. Such a Christology, as the Lutherans pointed out, has to run the gauntlet of the charge of Nestorianism - i.e. as leading to the division of the persons in the hypostatic union. Calvin, however, can be defended against such criticism. Apart from the fact that he explicitly condemned Nestorianism and held himself a milder form of the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum, his stress on the humanity of the Mediator which we have seen implied in the doctrine of the extra dispenses with any suggestion that the Word's becoming flesh

was a mere appearance of God in flesh. Ultimately the suspicion of Nestorianism can be allayed by recalling the enhypostasis - that it is concretely in this union that the flesh of the Mediator has its reality.

Barth as we have already pointed out does take note of the Reformers' use of the extra and shows an appreciation of their concern to preserve the divinity and humanity of Christ against the divinising of the human and the humanising of the divine to which the Lutheran Christology tended with its implied reversal of the enhypostasis. Barth's complaint with the doctrine of the extra, and here his fundamental theological fear manifests itself, was that it opened the door to "false speculations about the being and work of the Λόγος."

The effect of this fear, however, is that Barth does not really open himself to the implications of the extra for the humanity of the Mediator and hence for the Being of God Himself. Barth of course does affirm the reality of Christ's flesh - even referring to it as fallen flesh - but he does not attain to the full implications of this fact. Had Barth done so he would have been able to avoid the complaint which has often been made against him, and which we saw grounds for supporting when discussing the fall of man, that he tends to lose the historical dimension of revelation and view it too much "from eternity" so that the temporal has the character of an unveiling in time of the eternal being and decision of God, and faith becomes primarily a poetic movement from a 'not knowing' to a 'knowing'. This is also the real root of the difference between Barth and Calvin noted by Hoogland, viz. that Barth will not distinguish as Calvin does between the two states of Christ, before and after the Cross. For Barth precisely the humiliation is the exaltation of the Mediator. Calvin also speaks of the cross as the glory of the Mediator but he can also make much of the new glory which He attains beyond it. For Calvin the exaltation of Christ is a movement of exaltation in God Himself.

95. I/2, pp.168-9; also IV/1, pp.180-81.
96. I/2, pp.169-70.
97. IV/1, p.181.
98. Berkouwer, op.cit., 252f, 270f, 316; also chapter on fall above.
100. Calvin, Institutes, 2, 16, 14.
iii Towards a revised Christology

Relating this to Barth's earlier discussion of Christology where he outlined a two-fold approach to it we would argue that the real alternative to the Lutheran approach is one which moves via the extra-Calvinisticum to a full recognition of the humanity of the Mediator in all the breadth of its ontological implication. Such an approach would retain the dynamic element which Barth seeks without requiring the more questionable support at this point of his actualistic view of revelation. If followed consistently however this view and approach would require a modification of a number of Barth's positions. We have already hinted at several of these. We turn finally to see how this revised Christology would affect his view of sin.

iv Implications for the idea of sin

Its "being" would remain absurd and mysterious without a proper ground for its existence in God's world and in face of the movement of God against it in history in the person of the Son. This movement of God could now be thought of as unambiguously historical rather than having the suspicion of being simply the reflection in time of God's primeval victory over sin when the Yes of His creating affirming Word dispelled and annulled the No which He overlooked and set aside. This Christology with its affirmation of the historical would be better able to cope with the Scriptural witness to a fall of the first man at the beginning of history and also for a provisional reversal of the gospel-law order to allow for a genuine encounter between God and man on the plane of history by which man is rendered inexcusable for his ignorance of Him. Again, this Christology with its affirmation of the human in the humanity of Christ would dispel the suggestion in Barth for an unconcern for concrete existence and would afford the basis for an ethics related more directly to the phenomenon of the human. Such a Christology would have implications too in the area of the church and the overcoming of sin since it would imply a real wrestling with, and conquest of sin in the life and death of Jesus Christ. By means of the filioque - the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of this Jesus Christ - the renewed humanity of the Son would be conveyed to the being of the believing faithful community. We would be able in other words to give a basis to the N.T. testimony to a radical distinction between believer and unbeliever and hence to the cruciality of the preaching situation;
and we would also be able to speak of a real ontological renewal of man in sanctification. It would also allow the ultimate either/or of the Biblical eschatological perspective while retaining and affirming the exultant N.T. hope of final triumph in the full outworking at the close of history of the victory wrought in history in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We would argue then that Barth's Christology like Niebuhr's has its limitations, in its failure to take fully seriously the implications of the humanity of the Son of God and that this has had important implications for his view of sin.

It is at this point, and in conclusion that it is possible to re-introduce Niebuhr and allow a more positive evaluation to be made of him. We have seen that the theoretical terms of his theology are inadequate for a full Biblical understanding of sin. Despite this theoretical limitation we can discern in Niebuhr certain pointers in correct directions. In particular Niebuhr has worked from an understanding of man as immediately encountered, an ethical approach to him, for which he sought theoretical support in the doctrine of man made in the image of God. As we saw Niebuhr's attempt to follow this approach is less than adequate and led eventually to a Christology inhibited by alien anthropological ideas. Nonetheless in his concern for man in his humanity before God we can see him as pointing a relative corrective of Barth who through his gathering the humanity of man so fully into the being of Christ cannot adequately affirm the human dimension. Again Niebuhr's attempt to draw a proper distinction between creation and redemption is a pointer towards a more Biblical trinitarian approach to man and is correct as against Barth's monistic tendency. Thus while not able to complete the journey himself, and indeed guilty of serious sidetracks in places, Niebuhr at times does point in the correct direction towards a full Biblical understanding of the human situation in general and man as a sinner in particular.

D. CONCLUDING COMMENT

We conclude hence that it is in their respective Christologies that Barth and Niebuhr's really significant differences have their source,
and also that it is to this point that their different understandings of sin have to be finally traced. We have sought to show that in both cases the inadequacies in their views of sin which we have noted over the course of this discussion can be related to a weakness in their Christologies. In conclusion, and as a corrective to Barth in particular, we sought to trace the shape of a Christology which would take account of both men's contributions to the understanding of the doctrine of sin as well as pointing beyond the limitations of their positions.

Thus, while both Niebuhr and Barth have much to contribute to our understanding of what sin is and how it is overcome, neither Niebuhr's approach from his standpoint "between gospel and world", nor Barth's attempt to "view sin in the light of grace", are fully satisfactory.
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